Impact of Media and Culture on Constructions of Homomasculinity Among Gay and Queer Men in Aotearoa New Zealand

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As a cultural industry, the mass media has symbolic power in articulating the prevailing images of society and its members. For minority groups, including gay and queer individuals, this power exerts symbolic violence, in that their identity is constructed as an aberration from a desired norm. This study analyzes the narratives of gay and queer men in Aotearoa, New Zealand, as they negotiate and resist dominant representations of themselves circulating in mainstream media and culture. The participants reflect on the negative impact of cultural themes of hypermasculinity and White heteronormativity on the development of homomasculinity as the core element of their queer identities, which manifests in their perceptions of self-loathing and internalized homophobia. However, the participants also acknowledge unrealistic expectations enforced by mediatized White male beauty standards and express their desire to resist the patriarchal model of masculinity rooted in the colonial settler ideology.

Keywords: homomasculinity, internalized homophobia, symbolic violence of media, White gay culture, Māori takatāpui identity

Across gender studies, many scholars have formulated masculinity as a hegemonic construct that drives the creation of a gender hierarchy and enforces normative gender scripts (Becker, 2006; Diefendorf & Bridges, 2020; Kimmel, 1994; Messerschmidt, 2000). As gender-nonconforming deviants, gay and queer men are considered *Others,* as opposed to men whose traditional masculinity coalesces as normative and "natural" (Gutting, 2005). From childhood, nonnormative queer individuals experience complex effects as Other beings in a straight man's world (McDonald, 2016). These personal, physical, and relational effects of hegemonic masculinity have enduring impacts on the identities of gay and queer men (Fulcher, 2017; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012). Viewing identities as stories we tell about ourselves to other social players (De Fina, 2015), this narrative inquiry seeks to generate an insider's perspective of what it means to live as a gay or

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queer man in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Using Judith Butler's (1991) conceptualization of gendered identities as performative and open to negotiation and reconstruction, we view homomasculine identities as culturally bound sites of oppression and marginalization by dominant heterosexual norms. The hierarchy of masculinities (Connell, 1995), where homomasculinity is allocated a subordinate and low-level value, is enabled by the symbolic power of hegemonic masculinity, which functions as "the culturally idealized form of masculinity in a given historical and social setting" (Messerschmidt, 2000, p. 10).

Cultural interpretations of masculinity in Aotearoa, New Zealand are rooted in the colonizing logic of European settlers, with an emphasis on self-reliance, a "can-do" attitude, and toughness in the face of hardships, and with problems fixed by "Kiwi ingenuity" and "No. 8 fencing wire" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 400). Discussing this cultural archetype, Kennedy (2007) suggests that "the dominant and enduring cultural theme portrays New Zealanders as self-reliant pioneers, brave and heroic, demonstrating initiative under pressure" (p. 5). However, this cultural archetype is "masculine in origin, with pioneering, rural and military provenance. The perspectives of women and Māori are underrepresented" (p. 7). The hegemony of this "primarily male (and New Zealand European) perspective" (p. 7) indicates that any deviation from the celebrated cultural ideal of the pioneering White settler masculinity falls outside normative boundaries and requires the exercise of high agency and resilience to construct a valid identity.

Hence, this study examines the experiences of gay and queer men as narrated in semistructured interviews in Aotearoa, New Zealand, in March to April 2020. The analysis focuses on how gay and queer individuals navigate their lives as nonnormative men who are Othered by traditional, White, hegemonic, and hierarchical heteromasculinity, and how they construct and perform their homomasculinity in mediatized contexts of hypermasculine stereotypes.

Symbolic Power and Internalized Homophobia

Within queer theory, sexuality is seen as a deeply socially conditioned phenomenon that does not constitute any form of separate entity but as part of our cultural identity (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016; Eguchi, 2021). Contrary to the essentialist view of homosexuality, which renders sexuality as innate and repressed in society and, accordingly, as natural or inevitable (Edwards, 1994), homosexuality is socially constructed and dynamic, arising from multiple interactions (De Fina, 2015). Butler (1991) suggests that homosexuality is underscored by performing masculinity—the most prevalent gender marker enacted by men. Gay and queer men tend to internalize dominant notions of masculinity (Bartone, 2018), well aware that masculine practices and behaviors convey more symbolic value than those perceived to be feminine or womanly (Kimmel, 1994). Halberstam (2019) argues that Western/Eurocentric heterosexual masculinity is hegemonic in nature, as it subjugates and denounces all other expressions of masculinity by women, gay men, and other queer individuals, including people of color. It places gay and queer men into a hierarchy of undesired gender identities (Becker, 2006), conflating them with the feminine gender (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and, as such, not real men (Eguchi, 2009; Yep, 2003).

The symbolic power of hegemonic Western masculinity inflicts beliefs of inadequacy and self-deprecation on those who do not fit in with its prescriptions. According to Bourdieu (2000), "symbolic power is exerted only with the collaboration of those who undergo it because they help to *construct* it as such" (p.

171; emphasis in the original). Foucault (1990) observed that this power was operationalized in some people both as objects *and* as subjects of control, with the norms of disciplinary control resulting in the internalization of homophobic norms of oppression by gay men to the point of policing their own and others' behavior. Embracing "the bias of the oppressor" (Clarkson, 2006, p. 193) in this way presents the mechanism by which external norms, such as self-loathing and self-hatred, are internalized as homophobia, causing a gay person to direct negative social attitudes toward their own self (Bartone, 2018). Internalized homophobia plays a major role in generating problematic homomasculine identities that follow a "master-script" (Bartone, 2018) of inclusion/exclusion of stereotyped queer masculinities. Thus, hypermasculinity, straight-acting, and the cult of muscularity in contemporary White gay culture, along with the attitudes of antieffeminacy, are prevalent in the communication and behaviors of certain gay men (Eguchi, 2011; Milani, 2016). These problematic homomasculinities reproduce the characteristic misogynistic behaviors and discourses of heteromasculinity as a distinct form of homophobia and femmephobia (Anderson, 2009).

Hypermasculinity, Straight-Acting, and Femmephobia

Gay men internalize prevalent concepts of masculinity (Bartone, 2018; Butler, 1991) by enacting "hegemonic homosexuality" (Baker, 2008, p. 176, as cited in Milani, 2016). Consequently, postliberation gay men have fallen into binary camps (Edwards, 1994). *Masculinists* are proponents of hypermasculinity, challenging the long-held stereotype of gay men as effeminate by eroticizing and rigidly enforcing masculinity. Alternatively, *effeminists* are gender-nonconforming individuals who seek to denounce traditional masculinity. In this view, the appearance in the 1970s of gay "clones," who valorized the traditional heterosexual masculine performance of the working man, heralded the beginning of the masculinity cult in gay culture (Clarkson, 2006; Milani, 2016) and the ascendancy of hegemonic White homosexuality within mainstream Western gay cultures (Sonnekus, 2009).

Hegemonic homosexuality is negotiated and performed as hypermasculinity, or the "desire to be a real man" (Bishop, Kiss, Morrison, Rushe, & Specht, 2014, p. 563). Straight-acting gay men conform to the "heteronormative masculine image" (Eguchi, 2011, p. 37) and strive to be undetectable as gay men (Milani, 2016), enacting masculine identities similar to the cultural norm of strong, tough workingmen (Clarkson, 2006). Furthermore, straight-acting identities have been understood as resistance to stereotypes of feminine gay male culture (Milani, 2016) because of the AIDS epidemic (Sender, 2003) and the eroticization of maleness (Baker, 2005). The promasculine and promuscular attitudes expressed by straight-acting gay men may also derive from childhood homophobia (Taywaditep, 2002).

Such attitudes produce femmephobia or sissyphobia, which manifests itself as the fear and rejection of feminine men's identities and behaviors (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012) and is targeted at those men whose "expressions of femininity… stray from the confines of patriarchal or essentialized femininity" (Blair & Hoskin, 2015, p. 232). It is a communication strategy by which straight-acting gay men justify and enforce their masculinity (Eguchi, 2011). Activated by internalized homophobia and perceived threats to the self of masculinist gay men, femmephobia and other homonegative discourses stratify men according to the hegemonic system of dominance that is consistent with that of heterosexual men (Anderson, 2009). Finally, sissyphobia enables the distancing of promasculine and straight-acting gay men from effeminate gay men to avoid being stereotyped as such (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012). The latter are first marginalized as gay men

in a heteronormative world and then as effeminate, gender-nonconforming men who are doubly oppressed by hegemonic homosexuality. Another level of oppression exists for Asian, Black, and all other non-White gay men who face femmephobia by default because of their race and are deemed sexually nonattractive and nonmasculine (Eguchi, 2009; Jackson, 2000; Sonnekus, 2009; Yep, 2003). Jackson (2000) states that "the dominant de-eroticisation of Asian men within White gay cultures occurs by an effeminisation of Asian men's bodies and the privileging of a model of masculinity based on the idealised attributes of a Caucasian male" (p. 183). Similarly, Eguchi, Files-Thompson, and Calafell (2018) argue that "Black men are not supposed to be (White) homosexual" (p. 182), as their subjugated position in the White-dominated hierarchy of masculinities only affords them to perform Black hypermasculinity.

Hence, femmephobia is the articulation of misogynistic attitudes toward feminine traits in men whose performance of self diverges from prescribed gender roles in the White, straight, male, able-bodied world. It strengthens dominant social discourses that "valorize masculinity at the expense of femininity" (Milani, 2016, p. 453), whereby femme men are subjected to a range of negative stereotypes (Bishop et al., 2014) and perceived as less desirable for lovers (Bartone, 2018; Clarkson, 2006). Unsurprisingly, therefore, a man's tolerance of effeminacy in other men is ultimately a measure of his own security (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012).

Media Representations of Homomasculinity

As we live in a mediatized society, negative stereotypes circulating among different groups in society are recycled and reinforced in traditional media (Gross, 2001), as well as in new media, such as the internet and social networking sites (Craig & McInroy, 2014). The symbolic violence of media manifests itself through constructing images of gay and queer individuals as abnormal and threatening to the "moral order" of the straight majority (Gross, 2001). According to Gross (2001), these stereotypes "have had a double impact on gay people: not only have they mostly shown them as weak and silly, or evil and corrupt, but they continue for the most part to exclude and deny [their] existence" (p. 16). The most common representation of gay men as effeminate and camp, overly theatrical and exaggerated, has become an object of ridicule across various television shows and cinemas, even when stereotyped "gay" qualities, such as an exquisite taste in fashion, food, and interior design, are employed for the "betterment" of straight men (Sender, 2006). Sender (2003) points to two extremely negative stereotypes held in society: "the hypersexual, predatory, possibly paedophilic gay man and the promiscuous AIDS victim" (p. 332). The emphasis on the effeminate and often asexual gay prototype, therefore, has afforded the inclusion in mass media content of nonthreatening and physically (as well as psychologically) weak gay identities (Gross, 2005), while at the same time rendering their claim to masculinity ambiguous and invalid.

The heteronormative inscriptions on homosexuality in the media drive homophobic attitudes (Poole, 2014), representing symbolic violence over gay and queer men. According to Menendez-Menendez (2014), "masculine domination is a paradigm of symbolic violence" (p. 66), through which mass media can exert power and control over nonconforming individuals (Poole, 2014). As mainstream media in contemporary Western societies cater to the perceived majority, being mostly White, male, straight, able-bodied, and middle/upper class (Gross, 2001), many minority identities are enacted by majority media actors (Cover, 2023), thus denying minorities the power to represent themselves. Concurrently, traditional media have

long been a means by which people with Othered sexual identities learn about themselves, despite the secrecy and silence they encounter in wider social and cultural contexts (Gross, 2001). Further, new media have amplified and expanded the capacity for people to "explore identities, behaviors, and lifestyles that might remain inaccessible offline" (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p. 95), often providing cultural resources and social networks that otherwise would be difficult to find. Most gay men have been found to make regular and frequent use of mobile dating and other social networking apps (Conner, 2019), rife with the "consistent presence of promasculinity and promuscularity constructs" (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016, p. 266). Clarkson (2006) highlights selective homophobia that arises from the normalization of straight-acting gay identities in opposition to those of femme gay men. Such homophobic and femmephobic discourses enable a hierarchy of homomasculinities (Bartone, 2018) within which gay men turn against each other in the battle for ascendancy, categorizing and ranking the masculinity of other gay men (Sanchez & Vilain, 2012). In online spaces, communicative framing typically promotes promasculinity, promuscularity, and antieffeminacy (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). In this regard, Miller (2015) identified the "Adonis Complex" (p. 7), which causes gay men to fixate on the muscular body as an ideal and to engage in self-objectification more profoundly than heterosexual men, making themselves susceptible to the effects of hypermasculine scripts and norms.

Overall, gay men are more likely to internalize cultural standards of beauty, deeply rooted in what Sonnekus (2009) calls the gay "colonial" representations of homomasculinity, "based on a stifling stereotype of gay identity that obscures the race-based power relations within which it operates" (Sonnekus, 2009, p. 37). Sonnekus (2009) argues that "the fetishisation and commodification of the 'frontier', gay beauty ideals, and the racist ideologies [ ] exemplify such homoerotic visual cultures" (p. 37). The Western/American ideal of masculinity reflected in rugged "frontiermanship" is echoed in Aotearoa New Zealand cultural themes of pioneering settler ideology (Kennedy, 2007), producing racialized standards of masculinity and creating gender hierarchies, where queer folk of color are placed at the very bottom. The Indigenous Māori masculinities must affirm their place in the hierarchy by amplifying the tropes enshrined in European settlers' cultural themes of toughness and strength, for example, in the public arena of contact sports, such as rugby, considered the national sport and national pride. Before each game, the All Blacks rugby team, consisting of Māori, Pākehā (White New Zealanders), and players of Pacific descent, performs the stylized and commodified *haka* (traditional Māori dance), aimed at breaking the opponent team psychologically by demonstrating a warrior spirit, strength, and, ultimately, aggression (Scherer, 2013). Accordingly, Māori and Pacific men are only seen as good athletes when they embody the cultural theme of a hypermasculine rugged warrior, which simultaneously contributes to the stereotype of Māori and Pacific men as violent abusers and criminals (Maydell, 2018). The images of "deculturated haka" and rugby games as the "racialized spectacles of consumption" (Scherer, 2013, p. 44), promoted as national cultural symbols, enforce hegemonic masculinity ideals on all men. Such pressure to conform to this cultural hypermasculine ideal that, despite the decades of gay/queer advances in their rights in Aotearoa, New Zealand, only in January 2023, the first openly gay Pākehā/White All Blacks' player, Campbell Johnstone, came out publicly on national television, and only after he retired from rugby (Stuff Sports Reporters, 2023). He has been applauded for publicly coming out across different platforms; however, it can be argued that his whiteness provides him with relative safety and acceptance into the White (hypermasculine) gay culture, with his race being a default privilege. While the "deculturated haka" presents a false image of race equality and recognition of Māori culture, the ideology of colonial dominance is signified through the authority of mostly

Pākehā captains, owners, coaches, and other stakeholders of All Blacks. It harks back to the White owners/Black players' power structure in the NBA, which defines "the parameters in which black male professional athletes operate. While complicit, black athletes are packaged, sold, disciplined, and dehumanized under the gaze of whiteness as objects for voyeuristic consumption" (Griffin & Calafell, 2011, p. 129).

Thus, White gay culture has carved a particular version of homomasculinity, embracing the Western frontier/pioneering settler's identity, which manifests as femmephobia and racism (Sonnekus, 2009), imposing White homonormativity on people of color (Yep, 2003). This homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) causes the lack of diversity in media production of "gaystreaming" in American programs (Ng, 2013), which influences global queer cultures. However, with the wider acknowledgment of queer identities and deeper knowledge of Māori cultural traditions in contemporary Aotearoa, New Zealand, there is a growing acceptance of different genders and sexualities that were normalized among Māori and Pacific peoples before European colonization and the enforcement of religious restraints (Kerekere, 2017). The Māori term *takatāpui*, originally meant the same-sex partner, now encompasses all queer Māori identities, while the Samoan term *Fa'afafine* indicates a "third" gender identity (Schmidt, 2016). Still, media representations of these Indigenous queer identities are lacking, with the exception of a 2020 highly praised drama film *Rūrangi*, made by the queer crew and exploring queer Māori identities.

To understand the impact that mediatized cultural discourses have on the development and construction of homomasculinity and overall gay and queer identities in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the current study posed two research questions:

RQ1:   *How do gay and queer men develop, negotiate, and perform homomasculinity?*

RQ2:   *What effects do media and culture have on the lives and identities of gay and queer men?*

Methodological Issues and Considerations

Following the framework and principles of narrative inquiry (De Fina, 2015), we considered how best to understand the significance and complex communication of the gendered sexual identities of gay and queer men. Such deliberations informed our reflexive thought processes and were addressed by orientating this research to be not just *about* gay men, but also undertaken *with* gay men, through negotiating the insider/outsider dilemma and balancing internal and external perspectives (Maydell, 2010).

The participants were recruited via snowballing using both researchers' personal connections and a recruitment poster displayed in local gay bars and emailed to local rainbow organizations. Both authors are queer and Pākehā, with the interviews conducted by the first author identifying as a gay/queer man, indicating insider status to the interviewees. This necessitated constant negotiation as to what to reveal or keep hidden during interviews—an ongoing balancing act complicated by narrative research having no illusions of objectivity, foregrounding instead the researchers' subjectivity (Maydell, 2010). Therefore, "queer reflexivity" (McDonald, 2016)—the reflexive questioning of the categories used to identify people and a recognition of the shifting nature of researchers' and participants' identities—informed the interactions

with the interviewees, as well as understanding their stories throughout the research stages of data management, abstraction, and interpretation.

However, by representing the Western/Eurocentric system of tertiary education and research, we simultaneously hold a default outsider position. We acknowledge both our White privilege in a colonized society and our institutional power to decide how to interpret our participants' narratives and how to conduct research in general. In social constructionism, all meanings are viewed as co-authored according to the indivisibility of a researcher and object in a common context (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Such a view foregrounds researchers' engagement with interview data alongside that of the participants, highlighting that such reflexive steps are necessary to illuminate which parts of our narrative contribute to the interpretation of the results. In this, we strive to engage with this scholarship by following the principles of self-reflexivity and critical self-analysis, using as guidance the overall goals of social justice and the further emancipation of society. We also accept that our participants function as co-researchers by sharing their knowledge and insights on the concepts we are exploring; however, we use the term "participants" to avoid obfuscating the power differential between us.

We aimed to interview up to 20 participants in suitable locations, for example, in adequate university spaces. However, in March 2020, Aotearoa, New Zealand, entered a strict lockdown because of Covid-19, causing interviews to be moved online and recorded via Skype or phone. Several participants withdrew from the study, citing their inability to find safe locations with enough privacy to share sensitive information. Therefore, the dataset consisted of nine interviews, with only the first two recorded face-to-face.

The duration of the interviews was between 30 and 90 minutes. The interview questions probed into the participants' understanding of masculinity and homosexuality, as well as their perceptions of themselves and others. For example, "What do you understand masculinity to mean for gay and/or queer men? Can you tell me about the gay/queer part of yourself and your life? How do other gay/queer men respond or relate to you? How are they represented in media and what impact media representations have had on your sense of self?"

The interviewees' ages ranged from mid-20s to late 50s, with all of them having tertiary education and middle-income status, limiting our sample to highly educated and middle-class members of society. Only one participant identified as Māori and takatāpui, while others—as Pākehā gay/queer men, reflecting the racial and class privilege of most interviewees. All participants were residents or citizens, while some of them migrated to Aotearoa, New Zealand, at a younger age. However, none of them demarcated an immigrant identity. Interestingly, several of them lived either in Sydney, Australia, or in London, United Kingdom, in their youth and reflected on that time as an important stage in embracing their homosexuality. In the following analysis, we refrain from reporting specific details and use pseudonyms to protect the participants' confidentiality because of the small size of the local queer community.

We analyzed the dataset following thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within the wider narrative framework (De Fina, 2015). Because of the incredible richness and complexity of the data, it is beyond our ability to include all ideas and illustrations in one academic article. Hence, this study mainly focuses on mediatized representations of homomasculinity as understood and reflected on by the

participants. Guided by the research questions, the analysis led to the construction of four main themes: (1) homosexuality as deficient identity, with subthemes *internalized homophobia* and *cultural legacies*; (2) media constructions of homomasculinity, with subthemes *femmephobic stereotypes* and *fantasy beauty ideals*; (3) impact of media representations, with subthemes *symbolic violence* and *false beliefs*; and (4) construction of homomasculine self, with subthemes *resisting dominant stereotypes* and *rewriting cultural themes.*

Findings and Discussion

Homosexuality as a Deficient Identity

Gay identities exist within broader cultural discourses that frame homosexuality as the abhorrent, deviant Other, in contrast to what heterosexuality coalesces as normal and desirable (Foucault, 1990). The Other is "a projection of part of ourselves we would deny, exclude and repress" (Carlson, 2001, p. 307). From childhood, gay and queer men are Othered as nonmasculine males and homosexual deviants from the heteronormative (Gutting, 2005). They learn from homophobic interpersonal contacts and mediated messages that their desires are shameful and hate-deserving, implanted in their lives as internalized homophobia (Yep, 2003). Pressure to conceal and resist their homosexuality leads to self-loathing, driving them toward "a solitude, a secrecy and a silence" (Plummer, 1996, p. 33). Such erasure and undermining of the homomasculine self constitute considerable "psychic violence" (Yep, 2003). It is unsurprising, therefore, that the participants in this study indicated that their awareness of the shameful "error" of homosexuality resulted in *internalized homophobia*:

> …it's this whole feeling of knowing that you just weren't right. I was chasing the impossible of being, wanted, desired… I've fed this beast within me… that I am not worthy… I've wasted many years of my life struggling internally with who I am. (Doug)

> I was young and I was very scared about the fact that I was gay… I also decided that I may or may not come to terms with being gay… I was pretty scared about the ramifications… I learned how to be more masculine because I realized it wasn't acceptable not to. (Oscar)

Internalized homophobia, driven by fear of the "wrong" sexual identity, comes from growing up in a cultural environment embedded with hegemonic heteronormative discourses that valorize traditional gender performances. As explained by the Māori participant pointing to *cultural legacies*:

> Our generations have grown up with legacies around how they've been socialized… they have a great impact on how ultimately the culture seems to see itself these days. So, masculinity and sexuality are still defined by legacies of the past. Whether it's colonial legacies, whether it's religious legacies. And they have been hard… to counter… In Māoridom, we don't have any real stories that seem to have carried down around, around male to male, which is honored. (Henry)

While Henry was the only one who directly discussed the impact of colonial legacies on society's perceptions of homosexuality, other participants lamented how the enduring cultural themes of pioneering settlers' identity (Kennedy, 2007) infused the notions of masculinity with images of 'blokey' culture, tough and physical:

> We have a bowls club down the road here, and there's a few people out there that are as blokey as you can possibly get. You know, [wearing] jandals all the time, they talk about sport endlessly and drink beer … I aspired to be part of the rugby team, but I was never going to be part of the rugby team. And these are what these people have grown up to be now. These were the rugby players. (Doug)

> As a child my concept of a masculine man was about men who worked physically. Men who engaged in hunting deer and duck shooting. Men who had hairy chests, who were confident, men in the farming community I grew up in. (Peter)

> I think that masculinity for gay men is just representative of what masculinity is for straight people as well. That's what you see on TV. It's the New Zealand farmer, it's people not speaking properly or getting all their sentences correct. It's all of that stuff, it's people not being articulate. It's everything that you see out there that New Zealand promotes, this is your regular Kiwi masculine guy. He probably won't be able to string a sentence together… he'll be carrying blocks of 4 x 2 around in a singlet. And that's how I see it portrayed in New Zealand. And I think the gay community just picks up on that, because it's very hard not to pick up on what's going around. (Oscar)

Oscar located the notion of masculinity among cultural artefacts that forge meanings for the whole society, also functioning as desirable qualities of homomasculinity, based on "the fetishisation and commodification of the 'frontier', gay beauty ideals, and the racist ideologies that exemplify such homoerotic visual cultures" (Sonnekus, 2009, p. 37).

Media Constructions of Homomasculinity

The mediatization of global queer culture creates what Shaw and Sender (2016) call "mediated sexuality and everyday experience: in much of the world it is no longer possible to grow up as a person with same-sex desires [ ] and believe oneself to be 'the only one'" (p. 1). Thus, feature films, advertising, and television shows mediate the construction of masculinity by presenting particular performances as normative (Yep, 2003) in relation to which homomasculinities are Othered as nonnormative (Gross, 2001). Accordingly, the participants' narratives indicate the formative role television and the internet play in the generation of homophobia, especially in the form of *femmephobic stereotypes*:

> So, the pictures, the communication, would be, you know, an effete man with a fag, and not presenting as a proud person, but someone that was sort of shrinking… all of these stigmas that were hidden and that were part of the communication, they came through. (Henry)

For Oscar, nonnormative masculinities were presented by the media as undesirable, often in the vehicle of parody and ridicule. For instance, viewing Julian Cleary, the gender-bending comedian on television "wearing makeup… sort of quite camp" and being laughed at emphasized to Oscar "the fact that it's really quite funny being feminine and a male." While the images of effeminate "funny" men are recycled in the media to supposedly bring entertainment to audiences, the specific target such images are addressed to is obvious—a ubiquitous White male gaze, a default consumer of Western capitalist cultures who needs to be catered to and pleased by different cultural industries, in what Hall (1997) termed "commodity racism" (p. 239). For example, Mike explains how gay and queer culture draws on the ideas of (White) patriarchy to strengthen the hierarchy within gender and sexuality diversity, which is infused with White dominance:

> I believe we devalue everything that we feminize. So, if we're only going to uphold the traditional masculine stereotypes, beliefs, values, then yeah, it's just anything feminine can be seen as a big negative in our culture, in a patriarchal culture anyway… So, if we talk about within the culture, the LGBT queer culture, you do have your hierarchy. I would say that as a White middle-class queer man, I definitely hold a lot more privilege than others. And I'm aware of that and I'm conscious of that… I think the idea of intersectionality, you know, we're queer, disabled, socio-economic status, mental illness, yeah, we will have things that we benefit and lose from. But I think White men in particular carry a lot of power within society. Whether you're gay or not. I think even White gay men benefit from straight White men's activity, for sure. I see how queer men can also act like straight men sometimes, in terms of access to females' bodies and they can just grab, touch, access, and it's just a joke, they're gay, they're not a threat. But at the same time, it's still a repetition of the straight man, and that's still problematic. (Mike)

Stereotypical constructions of gay men as subjects of derision follow the symbolic annihilation techniques applied to female representations (Tuchman, 1978), where women are trivialized and condemned, and any meaningful representations of them are erased. The objectification of a female body, expected to please straight White male audiences, produces specific standards of beauty—a "perfect" body, young and sexually attractive, while those women who do not possess such attributes are discharged into invisibility and oblivion.

Similar cultural meanings are communicated to queer men through mediatized representations of male beauty. The "unspoken, yet specified, white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual male standard" (Chávez, 2018, p. 242) places gay/queer men on the scale from the desired male forms, which are objectified and trivialized, to the condemned and erased ones, if not fitting in with the beauty standard. The erotization and fetishization of masculine bodies drive the desire to attain a body that would fulfil the idea of gay beauty in the form of muscular, sculptured, and toned gym-fit bodies, called by Henry "muscle queens" and "muscle Maries," also referred to by Doug as "images of Tom of Finland." Several participants admitted that they had tried, often unsuccessfully, to reach this beauty ideal by attaining the body shape deemed desired and attractive to other men, which they realized was ultimately based on *fantasy beauty ideals*:

I've gone through cycles, gone really big, hard at the gym and done the steroids… 'cause it was like, I want to hit that circuit party, beautiful people. But it was an unattainable goal for me… You're never going to get what you want to be. You're never going to look in the mirror and go, Oh my God, I look awesome. (Doug)

…fantasy ideal of what might've been… those ideas we see so much in some parts of the gay press or the gay media that being gay is about going to a lot of parties. It's about having lots of sex. It's about being part of the world of beautiful people who dance shirtless at a dance party… and I think probably lots of gay men grapple with those sorts of issues. (Craig)

Sonnekus (2009) argues that the iconic status of hypermasculine, homoerotic images of Tom of Finland in global gay culture cement the White patriarchy, as their "'masculine' aesthetics are predicated not only on musculature and facial hair but also on 'whiteness'" (p. 46). Henry's construction of his own Māori takatāpui masculinity as "flawed" and "imperfect" draws on limited cultural resources that allow gay masculinity to exist only within White beauty standards, ultimately erasing Māori homosexuality and homomasculinity. While Māori and Pacific rugby players are accepted as symbols of physicality and strength along with Pākehā ones, they only embody the heteronormative signifiers, which entail a unidimensional and generalized understanding of their cultural identity, that is, a warrior rugby player. This indicates the unintelligibility of Māori homosexuality and homomasculinity and the absence of cultural resources to define them, as reflected by Henry explaining what masculinity means to him:

Masculinity is beauty and a physical form. Atlas type figures. So, from a Māori perspective, or from my own perspective as a Māori, I think also the White male has been very prevalent, in terms of forming an opinion of the male beauty. I think there's not enough of the non-White physical form. I guess from the White male perspective, the sex thing comes through quite strongly because that was the area where one could find out more about sex between men. So, there was no comparison amongst my own, about having sex amongst my own, and comparing that to the pictures… Takatāpui, and particularly gay takatāpui, are really challenged… Māori individuals, their private domain is fairly compromised. (Henry)

Hence, the cultural identities and lived experiences of Māori takatāpui/queer men in Aotearoa, New Zealand, are symbolically annihilated by mediatized discourses and are therefore invisible to the rest of society. The fantasy beauty ideal promoted by global queer culture emphasizes the cult of a White male body replete with colonial tropes of dominance and patriarchy, as in Tom of Finland's gender-race matrix (Sonnekus, 2009) and pioneering settlers' cultural themes (Kennedy, 2007).

Impact of Media Representations

Hypermasculine and femmephobic viewpoints and messaging have devastating consequences on the lives of many gay and queer men (Fulcher, 2017; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The fetishization of masculinity and the rigid enforcement of hypermasculinity oppress gay men by relentlessly demanding a

performance of perfect masculinity that is impossible to achieve (Edwards, 1994; Kimmel, 1994). The hypermasculine and hypersexual stereotypes conveyed through media exert *symbolic violence* on the homomasculine self by devaluing it and coercing it into accepting oppression. As some participants reflected, the hypermasculine, hypersexual messaging of media plays a key role in generating destructive social discourses and behavioral expectations:

> …the messages I received, I thought I had to behave in line with, things like going to beats… and so I'd go to saunas, or that kind of beat culture or like lots of fucking, kind of fuck as much as you can, and all that sort of messaging. It's just extraordinarily destructive to how relationships should work and do work when they're healthy. (Francis)

Hypermasculine norms and scripts, especially those communicated through pornography, are damaging to the gay community collectively (Bishop et al., 2014), and unfortunately, negative effects were evident in the participants' narratives:

> There were expectations: I remember the extraordinary social pressure that I felt to perform sexually, to have long lasting erections, kind of being able to have sex forever, kind of the porn ideal of sex, and my extreme anxiety around that, which then of course made sex far less pleasurable, and being much less capable of performing. (Francis)

> I think that sexuality is something that I initially struggled with, and it was something that I was kind of a victim… I was really detrimentally affected emotionally by having casual sex, I think, a lot more than I realized initially… I started to look at men as objects of sexual gratification rather than as individuals. I think that was a massive detriment to me because I felt like one of that, because I was doing it… It's being part of that cycle. (Kelvin)

However, as powerful as the effects of the mediated generation of hypermasculinity were, the participants also understood their illusory, fictitious nature. Identities are effectively nothing more than the normatively driven stories that we tell about ourselves in the hope that they are the ones that others wish us to tell (De Fina, 2015; Yep, 2003). Accordingly, several participants articulated the artifice at the heart of mediated homomasculine gender constructs and lamented the damage and disappointment caused by the culturally inscribed presentation of gayness, which generated *false beliefs*:

> I think people are prescribed certain roles or expectations of how they view themselves and how other people view them… Whether they've got to be super bitchy or cutting, or whether they've got to be super macho and really stake their dominance. I do feel sadness because I don't feel as though there's authenticity… But you can't escape that influence. (Mike)

This realization of the ephemeral nature of hypersexualized and hypermasculine ideals that permeate White gay culture indicates that the symbolic violence of mediatized constructions of homomasculinity is not located only within individuals. Some gay men channel internalized homophobia

toward other gay and queer men through straight-acting and performing hypersexual and hypermasculine identities and by deploying femmephobia toward those who do not embody hegemonic homomasculinity.

Construction of the Homomasculine Self

The symbolic violence of mediatized cultural tropes and hegemonic White masculinity contribute to the delay in the development and construction of a valued homomasculine self (Carlson, 2001; McDonald, 2016). Many gay men spoke of the loneliness of the time before they came out. Yet, gay identities are not made static or stable by coming out once (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Rather, coming out is continuous and is a process in which nonnormative individuals, whose identities are Othered and otherwise invisible, must "constantly negotiate which of their selves to reveal to others and which of their selves to keep hidden" (McDonald, 2016, p. 39). Homomasculine self is, therefore, always a work in progress and an ongoing process. In Craig's words, "The coming out process is really continuous, I think, for me. So, it's never finished." It is predicated on the considerations and tensions inherent in disclosing self and coming out, as noted by Doug: "I've had to constantly come out for my entire life." In their desire to find functional ways to perform their homosexuality and homomasculinity from a high-agency perspective, the participants indicated their determination *to resist dominant stereotypes*:

> You can refuse to be the dominant stereotype. That was the first step for me, I suppose, an understanding, actually, I don't have to be like other men. …We've got to get through all this awful shit that we're given, from basically media representations I had to unlearn, realizing that, you know, we're just people. (Francis)

> If I don't fit their tribe or what they deem to be aesthetically pleasing in the queer community, then they might just ignore me and that's fine. I play with gender expression a lot. I can be very strategic. I can be working with some minors, and I might have some feminine stuff on, and I've done it purposefully. I've done it to change the narrative around manhood, and to break the restrictions for straight men and gay men. (Mike)

Craig implicated the power of (White) patriarchy enabled by capitalist logic in producing "toxic masculinity," which rules gender hierarchies and subjects nonconforming males to homophobic attitudes. He also suggested that this power oppresses the whole society, including the social and the natural environment:

> By the toxic masculinity I'm talking about ideas circulating around male dominance, around the whole homophobic sort of thing that circulates in some circles of male culture, about the whole idea of abuse of power, the whole idea of degradation of the environment… for me, sort of rampant, exploitative capitalism is deeply tied in with a patriarchal model of dominance over the environment. And that in turn is tied into a construct of masculinity that enables all of that. (Craig)

By resisting the dominant stereotypes of White patriarchy, the participants could see more clearly the oppressive and hegemonic nature of hypermasculinity. As the participants' agency strengthened over

time, their authorship of identity categories and gender roles also increased, while their adherence to prescribed hierarchies and hegemonies decreased. The recognition of the unspoken and taken-for-granted norms and social scripts of behavior into which they had been socialized made some of them contest the colonial underpinnings of highly praised pioneering settlers' symbolism, leading to the intention of questioning and *rewriting cultural themes*:

> I feel that New Zealand itself has a problem with how it interprets masculinity. And any gay man born in New Zealand is going to have that interpretation… it's something about how New Zealanders see masculinity, and maybe it's something about how the gay world sees masculinity, and you get into this whole question about why being masculine is being stronger, and being feminine is considered being inferior. (Oscar)

While the Pākehā participants showed their understanding of the origins of (White) gay culture within global White heteronormativity, being the only Māori person in the study, Henry suggested that Māori queer identities grouped under the umbrella term takatāpui were much more inclusive and less prescriptive. He proposed that the cultural scripts that dominated White gay cultures were also changing and diversifying to include various gender and sexuality performances:

> From a takatāpui perspective… we don't tend to concentrate on masculinity as an issue within our community… even in the Western community, masculinity seems to be more of a need to expand upon… I think older gay and probably White males have a higher profile and a bigger voice and, therefore, could be seen as the defining presence of the gay community. But I think that's just the way that this community has grown up. And I think that will change. I think it's diversifying. There is no one gay way now. That there's a gay way as it's defined by culture, and even by religion… we can diversify and start to engage gayness more on our own terms… if there's a question coming from a Māori perspective, then I'll look at that from a gay male perspective and say, well, how do I feel about that? And is there something new that we need to be looking at in terms of our own culture? (Henry)

From the participants' narratives, it transpires that the gay liberation trajectory internalizes the colonial imperialist gaze (Asante, Baig, & Huang, 2019), when the diversity of gender performances still refers to White queer diversity, with queer people of color relegated to invisibility and unintelligibility. However, as most participants referred to themselves as "older" generations of gay and queer men, they expressed hope that younger generations of queer individuals would rewrite dominant cultural themes infused with colonial heteronormative and hypermasculine meanings to incorporate multifaceted and complex gender and sexuality performances across different cultures, including Indigenous ones.

Conclusion

The literature on global queer cultures (see Eguchi, 2021; Jackson, 2000; Ng, 2013; Yep, 2003) indicates the prevalence of White worldviews across different cultural industries and domains in Western society. Unsurprisingly, our participants almost unquestionably accept the dominance of norms and ideals

of White gay culture and acknowledge the hegemony of White hypermasculinity in cultural performances of gay and queer sexual identities, with old colonial tropes of frontiermanship and pioneering settlers' ideologies tramping over other cultural identities (Kennedy, 2007; Sonnekus, 2009). However, the participants also reflect on the artifice of gay male beauty standards imbued with unrealistic ideals of a hypermasculine and sculptured White male body, which instill feelings of self-loathing and internalized femmephobia in men who cannot achieve these. The symbolic violence of mediatized hypermasculine scripts is echoed by the participants, who describe harmful stereotypes and oppressive gender hierarchies, with the power of White patriarchy having "toxic" effects on the whole society and the planet.

However, as Mike suggests, we can change the narrative. The participants indicated their realization of the impact of mediatized norms and scripts on their gendered selves and their desire to resist dominant stereotypes. Cavalcante (2017) points to the possibility of "the identity work performed as a result of the media encounter" (p. 552). Thus, counteracting degrading and damaging media discourses and making homomasculine identities meaningful articulations of the self allows the possibility of diversifying, as well as rewriting old colonial themes, to reflect what Henry articulates as "no one gay way now."

The limitation of this research is its rather homogenous group of interviewees, with only Henry being Māori and no other ethnicities represented apart from Pākehā. Henry discusses Māori visions of homomasculinity, both connected to White gay culture and idiosyncratic cultural meanings embodied in the Indigenous identity of takatāpui. His explanations indicate the need for broader engagement with Indigenous queer identities and further development of in-depth understandings of cultural complexity and multiplicity that lie at the foundation of a valued gendered and sexual self.

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