Gay Skinheads: Negotiating a Gay Identity in a Culture of Traditional Masculinity

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Gay Skinheads: Negotiating a Gay Identity in a Culture of Traditional Masculinity

Kevin Borgeson[1] and Robin Valeri[2]

Abstract

Through case studies, the strategies used by six men to negotiate between their gay and skinhead identities were examined. Skinheads are defined by traditional masculine values and culture, primarily fashion and music. These men differed in their definitions of skinheads and the centrality of their gay identity to their overall identity. Four of the men, when interacting with other skinheads, strove to minimize their homosexuality. Two of these four relied heavily on fashion and music to validate their skinhead identity. The other two accentuated their masculinity and aggressed against effeminate men. For one, being gay was always central to his identity. For another, his gay identity was balanced with his skinhead and occupational identities.

Keywords

masculinity, gay, skinhead, identity

The stereotypic image of a skinhead is of a White male, with a shaved head and tattoos, wearing Doc Martens and suspenders, exuding traditional masculinity, filled with hate and prejudice, and eager for violence. However, recent research reveals more heterogeneity within the skinhead movement than the stereotypical neo-Nazi hate monger (Borgeson, 2002, 2003; Marshall, 1994, 1997; Wood, 1999).

Marshall (1994, 1997) suggests there are three main skinhead groups, Traditional, SHARP (SkinHeads Against Racial Prejudice), and neo-Nazi skinheads. Sarabia and Shriver (2004) describe traditional skins as individuals who adhere to the historical

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origins of the skinhead movement started in England during the late 1960s. The term *traditional skinhead* came into use as a means for these skinheads to make clear their connection to the traditional skinhead movement, in terms of dress, music, and values, and to distance themselves from racial factions (Sarabia & Shriver, 2004). Traditional skins emphasize hard work, self-reliance, pride, loyalty, racial harmony, and class consciousness (Sarabia & Shriver, 2004). Skinheads who identify as members of SHARP adhere to the original politics of the skinhead movement, but take a militant stance against prejudice (Marshall, 1994, 1997). Neo-Nazi skinheads espouse prejudice and discrimination against minorities and Jews (Marshall, 1994, 1997).

More recent research reveals an increasing number of women (Borgeson, 2003) and gays (Borgeson & Valeri, 2005; Healy, 1996) within the skinhead movement. An examination of skinhead websites by Borgeson and Valeri (2005) revealed that gay skinhead websites constituted 30% of all skinhead websites.

Gay Skinheads

Although the percentage of gay skinhead websites suggests a strong presence of gays within the skinhead community, there is a paucity of research on Gay Skins, with the notable exception being Healy's (1996) seminal work and two reviews of skinhead websites (Borgeson & Valeri, 2005; Waldner, Martin, & Capeder, 2006). Healy, through interviews as well as an examination of *skinzines*, a slang term for skinhead magazines, pamphlets, and websites, examines the history of gay skinheads in England. Healy explains that the skinhead movement developed from a need to reassert masculinity at a time when more effeminate or androgynous men and men's styles were in fashion. Important to this article is Healy's assertion that "Skinheads were safeguarding conservative definitions of 'Man' by reasserting an 'authentic' working-class masculinity in the face of challenges to male identity from middle-class counter-culture and working class aspirations" (p. 48). As Healy explains, the working-class masculinity of the skinhead resonated with gay men for two reasons. Part of the appeal to gays was the erotic nature of the skinhead look, ultra masculine, tight jeans, and shirtless. But for gay men who were dissatisfied with the then current image of homosexual men as effeminate or "queens," the strong masculinity asserted by skinheads was appealing. To this latter group of gay men, being a skinhead was not just the appeal of the clothes but also about expressing their masculinity. Within the larger skinhead community there were growing concerns that the skinhead look and identity were being co-opted by other groups, most notably neo-Nazi groups and gays. A quote from a skinhead interviewed by Healy captured this sentiment, "In London, if someone sees a skinhead, they don't think, 'Blimey, is he gonna beat me up, is he gonna mug me? No, they think, There's a bloody fairy" (p. 208). With more people laying claim to the skinhead look and identity, there was growing debate among skinheads as to who was truly a skinhead.

Healy (1996) also briefly discusses how being a gay skinhead, at least one that isn't obviously gay, has its benefits. According to Healy, because the skinhead image promoted fear among the general public, no one outside the skinhead movement would

challenge you for being gay. Within the skinhead community, you were typically safe from harm because you were part of the community.

> Sporting an image that unintentionally inspired terror had its compensations: "No one dared call you queer," recalls Michael. "They wouldn't say anything to you . . . And for other skinheads, it was enough that you were part of the gang." (Healy, 1996, p. 83)

While the above quote suggests that gays within the skinhead movement are safe from other skinheads, Healy (1996) does provide accounts of "queerbashing" by skinheads. Healy states, "Queerbashing safeguards the territory of masculinity by policing the boundaries of acceptable (i.e., 'natural') behavior at a time when masculinity was being interrogated, politically by feminism and, at the level of appearance, by mod and hippy fashions" (p. 49). According to Healy, the target of a queerbashing did not have to be a gay man, it could be a heterosexual man who did not look "hard enough to look like a real man, not faithful enough to the 'naturalness' of the gender" (p. 49). Alternatively, one gay skin interviewed by Healy suggested that gay skins engaged in queerbashing because of the sadomasochistic appeal of it, suggesting that they could satisfy their sexual pleasures by kicking people. "It's a turn on to kick the shit out of somebody. That is something we like to do. To each other, or *preferable to someone who doesn't actually want the shit kicked out of them*" (Healy, 1996, p. 114). Eric Anderson (1987), in his thesis on the skinhead scene in San Francisco (S.F.), notes that

> S.F. Skins were also quite vocal about their "anti-homosexual" sentiments . . . regardless of the topic at hand, these youths would frequently interject statements such as "I've got one thing to say, I hate faggots." And while . . . the S.F. Skins had not turned "queerbashing" into a ritualized activity, they seldom missed an opportunity for verbal harassment, which would occasionally lead to a fight. (pp. 99-100)

Each of these accounts suggests differing reasons for "queerbashing." The first quote suggests that the practice targets effeminate looking men, the second, that the practice provides sexual gratification to the aggressors, and the third that the practice targets homosexuals. Thus, depending on the perpetrator, the act could be tied to beliefs about traditional masculinity, sexual gratification, or homophobia.

In summary, Healy (1996) presents two gay skin identities, one more focused on the skinhead look and the sexual appeal of that look, and the other more focused on the values associated with traditional skinhead culture including working-class masculinity. Healy suggests that most gay skins fall into the former group.

Waldner et al. (2006) identified and described four main categories of gay skinhead websites, gay fetish, gay traditional, gay generalist, and gay racialist. These sites differ in the extent to which they include homoerotic images, provide a means for finding sexual partners, promote traditional skinhead culture and values, and espouse a political agenda. The gay fetish sites, as compared with the other sites, tend to have more images of gay skins with homoerotic appeal and also provide a means for gay skinheads to find sexual partners. While the gay traditional and gay generalist websites usually explicitly state that they are not gay sex sites, promote the skinhead subculture,

and disavow both racism and the stereotypic racist skinhead image. Finally, the gay racialist skinhead websites, of which the authors were able to identify only one active site, American Resistance Corps, promote racism and anti-Semitism, challenged the homophobia of traditional White Power Groups, and do not feature any eroticized content.

As mentioned previously, Borgeson and Valeri (2005), in their analyses of skinhead websites, also discuss the prevalence and content of gay skinhead websites. These researchers categorized skinhead websites as either Traditional, SHARP, gay, neo-Nazi, or other. These researchers reported that, consistent with the Traditional, SHARP, and other skinhead websites, the gay skinhead websites did not promote racism or anti-Semitism. However the gay skinhead websites all had pornographic images and some of the pornographic images included violence. While the website reviews of Waldner et al. (2006) and Borgeson and Valeri both suggest a strong emphasis on the sexual aspects of gay skinhead websites, it is important to remember that these web-sites are promoting an image and are seeking to attract browsers, or in the cases of those websites selling clothing and other paraphernalia, are also seeking to attract customers. Taken together, the research on gay skinheads (Borgeson & Valeri, 2005; Healy, 1996; Waldner et al., 2006) provides an informative look at the contributions of gays to the skinhead movement and provides images of gay skinheads. A recurring theme throughout this research is that for many gay skinheads, the appeal of the skin-head image and their association with it is based more on the sexual appeal of the skinhead look, rather than the social or class identity associated with being a skinhead.

However, the above-mentioned research provides little insight into how or why an individual comes to identify himself as both gay and a skinhead and the ease or diffi-culty with which these identities are negotiated. Through the use of cases studies, the present research explores how six men came to self-identify as gay and as a skinhead and examines how each negotiate both the compatible and incompatible elements of skin identities into their self-image.

Traditional Hegemonic Masculinity: Anti-Feminine and Homophobic

As mentioned previously, Healy (1996) described an "authentic working-class mascu-linity" as part of the skinhead image. This working-class masculinity is consistent with what many researchers describe as traditional hegemonic masculinity or traditional masculinity ideology (David & Brannon, 1976; Franklin, 1984; O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b, 2008; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). At least in the United States, traditional hegemonic masculinity is associated with achievement, aggressiveness, competitiveness, success, restricted emotions, and lim-ited affectionate behavior between men. Traditional masculinities have been viewed as the opposite of traditional femininities, and also homophobic. Research suggests the co-occurrence of negative attitudes toward women and negative attitudes toward gay men is not uncommon (Bierly, 1985; Harry, 1995; Kilanski, 2003; Morin & Garfinkle,

1978; Stevenson & Medler, 1995). Previous research also suggests that traditional masculine identity is positively correlated with aggression (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, & King, 2004; Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002; Mosher & Sirkin, 1984; Parrott & Zeichner, 2003) both of which are common traits associated with skinheads.

Cohn and Zeichner (2006) examined the relationship between masculine identity, defined as attitudes about masculine norms and adherence to them; gender role stress, defined as a man's subjective appraisal of the extent to which he has met society's expectations of these norms; and direct physical aggression. Cohn and Zeichner's results revealed a positive correlation between masculine identity and aggression, as well as a positive correlation between gender role stress and aggression. The latter correlation is especially pertinent to the current research because it suggests that gay men who are striving for acceptance in a culture that values traditional masculinity might experience greater gender role stress and therefore demonstrate more aggression. An examination of the interaction between masculine identity and gender role stress revealed that regardless of gender role stress, when masculine identity was high, aggression was also high. Also, regardless of masculine identity, when gender role stress was high, aggression was also high. Only those men who were low in masculine identity and low in gender role stress were low in aggression. Cohn and Zeichner concluded that measuring high in either or both masculine identity and gender role stress resulted in aggression but that aggression served different purposes for these groups. Specifically, Cohn and Zeichner state " . . . aggression may serve an adaptive function so that highly masculine men would maintain a sense of identity and men who are high in gender role stress would appear powerful, dominant, and strong" (p. 188). Cohn and Zeichner's findings regarding the positive correlation between gender role stress and aggression are especially relevant to the present study, because they suggest that the more concerned a man is that he is not meeting society's expectations for traditional masculinity, the greater his gender role stress will be and, therefore, the more likely he is to use aggression to demonstrate that he is living up to society's expectations for traditional masculinity.

As stated previously, the ideals commonly associated with traditional hegemonic masculinity are achievement, aggressiveness, competitiveness, success, restricted emotions, and limited affectionate behavior between men. Because the definition of traditional masculinity includes limited affectionate behavior between men, it might be expected that gay men, because their sexual orientation is contrary to the homophobic ideal and perhaps also to the anti-feminine ideal, would define masculinity differently.

However, research suggests that many gay men value traditional masculinity. Sánchez, Greenberg, Liu, and Vilain (2009), as part of a qualitative study examining the impact of masculine ideals on gay men, examined the characteristics associated with masculine versus feminine gay men. Their results suggest that masculine gay men were most often described as having stereotypical masculine personality traits, such as restricted emotions, control, and competitiveness, as well as having stereotypical masculine physical traits, such as being muscular and strong. The second most common

description for masculine gay men was *straight acting* or passing for a heterosexual. In contrast, feminine gay men were most often described using stereotypical feminine personality and physical traits, such as having a higher voice, being more concerned about appearance, dressing more flamboyantly, and being more affectionate.

The second most common description for feminine gay men was not being able to hide one's sexual orientation or not being able to pass as heterosexual. Research by Clarkson (2006) also suggests that straight-acting gay masculinity is similar to the cultural norms for traditional masculinity. Important to this article is the finding that straight-acting gay men frequently have negative attitudes toward feminine gay men and use derogatory words such as *bitchy, sissy*, or *queen* to describe them (Christian, 2005; Clarkson, 2006; Payne, 2007; Ward, 2000) thus assisting in the continued reproduction and dominance of traditional hegemonic masculinities in the skinhead culture. Taken together this research suggests that for those gay men who value traditional masculinity, it would seem that being a skinhead would not be completely inconsistent with their self-image because they share some of the values inherent in the traditional masculine ideal.

Developing a Gay Identity: Stage, Ecological, and Constructionist Approaches

Traditional stage theories of gay identity development suggest the development of a gay identity progresses from awareness of one's own homosexual feelings, to exploration of these feelings, then to the adoption of a gay identity, and finally to the integration of a gay identity into one's self-construct (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981-1982; Cox & Gallois, 1996; Floyd & Stein, 2002). Two other models of gay identity development, the Ecological Model proposed by Alderson (2003) and the Constructionist Model proposed by Brekhus (2003), are especially relevant because they incorporate the impact of the situation, especially the reactions of others, on the individual's identity development.

The Ecological Model of Gay Male Identity (Alderson, 2003) includes a discussion of how both internal and external factors, as well as the interaction between these two, impact the development of a gay male identity. Internal influences are the individual's own thoughts and feelings about homosexuality in general and about his own homosexuality. While external influences are the reactions of, or anticipated reactions of, parents, family, and peers to the individual's homosexuality as well as the larger cultures views' about homosexuality, in terms of cultural norms, spiritual or religious beliefs, and institutional rules and laws pertaining to homosexuality. According to the Ecological Model of Gay Identity Development, an individual progressed through three stages, Before Coming-Out, During Coming-Out, and Beyond Coming-Out. In the Before Coming-Out stage, an individual will become aware of his homosexual feelings and explore these feelings. Whether an individual comes to self-identify as gay and progress to the During Coming-Out phase will depend on the individual's reactions to his own homosexual feelings as well as how others, or how he thinks others, will react. If the individual's own reactions as well as the real

or anticipated reactions of others are primarily positive, it is more likely the individual will accept his gay identity. Conversely, if the reactions are primarily negative, it is less likely the individual will accept a gay identity. If the individual does accept a gay identity, he will progress to the During Coming-Out phase. In this phase, the individual's own identity will change from a heterosexual to a homosexual identity. During this phase, the individual will experience conflicting emotions about his homosexuality and his change in identity. As with the previous phase, the more accepting the individual is, as well as the more accepting the individual's family, friends, and society are of homosexuality and the individual's own homosexuality, the easier it will be for the individual to identify as gay. Alderson (2003) notes that as part of the During Coming-Out phase, the individual will have to learn what it means to be gay and how to act in a manner that seems right to him. Finally, during the Beyond Coming-Out phase, the individual will develop a positive gay identity as he learns to integrate his new identity with other aspects of his self-identity. During this phase, the individual will establish connections with the gay community and reconnect with the heterosexual world. Of special relevance is Alderson's note that " . . . becoming visible by disclosing one's sexual identity to others likely increases the chances of becoming the victim of prejudice, discrimination, or violence" (Alderson, 2003, p. 80).

Constructionist views of identity (Goffman, 1959; Nagel, 1994; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987) suggest that one's identity is subject to change depending on the situation. Thus, an individual continually negotiates identity, changing the emphasis placed on any one component in their self-concept. For example, depending on the situation, a man who is White, Baptist, and gay may, at times, emphasize his sexuality to a greater or lesser degree just as he might emphasize his religious beliefs to a greater or lesser degree. The extent to which a component of identity is emphasized will depend on the situation.

With regard to sexuality, Brekhus (2003) identified three gay identities, the *gay lifestyler* or *peacock*, the *gay commuter* or *chameleon*, and the *gay integrator* or *centaur*. For the gay lifestyler, being gay is always central to one's identity and one's identity is stable over time and across situations. For the gay lifestyler, being gay is the prominent component of identity. Other components of identity exist, but take a back seat to or support the central aspect of the self, in this case, one's gay identity. Brekhus suggests that to achieve this, the gay lifestyler, or for that matter any identity lifestyler, will create an identity-specific niche, typically by separating from the larger society and creating a life space in which they are surrounded by supportive others and are able to live or express their true identity full-time. In contrast, for the gay commuter, identity is situation specific. The commuter moves in or out of an identity or molds their identity to fit the situation, much as an individual who is high in self-monitoring might change their behavior to fit the situation. For the commuter, being gay surfaces in some situations but not others. Finally, for the gay integrator being gay is combined with other facets of identity (ethnic, religious, occupational, geographic, etc.). Unlike the gay lifestyler, where the components of identity might be viewed as a hierarchy, with gay identity dominant over other aspects, for the gay integrator, identity

is multifaceted, with no one aspect of identity dominating the other components of identity. In summary, for the gay lifestyler, being gay is always prominent and at the forefront of one's identity. For the gay integrator, being gay is always a part of one's identity, but it is neither hidden nor at the forefront of identity. Finally the gay commuter tends to separate their gay identity and life space/friends from their other identities, spaces, and friends and moves between these identities as he moves from one environment to the other.

Finally, Skinhead may be a constructed self-identity that an individual can more readily slip in and out of than other identities, because, barring tattoos that cannot be concealed, much of being identified as a skinhead is dependent on dress and manner. As part of this case study, the interaction between the individual and the situation as well as the balance each individual strikes between being gay and being a skinhead will be examined.

Specifically, this research explores the daily interaction of gay skinheads and examines how they negotiate being gay and a skinhead. Given that values and identities within the skinhead movement revolve around pride, masculinity, violence, unity, and loyalty to fellow skins (Marshall, 1994; Wood, 1999), definitions of masculinity as well as attitudes toward violence will be examined.

Method

Participants

Participants were six White men, all from the greater metropolitan Boston area, who self-identified as gay skinheads, and volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling technique. The initial recruitment efforts were made through participants for a separate study regarding skinheads. At the time of their first interview, participants ranged in age from 19 to 23 years.

Procedure

From 2000 to 2006, three separate interviews, spanning over a 15-month period, were conducted with each participant. To conduct the interviews, an open-ended, conversational format was used. Each interview began with several general questions: What is your life story? What does being a skin mean to you? How would you sum up your relationship with other skins? Of particular interest was how an individual was able to reconcile their participation in the skin movement with the gay aspect of their lives.

Results

Introduction to and Demographics of Participants

Ken. Ken was an unemployed 23-year-old when he was first interviewed. Ken is from a working-class family. He describes his family as homophobic and unaware that he is gay.

Sean. Ken introduced Sean, his live-in partner, who was 20 at the time he was first interviewed. Sean has a middle-class background.

Peter. Peter was 19 when he was first interviewed and comes from a middle-class background. Peter's family and other skins are aware he is gay. Peter describes himself as academically average to below average in high school, has no ambitions of attending college, and is content to work in menial labor jobs, which he realizes will never allow him to get out of the working class. Peter says he does not see much of a future for himself.

Dave. Dave is an associate of Peter and like Peter comes from a working-class background. Dave was first interviewed when he was 20. Dave describes himself as a below average high school student who does not see himself continuing his education. Both Dave and Peter project a macho image. Dave has told only his skinhead friends, but not his family, that he is gay, because he feels that among his family "nobody would understand."

Ed. Ed was 19 at the time of the first interview and comes from a middle-class background. Unlike many skinheads, Ed was an average student, but felt that "school wasn't right for me." Like other skins he was picked on in school, and was not very social.

Paul. Paul, at the time of the first interview, was 21, working as a carpenter, and came from a working-class background. According to Paul, other skins are aware that he is gay and he is proud of the label. Unlike other skinheads in this project, Paul enjoyed school and went to trade school to learn carpentry. Paul claims that his history with school is a little different from others who were interviewed, because he "knew that he always wanted to be a carpenter and had worked hard to become one." As a result of his determination, Paul did well in school, specializing in carpentry at a school, which concentrates on students who want to enter the work force on graduating from high school.

Identities: Skinhead and Gay

Ken. Ken has been a skinhead since graduating high school. According to him, he was not very popular in high school, nor did he have many girlfriends. Ken joined the skinhead movement, because other skins "were like brothers" and because being a skinhead made him feel like he "got some respect."

   In high school Ken says that he was not a violent person and that he never engaged in any fights, even though he was picked on quite a bit. According to Ken, it wasn't until he was introduced to the skinhead movement that he learned to "enjoy the violence of slam dancing," a form of dancing where dancers purposefully collide with one another.

Ken recalled that it was during his first 18 months as a skinhead that he realized that he was gay. It was during this time that he realized "he like to be around men and began to view them in a sexual nature." Even though Ken is gay he does not consider himself a gay skin. Ken sees himself as "just a skin" because he doesn't believe in prefixes such as gay, traditional, or neo-Nazi. According to Ken,

> What is important is being a skin. It doesn't matter whether you are gay or not, as long as you believe in what skins was founded for. When you start to add all those other titles you start to bring in politics to the movement. I hate fucking politics.

According to Ken, what skins are suppose to stand for is the expression "of who you are." Ken associates with several types of skins: traditional, gay, and SHARPs. Although Ken states that he strongly believes in expression, when asked whether he tells other skins that he is gay, he states that although he is gay, he doesn't "make a habit of telling the other skins that he hangs around with about his sexuality." Ken claims that his lack of disclosure is a result of "not wanting to constantly remind people of his gayness," as labels are what creates the social construction of difference.

Sean. Like Ken, Sean does not describe himself as a gay skin. According to Sean, the reason for this is because he does not want to have to deal with other skins who are homophobic. Sean, unlike Ken and the other skins interviewed for this project, says that he has no interest in the history of the skinhead movement or the norms of the subculture. For instance, while it is common for skins to drink English ales like New Castle, John Courage, or Bass because they are a part of traditional skinhead culture, Sean says he drinks whatever beer is cheapest "I like the cheap shit (beer). I can't afford to drink the stuff that some of Ken's friends drink. As matter of fact, I don't know how they can even afford it since none of them work."

Sean does not describe himself as a gay skin, but as a traditional skin. According to Sean, describing himself as a traditional skin allows him to get along with Ken's friends, at the same time avoid the negative repercussions from other skins for being gay.

> Some skins are really against gays, the bashing and all that. I guess that's one of the reasons that I live like a trad (traditional skinhead)—if they see you as a trad, they most likely are not gonna want to beat the fuck out of you, since they think you are the same as them.

Ed. Ed says that he became interested in the skinhead movement because he was attracted to the skinhead image. Ed felt that the image of the clothes, haircuts, and the male image that they portrayed was sexually attractive to him. Ed also believes in the history and traditions of the skinhead movement. For instance, Ed has recently been into getting tattoos, which is a large component of the skinhead lifestyle. Ed has gotten a boot put on his arm, a pit bull, and several other skinhead insignia. For Ed, although he believes in what the skinheads represent, he expresses some sadness that people do not hear the message of skinhead values, and "abide by them":

> I like being a skin. We like to say "skinheads for life." No one usually does though. I have seen people leave and we never hear from them again. To me that is a shame. What happens to the loyalty part of being a skin?

For Ed, this lack of commitment by other skins is why he sometimes associates with gays outside of the gay skin scene. "I hang with others who are not skins also. I mean I am a skinhead, but I am also gay." Ed is proud of being gay, and claims that he likes the gay social networks he has established, even though some of the other skinheads that he associates with do not like it. Ed claims that he feels that those who do not like his associations are afraid that he is going to become "too gay," meaning too effeminate. However, this does not deter Ed from these associations.

Dave. Dave, like Ken, rarely talks about being gay around his skinhead friends, but unlike Ken, he could not give a reason why he does not talk about it except to say, "they just don't."

Paul. Paul is very much into one of the core element of the skinhead scene, ska music. Paul was introduced to ska music by another skinhead he met while in high school, and has been listening to it ever since. Paul does not wear any skinhead paraphernalia (suspenders, tattoos, etc.) except doc marten boots. Paul's family knows that he is a skinhead, as well as being gay. He states that his "parents don't like it" but have learned over the years to "accept it." When asked about which elements they don't like, Paul claims, "being a skin." When pressed for the reason, Paul claims,

> I guess they associate being a skin with being a Nazi. I have tried to tell them that there is a difference, but I think they have seen American History X or something one too many times. They think that because I am gay I ought to not hang around other skins because they are afraid that they might want to beat me up.

When asked about whether or not he feared for his safety, Paul responded, "Not really. No one can tell that I am gay, besides we all know who the Nazi's are, and we stay away from them. It's just that easy."

Masculinity, Homophobia, and Anti-Feminine Attitudes

This next section focuses on the interplay of traditional hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and anti-feminine attitudes within the skinhead movement. Given that the homophobia within the skinhead movement is not limited to the neo-Nazi Skinheads but also includes some traditional skinheads, and can even come from within the gay skinhead community, the question arises as to whether these negative feelings represent simple prejudice toward homosexuals because of their sexual preference or stems more from a defense of traditional masculinity.

During the interviews, these men frequently used the following words when referring to effeminate gay men, regardless of whether they were skinheads: *Faggots, Pillow Biters, Camp Queens, Pussies, Bitches.*

Note that this language is the same or similar to that used by masculine gay men, as discussed in the introduction, and is consistent with the anti-feminine attitudes associated with traditional masculinity. In addition, by engaging in such language, gay skinheads are able to draw a clear distinction between themselves, men with traditional hegemonic masculinities, and those with other masculinities. For skinheads, the definition of traditional hegemonic masculinity is reproduced daily through their interactions, in their culture, and is expressed through the values of pride, loyalty, unity, and violence.

Peter. Peter has a very macho image and expresses homophobic views toward gays who are effeminate that are similar to those views held by mainstream society. Peter says that he is very content with being gay, and enjoys the lifestyle he has created. But, according to Peter, his main "hang-up" is that he wishes that other gays who are effeminate would get out of the skinhead movement because he feels that it will give the movement "a bad name."

> Some of the queers that go to the clubs that we do, and listen to the ska bands, ought to be shot. They do nothing but show everyone there that gays are effeminate and only care about getting fucked. I actually care about the history and all the traditions that go along with being a skin . . . they don't.

In the above quote, Peter makes a distinction between himself and other gay skins who are different from him because they are effeminate, and uses the derogatory term *queer* to describe them. While some in the gay movement use this term in a positive or endearing manner, Peter is using it in the same derogatory manner as is used in mainstream society. As the interview continued, Peter used more derogatory terms for effeminate gay skins, "Queens" and "Bitches," suggesting an anti-effeminate attitude. Peter expresses the same sentiment in a later interview, saying,

> If I was a bar owner, and it was up to me, I wouldn't let any queers (effeminate) in to see the bands we go to see. All they do is want to check out the other guys, they ain't there for the music they just want to pick up a guy and go home.

Dave. Dave also does not like effeminate gay men. The following statement suggests that he believes such men deserve getting beaten up.

> In my opinion they had it coming to them, no one should walk around looking like a stereotypical faggot. If you do, then I guess you have to face the consequences and get your ass kicked.

Of the people interviewed, Dave was the only one to report that he likes to occasionally engage in gay bashing. For Dave, the perfect target is an effeminate gay, who is not a skin, and "they like to give him a boot party." When asked to explain about a boot party, Dave replied,

> A boot party is when we knock a person onto the ground, and kick the hell out of them with our boots. If they get up, we kick them until they fall down again. The game can go on for awhile. If the stupid shits get up, they deserve to get the shit kicked out of them. Me, I would just stay down. It is actually quite fun.

Dave's quote provides an informative look into the thoughts of someone who would commit a violent act like this. Dave's description of the targets as effeminate and deserving of these actions suggests that, for someone who is gay but also has a traditional hegemonic masculine identity, effeminate behavior is unacceptable. The anti-feminine, pro-masculine ideology expressed in the above quotes by Dave, and perhaps to some extent by Peter, serves as a means for them to separate themselves from effeminate gay men and to more closely align themselves with the traditional skinhead movement, by proclaiming we too are masculine, tough, and aggressive. In other words, they are creating a cultural definition of what is allowable within the gay skin community. In Dave's instance he wanted those he beat up to learn the lesson that he does not like the effeminate *camp queen* style, and to send a message to other effeminate gays not to engage in such behavior. However, Dave's comment that the boot party is "quite fun" also might suggest that he views this violent crime as a source of entertainment or perhaps, as suggested by one of the men interviewed by Healy (1966, p. 114), that it was a sexual turn-on.

Negotiating Homophobia in the Skinhead Community

While some skinheads are homophobic and see no place for gays in the skinhead movement, as discussed in the introduction, for the gays skins involved in this study, homophobia did not deter them from being a skinhead. As many of the quotes presented suggest, these men are aware of the homophobia that exists within the skinhead movement, some have personally dealt with the negative repercussions, and yet they all have found a way to be a part of the skinhead community. For example, Ed states,

> I really don't listen to others (skins), I have found a place in this culture and I like it. I like being a skinhead. Those that don't want me here can kiss my ass, because I am here to stay.

Most of the men interviewed referred to gays being the real skins, and neo-Nazis and other identities as the fakes. Peter reflects,

> The way I look at this movement is that the Nazis aren't the real skins. The real skins that formed this movement in England based it on expression of individuality: being gay and looking this way is who I am.

Although some of the men, during the interviews, expressed defiance toward the Nazi skins and other homophobic skinheads, they also know that the movement is not as tolerant as they would like it to be, and have found means for expressing their gay identity without putting themselves in danger of gay bashing. Paul states,

> In the past I use to get beat up, and thrown out of skin bars I would go to. Now my friends and I limit ourselves in going out to these places. Mostly we only go out looking like skins to see bands where the Nazis don't frequent. Sometimes we even throw our own parties to avoid trouble.

It is clear that these men were able to sustain their involvement as skins despite the movement's homophobic tendencies. Borgeson's (2003) research on female skins revealed,

> The more they socialized with skins, the more they came to feel that the skin scene was the right choice for them, and that it was in fact a choice. In this respect, it is possible that becoming a skin expressed a desire for freedom, to be able to choose one's life and not merely chose from among pre-set options. (p. 107)

This may also be true for gay skins. Half the men involved in this study suggested that they joined the skinhead movement because it gave them the opportunity to express who they really are. Also some gay skinheads feel that there is more honesty and safety within the skinhead movement than in mainstream society because, within the skinhead community, individuals are more upfront about their attitudes toward gays.

> Skins that are homophobic tell you upfront; get out of my face or I will beat the shit out of you. You don't get that honesty in society. I have to guess who wants to gay bash, here there is no guessing, just stay away from the homophobes.

Sexual Appeal of Skinhead Image

Regardless of whether the men interviewed joined as a means to express who they were or to reproduce traditional hegemonic masculinity, all of them reported an attraction to the violent look of the skinhead as exemplified by the following quote from Ken, who joined for more self-expressive purposes:

> When I went to my first Oi! Show (a subgenre of punk rock geared toward the working class and skinheads), I was shocked. There was this loud music playing, and all these bodies slamming into each other on the dance floor. Although I was kind of afraid, I was also excited by it. I just had never seen anything like it before.

Paul, who joined the movement more because he was attracted to the traditional skin values and culture, states,

> I guess like other gays, I was attracted to the short hair, tight clothes, and rough appearance of skinheads. I didn't really like the music at first, but eventually it began to grow on me.

Discussion

The life stories of the six men interviewed reveal a variety of reasons for identifying as a skinhead. For Ken, being a skinhead helped to boost his self-esteem and to gain a

sense of belonging or camaraderie that was previously lacking in his life. For Sean, identifying as a skinhead allowed him to more readily fit in with his "roommate's" friends. Both Pete and Dave care about traditional skin culture and values including the strong masculine ideology. Paul was drawn to the skinhead movement because of the music but, aside from the Doc Marten boots, does not dress like a skinhead. In contrast, it was the fashion or look that appealed to Ed, who initially became a skinhead because he found the image sexually appealing. This research reveals that gay men become skinheads for a variety of reasons. Many of the reasons these men expressed for becoming a skinhead are true for both heterosexual and gay men, that they join for a sense of belonging, to fit in, and to express shared values or interests. For gay men, the skinhead look can also be sexually appealing.

With regard to gay identity development, from a stage perspective all of these men are aware of their homosexual feelings and have explored these feeling but differ in the extent to which they have adopted a gay identity and have integrated their gay identity into their self-construct.

The Ecological Model, because it emphasizes the role that friends and family play in the process, may provide a better means for exploring each individual's acceptance of his gay identity and his ability to integrate it with other aspects of his identity. Ken, Sean, Peter, and Dave all seem to be in the During Coming-Out state of identity development. All four of these men say that their skinhead friends know that they are gay but that they tend to downplay this aspect of their identity when they are with other skinheads. Ken and Dave also report that, while their skinhead friends know they are gay, they have not disclosed their being homosexual to their families for fear of rejection. According to the Ecological Model, the anticipated negative reactions of others to their homosexuality hinder these men from fully accepting a gay identity and integrating that identity into their overall self-concept. In contrast, Paul's family knows that he is gay. Paul's family worries that the larger skinhead community may react negatively to his being gay. In fact, this causes them concern about his associating with skinheads. However, Paul, who has been a victim of anti-gay violence by other skinheads, tends to limit his association with other skinheads to those who are also gay and to consciously avoid places frequented by homophobic skinheads. Paul's experience with anti-gay violence is consistent with Alderson's (2003) assertion that disclosing one's sexual identity can make an individual a target of violence. Of the six men, Ed seems to be the only one who is in the Beyond Coming-Out phase. He is open with other skinheads about his being gay, his skinhead friends are aware of his gay social networks, and he has established ties to the larger gay community. It would be interesting to conduct follow-up interviews with each of these men, especially Ken, Sean, Peter, and Dave who, because they anticipate negative reactions, downplay or hide their gay identity to either their skinhead friends, family, or both, to examine whether their gay identities and/or skinhead identities have changed and to see how their gay and skinhead social networks have developed or changed.

The constructionist view of identity offers a different perspective. Both Ken and Sean *commute* between their skinhead and gay identities but for different reasons. Ken, because he feels more at home with skinheads and values being a skinhead, he

downplays being gay when he is with other skinheads, because he wants to be accepted as a skinhead. Whereas for Sean, who puts being gay before being a skin, he puts-on a skinhead identity and downplays his gay identity when Ken's friends are around because it allows him greater acceptance among Ken's friends. Peter and Dave also commute between their skinhead and gay identities and, to fit in with other skinheads, emphasize the shared value of strong masculinity. Of the six, Ed might be the closest to a gay lifestyler because his gay identity is always prominent. This is evident in several ways, by the fact that he was attracted to the skinhead movement because of the sexual appeal of the skinhead look, that when he is with other skins he emphasizes being gay, and that he has ties to the larger gay community. However, unlike some gay lifestylers, Ed has not created an identity niche separate from the larger culture. Paul may best be described as a gay integrator because he seems to have balanced being gay with other aspects of his life with no one attribute defining him. Although he sees himself as a skinhead and likes the music, he is not into all of the skinhead fashion. Also, given that being a carpenter is important to Paul, he did not let the anti-education sentiment often associated with skinheads derail him from his studies or his work. Thus Paul seems to balance his occupational, gay, and skinhead identities. As mentioned above, it would be intriguing to conduct follow-up interviews with these men to see whether their identities as gay commuter, lifestyler, or integrator have changed.

As suggested in the introduction, traditional hegemonic masculinity is often associated with skinheads. Of the six individuals interviewed, Pete and Dave best exemplify this value. As mentioned, homophobia and anti-feminine attitudes are frequently associated with a traditional masculine ideology. The traditional hegemonic masculinity prevalent among skinheads may be the reason that Ken, Sean, and Paul all downplay being gay when they are with other skinheads. Of particular interest is the anti-gay or more specifically the anti-effeminate gay sentiments and behaviors expressed by Pete and Dave. Healy (1996) suggested that the skinhead movement derived in part as a reaction to the feminization of men and men's fashion. The skinhead movement provided a means for straight men to reassert working-class masculinity and for gay men, who were dissatisfied with effeminate gay men, to assert their own masculinity. The violence directed at effeminate men and effeminate gay men by skinheads may reflect the anti-feminine and homophobic attitudes associated with traditional masculinity. It is also consistent with the positive correlation between masculine identity and aggression. This behavior can also be interpreted in light of Cohn and Zeichner's (2006) research on masculine identity, gender role stress, and aggression. For straight skinheads, high in masculine ideology, aggression toward effeminate men and effeminate gay men may serve to help them maintain a strong masculine identity. As mentioned previously, gender role stress occurs when a man feels he is not meeting society's expectations of masculine norms. Gay skinheads, who want to be accepted within the skinhead community and are aware of the traditional masculine ideal within the group, including the anti-feminine and homophobic attitudes, may be especially likely to experience gender role stress. For them, engaging in aggression toward effeminate men and effeminate gay men may serve to help them appear to straight skins, as strong and powerful, and thus achieve the strong, tough, masculine ideal of the larger group.

The values of pride, loyalty, and unity which previous researchers have described as crucial to skin culture (Hamm, 1995; Healy, 1996; Marshall, 1994; Moore, 1993; Wood, 1999) became apparent in the course of these interviews. Violence also plays a role in the skinhead community and impacts gay skinheads. As mentioned above, gay skinheads can be perpetrators of the violence but they can also be targets of the violence. Based on these interviews, it is clear that gay skinheads, as a means of avoiding the anti-gay or anti-feminine violence, are able to live within the skinhead culture by detecting who is homophobic and avoiding these individuals or groups.

This study is consistent with the conclusion that skin identity, at least what is expressed as identity, is more complex than previous research has demonstrated (Christensen, 1994; Hamm, 1995; Moore, 1993). While all the men interviewed agreed that skinheads shared the values of loyalty, unity, and pride, they differed in the extent to which they saw these values as central to the skinhead identity. They also differed in the extent to which they saw violence and homophobia as central to the skinhead identity. The men who were interviewed used a variety of strategies to navigate the homophobia that is a part of the skinhead culture. Most saw the homophobia of the movement as no different from the racism, anti-Semitism, or homophobia associated with mainstream society. Some even saw homophobia expressed in the skinhead movement as safer than that in mainstream society because, in the skinhead movement, it is overtly, not covertly, expressed.

These interviews suggest that skin culture is not homogeneous but heterogeneous in nature and that even within the microcosm of the gay skinhead community, opinions differ as to what defines a skinhead. While only six case studies were presented, the interviewees differed in their gay identity development and how central their gay identity was to their overall identity.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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