The Intersection of Dating Scripts and Queer Theory:
An Analysis of Dating Experiences of Gay Men in West Texas

by

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ABSTRACT

Gay dating scripts have been rarely researched and when these studies have been conducted, there have been significant limitations with their design. In this thesis, I investigate first date encounters experienced by self-identified gay men in West Texas by taking a qualitative approach to understanding participant definitions of dating, as well as dating script behaviors. Within the research, I collected open-ended responses from 75 gay men located in the West Texas region and analyzed the research through a queer theoretical lens and qualitative cluster analysis. Cluster analysis involved close reading the data, open line-by-line coding, the creation of a codebook, peer debriefing, and clustering codes into thematic categories.

After data collection, 211 coded points were clustered around 18 separate thematic categories for dating definitions. Participants provided 630 dating scripts, which proffered 1521 coded data points that clustered around 43 thematic categories. Analysis of data revealed that definitions of dating produced five themes of analysis describing the components of dating, the purposes of a date, definitions of negation, the presence of heteronormativity as well as themes on the queering of dating behaviors in West Texas. Additional analysis on data concerned with dating scripts enacted during a first date found six emergent themes including the use of definitions to inform dating scripts through components and date purpose, assessment as ongoing process through "follow up" and debriefing, role negotiation with(in) the date, recognition of heteronormativity, as well as the performance and realization of queer identity. From these themes, a conceptual model was created and forwarded as means to explain the process of gay male dating scripts.

The data and emergent conceptual model revealed several salient implications. For example, the importance of dating as a social construction was illuminated within the data reported by gay men and when comparing this data with past dating script research. Further, I explicated similarities between gay men and heterosexual dyads stemming from data analysis, which impacts the adoption of heteronormative practices by gay men and the socialization of gay men into heteropatriarchal dating behaviors. Differences between gay men and heterosexual couples revealed important concepts such as the breaking of heterosexual gender roles through assessment, differences between lesbian women and gay male dating behaviors, the use of "coming out" narratives, role negotiation as a process of resistance, the navigation of a heterosexual matrix, as well as tensions between private and public spaces. Moreover, I argued for extending queer theory by carving out discursive space, engaging against homophobic behavior, and calling for queer frameworks to dating guides. Future directions are proffered by outlining constraints and the potential for future research. Constraints of participant inclusion, peer debriefing similarities, as well as the conceptualizing of identity through category construction are reviewed. These constraints and the analysis derived during the study provide opportunities for future research in areas including the use of more intensive qualitative methodological techniques, the expansion to other geographic regions, the extension of the data and method to other areas of queer interpersonal research, and the completion of a more complete model of the first date experience.

Keywords: dating scripts, queer theory, role negotiation, queer identity, qualitative cluster analysis, gay men, definitions of dating

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I used to be straight.

The perfect girlfriend on my arm

And the envy of all the boys

I knew how to seduce them,

I knew how to use them.

But, I didn't know how to love them."

As a young man growing up in Missouri, I was taught to be well mannered and that one of the best things I could do in life was get married to a girl. In high school and college, I had a number of girlfriends and went on plenty of dates. I was sometimes called a "ladies man." If there was a moment where I was without a girlfriend, it was not for long. Other boys would be upset that I could move from girl to girl so easily. But, it was easy because there was never really a connection between the high school female and the smart, funny, closeted kid. While engaging in this performance of heterosexuality, I was also managing and creating a queer identity.

There are stories similar to mine, where men across all age groups are constructing and renegotiating identity. The National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB) reveals that 7% of women and 8% of men identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Reece, Herbenick, Schick, Sanders, Dodge & Fortenberry, 2010). This represents approximately 15% of the sampled population that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual indicating a substantial percentage of the population falling outside of typical

heterosexual boundaries. Furthermore, the study found that 15% of men had sexual

contact with other men before the age of 50. The NSSHB study supports previous

findings from Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948), who found that only 50% of all men

in the United States were, in their terms, "exclusively heterosexual." Kinsey, et. al (1948)

found that 18% were exclusively homosexual or persistently bisexual, while an additional

15% reported having homosexual urges without acting on them. Interestingly enough,

this significant set of the population is understudied in terms of dating and the initiation

of romantic relationships. A vast majority of studies completed on romantic relationships

focus primarily on heterosexual populations.

The effect of not studying homosexual relationships vastly impacts the nature of

how gays know, negotiate, and construct identity. A number of studies explain the

importance of a social lens in identity construction (Byrd, 2009, Cerulo, 1997; Teske,

1997) and identity management (Brekhus, 1996; Howard, 2000).   A social interrogation

of how romantic relationships between homosexuals are developed and enacted is

warranted to better understand how sexual identity and management are described and

utilized. Further, some reasons for not writing or studying about homosexual romantic

relationships have stemmed from a notion that homosexuals do not engage in long term

relationship couplings. This assertion has long been discredited. Beasley and Reinisch

(1990), in their research, found that most homosexuals had been or were in continuous,

monogamous relationships for more than a two-year period. In fact, Beasley and

Reinisch's (1990) work also found that gay men and women have preceded most

heterosexual couples in developing relationship conditions of relative equality between

partners. This relational equity was due to a need for "getting along" without

traditionally established frameworks.

Heterosexual dyads have long used dating rituals and dating scripts as an established framework to negotiate the first date experience (Rose & Frieze, 1989; Rose & Zand, 2000). Unfortunately, when investigations into homosexual dating and interpersonal dating scripts are considered, there seems to be substantial gaps in their analysis. While some findings from these studies might be generalizable, often is the case that differences between heterosexual and homosexual populations limit their applicability from one group to another. Dating scripts are such an area where transferability of findings is not quite possible. As dating scripts are based on behavioral enactments of social and individual norms, an understanding of what norms and scripts are present is a pre-requisite to being able to establish transference from one sample population to a larger community. This transferability issue presents a problematic concern for the few studies that have examined homosexual dating practices. Dating script studies completed on homosexual populations have focused on applying heterosexual norms and scripts to gay and lesbian relationships (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). Not investigating what kinds of scripts that gays and lesbians undertake on their first date limits the reliability of data where scripts found in one population is proscribed to another.

Additionally, studies, like Klinkenberg and Rose's (1994), examine both lesbian and gay men. Conflating female and male same-sex relationship behaviors could also be problematic, as the nature of dating has been found to be different for men and women due to various socialization and societal expectations (Rose & Frieze, 1989). Rose and Frieze (1989) found that due to differing script expectations that men enact scripts

attempting to facilitate the date, while women attempted to enact social expectations of being feminine and hard to get. Aside from differences between men and women on dating expectancies, the combining of gay and lesbian dating script behavior underscores the lack of understanding about differences between gay populations and lesbian populations. While gay and lesbian populations may both participate in same-sex romantic and sexual behavior, they are not the same. To study both populations as a singular, homogenized group, undermines important investigations into queer behavior and identity construction.

Noting the critical lack of data concerning gay dating and queer dating scripts, I intend to engage in a qualitative study to elucidate the scripts and behaviors that gay men engage in during a first date. This thesis begins with a review of the relevant literature for queer theory by examining key concepts in the development of queer theory and the defining of homosexuality. The review also illuminates research concerning queer identity construction and the negotiation of identity roles. Furthermore, the literature review examines theory and research concerning dating and script development. Finally, the review of literature presents the three research questions guiding this qualitative inquiry which include: 1) *How do homosexual men in West Texas define a "first date?";* *2) How do gay men in West Texas describe their first date experiences?; and 3) What script categories emerge from scripts described by gay men in West Texas about their first date experience?*

Next, this thesis outlines the method to be utilized in the study. Specifically, this study takes a qualitative approach by critically analyzing responses, using queer theory as a theoretical lens, to an online questionnaire taken by gay men located in the West Texas

region. Additionally, my methods section establishes my own reflexivity in reference to

the research to give the reader an understanding of my positionality. Chapter Three

concludes with an explanation of how data was analyzed through open line-by-line

coding and cluster analysis.

This thesis discusses, in Chapter Four, the analysis of the data. The section

begins with an analysis for definitions of dating provided by participants, thus resulting in

five themes of analysis: components of a date, purposes of a date, definition by negation,

recognition of heteronormativity, and the queering of a date. The chapter then proffers a

theoretical model for gay dating as it relates to the data. Finally, the analysis resolves by

examining the data described by gay men in West Texas concerning their dating scripts

used and enacted during their first date encounters. Thus, providing six additional themes

of analysis: scripts as enacting components of a date, scripts as enacting the purpose of a

date, assessment, role negation (with)in the date, the presence of heteronormativity, and

the performance and realization of queer identity.

The study also explicates, in Chapter Five, implications stemming from this thesis

by considering dating as a social construction, similarities and differences when

comparing the present study to previous research, carving out academic space, engaging

homophobic behavior, and formulating queer frameworks for dating guides. Next, the

thesis then acknowledges future directions by examining constraints to the study with

participant completion rates and inclusion, peer debriefing viewpoint similarity, and

trouble conceptualizing categories of identity.   Further, I outline areas of research that

could be conducted at a later time, thus broadening this study's investigation by using

more intensive qualitative methods, changing the geographic context, script development,

expanding queer interpersonal scholarship, and extending a theoretical model.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"*I just want to be able to fall in love*

One day, I want to sing my daughter to sleep

But, in a world where dating your own kind is unacceptable

In a world where Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin feed lies to the lions

Sometimes, feeling like a father feels more like a pipedream."

While dating is tumultuous for any one person, there are at least normative scripts

for heterosexual individuals and parties to guide their behavior and communication.

Unfortunately for gay men, those guidelines may not exist. Because dating scripts have

been largely studied from a heterosexual perspective, studies on gay dating have used

scripts found in a heterosexual context. This study uses queer theory as a means of

broadening our collective understanding of gay dating by revealing scripts that may have

yet been uncovered or discussed in previous research. To better understand the nature of

gay dating and potential scripts for queer first date encounters, I begin by outlining

notions of dating and review research concerning dating scripts. Finally, I examine

relevant literature concerning queer theory for use as a lens to understanding gay dating

scripts.

Dating

There are myriad of different definitions attempting to define what makes up a

"date." Most definitions of dating have focused primarily on interactions in a

heterosexual context, which leaves little space for a queer understanding of dating. To better understand the nature of dating, it is necessary to uncover how dating has been defined as well as identify variations between dating, hanging out, and hooking up.

Rose and Zand (2000) defined (heterosexual) dating as "informal interactions with no specific commitment or goal between two individuals with the implied intent of assessing each other's romantic potential" (p. 79). Nimmons (1994) defined (heterosexual) dating as a temporary romantic relationship focused on current enjoyment/pleasure without future commitments; usually one of a series in an emerging relationship. A (heterosexual) date has also been described as a meeting at a particular time and place for an activity and/or discussion (Laner & Ventrone, 1998). Furthermore, "dating" and courtship," in the heterosexual relationship literature, have been terms that have been used interchangeably. Courtship, though, is a more formalized system of finding a compatible mate to make an emotional commitment and permanent partnership (Cate & Lloyd, 1992). These varied definitions have made it difficult to operationalize dating as a contextualized variable.

While dating has been difficult to define, researchers have pointed out that dating is separate from that of "hanging out" (Laner and Ventrone, 2000). Laner and Ventrone (2000) assert that hanging out implies a non-date situation, as there is no emphasis on continued romantic involvement. "Hooking up" has also become a recent term in interpersonal relationship study. Prior to the year 2001, the term "hooking up" could not be found in the popular zeitgeist or within scholarly literature (Bogle, 2008). Since then, the term "hooking up" has promulgated itself in sociological, psychological, and interpersonal research. While still a slang term, "hooking up" has been defined as two

individuals getting together for a physical encounter without necessarily expecting any further intimacy or romantic relationship (Bogle, 2008; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003).

First date encounters. The "first date" experience is an excellent avenue for contextualized analysis as it is easily identifiable and widely experienced (Rose & Frieze, 1989). Furthermore, the "first date," in heterosexual dating, comes with cultural and socialized scripts. While dates farther along in the courting cycle may end up widely deviating from various experiences, the "first date" has tended to find generalizability in the types of scripts that may be used during the experience (Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). Instead of gauging various scripts at different points of the dating experience, this study attempts to centralize its focus to the initial "first date" to find commonalities between script creation and usage.

Like heterosexual first dates, the first date experience for a gay male is also an important placement point for contextualize script construction and implementation. This study will use the first date encounter as a centralized point for comparison for gay men engaging in the dating process. By using the first date, I can identify and compare various scripts to one another without worry of data being conflated between the initiations of the dating ritual or other periods of time that may utilize other particular scripts.

Theorizing scripts in dating. While the first date encounter does well to set up the scene for a dating experience, the actions and behaviors enacted within that scene are known as scripts. Scripts are essentially the "sequencing and categorization of behavior across time to accomplish a goal" (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001, p. 18). These sequences create a step-by-step set of guidelines for individuals to use to navigate and negotiate

specific relational scenes and interactions (Abelson, 1981).

In dating encounters, Pryor and Merluzzi (1985) found that heterosexual dating scripts were so engrained in individuals that as participants revealed more frequent experiences with dating, the more those same participants would be able to recall the sequence for how a date *should* proceed. This suggests that scripts provide individuals with a set of guidelines for when they enter into a new or unfamiliar encounter. Moreover, Abelson (1981) argues that because these scripts are so integrated into our behavioral blueprint that participants report a script upon seeing it enacted, but have a difficult time recalling it freely. Abelson (1981) continues that it is when participants are able to recall their script behaviors that the behavior is deemed as significant by the participant.

Heterosexual dating scripts. The initiation of a first date is often scary, confusing, and full of tension. More often than not, the participants perform a ritual whether or not they are consciously aware of their performance. Rose and Frieze (1989) acknowledge these rituals as dating scripts. These scripts are formal norms that are explicit for first date behaviors shared by the participants engaged in a date (Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). Heterosexual dating scripts are strongly gender stereotyped, showing the traditional dominant/subordinate relationship between the sexes (Alksnis, Desmarais, & Wood, 1996; Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989). These scripts are mainly socially constructed norms that are passed on to participants via media, family, friend, and society (Rose & Frieze, 1993).

Homosexual dating and dating scripts. Mohler (2000) argued that dating is significantly different for homosexuals than heterosexuals. Homosexual dating involves

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some level of confusion as to role choice, expectations, and fulfillment. Mohler (2000) noted that dating for homosexuals is not simply about finding a partner, but rather it is about trying to determine what kind of homosexual partner an individual wants to become. Thus, dating for gays is a rite of passage and allows individuals to start making life choices based on sensory feedback and communication. Many homosexuals use the process of self-reflection and partner analysis as they engage in dating and initial romantic relationships (Mohler, 2000).

A study of homosexual dating scripts was attempted by Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) by utilizing scripts found by Rose and Frieze in 1993. Klinkenberg and Rose surveyed 176 gay men and 124 lesbian women ranging from 19-54 years in age. The participants were mostly white (73%) and middle class (49%). The researchers attempted to find regional diversity among participants and passed out surveys through four gay support organizations. The study listed 41 possible first date behaviors established by Rose and Frieze (1993) and asked participants if they had engaged in such behavior. Results found that many participants had engaged in ten or more of the first date behaviors that were identified in prior research (98%). The investigation also found that first date behaviors were skewed towards male role behaviors.

Regrettably, the study applied dating scripts found in heterosexual focused studies to a homosexual population. This seems incongruent and problematic when compared to the very prominent notion that homosexuals and heterosexuals may have different first date behaviors/expectations/communication. Furthermore, Klinkenberg and Rose's (1994) study failed to determine if any new scripts were uncovered based solely on homosexual dating patterns and behaviors. Finally, the study conflates a gay male

population with a lesbian population in the same group.   The study attempts to generalize about the gay men and lesbians when they are considered to be separate populations. This indicates that data may not be specific to gay men or to lesbian participants as separate populations.

In 2000, Rose and Zand completed a study examining the use of friendship, romance, and sexually explicit scripts in lesbian dating. Friendship scripts are behaviors and communication during a first date that follow a prior existing, non-intimate friendship (Rose, Zand, & Cini, 1993). Romance scripts were categorized by behaviors that indicate that a pairing wants more intimacy than friendship, but have not quite evolved to sexual intimacy (Rose & Zand, 2000). Finally, sexually explicit scripts can be described as intimate sexual contact as part of the first date (Rose, Zand, & Cini, 1993). Rose and Zand's (2000) study also utilized heterosexual scripts found by Rose and Frieze (1989), asking 38 lesbians about their use of heterosexual female oriented dating scripts. Rose and Zand (2000) found that 74% of the women surveyed and interviewed used a friendship script, 55% had used a romantic script, and 63% had participated in a sexually explicit script.

Rose and Zand's (2000) findings match other theoretical writings concerning how women are socialized into gender and sexual activity. Hendrick and Hendrick (1986, 1996) found that women tend to be more friendship-oriented and pragmatic when it comes to developing romantic relationships. They also reveal that men tend to be more sexualized and active (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 1996). Furthermore, the socialization of women into sexual activity is one that is typically closed-off. While men are socialized to engage in sexual activity with improvement in social status and a "that'ta

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boy," women are socialized to protect their virginity and sexuality via discipline and discursive punishment (Shaughnessy, Byers, & Walsh, 2011). Extending from these concepts of socialization and gender differences, one might expect significant differences in dating scripts for gay men in relation to Rose and Zand's (2000) lesbian participants.

Unfortunately, Rose and Zand's findings may also be similarly troubled to Klinkenberg and Rose's (1994) study, due to variations in heterosexual and homosexual dating behaviors. By applying heterosexual scripts to a homosexual population, there is a probability of some specific scripts being ignored or excluded from research. In an attempt to deconstruct the heteronormative implementations of dating scripts on homosexual groups, gay men and lesbian participants should be treated as a separate population.

Summary. Having reviewed the relevant dating script literature, it is clear that research should focus on the description of dating scripts from a queer point of view. Having gay men report and describe their own scripts provides not only more fidelity to gay dating script research, but also allows them to explain in their own voice their dating experiences. These types of self-reports also provide texts for a theoretical lens utilizing queer theory, which can be used to uncover heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy.

Queer Theory

Once the term "queer" was, at best, slang for homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse. In recent years, "queer" has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model, which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies.

The parallel construction of queer theory and the study of lesbian and gay issues urges an examination of several issues. Initially, an assessment of queer theory via its inception and implementation is in order. Next, delving into how researchers define "homosexuality," provides the study with a grammar that provides continuity for this research. Third, queer identity construction is discussed as a means of establishing how identity negotiation and construction occur for gay men, which provides a framework for dating script development. Finally, I examine the development of roles within the sphere of queer identity construction to elucidate how these roles may relate to current research concerning dating scripts.

Development and implementation of queer theory. Because queer theory has had a fairly storied development, an understanding of how this paradigmatic lens has developed is helpful for conceptualizing queer theory as a viewpoint for this study on gay dating scripts. The theory has its roots at an academic conference in early 1990, where Theresa de Lauretis coined the term "queer theory" (de Lauretis, 1991; Halperin, 2003). A professor in the Department of History of Consciousness at the University of California - Santa Cruz, de Lauretis created the term as a way to shake up the complacency of gay and lesbian studies (de Lauretis, 1994; Halperin, 2003). Prior to its use as an academic term, "queer" was used pejoratively to mean "weird," "abnormal," or "sick" (Halperin, 2003). In fact, the phrase, "queer theory," has become a means for gaining unity between various and different factions that exist within sexuality and sexual discourse (Yep, 2003).

Queer theory is not just an examination of gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, transgender issues. Specifically, Smith (2003) outlines key tenets that queer theory has

evolved into: (1) all categories are falsifications, especially those viewed in a binary and are descriptive of sexuality (Butler, 1993); (2) reality and discourse surrounding it is socially constructed (Halperin, 2003; Butler, 1990);(3) all human behavior can be read as texts and are significant (Butler, 1990, 1993); (4) texts form discourses about power and knowledge that can reveal dominance (Sedgwick, 1990); (5) deconstructions of categories and perceived deviance can best be accomplished by queer readings of performative texts (Smith, 2003, p.346).

While queer theory is situated under several critical principles, a few principles are more relevant to this particular study than others. Specifically, the idea that all sexual identity categories are falsifications is particularly important to the study as this tenet creates a lens that allows for viewing dating scripts with an eye away from the normative. These categorical considerations help to illuminate the relationship between homosexual and heteronormative interactions, which has been a substantial problem with previous dating research. Second, queer theory in this study helps to deconstruct categories and perceived deviance in a way that allows for thoughtful analysis of dating script data. Problematizing existing literature and engaging data from a queer theory perspective focuses analysis on the gay male dating experience.

However, it is important to note that not all categories should be immediately discarded as there might be a place for *strategic essentialism* (Spivak, 1988, 1990). For example, the use of "homosexuality" and "gay men" within this study focuses not on limiting a particular group of individuals to an isolated instance of their sexual identity, but rather as a potential descriptor for men that self-identify as being gay (Lovaas, 2003; Yep, 2003). Spivak (1988, 1990) explains this concept as a type of strategic essentialism,

where groups may forward issues of identity in a more simplified way to express a more complex construction of that identity. To be able to describe the phenomenon of dating scripts and locating a commonality of identity within a population, this type of essentialism is necessary (Shome, 1996).

Further, queer theory also disavows the constitutive relationship between homosexuality and heterosexuality (Sedgwick, 1990). Sedgwick (1990) argues that heterosexuality both requires and repudiates, via heteronormativity and homophobia, homosexuality. This juxtaposition is necessary for heterosexuality in order for its positionality to sustain and maintain its normative status. Despite the presentation of homosexual and heterosexual as binary opposites, the relationship between these categories is more dynamic and unsettled (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990; Yep, 2003). Queer theory is used as means of disrupting the congruency between gender, sex, sexuality, and identity that is pervaded and privileges heteronormativity (Sedgwick, 1990). This disruption is critical to understanding the nuances that exist in a gay dating experience that might not otherwise be seen from a privileged heteronormative lens.

The positionality of queer theory is an important consideration for the present study as it helps to inform the reasons why gay men might implement particular dating scripts. A lens utilizing queer theory would help to subvert the heteronormative frame that is frequented in current dating script analysis. By understanding how queer theory has developed and evolved, the present study can adapt to new or undiscovered dating scripts that may not have been sought after by previous researchers.

Defining homosexuality and men self-identifying as gay. Defining "homosexuality" and "gay men" is a tough task, as it risks placing individuals into

categories of sexuality and/or sexual identity that they may not fit. Tracing the history and context of these two labels is an important step in identifying a population to be studied, while avoiding homogenizing pitfalls of over-labeling. These labels have a development point through the concept of sexual orientation.

First, words and phrases used to represent homosexual individuals have been adjectives such as homosexual, bisexual, gay, and queer, preceding words such as man, male, female, adolescent, sexual orientation, etc. As "sexual orientation" has been the phrase most widely used in defining homosexuality and other sexual gender issues, an analysis of the term is in order.

Sexual orientation can be defined as an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to another person (Katz, 1995). Some theorists argue that sexual orientation exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality (Kinsey et al., 1948). While bisexual persons can experience sexual, emotional, and affectional attraction to both their own sex and the opposite sex, homosexual individuals are sometimes referred to as gay (both men and women) or as lesbian (female only) (Mohler, 2000). Sexual orientation is different from sexual behavior because it refers to feelings and self-concept. Persons may or may not necessarily express their sexual orientation in their behaviors.

This current definition of sexual orientation is based on a false biological gender binary, which has produced the words "homosexual" for same-sex attractions, "heterosexual" for opposite sex attractions, and "bisexual" for varying degrees of attractions to either gender (Butler, 1993). These definitions, categories, and related labels, however, were not always so, as explained by Michel Foucault (1976) and as

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strongly emphasized in "The Invention of Homosexuality" (Katz, 1995). The words "homosexual" and "heterosexual" were invented at the end of the 19th century. Prior to the late 1800's, "homosexuality" as a term did not exist. The construction of "homosexual," as a word, being a recent invention gives rise to the notion that the framing for homosexuality is still evolving. Recognizing that static categories of sexual identity and orientation are problematic and constraining is a basic premise of queer theory (Halperin, 2003). Regardless of the historical construction of homosexuality, the term is conceptually defined by many authors to be the sexual attraction between same-sex individuals (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994; Mohler, 2000; Rhoads, 1994). These attractions can take on many forms including: sex, one-sided attraction, mutual attraction, and dating (Rhoads, 1994).

Homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, etc., it should be noted, are also limiting categories that ought to be troubled and problematized. Butler (1990) argues that a binary reading of sexuality primarily allows for dominant and marginalized engagements or categorization. The importance of this debate cannot be understated, as categorizing an individual's performance of sexuality and/or sexual identity might dehumanize the individual in question (Alexander, 2003). Use of terms like "gay men" and "homosexuality" should not be done so loosely and without question.

Summary and Research Questions

Because of the lack of serious targeted research into gay dating, a critical examination of how gay dating scripts are described and identified is warranted. The previous literature generated the following research questions:

RQ 1. *How do homosexual men define a "first date?"*

This question is important to begin any investigation, as it is the catalyst of this examination. While heterosexual dating studies have examined the difference between "dates" and other interactions such as "hanging out" (Laner & Ventrone, 2000), there has been no clarification of this critical concept for gay men. By attempting to answer this question, we can then move on to questions concerning dating scripts.

A second question to be considered is:

RQ 2. *How do gay men describe their first date experiences?*

A detailed list of behaviors, communicative actions, and events expanded the data about what types of dating scripts are utilized and enacted in a first date between gay men. This is a central component to understanding the roles of scripts and norms in gay male dating.

A final pertinent question to guide this study's inquiry was:

RQ 3. *What script categories emerge from descriptions by gay men about their first date experience?*

Once scripts were detailed and collected, I then determined if particular types of scripts emerged from the data. This question was key to my examining particular insights into what may be the impetus for certain script usage during a first date encounter.

These questions helped guide my examination of gay dating scripts, allowing me to collect thick data about dating and script usage. Like all qualitative research inquiries, these questions have changed and (re)formed based on the data and what is happening within the gay dating scene (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I turn to Chapter Three for details on methods of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

"The computer blinks at me

The guy on the other side of the screen wants to be my first

Am I ready for this?

It's like I can never go back

I can't undo being gay

It is or it isn't

You're either gay or not gay, right?"

To engage the previously mentioned research questions, a qualitative approach is utilized to illuminate data about gay male dating and queer dating scripts. Such an approach is warranted for this study, as gay dating scripts would be difficult to detect without a foundational understanding of their nature. Only a qualitative approach provides enough description to be able to draw in thick data surrounding not only what dating scripts might be used in a gay first date, but also how gay men describe and define a first date encounter (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Further, the lack of qualitative studies in the area of dating scripts and homosexual relational development make a qualitative study an important addition to any body of literature.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

This study, using networking and convenience sampling, recruited 75 self-identifying gay men from the West Texas region to fill out an open-ended online questionnaire about gay dating. Participants ages ranged from 18 to 73 years of age

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(M_{Age}=29.52, Median=25, Mode=24, SD=9.70). While participants were older than prior to other studies, an older participant group may be a benefit as one gets older they are likely to have thoroughly engaged in the dating experience, thus being able to describe their definitions of dating more articulately. Participants also self-identified from diverse racial positions. Participants representatively matched racial identifications for the region as identified by the US Census Bureau (2011). Participants identified as Caucasion/White (51); Hispanic/Latino (15); African American/ Black (4); Asian (2); "Mixed"/Multiracial/Multiethnic (2)[1]; and Native Eskimo (1). In addition to age and racial identifications, demographic information was collected concerning education (Bachelors (21), Masters (17), High school diploma (15) being the majority of degrees earned), occupation (most participants identified as students (25), teachers/working in education (10), retail sales (9), or health care (8)), as well as income (M_{Income}=$30198 a year). Finally, participants, on average, had participated in 1.6 dates within the last six months.

Rose and Frieze (1989) found that 100 undergraduate students were enough to create a comprehensive listing of heterosexual dating scripts. In Pryor and Merluzzi's (1985) study, they found that 51 undergraduate students provided enough data for quantitative analysis of what types of dating scripts existed in a heterosexual first date. To ensure proper theoretical saturation, I collected data until I saw no new variation in script coding and then expected to analyze a dozen questionnaires beyond that point (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In this study, I reached theoretical saturation at 60 participants, but analyzed all the participants that completed a questionnaire by providing

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1. "Mixed" was a term produced by participants to describe their racial identification.

a definition of a date and at least five dating behaviors, actions, or events. As this is a qualitative study, I recruited gay men as a sample of convenience from the West Texas region. While generalizability is not a goal of this particular study, the research from this analysis allows for a significant level of transference to other geographic regions. Transferability, in this instance, refers to the theoretical and analytical placement of analysis from one population to another (Krefting, 1991). To ensure transference of data, participants coming from one geographical region help to center the fidelity of the gay dating experience within the cultural location (Barton, 1998).

Because of the need for a large number of participants, I utilized several meeting areas where gay men gather to contact and recruit participants. Initially, gay dating sites (such as gay.com, gaydating.com, and chemistry.com) were used as a means of contacting gay men to participate in this survey. Campbell (2004) explains that the "virtual bar" has become the new meeting place for the LGBTQ community. Campbell (2004) also notes that these virtual spaces are constructed to enable intimate and romantic interaction, which places the researcher at the heart of where gay men are dating. These websites are an excellent place to recruit gay men suitable for this study, as each of the aforementioned sites require that you be 18 years of age or older to join and utilize their services. In addition to online chat rooms, participants were recruited from Texas Tech University, via an email, utilizing an invitational script asking the campus community for participants (Appendix A). After an initial recruitment phase, more gay men were needed to gather additional data. Network sampling was used to recruit supplementary self-identifying gay men from various communal social networks. Network sampling was an excellent way to enlarge the participant base to ensure that a qualitative study,

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such as this, reached data saturation (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The Gay/Straight Alliances at Texas Tech University and South Plains Community College were also contacted for more participants to guarantee theoretical saturation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

Procedures

For this qualitative study, I constructed and implemented an online questionnaire that was used to collect thick description. To better understand the procedural methods used for this research, I first examine the use of online surveys. Next, I present what questions were asked to gather data from participants. Finally, I outline how the survey was implemented to participants.

Online questionnaires. While differences exist in implementation, online questionnaires have little variance when compared to physical hard-copy questionnaires (Wright, 2005; Staton, 1998). Essentially, anonymous data provided by participants in hard-copy surveys has little to no differences in similarity to data collected by online questionnaires (Wright, 2005). Additionally, online questionnaires also provided this study with a significant set of advantages over a physical questionnaire. First, an online questionnaire provided an outstanding means of collecting data from a population that may sometimes be hidden, especially in places that are less likely to be accepting or welcoming (Ashford, 2009). Because West Texas is known for being a socially conservative area of the United States, using online data collection allowed the researcher access to a sometimes-concealed community (Bay Area Center for Voting Research, 2005). Next, online surveys also reduced transcripting mistakes and other human errors during data collection (Wright, 2005). Since Internet questionnaires can be "copy and

pasted" into programs like NVivo and Excel worksheets, there was a smaller opportunity for mistyping, illegible participant handwriting, or various other mistakes that might make data difficult to analyze (Wright, 2005). Finally, paper questionnaires tend to be costly and time consuming with even small sample sizes (Watt, 1999). A virtual survey allowed for more data to be collected, in a cheaper way, and in a more efficient timeframe (Taylor, 2000).

Online questionnaire construction. This study utilized the site www.surveymonkey.com to craft an online questionnaire. Access to the site is free and required only a valid email address to collect participant data. Surveymonkey allows for various question construction ranging from multi-field text boxes to open-ended essay boxes and is one of the few survey sites that allows for disabling of IP address tracking (Wright, 2005). As participants enter the site, they were greeted with information concerning the research project (Appendix B).

Initially, basic demographic information was collected including: gender, age, race, education level, geographic region of origin, occupation, socio-economic status, identification of sexual orientation / identity, and the number of first dates the participant has been on in the last 6 months (Appendix B– Part I). Second, the online questionnaire asked participants in an open-ended essay box "As a gay man, how would you define a "date" with another man?" (Appendix B – Part II).

Finally, this study used a modified version of Rose and Frieze's (1989) scenario to elicit participant responses (Appendix B – Part III).

For example, Rose and Frieze's (1989) scenario asked participants to:

List the actions which a woman (man) would typically do as she (he)

prepared for a first date with someone new, then met her (his) date, spent

time during the date, and ended the date. Include at least 20 actions or

events which would occur in a routine first date, putting them in the order

in which they would occur. (p. 263).

I used a modified form of their scenario asking participants to:

List the actions, behaviors, communication, and events in which

you would typically engage in as you prepared for, met, spent time

with, and ended a first date with someone new. Include

approximately 20 actions, conversations, or events that would

occur in and in preparation for a routine first date with another gay

male, putting them in the order in which they would occur.

"Behaviors, communication, and events" was added to broaden the scope of the scripts

that may be present during a gay first date. Next, the modified question changed the

pronouns from a third person account to a second person description of events. Rose and

Frieze (1989) use "he/she," which makes the date seemingly hypothetical. By using

"you," the question focuses the participant's behavior on actions that they routinely

engage in during a first date encounter. Third, the question also asked for "*approximately*

20" behaviors instead of "*at least* 20 actions." This is an important distinction because

dates may not always include 20 actions and behaviors, but asking for "at least" 20

implies that participants who experience shorter dates may be excluded unnecessarily

from the study. By asking for "approximately 20" behaviors and communication events,

the study can draw thick description without disregarding participants' experiences not

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fitting into what may involve a longer or more thorough dating encounter. Finally, the question also specifies that it is looking for actions that occur during a gay male first date experience to avoid confusion with participants generalizing to potentially heterosexual first date experiences.

Queer theory informed some of the changes made to Rose and Frieze's (1989) question. Disrupting the he/she dichotomy helps to situate the context of the dating experience outside the heterosexual date. Further, the centering of the question on the "you" form immerses participants in the lived experience (Pelias, 2008). As participants focus on their experience – rather than a hypothetical – they recall that experience more vividly, thus providing richer descriptions (Pelias, 2008). It is important to note that the modified question does refer to the participant's partner as another gay male. While this modification might be normative and fixed to an identity, the change was necessary to ensure that participants grounded their answers within a same-sex dating encounter and not to a heterosexual dating experience.

Respondents were offered 20 text boxes and then a larger open-ended essay box to answer the question and list behaviors and actions that happen during a first date encounter. Once completed, the site thanked participants for their participation. The questionnaire was expected to take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Data was then exported from the Surveymonkey website to an Excel file. Participants' demographic information, definitions of a date, and descriptions of dating scripts were then sorted by question and response. Using an Excel spreadsheet, allowed for recognition of specific scripts and then clustering specific scripts into thematic categories during data analysis (Patton, 2002).

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Data Analysis

Analysis of questionnaire data occurred in five distinct phases: 1) familiarization and recognition of emerging themes, 2) open line-by-line coding, 3) creating a codebook, 4) peer debriefing, and 5) comparing codes against present literature using cluster analysis. After initially moving participant data, information was then printed out and closely read by me. As emergent themes developed, notes were made on that theme and then cross-reference against existing literature. Questionnaire results were then read an additional time to completely familiarize myself with the study's data.

The second phase of data analysis involved the use of open line-by-line coding. Open line-by-line coding allows researchers to constantly compare data and themes as they emerge (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Initial coding will employ theme and category level classifications, before refining categories to analytical and descriptive codes. This type of narrow coding permitted me to concentrate data for better analysis (Van Maanen, 1988).

The third phase was the creation of a color-coded codebook to outline analytical and descriptive codes. A chart containing columns for code abbreviation, category, definition, and coded example was developed to provide consistency in coding (Charmaz, 2001). The color-coded function allowed me to see "cross-talk" or layered communication about multiple categories and themes (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2006).

Those themes and codebook were then taken to several academic peers that were familiar with existing literature and the phenomena for data debriefing. Peers consisted of a gay male colleague formerly connected to the West Texas area, as well as my

advisor, who specializes in the intersection of class, race, gender, sex, ethnicity, and culture. Peer debriefing was utilized as a means of verification for coding completeness and to insure that thematic categories were not overlooked (Spall, 1998). Peer debriefing was an ongoing process and happened throughout data analysis.

Finally, the data was clustered following the method utilized in Heuman's (2012) research on offensive terms for men and women. Clustering involved an open-coding of terms, which are analyzed for connections, placed into emerging categories based upon similarities/connections, and further analyzed using queer theory as a lens for data analysis (Heuman, 2012). The data was clustered according to the type of first date preparation or behavior that are described by participants. Moreover, this phase of data analysis compared the codes found in the questionnaire data to existing research literary assumptions about dating scripts and queer theory (Boyatzis, 1998). This comparison allowed me to create connections between data points and codes. Additionally, code comparison allows me to draw implications from the data and contrast them with prevailing literature in queer theory (Boyatzis, 1998).

Reflexivity

Qualitative study requires a large degree of reflexivity from its researcher (Denzin, 1999). As you will note, I have infused my own narrative throughout this thesis as a means of being self-reflexive about my positionality in relation to my research. An examination of the researcher's reflexivity and cultural positionality is a critical component to framing how a qualitative exploration is conducted (Reinhart & Reuland, 1993). Reflexivity allows the researcher to sensitize themselves to the various social realities within a particular scene (Murphy, 1999).

Prior to engaging in this study, I have created a list of identifications, questions, and previous conceptions of gay dating and gay dating scripts. It is important to note that throughout my undergraduate studies, I self-identified as a heterosexual. In fact, I was almost engaged. I have been on hundreds of heterosexual dates and at least 20 heterosexual first dates. When I began realizing that my sexual orientation was more aligned to same-sex feelings of desire, dating took on a whole new frame. Dating suddenly became confusing and the courtship rituals that were once familiar, no longer were there as a guide. My confusion as to what to do during my first gay date helped to inspire this study. As a middle-age, working class, white gay male working on a graduate degree, I find myself still situating my identity. These references to my cultural positionalities are not a means to undermine this important research, but to explain the viewpoint in which qualitative data is filtered and analyzed (Denzin, 1999).

Because reflexivity is ongoing, I maintained a self-reflective journal for this research to identify and recognize my positionality to the research and the data. Self-reflective journaling requires that I honestly assess my own feelings and experiences in comparison to the data being analyzed (Ortlipp, 2008). I kept a reflexive journal using Microsoft Word to document my thoughts and experiences about the research on a bi-weekly basis. Journaling multiple times during a week helps to inform the researcher about the research and the data (McGuinness & Brien, 2007).

Summary

This chapter has outlined the method for inquiry by breaking down how participants were recruited and compiling demographic information. Next, I examined

the use of online questionnaires and the questions asked within the survey. I then plotted

the method for analyzing the collected data. Finally, I investigated my reflexivity to

position my internal lens in relation to the research area and data. Having detailed the

methods for this study, I next turn to Chapter 4, which presents the analysis conducted by

these methods.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

"The computer tells me he's on his way

Why can't this be more like a date?

I have been on hundreds of them with girls.

I'd know what I was doing then,

I'd know who should pay,

I'd know why this felt so right"

In this Chapter, I analyze the data collected from participants by the online
questionnaire. Analysis included an examination of definitions for dating as well as the
dating scripts detailed by participants. Thus, this Chapter begins by analyzing dating
definitions provided by participating gay men in West Texas. The second portion details
an examination of the dating scripts data described by participants. Within this section, I
argue for a conceptual model for understanding themes of analysis drawn from the data,
before examining these themes in more thorough detail. Even though these areas were
treated as two separate data sets, I compare and contrast the data from participant's
definitions of dating and their self-reported dating behaviors throughout Chapter Four.

Definitions of Dating

After completing the initial stages of data analysis on how gay men defined a
same-sex date, 211 coded data points clustered around eighteen separate thematic
categories. Definitions of dating provided by participants sometimes had multiple codes

imbedded within their descriptive text, which accounted for the abundance of coded data points over the number of participants. Once coded, these thematic categories were then organized and clustered into five specific themes of analysis for definitions of a date between gay men: 1) components of a date, 2) purpose of a date, 3) definition by negation, 4) the presence of heteronormativity and patriarchy, and 5) queering a date.

Components of a date. Many participants described a date by what might be involved during the dating encounter. Specifically, forty-one gay men noted that a physical or social activity of some sort was necessary for a date to take place. Similarly, thirty-four participants defined a date to include a meal, beverage, or dessert. Typical mentions of both an activity and a meal centered on a dating pair engaging in a "dinner and a movie." These findings are consistent with research conducted by Mongeau, Jacobsen, and Donnerstein (2007), which found that heterosexual definitions of dating predominately incorporated activities like food and an activity.

Eighteen men also noted that a date should be dyadic and thus including only two men. Surprisingly, no participants in this study offered definitions of dating that included more than two men. Because other authors have found that polyamorous relationships are not all that uncommon within homosexual populations (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Klesse, 2007), participants might well be framing a date in a dyadic way due to other externalities. Specifically, heteronormative frameworks could be disciplining gay men within the West Texas region against non-dyadic relationship. Another explanation could simply be that these participants have previously engaged in polyamorous dating, but more frequently interact in more "traditional" dyadic relationships. A final explanation could simply be that the participants filling out the questionnaire are not involved in the

practice of polyamorous dating.

Further, eight descriptions of dating definitions also mentioned the inclusion of sex or sexual activity. One participant explains, "If there was chemistry and attraction there, sex would often be a part of the date." Additionally, a few participants were explicit about their expectation for sexual activity as one gay male defined a date as "Dinner, movie, sex." Sexual activity as part of a gay date may not be that uncommon as Bricker and Horne (2007) explain that gay men have been known to engage in sexual intercourse early within a gay dating relationship. They argue that early relationship sexual activity results in more partners, but also lower dyadic attachments to their dates (Bricker & Horne, 2007). It is possible that the inclusion of sex as a component of a date falls in line with socializing forces of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and heteropatriarchy. Patriarchy refers to the privileging of men within a societal construct - in this case – men as the taker of sexual intercourse and conqueror of sexual activity (Johnson, 1997), while heteropatriarchy attempts to push men into compulsory heteronormativity through a system of male dominance (Yep, 2003). If gay men are socialized into sexual activity, then perhaps these descriptions are an indication of systematic heteropatriarchal hegemony.

In addition to activities (social, sexual, and meal related), eleven participants mention communication as a component of a dating experience. Participants described dates as involving conversations, talking, and visiting. These participants explain that talk allows gay men "to explore a relationship with another man through conversation to see if we are compatible." As a communication scholar, I am keenly aware of the variations on communication (or lack thereof) that takes place during a date: small talk

(Laner & Ventrone, 2000), nonverbal (Fichten, Tagalakis, Judd, Wright, & Amsel, 1992), intimate (Arvidsson, 2006), etc. Effectively, communication is the medium for getting to a date's purpose. By using conversation, dating dyads can uncover similarities and difference, determine compatibility and interest, as well as stimulate exploration of potential partners.

Purpose of a date. Finding a compatible partner was of some importance to quite a few men. Compatibility was described by thirteen participants in a number of ways including "hoping that we may click," "if there is enough similarity between each person to continue a relationship," and "if there's a deeper connection." Compatibility was acknowledged as a way to create "companionship," as well as romance. In addition to compatibility, twenty participants also defined a date as a means of exploring a potential relationship and/or partner. One gay male explains that a date is "meeting a man with the intention of exploring a relationship with him." Touching on the idea that components of a date are used to assist in the date's function, a participant describes this exploration by "engaging in an activity, which allows you to get to know the other person." Exploration was also characterized as a learning process, where one not only "gets to know" their dating partner, but to also determine compatibility and romantic interest.

A second layer to a date's purpose involves romance, intimacy, and mutual attraction. Fourteen men expressed that a date ought to centralize itself around a romantic desire or intimacy. While I recognize that romance and intimacy are separate ideas, a few participants conflated romance and intimacy into a singular purpose. One gay man writes that a date is "any prearranged get together…with another gay man with

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the aim at a more intimate relationship." While another participant states, "I define a date

as spending time with someone that may [be] of particular interest to me romantically."

The assumption of romantic or intimate involvement is not one to take lightly. While

Mohler (2000) indicates that like many of this study's gay male participants that use

dating as a means of exploration for compatibility, romance may not always be at the

forefront of men's minds. The few number of men that defined a date as having a

romantic or intimate element might indicate that these purposeful components are being

saved for an encounter after further relational development. Mutual attraction also plays

a role in a date's purpose. Five men indicated in their definitions that a similar interest

between the dyad should be determined by the date. One participant explains, "A 'date'

must be either expressed or implied by both parties for a sufficient duration that their

attentions and actions are directed specifically toward one another." While slightly

clinical, the participant is clearly signifying that a date should need mutuality. This is

supported by other scholars arguing that without a mutual interest that a date will

typically terminate without further interaction between daters (Luo & Zhang, 2009)

 While elements of a date are important to consider, they help to create

opportunities to understand why gay men are dating. Analysis reveals that the purpose of

a date goes farther than just the sum of its underlying components. Several men

acknowledged that while sexual activity or intercourse was a possibility that definitions

of dating should be more than just sex. Five men provided similar definitions that

explained that "sex may or may not be part of a date," but that a date should have "a

romantic interest (not just for sex)." These types of acknowledgements also indicated

that a first date might not always include sex until another purpose for dating was

established – such as compatibility or romance.

Definition by negation. While many men defined a date by its components or purpose, a large group of men defined a date through negation. Burke (1945) describes definition by negation as defining a thing or idea by what it is not. In the case of this particular study, gay men described a date as not being informal, as not text messaging with an invite to come over, as not having sex, and as not hooking up/hanging out. Ten of the men that defined a date using negation focused on the notion that sex should not be a component or purpose of a date. Many men were explicit about their exclusion of sex from the date saying "this excludes anything sexual" and "I wouldn't consider having sex on the first date." This divergence as to the inclusion or exclusion of sex for a date within the participant population indicates that definitions as to what a date *is* and *how* it is defined may be more fluid. Further, participants also affirm other findings, which indicate that there are differences between hooking up (Bogle, 2008), hanging out (Laner & Ventrone, 2000), and a date. However, if sex is part of a date, as some participants indicate, then "hooking up" and "hanging out" may also be unfixed terms within the West Texas gay male population.

Presence of heteronormativity and patriarchy. After close inspection of the definitions established by the study's participants, most definitions of dates are described by what many folks within heterosexual dyads might call being a "normal" or "traditional" date. Twenty-one of the gay male participants noted that a date should typically reflect a "dinner and a movie," which has been found by several researchers to be inline within heterosexual identifications of a first date (Bartoli & Clark, 2006; Gilbert, Clark, & Anderson, 2012). This seems to indicate that gay men may have

performed norms, which have been projected by heterosexual culture. Yep (2003) refers to this matrix of meanings as *heteropatriarchy*, which refers to the male centric domination of a social system promulgating and forwarding compulsory heterosexuality.

The idea that there is an adoption of heterosexual norms for conceptions of gay dating is not lost on me. I am reminded of Butler's (1988) notion of "stylized repetition," where individuals can be so entrenched in their performance of identity that it can become a monotonous and ritualized system of finding and legitimizing meaning from our social world. As I look at the data, I am reminded of my heterosexual performances of the past. But, it also makes me more aware of the phenomenon of heteronormativity at work pushing its framework on those with(out) system. While those norms provided a guideline for how one should behave during their first set of dates with other men, it also serves to confuse how roles are to be developed and negotiated during the experience. This suggests that gay men are mediating their dating relationships within a matrix of heteronormativity.

Role negotiation during gay relationship development is central to establishing concepts of identification and identity (Cohn, 1995). Therefore, we must be mindful that this type of heteronormative framework can create distress for gay men (Yep, 2003). Further, these types of heteronormativity may also be reified by notions that sex should be excluded from definitions of dating similar to heterosexual expectations of "proper" dating behaviors (Rose & Frieze, 1989). The very divergent viewpoints on sexual activity as part of dating behavior within gay male culture and in the study suggests that some gay men may be "borrowing" norms from heterosexual schemas – a phenomenon not unknown to queer research (Jackson, 2001; Tan, 2001). For example, Jackson (2001)

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argues that cultural differences can impact queer identification through reification of heteronormativity and adoption of heterosexual practice. Similarly, Tan (2001) explains that emerging gay communities can clasp onto heterosexual ways of doing and knowing that allows gay men to keep men one foot grounded in their queer identity, while simultaneously keeping the other foot grounded to heterosexuality.

While heteronormativity often exerts itself silently, there were moments in this study that heteronormativity and even homophobic behavior was made explicit. Initially, there were several instances of gay men describing a date as "anything a straight couple would do" or as a date being "the normal dating definition." These descriptions are clear examples of participants internalizing the dominant scripts of heteronormativity. Yep (2003) argues, "Heteronormativity makes heterosexuality hegemonic through the process of normalization" (p. 18). He continues, "Normalization is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values" (Yep, 2003, p. 18). The very descriptions of dating as the "normal" and being "pretty much anything a straight couple would do" is evidence to the role heteronormativity plays in gay constructions of dating. Further, this notion of attempting to play by heterosexual norms often is an indication of what Yep (2003) terms as *interior-individual violence*, where gay men attempt to normalize to the heterosexual mandate to avoid anxiety, guilt, fear, shame, and hate. Such an internalization of heteronormative scripts can result in acts of self-loathing and even suicide.

Perhaps due to this internal and individual violence, three gay men also

mentioned that a date should take place in a private setting. One participant explains that a date should take place in one of the dater's residence. Additionally, another gay male notes that "staying in" was a preferable option. This need for private dating interaction may be due to the previously mentioned conservatism of the West Texas region, but may also be a lingering notion that gay performances in public might draw ire, abuse, or violence (Yep, 2003). Harper (1997) explains that not all gay men are ready or willing to perform their homosexuality in public spaces. As such, private dating interactions may be a mechanism for engaging in the dating experience without the anxiety of being "found out" (Harper, 1997).

Queering the date. Even though heteronormativity was pervasively evident within the data, there were acts of resistance and recognition of the complexity involved in dating between two gay men. One participant explains, "Due to the sometimes challenging circumstances confronting same-sex interactions, I am not confining 'dating' to the stereotyped, mainstream practices." This recognition of complexity acknowledges that perhaps there is more to how dating is defined by gay men than previously thought. This rejection of normativity is present in two places: sexual activity as part of the date and the public performances of a dating encounter.

Initially, sexual activity as a defining characteristic of a date by participants indicates that gay male conceptions of a date are different from heterosexual ideas of dating. To that point, Rose and Frieze (1989, 1993) posit that sex as a conception of heterosexual dating was very rare. If gay men are expecting sexual activity during a date, this may signal that many gay men may not be confined by what is traditionally held as dating practices between heterosexual couples. It is possible that participants are simply

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relying on their socialization of male sexual prowess as a means of dating as expressed

by Shaughnessy, et al (2011). Without the constraints of female socialization, who are

told to hold onto their sexual chasity for as long as possible – gay men may be free from

the courting practices of heterosexual men, who might be dating to conquer or take

sexual intercourse from their female dating partners (O'Sullivan & Gaines, 1998). While

sex as part of a dating experience might be freeing from heteronormativity, by simply

being present, it certainly serves as an indication to the mechanisms of patriarchy. As

gay men perform their queer identities, they are disciplined into a gender-role version of

dating that privileges a narrative needing sexual intercourse as quickly as possible within

a dating relationship.

    Furthermore, the performances of gay men in public spaces within this West

Texas conservative locale are important to note. Sixteen men defined a date as having a

public element. These public components may act as a means of resistance to the

heteronormative framework established by the surrounding community. For example,

Morris and Slope (2006) found similar types of resistance with public displays of

affection by gay men and lesbian women. The very public performance of a same-sex

date provides for space to resist and, in some cases, reject the normative structures that

have sent gay men into private areas to engage in the act of dating. Gay men, within their

dating scripts, note similar ideas when describing some scripts that require "not drawing

attention." While heterosexual couples are pushed to the public space to be on display

(Pryor & Merluzzi, 1985; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993), other authors have noted that gay

men and women have been relegated and even disciplined to private spaces (Morris &

Slope, 2006). This strategy for queering the public dating space resonates with me as I

clearly remember the moment, where I came to the realization that I can conduct a relationship in any way that I felt comfortable. I had just broken up with my partner of five years and was entering the dating scene. The guy that had invited me on this date was being insistent that I "follow the rules" and that we try to be as discrete as possible while interacting in public. I had enough and told the gentleman that I had no intentions of hiding who I am any longer. It was a freeing moment. Butler (1988) might call it a "subversive moment" for individual and social change. I proffer that by conducting dates in public spaces as a definitional component – gay men are resisting the heteronormative/homophobic frame that might push them towards private places. My experience, tied to the study's data, indicates that a tension exists between the public and private space, which is a unique understanding within the context of queer dating.

Analysis of Dating Scripts Data

After thorough analysis of 630 dating scripts described by participants concerning reported actions, behaviors, and communications, 1521 coded data points emerged. Some dating scripts indicated that several categorical codes were occurring within the participant's descriptions, thus several scripts were multi-coded to insure comprehensive analysis. These codes were then clustered into 43 thematic categories, which then were organized into six different themes of analysis: 1) scripts as enacting of definitional dating components, 2) scripts as enacting of dating purpose, 3) assessments by gay men of the date, 4) role negotiation (with)in the date, 5) recognition of heteronormativity, and 6) realizing/performing queer identity. These themes provide similarities and striking differences to how dating and dating scripts have been enacted by gay men.

To understand these themes of analysis, I offer a conceptual model (Figure 1).

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This model begins from the outside acknowledging the roles of queer identity and the

heteronormativity/patriarchy/heteropatriarchy matrix – both of which are rejected,

accepted, constructed, negotiated, and navigated. While heteropatriarchy, in this

instance, refers to an "overarching system of male dominance through the institution of

compulsory heterosexuality" (Yep, 2003, p.31), heteronormativity expresses itself

through the privileging and domination of heterosexuality on competing systems of

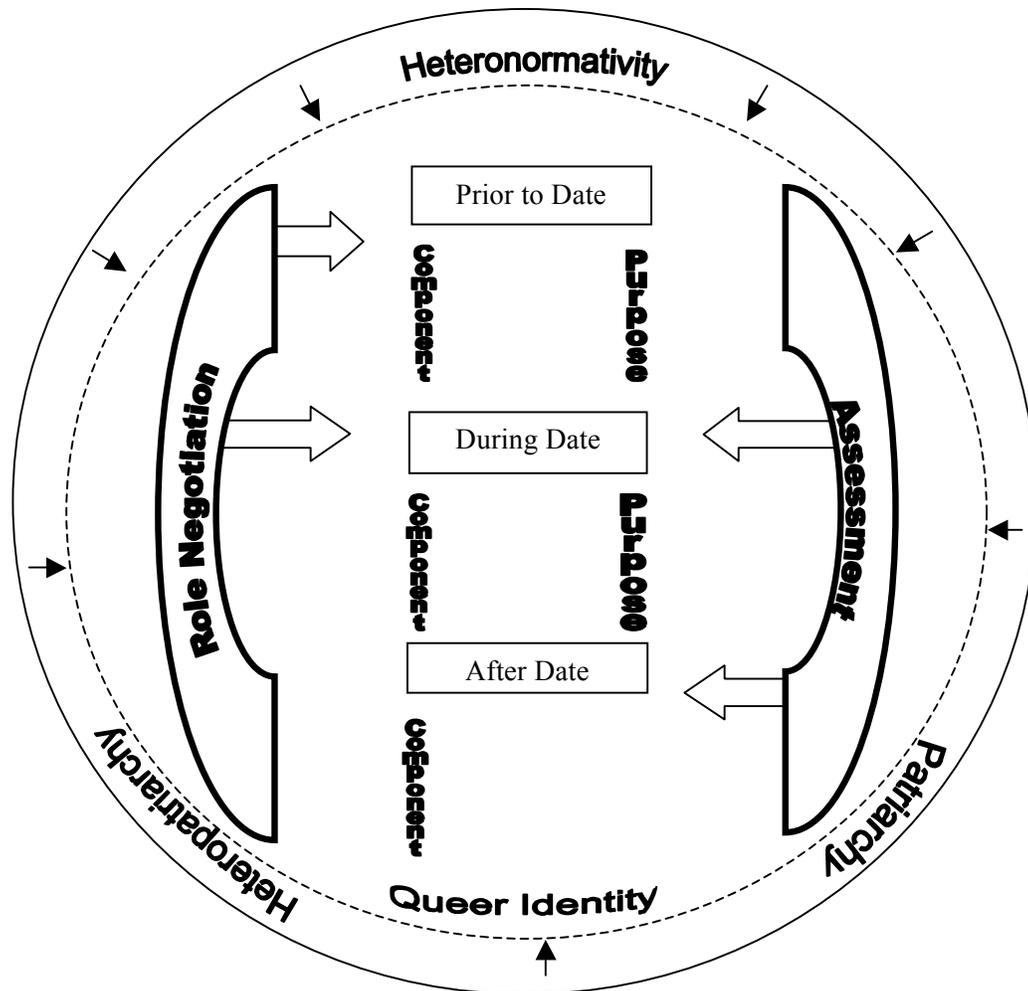sexuality and gender (Butler, 1993).

Figure 1. Model of gay dating script themes. This figure illuminates the conceptual framework

surrounding gay dating scripts.

At the center of the model, I establish where a first date encounter is being experienced. The first date comes in three parts: interaction prior to the date, events during the date, and experiences after the date. Prior to the date as well as during the date, participants acknowledged enacting components and purposes as dating scripts. However, once the date was over, the purpose of the date was complete and only components of a date remain. Pushing in on the date at various times are concepts of assessment and role negotiation. While assessment occurred during and at the conclusion of the date, role negotiation was found prior to the first date and during the encounter.

Queer identity is what is being built by the first date between these two gay men. Role negotiation, assessment, and even the date itself are reproductions and performances of the gay man's queer identity. While queer identity is formulated by the dating experience, it also is positioned against/in relation to/within a framework of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, patriarchy, and heteropatriarchy are engaged by queer identity in several ways including resistance and acceptance. This model suggests that queer identity is mediated within the context of hegemonic patriarchy, heteropatriarchy, and heteronormativity through socialization of gender and sexual identity.

Scripts as enacting of definitional dating components. While there were similarities that emerged from the dating behaviors described by gay men, there were also vivid differences that emanated from the data. Earlier, participants defined dates as having components that included an activity, food, talk, and sex. Descriptions of behaviors and activities occurring during the date mirrored these components in parts, while being additive in other areas. Specifically, dating scripts that emerged revealed

themselves in a chronological pattern in which there were scripts that were enacted 1) prior to the date, 2) scripts occurring during the date, and 3) scripts that revealed themselves after the date (see Table 4.2).

Prior to the date. Like previous studies, the time prior to the date was marked with dating scripts involving preparation, appearance, and cleaning of spaces in which the participant's date might view (Klinkenburg & Rose, 1994, Laner & Ventrone, 1998, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). Participants described areas of general preparation such as "getting ready" and "checking on the time and place." Eighty-one descriptions of various acts of preparing the participants for the date were also reported. Men explained that "grooming," "showering," "picking out appropriate clothes," and "brush[ing] teeth" were a part of the scripts concerned with preparing for the date. In addition to prepping their appearance for the dating encounter, five participants mentioned that part of their preparation ritual was cleaning spaces with which their date might come into contact. These areas of readying included "clean[ing] car," "clean[ing] house," and even "making the bed."

During the date. During the date, participants noted components similar to those found in their definitions of a date. Surprising, only eight men described the beginning of the date. For those participants describing the beginning of the date, their description centered on either "arriving at the location" or "meeting their date for the first time." The lack of accounting by many men for the beginning or arrival at their date except for those meeting their date for the first time could indicate that many participants might already know their dating partner more thoroughly. This idea is supported by one participant that mentions, "I don't do blind dates, so typically, I already know a little about the

individual." If participants are expecting that they already know a bit about their date, then descriptions of the beginning of the date might be moot. The beginning of the date might also be so rote that freely recalling the beginning of the date, as a script, might have been difficult (Adelson, 1981).

A date consisted of eating food or a meal for 59 participants and 56 participants reported participating in an activity as scripts for a first date. This aligns closely with descriptions from participants' definitions of a date between gay men. These descriptions also match up with previous scripts described by homosexual men and women that reported enacting those scripts (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994) and by heterosexual daters (Rose and Frieze, 1989, 1993). Divergent from previous studies, 27 participants in this research discussed the use/consumption of alcohol and attending places where alcohol was served. While the use of alcohol as a script was noted by 27.5% of Rose and Frieze's (1993) heterosexual participants, 36% of this study's gay male participants allude to the use and consumption of alcohol as part of their dating behaviors. The significantly increased mentioning of alcohol as a behavior could be a result of the gay community's emphasis on the use of alcohol in social situations (Woolf & Maisto, 2009). Stall et al's (2001) research explains that 90% of their study's 2,172 gay participants had reported using alcohol within the last six months compared to 62% of their heterosexual male peers. The lack of noting alcohol as a definitional part of the date may be an acknowledgement of there still being a stigma in relation to the use of alcohol by many gay men (Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003).

In addition to descriptions of meals and activities as part of the dating experience and being a definitional component of a date, sexual activity was again advanced by gay

men within the study as an emerging dating component. While eight men defined a date as having sex, 18 participants noted that sex was a prevailing script. More analysis of this phenomenon will take place later in this chapter concerning sexual explicit scripts as an enacting of a date's purpose.

Notably, conversation was used by 100% of participants within their lists of dating behaviors. Like their definitions of a date, participants acknowledged communication as the medium for a number of behaviors that focused on the date's purpose. Participants revealed 171 scripts involving verbal or written communication making it by far the most frequent thematic category described by the gay men within this study. Some of these conversations or talk related to romantic inquiry, intimacy, getting to know one another, investigating their dating partner, assessing the date, and even engaging queer identity. Specifically, conversation was a means to engage in sharing "coming out" narratives and to ask questions about queer identity and representation, which is a distinctive experience to gay (and perhaps lesbian) dating. I discuss the importance of this form of conversation and disclosure later in this chapter.

A final component that involved itself in the accounting of dating script behavior during the date was the ending of the date. Forty-one participants noted the end of the date in a variety of ways including "depart[ing] from the location," "saying goodnight," and "driving home." The ending of the date matched descriptions found by other studies (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994; Laner & Ventrone, 1998, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). This departing script seems like a natural conclusion for the enacting of the first date experience. While other activities and behaviors occurred after the conclusion of the date, the departing by the daters was an expected break point within the encounter.

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After the date. Post the conclusion of the date, two more activities were described by participants: following up and debriefing. "Following up," noted by ten men, involved participants checking back with their date to express the sentiment that the dater had a good experience during the encounter. One participant explains that he "calls to tell my date [that] I had a nice time." This type of follow up is similar to scripts found by Rose and Frieze (1989, 1993), where heterosexual male participants were expected to call their date after the first date experience was complete.

In addition to follow-up, debriefing was also reported by ten participants as an event that took place after the conclusion of the date. Interestingly, Rose and Frieze (1989, 1993) found that only female participants engaged in debriefing, where daters would check with friends, family, and co-workers about the date. Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) found that only lesbian women produced debriefing scripts similar to their heterosexual female counterparts. Gay men did not report debriefing to a significant extent in that study (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). This study reveals that debriefing is not simply limited to women, thus providing another key difference between heterosexual dating script research and dating research concerning gay men.

Scripts as enacting dating purpose. While dating components compose a large number of the scripts expressed by the study's participants, scripts also emerged focusing on the date's purpose. These scripts, like parts of a date, matched many of the definitions of a date provided by participants with a few notable differences. These scripts centered on four separate purpose based categories: 1) romance scripts, 2) sexually explicit scripts, 3) getting to know scripts, and 4) investigating scripts (see Table 4.3). The first two categories are similar to categorical script findings noted first by Rose, Zand and Cini

(1993) and then by Rose and Zand (2000). They found three script categories that emerged in their research on dating script behaviors with lesbian women: romantic scripts, sexually explicit scripts, and friendship scripts (Rose, Zand, & Cini, 1993; Rose & Zand, 2000).

While there were some similarities to Rose and Zand's (2000) findings in that romantic scripts and sexually explicit scripts were quite present within the data, there were also points of divergence in which no friendship scripts were emergent. Rose and Zand (2000) found that lesbian dating and courtship behaviors predominately used friendship scripts over romance and sexually explicit script behaviors. While it is not surprising that lesbian women might predominately be engaged in friendship scripts due to female socialization of sex (Shaughnessy et al, 2011), it is unexpected that no friendship scripts for gay men were present in this study's data. The lack of friendship scripts might be attributed to male socialization of sexual activity, which places friendship with partners as a secondary or even tertiary parameter for men (Shaughnessy, 2011). Additionally, this absence of friendship scripts indicates that perhaps male socialization of gender helps to develop and discipline men into a heteropatriarchal view of dating.

Furthermore, purposeful scripts concerning the daters getting to know one another and investigating their potential partner were also present. These script categories resolve to know more about the dater's potential partner in varying levels of intensity. While getting to know scripts allow participants to examine issues of compatibility and exploration, investigating scripts focused on deeper interpersonal connections.

Romance scripts. Rose and Zand (2000) explain that romantic scripts typically depict "emotional intimacy and sexual attraction as being intertwined" (p.87). Specifically, this research reveals that romance scripts are a large consideration for gay men in West Texas. Participants acknowledged a variety of romantic scripts that mirrored heterosexual and lesbian romantic scripts.

Escorting. Seven participants described escorting their dates either back to the other dater's vehicle or to their residence. Laner and Ventrone's (2000) research that found that both men and women expected that the male dater would escort their female date home. Interestingly, all participants acknowledging escorting as a script described themselves as being the one to escort their date to the final location. One participant explains that he would "walk my date to the door." Another participant also participating in this romantic script notes that he would engage in "escorting them to their vehicle/ place of residence." The fact that only men that were involved in directing the escorting behavior mentioned the activity as a script is not lost on me. It may be that these men entrenched in this type of dominant escorting behavior would find it a notable part of the date, which could reveal heteronormative adoption of masculine roles with script enactment. This idea of selective reporting of ritual enactments is supported by Bailey's (1989) writings, where she argues that men are more likely to outline their roles and behaviors in a heterosexual date than women being able to chart the same behaviors for men. This gives further evidence to the socialization of patriarchy into the dating landscape, which then follows gay men into their dating behaviors.

Positive nonverbal behavior. Even though other research has combined verbal and nonverbal communication into a singular category (Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Rose &

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Frieze, 1989, 1993), gay men within this study expressed nonverbal dating scripts as being separate from verbal communication. Eleven men described engaging in "laughter," "making eye contact," and "smiling" as important nonverbal behavior for them to enact during the dating ritual. Tuckers and Anders (1989) describe these laughing, eye contact, and smiling behaviors within the dating context as positive nonverbal communication. These positive nonverbal performances help dating partners to react and adjust their romantic overtures in terms of intensity and duration (Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, & Altemus, 2006). The independent descriptions of these nonverbal skills, as individual components, explicates that perhaps more distinguished and nuanced coding should be done on where participants note these as specific scripts.

Mutual attraction and intimacy. Similar to participant's definitions of dating, mutual attraction (19) and intimacy (17) were also described as part of the dating experience. Mutual attraction was coded as scripts where one or both parties expressed interest in the other, which coincides with Kurdek and Schmitt's (1986) interpretation when they examined relationship quality of gay men in both monogamous and open relationships. Mutual attraction was explained by one participant as "expressing feelings of interest." In some instances, mutual attraction can take on a romantic script of admiration (Noller, 1996). This was expressed by a participant saying that he "admires how the guy walks and behaves in public." Admiration for their partner's behavior and body help to inform both the individual and their potential partner of the dater's romantic desire.

In addition to mutual attraction, intimacy was also mentioned by a number of gay men as a romantic script. Intimacy was described in a multitude of ways, but was still

connected to the understanding that emotional or physical attachment to the other dater

was important (Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). One participant explains an

intimate script as "mustering up the courage to hold their hand." This is a particularly

good example of physical attachment as it provides an idea of physical, yet intimate

touch as a way to become closer to another person (Guerrero & Andersen, 1999).

Emotional attachment was also expressed by another participant saying, "If the chemistry

is there and the conversation is there…inviting him back home for more intimate

conversation is an option." Emotional intimacy, such as this, can involve areas of

attraction that become desirous to the dater (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dube, 1999).

This description also indicates that mutual attraction and intimacy occurs via talk,

providing additional evidence of conversation as a means of exerting purpose within a

date.

   Flirting. Playful romantic and sexual overtures were also reported by twelve

men. These flirtations fall within purposeful romantic scripts as they serve as

instrumentations to romantic relational development (Frisby, 2009). A participant

explains that he "flirt[s] subtly, but apparent enough to show interest." It is this type of

romantic script that allows gay men to show their romantic and sexual interest in the

other dater (Frisby, 2009). Flirting was frequently coupled with mutual attraction by the

gay men taking this questionnaire. This phenomenon concurs with previous research

done by Malachowski and Dillow (2011), which found that as mutual / interpersonal

attraction increased, so did flirting behaviors. This indicates that flirting might be an

engaged method for gay men to express their mutual attraction in both a subtle and even

explicit way.

Displays of affection. Participants reported a number of different ways that they displayed their affection for their dating partner. These displays of affection ranged from simple touch, to hugging, to kissing, to "heavy petting." While previous research within a heterosexual context reports that these displays are intensity related (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), these displays were reported at happening at various times within the date. Several participants noted hugging or even kissing their date near the beginning of their first date encounter, while others engaged in hand holding only towards the end of the date. The variety of displays placed in various chronological orientations within the date indicate that perhaps displays of affection for gay men are not as much of a waxing and waning process as Hazan & Shaver (1987) found with heterosexual couples. It could be that these displays are more contextual and compartmentalized for gay men than previous research indicates. Further, the compartmentalization of these displays suggests that intimacy may not necessarily be connected to instances of physical contact for gay men in ways that are typically found in lesbian and heterosexual dating/relationship development (Rose & Zand, 2000; Shaugnessy et al, 2011). While this follows previous socialization arguments about intimacy and sexual activity, it certainly is a departure from existing research.

Sexually explicit scripts. While Rose and Zand (2000) found that sexually explicit scripts were less common for lesbian women, this research reveals that sexual activity on first date encounters is more frequent. Eighteen gay men in this study indicated explicit sexual activity. One participant notes that "if there is chemistry, but there's no indication that the date is relationship material, a one night stand is not out of the question." Another participant acknowledges that he was "likely to wind up in bed."

The explicitness of the date's purpose as a means for sexual interaction matches previous research, which explains that gay men are likely to engage in sexual activity early within their relationship with a partner (Klesse, 2007; Scrivner, 1997). This component of a date is also linked to areas of socialization of men and women based on sex. While heterosexual couples face female socialization barriers concerning sex, no such barrier exists for gay men. In fact, due to socialization, gay men may be more likely to initiate sex early within the dating relationship to conform to previous socialization under a heterosexual framework.

While sexually explicit scripts are expected when sex is identified as a component of a date, the divergence from participant's definitions of dating is fairly interesting to note. While only eight of the men in the study produced definitions that included sex, the number of men that indicated sexual activity doubled when identifying behaviors they engaged in during the date. More interesting, three men from those that indicated that sex should not be part of a date within their definitions of dating then indicated that sexual contact was present within their typical first date experience. The increase in the number of men acknowledging sexual activity or even contradicting themselves within their questionnaire is telling, as it may present support for the idea that sexual intercourse between gay men is perhaps a sometimes casual endeavor. The data indicates that while sexual activity during the date is disciplined as being negative and disruptive through disavowals of sex as a component of a date, sex is still revealed as a factor within dating scripts expressed by gay men in West Texas.

Getting to know scripts. Departing from Rose and Zand's (2000) framework on purposeful dating scripts, "getting to know" scripts were in abundance. These scripts

centered on trying to obtain more information from conversation and asking questions.

Within the data, fifteen instances of questions as a means of gathering information about

their dating partner were described by participants. These types of scripts draw from the

purpose of determining compatibility and exploring the date as well as potential partner.

Compatibility. Like participant's definitions of dating, men within this research

were enacting scripts that seemed to look for compatibility with their dating partners.

Thirty instances of compatibility inquiries or information gathering as a means of getting

to know their partner were expressed by participants. One gay male explains, "Mutual

interests [are] good to talk about." By looking for mutual interest, participants are testing

the waters to determine whether a continuing a dating relationship is advantageous.

McCabe and Collins (1984) explain that this phenomenon in heterosexual couples occurs

primarily in the dating stage of relational development. They argue that if compatibility

was low or decreased then relational interaction dropped off or even ended (McCabe &

Collins, 1984).

Exploration. In addition to compatibility, exploration also emerged from the

dating scripts data as a purposeful means of "getting to know" their dating partner. Fifty-

three instances of exploration were revealed by participants, which made the conceptual

category as one of the most consistently expressed dating script behaviors. This is not

unexpected as exploration was a highly mentioned category within participant's

definitions of dating. These scripts of exploration, while different in some ways, work

closely with compatibility to inform the dater of the potentiality of the relationship

(McCabe & Collins, 1984). Exploration allows participants the ability to ask questions,

inquiry about their dating partner's lives, and determine what kind of person they are

sitting across from at the restaurant table. Participants revealed exploring by "ask[ing] about his family," "ask[ing] questions about [his] job," and asking their date "what is your favorite color and why?" These types of questions were mostly benign, but serve an important purpose as they allow gay men to pierce the outer layer of self-disclosure in a meaningful way to get at more intimate and personal information through another purposeful script of investigation (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Investigating scripts. A final purposeful script emerges from participants asking more intensive and personal questions to get to a deeper understanding of their potential partner. Twenty-two instances of investigating scripts were uncovered by data analysis. These types of scripts were enacted in two specific, yet meaningful ways: personal information gathering and background checking. Initially, intensive personal information was gathered by participants asking specific questions about "politics," controversial "scenes," and even "relationship status." These types of questions while similar to exploratory or compatibility questions were framed in a way that got at more personal information from their dating partner. One participant investigates by "ask[ing] if they are living alone or with someone." This question reveals several pieces of information. First, it could alert the participant to their dating partner's relationship status. Due to the influx of non-monogamous gay couples noted previously by Barker and Langdridge (2010), the dater could be investigating their partner's previous and perhaps current relationship behaviors. Second, the question may also indicate the openness their partner is with their sexual identity. Determining if someone is living with another person, might provide an opening to ask more questions and engage in conversation about how "out" someone is and what their identity looks like (Gamson, 1995).

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In addition to personal information gathering, more intensive strategies were employed such as "Facebook stalking" or using social networking sites as a means of checking the veracity of information provided by their dating partner (Muise, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009). This new phenomenon is not limited to just gay men in West Texas. As Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009) explain, heterosexual couples are turning to social networking sites (such as Facebook and MySpace) as a way to determine the manner with which their potential partner may be interacting with others, be involved in with particular groups of people, and in some cases whether still involved in a relationship. These more invasive investigating scripts tended to be front or back-loaded into the dating experience happening during the pre-date phase or the post-date phase.

Assessment of dating. While component and purposeful scripts were predominate, daters report engaging in various levels of assessment of their dating encounter as well as their dating partner. Participants described the process and sequencing of dating that was essentially controlled and filtered by assessment. Gay men within the questionnaire explain that assessment occurred when choosing to extend the date, answering questions of intimacy, planning for a future date, and debriefing (see Table 4.4). While previous research has mentioned what could be valued as assessment scripting, no scholarship of how assessment impacts the sequential ordering or completion of the gay dating encounter has been investigated (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994; Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993).

Extending the date. Initially, nine gay men used assessment as means of determining whether they wanted to expand the timeframe of the date past the pre-

planned encounter. A couple of participants used "if/then" frameworks for their assessment of extension. One participant explains, "If that all seems to go well, then maybe after food you can move to somewhere more comfortable." Other variations of "if/then" statements relied on an assessment and then the extension such as "If [there is] no attraction or not interested in continuing date, that'd be the end of the date. If attracted, proceed to next event." Like this participant, daters revealed that they had no difficulty ending the date early if there was no or little mutual attraction. This coincides with previous heterosexual scholarship that indicates that individuals use compatibility and attraction as turning points within a relationship to determine if the relationship should continue or should be terminated (McCabe & Collins, 1984).

Further, this type of assessment also corresponds to Thibaut and Kelley's (1978) *Social Exchange Theory*, which has been incorporated into Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973). These scholars argue that individuals will attempt to predict an outcome through a calculation of cost and rewards by comparing relational satisfaction and relational stability of alternatives. As participants use "if/then" calculations to determine the next sequence within the date, they may be comparing the "then" based on the cost the relational satisfaction and relational stability of the "if." These "if/then" statements indicate that participants' assessment is not only determining sequence, but also determining relational closeness.

Questions of intimacy. In addition to continuing the date, questions of intimacy were also assessed by participants. Thirteen instances of men using "if/then" type statements similar to extending the date were reported. One gay male supports this claim by saying, "If I like him, kiss him." Unlike displays of affection as compartmentalized

intimate performances, these intimate interactions followed a more intensifying framing of engagement. Specifically, one participant explains, "If hug [is] successful, then a kiss." These types of assessments follow what heterosexual dating research has framed as *intensifying intimacy* (Tolhuizen, 1989). Intensifying intimacy may explain why assessment is necessary for daters, especially in a world where displays of affection and intimacy are seemingly more compartmentalized by their dating gay peers. Assessment could help participants navigate questions of intimacy in a sequential and thoughtful way, which could allow more systematic control over their choices.

  Planning for a future date. Finally, assessment was engaged by determining whether another future date was an option. Eighteen men in the study explained that they consider the potential for another date. Similar to extending the date and questions of intimacy, "if/then" type questions were used to assess planning a future dating encounter. A participant provides evidence to this saying, "If still interested: preoccupy yourself with future plans, dates, and/or sex." This focus on a continuation of future interaction follows similar relational development behaviors found by McCabe & Collins (1984) in heterosexual couples. The notable difference from previous research was that while Rose & Frieze (1989, 1993) found that future dating scripts happened during the date, several men placed future date planning after partner follow-up and debriefing of the date. This could indicate assessment is an ongoing process that provides insight to gay men on how to make decisions and interact with their dating partner.

  Debriefing as assessment. Participants also used assessment in gauging how well the date went by disclosing the dating encounter to other individuals. Debriefing was used by ten participants as a means of reviewing the date with friends, family, and co-

workers. One participant explains that they "go home and tell [their] friends step by step how the date went, so they can break down the date." Debriefing has been seen in past heterosexual dating research as mainly a female reactive script (Laner & Ventrone, 1998, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993). Jellison and McConnell (2004) found that disclosure by gay men about their lives to their friends was a natural part of their relational development. The current study implicates that the disclosure and debriefing of gay men's lives also includes the topic of their dating relationships, which has not been revealed previously.

Role negotiation (with)in the date. As assessment provided assistance to participants in making decisions, role negotiation provided a means for determining who would enact those decisions (see Table 4.5). The data reveals that roles typically were negotiated / determined at specific times during the first date experience and involved specific areas to be negotiated. Further, specific role negotiation scripts emerged from the data as a means of navigating and performing within the date.

Role negotiation specifically emerged primarily at times prior to the start of the date and during the date. One participant notes that prior to the date that, "if it's something new to one of us, [we would] talk about what to expect." This intimates that the gay date needs to have expectations discussed, but that daters are interested in determining their roles prior to the dating experience. While prior role negotiation was present, role negotiation was reported more frequently to occur during the date. Often, roles were determined by other actions such as "offering to pay" or "deciding to drive." This indicates that roles were negotiated in a more contextual manner based on areas of negotiation rather than in a predictive way.

Areas of role negotiation. While role negotiation was present, three areas were predominately described as being contexts for engagement: setting up the date, driving/transportation, and paying/taking financial responsibility for the date. Initially, setting up the date became a framing issue for interaction. Twenty-six instances of setting up as areas of role negotiation were present in the data. As participants were planning and organizing their dating encounter, what roles they took were also planned. One participant explains that he, "Decide[s] where we are going, or be told where we're going, depending on who initiated the date." This statement clearly serves as evidence that the planning phase of the date allows for questions of role identification and fulfillment to be answered. This is similar to research done by Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dube (1999) that suggests that preparing for a date allows for adolescents to determine how to behave and interact within the encounter.

Transportation was another area in which role negotiation was present. The act of getting to and from the date's venue was a context for which specific roles needed to be identified in sixteen questionnaires. Some participants explain that a determination prior to the date as to who will drive is important. A gay male explains, "Determine what the arrangements are (am I driving? Is he driving? Are we meeting there?)" Answering questions prior to the date might help to alleviate uncertainty as to what role one might perform within the date. To this end, another participant acknowledges the multi-layer decision that takes place when determining small things like transportation and logistics. He notes this involved process as, "Drive to pick up date/wait to be picked up by date/meet date at chosen location." While a heterosexual date typically has a specific role for the male dater to pick up the female (Laner & Ventrone, 1998, 2000; Rose &

Frieze, 1989, 1993), this small mundane decision takes on a larger function within determining role identity.

Finally, financial responsibility of the totality or portions of the date was also an area for negotiation in descriptions produced by twenty men. Paying for a date, buying the meal, and having money ready to pay for the activity were issues that helped to frame role negotiation. This context of role negotiation, unlike driving and arranging what activities would occur during the first date experience, happened predominately during the date rather than prior to the dating experience.

One dater explains,

> "If going out to dinner: if the date went really well I would offer to pay for the meal, otherwise I would suggest going dutch. If we went to an event that required paying before we got to interact much, I would suggest going dutch."

Like this dater, on the fly assessment determined future script usage and role fulfillment that is different from heterosexual scripts (Laner & Ventrone, 1998, 2000; Rose & Frieze, 1989, 1993) and from the study conducted by Klinkenberg and Rose (1994). While Rose and Frieze (1989, 1993) found that men were expected to pay (almost exclusively) for the date/meal/activity, financial responsibility was a more thoughtful consideration for almost 27% of the gay men participating in this questionnaire.

Role negotiation scripts. As there were three main contexts for negotiating behaviors and performances, role negotiation scripts revealed themselves in multiple ways including: 1) dominance/submission, 2) initiation, 3) reciprocal, and egalitarian (see Table 4.5). These scripts allowed daters to act with their dating partner and within the

date. In some instances, participants indicated that multiple role negotiation scripts were used at various points before and during their date.

Dominance/submission. Role negotiation scripts in previous research in gay relationships and dating focused on masculinity and femininity as a means of navigating an interpersonal encounter (Cohn, 1995; Kaminsky, 2003; Maddison, 2000). In this research, masculinity and femininity were not described – but, issues of dominance and submission were acknowledged. Eleven men noted that they engaged in what might be seen as dominating behaviors or scripts. One participant explains that, "Once the date of the date had been determined, I'd decide on a restaurant, decide on activities, etc." This statement suggests that the participant is utilizing power or control over the situation in attempting to plan the events of the date. In previous research conducted by Layne (2011), this type of dominating behavior was justified by interviewees as necessary when performing the "man role" (p. 24). Stereotypical frames, based on the effeminacy or masculinity of individuals, have historically framed homosexual roles. The extreme masculine frame for a gay male has been described as "butch" (Kaminsky, 2003). This description references the stereotypes assumed for gay men in the 1960's and 70's. A "butch" gay man is assumed to wear a beard, have lots of body hair, and wear very blue-collar attire (Kaminsky, 2003).

In contrast to dominance/masculinity, submissive scripts were also presented by four men in the current study. Submissive scripts were described as a participant relinquishing power or control over themselves or the date. A dater acknowledges this submissiveness by saying he would prefer to be, "almost overly polite." Politeness has been shown by Held (1999) to be a primary strategy in submitting to other individuals in

social relationships. These types of submissive scripts were also documented by interviewees participating in previous gay dating research as a function of perceived femininity (Layne, 2011). Previous research, unfortunately, described the effeminate frame as being "queen-like" (Kaminsky, 2003). In comparison to a heterosexual relationship, the "queen" takes on a very effeminate role much like a female. This performative frame might include the individual dressing effeminately (Kaminsky, 2003), speaking with a higher pitch (Maddison, 2000), and/or taking on presumed stereotypical female gendered behaviors such as being more interested in appearances and power-giving communication (Maddison, 2000).

Importantly, these roles might not be as static as once thought. One participant explains that he "contemplates dominance/passiveness." This suggests that these dominant and submissive roles may be more fluid. Furthermore, there is an additional layer that reveals itself when looking at the age of participants documenting these dominant script behaviors and submissive scripting. Those participants documenting dominance-type behaviors all indicated being over the age of 30, while those describing submissive behaviors were 20 years of age or younger. This suggests that age may play a significant role in creating or enacting specific types and functions of roles.

As with previous discussions of "homosexuality," role identities and stereotypes should be problematized (Butler, 1993). While some individuals may choose to perform their sexuality in a variety of ways, those performances are certainly not the epicenter of role creation and fulfillment within gay culture. I outline the preceding roles to illuminate that research on gay roles has been limited and focused on the entertaining, rather than the range of role possibilities that gay men experience and perform on a daily

basis. Furthermore, it is important to note that roles may have a particular influence on the scripts used by gay men. Thus, an examination of prominent frames in the literature is necessary not only to problematize, but to understand the use of queer identity roles in dating encounters. From a queer perspective, simply reifying gay men into two categorical roles creates a necessity for expanding upon research that disrupts such efforts of essentializing thought. While these two frames are representations of the extremes within gay culture, it certainly is a reflective description of some potential roles created by gay males. However, it is important to understand that these limited and dichotomous representations encourage a troubling false binary that must be problematized and questioned.

Initiation scripts. Although dominance and submission scripts were present in participant descriptions, there were several indications that initiating behavior also produced specific scripts and expectations. Six men reported instances of initiating behaviors as a role negotiation script. A participant remarked, "If the guy asked me on a date, I would hope he would pay; if I asked him on a date, I would pay." This suggests that depending on who initiated the date that they would take an increased role financially over the paying for components of the date. This is similar to previous research, where gay men in that study took responsibility for driving and paying for deals based on their initiation of the date (Layne, 2011). Initiation scripts, seemingly, provide participants with a set of guidelines that can be followed as roles are created and performed.

Reciprocal scripts. In opposition to what might be characterized as still fairly dominant behaviors entrenched within initiation scripts, reciprocal scripts were also revealed in eighteen instances by the data. The difference between initiation and

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reciprocal scripts, as participants noted, that when a major role was taken by one party, then the other party was expected to enact the next major role. Roles negotiated by reciprocation were explained by one participant as, "If he drove, I'd pay. If I drove, then he should pay." This accounting of expectations illuminates reciprocal behavioral dating scripts as it does not insert an individual context by social construction and instead relies on corresponding behaviors from their date or themselves. This is consistent with research completed by Jones (2005), where he found that reciprocal script behavior was frequent in online relationships. Layne (2011) also found that reciprocal scripts could pervade conversation as well as behavior enactment. This study supports that idea as several participants acknowledged "exchanging" in a reciprocal fashion including personal information, phone numbers, and email addresses.

Egalitarian scripts. In contrast to that literature, this research suggests that gay men in West Texas are performing equalitarian scripts. Participants revealed fifteen instances of egalitarian script behavior constituting instances of equal behavioral expectations. Several examples involved driving, where participants drove themselves to the dating destination. Additional examples focused on paying for the date by splitting the check or as a previous participant explained, "going dutch." Egalitarian scripts within gay dating research are congruous to previous research, where interviewees shared conversation time and planning of the date (Layne, 2011).

Laner and Ventrone (1998) did research on heterosexual dates to determine if claims that contemporary heterosexual dating had become more egalitarian. They found that despite movement in terms of gender identity, dating scripts were indeed still highly gendered affairs with specific roles for both men and women (Laner & Ventrone, 1998).

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These types of scripts are explicit violations of what are previously established heterosexual and homosexual norms concerning dating, thus suggesting that there is more to the phenomenon of gay dating scripts than previous research has investigated.

Recognition of heteronormativity. Just as heteronormativity was performed and acknowledged by participants while defining a date between two gay men, heteronormativity was ever present in relationship to how a date was performed and how scripts were enacted (see Table 4.6). Initially, there were fifteen instances of men expressing discomfort with their identity and participation within the dating ritual. Participants expressed that they "antagonize[d] with flirtation," "were overly critical of themselves," and gave "awkward hug[s]." One participant explains that he might "criticize [him]self for all the weird or 'stupid' things you think you did on the date." This discomfort with identity is consistent with Yep's (2003) interior-individual dimension of heteronormativity, where gay men will feel uncomfortable with their own performances of identity and sexuality.

While some might write off such discomfort as first date jitters, these identity disruptions become more important when coupled with more explicit expressions of heteronormativity. One participant notes that he tries not to "attract unwanted attention." Another dater concurs by explaining a hesitancy to enact displays of affection based on their public or private location. These issues of private spaces are an important thematic category to consider in conjunction with heteronormativity as they encourage gay men to only engage in queer/gay performances in private places and spaces. An additional participant provides evidence for this argument saying that he "pick[s] a table near the back – not highly visible." Within the literature, this hesitancy of public performance and

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entrenchment of dating into primarily private spaces is described as being "discreet" (Green, 2002; Oswald & Masciadrelli, 2008). Like definitions of dating, this heteronormativity can either be repudiated or reified (Butler, 1993). If daters are pressed by a framework of heteronormativity, they may be feeling squeezed by several dimensions that could make breaking from the heteronormative tradition/disciplining difficult.

Realizing/performing queer identity. As role negotiation scripts and heteronormative performances have revealed, identity is being realized in varied and exciting ways that are sometimes in conflict with heteronormativity (see Table 4.7). Specifically, nineteen gay men revealed that part of their date was the sharing of their coming out story or "level of out-ness." This is an important revelation from the data that diverges from previous heterosexual research, but serves as a disrupting function to heteronormative frameworks of gay dating. A main way that participants engaged queer identity constructs was through the use of questions and specific inquiries into sexual identity markers. One participant explains that he asks "how long he's been out?" Another gay male mentions that he asks if his date is "openly gay with family and friends?" These inquiries help to establish how comfortable someone is with their queer identity in a manner that also informs the dater of the partner's potential. These questions also may serve as ways to compare and contrast the questioners own experiences that have formed their identity.

In addition to questions, the sharing of coming out stories was also illuminated by the data. Several participants mentioned the sharing and discussion of coming out stories. This phenomenon seems unique to the queer experience as it is highly unlikely

that heterosexuals are sharing stories about when they knew they were straight. Previous research suggests that "coming out" narratives serve as a means of relating identity both interpersonal and collectively (Bacon, 1998; Rhoads, 1994). One participant reveals that he, "talk[s] about homosexuality in general, coming out, what kind of relationship we have with family after coming out." Engaging in conversation about queer identity helps to disseminate information that individuals are not alone as well as inducts new "members" into gay culture (Rhoads, 1994).

Queer identity was also situated by participants in public ways and through explicit performance. Like participant's definitions of dating, public performance of identity was revealed by the data. One participant explains that they "attempt to hold his hand during the movie." Engaging in public displays of affection helps to push back and subvert the heteronormative expectation that queer identity should be done behind closed doors (Morris & Slope, 2006). In addition to these public displays of affection, one participant notes his performance during the date where he mentions that he moves closer to his date on the dance floor to entertain the people watching. While done for an entertaining purpose, the result is that heteronormativity's control on his performance has been loosened ever so slightly.

Early study of identity construction focused primarily on individual formulations of self. As identity construction scholarship moved forward, researchers moved from the individual to the collective (Cerulo, 1997). Recently, shifts in scholarship have refigured identity politics, construction, and management back on conceptions of "me" (Howard, 2000). Three categories of identity construction have formed the bulk of identity study: gender/sexuality, ethnicity/race, and class (Appiah & Gates, 1992), with queer identity

construction making up a small quantity of that being examined (Gamson, 1995).

Queer identity construction has been framed from a more post-modern approach to critical thought. Specifically, Gamson (1995) argues that queer identity has been constructed through social interaction and communication with others. This means that reality, identity, and communication are intrinsically linked to one another. The grammar that is used within communication shapes the process for identifying and experiencing reality (Teske, 1997). Additionally, identity is constructed as a process of determining meaning for experiences. Thus, queer identity has to evolve and change in a process of constructing, deconstructing, reconstructing, and co-constructing (Patton, 1996).

The evolution of queer construction and negotiation also means that identity is not stable. As such, identity is a process of interaction instead of a thing. These interactions are especially important in romantic relationship development for queer identity as finding a partner, engaging in same-sex dating, and even physical interaction assist in constructing and reifying the individual (Brekhus, 1996). These developmental cycles are particularly important for the present study as it helps to inform increase understanding of dating scripts for gay men. If, during the process of queer identity construction, gay men engage in a first date encounter, then those men will likely also have to (re)negotiate various scripts for that date. Essentially, queer identity construction becomes the foil for which gay male dating scripts are implemented and negotiated.

Summary

After thorough analysis of dating definitions and themes, multiple themes emerged. Components and purposes of a date were both definitional and present within the dating script data. Additionally, definitions were expressed through the use of

negation, which helped to provide context to participant descriptions of a date. Next, assessment and role negotiation scripts were investigated as a means of pressing in on the date. Finally, similar to components and purposes of a date, heteronormative and queer identity/performance permeated the data helping us to understand how these two frameworks work to repudiate and reify one another. From this analysis, I move to Chapter Five to draw implications from this inquiry and examine future directions stemming from this research.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

"No longer am I left to hide.

Holding hands in the back of the restaurant,

under a scratchy cloth napkin.

In all this nervousness,

there is a sense of calm that sweeps over me.

I can finally be myself.

And all I'm left to wonder is…

Why did I used to be straight?"

I began this project with a poem grounded in my experience as a gay man coming to terms with identity and the functions of communication in dating relationships. As I close this thesis, I find that our work – collectively – as communication scholars is not complete and that we have a larger responsibility to communities that are under-researched or researched in inexplicably stereotypical ways. In this chapter, I explicate the implications of the data, which emerged through this research. Further, I examine future directions both in terms of constraints within this study and how scholarship can be extended in new ways. Finally, I offer some concluding thoughts to this intersection of dating scripts and queer theory.

Implications for This Study

Initially, it is important to note that this analysis affirms that dating should be seen as primarily a social construct. Additionally, this study reveals numerous similarities *to* and strikingly significant differences *from* previous research conducted on gay dating scripts. It is in this process of comparing and contrasting that more is gleaned from data analysis. This practice of differential assessment allows for specific insights on the impact of this research. Furthermore, implications concerning how this thesis instigates the extension of queer theory and carving out discursive spaces are also assessed. Moreover, I examine instances of homophobia that intend to disrupt research and how we as scholars should approach these types of challenges. Finally, I urge for a queer framework for relationship development to guide gay men in the future.

Dating as a social construct. Throughout the analysis, it becomes clear that dating, as a concept, is socially constructed. Previous research has indicated that love (Beall & Sternberg, 1995) and romantic relationships (Dion & Dion, 1993) are both social constructed concepts. Social construction refers to the ongoing, dynamic process of interpreting the world in a way that builds and re-affirms social phenomena through context and personal knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The analysis from this study indicates that participants are constructing their dating world as they experience the first date. This is an important addition to the body of knowledge, because it adds gay dating as affirming data to the conceptualization of social construction. Despite heteronormativity, patriarchy, and heteropatriarchy, participants can construct a date that is suitable for their identity using their interpretations of how a first date experience should progress. This is evidenced by the diversity in role negotiations and the use of

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assessment by participants. Moreover, whether we are involved in gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, or other matrices of dating – the dating experiences is a social construction given meaning by individuals and other people our social worlds. Clarifying this concept, Coontz (2006) outlines the social construction of marrying for romantic love as modern/contemporary construction within the heterosexual matrix. Prior to love as a normalized marital factor, marriages were predominately constructed as a financial contract between father and husband/husband's family (Coontz, 2006). Similiarly, there is no such thing as "right" date, but rather only "socially sanctioned" dates. Clearly, there is a movement to queer the social construction of dating as evidenced by participants to break from heterosexual or stereotypical dating constructs.

Striking similarities. Due to the impact social construction has within society, there are also striking similarities between gay dating and heterosexual dating. Previous research conducted on heterosexual scripts illuminates similar processes that exist for gay dating. This is important when considering the conceptual model (Figure 1) in conjunction with previous analysis on adoption and performative conformance to heteronormative practices. Components and purposes to a date, and the socialization of patriarchy are some examples of how heterosexual dating research coincides with this study, but also impacts our understanding of the gay dating experience.

Impact to similarity of components and purposes. Male same-sex dating has similarities to various elements of heterosexual dating scripts. Components such as "dinner and a movie" and purposes such as romantic interaction found in this study are stunningly similar to previous research on dating scripts. These similarities have a few important implications. First, heteronormative practices are prevalent within gay dating

scripts and definitions. It does not seem far-fetched that gay men might adopt, conform, or borrow practices developed and enacted by heterosexual dyads. Even with a push within the queer community to reject, repudiate, and resist the norm, it would be foolish to believe that heteronormativity has no impact or power over gay relationship development. This simply reveals the extent to which this type of heteronormativity has entrenched itself within queer culture and relationships.

Second, the likeness between certain parts of gay male dating rituals and heterosexual first dates underscores the human impulse. We, as humans, have a need for compatibility and exploration that goes deeper than being simply homosexual, heterosexual, female, or male. Similarities found in this research encapsulate that the human experience, while different for some, is close in others. Basic human traits, despite discursive advancements to the contrary, indicate that romance and love is still an entirely human trait. A trait that we should celebrate in the best of ways.

Finally, this similarity in components and purposes of a date also implicate the relationship homosexuality has with heterosexuality in a more nuanced way. Sedgwick (1990) explains that heterosexuality and homosexuality need each other to position the other *to* and *away* from power. Perhaps in some ways, the fewer differences that exist between heterosexual couples and homosexual male dyads may make this inevitable and violent positioning less necessary. The acknowledgement that gay males date in similar ways (despite some differences) might open up opportunities for dialogue within communities to confront broader social issues of equality and social justice.

Socializing gay men into patriarchy and heteropatriarchy.   While queer theory has been criticized in the past for ignoring and minimizing the contributions and specific

challenges faced by lesbian women (Yep, 2003); I find there may be something more to that point of criticism. As discussed within the data analysis, the process of socializing men (regardless of heterosexuality or other) still promotes a system of patriarchy. Even though differences exist in areas of sex between heterosexual couples and homosexual pairs, they are still linked by a similar thread in the way that men and women are socialized to participate (with)in relationships (women as the protectors of their virginity and pureness; men as instigators of sexual intercourse) (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). This similarity encourages researchers to look not only at heteronormativity, but also patriarchy and heteropatriarchy's influences on systems of power over relational development. The differences between gay men dating behaviors and heterosexual dating schemes only highlight the sameness of socialization into a patriarchal framework.

Differences in data. The similarities found in this research inform scholarship to the fact that it is not the case that same-sex dating is correspondingly different from heterosexual dating. But rather, it is the acknowledgement that while there are similarities, there is also unique differences that deserve more thorough investigation from communication scholars. Differences in how assessment of a date is conducted between homosexual and heterosexual men are first examined. Second, differences between gay men and lesbian women are discussed. "Coming out" narratives, as a unique script for queer identity and disclosure, are then considered. Next, role negotiation strategies as a process of navigation and resistance to heteronormativity are assessed. Finally, I discuss the unique public/private tension that gay men face as they engage in their dating experiences.

Assessing assessment. This research reveals that assessment is an ongoing and thorough part of the first date experience. Unlike heterosexual dyads where women are typically the only ones to engage in active assessment, gay men are engaging in assessment throughout the date and after its conclusion. This underscores that gay men might be more interested in determining compatibility and romance with a potential partner than simply looking for sexual activity. Even though some gay men described sexual activity as a component of a date, there were still several that concluded that dates could include sex – there should just be more to the encounter. This difference in assessment challenges previous research, thus indicating that more critical investigations need to be conducted by communication and behavioral scholars to determine whether past research might not be appropriately or executed using a heteronormative lens.

Impacting dating differences between lesbian women and gay men. While other studies have coalesced queer populations through conflation of sex, this research has focused on a strategy of non-homogenization of the queer community. In doing so, clear differences have emerged between gay male participants and lesbian female daters. Socialization of sexual activity is a key distinction revealed through this study. While Rose and Zand (2000) found that friendship scripts were more prevalent within lesbian dating, gay men in this study produced no friendship scripts. I argue that this is due to socialization of gender. If women are socialized into sexual activity as something they should protect, then it follows that friendship scripts should necessarily be predominate within lesbian dating relationships. Rose and Zand (2000) argue that friendships and friendship scripts provide lesbian women with comfortable transitions into sexual activity later in the relationship. Gay men, on the other hand, are socialized into sex as an

experience that should happen early and often (Shaughnessy, et al, 2011). This is an important dissimilarity as it not only highlights that these two populations engage in dating differently, but also that research should be done to compare experiences between these two populations within the queer community.

"Coming out" narratives as unique experience of identity. The sharing of a "coming out" story is a particularly interesting and important phenomenon revealed by this study. These narratives are central to a queer experience as it is unlikely that heterosexuals are sharing their heterosexual-ness in quite the same way. "Coming out" stories also provide insight into methods of interpersonal development and disclosure for these gay men (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). The narratives shared during the date about their queer lives fall into what Knapp (1984) calls *experimenting* and *intensifying* stages of relationship development, where dating couples will get to know one another, but also begin sharing intimate parts of their lives. While these stages typically take heterosexual couples a few dates to navigate through (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009), it seems that gay men disclose parts of their identity more quickly.

Previous research had yet to pick up on what is a critical difference between heterosexual and homosexual dating practices. As this phenomenon is primarily a communication oriented event, it is necessary for communication scholars to take a more careful look at how gay men share their stories during their first date experiences. Moreover, while "coming out" has been studied as a process, more research should be conducted simply looking at the narrative of that process. This could add depth and understanding to not only how gay men and women come to know their sexual identity,

but also *how* they share their identity with others.

      Role negotiation as a process of navigation and resistance. Prior to and during a first date encounter, gay men are attempting to establish roles for themselves to navigate the dating experience. This role negotiation is unique to the queer experience of dating as gay men are navigating and mediating a heteronormative matrix. While there are some gay men that cling to heteronormative and heteropatriarchal practices of relational development, homosexual men have diversified their role-taking into other forms of power sharing and role expectations. The very diversity of how gay men negotiate roles (with)in a date suggests that queering of relationships is already occurring as a means of mediating identity in a world framed by heteronormativity. The move toward egalitarian frameworks for dating encounters speaks to the resistance of former binary role formations and constructions. More work needs to be done to establish why certain role negotiation styles are chosen over others, how the choice is made to implement a certain role negotiation style, and how those decisions are communicated between the gay male dyad.

      Gay men facing public/private tension in dating. While gay male dating does take place in public, these public spaces/places have typically been reserved for heterosexual dating performances. This recognition of heteronormativity is apparent from the analysis conducted within this study. This acknowledgment sets up a unique tension for gay men as they mediate the heteronormative matrix, where public displays of queerness are disciplined by looks of disdain, pejorative utterances of *faggot*, and even threats of violence. Some men, keenly aware of this heteronormative violence, have moved their relationship building into private spaces; thus, away from a public eye. This

creates a tension for gay men that they must navigate: feeling included within a public community space or protecting of their safety and identity within the private.

Extending queer theory. In addition to this recognition of similarity and difference, researchers doing research in this area should consider framing their analysis from a queer theory approach or at least an approach informed by queer theory. By opening our eyes to heteronormativity in our qualitative and quantitative studies, scholars can pull back the veil to reveal frameworks of power, discipline, and punishment. This is important as it helps frame our understanding of the gay male's experience. If we, as a scholarly community, continue to structure our methods and analysis in heteronormative ways – we will never truly comprehend how phenomenon related to gay male behavior is situated.   Queer theory, as theoretical lens, can and should be used more often and in other areas like lesbian women research, health communication, and relationship development. This study provides an excellent exemplar for the theory's future use. The research methods used in this thesis help to expose the inner-workings of heteronormativity, while simultaneously foregrounding the queer experience.

Carving out a discursive academic space. Often times in research, having an example from which to work from is a critical starting point for acts of discovery and scholarship. An example of this is how I started this thesis project. Yep's (2003), *The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies*, was an example of how conceptualizations of heteronormativity and queer theory might be framed. Yep's article became a starting point for my research that has opened up new ground and viewed a phenomena in a fresh light. All it takes is a starting point – which I hope this becomes for some other scholar wanting to examine intersecting issues of sexuality and

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communication. As thesis has noted several instances of previous problematic research (Kaminsky, 2003; Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994), perhaps becoming more informed in how heterosexuality/heteronormativity functions can we then begin to solve inequalities within the communication discipline in how research is conducted in regards to marginalized groups. This research sets up a framework for continuing and thoughtful engagement of the identity in a responsible and respectful way.

Experiencing homophobic behavior. While I have noted heteronormativity and the fear of homophobic response as themes of analysis, this study was at the center of a minor (but notable) attack of homophobic behavior. After an initial call for participants from my personal, social, and professional networks, more participants were needed to insure theoretical saturation. A second call was made to the larger campus community at my University and to the surrounding area. From this more general call, three separate instances of blatant homophobic remarks were left on questionnaires. Comments such as "fags shouldn't date," "Why would I want to be a faggot?," and that a date was a "queer on queer orgy" were left by individuals intending to harass and impose discipline against the research being done by this study. While this type of behavior was only directed at and left for the researcher, this is an obvious instance of externalized homophobia. Yep (2003) explains that this type of *external-individual violence* is "a potent, and at times deadly, mode of enforcement of the heteronormative order" (p. 23). Protected by the guise of anonymity from the internet, these would-be assailants tried to disrupt an academic endeavor in the name of homophobic and bigoted ideology.

The type of verbal harassment from anonymous attackers via the internet should not serve as a cautionary tale, as data from those individuals was easily set aside and

work continued on data collection and analysis. These types of comments could be left on physical questionnaires as well, thus providing little barrier to antagonistic homophobic aggression. Instead, this incident helps to inform and acknowledge that even within what we believe is a safer "bubble" of academia that intolerance still pervades daily life. We should not be resigned to the homophobia, but rather we should work to repudiate and acknowledge it when it occurs. When we talk about normativity and problematize homophobia, we reveal its power – thus decreasing its oppressive effect (Butler, 1990, 1993).

Queer frameworking: A call to action. This study illuminates the need for frameworks to help create scripts and guide experiences for those beginning their negotiation and construction of queer identity. Specifically, much of what gets researched and written about within the literature is mediating the gay and queer experience in a heterosexual world, but that only leaves room for heteronormativity and discourages resistance to heteronormative power structures (Duggan, 2002). Heterosexual couples have an abundance of self-help guides grounded in theoretical, conceptual, and pragmatic research. Many dating guides that are marketed to gay men read more like popular psychology, lacking academic merit and rigor (Rhoads, 1994). Worse, some of these guides are based on research conducted with heterosexual couples as participants or from an explicit heteronormative perspective (Elias, 2003). By understanding how gay dating scripts play out during the first date experience, research can take its first steps toward normalizing homosexuality in a way that provides guidance to youth bombarded by societal messages that only a specific way of dating and conducting relationships is permissible. Research like this study grounds advisory texts

in rigorous research and sound methodological design. I also argue that these guides are

not category inducing (rebuking the notion that I might be inconsistent with my queer

theoretical framework), but rather these advisory guides could provide alternative

perspectives to the predominant heteronormative frame.

Methodological Constraints

As with any study, there are sometimes limitations to research that should be

acknowledged and overcome in future studies. Examining methodological constraints

help to improve research and instruct proceeding research on potential challenges. In this

section, I audit areas of participant completion and inclusion, peer debriefing viewpoint

similarity, as well as categorical conceptions of identity.

Participant completion and inclusion. Initially, this study provides the first step

in gathering and understanding dating scripts performed by gay men. To that end, some

steps were taken to ensure proper data collection from participants. Even though 159

men began taking the online questionnaire and filled out demographic information, only

97 gay men completed the dating definition question. From those 97 men, only 84

identified any dating scripts on the final question. The drop off in participation numbers

from demographic information to the first question may be due to misestimating the time

taken to complete the questionnaire. While I expected that participants could complete

the survey in 15 minutes, a few participants indicated that the survey took longer to finish

due its open-endedness. Future scholarship should likely provide a higher estimation of

20-25 minutes for completion to allow participants to prepare themselves for answering

thought provoking questions.

Additionally, participants used for this study were included only if they had

completed the question concerning definitions and provided at least five dating scripts on the concluding survey question. This choice was made to ensure that enough data was present to be able to compare and contrast data from definitions of dating and dating script descriptions. While this study reached theoretical saturation, more analysis should be conducted between online questionnaire and physical copy influences on survey completion rates. Further, future studies should consider using all dating definitions and dating script data provided by participants if not attempting to cross-compare data sets.

Peer debriefing viewpoint similarity. To verify analysis and coding, I used a system of peer debriefing. While confident in the coding conducted in this research, a potential constraint may be present based on the peers chosen for this thesis. Both peers, while divergent in terms of sexual orientation identification, had similar backgrounds with queer literature and positionalities utilizing a queer theoretical lens. This is a choice that I argue allows for recognition of queer readings, which is a tenet of queer theory. Further, I justify this selection of peers with an acknowledgement that those positioning themselves with a queer lens are less likely to fall into assumptions framed by heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy, and patriarchy. To more fully engage the data, future research should consider using more divergent peers as well as conduct member checking to increase the veracity of the study's analysis.

Conceptualizing categories of identity. Even with a conceptualization that normative categories can be troubling, I found that those categories are practically often difficult to break. In my questionnaire, I ask "What gender do you identify with? (i.e., female, male, transgendered, etc.)." A colleague pointed out that while I allowed for self-identification of gender, that my examples within the parenthetical were of sex. While

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DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007) note that *gender/sex* can be considered a conceptual framing of biological and social construction, I am reminded that more should be done in framing and informing our research. Even basic questions that attempt to collect demographic data should be thoughtful to considerations of category and social constructions of difference. Future studies should be mindful of these categorical challenges and work to trouble them whenever possible.

Future Research

After assessing the challenges that exist with limitations to this study, I now turn to areas of future research. As researchers, we should continue to look forward as to how we might extend our knowledge to other areas or engage phenomenon from different means. I argue that additional studies can be developed from areas concerning methodological inquiry, geographic location, interpersonal research, as well as the creation of a holistic model.

Use of more intensive qualitative methods. As this is the first step in gathering what scripts are apparent within same-sex first dates, scholarship should next consider going more in-depth by engaging in interviewing, ethnographic, and/or autoethnographic research. By immersing further into the phenomenon of gay male dating, research can uncover not only the answer of *what*, but also the answer to in *what ways* or *how*. Essentially, more intensive qualitative research is suited to revealing more information that can illuminate the phenomenon of gay dating in a more distinctive manner. While online questionnaires provided useful advantages to gathering a substantial amount of data, interviewing and ethnographic methods might add another layer of richness to the phenomenon of the first date experience. Further, interviews might get closer to

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exploring and understanding issues of identity construction in a more nuanced manner. While this study revealed that identity plays a role in the types of scripts performed by gay men, more information is necessary to draw out the differences between identity construction, negotiation, performance, and management.

Geographic positioning. Future research should look for transference to other geographic and culturally different areas. Transference, in this instance, is the application of results from one population to another (Patton, 2002). As the sample used in this qualitative study is one of convenience, it is possible that cultural factors like political acceptance of homosexuality, religiousness, and conservatism may play a part with dating scripts and relational development in the geographic area. Future studies should expand their gaze toward a broader swath of the gay community in the United States and international locations. This can help to determine the transferability of findings from one geographical and cultural grouping to another.

Queer interpersonal research. Next, this research should be extended to other areas of queer interpersonal research. Relational pivotal points within the gay male relationship would provide a bountiful area for researchers to investigate issues of queer communication and behavior. Specifically, an examination of commitment, having children, as well as participating in the first big fight is possible to implement using this data and analysis as a starting point in how script collection might occur. Furthermore, script usage in relational development and attachment styles may also be illuminated after extension of this work. Regardless of specific areas, it is clear that more research must absolutely be done by communication scholars on gay men in interpersonal research to gather a better understanding of this important, yet understudied population.

Extending a theoretical model. Finally, this research suggests that a theoretical model might be useful to comprehend how gay dating scripts function in a more wholistic manner. Future research should work more closely with thematic categories within this research to potentially frame the process for the first date. While a unifying model might not be possible, an impression of the phenomenon might be understood in a more substantial way with more research focused on constructing a detailed diagram. Furthermore, this could have implications for studying lesbian and heterosexual dating scripts if the model conceptualized in this thesis could be extended to other sexual identities.

Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have reflexively acknowledged the intersection between dating scripts and queer theory. By reviewing relevant literature, outlining this study through a qualitative lens, analyzing data, and outlining some potential considerations for the future, I have attempted to bring attention to the relational development and dating behaviors utilized in gay romantic relationships. Focusing our attention on areas of marginalization, allows us as researchers to reveal the framework of normativity and heteronormativity – if only for a moment. It is my hope that this project serves as a stepping stone to future gay dating research and can provide guidance for prospective researchers considering questions of queerness.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Gay Men Needed for Research Project on Dating

We are looking for gay men to participate in completing an online questionnaire on same-sex dating and first date encounters between gay men. To participate, you must be a self-identified gay male, over 18 years of age, and residing or connected to the West Texas region. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete, and the results will be used for a research study. Participation is completely anonymous and voluntary. If interested in assisting us with this important study, please go to www.surveymonket.com/s/texastechgaydating .

If you would like more information or have questions about this research study, please contact Robert Layne at robert.layne@ttu.edu or Dr. Amy Heuman at a.heuman@ttu.edu. Dr. Heuman can also be reached in the Department of Communication Studies by phone at (806) 742-3912.

APPENDIX B

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Information about Research Survey on Gay Dating

You are invited to participate in a research study aimed at examining same sex dating behaviors among gay men as well as what events/communication takes place on a first date encounter. We anticipate that the research gathered in this study will contribute to understandings about how gay men engage in dating and improving knowledge concerning interpersonal communication. Via an online questionnaire, this study will explore gay men's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward same sex dating. This research is being conducted by Robert B. Layne II (Co-Investigator) under the direction of Dr. Amy N. Heuman (Principal Investigator). You may contact Robert B. Layne II by email at robert.layne@ttu.edu or Amy N. Heuman by email at a.heuman@ttu.edu. You may contact both researchers by phone in the Department of Communication Studies at (806) 742-3912.

The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. This survey is completely anonymous. No answer can be traced back to you individually. IP addresses, identifying information, or names will not be tracked or collected.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at anytime without penalty or consequence of any sort. For questions about your rights as a subject, contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research Services, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409. Or you can call (806) 742-3884.

Part I. Demographic Information

1. What gender do you identify with? (i.e., female, male, transgendered, etc.)

   *_____

2. How would you describe your sexual orientation or sexual identity? (i.e., gay, heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, etc.)

   *_____

3. With what race do you self-identify? (i.e., Asian American/Pacific Islander; African American/Black; Caucasian/White; Hispanic/Latino; Native American; etc.)

   *_____

4. What is your age?

   *_____

5. What is your current geographic location of residence? (i.e., West Texas, Eastern New Mexico, Southern Oklahoma, Central Texas, etc.)

   *_____

6. What your highest completed level of education? (i.e., High School Diploma, Associate's Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Ph.D., etc.)

   *_____

7. What is your occupation?

   *_____

8. What is your yearly average income?

   *_____

9. How many first dates have you been on in the last six months?

   *_____

Part II. Dating Definition

10. As a gay man, how would you define a "date" with another man?

   _____

Part III. Dating Script Survey

11. List the actions, behaviors, communication, and events in which you would
    typically engage in as you prepared for, met, spent time with, and ended a first
    date with someone new. Include approximately 20 actions, conversations, or
    events that would occur in and in preparation for a routine first date with another
    gay male, putting them in the order in which they would occur.

    1. [_____]
    2. [_____]
    3. [_____]
    4. [_____]
    5. [_____]

6. _____

7 _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

12. Are there any more events or behaviors that may occur on a first date? (Please list
as many as pertain below).

_____

APPENDIX C

DATA TABLES

Table 4.1: Thematic Clusters of Dating Definitions Between Gay Men in West Texas

Themes of Analysis	Thematic Categories	Examples	Frequency
Components of a Date	Activity	Movie, dancing, bowling	41
	Food/Meal	Dinner, meal, coffee	34
	Sexual Activity	Sex, hooking up, sleeping together	8
	Communication	Engage in a conversation	11
	Dyadic	Two individuals	18
Purposes of a Date	Exploration	Getting to know each other	20
	Determining Compatibility	Meshing together, looking for chemistry	13
	Romance	Excitement or other feelings of mystery in relation to love	9
	Mutual Attraction	Both interested in each other	5
	Intimacy	Focus on attachment or emotional closeness	4
	More than Sex	Sex could be included in the date, but there should be other components/purposes	5
Definition by Negation	No Sexual Activity	No sex should happen during the date	10
	Not a Date (Other than No Sexual Activity)	Not texting to hang out, not informal	4
Heteronormativity	Heteronormative Behaviors	Anything a "straight" couple might do	7
	Inexperience	Not the experience that I have	2
	Private Spaces/Places	Date should take place away from others	3
Queering a Date	Rejection of Normativity	Not confining dating to stereotyped, mainstream practices	1
	Public Spaces/ Places	Date was enacted in front of other people	16

Table 4.2: Scripts As Enactment of Dating Components

Themes of Analysis	Thematic categories	Examples	Frequency
Prior to Date:	Preparation	Getting Money, Calling Date	9
	Appearance	Grooming, Picking Out Clothes, Looking Nice	81
	Cleaning Spaces	Tidying Home, Washing Car	5
During Date:	Arrival	Beginning of Date, Meeting Date, Arrival at Location	8
	Food/Meal	Eating Food, Having Dinner, Drinking Coffee	59
	Activities	Movie, Dancing, Bowling	56
	Alcohol	Drinking Alcohol, Going to a Bar	27
	Conversation/Talk	Verbal or Written Communication	171
	Departing	Ending the Date, Departing From Location or Date	41
After Date:	Follow Up	Checking back with date after completion	10
	Debriefing	Checking with friends or others about date	10

Table 4.3: Scripts as Enacting Dating Purpose

Themes of Analysis	Thematic categories	Examples	Frequency
Romance Scripts:	Escorting	Walking Date to Door or Vehicle	7
	Intimacy	Emotional or Physical Attachment to another	17
	Mutual Attraction	An involved interest by both parties	19
	Positive nonverbals	Making Eye Contact, Laughing, Smiling	11
	Flirting	Playful romantic or sexual overtures	12
	Displays of Affection	Kissing, Hand Holding, Touching, Hugging	49
Sexually Explicit Scripts:	Sexual Activity	Sexual Intercourse, Hooking Up	18
Getting to Know Scripts:	Compatibility	Looking for Chemistry, Asking about mutual interests	30
	Exploration	Talking/Asking about partner	53
Investigating Scripts:	Background Checks	"Facebook stalking," Checking with friends about date's past	4
	Personal Information Gathering	Asking intimate personal questions	18

Table 4.4: Thematic Categories Concerning Assessment of Dating

Themes of Analysis	Thematic categories	Examples	Frequency
Assessment of Dating	Extending the Date	Adding on additional events or interactions to prolong the date	9
	Questions of Intimacy	Assessing the date to determine levels of initimacy	13
	Debriefing	Review of Events from the date	10
	Planning a Future Date	Planning for another dating encounter, wanting to do the date again	18

Table 4.5. Role Negotiation (With)In the Date

Themes of Analysis	Thematic categories	Examples	Frequency
Areas of Negotiation:	Setting Up the Date	Planning or organizing the events of the date	26
	Driving/Transportation	transporting one or both parties by vehicle	16
	Payment	Paying for meal or activity, getting money with the intent on paying	20
Role Negotiation Scripts:	Reciprocal	An expectation of one party acting, because the other party just acted	18
	Initiation	The act of taking the first step or initiating the date	6
	Dominance	Utilizing power or control over situation or other person	11
	Submission	Relinquishing power or control over date or to another person	4
	Egalitarian	Participants acting equally	15

Table 4.6. Thematic Categories Concerning Recognition of Heteronormativity

Themes of Analysis	Thematic categories	Examples	Frequency
Recognizing Heteronormativity	Heteronormative Behaviors	Implementing heterosexual behaviors	4
	Private Spaces/Places	taking place in seclusion from others	9
	Discomfort with Identity	An uneasiness about dating other men or with being on a date	15

Table 4.7. Thematic Categories Concerning Queer Identity

Themes of Analysis	Thematic categories	Examples	Frequency
Queer Identity	Coming Out	Recognition of one's sexuality	19
	Identity	Framing of a person's conception of the individuality or group affiliation	12
	Public Spaces	Being visible in the community	18
	Performance	The act of private or public displays for others	1