

Running head: CISGENDER PRIVILEGE

"Head Ladies Center for Teacup Chain":

Exploring Cisgender Privilege in a (Predominately) Gay Male Context

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INTRODUCTION

Marginalized communities and social movements are not without their internal struggles around issues of power, oppression, and privilege (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006). Women of color, working class women, and lesbians challenged the feminist movement to address the privileging of whiteness, middle and upper class values, and heteronormativity that was central to the movement's goals, and critiques of the patriarchy (Butler, 2004; Calhoun, 2003; hooks, 1994; Kelly, 2001). Likewise, numerous segments of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community – bisexuals, trans-identified individuals, people of color, working class individuals, and people with disabilities, among others – have critiqued the gay and lesbian community and movement for a similar centering of monosexuality, cisgender identities, middle and upper class values, whiteness, and abled-bodied assumptions (Duggan, 2003; Ferguson, 2006; Hutchinson, 1997; Schulman, 1995). In this chapter, we explore our experiences of cisgender privilege – the unearned advantages that individuals who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth accrue solely due to their cisgender identity – within the context of an organization that primarily serves a marginalized community – a gay and lesbian square dance club to which both authors belong. Because one author identifies as transgender and the other as cisgender, our intention is to use our differing social locations to interrogate our experiences of what is a very traditionally gendered space (square dancing) to illustrate how privilege functions to maintain oppression of trans-identified individuals, while reinforcing cisgender supremacy.

The general scholarship on issues of privilege has been expanding in the last couple of decades (Manglitz, 2003; Ore, 2006), and has included examinations of white privilege (Dobbins & Skillings, 2000; Pewewardy, 2007; Pewewardy & Severson, 2003; Rodriguez, 2000), male privilege (Anderson & Accomando, 2002; Calasanti & Steven, 2001; Farough, 2003), and to a lesser extent, heterosexual (DiAngelo, 1997; van Every, 1995), Christian (Blumenfeld, 2006; Clark & Brimhall-Vargas, 2003; Schlosser, 2003), and social class privilege (Abramovitz, 2001; Kivel, 2004; Wright, 2008). Much of the writing has focused on defining various forms of privilege and how those forms function to maintain inequality (Goodman, 2001; Walls et al., 2009). More recently, however, an arena of scholarship has emerged that focuses on the pedagogy of teaching about privilege (Curry-Stevens, 2007; van Gorder, 2007; Walls, Roll, Griffin, & Sprague, 2009; Walls et al., 2009), on the experiences of that educational process from the perspective of educators (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Pewewardy, 2007) and on personal narratives regarding coming to recognize privilege (Anderson & Middleton, 2005). However, the academic literature on cisgender privilege across all of these different arenas is virtually non-existent (Nickels & Seelman, 2009).

Much in the same manner that the scholarship on white privilege by white academics was preceded by writings on white privilege by scholars and activists of color (Wise, 2005), what does exist on the topic of cisgender privilege has been written primarily by trans-identified individuals (Koyama, 2002; T-Vox, 2009; Taking Up Too Much Space, 2008).

We begin this manuscript by explaining a number of terms that may not be familiar for many readers as well as discussing the context of square dancing to acquaint the reader with the specific context about which we write, and follow that by indicating our individual social locations. After that, we then examine our experiences to illustrate how cisgender privilege

functions, and end with a discussion of what we have learned and the questions we are still exploring.

VERNACULAR AND CONTEXT

Definitions

It is only within the last couple of decades that transgender issues and concerns have gained any traction in the academic literature, and what has traditionally existed has focused on medical and psychological treatment of trans-identified individuals (Factor & Rothblum, 2007). Trans-identified individuals have, however, been contributing to the knowledge base regarding gender through writing narratives, zines, blogs, and theorizing about their lived experiences for significantly longer (Buchanan, 2009; Schenwar, 2006; Zobl, 2003). For example, there are at least 206 different zine titles specifically written by trans writers or with significant trans content (Shortandqueer, 2008; see for example Koyama, 2003-2007; Jindal, 2005; Shortandqueer, 2004-2009). Similarly, the attention to the issue of cisgender privilege is largely absent from the extant academic literature, even as numerous trans-identified authors and activists have been examining the topic in their critique of trans oppression (Koyama, 2002; T-Vox, 2009; Taking Up Too Much Space, 2008). Because of this invisibility and marginalization of trans voices in academic writing, many readers may find themselves unfamiliar with a number of terms we use in this chapter. As such, we wanted to clarify a number of important definitions and provide some information about the context about which we write.

We use the term *transgender* within this manuscript to refer to individuals whose gender identity differs in some way from the one they were assigned at birth. They may identify and feel internally as the “opposite” sex or identify as another gender altogether, and/or they may feel the gender they were assigned at birth is a misleading, incorrect, or incomplete description of

themselves (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, 2007). Some of these individuals may choose hormones, surgery, and/or legal name changes to allow them greater ability to express their gender identity externally. Access to hormones and surgery is, however, class-based and rarely covered by insurance, thus only those who have wealth privilege are able to access such options, should they choose.

By *cisgender*, we mean individuals whose experience of gender is such that their internal sense of their own gender matches the gender they were assigned when they were born, in other words, they do not identify as transgender (e.g., a female-identified individual who was designated as a female at birth). Cisgender individuals behaviors and roles are considered appropriate for their sex within the society within which they live (Crethar & Vargas, 2007).

As defined above, *cisgender privilege* is the set of unearned advantages that individuals who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth accrue solely due to having a cisgender identity. This set of advantages includes material, political, and social advantages. Some material examples include not having to worry about being fired based on hostile reactions to one's gender identity, and feeling certain that medical insurance will cover most any medical needs. In the political realm, mainstream gay and lesbian organizations are more likely to advocate and prioritize what they deem as civil rights focused on sexual orientation,¹ and one can expect government-issued documents to accurately represent who one is. Finally, in the social arena of privileges, cisgender individuals don't live with the fear of being targeted for violence, humiliation, and exclusion based on gender identity, nor do they face interrogation about what their bodies look like. (For a more complete list of cisgender privileges, see T-Vox, 2009).

The Square Dancing Context

¹ We want to acknowledge that it is not only the rights and needs of transgender folks that get de-prioritized by the mainstream organizations, but also the rights and needs of LGBTQ people of color, LGBTQ people with disabilities, and low-income and working class LGBTQ people, among others.

We also wanted to include in this section some information to assist the reader in understanding the context about which we write. By *square dancing* we specifically mean modern Western square dancing, a form that is distinct from, but related to traditional square dance (dosado.com, n.d.). While many readers who were raised in the context of U.S. public schools may remember being introduced to square dance from middle school physical education classes, what is generally not as well known is that there exists a complex, international structure of square dance clubs and organizations, including clubs whose membership is predominately LGBTQ. Most urban areas in the U.S. have square dance clubs which belong to one of a number of larger square dance associations as well as at least one gay and lesbian square dance club.

Gay and lesbian square dance clubs emerged in the mid- to late-1970s and now exist in approximately 80 cities (IAGSDC, 2009). In contrast to the "graying" of many heterosexual square dance clubs – the phenomenon where the average age at clubs is getting older as fewer younger people are joining them – the gay and lesbian square dance clubs typically have a wider age range of participants and many are growing while other square dance clubs in the same geographic areas are shrinking (IAGSDC, 2009). Many gay and lesbian square dance clubs are members of the International Association of Gay Square Dance Clubs (IAGSDC), and in 2009, 62 such clubs were officially associated with the organization (IAGSDC, 2009).

Standardized in the 1970s by the International Association of Square Dance Callers (Callerlab; Callerlab, 2008), calls in modern square dancing are grouped in a series of increasingly difficult and complex sets (mainstream, plus, advanced, and challenge) that require dancers to take classes in order to master the different levels of calls. From the title of this manuscript, *head ladies center for a teacup chain*, for example, is a 32-beat plus-level call.

In general, square dance is a highly gendered activity where gender is reinforced and performed by assigning certain roles to specific genders. For example, in most non-gay square dancing clubs, men typically lead and women typically follow. Some of the square dance calls are such that "men's" parts are not interchangeable with "women's" parts. In other words, one may very well know how to *weave the ring* as a "man", but not be able to dance the same call as a "woman". In gay and lesbian square dance clubs, however, individuals may choose lead and follow positions regardless of their gender identity.

This gendered pattern can be so institutionalized that callers have noted that some heterosexual square dance clubs find all-position dancing (APD) or dance-by-definition (DBD) – an approach that does not so rigidly follow the strictures of gender-based calling – "undanceable" (Hurst, 2005). This is partly due to the differences in executing the call, as mentioned previously, but also is reinforced by both the gendered language of some calls (e.g., *ladies center, men sashay*) or the square dance norms that use gendered notation when directing the dancers to execute a certain call (e.g., *ladies touch a quarter* when *centers touch a quarter* would result in the same movement). APD or DBD calling is much more common in gay and lesbian square dance clubs.

SOCIAL LOCATION AND PERSONAL CONTEXTS

Kelly

I am a 28 year-old, white, queer, trans person on the FTM spectrum. I was born and raised in Philadelphia, the only child of divorced parents. I came out as queer during my freshman year of college, but struggled with finding identity labels that fit comfortably. It took several years for me to find the term "queer", a word that gave me flexibility and movement in

both my sexuality and gender expression. I graduated from American University with a degree in elementary education and a minor in mathematics

At the age of 23, I came out as transgender, openly identifying as male to my friends, family and coworkers. At 24, I began taking testosterone and my physical characteristics began to change such that I am most often now perceived as male.

Since 2004, I have been self-publishing a zine series that often focuses on my experiences regarding sexuality and gender identity. I have rarely found media that reflects my experience as a trans person, so it has been important for me to publicly create a counternarrative that disrupts the binaristic gender narrative as well as creates new transnarratives. In line with that, I co-founded the Tranny Roadshow in 2005, a multi-media performance art tour with all self-identified transgender performers.

I am currently the Director of Advocacy at the Colorado Anti-Violence Program, a statewide organization that works to eliminate violence within and against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities. I have been a member of the Denver-based gay and lesbian square dance club, Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus, since September of 2008, and currently dance at the plus-level of square dancing.

Eugene

I am a 46-year old white, gay man who was born in Conway, Arkansas. At birth I was assigned a male gender. I was raised in Arkansas in a working class, conservative, Southern Baptist family, attended public schools, and came out as a gay man when I was a senior in high school. I graduated with an undergraduate degree in sociology from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, a Masters in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin, and a masters and doctoral degree in sociology from the University of Notre Dame.

I practiced as a community-based social worker for approximately 8 years after my MSW and prior to returning to school for my doctorate. During that time I worked with people with disabilities, homeless men, women, and children, and ran a therapeutic foster care agency. During most of that time, I also worked part-time as a therapist with a clientele that was mostly gay and lesbian.

I am currently an Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver where I teach research methods, multicultural social work practice, and, for the last three years, a course I developed titled, Disrupting Privilege through Anti-Oppressive Practice. My research is focused on three primary areas: risks and resiliency among queer youth and young adults, modern forms of prejudice, and multicultural education.

I am also a plus-level dancer with the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus, and have been dancing since September of 2007.

An Acknowledgement

One final aspect that influenced the development of this manuscript is the intersection of our social locations. While there is much overlap in our constellation of identities (male, white, gay/queer-identified), the reality that one of us identifies as trans and the other as cisgender shaped this interaction from the onset and is important to acknowledge.

The social and political risks for writing about cisgender privilege and trans oppression are different for each of us. Individuals from privileged groups frequently can write about, advocate for, and challenge systems of oppression from which they benefit without being seen as self-serving or biased, while individuals who are oppressed in relation to that same system can be demonized for reporting the same information (Goodman, 2001). Second, because publicly being cisgender-identified is not stigmatized, acknowledging a cisgender identity carries minimal risks,

while trans-oppression makes publicly acknowledging a transgender identity a much riskier endeavor (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006, 2007; Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005). Finally, writing about an oppression that one experiences, likewise, has potential emotional costs as one is once again exposed to the social, political, and emotional violence of that oppression. Prior to the process of writing this manuscript, we discussed and acknowledged these differences, and revisited this discussion numerous times during the process.

CISGENDER PRIVILEGE FROM THE INSIDE

Kelly

In 2008, I was invited by Eugene to attend the open house for the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus. I attended with a friend, not really sure what to expect. Within minutes of dancing, I was having a blast. Thoughts of middle school square dancing, where I think I was the only one who enjoyed myself, came flooding back. This time, I was surrounded by lots of people with smiles on their faces and the excitement was contagious. Before the night ended, I decided that I wanted to begin taking the mainstream class. I had previously been talking about wanting to find more settings where I could meet new people and learn new skills. In many ways, at first glance, this seemed like a perfect opportunity.

I showed up, enthusiastic for class every week, but also with some amount of reservation. This was the first time I experienced being surrounded primarily by older, gay, white men. As a transman, when participating in gay spaces, I am very aware of my history of female socialization and am still learning the cultural norms that are assumed and expected in those spaces -- some norms which are similar to heterosexual male norms, but others which are unique to the gay male culture.

In most of my life, I am out as transgender. My family, friends, and coworkers know because this is an important part of my identity and, for me personally, it's important for me to stay visible as a transgender person. This isn't to say that I come out to every stranger I meet in passing. On the whole, though, I am consistently out and open about talking about this identity. It took me by surprise when I realized that I was making a conscious decision to not out myself in the context of square dancing. Now that I am primarily perceived as male, when entering new social spaces, I am conscious of the fact that many people no longer read me as female, genderqueer, or transgender. I generally surround myself with queer community that celebrates fluidity in gender and sexuality. My experience in gay and lesbian spaces (as opposed to queer spaces) has been much more rigid, and I've often encountered ignorance of transgender issues or explicit transphobia. For instance, there have been several occasions where, after telling gay men that I am transgender, they respond, "I don't know what that means" indicating ignorance, or, in an explicit transphobic manner, people *intentionally* using the wrong pronouns.

Unfamiliar with many of the members of the Rainbeaus, I was hesitant to say anything to invite this conversation. Instead, I left each week, feeling energized about using my body and meeting new people, but struggling with feeling like I had to check my transgender identity at the door in order to allow myself to have fun. Most of this fear of losing access to this space was self-imposed as I have had past experiences of dynamics shifting once I came out as transgender. I wasn't prepared to lose what I viewed as an exciting new activity and an expanded community, and therefore policed my own behavior and identity disclosure (Foucault, 1975)

Every week, I found myself questioning when I should come out, and in what context or if it was even relevant. I wasn't particularly avoiding the issue, it just never came up. While this

makes complete sense in my head, I know that many people feel entitled to this information and are often upset when they find out after knowing me for a while.

I'm not exactly sure how I was eventually outed, but at some point, I was aware that many people knew I was transgender without my ever telling them. On one hand, it was positive reinforcement that there was no discernible shift in relationships based on this knowledge. On the other hand, a few of the people I know and trust would let me know that people were approaching them with inappropriate questions about my identity and my body.

Square dancing is a physical activity, most of which occurs through hands touching and occasionally touching people's backs. While I haven't had experience in heterosexual square dancing clubs, I am aware that there is much more physical contact in the gay and lesbian clubs. There's "unofficial" hugging, back rubbing, and the norms around physicality are markedly different (IAGSDC, 2009). Many transgender people have different boundaries around physical contact as our bodies are often sites of victimization and violation. I am constantly aware of the way my body is being perceived, most often visually, but sometimes by physical contact. There have been many times when I wondered if my dance partners perceived any incongruence with what they expected. Only one time have I been asked a direct question about my body after physical contact with a dancing partner.

There are times when I'm aware of inconsistencies for what I'm "allowed" to do or how I'm "allowed" to behave with the Rainbeaus. For the most part, the policing that occurs is not brought directly to my attention, but instead I find out about it later. Much of this is rooted in standards of masculinity that are different for me than for cisgender men with whom I dance – even cisgender gay men. Eugene writes below about his own process around my choice to dance in the follow position, which, as mentioned above, is typically the "woman's" role. When we

were initially choosing positions to learn, we were told that if we like to twirl, we should be follows. That was all of the information I needed. I did not realize that in my choice of dance part, my performance of masculinity would be up for questioning – even by colleagues who I consider to be allies.

Another clear inconsistency occurred at the graduation for my square dance class. I had sewn a dress from scratch and accessorized with a blue wig, blue eyelashes, petticoat, and stockings with a seam up the back of the legs. I shaved my beard and knew that many people would not recognize me at first glance. As someone who very much enjoys drag and costumes in general, I was excited to bring this part of me into this space. I was even more excited to see, for the first time, the presence of the Rainbelles, the drag contingent of the Rainbeaus. While I wasn't wearing the Rainbelles' outfit, I felt more comfortable with other folks joining me in drag in the space. After the graduation, one friend in the club let me know that people who know that I'm transgender were having a "hard time" with my outfit. Why would I want to be feminine if I wanted everyone to perceive me as male? This was not a question posed for any of the cisgender male Rainbelles wearing dresses.

There has been only one major incident with explicit transphobia where one club member began a conversation by policing the validity of another transgender person's identity². This conversation, while frustrating at the time, escalated in follow up conversations. What I found when engaging in a process of accountability, both for this specific member and the club in general, is that there is a general desire to be inclusive, but a lack of knowledge about the best way to move forward. The lack of knowledge exists not only about trans oppression and the lived experience of trans people, but also about how gay and lesbian people embody cisgender

² The policing of gender was not in relation to anyone in the square dance club, but rather of a transman who was in the news when he and his partner decided to have children, and they made the decision for him to become pregnant and bear the child.

privilege and play a role in the reinforcement of marginalization of trans-identified people. This is further complicated about whether, in a social, recreational setting such as a square dancing club, one should address issues of oppression and privilege, and if so, then how does one educate others in an effective way?

Like many social settings in my life, being a member of the Rainbeaus presents me with complicated relationships where I am constantly aware of my transgender identity, how my gender influences my interactions with others around me, and the ways I call on the allies around me for support.

CISGENDER PRIVILEGE FROM THE OUTSIDE

Eugene

The first place I found myself consciously face-to-face with cisgender privilege was not something 'out there' in the square dance club, but was rather something inside myself. While I am fairly knowledgeable about transgender issues from both the standpoint as an academic who is fairly well read and teaches in the area, and as a friend and supporter to the local transgender community, I have no illusions that my work on understanding my own embodiment of cisgender privilege is anywhere near complete. I recognize that – as with all arenas of privilege that I inhabit – I probably fail to recognize and acknowledge my cisgender privilege far more often than I actually see it. It is typically when I am tripping over it, that I actually come to recognize it.

Such was the case when I found myself surprised that Kelly, upon joining the square dance club, had decided to learn the follow dance position. It took a full two weeks of me talking with my partner and a social justice colleague about my confusion over Kelly's decision to follow that it dawned on me that I was clearly speaking from my cisgender privilege. To make it

more explicit, let me outline the string of thoughts that led me to this place of confusion. First, I clearly knew from my friendship and numerous conversations with Kelly that he was assigned a female gender when he was born, but now identified as male. Second, although our particular square dance club does not solely rely on gender-based teaching of square dance calls, I was clearly conscious that traditionally the lead role is thought of as the "man's" part, while the follow role is thought of as the "woman's" part. Combining those two thoughts, I then reasoned, that Kelly would want to learn the "man's" part so that he could *more convincingly perform the masculinity that was associated with his identity as a male*. When Kelly's choice did not follow my line of logic, I become confused and found myself wondering, "Why the hell is Kelly learning the 'woman's' part?"

Now this string of thoughts may seem very logical – and, of course, at some level it is.³ However, what is interesting and makes this line of reasoning problematic is that in the context of gay and lesbian square dancing clubs, it is not unusual at all for some men to choose to dance the follow part, or for some women to choose to dance the lead part. In fact, I myself, dance the follow part. When other men in our club make that choice, it does not surprise me, nor do I find myself questioning why they would want to learn the follow part. However, when I started wrestling with my reaction to Kelly's decision, it became clear to me, that what was really going on was a bit more complicated. What I clearly should have written above is, "When *cisgender* men in our club make that choice, it does not surprise me..." In that instance, it creates no cognitive or emotional dissonance for me when a male-identified person who was assigned a male gender at birth makes the choice to learn the "woman's" part, but when a male-identified person who was assigned a female gender at birth makes that same choice, I suddenly have a

³ While logical in the academic sense of the word, we want to insure that readers do not confuse this statement with supporting, or condoning cisgender privilege. Many logical inferences – when divorced from issues of power and contexts of social justice values – are highly problematic, even as they are logical.

reaction. Why was it that I – as a cisgender man – could learn to follow in a gay and lesbian square dance club without my maleness being suspect at all, but my friend Kelly was not supposed to be able to do that because I *expected* and *needed* him to more stringently perform masculinity because he was a transman? Otherwise, his maleness would be suspect? In this excavation (Kendall, 2001) of my cisgender privilege, there was the expectation that Kelly had to go above and beyond what I expected of cisgender gay men in order to be able to fully claim his maleness. When I first recognized the entitlement that I was carrying about how loose my performance of masculinity could be without my maleness being questioned in the square dance club while having very different standards for transmen, I was sickened.

The second incidence – or really a string of incidents over a fairly short period of time – came from other well-meaning members of the square dance club. While they were not all exactly the same, nor were they in the same context, their similarity was based on the notion that cisgender people have the right to ask very personal questions about trans folks' identities and bodies, their transitions, and their motivations. The fact that members were asking me – because I was friends with the two transmen who had recently joined the club – rather than asking those questions directly of Kelly and the other member, should have been a clue to the members themselves that their questions were problematic. Among other things, I was asked, (a) whether Kelly (who is most often read as male rather than as a transman) is transgender; (b) if Kelly was on hormones or had had "the surgery;"⁴ and (c) at what point does Kelly – since he identifies as a gay man⁵ – tell potential sexual partners about his anatomy. On repeated occasions, I had to

⁴ Not an infrequent assumption, this statement is problematic because (a) there are multiple types of surgeries and medical procedures that are options and those options differ for transmen and transwomen; (b) some trans-identified individuals choose not to alter any part of their body; and (c) some individuals choose different combinations of surgical and medical procedures.

⁵ This question not only misreads Kelly's sexual orientation (queer), but also fails to recognize the same dynamic emerging regardless of the gender/sex of Kelly's potential sex partner.

correct the pronouns used for the other trans-man in the club – even after the member I was correcting had been repeatedly corrected by the transman and by others in the club. Finally, in a social setting at a local bar, I experienced a member of the club share information with me about a surgical procedure that one of our transgender club members had had in a very blasé manner.

A third crucible occurred when the square dance club officers were confronted with a transphobic incident that happened after class one night, which Kelly mentions above in his narrative of cisgender privilege. In the follow-up discussions that ensued about the incident, I had to intervene to explain that expecting the transgender members of our club to educate and train our club members on transphobia and cisgender privilege was not appropriate, and is a form of cisgender privilege, in and of itself. This dynamic of privileged people expecting marginalized people to be responsible for educating them on power, oppression, and privilege is, of course, a common dynamic (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006)

CONCLUSION

While it is often mistakenly believed that marginalized communities somehow automatically understand oppressions they don't experience because of an empathy that reaches across experiences of marginalization, we have demonstrated this is not the case in our lived experiences of our participation in a social recreational club. In no way do we believe that Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus is more problematic than most organizations or groups in the LGBTQ community, or, for that matter, most organizations or groups in most marginalized communities. In fact, the Rainbeaus' explicitly stated commitment to inclusivity across axes of difference probably situates the group as further along the progressive continuum than many other groups who have yet to publicly communicate such a commitment to inclusivity. However, intention to be inclusive is not enough.

Our experiences in the group – of which we are still active and supportive members – demonstrates that the vast majority of problematic interactions are not at the end of the continuum that we would classify as overtly transphobic (although one incident clearly was), but rather fall along the parts of the continuum that we would classify as cisgender privilege. These behaviors – regardless of the well-meaning intent of the members who engaged in them – illustrate how even members of the LGBTQ community, who are considered gender outlaws by many outside the community, take part in policing gender and reinforcing a system of gender stratification that is oppressive to trans-identified individuals (and ultimately damaging to cisgender people as well (see Kendall, 2006)).

Within marginalized communities, certain identities continue to be privileged over others, both mirroring and maintaining the hierarchical paradigm that exists outside in the dominant culture. This within group ranking based on within group differences illustrates the importance of intersectionality not only in understanding complex social locations, but also in illustrating the role that marginalized others play in reinforcing the stratifying ideologies of the dominant culture. We have attempted in this manuscript to mobilize the differences in our intersectional identities along the axis of gender identity to illuminate the presence of cisgender privilege within a marginalized space – that of the LGBTQ community.

Of course it is not only the identities of the individuals that are important in the interaction, but also how those identities get read by others. In one incident, Kelly was being misread as a gay man, while he identifies as a queer male. Those identity differences are significant and shape experience in fairly major ways. Likewise, the question arises as to the authenticity of how people are reading Kelly's maleness. Using male pronouns while still viewing Kelly as female or as an "inauthentic" male is still problematic as it privilege's one's own

view of Kelly's gender over Kelly's ability to use self-knowledge to self-define. The arrogance of privileging one's own definition of marginalized others (persons or communities), rather than trusting that the other has more knowledge about their own experience than we do is of course another hallmark of privilege.

The types of privileges that we have uncovered are similar to privilege as it exists in other communities. They include the sense of entitlement that privileged people often have with regard to very personal knowledge about marginalized others, most often just to satisfy the privileged person's curiosity, rather than being driven by any real need. They include having higher expectations regarding standards of behavior for marginalized others than for people in the privileged group and judging the same behaviors very differently depending on the privileged or marginalized status of the person engaging in the behavior.

We also raise the issue of how our different social locations as co-authors potentially have very different consequences for each of us because of what those social locations mean in the world around us. While co-creating across difference can be a powerful way to explore, deconstruct, and challenge issues of power, oppression, and privilege, failure to attend to the potentially differential consequences in that process can just as easily reinforce the power dynamics the co-creators are trying to explore. The context of the relationship between co-authors, the level of trust, and the writing process must attend to the differences in power or be suspect.

Throughout the writing of this manuscript and even as we have neared completing the project, we have continually asked ourselves, how the process of our joint exploration of our different experiences of oppression and privilege from our different social locations has impacted our friendship. Has it lead us to a deeper and more authentic understanding of one another, or has

it created distrust and fear as Kelly has been exposed to Eugene's disclosure of his own struggles with cisgender privilege? Was it even appropriate for this interaction to occur across this axis of difference? How is Eugene's vulnerability about his own struggles different from Kelly's vulnerability at being exposed to a broader understanding of the cisgender privilege that is part of the square dance club – a group that is very important to both of us? On an even larger scale, how does reporting our experiences with the Rocky Mountain Rainbeaus shape our relationships with the club, both from our own internal perceptions and narratives about our participation in the group as well as the groups' reactions to hearing about our experiences?

We hope in this exploration that we have added to the inchoate literature on cisgender privilege. Given the lack of attention to the topic, we similarly hope that it will encourage others to take up the topic as an important one not only for the growing literature on the lived experiences of transgender people, but also for the diversification of the scholarship on privilege and its role in maintaining oppressive systems.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the myriad ways that cisgender people benefit from cisgender privilege, and how are those benefits related to the costs paid by transgender people?
2. How does one bring up issues of power, oppression, and privilege in the context of social and recreational groups whose primary aims are not 'political' or 'educational'?
3. How often does the issue of privilege get raised in communities in which you participate that are organized around some aspect of your identity that is marginalized, both privilege that corresponds to the marginalization the group experiences as well as privilege that some (many?) in your marginalized community might embody?
4. On what cultural axes of differences do people in your marginalized community get unjustly ranked? How do you make those within group differences and their connected consequences visible?
5. How do you talk about differences with your friends and colleagues who do not share your marginalized or privileged identity? When is it appropriate? When is it not?

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