

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: A
POSTSTRUCTURAL AND QUEER
PHOTOVOICE PROJECT EXPLORING
NUTRITION AND BODIES AMONG GAY
MEN

by

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Dedication Page

Alice could not help her lips curling up into a smile as she began: "Do you know, I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too? I never saw one alive before!" "Well, now that we have seen each other," said the Unicorn, "If you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?"

(Carroll, 2014).

This work is dedicated to Troy, my parents and family, the bears, and all the gay boys who struggle.

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Abstract

The image we have of our bodies is an integral part of our health. Body dissatisfaction has been previously related to negative health outcomes and poor mental health for many gay men. Through a Foucauldian conceptual framework and employing an arts-based qualitative methodology that weaves together components of poststructuralism and queer theory, this thesis examines how gay men navigate the tensions to their health and well-being from competing discourses of gender, sexuality, beauty, health, and fat. Using photovoice, nine self-identifying gay men in Nova Scotia, Canada explored their beliefs, values, and practices about food and their bodies. Discourse analysis of their interviews revealed that participants viewed their bodies as works of art that are shaped through many facets of gay culture, including dominant beauty ideals, social media, and hegemonic forms of masculinities. Tensions that influence their health and well-being were often experienced by participants when they felt their bodies were not aligned with societal body ideals and discourses. The findings of this study reveal that by recognizing and challenging body ideals, connecting with other gay men, and expressing compassion towards oneself and others, participants were able to help ease their tensions and positively influence their lives.

List of Abbreviations Used

LGBTQ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer

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Chapter 1: Introduction

'Who are you?' said the caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly 'I-I hardly know, sir, just at present – I knew who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.' (Carroll, 2014, p. 46).

I often felt like Alice in the quote above on my journey with this research and through the process of writing the following dissertation. Alice in her conversation with the caterpillar comes to understand that she does not know who she is at the present and through her adventures she has not only changed many times but is continually changing. I am Alice. I invite you to follow me down the rabbit hole of my research as I attempt to understand, and to disrupt how society and culture shape the beliefs, values, and practices of gay men concerning their eating, body image, and health.

The personal is political is the mantra for this dissertation. This radical slogan, borrowed from feminist traditions, has come to represent many ideas, but, to me, it reflects the core concept of this research. Our personal lives, our experiences of our bodies, and our nutritional practices are shaped by social and cultural forces in ways that are both known and unknown. This phrase compels us to critically examine the historical context of our lives and, at the same time, to become socially disruptive when we confront differing power relations. Through the lens of poststructuralism and queer theory, this research provides both a personal and political perspective on the topic of body image among gay men. It explores the social context in which the nutritional practices of gay men are shaped. The research aims to subvert and challenge the dominant thinking about food and bodies within gay culture that often can be harmful and detrimental to the health of gay men.

Cultural notions of gender and sexuality play an integral role in the way gay men view their bodies. For example, stereotypes suggest that gay men should look after their bodies, be fashionable, fit, and attractive. Advertising, social media, websites, fitness magazines, and dating apps all contribute to an idealized masculine gay body, that is muscular and free of fat. This dominant ideal of gay men's bodies can foster exclusion for those whose bodies are not aligned with it, resulting in unique health concerns, such as feelings of loneliness, isolation, and eating disorders (Bordo, 1999; Brennan et al., 2011, 2013; Jankowski, 2015; Kaminski et al., 2005; Kanayama et al., 2006; M. A. Morrison et al., 2004; Olivardia et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2000; Siever, 1994; Strong et al., 2000). The way gay men constitute the cultural ideas of eating and the way gay culture constitutes the eating practices of men is largely unknown. This dissertation is both personal and political for me. As a gay man, I have struggled with the dominant social ideals of bodies and the challenges that this has posed to my well-being. In this chapter, a brief overview of the project including research questions, the journey to this research, and the study design is provided. This research uses an arts-based methodology known as photovoice. Again, the methodology reflects the personal nature of this project. As a photographer, art became a way to express myself, and I believe the participants of this research have given their voice through the arts-based processes.

Research Purpose and Question

The aim of this project is unlike most dietetic work. It is not about finding a single truth to make nutritional recommendations, prevent body image concerns, or to find a solution to weight issues. The purpose of this study is to explore how gay culture influences the nutritional practices and body images of gay men and to examine health

outcomes related to these cultural practices. The primary research question is: How do gay men navigate the tensions to their health and well-being from competing discourses regarding their relationship with food and their bodies? The research further aims to challenge and disrupt the dominant ideology on these topics as a means for potential health improvements.

My Position within the Research

This project is a co-creation between the participants and myself. The philosophy of photovoice is one that fosters this construction and sharing of knowledge. I am not the health expert for these men. As a dietitian, I do not hold one truth, answer, or knowledge that will improve the lives of the participants. Although the participants and I are co-creators of the knowledge of this research, we are still embedded in the culture that creates our experiences. This project is an opportunity to explore together the social norms that shape our health and to reflect on ways these norms can be changed, challenged, or disrupted. The stories participants share become the data of this research that are analyzed through a lens of language and relations of power. The analysis of the data does not tell the participants what is but is informed by them. The research process is one that is productive. It calls upon all of us to be contemplative and for me, as a researcher, to explore my position within the project. I am at once a gay man, a photographer, a learner, and a researcher.

Qualitative researchers often view being part of a community as an effective way to enhance collaboration, which is key to the success of this project. Being an 'insider' can provide the researcher with a greater understanding and knowledge of the culture

under study. It can also enhance trust and create bonds between the researchers and participants (Unluer, 2012). Familiarity with the culture, however, may lead the researcher to assume shared perspectives with participants. It may leave me unable to see alternatives to the very social categories I am seeking to disrupt. Semp (2011) recounts how his belief about his “shared queerness” (p. 75) with participants allowed him to connect with the men in his study, but also left him unprepared for several differences and challenges he encountered during interviews. The distinct boundaries between researchers and participants become blurred when poststructuralism and queer theory are used to disrupt categories of identity. The straightforward notion of being an ‘insider’ to the community fades as researchers and participants take on multiple subject positions. Semp (2011) recommends that researchers reflect on their multiple identities and consider how they are both insiders and outsiders to communities. My use of these theoretical frameworks entails a thoughtful reflection on my underlying assumptions of nutrition and gay bodies, and my shared queerness that influences the collaborative process and analysis of this research (Semp, 2011).

The Journey to this Research

This research reflects a desire to understand how cultural norms shape the experiences of nutrition and bodies of gay men. This research is a personal journey for me because of my own experiences and struggles with body image. Through this research, the participants and I can learn more about the experiences of gay men and the tensions that exist relating to their eating practices and bodies. This exploration of the experiences of gay men is framed by the work of Scott (1991) who views experience through a poststructural lens. Often the experience of a person is seen as a universal truth

within research. Scott (1991), however, critiques this assumption and views experience not as a knowable truth but as a product of discourse that is set within historical context. Scott (1991) notes that a person does not have experiences but that experiences are what shapes a person or subject¹. Poststructural analysis is not about examining an experience in isolation, but rather it is about examining the social structures and systems that create people's experiences and thus their subjectivities. In this work, participants share their experiences through photography and interviews and my analysis is an exploration of how their experiences are threads of discourses that shape their identities.

For me, this journey in gay men's health research starts with my own experiences. I grew up in a rural Nova Scotia village where everyone knew everybody else. My childhood seemed different from the other boys in my community. During high school, my attraction to boys began to negatively affect my identity. Non-conformity to strict gender rules resulted in stress, anxiety, fear, and isolation. It was not just my mental health that was affected by my otherness. My nutritional and physical health was also influenced by the consequences of my non-conformity to heteronormativity and gender roles. Lunchtime for me was not about eating with friends, it was about escape and avoidance from my peers. I do not remember ever stepping into the cafeteria during junior high school for fear of being teased. I spent my lunchtime eating in the library where no one could find me. Eating became emotional for me. Like the cafeteria, I also avoided gym class as much as I could. The physical education system is a system of

¹ The term "subject" is explored in greater depth in chapter three. It is used within poststructuralism to describe the individual that is historically constructed (Numer & Gahagan, 2009).

heteronormativity that reinforces binary gender norms, maintains man and woman stereotypes, and reaffirms heterosexuality as the 'normal' sexuality (Landi, 2017). Gym classes, for many students outside the heterosexual identity, are hostile, homophobic places of emotional and physical abuse (D. Gill et al., 2006; Landi, 2017; Larsson et al., 2009; Sykes, 2009, 2011; Sykes & McPhail, 2008). Sykes (2011) notes that many non-heterosexual students often sit out of activities, miss class altogether, or isolate themselves from other students to avoid negative experiences and to protect their sense of self. Reading the personal stories of other youths within Sykes' (2011) work was like reading my own story.

During these school years, I also discovered the bodies of men through gay magazines, such as *XY*, that were filled with youthful, thin, and fashionable men. I discovered, through these magazines and the other limited media I could find in my small conservative town, the men I wanted to look like and to be. Without realizing it, I was learning what it meant to be a gay man. I was learning what it meant to look like a gay man, what a body of a gay man should be like, and what it meant to be desirable as a gay man. My body, however, did not conform to these images no matter how much I wanted it to. Puberty not only made me taller but also wider. I entered the dating world naive, thinking that the common bond of being gay would be enough for connecting with other men. I came to understand that there were social expectations of bodies and ideas about masculinities in the gay dating world. I often struggled with body images, comparing myself with other men both in the media and within the real world. I feel these struggles not only persist but affect most aspects of my life, including my interactions with others, my relationships, and now my research.

Nutritional studies seemed a natural extension because it combined my love of food with my desire to look like the men plastered in all my magazines. I thought, what better way to control one's weight than to learn about what causes a person to gain weight? In the program, I began to learn about the negative health outcomes to weight, and the need to control the weight of myself, clients, and populations. My nutritional degree was mostly quantitative, learning how to count calories, measure portion sizes, and treat diabetes and the other diseases attributed to excess weight. Alternate views to nutrition, bodies, and weight were limited. Body image concerns were reviewed but mostly in relation to women. I remember once when giving a presentation on body image concerns for young boys, another student commented that she did not even know that "was a thing" and only imagined young girls with body image concerns. I was left, as a man who struggled with weight and body image concerns, wondering about the experiences of other men and what factors shaped their experiences with food and their bodies.

The question of how best to examine the societal influences on my own life and the lives of other gay men arose many times on my research journey. I became exposed to qualitative research and arts-based methodologies through my community dietetic internship placement. Arts-based methods became an excellent way to combine my passion for photography with my drive to understand the cultural influences on the nutrition and health of gay men. This journey and the factors that have shaped my experiences are reflected in this project.

Study Design

The design of this study allows for the exploration of how social and cultural norms shape the nutritional and health experiences for gay men. It allows for an examination of the tensions that may result from gay cultural pressures, such as media and the portrayal of ideal men's bodies. In this study, gay men are recruited and asked to take photographs reflecting their experiences, thoughts, and practices on eating and their bodies. The act of taking pictures allows participants time to consider the research questions and through subsequent discussions on the meanings of their photographs, the way their identities are shaped can be explored. The project concludes with an art show that displays their work to the wider community and stimulates conversations among community members. This process is known as photovoice. Photovoice affords individuals the opportunity to be actively involved in the research process, to narrate, and reflect on their experiences with the intent to address health disparities, improve community problems, and affect social change through individual and collective actions (Carlson et al., 2006; McIntyre, 2003). Photovoice at its core is a political method because it shifts power relations, both within the research process and within the community, and has the potential to disrupt cultural norms and traditional binary categories of gender and bodies.

The Dissertation

This is a queer dissertation. It does not traverse the traditional paths of many health dissertations. It queers the processes of dissertations. It weaves a story and shows the messiness of life. This dissertation documents the research journey and processes to bring about an understanding of the health of gay men and the social and cultural

structures and discourses that shape their experiences concerning food and their bodies. I attempt to tell the stories of my participants. Their stories, and my own story, cannot be dissected into orderly sections. I follow a different path in writing this dissertation, a queer path. You will find chapters that discuss and explore the literature, theoretical underpinnings, and methods of this work but you will not find a discreet results section nor a discreet discussion section. You will find stories of gay men told their photographs and their words. Stories that reveal the cultural and social norms that shape their nutritional practices and bodies.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the background literature that informs this research. This chapter provides an overview of the language and approaches to gay men's health, emphasizing an intersectional approach and reviewing the theory of syndemics. Chapter Two also attempts to define masculinities and explore the assumptions of masculinity. It provides an overview of how masculinities are shaped and the cultural images for gay bodies, as defined by social media, pornography, and a culture of beauty. The chapter ends with a review of the body dissatisfaction within gay men and the consequences to their health.

Chapter Three describes the theoretical framework that guides the project. The chapter examines the various philosophical underpinnings of the research, including poststructuralism, particularly the Foucauldian lens of the project. This chapter also explores queer theory that provides the political framework to the project. Finally, the chapter examines the Deleuzian approach to the body.

Chapter Four reviews the arts-based methodology of the research, focusing on the epistemological roots of photovoice and its alignment with a queer poststructural framework. Chapter Four also provides an overview of the methods, including the research questions, recruitment strategies, the photovoice process, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the participants, providing context to the beliefs, values, and practices that informed their artwork and interviews. The chapter also provides a discussion on the participants' experiences with photovoice and some of the challenges they faced with the photovoice method.

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight explore and analyze the major findings of this research. Each of these chapters describes the journeys of the participants. Chapter Six explores the social and cultural influences that shape their beliefs, values, and practices of food and their bodies. Chapter Seven explores the health consequences of the competing discourses the participants experience and how such discourses influence the practices participants use to create their bodies. Chapter Eight explores the ways through which participants attempt to ease the tensions they experience from the dominant cultural notions about the bodies of gay men.

Chapter Nine provides a summary of the research and its methodologies. It reviews the major findings on the body becoming art and how the participants find their way through body tensions. Finally, it explores the meanings of the project on a personal level, as well as discusses implications of the research for dietetic practices.

In the appendixes of this dissertation, are the various documents discussed within it and used throughout the project. These documents include the recruitment materials, project outline, informed consents, participant worksheets, interview guides, and the confidentiality agreement for the transcriptionist. A list of outputs, including articles, conference abstracts and presentations, and media links, that have resulted from this work is provided. The dissertation ends with a glossary of terms that is a starting point for readers that may be unfamiliar cultural references. It is recognized that language is ever shifting, and these definitions may change over time.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The nutritional health of gay men is complex and dynamic, continuously being informed by gay men as it simultaneously shapes them. This chapter begins with a brief overview of two different approaches, an individualistic approach and a syndemic approach, to gay men's health. A critique of the language within the individualistic approach suggests that this type of approach can be problematic because it does not focus on the social and cultural factors of health. The analysis of gay men's health further reveals that the concept of masculinity is a critical factor that is deeply connected to the health of gay men. The chapter attempts to define the shifting concept of masculinity by reviewing the assumptions that underpin it. A review of Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is provided, highlighting the connections to the bodies and body ideals of gay men. The chapter then explores how masculinities are constituted through gay culture, detailing how advertising, pornography, and social media shape the bodies of gay men and, in turn, may contribute to body dissatisfaction. The chapter concludes with a review of the consequences of body dissatisfaction on the nutritional practices and the overall health of gay men.

Understanding Gay Men's Health: Language and Approaches

It is well recognized that societal notions of sexuality create health disparities for gay men regarding their physical, mental, emotional, and sexual health. The consequences of health disparities for gay men is poorer overall health compared to the general population (Collins & Rocco, 2014; Coulter et al., 2014; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014; Friedman & Dodge, 2016; Garofalo & Katz, 2001; Institute of Medicine (U.S.),

2011; Isacco et al., 2012; Kipke et al., 2007; Lim et al., 2014; Numer, 2008). The health of gay men is shaped by heteronormativity or the set of guiding norms and practices that structures human relations by privileging heterosexuality and supporting binary gender identities (Caudwell, 2007; Green, 2002; Numer & Gahagan, 2009). Heterosexuality becomes the societal norm and a sense of naturalness is ascribed to it. Heteronormativity shapes the way all people come to know themselves and their relationships (McWilliams, 2016). For gay men, this means they become 'othered' or marginalized. Social marginalization has been reported to lead to mental and physical health problems, including higher risks for sexually transmitted infections, increased mood and anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and increased thoughts and attempts of suicide (Brennan et al., 2010; Cochran, 2001; Eldahan et al., 2016; Gedro & Mizzi, 2014; Isacco et al., 2012; Mayer et al., 2008).

The language of gay men's health: a critique. The health of gay men is often framed as a consequence of the way they are viewed within the society. Within the literature for gay men's health, several terms emerge that are used to describe the causes of many of their health issues. For example, terms such as homophobia and internalized homophobia are often used. Homophobia is defined as the irrational fear, aversion, hatred, and anger of people who identify as heterosexual towards people who do not identify as heterosexual. Within this definition, homophobia can take on many forms, including discriminatory laws and employment policies that create inequalities, anti-gay rhetoric, hostile environments, violence, and hate crimes (Aguinaldo, 2008; Herrick et al., 2011). Internalized homophobia, sometimes referred to as internalized homonegativity or internalized heterosexism, are terms to explain how queer people supposedly experience

self-hatred and guilt about being gay (Aguinaldo, 2008; Isacco et al., 2012). These terms have become common in both the health literature and the popular understanding of the health of gay men.

The meanings of homophobia and internalized homophobia have significance and are problematic in the construction of an approach to gay men's health. As Aguinaldo (2008) clarifies, these terms represent a psychological and individualistic approach to gay men's health that does not fully examine the broader social causes of negative health outcomes. The concept of homophobia frames people who fear or hate gay people as deviants from society who suffer from individual mental health issues (Aguinaldo, 2008; Isacco et al., 2012). Internalized homophobia also places the responsibility of health onto the individual, but, in this case, it is the gay individual who is identified as the problem (Aguinaldo, 2008; Isacco et al., 2012). Internalized homophobia positions gay men as psychologically damaged with a negative self-image. As a result, gay men engage in coping strategies to offset the tensions produced by their inner damage (Aguinaldo, 2008). Coping strategies identified in the literature include drug and alcohol abuse, acts of violence, riskier sexual behaviors, poorer educational performance, and suicidality (Garofalo & Katz, 2001). As Aguinaldo (2008) further states, these concepts focus "our attention toward the dark workings of the mind" (p.93) and not the structures within society that create a system that privileges and normalizes heterosexuality. The language of homophobia and internalized homophobia within health literature shifts the focus onto people, prompting health interventions to be aimed at the individual instead of changing the broader social structures that create the health experiences of gay men (Aguinaldo, 2008). The individualistic approach to the health of gay men may not be useful in

improving their overall health and well-being due to the lack of consideration of the social and cultural factors of health. There is, however, another view of gay men's health that does consider the social interconnections of disease.

An intersectional approach to gay men's health. The health of gay men can be viewed as an intersection of socially constructed epidemics (Stall et al., 2008). For more than thirty years, evidence of the interdependent nature between the most prevalent health issues for gay men has been building. Singer's (1994) work revealed that class and marginalization create a set of mutually relating epidemics that reinforce each other to lower the overall health of gay men more than each epidemic would do separately. His work exposed the connections between HIV, racism, substance use, poverty, and violence. This came to frame gay men's health as syndemic epidemics and shifted the focus away from biomedical factors. The theory of syndemics considers how race, gender, and sexuality interact with community contexts, such as personal relationships, access to resources, and adequate nutrition, to influence risk behaviors and overall health (Wright et al., 2016). Since the work of Singer (1994), further research has strengthened this approach to gay men's health. For example, Stall (2008) reports that the Urban Men's Health Study, which was conducted in urban cities across America in the 1990s, revealed the syndemic relationship between depression, suicidality, substance abuse, and HIV. Syndemic connections have also been made between chemsex (the use of drugs during sexual situations) and HIV risk for gay men. In a study with gay men living in London, UK, it was found that the social effects of marginalization and stigma are entangled with the practice of chemsex and HIV risk (Pollard et al., 2017). Herrick

(2011) suggests that syndemics may be “driving the HIV epidemic,” (p.26), as well as other health disparities among gay men.

The syndemic view of gay men’s health recognizes that the conditions that give rise to health issues are historically produced and may change depending on social and cultural norms (Stall et al., 2008). This means that different communities of gay men may experience syndemics differently. Egan (2011) proposes that the social factors contributing to the various syndemics challenging gay men may be further influenced by race and ethnicity, as previously discussed. Two social issues, however, have been suggested to be common contributors to the major syndemics confronting gay men, regardless of race, ethnicity, or class. These factors are heteronormativity and notions of masculinity (Stall et al., 2008). Although these two factors may be experienced differently within diverse ethnicities and cultures, they do influence the health of gay men.

Social norms of sexuality and gender are thought to influence the health of gay men at an early age and continue throughout their life (Stall et al., 2008). For example, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is administered to about 60 schools in Massachusetts every two years, found that gay and bisexual students were five times more likely to miss school out of fear of violence, eight times more likely to require medical attention due to suicide attempts, and more than nine times more likely to use heroin or other illegal drugs than the general school population (Massachusetts Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Youth, 2013). Surveys, such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, indicate the influence of heteronormativity on the health of young children. It has also been noted that the inability

for young boys to openly discuss the sexual feelings they have towards other boys has been linked to self-censorship, sexual health issues, depression, and substance abuse later in life (Stall et al., 2008).

Gender non-conformity has also been linked to increased physical and verbal abuse for young boys and these abuses continue to have health consequences well into adulthood (Stall et al., 2008). For example, higher levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidality in adulthood have been reported for gay youth that experienced physical and verbal abuse (Stall et al., 2008). Hegemonic masculinity, which will be explored in subsequent sections of this literature review, has also been reported to influence sexual health risks, drug use, steroid use, and body dissatisfaction in a syndemic manner (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009; Isacco et al., 2012). It is apparent in the review of such studies that the health of gay men is intimately tied to societal views on sexuality and gender.

The health experiences of gay men have common roots but are also multi-faceted. As Lyons and Hosking (2014) note gay men are a diverse group that may experience health in very different ways. As Carnes (2016) reiterates the communities of gay men include men of various ethnicities, racial backgrounds, levels of educations, and socio-economic status. Gay men live in many “convergent and divergent ways, with varied outcomes” (Carnes, 2016, p. 44), and although all gay men experience heteronormativity and stigma the impact on their health may be very different. The gay men’s community is a mosaic, a tapestry made of complex people, and acknowledging this through the lens of syndemics allows for a richer and more intricate approach to gay men’s health.

Gay men's understandings of health. The concept of health can mean different things to different people and can be shaped by dominant discourses within society. For some people, health means an absence of sickness and disease. For other people, health is viewed more than an absence of disease but is viewed holistically, involving complete physical, mental, and social well-being (WHO, 2017). Within health research, an understanding of how community members view health and what they believe about their health allows for different perspectives to emerge that can inform effective health programs (Pennel et al., 2017).

Researchers in New Zealand explored the meanings of health in interviews with gay men (Adams et al., 2013). The participants in this study reported that they saw health as predominantly individualistic. To them, health is something that a person is responsible for engaging in and maintaining through practices, such as going to the gym and consulting dietitians. An individualistic view of health creates moral implications and can divide gay men into those who are responsible, good citizens and those who are not (Adams et al., 2013). Although the participants in the Adams et al. (2013) study saw health as the domain of the individual, they also recognized that gay men's health is also influenced by social and community factors. Participants in Adams et al., (2013) study described how negative health experiences are caused by heteronormativity within society and the exclusion that results from it. They also viewed cultural stereotypes as potentially detrimental influences on the advancement of health for gay men. For example, the belief that gay communities are only places of celebration was viewed as one such stereotype that negatively influences the health of gay men (Adams et al., 2013). Participants believed that challenging stereotypes, changing cultural norms, and

disrupting heteronormativity were essential to improving the health of all people regardless of sexual identity (Adams et al., 2013).

An understanding of what gay men view as the most prevalent health issues in their lives has been noted to be a critical component in the design and creation of effective health research and health promotion programs (Pennel et al., 2017). A study by Grov et al. (2013) examines the health issues that a sample of gay men viewed to be the most relevant to their lives. Grov et al. (2013) recruited gay and bisexual men in New York City bars, clubs, and bathhouses to complete a brief survey. Participants were asked to rate five health issues on their perceived importance; HIV and STIs, drugs and alcohol, body image, mental health, and smoking. Results indicated that participants viewed HIV and STIs as the most important health issue out of the five concerns indicated in the survey. Mental health issues were rated second, followed by drugs and alcohol, body image, and lastly, smoking (Grov et al., 2013). The authors claim several factors limit their work, including the closed nature of the questions and the limited representation of gay men based on the survey's location (Grov et al., 2013). The authors also provide no discussion within their report on the lower rating given to body image issues, suggesting that the other health issues took priority over body image concerns. Research that explores more deeply the meanings gay men give to nutritional issues to their health, and the contributing factors to such issues, is needed.

Compassion has also been recognized by many gay people as a component of their health and well-being. Compassion can be conceptualized as acts of kindness to oneself and others (Neff, 2003; Walsh et al., 2014). Compassion can also be a process of

inquiry that allows people to move beyond their current knowledge to come to understand the lives and experiences of oneself and others. It is about seeing oneself as a part of the human experience and reaching out beyond the boundaries of oneself to become someone else. Compassion is about letting go of the negative and painful experiences (Neff, 2003; Walsh et al., 2014). In a survey of self-identifying gay men and women, Riggle et al. (2008) found that participants believed that being gay gave them experiences that fostered understanding about being othered within society and taught them about acceptance. Participants believed that developing empathy and compassion is a positive aspect of being gay. Other researchers have suggested a relationship between compassion and positive health and well-being for gender and sexually diverse people. For example, it was found that self-compassion may help gender non-conforming individuals to ease the tensions they experience and improve their sense of well-being (Keng & Liew, 2017). In another study with self-identifying gay men, self-compassion was positively related to the well-being of the participants (Beard et al., 2017). Jennings and Tan (2014) reported that self-compassion was related to life satisfaction for gay men and suggest that it may be a way to help improve the health of gay men. Beard et al. (2017) call for more research to understand the role of compassion in the well-being of gay men and how compassion may help to ease health tensions created by heteronormativity and binary notions of gender.

Masculinities

As previously discussed, one of the common contributors to the major syndemics confronting gay men is the concept of masculinity. The following section examines the concept of masculinity and reviews the underlying theoretical assumptions. Masculinity,

within health literature, is most often framed through Connell's (1995) theory of masculinity and, as such, is the focus of this analysis and critique.

Assumptions of masculinity. Defining masculinity can be a slippery and difficult thing to do. As Edwards (2006) writes "masculinity is at once everywhere and yet nowhere, known and yet unknowable, had and yet un-*have-able*" (p.1). In this statement, Edwards (2006) elegantly considers the nature of masculinity and its underlying assumptions. The first assumption is that masculinity is found within all aspects of culture and is so pervasive that it often goes unnoticed or is not critiqued within many social structures (Edwards, 2006; Gee & Jackson, 2017). Edwards' (2006) quote also speaks to the unstable nature of gender. Masculinity is always in a state of flux; changing and shifting as cultural meanings change and shift over time (Bordo, 1999; Butler, 1990; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Wooten (2006) details how concepts of masculinities have changed with historic shifts in thinking, technologies, and cultures. For example, Wooten (2006) notes how social media and the increasing use of visual language is shaping the ways masculinities are currently being constructed in the 21st century. The final assumption that Edwards (2006) refers to is the pluralistic nature of masculinity. Countless masculinities exist and have different meanings throughout history and across cultures. Masculinities are, therefore, not universal nor generalizable to all individuals (Edwards, 2006; Gee & Jackson, 2017). There may, however, be a common thread to all the different forms of masculinities. As Gee and Jackson (2017) suggest, that one commonality is a relationship with power² within social institutions.

² Power is viewed through a Foucauldian lens and is further described in Chapter 3.

Hegemonic masculinity. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is a widely used theory within a variety of disciplines, including sexuality, pedagogy, criminology, sports sociology, and media studies, and health (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). The theory has roots in both the gay liberation and women's liberation movements and views masculinities within a socially structured hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity is at the pinnacle of the hierarchy and represents an idealized form that many men strive to live up to and personify (Connell, 1995). It is often characterized by being perceived as strong, both physically and emotionally, invulnerable to disease, and exclusively heterosexual (Bordo, 1999; Connell, 1995; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017; Wooten, 2006). In Connell's theory, other forms of masculinities are subordinate and marginalizing (Connell, 1995). As a result of this hierarchal nature, masculinity becomes a social process in which men strive to live up to the hegemonic ideal. But Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) specifically state that hegemonic masculinity is not "normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it is certainly normative" (p.832). Hegemonic masculinity creates the cultural references of what it means to be masculine even when many men cannot embody fully them. As a result, men often experience tensions when they do not live up to the ideals (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). The concept of hegemonic masculinity also implies a "social ascendancy" between groups of different men, such as the hegemonic dominance of straight men over gay men (Demetriou, 2001, p. 341). As Eguchi (2009) suggests social pressures to adopt hegemonic masculinity exist for gay men. In a study by Ravenhill and de Visser (2017), men report that heteronormative constructs of gender often position gay men in opposition to hegemonic masculinity. This division is a central concept to Connell's

theory and may explain many of the tensions experienced by gay men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Connell's theory, however, is not without critiques and has even been labeled a contested theory (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The major critiques cited for this theory are: 1) that it traps masculinities in a static reality and asserts certain characteristics to men that are often negative characteristics, such as violent, unemotional, and dispassionate; 2) that is ambiguous and does not provide a concrete depiction of what conformity to hegemonic masculinity looks like; and 3) that the subject is often lost (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). A deeper analysis of Connell's theory, however, can address all these critiques. Connell's theory recognizes the historical, social, and fluid nature of masculinities. In this theory, hegemonic masculinity is not intended to be a fixed universal representation (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although Connell's theory structures masculinities within a hierarchy, it is not a rigid hierarchy. Masculinities overlap, merge, and shift (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The shifting nature of masculinities negates the critique of an ambiguous nature to hegemonic masculinity. Conformity to the masculine ideal may be very different depending on the historical, social and, cultural contexts. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also suggest that hegemonic masculinities often encompass positive characteristics and that it is "impossible to erase the subject" because of the way hegemonic masculinity is constituted through social processes (p. 843). Connell's theory of masculinity provides a useful way to conceptualize and explore the influence of masculinities on bodies and the nutritional practices of gay men.

Masculinity and bodies. Connell's theory also recognizes the importance of

bodies in the construction of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell (1995) suggests that the body is *inescapable* in the construction of masculinity. It has been noted by many researchers that men's bodies are increasingly becoming visible within society through the development of men's fitness, beauty, and fashion industries (Bordo, 1999; Coffey, 2016; Connell, 1995; R. Gill et al., 2005). The bodies of men, through the process of becoming visible, are inscribed with notions of hegemonic masculinity that often positions and defines a strong, muscular, and fat-free body as the ideal masculine body (Bordo, 1999; Wooten, 2006). Cultural images come to influence what is considered to be a proper masculine body (Norman, 2009). As Bordo (1999) affirms, "We use our bodies to advertise masculinity" (p.88). For men, this means their bodies become how they display their masculinity to others and construct their masculine identity (Bordo, 1999; Coffey, 2016; Connell, 1995; R. Gill et al., 2005). Wienke (1998) suggests that men who embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity tend to accept these ideals as reflections of hegemonic masculinity more so than men whose bodies do not embody them. The practices, such as dieting and exercising, to shape bodies to masculine ideals can be very difficult for many men and they may experience tensions, stress, and conflicts in trying to do so (Edmonds & Zieff, 2015; McGrady, 2016). This may lead to body dissatisfaction that is discussed in an upcoming section of this chapter.

As previously discussed, Connell's theory also implies that men may experience tensions when they embody a subordinate or marginalized form of masculinity. Connell (1995) states that gay men may often experience this tension as hegemonic masculinity that is constituted through heteronormativity. Duncan (2007) furthers this argument and suggests that a muscular body may be a way for some gay men to navigate the tensions

that result from the heteronormative ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Duncan (2007) posits that by attaining a muscular body, gay men may find acceptance within a heteronormative culture. As he states, “a cultural celebration of masculinity and the stigmatization of any form or suggestion of femininity... coupled with the rise of a commercial sexual gay culture were the foundations” (Duncan, 2007, p. 334) of the modern muscular ideal body type within the gay community. In essence, Duncan (2007) is saying that the shaping of a muscular and, therefore, a masculine body is a way for some gay men to negotiate the tensions of being gay in a heteronormative society. The commercial sexual gay culture that Duncan (2007) refers to includes many aspects that inundate gay culture and reinforce the ideal masculine body as the most sexually desirable for gay men (Bordo, 1999; Kvaalem et al., 2016; Rothmann, 2013; Whitesel, 2007). This is more closely examined in the following section.

Shaping Masculinity: Cultural Images for Gay Men

Notions of masculinity are shaped through myriad cultural and social factors. It would be impractical, if not impossible, to trace, review, and critique all of the integral components that come to define masculinities. Social notions of masculinities are interconnected and constituted through relations of power in work and family life, education, mass media, consumerism, sports, cultures of violence, and religious doctrines, as well as historic perspectives (Bordo, 1999; Connell, 1995; Gee & Jackson, 2017; LeBesco, 2004; Pope et al., 2000). As this project explores the meaning gay men give to photographs it seems appropriate to focus on how mass media and social images construct masculinities for gay men. Several examples are presented, including images for advertising, pornography, and social media.

Men's bodies: Objects of consumption. The marketing of the modern interpretation of masculine bodies as lean, fit, and muscular is now a common practice to sell products within the fashion and beauty industries. Many companies that target gay men use designed images of youthful, fit men to advertise, sell, and represent their products (Morgan & Arcelus, 2009). Bordo (1999) credits the influence of gay culture and the fashion industry for the commercialization of men's bodies as sexual objects. She explains that gay photographers from the 1950s to the 1970s were successful in creating eroticized images of men, but their influence was relegated to the mostly hidden gay culture in America. It was not until Calvin Klein began to use influences from gay culture to sell jeans and underwear that American companies realized the marketing potential of the male body. Klein effectively used nearly-naked young men with sculptured and muscular bodies in his provocative underwear advertisements to sell millions of dollars' worth of product (Bordo, 1999). The consequences of using certain bodies for marketing may be increased sales for companies but, as Gee and Jackson (2017) suggest, images within advertising also "provide men with carefully crafted and publicly circulated images of preferred forms of masculinity" (p.13) that marginalize all other forms. Images within the media define and show men how to be masculine and the awards to living up to the ideal. Although the sexualization of muscular men may be good for business it may not be as good for men's body image and overall health.

If men cannot live up to these *crafted* images then they may experience tensions about their masculinity and this may influence their health and well-being (Gee & Jackson, 2017). Bordo (1999) suggests that it is not the physicality of bodies that are

important to consider when speaking of health impacts of media but the cultural meanings within images and advertising. Bordo (1999) states,

Statistics on average weights and medical charts are irrelevant. What matters is the gap between self and the cultural images. We measure ourselves not against an ideal of health, not even usually (although sometimes) against each other, but against created icons, fantasies made flesh. Flesh *designed* to arouse admiration, envy, desire” (p.70).

It is a person’s view of how their bodies compare to the images persistent within their culture that create tensions and health concerns for people relating to body image. Leit et al. (2002) also report that advertisements featuring muscular men produced body image concerns in college-aged men but suggest that their results may underestimate the degree to which media influences men’s view of their bodies. Their study was limited in scope by only examining brief exposures to the advertisements in a lab setting (Leit et al., 2002). Men, however, are constantly bombarded by advertisements that equate muscularity with masculinity. This daily exposure to such advertisements may cause greater tensions for men than were observed in their study (Leit et al., 2002).

The influence of media, magazines, television, and gay culture on the body image of gay men has also been studied. In one study, participants noted experiencing moments of tension and frustration when flipping through magazines because they did not look like the male models within the pages (Morgan & Arcelus, 2009). Participants discussed the pressures within gay culture to look a certain way in order to be considered desirable. They also described experiencing competition with other men when going to gay bars and clubs because of the emphasis on appearance (Morgan & Arcelus, 2009). Wooten (2006) also confirms that many gay men often feel compelled to live up to body standards seen in advertisements and often experience body dissatisfaction, especially in

terms of weight. Participants noted that masculinity was a crucial consideration and was described as maintaining a strong body with very little fat (Wooten, 2006). During the interviews of this study, participants shared stories of disordered eating, excessive exercise, and the use of supplements to build muscle and live up to media standards for gay bodies (Wooten, 2006). These studies affirm that the health experiences for many gay men are rooted in the images of our consumerism and media.

Images of masculinity within gay pornography. The commercialization of men's bodies is not limited to the fashion or beauty industries but also exists in pornography. Pornography is present in the lives of many gay men. It has been estimated that 98-99% of gay men have recently viewed sexually explicit materials and that gay men watch an average of one to three hours of pornography per week (Duggan & McCreary, 2004; Rosser et al., 2013; Stein et al., 2012; Whitfield et al., 2018). Namaste-Maiatohe (2017) suggests that gay pornography largely represents heteronormative ideals and norms that produce a specific image of gay sexuality and gay bodies. This image is often represented by muscular, fit, white, and able-bodied men that epitomize notions of hegemonic masculinity (Namaste-Maiato, 2017). He argues that gay pornography limits diversity and relies on ethnic stereotypes, rigid body ideals, and gender norms to make profits. In a study by T. Morrison (2004), some gay men express the desire to see more types of bodies within gay pornography. Limited bodies within mainstream gay pornography may influence the way some gay men view and feel about their bodies. For example, gay men who do not represent dominant images within gay pornography may feel frustration, compare their bodies to other men, experience poor mental health, and suffer damage to their sense of gay identity (T. Morrison, 2004; Namaste-Maiato, 2017).

The findings of other studies also support Namaste-Maiato's (2017) views. Whitfield et al. (2018) report that greater use of pornography for gay and bisexual men was associated with more negative body image, higher rates of depression, and greater levels of overall anxiety. Duggan and McCreary (2004) also report an association between pornography use and anxiety for gay men. Other researchers, in studies with gay men, have found no relationships between pornography use and drive for muscularity (T. G. Morrison et al., 2007) or evaluations of self-attractiveness (Kvalem et al., 2016). Whitfield et al. (2018) attribute the differences in their findings to the studies of T.G. Morrison et al. (2007) and Kvalem et al. (2016) to the methodology employed. Whitfield et al. (2018) examined a wider scope of attitudes towards the body and did not limit their focus to certain body parts. This broader scope in Whitfield et al. (2018) may have revealed relationships not seen in other studies. These differences in findings highlight the need to further explore the influence of gay pornography on body image and health of men. Gleason and Sprankle (2019) suggest that future research should explore factors as long-term use of pornography and different genres of pornography to better understand the relationship between pornography and body image for gay men. Regardless, it seems that notions of masculinities and beauty standards within gay pornography may shape the experiences of body satisfaction and health for some gay men.

Blogs and websites. The deep connections between masculinity, muscular bodies, and sexual identity are also emphasized in other forms of media within gay culture. Schwartz & Grimm (2016) analyzed the images and language on Queerty.com, a gay men's news and entertainment blog. They report that body types on the website predominately portrayed the standards of leanness and muscularity and suggest the users

of the website are supportive of the images even though the portrayed physical qualities are unattainable for most men. The authors conclude that the language and images of the site may contribute to the sexual objectification of men within the gay community and reinforce the importance of physical attributes relating to hegemonic masculinity (Schwartz & Grimm, 2016).

In another study, the multi-platform social media and website called TubeCrush was analyzed with respect to cultural norms of masculinity (Evans & Riley, 2017). TubeCrush is a British website that allows users to post, comment, and rate unsolicited photographs of men on the London underground (Evans & Riley, 2017). Although not specifically a gay site, it does attract gay men. In their analysis, Evans and Riley (2017) report that images focused on white athletic men typical of the dominant ideals of men's bodies. Evans and Riley (2017) suggest that such photos emphasize and eroticize the muscularity of pecs, biceps, chest, and thighs and demonstrate that masculinity is "a bodily property" (p.9) that maintains hegemonic masculinity through "notions of strength and phallic power" (p10). Masculinities are expressed through the body, and although gay men do not collectively share one form of masculinity, they are influenced by the dominant heterosexual masculinity that is prevalent within gay media. The bodies of men are regulated through all forms of media that inform men what they should look like to be considered masculine (Wooten, 2006).

Masculinity and a culture of beauty. The regulation of bodies through various social factors is both constituted by and constitutes a culture of beauty standards. Gay culture has often been labelled as highly aesthetic with certain physical attributes of the male body symbolizing status, attractiveness, sexual appeal, and masculinity

(Drummond, 2005). Mann (1998) refers to this concept as a *hierarchy of beauty* in which men who embody the dominant ideals of beauty have greater status and desirability than those whose bodies do not represent the dominant ideals. Although many aspects of the body are considered in the hierarchy of beauty, two attributes of men's bodies are often highlighted. These attributes are a highly developed musculature and a low percentage of body fat. As previously discussed, both of these physical attributes are deeply connected to hegemonic masculinity. Men that embody these two physical attributes, and by association hegemonic masculinity, are often considered at the top of this hierarchy of beauty (Bennett & Gough, 2013; Drummond, 2005; Feraios, 1998; Mann, 1998; Martins et al., 2007; McGrady, 2016).

Several studies have examined perceptions of attractiveness and the consequences of such perceptions on gay men. For example, in a study in which gay men were asked to rate the attractiveness of various male body types, Varangis et al. (2012) confirm that body fat percentage and muscularity are two integral components to the perceptions of attractiveness for gay men. They reaffirm a lean body with high muscularity is the most attractive type of bodies to gay men. In another study of gay men in the Chicago area, over one-third of participants recounted experiencing or witnessing incidents of discrimination, acts of ridicule, and instances of rejection by potential romantic partners based upon the negative way fat is framed within gay culture (Foster-Gimbel & Engeln, 2016). These studies illustrate that strict body ideals are perpetuated and reinforced through various cultural ideas related to masculinity. For some men, obtaining the body standards within the hierarchy of beauty may be a source of pride but, for other men, such standards may be a source of health concerns, tensions, and frustrations (Kousari-Rad &

McLaren, 2013; M. A. Morrison et al., 2004).

The concepts of masculinities and beauty shape, and are shaped by, gay cultural images and norms. They are integral parts of gay culture that must be considered when exploring how gay men practice nutrition and view their bodies. Although multiple forms of masculinities are constituted through social and cultural factors, it is hegemonic masculinity that positions a muscular body devoid of fat as the ideal male form. This may produce tensions for gay men who attempt to embody the *constructed fantasy* of the masculine body. These tensions often result in health concerns and feelings of body dissatisfaction.

Body Dissatisfaction in Gay Men

Body dissatisfaction can be defined as the negative perception of one's physical body (Hospers & Jansen, 2005; Slade, 1994) and may be normative for men. Jankowski (2015) suggests that body dissatisfaction is underestimated within the health literature for men. Many studies focus narrowly on body dissatisfaction, using scales that measure only satisfaction with certain body parts, ignoring the totality of the body. Body dissatisfaction, however, can encompass many aspects of men's bodies, from hairlines to waistlines; from the size of the biceps to the size of the penis (Bordo, 1999). For this research, the focus will be on aspects of the body related to weight and muscularity as these are the concerns that are thought to shape the eating practices of gay men. For example, Blashill (2010) examined the relationship between muscle, body fat, and height dissatisfaction and depression, eating concerns, eating restraints, and social sensitivity within gay men. The author reports that body fat dissatisfaction was the only component

that was associated with all of the health concerns investigated. Muscle dissatisfaction was only associated with social sensitivity while height dissatisfaction was associated with none of them (Blashill, 2010). This supports the importance of weight and body fat in the construction of gay men's bodies and health.

Theoretical approaches to body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction has been historically studied through a positivist paradigm. The underlying assumption of much of the clinical, psychological, and health research within the literature is that body dissatisfaction is something that exists within an individual (Jankowski, 2015). It is an internal condition that exists outside, and independent, of external influences. The causes of body dissatisfaction are positioned to be either biologically driven by hormones or weight, personality driven, or cognitively driven through the internalization of body ideals (Jankowski, 2015). In this paradigm, body dissatisfaction can be documented, measured, and analyzed through the use of various quantitative scales and instruments. The consequences of this condition are spoken of in terms of the physical and psychological impacts on the individual. Social, spiritual, or communal impacts are often not considered (Jankowski, 2015). Treatment for body dissatisfaction is directed at the individual with recommendations to change their behaviors, beliefs, or personalities (Jankowski, 2015). As Jankowski (2015) notes, some positivist studies do include consideration of mass media as a social influence to body dissatisfaction but it is often viewed as having little to no influence. This slight consideration of social influences on men's body dissatisfaction is often one of the major critiques of positivist studies (Jankowski, 2015). The recognition of historical context within positivist studies is, therefore, considered to be negligible.

Two other important critiques of studies within the positivist paradigm exist. First, these studies do not recognize the fluidity of sexuality and gender. Participants are often given strict categories of sexual identity in which they have to place themselves. Sexual orientation is, however, not constant. It can change over time. The categorization of men into distinct sexual orientation categories creates divides and leads to comparisons of gay to straight men. Vasilovsky and Gurevich (2016) suggest that such comparisons tend to stereotype, pathologize, and essentialize gay men. They argue that the underlying assumption within comparative studies is that being gay inherently causes body dissatisfaction and position all gay men as body-obsessed and self-harming. The second critique is that many positivist studies often have methodological issues that confound results. For example, small sample sizes, recruitment strategies, statistical errors, and the use of body dissatisfaction scales designed for women are the major concerns (Clarke & Smith, 2015; Filiault & Drummond, 2009; Kane, 2009; Vasilovsky, 2012; Vasilovsky & Gurevich, 2016). This is not to say that gay men do not experience high levels of body dissatisfaction. Many examples within the literature show that gay men do experience these concerns but it is a far more diverse and complex issue than simple comparisons between gay and straight men allow (Filiault & Drummond, 2009; Kane, 2009; Vasilovsky, 2012; Vasilovsky & Gurevich, 2016).

The positivist tradition, however, is not the only way men's body dissatisfaction is studied. Critical approaches that make different assumptions about body dissatisfaction are also noted in the literature on this topic. These approaches recognize the "fluid, highly nuanced, and context dependent" nature of body dissatisfaction (Jankowski, 2015, p. 12). Poststructuralism is one critical theory that is used as it rejects the idea of a single

universal truth or cause of health concerns, such as body dissatisfaction (Agger, 1991; Cheek, 1999). This paradigm, which is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 3, examines how language and historical context constructs body dissatisfaction. Critical theories aim to reveal new ways of thinking and new ways of being (Agger, 1991; Aston, 2016; Cheek, 1999; Weedon, 1987) that may help people feel better about their bodies. Both approaches, however, can be useful in understanding gay men's body dissatisfaction.

The literature on body dissatisfaction. Many studies confirm body dissatisfaction with gay men. As previously discussed, many studies investigating gay men's body dissatisfaction are within the positivist tradition. These quantitative studies have been useful in capturing the scope of the issue for gay men³ (Jankowski, 2015). In their meta-analysis, M.A. Morrison et al. (2004) report that gay men are more susceptible to body dissatisfaction than straight men. Results from another study also indicate that gay men have higher concerns for obtaining lean bodies than straight men (Calzo et al., 2015) (Calzo et al., 2015). Kaminski et al. (2005) report that gay men are more likely to be afraid of gaining weight, be more dissatisfied with their body image and muscle mass and feel more stress to live up to cultural ideals of male bodies than their straight counterparts. Kimmel and Mahalik (2005) report that internalized homophobia, stigma, and experiences of physical attacks relating to being gay are associated with body image dissatisfaction and masculinity concerns. The authors also report that gay men experience stress and tension if their bodies do not meet the masculine ideals of men's bodies

³ As previously discussed, sexual orientation is not a stable or distinct category that can be neatly expressed by binary labels. But for the purpose of this section, the findings are presented as in the original literature, meaning comparisons between gay and straight men are noted.

(Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). Brewster et al. (2017) found that societal stresses, such as heterosexism, were positively related to body dissatisfaction for gay men (Brewster et al., 2017). Other researchers report that, in comparison to straight men, gay men experience higher levels of judgement based on their appearance and make more evaluations of their bodies than other men (Frederick & Essayli, 2016). There is also much quantitative research that indicates and documents the consequences to the health of gay men due to high levels of body dissatisfaction.

The Consequences of Body Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction is “never benign” (Jankowski, 2015, p. 34). McCreary (2007) suggests that a goal of enhancing leanness and gaining muscle contributes to many men engaging in eating behaviors that may be problematic to health, including focusing only on certain foods, extreme restrictive eating (or binging), and the intake of specific nutrients. Mor et al. (2014) report that gay men in Tel Aviv had a stronger desire to be muscular and were more likely to follow a diet, use protein powders, perform intensive anaerobic training, and take anabolic steroids to build muscles compared to straight men. Blashill (2010) notes that body fat dissatisfaction in gay men is related to eating concerns and eating restraint. A Canadian article finds higher levels of body dissatisfaction within gay men and suggests that they may be at greater risk for eating disorders than the general population (Brennan et al., 2011). The authors further report that ethnicity, depression, age, history of sexual abuse, and engagement with activities to build muscle mass are associated with disordered eating practices in gay men. Hospers & Jansen (2005) report that body dissatisfaction plays a key role in eating disorders for gay men. Approximately 10-42% of men who are diagnosed clinically with an eating disorder

identify as gay (Blashill & Vander Wal, 2009; Hospers & Jansen, 2005). In a study of college students, gay, questioning, and bisexual men reported higher incidents of clinical eating disorders, as well as disordered eating behaviors compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Matthews-Ewald et al., 2014). In another study, American youths, who self-identified as gay, bisexual, or mostly heterosexual, were found more likely to report purging and bingeing of foods than their exclusively heterosexual counterparts (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2012). Griffiths et al. (2018) found a positive association for non-heterosexual identifying men between social media use and body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. This association was stronger for image-based media platforms, such as dating apps, suggesting that cultural values and norms surrounding beauty ideals may contribute to the creation of tension and stress for gay men.

In addition to muscle dysmorphia, eating disorders, steroid use, and depression there are also the less recognized impacts on health (Jankowski, 2015). These impacts are often not diagnosed and escape the notice of health providers yet can affect the overall well-being and day to day life of men. Isolation, feelings of being inadequate, avoidance of social situations, and issues with sexual intimacy have been reported (Bordo, 1999; Brennan et al., 2011, 2013; Jankowski, 2015; Kaminski et al., 2005; Kanayama et al., 2006; M. A. Morrison et al., 2004; Olivardia et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2000; Siever, 1994; Strong et al., 2000).

It is worth noting that much of the literature on body dissatisfaction and nutritional practices for men is done with Caucasian participants. The issue of ethnicity is rarely discussed but, several studies suggest gay men may be negatively influenced by cultural norms that can result in the exclusion of individuals based on race, weight, age,

class, and constructs of masculinity (Caluya, 2008; Feraios, 1998; Joy & Numer, 2018a; LeBeau & Jellison, 2009; Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2016).

In terms of nutrition-related studies, Brennan et al. (2013) explore how race influences body image in various ethnoracial groups of gay and bisexual men. They report that body image for their study's participants is indeed negotiated through cultural norms related to ethnicity, stereotypes, and racism, in addition to factors relating to their sexuality. Participants believed that media was one of the strongest influences on their body image but common to all their discussions was the idea of living up to expectations related to masculinity. In the study, Black, East/Southeast Asian, South Asian, Latino/Brazilian gay men report skipping meals, vomiting, and taking steroids to achieve bodies that cultural messages and images define as the most masculine. The influence of masculinity on nutritional practices has been shown by other researchers. For example, De Santis et al. (2012) report that some gay Hispanic men engage in eating disorders to compensate for feelings of inadequacy relating to "machismo" or the perceived lack of masculinity associated with being gay within their culture. The literature suggests that dominant notions of masculinity in all cultures can lead to body dissatisfaction and compromise the physical, mental, and emotional health of gay men through eating practices as they attempt to align themselves with social ideals of a masculine body (Lefkowich et al., 2017). Perhaps in highlighting the pluralistic and ever-changing nature of masculinities, the dominant discourses about masculinities and idealized men's bodies can be shifted and come to encompass a wider range of body types (Lefkowich et al., 2017). Cibralic and Conti (2018) propose that more awareness about the experiences of men with body dissatisfaction and eating behaviors, especially by health providers also

may help to shift dominant discourses of men's bodies. Expanding the notions of masculinities and bringing attention to men's body image concerns may ultimately be a way to improve body dissatisfaction and the overall health and well-being of gay men.

Chapter Summary

The chapter suggests the need for continued work in the area of health research for gay men. It suggests that the health of gay men is not improved by discourses of homophobia that pathologize or essentialize gay men. Framing gay men's health through an intersectional and syndemic approach may be a more helpful approach to addressing health issues. A syndemic approach recognizes the multi-faceted nature of gay men's health and acknowledged that gay men are a diverse group that may experience health in a variety of ways. Gay men may all experience heteronormativity and stigma, but the impact on their health may be very different. As such, an understanding of what gay men view as important to their lives, as well as an understanding of the major social and culturally discourses that shape their health, is critical for any health research that aims to improve the health and lives of gay men.

Gender, in particular, the construction and role of masculinities, is an important component of the lives of gay men that must be critically explored. Notions of masculinity are shaped through a myriad of cultural and social factors. Media, such as television, pornography, and websites, are just a few of those factors that contribute and shape hegemonic masculinity. This type of masculinity positions a muscular body devoid of fat as the ideal male form and may create tensions for many gay men who do not embody the ideals of the masculine body. These tensions often result in health concerns

and feelings of body dissatisfaction and are slowly being explored in the literature. But more understanding is needed to improve the health and well-being of many gay men.

The influences of social and cultural ideals on body image and eating practices for gay men need to be more fully explored. This research aims to build upon the reported literature through a framework that considers historical contexts. Paradigms, such as poststructuralism and queer theory, are utilized to explore how the bodies of gay men are discursively constructed. Chapter 3 reviews the underlying philosophical ideologies of poststructuralism and queer theory.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another! (Carroll, 2014, p. 54).

The *Alice in Wonderland* books by Carroll (2014) trace Alice's journey through a wonderland in which she comes to discover the ever-changing nature of existence and the need to understand things from different perspectives. Alice, on her adventures, comes to realize she is not who she thought she was. Alice comes to realize that she changes minute to minute depending on where she is, what she understands, and even what she eats and drinks. These are ideas often explored in philosophical traditions, such as poststructuralism.

This research follows a qualitative approach and draws upon poststructuralism and queer theory, as well as the works of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari that explore assumptions of existence, knowledge, and identities and the influence of culture and society upon them. Some researchers, as noted in the literature review of the previous chapter, have begun to reframe nutrition as social, cultural, and historical discourses of health. This work aims to build upon the reconceptualization of nutrition and bodies as discursively constituted. Through a **queer poststructural framework**, this project will **explore how power relations shape the eating practices and bodies of gay men and examine ways to disrupt entrenched hegemonic and oppressive social norms** (Agger, 1991; Cheek, 1999; Weedon, 1987). This chapter reviews the **theoretical paradigm that guides this project**. It includes an overview of poststructural and queer approaches for **health research, highlighting** Foucault's concepts of discourse, subjectivity, power, and knowledge, as well as an overview of Deleuze and Guattari's **perspectives on bodies**.

Poststructuralist Approaches and the Theories of Foucault

Poststructuralism is a theoretical approach that attempts to critique fundamental assumptions of existence, knowledge, and research (Macdonald et al., 2002). It is a paradigm that explores how individuals are constructed through discourse and in relations of knowledge and power (Agger, 1991; Cheek, 1999; Denton, 2016; Francis, 2000; Macdonald et al., 2002). As Harcourt (2007) suggests, the fundamental concern for poststructural researchers is how knowledge becomes possible within any given historical and social context. To answer such questions researchers should consider more than simple cause and effect mechanisms. We need to critically examine the social contexts within individuals lives, and by which they are constructed through intersectional lenses that include class, race, gender, cultural, historical, and other social contexts (Creswell, 2013). One of the central ideas of poststructural research is on the individual as a subject of discourse.

Language and discourse. A major focus within poststructuralism is the way language and discourse work to construct reality (Agger, 1991; Aston, 2016; Cheek, 1999; Denton, 2016; Perron & Holmes, 2011; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008; Weedon, 1987). Poststructuralism positions language as structuring the way things are thought, and the way people act on the basis of those thoughts. Language is, however, set within historical contexts and as a result, is not stable or representative of one meaning. Language has multiple and fluctuating meanings depending on the social and political circumstances in which people live (Aston, 2016; Foucault, 1972; B. Grant & Giddings, 2002; Perron & Holmes, 2011; Rose, 2012; Weedon, 1987).

Discourse, however, goes beyond language within the poststructural paradigm to represent the interconnected systems of social meanings and practices “that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Discourses are constantly merging, overlapping, and being re-created as people collectively think and talk in different ways about the world (Fendler, 2010). Discourses include that which is spoken and that which is not spoken; discourses represent all the thoughts and practices, known and unknown, that produce what seems to be individual experiences (Fendler, 2010; Foucault, 1990). All the various thoughts and practices, however, do not always align. Conflicting thoughts and practices become competing discourses or sites of power and political contentions that can repress, or even exclude. These conflicts represent sites of resistance against dominant discourse. Resistance can arise through conflicting and competing discourses that constitute discomfort with hegemonic social norms (Cameron & Gibson, 2005; Denton, 2016; Foucault, 1995; Jagose, 1996; Weedon, 1987). Weedon (1987) furthers this analysis by stating that:

Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle (p.24).

The different meanings found within language give rise to new ways of experiencing and understanding the world. Competing discourses emerge and create tensions for people as they struggle to align themselves with multiple discourses. These tensions produced more discourses, counter discourses that become *sites* for political struggle or resistance. These counter discourses bring forth alternatives to the norms, enables people to view their place within social institutions differently, and can lead to social and cultural shifts as

people attempt to ease their tensions. In this way, discourse not only constructs objects, political systems, and social institutions but can also construct subjects.

The subject and subjectivity. Poststructuralism positions the subject as produced within social and historical contexts and not a reflection of an essential self. As such, the idea that an individual has a knowable essential identity is a myth; a cultural construct created by mechanisms of discourses (Cameron & Gibson, 2005; Denton, 2016; Foucault, 1995; Jagose, 1996; Weedon, 1987). Foucault views the subject through historical context, stating that we see “a subject that constitutes itself within history and is constantly established and re-established by history” (Foucault, 2001, p. 3). A person’s values, beliefs, and practices are constituted through the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts in which they live (Weedon, 1987). A subject is always in a state of flux or in the process of re-establishing itself as discourses shift and change, as such, individuals are discursively produced (Rose, 2012; Weedon, 1987). Foucault’s analysis of the subject also suggests that we can never fully understand all the influences that affect our subjectivity (Weedon, 1987). The subject is “written and overwritten through multiple and contradictory discourses” (B. Davis, 1997, p. 275). The subject can be thought of as a palimpsest, a manuscript on which the writing has been partially erased to make room for other writings but with traces of the original remaining (B. Davis, 1997). This metaphor illustrates how a subject is constantly in process and being shaped; written through multiple discourses layered upon and affecting each other. The subject is not ever blank. There is no pre-discursive self as one is never outside the influence of discourses (B. Davis, 1997).

Subjectivity can be understood as a sense of self, including the thoughts and emotions of an individual (Macdonald et al., 2002; Weedon, 1987). It is the means through which individuals experience themselves and the commitments they make to enact social and cultural roles (Aston, 2016; Springer & Clinton, 2015). Subjectivities illustrate how multiple forces produce individual experience, but this does not mean that an individual does not have agency to change. As Fendler (2010) reiterates, Foucault's "purpose of investigating subjectivity is to surprise us with an awareness – namely that we do not have to be what we had assumed" (p.64). The subject can examine and critique the social and cultural discourses that shape them and, once surprised, can work towards changing these discourses.

Power and knowledge. Discourse also shapes power and knowledge because it influences not only what is said but also who can say it and equally as important, what cannot be said and who cannot say it. Discourse is the mechanism through which power and knowledge flow and act through institutions and individuals (Linstead, 2016). Foucault (1980, 1995) proposes power as relational. He views power, not as something inherently bad or repressive. Instead, he recognizes power as productive with transformative capabilities, as he describes:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

For Foucault, power is not something that is held by a particular group of people to repress others but is a *productive network* that connects all people. It is a means through

which possibilities and opportunities can be created. Power is intimately connected to discourse and knowledge. It flows, unstable and reversible, through discourses shaping subjects and their beliefs, values, and practices. In doing so, power relations become knowledge, or what is knowable, and, in turn, shape what is considered truth. Knowledge and truth are produced through competing sectors of political, economic, social, and cultural systems and are effects of power (Fendler, 2010; Linstead, 2016; Schirato et al., 2012; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). Different systems produce different knowledge and different truths. Knowledge can become part of a dominant discourse within society or it can become subjugated. As Foucault (1980) explains, subjugated knowledges are knowledges “that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity” (p. 82). Subjugated knowledges are either hidden by other dominant knowledges or deemed unworthy for some reason, but such knowledges are still part of the discourses of social, cultural, and political institutions. Subjugated knowledges have the potential to lead to resistance and social and cultural change.

Foucault’s analysis of power and knowledge reveals that it is through the interrelationship of discourse, power, and knowledge that resistance can happen. As Foucault (1990) relates:

discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart (p. 101).

Discourses form and produce power relations and when a discourse becomes dominant, other discourses become subversive. These subversive discourses create or reveal other knowledges and can become dominant within that subversion; the relations of power can shift through these competing discourses. It is through this process of competing or reverse discourses that resistance can occur. Reverse discourses can produce new knowledges and experiences and new ways of doing things (Schirato et al., 2012). Foucault illustrates this in his examination of the history of sexuality.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1990) details how systems of power and concerns about sex gave rise to competing discourses of sexuality. New language and discourses produced new knowledge and new ways of viewing sexuality. As a result, the heterosexual and homosexual categories were produced, and people came to understand themselves within these categories. The homosexual became subversive and pathological to the heterosexual. These categories reinforced social institutions through mechanisms of power but people who identified as homosexual eventually sought ways to resist the labels of perversion and pathology. New discourses emerged and began to shift power relations. As Foucault (1990) states, “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged” (p.101). This counter discourse revealed the *fragility* of the dominant discourse and resistance took shape in the form of political activism and the gay rights movement. Homosexuals began to speak and view themselves differently from the dominant discourse. They rejected the labels of disease and deviance. This rejection produced new views on sexuality, subjectivities, and new ways of being (Foucault, 1990). Foucault’s work offers us a philosophy to critically examine, disrupt, or deconstruct discourses, knowledge, and power relations within

healthcare. The critical analysis of discourses and subjects done within poststructuralism was adopted by many theorists to debunk binary notions of sex, gender, and sexualities giving rise to queer theory.

Disrupting Discourses: Queer Approaches

Queer is a contested term. It is both a derogatory epithet and a reclaimed term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, 2-spirited, asexual people. As such, the meaning of this term will be different for different people. In its reclaimed use, queer has no fixed meaning and is connoted with social disruption and activism. Queer is also a critical theory that has been used within disciplines ranging from cinema, literature, and photography to gender and sexuality studies, education, sports, and health policy (Atkins & Brady, 2016; Caudwell, 2007; C. Davis, 2018; Greteman, 2017; Larsson et al., 2014; Longhurst, 2016; Sykes, 2011). This section provides a brief overview of the central tenets of queer theory and explores how photography can be a means to queer subjects.

Queer theory is largely derived from gay and lesbian identity politics and a reconceptualization of binary notions of identity, gender, and sexuality (Jagose, 1996; Spargo, 1999). It shares many foundational principles of poststructuralism, especially regarding the social construction of identities. Queer theory allows fundamental assumptions about identity categories to be questioned (DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005). Rooted in the deconstructive nature of poststructuralism, queer theorists view sexual orientation, gender systems, and gender identity as constituted through language and contingent on the society that constitutes them (Skodbo, 2007). Gender and sexual

orientation are not innate to identities. Queer theory frames identity as fluid and transitional; “a constellation of multiple and unstable positions” (Jagose, 1996, para. 3). In doing so, it dismantles the assumption of a knowable and stable subject and disrupts categories of male or female, gay or straight, while analyzing the power relations and social institutions that create such concepts (Denton, 2016; Halperin, 2003; Numer & Gahagan, 2009; Smith, 2003; Spargo, 1999). Queer theory allows for the possibility of questioning, exploring, and, ultimately, changing existing social and cultural arrangements of gender (Denton, 2016; Hesse-Biber, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Resistance and subversion are, in fact, central to queer theory (Skodbo, 2007).

One of the ways for individuals to resist, subvert, and reveal new possibilities to life is through art. Queer art in the twentieth century has been shaped by both the need to remain hidden and the desire to be visible (Burk, 2015). As gay liberation began to gain momentum artists, activists, social commentators, and others working within the movements used art in various forms to critique, challenge, and disrupt notions of gender and sexuality within political systems, healthcare systems, and capitalism. Art is also a way for queer people to reveal their experiences, challenge notions of heteronormativity by becoming visible, and recreate identity categories (DiGrazia & Boucher, 2005; Skodbo, 2007). Photographers were queering gender and sexuality through their art decades before Teresa de Lauretis first used the term “queer theory” in 1990 (Halperin, 2003). Skodbo (2007) analyzes the photographic work of Nan Goldin to illustrate how photographs can be used as a medium to critique and destabilize binary concepts of gender. Goldin is an American photographer whose work has explored many queer issues, including the post-Stonewall gay era, queer bodies, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s,

and gender politics. Skodbo (2007) specifically explores her photographs in *The Other Side* that documents the lives of drag queens and trans people living in New York City in the 1970s (Skodbo, 2007). In Goldin's photographs, gender is unfixed as concepts of masculinity and femininity are blurred and overlapped. From his analysis, Skodbo (2007) suggests that photography can be a means to either reaffirm gender identity dichotomies or to reveal the infinite gender identities that can exist.

Although queer theory has been predominately applied to the debunking of gender and sexuality, Halperin (1995) suggests "queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers" (p. 62). As this quote illustrates, queer theory can expose and challenge normalcy within a wide variety of topics and professions, including dietetics. Recently, there have been calls for the use of queer theory within dietetics education as a means to deconstruct heteronormative and gendered practices within the profession (Atkins & Brady, 2016; Joy & Numer, 2018b). Atkins and Brady (2016) suggest that the lack of queer theory within dietetic pedagogy is problematic for the profession as dietitians-in-training are not exposed or asked to challenge the heteronormative epistemological foundations of dietetic practices. As a result, dietitians are often not equipped to work with queer individuals or within queer communities (Atkins & Brady, 2016; Joy & Numer, 2018b). It is with Halperin's (1995) proclamation that queer theory is applied to this project in an attempt to challenge, disrupt, and offer alternatives to the discourses of food and bodies within gay culture.

The Becoming Body

The philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari covered many topics from capitalism to linguistics to pop culture but this research focuses only on their concept of the becoming body. This theory recognizes an embodied subjectivity and offers a radical view of the body within health research (Coffey, 2016; Fox, 2002, 2013, 2016). Subjectivities are not only social constructs that produce the self but are also a discursive constitution of bodies. The body is inscribed with meanings produced from language, discourse, and power relations (Macdonald et al., 2002). Subjectivity is "impossible without having a body too" (Fox, 2002, p. 349). The body is not simply an independent object considered to be static and trapped in dualistic forms, as is commonly conceptualized within Western cultures. The body is not discretely man or woman, or fat or thin, but is an ever-changing and dynamic system. As Coffey (2013) notes Deleuze and Guattari view the body as "neither a blank and passive canvas upon which social structures impose themselves, nor does it operate as a 'free agent', unaffected by social structures and discourses, particularly gender" (p. 3). The body is not intrinsically separate from historical relations nor is it simply an empty vessel that is ascribed with social meanings.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) define the body as dynamic and always in the process of becoming. The body is not conceptualized by what it is but by what it can do. This paradigm goes beyond the physicality of the body and views the body as more than its fleshly components and their related functions. The body is more than the heart pumping blood or the chemical firings of synapses (Fox, 2002). It is an object set within an intricate network of social relations that it engages with, in a creative and productive manner (Fox, 2013). It is an assemblage that both affects and is affected by the other

bodies, objects, languages, technologies, ideas, laws, and social organizations, and, by its very nature, has a desire to become, to shift and reassemble, creating new ways of being or functioning (Colebrook, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Parr, 2010). The becoming body is visualized as a continuing process of shifting connections between itself and other bodies (Coffey, 2013). The body, and hence the person, is not defined by such things as gender, age, or weight but by their ever-shifting relations with other bodies.

A Deleuzian approach to the body allows for an exploration of the many known and unknown relations that define what a body is capable of doing, feeling, and desiring (Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Fox, 2013). This perspective also allows for an exploration of how these relations construct the knowledges and experiences of the body, and it is through the critical examination of the body's relations that we may discover other possibilities. We may be able to change or reform the body's relations to offer ways to improve the health of gay men (Fox, 2016). We are able to explore the way gay men's bodies engage with various other bodies, such as social norms of gender and hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Coffey, 2013, 2015, 2016). This perspective offers ways to deconstruct binary constraints placed upon the body and allow for the exploration of the body's possibilities within its social and cultural contexts. This is particularly relevant as the project attempts to explore and disrupt the social relations that affect, monitor, and maintain the nutritional practices and experiences of gay men.

Chapter Summary

Poststructuralism, queer theory, and the concept of the becoming body by Deleuze and Guattari merge and overlap within this project to guide the exploration of

nutrition and body discourses within gay culture. The merging of these theories into one framework allows for a detailed and critical analysis of the power relations that are intimately connected with discourses; a fundamental aspect of all these theories. This framework also opens up the possibility of resistance and the challenging and disrupting of hegemonic and oppressive discourses through art, discussions, and reflection that are integral components of the photovoice method. Chapter 4 details the theoretical underpinnings and the methods of this photovoice project.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this study is to explore how gay culture produces the nutritional practices and body image of gay men and to examine health outcomes related to these cultural practices. The primary research question is: How do gay men navigate the tensions to their health and well-being from competing discourses regarding their relationship with food and their bodies? The research further aims to challenge and disrupt the dominant ideology on these topics as a means for potential health improvements. Art-based methodologies are an ideal means to do this and, in the process, bring about social transformation. The use of arts-based methodologies is increasing within health research (Boydell et al., 2016).

This chapter reviews the methodology of photovoice, an arts-based methodology used in health research. First, the theoretical underpinnings of photovoice are reviewed. This is followed by an examination of photovoice within health and nutritional research and a discussion on how the underlying principles of freedom from oppression that is central to photovoice can be reconciled and used poststructural and queer frameworks. The chapter then provides details on the methods of the study including research design and questions, recruitment, the five stages of the photovoice process, and the ethical considerations of using photography within research. A discussion on the analysis of the data concludes the chapter.

Arts-based Methodologies

Arts-based methodologies are not about trying to find the one “final ‘truth’ but to question the intelligibility of truth(s) we have come to take for granted” (Graham, 2011,

p. 4). Truth is dependent on the subjectivity of the reader that is, in turn, contingent on power relations, knowledge, and social norms. The underlying ontological and epistemological principles of arts-based methodologies contest positivism that asserts there is one essential truth that is discoverable through scientific investigation. Arts-based research acknowledges multiple truths within the world. Finley (2008) suggests that “to claim art and aesthetic ways of knowing as research is an act of rebellion against the monolithic ‘truth’ that science is supposed to entail” (p.73). Arts-based methodologies can disrupt the foundations of health research that propose knowledge is found only in hard numbers or in data that is independent of human experiences. Art allows research to be expressive by involving the emotions, the senses, the creativity, and the bodies of participants (Finley, 2008). Art can challenge and subvert the constructions of subjectivities, sexuality, gender, and body norms while contributing to social transformation through the expression of new perspectives (Schuhmann, 2014). This research, by the integral use of images, aims to shift the understanding of gay men’s bodies and to acknowledge the complexities within their nutritional practices and experiences.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Photovoice

Photovoice, as an arts-based methodology, has its roots in several different theories including documentary photography, feminist theory, and Paulo Freire’s pedagogical philosophies (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). Documentary photography is a way to tell stories. Photovoice takes the act of capturing stories out of the hands of professional photographers and places it in the hands of community members (Wang & Burris, 1994). The process of taking photographs becomes a way for people to share their

individual and collective experiences. Wang and Burris (1997) grounded photovoice in feminist theories by giving rural women in China cameras to capture and document their own lives through a camera lens (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). The following discussion focuses on Freire's pedagogical philosophies, specifically critical consciousness and problem-posing education, and how Freire's philosophies inform and guide photovoice and this research.

Critical consciousness. Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator whose work focuses on transforming society. Freire worked in some of the poorest regions of the world to help impoverished and illiterate people. Freire's experiences as a young boy during the Great Depression of 1928-1932 shaped his life and his dedication to alleviating hunger (Freire, 1993). His work examines how people can be "empowered" or create shifts in power by revealing knowledge about the social and political circumstances in which they live (Freire, 1993). Political, social, and economic factors, according to Freire, create a culture of silence that keeps people oppressed. Freire sees the development of a critical consciousness as the only means a person may come to recognize, and potentially change, the political, social, and economic structures within societies, educate and empower people, and subsequently improve their health (Freire, 1993).

Freire's concept of critical consciousness focuses on achieving a deeper understanding of the way the world works and learning about how political, social, and economic factors can affect a person's place within it (Cahill, 2007). Freire identifies three levels of consciousness (Carlson et al., 2006). The first level, magical

consciousness, is the lowest level of consciousness. In this level, people silently accept the status quo, do not question social injustices, and feel a sense of helplessness about their situation (Carlson et al., 2006). At the second level of consciousness, naïve consciousness, people are more aware of their problems but do not analyze the social sources of injustice (Carlson et al., 2006). Freire refers to the third level as critical consciousness and proposes at this stage people become more fully aware of their assumptions that shape their realities and make connections with socio-economic contradictions that keep them oppressed (Carlson et al., 2006). Although people can never fully be conscious and aware of all the forces that produce their subjectivity and experiences moving through a process of critical consciousness can provide a deeper understanding of their lives. This is achieved through dialogue, co-creation of knowledge, and praxis (Cahill, 2007). Through praxis, or acts of reflection and action, people can gain an awareness of their own lives and work towards change. The development of critical consciousness is a form of education that, according to Freire (1993), is a force for social subversion.

Problem-posing education. Freire (1993) critiques mainstream education systems and refers to the standard process of teaching as banking education. In this type of system, the learning process is dichotomized between teachers and learners. The teachers are knowledge holders who prepare and explain their lessons to students. Students are passive, empty vessels to be taught appropriate knowledge approved by social institutions. Freire (1993) believes that in the banking system students do not need to think but simply memorize the knowledge given to them. Freire views this type of education as contradictory to critical consciousness and believes it reinforces systems of

oppression. He proposes that education is not neutral but takes place within the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts of people's lives (Freire, 1993).

As an alternative to the banking system, Freire (1993) proposes a system of education that he calls problem-posing education. In this system, Freire recognizes that all people have and create knowledge. He views all people as co-creators of knowledge. He believes that education is only effective if "everyone participates as equals and co-learners to create social knowledge" (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988, p. 382). Through his work, Freire seeks to disrupt the strict roles of teachers and students, thereby, acknowledging the multiple roles people have as both teachers and learners. Freire also believes people are the experts about their realities and can use their prior knowledge to help them examine the socio-political mechanisms of the world in which they live. People can, through the co-creation of knowledge, understand the world not as a "static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1993, p. 64). In problem-posing education, learners become aware of the multiple ways of being and the social norms that produce their experiences. This awareness may become sites for political struggle and social transformation (Weedon, 1987). As people come to understand different ways of being, they also may see opportunities to disrupt, resist, and change hegemonic and oppressive norms within society.

Research as problem-posing education. The principles of problem-posing education are applied to photovoice research. Freire's (1993) problem-posing education

approach shifts the relationships between researchers and research participants⁴ by acknowledging that all people know about their lives. The shift in relationships allows participants to engage in research at the level of co-creators of knowledge through communal reflection and dialogue. Their relationship moves from one in which knowledge is transferred from the expert researcher to the participant to a relationship in which knowledge is shared between the researcher and the participant with each person taking on the role of the other person. The researcher becoming the participant and the participant becoming the researcher (Carlson et al., 2006). Shifting the relationships between the researcher and the participants can build trust between them and create a sense of ownership with the participants. In research that utilizes the Freirean approach, knowledge is produced in a more egalitarian way and the capacity of individuals, researchers, participants, and communities to make social change through the application of collective knowledge may be strengthened and enhanced (Harley, 2012; Nelson & Christensen, 2009).

A Freirean approach to health research emphasizes the production of collective knowledge through three main steps. The first step involves the researchers and participants coming together to listen to each other and to identify health concerns relevant to the community (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). The second step is holding problem-posing discussions to assess the historical and social contexts that shape their situations. Freire (1993) proposes the use of codes or codifications at this stage to

⁴ Although this research recognizes that the researcher and research participants are both teachers and learners, for clarity, the terms “researcher” and “participants” will be maintained throughout this dissertation.

stimulate discussions and consciousness raising. Codes are physical objects that represent the issues under investigation and provide structure to the dialogues. The codes may be drawings, stories, songs, poems, plays or, in the case of photovoice, photographs (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Freire (1993) notes that images are among the best means to begin dialogues about the political and social forces that influence the lives of participants. In his work, Freire (1993) created line drawings from the stories he collected to symbolize the experiences of his participants. He used these drawings to begin discussions with his participants to facilitate their reflection on strategies to improve health and communities (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). The third stage is a process of action-reflection-action, where participants continually test and refine strategies with the hope of becoming more deeply involved in changing the contexts of their lives (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). The photovoice methods used during the three stages of knowledge production will be further discussed in the upcoming section of this chapter entitled 'Photovoice: The Process'.

Photovoice within a Poststructural Framework

Freire's (1993) views on the oppression of people are not completely aligned with the ideas of power relations within poststructural thought as reviewed in Chapter 3. The following section reconciles Freire's concepts of oppression that underpins photovoice with the concept of power relations within poststructuralism and Foucauldian thought revealing how photovoice can be used within research that utilizes poststructural and queer frameworks. As discussed in the theoretical underpinnings of photovoice section, Freire (1993) views political, social, and economic factors as contributing factors in the creation of a culture of silence that oppresses, repress, and negatively influence the health

of groups of people. As other researchers (Cahill, 2007; Cameron & Gibson, 2005; Norman, 2009; Warschauer & Lepeintre, 1997) note, the language used within much photovoice research often views subjects as having an innate and pre-existing identity that is repressed by social structures, such as capitalism and patriarchy, that can be freed or emancipated through research and subsequent political action. Terms such as giving “a voice to the voiceless”, “empowering people”, or “freedom to the oppressed” represent repressive types of power that are not consistent with the poststructural framework within which this project is situated.

Within a Foucauldian perspective, however, power is not something that is held by a particular group of people to repress others but is a *productive network* that connects all people. Relations of power form a web that connects everybody and flow between all people and institutions. Relations of power acknowledges people are never completely powerless nor fully powerful. Power is dynamic. People may feel powerful in some circumstances but not in other circumstances. In a Foucauldian sense, silence is not a repressive force but part of productive potential of relations of power. Silence is “an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies....There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (Foucault, 1990, p. 27). Foucault identifies silences, not as a repressive force that keeps people oppressed but as productive. Silences are integral to the power relations that flow through society and that create knowledge or institutional systems and practices. Constantly shifting power relations produce behaviors and practices and can prevent actions or create opportunities for action (Fendler, 2010). As such, people need to explore not only what is said within

society but also what cannot be said. Individuals can critically examine their situation to uncover the influence of what is not spoken and how silence can shape power relations, social institutions and, as a consequence, their health.

The goals of photovoice projects should not be to empower participants but to promote discussions on the social, political, economic factors that shape the lives of people and, in the process, produce what Norman (2009) refers to as complex and messy texts. Texts that have many voices and are produced within the web of social constructs. As Foucault (1995) suggests, power is relational. As such power cannot be overthrown or taken from one. It is by acknowledging and critiquing power relations, as well as the production of knowledge, that we can shift or negate the effects of power and work towards changing societies and the health of communities. Researchers using photovoice need to be reflective regarding their assumptions on power relations and knowledge production to ensure alignment with the theoretical underpinnings of poststructuralism (Norman, 2009).

Photographs: More than Pure Reflections

Photographs are crucial components of photovoice and this project. Artists, philosophers, and researchers have grappled with the meanings of images throughout history. Modern westernized culture is visual, and we are accustomed to seeing a variety of images daily. People are bombarded with visual information ranging from classic and surreal images to the images used to advertise and sell a multitude of products. Family portraits, selfies, social media memes, and news images are prolific in Canadian society. Many of these everyday photographs fade into the deluge of images and are often given

no more than a cursory thought, deemed unworthy of deeper interpretation. Realistic photographs are often viewed as simple reproductions of the world, depicting things as they are, as reflections of the truth. T. Barrett (2000), however, argues that there are no “innocent eyes” within photography (p.37). Images are not mere reflections of an impartial truth but are reflections of people’s knowledge, beliefs, and values.

Photographs are, in fact, social constructs that mirror the photographer’s culture. Photographs also contribute to constituting the culture of the viewers. For example, T. Barrett (2000) relates how an advertising image for pasta depicts not only the actual food products but also implies values for fresh products, adding to a cultural discourse about the worth of wholesome home cooking. A portrait of a person does not only reflect the appearance of that person but also represents the social values placed upon them. As T. Barrett (2000) affirms, “every photograph embodies a particular way of seeing and showing the world” (p.36) whether this is done intentionally or unintentionally by the photographer. He suggests that all photographs, from the stylish and bizarre to the straightforward and realistic, require interpretation and deconstruction to fully understand the meanings implied within them.

Photos with a queer poststructuralist framework. Photographs can be considered with a queer poststructural framework to be texts created within historical contexts. The interpretation of photographs is often grounded in our understanding of various social categories and norms, including class, gender, race, and sexuality. Each person sees and experiences something different from a photograph, depending on their cultural contexts. Photographs are not read once to reveal a conclusive and complete truth

but are read multiple times, giving multiple interpretations. As cultural and social norms shift over time the meanings of images will also shift. People interpret meanings within a photo by the relations between the photo and their subject experience (T. Barrett, 2000; Rose, 2012).

The meanings people give to photographs also inform discourses, knowledge, and power relations. Images allow people to express things visually, to evoke feelings and sensations that may be difficult to name or to articulate. At some point, however, we need to use language to convey our expressions. As T. Barrett (2000) notes people must discuss their “complex jumble of thoughts and feelings about art into words that can be understood first by themselves and then by others” (p.13). People must ask questions through language to explore the meanings of photographs and it is this act of expression that can expand discourses, reveal or produce new knowledge, shift power relations, offer alternatives to social norms, and disrupt binary concepts of bodies, gender, and sexuality.

Photography, as a health research methodology, has the potential to challenge the dominant conceptions of what is considered to be knowledge and allow for the existence of multiple knowledges (Carlson et al., 2006; Ingrey, 2013; Prins, 2010; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Previous research illustrates the potential of photography to reveal subjugated knowledges. In the work by Prins (2010) community members noted that through the photovoice process they came to see and understand their communities and themselves in different ways. In another study, participants examined attitudes towards immigration and noted that they were able to reflect on issues of cultural adaptation of immigrants that they had previously not considered (Rania et al.,

2014). Photovoice can be a means for participants, researchers, policymakers, and community members to uncover hidden or taken-for-granted knowledges and beliefs within society.

Poststructuralist researchers who use photography should recognize that photos can also be mechanisms of discipline and surveillance that influence people and the way they live (Prins, 2010). Foucault (1995) discusses discipline and surveillance in relation to the Panopticon, a prison where a single watchman can observe all inmates at once. The inmates, however, do not know if they are being observed or not. It is not the actual observations that keep inmates disciplined, but the fact that they cannot discern if or when they are being watched. It is the mere thought that they are being watched that drives them to enact mechanisms of surveillance and self-discipline (Fendler, 2010). Foucault (1995) refers to this (disciplinary) power as the 'gaze'.

The actions of people are driven by the knowledge, messages, images, and rewards present in societies. Through activities such as self-monitoring and self-discipline people adhere to the behaviors that align with how they have come to understand what is right or wrong (Coveney, 1998, 1999). Behaviors and practices are ingrained with ideas of responsibility, morality, and health (Fendler, 2010). The disciplinary mechanisms may not always be overt, named, or talked about but can give people a sense of morality or good citizenship (Fendler, 2010). The feeling of being watched is enough to ensure individuals act in ways that discipline themselves; the invisible part of disciplinary power.

People become visible by enacting social practices that give a sense of morality or good citizenship (Fendler, 2010). The production of knowledge is another mechanism of disciplinary power. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Foucault saw power and knowledge as intimately linked. Knowledge is produced historically under certain conditions as a result of many competing interests. Depending on the unique historical context some discourses will become knowledge while other discourses will not (Fendler, 2010). It is this knowledge that allows people to govern themselves in certain ways. It is the dominant knowledge of foods, bodies, and health that forms the basis of discipline mechanisms, such as eating 'healthy' foods, counting calories, or partaking in exercise.

Prins' (2010) photovoice project demonstrates the potential of photography to be a mechanism of discipline and surveillance. Prins' (2010) project took place within rural communities in El Salvador that had histories of civil war surveillance, torture, disappearances, and killings. The act of taking photographs in these communities was viewed with suspicion and often violated existing social norms. Some of the participants in Prins' (2010) project, during the process of taking photographs, felt highly visible to others in their communities, were exposed to criticism and mockery, and felt *pena* (shame, timidity, and embarrassment). These experiences, produced from social, cultural, and historical contexts of the communities, hindered some participants during the photography process. Prins (2010) suggests that photography, as a mechanism of surveillance by others and the self, ensures people conformed to societal norms to be good citizens. Photovoice researchers should be cognizant of the capacity of photography to be both a means of uncovering subjugated knowledges and a means of social control (Prins, 2010). Researchers using photovoice will be able to draw attention to the elusive

nature of power through the process of knowledge dissemination and translation of the photographs produced from the participants.

Photography as knowledge translation: The use of photography within photovoice methodologies can also change the way research knowledge is shared and disseminated. The Canadian government recommends that researchers make their work more effectively utilized by health professionals through effective and creative knowledge translation strategies (Government of Canada, 2005). Knowledge translation is defined as the synthesis, dissemination, and communication of the results of research projects with the aim to improve the health and healthcare systems of Canadians (Archibald et al., 2014; Government of Canada, 2005). When researchers are far removed from those working in healthcare systems, a knowledge-to-action gap occurs (Archibald et al., 2014). Knowledge becomes ‘stuck’ in academic institutions and its potential to disrupt and change social norms is limited. Researchers working within poststructural and queer frameworks need to question their privileged positions and, by doing so, attempt to shift the power relations within the knowledge dissemination process (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Innovative knowledge translation strategies such as participant-produced art and photography exhibits that are integral to photovoice methodologies can help shift the way research knowledge is shared (Archibald et al., 2014).

Participant-produced art is one effective knowledge translation method that has the potential to benefit researchers, participants, and health practitioners (Archibald et al., 2014; Parsons & Boydell, 2012). There are numerous strategies for art as knowledge translation, including dance, performance, song, poetry, and photography exhibits. The

process of art as knowledge translation is an interactive and democratic process that involves researchers coordinating with participants to identify the pieces of art that are expressive of their experiences and lives. Art as knowledge translation is a unique method of dissemination which leads to more inclusive results, a broader sense of what counts as knowledge, and a greater utilization of knowledge (Archibald et al., 2014; NCDDR, 2005).

Russell and Kelly (2002) emphasize the importance of communicating research results back to the community through knowledge translation and suggest that when researchers use creative venues for dissemination that it can be a catalyst for change. They refer to the emotional impact as people engage with art and come to understand new perspectives. Art, however, does not necessarily transfer the same meanings to all people (Parsons & Boydell, 2012). For example, Parsons and Boydell (2012) report that art as knowledge translation can stimulate new understandings of patient issues to health practitioners while patients come to understand the factors that influence their lives. In this process, participants can directly voice their stories, interact with audiences, and bring awareness to their lives. This often results in positive change in the lives of participants, such as increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and passion, as well as a stronger sense of community (Parsons & Boydell, 2012). Art becomes a way for participants to reveal themselves to the world and promote social change (Finley, 2008; T. Grant, 2017).

The process of art as knowledge translation within critical research is also political. As Finley (2008) notes, research cannot just offer information but must promote dialogue

and be provocative. Finley (2008) suggests that one way to do this is by moving knowledge translation to “dynamic indigenous spaces” (p.73). Knowledge translation must move beyond the ivory towers of scientific institutions, which are often inaccessible, and out into the everyday environments of the participants, such as schools, homeless shelters, and other venues within the community (Boydell et al., 2012; Finley, 2008). Art shows enable people to come together to discuss, reflect, and shift cultural understandings of health (Finley, 2008). Art as knowledge translation can also allow for the representation of alternative ways of living and the deconstruction of cultural beliefs and values (Parsons & Boydell, 2012). It facilitates experiential and interactive learning that can promote a deeper understanding of health issues. In this way, it is a political act. Community members, health practitioners, and policymakers may come to understand the need to disrupt the social norms that produce health inequalities (Parsons & Boydell, 2012).

Photovoice within Health Research

Researchers have traditionally used photovoice within marginalized populations to examine issues of their health and how people can work towards positive changes in their community. For example, photovoice can be a means to examine and disrupt the forces that shape the health experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) people who have historically experienced marginalization within heteronormative healthcare systems. Hussey (2006), in a study of healthcare access of trans men, notes that the process of story-telling and reflection enabled participants to question and challenge the social forces that influenced their experiences in the healthcare system. A photograph of a hospital registration office provoked discussions on

how the healthcare system, and the complexities of insurance companies, produced negative experiences for some trans men. The men in Hussey's (2006) study often felt humiliated, scared, alone, dehumanized, and overwhelmed when seeking healthcare. The study's participants also reflected on the language used by health professionals. The language of respect, dignity, and compassion, which included the proper use of pronouns, when used within healthcare services provided more positive experiences. When pronouns were used incorrectly participants felt their healthcare experiences were negative. Hussey's (2006) study highlights the potential of photovoice to challenge the competing discourses of gender found within healthcare systems that overlap and produce sites of tension for LGBTQ individuals.

Photovoice involves a reflective and analytical process through which a person may come to understand the multiple discourses and contexts that shape their subjectivities and produce their experiences (Aston, 2016). In a study with queer and trans youth, participants described their feelings of visibility (Holtby et al., 2015). The participants discussed various aspects of visibility, including being authentically viewed, the experience of being watched as they deviated from gender norms, and the experience of having their identities erased (Holtby et al., 2015). They discussed how the pressure to conform to the social and cultural ideals of queer and trans identities affected their visibility and resulted in negatives experiences. Participants often felt one-dimensional as if only their gender represented them but saw themselves as complex and multi-dimensional individuals (Holtby et al., 2015). The results of this study highlight the effectiveness of photovoice in bringing to the surface the multiple and conflicting subject positions that can be produced from social norms, gender stereotypes, and trans- and

biphobia that queer youth experience. Numer (2014) suggests that an awareness of the productive potential of discourse can change the focus of health research from examining individual behaviours thought to arise from an intrinsic self to exploring the effects of dominant discourses on subjectivities. Cahill (2007) proposes that methodologies like photovoice have the potential for conceiving alternative subjectivities and other ways of knowing oneself through the production of alternate discourses. This work explores alternative discourses of nutrition and bodies for gay men through the use of images.

Photovoice can be used to explore many nutritional issues, including the roles of gender, culture, economics, and politics. As Power (2003) argues, people know more about food and food practices than they are able to express through words alone and photography allows for the communication of intangible cultural aspects that can facilitate deeper expressions of people's experiences. A photovoice study to investigate the experiences of hunger and food insecurity within low-income women living in New York City demonstrates its potential to positively affect the nutritional health of individuals and communities (Valera et al., 2009). Participants in this study photographed and reflected upon their knowledge about the nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables but also on their need to buy less expensive products that they felt were less nutritious. As part of the photovoice process, the participants wrote letters to local policymakers and then presented their findings to the community. They became agents of change for their communities. As such examples show, health research that is aligned with the underlying theoretical principles of photovoice can be a way to create positive change for individuals and within communities. Photovoice research framed by poststructuralism and queer theory can challenge and disrupt existing social structures, as well as reveal and create

new knowledge that can inform changes to health systems. To be effective in this, however, each stage of the research process, beginning with the research design and questions needs to be aligned with the principles of the theoretical framework. The following sections of this chapter review the design, questions, processes, and analysis of this research.

Research Design and Questions

The design of health research informed by poststructuralism and queer theory allows for the exploration of the discourses, knowledges, and power relations that sexualize bodies, acts, desires, and identities, as well as how public health institutions maintain normative gender and sexuality roles. Poststructural and queer researchers also attempt to challenge and disrupt social norms (Cheek, 1999; Nash, 2010; Semp, 2011). With this research, the aim is to move beyond the surface layers of nutrition and body practices of gay men to open up the possibility for new perspectives that can destabilize and disrupt the dominant discourses, knowledge, and power relations that produce nutritional and body concerns for gay men.

The research questions were designed to consider how some practices, beliefs, and values concerning nutrition and body image have come into being and how some have become standard, accepted, and normal while others have been rejected, dismissed, or silenced. My experiences as a gay man and the literature review in Chapter 2 has led to the following overarching research question: how do gay men navigate the tensions to their health and well-being from competing discourses regarding their relationship with food and their bodies? To guide this research, the following sub-questions were posed:

- 1) For the study's participants, how does gay culture shape their values about food in relation to their bodies and their health?
- 2) How do participants talk about the bodies of gay men in relation to masculinity and the cultural ideals of men's bodies?
- 3) How are the dietary and body practices of the participants shaped by the language and images found within gay culture?
- 4) In what ways do the discourses of food and bodies within gay culture constitute the participants' experiences.

The information provided by the participants, as discussed in subsequent chapters, reveals some of the discourses of nutrition and body image for gay men, and adds to the knowledge of this topic. The methodology of the project provided an opportunity to reveal pathways of resistance to the tensions between health, nutritional practices, and body image felt by participants. Photovoice, through the process of creating and displaying artwork, contributes to expanding discourses and disrupting the hegemonic ideals of gay men's bodies that negatively affect their health.

Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies are often based on identification within certain groups and this can influence who takes part in the research. Subjectivities in poststructuralism and queer theory are multiple, shifting, and complex (Spargo, 1999). Gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality will shape the way people view themselves and their place in the world. Often people prioritize the various dimensions of themselves. For example, some individuals may see their ethnicity rather than their sexuality as more relevant to

who they are or vice versa (Semp, 2011). This may influence who identifies within certain categories and ultimately affect the recruitment process (Semp, 2011). Semp (2011) critiques the use of the terms 'gay' and 'homosexual' to recruit men who have same-sex attractions for research using a queer framework. He suggests that this places limitations on the diversity of participants within these studies as not all men attracted to other men identify as gay or homosexual.

The use of queer theory requires the researcher to be aware of how heteronormativity within society influences the way men may use or reject certain identity categories (Semp, 2011). The idea that the 'heterosexual' or 'straight' identity is privileged and natural creates protective strategies that may be used by some people outside the heterosexual label. Such strategies may include avoidance of gay culture and communities, as well as the refusal to use gay identities (Semp, 2011). Regardless, the use of limited identity categories for recruitment purposes within arts-based research may restrict the diversity of participants. Semp (2011) offers the following example as a recruitment advertisement informed by queer theory: "The study invites staff who identify (not necessarily publicly) as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans- gender, or takataapui, and staff who have same-sex attraction but do not identify with any of these terms" (p.74). Although the ad does use identity categories, it also specifically calls for people who do not ascribe labels to their sexual attractions. In this way, the researcher acknowledges both the heteronormative nature of society and the fluidity and transitional nature of identities that are prominent principles within queer theory (Semp, 2011).

This project investigates the productive nature of gay men's culture, so it becomes relevant to use identify categories for recruitment. The term 'gay' was used to recruit men as the focus of the research was to examine how identifying as gay shapes the beliefs, values, and practices on eating and body image of men. The inclusion criterion for this project was set to be anyone over the age of 18 years who self-identifies as a gay man. Recruitment advertisements reflected this and used the term gay.

Participants were recruited randomly through a variety of strategies. Community networks, such as the queer student groups (DalOut, SMUQ, Mount Pride) and community service organizations (AIDS Coalition Nova Scotia, prideHealth, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, Healing Our Nations) were emailed or contacted through Facebook with electronic recruitment materials. A project Facebook page was created and shared with these organizations and through personal community networks. Posters were placed on noticeboards at various locations across the university campus, as well as other places where gay men may frequently visit, such as local LGBTQ-friendly coffee shops. Community photography networks were also contacted through email and Facebook posts. Finally, snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) or referrals from people in the community was also be used in this project. Refer to Appendix A for sample recruitment advertisements.

The number of participants for a photovoice project varies. Blackman (2007) suggests that the project's objectives, timeframe, and budget all play a role in the number of participants. lackman (2007) further notes that the number of participants for successful photovoice projects has ranged from five to fifteen people. This number of participants is

ideal to establish rapport within the group and to facilitate the co-creation of knowledge as per the underlying philosophical perspectives of the project. The aim of this research was to recruit between five to ten men. Fifteen men from the community contacted the researcher to be involved. After the initial contact, several men could not participate due to time requirements, family situations, or not feeling the project was appropriate for them. In total, nine men participated in the project. Participant details are discussed in Chapter 5.

Another consideration of photovoice projects is to retain the participants throughout the duration of the project. Photovoice is an intensive research technique that asks the participants to contribute in multiple ways. One way to improve participant retention is by removing barriers to engagement (Blackman, 2007). Funding provided by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Doctoral Award was used to remove any financial barriers of participating in the project. Bus tickets for travel to workshops and interviews, held at Dalhousie University, were offered to participants. A digital camera was available to be loaned out to any participants that do not have a camera or a phone. Flash drives that allowed participants to share their photographs with the researcher were provided to all participants. The printing and framing of all images were paid for, ensuring the participants did not incur any costs associated with the study or art exhibit. Tea, coffee, and snacks were provided at workshops and the final art show. Finally, a small honorarium was given to all participants. The honorarium was \$10 for each part of the project and was paid to the participant after they completed each stage for a total of \$50 at the conclusion of the project. If a participant withdrew during a given component, they were still compensated for that component. All participants were given the \$10

honorarium associated with the final art show, regardless if they attended the show or not. These incentives, as well as the opportunity to express their creativity and share their stories, were thought to be effective strategies to recruit participants and support them throughout the duration of the research.

Photovoice: The Process

Arts-based methods are not only mechanisms through which to collect and record data but a means to engage participants in thoughtful ways. The use of photovoice methods, unlike more traditional interview strategies that are often extemporaneous, gives participants time to reflect, and move to a more critical understanding of health-related issues (Boydell et al., 2012; Eisner, 2008; Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). The act of creating something, whether it is a poem, a play or photograph is a thoughtful process and allows people to re-live their experiences (Eisner, 2008; T. Grant, 2017). This can be advantageous to researchers as traditional ways of collecting data, such as interviews, often place participants in circumstances where they need to answer questions spontaneously. For many people, these circumstances can be challenging, especially when they are asked to give detailed descriptions of themselves or consider why they say or do certain things (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). Active participation in art as research evokes the intellect, emotions, and creativity of the participants, giving them time for this contemplation. This is useful in later interviews as participants have spent time on the topic and research questions. They have been given the opportunity to think about the ways social and cultural norms have influenced them, providing useful data to the researcher and, perhaps, themselves (Eisner, 2008).

Participants in this research were asked to use the photovoice method to ‘voice’ their thoughts regarding nutrition and body image. Photovoice is considered the primary means of data collection for this project. Visual methods offer participants a means to express themselves and their health concerns in ways they may not be able to do verbally (T. Grant, 2017). This type of method facilitates a process where the participant is thinking, feeling, and experiencing the research on a personal level (T. Grant, 2017). Weber (2008) notes that the use of images can help people share their perspectives with others and can be a means through which social and cultural norms are critiqued. The photovoice method is a multi-stage process that engages participants at each level. There are five major stages of photovoice research. These include:

- 1) an introductory workshop
- 2) a period during which participants take photographs
- 3) semi-structured interviews
- 4) an art workshop
- 5) an art exhibit

Appendix B provides an outline and the timeline of the project.

Introductory workshop. The first stage of this research was an introductory workshop for all participants. The purpose of this workshop was multi-faceted. It was used as a means to familiarize the project to the participants, integrate their viewpoints and suggestions into the project, review basic photography techniques, and discuss ethical considerations and informed consent procedures (see Appendix C). Due to scheduling conflicts with the participants, two introductory workshops were completed.

One workshop was held on a Thursday evening and the other workshop held on a Saturday morning. Both workshops entailed a 3-hour session and followed the same format. This format consisted of three small modules.

The first module established group dynamics and built participant ownership of the project by seeking their active engagement in the workshop (Blackman, 2007). An ice-breaker activity, which involved participants introducing themselves and sharing a fun piece of information about themselves, was done to encourage positive and creative group interactions (Blackman, 2007). After this activity, the group consulted with each other to create guidelines for respectful sharing and listening during all group activities. Participants noted the need to feel safe within the space and the need to be non-judgemental to each other. These needs became the two main guidelines for the project. Participants were also given the opportunity to voice their ideas on the research concepts and to re-evaluate or modify project goals and objectives. No suggestions for additions or modifications to the project were suggested by the participants. This module concluded with a review of the consent form to the project, including the participant's rights and responsibilities. All participants signed the form at this time (see Appendix C).

The second module was an introduction to visual literacy (Blackman, 2007). It covered the essential principles of photography and prepared participants to partake in the photovoice process. Participants were asked to think about the nature of photography, the perceived strengths, and weakness of photography, and the power of photos to tell a story. To help participants do this, several photographs were presented to

the participants and a group discussion was initiated to explore the various meanings that the photographs held for them. This activity was intended to highlight the use and benefits of photography as a research tool (Blackman, 2007). A brief overview of the history of photovoice as a research tool and a review of other photovoice projects within LGBTQ communities followed. This was done to create a sense of enthusiasm and excitement for the current project. Participants seemed to be interested in the application of photovoice within LGBTQ research.

The tools of photovoice, primarily the cameras, were also introduced in the second module. Participants were asked to use either their cameras, their phone cameras, or to sign a camera out from the researcher. O. Ferlatte recommends that participants use cameras they are familiar with to avoid technical issues and notes that within today's Western culture most people have camera phones that work well within photovoice projects (personal communication, December 18, 2017). All participants chose to use their cameras. Discussions about camera use, camera settings, photo quality, and basic photography techniques were also a part of this module. Topics included rules of composition, subject framing, lighting techniques, and the use of black and white photographs (Blackman, 2007). It was emphasized that photography rules are flexible, and participants were free to be creative when taking photographs. This module concluded with a discussion on the ethics of photography as it was expected that participants may photograph themselves or other people for this project. Ethical topics included principles of informed consent concerning self-portraiture and photographing other people, as well as respect for people's property and legal considerations. A review of the consent forms that focused on taking photographs was done at this stage. A more

detailed discussion on this topic is found in the ‘Ethical Considerations’ section of this chapter.

The last module of this workshop included an idea-sharing exercise that explored the main topic of the project. Participants were asked to think about their personal goals for the project and then to explore as a group how to “speak out through photography” (Blackman, 2007, p. 88). The intent was to once again to give participants the opportunity to take ownership of the project and to build a sense of connection among the group. During this time, the participants expressed and shared some of the ways to achieve their goals through the photovoice process, such as the use of curated photographs and the use of “real-life” photographs. The workshop concluded with an opportunity for participants to vocalize any concerns or any questions raised during the workshop. No concerns were noted.

Taking the photos. After the introductory workshop, participants were asked to use their cameras to photograph their experiences with food, eating, their body image, and their health, as well as social and cultural aspects that constitute their experiences. Participants were given two to three weeks to take between five and fifteen photographs. Participants needed to be aware of the number of photographs to take as part of the research project so they could carefully consider what they wanted to capture in their work (Amos et al., 2012). It also made the project more manageable in relation to the subsequent interviews, the art workshop, and the art exhibit (Amos et al., 2012). The participants were given a ‘Photo Caption Worksheet’ (Appendix D) and asked to complete it for each photograph they took. This worksheet was designed to assist them

in explaining the photograph and why they felt it was important to them (Amos et al., 2012). Only two participants completed the worksheets. After participants were finished taking the photographs, they were asked to download high quality electronic files of their photographs and save them to an external flash drive provided by the researcher. Participants submitted their photographs to the researcher during their individual interviews.

Interviews: Using photographs for data collection. As Gauntlett & Holzwarth (2006) note, most people like to talk about their works of creation, especially in a process that is open and engaging. At the end of the photographing period, each participant was invited to an individual face-to-face interview. It is the process of discussing the photos in interviews that clarifies the meanings of the photographs for the participants and provides insight into social discourses that shape the participants' photographs (Rose, 2012).

Appropriate interview techniques and questions are critical for rich data collection. The interview questions are a means for the researcher and the participant to consider the social mechanisms that have shaped the meanings represented by their photographs (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006). Open-ended interview questions, aligned with poststructuralism and queer theory, were utilized in semi-structured interviews with each participant to elicit thick descriptions on the socially constructed experiences of the participants represented by their photos (see Appendix E for interview questions). The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to be guided by the participant's responses. The use of prompts or probes during the interviews further

guided the dialogue between the researcher and participant, as well as the mutual exploration of the meanings of their photographs (also see Appendix E).

All interviews in this research started with questions concerning the photographs and the photographing process. This allowed each participant to begin the interview by discussing the content and surface level meanings of their photos and then to be guided through subsequent questions into exploring the deeper levels of meanings to their photographs. Together, the participant and the researcher explored the personal thoughts, experiences, stories, and knowledge regarding the cultural influences that constitute the nutritional practices, bodies, and health for gay men represented in the photographs. The photos essentially became a starting point for interviews during which participants described their artwork, reflected on why they created it and discussed what it signified (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006).

In addition, participants were asked about what they did not photograph and whether it was due to technical issues, inability to represent their idea visually, or due to legal and ethical concerns. Questions relating to what was not photographed were recommended by O. Ferlatte, a post-doctoral research fellow with British Columbia Centre on Substance Use, who has experience in conducting photovoice projects within the LGBTQ community (personal communication, December 18, 2017). As photovoice studies often focus on what is observable and what can be captured through the camera lens it was necessary to ask participants if they had challenges in photographing ideas or concepts or if they experienced any security, ethical, emotional, or creative barriers when taking photos. Otherwise, the participants may not have discussed key ideas about

the research questions during their interviews. To ensure the data were comprehensive and not missing relevant information due to the photovoice method, it was critical to consider what was missing from the photographs in addition to what was present in the photographs (Castleden & Garvin, 2008; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Interviews lasted 60-120 minutes and were audio-recorded for transcription. A transcriptionist, who signed a confidentiality form (refer to Appendix F), transcribed all interviews. Participants were invited to individually review their transcript to ensure the accuracy of the process, a process known as member-checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Once member-checked the data was analyzed by the researcher for threads of discourses, as outlined in the upcoming 'Art of Analysis' section of this chapter.

Art workshop. An art workshop was organized with the participants to discuss the images of the project and to design a community exhibit as a means for knowledge translation. As Blackman (2007) notes this is an important process in a photovoice project as it links the images and voices of the participants back to the project's advocacy goals. The workshop provided participants with the opportunity to share their photographs, discuss what their images represented, and to strengthen the messages they wanted to communicate during the art show.

The workshop was attended by six of the participants. The beginning of the workshop was used to plan the details of the art show, including the date, time, location, and methods for promotion. The next phase of the workshop focused on the participants' images. The researcher asked the participants to look through their collective work and to select one image that best expressed their stories during the art

show. The selected image would be printed and displayed in the art show with a title and a brief statement. The participants debated this idea, suggesting that this was not the best way to proceed as a single image was not enough to tell their full stories. The participants offered alternative methods to display their photographs during the show. It was collectively decided that each participant would create a collage of their photographs that would be framed. The participants then were asked to do a mock-up of their collage. Participants were provided with prints (10cm x 15cm) of their photographs and poster boards to do this.

Participants were further asked to write down any text that they wanted to include with the photographs during the exhibition. A booklet was designed that contained either the statements written from the participants, or statements taken from participants' interviews. Each image within the collage was given a reference number that corresponded to a number in the booklet. The text provided context to each image within the collage to the audience of the art show.

The workshop concluded with a group discussion during which participants shared and reviewed the collective work for the art exhibit. The art workshop was integral to the participatory and advocacy nature of photovoice. It allowed participants the autonomy to design their art pieces that are the vehicles for social disruption of hegemonic and oppressive body and gender norms.

Art exhibit. The final stage of the photovoice process was an art exhibit that provided the opportunity for the participants to discuss their work with the public, healthcare workers, and policymakers. The art show took place on January 10, 2019,

from 6 PM to 9 PM in a local art gallery in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The art show consisted of nine framed (57cm x 86cm) pieces of art. These framed artworks were collages of four to twelve images chosen by the participants themselves. There was one collage for each participant. Each image in the collage was given a number that corresponded to a number in a booklet that was created. The booklet was designed to provide context to each photo on display and contained either participant created statements or selected quotes from the participants' interviews. Copies of the booklet were printed for attendees of the show to use as they viewed the artwork.

In the weeks leading to the art show, promotion efforts were undertaken. The art show was advertised in several ways, including listings in local community newspapers, Facebook pages of local LGBTQ organizations and art organizations, university notices, two radio interviews on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and in an article detailing the preliminary results published in *The Conversation* (Joy & Numer, 2019). Local politicians and LGBTQ community activists were also invited to attend through their websites.

The event was well attended, with approximately 30-40 people in attendance including members of the local Pride Committee Executive Board, health providers for gay men, the Vice-president of Research and Innovation at Dalhousie University, members of the LGBTQ community, students attending a graduate course on arts-based methodologies, dietetic students, and six of the participants. The attending participants were given the option to identify themselves at the event by wearing nametags. The participants who chose to identify themselves engaged with many of the community

visitors, talking and sharing their thoughts on their artwork and their experiences. It was observed that the event was emotional for both the participants and the audience.

Feedback left by visitors indicates they felt the photos, in combination with the booklet, was a powerful, thought-provoking, and meaningful way to translate knowledge about gay men's values, beliefs, and practices concerning food and bodies. As one attendee commented the show opened their minds to things they would not normally think about in relation to nutrition and men's experiences. The art show feedback emphasized that photovoice is a critical method to engage individuals, health leaders, and communities in disrupting and challenging social norms of food and bodies.

The Ethics of Photovoice

Researchers who use photography in their work are faced with unique ethical considerations. In addition to the principles of respect, justice, and concern for the welfare of participants that are central to ethical research conducted in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016), photovoice researchers need to address issues of anonymity or confidentiality, ownership, and representation that may become complex in photographic research (Clark et al., 2010; Creighton et al., 2017). The following section examines the ethical principles and methods used in this project.

Photographs are enduring and capture the moments of people's lives. Photographs portray people, places, and events and as such visual research often does not allow for strict anonymity or confidentiality. Photographs may capture faces, bodies, and other recognizable details. This may be a concern for many people and is an important consideration for research within vulnerable populations. For example, some gay men are

often challenged with homophobia and may not want to be recognized. They may have fears about the consequences of their images being in the public domain to their careers, personal lives, and families. Other gay men, however, may not be concerned with homophobia or other issues surrounding anonymity or confidentiality. Either way, photovoice can accommodate all participants because its foundation and underlying principles are storytelling with consent. A person may participate in ways that reveal nothing about themselves or they may participate in ways that reveal the totality of their lives. Prohibiting participants from photographing themselves if they wish or otherwise limiting their voices, creativity, and knowledge undermines the philosophical perspectives of photovoice (Carlson et al., 2006; Creighton et al., 2017; Molloy, 2007; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Ethical photovoice researchers recognize this and are obligated to ensure that all participants are made aware of the consequences of their participation within such projects. Once these principles are discussed openly with the participants, it becomes their informed choice whether to participate in the research and how they can show themselves in their work and to the world.

Creighton et al. (2017) recommend a three-stage informed consent process. This process was approved by the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board at Dalhousie University and implemented in this research. The first level of informed consent was the consent to participate in the project. The process intended to give participants an overview of the project and to discuss their rights and responsibilities, as well as to provide an awareness of the potential benefits and risks of the project. Perceived benefits to the participants, included the opportunity to discuss their experiences in a non-judgemental space, the opportunity to express themselves creatively, and the chance to

connect with others in the context of the community art show. There were low potential risks anticipated for participants in this study, but it was possible that disclosing personal information about their sexuality, eating practices, and experiences with body image may have induced emotional discomfort for some participants. Contact information for resources and supports, including Eating Disorders Nova Scotia, Health Sexual Health Clinic, AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia, and Pride Health, were included as part of the informed consent documents (see Appendix C: Informed Consent).

The goal of this first level of consent was to give participants all the information they needed to make informed choices, declare their autonomy, and to freely choose to participate in the project. The consent form also gave each participant the freedom to choose how they wanted to be identified within the project's reports, publications, websites, and exhibitions. Participants were given the choice to use their real name or a pseudonym. Again, this underscores the philosophical perspectives of photovoice by giving the participants ownership of their lives. The process of reviewing the risks, benefits, and the way participants were to be identified was essential in upholding the ethical integrity of the research and the principles of respect, justice, and concern for welfare (Government of Canada, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The project consent form was reviewed with each participant during the introductory workshop and signed by all participants.

The second level of informed content was focused on the photography process and people who may be photographed but are not directly involved in the research referred to as non-research subjects. Participants were given a non-research subject

consent form in the introductory workshop and asked to have anyone they photographed to review and sign it (see Appendix C: Informed Consent). This ensured that any non-research subjects knew the reason for the photograph and the way the photograph would be used. Signed non-research subject consent forms were returned to the researcher during the interview.

Lastly, the third consent process involved the release and the use of the participants' work. Researchers need to make it known to the participants that once their work is within the public domain it cannot be retracted and may even be used for purposes outside of the research. For example, Creighton et al. (2017) note that if participant photos are displayed within an online gallery with the 'save as' functions disabled there are still ways that people can copy and use the work elsewhere and in different contexts. Although researchers can take steps to prevent such things from happening, often it is outside the control of the project team. Once again, the important point was to be up-front to the participants about what might happen when photographs are shared publicly and to obtain their informed consent regarding how their photographs are used. It is the respect and value for their autonomy, as demonstrated by their informed consent, that ensures the project is ethical. Each participant was asked to complete a consent form that detailed the way the researcher can showcase their photographs and interview quotes, such as in promotion, art exhibitions, publications, teaching purposes, and online galleries (see Appendix C: Informed Consent).

One way that is often discussed to deal with issues of consent and anonymity when releasing the images of participants and non-research subjects is digital

manipulation of the photographs. This may include pixelation, blurring, or blackening out faces and other identifying features. Although this would be a way to obscure or hide people, such modifications are philosophically opposed to the underlying principles of photovoice. Digital manipulations can decontextualize the meanings that the participants wish to convey in their photographs and may also negatively influence the emotional impact of the photographs by dehumanizing the subjects (Banks, 2007; Creighton et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2011; Wiles et al., 2008). As Creighton et al. (2017) note, altering images can be both patronizing and contrary to the goals and values of photovoice. Within this project, no digital manipulation of photographs was done. This ensured the voices of the gay men taking part in the study were not obscured, silenced, or altered.

Although the three-staged consent process gives participants the ability to do freely choose to participate it should be noted that researchers do not have the right to use the photographs in unlimited ways. Thought to the participants' lives, reputations and their portrayal within the photographs need to be given prior to use and publication (Clark et al., 2010; Joy & Numer, 2017). Several examples can be found in the literature that emphasizes this idea. For example, in one study exploring gender production within schools in Buenos Aires, self-images of a boy wearing make-up and posing in sexualized positions were deemed potentially harmful to that student. The researcher decided not to publish even with the student's consent (Meo, 2010). In another study, images of people recovering from drug addictions were withheld from publication despite informed consent as the researcher thought that participants may feel differently in the future about having their images associated with the research (D. Barrett, 2004). These studies highlight the difficult ethical dilemmas that many visual researchers may face. As Joy

and Numer (2017) suggest the values of respect, dignity, integrity, and collaboration between researchers and participants can help to find a balance between freedom of expression to tell one's story and potential negative consequences to the participants.

Data Analysis

The main data for this project, as previously discussed, were the interview transcripts for each participant. Each transcript was individually reviewed and independently analysed by the researcher. The photographs were used in conjunction with the transcripts for the analysis process as the photographs were linked to the interview discussions. Discourse analysis, which is reviewed in the following section, was used for the analysis process.

Theoretical underpinnings of discourse analysis. Careful attention to discourses is key to ensuring the alignment between theoretical frameworks and data analysis. Discourse analysis is used to provide insights into the way discourses emerge, change over time, and shape knowledge, relations of power, and institutions (Aston, 2016; Numer, 2014; Semp, 2006). It is a systematic and critical process that looks beyond the surface meanings to situate texts within historical, political, cultural and social contexts (Cheek, 1999).

Researchers also use discourse analysis to explore how subjectivities are formed and the ways people try to resist (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006; Semp, 2006; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Sites of resistance or political struggles can be explored through the analysis or deconstruction of texts. The deeper underlying meanings, assumptions, and biases, on such topics as gender and sexuality, can be exposed. As Cheek (1999) states, "a deconstruction approach seeks the aporias, that is the blind spots, omissions,

tensions, circumlocations and contradictions, in every text” (p. 57). The hidden assumptions and Foucauldian silences within social institutions that maintain the dominance and normality of heterosexuality and binary notions of gender can be revealed when language is analyzed with an awareness of social hierarchies and power relations (Creswell, 2013; Semp, 2011).

The process of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis was used to critically examine the ‘how’, the ‘whys’, and the ‘what’ of the research texts. Following Aston (2016), this process involved reviewing the interview texts multiple times, paying attention to the beliefs, values, and language of the participants in relation to the research questions and the nutrition, eating behaviors, bodies, and health of gay men. The recommendations, outlined by Numer (2014), that researchers look for repeated statements that give meaning to the issues, as well as statements that indicate how participants have come to know themselves, were utilized during analysis. Competing discourses that emerged through the text were noted as competing discourses may reveal areas of tension for the participants, subjugated knowledges, or avenues of resistance (Numer, 2014). In addition, what was hidden, not said, or absent from the transcripts was also explored as part of discourse analysis. As Cheek (1999) notes, the absence of things from discourses can also influence the subjectivities of people.

Overarching threads of discourse that speak to the research questions were developed after the review of the texts following the aforementioned process of discourse analysis. The discourses described in this dissertation reflect the discourses of the participants’ interviews. Discourses that were similar were grouped together to inform the

three major findings chapters (Chapters 6, 7, and 8). The use of selected photographs and quotes throughout the remainder of this dissertation demonstrates the threads of discourses and draws attention to the cultural and historical context of participant's language within their interview texts (Cheek, 1999). It should be noted that the photographs in this dissertation reflect my analysis of the threads of discourse. Not all photographs provided by the participants we used as many reflected the same threads of discourse. The use of discourse analysis aligns with the queer poststructural perspective of the project. It allowed for a deeper understanding of the knowledge, power relations, tensions, and the unspoken assumptions which have shaped the subjectivities of the participants.

Chapter Summary

The design, research questions, methods of this research were aligned with the philosophical traditions of poststructuralism, queer theory, and photovoice. The project followed an approved three-staged informed consent process that included overall project consent, non-research subject consent, and consent for the use of participant's creative work. This tiered process of consent ensured that the principles of respect, justice, and concern for the welfare of participants, as set out by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) (Government of Canada, 2016), were core pieces of the research project.

Gay men living in Halifax, Nova Scotia were recruited to participate in the five stages of the project. An introductory workshop was held to review the goals, procedures, and timelines of the project, as well as to provide an overview of photovoice and

photographic techniques to the participants. A two- to three-week period was allotted to each participant during which they took photographs that represented their beliefs, values, and practices relating to their eating practices and body image. After the participants captured all their photographs, individual semi-structured interviews were held. The photographs were used as a guide and allowed the participants to tell their stories. Next, participants engaged in an art show planning workshop during which they discussed details for knowledge translation in the form of a community art show. Participant's images and selected quotes were displayed for one evening in a local art gallery. Participants were invited to connect and discuss their work with the wider community during the art show. Finally, interview transcripts were analyzed using the principles of discourse analysis. The results of the analysis are discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Participants

This chapter provides details on the participants, providing context to their beliefs, values, and practices that informed their artwork and interviews. The chapter also provides a discussion on the participants' experiences with photovoice and some of the challenges they faced with the photovoice method.

The Participants

As described in Chapter 4, participants were recruited from social media and posters placed within various locations in Halifax and on the Dalhousie University campus. This section intends to provide some details about each participant and their background that not only provides a richness to their stories and experiences but also provides cultural and social context that have constructed their nutritional and bodily beliefs, values, and practices. These social constructs will be further explored in Chapter 6. In total, nine self-identified gay men participated in this research and completed all components of the photovoice process.

Several of the participants were directly recruited from Dalhousie University. Mohammed (25) is a health care professional student who came from Kuwait to study in Canada. Mohammed (25) identifies as a gay Muslim. He notes that his queer identity is often at conflict with his home country's social views, stating "being queer and Muslim at the same time is a big no-no" there. He now lives openly in Canada as a gay man. Jonathan (23) is another student at Dalhousie University. He is a fifth-year student who was born in the UK and moved to Calgary when he was nine. He was raised in a Christian Protestant family in which religion was an important component of his family

life. Oliver (28) grew up in Ontario and graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design University with majors in painting and drawing. He worked in the foodservice and retail industries in Toronto before returning to university to follow his interest in biology at Dalhousie University.

Ryan (25) is a recent graduate from an undergraduate health program at Dalhousie University working as a research assistant at the university. He is from a small Catholic community in Nova Scotia. He notes he has a big family, with five siblings and that traditional Christian and gender norms were an integral part of his upbringing. Scott (30) grew up in the Halifax area and works as an engineer. Mark (32) grew up in Newfoundland and works as a registered nurse with a passion for health promotion, illness prevention, promoting positive body images especially among queer people. These participants were at the start or early parts of their careers. Other participants were further in their careers or retired.

Daniel (55) grew up in rural Nova Scotia, attended Kings College in Halifax and has been active in the city's gay community for many years. Daniel has a passion for food. Scott (65) is also from a rural area in Nova Scotia. He grew up in a close-knit family in which mealtime was a family affair. He had a 30-year career in the food industry and loves food. He has been diagnosed with Bulbar Onset ALS. This disease affects the motor neurons located in the bulb region of the brainstem that controls the muscles used for chewing, swallowing, and speaking. During the time of the project, he was on a puree diet and unable to verbally communicate. Scott used writing to communicate during the project. Ralph (57) likewise grew up in Nova Scotia but moved

to New Brunswick where he had a long career in finances. He has recently moved back to Nova Scotia, retired, and started a new relationship. Both his parents passed away with his father passing during the period he was taking photographs for this project. Ralph believes that his participation in this project, even at this time emotional time in his life, is important as the topic of body image is something, he strongly thinks is critical for gay men to talk about and to examine. His family experiences with fatness, weight, as well as his struggles with his body weight throughout his life were integral components of his story he wanted to share. Ralph (57), however, was not the only participant who struggled with issues about their body weight.

Struggles about body weight, as a result of the dominant ideals for gay men's bodies, were a shared experience for many of the participants, regardless of their actual body weight, shape, or size. Their struggles with weight and body ideals were major motivations for participating in this project. Participants wanted to tell their stories and, by doing so, come to understand their own experiences, as well as feel a shared connection with other gay men. The struggles concerning body ideals led participants on personal journeys of reflection as they tried to ease tensions, they experienced between themselves and cultural norms. Consequently, participants were ready to tell their story. For example, when Scott (30) was discussing his past struggles with body expectations and was asked if he would have participated in this project a year ago, he responded,

...no probably not. I think I would have seen it as just something that would have reinforced the fact that I was unhappy, at that time; was unhappy with myself and was not in a good place. Then having to talk about it with somebody, or potentially a group, and where they put it up there on the wall or something, I wouldn't have felt great about that. (Scott, 30)

As Scott's (30) quote indicates, he needed to be at a point in his life where he was comfortable talking about food and body issues with other men. The topic of this project is personal and, as Scott's (30) quote highlights, may have limited the men who chose to participate in the project. The men who did participate, however, seemed comfortable talking about and sharing their experiences with the intent of bringing attention to this topic.

The project was also political for several participants who believed that the act of sharing their experiences would help other gay men to understand their own experiences relating to food and bodies. Ryan (25) wanted to create an awareness of body concerns that gay men experience, stating that "I think it's a little bit unique where we have these pressures to preen ourselves in a similar way [to women] but also to retain masculinity... by building muscle, or like eating a lot of food, or doing things like that" (Ryan, 25). Ryan (25) saw body concerns for gay men as being distinctly *unique* yet also encompassing concerns of both straight women and straight men. Mark (32) also had political goals for his contributions. He hoped that by sharing his story he could help other gay men who may be struggling with body issues and to challenge cultural ideals that lead to judgements about bodies. Mark (32) wanted his voice to "inspire other people to accept themselves" (Mark, 32) by changing social expectations on bodies. Mohammed's (25) political aims were focused on representation. He believed that by voicing his story he would help other gay men realize that other body types outside the idealized bodies depicted in many forms of gay media do exist and are desirable. The act of representing himself, through his photographs, as a gay Middle Eastern man without a six-pack (visible abdominal muscles) was critical to Mohammed (25). He wanted to

disrupt the dominant media portrayal of all gay men as white, muscular “Ken dolls.” Oliver (28) also sought to disrupt societal norms, particularly regarding gender. He wanted to challenge the notions of male beauty through his photographs and creativity.

The opportunity for participants to express themselves creatively and to explore gender, food, and men’s bodies through a reflective and artistic manner was appealing to many of them. Daniel (55) believes that the act of capturing moments and experiences in photographs “is like spreading your consciousness into the past and the future” (Daniel, 55). It was a way for him to think about how his subjectivity is constituted through social institutions and how he then curates his image to others.

The process of creation, however, was also challenging for some participants. The artistic nature of the project meant that the project was open in terms of the photographs. When asked about his process of taking photographs, Jonathan (23) noted that there was a “general vagueness of the project... to take pictures of things around you on nutrition in some ways was a challenge... to think of something, but it also meant I could photograph whatever I thought... these are images that would portray what I think, and so it’s very subjective and it might mean nothing to someone” (Jonathan, 23). This vagueness was viewed by Jonathan, and other participants, as both an opportunity and a challenge for the creation of their photographs that would tell their stories. Ralph (57) notes that this may especially be challenging for people who are not used to expressing themselves through photography. The vagueness of the project was intentional to allow participants the freedom to photograph whatever they thought and the opportunity to reflect on what those things were.

The ethics of the project also presented some challenges to participants, especially the consent process. As previously discussed, it was requested that participants obtain written consent from any other people they photographed and that participants have the rights to the photographs. It was believed by some participants that this may have limited subjects within their images. Most photographs that depicted human subjects were selfies. Participants also noted that selfies also have some challenges. In some situations, such as the gym, participants felt self-conscious taking selfies or afraid of looking “like douche bag who takes pictures of himself working out” (Jonathan, 23). They did not want other gym users to view them as someone who was “shamelessly showcasing their own body or looking for attention based on shallow body ideals” (Ryan, 25). Not all participants felt uncomfortable taking selfies in such spaces. Other participants, however, noted that selfies can be technically challenging. They had to be creative to find solutions to overcome technical issues. For example, Mohammed (25) explained how he taped his phone to the ceiling of his bedroom and used a timer to capture some of his photographs that show his whole body. Technical issues were also described by some participants as a factor for not taking photographs in certain gay spaces.

I thought about taking a picture of a group of gay men at a bar dancing if I could have gotten a good picture of that or a music video with perfectly toned shirtless men dancing in the background. I feel like that probably would have captured a lot of what I was trying to do with other images. I’ve heard the term meat market before at a gay bar, where you go and everyone is on display and everyone is scoping around trying to make eye contact or trying to find a perfect partner for that night. But everyone is judged completely on their looks and I feel like that image might have been a good image to portray that but that wasn’t something that I was able to get (Mark, 32).

For Mark (32), some situations of gay life, such as the meat market, were challenging in terms of technical, lighting, and consent issues, to photograph. Although Mark (32) did not take photos in a gay club, he was able to express his beliefs, values, and practices about the intense body pressures he experiences as a gay man within these locations. He did this by taking other images and through his interview. Photovoice presented several challenges around the issues of consent, comfort, and gay spaces for some participants but they were able to overcome these challenges and did not view them as limitations. Participants used their creativity to tell their stories in their photographs and were able to further discuss their experiences within their interviews.

Chapter Summary

The men who participated in this photovoice project were diverse, spanning different ages, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, they all wanted to tell their stories. For them, the project was both personal and political. They wanted to voice how they viewed food and their bodies in the hope that other gay men might hear their stories and connect with them. Some participants wanted to disrupt and challenge hegemonic and oppressive views of gender and men's bodies through the photovoice process.

Chapter 6: Bodies Becoming Art

'Well, what are you?' said the Pigeon. 'I can see you're trying to invent something!'
(Carroll, 2014, p. 53).

The participants in this study, similar to Alice in Carroll's (2014) work, I would argue, are trying to *invent* themselves through their bodies. This chapter explores the invention or creation of the participant's bodies, in particular, the becoming of gay men's bodies as works of art. The poststructural and queer framework of the project is employed to analyze the participants' view that their bodies are living works of art or sculptures that are constituted through social discourses within gay culture. The images and stories of the participants reveal that social media, television, pornography, and cultural notions of masculinities produce and reproduce knowledge on men's bodies that shape the experiences of the participants. Participants use the socially constructed knowledge of men's bodies to create or invent identities that are reflective of this knowledge and bodies that they believe will be the most attractive, desirable, and healthy to other men. Other participants seek to challenge or disrupt the dominant beauty ideals for men. The chapter concludes with a discussion on participant's beliefs, values, and practices of eating and exercise that they use in their attempt to invent themselves and create their living works of art.

Bodies Becoming Art

As Parr (2010) reminds us, Deleuze describes art as one of the quintessential ways that people communicate, learn, and interact with the world (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Art does not merely describe or re-describe something but evokes human senses, emotions, and desires. Art produces effects that continually shift connections between

bodies in a process that creates new ways of being and new opportunities for living (Colebrook, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Parr, 2010). In other words, art is productive. Art becomes movement and is the catalyst for the continual flow of changes within societies and individuals (Parr, 2010). As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Deleuze also views bodies as productive and in the process of continual change. The body is always in flux or in the process of becoming something (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Bodies and art are symbiotic as both are creative and productive. The body can be conceptualized as a body becoming art. The body becoming art is a constantly changing assemblage of interactions and connections between multiple other bodies that evokes human senses and desires. Bodies becoming art are constituted through languages, institutions, and social expectations and are never static nor complete (Colebrook, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Parr, 2010). They constantly change as society and cultures change through time and space, creating new knowledge, new desires, and new ways of being (Colebrook, 2002; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Parr, 2010).

Participants in this study viewed their bodies as a body becoming art. The participants not only saw their bodies as constantly in flux but also saw their bodies as something that was within their autonomy to create and change. One participant, Oliver, summarizes this by saying, “my body is like a sculpture that I’m constantly critiquing and wanting to edit... by changing my diet or activities” (Oliver, 28). According to Oliver (28) his body as a sculpture or a body becoming art that he creates through his diet, eating practices, and activities, such as exercise. Oliver (28), like other participants, believes his body is a reflection of his eating practices and the work or discipline he puts into it. Oliver’s (28) quote also references some of the tensions he experiences as he tries to live

up to the cultural standards for men's bodies, such as negative self-talk and negative self-esteem that influence his overall health experiences. He critiques his body, comparing and judging it to the standards of beauty within social media and is constantly trying to meet the cultural expectations placed upon his body becoming art. These tensions and the resulting influences on health are shared by many participants and will be explored in Chapter 7.

The comparisons Oliver (28) makes between his body and the bodies of other men within media are emphasized when he discusses his process of taking his photos. When deciding on what to photograph, Oliver (28) says, he particularly thought of a scene in *Fight Club* where Tyler Durden and the narrator are on a bus.

They see a Calvin Klein ad and there's a man who's clean-shaven, every inch of his body is sculpted muscle, he has just a pair of Calvin Klein briefs on and they look up and they're like is that what a real man is? And I was thinking a lot about that... to how the male body can be beautiful and has the ability to be. The male body is limited by gender roles or what's provided by clothing companies, that sort of thing... it really limits your ability to be creative with it. Just let the male body be attractive, beautiful, and the subject of the male gaze (Oliver, 28).

Oliver (28) recognizes the social pressure for gay men to embody the physical characteristics, of sculpted muscle, that have been deemed attractive through modern media, such as movies and Calvin Klein advertisements, but he also believes that the ideal beauty standards are limiting to the expression and creativity of men's beauty and bodies.

Oliver (28) suggests that "gender roles are dumb. There's all this clothing out there, there's all this behaviour, and ways you can live your life. You don't have to cut all your options in half. You can pick and choose what you like and create who you are"

(Oliver, 28). Oliver (28) believes men's bodies should not be restricted by gender norms created by clothing companies, movies, and other social institutions. The body should be creative, productive, and able to start conversations about gender, beauty standards, and men's bodies. This is the subject of his photos as seen in Figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1. Disrupting gender norms, Oliver (28).



Figure 2. Disrupting hegemonic beauty standards for men, Oliver (28).

Oliver (28) views his body as a body becoming art but sees gender constructs as imposing limits on it through the narrow definitions of masculinities. His body within his photographs is being productive by disrupting the cultural limitations placed upon it, allowing for the possibility of men's bodies to just be beautiful. Oliver's (28) body becoming art embodies the possibilities to inspire social change and to create new desires within others.

Gay Men's Beauty Ideals

The literature on the social and cultural expectations for gay men's bodies and the dominant characteristics that constitute beautiful and masculine bodies was reviewed in Chapter 2. Most participants talked about men's ideal bodies in a similar way to this cited literature, emphasizing their belief that muscular and lean bodies that embody notions of hegemonic masculinity are the epitome of perfection for gay men. For example, Ryan (25) believes the ideal body for gay men include big muscles and the absence of fat. This is emphasized when he describes the meaning of his photo in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Revealing his ideal body, Ryan (25).

Ryan (25) believes that he embodies the dominant beauty standards for gay men by wearing the shirt that accentuates body characteristics associated with the ideal bodies for men. He says the shirt makes “my shoulders look big and makes my arms look big...I strategically wear shirts like this because it makes you feel good about yourself. It’s tight against your body... I look trim and I look nice so other people can see that ‘oh there’s Ryan, he’s still fit’” (Ryan, 25). Big shoulders, big arms, big muscles are highlighted as aspects of the body that is not only attractive for other people but are reflective of his fitness, his health, and his worth as a gay man.

Another example of the alignment of participants’ views on body ideals for gay men and the cited literature can be found in the experiences and photographs of Ralph (57), pictured below in Figures 4 and 5.



Figure 4. How I wish the world would see me, artist-entitled, Ralph (57).

When Ralph (57) discusses this first photograph, he says,

This is how I wish the world would see me...the belly is flat, there's no wrinkles, there's no rolls, there's no hanging over the belt...that's the goal, it's the beginning and the end but for me, in this particular photo, it was the beginning on how I would like to be judged as, not as a middle-aged fat man, but as a trim, healthy individual. So that was my thought. It's how I wish the world sees me; no rolls, no bulges, and fit (Ralph, 57).

Ralph (57) is describing the ideal bodies for gay men that are focused on being lean and free of bulges or fat hanging over the belt. Ralph (57) explains that his intent with this photograph is to highlight how society, through advertising and social media, produces the message that thin attractive people are the most successful and that gay men need to emulate this body to be desirable. Thin bodies are the bodies to work towards and to create. If you cannot meet this

standard, then you may suffer. Ralph (57) further explains that the “gay world is cruel to fat people” (Ralph, 57). He draws from his past experiences to make this statement referring to how people can be very judgemental of fat bodies and say mean and cruel things to them, such as calling them a “fatty” or “ugly.” For Ralph (57), being a thin gay man is more acceptable than being fat.

The second photograph in Ralph’s (57) series further supports his beliefs concerning gay beauty ideals. In this photograph as pictured below, Ralph (57) contrasts his ideal flat belly by showing what he views as his “reality.”



Figure 5. My reality, artist-entitled, Ralph (57).

Ralph (57) is still in his bed, as in the first photograph, but at a different angle, sitting up with his upper body viewed from the side. He explains that

this is what I deal with. This is what life is. When you walk by that mirror and you look, or you're sitting down, there's rolls, there's a belly. It's not so pretty and this is how I see myself. I've been heavier and I've been thinner but this photo shows that it's always that thought that it's never good enough because this is the reality (Ralph, 57).

Ralph (57) is again reiterating his belief that fat bodies are not pretty and even when he was thinner, he still did not feel it was good enough. Ralph (57) is saying that living up to society's expectations for gay men's bodies is a constant challenge that can never be fully realized. Beliefs that a person can never fully realize the social expectations of bodies and create the perfect work of art exemplifies what LeBesco (2014) refers to as "myths of permanent self-transformation" (p.46). These myths suggest that bodies move from one distinct state to another distinct state. The body, however, is becoming and should not be thought of as one distinct body transforming into another distinct body. Nor should the becoming body be thought of as an intermediate body between two events.

Men's bodies are not static and do not move from a state of fatness to a state of thinness, nor vice versa but are fluid and move through time and space, always in flux. For Deleuze, viewing a body as something that transforms from one distinct state to another distinct state does not allow the complexity of human experience to be contemplated and examined (Parr, 2010). In this perspective, social bodies exist as physical bodies, at flux at any given point in time and produced by the continuing interactions with other bodies. As such, gay men can never actually live up to and embody, the ideals of beauty as those ideals are constantly changing, flowing, and reforming through the various interactions, known and unknown, of social bodies. This, for Ralph (57), produces his feelings of never being good enough. The myths of permanent self-transformation create tensions for Ralph (57), and other participants, that constitute

their identities and, in turn, their health. The consequences to their health will be more fully explored later in Chapter 7.

Ralph's (57) belief of never being able to attain the perfect body is shared by other participants, such as Mark (32).



Figure 6. Recovery from surgery, Mark (32).



Figure 7. Creating a better body, Mark (32).

The photos in Figures 6 and 7 reveal Mark's (32) experiences in the creation of his body becoming art and his attempts to live up to social expectations placed on gay men's bodies, especially the chest and torso. Figure 6 shows him standing in front of a mirror, his lower abdomen in bandages from a surgery to remove excess skin he had from weight

loss. Figure 7 shows the healing process and scars of this surgery. In both photographs, his head is intentionally cropped as a playful commentary on gay dating culture. He says,

I intentionally cropped the photo because I feel like in the dating app culture and in gay culture, headless torsos are a running joke. They're so common ... it's just like the perfect torso is always shown... that's what you see and that's what the value is placed on. How in shape your body is or how hot your body is and that's the most valuable thing that's portrayed (Mark, 32).

In his photographs, Mark (32) is attempting to discuss what he sees as the privilege that is placed upon perfect torsos within gay culture and dating apps. His experiences on gay dating apps are that many of the photographs displayed are also headless, as in his photograph. But unlike his photograph that shows his scarred skin, the privileged torsos on the dating apps are scarless, smooth, and without fat, a reflection of the idealized torso for gay men. Mark (32) believes the headless torso photographs that are so common on gay dating apps highlight the value that is placed on bodies, in particular, the high value placed on perfection. The value or worth of gay men within these apps is a reflection of how hot your body is or how well a body aligns with the dominant social constructs of beauty and masculinity.

Mark (32) further explains that the photographs in Figures 6 and 7 also represent his struggles with the idea of perfection and his journey to realize that perfection does not exist. Mark (32) experienced weight loss over several years and had excess skin on his lower stomach that bothered him. After years of planning, he decided to undergo abdominal plastic surgery to have the excess skin removed. He states,

It was that idea of perfection and attaining the perfect body and I just thought once I got this surgery, I wouldn't have to worry about people

seeing the excess skin. Maybe I'd finally feel comfortable taking off my shirt in public or going to the beach or being in a locker room (Mark, 32).

Mark (32) believed that the pursuit of perfection in his body, his work of art, was a worthy goal. He saw perfection as being defined by the weight, shape, and fatness of men's bodies and that practices, such as losing weight and his surgery, would be an immediate fix to his body struggles. The end to Mark's (32) worries and unhappiness with his body was, however, not immediately provided by either weight loss or the surgery. The struggles he experienced by not having the tight firm abs that gay culture demands of men did not simply go away even as pieces of his body disappeared or were removed. He believed that by losing weight he would finally feel happy and content with his body but when that did not happen, he thought surgery to remove his excess skin would help to relieve the tensions he felt about his body. He thought when the surgery was complete, he would finally feel happy and content with his body, but again, he did not experience such feelings.

The surgery, although it modified Mark's (32) physical body, was not an instant solution to his tensions or dissatisfaction with his body created from the ever-present standards for men's bodies within gay culture. Mark (32) viewed his body after surgery as different from the ideal constructed image for gay men. Cultural standards are intertwined within identities and cannot be changed instantaneously, as reflected in Mark's (32) experiences of body dissatisfaction after surgery. Mark's (32) photographs (Figures 6 and 7) that illustrate his experiences suggest that cultural notions about bodies become a part of ones' identities and influence a person's beliefs, practice, and, values about their bodies. Cultural notions of bodies are so intertwined with one's identity that,

as in Mark's (32) example, a physical change in body shape and size does not always bring about a change in how a person experiences their body. Mark (32) still saw a disconnect between his new body and the dominant cultural ideals of bodies for gay men.

Mark's (32) experiences, similar to Ralph's (57), illustrate the myths of permanent self-transformation. Bodies are never fully one thing nor are bodies ever stable. The many practices and measures that men undertake to alter or change their bodies to conform to social constructs and to create desired bodies often have outcomes that continue to produce or reproduce tensions. An exploration of the social constructs that shape their practices is critical as it may be the understanding and potential disruption of these social constructs that could ease the tensions gay men experience.

Gay Culture and Social Influences on Bodies Becoming Art

Participants discussed various cultural and social influences that produce and reproduce the beliefs, values, and practices that they use in their quest to align and sculpt their bodies to the dominant body ideals for gay men. This section explores the various forms of media and gender norms that the participants believed are critical in shaping their beliefs, values, and practices about eating and their body.

Social media. Technology is an integral part of the lives of most gay men and opens up new opportunities, possibilities, and ways of living (Numer et al., 2017). The influence of social media in the lives and experiences of gay men have been previously explored in many contexts, including identities, gender constructs, community relations, and health (Blackwell et al., 2015; Bonner-Thompson, 2017; Goedel et al., 2017; Jaspal, 2017; Numer et al., 2017; Phillips, 2015; Race, 2015; Roth, 2014; Shield, 2018). Social

media is neither positive nor negative but a means by which knowledge and power relations flow. This, in turn, produces and reproduces social norms. The participants in this study discussed the way social media including Instagram and gay dating apps, such as Grindr and Tinder, have shaped their identities and their views of men's bodies. In Figure 8, Mohammed (25) expresses his belief that social media is a way for many gay men to explore and construct their identities.

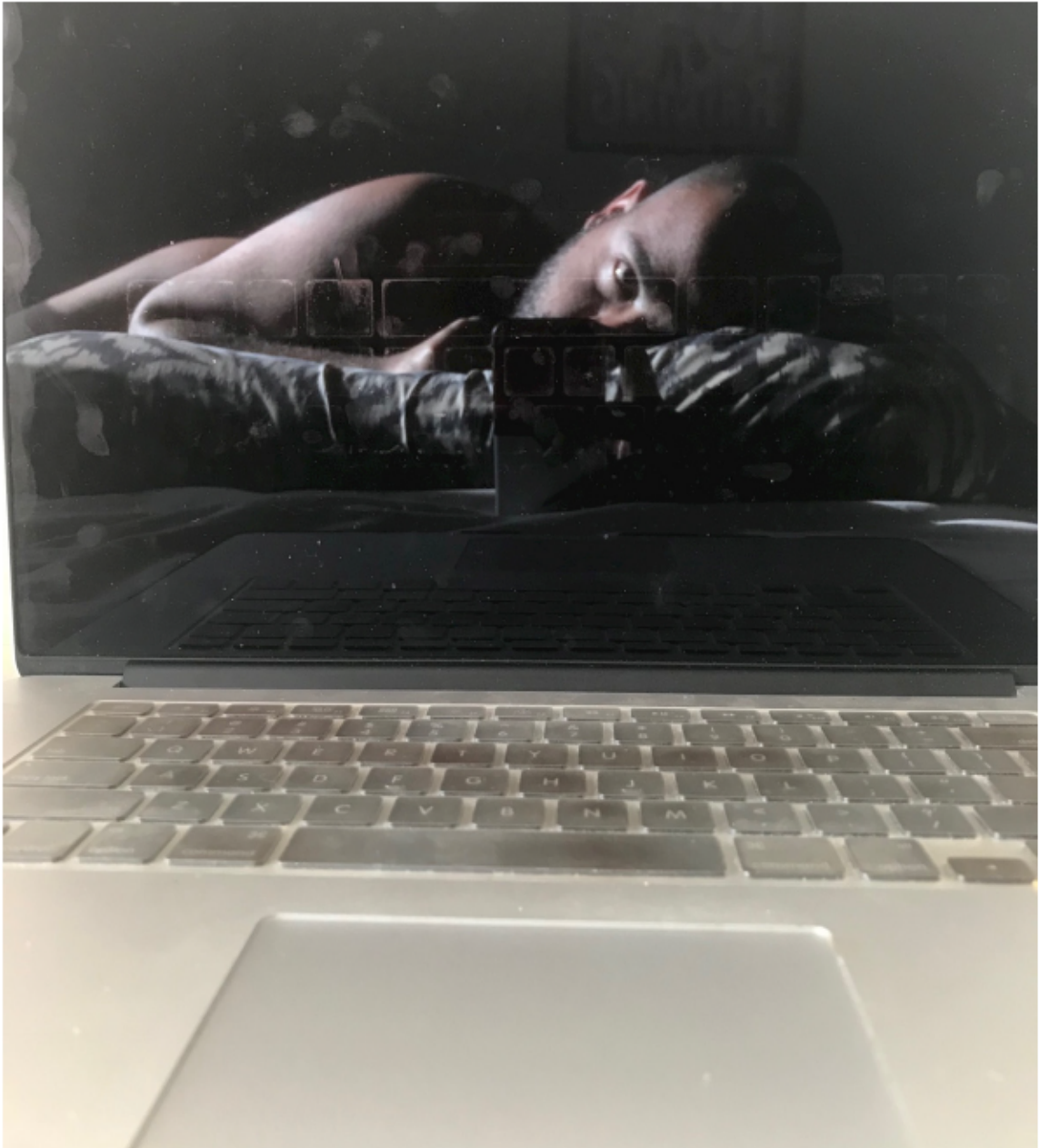


Figure 8. Constructing identities on-line, Mohammed (25).

In his photo, Mohammed (25) is behind his laptop, a reflection of his created identity within social media. He says we are “just people behind screens so you go on Grindr or Tinder and this is what people are doing. They’re just behind the screen and you could be your own self, or you could not be” (Mohammed, 25). For Mohammed (25), social media

allows gay men the opportunity to create their identities behind the screens of their phones, laptops, and computers. As other participants note, social media is ever-present in the lives and identities of gay men. Bodies are central to the construction of their identities on social media and the way they present themselves to others. Another participant Scott (30) notes,

Everything is always in your face with phones and you're always on Instagram and Facebook. It's always there and it's always sending the same message maybe in slightly different forms. That this is what is desirable, and all of these other things are not. I think the way gay men are portrayed is pretty narrow. On social media and the dating gay apps you can see it in their screenshots. When you go to download an app all the people in the preview of the app look a certain way and it goes back to that muscular, jock type guy (Scott, 30).

Scott (30) acknowledges the constant and in your face influence of social media. Scott (30) and the other participants view social media as an intimate part of their lives and something that shapes their views of gay men's bodies. Scott (30) discusses how social media is designed to create desire within users and, in doing, so, creates knowledge on what is considered to be desirable bodies. As Scott (30) reveals the messages may be slightly different but the underlying meaning is that muscular, fat-free jock type bodies are the ideal bodies for gay men. Scott (30) believes this is a narrow portrayal of desirable bodies but, as will be further discussed, something he strives to achieve through his eating and other body practices.

The creation of desire and effects that Scott (30) highlights in the above quote are part of the visual nature of social media. As Hardy and Lindtner (2017) report Grindr, and similar apps, are based on images that are designed to create desire. In fact, the CEO

of Grindr, Joel Simkhai, has acknowledged that “Grindr is a very, very visual experience... I’m not saying inner beauty is not important but the visual leads to the drive to desire and to be desired” (Trebay, 2017, para. 9). Grindr has been designed to produce desires within its users and to allow users to feel desired through the images on their profiles. Images are the first thing users experience with Grindr, either in the form of the ads as discussed by Scott (30), or when uploading their image to their profiles. The ability for users to upload their images allows them to create and curate their identities, identities that are aligned with socially created meanings of physical desirability. This is often at the expense of what Grindr’s CEO Simkhai referred to, in the quote above, as inner beauty or qualities outside of the physical body, such as personality characteristics. Penney (2014) suggests users cannot fully know someone by the images within Grindr and often make assumptions about others based on the meanings of the images within society. For example, images that depict the jock type of bodies create assumptions about the user’s fitness, worth, and value as a desirable man. Even a lack of images in profiles speaks to one’s desirability. Scott (30), and some of the other participants, experience narrow definitions of desirable bodies within social media. These definitions are reflections of the design of the apps and the interactions of the users on the apps.

Social media also creates opportunities for men to identify themselves in various categories within gay culture. Some apps actively create an ideal user that is often defined by bodies and masculine ideals. For example, Scruff, another dating app for gay men, is targeted towards the “Scruff guy”: a guy defined as older, larger-bodied, hairier, and more hegemonically masculine than other men (Roth, 2014). Men who reflect such characteristics in their profiles, images, and bodies are viewed as authentic within the app

and fit the prescribed definition of a Scruff guy (Roth, 2014). Categories, such as the Scruff guy are often based on body shape, body size, and other physical attributes, such as body hair. Other categories based on bodies that gay men can identify with include bears, cubs, twinkles, and otters. The use of various labels within social media makes it easier for men to fit within categories. The labeling of oneself into certain categories based on bodies becomes an integral part of gay cultures and the experiences within social media for many gay men. Each of these body categories is a narrative. Each category paints an image for users and shapes a person's view of themselves and the way others view them. Social media creates knowledge about how bodies should be presented, and which bodies are acceptable and desirable. This labeling may be helpful for some gay men to make connections with others and may create possibilities for some men to overcome tensions relating to their bodies. The idea of connecting within other men within the gay community as a means to ease tensions resulting from the socially constructed body ideals will be further explored in Chapter 8.

The use of bodies to categorize and label may also contribute to the tensions many gay men feel towards their bodies. For example, Mohammed (25) questions the boundaries and the potential benefits of labels and the categorization of identities based on bodies. Mohammed (25) wonders when someone is hairy enough, chubby enough, or muscled enough for a particular category. His questions allude to the slipperiness of labels and may prove challenging for some gay men as they struggle to fit into the narrow definitions of labels. As Mohammed (25) voices, "it feels weird that as an already marginalized community, we like to marginalize ourselves even more" (Mohammed, 25) based on bodies and labels. People can be viewed as disposable and we can eliminate,

filter, block, or swipe right those who do not fit into the dominant desirable categories. The possibilities of interactions may become limited to only those that are deemed socially desirable, limiting the diversity within our lives and, as Mohammed (25) suggests, marginalizing gay men even further. Mohammed (25) also relates the contradiction he experiences within social media in which people promote the celebration of all bodies and types of people but in practice, only the dominant ideal bodies are celebrated and desired. Ryan (25) also experiences this contradiction involving the acceptance of all body types with social media. He says,

these men on social media are like ‘oh love yourself’ and they promote self-love because that’s like a trendy thing now, like accept others in the gay community... but then I feel like it’s almost hypocritical because they’re still contributing to this standard that is harmful to people (Ryan, 25).

Ryan (25), similar to Mohammed (25), sees a difference between what men say on social media regarding the acceptance of bodies and the practice of acceptance or, as both participants suggest, the lack of body acceptance outside the limits of body labels and categorization. They believe all types of bodies should be accepted and found desirable and see similar messages on social media from other users. Their experiences, however, are the opposite. Both note that many gay men often are not open to bodies outside of the narrow confines of what is considered desirable within each of the categories or labels for gay men. Ryan (25), Mohammed (25), and several other participants also suggest that a lack of cultural acceptance of diverse bodies is harmful to gay men, which will be further explored in Chapter 7.

Social media was a central theme for the participants. The following section will highlight the experiences of Ryan (25) because a central thread of discourse in his photographs and interview is how social networking apps are central to the lives of gay men and are shaping their bodies. Ryan (25) refers to social media use as an integral part of his identity, his body, and his connection to other gay men.

I often feel super isolated in places like this [Halifax, Nova Scotia]. And this [social networking and gay dating apps] is sometimes the only way to connect with people, even if it's just sexual or anything. I can't just go to the bar and like meet someone organically or meet someone through friends like it's not easy to do that here, so I feel like you know I'm constantly changing my picture on Grindr to present myself and my body in different ways (Ryan, 25).

For Ryan (25), Halifax can often be isolating because of the small gay community that exists in the city compared to other major urban areas within Canada. Many gay men in rural areas or small cities often do not feel connected to others and experience loneliness and isolation (Currin & Hubach, 2018). Other researchers, such as Manganas (2017), suggest that loneliness may be an integral part of the experiences for gay men regardless of rural or urban environments as it is the social codes and values, media, and changing technologies that shape and produce experiences of loneliness. Ryan (25) believes social networking is the only way to connect with other gay men and to overcome feelings of loneliness. Other researchers suggest that social networking can help men navigate the challenges of living in a city with a small gay community and a lack of dedicated gay spaces and resources (White Hughto et al., 2017). Ryan (25) views social networking as a way to navigate the isolation he experiences living in Halifax and to connect with other gay men. Social media also creates knowledge about what it means to be a gay man. For example, through social media Ryan (25) learns what types of bodies and experiences

define a successful, fit, and healthy gay man. This knowledge allows Ryan (25) to create his image to align with this knowledge. In other words, social media is the way Ryan (25) defines and presents himself to the world as fit, attractive, healthy, and living an ideal life that others would want to emulate. Social media is a means through which Ryan (25) defines himself as a gay man. He is discursively produced and is only identifiable by the knowledge produced in or intensified in these spaces.

The knowledge Ryan (25) uses to inform his identity as a fit, healthy, and attractive gay man is produced through social media. For example, in his photo below (Figure 9), Ryan (25) describes how his use of Instagram, a popular social media platform, has shaped his knowledge of gay bodies and the labels and definitions ascribed to certain body types. Instagram is a mobile app that allows users to instantly capture and share images with other users worldwide. Filters within the platform are often used to enhance photos before posting to be consumed by other users. Instagram also allows users to share image “stories” of their lives for a limited time. It was launched in 2010 and has since gained immense popularity with more than 16 billion images shared as of 2013 (Hu et al., 2014). The platform has become a means for users to develop social networks by following other users and liking their images. Birnholtz (2018) report that shirtless selfies are a popular image to post for many gay men and suggests that such images may not only affect how the men who post images are viewed but also influence the way other users view their own bodies.

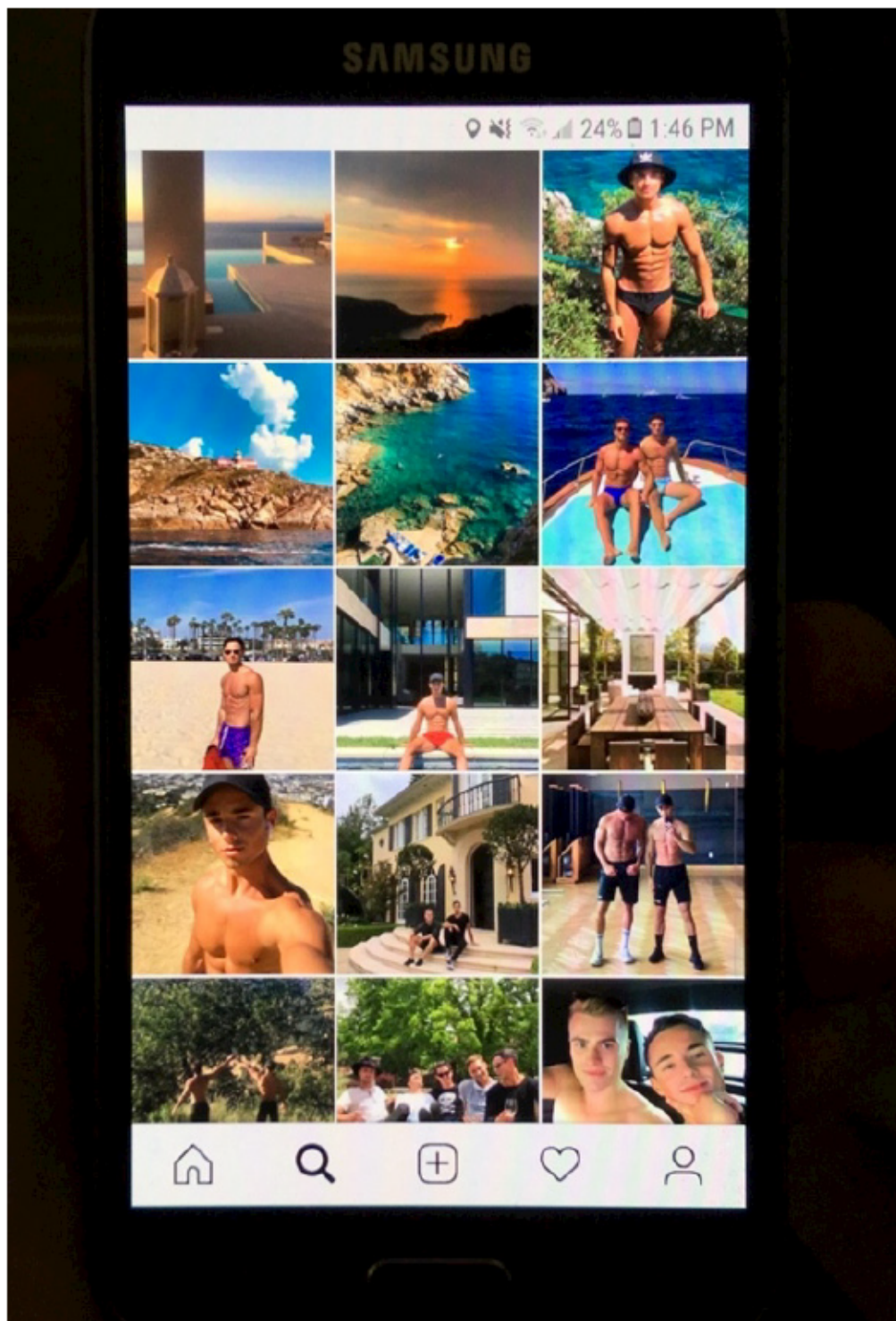


Figure 9. The beautiful men on my Instagram feed, Ryan (25).

The photograph is a screenshot of Ryan's (25) Instagram feed. It shows a page of a gay man that Ryan (25) follows and who, Ryan (25) notes, has over 100,000 followers. He

describes the man as “very fit. He’s very chiseled, and he’s adventurous. He’s outside, he’s traveling, he’s at the gym... he has a hot boyfriend, he looks like he has a lot of money, he looks very successful, and is young and attractive” (Ryan, 25). Ryan believes his images depict bodies and experiences that are central to living as a gay man. Other researchers have noted that displays of strength, wealth, and success are integral to being an attractive, masculine, and healthy man (Evans & Riley, 2017).

Ryan (25) relates how when he first came out as a gay man that these social pages were a means to connect with the gay community and other men but as time went on these pages became a source of tension for him.

For me, when I came out... I started following more accounts like this one. I still follow this guy on Instagram, but I unfollowed a lot of other people who were like this, who are Instagram models because I was scrolling through my phone and feeling shitty because I was looking at all these guys who like their full-time job is to look good and to post it on social media. I think that’s something that we forget (Ryan, 25).

Instagram provided Ryan (25) with a way to connect with other gay men but also gave him knowledge of the bodies and experiences of gay men. Instagram gives meaning for many gay men about bodies and identities but for Ryan (25), and several other participants, trying to live up to the ideal definitions can be challenging. Tensions, such as feeling shitty, are often experienced and participants struggle to find ways to ease or overcome these feelings. For Ryan (25), this meant deleting numerous accounts that he saw as a source of discontentment in an attempt to ease the tensions he felt, yet he did not delete all of his Instagram accounts. He still follows selected Instagram models because they define the bodies and experiences he should strive to achieve. Ryan (25) further notes that, in relation to bodies, he feels that Instagram models are

put on a pedestal and we're trying to achieve and to reach these ideals as if it will make us happy. It's like we're trying to adhere to this ultimate definition of what it means to be gay in 2018 and what it means to be fit and all these things. Everyone's trying to copy this, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't like it (Ryan, 25).

Ryan (25) suggests that gay men try to emulate the bodies and lifestyles portrayed within social media and that collectively certain bodies are put on a pedestal or are privileged. He suggests that many gay men are trying to copy the ideal gay identity which includes being young, successful, wealthy, adventurous, and having a body that is chiseled enough to attract the attention of other men and to get a hot boyfriend. The photograph of Ryan's (25) Instagram account provides insight into the way this form of social media produces and reproduces knowledge about bodies, eating practices, and the health of gay men. Social media is a means by which gay identities are defined and a means for certain bodies and identities to be privileged. Social media both creates and reflects the ultimate definition of what it means to be gay for many men.

Ryan (25) uses other forms of social media and included another photo exploring social media within his photo series. Ryan's (25) next photo, shown in Figure 10, is a selfie of himself at the gym that he uses as his profile photo on Grindr.

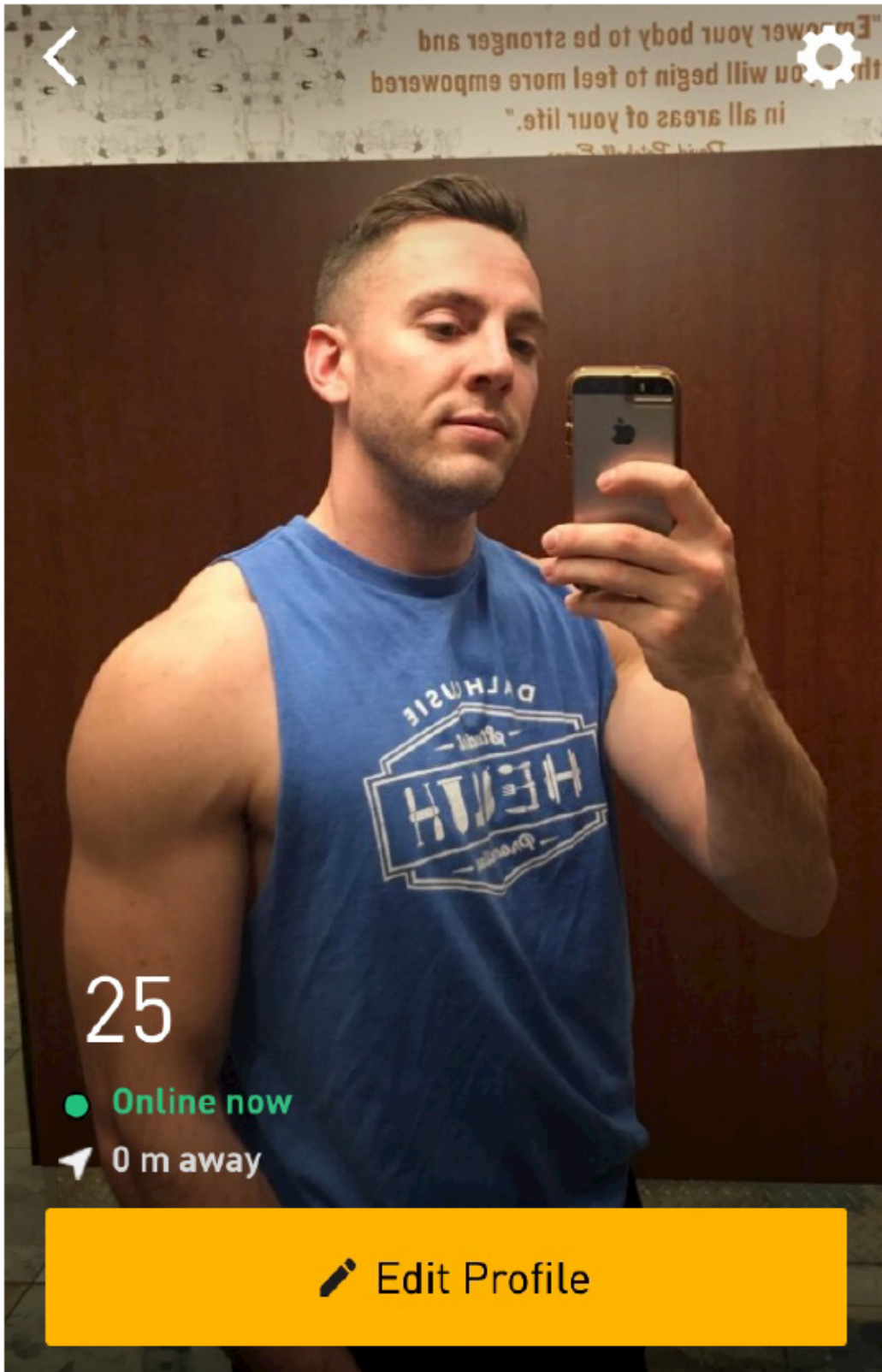


Figure 10. My Grindr profile, Ryan (25).

Grindr is designed to create connections between, friendships and sexual encounters.

Ryan explains how photographs of his body on Grindr shapes the way he feels, his identity, and the possibilities of connections with other men.

I feel like my body is a social experiment. If I post a picture like that on Grindr I'll get a lot of messages. So, it's not even necessarily that this is who I am, I'm just commodifying myself in a way to get a response, to get messages from guys, so I'll feel good about myself. Or I'll feel like you know this kind of photo is a type of photo I would respond to on Grindr. And yes, it's shallow but I feel like it's an attractive photo of myself and, at the end of the day, I like attractive guys who go to the gym and lift (Ryan, 25).

Ryan (25) describes his body as a social experiment within Grindr and is a means for him to explore and connect with other gay men. Images of his body are used to begin conversations with other men. As Ryan (25) relates, he often feels isolated in the small gay community in Halifax. Gay men in rural areas have been reported to experience higher risks for feeling isolation, community disconnection, and stress (Morandini et al., 2015). Ryan (25) views the app as one of the only ways to connect with people for friendship and sex. In his social experiment, Ryan (25) constantly changes the image on his Grindr account to garner different responses from different people. For example, during his interview, he relates how he receives different responses when his profile image is of his shirtless torso compared to his face. Ryan's (25) social experiment is the body becoming art. His body is becoming productive, shifting during his interactions on social media. His body, whether a torso or a head, creates opportunities and new possibilities. His feelings about himself and his body are intimately connected and intertwined with the app and are constantly being shaped and reshaped within the app and the responses from other men. For Ryan (25), social media is a way to present himself to

the world as a fit, attractive, healthy gay man and to make connections with similar fit and attractive men.

Ryan (25) also recognizes that his presentation on social media is curated. He often refers to his images within social media as curated images that do not reflect the entirety of his identity and his experiences as a gay man but as a means to embody the dominant body ideals for men. Ryan (25), in acknowledging that his profile images are not necessarily who he is, recognizes the complexity and the ever-shifting influence of social media on his identity and his body becoming art. Similarly, he recognizes the staged nature of the various images on Instagram and similar influences of social media on the experiences of other gay men. Many gay men are trying to live up to body standards and social expectations that are not completely shown within the images of social media. As Ryan (25) admitted this often made him feel stressed and isolated. The health outcomes of body standards on how participants feel about themselves will be further explored in Chapter 7.

Ryan (25), however, was not the only participant that included his Grindr profile in the images submitted for this project. Daniel (55) included his Grindr profile picture as he believes the image represents the interconnectedness between his identity as a gay man and his views on food (Figure 11). Daniel's (55) photo once again highlights the importance of social media on the experiences of food and bodies for gay men. The image shows Daniel (55) at a Crystal Crescent beach having a picnic and enjoying the things he values in life. The image reflects his life view of good food, good sex, and a good life. As he says, the image shows that

I'm having fun, and I'm enjoying myself. There's two ways that you present yourself on Grindr, either you look fierce or you look like you're having fun and so I pick the fun one. I'm living a hedonistic lifestyle. I'm living a lifestyle that is fun. A lifestyle that is appealing, that is satisfying to your senses with good sex, good drink, good food, and good parties (Daniel, 55).



Figure 11. My Grindr profile, Daniel (55).

Daniel's (55) quote not only provides insight into his philosophy of living a hedonistic lifestyle in which he enjoys food but also alludes to the shaping of identities within Grindr, and similar apps, that allow users to construct their identities through their images and language. Daniel (55) constructs an identity based on having fun rather than being fierce. In relation to this image, Daniel (55) also discussed the views of fatness that is prevalent within social media. He related the experiences of friends who were told that they would be more attractive if they went to the gym and lost weight. The experiences of body shaming within social media have been previously reported by other researchers and have been associated with negative outcomes for many men (Han, 2016). Daniel views body- and fat-shaming with social media as "stupid" and "ridiculous" and does not embrace fat stigmatizing views. He constructs an identity outside the dominant views of bodies within gay culture and sees social media as a way to connect with other men who are similar to him.

Social networking platforms and dating apps, such as Instagram and Grindr, are constantly changing technologies that continually shape and reshape the identities and bodies of gay men. It has been reported that the number of apps used can negatively influence the body satisfaction and self-esteem of gay and other sexually diverse men (Breslow et al., 2019). It has also been suggested that different apps may have different degrees of influence on body image and the way gay men feel about their bodies (Filice et al., 2019). For example, Hardy and Lindtner (2017) suggest that Grindr constructs a desiring user whose sexuality is mediated through the design and use of the technologies. Filice et al. (2019) note that Grindr, due to the anonymity inherent in its design, may encourage weight stigma to a greater extent than other apps. Filice et al. (2019) also

report that Grindr affects body image through weight stigma, sexual objectification, and social comparison. The participants in the Filice et al. (2019) study noted that most of the negative comments they received about their appearance from other Grindr users were about their body weight, shape, and composition. Filice et al. (2019) suggest that the weight stigma within Grindr can result in certain body types being privileged over other bodies and that men who embody the privileged standards gain social and sexual capital within the Grindr space. This research supports the previous studies of Hardy and Lindtner (2017) and Breslow et al. (2019). Such research reveals that the bodies of users are intricately shaped through social media technologies. Participants of this study discussed how apps and even the advertisements for apps, such as Grindr, use images to construct knowledge about sexuality and desirable bodies. This knowledge is what many gay men use in their attempt to align their own identities and bodies to those that are privileged within the spaces of the apps.

Television and pornography. Participants also discussed other forms of media that shape body ideals for gay men. Television was mentioned by several participants in their interviews as a source of knowledge about what gay men should be and how gay men should look. Mark (32) recalls his experiences as a teenager of watching a show called *Queer As Folk*, a series that followed the lives of gay men and women.

It was the first time I remember seeing gay men in mainstream media. An entire show that was devoted to gay men, however, it was a group of four or five white, cis-gendered men who were all in very good shape... and going to bars where there were cut, ripped, muscular shirtless guys everywhere. I remember there were scenes where they were in the gym... saying 'I don't go to the gym to be healthy, I go to the gym to look good.' I remember thinking that was the ideal body that you needed to attain (Mark, 32).

Mark (32) remembers this show as the first representation of the lives of gay men that he saw on television. The gay men on this show were cut, ripped, muscular, embodying the characteristics of ideal men's bodies. For Mark (32) this show provided him with knowledge of what gay men should look like and why he should attempt to sculpt his body into a work of art. A work of art as defined by his experiences watching television. The underlying message Mark (32) took from this show was that by going to the gym and working out you will obtain a body that others will desire. Mark (32) further elaborates on how this message was deeply ingrained within himself and how this knowledge shaped his future experiences.

Mark (32) recalls the first time he went to Montreal. "I was 20 and going to a big club in the village...and seeing exactly what was in *Queer As Folk* [cut, ripped, muscular shirtless guys]. I remember feeling so out of place like I did not fit in or belong there whatsoever" (Mark, 32). The body ideals depicted on *Queer As Folk* was knowledge that shaped Mark (32) and subsequently created negative experiences later in life for him as he felt his body was not what it should be for gay men. He felt out of place in the gay scene and that his body and consequently, himself, did not belong. He felt he was not desirable to other gay men.

It's that underlying fear of, I keep going back to *Queer As Folk*... of not having the perfect body. It's like if you gain weight or if you don't have abs...then no one is going to want you... no one is going to want to have sex with you and no one is going to want to be in a relationship with you and no one is going to love you (Mark, 32).

Mark's (32) understanding of what a gay men's body should be was influenced by the bodies he saw on television and this knowledge shaped his experiences with his own body as well as his experiences with other gay men. For Mark (32), his body was not

what he had come to know as the attractive and desirable body for gay men. He experienced deep fears, including a fear of not being desirable to other men, a fear of not being worthy of a relationship, and a fear of not being loved. The fears Mark (32) experienced are fears based on his perceived differences between his own body and the bodies of the men dancing on the screens of his television in such shows as *Queer As Folk* or as Bordo (1999) suggests between himself and the created icons of gay men's flesh.

Another television show Mark (32) refers to and believes is reflective of body ideals for gay men is *RuPaul's Drag Race*. As an example, he explains one situation that takes place on the show.

At the very end of each season, the final three or four contestants will have lunch with RuPaul... for lunch is TicTacs and they only eat one TicTac for lunch because it's like 'oh no I couldn't eat any more' like that's too much food... it's this whole idea of being as thin as humanly possible and that's the standard and ideal within the gay culture (Mark, 32).

For Mark (32), this scene in which the contestants joke about not eating more than one TicTac represents the ever-present pressures that gay men experience to look a certain way. Thinness and the absence of fat is set as the ideal even if it means restricting food and as Mark (32) suggests "starving yourself". Mark (32) further explores how the ideal of thinness can create experiences of shame and guilt about eating, a thread of discourse further explored in Chapter 7.

Television shows were not the only form of media shaping the bodies of gay men. Several participants view gay pornography as critically connected to the way gay men view their bodies. Pornography is one contemporary factor of gay culture that is shaping

gay sexualities and the sexual subjectivities of men (Mowlabocus, 2007) Through pornography the bodies of gay men can be classified and re-classified according to gendered beliefs about body shape and size. Such classification systems often reinforce social values that privilege some body types over other body types (Mowlabocus, 2007). In his interview, Oliver (28) reflects upon a personal experience during which he auditioned to be in a pornographic movie and how this experience made him feel about his body. He recounts being told that he could lose some weight and how that made him question his own body. The experience of being told to lose some weight before being considered attractive enough to do a pornographic movie was an experience that caused Oliver (28) to consider and to compare his own body and the bodies of other men. In his reflection, Oliver (28) states “I don’t like so much my stomach area. Whereas sometimes I’ve seen this person’s stomach area and I wish I had that flat stomach” (Oliver, 28). Oliver’s (28) description of his experience indicates that he is not satisfied with his stomach. He believes that his stomach area does to meet the expectations of the pornography industry nor other body ideals within gay culture that he sees reflected in the flat stomachs of other men. Oliver (28) also recognizes that a lot of characteristics of ideal bodies are constructed and not realistic, saying such standards are often “an impossible thing to reach” (Oliver, 28). He was not the only participant to feel body standards in gay pornography shapes the way men feel and experience their bodies.

Ralph (57) also talks about the influence of pornography on his pursuit of the ideal body. He refers to gay pornography as “terrible” in that it limits the diversity of desirable bodies for men, stating “there’s no chubby, hairy men and with six-inch penises in the porno world” (Ralph, 57). Ralph (57) views the majority of pornography as

limiting desirable bodies to bodies that are not only lean but also bodies that are large in terms of muscles and penis size. He further explains that body size is a critical factor in gay culture and can influence how desirable men feel and the experiences of their bodies.

Size equals attractiveness, size makes you a better person, size makes you a better lover, size is self-worth, small size is less than, size determines choices, size equals self-confidence (Ralph, 57).

Although in this statement Ralph (57) is talking specifically about penis size, it is apparent that he feels bigger (and leaner) bodies are idealized in gay culture and viewed as better than smaller (and fatter) bodies. His quote equates size with self-worth, self-confidence and suggests that certain bodies are privileged over other bodies. Ralph (57) deeply believes that bringing attention to the limiting body messages within gay pornography is a critical message for this project because in various periods of his life he often felt judgement based on his body. He confesses that his body image and self-esteem were “damaged” by the body ideals set within gay pornography. In his interview, Ralph (57) recognizes the influence of pornography on his feelings about his body and what it means to be a desirable gay man. In a focus group that explored the views of gay men, T. Morrison (2004) reports conflicting views about the influence of gay pornography on the way men view their bodies. T. Morrison’s (2004) work suggested that some men believed gay pornography had little influence on their body image while other participants believe it does. The experiences of Ralph (57) in this study seems to suggest that gay pornography can influence body image.

Hegemonic masculinity. The way masculinities are socially constructed is also a critical influence on participants’ beliefs, values, and practices about nutrition and their bodies. Cultural meanings associated with masculinities are integral to the body

becoming art. Several participants captured their beliefs about masculinities in their photographs. In the interviews, participants revealed the way ideas about masculinities shape their bodies. Participants also discussed how constructs of masculinities often impose limitations on how they express themselves, how they form connections with other men, and how they can talk about their feelings, concerns, and desires with other people. The following section details the participant's thoughts on masculinities.

When most participants discussed masculinities, they often referred to an idealized and culturally shared notion of masculinity. Although participants did not use the term hegemonic masculinity this is often what was meant, as described in Chapter 2. They talked about a privileged form of masculinity that many gay men aspire to, a form that is idealized within gay culture through social media, pornography, and other cultural references. When asked to describe what masculinity is to them and how it is embodied, participants spoke of strength both physical and emotional. For example, Jonathan (23) states being masculine means “big, like big muscles, big beard, and kind of like closed off. It's not loose and flowy, and it feels like a performance” (Jonathan, 23). For Jonathan (23) embodying masculinity means performing acts or rituals of strength, not talking, being stiff and closed off, as well as performing acts or practices that display strength in the body by building big muscles. In Figure 12, Jonathan (23) is displaying his masculine body. He says that this was the first image that he thought and that his intent is to show his body in a mundane but intimate way. The photograph depicts Jonathan (23) embodying his masculine ideal and performing his daily rituals, his beard, bare skin, and muscles – the tokens of his ideal masculinity - prominent in the photograph.



Figure 12. Embodying the masculine ideal, Jonathan (23).

Ryan (25) shares a similar view of masculinity that he presents in the photograph in Figure 13. This photograph illustrates a church his family attends. Ryan (25) views the institution of religion as central to the construction of his knowledge and beliefs about gender and masculinities.



Figure 13. Masculinity and my church, Ryan (25).

During his interview, Ryan (25) reflects on how his religious upbringing helped to shape the way he embodies his masculinity to be seen and recognized as a man and the physicality of his body.

I think the church is the source of the divide between genders... putting men in the position of power... I feel like it just reinforces that notion that they're superior, that men are powerful... I feel like we have these expectations of gender, you know whatever it means to be a man, and this is the source of it... men are more powerful, men are the provider, women are less powerful, men are bigger and stronger and the doers (Ryan, 25).

In his quote, Ryan (25) alludes to the heteronormative nature that is interwoven into Christianity. He reflects on the influence of religion on his upbringing and how it influences his notions of gender, particularly how men and women should be, act, and look. He suggests that religion often divides men and women into particular roles. For example, he views men as the providers and leaders of families. Men are to be powerful and strong and their bodies should reflect their position and roles, meaning men's bodies should be physically strong, big, and muscled.

Through a Foucauldian (1990) lens, religion produces knowledge about men and gender. This knowledge informs discourses about men's bodies and reinforces heteronormativity and binary notions of gender. For Ryan (25), this knowledge is critical in his drive for muscularity and embodying a masculine body. He also discusses the consequences of not living up to these masculine ideals. "If I wasn't adhering to masculine ideals, I felt crappier about myself or I felt like less of a man" (Ryan, 25). The knowledge that he learned about genders through his religious upbringing in Nova Scotia, in particular, the knowledge that men show strength through their bodies, still shapes his experiences and how he feels about himself. If he does not embody the dominant

masculine ideals than he feels crappier about himself. In essence, he believes he is not known as a man without embodying the physical strength that is associated with hegemonic masculinity. The further Ryan (25) feels like he deviates from the proscribed religious meaning of gender the more tension he experiences. It is the gap between Ryan's (25) views of his masculinity and the constructed masculinities of his religious upbringing that produces his negative experiences and feelings about himself.

Dominant forms of masculinities do not just influence ideas about how men's physical bodies should look but also about how men can express themselves and their emotions. For example, dominant forms of masculinities have been previously noted to not encourage men to talk about their feelings and their health (Bordo, 1999; Connell, 1995; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). Jonathan (23) explores how dominant notions of masculinity often close men off or limit the way they can communicate and express their feelings. Jonathan (23) illustrates the idea of masculinity limiting men's experiences and isolating them from other people in one of his photographs. Jonathan (23) entitled the photograph in Figure 14 *Performing Even When Alone* and shows Jonathan (23) alone in his bedroom.



Figure 14. Performing when alone, artist-entitled, Jonathan (23).

The photograph in Figure 14, represents acts of masculinities for Jonathan (23). He wants “to train [his] body in a masculine, attractive way... that stays in your body even when alone” (Jonathan, 23). The notion that dominant and privileged forms of masculinity equate with strength is reflected in Jonathan’s (23) photograph. For him, men need to be able to be independent and be able to rely on their physical and emotional strength to manage the tensions and pressures created by dominant social ideals of bodies. When asked if men talk about their tensions relating to body image and nutrition, Jonathan (23) explains that

it’s not expected for you [gay men] to talk about these sorts of touchy issues, talk about emotions and stuff... but recently with my gay friends even because of this study I’ve been talking to them about it and why there is an obsessive push to really punish yourself for eating (Jonathan, 23).

As Jonathan’s (23) quote highlights, dominant forms of masculinity are limiting to some men. Often men feel that they are not able to talk about their emotions or the tensions they experience. Jonathan’s (23) belief about hegemonic masculinity means that he feels he is not able to openly talk with other men about his obsessive push towards leanness and how he often punishes himself for eating.

Several other participants share Jonathan’s belief of limiting masculinities. For example, Scott (30) believes that there is stigma for men to discuss issues such as eating disorders saying there is “pressure on men in general to not talk about the problems that they’re dealing with personally... [men] need to maintain that strong exterior” (Scott, 30). Mark (32) also suggests that men are “afraid to be vulnerable. They don’t want anybody to see their weakness” or that perfection in bodies is unattainable. Daniel (55) also suggests that body image is not a topic that is openly discussed among gay men as the subject is personal and that, as he describes, “male bravado” would prevent men from

expressing struggles with body image. The constructed idea of male bravado creates experiences in which men pretend to be fine to others while suffering the consequences of negative body image in silence. Several participants believe constructs of masculinities create the perception that gay men must create an identity and, by consequence, a body that is strong and deemed to be perfect. Dominant notions of masculinities, however, do not allow men to express the difficulties and challenges of curating a strong and perfect body.

Gender norms and hegemonic masculinity also shape the way men connect with each other and their relationships. Jonathan (23) suggests that dominant cultural ideals about the appearance of masculine bodies can limit the connections gay men can make with others.

There's this kind of toxic idea in the gay dating scene that you should be the kind of man you want to date and so if you do want to date a guy with a six-pack like you better have a six-pack and if you want to date a tough masculine guy you better act that way (Jonathan, 23).

Jonathan (23) is describing a toxic idea that he feels is present in gay culture, social media, and among his friends. The toxic idea that Jonathan (23) believes is present within gay culture is that men must have a body that is fit and embodies the physical representations of hegemonic masculinity, such as six-packs, to be known as attractive and datable to other men. Masculinities, and by extension bodies, can be viewed to be produced, reproduced, and regulated through gay dating culture. This can influence the experiences of men. Several other participants discuss the way masculinities shape their dating experiences and suggest that rigid ideas about masculine bodies can often limit their experiences. It seems that when certain masculinities are privileged and desired over other forms, possibilities for new connections for many gay men may be limited.

Several participants believe that the deconstruction of gender norms, especially in relation to hegemonic masculinity is critical for them to understand their experiences as gay men and to explore new ways of being. Oliver (28), as previously noted, wants to deconstruct and challenge gender norms about men's beauty, but he was not the only participant to see the disruption of hegemonic masculinity as opening up possibilities to experience new ways of being. In his reflections about masculinities, Jonathan (23) describes the beginnings of his journey to deconstruct and challenge the dominant norms of hegemonic masculinities. He talks about the admiration he has for a friend who is physically big and masculine but who will sometimes wear nail polish. Jonathan (23) views this act of gender transgression as a form of confidence and wants to be able to do the same. Jonathan (23) desires to create and embody the physical characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, including the big muscles and the six-pack so that he is known as desirable to other men, but he also wants to express himself in different ways than strict gender norms and hegemonic masculinity can allow.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides support that participants view their bodies as works of art. Participants' bodies can be viewed as bodies becoming art as both art and bodies express the constant shifting of the cultural and social forces that shape them. Art, like participants' bodies, are productive and affect other bodies, creating new desires, experiences, and ways of living (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). Bodies becoming art are conceptualized as in continual flux or of becoming something. The journey of becoming often involves aligning themselves with the social constructs of beauty for gay men. Through photographs and interviews, participants reflected on the influences within gay

culture that shape their journey and their bodies. Participants note the role of social media, televisions, pornography, and notions of masculinities on their beliefs, values, and practices on their bodies. The gay cultural and social influences the participants discuss are constantly changing, creating new knowledge and new desires relating to men's bodies. These influences, however, are not the only social discourses that shape the body becoming art. The next chapter explores how societal discourses of health and fat discourses shape the experiences of the participants.

Chapter 7: Creating the Body Becoming Art

'I know something interesting is sure to happen,' she said to herself, 'whenever I eat or drink anything; so I'll just see what this bottle does. I do hope it'll will make me grow large again, for really I'm quite tired of being such a tiny little thing!' (Carroll, 2014, pp. 36–37).

Alice in Carroll's (2014) story consumes cakes, mushrooms, and drinks to become bigger and smaller in size. In the story, food is a way for her to change her body and, thus, how she views and interacts with the world. Carroll (2014), by shifting the physical appearance of his character through food, illustrates the unstable nature of bodies and identities. Eating practices, for the participants in this study, are also a means to shift their bodies. Food, and other health practices such as exercise, are the means for participants to create their bodies becoming art. The bodies of the participants are not only shaped through various gay cultural factors, as described in the previous chapter, but also through wider social discourses of health and fat. It is not possible to separate the intricate web of factors that shape bodies and eating practices from social discourses of health and fat that produce knowledge about healthy bodies regardless of sexual identity and gender.

The way health and fatness are framed together shapes the way people think about their bodies and creates power relations that often privilege people with bodies deemed to be healthy and fat-free. This chapter, through a poststructural lens, explores how discourses of health and fat constitute the body becoming art for the participants. The chapter explores how the body is inscribed with meanings created by the language and discourses of health and fat and how participants engage with these discourses in a productive manner to create their bodies into works of art. Participants' bodies, as works

of art, allow for the conception of new desires, new experiences, and new ways of living. The chapter explores how health and fat discourses can create tensions for gay men and create negative outcomes in relation to their emotional and mental health. A critical analysis of this process through the beliefs, values, and practices of the participants can provide an appreciation of the ever-changing and dynamic forces that render the bodies of gay men.

The chapter begins with an overview of health and fat discourses, including the way participants speak about fat, bodies, food, and exercise that inform their experiences, and often creates tensions for many of the participants. A discussion on the eating and exercise practices that the participants use in their attempts to align their bodies with gay cultural ideals and health and fat discourses follows. The chapter concludes with a discussion on their health outcomes that are shaped through their beliefs, knowledge, and practices of food and bodies.

Health and Fat Discourses

The language the participants used during their interviews are constituted through health and fat discourses within society. The following section first explores the social discourses of health and fat that shape the experiences of the participants. It can be argued that health and fat discourses within our society are intimately interconnected as health is equated with fatness. Healthy bodies are equated with thin bodies and thin bodies are equated with healthy bodies. Fat bodies are often seen as both physically and morally corrupt (Longhurst, 2016). Dietary guidelines and recommendations are an integral foundation of our current knowledge and discourses about food, health, and fat

(Campos et al., 2006; Dodds & Chamberlain, 2017; Guthman, 2013). Historically, ethical and spiritual undertones were part of the way food was viewed and are still a critical component in the medicalized views of nutrition and food (Joy et al., 2018). As a result, food is viewed as both a source of fuel for the body and as a reflection of a person's moral character (Coveney, 1998, 1999). Whether government or community-sponsored, modern-day nutritional systems all share the fundamental idea that people or communities need to determine what the 'right thing' to eat is and then self-monitor to ensure adherence to proper dietary guidelines and social codes of morality (Coveney, 1998).

Food choices are now largely viewed as choices that are strictly left to the individual and are believed to be the cause of body shape and size, as well as health status (Coveney, 1998, 1999, 2019; Joy et al., 2018). Trainer et al. (2017) suggests that fat bodies are viewed as a failure to self-monitor and practice self-discipline and that these failures are not only associated with negative health but also with poor citizenship. Many people experience stigmatization within healthcare, employment, education, and media because of cultural ideals of fatness and body shape and size (Heuer et al., 2011; Puhl & Heuer, 2009, 2010). People who are labelled as fat, overweight, or obese are often labelled as poor citizens and viewed as lazy, greedy, self-indulgent, unintelligent, and weak. There is an underlying assumption that the moral transgression of fat is also a dismissal of health and poses strains on the healthcare system (Puhl & Heuer, 2009, 2010). Health and fat discourses can limit desirable and healthy bodies to certain sizes and may influence how people view themselves. As a result, many people attempt to lose weight through their eating practices not only to be healthy but also to maintain or regain

their morality and good citizenship (Trainer et al., 2017). The tensions people feel to look a certain way to maintain health, morality, and good citizen may be more harmful than the proposed medical conditions associated with fatness (Edmonds & Zieff, 2015; Puhl & Heuer, 2009, 2010; Rich & Evans, 2005; Trainer et al., 2017). Many of participants' photographs reflect their eating practices. The following section explores how the discourses of health and fat shape their eating practices and the way they view themselves.

Eating and Exercise Practices for Health

As discussed in the previous chapter, participants attempt to create bodies that embody the dominant beauty and masculinity ideals for gay men. In the process, they become known as fit and healthy men who are desirable to other men. In the perspectives of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; Parr, 2010), their bodies can be viewed as bodies becoming art. Art is the principal way in which we learn about the world and transform it into sensory experiences (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; Parr, 2010). Art is a means by which we can express the ever-changing shifting desires of positive and productive social forces that create opportunities for experimentation and the formation of connections between bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; Parr, 2010). Conceptualizing participants' bodies as bodies becoming art or, in other words, as bodies that are relational, that have the capacity for actions, and that are capable of productive interactions can provide an understanding of the forces that shape bodies. Such insights can be critical in exploring how social discourses of health and fat shape the beliefs, values, and practices of the participants about their eating and bodies.

Participants discuss how being healthy through their eating practices is critical to the process of creating their bodies and identities. For these participants, being known as a desirable gay man includes being known as a healthy man. Discourses of health are an important consideration to the participants when reflecting and discussing their bodies. For example, Scott (65), who suffers from ALS, loves food but now views it primarily as a means to stay healthy and to maintain his weight. In the photographs of Figures 15, 16, and 17, Scott (65) presents his favorite foods. Scott (65) now prepares his foods in new and modified ways due to the decline of his physical health. Figure 15 shows his standard breakfast for the past 25 years, a bowl of oatmeal that he enjoys every morning. Figure 16 shows his favorite lunch, a tuna fish sandwich but now made without bread because bread is too difficult for him to swallow. Figure 17 shows his favorite fruits that he now consumes as ingredients in smoothies. Food for Scott (65) is now a central way for him to maintain his health. His disease has resulted in weight loss and mobility issues for him. As a gay man, these issues now override other areas of his life, such as his sexual life. Although he “still has it going on” food is now a means to maintain his weight. For Scott (65), his body image is now “all about looking healthy.” Although food is still a passion for him and still gives him pleasure it is now also a way to health.

Scott’s (65) reflections highlight the important role of food in health and weight discourses. Within health discourses, food is seen as nourishment, energy, and fuel for maintaining the body. It is to be measured, counted, and eaten according to guidelines created by governmental and health institutions to maintain the health of populations. Dietary guidelines and recommendations are the foundation of health and fat discourses within our culture and have created knowledge about which foods are deemed healthy

and which foods are deemed unhealthy. As a result, certain types of food are often viewed good and others are labelled bad. If a person eats too much bad food then they are also labelled bad, unhealthy, morally unfit, and will embody this unfitness through their fatness (Coveney, 1998, 1999; Joy et al., 2018).

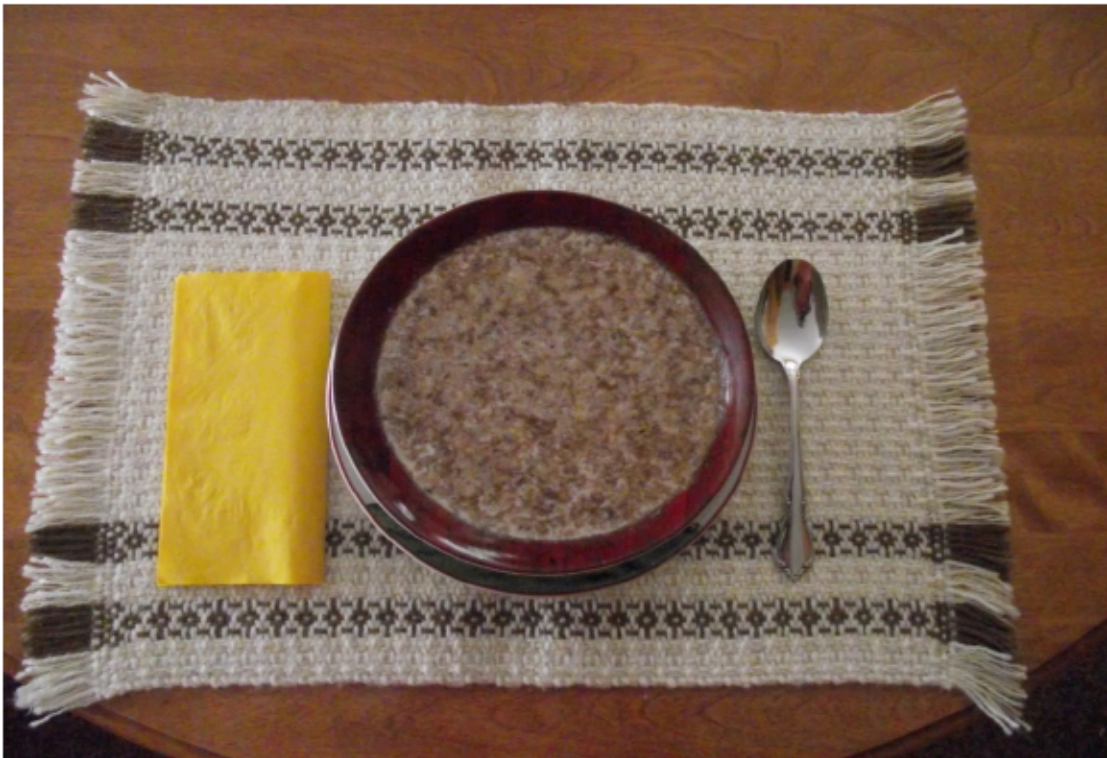


Figure 15. My usual breakfast, Scott (65).



Figure 16. A modified lunch of tuna fish, Scott (65).



Figure 17. Fruit smoothies, Scott (65).

Within health and fat discourses, good health is often a reflection of body size. This was highlighted in the beliefs and values of several participants. For example, Ralph (57) talks about the struggles he experienced throughout most of his life about weight and says that as a young man his motivations to be thin was to be desirable to other men. For Ralph (57), being a gay man who is desirable is related to thinness. Much of his youth was spent struggling to reconcile the opposing viewpoints of fatness and desirability within gay culture. Now that he is older, he states that his motivation to be thin and his eating practices are “to maintain health more than body image. Anything that is motivation for me is based around a health concern, not around being young and pretty, or trying to get laid” (Ralph, 57). For Ralph (57), the importance of a thin body is now more about health than simply as a means to get laid. This change in his motivations to be thin stems from his new relationship, and his desire to enjoy his retirement and live a long life. He is now reflecting on the lives of his parents who have recently passed away and how he saw their lives limited by fatness and health problems that he attributes to their lifestyles.

Both of my parents who died, my mother in 2012 and my father recently, both were obese. They had complications from obesity, diabetes, they were smokers...they both had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, had cholesterol, blood pressure, and various things. Basically, obesity, which maybe not the cause of their death, certainly didn't help them (Ralph, 57).

The experiences that Ralph had with his family, in witnessing what he perceived as negative influences of weight to their health motivates him to learn about food and to incorporate that knowledge into his eating practices.

[I] educate myself, and try to know what a carbohydrate is, what proteins are, it sounds pretty basic, everybody would know that, but you know my parents just ate for the sake of eating. They didn't know if you ate more bread that you're going to get fat. So, I've taken it upon myself to learn about health and my goal is not to die yet (Ralph, 57).

Ralph believes that by learning about food, such as carbohydrates and fat, and by eating with knowledge and understanding about food rather than simply eating for the sake of eating a person will be better able to create a body that is healthy and not fat. Ralph (57) believes that by not being fat he can avoid the health problems he saw in his parents, health problems that he believes were related to their eating practices and their *obesity*. Ralph's (57) knowledge about food, which is culturally produced through health and medicalized discourses of fat, shapes how he views certain food and allows him to make decisions about what to eat. His knowledge helps him to define certain foods to be healthy or unhealthy and to determine which foods contribute to fatness and, by extension, unhealthiness.

Ralph (57) believes that being knowledgeable about foods will help him achieve his goals of losing fat and improving his health. Figure 18, which Ralph (57) entitled *Rabbit Food*, reflects Ralph's (57) knowledge of food and how he uses this knowledge in the creation of his body. Ralph (57) believes his knowledge about foods will maintain his health and enable him not to be immobilized or limited by the health issues he saw his parents struggle within their lives. In this way, Ralph's (57) body is becoming art, a body that is open to new possibilities of living, new experiences, and new connections.



Figure 18. *Rabbit Food*, artist-entitled, Ralph (57).

In describing his *Rabbit Food* photograph, Ralph (57) depicts his struggles relating to healthy eating. He states the significance of the photo is that it shows his “ongoing battle of trying to eat healthy and trying to eat lettuce and salads and... symbolic of all the things that we try to make those right choices” (Ralph, 57). The photograph in Figure 18 represents Ralph’s (57) eating practices that he sometimes finds difficult to enact but nevertheless views as necessary to be healthy and not fat. It is the language, however, that he uses to describe his photograph that reflects the tension Ralph experiences in trying to make the right choices, to eat healthy, and to diet. He refers to his tension as an ongoing battle and suggests that it is a constant struggle to monitor his eating.

Several other participants use language that alludes to the tensions they experience on eating the right types of foods, foods labelled by medicalized health discourses and nutrition guidelines as healthy foods. Words like battle and struggle are common words within the participants' interviews. Certain foods are labelled as gross and, if eaten, often result in the participants feeling guilty, ashamed, and unhealthy. In other words, if they eat foods considered to be unhealthy or fattening then they feel as if they are losing the battle to be known as fit, attractive, and healthy gay men.

Ralph (57) believes that certain foods and eating practices are the right choices to create his healthy body. When asked to describe what he believes are the right choices in relation to foods and his eating practices he describes the following:

I've been involved with every diet going and basically, it's calories in, calories out. It's what you eat, if you're going to drink your calories through alcohol or other things then you're going to have to exercise. I learned that if I can eat a balanced diet and stay away from junk food. I love salt. I love potato chips. I try to eat three meals a day, balanced... I was doing all the right things for a long time and I knew the right and wrong and a good food and a bad food, but I had a real problem with portion size. So now I'm very aware of the portion size... I try to sit down and have a conversation, have a meal and talk about the day and eat slower, try to set your fork down instead of just you know wolfing it in so it's been, it's a learning process but that just represents that need to be on that right track and to try to eat a healthy diet (Ralph, 57).

For Ralph (57) healthy choices about foods relate to calories. He believes that to be healthy and to prevent getting fat a person must eat foods that are viewed as low calorie, such as salads, and to avoid highly caloric and unhealthy foods, such as alcohol and potato chips. If a person does eat highly caloric and unhealthy foods, then they must compensate by engaging in exercise to burn those calories. Ralph (57) talks about balance in his eating practices, portion sizes, and taking his time to eat as a means to stay on the

right track and eat a healthy diet. The underlying assumption is that if a person does not stay on the right track then they are viewed as unhealthy and likely to become fat and suffer the consequences that being fat entails.

Ryan (25) also reflects about his eating practices through his photographs and the relationship he sees between food, fitness, and health as a gay man. The photograph in Figure 19 shows a table with several homemade freshly baked pies. The pies are part of a feast that Ryan's mother made for a family celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday.



Figure 19. Mother's homemade Thanksgiving pies, Ryan (25).

When discussing his photograph (Figure 19), Ryan (25) reflects on his eating practices when he was growing up. He talks about being a skinny kid and not really thinking too much about what he ate because as a youth he actually wanted to be bigger. He describes being teased by his peers for being too skinny and not having bigger muscles like boys are supposed to have. He states that he knew that he “wasn’t supposed to be that small or that skinny” (Ryan, 25). This quote suggests that even at a young age, Ryan (25) recognized that there were bodies that society valued more in terms of masculinity. Now as an adult, however, Ryan (25) feels more pressure to pay more attention to his eating practices as a way to maintain his identity as a fit and healthy gay man even though he still enjoys eating foods, such as his mother’s homemade pies. This is a source of tension for him as he struggles to balance the enjoyment of eating with the pressure within gay culture to embody certain body types.

I loved eating the Thanksgiving dinner and the pie and everything but now I have this thing in the back of my head, I’m like ‘oh if you eat like this all the time you’re going to lose your abs’ or ‘don’t eat too many calories, you’re not going to be young forever, your metabolism is going to slow down’... You have to be streamlined, perfect, and slim with low body fat but you’re still a man so you’ve got to work out and build muscle to be ripped and jacked at the same time (Ryan, 25).

Ryan (25) believes that the control of food is the way he creates his body and aligns it with what he believes it means to be a fit and a desirable gay man. It is the deliberate practice of watching what he eats and the focus on calories that allows Ryan to be streamlined and slim. Ryan (25) speaks of the source of the tensions he experiences as the thing in the back of his head. He struggles to balance the foods that he loves to eat, such as pies and turkey dinners, and the social pressure to be ripped and jacked. For Ryan (25),

eating too many calories, or pies, is not aligned with being a young, healthy, productive, and attractive gay man.

Ryan (25) also views muscular bodies not just as a reflection of masculinity but also as a measure of health and fitness. These beliefs are expressed in his next photograph (Figure 20).



Figure 20. Turkey day workout, Ryan (25).

The photograph in Figure 20, shows Ryan (25) in the gym after his Thanksgiving Day meals. He describes the photo as a curated picture for social media that was created to make him look muscular, fit, and engaging in healthy practices to compensate for his eating the pies on Thanksgiving. In reference to the photograph, Ryan (25) says, “I just make it look nonchalant, like ‘oh turkey day workout like yah I ate like shit this weekend but I’m in the gym and you’re not.’ That’s basically what I’m saying” (Ryan, 25). He refers to pies and other holiday foods as shit which positions such food as unhealthy and something to avoid if you are to be considered and known as attractive and healthy. The last part of his quote in which he says “and you’re not” speaks to the idea of surveillance of the body and body practices. The underlying assumption here is that he is participating in activities that make him a better citizen, a more fit, healthy, and attractive citizen over people who do not go to the gym, especially after a holiday feast. The photograph reflects how Ryan (25) constructs his identity as a healthy and fit gay man and is a way for him to let other gay men know that he is performing the necessary practices to be viewed as a worthy to be deemed desirable and healthy.

Other participants also spoke of the tension they experienced to balance eating what they believed were unhealthy, gross, or empty-calorie foods with exercise to maintain health and desirability. For example, Scott (30) describes how he tries to be very conscious of drinking black coffee, as shown in Figure 21. He says, “it seems silly, my co-workers are ‘oh it’s only like 20 calories for the milk’ and but I don’t know, if I feel I’m in a healthy mindset I’m drinking black coffee or just like zero calorie beverages in general” (Scott, 30). Being healthy for Scott (30) means thinking about and monitoring calories. Scott (30) views the extra twenty extra calories from the milk in his coffee as

unnecessary and this creates enough tension for him to feel anxious and unhealthy. To be healthy is to minimize and eliminate as many calories as possible.



Figure 21. Black coffee, hold the calories, Scott (30).

Scott (30) describes another instance when he orders a sandwich and coffee. Figure 22 illustrates this experience. The photograph shows a sandwich and coffee that he ordered. Scott (30) describes this as a day in which he was “on a tear”, indulging in a coffee with added milk, something that he normally avoids doing in order to limit calories in his diet. Scott remembers feeling a sense of judgement from the server, who was another gay man.

When I got the sandwich, the person I was ordering it from was a gay guy and I was, in my head thinking 'oh I'm ordering something that's not really that healthy'... judging myself and thinking he's judging me to some degree (Scott, 30).

Scott (30) feels judged because he views bread within the sandwich as a food that should be avoided. He believes that bread contributes calories and result in fatness. The photograph in Figure 22 alludes to the surveillance of foods that is created through health and fat discourses. Surveillance that is both done by oneself and by others. Acts of surveillance that are done to be known as a healthy gay man. Scott (30) believes his diet and, as a consequence, his identity as a fit and attractive gay man is under surveillance by the server, even when the server never actually said or even implied anything about Scott's (30) body. As Foucault (1995) notes the server does not need to be actually observing Scott (30) as surveillance occurs with the mere thought of being watched. Thoughts that drive people to enact mechanisms of surveillance and self-discipline. The surveillance Scott (30) experiences allows judgements about his health, body, and desirability as a gay man to be made on the basis of the foods he eats. The monitoring of food allows gay men to compare bodies and to know the practices that constitute masculine and healthy bodies. Scott (30), and several other participants, suggests that this is a common occurrence for many gay men.



Figure 22. Sandwich with a side of judgement, Scott (30).

Jonathan (23) also discusses the surveillance of foods and how he tries not to consume “empty calories.” He tries to ensure everything he eats “has a purpose.” Jonathan discusses empty calories in relation to alcohol and jokes about how the “gayest drink” (Jonathan, 23) is one that has the most alcohol for the least number of calories. He believes that fit gay men need to watch their caloric consumption. If a gay man consumes a food or beverage considered to be highly caloric then they need to burn off the excess calories through exercise and, thereby, prevent fatness. As Jonathan (23), states “if you do indulge in food then there is an expectation you better work it off by exercising. But also, like not give an impression that you do exercise a lot.” Jonathan (23) often feels stress not only to look healthy, but also to make it look natural and effortless to other

men. Underlying notions of hegemonic masculinities that do not allow men to talk freely about their emotions, struggles, self-doubts, and that often limit connections between men may play a role in Jonathan's (23) comment that looking fit must be viewed by other men as natural and effortless. The social construct of hegemonic masculinity limits men from telling other men about their experiences, tensions, and struggles with dominant body ideals and the degree to which concerns about body image fuels their exercise practices.

Jonathan (23) explains that he feels that "there is always a struggle between making decisions that are healthy and unhealthy" (Jonathan, 23). Figure 23 is a symbolic representation of the tension Jonathan experiences between balancing food, exercise, and the creation of his body becoming art, a body that reflects social discourses of health and fat and through which Jonathan interacts and connects with the world. The photograph shows his boxing gloves in the foreground and, in the background, a cider bottle on top of his textbooks. The photograph in Figure 23 juxtaposes what Jonathan (23) believes to be something healthy, the kickboxing, with the instant gratification and indulgences he believes is represented by the alcohol. For Jonathan (23), the beer is full of empty calories that are neither good nor productive in creating his ideal healthy and desirable body. Jonathan's (23) photograph, as with Ryan's (25) photographs, highlights the way social discourses of health and fat shape their identities as a healthy and fit gay man.



Figure 23. Exercise and empty calories, Jonathan (23).

Not all participants experienced tensions with food. Most participants talked about the joy and comfort eating can be for them but also the tensions they experience living up to cultural ideals for gay men's bodies, as well as the tensions they felt as a

result of constant monitoring of foods and bodies. Daniel (55), however, discusses food in relation to pleasure without as much of the tensions other participants describe, fully embracing food and the enjoyment of eating as an integral aspect to his “hedonistic” lifestyle. He describes himself as “living a lifestyle that is fun and... that is appealing, is satisfying to the senses and is about good sex, good drink, good food, and good parties. A kind of hedonism” (Daniel, 55). Although eating for Daniel (55) is about pleasure and living a life that he enjoys, he does recognize that health and fat discourses that labelled foods as healthy or unhealthy play a role in the eating practice for many gay men. This he represents in his photograph in Figure 24, entitled *Decisions I*. This photograph represents the choices faced by many participants. The choice between foods labelled as healthy, the vegetable wraps, and foods labelled as unhealthy, the tray of cookies, cinnamon rolls, and sweat loafs.



Figure 24. Decisions I, artist-entitled, Daniel (55).

Daniel (55) explains that the photograph in Figure 24 represents the food choices that many gay men face in their daily lives and how the meanings ascribed to foods are messy and often contradictory. In Figure 25 entitled *Decisions II*, Daniel (55) delves deeper into this concept and depicts the complexity of food choices he often experiences through an example using sugar and artificial sweeteners.

There's a lot of folklore. People just adhere to a folklore and there's no point arguing about it. I just have to say o.k. you know you're going to die of the sugar and I'm going to die of the brain cancer [caused by aspartame] and life goes on. We're all going to die of something (Daniel, 55).

Daniel (55) believes that there are many different messages, coming from many different sources, folklore as he refers to it, which can be contradictory and confusing. He acknowledges that foods are labelled as either healthy or not healthy but recognizes that it is a narrative that is created within society. He believes that there is not enough knowledge to fully know how foods influence health, therefore, it is best to simply enjoy the foods you eat. He views food as a way to enjoy life and believes it is not useful to worry excessively about the way foods might negatively influence your health. Even with his beliefs the hedonistic nature of eating and his enjoyment of food, Daniel (55) still refers to himself as overweight and plans to lose weight. It seems that even for participants who ascribe to the concepts of food for pleasure that body standards and the surveillance of bodies still influence their beliefs, values, and practices of food.



Figure 25. Decisions II, artist-entitled, Daniel (55).

Health Outcomes

This section explores the outcomes to the health of the participants as a result of their journey to shape their bodies to the dominant social and cultural ideals of fit, attractive, desirable, and healthy bodies for gay men. Several of the participants refer to emotional and mental tensions when discussing how body ideals within gay cultural shape their health experiences. Many of their photographs represent anxiety and depression relating to their body image and express their feelings of guilt and shame about their eating practices. Mohammed (25) discusses body standards for queer men in great depth during his interview and provides multiple examples of how fat is often viewed negatively in gay culture and the influence this has on his mental and emotional

health. He comments that during the process of taking his photographs for this project, he tried to portray some of his “darkest mindset” in his photographs, indicating that for him body standards for gay men have serious outcomes for his health. Mohammed’s (25) photographs are interrelated. The next few photographs in this dissertation are from Mohammed (25) and reveal his experiences and health outcomes related to cultural standards for the bodies of gay men.

Figure 26 is the first photograph in this series and represents feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression that Mohammed (25) often experiences. He views his feelings as being deeply connected to his body and cultural messages that inform him that his body is not acceptable or desirable for gay men. The photograph shows Mohammed (25) laying in his bed, his body naked and curled in the fetal position.



Figure 26. Vulnerability in his body, Mohammed (25).

For Mohammed (25), the photograph reflects how he often feels alone. It illustrates how he sometimes wants “to curl up in a ball... to go in the fetal position ...to go to bed and to stay there.” Mohammed (25) believes the fetal position is a vulnerable position and

that the photograph illustrates how he perceives his body as also vulnerable and open to attack, ridicule, and shame within the gay community. He discusses the double standards that he experiences in the gay community. He discusses how many gay men speak of the benefits of diversity and about loving each other regardless of body shape, size, or color but that this sentiment is something that he has not often experienced in the community. He provides an example in the following quote:

I know a friend of mine who is gay as well and he is like all for equality, accepting everyone, but when it comes to him he's like 'oh I'm not into it, it's just personal perspective.' I'm like but you literally said the exact opposite of what you're doing now. It's that contradiction. If you are telling everyone else to accept everyone and give it a shot, then why don't you give it a shot (Mohammed, 25)?

This example highlights the duality that is often experienced in the gay community, one in which the concepts of inclusion and diversity are promoted but often not enacted, especially in relation to men's bodies.

As previously discussed, cultural notions about masculinities influence ideas about how men's bodies should look to be considered desirable. Other studies have previously explored the discrimination of men whose bodies fall outside the rigid definitions of acceptable bodies. For example, Robinson (2016) explores the discrimination of fat men on a gay cruising site and proposes that relations of power based upon height and weight of bodies produce and reproduce discourses that reinforce acts of discrimination towards men whose bodies are outside the socially-constructed ideal height and weight proportions for gay men. Robinson (2016) suggests that their study highlights how technologies allow men to easily compare bodies and normalize daily rituals of discrimination. Other researchers have explored discrimination based on

bodies through an intersectional lens. For example, the “No Fat, No Fem, No Asian” slogan that is seen in the dating profiles of some gay men within cruising apps is a means to filter out men who are deemed too overweight, feminine, and non-white (Joy & Numer, 2018a; Scott Jr, 2015). Often the justification of such slogans is personal sexual preferences, but Han and Choi (2018) suggest that such sentiments are not just personal preferences but acts of sexual racism that are neither harmless nor without consequences. Although Han and Choi’s (2018) work focuses on discrimination of sexuality and desire based on racism it is clear from Mohammed’s (25) photographs and interview that fatness is also deeply connected to discrimination and has negative health outcomes for him and other gay men.

In Figure 27, Mohammed (25) also illustrates his anxieties about his body that is another health outcome relating to body pressures he experiences as a gay man. The photograph shows Mohammed (25) in a cloud of vapour that represents his constant analyzing and thinking about bodies. The photograph alludes to the doubts he experiences about the desirability of his body and the confusion he experiences in dating other men.



Figure 27. The cloud of overthinking, Mohammed (25).

Mohammed (25) explains how the photograph relates his experiences below:

Whenever I try to find someone to go on a date with or talk to someone and flirt, and then I get rejected, and I'm used to that, like it's fine, but that picture (Figure 27) keeps popping up like overthinking, and I'm like o.k. is it because of my weight, is it because of how I look, because of my skin colour, is it because of my personality, am I too much, like what is, what happened you know (Mohammed, 25)?

Mohammed (25) discusses how acts of rejection make him unsure about himself and often leads to him overthinking and feeling anxious. He is not sure if the rejection is because his body does not fit the ideal image for gay men in relation to his weight and skin colour, or if the rejection is based on some other aspect of his personality. This creates doubt for Mohammed (25) as he further explains by saying,

It [rejection] just makes you doubt things that you didn't doubt before. What if I do lose weight would I be more attractive to some people? Do I really want to change myself to other people or do I stay the way I want to be? Do I want to change for myself (Mohammed, 25)?

Mohammed (25) wonders if losing weight and, thereby, shaping his body to be more aligned with the narrow socially constructed body ideals for gay men would make him more attractive and desirable to other men. He also questions his motivations for shaping his body. He questions if the process of creating his body to fit within the narrow definitions created by gay culture, and to be known and seen as a fit, attractive gay men is worth it.

The third photograph that weaves into Mohammed's (25) health narrative is shown in Figure 28. His story continues to reveal how Mohammed's (25) health outcomes are created through competing discourses of food and bodies. The photograph, titled by Mohammed (25) *NOT Lovin' It*, shows several bags of food that Mohammed (25) refers to as "garbage" and considers not to be healthy.



Figure 28. NOT lovin' it, artist-entitled, Mohammed (25).

Mohammed (25) explains that food is often a comfort for him and that it represents a way for him to deal with the feelings of isolation, depression, as well as the anxieties that were represented in Figures 26 and 27. The comfort he receives from the food depicted in the photograph, however, is not without tension.

For Mohammed (25), the pleasure of food is interwoven with negative feelings. He explains this tension, saying that the types of food shown in Figure 28 are the reason that he is fat and, as previously discussed, that being fat is a source of rejection and loneliness for him. Mohammed (25) finds comfort from the social consequences of not

embodying the culturally created and idealized standards for gay men's bodies with food. The comfort Mohammed (25) experiences, however, is interlaced with guilt and shape the negative feelings he has for himself. He says, "I'm fat for a reason and I suppose this picture (Figure 28) tells it." Mohammed (25) believes that the foods in the photograph are responsible for him not embodying the physical standards set before gay men and that the consequences he experiences are justified.

Dominant health and fat discourses are about personal responsibility and surveillance of our own bodies. The food shown in Figure 28 is socially viewed by many people to be unhealthy and fattening. It is up to the individual to monitor and regulate such foods to prevent fatness. Paradoxically, other discourses position many foods labelled unhealthy to be sinful, delicious, decadent, and something to enjoy and savour (Coveney, 1999; Joy et al., 2018). Discourses that position foods as indulgences are in opposition to the social discourses that require gay men to regulate their food to create bodies that are fat-free, muscular, and healthy. These multiple and competing discourses about food and bodies create tensions for Mohammed (25) as he struggles to maintain good citizenship and to uphold the dominant beauty standards while also being able to enjoy foods. Mohammed (25) reveals how he struggles with these competing discourses and how his struggles often drive him into what he believes is an endless cycle of vulnerability, overthinking about his food choices and his body, and feelings of shame and guilt. Mohammed's (25) three photographs (Figures 26-28) merge together in his narrative and come to symbolize the relationship between his eating practices, his feelings, and his tensions with body ideals within gay culture.

Other participants also discuss the negative health outcomes they have experienced trying to embody the dominant beauty standards found within gay culture and media. Mark (32), as previously discussed in Chapter 6, talks about the fears of gaining weight and the rejection and loneliness that he believes would be the consequences of not living up to the dominant fit and healthy standards for the bodies of gay men. Mark (32) comments on how the anxiety and fear of not being ever happy with his body influences the foods that he eats and, in turn, are shaping his body. Scott (30) also discusses how body standards and the social connections between thinness and health have influenced his mental and emotional health. The dominant body standards epitomized in the gay community have shaped his beliefs, values, and practices about his health, his eating, and his body. For example, he recalls experiences, similar to Mohammed (25), on dating apps that he believes has influenced the way he feels about his body.

On the dating apps, you'll have a face picture, and somebody wants to see your body and then you're like 'o.k. now they're going to judge me' and sometimes it is pretty abrupt whether it's like you send the picture and they block you or just stop communicating. I've experienced that and that can make you feel pretty bad about yourself (Scott, 30).

As Scott (30) highlights, the rejection by other men on social media based on images of bodies is often hurtful to many gay men. It can make men feel bad about themselves, lower their self-esteem, and get lost in moments of doubt, darkness, and confusion.

The judgement Scott (30) feels is part of the discourse of bodies and health for gay men. It is a means by which we police and regulate our own and other men's bodies. The consequences of not embodying the dominant ideals of healthy, fit, and attractive

bodies are often rejection, particularly on social media. The message this sends for many men, including Scott (30), is that you need to be attractive, muscular, fit, and fat-free otherwise you are not worthy to be talked to and will be blocked. Such experiences may be productive to some men, allowing for the possibilities to become something else but for other men, such as Scott (30), experiences of rejection on social media seem to be damaging to their health and limiting to the becoming body. For Scott (30), the act of ending communication and being blocked by someone on social media limits his interactions and connections. Such acts create negative feelings that are detrimental to his health. Scott (30) further discusses how social media is “everywhere and constantly in the face” of gay men. Technology and social media are not something that gay men can often remove from their daily lives, but it is central in shaping social norms for them. Social norms that, for example, make it acceptable to abruptly end conversations and block people based on their bodies. Griffiths (2018) suggests the ability to always have access to the messages, images, and peer interactions within social media may be critical components in the experiences of users. This is certainly the case with Scott (30) as he experiences judgement and negative health outcomes as a result of persuasive and dominant body norms within social media.

Scott (30) also talked about his “interesting relationship” with food and how he often uses food to deal with emotional issues. Figure 29 is a photograph of an empty ice cream container. Scott (30) discusses how this photograph symbolizes how he eats emotionally, saying “I didn’t feel great after eating most of a container of ice cream.” Scott (30) refers to the aspect of eating emotionally as part of his unhealthy relationship with food.



Figure 29. Gone, artist-entitled, Scott (30).

The emotions that Scott (30) talks about relates to being gay. Emotional eating is a way to deal with the emotions he experiences as a gay man. Scott (30) reflects on the emotions he felt when coming out. He says that “the whole realization of being gay, that led to more anxiety, maybe some depression.” Many gay men experience similar emotions as they struggle with being gay in a heteronormative world and try to reconcile these two conflicting worlds. Binary constructs of gender and the assumption that heterosexuality is the privileged sexuality often lead many gay men feeling ashamed, isolated, anxious, depressed, and scared to live outside these social constructs (Connolly & Lynch, 2016).

Other participants also saw a relationship to being gay and their eating practices. For example, Mark (32) talks about the relationship between being gay and overweight. He talks about the shame he experienced as an overweight gay teenager and how food was a source of comfort for him. He describes going through a “vicious cycle” of eating and feeling shame because his body was not aligned with socially acceptable thin bodies. He talks about suffering from a binge eating disorder and feeling like an outsider, a feeling that did not go away when he entered the gay community.

It was a struggle all through my teenage years and into my early 20s and being a gay man especially. I remember feeling like an outsider because I was gay in high school growing up in like a heteronormative culture but then when I turned 19 and finally started going to gay bars and trying to integrate into the gay culture I still felt like an outsider because my body did not fit the normal, typical version of what was considered attractive or acceptable. So, I still kind of felt like I didn't belong in that community because of my body or my perception of my body (Mark, 32).

Mark, as a young man, struggled with his weight because of negative societal views of fat and the moral and health meanings associated with fatness. As a consequence, he often felt like an outsider. Discourses of health and fat are integral to the way Mark (32) felt about his body. He believed that his body was not acceptable because of its fatness. When he entered the gay community, he hoped to find acceptance and a feeling of belonging. Dominant body standards within gay culture that privilege bodies that are fit, thin, and muscular, however, created experiences that were isolating for Mark (32). As a young man coming into the gay community, Mark (32) saw his body as not embodying the standards set for healthy and attractive gay men. As a consequence, Mark (32) saw himself as not belonging within the gay community. Mark (32) is not alone in his experiences of intensified body pressures for men within the gay community.

Scott (30) also reflects on the added pressures about bodies and being sexually desirable within the gay community.

I think I've always had this pressure on myself to like look a certain way... Then when I came out as part of the gay community, I feel like there's external pressure to look a certain way, so it just doubles down for me how I feel I should look and in my world, I guess that look is the muscular, fit guy (Scott, 30).

He recognizes the external pressures placed on men to have a certain type of body within the gay community is influencing or double downing on the pressures he already feels.

Both Mark (32) and Scott (30) believe that the increased body pressures in the gay community influence their eating practices and their health. Scott (30) believes such pressures for gay men to look a certain way led him to restrict his diet with the goal to be "healthier." He describes making sandwiches with lettuce as the outside instead of using bread and how he became addicted to losing weight. He became addicted to seeing the numbers on the scale fall and felt that he was constantly thinking about what he was eating and what he "should be eating." His desire to lose weight and align his body with the dominant cultural image of a fit and healthy gay man influenced his eating practices. Scott (30) lost weight and felt positive about this, but his practices did not always result in emotional, mental, or physical benefits. He explains the duality of his experiences, saying,

I was seeing results and fitting into smaller clothes... it felt good when the number went down but then it felt really bad when it went up, so it was definitely a battle... there were times where I don't know if I'd qualify it as an eating disorder but would make myself throw up if I ate something bad and felt guilty for it. I wouldn't say I did it on a regular basis, probably just a few times here and there but still not healthy (Scott, 30).

Scott (30) feels good when he loses weight and his body becomes more aligned with the dominant cultural images of fit and muscular men, but this is feeling is not lasting and can be overshadowed if he eats something, he believes will make him lose the battle and gain weight.

In a Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1990), Scott (30) sees himself as a healthy citizen as he loses weight. He experiences a sense of rightness at being a productive and moral citizen. When the numbers on the scale, however, move in the opposite direction and Scott (30) gains weight his identity as a healthy and fit gay man is questioned. His morality as a healthy and productive citizen is lost. He experiences guilt and negative feelings from eating the wrong foods that are classified as unhealthy and fat-producing. Scott (30) describes his quest to lose weight as a battle. A battle he must win to be considered moral. A battle in which he is willing to engage in practices, such as regurgitating food, to win even if he recognizes such practices as unhealthy.

Mark (32) also discusses how weight loss can bring both a sense of joy and a sense of stress. He illustrates this duality in his photograph in Figure 30. He describes the photograph as ethereal with the light shining down on the scale emphasizing the meaning the scale has for him. He reflects on how the “number on the scale was everything” for him and how he became obsessed with the foods he was eating and losing weight. He notes how people are “celebrated for losing weight.” The celebration for weight loss is part of the societal health and fat discourses that equate fatness with health and morality of citizens. When Mark (32) lost weight, he was celebrated because he was aligning his body with the dominant body ideals for fit and healthy men. The praise he receives for

weight loss is another form of social body surveillance. Praise produces and reproduces knowledge that thin bodies are moral bodies. By losing weight people and being praised for it, people come to understand that weight loss is a way back to morality and healthy citizenship (Trainer et al., 2017). Mark (32) notes that such praise can often boost people's confidence but if the numbers go the wrong way on the scale the confidence is replaced with guilt, shame, and frustration for many men, similar to Scott (30).



Figure 30. The scales of morality and health, Mark (32).

Health and fat discourses often position exercise as a means to lose weight and to shift bodies to align with the dominant notions of health, gender, and beauty for gay men. Many participants talked about exercise and physical activity as a means through which they create their bodies and align them with the dominant beauty ideals for gay men. Several participants took photographs that centred on exercise. They talk about exercise as a way to relieve the tensions about food and their bodies. This idea of exercise as a means to ease their tensions about their bodies and to improve their emotional health will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Exercise, however, can also influence or exacerbate tensions, often being a source of emotional and mental stress. For some participants, exercise represents the constant need to think about bodies and the desire to ensure their bodies embody the dominant notions of attractiveness, masculinities, and sexual desire for gay men. Jonathan (23) says that he has a definite image of how he wants to look as a gay man and his exercise routine is how he reaches his goals. But he often feels pressure to exercise and eat restrictively to maintain his status as a masculine gay man. Jonathan (23) represents this tension in one of his photographs. This photograph in Figure 31 shows a pair of running sneakers in a gym locker room.



Figure 31. Locker room coldness, Jonathan (23).

Jonathan (23) provides context to the photograph and reveals the meaning it has for him.

This is the locker room... it's a very ugly locker room. It's a manual locker and it just comes across as very, very cold and unpleasant. The walls are concrete and it's also physically cold. I thought the running shoes show us the pressures of exercise and staying healthy that can feel a bit imposing, unpleasant and impersonal. It's a chore (Jonathan, 23).

In Figure 31, Jonathan (23) is drawing similarities to the physically cold and unpleasant environment of the gym to the overwhelming pressure he experiences in relation to going to the gym. He sometimes feels that going to the gym is a chore, something he must do to be healthy, attractive, and desirable as a masculine gay man. Again, the Foucauldian idea of surveillance of bodies, health, and citizenship are revealed through this story. Jonathan (23) is drawing awareness to the constant pressures and surveillance he feels to go to the gym to create a body that will be deemed by society to be a healthy and fit body. These pressures create tensions and contribute to emotional and mental stress for him.

Several other participants bring attention to the health of outcomes they experience as a result of the pressure to create and maintain fit bodies as gay men. Ryan (25) when discussing the connection between his sexuality and nutritional practices states that being gay directly relates to how he feels about his body. Gay culture can contribute to added pressures to maintain a fit body and, as Ryan (25) reveals, can result in feelings of self-hatred.

It is stressful. Last night I almost didn't go to the gym because I was feeling tired, but I knew I'd just feel like shit if I didn't go. I would have this whole complex in my head about me like partially hating myself if I don't work out. So, I'll be like 'oh well if you skip one day' but skipping one day leads to one week and one week leads to a month and one month leads to a year and then soon you're not going to be muscular and attractive (Ryan, 25).

Ryan (25) feels immense pressure to maintain his physical body to the dominant standards set within gay culture and feels stress, emotional distress, and even self-hatred if he lapses in his practices of fitness. The privilege afforded to men with bodies that epitomize dominant body ideals is evident in Ryan's (25) statement. He does not want to lose that privilege and feels a constant need to always be working and exercising towards those standards. He believes that skipping one work-out will lead to other missed workouts and eventually to the end of the privilege his body affords him within the gay community. It seems that the drive to be muscular and attractive for some gay men is ceaseless.

Mark (32) also discusses the privilege of certain types of bodies within the gay community and the consequences to those men whose bodies do not embody the dominant standards of fit and muscular.

I thought that I needed to have this perfect body and I need to exercise every day to do that and I feel like, within the gay culture, and for a lot of people, that is still very prevalent You see on Grindr, people's bios and their descriptions and it's like oh you know go to the gym every day, I'm gym fit, I only want fit guys, or I only want like toned guys or muscly guys or whatever. It's like how often they exercise or how often they work out or how much time they spend at the gym is this badge of honour or this measure of their worth (Mark, 32).

The relations of power between men of differing body types drive Mark (32) to experience a deep need to have the perfect, privileged body. A body that epitomizes the cultural standards for desirable gay men. He relates the consequences of not embodying these standards, including rejection from other men within social media apps such as Grindr. Mark (32) also reveals the rewards of working out and achieving a fit and toned

body. It is a measure of self-worth, a badge of honour, but also a measure of worth within the gay community.

The results of this research suggest that relationships gay men have with each other is an important component of their overall nutritional, mental, and emotional health. Personal relationships for many gay men are also influenced by dominant body ideals. For example, Jonathan (23) discusses how the need to be fit and live up the body ideals affected his relationship with his partners and, in turn, how he feels about himself.

I've had my ex was a lot thinner than I was and he didn't, he never shamed me, more like but brought it up, but he also he told me that he only eats like 900 calories a day and he does acrobatics, works out hard, it pays off and he was such a perfectionist that all of that I felt he unintentionally just pushed that on to me. I couldn't help but feel inadequate when my partner has a fitter body than me. It's a lot of what I am trying to do now so if that ever happens again, I mean he was really fit, I probably would feel less inadequate. I'd hate if my partner felt like I was you know a lot fitter than them. But I really think unfortunately that's the nature of the gay dating scene is to get your body the same one like your partner and that's different than opposite sex couples. I imagine they don't compare themselves to their partners. So, there's a lot of pressure (Jonathan, 23).

Jonathan's (23) story reveals that social discourses of health and fat the underpin the relations of many gay men and that shape their health outcomes and the health of their relationships. As previously discussed, discourses of health and fat privilege bodies that are free of fat and label such bodies as the healthiest bodies. Gay culture also predominately privileges bodies free of fat as the most desirable to have, both in oneself and in a partner, something Jonathan (23) notes that is unique to gay men. As a consequence, many gay men experience a lot of pressure to create their bodies in the dominant image of fitness to be known as attractive and to find a partner. Several participants talked about feeling unlovable because of fatness. The social pressures of

having a fit body do not end when gay men find relationships. Jonathan (23) shares his feelings of inadequacy with his partner whom he describes as more fit. In suggesting that his partner did not intentionally bring up body ideals Jonathan (23) reveals the pervasive nature of health and fat discourses.

Health and fat discourses influence various aspects of the lives of gay men and often create situations in which gay men compare themselves. Jonathan (23) believes that when gay men compare themselves based on dominant body standards it often leads to feeling negative about their bodies and their relationships. Jonathan (23) accepts this as part nature of dating for gay men but notes that he would not want to make others feel inadequate or bad about their bodies. Ryan (25) also suggests that gay men compare themselves through social media and often become obsessed with curating a fit, healthy, attractive image that reflects the dominate image of men that permeate gay culture. Ryan (25) says that he feels “these ideals are created in our community... and makes people dislike themselves and also dislike other people.” Like Jonathan (23), Ryan (25) sees unrealistic body standards being perpetuated with gay culture, resulting in people disliking their own bodies and disliking people whose bodies do not fit within these body standards. Narrow body standards within gay culture can be viewed as limiting to men and their relationships and can drive men to pursue unrealistic body expectations through modified eating practices and exercise.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explores the way health and fat discourses shape the beliefs, values, and practices of food and bodies for gay men. Health and fat discourses position and privilege thin bodies as healthy bodies. Fat bodies, in these discourses, are viewed as a

failure to self-regulate to the norms and morality of society. Participants believe body size is a reflection of health and, for most participants, eating practices are seen as the means to create healthy bodies. Health and fat discourses often create tensions for the participants as they struggle to monitor their food and bodies. Participants often frame these tensions as a battle that can leave emotional and mental scars. Participants believe that there is increased body pressure for gay men that contributes to feelings of isolation, fears of rejection and being vulnerable, and anxieties to have and maintain the right body. The next chapter explores the way participants attempt to ease the tensions the experience and find places of healing.

Chapter 8: Finding their Way

'I could tell you of my adventures – beginning from this morning,' said Alice a little timidly: 'but it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.' (Carroll, 2014, p. 99).

Alice in Carroll's (2014) story recognizes that she is always becoming someone else and that her identity is never stable. It is her experiences that continually shape who she is as a person. Alice cannot go back to yesterday nor be the person she was previously because she is always changing, always in the process of becoming a different person. Similarly, the participants of this study are also always in the act of becoming. As explored in the previous chapters, the beliefs, values, and practices of participants are shaped by the cultural images and social discourses of health, fat, bodies within the gay community. Participants are not only shaped by cultural and social forces but also shape such forces in a mutual co-productive manner. The productive nature of bodies influencing and shaping each other has the potential to (re)shape, disrupt, and challenge the meanings of gay men's bodies and has the potential to create experiences that may help ease the tensions of bodies and food that many of the participants expressed in this study.

This chapter explores the personal journeys of the participants as they reflect on what has helped them to ease their anxieties about their bodies and their feelings of shame, isolation, and unhappiness. This chapter describes three threads of discourse that are created from the participants' photographs, interviews, and reflections. The threads of discourse explore how recognizing and challenging body ideals for gay men, connections and community support, and compassion for self and others are central components in the

journeys of the participants. The knowledge created by these three threads helps the participants find their way through their own body and food tensions and may help other gay men to do the same.

Recognizing and Challenging Body Ideals

Some of the participants believe that recognizing and challenging body ideals for gay men is a way to help overcome some of the tensions and negative health outcomes that they have experienced. As previously discussed in Chapter 6, participants described how dominant body ideals are continually being shaped and reshaped through the interactions of social media, pornography, television, and gender constructs within gay culture. In Figure 32, Ralph (57) represents his personal journey in recognizing the influence of body ideals on his experiences.



Figure 32. No more bull, artist-entitled, Ralph (57).

The photograph, which Ralph (57) entitled *No More Bull*, shows a colorful ceramic bull starkly highlighted against a white background. The meaning of the image, although it appears to be visually minimalistic, is deep and complex for Ralph (57).

It represents the space and time in my life where I came from being really an unhappy individual and never, ever feeling that I measured up to being in a good space and feeling good about myself. It's a work in progress... I don't want to deal with, to be perfectly honest, the bull shit that's surrounding the young, pretty things. ... a representation of being acceptable, an acceptance.

Ralph (57) comes to understand that he can move beyond his feelings of unhappiness that he has experienced as a consequence of rigid body standards for gay men. He has come

to believe that he can find a space to feel good about himself by recognizing these body standards are bull shit and that being young, and pretty are not the only ways of being.

The photograph epitomizes the frustration Ralph (57) has with body ideals that narrow the definitions of attractive bodies and that create experiences and feelings of not being worthy or desirable. The photograph reveals his defiance of rigid body ideals and his attempt to move beyond narrow definitions of beauty to become something more, something that is not defined by social constructs of bodies. The photograph itself is a call to gay men to end the bull shit of body ideals. The act of recognizing and challenging body ideals can for some gay men, such as for Ralph (57), be liberating and provide men with the opportunity to feel worth and happiness with themselves and with their bodies. Men whose bodies are not within the narrow standards of socially acceptable bodies can find acceptance through the process of recognizing and challenging body ideals. Ralph (57) understands that coming to a place of acceptance with one's body can often be difficult and is a continual process. This process can be viewed as an integral part of his body becoming art. The acts of recognizing and challenging body ideals are productive and create new desires and opportunities for Ralph (57). By recognizing and challenging body ideals Ralph (57) is coming to an understanding of the forces that render his body and this is giving him opportunities to view his body differently. He is experiencing and connecting with his body as a beautiful work of art.

Other participants also provide reflections on recognizing body ideals for gay men. Several participants provide examples of ways body ideals can be challenged within society. For example, Mohammed (25) discusses the importance of having diverse

representation within media. He believes that having gay characters on television that are outside the dominant fit and athletic image of gay men would help challenge body ideals and create opportunities for the celebration of the diversity of gay men. Mohammed (25) relates his experience of watching a show with a character that he believes reflects himself.

The one character that I related to is this character in this show called American Gods... a gay Muslim, the jinn, and I've never seen anyone in any other show that is labeled the way I am. I see myself in his shoes... how they portray brown men, and he was on the chubbier side. He wasn't the perfect Michelangelo statue. I cannot think of anyone else that is a character in a plot line that is not being made fun of for what they are, whether they're like overweight or they're gay.

Mohammed (25) had not previously seen anyone in television media like himself, a gay Muslim who did not have a perfect Michelangelo-type body. This act of challenging body ideals within mainstream media was important to Mohammed (25). The connection Mohammed (25) feels towards the character that represents him as a gay man is evident as he reflects on the show. Having such a character transcend the boundaries of dominant body ideals and to break away from the typical stereotypes of fat gay men can reveal new possibilities of living for other gay men. Mohammed (25) suggests that challenging body ideals within gay media would help more men feel supported in their communities.

Gender norms are intimately connected to body ideals for men. To challenge body ideals is also to challenge gender, in particular, hegemonic masculinity. Several participants note that challenging notions of hegemonic masculinity was something that helped them expand their beliefs about how masculine bodies should be, act, and appear. Jonathan (23) discusses how his interactions with friends have been changing the way he thinks about masculinities.

I think for me what I got from [conversations with friends] and something that's been like the standing message for me recently... is that people will like me no matter how masculine or non-masculine I come across... that I have no need to pretend and if people don't like it then whatever, that's not my concern (Jonathan, 23).

The conversations Jonathan (23) is having with his friends are creating new knowledge for him about the meanings of masculinities and how masculinities are expressed through bodies.

New knowledge is opening ways for him to express his masculinity in a way that he feels is less restricted by cultural norms and the surveillance of gender. He is beginning to think about more openly challenging some of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and to not worry about the way other people think of him. He is starting to resist the narrowly defined notions of hegemonic masculinity. This is a continual process for Jonathan (23) as he still believes masculine bodies should be muscular, fit, and free of fat. In Deleuzian terms (Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Fox, 2013), Jonathan (23) is in the act of becoming through his continual interactions with his friends, social institutions, and other bodies and his critical examination of masculinities. Jonathan (23) is discovering more possibilities of his masculinity and is helping him to move beyond the tensions he often feels to embody the narrow definitions of hegemonic masculinity.

As previously discussed in Chapter 5, Oliver (28) seeks to challenge gender norms, particularly gender norms relating to fashion. Oliver (28) believes that heteronormative gender binaries place limits on fashion for many men. This often frustrates Oliver (28) and creates tension for him. His frustration, as he describes, often occurs “when you go to the men’s clothing, department store and see the way everything

lines up perfectly because everything is the same shape.” In his photographs (Figure 33 and 34) Oliver (28) moves past the tensions and limitations he experiences with men’s fashion to express himself. He challenges the dominant ideals about how masculine bodies should be dressed and presented within our culture.



Figure 33. Challenging fashion, Oliver (28).



Figure 34. Challenging masculine beauty through fashion, Oliver (28).

Oliver (28) describes how he wanted the photographs in Figures 33 and 34 to be “sexy, pin-up photos” that show men’s bodies as “being something more”. Through his photographs, Oliver (28) challenges hegemonic masculinity and how men can be seen and dressed. Oliver’s (28) photographs are essential pieces of his story and are the way he contributes to the ever-changing meanings of masculinities and men’s bodies. He believes that men’s bodies can move beyond the typical masculine representations of sexuality and attractiveness and that this will allow men to feel less constrained in their gender expression and open new possibilities of living for them. Olivier’s (28) desire to “test the borders of clothing” helps him to find his own way through the tensions, frustrations, and limitations he often feels because of heteronormative and binary gender norms.

The connections between masculinities and fashion were also explored in the literature. For example, Barry (2019) notes that changes in men’s fashions, including the emergence of the slim-fit silhouettes and slender bodies, can marginalize and stigmatize men whose bodies do not conform to these changes. Clothing is a symbol and expression of masculinities and men’s fashion often follows shifts in cultural notions of masculinities.

The fashion trend towards slim-fitting clothing may expand privileges associated with beauty and attractiveness to slim bodies but at the same time limits such privileges for fat men. Clothing for fat men, if and when it is designed, is designed to conceal fat, reinforcing social values towards slim bodies and perpetuating knowledge that if a man is fat, he should hide it and feel shame (Barry, 2019; Klepp & Rysst, 2017). Barry (2019) interviewed queer and trans men who self-identified as fat or disabled and found that

these men create new understandings of masculinity by styling and wearing clothing for their bodies. Barry (2019) suggests that by creating and wearing clothes that reflect their identities and, that transgress the social norms that dictate what clothing is appropriate for their bodies, these men expand the possibilities of gender, creating what Barry (2019) refers to as fabulous masculinities. In this study, Oliver's (28) photographs, in alignment with Barry's (2019) study, suggests that reconceptualizing or reimagining the meanings of bodies and masculinities through fashion can disrupt binary gender norms and create pathways to resistance that may help many men feel better about themselves and their bodies.

Connections and Community Support

Recognizing and challenging body ideals are not the only ways participants find ways through the tensions they experience. Participants discuss the way connections with other gay men can help them move through some of their negative experiences about their bodies to feel better about themselves. Connections take different forms for the participants, including finding supportive communities and starting conversations with other men about food, body image, and the pressures they experience to live up to body standards. Several participants are changing their relationships with food and the way they think about their bodies through these connections. This section explores the intricacies of social connections among gay men and how these networks produce a path from the confines of gender constructs and body idealism.

Daniel (55) views food as an integral part of socializing. He believes that food is something that can bring people together, something that can be shared, talked about, and enjoyed with other people. Daniel (55) describes how he likes to create different foods to

share with others, from vegetarian spareribs to bread. Figure 35 illustrates his love of sharing foods and is a collage of all the various types of bread he likes to bake and give to other people. In the bottom left-side corner of the collage is an image of his cornbread that Daniel (55) touts as a real “crowd pleaser” and that “people just lose their minds” when they taste it because it “transforms in your mouth” to reveal a delicious and sweet taste.



Figure 35. Breaking bread, Daniel (55).

During his interview, Daniel (55) shares stories about gathering with other people over bread and other types of food. He believes that sharing foods is a way to build connections with other people and to strengthen communities. He talks about his work with Elderberries, a social and activist group for LGBTQ elders in Halifax and how food is something that brings them together to socialize, learn, and raise awareness of LGBTQ community issues. He says they met “once a month and we eat together and then we have some other kind of presentation. This month the presentation is all about LGBTQ leadership.” For Daniel (55) food becomes something that brings people within the LGBTQ community together to learn and work towards improving their communities. Food can play an essential role in activism by uniting people who work towards improving the lives of queer people and, in the case of Daniel (55), food brings together LGBTQ elders to communally work together to learn and improve their lives.

Sharing and connecting with other people over food is also a part of the body becoming art. Sharing food is productive in nature, allowing people to interact and intertwine in many new ways. It creates possibilities for interactions that expand discourses and unearth knowledge that shape individuals and society. This is the body becoming art, a body that is a constantly changing assemblage of interactions and connections between multiple other bodies that evokes human senses and desires. Bodies becoming art are constituted through languages, institutions, and social expectations and are never static nor complete. Sharing food is an experience that allows people to explore new desires and to become something new, something they may not otherwise become without the connections and possibilities created by sharing food. In essence, these interactions and connections over food reveal new ways of living for people. The body

becomes art. Figure 36 is an example of the body becoming art that reveals Daniel's (55) beliefs that food is means new desires, new experiences, and new connections.



Figure 36. Church pancake supper with friends, Daniel (55).

The photograph in Figure 36 shows Daniel (55) with a close friend at a pancake breakfast held by a local church. Daniel (55) believes that “food and spiritual things very often overlap... [usually] there's a foodie fellowship afterwards.” He views food as a common experience within spiritual communities and fellowships.

Food during spiritual fellowship forms connections between people, regardless of religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Fellowships with food can create knowledge and can build bridges between people who may not traditionally share life experiences. By attending religious events and fellowships over food as an openly gay man, Daniel (55) is creating his body becoming art by expanding his connections and new spiritual

experiences. He describes attending one religious event where he thought “a few hackles would be raised” due to his sexuality but found that he was warmly welcomed. “Their captain who was the minister at the Salvation Army came up, grabbed my hand, said ‘Welcome, please enjoy the service today, please join us.’” As a result, his views on this religion changed and, as he describes now, “if someone asks me, ‘Is the Salvation Army church in Halifax is homophobic?’ I would say absolutely not.” The fellowship, both over spirituality and food, is a way Daniel (55) changes his views about people and social institutions of religions.

The examination of Daniel’s (55) story provides insight into how food can bring people together to fellowship, connect, and share experiences. Companionship over food, as in the example Daniel (55) gives, can shift the way people know things. Daniel’s (55) belief that he would not be welcomed in the Salvation Army as an openly gay man was challenged and disrupted through his companionship over food. The Salvation Army has been historically homophobic and is under scrutiny for its position on same-sex rights and issues of equality. The Salvation Army encourages a life of celibacy to gay men since according to their doctrines sexual intimacy between men is forbidden (Ventimiglia, 2012). For Daniel (55), the act of sharing foods can transcend these issues and create possibilities that can shift relationships and bring people together. The act of sharing foods can shape and change the way gay men view social institutions, such as religious organizations, and the people within them. In this way, food is part of the body becoming art. Food and its sharing with others create new possibilities, new desires, and new connections.

Several participants note the act of sharing conversations and connecting with other gay men, often over food, has helped them find their way through the tensions they experience with food and their bodies. Mark (32) suggests that “if people could share their stories and talk openly and honestly about their pain and their struggles then other people would feel more confident doing it as well and people wouldn’t feel like they were alone.” Mark (32) and several other participants shared their beliefs that constructs of hegemonic masculinity prevent men from sharing the struggles and the tensions they experience as a result of body standards for gay men (Chapter 7). Mark (32) suggests in his quote above that challenging and destabilizing hegemonic masculinity constructs that keep men from sharing their nutritional concerns and emotional struggles would allow men to be more comfortable opening up about their mental health. Mark (32) relates, through one of his photographs (Figure 37), how food can be something that can facilitate the sharing of feelings and, by doing so, destabilize hegemonic masculinity constructs.



Figure 37. Sharing food, advice and comfort, Mark (32).

The photograph (Figure 37) represents the connections he experiences with other gay men and the sharing of advice, feelings, mutual understanding, and help that occurred during an evening of eating and companionship with friends.

I was visiting a friend of mine... he's an older gay man and I feel we have very similar values and beliefs, the life that he's had and the career that he's had... I hopefully aspire to in some ways. We were hanging out and

we were just like preparing food... We had great conversation, there was like great advice given, you know many laughs were had, it was a good experience of human connection over shared food. Which I think is really important, and we kind of forget. I was spending a lot of time alone and eating was this thing that I did in solitude, in like shame, and remembering that for thousands of years humans have shared food and it can be like a wonderful, communal thing (Mark, 32).

The act of sharing food with other people, and in particular other gay men, is meaningful to Mark (32). Sharing food becomes a social practice and a means by which Mark (32) can connect with other gay men.

Mark (32), through the act of sharing food, is able to openly express his feelings and explore with other gay men the pressures he feels to embody the physical perfection he believes is required of him to be known as an attractive gay man. Mark (32) and his friends, over food, offer each other advice and encouragement that helps them with their body image struggles. As they talk, Mark (32) recognizes he is not alone in his negative feelings about his body. He connects intimately with other men and finds a reprieve from his isolation and loneliness that is often a consequence of hegemonic masculinity. The connections Mark (32) creates also help him to view food in a different way. Eating, instead of being something to be ashamed of, becomes a means to connect and form relationships with other gay men. Sharing food becomes a means through which Mark (32) finds his way through some of his body tensions. Sharing food and connecting with other gay men becomes a way to resist and destabilize notions of hegemonic masculinity that often pressure men to deal with emotional issues in isolation. For Mark (32), sharing food and connecting with other gay men is a path towards healing.

Most participants believe that connecting with other gay men is a way to help relieve their tensions about their bodies. This can, as Jonathan (23) suggests, mean being

able to talk with other gay men openly and honestly about body issues. He suggests that conversations about why he feels he must constantly exercise and diet to achieve a body that displays the dominant characteristics for masculine bodies are helpful in understanding his experiences.

Talking to my friends has helped me deconstruct it a bit and be like ‘yah why, why do I do it, is it good?’ And that’s been helpful especially from other gay men who usually it’s expected that they are someone you perform [masculinity] to... but we subvert that [masculinity] by talking about it (Jonathan, 23).

Talking with friends about body image gives Jonathan (23) the chance to critically examine and deconstruct the social influences, such as binary gender norms, that affects how he feels about himself and his body. He believes it is especially helpful to have such conversations with other gay men as the act of talking and deconstructing masculinity is a means to subvert it. The subversion of hegemonic masculinity liberates Jonathan (23) from the rigid gender constraints he often experiences and that create tensions for him. Subverting gender through conversations and connections with other gay men gives him the possibility of expressing multiple genders and living in new ways.

Participants also find their way through body tensions by identifying with subcultures of men within the gay community. These subcultures are created when gay men who share experiences, interests, and often body types come together for social interactions and advocacy (Holt, 2011). For example, Ralph (57) discusses how he surrounds himself “with positive people, like-minded people” meaning he now focuses his relationships on people who support him in positive ways, as well as people that share his values and beliefs. In his self-entitled photograph, *Acceptable Bear* (Figure 38), Ralph (57) draws attention to one subculture of gay men known as the Bear community.

Bear is a term used to describe physically large men, usually with hairy bodies (Monaghan, 2005; Pyle & Klein, 2011; Quidley-Rodriguez & De Santis, 2016). Bear communities are groups of men that celebrate bodies outside the thin ideals that are dominant within gay culture. Bear-specific media, magazines, bars, and pride events promote images of large bodies and create subversive discourses through which resistance to the dominant thin body ideals is revealed. Resistance can create change in what gay bodies should be and how gay men view and think about their bodies (Beattie, 2016; Foucault, 1990; Joy & Numer, 2018a; Schirato et al., 2012).



Figure 38. An acceptable Bear, artist-entitled, Ralph (57).

Ralph's photograph in Figure 38 reveals how resistance and alternative discourses of bodies can reveal new ways of living and help gay men find ways through body tensions. Ralph (57) shows himself in a leather harness, his chest laid bare for all to see, something that he can now do because of his journey of body acceptance.

For all those years of struggling, of wanting to fit in somewhere, in my youth there were some other cultures to the gay world... but I didn't know about bears and various other things like leather and all that stuff growing up. So, as an older adult, and this is just a picture to symbolize that as an older man that's hairy and not into all the grooming and the man-scaping that takes place, it's acceptable to look like you. There's a place for you if you want to find a place. I really didn't go looking for it, it came to me and all of a sudden, I met a lot of different people and a lot of different individuals that were accepting of twenty extra pounds (Ralph, 57).

For Ralph (57), the photograph symbolizes his many years of struggling to live up to the thin and muscular body standards for gay men to find a place of comfort within his own flesh. This place of comfort was found, as he describes, through the realization that for gay men there are other ways of being, other cultures, and communities for gay men that are outside the dominant discourses of bodies and that view bodies in a different way. He discusses that gay men can find places or communities of acceptance regardless of your body and its size and hairiness. Ralph (57) speaks in particular of the Bear community. The subversion of the dominant gay body ideal that can be found in Bear communities can have positive influences on the health of gay men, as Ralph summarizes.

It's o.k. that if you're not that perfect type, thin body that you know that society projects as the perfect image, and that every, you know a lot of gay men want, there's equally as many people that would be happy with a bigger guy that loves himself and that would accept who they are and the way they look (Ralph, 57).

Ralph (57) suggests that many men love and embrace men whose bodies are not reflective of the dominant cultural images of gay men's bodies.

Daniel (55) agrees that all gay men, regardless of their bodies, have the potential to be accepted by other men and viewed as desirable and loved, describing this idea as “for every little pot there is a little lid. It means for every kind of guy there’s someone who’s hot for them... we have the bears and we have bear chasers” (Daniel, 55). Ralph (57) comes to understand this sentiment as he comes to know about various subcultures and communities, including the Bear community, that exist for gay men. In connecting and interacting with other gay men in such communities, both Ralph (57) and Daniel (55) create knowledge that not all men view bodies the same way or struggle with issues of fatness in themselves or in their relationships. As Daniel (55) says, “I spend lots of time with ‘obese’ guys and I don’t see them being neurotic. They’re not particularly good actors and I don’t see them being neurotic about their body image.” This construction of knowledge gives these participants an appreciation that not all gay men view fatness as problematic and that a variety of bodies exists that are both acceptable and desirable by other men. Knowledge that fat bodies can be desirable creates new possibilities for gay men to appreciate, accept, and come to love their own bodies, as Ralph’s (57) story reveals. “This [photograph in Figure 38] is my indication that I’m o.k. with where I’m at in my life” (Ralph, 57). Ralph (57) has come to accept his own body. Ralph (57) is not alone in improving his health through the subversion of dominant ideals of thin and muscular bodies for gay men.

Previous studies have shown that the Bear community is a means for some men to diminish the feelings of harm, isolation, and rejection caused by weight stigmatization. In an autoethnography, Santoro (2012) explores the stigmatization he experienced within the gay community as a result of his fat body and documents his journey of body

acceptance through his identification as a Bear. Participants in Manley's (2007) study also report that identifying within the Bear community often provides a sense of belonging that the participants previously did not experience in the mainstream gay community. The experience of belonging to a community that celebrates bodies can positively influence self-esteem and the way men view their bodies (Gough & Flanders, 2009; Manley et al., 2007; Santoro, 2012). Joy and Numer (2018a) suggests that communities of men, such as Bear community, open up spaces that may reveal the rigidness of dominant body ideals within gay culture. Bear culture produces new discourses about men's bodies that subvert, challenge, and destabilize dominant discourses and reveal pathways of resistance to these dominant discourses that gay men may use to find new possibilities of thinking about their bodies, new ways to find body acceptance, and new ways of living.

Compassion for Self and Others

This section explores the role of compassion in the body becoming art, in other words, the way compassion can be productive and create new possibilities for gay men to think and experience their bodies. Compassion, according to Neff (2003), is comprised of three elements. The first element is self-kindness that means being less harsh in judging oneself. The second element is mindfulness that means having a balance between painful thoughts and feelings and an awareness of not over-identifying with those painful thoughts and feelings. The final element to Neff's (2003) understanding of compassion is seeing one's experiences as shared experiences with others. It is seeing one's experiences as part of a common humanity rather than isolating or separating experiences. Studies

have shown that compassion can be beneficial to mental and emotional health, as well as the overall well-being of gay men and other individuals within LGBTQ communities (Beard et al., 2017; Bell et al., 2019; Keng & Liew, 2017). Beard et al. (2017) suggest that compassion is not only a strength that gay men may use to promote their own well-being but may also be a way to change social views and stigma on sexual orientations and gender non-conformity. Compassion may also be a way to change social views on bodies as well.

In this study, compassion is another way that participants find their way through the tensions created by the body standards set before gay men. Although the participants do not specifically use the term compassion, the way they talk about the tensions they experience as a result of the cultural construction of gay men's bodies is the language of compassion. For example, participants talk about finding ways to be less critical of themselves, Neff's (2003) first element of compassion. Participants also tried to find ways to be more forgiving and understanding about their eating practices and bodies. Oliver (28) says that "if you want something [to eat] you don't have to torture yourself and tell yourself no all the time, you should like be able to comfort yourself." Oliver (28) despite his tensions about his body views food as something that can be comforting and help to make a person feel better. Oliver (28) believes that a person should not need to torture oneself when they eat something that may be considered unhealthy. He recognizes that one must have compassion towards oneself to help ease the tensions often experienced by body standards and the surveillance of eating practices.

Other participants, on their journey to ease the tensions related to their body image, also speak about changing the way they think about food. Mark (32) illustrates this through his photograph in Figure 39.



Figure 39. Morning pie, Mark (32).

The photograph shows a homemade pie cooling on the windowsill in the morning light. Mark (32) tells the story of spending the weekend with friends and baking the pie. He believes the photograph not only looks like it belongs in a cookbook as it displays a tasty dessert in front of a beautiful garden but also reflects his changing beliefs about food.

I've attached a lot of guilt with certain foods like a pie, or like a dessert, or like a bad food, like something that I couldn't eat or that I shouldn't eat or that I would feel guilty about at one point in my life, especially when I like had started losing weight or was following really strict diets. I took this picture because it reminds me that I'm an adult and if I want to enjoy a slice of pie with coffee for my breakfast then that's something that I'm allowed to do ... I'm trying to let go of labelling foods or judging myself when I eat them. I love food and I love eating and I think that it's one of the great joys in life. I'm trying to just enjoy food and not feel ashamed or guilty about it (Mark, 32).

Figure 39 comes to symbolize Mark's (32) journey of self-compassion in regard to his eating practices. He describes his journey as one of growing awareness about the experiences of food and self. It is an awareness that he can enjoy foods, even foods like a pie that he would have once labelled as bad, without guilt. Mark (32) views the act of eating as one of the great joys of life. Mark (32), in viewing eating as joyous and by not labelling foods as either good or bad, is moving past his feelings of guilt and shame that accompanies eating "bad" foods. This is an act of self-compassion that allows him to experience new ways of viewing food and the practice of eating.

Mark (32) also speaks about changing the way he thinks about his body. He says, "it's like learning to just love and accept my body the way that it is because it's amazing and it does so many wonderful things for me and I'm just trying to feel gratitude for it." Mark (32), in this quote, reveals his journey of self-compassion to find body acceptance within himself. His personal journey is one of learning to love his body and feeling

gratitude for it no matter its size or shape. For Mark (32) compassion is about learning to let go of his struggles with his body and the idea of a perfect body. “I really struggled with this idea of perfection and I guess a good theme [for the experiences represented in all of his photographs] is that perfection doesn’t exist” (Mark, 32). Mark (32), through his journey of self-compassion, realizes that the idea of a perfect body is a construction created within culture and society and that to heal himself he must change the way he thinks about bodies. Mark (32), by being more compassionate with himself in relation to his body, is subverting the idea that he should feel shame about his body and creating new ways of experiencing his body and living his life. He is trying to move beyond his feelings of shame and worthless that stem from cultural standards for the bodies for gay men to find a place of compassion and acceptance.

Life balance is also viewed by several participants as important when discussing food and body image. Life balance can also be viewed as acts of self-compassion according to Neff’s (2003) definition. Acts of life balance are acts of mindfulness that bring forth awareness and remind participants that painful experiences and feelings about their bodies can be balanced with more joyous and less harmful thoughts and experiences. Life balance for some participants means being less obsessed with food and its restriction. Scott (30) discusses that a central idea that he was hoping that his photographs would reveal is his journey to find balance in his life. His path illustrates that he is “trying to achieve balance between nutrition and still enjoying life and not being too restrictive” (Scott, 30). Life, in the views of Scott (30), cannot be solely focused on the monitoring of food and the constant watching of what he eats but also needs to be balanced with enjoyment. Figure 40 shows Scott (30) in acts of life balance.



Figure 40. Beach, beer, and belly, Scott (30).

The photograph in Figure 40 shows Scott (30) at the beach enjoying a beer. He describes his thoughts during this moment at the beach.

I went to the beach one day after work in late September which was lovely... I was thinking about having a beer at the beach, about my bathing suit and belly... I was thinking about balance... in terms of body image, going to the beach is something that I always struggled with as a kid. I was the kid in the water that wore a t-shirt and generally did not enjoy going to the beach as a young adult, in my late teens, early 20s, so now I'm pretty o.k. with it. Still somewhat self-conscious going to a beach, taking off my shirt and being on display, not so much this evening because it was pretty quiet but then in terms of beer, it's something that you enjoy and try to keep that balance between being healthy and still enjoy things (Scott, 30).

Figure 40, *Beach, Beer, and Belly* describes the acts of balance and self-compassion that Scott (30) practices as a means to ease the tensions he experiences with his body image. He has come to believe that life cannot be all about attempting to mould his body to the dominant standards of beauty within gay culture. He recognizes that life is also about enjoyment and that sometimes to enjoy his life he needs to let go of some of the rigid ideas about men's bodies that he believes. He describes being more comfortable now as an adult in taking his shirt off at the beach and putting himself on display than he was as a teen and young adult. The comfort he now experiences at the beach, however, is still intertwined with self-consciousness with his body. As Scott (30) reveals he is still somewhat self-conscious going shirtless at the beach but believes that working towards being comfortable with his body helps him to experience more joy in his life.

Scott's (30) comfort with his body, however, is also intertwined and contingent on dominant societal discourses of health and fat, as well as the cultural meanings of fit bodies. For Scott (30) balance still means exercising to achieve a fit body so that he may enjoy life experiences at times. He explains that one side of that balance is fitness and exercise. He views exercise as a way to indulge in beer at the beach without as much guilt about not being strictly healthy or embodying a healthy identity created by the health and fat discourses as previously discussed. Scott (30) continues to relate how going to the gym helps him "a lot in terms of getting in shape, being more comfortable [with himself]" and how "exercising has been good for [his] mental health in addition to [his] physical health" (Scott, 30). It is a balance between his mental health and his physical health that Scott (30) is striving to achieve and represent in Figure 40. Scott (30) is attempting to reconcile the discourses of health and beauty for gay men with the social

discourses that promote enjoyment of life, often through foods and practices that are at odds with dominant health and fat discourses. Exercise, for Scott (30), seems to be a way he can balance these competing discourses, a way on adhering to the thin and muscular ideals for gay men while allowing him to take time to enjoy unhealthy practices, like drinking beer at the beach.

Mark (32) also talks about exercise as an act of self-compassion and integral to easing the tensions he often experiences from culturally constructed body ideals for gay men and competing discourses of food and health. Figure 41 shows Mark (32) practicing yoga which he describes as a form of exercise that helps with being mindful of his body and his overall well-being.



Figure 41. Yoga practice as self-compassion, Mark (32).

The photograph in Figure 41 reveals Mark (32) in an act of self-compassion. Mark (32) describes most exercises as “just another form of distraction... a healthier distraction.” He continues to talk about how exercise and focusing on achieving a perfect body was a distraction from the pain he often experienced.

If I spend all my time focusing on exercising or achieving the perfect body then I'm not going to think about the pain that I went through or all of the pain that I felt, and the hate that I had for my body, or the self-loathing that I had for some of my life. I feel like for a long time I was using different things to distract myself from that. But then it eventually it catches up with you and you're just forced to deal with it. And exercise was definitely one of those distractions for me in addition to food and alcohol (Mark, 32).

Mark (32) reveals how he viewed exercise as a way to distract from the pain of being gay and fat in a culture that is heteronormative and fat phobic. A culture that fostered self-hatred for his body. But he has come to recognize that distractions, whether food, alcohol, or exercise, are symptoms of his pain and self-loathing and are not helping him move beyond his pain. This realization, in and of itself, is an act of self-compassion. An act of mindfulness that brings forth awareness not only of his painful experiences but also an awareness that he must balance his pain. Mark reveals in Figure 41 that he has found yoga to be an act of balance and self-compassion.

For me, yoga is a way to exercise and move my body and strengthen it while still being kind to it. Yoga really helps me with being mindful and with my mental health and my spiritual health, not just my physical health. I do still go to the gym and lift weights sometimes and I used to do it a lot more, but it was very much like trying to reach a never-ending goal. You are constantly trying to push yourself forward and it's almost never attainable. But this photo is very much me doing physical activity that I really like, an activity that's helped me with my body image as well as my anxiety. It's helped me listen to my body and check in with my body. I was not happy with what I was doing to it [his body], cause I feel like I live inside my mind a lot and it's easy to just overthink and over analyze

everything, with yoga you just have to focus on your breath and you have to really listen to the different parts of your body that you're moving (Mark, 32)

Yoga, unlike weight-lifting and other forms of exercise, is for Mark (32), not so much about losing weight or endlessly trying to reach an ideal body but is about listening to his body, listening to the rhythms of his body and his breath. Yoga provides Mark (32) with a way to deal with the stress he experiences about not having the perfect body according to the cultural standards within gay culture. Mark (32) believes yoga is an act of mindfulness that helps with his anxiety, mental health, and spiritual health. It is a way for Mark (32) to move beyond his focus on achieving perfect bodies to a focus of self-compassion and healing. Compassion that balances his painful thoughts and feelings with his growing awareness of not over-identifying with his painful experiences.

Several participants, in their interviews, also address Neff's (2003) third component of compassion, seeing experiences as shared experiences with others. Both Scott (30) and Mark (32) share stories of coming to see and understand negative body image as something that many gay men experience. They reveal that they had conversations with other gay men. Gay men whom they believed had no reasons to be concerned about body image as they embodied the dominant standards of attractiveness for gay men.

People don't see that other people are facing the same issues all the time. Like I didn't see it, talking to somebody who I would perceive as being in great shape. They're skinny and I'm like 'oh you're fine' because I've been on the other side for so long that you don't really consider that somebody would have body image issues from being too skinny. Which I know it's there but it's still like hard for me to comprehend it because I've been the opposite and would be like, 'oh I'll trade you' (Scott, 30).

Scott (30), through his experiences and connections with other gay men, comes to understand that many people are facing the pressures to embody cultural definitions of beauty even if they are viewed as skinny, a defining feature of attractive bodies for gay men.

Scott (30) still struggles with comprehending the pressures “skinny” men experience because of his desire to embody such physical attributes, but his growing awareness of the commonality of body image concerns among gay men is an act of compassion to himself and to others. He is beginning to see and understand the shared experiences he has with other men. Mark (32) shares a similar story about cultivating compassion through the realization of shared experiences, telling a story about his friend.

I have definitely been guilty of judging people unfairly and within the gay community, but I remember specifically a really good friend of mine... when I first met him, he just seemed perfect, tall, naturally athletic, naturally in shape, stereotypically attractive white gay man... he just seemed to have all of the confidence in the world and I remember feeling insanely jealous of him... and thinking ‘wow you have never had a hard day in your life’... which was not true... He has also struggled, he hasn’t been overweight or struggled with the same weight loss that I had but he has definitely struggled with body image issues... we had this heartfelt conversation where he opened up about his struggle with body image as well. I think it’s something that everybody thinks about even somebody like him (Mark, 32).

Mark (32), similar to Scott (30), assumes that men who are viewed as perfect, naturally athletic, and naturally in shape are confident in their bodies and do not struggle with body issues. It is only after connecting and sharing with another man whom Mark (32) sees as embodying all these characteristics that he comes to realize that this was not the truth for this “perfect” looking man. Both men opened up to each other and realized that although their bodies are different and their personal history with fatness are different, they share the same struggles and tensions to look a certain way. Mark (32), through his

conversations with this other man, is able to understand more fully their shared experiences. Mark (32) moves away from his feelings of jealousy towards this “perfect” man to feelings of compassion for the body struggles they share. This is an act of compassion aligned with Neff’s (2003) third component of compassion.

Chapter Summary

The participants of this study find many ways to deal with the body tension they experience as gay men. They find their way through feelings of shame, isolation, and unhappiness by recognizing and challenging body ideals for gay men, by creating and expanding connections with other men, and through acts of compassion. Participants on their journeys to move beyond the tensions they experience come to understand and recognize how culture shapes their beliefs, values, and practices and in the process attempt to disrupt the culturally constructed body ideals that they view as restrictive and limiting to the definitions of attractive and desirable bodies. Participants call to end the bull shit of these cultural standards through diverse representation in the media and by challenging gender norms. They seek other men to speak with and to connect with disrupting the practices of hegemonic masculinity that limit the expression of their feelings and their potential connections with other men.

Participants seek and find comfort in connecting with other gay men in meaningful ways. Participants, through their connections, change their beliefs and values about food and bodies. Through their supportive relationships, participants create new knowledge and understanding of their experiences and the experiences of other men. They become compassionate to themselves and others. They become less harsh with

themselves and attempt to find balance in their lives between the cultural standards of bodies and the enjoyment of life. Some participants come to recognize that perfection in bodies does not exist and see that moving away from the desire to be perfect improves their overall health and well-being.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit hole – and yet- it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! (Carroll, 2014, p. 38).

This dissertation explores the ways mainstream gay culture, social constructions of gender, and body ideals come together, intertwine, and shape the beliefs, values, and practices for gay men regarding food and their bodies, as well as their resulting health outcomes. This exploration provides critical insights into the way gay men navigate the tensions to their health and well-being from competing discourses of health, fat, and beauty within society. The research stems from my own tensions as a gay man with my own body and eating practices. The research is a personal exploration, a way to understand how my experiences as a gay man have come to shape my own body and my own values, beliefs, and practices towards it. This dissertation is also political as it attempts to challenge, subvert, and reveal ways to resist the dominant discourses of bodies for gay men as a means to improve their health and well-being. Art has become the means through which this dissertation explores and deconstructs the personal experiences of participants and the means through which political disruptions occur.

The research is grounded not only in art but also in the philosophical traditions of several theoretical perspectives, including poststructuralism and queer theory. These perspectives worked congruently to create a framework for the research that allowed for the exploration of discourses, knowledges, and relations of power that influence and shape the nutritional health, bodies, and the lives of gay men. The congruent philosophies also provide the foundation for the political underpinnings of the research that was expressed through the art of the project. The photographic art show developed in

connection with the participants was a critical component of the framework and gave the participants a means to bring the issues that many gay men face in relation to nutrition and their bodies to the broader community. Participants, during the art show, discussed their experiences and reveal themselves and their lives through their photographs and the discussions that were stimulated from their photographs. The art show was political in that it brought to light the struggles that many of the participants deal with regarding their bodies. The art show also created conversations about the values, beliefs, and practices of the bodies of gay men more broadly. These conversations are a step towards change because often such conversations about men's bodies do not occur in public discourses. The art show was an act of resistance against the dominant discourses that create idealized and standards of beauty and attractiveness for gay men.

The research design, questions, and methods were aligned with the philosophical traditions of poststructuralism, queer theory, and photovoice. Nine gay men living in Halifax, Nova Scotia were recruited to participate in the research. The primary research question for this study asked how does gay culture shape participants' beliefs, values, and practices about food, their bodies, and their health. Following ethical guidelines, participants explored this question through the processes of the photovoice methods that included an introductory workshop, a two- to three-week period of photographing their thoughts and experiences on the research question, and individual semi-structured interviews. The photographs and the interview transcripts became the data of the research. Discourse analysis was utilized to trace the most prominent threads of discourses within the data.

Review of Findings

Chapters Six presented the idea that gay men's bodies can be conceptualized as bodies becoming art. This concept draws on the work of Deleuze & Guattari (1988) that view the body as a constantly changing assemblage of interactions and connections. Bodies interact with multiple other bodies to evoke human senses and desires, always changing, never static. The dissertation draws similarities between Deleuze & Guattari's becoming body and the threads of discourse that were drawn from the participants' data. I extend the idea of becoming bodies to bodies becoming art to highlight the participants' view of their bodies as works of art that are created through their beliefs, values, and practices with the purpose to create desire and to create possibilities. Participants saw their bodies as sculptures, works of art to be crafted and shaped, to reflect the dominant standards of attractiveness and desire within gay culture. The chapter explored how the bodies becoming art are constituted through the language, cultural, and social expectations within gay culture, including social media, television and pornography, and notions of masculinities. The gay cultural and social influences the participants discuss are constantly changing, creating new knowledge and new desires relating to men's bodies. The influences discussed in Chapter six were not the only social discourses that shaped the body becoming art.

Chapter Seven detailed how societal discourses of health and fat discourses shaped the experiences of the participants, especially in relation to their health and well-being. This chapter explores the way health and fat discourses shape the beliefs, values, and practices of food and bodies for gay men. The findings of this research suggest that health and fat discourses position and privilege thin bodies as healthy bodies for many

gay men. Most participants viewed their eating and exercise practices as a means to create bodies that were reflective of the dominant body standards for gay men but often experienced tensions as they struggled to monitor their food and bodies. Participants framed these tensions in terms of negative emotional and mental health consequences. Participants believed body pressures for gay men contribute to feelings of isolation, fears of rejection, and anxieties to have and maintain the right type of body.

The participants of this study find ways to deal with the body tension they experience as gay men, as reviewed in Chapter Eight. Participants on their journeys to move beyond the tensions they experience come to recognize and challenge culturally constructed body ideals that create their tensions. Participants also find comfort in connecting with other gay men in meaningful ways. Participants change their beliefs and values about food and bodies through their connections with others. Compassion is another way that some participants ease their body tensions. They become compassionate to themselves and others by finding balance in their lives between the cultural standards of bodies and the enjoyment of life. Many participants come to recognize that perfection in bodies does not exist and see that moving away from the desire to be perfect improves their overall health and well-being.

Alice's Adventure Continues

This project has been a looking glass for me. I see my reflection within it. I am still Alice. An Alice that has changed from the beginning of this thesis. An Alice that has co-produced knowledge with my participants. An Alice that is still existing within, and producing, a system that continually shapes the bodies of gay men. The system can be

metaphorically viewed as a wonderland in which bodies continually interact to create new ways of being. I reflect on my own journey as I write these final words of this dissertation. I have listened to the stories of my participants and found myself connected with them. I have come to realize that I share many of the experiences they talked about and captured in their photographs. I was moved and touched by photographs. I hear their words reach out to me as I struggle with my comfort within my body. I find it reassuring to hear that I am not alone. That the things I have experienced are shared with others. I also take reassurance from them that compassion to myself and to others can be a part of my own journey. I may not be totally satisfied with my body but now I know some of the whys of my experiences. I believe this dissertation, in the language of Freire, increased my critical consciousness to be more aware of some of the assumptions that shape my experiences. I know my journey is not over and there is still more to learn and co-create with others. I recognize that my own body is a body becoming art and it is constantly shifting and interacting with others. In this way I will continuously be open to new possibilities.

I also find myself reflecting on the value of this research to others. As reviewed in Chapter 5, the participants all seemed to enjoy and see value of the photovoice process. It allowed the participants to critically explore the influences of gay culture on their health and body image. Many of these influences were elegantly captured in the photographs of the participants. The art show was a vehicle for the participants to engage with other people both within and outside of the gay community. It gave the participants the opportunity to add their stories to the discourses of gay men's bodies and health. Discourses they felt were often silent in their communities. The art showed them as they

were. Their photographs revealed and challenged many of the dominant discourses they discussed in their interviews.

Visitors to the art show commented that the show sparked conversations and allowed them to see and understand the experiences of the participants. In this way, I believe the dissertation is political. It begins conversations that many participants feel are not encouraged within culture; gay, straight, or otherwise. Art can bring people together to discuss, critique, and subvert norms within society. Our art show was one such political act, creating possibilities for new connections and ideas to be shared. In this way, the intent of the art show, as well as the goals of the project, were fulfilled.

This dissertation creates knowledge about the experiences of gay men that is also valuable to the dietetic profession. Sexuality and gender are determinants of health but are not widely recognized within current Canadian dietetic competencies (Joy & Numer, 2018b). Research into these topics within the dietetic profession is recommended. I, like other researchers using similar methodologies (Aston, 2016; Numer, 2014; Perron & Holmes, 2011), recognize that the knowledge created through this dissertation is contextualized. The stories shared are just a few of the myriad stories of gay men. That is not to say that this research cannot influence and shape dietetic practice. The process of critically exploring gender and body norms through the methodologies of this research can only enhance dietetic profession. The methodologies can bring awareness to how discourses merge and (re)create our knowledge about food, bodies, and health. With such knowledge dietitians can practice in a more informed way. This can help bring about a more holistic way to practice dietetics. A practice that is inclusive and compassionate.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

Email Invitation

Good day,

As part of my research as a PhD candidate at Dalhousie University, I am seeking participants for a photovoice project examining eating practice, body image and health of gay men. I am hoping that you would be willing to circulate this call for participants through your networks?

This purpose of the study is to explore how gay culture shapes the nutritional beliefs, values, and practices and body image of gay men.

Eligibility for the study would require that study participants self-identify as a gay man, live in Nova Scotia, are able to speak and understand English, and are comfortable talking about their sexuality and body image.

Participants will attend an introductory workshop, be asked to take photos on the topic, and to discuss these photos in individual interviews. We will also plan a community art show in which some of the photos can be displayed. If you are interested in participating or want more information, please contact me at pjoy@dal.ca

I have provided the link to the project's Facebook page where you can find out more about the study. I have also attached the recruitment poster if you would like to put that up in your organization.

This project is funded by CIHR pre-doctoral award and has been approved by Dalhousie University Ethics Board.

I can be contacted at 902-789-6300 or through email at pjoy@dal.ca

Thank you,
Phillip Joy

Facebook Recruitment Page

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for 'Gay Men's Nutrition and Body Project' (@gaymensphotovoice). The page is categorized as 'Scientist' and has a profile picture placeholder. The 'About' section is expanded, showing the page's name, username, and contact information. The 'CONTACT INFO' section includes a phone number placeholder, the page's handle (@gaymensphotovoice), an email address (pjoy@dal.ca), and a website placeholder. The 'MORE INFO' section includes an 'About' section with a brief description: 'A photovoice project exploring gay men's nutrition and bodies'. The 'Our Story' section is also visible, with a prompt to 'Tell people about your business'. The 'TEAM MEMBERS' section is empty, with a prompt to 'Add yourself as a team member'. The page has a 'Send Message' button and a 'Chat' button in the bottom right corner.

Facebook Recruitment Message (to be used on this page and other LGBTQ Facebook pages)

Would you like to explore gay men's nutrition and body image using photography? I am seeking gay men to participate in a photovoice study. This purpose of the study is to explore how gay culture shapes the nutritional beliefs, values, and practices and body image of gay men.

Eligibility for the study would require that study participants self-identify as a gay man, live in Nova Scotia, are able to speak and understand English, and are comfortable talking about their sexuality and body image.

You will participate in an introductory workshop, asked to take photos on the topic, and to discuss these photos in individual interviews. We will also plan a community art show in which some of your photos can be displayed. This project is approved by Dalhousie University Ethics Board. If you are interested in participating or want more information, please contact me at pjoy@dal.ca



Would you like to Explore Gay Men's Nutrition and Body Image using Photography?



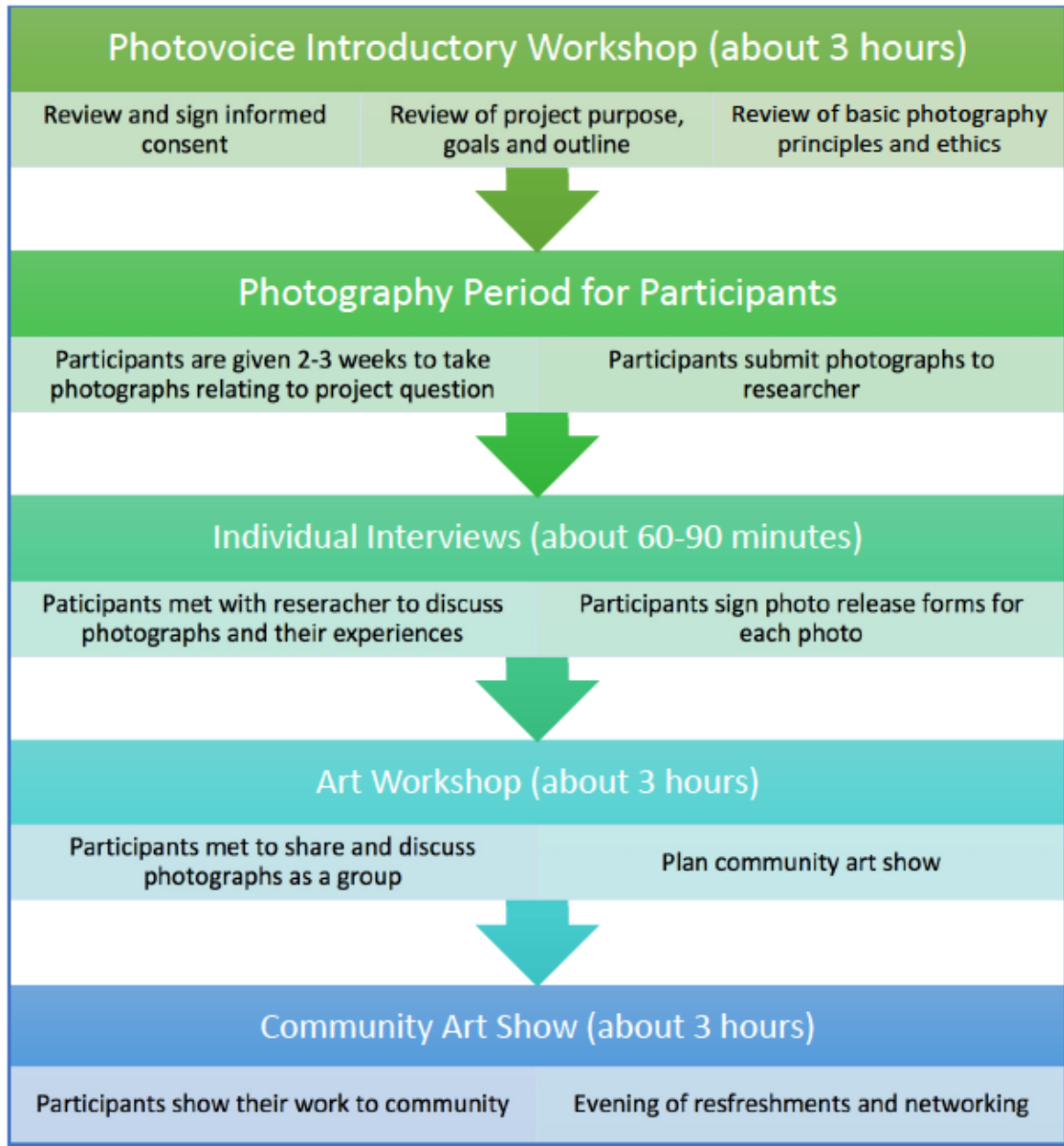
Do you self-identity as a gay man?
Are you comfortable talking about body image and your sexuality?

If you answered yes, you are invited to take part this research study
To participate, or just learn more, please contact:
Phillip Joy - pjoy@dal.ca

This research study has been approved by Dalhousie University Ethics Board (# 2018-4506)
Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Photovoice Project: Phillip joy pjoy@dal.ca or 902-789-6300
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Appendix B: Project Outline and Timeline



Appendix C: Informed Consent Documents



CONSENT FORM FOR PHOTOVOICE PARTICIPANTS

Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

Who is conducting this study?

Researcher: Phillip Joy, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-789-6300; pjoy@dal.ca

Supervisors:

Dr. Matthew Numer, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-494-1153; matthew.numer@dal.ca

Dr. Sara Kirk, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, (902) 494-8440; sara.kirk@dal.ca

Who is funding this project?

This study is funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is the Government of Canada's health research investment agency. CIHR was created in 2000 under the authority of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Act. It is an independent agency and is accountable to Parliament through the Minister of Health. Their mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to enable its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health care system. The aim of Doctoral Award is to provide recognition and funding to students early in their academic research career, giving them with an opportunity to gain research experience. The project was approved by the Dalhousie Ethics Board.

Introduction

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by me, Phillip Joy, a student at Dalhousie University as part of my PhD in Health program. Choosing whether or not to take part in this research is entirely your choice. There will be no impact on you if you decide not to participate in the research. The information below tells you about what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do and about any benefit, risk, inconvenience or discomfort that you might experience.

You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me, Phillip. Please ask as many questions as you like. If you have questions later, please contact me or my supervisors at contact information provided above.

Why are we doing the study?

This purpose of the study is to explore the beliefs, values, and practices of gay men on their nutritional practices and body image. The study will also explore your view on how gay culture and social factors shapes your notions of health.

Who can take part in the study?

You may participate in this study if you identify as a gay man and over 18 years of age. Eligibility for the study would require that study participants self-identify as a gay man, live in Nova Scotia, are able to speak and understand English, and are comfortable talking about their sexuality and body image.

What will you be asked to do??

You will be asked to participate in a photovoice project that will consist of several components. You will first be asked to attend an introductory workshop on the project and on basic photography principles (approximately 3 hours). Next, you will be asked to take photographs over a span of a three weeks about your experiences and, any tensions you may feel, with food, eating, your body image, and your health in context to their life as gay men. Specifically, you will be asked to highlight in your photographs the influences within gay culture that constitute your eating practices and your body image.

After you have taken the photographs, you will be asked to discuss them individually during interviews with the researcher (approximately 60-90minutes). Finally, you will be asked to participate in a workshop to design and coordinate a community art show of the project's photographs and selected quotes. You will be asked if you want to provide any additional text to be displayed with the photographs. This text may be used in other publications relating to this project. Observations and notes will be taken by the researcher during this time and may provide additional data that informs the results of this project.

The project will end with the community art show. Workshops and interviews will be audio-recorded for data analysis and will take place on the Dalhousie campus. Refer to attached document entitled, 'Photovoice Outline and Timeline' for more details.

The Nature of Photography

The photographs you take during this project will be shared in many ways, including a community art show, various academic and non-academic publications, art books, and in public conferences or exhibitions. Your name (if you choose) will be changed in all reports and public forms resulting from this project but due to the photographic nature of the project your identity might become known to others. Please be aware of this if you decide to take selfies or photographs of yourself that show face or other body parts. You are under no obligation to take photographs that show your face or your body. We ask you to limit photographs of others unless they provide written consent and fill out the attached form entitled 'Photo Release'. Participants should be aware that in this digital age, with on-line gallery and exhibitions, images may be copied and used outside of the scope of this study. All electronic records will be kept secure in an encrypted folder on the researcher's password-protected computer.

Are there any benefits or risks in participating?

Benefits: You may feel a sense of accomplishment from participating in this project. Participating in the study might not benefit you directly, but we might learn things that will benefit others.

Risks: This research is photo-based and as such there are some risks associated with participating. Photographs portray people, places and life events and, as such, visual research often does not allow for strict anonymity or confidentiality. Photographs may capture faces, bodies, and other recognizable details. This may be a concern for many gay men. Participating within this project, however, does not mean you have to take photos that may identify yourself. Your photos may include a variety of things. You may participate in ways that reveal nothing about yourself or you may participate in ways that reveal the totality of your life. The choice is yours.

It is possible that disclosing sharing your experiences regarding your sexual identity, nutritional and body practices, and body image, may induce emotional discomfort. We will provide you with resources and supports if this happens to you (See attached page).

How will my information be protected?

Photovoice is about telling your stories. You may choose to use your real name, or you may choose to use a fake name. The name you choose to use will be used in all publications, reports, and art shows. You can indicate your chosen name below on the signature page.

Information that you provide to us will be kept private to the best of our abilities. All your identifying information and consent forms will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at Dalhousie University. Only the research team at Dalhousie University will have access to your original information. The people who work with us (i.e. the transcriptionist) have an obligation to keep all research information private. We will describe and share our research in public presentations, journal articles, community reports, and community art shows but will use your chosen name in these documents. All electronic records will be kept secure in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer. The audio files of the interviews will be encrypted at all times and transferred to transcriptionist via the Dalhousie FileExchange system. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be destroyed 5 years after completion of the project.

What Will Happen to my Photographs?

All photographs (digital and printed copies) submitted by participants will be kept indefinitely by the researcher for future art shows and other knowledge translation avenues. In the **Release of Creative Materials** consent form you may specify how your photographs may be used in the future. You will be contacted by the email provided on the signature page if any additional art shows or publications are done.

Participants may also keep a copy of their own photographs and use as they like. Participants are asked to reference the project if they show their own photographs outside of the research project.

Compensation / Reimbursement

To thank you for your time, if needed you can request bus tickets for your travel to Dalhousie University for all workshops and interviews and we will provide them to you. Flash drives will be provided so you can download your photographs onto these drives and give to the researcher at the time of the interview. If needed, a digital camera may be loaned to you for a two-week period, so you may take photographs. A small honorarium will be given to all participants. This honorarium will be \$10 for each part of the project. The \$10 honorarium will be paid for each component of the project. If you withdraw your participation during a given component, you will still be compensated for that component. All photo printing and art show costs will be covered by the project.

What if I decide to stop participating?

Your participation is voluntary, and you can leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating at any point in the study, we ask that you connect us at pjoy@dal.ca. At this time, you can decide whether you want the information that you have contributed up to that point to be removed or if you will allow us to use that information.

After your interview is transcribed you will be asked to review it to ensure the correctness of it. You will be given 2 weeks to review. This will also be your last opportunity to have any of your data removed from the project. Please be aware that once your work has been released to audiences or published as part of the study, it will become impossible for us to remove.

How do I obtain the results?

We will provide you with a short description of group results when the study is finished. No individual results will be provided. You can obtain these results by providing your email on the signature page.

What if I have questions or concerns?

We are happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have about your participation in this research study. Please contact Phillip Joy at 902-789-6300 or pjoy@dal.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Matthew Numer at 902-494-1153 or at matthew.numer@dal.ca at any time with questions, comments, or concerns about the research study (if you are calling long distance, please call collect). We will also tell you if any new information comes up that could affect your decision to participate.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may also contact Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email: ethics@dal.ca (and reference REB file # 2018-4506).

Signature Page

Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men’s Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

Researcher: Phillip Joy, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-789-6300; pjoy@dal.ca

Supervisors:

Dr. Matthew Numer, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-494-1153; matthew.numer@dal.ca

Dr. Sara Kirk, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, (902) 494-8440; sara.kirk@dal.ca

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I have been asked to take part in several components of a photovoice project including workshops and interviews that will occur at Dalhousie University and that these workshops and interviews will be recorded and analyzed. I understand direct quotes may be used. I understand that if I take photos of myself that I may be identifiable to others. My participation is voluntary, and I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time during the photovoice process.

How Will I Be Identified?

I want to be identified as the creator of these materials by my first name in any project reports, publications, website and exhibitions.

I want to be identified by the following fake name in any project reports, publications, website and exhibitions: _____

By signing below, I am agreeing to take part in this study:

Participant’s Name (Printed): _____

Participant’s
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher’s Name (Printed): _____

Researcher’s
Signature: _____ Date: _____

I wish to receive a copy of an aggregate summary of study results (no individual results will be available) or be notified of any further art shows that include my work:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Resources and Supports for Participants



Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

The following is a list of resources and supports available in the Halifax region for you to contact if you feel you need help or want to talk with someone:

Pride Health

Tel: 902-473-1433
prideHealth@cdha.nshealth.ca

Eating Disorders Nova Scotia

Email: info@eatingdisordersns.ca
Phone: 902-229-8436
63 King Street
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia
Canada B2Y 2R7

National Eating Disorders

Information Centre HelpLine
1-866-633-4220

Nova Scotia Mental Health Mobile Crisis

1-888-429-8167

AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia

5516 Spring Garden Road, Suite 200, Halifax NS B3J 1G6
902.425.4882 or 902.429.7922, toll-free 800.566.243

Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project

E-mail: nsrap@nsrap.ca
Telephone: 902-237-3055
Mailing address: 5675 Spring Garden Rd, P.O. Box 36082, Halifax, NS B3J 3S9
Twitter: <http://twitter.com/nsrap>
Facebook: <http://facebook.com/nsrap>
Web site: <http://nsrap.ca>

Consent for Direct Quotations

Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

I, _____ (print name), hereby confirm that I give permission for direct quotations to be used from my interview conducted as part of this research study, *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*.

Initial the following statements:

I understand that the name I have indicated on the consent form will be the name associated with my interview quotes.

Initial: _____

I understand that the quotes from my interview may be used in publications, art shows, for teaching purposes, conferences, community workshops, and other educational and gay community events

Initial: _____

I understand that any additional text I include in the art gallery workshop may be used in other publications, art shows, for teaching purposes, conferences, community workshops, and other educational and gay community events

Initial: _____

Non-Research Subject Consent Form



Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

Researcher: Phillip Joy, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-789-6300; pjoy@dal.ca

Supervisors:

Dr. Matthew Numer, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-494-1153; matthew.numer@dal.ca

Dr. Sara Kirk, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, (902) 494-8440; sara.kirk@dal.ca

Who Is Funding This Project?

This study is funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is the Government of Canada's health research investment agency. CIHR was created in 2000 under the authority of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Act. It is an independent agency and is accountable to Parliament through the Minister of Health. Their mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to enable its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health care system. The aim of Doctoral Award is to provide recognition and funding to students early in their academic research career, giving them with an opportunity to gain research experience. The project was approved by the Dalhousie Ethics Board.

Introduction

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by me, Phillip Joy, a student at Dalhousie University as part of my PhD in Health program. Choosing whether or not to take part in this research is entirely your choice. There will be no impact on you if you decide not to participate in the research. The information below tells you about what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do and about any benefit, risk, inconvenience or discomfort that you might experience.

You should discuss any questions you have about this study with me, Phillip. Please ask as many questions as you like. If you have questions later, please contact me or my supervisors at contact information provided above.

Why Are We Doing The Study?

This purpose of the study is to explore the beliefs, values, and practices of gay men on their nutritional practices and body image. The study will also explore your view on how gay culture and social factors shapes your notions of health.

What Will You Be Asked To Do??

A participant in this project may ask you to be included in a photograph. You may decide to be included in their photograph, but you may also decline. The participant will discuss their photograph with the research and why they have taken the photograph. Your connection to the photography may be discussed. The photograph may be used in a community art show or other publications.

The Nature of Photography

The photographs in this project will be shared in many ways, including a community art show, various academic and non-academic publications, art books, and in public conferences or exhibitions. Your name will not be used in any reports and public forms resulting from this project but due to the photographic nature of the project your identity might become known to others. Please be aware of this if you decide to take part as a non-research participant. You are under no obligation to take photographs that show your face or your body. You should be aware that in this digital age, with on-line gallery and exhibitions, images may be copied and used outside of the scope of this study. All electronic records will be kept secure in an encrypted folder on the researcher's password-protected computer.

What Will Happen To The Photographs?

All photographs (digital and printed copies) submitted by participants will be kept indefinitely by the researcher for future art shows and other knowledge translation avenues.

Participants may also keep a copy of their own photographs and use as they like. Participants are asked to reference the project if they show their own photographs outside of the research project.

Are There Any Benefits Or Risks In Participating?

Benefits: You may feel a sense of accomplishment from participating in this project. Participating in the study might not benefit you directly, but we might learn things that will benefit others.

Risks: This research is photo-based and as such there are some risks associated with participating. Photographs portray people, places and life events and, as such, visual research often does not allow for strict anonymity or confidentiality. Photographs may capture faces, bodies, and other recognizable details. This may be a concern for you. Participating within this project, however, that photos need to identify you. The photos may include a variety of things. You may participate in ways that reveal nothing about yourself or you may participate in ways that reveal the totality of your life. The choice is yours.

If I have questions or concerns I know I can contact Phillip Joy at 902-789-6300 or pjoy@dal.ca or Dr. Matthew Numer at 902-494-1153 or at matthew.numer@dal.ca at any time with questions, comments, or concerns about the research study (if you are calling long distance, please call collect)

Non-Research Subject Signature Page

I, _____ (print name), give permission for
_____ (print name), who is participating in the
*Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body
Image* project, to take my photograph.

By signing my name below, I understand and agree that the Project Researchers have permission to use my photographs for project related reports, exhibits, on-line galleries, publications, and presentations that are likely to result from this project. I understand that researchers, policy makers, students, and possibly people from my community may see my photo and recognize me. I also understand that once published, in these various forms, the photographs cannot be retracted.

Non-Research Subject's Name (Printed): _____

Non-Research Subject's
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name (Printed): _____

Researcher's
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Release of Creative Materials: Photographic Images and Captions



Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

Researcher: Phillip Joy, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-789-6300; pjoy@dal.ca

Supervisors:

Dr. Matthew Numer, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, 902-494-1153; matthew.numer@dal.ca

Dr. Sara Kirk, School of Health and Human Performance, Dalhousie University, PO BOX 15000, 6230 South St. Halifax, NS B3H 4R2, (902) 494-8440; sara.kirk@dal.ca

Funding provided by: Canadian Institutes of Health Research: Doctoral Award

Where can my photographs be used?

In addition to being used for the purposes of the research study, I also give permission for my photographs and captions to be used in (Please check all that applies):

- Published academic papers on this topic (books and journal articles).
- Non-academic publications and books
- National and international conferences
- National and international photography exhibits
- Public presentations on this topic (talks, online and in person exhibits, conferences).
- Content for the project's webpage
- Content for the project's facebook page
- Content for teaching purposes
- Promotional materials for the project (brochures, posters, press releases, media articles, blog posts).

OR

DO NOT use my photographs publically for anything other than the research study (i.e., share them only with members of the research team).

Can I exclude some of my photos?

Once you have finished taking photographs, you can decide to exclude some or all of your photos from being used beyond the research study. This means they will only be seen by the research team and will not be shared publically in any other way.

For example, you can write “Don’t use any photographs that show my face.” You can change your mind about this until 2 weeks after the interview transcript review. After this time, it will not be possible to change this.

I give the research team permission to use all of the photos I have produced except for:

Photo number or identifier	Special instructions

Consent and signature (Release)

I give my permission for the use of my photographs and captions as described above. I have been given an opportunity to review all pictures I have taken.

I give my permission to use any additional text I include from the art gallery workshop to be used in other publications, art shows, for teaching purposes, conferences, community workshops, and other educational and gay community events

I also acknowledge, that once published on-line or in publications, the photographs/quotes cannot be removed from these resources and publications. If the photographs contain my image than I acknowledge that people may recognize me.

Participant’s Name (Printed): _____

Participant’s
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher’s Name (Printed): _____

Researcher’s
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: PHOTO Caption Worksheet

Photographer: _____

Please check box if you completed the 'Subject Consent Form' when photographing someone else

P	Describe your <u>picture and</u> give it a photo ID number
H	What is <u>happening</u> your picture?
O	Why did you take a picture <u>of</u> this?
T	What does this picture <u>tell</u> us about your life and your community?
O	How can this picture provide <u>opportunities</u> for creating change?

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Guide with Questions and Prompts

Introduction:

- Explain the study purpose, consent and reminder of digital recording.
- Offer to answer any questions (repeat this offer at the end of the interview as well).
- Reaffirm that it is a safe space and there are no right or wrong answers.
- Get Release of Creative Materials Form Signed

Interview Questions

Questions about the participant (demographics)

- Tell me a little bit about yourself – e.g., where you grew up, went to school, your career history, age, marital status
- What prompted you to participate in this study?
- Probe: What did you hope the outcome would be?
- Tell me about your family and cultural background.
- Probe: role/impact of mother, father, siblings, children and other close relatives
- How do you describe your sexuality?

Questions about taking the photos

- How did you find the experience of taking pictures?
- Did any photos not turn out the way you wanted them to? How so?
- What were you hoping would come across to the viewer in your photographs?
- What was the most influential inspiration for your photographs?
- Are there any photographs from the set that you feel best represent this experience?
- Probe: Tell me what this picture is about; what was the inspiration for this image; tell me more about why you decided to take this picture?
- Probe: What does X symbolize in this particular photograph?

Relating to Sub-questions 1 and 3: How does gay culture shape their values about food in relation their bodies and their health? How are the dietary and body practices of the participants shaped by the language and images found within gay culture?

- Tell me about your experiences with food and nutrition (general)
- Describe what eating means to you.
- Describe your nutritional practices.
 - Probe: Describe what you consider when sitting down for a meal or preparing foods.
- What do you see as the relationship or connection between your sexuality and what you eat or your nutritional practices?

- Probe: What are some of the messages you hear, as a gay man, in relation to eating practices and nutrition?
- Probe: As a gay man do you see any contradictory messages about food and bodies?
- Probe: If so, how do you resolve these messages?
- Describe some experiences within gay culture that you have had that influences the way you eat? Think about food? Talk about food?
- Are there any images or other gay cultural influences that effect the way you eat?
 - Probe: Are eating practices talked about by gay men or in the gay men's community?

Relating to Sub-questions 2 and 4: How do participants talk about the bodies of gay men in relation to masculinity and the cultural ideals of men's bodies? In what ways do the discourses of food and bodies within gay culture constitute the study's participants experiences.

- Describe what you think of when I say body image?
- What do you see as the relationship or connection between your sexuality and your body image?
 - Probe: How does the media images of gay men influence your thoughts on your body?
 - Probe: How does your involvement in the gay community influence your thoughts on your body?
 - Probe: What are some of the messages you hear, as a gay man, in relation to body image?
- Research studies report that gay men are more likely to have body image concerns and eating disorders. Why might that be?
- Describe some experiences within gay culture that you have had that influences the way you feel about your body?
 - Probe: Is body image talked about by gay men or in the gay men's community?

Final Questions

- What aspects of your experience were difficult to capture through photos?
- Did you have any ideas for images that you could not take? What were these ideas?
- Would you like share is there anything else about these issues or the photographs that you took that I have not yet asked you about?

Appendix F: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Project Title: *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*

You have been hired to transcribe interviews for Phillip Joy, PhD (c) and researcher for the photovoice project at Dalhousie University entitled, *Through the Looking Glass: A Gay Men's Photovoice Project on Nutrition and Body Image*. Given the ethical guidelines of this study, please read and sign the form below, signifying that you are willing to enter into a confidentiality agreement with respect to the data collected in this study.

The audio-recordings may contain personally identifying information about the participant, such as the names participants. You are to remove all identifiers in the transcript in order to protect the confidentiality of the participant. In addition, you will be required to remove all identifying information such as place names, or names of friends, and to provide an appropriate designation. For example, if a specific rural town is named, you would remove it and indicate 'rural area.' If transcription occurs outside the School of Health and Human Performance, you will ensure that all records, transcripts, and recordings ne kept confidential (i.e. materials are never left unattended or are secured when not being used). By signing below, you agree not to reveal any information about what is contained on the audio-recordings or in the written transcripts. Furthermore, you agree not to discuss anything regarding the participants, or the data collected in this study with anyone other than the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this contract or the confidential nature of this study, please contact the researcher, Phillip Joy at (902) 789-6300 or via email at pjoy@dal.ca.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have read and understand the above agreement and that you will follow all of the specified conditions.

Name: _____

Contact Telephone: _____

Contact E-mail: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: List of Outputs, Articles, Presentations, and Media

Conference Abstracts and Presentations

1. **Joy, P.,** & Numer, M. (2019). Art-Based methodologies as a way to explore and improve nutritional health. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 2455. (Abstract)
2. **Joy, P.** (2019). Creating a Knowledge Translation Comic Book to Improve the Nutritional Health of Queer Men. Dietitians of Canada Conference. Ottawa, Canada. June 4-6th (Oral Presentation).
3. **Joy, P.** (2019). Exploring Gay Men's Bodies and Health using Photovoice. *PREP Graduate Student Research Day*. Halifax, NS, May 14. (Oral Presentation).
4. **Joy, P.,** & Numer, M. (2018). Art-Based Methodologies as a Way to Explore and Improve Nutritional Health. *24th Qualitative Health Research Conference*. Halifax, NS, Oct 27-29. (Poster Presentation).
5. **Joy, P.,** & Numer, M. (2017). *Exploring obesity discourses and the health of gay men using feminist poststructuralism*. 13th Gay Men's Health Summit. Vancouver, Canada, Nov 2-4 (Poster Presentation).

Knowledge Translation: Comic

1. Joy, P., Aston, M., and Numer, M. Through the Looking Glass Comic. (2019). *Rainbow Reflections: Body Image Comics for Queer Men*. Ad Astra Comix.

Media

1. Wentzell, S. (2019, Oct. 5). *New comic book celebrates the queer male body and sexuality*. Dal Gazette [Article Link](#)
2. D'Entremont, Y. (2019). *Comic brings body image fears out in the open*. Star Metro Halifax, July 19-21. [Article Link](#)
3. Brown, S. *Framing the issue: PhD student tackles queer men's body image in comic book*. July 12, 2019. Dal News. [Article Link](#).
4. **Joy, P.,** Gauvin, S., Aston, M., & Numer, M. (2019). *Pow! Comics are a way to improve queer men's body image*. The Conversation. [Article Link](#)
5. **Joy, P.,** & Numer, M. (2019). *How body ideals shape the health of gay men*. The Conversation, [Article Link](#)
6. *How body ideals shape the health of gay men*. CBC Radio: Information Morning. Jan 10, 2019.
7. *How body ideals shape the health of gay men*. CBC Radio: Mainstreet. Jan 7, 2019.

Appendix H: Glossary of Terms

Bear - Within gay culture, a bear is often an older man with a larger and hairier body type. Bears are one of many LGBTQ communities with events, codes, and a culture-specific identity that often embodies a rugged form of masculinity.

Cub - Within gay culture, a cub is a younger bear.

Otter - Within gay culture, otters are men similar to Bears but with more slender type bodies.

Queer - A contested term that is both a derogatory epithet and a reclaimed term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, 2-spirited, asexual people.

Twink - Within gay culture, twink is a young man who is skinny and hairless.