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Out on the Highway: Cars, Community, and the Gay Driver

Since the 1908 debut of Ford's mass-produced Model T, the automobile has been associated with a particular configuration of hegemonic masculinity. Such persistent representations—in traditional historical accounts, industry rhetoric, and popular culture—assume only those who are straight, White, and male are truly capable of understanding and appreciating the automobile. This examination of gay car culture—as practiced through participation in the Lambda Car Club International—suggests otherwise. Calling on Lambda club websites, Facebook® pages, and videos, as well as survey responses from eleven Lambda members, this investigation provides insight into the meaning gay drivers ascribe to the automobile, uncovers the valuable connections to the past automobiles make possible, and explores the role of cars in creating community among gay drivers. Perhaps more importantly, this inquiry provides an alternative construction of masculinity, one with the potential to disrupt and displace the current hegemonic model that permeates American car culture.

Keywords: automobile, hegemonic masculinity, hybrid masculinities, gay identity, American car culture

Since the first Model T rolled off Henry Ford's assembly line in 1908, the gas-powered automobile has been an important site for the production and performance of masculinity. While the automobile has undergone tremendous transformations over the past century, the subject most strongly associated with the American car has remained constant. Whether tinkering under the hood, driving the family car, cruising on an urban thoroughfare, or drag racing on a country road, the individual who emerges as the ideal, universal American driver is invariably White, male, and heterosexual. Such persistent representations of men and cars—in traditional auto histories, industry rhetoric, and popular culture—not only reinforce a particular configuration of hegemonic masculinity in American car culture, but also suggest that only those who are straight, White, and male are truly capable of understanding and appreciating the automobile.

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Yet despite this ubiquitous characterization of the American driver, there are thousands of serious and knowledgeable auto enthusiasts who do not adhere to the stereotypical White-straight-male mold. This is evident not only in mainstream car culture, which has recently experienced an increase in women's participation, but also in the emergence of various automotive subcultures that cater to specific populations and automotive interests. The Latino lowrider culture in the southwestern United States, the import street racing culture in Asian-American communities, urban neighborhood car clubs composed of young African-American males, as well the young working-class men who identify as old school "rat rodders" represent just a few of the automotive subcultures that have diversified American car culture in interesting and important ways. Not only has American car culture expanded to include subcultures framed by ethnicity, race, and class identity, but has also witnessed the emergence of a car community that caters specifically to the gay and lesbian auto aficionado. Lambda Car Club International (LCCI), an organization which boasts over 2,200 U.S. members in 32 regional chapters, provides members of the LGBT community with the opportunity to participate in classic car shows and cruises, exchange automotive information, and socialize with like-minded individuals in safe and congenial spaces. Lambda's growing membership roster, as well as its increased presence on the Internet through regional club websites and Facebook® pages, suggests that the gay and lesbian auto enthusiast is not an anomaly, but rather is a significant participant in American car culture.

NONHEGEMONIC CAR CULTURES AND THE GAY AUTO ENTHUSIAST

While alternative car cultures have infiltrated mainstream car culture to some degree, inclusion has been dependent on the success of particular group strategies. Women who own classic muscle cars, for example, often reconfigure classic muscle car culture as a family activity in order to create a place for themselves—as traditional women—within it (Lezotte, 2013). Young Asian men, active in the import car racing scene, distance themselves from the "brutish" White working-class masculinity of American muscle car culture by reclaiming identities as "ricers"—a term often used pejoratively to hyperfeminize the Asian driver—to forge alternative masculinities (Best, 2006). Latinos call upon lowrider culture not only to instill masculinity in male participants, but to celebrate ethnic tradition, creativity, and community as well (Bright, 1998; Sandoval, 2003). And young African-American men—many who are former gang members—repurpose the castoffs of undesirable automotive models to create new identities for themselves and their community (Brown, 2010).

In a study of gay fraternities, Yeung, Stombler, and Wharton (2006) assert that in order to break into the historically heterosexual brotherhood, gay men adopt the hegemonic model of masculinity "on their own terms" (p. 5). Gay men enter mainstream car culture in a similar manner, as they draw upon various texts of heterosexual masculinity to create identities as gay car enthusiasts. However, as Fred Fejes (2000) remarks, the end product of such a process is not simply a distorted mirror image of heterosexual masculinity, but rather, "a deconstruction and recombination of many of its elements" (p. 114). Thus while gay Lambda members call upon many of the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity to claim membership in American car culture, they also reject those in conflict with

gay identity. The result is a remade masculinity based not only on shared automotive interests and love of driving, but one that also includes attention to community, connection to past relationships, and a critique of the limitations found within mainstream classic car culture.

Focusing specifically on gay male Lambda Car Club International members, this investigation will respond to R.W. Connell's seminal theory of hegemonic masculinity—as well as more recent interpretations—to suggest an alternative configuration of masculinity that incorporates the gay auto enthusiast. It will draw attention to how, as Dag Balkmar (2012) notes, "other relations of power such as ethnicity, class, sexuality and age intersect with and produce different concepts of masculinity and gendered practices" (p. 46). It will demonstrate how gay drivers, rather than mirror mainstream car culture, have created a unique space for themselves through the incorporation, as well as rejection, of hegemonic masculine characteristics long associated with the American automobile. Through the examination of club websites, Facebook® pages, and videos produced by Lambda members, as well as the survey responses of eleven gay car enthusiasts, this project will broaden an understanding of American car culture as well as provide insight into the various meanings gay men ascribe to cars. Such an inquiry will not only offer an alternative construction of masculinity, but will ultimately locate the gay driver as a legitimate participant in American car culture.

MEN, MASCULINITY, AND MACHINES

Scholars in a variety of disciplines in multiple locations have examined the long-standing association of men, masculinity, and cars. Social historians Clay McShane (1994) and Ruth Oldenziel (1997), as well as gender scholars Judy Wajcman (1991), Wendy Faulkner (2001), and Ulf Mellström (2004) investigate the development of technological knowledge as indicators of masculinity. Sociologists Amy Best (2006), Sarah Redshaw (2008), and co-authors Linley Walker, Dianne Butland, and R.W. Connell (2000), consider the automobile as a source of male identity and embodiment. Cultural studies scholars Cotten Seiler (2008), and Dag Balkmar and Tanja Joelsson (2012) examine particular driving practices—automotive mastery and risky driving behavior—as expressions of masculinity. While each of these scholars focuses specifically on the ways in which masculinities are constructed through relationships with cars, the subject of the collective investigations is most often heterosexual.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is an absence of scholarship that addresses the relationship between the automobile and the gay driver. Traditional accounts of American car culture (Flink, 1990; Rae, 1971) have been written from the perspective of the straight White male. Feminist historians such as Virginia Scharff (1991) and Margaret Walsh (2006, 2011) have recovered the woman driver from automotive history. Ethnicity scholars, including Denise Sandoval (2003) and Brenda Bright (1998), have turned their attention to the Latino lowrider culture. Amy L. Best's (2006) ethnographic project focuses on the contemporary youth car culture in Southern California; the subject of Karen Lumsden's (2014) research is young women who participate in the male-dominated "boy-racer" scene. Although there has been attention given to the connection between gay men and cars (Holth & Mellström, 2011; Picano, 2002; Retzloff, 1997), particularly as a means of connection between fathers and sons, there is a notable dearth of literature that directly ad-

dresses the gay auto aficionado. This lack not only suggests the meanings the gay driver ascribes to the automobile have little importance, but also implies the construction of masculinity associated with the automobile is limited to that performed by the straight White man behind the wheel.

This current project adds to the recent literature by focusing on a segment of American car culture that has been heretofore unaddressed. It brings further attention to the multiple meanings ascribed to the automobile that have little do with its function as a means of transportation. It demonstrates how participation in car culture can be called upon as a form of resistance. And it asks us to consider how Connell's theory and its postmodern responses provide new ways to understand how masculinity can be constructed and performed through relationships with cars.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND AMERICAN CAR CULTURE

Traditional investigations of men and masculinity have often relied on Connell's seminal theory of hegemonic masculinity. James Messerschmidt (2012), who reformulated the concept with Connell, writes, "Connell initially conceptualized hegemonic masculinity as the form of masculinity in a given historical and society-wide setting that structures and legitimates hierarchical gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men" (p. 58). Masculinity, argues Connell, becomes hegemonic when it becomes "widely accepted in a culture and when that acceptance reinforces the dominant gender ideology of the culture" (Trujillo, 1991, p. 291). Hearn and Morrell (2012) suggest it is most useful to consider hegemonic masculinity as "an ideal, a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society and gender in unequal ways" (p. 4).

American car culture has its foundation in a particular construction of hegemonic masculinity. Acceptance into this longstanding automotive fraternity is contingent on adherence to a number of ideals that mark a participant as an authentic auto enthusiast. In his analysis of mediated sport, Nick Trujillo (1991) argues that sports culture maintains and promotes a number of features integral to the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. This notion that a particular culture can establish its own set of conditions for the production and preservation of hegemonic masculinity has applications to American car culture as well. As automotive scholars have noted, mechanical ability, homosocial bonding, embodiment of the automobile, patriarchy, and heterosexuality are features considered integral to the maintenance of American car culture and mark it as a legitimate masculine space.

Mechanical ability and technical expertise have a longstanding association with masculinity. Historian Clay McShane (1994) suggests that as changes wrought by industrialization "profoundly threatened many traditional sources of male identity," men found it increasingly necessary to define their gender in terms of mechanical skill (p. 151). Ulf Mellström (2004) argues that technologies such as automobiles contribute to the formation of homosocial bonds and communities based on men's passion for machines. These social practices, Mellström asserts, effectively leave out women (and lesser others) and thereby reaffirm the association of masculinity with cars. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) attest, hegemonic masculinity "is related to particular ways of representing and using men's bodies" (p. 851). Notes Mellström (2004), "machines are culturally defined as an object of

men's passion because men have an embodied relationship with the machine and because the machine is often a symbiotic extension of the person, the man" (p. 377).

Car culture is patriarchal. It is "framed within a heteronormative conception of gender that essentializes male-female difference and ignores difference and exclusion within the gender categories" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). American car culture divides automobile use by gender. As Scharff (1991) writes, the automobile industry "played no small part in reinscribing assumptions about masculinity and femininity" (p. 112). Balkmar (2012) adds, "As material and meaningful objects, [cars] need to be understood as active parts of an ongoing creation of sociocultural values and gender patterns" (p. 42). Hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual; it builds on a "system of associations that privileges heterosexuality" and perpetuates a mode of gender and sexual relations to which men's and women's bodies and actions must conform (Robinson et al., 2011, p. 32). The process of "men-making" in the traditional hegemonic model, suggest Yeung et al. (2006), "hinges on stigmatizing homosexuality and constructing a particular ideology toward women and femininity" (p. 7). Although gay car enthusiasts are as knowledgeable about cars as their heterosexual counterparts, they are excluded from mainstream American car culture due to their perception as not masculine enough.

Revisiting Connell's original treatise, Chris Beasley (2008) asserts it is necessary to "produce a more nuanced understanding of privileged legitimating conceptions of manhood, and of relations between different masculinities" (p. 86). Like Michael Kimmel (1997), Beasley contends that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is most useful in its recognition that "not all masculinities are created equal" (p. 88). As Beasley argues, hegemonic masculinity is not just about men's power in relation to women, but refers to a dominant version of manhood that dismisses or excludes presentations of masculinity that do not adhere to specific and resolute ideals. As she writes, "it is a matter of some importance to be able to distinguish hegemonic from merely dominant men, from actual men or from their specific personality traits" (p. 91). The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity Beasley describes has a more narrow focus. It is concerned, she notes, "with a political ideal or model, as an enabling mode of representation, which mobilizes institutions and practices" (p. 94). Those who are recognized as legitimate participants in American car culture are not, for the most part, dominant or powerful men. However, they subscribe to an ideology that grants them power over "others"—i.e. women, Latinos, Asian Americans, African-Americans, and homosexuals—through adherence to those tenets of hegemonic masculinity long deemed integral to American car culture. They engage in exclusionary tactics as a means to refuse membership to those who do not fit the hegemonic model. In my investigation into women's participation in classic muscle car culture (Lezotte, 2013), I note that women do not mimic the actions of male participants as a means of inclusion. Rather, they are able to construct a legitimate place for themselves through the embracement of cultural gender roles; they position themselves in relationship to rather than separate from or equal to male participants. As Hearn (2004) remarks, hegemony involves "the consent of some women to maintain patriarchal relations of power" (p. 52). Gay car enthusiasts have no such option. As men, they cannot establish an oppositional position within the culture; as Tim Edwards (2005) writes, "gay men remain men, with all the perhaps increasingly precarious privileges and benefits that maleness bestows on them" (p. 65). As homosexuals—representatives of what Connell (2005) defines

as a subordinate masculinity—they cannot participate as equals. Thus in order to gain access into the social world of cars, the gay car enthusiast finds it necessary to establish a separate automobile subculture.[1] It is a place in which he is able to assume a masculinity of his own creation, based on the subsumption, rejection, and reinvention of particular hegemonic elements, as well as the incorporation of new elements that celebrate gay identity. It is a space that is inclusive rather than exclusive, built on shared automotive interests, respect of past relationships, and gay community.

Scholars have called upon the concept "hybrid masculinity" to examine how non-hegemonic elements are often incorporated into hegemonic masculinities, as well as how alternative masculinities integrate particular features of hegemony (Demetriou, 2001). Steven Arxer (2011), in his examination of the college bar scene, reveals how college men call upon non-hegemonic practices—such as emotive sharing and cooperation—to strengthen homosocial bonds as well as to reinforce domination over women and subordinate masculinities. Yeung et al. (2006) investigate how gay college men negotiate membership in the masculine fraternity brotherhood through the incorporation of hegemonic elements, e.g. the exclusion of all women. Jones and McCarthy (2010) examine how gay football players—who not only engage in a pastime traditionally associated with heterosexuality, but who also embrace the hegemonic masculine qualities of strength and competition—choose to participate outside of mainstream culture as a means to form homosocial bonds and to challenge the straight community about its perceptions of gay men.

Each of these investigations expands Connell's original conceptualization through consideration of how hegemonic practices can be "influenced and informed by non-hegemonic ones," as well as how hegemonic masculinity can "extend legitimation" to subordinated and alternative masculinities (Arxer, 2011). Although scholars (Beasley, 2008, 2012, 2013; Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Hearn & Morrell, 2012) have interrogated the use of hegemonic masculinity as a relevant theoretical concept in lieu of postmodern approaches, it is useful in this context for its ability to frame the hybrid masculinity often assumed by gay auto aficionados. This project examines how the Lambda Car Club—as a site for the production and performance of a hybrid masculinity centered in a passion for cars, a desire for community, and a celebration of gay identity—provides gay men with the opportunity to present themselves as authentic car enthusiasts. It also demonstrates how, as participants in a subcultural community[2], Lambda members have the potential to challenge the hegemony of mainstream American car culture.

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[1] In my observations of the Detroit Lambda chapter, I noted that while members participated in the same types of activities as mainstream auto enthusiasts, they most often did so separately. For example, during the Motor Muster weekend at Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, the Lambda Chapter set up a separate car show in the Village parking lot. Each year, in conjunction with the North American International Auto Show held in Detroit, Michigan, the club organizes an After Glow event open only to Lambda members.

[2] Balkmar (2012), drawing on the work seminal work of Dick Hebdige (1979), uses "subcultural community" to suggest a cultural formation created in "opposition to other, usually dominant, structures of oppression, which can be understood as collective responses to social change" (p. 50).

AMERICAN CAR CULTURE AND THE GAY DRIVER

I first became aware of LCCI by chance while spending a weekend in New York City. As the owner of a classic car (1949 Ford Coupe) I am frequent exhibitor at southeastern Michigan car events populated primarily by 50s fins and 60s muscle. The NYC Lambda car show was distinctive in its emphasis on style, uniqueness, and eclecticism. I discovered the existence of a Lambda chapter in my hometown of Detroit, attended a few local shows, and accessed the Internet for more information about the Lambda organization. I discovered an amazing network of regional clubs that utilizes websites and Facebook® pages to provide auto information, advertise events, and share an automotive passion among gay and lesbian car enthusiasts. While the primary focus of my research is women and car culture, my broader interest is alternative car cultures and non-hegemonic constructions of the American driver. Surprised and somewhat perplexed that the gay and lesbian driver was absent in scholarship, I made the decision to conduct my own investigation into the LGBT auto enthusiasts who participate in car culture through membership in the Lambda Car Club.

This investigation consisted of two parts, observation and survey. Observation was conducted in person at Lambda events, and online on regional websites and club Facebook® pages. A request for survey participants was emailed to regional club officers and web administrators following university HSRB (Human Subject Review Board) guidelines. I presented myself as a both a car enthusiast and graduate scholar interested in the connections individuals have to cars. As I have a sexually ambiguous first name, I was occasionally mistaken as a member of the Lambda community; in fact, I received an enthusiastic invitation to join the local Lambda chapter. Therefore, I made sure to identify myself as an old straight woman with a passion for cars. While a few Lambda members expressed a hesitancy to participate for that reason, most were eager to share car stories with a fellow auto enthusiast.

While the Lambda Car Club International (n.d.) describes itself as "America's Largest Gay and Lesbian Auto Club," its membership is predominantly male. This is not due to any exclusionary policy on the part of male Lambda members, but is more likely reflective of other factors, such as women's lesser financial status and the existence of a separate lesbian car/motorcycle culture. The eleven men who completed surveys for this project hailed primarily from the Midwest and Eastern United States; they ranged in age from 43 to 61; they had comfortable incomes; and all but one identified as White. A few owned one car, but the majority had multiple vehicles, often purchased with partners. While wealth is not a prerequisite for owning and exhibiting classic cars, participation could be easily described as a "negative cash flow hobby". For the most part, gay auto enthusiasts do not have families; consequently, they often have considerable disposable income on which to spend on cars (Williams, 2007).

The survey questions were divided into two general categories and were open ended. The first set of questions requested general car(s) information, such as the make, model and year, history of the car, and personal stories about the vehicle. Participants were also encouraged to describe their relationship to the vehicle and the meanings it held for them. The second group of questions focused on the participants' experiences as Lambda members. The first names of the survey participants were changed to provide anonymity.

GAY OLD CAR OWNERS SOCIETY

The automobile, considered "an American way of life," has long surpassed its original function as a dependable means of transportation (Sanford, 1983, p. 138). Throughout its storied history, the automobile has represented industry and ingenuity, personal freedom and mobility, status and power, autonomy and identity, and various presentations of masculinity. The automobile has developed a culture onto itself; distinctive beliefs, attitudes, symbols, values, behavior, and institutions have grown up around the automobile's manufacture and use (Sanford, 1983, p. 138). While the automobile is ubiquitous in American society, each car has its own story, and holds particular and personal meanings for the individual who owns and drives it. These meanings are especially important to LCCI members.

The Lambda Car Club International is an automotive subculture in which sexual identity—rather than a particular model or class of automobile—determines inclusion. It was created in response to the homophobia that permeates mainstream car culture, and as a means to fulfill the need of gay auto enthusiasts for a safe and congenial space in which to share a love of cars. Judith Halberstam (2003) writes, "subcultures provide a vital critique of the seemingly organic nature of 'community' and make visible the forms of unbelonging and disconnection that are necessary to the creation of community" (p. 314). The Lambda car subculture not only serves as a source of community for gay men, but also brings attention to the disparities and inequalities that exist within mainstream car culture.

John Ball conceived of the notion of a car club for gay men as a means to find a companion with a similar passion for cars (Caldwell, 2005). In Ball's mind, such an organization would not only serve the automotive interests of the gay auto enthusiast, but would also function as a social meeting place for members of the gay community. To determine the viability of the idea, Ball placed an ad in *Hemmings Motor News*—a premier car collector publication—to recruit members for the "Gay Old Car Owners Society." While the ad resulted in a flurry of complaints from its straight-White-male subscribers, Ball also received dozens of letters from individuals eager to meet other gay men who shared a love of cars. The first event of the newly formed organization was a car show held in Atlantic City in 1982; 25 gay auto enthusiasts were in attendance. Other activities, as well as additional members, soon followed. The original name of the club proved to be problematic, especially when attempting to book hotel reservations. The Greek letter Lambda had been used as a symbol of gay rights since the 1970s; the name of the organization was changed to Lambda Car Club, which signaled its orientation to potential gay members without telegraphing difference to mainstream car culture. The growth of Internet communication resulted in an exponential increase in Lambda participation (Caldwell, 2005). Since its inception in 1982, LCCI has expanded to over 2,200 members across the US in over 32 regional chapters. The goal of Lambda Car Club International—to provide an entertaining, safe, social outlet for gay and lesbians interested in classic and collectible vehicles—is now prominently displayed on all club Internet sites and publications. For gay car enthusiasts, LCCI is not just a car club. Rather, it is an important site of gay community (AZ Gay Car, 2015).

Adopting a postmodern approach, Fejes (2000) writes, "following Butler's notion of performativity, we can argue that gay males draw upon the various texts of heterosexual masculinity as the basis for the construction of their own identities" (p. 114). In an effort to be taken seriously as car enthusiasts, Lambda members assume

elements of hegemonic masculinity endemic to car culture that are not in conflict with gay identity. However, the Lambda car club also incorporates elements not always found in mainstream car culture that support and celebrate subjectivities as gay car enthusiasts.

GAY CAR CULTURE AS COMMUNITY

Decades before the advent of gay car clubs, the automobile had an important role in linking gay men together. During the years following World War II, in areas without a sizable gay population, the automobile provided gay men with access to bars and parties, offered them a certain degree of anonymity, and served as an important space for same-sex desire. In his research into 1950s gay nightlife in the auto factory town of Flint, Michigan, Tim Retzloff (1997) remarks, "The car served as an entrance into a gay world and a ready getaway in case of danger" (p. 235). Without established gay communities, the automobile was crucial in establishing sites—car "cruising", car sex, roadside rest stops, and homosexually active parking lots—in which gay men could "claim public spaces as their own" (p. 244). In the pre gay liberation era, in which the open display of homosexuality was often dangerous, the automobile provided gay men with the opportunity to build a covert gay world in the midst of a hostile, straight environment. In the twenty-first century, the automobile not only links gay men together, but is also an object through which gay men create community.

Richard LeBeau and William Jellison (2009) address the importance of community to the formation of a positive gay identity. As they write, "social support can be a crucial factor in coping with one's stigmatized status" (p. 56). As responses from *Hemmings Motor News* readers, and the refusal of hotels to book "gay old car" owners suggest, gay men often find themselves unwelcome in organizations devoted to the automobile. Prior to joining Lambda, many gay car enthusiasts attempted to participate in mainstream automotive events with the belief that a common interest in cars would overcome any underlying homophobia within the straight car club population. However, as many discovered, gay car owners were not always accepted. While Lambda member Todd sometimes attends mainstream car events, he often feels uncomfortable. As Todd remarked, "I usually feel out of place, especially with my partner. While I have never experienced any negative consequences in those crowds, I usually get the vibe that many don't really care for our 'kind'." Mark experienced biased judging when exhibiting at mainstream events. He noted, "a homophobic judge would lose my judging sheet to disqualify my car from competition, make up things wrong with my car, and insult me and call me a troublemaker." Eighteen-year Lambda member Geoff asserted, "The straight clubs are about cars only. I develop little to no real personal relationships with those club members."

Membership in LCCI allows gay car enthusiasts the opportunity to engage in a pastime that was often closed to them. As many Lambda members remarked, the organization offers an inclusive and accepting environment in which individuals can open up about automobiles while remaining openly gay. As LeBeau and Jellison (2009) contest, involvement with others identifying as gay contributes to "higher personal self-esteem, greater social support, [and] more positive attitudes toward homosexuality" (p. 57). Wrote longtime Lambda member Brian, "in my formative years, [the club] provided a sense of validation for my sexuality within

the car hobby." Through membership in Lambda, gay men fulfill their need to actively participate in a pastime they enjoy without negating their sexual identity.

Auto aficionado Alan exclaimed, Lambda "is the only way I have any socialization with other gay people." Many Lambda members do not reside in areas with sizable gay populations. Thus, prior to joining the organization, it was often difficult for gay men to locate others with whom to mingle or connect. As avid car enthusiasts who were often ostracized for participating in what was considered a straight man's hobby, many found Lambda to be just what they were looking for. Noted Neil, "LCCI had a booth up at 'Pride' one year. I spoke briefly with the members that were there and was hooked immediately." Alan added, "I was looking for expanding my friendship base and learned of the Lambda Car Club from a friend in another state. So I sought out the local chapter and began attending events." And as Todd remarked, "I enjoy socializing with others that are car fanatics and LCCI allows us to combine that interest with other LGBT persons. Best of both worlds!" While many join Lambda as a means to meet other gay men, those without an abiding interest in cars do not remain in the club for long (Caldwell, 2005). In an analysis of gay football—a location analogous to gay car culture in many respects—Louisa Jones and Mac McCarthy (2010) write, "a widespread desire for an alternative outlet to allow people expression of more than just their sexual urges has provided some of the motivation for the emergence of other forms of socializing" (p. 170). This sentiment certainly applies to classic car organizations such as Lambda. While LCCI events sometimes serve as gay meeting places, for the most part, "car talk rules" (Caldwell, 2005).

Automotive events—shows, parades, field trips, car tours, and cruising—are an important source of community building in gay car culture. However, weather, particularly in the northern climates, is not always conducive to participation in auto-related activities. Lambda members maintain community during foul-weather months through participation on club weblogs and Facebook® pages. Online club locations not only offer news of upcoming events, but also provide the opportunity for members to post photos of their cars, ask questions, report on automotive happenings, introduce new members, and communicate with one another. Members share automotive archive material, give reviews of noteworthy (or not) automotive books and publications, list cars for sale, and participate in quizzes such as "What kind of car is this?" When unable to meet in person, online social networks continue the work of community so crucial to Lambda members.

Balkmar (2012) writes, "Part of the cultural work that cars have done and still do is to form social groupings, to attract men and facilitate various forms of collective identity formations by taking up a particular style" (p. 49). Lambda is a homosocial space in which gay men find connection through a shared passion for cars. It mimics the male camaraderie found in mainstream car culture without compliance to patriarchy. Gay men, suggest Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), most often have an ambivalent relationship to patriarchy (p. 832). Although the majority of Lambda members are male, all LGBT car enthusiasts regardless of gender are welcome into the organization. Men form associations in Lambda not as a means to dominate women or insubordinate men, but rather, to create community. As Geoff exclaimed, "It is my life. Virtually everything I do and have interest in is related to the cars and car clubs." Through sharing the love of cars with others, LCCI members experience a sense of belonging. Lambda provides gay auto enthusiasts with the knowledge that they are not alone; gay drivers come to understand that there

are others like them who share a sexual identity as well as an insatiable interest in cars. To the gay car enthusiast, the automobile is not simply a form of transportation, but is a vehicle, literally and figuratively, that creates meaning in one's life.

GAY CAR CULTURE AS CONNECTION

While LCCI welcomes gay and lesbian drivers of all ages, the majority of members are aging baby boomers, individuals who grew up during the golden age of car culture. Tim Falconer (2009) suggests that during the 1950s, people had fewer ways to define themselves; thus many young men sought identity through the automobile, viewing the car "as an extension of themselves" (p. 13). Classic car clubs are overwhelmingly populated by members of this generation; many individuals participate in classic cruisin' culture to relive their youthful glory days, or as a way to connect to events or individuals from their past. As Geoff reminisced, "I took my driving test in the '66 Galaxie, had my first date with a girl in the Galaxie, and a boy in the '46 Ford." Lambda members often drive cars handed down to them by family members. The meanings and memories attached to particular vehicles often make it difficult for owners to part with them. What is especially noteworthy are the number of cars owned by Lambda members that recall relationships between fathers and gay sons.

The relationship between fathers and sons often begins in an automobile. In an examination of the relationship between masculinity and technology, Holth and Mellström (2011) suggest that the sharing of technological knowledge often serves as a form of familial male bonding. As they write, "the men we interviewed describe their closeness to their fathers as a common understanding and curiosity about the mysteries of technology" (p. 319). In a collection of stories focused on gay men and their fathers (Shenitz, ed., 2002), Andrew Holleran reflects on the drives he took alone with his dad as a young boy, often sitting on his father's lap and steering the car. While his father was not a conversant man, Holleran recognizes that this gesture was most likely his father's attempt to form a bond with a son he sensed was "different." Daniel Mendelson remembers that when he needed to speak to his father, he could most often find him with his head under the hood of the car. Felice Picano cites the family's twelve-year-old Pontiac sedan as the location in which he "came out" to a disbelieving dad. Editor Shenitz writes, "most writers in this collection navigate complex territory, finding ways to relate to fathers" (2002, p. xvi). As the narratives collected in this volume suggest, the automobile was very often the singular shared masculine space in which sons and dads spent time together.

The cars belonging to Lambda members are often intertwined with stories about fathers. Geoff referred to his 1966 Ford Galaxie—which, at the age of eleven, he helped his father choose, and which was turned over to him when he started driving—as his "most prized possession." Brian noted that his interest in cars was piqued on car-buying expeditions with his father and grandfather. Todd's love of the automobile was fostered when helping his dad "do maintenance and small repairs on our cars." A New York Lambda member remarked, "I probably got my affinity for Cadillacs from my father," to whom the automobile represented "the American dream" (Empire). Carl, whose 1969 Buick Sport Wagon recalls his childhood family vehicle, states, "I've always had a love of cars; I think it was a combination of my dad being a car guy and something innate. Somewhere there's a picture of me on my dad's shoulders at a race."

These comments suggest that cars often serve as crucial bonds among fathers and sons in relationships that are otherwise tenuous. Engaging in a traditional masculine pastime of which their fathers approve allows gay men to acknowledge that on some level, they did not disappoint the first man in their lives. A mutual interest—automobiles or otherwise—can provide a father a way to connect with a son he does not always understand. As Andrew Gottlieb (2000) writes, "a father's ability to identify with his son [is] a major factor in eventually being able to accept and appreciate his son's sexual orientation" (p. xii). As the Lambda respondents intimated, a shared "car buff" identity between father and son can help keep a fragile relationship intact.

Traditional classic car shows feature an abundance of hot rods, pony cars, and muscle cars—fast, noisy, and powerful vehicles favored by young men during the 1950s and 1960s as a means to assert and display masculinity. However, many of the cars driven by Lambda members can be described as "boulevard cruisers." The large, luxurious models—e.g. the Buick Riviera, Cadillac Eldorado, and Lincoln Towne Car—were built not for speed, but rather, display. These automobiles had a reputation as smooth driving, comfortable, and classy. The majority of gay auto enthusiasts interviewed for this project do not put a high priority on power or performance; rather, they appreciate automotive qualities such as style and design, color, originality, and luxury. Unlike the inexpensive muscle cars that were produced principally for the young male market, boulevard cruisers were owned and driven by adults as symbols of status and success. Many Lambda members own cars inherited from family members; others look for vehicles that duplicate or represent the automobiles driven by their fathers. Carl searched high and low for a version of the car his dad owned when he was a kid. As he remarked, "I just wanted a wagon like I remember from my childhood."

GAY CAR CULTURE AS IDENTITY

As Mellström (2004) asserts, masculinity is often demonstrated through a symbiotic relationship with the automobile. Men frequently call upon the car to make statements about themselves; as Peter Marsh and Peter Collett (1989) write, "the automobile satisfies not only our practical needs, but the need to declare ourselves socially and individually" (p. 5). Gay men are no exception; when they talk about the cars they own and drive, they often call upon shared personality traits to describe them. Of his 1950 Rambler American and 1982 AMC Spirit, Mark wrote, "I am an oddball. I like small cars and independents. [The cars] say I am like no one else." Neil, whose collection of classic cars is constantly changing, noted, "I would say that my cars reflect my quirky personality!" He describes his most recent acquisition, a wood-paneled Vega wagon, as funky, "goofy and fun."

As noted by many participants in this project, the gay car enthusiast understands that despite his significant automotive knowledge and passion for cars, his sexuality places him on the margins of car culture. This is often evidenced in how the gay driver constructs his identity in relationship to his car, calling upon particular auto-human characteristics that reflect outsider status. Hal, the owner of a 1964 Corvair, remarked, "I like cars that are the underdog. This car marches to the beat of its own drum. It's unique like me." Masculinity, suggests Balkmar (2012), is "a number of accumulated and changeable imaginings, practices, and positions that form the basis for masculine identities at a certain time and place" (p. 46). The gay

car enthusiast—through identification with his car—claims a masculinity that is compatible with his sexual orientation as well as his participation in American car culture. Reflecting on his 1967 Corvair as a contributor to his identity, Richard remarked, "[it says] you can be different and still be beautiful and valuable."

Cotten Seiler (2008) equates driving with American citizenship, suggesting that the practice of automobility is a "highly specific conception of what it means to be modern and free" (p. 2). Seiler argues that between 1895 and 1961—from the founding of the first automobile company in America to creation of the Interstate Highway system—driving in the United States evolved into a crucial symbol of freedom and agency. As the figure of the driver blurred into that of the citizen, automobility became a powerful resource for marginalized groups endeavoring to enter the public sphere. As Seiler writes, "for women, immigrants, and people of color, groups whose automobility would be contested as their fitness for citizenship, the driver's seat beckoned as the crucible of that fitness and as the vantage of the American-in-full" (p. 40).

In the aforementioned study of 1950s gay nightlife in Flint, Michigan, Retzloff (1997) maintains that the automobile offered gay men the ability to travel freely and anonymously through a hostile, homophobic environment. While Seiler (2008) does not specifically refer to gays or lesbians, automobility certainly provided members of the LGBT community with an amount of access and agency often denied them. Writes Seiler, "the capacity of individuals to move freely serves as an index of their power" (p. 11). This sentiment often underlies the responses of Lambda members. Membership in a gay car club not only serves as a form of community, but also celebrates the freedom and mobility driving provides. As Todd noted, taking his 1978 Lincoln Mark V for a drive is "like floating above the ground. Ethereal." Historically, one of the most important male rites of passage has been "gaining a driver's license and the freedom to press an accelerator to the floor" (Walsh, 2006, p. 9). While gay drivers might be constrained by heterosexual cultural mores in everyday life, they are free to express themselves in multiple and flexible ways as men through the practice of automobility. Participation in car culture through membership in LCCI, therefore, allows gay drivers to rightfully claim identities as "Americans-in-full" (Seiler, 2008, p. 42).

GAY CAR CULTURE AS MASCULINITY

Automotive knowledge and technical expertise is an important component of masculinity in mainstream car culture. One of the advantages to membership in a gay car club is access to auto resources and networks (LeBeau et al., 2009, p. 64). LCCI members have private access to the national online membership directory, connecting them with over 2,200 auto enthusiasts with varying levels of automotive expertise. Members all across the United States are available to provide car knowledge, parts leads, technical advice, and a large dose of encouragement. Regional Lambda chapters host websites and Facebook® pages not only to keep members abreast of upcoming local events, but also to provide automobile related support and guidance. As the website of the LCCI New Mexico chapter reads, "a few of our members can talk about the type of bolt used in a 57 Mercury Turnpike Cruiser suspension and some just know where the key goes" (Rainbow, n.d.). While members share a common commitment to "be there when you need a hand," technical expertise is not a requirement for membership. Rather all that is necessary is an interest in "driving, talking about, tinkering with, or ogling cars" (Rainbow).

The common perception of gay men, suggests Connell (2005) is that they "lack masculinity" (p. 78). The automobile's culturally embedded association with masculinity might suggest, therefore, that gay men participate in car culture as a means to dispel the prevalent notion that gay men are feminine. However, the varied responses from Lambda members suggest that gay car enthusiasts perceive masculinity—as it refers to the automobile and themselves—in multiple and flexible ways. Mark associates the male body, rather than masculinity, with an affinity for the automobile. As he wrote, "Men of all orientations love cars. It is a guy thing. There are plenty of screaming queens who own classic cars." However Alan, who drives a high performance Mustang, asserts that his car authenticates his masculinity. He declared, "This car says of me that I am sporty, full of life, macho. Cars have personalities. Some are butch and some are fem. My car is butch." While Neil suggests that members of gay car clubs often "appear more masculine than feminine," he does not participate in car culture as a means to embody masculinity. As Neil wrote, "[Owning, driving, and exhibiting] my car is just relaxing, fun, and therapeutic. It doesn't make me feel like 'more of a man.'" Pablo Schyfter (2009) argues that technological artifacts—such as the motorcycle and the automobile—are gendered and normalized in heteronormative patterns. As he writes, "technological artefacts and their users reflect the prominent social valuation of heterosexuality and the concurrent marginalization and subordination of homosexuality—two processes fundamentally implicated in the social order of gender" (p. 78). While Lambda members recognize the hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity commonly associated with the automobile, they resist, reconfigure, and remake it to reflect their own gay identities. In doing so, gay auto enthusiasts engage in a practice performance scholar José Muñoz (1999) defines as "disidentification."

GAY CAR CULTURE AS RESISTANCE

The concept of disidentification is most often associated with the work of Beverley Skeggs (1997), who calls upon the term to describe the process by which young working-class women, cognizant of their stigmatized class status, seek invisibility in Manchester's "gay village." Skeggs writes that "to be recognized as something always invokes systems of knowledge, classification, and disciplinary power" (p. 220). Muñoz employs the term to explain the process by which subordinate groups work on and against the dominant ideology; disidentification, argues Muñoz, is the "remaking and rewriting of a dominant script" (p. 23). Muñoz writes, "the process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universal and exclusionary machination and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (p. 31). As men who grew up with an interest in cars, gay auto enthusiasts are well aware of the particular configurations of masculinity associated with the automobile. This knowledge provides them with the ability to creatively and purposefully tweak such representations as a means of critique as well as empowerment. A YouTube video of an event held by the Lambda Yankee Chapter reveals how gay men call upon "disidentification"—"remaking and rewriting" the dominant script of American classic car culture—as a means to trouble the association of cars with heteronormative masculinity and thereby invest the automobile with new meanings and new life.

One of the hallmarks of the straight-White-male auto enthusiast is an understanding and appreciation of a particular automobile's unique or valuable qualities.

At car shows and cruises, such an individual can be found standing alongside his vehicle offering a laundry list of auto minutiae to any and all interested spectators. Many of the Yankee members participate in this activity in a similar manner, remarking on an unusual color or noting the rarity of a particular vehicle. However, others respond with a bit of irony. Mike notes that his "daily driver," a 1966 Chrysler New Yorker, "fits eight comfortably" (Llata, 2010). Another Yankee member remarks that what makes his 1963 Ford Falcon special is that "it is the only model that comes with flamingoes" (Llata, 2010). Straight men, writes Mellström (2004) often give the car a feminine persona, thereby "(re)-producing both normative heterosexuality and gendered differences" (p. 37). As indicated in the Yankee video, as well as on a variety of club Facebook® pages, Lambda members are more likely to personalize cars to reflect interests and identity. Automobiles in the Yankee Parade feature Wizard of Oz and Pink Panther characters in the front seats; the cruisers in Detroit's Motor City Pride parade prominently display rainbow banners. As Geoff remarked, "it is important to accessorize a gay-owned car." Through disidentification Lambda auto enthusiasts acknowledge and critique the hegemonic masculinity of mainstream car culture.

Lambda members also participate in disidentification through the performance of drag. Cruisin'[3], which reached its heyday during the 1950s and 1960s in locations such as Detroit and Southern California, was a masculine activity taken up by young men. If women were present, it was as passengers or "avid spectators" (Genat, 2010, p. 47). When couples cruised, young men most often occupied both front seats, relegating women to the back of the vehicle. However, at the Lambda car show in Provincetown, two gay couples, including two individuals dressed in drag, cruise down the town's main thoroughfare in a 1982 Buick Riviera convertible. The two dressed in female attire sit in the front while those in traditional male garb sit in the back, blithely disrupting gender stereotypes associated with car culture. Roger Baker (1994) asserts, drag "is about disrupting notions of the normal and the expected. It is about both performance of resistance and resistant performance.… It is about role-playing and questioning the meaning of both gender and sexual identity" (p. 18). As Judith Butler (1999) contends, engaging in "gender trouble" through the performance of drag not only allow individuals to escape the boundaries of gender prescriptions, but also exposes the speciousness of behavior attributed to gender.

Judith Halberstam (2003) asserts that queer subcultures have both the potential and the ability to preserve the critique of heteronormativity implicit in daily queer life (p. 314). She reflects upon Dick Hebdige's (1979) influential work to suggest that such subcultures are able to challenge hegemony not only through ideological articulations, but also through style. As the Yankee Chapter video suggests, Lambda members often call upon their cars, bodies, and behavior to articulate resistance through style. Whether good naturedly mocking the mainstream car enthusiast, decorating cars with non-hegemonic—i.e. queer—imagery, or parading as straight men and drag women, Lambda members engage in disidentification as they playfully and effectively critique the hegemonic masculinity associated with the automobile.

[3] "Cruisin'" in this context refers to the driving practices of young heterosexual men, exemplified in films such as *American Graffiti* (dir. George Lucas, 1973).

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY

For nearly a century, American car culture has been considered the province of straight White men. However, the emergence of automotive subcultures centered not on car make, model, and year, but rather, race, gender, or sexuality, has permanently altered the automotive culture landscape. These changes have not come easily; the hegemonic masculinity long associated with cars has created significant obstacles to inclusion. Thus car enthusiasts with nonconforming identities—i.e. women, Latinos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, lesbians and gay men—have found it necessary to create specific strategies in order to be recognized as legitimate participants in American car culture. In the gay automotive community, this is accomplished through the incorporation of specific hegemonic elements into alternative, nonhegemonic automotive subcultures, a state Demetriou (2001) refers to as "hybrid masculinity".

Lambda Car Club International provides a safe and congenial space in which such a hybrid masculinity can be produced, maintained, and celebrated. It is a masculinity that combines hegemonic elements associated with cars—the acquisition and sharing of automotive knowledge, homosocial bonding, and embodiment of the automobile—with desire for community, connection to past relationships, and celebration of gay identity. This re-formed masculinity empowers Lambda members to present themselves as authentic "car guys," to disrupt the heteronormativity of American car culture, and to challenge perceptions of gay men.

Unable and unwilling to conform to the hegemonic model of masculinity associated with American car culture, Lambda members have created an important automotive subculture and have redefined themselves in the process. They have deliberately moved into "an arena of hegemonic masculinity and [claimed] it for themselves on their terms" (Jones & McCarthy, 2010, p. 169). Through membership in LCCI, gay car enthusiasts have not only disrupted the perception of the authentic American driver as White, straight, and male, but through the incorporation of hegemonic elements and symbolic resources, have successfully and convincingly remade masculinity in their own image.

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