
Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Susan Y. Ortiz, M.A.

Graduate Program in Sociology

The Ohio State University

2012

Dissertation Committee:

Liana Sayer, Advisor

Vincent Roscigno

Steven Lopez
Abstract

Vast disparities continue to exist between men and women, blacks and whites, and heterosexual and sexual minorities despite a plethora of legal changes that work against discrimination, particularly concerning race and gender. In the Post Civil-Rights era new covert forms of discrimination have replaced the older overt forms which, when combined with the ideology of individualism, prevents the majority of dominant group members from recognizing and thus working to change the status quo. Scholars of social justice research often recommend “progressives” or “liberals” as likely candidates for building a collective identity with subordinate group members to push for change. These scholars, however, fail to specifically name individuals with the greatest access to power and influence – white heterosexual men. Using a qualitative research design, I interviewed forty white heterosexual men concerning their identity as a progressive. First I examined their attitudes toward subordinate group members across three areas of stratification – race, gender and sexual orientation; then I explored their knowledge of privilege; and finally I investigated what actions, if any, they are taking to reduce any of the social problems they recognize. My data reveal that these men hold a variety of attitudes and beliefs toward and about subordinate group members and the inequality they experience. Some use more mainstream colorblind, gender blind individualistic ideologies to discuss the reasons behind inequality. Others held a more in-depth
knowledge of the ways institutions and structure play a role. Nearly all supported same-sex marriage rights and the reproductive rights of women, but in the domestic sphere they do little to change the unequal division of labor and continue to follow more traditional surname patrilineal decent patterns thus emphasizing the “twin ideologies” Ridgeway (2011) notes impact women specifically. Most have developed alternative “private” masculinities and often disavow the hegemonic ideal, including a rejection of sports, and tend to hang out with other progressive men who have done the same although not exclusively. Fewer than half held some knowledge about their own privilege. Knowledge of privilege seems to be closely related to taking some forms of passive “checkbook” activism or, at minimum, consciously trying to do no harm. Notably, neither knowledge of inequality nor privilege moves these men to action. I conclude that white heterosexual men have learned to reconceptualize the relationship they have to their dominant group status through identification as a “progressive.” This identity is complex, contextual, and situational and can be used to both support and reject mainstream individualistic views of race, gender, and sexual orientation while also allowing these individuals to develop a moral identity against such inequality. However, the ideology of individualism maintains its stranglehold on action and activism. Indeed, none had deep meaningful relationships with people of color, feminist women, and/or activists – relationships which seem to be necessary for dominant group members to move from passively supporting equality to actually pushing for change – although being a progressive does appear to open the possibility for such experiences in the future.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to those I love, especially...

My family by choice, which includes all of my dear friends, too many to name;

My friends Rob and Steve who continuously opened their home to me and have shown great support and patience;

John who loved me, supported me, encouraged me, and put up with me throughout this process;

My mom for showing me how to be courageous;

And my dad for his unwavering confidence in my ability to finish. I only wish he were alive to see this day.
Acknowledgments

I never anticipated what a long and difficult road this would be, and I certainly never expected it to take nine years to complete, but sometimes life just takes over. There were many people in my life who helped me along the way and continuously encouraged me to stay on track whenever I began to stray, but first and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Liana Sayer. If it were not for her encouragement and continuous support, this dissertation would not exist. In addition to her support, I also want to acknowledge all of the critical observations, thoughtful comments and substantial feedback she provided throughout this process. Again, without her constant support, encouragement, and dedication, I would not have finished this dissertation. I am sure her colleagues at The Ohio State University are sad to see her depart, but The University of Maryland now has the privilege to welcome her as a new faculty member. I am sure our paths will cross again in the future.

In addition, I would also like to acknowledge Steve Lopez and Vincent Roscigno for their critiques, comments, and support throughout the years. They, along with other students and faculty at The Ohio State University were fundamental in helping me to gain the knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to complete such a demanding task.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. ii
Dedication........................................................................................................................................ iv
Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................................. v
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ vii
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
Chapter 1: Understanding the Matrix of Domination ............................................................ 26
Chapter 2: Developing a Progressive Identity and What it Means to be Progressive .......... 47
Chapter 3: Identity Development and Attitudes Toward Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation ......................................................................................................................... 75
Chapter 4: Recognition of Privilege and Attitudes About Privilege ........................................ 137
Chapter 5: Inaction, Doing No Harm, Passive Action and Activism ....................................... 183
Chapter 6: Aligning a Progressive Identity with Attitudes and Behaviors .............................. 228
Appendix A: Methodological Appendix ..................................................................................... 277
Appendix B: Demographic Information and Views on Stratification ..................................... 286
List of Figures

Figure 1: Individual Behavior and Group Stereotypes........................................156
Introduction

Gender, race, sexual orientation and other forms of stratification shape our social relations. My early childhood experiences as a Latina woman – a visible member of two subordinate groups – led me to sociology, but my experiences as an adult piqued my curiosity about dominant group members, specifically those who consider themselves progressive or liberal. I wanted to know more about what progressive white heterosexual men – men not restricted by (or who are more likely to be framed positively by) cultural constructs concerning their ascribed characteristics – think about and act upon the current forms of inequality in the United States.

In the chapters that follow, I explore what these men believe in order to consider themselves progressive; what social problems they deem to be in need of immediate redress; where they fall in terms of white identity development; their views on privilege; how they work to either reduce, recreate, or maintain inequality; what prevents those who could take action from doing so; and finally why the label of “liberal” or “progressive” is more likely to be part of a person’s moral identity rather than an ideological stance that requires taking action. Many researchers call for increased education as one of the key components to reducing the disparities that still exist; yet most of the men I interviewed hold some form of knowledge about that systemic inequality and still do nothing. The rhetoric of individual meritocracy continues to inhibit action and emphasizes the primacy
of the individual regardless of a person’s depth of their understanding on issues such as gender and racial inequality.

Feminist theories suggest that personal experiences influence a person’s thinking and feelings regardless of the situation in which a person finds herself or the role(s) she has assumed, such as a researcher. The mind and heart are indivisible and thus are both a reflection of our experiences regardless of how much an individual tries to separate the two. Gender, race, sexual orientation, class, age, and all other forms of hierarchical stratification play a role in the way we see, think about, and understand the world. Thus, my experiences as a researcher, a woman, a person of color, and a heterosexual are all interconnected. Accordingly, I wanted to present my childhood experiences as an introduction to the holistic context in which my reality has been created.

**Race**

While growing up in a small village in Southern New Mexico, I always felt like something was wrong - something I could not explain but I could certainly feel. I was born as the youngest of three daughters into a Latino family in a small town with very little diversity. Although I am technically classified as a member of the “white” race, and indeed in a small box on my birth certificate the word ‘white’ is printed under the category race, yet my darker skin clearly distinguishes me from light-skinned non-Hispanic whites. As with most hierarchical categories, there are no innate immutable characteristics that define who belongs to each category and membership in these groups has been contextually derived. For the purpose of this study, I will be referencing the phenotype for non-Hispanic individuals born of European decent with light skin, which
may or may not include other phenotypes such as a (mostly) straight nose and (mostly) straight hair as “white.” People who do not fall into that category, I refer to as people of color, black or Latina/o.

For most of my childhood, I was surrounded by people who did not look like me. They were “white.” Growing up, I was told repeatedly either by teachers or other adults in authority, both physically present or represented through the media, that race no longer mattered. I was taught that racism, as a system of oppression, was in the past and no longer applied to modern U. S. society. I was brought up to believe that it only existed in the minds of a few racist individuals. These lessons about race (almost exclusively centered on the black/white divide) usually occurred once a year during Black History month and typically involved some sort of commemoration of the end of slavery and the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Typically these stories involved some mention of Martin Luther King. As for learning about people from my own ethnic background, I do not remember learning any Latino/a history that was not associated specifically with New Mexico history, and the rest of the year was devoted to white male history.

Despite recent claims that race and ethnicity or gender no longer impacts a person’s life or life chances, some of my earliest childhood memories were about standing out or being treated differently because of my (out)group status. This is something no child usually wants. I could never just “fit in,” as many of my peers seemed to do so easily. As a child, I could not put my finger on why I felt so different from them. My first memories of standing out centered on race. No one ever directly commented on my skin color or hair color but I definitely knew that my darker skin meant that I did not look like most of my classmates and that upset me. It also meant I
could not misbehave as they sometimes did. No one would ever mistake me for somebody else. If I was not in class, people knew it. If I skipped school, it was obviously I was not there.

I have two older sisters, but only my middle sister felt exactly the same way I did. My oldest sister did not seem to have the same experiences, conflicts, or feelings of being treated differently. Of the three of us, she was the only one afforded white skin privilege on some occasions. My middle sister and I had brown skin and dark hair, so we could not and did receive such privilege. Even as children, we all understood what it meant to be white. Most importantly, it meant you did not stand out. You were not noticed. It meant you were immediately accepted and trusted. You did not get treated differently. People did not stare at you. At the time, we did not call it passing, but we certainly knew that the color of our skin made a difference in our lives. Most of the people my oldest sister encountered, particularly after high school and into adulthood, believed she was white until they either heard her last name (prior to her marriage and changing her name) or met the rest of her family. In college, she often found herself in situations where friends told racist jokes because they did not know she was Hispanic. I recall one very upsetting incident when her future grandfather-in-law told her directly, “stay out of the sun honey, and you’ll fit right in.” Needless to say this has put her in a few very uncomfortable situations, but these situations also confirmed that in many instances she could pass as white.

My middle sister and I experienced the world very differently and we would talk about it with each other quite frequently while growing up. Again, we had been told that race no longer mattered, so we searched for other reasons for our differential treatment.
It was obvious to us that it was connected to the color of our skin, yet we did not use the words race or racism to describe our experiences. My oldest sister never took part in these conversations because she did not share our experiences. My middle sister and I discussed how our teachers treated us differently, as well as our friends and even members of our own family. My maternal grandparents, both of whom had light skin, always favored the lighter skinned grandchildren, including my oldest sister. It seemed fairly obvious to all three of us, and even my mother recognized the differential treatment, but she just tried to explain it away with talk about religion and my sister being older. My parents pretended not to notice that our grandparents were treating us differently. They did, however, recognize and understand that we were being treated differently at school. Indeed, my parents, and my mother in particular, heard many of our stories and complaints. She was pained and upset by our experiences and differential treatment, but my parents were not willing to move us out of what they considered a “good” school. They were also more traditional and saw teachers as authority figures, so nothing was ever said or done.

Although my skin color impacted how I saw myself and how others saw me, it was not until I was almost a teenager that I had my first overt experience with race. It occurred when I was about the age of eleven during a summer festival that attracted hundreds of people to my small town from around the state. I was walking around the park where the festival was being held and talking with friends when an older kid suddenly stopped me. He was a stranger to me, maybe fifteen or sixteen years old. He walked up to me and asked, “What are you?” No one had ever asked me something like that before so I was not sure what he expected as a response – A student? A girl? A kid?
A local? My puzzled expression must have revealed my confusion because the question was quickly followed with, “You don’t have an accent.” This immediately brought embarrassment. I had been stopped in front of my friends by a complete stranger and asked something that I knew they would never be asked. They would never be asked such a question because the person asking looked just like them – light skin with blond hair. I was singled out because of my skin color, which in this situation, signified to another person that I should speak with an accent. I was horrified. I was being grouped with other dark skinned individuals who did actually speak with an accent and to this boy it was odd that I did not. Being singled out for the color of my skin would happen repeatedly throughout my life, and this boy’s question would follow me throughout adulthood regardless of my education, age, or employment status. I cannot seem to escape the “What are you?” question.

I have lived in many cities throughout the country, but it is the same wherever I go. In one large Midwestern city, I was walking up the street toward my house in the pouring rain with my umbrella pulled close. As I approached an intersection, I noticed a man standing on the corner watching me walk toward him. Just as I began to cross the street, his face appeared under my umbrella and he said, “Um excuse me, but what are you?” I gave him a strange look, pulled my umbrella closer and kept walking without saying a word. In that same city, I was waiting for a bus when a man, who appeared to be homeless and intoxicated, walked past and started screaming at the top of his lungs, “What are you? Are you a terrorist?” over and over again until he fell over and passed out on the sidewalk. I walked into a convenience store to purchase a soda and while I was paying, the store clerk asked, “What are you?” I was leaving a parking garage and when
I stopped at the toll both, the attendant inside handed me my change and asked, “Um, what are you?” as he put the money into my hand. In an East coast city, I was sitting at a table in a local bar drinking a beer with a good friend (who is white) when two men approached our table and struck up a conversation. After a few minutes, one of them turned to me and said, “What are you? Uh, I mean, what’s your background?” In a smaller suburb, I worked in a bookstore for several years and many customers asked me this same question, typically after requesting my help to locate a book. It sounded something like, “Do you have that new book on Oprah’s list? And, um, may I ask, what are you?” I was sitting in an office in the backroom of that same bookstore when a truck driver making a delivery walked past. He popped his head in the door and asked, “Um, are you half black?” I looked up and took a couple of seconds before saying, “No.” He then quickly added, “I wasn’t trying to offend you.” I was offended by the latter statement not the former but simply said, “I’m not offended, but I’m also not half black.”

Some of my darker skinned Latina friends have shared similar stories with me, so I know I am not the only one to experience this. I alone could fill countless pages on how and when I was asked this question; and I will surely hear it again in the future. The color of my skin and my features make it difficult to classify me. As Ridgeway (2011) notes, classification is instantaneous and informs individuals how to proceed with social relations. Many people find it difficult to move into a normal conversation if they cannot first put me in the right box.
I learned about sexism and gender inequality in a similar manner. The oppressive societal forces women had rallied against were relegated to the history books. Women’s history was presented once a year during Women’s History Month. Women had won the right to vote back in 1920, and after the Women’s Rights Movement in the 1960s, women were treated equally and could be whatever they wanted to be. Yes, there were a few sexist individuals, but for the most part women were equal, or so I was told.

In terms of sexual orientation, it simply did not exist in my world. As a child, I was not even aware that there was any other possibility outside of being “straight.” High school dances always focused on boys asking girls. We picked a queen (girl) and king (boy) for everything from Homecoming to Prom. Most of my friend’s parents were still together and I did not know anyone with two moms or two dads. I know now that I went to school with many people who were gay or lesbian, but at the time, I was clueless. They were not “out” and I did not even think about it (which is my first experience with privilege). Even in college, I did not know anyone who was openly gay and the struggle for GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender) rights did not enter my world. It was not until graduate school, that I heard and understood the word heteronormative. Michael Warner coined the term ‘heteronormativity’ in 1991 to expand on what Adrienne Rich (1996) described as compulsory heterosexuality. Rich challenges the notion that women are best served in heterosexual relationships and argues that heterosexuality is a violent political institution, which encourages women’s dependence, both economic and social, on men. She also suggests that women do not need men for sexual or psychological completion. Warner expands up this to describe our society’s focus on
heterosexuality as the norm with any other form of sexuality seen as deviant. I never questioned the notion of compulsory heterosexuality until I became friends with gays and lesbians and began studying the sex/gender system. I am sure that many of the people I have come in contact with throughout the years have stories to tell about “passing for straight,” some of which would no doubt sound very similar to my stories of not wanting to stand out or be different.

Unlike sexual orientation, gender played a much more dominant role in my life, although in much more subtle ways than race. My hair and style of dress made it pretty obvious to everyone that I was a girl, so my gender was never called out or questioned. My family would be called a “traditional” one with my mother working in the home and my father working outside the home. Neither my mother nor father went to college, but they both knew the world was changing and encouraged me (and my two older sisters and five half brothers) to seek out higher education. Even before their push, however, I knew I was going to go to college - not because I understood that I needed an advanced degree to make a good living for myself - but because I viewed college as a way to get out of the small town in which I grew up. I hated small town life, particularly as a person of color in a town where very few people looked like me.

Indeed, I never questioned whether or not I would go to college, but I also never thought very much about what I wanted to do once I got there. Although I had always earned high grades in both elementary and high school and graduated as the Salutatorian of my class I never thought about exploring different careers based on my skills and abilities or preferences. In my small town, most of the college-educated women I encountered on a regular basis were teachers. I vaguely remember Geraldine Ferraro
running for Vice President on the Democratic ticket in 1984, but most of my immediate female role models were limited to educators. In addition, my father consistently encouraged me to become an elementary school teacher. He talked repeatedly about how educators were always going to be in demand and how teachers made a decent salary. Interestingly, my father had four sons from a previous marriage and he did not encourage any of them to become elementary school teachers, although he did encourage all of them to seek higher education as well.

In my small world, smart women became teachers or nurses, and since I had no interest in nursing, I earned a degree in elementary education. It seemed very practical, and I was a very practical person. According to West and Zimmerman (1987) everyone does gender without even thinking about it, and I followed a very gendered path without questioning. This is what Ridgeway (2009) would refer to as a background effect of the gender frame. In order for people to understand and coordinate their activities, individuals must share some form of common understanding about what to expect from other people. Gender is one of the foremost categories susceptible to cultural generalizations. I was encouraged to become a teacher by my family, friends, teachers, and school counselor. They saw it as a good career (for women), which would explain why my brothers and male friends were not similarly encouraged. In the context of my small town, there were few occupational choices for highly educated women, and as Cecelia Ridgeway (2009) discusses, most of us “do gender” in expected ways even when we do not think or understand the reality of gender or the normative beliefs about gender. Gender is a background identity that consistently operates in implicit ways to shape our activities and interactions in varying degrees (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). In my case,
assumptions were made that I would enjoy teaching and be good at it because I was a woman, and women “naturally” possess characteristics appropriate for the education of young children. It was a consistent message regardless of whether or not I would like it or excel in the field.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew teaching elementary school was not what I really wanted to do with my life. I always felt I had to put on a show when I was in front of a room full of little kids and it just did not feel right. In fact, it was exhausting, but I trusted the adults around me and I was never encouraged to do anything else. I was never pushed to explore other opportunities. After student teaching and then three years of teaching elementary school, I was finally ready to admit that I did not want to teach young children in that type of environment. It was not making me happy and I dreaded going to work every day. After leaving the teaching profession, I spent the next three years working as the Community Relations Manager for a large chain bookstore while I tried to figure out what career path I wanted to follow. During that time, I found myself working with various local high schools, college groups, and professors on issues of diversity and equality. That eventually led me to discover sociology and then graduate school.

Since beginning this graduate program, I have read volumes of literature about the unequal outcomes and differential treatment experienced by all people of color, white women, gays and lesbians, and other marginalized groups, but like many graduate students, I had no idea what specific topic I was going to investigate for my dissertation. As I learned more about how oppressed groups were affected by our current systems of inequality, I was also drawn to learn more about the privileged groups who benefit from
them. While reading countless research articles and books, I was constantly reminded of all those white men throughout my life asking me about my ethnic background.

I was first inspired to do research on dominant group members after reading Eileen O’Brien’s (2001) book, *Whites Confront Racism: Antiracists and Their Paths to Action*. Since then I have come across other research analyzing why higher status individuals participate in actions for a more equal and just society, such as Mark Warren’s (2010) book *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice*; Schact and Ewing’s book (2004) *Feminism with Men: Bridging the Gender Gap*; and Melinda Miceli’s (2005) *Standing Out, Standing Together: The Social and Political Impact of Gay-Straight Alliances*, to name just a few. These authors continue to explore how and why higher status individuals work toward social justice as well as the importance of such work. At the same time, I also met and became friends with several white men who identified as anti-racist and feminist. Their knowledge and understanding inspired me to learn more about their views, particularly when the majority of dominant group members seemed to have developed what Feagin and Vera (1995) refer to as “sincere fictions” - the mythologies that people create when they claim racial inequality no longer plays a role in an individual’s life chances. Although Feagin and Vera were speaking specifically about race, I suggest that these sincere fictions could be expanded across multiple forms of inequality.

**Ideological Dissidents**

Despite the dominant mainstream ideological frames that have emerged post-civil rights, post-women’s rights, and the ongoing struggle for gay and lesbian rights, it is clear that
some higher status individuals do recognize their privileged positions and perhaps even admonish such unfairness. Bonilla-Silva et al. (2004:577) refers to these dominant group members as ideological dissidents, which he describes as “white racial progressives.” He does not define exactly what it means to be progressive, and in other texts, he refers to ideological dissidents as race traitors as well as liberal whites (2001).

Bonilla-Silva (2001) suggests that all racialized social systems produce ideological dissidents, and although research does not unequivocally demonstrate this, I believe we can extend Bonilla-Silva’s statement and argue that all oppressive systems can produce such ideological dissidents. When discrimination was overt and even acceptable in some regions of the country, such as during slavery and then the Jim Crow era, and before the Women’s Rights Movement many ideological dissidents were moved to action because of what they heard and saw – either through word of mouth, in the media, or through personal experience. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, many people found the brutal images of black children being attacked by dogs hard to ignore; and images of lynched bodies hanging from trees stirred some people to action; yet, for decades (and even centuries) before the civil rights movements oppressed people struggled for equal treatment on a daily basis. Their struggles were often ignored or even denounced by most privileged members of society, but as history has shown, approval or acknowledgement of a problem (or lack thereof) does not attest to the need for change.

As I read more about privilege and the lack of awareness most higher status group members have about this important component of our social system, I started thinking more about dominant group members, in this case white, heterosexual men, who had developed a deeper understanding about various forms of inequality. Very little is
written about them, and I found several gaps in the current literature. First, it was
typically limited in scope to one area of stratification. For example, O’Brien (2001) and
Warren (2010) only discuss race, while Digby (1998) and Schacht and Ewing (2004) only
discuss gender. More recent research in sociology has expanded to include multiple areas
of stratification, but typically focus on either theory or outcomes. Few of these studies
have included dominant group members who might be considered ideological dissidents.
In terms of race, the literature tends to focus on the anti-racist action of white women
(Frankenberg 1993; Trepagnier 2006) or gay white men and white women (Eichstedt
2001). For the most part, white heterosexual men are typically not recommended as
individuals with whom to build coalitions (Frankenberg 1993; Hogan and Netzer 1993;
Bonilla-Silva 2001; 2003). Indeed, the people most often recommended for building
coalitions come from other oppressed groups – white women, all people of color, the
working class, and more recently gays and lesbians (Stone 2009), although middle-class,
educated “enlightened” whites have been recommended as well (Bobo and Licari 1989;
Quillian 1996), they are typically also women.

White heterosexual men are in charge of nearly every societal institution in the
United States. The media, the state, the courts, the financial and business sector, and our
education system are all still predominantly run by whites [and men] and “still speak for
whites [men and heterosexuals] while claiming – and sometimes sincerely aiming – to
speak for humanity” (Dyer 1988, p. 11). Progressive white heterosexual men could make
great allies in the struggle for equality, as they are more likely to have access to power
and influence in these institutions. Ideological dissidents throughout history have
acknowledged and challenged the disparities between oppressed and privileged groups.
Do modern progressive white heterosexual men do the same? I wanted to know what they understand about the new forms of racial and gender inequality. Could social movements possibly tap into this pool of individuals for support? Could they be strong allies in the fight against inequality?

I began this research with a positive heart and mind. I knew several men who considered themselves progressive, yet I never explicitly asked how they felt about specific issues nor did I know how they reacted to information about inequality. I knew a few who had attended some gay rights rallies; some even discussed racism with me at length; but I did not have any in-depth information about what they knew concerning race, gender and sexual orientation overall. Was there a common theme or umbrella under which progressive united? What issues do these men view as important? Do they even mention gender or racial inequality? What do they think about discrimination against people based on sexual orientation? How do they feel about the lack of rights for sexual minorities? Does their knowledge of discrimination move beyond the overt when it comes to sexual orientation? I wondered whether or not individuals who had developed some type of consciousness in one area of stratification, such as the anti-racist activists in O’Brien’s work, would be familiar with other forms of inequality such as that within the gender system? In other words, does developing an elevated consciousness in one area of stratification translate to the recognition of inequality in another? What do progressives know about privilege, and do their beliefs compel them to take action? If not, why not? I could not find the answers to my questions elsewhere, so I begin collecting data.
After reading several books on anti-racist activists, pro-feminist men and heterosexual allies, I started speaking with men who considered themselves progressive. After several meetings and conversations with them, I created an interview guide and began searching for self-identified progressive white heterosexual men. I specifically targeted men who held a middle class status and lived in or near cities with populations over 100,000. Between October 2008 and March 2010, I conducted forty in-depth semi-structured interviews across two mid-western states. I interviewed respondents in their homes, their workplaces, in coffee shops, in local city parks, or in my office. Their names and identifying information have been changed in order to protect their identities. The shortest interview lasted one hour and thirty minutes, while the longest lasted three and a half hours. The average interview length was slightly over two hours and fifteen minutes (see Appendix A for a complete discussion of methods). Through these interviews I was able to learn how dominant group members relate their progressive identity to inequality and privilege as well as how they respond to such knowledge. Although I did not ask them directly, some of these men shared their thoughts about why they originally became a progressive. For those men, I have also included literature about identity development and the interest-based versus exposure-based explanations often associated with holding more liberal attitudes.

I believe that these stories provide rich insight into how inequality is maintained and reproduced even by those object to it, but it also highlights how some men are working, even if in individual passive ways to either reduce inequality or at least to consciously do no harm. I predict that while the latter is far from developing a collective identity with subordinate group members, which Thomas et al. (2009) describe as
necessary for sustained commitments to a social or political cause, but it may open these
white heterosexual men up to further identity shaping exposure-based experiences that
may push them in that direction. Future research should explore this possibility.

Most of the current literature on anti-racist or feminist work concentrates on
people who identify themselves as “activists” yet most people would not describe
themselves this way. Indeed, if activists made up the majority of the population then we
would see major changes in our gendered, racialized, and heterosexualized social
systems. We know throughout history there have always been some members of the
dominant group who have come to embrace social justice and worked diligently to reduce
(2010) specifically sought out white activists working toward racial justice. Obviously
some dominant group members have committed themselves to activism, so what is
holding others back? I explore what current research has to say about why some people
take action and compare the differences between their experiences to those of the
progressive men I interviewed in order to determine possible reasons for inaction as well
as to explore if holding a progressive identity and associated attitudes translates into any
form of action.

I do not intend to bring white heterosexual men to the center of attention as they
have been historically and are currently. Instead, my aim is to examine whiteness,
maleness, and heterosexuality in a critical way. As discussed, much of the research on
whiteness, white supremacy, masculinity, patriarchy, and heteronormativity focuses on
some, usually unrecognized, form of privilege. The assumption is that this privilege is
unknown. It is the norm and thus ignored. It is the thing to which everything else is
compared. As the saying goes, if you live your life in the spotlight, it is hard to see anything beyond the stage. Yet, I knew some dominant group members who seemed to be looking past the curtain. A few books and articles have been published detailing the lives of ‘progressive’ or ‘liberal’ members of society working to challenge and reduce inequality and I wanted to expand the sociological knowledge about dominant group progressives specifically. As discussed in the next chapter their standpoint is very different from that of people who are directly affected by inequality associated with race, gender, and sexual orientation and thus it is necessary to not essentialize what it means to be progressive. Identity formation can be both individual and social as well as contextually based and collective. I explore how these appear to interact for dominant group progressives.

Again, I had a great deal of optimism when I began this research. I wanted to understand more about individuals who not only hold privilege in our society on multiple levels (white, heterosexual, and male) but who also recognized some of the problems facing white women, all people of color and/or homosexuals. As oppression and inequality continue to become more subtle and hidden, it has become more important than ever to have people from various backgrounds united together in vocal opposition against it. My intention was to explore how progressive men could become or (already were) allies for dismantling racial injustice, gender inequality, and the unfair and unequal treatment of gays and lesbians, but that is not what I found. I have come to the conclusion that holding a progressive view on any form of inequality is only one step toward a commitment to social justice. Literature has shown that any type of social change necessitates alliances between impacted groups and those in power. Working
with “progressives” is often recommended, and although I do not disagree with the literature on this, I must also add that for any movement is to be successful, dominant group members must not only understand inequality, but also understand the benefits they receive from such inequality and be willing to learn about the position of subordinate group members through exposure to new people, relationships and experiences with people of color, feminist women, sexual minorities and activists. These appear to all be necessary steps to move dominant group members from sympathy to empathy for others (i.e. developing a collective identity) and finally to action.

In the next five chapters I explore the reproduction and maintenance of inequalities in modern U.S. society by connecting it to the lack of action or involvement of progressive white heterosexual men. Specifically, I examine the individual (passive) efforts to reduce inequality and the conscious efforts some men make to do no harm. Although my findings were somewhat contrary to my expectations, particularly concerning the wide-spread use of a colorblind, genderblind ideology, my research offers new insights into how an identity can information attitudes and actions.

In Chapter 1, I review the legacy of inequality and explore modern forms of discrimination in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation through the use of the metaphorical Matrix of Domination. The goal here is to describe many of the problems that still remain and establish the foundation for understanding why working toward a more fair and just society is vitally important. I do not expect any of the men I interview will hold such vast knowledge, but it gives the reader an opportunity to comprehend the myriad of ways covert institutionalized discrimination continues to play a role in modern society and various avenues for dominant group members to recognize it.
Many scholars discuss how the current institutionalized nature of inequality has led many social movements to stall and has allowed dominant groups members (and some subordinate group members) to turn a blind eye to the inequality that still persists (Taylor 1989; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Faludi 1991, 2006; England 2010). Oppressed groups have experienced inequality for centuries and despite changing conditions, their push for change has been relatively continuous. However, support by dominant group members has waned particularly as new covert, symbolic, and/or aversive forms of inequality have emerged. I end the chapter by exploring some of the mechanisms that have pushed a number of dominant group members throughout history to take action despite the powerful explanations and justifications that have been created to maintain inequality.

In Chapter 2, I explore how white heterosexual men think about and give meaning to their identity as “progressives.” I begin by reviewing the current literature on identity development including concepts of the self, self-concept, role-identity, cultural and situation contexts and briefly introduce collective or group-based theories of self. I then analyze my data and return to the literature to determine how white heterosexual men develop identities as progressives. My discussion of the literature and the information extracted from my interviews includes interest-based and exposure-based explanations. I then return to the data and reveal what themes emerged when I asked these men to explain why they are progressives. I discuss the three themes that emerged and relate them to an understanding of identity. Finally I examine what specific issues these men determine to be relevant to their identity as a progressive paying particular attention to what issues are listed most frequently. I conclude by linking my respondents’ views on progressivism to their identity development.
In Chapter 3, I investigate the attitudes developed by progressive white, heterosexual men that give meaning to their identity as a “progressive.” I considered variability in the social factors and socialization processes that differentially constrain and facilitate my respondents’ progressive identities. Previous research finds individual beliefs about systems of stratification are influenced by a person’s own social location and relative relationship to social inequality (Davis and Greenstein 2009), thus I explore when it is more salient for progressives to use their progressive identity versus when it is more salient for them to use their dominant group identity associated with mainstream individualistic views while specifically examining three areas of stratification – race, gender, and sexual orientation. I report on the situation contexts within which progressive men are more likely see their progressive identity as salient.

In Chapter 4, I examine how identity as a progressive is or is not related to knowledge of privilege. I begin by exploring current white racial identity development models and connect racial identity development to knowledge about inequality. I then explore how knowledge of inequality is conceptually distinct from knowledge of privilege. Using Rowe et al.’s (1994) identity development model combined with the data I have collected, I further examine what attitudes results from a progressive identity except this time couch it in an understanding of privilege.

In Chapter 5, I explore the potential behaviors that result from holding a progressive identity and associated attitudes surrounding race, gender, sexual orientation specifically. I reveal what actions, if any these progressive men are taking in response to their identity development. I expand upon the theories generated by Schwalbe et al. (2000) concerning how inequalities are created and reproduced, drawing upon examples
from my interview data. Schwalbe et al. (2000) argue that inequality cannot be understood apart from the processes that reproduce it. Precise forms of reproduction vary across settings, but there are underlying generic processes that can be studied and analyzed. I add to this theory and argue that inaction, doing no harm, and passive action are all influenced by mainstream views concerning the ideology of individualism. Individualism often inhibits action even for those with a deeper understanding of inequality and emphasizes the primacy of the individual. I conclude by examining the behaviors of those taking passive action and theorize about what constraints exist which prevent these men from becoming more active. I also introduce the concept of collective identity and analyze barriers that remain and that likely prevent progressive men from developing a group-based identity and formally working to reduce inequality.

In Chapter 6, I summarize my findings and review all of the themes that have emerged in the previous five chapters. I argue that for some progressives, chiefly concerned with developing alternative masculinities, self-identifying as a progressive can be seen as a path to personal development. For others, being a progressive can be seen as a step toward creating more meaningful relationships with people of color, white women and sexual minorities and opens the possibly for developing a collective sense of identity through those relationships.

In summary, my dissertation explores what holding a progressive identity means; how that identity is related to attitudes about inequality and privilege; what behaviors result from such knowledge and what constraints prevent these men from being more active. Every individual takes on multiple roles, such as student, parent, worker, etc. Those roles can include the adoption of values and thus a corresponding identity based on
either mainstream ideological views of how a society functions, which tend to be more conservative in nature and work to preserve the status quo, or through the adoption of more “progressive” views based on exposure to and experiences with alternative situations that contradict mainstream ideological views. Either point of view can be more or less salient based on situational and contextual environments. This dissertation explores when a progressive identity becomes more salient than the dominant group mainstream ideological views and vice versa. I examine why so many individuals have difficulty articulating the problems we still face in terms of the unequal power relations and distribution of resources in this country and why, even if these dominant group members consider themselves knowledgeable about inequality, they are doing very little in terms of actively working for systemic change. Most dominant group progressives, in point of fact, take a more passive, slow-moving approach, often through the support of bureaucratic methods or simply trying to do no harm.

In modern society, interactions increasingly take place in more homogenous groups or lifestyle enclaves and meaningful relationships are developed more frequently with those who share similar ascribed characteristics, attitudes, tastes and styles of life. Physical and emotional separations are naturalized through the ideology of individualism. The normative rights of the individual are elevated over the validity of group complaints while also defining and managing the emotional responses of not only subordinate group members (Jackman 1994) but dominant group members as well. Complaints about inequality from either group can then be channeled into less threatening, individualistic goals.
Our society was established upon a system of inequality, and although a great deal of progress has been made, inequality persists and the hierarchical systems remain. Mainstream explanations about inequality almost always focus on individual failings and rarely examine how the system and interaction (or lack thereof) both play an important role in the continuing divide between the oppressed and the privileged.

My intent is not to essentialize any particular group, whether created by race, gender, or sexual orientation. No two people who occupy the same outward identity believe in exactly the same philosophy, experience the same world, or interact with their environment in the same way. I do, however, agree with Collins (2003) when she states that groups are constructed within social practices and those groups have shared histories and shared locations in hierarchical power relations. These shared histories provide groups distinctive experiences based on their intersectionality within the Matrix of Domination (as explained in the next chapter) and although categories of difference are narrative fictions, they are very real in their material, social, and psychological consequences. My research documents the attitudes, beliefs and practices of self-identified “progressives,” and tries to get at not only how these dominant group members understand inequality and privilege, but also how such knowledge combines with other constraints or moral/social obligations that might push them to action.

Finally, although throughout this dissertation I focus on the identity, attitudes, beliefs and (possible) actions of white heterosexual men, my research does not support the notion that white women, people of color and sexual minorities are simply the victims of oppression and if these men would simply recognize and then give up power, equality would be achieved. Everyone has a significant amount of work to do to dismantle the
racialized, sexualized and gendered social systems. However, I do believe that individuals, through the development of a combination of individual, social, and collective identities are the primary drivers of social change (Miceli 2005), and we do not have enough information about dominant group members and their thoughts on inequality - particularly those who might be more inclined than others to work for change. Bernice Johnson Reagon (2000) emphasizes the difficulty as well as the critical importance of developing collective identities and moving toward collective action and my research hopes to build on that. If social scientists are to continue to use the word ‘progressive’ to describe potential allies in the work against inequality it is important not to essentialize them, but rather explore whether commonalities and similar values do exist.
Chapter 1: Understanding the Matrix of Domination

Let me tell why you’re here. You’re here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain, but you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life—there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is, but it’s there, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad…The matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth…You are a slave... Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch—a prison for your mind. Unfortunately no one can be told what the matrix is. You have to see it for yourself. This is your last chance. After this there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember all I’m offering is the truth. Nothing more.

If you have watched the 1999 film, The Matrix, you will recognize this passage as the oration given by the semi-mystical character Morpheus as he talks to the computer hacker and potential savior of the “real” world, Neo. Morpheus offers to show Neo what he refers to as “the truth” - that the world Neo thinks is real is actually computer generated. It is “the matrix,” a computer program created by machines to distract people’s minds and keep them unaware of their actual physical enslavement. In “reality,” people are being used as batteries to power the world of machines. Although this is a tale of science fiction, many people can relate to wanting to know the truth about the world around them, and they recognize distractions that often hide pieces of the truth. The truth however is often very elusive and we typically only have access to one perspective on it—never the whole.
As a species, we all share the same physical world, but we experience the social, political and economic aspects of that world quite differently based on our gender, race, sexual orientation, class, nation, religion, etc. Membership in categories such as race, gender, and sexual orientation involve very different attributes and life outcomes, yet they also incorporate many similarities specifically in the processes that create and reproduce the inequality found within them. These processes serve as a framework for understanding how various forms of oppression are linked. According to hooks (1989), systems of oppression interconnect to form an overarching structure of domination. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) refers to this as the Matrix of Domination.

Like the fictional “matrix,” the Matrix of Domination is all around us, but now more than ever is easy to ignore. A study conducted jointly by the Washington Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University (Morin 2001) found that the majority of whites (between 40 and 60 percent depending on the specific question), believe blacks are about as well off as whites in terms of school, jobs, income and healthcare, despite the abundance of evidence indicating pervasive racial inequality in these domains. The majority of blacks, somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths, believe blacks are behind whites in those same categories, testifying to their lived experiences with these inequalities. Recognizing the existence of inequality increases whites support for government actions to ensure equality of treatment and outcomes. In the study previously mentioned, fifty-seven percent of whites supported government intervention in schools and healthcare if it ensures access, yet if they held accurate information about the black/white divide sixty-nine percent of whites believe the
government was obligated to ensure that black and white children attend schools of equal quality and to ensure that blacks were treated equally by the police and court system.

In the Matrix of Domination, the master binary of normal/abnormal, good/bad, white/black governs Eurocentrist masculinist thought (Collins 2000). Current views on sexual orientation give us an example of this. Adrienne Rich (1996) describes how compulsory heterosexuality is part of the gender power system. Specifically, the concept “heteronormativity” describes the taken for granted “naturalness” of heterosexuality and heterosexual gender roles, both set as fixed, universal norms. These normative categories thus demarcate homosexuality as a deviant or unnatural state of being (Carabine 1996).

According to Ridgeway (2006), classification by race, gender, age, and other characteristics occurs so that we know how to proceed with social relations. A person’s sexuality is not as readily classified, but heterosexuality is assumed and therefore such classification is unnecessary. Ridgeway builds upon an expectation states theoretical research program (Lakatos 1970), which asserts phenomenon such as a person’s or group’s performance, power and prestige, evaluations, authority, status characteristics, decision-making control, and many other categorical differences are connected to situations that produce conditions which eventually combine to form underlying structures (Berger et al. 1985). Within expectation states theory, status construction theory focuses on the local contexts of action (Ridgeway 2006) and examines how status beliefs about social conditions develop. Status beliefs result from shared evaluative hierarchy among different groups, and encounters with people who are different can maintain, recreate, spread or interrupt status beliefs. Status beliefs occur when the
majority of a society, both dominant and subordinate groups, agrees that one group is lacking in comparison to another regardless of whether or not a group is actually lacking. Status beliefs have force through the collective nature of society itself. Once “most” people believe certain status characteristics exist both the dominant and subordinate groups are affected by these assumptions. Lucas and Baxter (2012) review the vast amount of literature that documents how dominant group members use the positive characteristics associated with their ascribed physical traits (via race and gender) to their advantage and find that the lower status(es) associated with women and people of color continue play a role in their decreased power and influence. They face multiple challenges to not only acquiring power but also in their ability to use what power they obtain to influence others because their power is not seen as legitimate. Thus, a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs. Dominant groups are able to keep their power and influence while simultaneously viewing subordinate groups less worthy (Lucas and Baxter 2012). In more sociological terms this is known as homosocial reproduction (Elliott and Smith 2004).

Focusing specifically on gender, Ridgeway (2011) argues that women are “framed by gender” according to the status women hold in society. Gender stereotypes contain status beliefs and provide greater status (worthiness and competence) to men rather than women (Ridgeway 2001). Gender has become a cultural frame that biases both men and women during the performance of behaviors undertaken in the name of organizational roles and identities. Women are seen as having (or lacking) essential or innate characteristics that are associated with a particular kind of work in the labor
market, political arena, and domestic sphere. Beliefs and attitudes about social differences help to develop preferences for “in-group” members and eventually turn into shared ideologies concerning both dominant and subordinate group members that make up status characteristics and expectation states. These attitudes and ideologies transfer into actions, either conscious or nonconscious, because of the mutual dependence and interaction between social groups in contemporary society.

Categorization by gender, race or sexual orientation could be a dispassionate process, but according to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), “this emphasis on quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief that either/or categories must be ranked. The search for certainty of this sort requires that one side of a dichotomy be privileged while its other is denigrated. Privilege becomes defined in relation to its other” (emphasis added). In the case of race, white is the privileged category. It is ranked the highest of all racial categories. In the case of gender, male is ranked higher, and in the case of sexual orientation, heterosexuality holds the top position.

The categorization of individuals into groups occurs in all social interactions (Ridgeway 2006) and for people who occupy a subordinate position, it often leads to unequal outcomes, yet the naturalness of classifying and the hierarchical nature of status distinctions are taken for granted. Categorizations and the beliefs about such categories are supported by cultural views and stereotypes that impact everyone. These frames are all tightly linked to a cultural ethos of individualism, which also dominates U.S. society, and claims that group differences do not exist.
Individualism and the American Dream

In political philosophy and economics, rational choice theory holds that the interests of normal adults are best served by allowing them maximum freedom and responsibility for choosing their own objectives as well as the means for obtaining them (Becker 1974). Based on this, ideas about equality have come to mean providing *rights* as opposed to making sure everyone’s voice is actually heard. According to Mary Jackman (1994) strict construction with the ideology of individualism means that subordinates are “pressed to transform their group demands into individual aspirations…those demands that continue to be issued by subordinates shift away from the redistributive issues that lie at the core of the intergroup relationship to the safer moral ground of individual rights and equal opportunity.” The morality of individualism thus becomes “omnipresent.” Working from there, logically group rights do not or should not be considered if the equality of opportunity and freedom from interference for individuals is applied equally. However, subordinate group members continue to be categorized and judged by their ascribed characteristics and are situated in subordinate positions in the Matrix of Domination. This impacts their freedom to fully participate in society and be self-determined. Dominant group members are not typically judged by the group(s) to which they belong, which permits them to assume that everyone else must be treated in a similar manner regardless of the reality in which women, people of color, and gays and lesbians (and other subordinate group members) find themselves.

The dominant group status (in this case white, male, heterosexual) is a given, a starting point, and thus dominant group members never have to think about their position
in society. Everyone else is defined in contrast to them: women, black, Hispanic, gay, lesbian, etc. For example, women do not just play basketball. They play “women’s basketball.” Whites are typically not referred to as European-Americans, yet the term African American has become synonymous with black and is used to define people with darker pigmentation and other phenotypical characteristics, such as hair texture, through an assumed African heritage, regardless actual heritage. A person’s sexuality is assumed to be heterosexual unless otherwise stated (or overtly displayed), which makes policies such as “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” seem reasonable. A person is only allowed to discuss their sexual preference if it is the “right” one. As described in the introduction, my personal history is a good example of this. People assume I am a woman because of my gender display. My gender and sexual orientation are not questioned because of such display, so I am placed in the category “woman” and “heterosexual” regardless of my biology, orientation, or preference and conferred that status determined by such classifications. As for my race, many in American society continue to focus on the binary black/white divide. Although my birth certificate says I am “white,” I do not have white skin privilege. It could be assumed that I am black, but my hair texture (or other stereotypical phenotypical characteristics) may not allow some to make that assumption, thus I am repeatedly asked to what racial group I belong. In this case categorization is not automatic, thus I must consistently put up with a barrage of questions about it, particularly in predominately white areas with relatively few Hispanics, allowing certain stereotypes and status characteristics to ensue. Categorizing people happens instantaneously and is not necessarily problematic in and of itself, but the social
categories we have created concerning gender, race, and sexual orientation are hierarchical in nature and interconnect to form an overarching structure of domination. This subtle but powerful quantification and categorization combined with the emphasis on individualism deny subordinate group members both equality of opportunity and equality of outcome.

**The History of Inequality**

Accurate information can have a significant impact on how people act, thus it is critical to review where we are and where we have come from in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation. Despite the political gains made during the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Rights Movement and Gay Rights Movement, inequality remains high and many forms of discrimination, such as color-blind racism, remain strong. A thorough review of the plethora of unequal outcomes created and reproduced within the modern U.S. social system is beyond the scope of this work. Instead, I synthesize key literature on each of these systemic forms of discrimination below, beginning with race.

**Race**

Where a person lives, works, goes to school and prays is all shaped by race (Lewis et al. 2004). Simply conceiving of race as a legacy, as irrational, as a static phenomenon, as a psychological phenomenon, or only as overt behavior denies this reality (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Scholars have shown repeatedly how centuries of slavery, segregation, and unequal treatment result in intergenerational cumulative patterns of socioeconomic
disadvantage and advantage, but inequality is also recreated and perpetuated through modern institutions and current social interactions. A singular focus on the historical legacy of racism ignores its contemporary material foundation.

The hierarchical relationships between racial groups can shift over time, but they remain strong nonetheless. Although overt racism has declined, the black-white divide remains firmly in place (Feagin 1991; Massey and Denton 1993; Conley 1999; Charles 2003; Krysan and Lewis 2004; Shapiro 2004; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2004; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Alexander 2010). Moreover, historical patterns of racial inequality are institutionalized and continue to impede blacks and other people of color, at the same time whites continue to benefit from an unrecognized access to good neighborhoods, school systems, and better employment opportunities. Large amounts of empirical evidence show consistent patterns of discrimination, unequal treatment, and racialized status hierarchies, aspects of which Eduardo Bonilla-Silva refers to as a “racialized social system” (Bonilla-Silva 2001:37) and white supremacy.

Although whites benefit from unrecognized disparate access to societal institutions, resources, status and power, success among whites is most often framed as resulting from individual initiative and discipline. Kluegel and Smith (1986) find that whites are more likely to use individual explanations to understand differences in wealth and poverty while Blacks are more likely to look to structural explanations. In modern society, higher status individuals often take the color-blind attitude that if blacks “would just stop thinking about the past, work hard, and complain less (particularly about racial discrimination), then Americans of all hues could ‘all get along’” (Bonilla-Silva 2003:1).
Thus, it appears that “white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular” (Dyer 1988). White heterosexual men have historically been the full recipients of the benefits and privileges of society, yet according to Feagin and Vera (1995), those same whites have developed “sincere fictions” about how little they are advantaged, with some believing they now benefit the least. Institutionalized racism aids in the maintenance of white privilege for all whites regardless of their personal history (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Sincere fictions arise because overt racist behavior by individuals is now considered unacceptable and dominant group members openly object to obvious forms of discrimination. Yet, dominant group members often remain unable or unwilling to recognize how they benefit – and how others are penalized – by the structure of society.

Across the spectrum from housing, to education, to employment, to health and well-being, research continues to provide examples of how color-blind racism works. In his book, The Wages of Whiteness, David Roediger (1991) describes the “psychological wage” paid to white workers during the early formation of the white working class. White workers constructed notions of white supremacy in opposition to black slaves who were seen as inferior. This racial divide has continued throughout history in both employment and housing with or without the support of the legal system.

In her book Race and the Invisible Hand, Royster (2003) shows how systemic disadvantages follow blacks throughout the employment process. Comparing otherwise similar whites and blacks, she finds whites experience far greater success than blacks at every level including higher wages, fewer bouts of unemployment, and smoother transitions between jobs, much of which is related to more effective assistance from
family, friends and teachers. Even in the hiring process, where discrimination is notoriously difficult to prove, it appears that whites also have an advantage. In terms of getting hired through a referral or social network, employers accepted applicants with little or no training from white referrers but tended to only accept applicants with extensive training or expertise from black referrers (Royster 2003). In audit tests conducted through job interviews and the application process, results suggest that employers’ have a propensity to hire white workers over black workers (Pager 2003; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004).

Labor market research on promotions and mobility reveal that whites are more likely to be promoted than Blacks (Baldi and McBrier 1997; Maume 1999), and a number of studies demonstrate that everything else being equal, Whites’ job evaluations are higher than those of black workers (Sackett, DuBois and Noe 1991; Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley 1990; Elvira and Zatzick 2002). Kmec (2003) finds that wages are higher in jobs that are predominantly held by whites. White workers experience lower unemployment rates (Cohn and Fossett 1995) and are disproportionately placed in both higher tier occupations and in jobs which possess authority (Lieberson 1980; Wilson 1997; Smith 1997, 2001). There is also evidence that Black workers may be placed in “racialized jobs” in which they serve other minorities (Collins 1997) while white workers are in jobs that serve everyone. Whites are also significantly less likely to be laid off or fired, regardless of personal and firm characteristics (Elvira and Zatzick 2002; Park and Sandefur 2003). Segregation at work also remains an issue, which McPherson et al. (2001) relates partially to race/ethnic
homophily in personal networks previously discussed. In terms of both employment and housing Vincent Roscigno (2007) and his co-authors document concrete examples of how gatekeeper decision making and social closure maintain stratification and inequality.

Moreover, leaving the labor market does not mean leaving the unequal treatment behind. Housing discrimination and segregation, educational disparities, differentials in income and wealth accumulation, unequal health outcomes and disparate treatment within the criminal justice system are all detrimental to the social mobility and well-being of people of color. Although housing discrimination is no longer legally or politically mandated, de facto hyper-segregation continues to exist, particularly in rural areas and large urban centers (Massey and Denton 1993). In the early to mid twentieth century when large numbers of people of color moved into cities, whites concurrently evacuated those increasingly racially mixed urban regions and moved to more homogenous suburban areas - a condition also know as white flight. Redlining and mortgage discrimination perpetuated the problem and these historical processes continue to play out in the vast amounts of segregation that still remain. Although many white homeowners would not consider their motives for wanting to live in a mostly white neighborhood, inequality is perpetuated when such choices are made. Whites often cite fear of crime, lack of educational opportunities, and declining home prices as reasons for not wanting to purchase a home such neighborhoods or as to why they are leaving such neighborhoods (Shapiro 2004), but racial preferences also play a major role and the evidence shows that whites are significantly less likely to move into a neighborhood where blacks already make up the majority (Lewis et al. 2004). Negative racial
stereotypes often lead to an overestimation of the link between having black neighbors and living in a crime-ridden community (Quillian and Pager 2001). This combined with few economic opportunities in urban and rural areas, particularly for the working class or those with limited educational advancement, often results in hypersegregation (Massey and Denton 1989; Charles 2003.)

Housing choices have a serious detrimental impact on the people of color who do live in such neighborhoods. Home ownership across all class divisions gives whites more wealth than their black counterparts. Blacks receive the lowest return of any group for home ownership, and the gain they get from educational attainment is confined to college graduates, and even there, the gain is less than half of that among whites (Logan and Alba 1993). Segregation in the housing market limits the supply of housing available to blacks while also driving up the price of houses available to them as well (Kmec 2003). Residential segregation cost African Americans approximately $58 million in lost equity between the years 1965-1995 (Lipsitz 2006). Dalton Conley (1999) and Oliver and Shapiro (1995) convincingly argue that home ownership is the key to wealth accumulation and housing segregation often closes off that important avenue to obtain wealth for African Americans. Oliver and Shapiro (1995) find that even middle class blacks earn less than middle class whites and have only a fraction of their wealth. In addition, there are also health costs associated with segregated neighborhoods as unequal access to home ownership also impacts whether or not a person lives in a neighborhood affected by toxic hazards or other environmental problems (Bullard 1993; Bryant and Mohai 1992). In terms of health care, whites live about six years longer on average than
blacks; have twice as low an infant mortality rate; and black males are about three and one-half times more likely to die from cancer than white males (Eitzen and Zinn 2006).

Moving away from neighborhood effects, the criminal justice system is also an arena that draws tremendous scrutiny for racial disparity in terms of who is targeted, who is arrested, who is prosecuted, and who serves jail time (Lewis et al. 2004). In her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander (2010) argues that the criminal justice system is not just a discriminatory system but is actually an integral mechanism for recreating racial disadvantage.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2011) in 2010 black (non-Hispanic) males were incarcerated at the rate of 4,347 inmates per 100,000 citizens while white males were incarcerated at the rate of 678 inmates per 100,000 citizens. Pettit and Western (2004) estimate that for men born between 1965 and 1969, three percent of whites and twenty percent of blacks have served time in prison before they reach the age of thirty. The risks of incarceration are highly stratified by education. Among black men born during this period, 30 percent of those without college education and nearly 60 percent of high school dropouts went to prison by 1999. Alexander (2010) offers the difference in incarceration rates as an example of how a new racial caste system has emerged.

Finally, language also plays an important role in the new color-blind racism. Stephen Steinberg (1995) wrote about the new language of race baiting in his book *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*. Since overtly racial language is not longer acceptable in polite society, new language codes associated with race have emerged. They include the words welfare, food stamps, urban
poverty, taxes, and (lack of) family values, among many others. Using these words to reach out to white voters does not carry the same political costs that overt racist language might, yet the same underlying racist philosophy still exists. The use of a racially coded language began in the mid to late 1970s when many whites began to experience layoffs and their economic future was more uncertain. During this time white victimization and resentment began to crystallize and the conservative movement became more influential (Bush 2004).

**Gender**

Similar to the argument Feagin and O’Brien (2003) make about race, most men have not developed a serious commitment to implementing the ideals of equality for women (Schact and Ewing 2004). Women continue to struggle for parity in the paid labor market and although some progress has been made, inequalities continue to exist in the sex labeling of jobs, sex differences in earnings and mobility (Marini 1989, Kilbourne et al. 1994, Padavic and Reskin 2002; England 2010), sexual harassment, and sex segregation across industry and occupations (Killingsworth 1987). McGuire (2002) discusses how white men are advantaged over both white and black women when it comes to labor market resources such as forming advantageous networks that lead to promotion and advancement. When men enter predominately female sex-segregated occupations, a “glass escalator” whisks them to the top of the organizational ladder (Maume 1999; Budig 2002). Indeed, in many of these cases men earn more, have faster wage growth, and move more quickly into higher positions (Budig 2002). Work by
David Maume (1999) shows that the glass escalator is much more likely for white men than all men.

Women who are in the labor market and have children can add additional stigma. Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) find that in the hiring process mothers are judged significantly less competent and committed than women without children, yet, interestingly, being a parent does not lower the competence ratings for men and in many cases it often gives them an advantage. Once hired, Budig and England (2001) find that mothers pay a wage penalty due to the perception that they are less productive on the job than non-mothers and men (whether or not men have children). Rebecca Glauber (2008) and Hodges and Budig (2010) document how white men in particular actually receive a fatherhood premium in the form of higher wages after having children (less so for Hispanic men, but not for Black men). In addition, gendered and racialized views of women often intersect with quite negative implications. Kennelly (1999) documents how the stereotypes of black women have deleterious effects for both potential employees. Employers use these (mis)perceptions to unfairly try to predict the behavior of their prospective employees.

All of these often subtle, unconscious views, actions and gatekeeper decision-making perpetuate gender inequality at work (Roscigno 2007). However, comparable to race, inequality is not limited to the labor market. As Ridgeway (2011) argues, it is possible to maintain twin ideologies about women. Although the ideology of individualism supports egalitarian views of women in the labor market, the domestic sphere remains an area of contestation. Although men’s domestic labor has increased,
women, including working women, continue to do the lion’s share of housework (Coltrane 2000), typically after coming home from paid work, which Arlie Hochschild (1989) refers to as the “second shift.” In addition to unpaid labor such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare and other forms of care, such as for aging parents, women are also more likely to be responsible for the emotion work required to keep a family together (Folbre 2001). Hochschild refers to this as the “third shift” (1997). This results in men benefiting from more free time and less stress within the home than their partners (Hochschild 1989; Sayer 2005; Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie 2006; Cooke and Baxter 2010).

Sexual Orientation

Unlike gender and racial inequality overt discrimination against people because of their differing sexual orientation is still the norm and legally allowed in many states. Although a few states have passed laws barring discrimination in the workplace, a federal ban has yet to be implemented. Since it was first introduced in Congress in 1994, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act has failed year after year to receive enough votes to pass, which means that anyone in the GLBT community can be fired based solely on their sexual orientation.

Outside the labor market, gay and lesbian communities experience other legal discrimination in terms of long standing sodomy laws (which were not overturned until Lawrence v Texas in 2003) and the denial of federal laws protecting their families – laws that are extended to heterosexuals through either marriage or adoption. Indeed, “marriage
provides a legal framework for a committed relationship between two adults, a framework that cannot be duplicated by other legal forms” (Hohengarten 1994). However, gays and lesbians in committed relationships are denied this legal protection because of strict marriage laws. Hohengarten (1994:1495) explains, “the law produces and imposes another stereotyped identity: the identity of the isolated and outcast “homosexual,” whose deviant sexuality is incompatible with committed familial relationships.” By pushing the idea that this form of sexuality is deviant and ‘not natural’ many states have amended their constitutions to prevent unions by same-sex couples, despite the fact that many of these couples are forming families.

Speaking of family relations, a report issued by The Urban Institute and the Williams Institute at University of California at Los Angeles School of Law (2007) estimates that if states restrict the adoption or fostering by gay or lesbian parents, it could create major “financial and logistical” challenges for those states. Interestingly Florida, Mississippi, Utah and now Arkansas all have laws that prevent some form of adoption by homosexual couples. In addition to the legally sanctioned discrimination, gays and lesbians continue to be victims of hate crime violence, such as “gay bashing,” which occurs even though they are legally protected against personal violence. 

Although the gay rights movement has recently made progress in some areas, such as removal of the military policy, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and three states have recently passed same-sex marriage rights by voter referendum, gays and lesbians are still denied equal rights in the majority of states.

---

1 It should be noted that women continue to experience hate crimes often in the form of domestic violence and people of color also continue to experience hate-crime violence.
The nature of discrimination and inequality has changed over time and continues to be transformed, and thus the ways to work against it must be modified as well. The outward appearance of a racialized social system in the United States has shifted over time from slavery to Jim Crow to modern colorblind racism, but it has also surely endured. For the most part, biological explanations for race have all but disappeared from mainstream society, yet they still remain firmly in place for women. Women still must contend with ideas that women and men are fundamentally (biologically) different, and thus they want different things from life, on one hand with gender egalitarian views, if not reality, toward their labor market participation on the other. In modern society, particularly in advanced industrial nations, it is possible to hold both views simultaneously (Charles and Bradley 2009). These twin ideologies explain the uneven progress of women into male-dominated jobs, particularly for working class women (England 2010). Gender also plays a role in society’s views on sexual orientation. The push to legalize same-sex marriage is often predicated on the notion that homosexuals are just like heterosexuals, but if continued social disadvantage linked with sexuality remains after civil rights are granted, it will engender a discourse of victim blame similar to that of race and gender.

Now that de jure discrimination is no longer legal mainstream societal views on inequality have changed accordingly. Laws focusing on hostile or discriminatory treatment are important, but they also require intentional wrongdoing. They do not recognize the systemic unfairness beyond intent. Wildman (1996) argues that working against discrimination alone cannot end subordination because privilege continues to
regenerate discriminatory patterns. Overt discrimination tends to be individual in nature, must be proven in a court of law and almost always involves intent by a particular perpetrator whereas proof of privilege does not. Systemic institutionalized discrimination (and privilege) cannot be prosecuted away.

Racial and gender inequality in their modern forms are not only more difficult to recognize because overt blatant forms of discrimination are illegal, but also because the ideology of individualism is used to disavow the need for a development of a collective identity and collective action. Cultural beliefs about meritocracy and individual responsibility account for continued disparities with stories of individual deficiencies, misguided choices, and pathologies surrounding subordinate group members that have not “succeeded.” For subordinate group members, life experiences often counter these messages, but for whites living in segregated communities, the Matrix of Domination that allows these “sincere fictions” to not only persist but also thrive.

Feagin and O’Brien (2003) note that hierarchical arrangements remain firmly in place via our modern organizations and social structures and argue that this is done through “generally white-run firms and other organizations that provide the majority of the country’s jobs, the white-controlled financial institutions that control most capital for economic development and housing, the white dominate political and legal institutions that make and enforce the laws, and the white-controlled public and private schools that provide much of the education” (p. 8-9). In terms of gender, we can simply add the world male after the word white to discuss the breadth and depth of control of the same structures and organizations by men, and the word heteronormative to describe the
dominance of heterosexuality in almost every structure or organization in society that has influence over a large majority of the population.

Despite the pressure to hold individuals accountable for the inequality that remains, many people who experience and understand privilege know that social structures, and the social identities and status differences they create, rather than individual choices, result in the unequal outcomes for various subordinated groups. However, because of the new colorblind, gender blind discourse, it has become more difficult to recognize inequality, discuss it, and explain it to others. The Matrix of Domination is all around us and permeates every social structure in our society such as our families, schools, government, media, and labor market. Each person’s position in the matrix confines their perspective to the culture in which they were born, and as Upton Sinclair famously wrote, “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it.” For the purpose of this dissertation, I would modify that to say, it is difficult to get a white heterosexual man to understand something when his identity, created through socialization and interaction, depend on his not understanding it. In the next chapter I explore what it means for these men to hold a progressive identity and what social problems they views as important to recognize and work against. I begin by exploring whether there are similarities with how these men define a progressive identity and review the literature on identity formation. My data reveal a more in-depth understanding of how these men develop and view their identity as a progressive with some surprising and unexpected results.
Chapter 2: Developing a Progressive Identity and What It Means to be Progressive

In this chapter, I explore the social-psychological processes underpinning how white heterosexual men think about and give meaning to their identity as “progressives.” I also explore the specific social issues they believe to be in need of redress. And, lastly, I draw heavily upon current literature to theorize about the possible explanations for why some higher status individuals form and maintain an identity as a progressive. We know that positive social change, often through social and political action, requires a strong commitment to a cause. This commitment is typically created through the development of a collective identity. For higher status individuals (i.e. activists) to create such an identity, they often must also create an alternative identity in opposition to the dominant culture that is typically shared with or linked to a collective identity created by subordinate group members. On the other end of the spectrum, we also know why and how a large number of higher status individuals conform to the white male heterosexual power structure. This literature does not tell us about the white, male, heterosexual men who fall into neither category. They are not activists joining with subordinates working to reduce inequality nor are they conservative compatriots who are blind to (or choose to ignore) the white male heterosexual power structure and systems of dominance. I investigate this group in my dissertation – white heterosexual men who self-identity as progressive.
Sociological theory posits that individuals develop a *self* and *self-concept* through reciprocal social processes composed of individual acts and societal forces, like shared language, beliefs, and culture (Mead 1934; Stryker 1980). An individual’s sense of themselves as human being is constructed and refashioned through socially mediated processes of reflexivity and social interactions. Sociological theorists of various stripes agree that identities represent the self but part ways in their assumptions about the foundations/sources of identity and the levels at which identity functions (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010). Social psychologists argue that identities are internalized stable representations of self that emerge from socialization processes (Thoits 1983; Burke 1991); and the related but distinct structural symbolic interactionist tradition conceptualizes identity as a socially structured representation of “social position within a self-structure” (Stryker 2008). In contrast, cultural theories of identity, like Affect Control Theory (Heise 1979) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979) conceptualize identities as situationally variable evocations of widely shared cultural beliefs about persons, social groups and social acts. Despite their different theoretical roots, contemporary theories of identity “make clear that the boundary between personal and social identity theories is indistinct and ever-changing” (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010: 487). Additionally, critical race, queer, and feminist theorists have incorporated elements of status characteristics theory into their conceptualizations of identity, despite its theoretical home in social exchange theory.

The social-psychological based theories of identity emphasize how identity and category based membership are the basis of personal identity (Stryker 1968, 2008). More salient identities are more likely to be invoked during interaction, which allows for both
choice and agency (Owens 2010). The salience of an identity is influenced by the extensiveness of interactions with others who hold the same identity and a person’s emotional investment in relationships with others based on that identity. More recently Stryker et al. (2005) examine how social structures can also facilitate or constrain the salience of a particular identity and found intermediate-level social structures to be the most influential (Owens 2010). Larger social systems such as race, gender, and sexual orientation were found to be the least influential in terms identity salience.

Building upon Stryker, Thoits (1986, 2003) discusses how multiple role identities impact a person’s psychological and emotional well-being by helping individuals to figure out who they are and what they should do. Negative emotions that result from negative interactions based on a particular role-identity can influence whether or not a person holds that role-identity to be more or less salient (Brook et al. 2008). Interestingly when examining multiple identities, Thoits (2003) found that degree of choice within an identity (e.g. race versus political affiliation) matter for a person’s ability to use that identity as a resource to improve mental health (see also Jackson 1997).

Moving away from internalized role-based identities, social identity theorists also recognize that contextual variation in social structure and cultural beliefs affect identity. Goffman (1959) describes how we all work to present ourselves to others in a way that affirms the image we have of ourselves, comparable to an actor portraying a character on a stage. According to Smith-Lovin (1979) a person’s self-identity, the identities of others and each person’s actions and behaviors all work to shape meaning for the individual. Stets and Burke (2005) find that meanings actors give to identity and role-identity can shift over time as a result of interactions with others over a sustained period of time.
I discuss collective identity theories more in Chapter 5, so only briefly mention them here. According to Melucci (1989) collective identity includes the identification of shared features along with the recognition that opportunities and constraints are shared because of said features. Owens et al. (2010:490) find that a “sense of we-ness, or connection to other members of the group/category, is an essential component of collective identity.” The sociological literature focuses on collective identity as a common identity that result in feelings of empathy holding consequences for mobilization (Heise 1998).

I draw on these varied theoretical traditions in identity theory, but emphasize those that conceptualize identities as performances of self that are situationally and culturally structured. In social acts and interactions, identities are contextually activated and evaluated relative to taken for granted cultural meanings and rankings of status groups (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1994). This perspective assumes that individuals do not have unfettered freedom in forming identities. Instead, social structure, built from aggregations of patterned social behaviors, delimits the range of socially recognizable identities and interpretive meanings of social interactions and differentially provides access to material and cultural resources essential to maintaining these identities. Identity is thus facilitated and constrained by situated social environments.

It is important to fill in critical gaps in existing work about the identity processes of white, heterosexual men because of their singular privileged position of more status, resources, and influence. Currently we know much more about how and why higher status progressive activists form their identity – through a combination of knowledge, the creation of an oppositional culture, deep feelings of empathy, the development of a
collective sense of identity with subordinate group members, and organizational ties that encourage activism - in order to challenge the status quo and reduce inequality. Hughey (2012:2) finds that for these white anti-racist activists an alternative presentation of self is developed outside of both the subordinate group and the dominant group which results in a “broken and stigmatized white and antiracist identity.” Instead of seeing it as a stigma for these individuals, it is more likely to be embraced in order to demonstrate their moral commitment and authenticity. We also know a great deal about how and why higher status individuals adopt colorblind racist and gender blind sexist views that support an egalitarian philosophy on one hand, but deny the vast amounts of institutional, interactional, conscious, and non-conscious ways that inequality is perpetuated and maintained on the other. Mainstream individualistic abstract liberal views appeal to existing institutions and rules to justify why some are successful and others are not which allows these group members to either remain unaware or ignore how they benefit from the maintenance of these unequal social system. As the latter is more prevalent, it has much more power in shaping the identity and resulting attitudes of not only dominant group members, but some subordinate group members as well. I discuss and add to the understanding of the generic processes that dominant group members use to reproduce and maintain inequality in later chapters. We know very little about progressive dominant group members who are not activists but also who do not always adopt the prevailing mainstream ideological views. My work contributes to the literature on identity theory, political sociology, and stratification by examining when, why and/or how these dominant group members create identities in relation to or in opposition of these other identities.
Progressivism

The word progressive has changed and evolved over time, has multiple meanings, and often incorporates people with divergent opinions on specific topics, but there are commonalities as well. Dr. George Lakoff, Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley (2006) defines six different types of progressives, which I adopted as a guideline for whom to interview for this study. His definition includes the following types: 1) socioeconomic progressives – concerned with economic, social and political issues, such as the labor movement and antipoverty groups; 2) identity-politics progressives – concerned with groups that have been or are currently oppressed, economically, socially, and politically; 3) environmental progressives – concerned with the promotion and preservation of the environment; 4) civil-liberties progressives – concerned with political liberties such as freedom of speech, the press and information as well as voting rights, the right to privacy and equal rights before the law; 5) spiritual progressives – concerned with living a moral life on earth and nurturant morality in general; and 6) anti-authoritarian progressives – concerned with freedom from illegitimate uses of power such by government, corporations, religions and/or individuals.

A person can, and is often likely, to fall under multiple categories. The men I interviewed all fall into at least one category, but as expected, often cross over many of the categories listed. I did not specifically seek out one type of progressive over another, thus I do not classify them here by Lakoff’s typology I list the types here only as a reference to the various ways that progressives may define their ideology.
Another reason I do not classify respondents into the different types of progressives is because of the each form of progressivism is connected by a similar underlying view of morality, empathy and caring (Lakoff 2002). In this view, cooperation is stressed over competition as competition can bring out aggressive behaviors. Cooperation helps each individual to develop an appreciation of her or his dependence on others (in nonhierarchical relationships.) Lakoff argues that this underlying morality links progressives together even if, on the surface, they seem to be focused on separate issues. For example, it explains how progressive views on gun control might be linked to progressive views on global climate change or reproductive choice. Lakoff contends that empathy and caring about others underlie all progressive views.

Research indicates white progressive activists form and act on this identity because of experiences across their life course, specifically religious training, relationships with individuals from marginalized groups, and experiences of personal injustice. These experiences inform broad ideas of fairness and equality as reasons for challenging the status quo and working to support a more egalitarian society.

*Whites Working for Racial Justice*

John Brown (1800 – 1859) is one example of an individual who worked to support the equal rights of others. He was an abolitionist who not only wanted to end slavery, but also acted openly against pro-slavery regimes. His family was “extremely religious” and both religion and familial ties were influential throughout his life (Horwitz 2011). When John Brown was five his family moved to a district in Ohio that would eventually
become known for its anti-slavery views. He raised a former slave as his own son and was actively involved in the Underground Railroad (PBS) and is often credited for beginning the Civil War when he tried to raid a federal arsenal to steal weapons to help slaves start an uprising (Horwitz 2011). Another abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) held similar beliefs stemming from religion and worked “with unerringly reliance on nothing but the eternal principles of justice for the speedy overthrow of slavery” (Grimke 1974, p. 73). In several of his speeches he used the “law of God” as motivation for his abolitionist views.

During the Freedom Summer of 1964 over one thousand people - mostly white, Northern college students from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds- went down to Mississippi for a voter registration drive. Although these students came from all walks of life, ‘the children of northern liberals and radicals…were the most likely to join the new struggle with passionate commitment” (Evans 1980, p. 60.) In the eyes of these individuals, America was not living up to they expectations they held. According to McAdam (1988 p. 24), “Indeed, the very existence of Mississippi constituted a powerful challenge to virtually all aspects of the volunteers’ generally sanguine view of the world. Taught to believe in the flawed but essential goodness and humanity of the American system, Mississippi stood as the living embodiment of the potential for inhumanity and injustice inherent in that system.” McAdam (1988) notes that by the end of the 1960s many of those same activists turned their attention elsewhere to things like the war in Vietnam and working for women’s rights. All of this data highlights the actions of activists, but we know very little about those who hold a progressive identity, but are not activists.
Men Supporting Women’s Rights

As with issues of race, dominant group members have also been supportive of women’s rights throughout history. They are also often motivated by religious or political beliefs, as well as socialization and exposure to women with outspoken feminist ideologies. Frederick Douglass (in The Life and Times of Frederick Douglas [1892] 2003) wrote about being a “woman’s-rights man.” He stated that women had been crucial in the anti-slavery movement and he could find no consideration or argument against women participating fully in civil government. Douglas’s statements came as the first wave of the women’s rights movement, which granted women the right to vote, was taking hold.

According to Goldrick-Jones (2002) men have been supportive of, or directly involved in many “women’s issues” including the fight for reproductive choice, equal pay, and violence reduction. Many of these men discuss the influence of strong women growing up (Christian 1994; Goldrick-Jones 2002).

In the book Men Speak Out: Views on Gender Sex and Power, Shira Tarrant (2008) has collected dozens of essay from feminist and pro-feminist men. Within the book each man describes how he became a feminist. Some men give a singular motivation, but most have a combination of reasons. For the most part, they all describe strong feminist women in their lives ranging from mothers, to grandmothers, to girlfriends, to friendships with women both in high school and college. One contributor describes having both a feminist mother and a pro-feminist father. More than a few were moved to action through an alienation they felt from hegemonic masculinity. One contributor describes both his alienation from masculinity and his personal experience in
the military witnessing the almost constant sexual harassment of his fellow female soldiers. Formal education can also play a role both in terms of learning about oppression and opening up opportunities to meet strong feminist women, while others added informal education such as through music as influential to their pro-feminist views. Most held leftist or progressive political beliefs, and some men of color used overlapping approximations as a way to feminism. Overlapping approximations as defined by O’Brien (2001) involve translating one form of oppression into an understanding of another form although the second form is not directly experienced. In this case, racial oppression is used to understand gender inequality.

In sum, for white men specifically, there appear to be three ways for achieving a feminist identity or supporting gender equality. First, socialization through both strong relationships with feminist women which often include lengthy conversations about inequality and through political socialization (concerning leftist or progressive political views) play a role. Education on issues that affect both men and women such as rape, paternalism, and the patriarchal structure of society are also important, and most directly related to my findings social exclusion from patriarchal privilege or the male dividend relate to the adoption of a progressive identity. These alternative masculinities are maintained as a type of oppositional identity or alternative socially validated identity.

Wetherell and Edley (1999) found that men’s numerous complex views on masculinity lead to a wide variety of identity positions. They state that a “hegemonic masculinity cannot be sealed off from other hegemonic ways of being a person in western societies, such as demonstrating individuality and autonomy from social forces. These different requirements for how to be a man are in conflict and are a potential source of
ideological dilemmas” (351). They suggest that identification is created in action through which men “live/talk/do masculinity” (353) with men holding a variety of masculinities from liberal humanism to heroic individual rebellion. What matters most are the contexts in which one identity is preferred over another. Although it was not directly examined in their work, they suggest that pressures to be a “good enlightened liberal” intensify and sometimes contradict more mainstream gendered self-presentations.

Heterosexuals on Gay and Lesbian Rights

Although the documented history is shorter, there are still many heterosexuals who support the rights of homosexuals although their paths to action are not as well known. Indeed most work in this area is focused on a relatively recent shift in attitudes rather than examining why those attitudes continue to shift. I review this literature in Chapter 3. According to the 2002 General Social Survey there was a swing of over twenty percentage points compared to 1987 in the number of adults who viewed sexual relations between same sex partners as “always” or “almost always” wrong. In a 2012 article, Dawn Baunach found that opposition to same sex marriage no longer had the broad support it once did and she reports it to be more localized in subgroups such as older Americans, blacks, evangelical Protestants, and Republicans. She notes that the sharp change in attitudes between 1988 and 2010 denote a large cultural shift rather than any demographic changes in the population.

Prior to this study, others have found that men are more likely to hold negative attitudes (Donnelly et al. 1997; Klamen et al. 1999; Schellenberg et al. 1999), as well as those who have a religious affiliation (Herek 1994; Berkman & Zinberg 1997) or belong
to an ethnic minority (Klamen et al., 1999). Others find that having lesbian or gay acquaintances (particularly friends and family members) can reduce homophobia (D’Augelli and Rose 1990; Lance 1987; Klamen et al., 1999.) In her book, *Standing Out, Standing Together*, Melinda Miceli (2005) reports that lesbian and gay college students began forming officially recognized student organizations in the early 1970s which were clearly connected to the Stonewall Riots of 1969, but the first gay-straight alliance would not be formed until 1988.

Cultural beliefs about gender play a role both in how heterosexuals view homosexuality. Newman (1989) found that restrictive rather than liberal gender attitudes impacted how men and women felt toward lesbians, and more recent studies show that attitudes towards gay men are significantly more negative than attitudes towards lesbians (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Schellenberg et al., 1999). Along the same lines, Herek (2000) found that women were more likely to be supportive of policies that gave equal treatment to homosexuals in employment situations and adoption. Women were also less likely to hold stereotypical beliefs about gay people than men (Herek 2002). Kite and Whitley (1998) theorize that homosexual men are more likely to receive criticism from heterosexual men because they are perceived as renouncing masculinity as a dominant status. Herek (2002) further suggests that this may occur because heterosexual men now find that they must frequently “prove” they are not gay and this can often involve subscribing to hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Although culture, history, education, access to resources and other forms of social and cultural influences all play a role in the production of hegemonic masculinity (Cohen 1999), the role of homophobia and/or the fear of being thought of as gay should not be
discounted. In more recent work Peter Hennen (2008) finds that gay men who present as more conventionally masculine are less likely to be harassed and stigmatized. Hennen argues that the stigma gay men feel is more likely to be associated with being seen as feminine rather than a stigma against homosexuality in general. Even within the gay community, Hennen (2005) finds that “Bears” - a subculture of gay men who typically valorize the larger more traditionally masculine bodies - are influenced by the hegemonic forms of masculinity which dominate society.

At this time it is difficult to state definitively how men have come to actively support anti-homophobic, pro-civil rights attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Their shift in attitudes seem to be the result of three things: socialization to inequality through personal relationships (i.e. having friends, family or acquaintances who are gay or lesbian); greater flexibility in women’s and men’s gendered social roles, such as female breadwinners and male caregivers, and having little or no religious affiliation.

**Self-Defined Progressives**

My data show all of my respondents have adopted the “progressive” identity out of beliefs in equality and fairness, having an open mind, and wanting to see change. However, as later chapters reveal, I also found that although being progressive is associated with being supportive of continued civil rights advancements for people of color, white women, and homosexuals, colorblind, gender blind ideologies also play a role. For the moment, however, I focus on identity development and formation.

For the most part, my respondents are highly educated thoughtful individuals either currently working in professional positions; retired from professional positions; or
are students obtaining an education that will allow them to enter the professional world. With few exceptions, they grew up in middle class families and tend to be better off financially than their parents. As with many adults seeking professional “success” (as defined through the rules of capitalism) they chose to separate themselves geographically from their families of birth as they seek education or maintain professional work outside of the area in which they were born.

I began every interview by asking each man how he defined the word progressive or by asking what the word progressive meant to him. The majority of the men I interviewed (thirty-one) associated being a progressive with having “liberal,” “left of center,” or “leftist political concerns.” The remaining nine used words such as moderate (three), libertarian (two), radical (two), or did not give a specific political identification (two).

Sam is a great example of why I kept those with other political viewpoints outside of liberalism in the study. He is a Master’s student in his late twenties and would rather refer to himself as radical because he believes the word progressive has been co-opted by people in power who are not actually very progressive. He specifically names the Clinton Administration and the progressive coalition in the House of Representatives as groups he does not consider very progressive. He describes his relationship to the word progressive as “tumultuous” and goes on to say,

Yes, I’m progressive in that I want society to get more free and equal and not through ways, that uh, you know, not through the market. But it’s not exactly one [a definition] that encompasses the kind of political theory that I read and the political actions that I take because I think that those would actually be considered even more left of progressive for the most part.

Ray is another example. He is in his late twenties and self-employed. He selected
libertarian as his political affiliation, but describes himself as follows,

I guess in the liberal sense, it’s kind of, um, a rising above the kind of divisive issues that are dividing our country or things that aren’t really that important… I don’t want to put boundaries around those types of ideas, which ideological conservatives are trying to do – you know, use religion to divide people. Um, I think it’s more, I want to say a more progressive way of thinking – a more modern approach, kind of a melting pot type of thinking about cultural issues from a political standpoint. So progressives, at least this progressive, is thinking old cultural issues like homosexuality aren’t important anymore. You can’t put limits around those… You can’t legislate those types of things anymore, like you perhaps could one hundred years ago. Um, so those are kind of maybe liberal ideas.

Ray’s views on being a progressive align with the views of other progressives when it comes to sexual orientation, but as expected considering his selection as libertarian, his views are not as progressive in terms of race and gender which I will discuss later. Although the remaining men do not specifically associate being liberal or left of center with being progressive, as Sam and Ray demonstrate, at least part of their underlying worldview is similar in nature to those who did.

As Lakoff predicted, there are overlapping themes, which unite these men under the progressive label regardless of their affiliation with specific form of progressivism. Specifically, three main themes emerged through their descriptions of progressivism: 1) being fair; 2) wanting to see change happen (or taking action); and 3) having an open mind. It appears that one aspect of being progressive is associated to how these men define their political orientation. Despite the variation in names for their political beliefs most of these men base their progressive identity on the three themes previously mentioned.

Being Fair

These men are not shy about using the word fair and it came up in some form in almost
every interview. For example, Colby, a twenty-something who works for a local non-profit, describes his views about fairness in terms of being respectful of people’s opinions and being critical of things he considers unfair:

I, um, try to be aware of sort of cultural or institutional things I find to be unjust or sort of not equitable things and try to consider those closely and ensure that I don’t succumb to the kind of, I don’t know how to say this... I guess I try to be open and I try to be respectful of people’s opinions and beliefs as well as being critical of beliefs that I find, that are, sort of unjust - sexism, or sort of homophobia, things like that.

Gabriel, a professional in his forties, similarly says,

I think I’m a fair person. I try to be fair… I’ve had advantages in my life that other people haven’t had. So that’s how I look at it. I look at myself as wanting to be fair… I think there should be justice and there should be fairness… I mean I do believe people have a better life when they are able to achieve things for themselves, but I also know that to have a level playing field is almost impossible, so certainly, you know, there have to be interventions to do that.

Gabriel was not the only man to link fairness and justice together. Justice is what these men expect for the things they consider not fair. Although most spoke of fairness (or the lack thereof) between various groups of people, the unfair power given to corporations also came up frequently as well. For example Lawson states,

Somebody that’s progressive believes in second chances, believes in education, proud to pay taxes, thinks that business should be regulated… corporations and economies need some regulations, government intervention…The idea that a corporation can represent itself in a courtroom as an individual that’s protected of all rights, is absurd, absolutely absurd… There’s a reason unions exist in this country.

Although it can be approached from many angles or through various issues, fairness and justice were frequently cited as a reason for being progressive, how do progressives evaluate what is fair or just? Howard and Hollander (2000) indicate individuals determine what is fair through comparisons, such as social comparisons – comparing yourself with those like you; normative comparisons – awareness of what is socially acceptable, regardless of its actual fairness; feasibility comparisons – ranking something as fair considering the other possible (less appealing) alternatives; or self-comparisons-
looking at your past behavior to determine if current behavior is fair (although the past may have been unfair as well). In addition perceptions of legitimacy in resource allocation procedures can also influence a person’s views of fairness.

All of the men I interviewed recognize that there are many aspects of our current system that are not fair. They talk about wanting to change it and move toward a more just society. For example, Gabriel, a professional in his late forties, talks about working for change on a personal level. He supervises many people and is often involved in hiring and firing decisions. He uses gender as an example to describe how our society is not fair.

As Americans, I don’t think we’re living up to our ideals. I think we’re trying, but discrimination is unavoidable. It’s constant. It’s everywhere. There’s, you know, there’s conscious discrimination and then just this sort of unconscious discrimination that none of us can be completely free of. You know, we’re just not aware of it. So I think there’s both. I mean, I think the unconscious stuff is more prevalent.

Gabriel understands that both individual and institutionalized gender discrimination are a problem, but finds institutionalized discrimination more prevalent. Ideas of fairness and justice are clearly associated with mainstream ideological individualistic views, so it is not difficult to understand why progressives adopt this into their progressive identities, but (Bonilla-Silva 2001) argues that this framework does not challenge the colorblind racism that remains. In the next chapter I explore how a progressive identity is related to views on gender, race and sexual orientation and examine whether progressives use the idea of fairness and justice to challenge mainstream ideological views or to adopt them.

*Wanting to See Change or Taking Action*

The second theme to emerge in the definition of progressivism includes taking some type
of action or the need for action. Adrian is a graduate student in his early twenties who has already earned a Master’s degree and is working toward a Ph.D. Like the other respondents, he spoke about fairness, but also brought social change into the conversation. He would like to see a more fair society develop through what he calls, “solidarity work.”

…social change is needed and uh, you know, that is going to happen democratically, so it sort of identifies itself as being against the conservatism that [says] the society we have now is the best one and that the rights and freedoms that the people have now are the ones that they need. Um, for me personally, my progressive, like, identity is definitely related to expanding rights for uh, women, and uh, gay and lesbian and queer people and people of color and trying to support and engage in solidarity work with those groups. Um, and to try to check my own privilege as a white male, uh, in contributing to those systems of oppression as they exist… It has to be about the amount of social change that you think is necessary until we have a just society - which I think is a lot!

Interestingly, Adrian does not expand on what exactly solidarity work entails, and as I will discuss later chapters, I learn that he, like the majority of the progressives interviewed, he is involved in very little ‘solidarity’ work.

Casey is in his late twenties and describes himself as semi-radical or “left of left”. He also associates being progressive with taking some type of action that would push society toward a more fair and just outcome, yet he also finds problems with always seeking action.

You know, I think progressive, because it’s associated with action, I think sometimes if one’s kind of critically reflective of themselves and their actions then I think that they could constantly be mired in the state of always wanting to do more. And so I think I have kind of made up this term called faux-gressive. Faux, which is kind of like this person that identifies themselves as progressive, but then drives home in their Porsche or something like that. They’re progressive in certain circles or in certain instances when it’s convenient. So, I’d say sometimes [I’m progressive]. Yeah. Not to be ridiculous.

Casey has a tumultuous relationship with the word progressive. To be progressive in his view means to be active, but also self reflective of those actions. However, that self-reflection might then lead one to become “stuck” in a constant state of wanting to do
more. He also believes people call themselves progressive even if their actions do not match their words. He also believes that progressives should be aware of ‘economic privilege’ so it is difficult for him to reconcile how a person could actually be progressive if she or he is driving a Porsche. In Casey’s mind, once you start down the path of working toward fairness or fighting inequality, an individual can uncover more than they feel they can take on, so he chooses to call himself a “part-time” progressive. He describes how learning about inequality can take on a snowball effect and eventually be overwhelming, so he limits his participation in social action. Interestingly, he does not comment on how this sense of being ‘overwhelmed’ by inequality actually impacts those experiencing the inequality.

For Mark, action comes in the form of governmental intervention. He believes that the government needs to be more involved in working to reduce inequality and states,

I believe the government has a certain role, um, in taking care of its citizens. That it’s supposed to do the things that citizens can’t do for themselves. That it’s supposed to help provide for a certain quality of life. I guess if you boil it down to that bare of a thing, I mean without getting into specific issues like race, that’s basically what I believe is the role of government and the role of communities at large, I guess.

For these progressives, taking action does not necessarily only belong to the individual, however the government is composed of individuals who, like them, must make choices about what issues to give attention. Most of these progressive supported continued government intervention to reduce inequality.

Having an Open Mind

Many of my respondents associate being progressive with being open-minded, whether about society itself, people in society and/or changes to society. For example, Aaron, a
graduate student in his mid thirties, describes a progressive as “somebody who thinks a bit beyond their own upbringing or whatever.” Similarly, Chad, a self-described liberal in his late fifties, also uses both change and open-mindedness to describe what it means to be progressive when he says,

[being a progressive means] someone [is] open to change and um, a, a, notion of a uh, direction for civilization. Someone who is inclusive and not exclusive - at least inclusive in the consideration of ideas, new ideas, those that involve change.

Joshua is an undergraduate student in his late teens at a private university. He identifies being progressive with being open-minded and trying to understand another person’s point of view.

I think for me it’s, it’s trying to be open to other people and their ideas and not being stuck um, not being stuck on like, your own ideas and, you know, it’s ok to think your own ideas are right but at least trying to understand where other people are coming from.

Andrew is a professional in his late forties who works for the government. He goes a little further than Joshua and questions whether or not he can truly be open-minded.

I guess [being progressive means] maybe being more open minded, a tendency to want to ask questions. Now, I guess I’m honest with myself to realize that I’m somewhat old and calcified in my beliefs and probably delusional in the sense that I feel that I’m really truly open-minded. I’m probably fixed in my thinking a little bit. Um, I would say liberal folks tend uh, to look to the broader society as the context in which people can live and thrive and be healthy…healthy, happy, productive and that the wider society has some responsibility for that. Um, I guess I would look at a conservative, if you’re looking at this from the dichotomy as society, thinks that those characteristics come strictly from the individual and the individual sense of what they do and how they act. And then society has much less of a role in creating a context in which people can thrive.

Andrew associates being progressive with looking at things from a social perspective rather than and individual perspective and links being conservative – in his view the opposite of being progressive - with a focus on the individual without regard to the role society plays in shaping a person’s life. Thus, a progressive would understand the influences of society and social structures on the individual while a conservative would not. Aaron, previously mentioned, also believes that being progressive requires him to
examine the privilege he receives simply from growing up in a middle class white family.

I think that people that have, or have obtained a certain level, a certain position in society... they don’t kind of see the generations that have led up to that or see the privilege that comes with being born into that level. And they kind of have this belief that you’re… you’ve earned it, so to speak - you know that you have kind of picked yourself up by the bootstraps, and I don’t. I think if people really entertained the idea of having to try to like live their life over again, like but born as like say somebody from a minority group or somebody from a different SES group, um, and yeah, I think if people really put themselves in those shoes, maybe, they would see that yeah, it’s not really a place where there really truly is equal opportunity for everybody’s the same.

For Aaron, the idea of generational privilege is front and center. He believes that he has been able to advance in society not only because of his innate ability, but also because he was born into a middle class white family which, through no effort of his own, put him in a different, better starting place. According to Bellah et al. ([1985] 2007), one of the foundations for building community with others means knowing where you came from and understanding how previous generations allowed you to get where you are based on my data, as shown in the examples above, I argue that many of my respondents have an understanding of how both historical processes and our modern social structures play a role in a person’s life choices and life chances.

To summarize men’s beliefs on being progressive are loosely linked to their political affiliation and strongly linked to their beliefs that our system is unfair and needs to be changed. They have a global sense empathy and egalitarianism and consider themselves open-minded in terms of what types of changes need to take place. They support intervention to redress issues that still remain although some also recognize the ways the institutions such as they state can not only alleviate problems, but also create them.

*Identifying Social Problems*
After discussing why each respondent considers himself progressive, I asked each to identify what he believes are the most egregious or troublesome modern social problem(s) in need of immediate attention. In other words, if an individual holds a progressive identity, are there certain issues of which they should be aware? Much of the literature on inequality discusses gender and racial disparities, but dominant mainstream ideological views suggest that race and gender no longer play a role in determining life chances. Moreover Lakoff (2006) finds that progressives who recognize problems concerning race, gender or sexual orientation are much more likely to be individuals who themselves fall into a subordinate group. It is atypical for a person who is not affected by identity-politics to use this as a description of why they are personally progressive. Thus I predicted that progressive might have some knowledge about gender and racial inequality, but that these would not likely to be high on their list of concerns. In this case, I was wrong.

The top five social problems identified by respondents, listed according to how often they were mentioned, include 1) concerns about the economy, 2) gender inequality, 3) equal rights for gays and lesbians, 4) healthcare, and 5) racial inequality. Of course, not every man listed each issue, but these topics came up most repeatedly. Various other issues, such as the environmental protection, the criminal justice system, corporate-personhood, public transportation, unionism and other topics were included as well, but they were randomly added to the list of issues and did not appear as frequently as the ones noted above. As the U.S. had just experienced serious economic turmoil at the time of these interviews, it is not surprising that problems associated with the economy, and more specifically the “free” market and distribution of wealth, were mentioned most
frequently. In addition, healthcare and healthcare reform dominate local and national news, particularly during election seasons. News about these two topics was virtually inescapable. What was surprising to me was the frequency with which these men listed issues concerning race, gender and sexual orientation and I explore that further in the next chapter.

*Why Progressivism?*

Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) examine how feminist attitudes that support gender equality develop and offer two explanations for why these views might be adopted: interest-based and exposure based. Interest-based explanations are often associated with being a member of a subordinate group. For example, heterosexual women continue to do more domestic labor than their male partners. If women would like more free time and less stress, it is in their interest to get their partners to do more housework and carework. In this case, sex differences in socialization help to explain why men's gender ideology and behaviors are not as achieved compared to the ideology and behaviors of women (Myers and Booth 2002).

Exposure-based explanations for attitudinal development typically involve education, experience, or socialization. Education has often been considered to be a liberalizing influence (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004). Many studies have documented the positive association between education and more egalitarian attitudes (on gender see Kluegel and Smith 1986; Tallichet and Willits 1986; Panayotova and Brayfield 1997; on race see Kluegel 1990; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Quillian 1996; Schuman et al. 1997; Steeh and Schuman 1992). Education is seen as a path to tolerance, a reduction in
prejudice and a move toward supporting democratic values. Not only does education itself play a role, but the educational environment also seems to be influential. It exposures individuals to new environments and people, including feminists, racial justice activists, sexual minorities etc. and it also opens up opportunities for new experiences related to these issues.

Although I did not ask my respondents directly about why they were progressive, based on the literature and my findings, I can theorize about why this may occur. Again, my respondents are all highly educated, and thus I associate their progressive identity first and foremost to their education. Although it was not always the case, those working in education environments, such as professors, and/or those with education beyond a bachelor’s degree were not only aware of the inequality that remains for women, people of color, and sexual minorities, but they were also more likely to recognize privilege.

Thus, although education itself is important, it may also play an indirect role through both increased socialization and exposure to personal experiences that might not have occurred outside the educational institution. In post-secondary educational environments, these men are more likely to come in contact with people who are different in many interesting ways which can challenge any previous held beliefs, in this case concerning race, gender and sexual orientation.

In addition to education other forms of exposure can also play a role. Socialization to a progressive identity can begin early. Again, although I did not directly ask these men why they were progressive, several mentioned growing up with mothers, sisters, for friends who were concerned about gender equality. They also mentioned parents who were progressives and socialized them into a more progressive ideology,
usually through politics. In this case parents transmit general orientations about politics and more specifically attitudes about identity. Parents are also influential in determining the likelihood of their children being politically active (Jennings 1975, 1991; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Verba et al. 1995). Although socialization typically begins during early childhood through family and friends, it can take place throughout the life course.

Indeed, in addition to education, living in a diverse neighborhood, working in a diverse setting, peers, the media, and involvement in civic and social activities can all play a role at any point in someone’s life course (Jennings and Niemi 1974; Serbert, Jennings and Niemi 1974; Tedin 1980; Verba et al. 1995; Putnum 2000). I found that workplace and neighborhood settings were less likely to play a role as the majority of these men work in mostly white organizations and live in mostly white neighborhoods. I conclude that socialization, education, and the personal experiences resulting from exposure to an educational environment to be key in terms of developing a progressive identity.

Summary

Theories on identity help us to understand how and why identity-roles and contextual/situational factors influence the thoughts and behavior of social actors. Social-psychological literature emphasizes how categories of difference, culture, and situational contexts all have the ability to shape identities. Inequality is now framed as an individual phenomenon and contemporary forms of discrimination are more difficult to recognize, particularly for people who are not directly affected by them. In this case, it is easy to understand why dominant group members would adopt mainstream ideological views.
Literature on progressive activists and activism investigate why dominant group members develop collective identities, and their relevant patterns of norms, with subordinate group members in order to work for social change through a sustainable commitment to social and political action (O’Brien 2001; Thomas et al. 2009; Warren 2010). However, my respondents do not fit either category. Answering questions on how progressive develop an alternative identities as well as when and why they incorporate these identities into their attitudes, beliefs and actions is of importance in modern society moving toward a more egalitarian is desirable – thus aligning American mainstream ideological views with reality.

My data indicate that being progressive is loosely based on how these men define their political orientation. The identity these highly educated men do hold includes a more liberal view on categories of difference, and they do recognize that problems still exist in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation. Parents can play a key role in this form of socialization, but for a few progressives, socialization occurred later in life through work, neighborhood or educational settings. Thus, socialization throughout the life course is important as well. Prior research has also shown that education can strongly influence identity and has a liberalizing effect on men. Education can influence general global perspectives on difference, equality, and egalitarians views, but personal experiences through the introduction of new people and different points of view can often lead to the adoption of a more progressive identity as well. For my respondents, this was likely to occur in an educational environment, but the literature indicates that it can also take place in other settings such as the workplace or neighborhood.
Progressives are often acknowledged for their continuing support of an egalitarian philosophy by authors writing on social justice activism. For example Lakoff (2002) relates being a progressive to empathizing with people and working to reduce inequality while also leading a nurturant life, including a commitment to family and community. Schacht and Ewing (2004:159) describe liberals as people who, at least in principle are “opposed to all forms of injustice and work together using traditional models of organizing to reform existing social and political structures,” but the sociological and psychological identity literature lumps all progressives together despite their differences in status, power, and influence. This is problematic because it masks the differences in how status, and the benefits and resources available as a result of such status, impact the self, social, and collective identity progressives develop dependent upon their various standpoints in the Matrix of Domination.

My contribution to this literature in this chapter was to investigate the sources and meanings of white, heterosexual men’s identity as a “progressive.” I considered variability in the social factors and socialization processes that differentially constrain and facilitate respondents’ progressive identities in order for my respondents to consider themselves progressive. I also link their progressive identity to their beliefs about being progressive and to the issues they identify as most important for progressives to recognize and, for some, frame as problems in need of redress. Most literature finds that white heterosexual men should privilege their own interests and adopt mainstream ideologies about race, gender and sexual orientation but the progressive in my study repeatedly included these categories of difference in their lists of social concerns.
Before proceeding to the next chapter, it is important to remember that a progressive identity like other identities is contextualized and relational rather than absolute. For the most part, the men I interviewed claim to be interested in the expansion of the ideals of democracy and equality and relate this to their own lives through a continued concern about fairness and justice, having an open mind, and seeking change. They do not characteristically look to the past for their visions of a better society, but to the future. For the most part, they are responsive to the problems of disadvantaged groups and are open to governmental intervention if it means providing a greater measure of economic and social justice. On the surface, their beliefs seem to be similar to the views expressed by other progressives and liberals both in recent surveys and research as well as those discussed through a more historical perspective.

In the next chapter, I explore these views in more detail and find that general feelings about fairness and having an open mind may not necessarily translate across multiple areas of stratification. I first explore where these men are located in terms of their white [male] identity development and the types of consciousness about inequality they have achieved. More specifically critically examine their thoughts and beliefs about inequality concerning race, gender and sexual orientation in detail. Here, I found both consistencies and inconsistencies between their progressive ideology and their thoughts and actions, particularly concerning gender. I investigate variations in their progressive consciousness both across categories and within different domains of the same category with some surprising results.
Chapter 3: Identity Development and Attitudes Toward Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

In the previous chapter I investigated the sources and meanings of white, heterosexual men’s identity as a “progressive,” and I considered variability in the social factors and socialization processes that differentially constrain and facilitate my respondents’ progressive identities. I was then able to connect their progressive identity to their beliefs about being progressive and to the issues they identify as most important for progressives to recognize and, for some, frame as problems in need of redress. Previous research finds individual beliefs about systems of stratification are influenced by a person’s own social location and relative relationship to social inequality (Davis and Greenstein 2009), yet the men in my study repeatedly listed inequality associated with race, gender and sexual orientation as areas of concern.

In this chapter, I will show how for many progressives both taken for granted cultural meanings and the rankings of status groups (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1994) as well as contextual experiences derived through education and socialization play a role in shaping their identities as dominant group members as well as their identities as progressives. Based upon the contextual situation or topic being discussed, in this case the inequality experienced by subordinate group members, either their identity as a progressive or as a dominant group member structured how they interpreted various
forms of inequality. Although these views can be mutually exclusive, they were more likely to interact in order to explain attitudes and beliefs. Thus we see in some contexts their progressive identity allows them to recognize inequality, such as in the labor market, but in other arenas these respondents do not, such as in the domestic sphere. Once again, this demonstrates the active process of personal and social identity formation and reveals that individuals do not have unfettered freedom in forming identities. Instead, social structure, built from aggregations of patterned social behaviors, restricts the range of socially recognizable identities and interpretive meanings of social interactions. In this chapter, I show how dominant group members are more likely to recognize the abstract forms of inequality that impact the lives of women, people of color and sexual minorities when it is not situationally dependent on their actions, particularly concerning domestic labor and patrilineal surname descent.

Every member of society is exposed to socialization, interactions, education, and personal experiences that reinforce mainstream individualistic views. In the last chapter, I reviewed how developing a progressive identity could help shift attention away from mainstream colorblind, gender blind, sexuality blind views toward the adoption of attitudes more likely to support equality (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Myers and Booth 2002). Current sociological literature finds that the benefits dominant group members receive through status construction and expectation states (Ridgeway 2011; Lucas and Baxter 2012) and social closure (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Roscigno 2007) should reduce their recognition of disparities associated with race, gender, and sexual orientation. My findings in this chapter contribute to a more precise understanding of
how and when holding a progressive identity either mediates or reinforces such beliefs. When mainstream ideological views are adopted, specifically in terms of race, Bonilla-Silva (2003) references four different types of frames that are used by whites to justify their privilege and rationalize the current unequal racialized social system even if they claim to hold egalitarian views. They include: 1) abstract liberalism; 2) naturalization; 3) cultural racism; and 4) minimization of racism. Some of the progressive men in my study used these frames, but they were limited to the cultural racism frame and the minimization frame, so I only discuss those two now (see Bonilla-Silva 2003 for a thorough discussion of each frame).

Cultural racism uses perceived differences between cultures as an explanation for inequality. Examples of cultural racism include describing racial or ethnic groups as not having the “right” family values or work ethic and thus preferring to rely on government help, while ignoring how institutional inequality and privilege produce inequality. The minimization frame suggests that race based inequality is no longer a problem because things are better than they were in the past. When racial groups call attention to race-based economic and social discrimination, individuals who deploy these frames believe that people of color are playing the “race card” and/or being too sensitive. Thus, when these frames become part of the dominant ideologies, racism is viewed only as overt behavior rather than as reflexive behavior and attitudes that harm unintentionally. I found that the minimization frame was more likely to be used with gender as well as through the essentialization of gender (Ridgeway 2011). U.S. laws now work to eliminate intentional harm, except for sexual minorities who are not a protected group,
but they do not address inequalities that result from interactions and structural processes, which produce disparate treatments and outcomes without intent.

I begin this chapter by introducing a racial identity development model developed by Rowe et al. (1994) who updated and revised one of the most well-known identity development models in social-psychology (Helms 1984). This new model more clearly differentiates white racial identity development from other forms of racial identity development. I fit my respondents into this model in order to bring even more precision to not only understanding the various types of achieved white racial identity types, but also to recognize how a progressivism relates to identity development. Thus far, including the Rowe et al. model, racial identity development models only include an understanding of inequality rather than privilege. I argue that these models must also include privilege in order to more completely account for the variations in white’s attitudes about race, gender, and sexuality. Knowledge about various forms of inequality is quite distinct from knowledge about privilege, thus understanding how both inequality and privilege impact identity development extends the current theoretical work on stratification, knowledge about how identities are formed, and our understanding of what types of identities exist.

*Understanding White Identity Development*

In his classic book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) describes how we all work to present ourselves to others in a way that affirms an image we have of ourselves, comparable to an actor portraying a character on a stage.
Sociologists (and psychologists) have studied identity through both an individual and collective lens (Cerulo 1997). Through the years several identity development models have been created to understand racial, male, and heterosexual identity development. As with any subject, identity development models are critiqued and updated frequently. Most of them look at various forms of stratification separately although a few combine them. As it is not the purpose of this study to compare identity models of race, gender, and sexuality, I present and critique the predominant model. Although it is solely focused on race, this model can be extended to the development of masculine and heterosexual identity development as well.

Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) investigate and challenge previous white racial identity development models and present an alternative conception of identity development based on unachieved and achieved white racial consciousness. I make use of their model because it challenges assumptions that both subordinate and dominant group members follow similar paths in terms of identity development. Although both groups develop their identity under a system of oppression and privilege the attitudes that whites develop about themselves and others are reinforced by cultural and structural societal factors. Moreover, rather than seeing white racial identity as occurring in stages, as if directional, Rowe et al. argue that it is more appropriate to view identity development as a type of consciousness, with individuals moving between types or holding characteristics from multiple types. Again, Rowe et al. emphasize that they are not describing fixed personality characteristics, but rather situationally and contextually influenced types that can change over time.
Achieving racial consciousness implies not only an awareness of one’s own racial membership but also an awareness of how it relates to the racial membership of others. Further, although attitudes and behaviors are not always linked, they do have a correlation with activities. Thus a change in attitude can lead to a change in behavior, but attitudes are hard to interpret and vary across any number of categories (Ball-Rokeach and Loges 1994). Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) argue that people can have as many attitudes as there are objects in the world. Experience, education, maturity, socialization, personal attributes and many other factors can profoundly affect a person’s beliefs, but we also know that, “value systems provide people with broad, stable guides by which they may orient their actions when they must choose between two or more alternatives” (Ball-Rokeach and Loges 1994:10). Although not specifically examining progressive attitudes and behaviors, Bobo and Hutchings (1996) found that the specific expectations and definitions of interests validate some attitudes while discouraging others (see also Kohn 1981), and Page and Shapiro (1992) find that the adoption of a particular attitude follows the adoption of other attitudes within the same issue domain and attitude formation does not occur in isolation from issue to issue.

For progressives, Lakoff (2002) stresses the important link between being a progressive and having strong feelings of empathy. He argues that underlying feelings of empathy are related to the creation of a progressive view across various issues, such that progressives are more likely to support environmental protection and reproductive choice for women although on the surface these issues do not appear to be related. Looking at groups rather than issues, Batson et al. (1997) find that empathy for a stigmatized group
can improve feelings for members of that group. Relevant to gender, Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) find that ideological learning is a relevant way to understanding changing attitudes toward gender roles with an overall more liberal shift in views on gender equality and less restrictive views of gender roles. Moreover, Kaplowitz et al. (2006) find that individuals are more likely to embrace positions that are consistent with prior beliefs within a particular domain.

Returning to Rowe et al.’s model for white identity development, racial consciousness is broken down into two types, achieved and unachieved. Unachieved racial consciousness includes three subcategories that are described through both thoughts and behaviors. In an unachieved racial consciousness, whites avoid, dismiss, or ignore issues of race; depend on others to steer their views without seriously committing to learning about race relations; or are open to new information but lack commitment to any particular idea. I do not discuss these in detail as they do not apply to the men I interviewed. On the other hand, achieved racial consciousness includes four types: dominative, conflictive, reactive and integrative which I explore further. All of the men I interviewed could be categorized into one of these types.

The *dominative* type is characterized by a strong sense of ethnocentrism, which justifies the domination of the majority group over minority groups. There is a strong sense of dominant group superiority here. Any form of lower educational or economic achievement or social disorganization with subordinate group populations is viewed as confirmation of their negative personal characteristics as opposed to centuries of structural disadvantage. When threatened by forced contact or competition from minority
group members, the dominative type will respond with fear, anger and hostility. In addition, this category aligns with various forms of white supremacy.

In second type, *conflictive*, dominant group members clearly state an aversion to the differential treatment of minority group members, but are usually opposed to programs that specially try to reduce or eliminate discriminatory treatment such as busing or affirmative action. Mainstream ideologies about race and the new color-blind racism fall into this category. While egalitarian ideals are espoused in principle, views on individualism are more likely to govern white attitudes here (Katz and Hass 1988). In this category, dominant group members view minority group members as having equal opportunities and advantages, thus any differences in outcomes are the result of a lack of motivation, personal effort, and/or deviant values. As I report later in this chapter, there are some aspects of this identity that my respondents have adopted, but they also fall into the remaining two categories as well depending on the specific subject under examination.

Individuals in the *reactive* group recognize that race plays a significant role in the lives and outcomes of subordinate group members and that they, as dominant group members, benefit from such a system. Any socially deviant behavior of subordinate group members is often viewed as adaptive survival behavior and can even be construed as noble in some situations. There is often anger and guilt associated with white racial consciousness at this level. According to Rowe et al. (p. 140), “the more passive expression would not include personal involvement. Instead, there would tend to be an intellectualized acceptance of racial/ethnic minorities and perhaps an interest in knowing
things about them so as to justify that acceptance to other whites and to appear knowledgeable in conversation with one’s minority contacts.” The majority of my respondents are located here. They hold an academic understanding about inequality; sometimes voice guilt about it and want to see change happen; but for the most part express their concern passively.

Finally, the integrative type is based on moral responsibility, but also pragmatism about what will make a difference. Individuals in this category are less likely to want to adopt the minority culture itself and are less likely to reject the majority culture. They appreciate and value a culturally pluralistic society and they are less likely to be plagued by guilt. They object to social and institutional policies that promote inequality. When expressed passively, this often involves donating money to organizations or causes, whereas active participation might include seeking out opportunities to educate others, organizing demonstrations, or participating in social movements. Movement between statuses does not occur sequentially, but rather happens through education and life experience. It is quite possible for people to fall into multiple categories, but conflicting information usually pushes individuals one way or another. In addition to each category, there is also a passive/active continuum across all types concerning action that may result from identity development during that particular form of consciousness.

Although I would classify a few of my respondents, such as Jeff, Henry, and Ray as having conflictive racial consciousness, the majority of my participants seemed to fall into the last two categories with most in the reactive group, however, depending on the context any of these men could fall across multiple categories. Interestingly, Rowe et al.
find that in the integrative view, whites “display a variety of behaviors derived from a pragmatic view of racial/ethnic minority issues” (p. 141). Much of the work on identity development has focused on black/white racial identity development, which is why I have chosen to use this as my exemplar, but a few have looked at male and heterosexuality identity, so I briefly describe their findings.

Scott and Robinson (2001) write about white male identity development. They find that key differences between the socialization of women and men lie in power issues. Men are socialized to equate self-worth with economic status and thus feel like “workhorses” (power comes from money); they are ill-equipped to experience or express emotions (having emotions is seen as a loss of power); they are taught stereotypical gender information (gender essentialization); and are socialized to be homophobic (particularly as it relates to being less powerful). Thus Scott and Robinson suggest a more “achieved” white male identity allows men to use ideas of self-control and having power to “break the bonds of patriarchy” (417). Their types (Noncontact, Claustrophobic, Conscious Identity; and Empirical) roughly translate to match the categories created by Rowe et al. with those who have formed a Conscious Identity experiencing guilt about racism and sexism while those in the Empirical category are more likely to understand that race and gender are social constructions which negatively impact all people. Unlike Rowe et al., however, Scott and Robinson to include a fifth type that acknowledges action, however their category does not differentiate between passive and active forms of action. According to Scott and Robinson, a person who has
achieved this type is “more aware of oppression in a general sense and works to eliminate specific instances of oppression” (emphasis added, 420).

I do not discuss heterosexual identity development at length because so few models examine it, and it is vastly different from either the gender or race models due to the overwhelming naturalization of a heterosexual identity. Worthington and Mohr (2002) posit that heterosexual identity development is informed by both individual identity development and social identity development including biology; microsocial context; gender norms and socialization; culture; religious orientation; and systemic homonegativity, sexual prejudice, and privilege (Hoffman 2004). Their highest form of “achieved” heterosexual identity, synthesis, is similar to that of Rowe et al.’s integrative category, but is described as a status rather than a type. In this final status heterosexuals have developed an individual sexual identity, group membership identity and have positive attitudes toward sexual minorities. The least developed status is an unexplored commitment to heterosexual identity with various other levels of exploration in between. There is a complex relationship between various statuses, and individuals are more likely to shift between statuses rather than following them in any particular order (outside of not exploring sexual identity at all). Worthington and Mohr also note that the naturalization of heterosexuality may actually lead to a reverse consciousness where certain events can trigger a person to move into a diffused or exploration status. Indeed, they find that many adults simply mature into a heterosexual identity rather than arriving at it through a process of experimentation. As with Rowe et al.’s model, the Worthington and Mohr model does not address privilege nor does it distinguish between heterosexuals who have
a positive view of sexual minorities but take no action and those who have a positive view and are also actively working to increase the rights or improve the status of sexual minorities.

My main critique of all identity development models is that they either lack a serious discussion of privilege and/or combine both passive and active responses to inequality. I argue that there are clear differences between those who understand inequality and those who understand privilege and I believe that the evidence I present in the next chapter will clearly demonstrate this. In addition, there also are obvious differences between those who take an active role in reducing inequality and those who take a more passive approach either through “checkbook” activism or through the philosophy of ‘do no harm.’ In Chapter 5, I investigate and lay out the reasons for taking actions as well as the constraints that might prevent someone from taking action and advocate for an updated identity model which incorporates both the understanding of privilege and perhaps a new type that incorporates both privilege and activism rather than just a passive/active continuum.

White, Heterosexual Men on Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation

Brooks and Bozendahl (2004) discuss both interest-based and exposure-based explanations for attitude formation. For example, they find that privileged men should express less support for race, gender, and sexuality equality because it is in their interests to maintain privilege (see also Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Cunningham et al. 2005; Fan and Marini
2000; Myers and Booth 2002). Brooks and Bozendahl (2004) find that while gender role attitudes appear to have significant effects, ideological learning may a play a more important role. In this section I explore the attitudes progressive white heterosexual men hold in across different areas of stratification as well as how progressive identities is contextually situated.

Although the top five concerns of my respondents included gender, race and sexual orientation. I was initially surprised when these categories specifically kept surfacing as topics of concern for white heterosexual men. Lakoff (2006) finds progressives who are concerned with inequality in these categories are much more likely to be individuals who themselves fall into those categories. He suggests that it is atypical for a person who is not affected by these issues to use this as a description of why they are personally progressive. Although in more recent work, Norrander and Wilcox (2008:506) find that “ideological identities are the product of, and not the cause of, political beliefs [and]… political elites play a crucial role in defining the issue positions associated with liberal and conservative identities.” Thus, elite ideological framing of various ‘liberal’ issues may more readily explain their selections. However, in terms of developing political beliefs, parents, higher education, peers, the media, and participation in social and civic activities have all been linked to political ideological development (Jennings and Niemi 1974; Serbert et al. 1974; Tedin 1980; Verba et al. 1995) thus the reasons behind their beliefs remain unclear.

My dissertation does however make more clear the connection between social acts and interactions from which identities are contextually activated and evaluated
relative to taken for granted cultural meanings and rankings of status groups (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1994). As previously mentioned, the range of socially recognizable identities and meanings are created bound within a social structure and built from aggregations of patterned social behaviors, which limit the possible variations available. For the majority of my respondents, it is apparent that both a progressive identity and mainstream individualistic colorblind gender blind ideologies influence their attitudes towards white women, people of color and sexual minorities although it is clearly contextually and situationally derived.

For some issues there was a great deal of variation, yet for others there was almost universal agreement and support. I explore each of those variations in detail below. In terms of race, my respondents are doing very little about segregation. In many instances high levels of segregation mask much of the inequality because it is built into the nature of jobs (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Patricia Yancey Martin 2006; Roscigno 2007) and/or housing (Charles 2003; Lipsitz 2006; Charles and Bradley 2009). Although these men are not friends with people of color; work in mostly homogenous occupations; and remain relatively secluded in mostly white neighborhoods, they do show support for increased equality in the labor market including supporting for governmental intervention such as affirmative action, although inconsistently. For gender, there was an equal amount of support for labor market equality, but their progressive identities did not necessarily transfer to the domestic sphere. There was nearly universal support for a rights-based approach to eliminating inequality concerning sexual minorities, but only a limited few spoke about tolerance for homosexuality and the discrimination and unequal
treatment that may still remain even after rights have been granted. One respondent even supported equal rights for sexual minorities, but stated that he did not approve of public displays of affection between two men.

Over half the men I interviewed used the minimization frame as described by Bonilla-Silva (2003) and stated, “things are a lot better than they used to be,” even though they were aware that some problems remain. Dalton uses this frame to describe the students with whom he works when he says, “I don’t really encounter much in the way of racism, but people love to say stuff is gay.” In this case, Dalton continues to relate racism to overt forms of action or inaction. Similarly Aiden sees discrimination through the lens of individual action and states:

we’re not as racist as we used to be, but there’s still some racism. It still happens. The same with gender inequality, we’re not as bad as we used to be but it’s still there… We’re trying to get better at not doing it, but these are like the remnants of things left over.

To give these men credit, a good deal of progress has been made, but that progress has been concentrated on only overt forms of discrimination which are tied to individual action (or inaction), and the burden of proof still remains on the subordinate group members. As discrimination has become more covert, it is often more difficult to prove in a court of law. The minimization frame allows these men to maintain their progressive identities and supporting the notion of equal rights, but at the same time, they fail to recognize how they benefit. I relate this to their social location as dominant group members - a location that severely limits contextual or situational experiences consistent with understanding privilege, even if their progressive identity reinforces ideas of fairness and justice. They view race, gender, and/or issues about sexual orientation together as problems minorities face rather than problems whites face, males face, heterosexuals face
or problems we all face. Although these men initially grouped these issues together, I
found differences in their attitudes toward each form of inequality therefore I am going to
speak on each issue separately. As a reminder, the interviews I conducted were open
ended and I did not ask how they felt about set list of issues. Thus I am only able to
report how many respondents mentioned an issue rather than stating what percentage
recognized each issue as a problem. I was more interested in hearing what issues each
respondent choose to discuss and then looked for similar themes rather forcing them to
pick a side on a list of specific issues.

*Race*

Racial segregation dominates much of the literature on race and race relations in
sociology, yet only six of my respondents mentioned segregation as playing a crucial role
in the continued persistence of inequality (see Chapter 1 for details). Nearly all of the
men I interviewed grew up in homogenous white neighborhoods and continue to live in
them. Here Oscar, a professional in his late twenties, talks about how growing up in an
all white neighborhood with a racist father made him feel around people of color. He
states,

> What was interesting though is really, that uh, that discomfort that I had, and the
discomfort that I didn’t have. Well, the discomfort I had with black people and then the
discomfort that I didn’t have with Latinos. I do think it has to do with that idea that
because in our society it’s always been black versus white or, you know, in our culture
there’s been that tension. It’s not always, it’s been there with white people and Latinos,
but it’s not as severe as it is with whites and blacks… I think throughout school and your
education you’re constantly taught about those differences and you’re not always
exposed to the different struggles that other ethnic groups or races experience.
Oscar participated in a program that took him to South America, which meant he was often the only white person around. He claims he never felt uncomfortable or alienated while there, but when he came back to the U.S. he still felt uncomfortable around black people in particular. It was not until he worked with and became friends with a black woman that he was able to understand the feelings of guilt he had when he was around people of color.

I don’t think I ever recognized it til I, like, one on one encounters, where I, um I was in that situation where, you know, there was someone of a different color, primarily, they were black. We were forced into some kind of interaction where, you know, we had to be friends or whatever… That was like, my good friend, she, uh, we had spoken about that, like, within the first six months that I worked there. We had developed a really good relationship and we discussed that. She said it was probably because you’re [my] dad was racist, and you know, you have that discomfort because of that.

This type of relationship can never be built and take place between neighbors because so few of these men live in racially diverse neighborhoods. Any experiences they had concerning race almost always occurred either in an educational setting or in the labor market.

Patrick, the high school teacher who mentioned it in the previous chapter, recommends some form of affirmative action to help make up for the practice of redlining (i.e. denying or limiting financial resources to a community typically due to the racial make-up of that area which often led to segregation)

I think we go back to the need for affirmative action, uh, not just on the government level, but on the private level. We are living with the results of decades and decades of redlining, and it’s going to take a long time to overcome those things… and we have a long way to go to fix that. I go to a very progressive church and yet [there are] very few black faces in my church. We wring our hands about it. We don’t know what to do. There’s a lot of white guilt in my church; a lot of white guilt about where they [parishioners] live because we draw a lot of folks who come from all white neighborhoods…And we avow that we believe strongly in the dignity and worth of individuals and yet we looked at the people sitting next to us, and they’re almost all just like us.
Patrick advocates for government intervention to help reduce the immense segregation currently found throughout the country by encouraging people to live in mixed-race neighborhoods. He specifically recommends tax breaks or other incentives that might persuade people to choose such neighborhoods and even reminisces about how he was steered toward an all white neighborhood when he first moved to Columbus.

I then ask Patrick if he has conversations with other whites about his concerns over the problem of segregation or about the problems with race relations in general and he states,

I think when they [these types of conversations] do come up, they come up about things from the outside as opposed to our beliefs or what we’re trying to do about things. They come up in pop culture or in politics or in things like that. But as opposed to trying to have those serious conversations like Attorney General Eric Holder” was talking about, uh, most white folks that I know, when I talk to them, they, those things don’t come up. I’m not proud of that. I think it’s something we need to do, but it’s a fact. They just don’t.

Of the forty respondents I interviewed, only two lived in mixed-raced neighborhoods, in both cases majority black neighborhoods. Both Colby and Mark choose to live in these neighborhoods but only Mark does so because of his identity as progressive and his views on reducing segregation. For Colby, it was simply a matter of more affordable housing. Colby, a recent college graduate in his early twenties, is working at a minimum wage job that is not in his field of study. When discussing his neighborhood, he said, “Um, I live in a mostly African American neighborhood, but I don’t recall… I don’t think I’ve ever felt like that was really any kind of issue. I mean, most of my friends are white, but not all of my friends.” I then ask if he knows any of his neighbors and he states, “I don’t

---

2 On February 18, 2009 Attorney General Eric Holder spoke on race relations in the midst of Black History Month. Some considered his remarks controversial while others celebrated his courage. The entire text of the speech can be found at http://www.justice.gov/ag/speeches/2009/ag-speech-090218.html.
know my neighbors very well…it’s nothing more than just ‘Hi. How you doin’?’"

Although his house is in a mostly black neighborhood, he rarely interacts with his neighbors and most of his friends are white.

The desire to be in a “good” school district or away from crime is often cited as a reason for choosing to live in suburban racially-homogenous neighborhoods (Shapiro 2004) but neither Colby nor Mark see such a cost – yet. Mark, a professional in his mid-thirties, is in a serious relationship with a woman of color but neither he nor Colby have children, so for now neither seem concerned about the quality of the local schools. Unlike Colby, Mark expresses a specific desire to live in a mixed-race or even minority-dominated community. This choice is clearly influenced by his partner who is a woman of color, and even he acknowledges that his partner shares this preference. In terms of community involvement, Mark knows his neighbors on a much more personal level than Colby. He has attended parties with them; invites them over to his house; and appears to have interacted with them in more meaningful ways. The neighborhood kids congregate on his front porch and he has taken some of them out to the park and to the movies. He has also attended several neighborhood meetings and participated in neighborhood clean-up activities.

Although a few men brought up segregation, it was not the only topic to be discussed concerning race relations. Lawson, a professional in his late thirties working at a local university, actually gets choked up when he starts thinking about the unequal system of education and how so many children of color might be falling through the cracks.
African Americans were part of a class that was considered property. They were, and after that was over, there were economic, there were barriers that were cultural and policy oriented and a lot of that stuff has major effects - economics, history and policy. I think that race is still an issue. There are African American kids that are young, not even drinking age [who] talk to me about situations like guidance counselors singling them out, making this impact on them – otherwise they wouldn’t, you know… [his eyes start watering]. It makes me a little emotional, but they wouldn’t have gone to school if somebody hadn’t just grabbed them and told them that they should. It’s so stupid. Sorry, turn that thing off for a minute ok? Seriously.

Lawson apologizes for his emotional display, takes a minute, and then goes on to say,

A lot of poor kids whether they’re black, Hispanic, white whatever, they just need like role models, second chances, chances to interact as adults, um chances to see things that aren’t harmful, drug-oriented, criminal oriented, normal life… When I was little I thought that a role model was somebody that you really looked up to. It’s not really true. Being a role model is like, or having a role model is like, my boss is a role model. He’s rubbed off on me. I see how he acts. It’s not even that I think about it. So these kids that we would interact with, you know, I just think about how we didn’t even know what an influence we were having – just being normal and just being safe…

I ask Lawson how he thinks some of these problems he defined can be rectified, and he states,

I’m not in opposition to affirmative action. I think that policies should try to rectify some of these situations. So in my mind, race is an issue in this country because it’s associated with economics and therefore it could be approached through policy.

Some scholars, such as William Julius Wilson (1987) might agree with Lawson’s perspective, particularly concerning the association of race with class, but Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003) and many others would argue that the invisibility of whiteness and the privilege associated with being white still play a prevailing role in the maintenance of racial inequality outside of class. Support for governmental policies that directly target race or gender may wane if people no longer believe that race is a factor in determining one’s access to resources. For progressives, some of their attitudes about on how and why inequality persist are limited to thinking about inequality from the subordinate point
of view (e.g. being discriminated against) instead of seeing it as a way for dominant group members to maintain their privilege. Holding this attitude predisposes the men to use mainstream color blind ideology and/or minimization frames when talking about these issues whereas those men who perceive privilege as an integral lever of continued inequality are far less likely to account for hierarchy in this way and more likely to see government intervention as necessary. I discuss this further in the next chapter.

The large majority of respondents brought up affirmative action and their attitudes towards it were relatively similar with a few interesting exceptions. They believe that affirmative action is still necessary but hope that someday (soon!) it will no longer be needed. Although most were supportive of affirmative action policies, some were a little more wary than others about the benefits of such policies and, no matter how progressive their attitudes, most tended to conflate race with class. It is not surprising that these men link race and class considering that the majority of respondents stated economic inequality as their primary concern. Others, however, linked mainstream individualistic colorblind views to their beliefs about the causes of race inequality. I ask Henry, a professional in his late fifties, what he thinks about affirmative action and he takes a more mainstream, culturally racist, approach in his response.

I think Bill Cosby, Dr. Cosby, had it pretty well nailed. Um, where the lack of American family values – and that’s not a religious issue; that is a social issue – American family values have dropped tremendously. We travel more. We spread out more. We now communicate to each other via twitter. There is no base anymore for a family. Um, in uh, the black community, the head of the family is usually grandma. It’s a matriarch. But, because we are working so hard to maintain whatever status we have or the car we own or whatever it is, roof over our head, we have gotten so busy… When it comes down to what we’re doing with our lives as affirmative action is concerned, I think part, not the entire community, but I think there’s a part of that community that, the black community and the Latino community, to a point that truly believes that they have been left behind. But they also have not taken advantage of what has been handed to them. Yes, there’s a lot of discrimination out there. I have no question about that… but the idea
is that we still need affirmative action type laws in this country, yes, but we also have to teach our kids how to be more responsible for themselves, more responsible for their families. Once we do that, maybe the idea of affirmative action won’t be needed anymore in the future.

Although he did not overtly state it, Henry is using cultural racism to blame black women for the problems of black families. He also believes that if subordinate group members would just be more responsible (for their families, valuing hard work, etc.), then there would not be a need for affirmative action. He clearly fails to recognize how institutionalized privilege and inequality play a role. Interestingly, he then goes on to describe how (poor) whites have learned to blame people from other cultures for their lack of advancement.

There’s no such thing as reverse discrimination. There is discrimination period, and we discriminate because we need them. We need somebody else to blame. So, if I can’t find a job, I’ll blame those illegal Mexicans coming in. If I can’t get a loan, I’m going to blame those Jews who control all the money in the U.S. You know, maybe it was because you don’t pay your bills and your credit just sucks or maybe you didn’t get the job because you walked in with an attitude or you weren’t dressed properly… This is where the social side and my conservative side, my progressive and my conservative butt heads occasionally. There are a lot of people out there that need help and that I understand, but there are some people that just live on handouts. I don’t know.

Henry is conflicted about the reasons for continued racial inequality and says that his progressive and conservative sides ‘butt heads.’ For many, racial discrimination and inequality still seem to be associated with individual racism rather than a racial system set up for the benefit of the dominant group members and the disadvantage of others.

Indeed, Garrett, a professional in his early twenties working for a for-profit company, talks about racism as something that will soon disappear although he contradicts himself as to the reason why.

Racism is dying off with my generation and generations behind me. You know, these are people that watch MTV growing up and you know, you know there’s African American
entertainers all over the place and now, while there’s nowhere near an accurate representation of African American culture, in other ways, that culture is becoming more accessible. You know, when I was growing up the stereotype was you only, you know, see that if you go to the slums. We, now, it’s not really that way. It’s not anywhere near that way. You have African American CEOs and we have an African American president, you know, senators, well a senator. Once you know something, you understand something. You don’t fear it, in my mind. It might be the only access that some people have to African American culture, you know. Maybe some guy living in the middle of Wyoming that has less, probably less, than 1% African American population; the only access that they have to that is watching MTV and hearing rap lyrics and talking about you know violence and things like that. Maybe that’s the only access they have. If they actually meet real African Americans, they’d see it’s not like that.

Garret credits television for increasing whites awareness of black culture; then blames television for racist stereotypes; then credits television for being an avenue to a multicultural world; then blames it again for stereotypes. Finally, he acknowledges that actually knowing people of color would be the most beneficial. However, research shows that simply knowing people of color will not change racial inequality unless those relationships are deep and meaningful and also include serious conversations about race relations, which leaves people of color in the position of always having to educate dominant group members about their experiences. This type of rhetorical incoherence happened repeatedly as progressives shifted between seeing racial inequality through their more progressive identity versus viewing it through a more mainstream colorblind lens.

Gabriel, mentioned early in this chapter, believes that being uncomfortable talking about race with people of color is associated with the legacy of racism.
Gabriel believes that now acknowledging the past prevents people from actually taking the time to understand how that it affects the present. Along a similar line, Patrick, also previously mentioned, talks about lack of discussions between blacks and whites concerning race.

We don’t have the courage to really look at ourselves, or if we do, it’s something that has been fixed. As lots of my white friends would say when we would talk about the things like affirmative action, ‘I ain’t never owned no slaves. What do I care? That was a long time ago.’ And, I think that until we as a culture and as a society can indeed get the courage to face it and try to do something about it, then it is going to be seen as an unusual thing when a minority makes it to a pinnacle of power – whether that be the ultimate pinnacle of power like Barack Obama has or a CEO or a Principal of our school. We don’t have any African American teachers [referring to his school district]. None.

Patrick identifies people who say, “I did not personally enslave anyone, so why should they have to do anything about racism or racial inequality,” as part of the problem. They do not recognize how the past contributes to the present.

Unlike Henry and Garrett, Glynn, a self-described moderate in his late thirties, gives an example of how he recognizes (rather than uses) the abstract liberalism frame as described by Bonilla-Silva (2003). Our conversation had drifted toward affirmative action so I ask Glynn how he feels about it.

Yeah. A lot of people, a lot of people around here are very much against it. Actually, I had a really stupid thing happen. There was recently a law, or uh, uh constitutional amendment that was proposed to ban affirmative action in this state last election season and uh, they had a very deceptive tactic. It deceived me, that’s for sure. Um, in that they came up to you and they said, ‘would you like fair hiring practices?’ That’s what they said. Now when someone says fair hiring practices to me, I think, that means that we hire them if they’re qualified regardless of their race. And so I’m thinking, oh, well, this is a very progressive thing and I think this is you know, a very good thing. So I sign on and find out it’s a ban of affirmative action, and I was like, uh, now that’s not cool. Uh, happily that got crushed pretty handily, but uh yeah, they’re not a fan of it [affirmative action] here politically, I know. I ultimately hope it won’t be necessary, but I think it is necessary now. Ultimately, I hope it will be a situation where we don’t have to worry about that particular level of uh, of differences or pay inequity or things like that. That’s the ultimate goal, but right now some people don’t change unless you beat them over the
head and so you need programs like affirmative action and if, for no other reason than it can help some people. I don’t really care how rich people feel about it. I don’t really care how other people who have a good job feel about it. You know? So, yeah, I’m definitely, uh, uh, I wish it wasn’t the case, so I can’t really say I’m a fan, but I’m definitely in favor of it, um from a personal standpoint.

Glynn “hopes” that affirmative action won’t be necessary in the future, but understands the need for it now.

On the other end of the spectrum, I return to Casey, the self-defined radical who refers to himself and others like him as faux-gressives or part-time progressives. When I ask what issues he finds to be troubling, he states,

I guess the issues that are important to me are sort of, I guess through my identity development, like uh, you know becoming aware of things like economic privilege, racial privilege, gender privilege, sexual orientation privilege, abelistic privilege, age privilege. You know, all these sorts of privilege issues have always been important to me, so seeing policies and things like that that work to address like historical injustices as a result of those privileges. Those are issues that are generally more important to me and some of those issues aren’t… are considered left of progressive… For instance, I do believe in things like, um, you know, for instance, reparations under certain conditions for slavery – like conditions not defined by white people. I think there’s room for that. I think that that wouldn’t be considered a progressive issue, but it is important to me.

Casey was one of the few to describe social problems in terms of privilege, which I discuss further in the next chapter. In terms of race, progressives seem to be a mixed bag when it comes to using individual or structural explanations for inequality. Many have adopted some of the racial frames formulated by Bonilla-Silva (2003), but others indisputably understand the structural explanations. It appears that attitudes about privilege hold the key. For those with an understanding of privilege, there were clear connections to seeing race through a structural lens rather than an individualistic one.

Returning to Casey, he was one of a very small minority of respondents to discuss deep personal relationships with several people of color and also one of the few to speak
so coherently about privilege. His upbringing and background were very similar to those of so many other men with whom I spoke. He grew up in a small mostly white town and describes his upbringing as “conservative.” He was not allowed to play with another kid his age in the neighborhood because that other child was black. He relates several stories about his father being overtly racist, but also about how his mother tried to counter that by telling him everyone should be treated the same. He attended a public high school, but it was not until college that Casey had what Goffman (1983) would call a “processing encounter” that changed his views.

Goffman describes processing encounters as personal encounters that affect not only the person involved, but can also have an impact on relevant social institutions. For Goffman, these processing encounters were likely to be formal (such as an interview with a school counselor, personnel department staff member, courtroom official, etc), but the most important aspect of the encounter was the potential to change an individual’s future. For example, the encounter you have with a personnel director could dramatically change your life if they hire you. Processing encounters, particularly in terms of race, are extremely important (Warren 2010), but they do not happen very often. Although I did not specifically ask for this information, nine respondents shared various types of processing encounters. Six of them were associated with race while three were associated with being a progressive in general or a combination of the two. Here Casey specifically talks about how he came to develop an understanding of privilege, which ignited his passion and devotion to reducing inequality.

When I was about twenty-two or twenty-three, I had my first person of color professor ever, uh, an African American female. She taught a multi-cultural counseling class and I
took it because I was interested… I just wanted to see what it was about. On the day we talked about white privilege, I almost walked out of the classroom. Like, I was incredibly offended and this sort of thing because my reality had been constructed in such a way that I, you know, only understood… I didn’t see privilege or what have you. I sort of saw myself as being in my position by chance and hard work. You know, I felt some guilt for being white, you know, this sort of thing. How can I be held accountable? I mean the common sort of reactions, I guess, to learning about privilege. You know, how can I be held responsible for slavery? You know, all this stuff. But, so, I was really mad and I went to the professor’s office hours and I talked through it with her and she was and is amazing. She’s still a mentor of mine. I probably met with her once a week for well…like once a week for about thirteen weeks, and we talked through this. We really talked through it and you know, I was crying and I went through like guilt. And I went through like liberation, radicalism, you know all this stuff, like anarchy, like nonsense, and eventually it became more clear and I was able to work through this with her. And you know, I’m just so thankful for that because, honestly, I’m sure it was completely taxing on her. I mean you have this white boy coming in and, you know, from his twenty-three years of not really rich life experience, try to talk about himself knowing the world better than her – just completely pretentious. And, you know, I was able to talk through a lot of that stuff with her and come to an awareness of privilege… So since then it’s kind of been like, I’ve actually steered my education in such a way to learn more about this stuff and try to learn in such a way that I’m not constantly reinforcing things like tokenizing, and things like that. I like to do my own reading on it and then I’m very fortunate to have – I do have a group of mentors of about ten men and women who are people of color and there’s one white female on there and there’s one white male on there. You know, they kind of, you know, I check in with them about once every two months and just sort of, uh, they have at times called me out for things. You know, ‘you’re being silly about things’ or whatever, but I’m really really fortunate in that sense to have that group of people sort of behind me. And the woman who mentored me and mentors me now, you know the one, the first African American female professor I had, you know, she, I always ask her why she did it and sort of why she put up with me and she said she see this, that she saw something. And that’s really a nice thing to hear.

In retrospect, Casey came to understand how taxing it must have been for his professor to constantly be challenged when she discussed privilege. Casey has thus devoted much of his time educating others, white men in particular, about the enduring inequality associated with race. He believes white men must take on the burden of this discussion rather than leaving it up to the very people who experience the inequality itself. Interestingly, once Casey was able to understand racial privilege, he quickly moved into an understanding of male privilege and heterosexual privilege. For the men who recognized privilege, it was often not limited to just one area of stratification.
In *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), Gordon Allport puts forth a hypothesis asserting that many forms of prejudice can be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. Allport’s hypothesis is generally supported although with some clear caveats including equal status among all parties, a noncompetitive environment, having common goals or tasks and having wider societal support. For example, Yehuda (1969) finds that contact with high status members of a minority group can yield positive results, but contact with low status members of a minority group can actually worsen views of a group. Casey was not only able to have long term interaction with a high status members of a minority group, but these interactions consisted of specific discussions about race and privilege. He referred to this encounter several times in the interview and it obviously had a deep and meaningful impact on how he views the world. Yehuda describes how the nature of the contact activity is also important for a particular outcome.

Casual contact, even if frequent, is less likely to change attitudes than intimate contact and therefore even workplace contacts do not generally produce any significant improvement in attitudes toward another group. Warren (2010) findings support this as well. Although many individuals claim to have friends who are black or of another race/ethnicity, often these friendships do not alter or racially change a person’s thoughts about race and racism because inequality and privilege are rarely discussed. Thus, it appears that encounters are important, but more important is the *content* and exchange that occurs within these encounter.
All of the men I interviewed recognize that some form(s) of racial inequality persists despite the new covert nature of it. Pressure to adopt mainstream dominant group attitudes persist and that is clearly evident with those who talk about race as “nearly gone” or relate it to overt forms of discrimination. In these situations, it appears that their progressive attitudes are less salient and they use the minimization of race frame and the cultural racism frame to explain some differences. For those who recognize white privilege, their progressive attitudes are at the forefront. They had a much more nuanced understanding of race as an institutional problem and recognized that they received benefits from an unequal system regardless of their personal feelings.

Interestingly, very few of these men, even those who recognize privilege, have deep meaningful relationships with subordinated group members – relationships which have shown to be important for understanding inequality. Other factors, mostly exposure based, such as through education and processing encounters obviously play a role. Future research must investigate how men are able to acquire knowledge about white privilege. Although all of the men in my sample consider themselves progressive, the majority did not recognize privilege.

_Gender_

Ridgeway (2011) argues that all people develop frames concerning differences, which are then translated into real world situations, often in the form of discrimination and bias, through interaction. It is important to note, however, that this is not typically a conscious process. Indeed, some of the gender frames that end up hurting women at
work actually begin at home. Ridgeway contends that a “lack of deep change in the structure of the family has been a powerful force that pushes back against gender change in the public sphere” (159), and she maintains that family structure, and the inequality therein, shapes opportunities in employment and politics and reinforces stereotypes. Gender status characteristics are transferred from home to work and impact the perception of who is more likely to be able to complete a perceived task. Despite the creation of new institutions and labor market opportunities for both men and women, gender stereotypes continue to follow women and help to maintain inequality (England 2010; Ridgeway 2011). As shown in Chapter 1, all women continue to be disadvantaged in pay, occupational segregation, and authority through both social closure and expectation states related to their status characteristics, yet most Americans fail to recognize these obstacles exist.

Charles and Bradley (2009) find that in advanced industrialized countries, a gender-essentialist ideology, e.g. cultural beliefs in fundamental and innate gender differences, remains strong at the same time liberal-egalitarian ideals are promoted. They also find that structural elements of the labor market and education system promote gender-differentiated aspirations (and realizations). Drawing on the work of Ridgeway (2009) and Charles and Bradley (2009), Paula England (2010) argues that society’s belief in gender essentialism remains strong because of devaluation of characteristics and behaviors stereotyped as feminine, particularly caregiving. For the most part, biological explanations for race have all but disappeared from mainstream society, yet they still remain firmly in place for women. Women are assumed to be more caring, empathetic,
and just generally nice, but not agentic. Men on the other hand continue to be seen as risk takers, more agentic, more ambitious, and more aggressive – attributes typically valued in the labor market. Women’s unequal pay, difficulty in the labor market (mobility, hiring, etc.), and reproductive freedom were mostly commonly listed as problems that still exist for women in the United States, and the divergence of thinking about gender inequality of these sorts seemed to be by degree rather than kind.

In my interviews, most of the men are aware of some the inequality associated with gender. They are particularly concerned with both the labor market aspects of inequality and with reproductive rights. Interestingly, Bonilla-Silva’s minimization frames clearly come through for gender as well as race particularly concerning labor market inequality. Similarly to the way they see racial inequality in the labor market, most of my respondents recognize problems exist but at the same time discount the extent of those problems. For example, Steven states,

I think that we’ve made a lot of progress in gender equality, and uh, I know that people are never totally satisfied with it and there is argument that uh, the there is still kind of a glass ceiling to women. And that probably is true, but I would say we’ve made a lot of progress and will probably continue to make progress. And the attitude of women can change too. There certainly have been times when in order to overcome gender inequality women have basically insisted that they go out into the work force and be right there competing with men. And then, they began to get guilty feelings about whether or not they’re doing their jobs or not at home, so then the trend goes the other way. [/and so do you think there are problems that still need to be overcome.] Probably. I’m not too familiar with the statistics. As I, as my general observation is, women are doing pretty well, at least around here. And I haven’t heard many complaints, so I don’t know. And so the good ole boy network is probably going to break down more than it has and continue to, so I think that more and more, it’s going to be an equal opportunity situation. I know there are statistics that say that women get up to a certain level and then after that it gets to be much more difficult, or that they get to a certain level and the pay differences show up and if that’s true, it shouldn’t be, but I think it’s, uh, and there are women who are seeing to it that that gets brought to the courts or whatever. It’s an egregious situation. I think we’re making progress and have made a lot. It’s really not a big disadvantage to be a woman that it used to be.
Andrew sees discrimination against women at work, but then transitions into talking about race instead.

I’m working for this big insurance company and you know, I see glass ceilings for women. I see ceilings for every minority. You know, I see politics all around me and I’m thinking, you know, that could have been more contrary than any kind of rational sort of sense. But uh, as someone who’s struggling to seize and hold on to a job myself, I feel yeah, I’m sure in competition for everything but I think um, the notion of trying hard to hire minority candidates is not necessarily a bad thing.

Unlike some of the others, Blake recognizes that there is a glass ceiling and recognizes that he may be non-consciously prejudiced toward women.

I think there’s clearly a glass, glass ceiling or still a fairly large presence of a glass ceiling, even in my own profession in mathematics, it’s still, there’s still are a lot fewer women than men. Um, and I think people are unthinkingly prejudiced, uh, including myself unfortunately, I mean, I just you know, try to be aware but somehow, uh, you get a big mass of applications for instance, and somehow, you know, even though nobody’s specifically said I don’t want to interview any women, no women get interviewed.

Landon recognizes the good old boys network in the labor market, but thinks it is slowly disappearing. He believes discrimination will lessen over time.

There’s still is a bit of a good ol’ boy network that’s kind of slowly dissolving and things like that, but um, in general across society, I think, yeah, there are still a lot of sexism sort of issues going on, um harassment issues, there’s not going to go away for a long time. And, um, unequal pay is not going to go away for a long time, and um... [Why do you think that is?] Um, I think just through inertia. Um, I think it, it gets more and more level as time goes on and I think that’s just going to continue to happen, but I think there’s you know, for a big issue like that, there’s always social resistance and social inertia and it just takes a while to get things moving to that equalization point. Um, and you know, I’m sure, especially in the corporate world, and stuff like that, there are promotion issues and things like that, that are still, you know, keeping that glass ceiling in place and things like that, but I think it’s getting less and less so. I don’t see it as a rapid change.

Instead of labor market specifics, when I ask Mark about gender inequality he beings by speaking generally about economic rights before transitioning into talking about women.

We shouldn’t have these - this ridiculous, these ridiculous levels of poverty. Uh, anyway, um so, really to say a bigger share of the pie as far as women and minorities and gays are concerned... having them better incorporated and better represented in positions of power, you know, as as agents of of change. As as uh, people who can influence the lives of people beyond their own distinct, whether it’s an ethnic or sexual, or or you know,
group. I don’t think that it’s a zero sum game. I don’t think that as women, I don’t think that as us uh women, you know uh, gain more elected to office or gain, you know positions in, in industry. You know or in, in as become professors or scientists. I don’t think that that necessarily means men are going to lose out. And I think that’s a terrible way to look at it. And I think that, you know, uh, that, that a lot of men who feel under siege because you know say the declining uh real wages for non-college educated male workers in America since the late 70s. I think they tend to blame a lot of these men, blame their loss on the gains of other people - of other groups of women or minorities or even homosexuals. But that’s not the case. Um it’s not the case that their losing because the other groups are gaining. It’s the case that there are some people at the top who are hoarding. And I guess really I’m talking about economics.

Mark relates his concern that white men may not support full equality because they see the increasing power of white women and people of color related to their own loss of power and privilege in a zero-sum game but Mark sees it differently and understands how he, and the rest of society can benefit when everyone participates.

Shifting to an issue that was brought up by all my respondents, I now examine their attitudes toward reproductive choice. Only two respondents considered themselves pro-life and of the two, only one, Aaron, really struggled with it. Aaron’s religion plays an important role in his attitude about reproductive freedom, but he also understands the need for a woman to have control of her own body. The other respondent did not mention religion in relation to abortion, but talked about his liberal views in other areas instead. I return to these men later in this section, but I begin with a few quotes from men who support abortion rights. Glynn is a representative example.

I’m extremely prochoice. Um, adamantly prochoice. I have a very firm stance on privacy in general. I don’t think people should be messing around in other people’s business. Um, gay marriage is another big one for me. I’m very much in favor of gay marriage. It’s not anybody’s business what two people do in the safety of their own homes. Um, so in terms of that I get really annoyed when people put their religious perspective into politics. Um, basically, I don’t, there’s a lot of religions in the world and most of them conflict with each other and so it drive me basically insane when people start going on about how their religion is somehow important in, in discussions. Uh, when people start saying, oh, it’s just morally wrong. You know, then I get, I get itchy.
Glynn transitions from talking about reproductive rights to talking about same-sex marriage and relates both to religion. Glynn is agnostic and believes there should be strong separation between church and state. Indeed, he listed it as a reason for being progressive, and we can see that coming through here. Although Joshua is not as passionate about supporting reproductive choice, and even has some mixed feelings about it, he does not think the government should regulate it. He recognizes that as a male, he will never be put in a situation where he has to make such a choice, so he supports a women’s right to choose.

Uh, yeah, like uh the issue of abortion, I don’t even like to touch on that because uh, I’ve never been in the position and I won’t judge somebody else or me not being in that position. And I can, for one I can never be in that position because I’m a male. Um, but uh, I don’t think there should be laws against abortion. Uh, I’m not saying that it’s exactly right, but it’s not right for the government to say that you know, for the government to say that you cannot have an abortion.

Again, thirty-eight of the men I interviewed support reproductive choice, but I would like to also share the thoughts of the two men who did not support it as it speaks to how their attitudes are influenced by cultural forces. The first example is Patrick. He speaks as if there are a set of issues that progressives should recognize and support if a person is to call themselves progressive (or liberal), but he cannot bring himself to support abortion. Therefore he hides his views from some of the people he knows. His views are not related to religion, but rather stem from a personal experience.

Now I do have some issues on which, I don’t talk about with my leftist friends, such as abortion. I have real problems with that. Uh, I understand choice, implicitly, however I also, I’m having more and more difficulty with not accepting that life begins at conception. It really bothers me that we think it doesn’t. Um, and the arguments that are used to prove that it doesn’t, I find very spurious. Uh, and part of that is personal too. When I was young, when I was 19, my girlfriend had an abortion and I didn’t, I knew she was pregnant, but I went to pick her up and it was gone. And that idea of choice being completely taken away from the father, that bothers me. I don’t see that as being just.
No, I understand that it’s a woman’s body and it’s the woman who’s going to go through it all, but by that token, if that is going to be the way it is, then we have to get rid of legal paternity issues… I want so strongly to make up for sexism and racism and things in the past, that I don’t stand up for things [inaudible]. For example, with my friends and abortion. I may disagree with them strongly, but it is such a, such a label that a leftist has to be pro-choice that I usually don’t tell anybody. But I truly believe that maybe we need to look at this differently than what we are. Uh, I’m very worried about what people think about me, uh, and I’m very proud that I have the most liberal views [in place of work].

Although he does not relate it directly to his thoughts on abortion, Aaron’s religious views are obviously important to him and influence his attitudes and behaviors.

I consider myself to be pretty, well, not, I don’t want to say a strong Christian. I consider myself to be a person of faith, which is, and I would say that’s important to me. It influences my thinking. I’ve had conflict though too because uh, regarding things like uh, like homosexuality… I went to a very, very, very conservative Christian college for undergrad and so I was maybe nineteen when I became a Christian. So that was kind of the environment that I was first exposed to and so a lot of my uh, beliefs, even though I don’t feel conservative, especially in that sense at all. I mean, it still kind of shaped, you just get that pounded into your head.

Interestingly, he feels the need to say that he does not feel conservative because of them.

When I ask about abortion he says,

I’m very much anti-abortion. Very much. I think because…It’s just very much, uh, you know, women have the rights to have control over their body. And I believe that too, but to me, like to me the baby has its own body. That’s where I have the issue I guess. Um, so yeah because of the connotation there.

Outside of the labor market and reproductive choice, my respondents also held more general attitudes about gender inequality, I begin with Sean, a professor in his late thirties, who talks about the difficulties for women in his profession (a mostly male dominated field of science).

I’ve seen a colleague say, at a conference – all professionals - say to a woman presenting at the conference, uh, something to the effect of, ‘you should go back to the kitchen and um, go back to raising children and leave the [engineering] to us’…Oh, it was horrible, just horrible thing to say. So, it certainly is still there in isolated cases or maybe not in just isolated cases. I don’t hear it from students, but I think, I think partly it’s because while there may only be two women, they are very good students. Typically the women in our department are very good students and I think it’s probably, they’re over-
achievers. They’re in a male dominated field and they’ve got to constantly prove themselves, so they do.

The underlying statement is that women who are not over-achievers, which by default means they are exactly like most of the men in class, are going to constantly have to prove themselves whereas the men do not. Sean recognizes this as a huge problem, but is not sure how to rectify it, as it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Women must prove themselves whereas the men do not. Fewer women enter the field or leave the field more quickly because of such unequal treatment, meaning women continue to have to prove themselves. Views about women’s abilities are clearly an issue. Again, Ridgeway (2011) relates this to the status differences men and women have which are most certainly tied to views about their biology and ‘natural’ ‘innate’ differences.

Expectations for men and women are different and consequently produce different results.

Interestingly Garrett recognizes the limitations for women in leadership roles, but underestimates the significance of the problem and is inclined to believe that racism is a bigger problem.

There might still be some left over, um, I don’t want to say animosity, so much as a reservation um about women as particularly in leadership roles. But I don’t think it’s nearly as pervasive as say racism, but that does bring to mind my girlfriend, who also works in politics and she said, that you know, ‘being a woman in politics, you’ve got two options – you’re either a bitch or a whore. You know, people either perceive you as being a bitch or being a whore and they’ll start rumors no matter what, so you know, you’ve got to decide which you’d rather be’… I think a lot of people still have those reservations about women being in charge and women being powerful, but I don’t think you have near the discrimination that you do on a racist level, on a racism-level or even as much as there used to be… There are things that need to be changed, but I don’t think that there’s any institutionalized oppression going on. There is no law saying you know, women can only do this. They can’t do that. I mean, we’ve had women go through the military academies…if nothing else, women don’t have to sign up for selective service like I did, so hey, there’s one benefit… I would consider myself a feminist, you know, pay equity, reproductive rights, childcare. I would consider myself a feminist, but once you get into the nitpicky stuff, then that’s where it loses me. And that’s kind of what the connotation of it is now, the way language has changed.
There are also no laws that *overtly* prevent people of color from participating in all aspects of society, but Garrett does not apply those same standards to gender. Garrett goes on to say that it is “annoying” when women complain about the use of gendered language such as the use of firefighter instead of fireman or chairperson instead of chairman. He believes that the women who push these issues “do more harm than good” because they “see wrong when there really is no wrong.” He continues,

> The really nitpicky stuff, or what I perceive as being very nitpicky. It gets on my nerves. If you’re going to get upset about the word chairman, let’s start looking at you know, things about, you know, getting women up to the same level on math and science scores. Let’s focus all that energy on pay equity. Let’s, you know, work on protecting Roe vs. Wade. Take that energy and put it into something fifty times more useful than little nitpicky stuff.

The conflation of male categorical labeling with the generic category human may seem nitpicky to Garrett, but Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue that the gender neutralization of job titles aids in the decrease of the gendered division of labor, and male-oriented job titles are only one of a myriad of ways that women are discounted at work (Martin 2006; Ridgeway 2011). These seemingly irrelevant slights add up over time and result in persistent gender of inequality in resources, as well as frustration, anger, depression and loss of self-confidence for women.

Moreover, linguistic conventions can either maintain or change a dominant ideology, and they can “exercise a profound constraint on our thoughts and actions predisposing us to follow patterns set down over generations and throughout our own development” (McConnell-Ginet 2003:55). Although specifics about language only came up in a few interviews, they are salient to Mark, Casey, Adrian, Blake and Kyle. For these men, language plays an important role in how they speak about gender. They
have all declared that they try not to gendered language, particularly derogatory words such as ‘bitch’ and ‘cunt.’ It appears to be connected to their progressive identity and their recognition of privilege. Instead of using gendered language they try to use gender-neutral language as much as possible. For example, Blake, a professional in his late thirties, has a very different take on language than Garrett. He thinks language and the use of gendered language is “pretty important” to talk about because it plays a dominant role in how we think about other people and consequently what jobs are open to those people.

Gender Inequality and The Domestic Sphere

Most of the men I interviewed were able to discuss some form of gender inequality in the labor market, yet they struggle to apply those same standard to their personal lives and their responses often result in rhetorical incoherence. They stumble, repeat themselves, change their stories, or simply do not want to think about the questions I am asking. Gender inequality in the home is rarely recognized as a problem although two men become more aware of it as they spoke with me. Interestingly none of these men take the initiative to do anything about it.

Returning to Blake, as mentioned previously, I ask what problems he thinks progressives should address, and he replies,

I think there’s clearly a glass ceiling or still a fairly large presence of a glass ceiling, even in my own profession…It’s still, there’s still a lot fewer women than men. I think people are unthinkingly prejudiced, including myself unfortunately. I mean, I just, you know, try to be aware but somehow, uh, you get a big mass of applications for instance, and somehow, you know, even though nobody’s specifically said I don’t want to interview any women, no women get interviewed.
Since he seems to be aware and concerned about this issue, I ask if he feels he is sensitive to women’s experiences in general, and he immediately answers ‘yes.’ I press him to describe those issues and problems, but he cannot answer.

Um, I don’t know, like it doesn’t play out in my day-to-day life very much in terms of what I do. I don’t know how to answer that exactly. I don’t do anything in particular. I think I’m pretty aware of them [women’s experiences] and try to be conscious of my own thoughts, but um, you know, um, and especially, certainly there have been times where, you know, my wife has brought me up short with some realization of, that I’m basically engaging in some kind of stereotypical thinking.

Blake understands that gender segregation is still a problem in the education system and thus also the labor market. He even comments about how disappointed he was in the Supreme Court ruling against Lilly Ledbetter and declares that he wants his daughter to be able to do whatever she wants while getting paid the same as men, but he claims none of this affects his “day-to-day life.” Thus, I move the discussion to his personal life. As we start to discuss the division of labor in his house, Blake informs me that it was not something he and his wife discussed when they first moved in together; rather it just evolved over time. Both Blake and his wife work full time jobs outside the home.

I mow the lawn (laughs). There aren’t many things that are divided like where neither of us does something. Uh, but that’s one thing I always do – mow the lawn. We pretty much split the cleaning, I’d say.

Again I press for specifics, and Blake responds,

Well, we, we, we, uh, she actually hired somebody to do like, you know, every two weeks, someone comes in and does the bathrooms and floors and stuff like that. Neither of us wanted to do that, so we decided that it was worth paying somebody. Uh, and uh, but like the kind of cleaning, doing the dishes, etc., we kind of split it. Well, she’s better at straightening up. She does more of that. Um, she does most of the laundry, but I do some. She probably ends up doing more than I do because I just don’t care.

Finally Blake confesses that his wife does more domestic labor but only because she “cares more.” Interestingly the idea of wives or partners caring more or them caring less came up in about half of the interviews (limited to those who were married of had a
domestic partner.). Both Blake and Garrett are representative of those who claimed their partners cared more. Garrett admits his wife does more of the housework because she cares and he does not.

I do most of the cooking. She does most of the laundry because on the weekends I’m beat and feel like laying there. I mean I try to keep it pretty fair. Um, like I said, I do, I do about seventy-five percent of the cooking, but she has the more traditionally masculine role of uh, she makes more money than I do…She was doing all the buying and that, so that’s an untraditional gender role. Um as far as in-depth cleaning, she does most of it, but it’s not because I don’t want to, it’s because I don’t care. I don’t care about dusting. I don’t care about you know, knick-knacks being arranged just right. She does most of the decorating. Um, dishes are half and half and luckily we rent a duplex so the landlord handles the yard work.

Although women have increased their hours of paid employment over the last few decades, men have not added an equal amount of hours to their domestic work (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006). Coltrane (2000) finds that if a wife works, there is more sharing of domestic labor, but that cannot be generalized over a full range of incomes. Women with higher incomes outsource household work, instead of bargaining with male partners to do their share, leaving in place gendered assumptions that housework and child care are women’s, not men’s responsibility. When men do some housework and child care, it is more often in the role of “helper” with women organizing and coordinating the work (Cooke and Baxter 2010).

When men were in some type of co-residential intimate relationship with a woman, I asked about the division of labor. Virtually all of the men I interviewed would begin by saying that they did an equal or close to equal share of the housework, yet when probed and pushed for details, they admit they do less than their partner or at the very least wait for their partner to initiate the work and then tell them what to do. None of the men initiated work that was not already “assigned” to them without being asked to do it.
It was up to their partners to create the list of chores and divide up the tasks. Dalton is a
great example. I ask about how he and his wife set up their division of household labor
and he responds.

She read that like, Second Shift book, so for a while after she read that, she was almost
obsessed with it, like, and that’s not bad, but um, I’m more someone who like, it took
some conditioning for me to be sitting in a room that’s, yeah, there’s clutter here, but it’s
pretty organized. That’s [being organized] not my nature necessarily, so it took some
conditioning on her part to like get me up to speed as far as like keeping the house
looking nice…There were some times where she would be cleaning something and I
would not be in the house and then she’d be resentful, so I’d have to clean something
afterward, or whatever. And also she’s very, she wants to be very fair about like who
does cooking. Gradually I’ve learned to enjoy cooking certain things. There are other
things that I hate to cook like rice, but um, sometimes I don’t mind cooking.

Dalton’s wife took it upon herself to read about and then implement changes in their
household. He admits that it “took some conditioning” on his part to pick up the slack.

He portrays himself as a sensitive guy and seems proud that he does some housework and
cooking, but that still leaves the house management up to his wife. He did not and has
not taken the initiative to change anything without her first pushing for change.

Unlike most of the others, Lawson and Mark both openly admit that they do not
do as much as their partners. Lawson describes how he avoids domestic labor.

You know, it’s really funny. I think I’m a prick about that… Um, I do most of the
cooking. I do most of the laundry. [She] does the heavy duty cleaning, and if people are
coming over, she’ll enlist me, but I basically report to her - ‘You tell me what to do. I’m
going to do it for the next three hours. You tell me what to do.’ It’s interesting because
I’ve…and she’s voiced that she thinks that it’s sexist before, I would say, maybe twice.
Um, for some reason I’m comfortable with it though… There are certain things that I just
don’t do like mopping, like cleaning the bathroom, like real cleaning, I guess. In my
mind, it’s just real cleaning because I never ever… It’s so wrong. And you know, if she’s
there to supervise, I can participate and get it done, but she has to be like, tell me step by
step, every 10 minutes, what the next step is. I think that’s probably a sign of basically
what my dad would do. I think. I think it’s lazy too. I think it’s probably associated
somewhat with gender roles and gender models… I don’t know if I really feel like being
logical about this right now because that’s annoying to me if I have to confess that. I’m
somewhat amused, you know, I’m open to thinking about this. I’m somewhat amused.
Yeah. I feel like I’ve either been trapped or talked myself into a position where I have to
concede that it’s not egalitarian.
As Lawson talks, he seems to recognize that even though he does “most of the cooking,” the division of labor with his wife is unequal and unfair. Although he claims he is open to talking about it, he also describes feeling “trapped” into admitting things are unequal.

Like Lawson, several men mention chores that they “refuse” to do. These specifically include vacuuming, washing the dishes, mopping, dusting and cleaning the bathroom. In some situations, they negotiate with their partner to do a different chore in order to avoid the one they refuse to do. Only one man claimed he did more housework and stuck by his story throughout the interview. Interestingly, he also discussed how his wife was experiencing severe depression and doing more housework was his way of trying to help her cope with her recent cancer diagnosis. Prior to that, he claimed the housework was divided evenly.

Unlike most of the others, Mark openly admits that the division of labor is not equal in his household although his partner is a full time student who also works a part-time job. Mark seems to be slightly more self-critical on why this occurs.

I would like to think that we try to share a more equitable division of labor, but I know that’s not true. And she’s, you know, that’s something I’m still coming to terms with, but she’s…my partner is much more um… assertive about getting stuff done around the house, and I seem to be a lot lazier about that. Sometimes I don’t know if it’s the fact that she’s better at being busy and I’m just kind of lazier, or if it’s some unconscious assumptions about, ‘she should be doing that and I shouldn’t worry about that.’ Sometimes I worry that that might be part of it -- you know, that I think, ‘Well, I don’t need to do that. She’ll take care of it,’ and I’m afraid some of that belief might be based in assumptions about sexual divisions of labor. That’s something I’m still trying to come to terms with.

Mark recognizes that the division of household labor is not equitable, yet he does not initiate any action to change these patterns. At first he claims that his partner is more concerned with cleanliness, as many of the men I interviewed do as well, but then he
wonders if his laziness directly results in her doing more. He figures his partner will eventually do the housework if he just waits long enough, and since he “doesn’t care,” waiting is not a problem.

For my respondents, once they admit to a gendered division of labor a sense of guilt appears. Stets and Carter (2012) describe this experience as a negative response to, and in conflict with, the moral identity each man has created for himself. In studying a person’s moral cognition, moral behavior, and moral emotions, Stets and Carter find that when others react in a way that does not support the moral identity a respondent has created for herself, a person is more likely to report feelings of guilt and shame than when others affirmed an individual’s moral identity. These men know that the division of labor is a gendered problem, and they begin by claiming that they do equal work. They perceive the division of labor to be fair, and thus do not take the initiative to change things. However, in the end, they almost all admit that it is not. By saying and believing that they do equal amounts of work, these men can maintain the progressive label and view themselves as moral without actually committing to an equal amount of either physical or mental work required to maintain a house. The perception of fairness is what matters most.

Allan Johnson (1997; 2005) contends that this is patriarchy rearing its ugly head even with men who consider themselves sensitive to “women’s” issues. Men can be sensitive to women’s feelings without ever having to challenge or undermine patriarchy. They do not take the initiative to change things. In the home, they do not decide what needs to be done, cared for, attended to, or discussed. Their responsibility only surfaces
when a woman calls attention to it. Patriarchy allows all men to be drawn into the path of least resistance. As illustrated above, the majority of the men I interviewed exemplify this.

One limitation of this study is that without interviewing the women in these partnerships, the actual division of labor is unknown. However, the literature continues to show women typically do more housework then male partners regardless of the time they spend in the paid labor market (Cooke and Baxter 2010). Coltrane (2000) finds that the average woman does about three times what men do in routine housework even if both women and men rate the arrangement as ‘fair.’ Women also feel more responsible for family members and are more likely to adjust their schedules accordingly.

When it comes to gender inequality, the division of domestic labor is not the only area where I found an imbalance of power in their personal lives. Name changes are an enduring and familiar feature of heterosexual marriage. Most recently, Hamilton et al. (2011) looked at marital name change as it relates to gender attitudes. They found that the tension between a collectivist or individualist identity to be most relevant, with more women taking the collectivist approach when deciding to take their husband’s name. The collectivist approach comes from a more conservative view and includes a sense of tradition, responsibility and duty to family while more the individualist approach argues that women should maintain their own identity. Scheuble and Johnson (2005) find that women who marry later in life, are better educated, are employed full-time, have more income, held more liberal gender role values, and have higher levels of career commitment are most likely to keep their names or go by a nonconventional marital
name, but currently the majority of women take their husband’s name (Gooding and Kreider 2010). I could not find any studies about what factors might influence men to change their names, most likely because it rarely happens, although there is a small group with hyphenated names. Before my interviews I was unsure how these progressive men would respond to name changes within the context of family formation.

Glynn is engaged and about to be married, so I ask him if either he or his partner were going to change their last name. He responds,

We worked out a deal about names a while ago. I don’t particularly care that she is not going to change her name particularly since she’s done something, like she’s worked for political candidates under her own name, so at this point, it’s much more useful for her for a from a career standpoint to keep her name and her old contacts. Uh, so you know, reduce confusion. If we have kids, I’d like them to have my last name just because. I’m not really sure why. I just kind of would like it, and she doesn’t particularly care, so it worked out well. But yeah, she’s keeping her name. Also, her name just, it sounds terrible with my last name… We talked about it. She was like, I don’t think I want to change my name and I was like ok – any particular reason or are you just not feeling like it? She was like well mostly it’s just a big pain. I don’t want to do it. I was lik, ok, whatever. It was like a five-minute thing. Now my dad had some words to say because he really thought that she should change her name. He wasn’t ecstatic when my older brother’s wife didn’t change her name either, but um, he was mollified when they had, they have a daughter now, and she has his last name, so he doesn’t feel quite so bad now. But uh, yeah he was not ecstatic though he didn’t make an issue out of it. He was like, is she going to change her name and I was like, well, no… He didn’t look very happy but he didn’t say much.

I then ask Glynn if he ever considered changing his name to her last name.

Yes [she] mentioned it once and um, I was like he, he, no. And she said all right. I think she wasn’t really all that serious about it but uh, yeah, no. It never really came up again seriously. I would have said no. I like my name too. I would have been, again, it’s like my name with her last name, not going to work, so aside from any sentimental reasons, just you know. I don’t think he [my dad] would have been happy, that’s for sure, um, incredulous might be the word there. Um, I don’t know. I don’t think he’d be very happy with me that’s for sure. So, I don’t know. I don’t think he’d, he’s not the sort to turn into it into a fight, and you don’t really see fireworks with my dad, but he would definitely not have been happy, I’m sure.

Interestingly Glynn’s father seems to be the person most concerned about name changes.

Of all the men I interviewed only Mark said he would be willing to change his last name.
although he was not married, so whether or not he actually would remains to be seen. 

Most of the men scoffed at the idea of changing their last name, but regardless of their age, they did not seem to care if their wife changed her last name. The majority of discussions, if there was one, fell around whether she would change her name, but did not include conversations about whether he would change his name.

Gabriel talks about a name change in relation to other men and the changing nature of society where men can now “have a feminine side.”

I have friends that were like hyphenating their names and this sort of thing. [what do you think about that?] I didn’t like it for myself. I have good friends that have done it, and sometimes, it depends on where I’m at, sometimes I’m like that’s really courageous and that’s really, you know, their living it up. I don’t really know how the whole hyphenating thing works out for men or women because you know, eventually, you’re name is gonna be, you know generations, it’s gonna be long (laughs). [Have you ever considered changing your name?] No! (laughs). No, but I encouraged my wife to do it be she didn’t want to [hyphenate]. She wanted to just take my name and that was it which kind of surprised me because hyphenating was more the buzz and she’s into women’s rights. I was a little surprised, but she just said she didn’t really want to and just wanted to get it changed and get it over with and didn’t want to deal with hyphenating and explaining to everybody and then maybe changing later. And how would the kids names be and all this stuff, so she was sort of pragmatic about it. So, I mean, I was kind of into it in that sense, but I didn’t really consider it for myself. I guess I had more of the [19]50s male in me…It’s a phenomenon I guess. It was sort of a state, and maybe it’s more than that – gonna be lasting, but it was, you know a stage that people went through, I think, to say something is changing here in terms of identity and who gets to maintain their identity and you know, who’s going to be the ‘little misses’ versus, you know, two autonomous equal partners. So, I think it was kind of a sign that that was all going on. And, we’re all trying to work it out – still trying to work it out, I guess.

Gabriel recognizes the individualist argument of maintaining an identity as a reason some women keep their last name, but like the rest of the men I interviewed, he never considered changing his name. Thus, women were almost always responsible for this decision. If a respondent’s partner kept her last name, the children always took his last name. Chad, a professional in his late fifties was the only exception. His children have a hyphenated last name.
When I ask if his wife changed her name, he replies, “No. She retained her maiden name.” Chad does not elaborate, so I ask about his children’s last name. He responds, “They have a hyphenated name which they think is real cool because they’re the only one in existence with that last name.” I prod further and asked why he and his wife decided to hyphenate their last names together.

It wasn’t a decision to be made. I mean it was, [she said] ‘this has been my name all along. I’m not changing it.’ If you have, she never said this, but the implication was, if you can’t deal with that then maybe we ought not do this, but it wasn’t a big deal. I understood completely. She’s very vocal about uh, feminine issues.

His wife clearly used the liberal-feminist approach invoking individualist reasons for keeping her name. She was not going to sacrifice her name for the family. Chad has both a son and two daughters, so I ask if any of them were married and what they did concerning their last names.

Good question. We’ve asked them on occasion, you know, and as a matter of fact, uh, my son’s wife took his hyphenated last name. We thought that was, we’ve always encouraged them, look, you’ve got to make things work for yourself. If you’d rather be a [wife’s last name] or you’d rather be [my last name] or you’d rather be [hyphenated last name] or Smith or Jones, that’s your decision. It’s your decision. It’s not your parent’s decision or your husband’s or your wife’s decision. It’s your decision. You are who you are.

Chad was unusual in that he and his wife hyphenate the name of their children. In one study, Brightman (1994) finds that approximately ten percent of married women use something other than their husband's last name, but of those only five percent hyphenated their last name with that of their partner.

Connell (2002:142) finds that patrilineal surnames give multiple advantages to men as a group and creates a “patriarchal dividend.” Nugent (2010) finds that children’s surnames present a classic tension between commitment to self and others. Women alone must deal with the moral dilemmas concerning views of individual identity versus seeing
themselves through a collective lens of family. The normative expectation that a woman will give up her name and that children will take their father’s name remains dominant in the U.S. and this continues to reflect the patriarchal nature of society. This is one area where all of the men I interviewed fell squarely in line with the dominant view. More research is needed in order to determine if naming choice has any influence on marriage quality, commitment, satisfaction, or success. Regardless of its impact of the quality of marriage, the meanings and symbols of language continue tell us a great deal about the structure of society, and in this case, these progressive men are sticking with tradition.

Ridgeway (2001) and Martin (2006) find that even if ‘innocent’ men behave in ways that are unintentionally harmful, their actions could still produce disastrous effects for women both within the home and in the workplace. Unequal familial relationships between men and women often shift unconsciously into gendered relationships at work (Ridgeway 2011). Like race, gender is a category that organizes social interaction and this categorization is always hierarchical. It produces beliefs that men deserve a higher status, which allows gender inequality to emerge and be maintained. Despite the progress that has been made in many areas for white women and people of color, the underlying structures producing disadvantage have evolved to maintain status hierarchies and often begin in the home or within segregated neighborhoods.

When it comes to gender inequality, my sample of progressive men identifies the source of such inequality more readily in terms of employment discrimination than couple or relationship processes and dynamics. They are more likely to recognize that gender inequality exists rather than to see how it persists, particularly how their male
privilege perpetuates it in their own lives. A few individuals questioned whether or not their attitudes were a reflection of sexism or gender bias, but were very reluctant to walk down that path. I relate this to a conflict between their progressive identity and their identity as men in a patriarchal society. They benefit directly from decreased household labor, child labor, and surname privilege. To reconcile these two identities, they have convinced themselves that their partners care more; that they care less; that they are indeed doing equal amounts of work; or all three. Greenstein (1996) looked at how ideology influenced division and labor and found that even men with more egalitarian views did not increase their labor unless their partner also held an egalitarian gender ideology. I do not have data on the division of labor from the perspective of their partners thus I am unable to comment on whether their partners hold egalitarian views, although six men directly stated that their partners discussed their feelings about their unfair division of labor.

In terms of gender, most tend to follow a more dominant mainstream ideology, particularly concerning their own gendered expectations and outcomes on the domestic front both in terms of labor and the selection of familial surnames. They are less likely to discuss structural explanations for gender inequality and with few exceptions, they do not know (or want to know) how their choices and interactions affect people in subordinate positions.
Sexual Orientation

Unlike gender and race, there was an overarching rights theme connecting respondents views about sexuality inequality. Rights mentioned included same-sex marriage rights, adoption rights, and employment protections. Everyone, except Aaron, agree that same-sex marriage should not be an issue and same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt and have access to any other parental or spousal rights. Aaron, a graduate student in his thirties, is the only respondent who, using an interest based explanation, believes that the term ‘marriage’ should be reserved for heterosexual couples based on his religious views. He agrees that same sex couples should have all the rights and privileges of marriage, but would prefer that it be called something else, such as a civil union. Since Aaron appeared a little uncomfortable with same-sex unions, I pressed him further on the issue. He admitted that up until recently he did not support any rights for gay and lesbian couples. His recent shift in thinking came about through the development of a close personal friendship with a lesbian woman which exposed him to people he had previously not known before. This supports the exposure-based explanations of the liberalizing effect of education. He acknowledges that she has had a tremendous amount of influence on his thinking and their relationship has forced him to examine some of his previous, more interest based beliefs.

I consider myself to be a pretty, well, not, I don’t want to say a strong Christian. I consider myself to be a person of faith, which is, and I would say that’s important to me. I’ve had this conflict though too because, uh, regarding that, especially with like homosexuality. I’ve never believed that, um, being a homosexual is a lifestyle choice, which I think a lot of conservatives do believe... I went to a very, very, very conservative Christian college for undergrad, and so I was maybe nineteen when I became a Christian. Um, and so that was kind of the environment that I was first exposed to and so a lot of my uh, beliefs, even though I don’t feel conservative especially in that sense at all, I mean it still kind of shaped, you just get that pounded in your head. And, like, I don’t know, maybe also because I hadn’t really been close to very many, uh, people who are
homosexual until relatively recently… I struggle with it because I have attitudes that um, that are hard for me to hound out.

Aaron was one of the few who struggled with this issue. Interestingly, he was also one of the few with a strong religious background. A majority of the men I interviewed, twenty-five respondents, stated that they were either atheist/humanists/realist or agnostic while the remaining men were a mix of various Christian dominations and one Buddhist. Most of these men did not attend church on a regular basis, but regardless of their religious affiliation, they were all in support of equal marriage rights and other civil rights.

Personal relationships with sexual minorities and views on religious freedom both clearly play a role in how these respondents feel toward gays and lesbians. Fifteen respondents mentioned having a family member who was gay or lesbian ranging from cousins and aunts or uncles to siblings and parents, and nearly every respondent mentioned their friendship with a gay or lesbian individual - with most of those relationships beginning in college but a few even in high school. Family members and close friends play a significant role in how my respondents look at the inequality experienced by gays and lesbians. Stan, a professional in his late twenties who works for a for-profit company, discusses how both religion and relationships shape his views.

People use religion as a crutch and interpret, I think, the Bible in different ways, and I think take way too much meaning from it if they - people, pastors, or churches - have an agenda. I think you can pretty much manipulate different sayings to make it prove your views. And of course, my main thing with the church is, ok, well, you’re sitting here telling me homosexuality is bad. I’m related to someone who is a homosexual, so you’re pretty much telling me my brother’s going to hell? I know my brother and he’s a good person. So, I think you’re wrong and I don’t know why you have this hate towards members of my family, and, or I don’t see how you, the church, should be able to tell me how I should live my life, or how, a woman should use her body, I mean do with their body, or anything like that. As I keep progressing in life, I see the church taking this power stance on how people should live and a lot of the times I mean it’s good, with morals and all that kind of stuff, but when they start legislating morality and getting into the bedroom and all that kind of stuff then I really think they should stay out.
Mark adamantly agrees with Stan. Although Mark does not have a familial relationship with anyone who is gay or lesbian, he talks about how his friends, neighbors and co-workers are all affected.

I have some very close friends who are homosexual. I have plenty of acquaintances through my current job and through my former job. I live in a neighborhood that, in which there are obviously several homosexual couples and I believe they should have all the same rights as heterosexuals. You know, I think it’s a bullshit argument for example denying them the right, the state, a state sanctioned marriage is bullshit considering all the actual legal benefits that accrue to straight couples. It’s bullshit that, so much of that argument rests in this emotionalism that it will destroy the institution of marriage when marriage, the institution of marriage, can be hurt no more than it can be by anyone who goes through a fucking drive-in chapel in Las Vegas. I mean that’s a crock of shit – that argument against granting homosexuals the right to legally marry. It’s more about that, you know, just for so long we’ve stigmatized them and haven’t considered homosexuality normative or just even as a, as dammit an outcome that occurs in nature among people. I’ve very passionate about it [same-sex marriage] and wanting to see it advanced.

Mark brings the institution of marriage into the conversation. He refers to a statement made by many individuals in opposition of marriage rights - that it will ‘destroy the institution of marriage.’ Mark believes that if people were honestly worried about destroying the institution of marriage, then they should look at the practices of heterosexual couples. Mark was not the only one to criticize heterosexual marriage and multiple men rejected the institution of marriage altogether. Ideas concerning the ubiquity of marriage were made by only by single men, but among these men, they were very common. Sam is a representative example.

It think that if people what to get married, they should be able to get married, but I don’t necessarily think that love needs to be validated by marriage. I do think that people should have the option to be married, but I don’t think that we as a society should… I think if you want to get married great. I think getting married is cool. I love weddings, but I don’t necessarily think that, that’s a necessary component of a sort of like a long lasting relationship.

Aiden, a professional in his late twenties who works for the government, states that marriage does “not mean very much” to him, and connects this to how his gay friends talk about marriage. He believes that supporting same-sex marriage is a “stock”
progressive response (i.e. progressives must support same-sex marriage if they are to consider themselves progressive), and he moves beyond the discussion of rights to a broader discussion about improving equal rights for everyone.

This is where I say, like, your stock progressive answer is typically like, yes, you know, equal marriage for equal rights and all these kinds of things. The HRC, you know, the blue sticker with the yellow equal sign, it’s like, I think those things need to be supported, but at the same time, there are different social issues that aren’t going to be fixed through the state, and that’s where a lot of the energy seems to be kind of focused on this because gay marriage has kind of become the spearhead to a larger movement, that in fact, even a lot, there are quite a number of gay people I know that aren’t comfortable with this whole thing. They don’t really want marriage. It seems to be normalizing their existence through hetero-norms. So, what does that even mean? So, I take a somewhat more ambivalent stance on it because the idea of marriage to me means very little. I’m not even sure I want to be married, even if I meet someone I want to spend, you know, my life with. I’m not sure that holds any ritualistic importance to me, and I think for a lot of people that are even advocating for gay marriage, it doesn’t hold a lot of ritualistic meaning, because they know they are not being married inside of a church—so yes, I support gay marriage, or the issue in the sense that it seems to be one of those things that in the eyes of the state, it shouldn’t matter, you know, who it is, but in the sense of the social issue, it seems to be more of a gray area and it seems to need to be more nuanced… I think that’s the, that’s the big American thing. If we could just extend rights—equal rights, to everybody then we’ll be ok. And the problem is, is that even if we ended up extending equal rights to everyone, including animals, we’re still going to have violence. We’re still going to have places where there aren’t safe spaces and we’re still going to kind of encounter these problems with acceptance and tolerance and rights don’t always solve the problems. And that’s what I think makes me not necessarily progressive and maybe perhaps something different, because most of the people I know that identify as progressive stop at “rights.” They think “rights” are the answer and will solve all of our problems, but they won’t—look at race and gender. Having rights doesn’t solve your problems.

To clarify, Aiden is not someone who considers himself a radical. He selected liberal on the demographic survey, yet he questions whether or not the institution of marriage is actually something in which he wants to participate. He does not believe that simply allowing same-sex marriage would really change how sexual minorities are viewed in this country. As scholars of race and gender can attest, granting rights or offering government protections is far different from actually ending oppression.

Returning briefly to views of religion and religion’s powerful influence in maintaining heterosexuality as the norm, most of my respondents were either not
religious or were religious/spiritual but non-practicing. If religion was mentioned, it was always seen as an obstacle, but there was one interesting exception, which I want to mention. Chad used religion to define his attitude in a much different manner than others, particularly Aaron. Aaron has to take a stand against his church’s doctrine while Chad felt his church helped to shape and change his beliefs. Chad directly said that his religion forced him to examine and then accept same-sex marriage even though he was uncomfortable with it at first. I ask him how he moved from not really caring about marriage rights for sexual minorities to supporting them.

Uh, if you accept the notion of unconditional love, that, that has no place in that position to exclude people. And um, that was really the conflict and the one that I had, that I ran up against, you know, which is consistent with my beliefs and with my philosophy and with my learning. Is it the exclusive view or the inclusive view? Uh, I think it’s that that point uh, that, uh, I guess was an acceptance of my own, what I held to be true, you know, in my mind and really an acceptance of laying aside the issue that this was something I was uncomfortable with… I’m a member of a Methodist church, but I don’t know anywhere in that theology that says it’s ok to exclude people. It seems to be very consistent throughout that, uh, to do so is really, uh, not accepting the tenets of the religion itself and that’s why I use the term heretic. It’s a person who pretends that they are a member of a religion and, without the acceptance of the basic tenets of that religion or holding a position that is in opposition to those tenets.

Chad’s religious beliefs about inclusion helped him to move to support same-sex marriage rights, but, again, he was the only one to see religion as supportive of sexual minorities.

Although support for equal rights for gays and lesbians was virtually universal, interesting differences emerged in the discussions that surrounded this issue. As seen in the references above, several men criticized the institution of marriage itself regardless of the sexual orientation of the couple. Next I will speak about one other issue that came up repeatedly during my conversations with these men about sexual minorities. Several of them shifted the conversation to
include their views on masculinity. Seth is a great example. He begins by talking about same-sex marriage rights as human rights but shifts to talking about masculinity.

I think it [same-sex marriage] is more like essentially like a human rights issue... I think marriage should be open to any loving partnership, regardless of gender. I think, yeah, gay couples should be able to marry. They should be able to adopt. They should have full equal rights. I have gay friends. I’m open to talking about sexuality... I don’t have a problem with a dude, like, lifting weights and liking to scream when he gets excited, and, uh, not liking the thought of being intimate with dudes or anything like that. It’s the effects that that attitude can have, uh, that I think is really problematic. Uh, and I mean also it’s sort of the way that, uh, the sort of the balance of these, of attitudes about this in American culture. I think it is an unhealthy balance, so again, the attitude embedded in a context where hypermasculinity is, uh, masculinity dominates. Hypermasculinity is sort of embraced uncritically, and each gender has its roles. That type of structure, I think is probably unhealthy.

Seth believes that gender roles are unhealthy and goes on to tie his thoughts about masculinity to the recent decision made by the boy scouts.

I think that the boy scouts have been, they’ve sort of, there’s a lot of things that the boy scouts can kind of promote, like, here’s good qualities to be without necessarily being so negative about the other things like sexuality for example. They made it clear that they don’t really consider homosexuals to be the kinds of boys that they want involved in their organization, and I think that that immediately has a very specific meaning... It makes ‘male’ mean something very specific. Well, I guess it means male doesn’t mean something very specific and I think that’s already; you’re kind of making it too constricting. You’re pigeonholing the idea of male already too much.

Seth associates the rigid rules of masculinity with the disapproval of gays by the Boy Scouts and the condemnation of homosexuality in general. Homosexuality is often seen as both a rejection of patriarchy and conventional masculinity (Plummer 1981; Herek 1993), but as with so many forms of privilege, men can receive the benefits of patriarchy without displaying hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) as long as they stick to the conventional rules of masculinity, and homosexuality does not fit into those rules. In the next chapter on privilege, I speak further about how many of
these men cross-referenced issues concerning sexual orientation, gender and masculinity throughout our conversations.

My data reveal that there are several explanations for why men support the rights of sexual minorities. My respondents tend to be either not religious or non-practicing if they listed a religion on the demographic survey. Only three men actually discussed how religion influences their lives while the majority not only did not participate in religion and often openly rejected it. For those who rejected it, they saw it as a clear obstacle preventing same-sex couples from obtaining equal rights. I suggest that religion can be seen through both an interest-based or exposure-based lens depending on the contextual environment. In terms of exposure-based arguments for supporting the equal rights of sexual minorities, several men suggested that holding an identity as a progressive almost “required” that they support equal rights. It reminded me of Patrick’s views on abortion. Although he did not support a woman’s right to choose, he said he would never share that opinion with his liberal friends. Thus openly holding progressive identity does expose individuals to outside pressure to conform to a certain set of beliefs. Most common, however were comments about friends and family members who were gay or lesbian. Clearly these relationships play an important role in structuring how these men view sexual minorities. Contact matters.

Summary

The progressives I interviewed have diverse opinions on issues of inequality and no two men see each issue in exactly the same manner. Their attitudes are contextually and
situationally based, but there are similarities in how they understand some of the problems directly related to their progressive identities and which also clearly display their feelings of empathy and wanting to help those in need. Their attitudes about racial and gender inequality varied much more dramatically than their attitudes toward sexual minorities. For race and gender, attitudes appear to be influenced both by their progressive identity as well as their dominant group status and a more mainstream individualist identity. My data add a more precise understanding of the contextual and situational environments that influence whether or not these men use one or the other (or both).

In terms of race, mainstream views about being color-blind, including using the four frames described by Bonilla-Silva to diminish the reality of racial inequality, clearly came up in discussions of affirmative action and the reasons behind the unequal status and outcomes of people of color. Only a few men spoke about their thoughts on segregation and its role in maintaining these problems, which is not surprising considering that the large majority of respondents continue to live in all-white or mostly white neighborhoods and have few friends of color. Interestingly these differences were not influenced by their relationships with people or color or their education. Rather socialization and personal experiences seem to be more significant.

In terms of gender, there were two interesting findings. Lending support to reproductive freedom was clearly important to these men and only two men spoke out against it. Thus, holding a progressive identity is clearly linked to supporting a woman’s right to choose. One respondent even admitted that he felt as if he could not share his
“pro-life” views with his liberal friends for fear of rejection, but it was not related to any particular religious views. For the other respondent, religion appeared to be more influential in his objections to a woman’s right to choose.

In terms of the labor market there were mixed attitudes. Although all of these men recognized some form of inequality, some were able to articulate specific ways women were harmed without qualifying their statements (i.e. saying things are better today than they were in the past). Others however, as with race, used the minimization frame to dismiss the extent and pervasiveness of modern forms of gender inequality. These are clearly interest-based explanations. For those who did not qualify or minimize the inequality women experience in the labor market, exposure-based explanations were more likely to be influential. Relationships, personal experiences, and socialization appear to also play a role - although I did not specifically seek out this information - a few respondents shared it during our conversations. For many, early childhood socialization was key while for others a combination of education, adult socialization, and personal experiences were also important.

For those in committed cohabiting relationships their progressive attitudes were much less likely to be influential in determining their behavior. Again, Myers and Booth (2002) argue that sex differences in socialization help to explain why men's gender ideology and behaviors are not as achieved compared to the ideology and behaviors of women. For these men inequality in the workplace was much more likely to be recognized than inequality in the home. Indeed all of these men perceived their domestic labor to be equal, but finally admitted to doing less than their partners once pressed for
details. The only exception included a man whose wife was recently diagnosed with cancer. In this case he said neither of them cleaned and their house was a mess, but that he tended to do more as a way to help her through this rough period in her life. Only two men were able to directly connect the disparities in their division of labor to their gendered socialization and views on gender roles.

In terms of sexual orientation, all of these men support equal rights for sexual minorities and exposure-based explanations for their attitude formations are clearly influential due to their increased exposure to gays and lesbians as family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. This combined with the more overt nature of this type of discrimination help to explain their views. Unlike gender and race, where legal barriers to opportunity have been overturned, there are still overt discriminatory laws in place limiting full social inclusion of gays and lesbians and the overt nature of this type of discrimination make it more visible and easier to challenge. Education also seemed to play a role and was a context where some of this exposure took place.

As explained in the last chapter, exposure-based explanations for attitudinal development typically involve education, experience, or socialization, and all three seem to be at play here. In terms of education, not only does it exposure people to new environments and people, including feminists and racial justice activists, but it also opens up opportunities for experiences such as Casey’s processing encounter, although processing encounters are not limited to educational settings. Other exposure can come from living in a diverse neighborhood or working in a diverse setting. For example, Aaron considers himself religious and was taught to think homosexuality was not natural
and should not be encouraged (through same-sex marriage rights, etc.) However, he had to rethink his beliefs once he met and developed a friendship with a lesbian, which happened while he was a graduate student at an institution of higher learning.

Nevertheless, new covert forms discrimination continue to mask the hierarchical nature of the inequality experience by people of color and white women. Even progressives, who understand that inequality in these areas still remain, have a difficult time rejecting the mainstream individualistic views and often incorporate parts of these views into their progressive ideologies. This particularly played out in the domestic sphere. Of those in committed relationships, only Gabriel mentioned the feminist inclinations of his wife and interestingly, he was the only person to change his surname. They are all highly educated and this clearly influences their progressive attitudes in general, but it appears that for most of these progressives, their current exposure to feminism and feminist women is limited and their exposure to people of color has also been limited, particularly once they have left an educational environment. Thus, a physical, economic, geographical, and/or psychological separation remains between these men, people of color, and feminist women, and most of these men are not aware of how their personal decisions and personal relationships help to maintain inequality.

In terms of how their knowledge impacts their identity, I find that all of these men have developed an achieved white identity types, but move between reactive, conflictive, integrative types depending on both the category (race, gender, sexual orientation) and specific issue within that category. Future research on identity models must include this variation. In addition, current models do not account for a knowledge of privilege and do
little to differentiate between those who actively work against inequality and those who
do not. Bringing in white male identity, Scott and Robinson (2001) find that despite the
privileges white men receive, which are numerous, they are also subject to the ideology
of individualism and cultural assumptions about what it means to be a man including not
showing emotions, self-reliance, and a strict conformity with heterosexuality. My data
show that progressive men may be pushing back against some of the rules of masculinity,
particularly in its relationships to heterosexuality. Although this can result in a feeling of
a loss of power and control for some men, it may also result in making some cracks in the
Matrix of Domination. On the other hand, there are interest based explanations that may
also be influencing their views on masculinity all of which I examine further in the next
two chapters.

When discrimination is obvious, people can point to it, talk about it, and show it
to others. It can be a way to unite (in horror) as it was for many of the participants on the
Freedom Summer (McAdam 1986) and Civil Rights Movements of the 60s and 70s.
When bias is embedded in our social systems, everyone is less aware of it. Since
subordinate group members often have it directed at them, however, they are much more
likely to understand how it operates. This makes organizing together to fight against
inequality more difficult because it is a moving target. Few truly grasp the breadth and
depth of the disparity that still remains in terms of gender and race (and that may remain
for homosexuals even if they are granted equal rights). As Aiden so eloquently stated
“having rights doesn’t solve your problems.”
In the next chapter I explore the attitudes of progressives toward privilege. I examine whether having knowledge about inequality necessarily translates into knowledge about the other side of oppression. To many Americans, the advancement of policies and laws, such as affirmative action, equality in education, and labor market rights, were seen as the end of the social movements, not the beginning of new battles that continue to be waged. How progressive heterosexual men view not only inequality but also privilege based on their standpoint within the Matrix of Domination offers new insight into explaining how inequalities are maintained and reproduced, but also how they can be challenged. One of the main ways progressives appear to be challenging the status quo comes in the form of examining masculinity and its relationships to sexuality and gender but its relationship to a reduction in the inequality experienced by subordinate group members remains unclear.
Chapter 4: Recognition of Privilege and Attitudes about Privilege

The oppressive effect of privilege is often so insidious that dominant groups complain whenever it’s brought up for discussion. They feel impatient and imposed on. “Come on,” they say, “stop whining. Things aren’t that bad. Maybe they used to be, but not anymore. It’s time to move on. Get over it.” But people who are white or heterosexual or male or nondisabled or middle- or upper-class have to ask themselves how they would know how bad it really is to be a person of color or a lesbian or a woman or gay or disabled or working- or lower-class. What life experience, for example, would qualify a white person to know the day-to-day reality of racism? People of color are, by comparison, experts in the dynamics of race privilege, because they live with the oppressive consequences of it twenty-four hours a day.

- Allan G. Johnson in The Gender Knot

As social justice scholars, Wildman and Bush emphasize recognition of privilege by dominant group members as a necessary element for dismantling the Matrix of Domination. Their work assumes that recognition of privilege leads to action. This assumption deserves scrutiny, however, given the large literature that documents disjuncture between attitudes and behavior (on gender see Hochschild 1989; Bolzendahl, and Myers 2004; Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly 2005; Ridgeway 2011; England 2010; on race see Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Blauner 1995; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2003; Anderson 2003) as well as the general stratification literature about the constraining effects of social structure on individual agency. In addition, Brook et al. (2008) find that negative emotions resulting from negative interactions based on a particular role-identity can influence whether or not a person holds that role-identity to be more or less salient. My data reveal that knowledge of privilege, in terms of understanding a progressive identity, can also play a role in determining when such a
role-identity is more or less salient. Thus, it is not only important to examine progressivism as an identity but also to determine how people’s attitudes about racial, gender, and sexuality inequality correspond with views about their own privilege.

Holding attitudes of fairness, equality and tolerance are part of the American tradition and is not necessarily a reflection of how people truly feel toward members of subordinate groups (Kluegel and Smith 1986). As Bonilla-Silva (2003) demonstrates, whites use multiple frames across diverse contexts to discount the extent of racial inequality and the impact of discrimination. Gender is used as a primary frame to naturalize cultural beliefs, which are then used to discount the extent women experience discrimination. This is seen across many areas including the continuance of sex-segregated occupations and industries to pervasive devaluation of caring labor to the devaluing of female-typed characteristics and abilities (Ridgeway 2011; England 2010). It can also been seen in the home where women continue to do the lion’s share of carework and domestic labor. Heterosexism structures and justifies discrimination against sexual minorities because of their deviance from the norm of compulsory heterosexuality (Seidman 2002; Valocchi 2005). As I reported in Chapter 3, some of the progressive men I interviewed used color, gender, and sexuality blind frames to account for inequality even though they simultaneously characterize racial, gender, and sexual minority discrimination as unfair and immoral.

The ideology of individualism is now so pervasive in the United States, it can often work to constrain or dampen egalitarian ideals in order to align the understanding of inequality and its outcomes with each individual person’s initiative rather than allowing
for a more complex approach including institutional and unintentional bias. The work done by Sniderman and Piazza (1993) show that people will support policies designed to assist people of color if they believe such people have “earned” such help by exerting personal effort to improve their situation. Moreover, they find that conservatives are less likely to credit blacks with efforts toward self-improvement, thus people may still endorse principle of fairness, but oppose policies aimed at reducing inequality.

In this chapter I explore whether or not my respondents recognize privilege. Hochschild (1989) found that it is possible for individuals to hold specific attitudes concerning inequality but their own lived experiences reflect a different reality. Acknowledging privilege appears to lessen the extent men use gender, race, and sexuality blind frames to discuss inequality. Some have even developed oppositional narratives that frame inequality as a result of dominant group members’ disparate access to societal resources and preferential expectations and evaluations, while others have developed frames related to their own their inability to access the privilege associated with hegemonic masculinity.

This chapter highlights new insights regarding processes of enduring inequality. Findings indicate that a lack of awareness of privilege among self-identified progressives is structured and delimited by mainstream color-blind, post-feminist ideologies. The ignorance of privilege is thus not something that can be overcome simply with education; instead it represents the effect of structural forces that mask privilege and subverts progressive beliefs, particularly in the post-Civil Rights era where new forms of inequality have emerged.
Throughout history, subordinate group members have been struggling for equality and it is not difficult to understand their attitudes and motivations. They directly benefit for a more equal society, not only in terms of economic gains, but also in terms of their potential future status, power and influence (in terms of workplace diversity see Lucas and Baxter 2012). On the other hand, white heterosexual men’s self interests should lead them to support the status quo. Their in-group membership, in this case the dominant group, brings substantial benefits (Lucas and Baxter 2012). In the case of employment, Lucas and Baxter (2012) find that white men hold more status, power, and influence on across multiple dimensions. Both social closure and non-conscious in-group preferences lead to dominant group members being seen as more trustworthy; given more credit for their work; and given more opportunities to show their leadership skills and display their knowledge. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Privilege

Having privilege does not imply that every white person, male or heterosexual ‘has it easy,’ but what is privilege exactly? According to Webster’s New World College Dictionary (2000), privilege is “a right, advantage, favor, or immunity specially granted to one; esp., a right held by a certain individual, group, or class, and withheld from certain others or all others.” Sociologically, privilege is any material, social, economic, or psychological benefit and advantage, regardless of recognition of unequal benefit. As described in the next two chapters, privilege is often something ignored, trivialized or outright denied. While different groups experience disparate outcomes based on the
intersection of the Matrix of Domination, there are similar processes that create and reproduce various forms of inequality (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Is it possible that the recognition of privilege can change the attitudes of progressives and make it less likely for them to reproduce or maintain inequality?

In her book *Privileged Revealed*, Stephanie Wildman (1996) argues that privilege is often invisible, and “the invisibility of privilege strengthens the power it creates and maintains. The invisible cannot be combated, and as a result privilege is allowed to “perpetuate, regenerate, and re-create itself” (p. 8). She argues that our language may seem neutral when we use words like white, black, male, female, homosexual or heterosexual, but the reality is these words “mask a system of power” (10). Her analysis of privilege in the workplace and housing market reveals why anti-discrimination laws alone cannot end subordination. These laws are only one side of a coin, with privilege on the other side. Ignoring privilege in the legal system and in the everyday lived experiences of individuals in a society leaves half the problem unsolved. Wildman offers education as one way to combat the negative effects of privilege. She suggests that exposure to people of color with high status, such as bringing scholars of color into the classroom, is one way to help individuals recognize privilege.

My data support this interpretation and this was clearly evident in the last chapter with Casey’s processing encounter, but the specific details of the encounter also included conversations directly about privilege with those who do not have access to that privilege. Although it will vary by person, Casey’s initial reaction was anger and defensiveness not acceptance, so that must also be considered. Without prolonged exposure, processing
encounters could result in a more entrenched view of the mainstream color blind or gender blind ideology. In Casey’s situation, it was not until he spent many weeks working with a female professor of color that he was able to move from anger to understanding – all of which took place over the course of a semester of classes, and he remains close friends with this professor even at the time of the interview which was several years after this incident first occurred. Although I would certainly not argue against more education, I contend that it is only the first step toward reducing inequality. Some of my respondents were able to talk about inequality and privilege. It was not hidden, but very much visible, yet they still were not compelled to take action. Instead, they were “checkbook activists” who donated money or displayed their support in passive ways that took little effort.

Beyond education, Wildman also suggests that white folks begin by making friends with people of color and then really listening to what they have to say thus exposing individuals to ideas of privilege through socialization. Eileen O’Brien also recommends socialization as a path to understanding privilege and describes her experiences learning about whiteness in the book *Whites Confront Racism*. She states, “[African American people] taught me more about whiteness than any whites ever did, and we barely talked about it. We did not have to – it was all around us” (2001:xii), Interestingly she was open to listening. In the end, Wildman concludes that revealing privilege is the key to working toward a more just future for all people. I show that although these men consider themselves progressive, they have very little contact with people of color and feminist women.
Privilege is a societal norm and thus easy to ignore. It is like the air we breathe. Subordinate group members are more likely to recognize it because their air is constantly being polluted. In modern society it is no longer by thick grey factory smoke that is easily recognized, but instead is polluted by dangerous micro-particles that are no longer visible to the naked eye. It is there nonetheless and subordinate groups members still recognize it because they continue to suffer from its effects. Members who hold privilege can choose whether or not to recognize its existence (Wildman 1996). Continuing the analogy, the air they breathe is almost always cleaner so the assumption is that everyone else must have clean air as well. Most members of society hold some form of privilege and I do not aim to compare various forms of privilege or rank them. My focus is on individuals that hold more privilege than others based upon their standpoint within the Matrix of Domination and how they understand, deny, or ignore such privilege.

Vast amounts of research show how whites, heterosexuals, and men persistently benefit from unrecognized institutionalized access to wealth, power and prestige (Wildman 1996; Rothenberg 2002; Kendell 2006; Williams 2003; Kimmel and Ferber 2003; Bush 2004; Lipsitz 2006), yet most individuals who fall in this category would deny this. Further, according to Mandell 2011, some would even claim it is they who are now the victims of discrimination and unequal treatment. In modern U.S. society, inequality has become institutionalized with the dominant group’s position seen as natural or normal and thus not something that needs to be examined, addressed, or changed. Problems associated with the “other” are portrayed as belonging to the
individual: *Those people* are first and foremost, ‘obsessed with victimhood,’ but can also be ‘lazy,’ ‘violent,’ ‘weak,’ ‘apathetic,’ ‘unintelligent,’ ‘inferior,’ ‘loud,’ ‘self-segregating,’ ‘want something for nothing,’ or have just plain ‘biological differences’ or ‘essential natures’ that account for differential outcomes. In this version of reality, group outcomes, systemic problems, and the very structure of society itself can easily be ignored.

Within any system of dominance, each person’s view is almost always partial and incomplete. Although each of my respondents describes himself as a progressive, their understanding of the systems of privilege vary dramatically from a rich knowledge of how privilege plays a role in their lives and the lives of others to claims that being white and male is meaningless because they do not think about people in racial or gendered terms. The latter claim exemplifies privilege. As with attitudes about inequality, attitudes about privilege were contextually and situationally derived and varied across categories.

I begin by examining those who do not recognize their own privilege. Henry, a professional in his late fifties, is a representative example. Of those who did not recognize privilege, they all remarked about in a very similar manner typically associated with not thinking about it whether their statements were about gender, race, or sexual orientation. While discussing race, I ask Henry to tell me what it means to be white.

I’ve never called myself white. My, it’s kind of a joke, but I don’t consider myself white. I am beige. My, my melanoma just isn’t as dark as yours. We stereotype too much… Race is used today either as a source of pride or a source of vilification. We can’t do something because of ‘them,’ and we have to have a ‘them,’ so the ‘them’ becomes blacks becomes Latinos, becomes Asian Americans becomes Jews. It used to be Catholics. It used to be Baptists… We see when something goes wrong. We have to blame somebody else. It’s not our fault. It’s not my fault. It has to be somebody else’s, so race becomes an easy target.
According to Bonilla-Silva (2003) all actors socially regarded as white benefit from systemic privileges and arguing that race is similar to ethnic, religious, class or any other form of discrimination does not recognize the true centrality of race as a fundamental independent axis of social organization (Omi and Winant 1994). Even though Henry articulates a problem with stereotyping, he does not understand how not being negatively stereotyped—or being positively stereotyped—benefits him. Jeff is another example of a progressive who tries not to “see” race.

Well, I don’t really give it a thought. It’s, in terms of like representing a group or whatever, uh, what I have noticed overall for most white people, race isn’t really a consideration. I mean they’re, if they’re talking to someone black, they’re going to be, for the most part, they might be polite and not, uh, conscious of race since they don’t want to do anything that’s offensive.

Jeff sees race as belonging to the ‘other.’ He believes that whites do not think about race until they are dealing with blacks, and they then think about it, but try not to consider it or react to it for fear of being called a racist. Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) argue that this is just another form of racism—“aversive racism.” I will speak more about aversive racism at the end of the chapter, for now, it is important to understand how it works in relation to what Jeff stated. Gaertner and Dovidio explain that people who believe they are nonprejudiced and who consciously embrace egalitarian ideals are often motivated to avoid dealing with issues of race or with people of color altogether and this can have costly consequences for both dominant and subordinate group members. Here, Jeff ties racism and discrimination to the overt forms of the past. He, and many others of my respondents, believes that if you do not think about race, then you are not perpetuating (or benefitting from) racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva (2001), argues that color-blind
racism has become so dominant in our modern society that, “it has captured the hearts and minds of most whites and blurred and confused the hearts and minds of many blacks” (p. 195). Progressives are not immune to the mainstream views of colorblind racism or aversive racism. Mainstream ideologies are very influential and shape attitudes of the entire population, hence the term “mainstream.”

Jeff’s views on race are similar to his views on gender and sexual orientation. He says,

> Well, it’s not a perfect world. I mean, just looking, I mean compared to say the 60s or 70s and where we are now. We’ve moved tremendously in all those different areas, whether it’s race, gay, gay rights, uh feminism, but nothing is totally perfect… I’ll have women who will tell me those sexist jokes. They think they’re funnier. They may have a twist to them from a female point of view or whatever or they may just be the ones that a guy will tell another guy or whatever…Women can be much more than any guys talking about different things so…”

In this statement, he discounts both power relationships and the tremendous impact discrimination has on people of color, white women, and sexual minorities as described in Chapter 1. He also uses the minimization frame as an excuse to ignore the problems that still exist. If subordinate groups openly object to sexism, racism and homophobia, dominant group members often think they are “humorless” or being “overly sensitive” (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Hinze 2004). Garrett is one such man. I asked if there were gender issues that progressives needed to be aware of and he states,

> It depends on how you define that. [?How would you define that?] I mean, what I consider reasonable um women’s issues, you know, things like abortion, pay equity, childcare, all of that, I’m behind 100%, um but when it comes… I think that there’s some people out there, um, the, they’re essentially what I consider the Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton’s of the women’s movement. They do more harm than good, and they see wrong when there really is no wrong. They try to create something that’s not there or dig really deep to find something that’s not there. When you start getting into that stuff, and unfortunately those most radical people also tend to be some of the loudest, some of the most outspoken, and it hurts the movement really, but those are things that, I, I have a hard time with.

For some men, holding a progressive ideology is interpreted by these men as not seeing race, gender, and sexual orientation. That is a progressive act. They have combined the
mainstream “liberal” ideologies that state people should not see color and gender, into their progressive identity. Privilege is more than just ignoring or remaining unaware of how one benefits from inequality but also includes being able to ignore how others are affected by it along with thinking that somehow whites/males know more about the “true” amount of inequality. Racist, sexist, and homophobic language are structural sources of inequality and not recognizing the role they play in maintaining inequality is one aspect of privilege. In this case, Garrett does not believe the most “outspoken” women because he considers them “to see wrong when there really is no wrong.” Privilege allows him to speak as if he is a better judge of knowing when discrimination occurs rather than the people actually experiencing the discrimination and inequality. His comments indicate that he does not consider his own race, gender, or sexual orientation to be important and he is completely unaware of the benefits he receives from them. In Chapter 2, Garrett called worrying about language “nitpicky,” but language, individuals, and social contexts all interact to sustain unequal gender relations (Talbot 2010). My data show that holding a progressive identity means embracing egalitarian ideals and often supporting policies that are in place to move the system in a more egalitarian direction, but it does not necessarily lead to a recognition of privilege.

In the previous chapter Glynn talked about his support of affirmative action because, in his mind, there was still a need for it, but when I asked him how he viewed being white in America, he says,

I don’t think of myself as white in the cultural sense. Um, I don’t think of myself as part of the white community or as part of white culture as a stereotypical white male. Um, I probably have some stereotypical white man traits and that kind of thing. I work in a high tech job which is a stereotypical white thing, but I don’t, I guess, I don’t think of myself as, I don’t think of white as a cultural concept, I guess. Um, so I don’t, I guess I
just don’t honestly think about it. Um, really, aside from the fact, I get sunburned, other people don’t.

Glynn claims that working in a high tech job is a “stereotypical white thing,” but does not recognize how stereotypes about whites are mostly positive while those about people of color and white women are often negative. Glynn is also unaware of how structural differences - differential neighborhoods, differential access to education, differential access to employment opportunities, limited networks, fewer role models, and gendered socialization all play a role in workplace segregation. I ask Glynn where he thinks we are in terms of race relations in the U.S., and he responds by talking about how many people of color he knows.

That’s a hard one. See race is really difficult, for here. I don’t know. Uh, (pause), I know maybe three black people. I know no Latin Americans. Um, I know, I know several Chinese people. I knew a lot of Chinese and Indian people because that’s their field. You know, they would come to the U.S. to study math, so I know a whole bunch of those, but I know really not very many people who aren’t white. Um, which is, I don’t know if it’s strange for here [this city] to be honest. Um, I don’t think many of my friends know people of different races. Um, but I guess it does happen.

Glynn is in a discipline dominated by white men and he lives in a mostly white neighborhood. It is not surprising therefore that he does not know very many people of color, particularly blacks. He transitions from saying he does not know about race relations to the fact that he does not know any black people, implying that one must know a person of color in order to understand whiteness and race relations. He is not seeking out these types of relationships to expand his knowledge and white privilege allows him to avoid thinking about how his own race provides benefits, such as positive stereotyping, that others do not receive. I ask Glynn directly if he thinks race shapes his life, and he is unsure of how to answer.
My life? Personally? I don’t think it shapes my life too terribly much, um, because I’m not, I… uh, you know. It’s kind of out of my context of day-to-day existence. Um, I think that actually the conversation about rape, uh rape?… race, uh probably shapes my life as much as actual race shapes my life…[do you ever have conversations about race?]

We have conversations about the, like the legal implications of race and these, Margaret [fiancé] is a law nut and uh, we have conversations about situations where we like, if we saw something on the news about somebody like the guy that shot up the uh, Holocaust museum, uh, um, you know, long conversations about that kind of thing, um but we don’t, I guess, in the same sense that we talk about women’s issues or you know, women’s and gender equality, we don’t talk as much about racial equality. Um, not because I think, not because I personally think it’s any better, more advanced really, but just because it’s, uh, not really, we don’t have a good context from which to speak on it.

Glynn seems surprised that I would ask how race impacts his life. He appears to start his response by saying that race does not shape his life because he is not black or a person of color, but instead quickly shifts to state that race is out of his context of day-to-day existence. Like most whites, he plainly does not think about it, which shows that he is clearly unaware of white privilege. Race belongs to the ‘other.’ He goes on to say that he or his fiancé brings up race when it is relevant (in the news) but they are much more likely to have conversations about gender inequality, mostly initiated by his partner since she is a “legal nut.” Although I can only assume, it appears their conversations focus solely on overt gender discrimination rather than interactional or institutional discrimination if they are viewing them through a legal lens inspired by media events.

Even for self-described progressives, the gendered and racialized social systems can be hidden, and it is easy to understand why. Understanding race and gender solely through the media can support color-blind individualism. Media portrayals of both types of discrimination focus only on the overt actions of individuals or show images of blacks and white women as equals to whites and white men (Bush 2004). These more positive role models are beneficial for people of color and all women, but the inaccurate
proportion of subordinates in positions of power ignores the reality of barriers that remain in place. On the other hand, the portrayal of subordinate groups members in stereotypical (often negative) ways can perpetuate subtle prejudice (Coltrane and Messineo 2000). If dominant group members have limited superficial contact with subordinate group members, they will be inclined to believe that most problems are solved or “a lot better than they used to be.” Although Glynn does not suggest things are solved, it is not something he has to think about.

After speaking for a while longer about race, Glynn brings up immigration as a way to demonstrate his progressive views.

The illegal immigration conversation always makes me think racism. Um, because every time they’re like, well, they [undocumented workers] entered this country illegally, and we should kick them out or we should put big 50 foot fences down on the Southwestern border to keep those dirty Mexicans out of our clean, pristine state. I’m sorry. I’ve been to Texas and it is not a clean state, but either way, um, anyway, that aside uh, you know, that one, I’m always like, well, you don’t like those people because they’re brown. It doesn’t have anything to do with them coming in and stealing your jobs or them doing anything. They’re doing job you wouldn’t take if it was, if people begged you to do it. Most, I mean, I don’t know very many people who jump at the opportunity to clean hotel rooms or mow lawns for a living, but people who come in from Latin American countries all seem to really like it and the very few conversations I’ve had with people like that, they’ve always been like, I’m really glad to have had this opportunity and very excited to do these jobs and they’re not taking your jobs. I mean, they’re not doing anything to hurt you. They want a better life, but you don’t like them and you know, to me it’s just basically, it may not be blatant, but it’s pretty obviously racially motivated to me.

Interestingly Glynn counters the offensive ‘dirty Mexican’ comment, not in terms explaining how racist it is, but instead by joking that Texas is dirty so the people there should not care about other “dirty” people coming into their state. In addition, he unintentionally claims that people from Latin American countries seem to “really like” cleaning hotel rooms and mowing lawns for a living. Although he is trying to show that he understands how much undocumented workers contribute to our economy, and that
negative feelings against them are often the result of racism, many of his own racist assumptions trickle into the conversation as well. I ask Glynn what he believes are the causes of status differences between whites and blacks, and he responds,

Well, from what I understand they have, and based on my personal experience, they can’t be going to school, very well, or they can’t be in as good a situation at school… They’re not going to college. They’re not going to the colleges of the people that I know are going to because they don’t really know a whole lot of them either. You go to the, you go to the inner cities and you see some of them and apparently they’re stuck there. Like, from all I can see, they’re stuck. I don’t know how they’re stuck or you know, why they’re stuck, what their particular situation is, it’s just from all I can tell, you know economics or some sense of this is my home, this is where I’ve grown up. I can’t really leave it, have, have stuck them, have stuck a lot of them in situations that really just incredibly depressing really. I mean you hear stats on gang violence and it makes you want to cry. Um it’s, it’s definitely a situation that I hope will change but I don’t think it’s going to happen for a while.

Obviously Glynn does not have the sociological language to describe and interpret what he sees, but he does have a vague understanding of institutionalized discrimination. He sees that people of color are not going to college in the numbers they should, and he relates this to being “stuck” in bad neighborhoods. On the other hand, he does not see how his choices, in terms of living in an all white suburb and choosing to not understand more about his own privilege play a role in maintaining inequality. Glenn tells me that the only conversations he has with other whites about race tend to focus on white supremacists (i.e. overt forms of racism). Glenn’s progressive identity and education have led him to question the relationship between poverty, education, and race, but his dominant group status, lack of relationships with people of color, and the strength of individualistic mainstream ideologies prevent him from moving further.
Interestingly, some progressives, like Dalton recognize privilege in some areas, but not others. I ask if he thinks any groups in society have more opportunities or advantages than others and he says,

Yeah, definitely as a white man, things are a lot easier for me. Um, and I mean that’s the obvious one. I think there’s more opportunities for males, just because of, I guess expectations in society. Um, other that that, Um, I mean I think that there are definitely, you know, certain um, whatever you want to say, like certain people that are less desirable, like you know, a lot of jobs would prefer not to have, you know, a lot of employers, I guess, would prefer not to have gay people working for them, would prefer not to have people of Arab decent or whatever.

Dalton continues to relate stories about discrimination – all overt and mostly related to discrimination against people of Middle Eastern descent after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. After hearing a few of his stories, I bring gender back into the conversation and ask Dalton if he ever has conversations with other white men about either race or gender. He hesitates before answering and then does not answer the question directly.

I’m just going to throw this out there and I’m saying it because I don’t really know like what to say or whatever. Um, I would be, it would be more difficult for me to explain to someone how, how, um, men have privilege over women than it would be for me to explain how white people have privilege over black people. Does that make sense? So, I’m acknowledging that it’s there, but I mean I don’t really know how to articulate or even give examples that I can use, um, other than just, you know, obvious things like we live in a male dominated society and women have certain expectations as far as the way they look, dress, and behave. Um, but I’m just saying that it’s harder for me to articulate uh, why women are less privileged than men than it is to articulate other things… Maybe I just feel like, maybe, I feel less comfortable talking in general terms and maybe that’s an issue I feel has to be talked about in more general terms as opposed to more specific clear examples. Um, like, you know, like you’re Arab, so people are going to assume you’re a terrorist whereas, you’re a woman, people are going to assume what? Like people are going to have expectations, but… I don’t know. Yeah, see, I don’t know. I guess that’s my point. I don’t know how to talk about it.

Although he is able to articulate some of the problems he thinks exist in terms of gender, and even talks about differing expectations, Dalton feels as if he lacks an understanding
of the mechanisms that produce and reproduce gender inequality and how he benefits from them, which is not uncommon. Interestingly, as I discussed in Chapter 2, he relates a story about wife reading *The Second Shift* by Arlie Hochschild (1989) and then demanding that they share domestic chores equally. He talks about being “conditioned” by her to clean up after himself, yet he also claims he does not understand what expectations women might have forced upon them. He admits he does not know as much about gender inequality, but is not motivated to inform himself. He does not seek that information out. Popular literature about sociological issues can certainly help, but if his wife had not read *The Second Shift*, would the domestic labor in his home continue to be divided unevenly? The answer is most likely yes. He knows that men are in charge of every social institutional, but cannot see how this creates problems for women and does not recognize how his own behavior plays a role. Even though these men seem to be very sympathetic to the struggles of white women and people of color, it is very difficult for them to understand the systemic problems that still remain and even harder for them to see their own privilege. Their lack of knowledge is not enough of an incentive to make them take time to explore these issues unless they are forced to do so. In Dalton’s case, his wife’s insistence upon an equal division of labor forced Dalton to (reluctantly) change his own behavior.

Most of my conversations and discussions about gender and race with these men eventually turn into conversations about overt behavior. I ask Gabriel what he thinks about being white or whiteness in general and he starts by telling me, “It ain’t what it used to be.” I’m not sure what he means by this, but before I can ask, he continues by
telling me several stories about what it was like for him when he moved from the Midwest to Georgia as a teenager.

I felt like I was on an alien planet. I mean, I didn’t have African American friends down there, but I didn’t really, I mean, I didn’t really have friends at all. I knew I was white. Yeah. No doubt about it. I knew it when I was around white people and when I was around black people. I mean, they talk about, they’re still fighting the Civil War down there! It really was kind of like that, I thought.

To Gabriel people in the South more readily displayed their negative attitudes about race relations. He tells me multiple stories about feeling out of place while living there and how glad he was to move back to the North after only a few years. He appears to prefer when race is just background noise, which he believes does not affect his life. He does not have any friends of color and he lives in a mostly white neighborhood, but outside the South, he does not have to think about being white. On the other hand, Gabriel seemed to be very aware of male privilege, which I talk about later in this chapter.

I ask Andrew, a professional in his late forties, what social issues he believes progressives should be aware of and his first response is to talk about race. He goes from a progressive view about the need to address economic inequality and our “disastrous history” to using cultural racism to explain some of the problems. He then seems to realize how his own words could be interpreted as racist and corrects himself.

Well, certainly race is a big thing, which, as a white male, I’ve tended to run away from those issues. I think um even personally when, when sort of confronted with the whole issue of race in our society, I don’t know that I’ve been entirely aggressive in approaching them. Now, I’ll listen to folks when they talk and uh, you know read newspaper articles, magazine articles things like that, but those, race in particular does not necessarily grab me as something that I need to confront with. Although from time to time, I’ve certainly been awakened to just you know, just a disastrous history and an ongoing need to really come to terms with the issue. [So what do you think it is about race that we need to address?] Oh man. Well certainly inequality in income would be a, would be a really nice place to start. I don’t know that that’s going to change everything, but you know, I guess there are different views of how people behave and act in a society
and I guess a behaviorist would say, I guess if you change your behavior then your attitudes and thoughts will follow. Well, if we had a more equitable society, um, economically, then maybe our attitudes towards uh, race at least as it pertains to race difference in income, might follow. So I mean, I hate, that seems like a bit of a cop-out rather than dealing with racial issues directly, but um, I don’t know. I, I guess I would just sort of sit there and say, I don’t know, other than the uh, I think it’s probably a two way street that both, I guess, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, any other minority group that you might want to think of, needs to come to terms with sort of that melting pot culture of America and vice versa. [What do you mean come to terms with?] Well, learn to play the game. I was downtown yesterday, and this is a rather disturbing circumstance, but this kind of gang of youths sort of hanging around the bus stop, and they were all African American youthful, every second word was effing this and effing that and they’re spitting and grabbing their crotches. You know kind of off-putting. And off-putting not only to white middle aged men and women waiting for the bus, but also other Africans and people waiting for the bus as well. You know, respect goes both ways. So that, yeah that was a little disturbing. I’m not sure how you overcome that. Now if they had been in a gang of white kids, it would have been probably just as offensive to me and to everyone else, which is not to say that there aren’t white kids that do that too just as offensively, so maybe it’s more of a generational thing than it is a racial issue, but I think it hits you over the head more, and perhaps not fairly.

Andrew claims that people of color need to “learn to play the game” and then uses the behavior of a group of young black teens as an example. He claims that respect needs to “go both ways,” but after talking about their behavior, he seems to realize that he is making generalizations about all black people based on the actions of a few rowdy teens, which he would not do if those rowdy teens were white. This realization comes as he is speaking, so at the end of his story, he corrects himself and associates their behavior to adolescence. His progressive views about inequality are dampened by his culturally racist assumptions that connect the actions of a few young people to an entire population. Interestingly, after he begins speaking, he becomes aware of how his words could be interpreted and attempts to correct himself. Here we see how his progressive identity and mainstream colorblind racist assumptions compete to explain inequality. When white teens behave in disrespectful ways or even commit crimes, their actions are not generalized to the entire white population, but that is not the case for people of color.
This is one key aspect of privilege, and I recently came across a Beandocks cartoon, which illustrates this point.

![Figure 1: Individual Behavior and Group Stereotypes](image)

This cartoon was published after two tragic shooting events happened within weeks of each other over the summer of 2012. In a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado a young white male killed twelve people and injured twenty-eight others and then not even three weeks later a white male associated with a Neo-Nazi skinhead group killed six people and wounded three others at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin. According to Mingus and Zopf (2010), the race of the perpetrator influences both the media and public response to mass shootings. If the shooter is a person of color, race is given prominence, but when the shooter is white there is a deliberate omission of race. Again, privilege is not having to see race or be raced (Wildman 1996; Bush 2004; Rothenberg 2002; Lipsitz 2006).
As the previous quote shows, Andrew had absolutely no information about these teens but was ready to use them as an example of how black people in general are disrespectful and do not ‘play the game.’ Regardless of who they are, instead of examining their behavior through the lens of masculinity (Kalish and Kimmel 2010), which pressures boys to act tough and be disrespectful in order to gain status among their peers (Kimmel 2008) or leads to depression because they are forced to hide their emotions and are not encouraged to seek help, Andrew associates their behavior to race. His progressive identity appears to have enabled him to correct himself and change his statement, but his initial inclinations were revealed. I then ask how race shapes his life and he states,

Not too much. I think um, I feel somewhat fortunate to work where I do because we have quite a few African Americans, not in my immediate office, but in one of the offices nearby and I’ve met and had interactions with, uh just around the kitchenette and in the coffee, you know, near the coffeepot, just absolutely delightful, salt of the earth people that are just wonderful. And I don’t know that in my rather segregated upbringing and education, I never really had that opportunity to meet so many delightful people that are of a different race than me.

Andrew only has interactions with people of color at a coffeepot between his office and the next. Like Henry, Jeff, Garrett and Glynn, and many others, Andrew does not recognize that white privilege allows him to avoid seeing himself in racial terms. Andrew’s understanding of race comes from his superficial interactions in a kitchenette with a few people of color whom he describes as “delightful” and “salt of the earth.” They are clearly not on his mind when he states that blacks need ‘to learn to play the game.’ These may not be the only interactions he has with people of color and they do not account for the media’s representation of minorities as gangsters and thugs on one
hand and middle class equals on the other, but it is still informative that the positive interactions he has with people of color at work are not generalized to all black people while the negative perceptions about some kids at a bus stop are.

Andrew admits that race is a “big thing” but also that he has not been aggressively approaching the subject. Privilege allows him to sit back and ignore the institutional discrimination and inequality that persists because it does not impact his life (except for in positive ways.) As a progressive he finds that race relations are a matter of deep concern and sees how our “disastrous history” has an impact on this. He acknowledges that income inequality is a factor, yet all of this knowledge does not push him to educate himself further. His knowledge of inequality does not convince him to try to make friends with people of color in order to expand the narrow lens through which he, and so many others like him, view race relations. Race does not appear to impact his life directly therefore it is easier to care or show concern only when it is convenient to do so.

People continue to carry gendered and racist beliefs, but in the present day, they are much less likely to be expressed in an overtly racist manner. Indeed, most people do not appear to be racist or sexist (on race see Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bush 2004; Trepagnier 2006). Barbara Trepagnier (2006 p. 15) finds that the “shared images and assumptions of members of the dominant group about the subordinate group” perpetuate unacknowledged racist assumptions. These assumptions allow people to say, “I’m not racist but…” (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000) and then proceed to talk in very racist stereotypical terms.
My interview data reveal how - under this new colorblind regime - programs such as affirmative action are supported in principle when they address overt discrimination but even these self-identified progressive men do not recognize the ways they might offer redress for more covert practices that reproduce disadvantage. Although, for the most part the men were often in support of affirmative action or governmental intervention in general, they often do so through the lens of individualized racism or sexism. This means that their support is qualified by statements that include, “it’s a lot better than it used to be.” If progressive continue to fail to understand the role institutionalized discrimination and privilege play in maintaining inequality, their support for programs like affirmative action could wane in the coming years. I ask Colby about affirmative action. He agrees with it, but sees it only as a vehicle for reducing direct prejudice rather than helping to alleviate institutionalized forms of discrimination. As direct overt forms of discrimination decrease, his support may also decrease as well.

I think affirmative action is, is, for the, is inherently a good program. I think that it can help account for, I think that it’s a way of specifically directly weeding out people like, specific segregated practices in like schools, for example. It can help account for the sort of direct, um, direct prejudice. It can account for that immediate, which is good. Um, but I think there’s an issue of, of, of equality that this... there’s a measure of equality that affirmative action can sort of afford us, but like any program that, and like, really, practically any program ever, it’s one of those things that you have to do carefully and you have to watch and it requires oversight.

Colby sees the continued need for affirmative action, but he is also wary about such programs and adds that they must be watched carefully. The implication being that whites may be harmed from such programs. Gabriel, on the other hand, expresses similar support and caution, but for a different reason.
I think affirmative action is like busing. It’s a crude instrument that was necessary that will run its course. I mean it has limits. It can only do so much, and, uh, I don’t think its time has come, but it will come… It’s social engineering – all this stuff. We’re looking down on all the people. We’re going to engineer this society. We don’t think there should be as much segregation, so we’re going to bus. That’s a pretty big deal, right? I mean that’s, uh, people aren’t doing that on their own. The citizenry is not integrating. It’s maintaining problems and there’s, uh, but because of fairness and justice, it has to be done.

Unlike Colby, Gabriel’s caution seems to stem from what he describes as ‘social engineering.’ He appears to be more aware of the societal implications of continued segregation, but does not address why he believes the “citizenry is not integrating” nor does he interrogate his own decision to live in an all white neighborhood. In this case, Gabriel’s identity as a progressive has forced him to think about this issue, but his privilege allows this to be an academic exercise rather than helping him to understand how his own actions and (lack of) interactions as well as his possible stereotypes and personal constraints also influence his decisions.

Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) offer insights into this phenomenon. Based on the work of Joel Kovel (1970), they distinguish between overt racism and the new institutionalized forms of racism currently in play in what Bonilla-Silva (2003) refers to as our racialized social system. They specifically tie this form of racism directly to liberals and progressives and state,

Aversive racists…sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but, at the same time, possess negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks, which may be unconscious. Aversive racism is hypothesized to be qualitatively different from blatant, “old-fashioned,” racism. It is more subtle and is presumed to characterize the racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal Whites in the United States… the consequences of aversive racism… are as significant and pernicious as those of the traditional, overt form” (618 emphasis added).
They go on to argue that aversive racists are primarily motivated to avoid wrongdoing or acting inappropriately for fear of being called a racist. Their implicit racial attitudes often only appear under pressure to act or make decisions quickly while their progressive identity is revealed in discussions about equality and fairness. Conscious attitudes shape deliberative responses, but implicit attitudes are more likely to explain why even liberal whites show discomfort via non-verbal cues, often lack of direct eye contact when speaking with people of color, and avoid blacks in general whether at work, at school, in their selection of neighborhoods or even at the bus stop.

Recognizing White Privilege

Returning to affirmative action, not all the progressives with whom I spoke were leery of such programs. Unlike Gabriel and Colby, Aaron brings white privilege into the conversation when he discusses the continuing need for affirmative action. He even discusses how the actual words ‘affirmative action’ have been twisted to provoke apprehension in whites.

I think, like, whites think this is the land of equal opportunity, and um, you know fail to recognize that there’s this power imbalance and we’re kind of down on affirmative action and you know that sort of thing. I think, like, if you actually realized, like, in order to, like, make the balance of power equal that means whites have to give up some power. Um, and so I guess for me that means, uh, doing everything I can to empower ethnic and cultural minorities. I don’t know, I guess I have a sense of responsibility to do that as a white person because I don’t necessarily feel, like, there’s some aspect of being white that yeah, I’m not proud of, I suppose… I don’t think there’s a whole lot of dialogue on the issue anymore. I think that, like, that particular issue, with like many issues, um, I don’t know that… I think like affirmative action is an inflammatory word almost, meaning that it gets in the way of having a conversation about the reasons for it. I don’t know. I think it will be interesting, like in the next twenty or thirty years to kind of see how the dialogue changes as minority groups increase and, um, you know, like, our nice
little white communities, um, are exposed to, like, different cultures and whatnot… I think things are, I’d like to say that things are somewhat changing, um, uh, that’s just not something you can expect to just disappear in a day. I think we’re still certainly seeing like, the after, the after effects like if there’s an atomic bomb that’s dropped off, which is maybe what slavery is, this is still certainly the aftershocks, the residual of that period of our history.

Aaron uses a powerful metaphor to describe slavery - an atomic bomb. Like the resulting nuclear fallout, the effects of slavery remain long after the initial “clean up,” and the focus on overt discrimination has not served to change the privileged/subordinate status quo just as the effects of radiation remain long after a nuclear meltdown is contained. Aaron describes the need to ‘empower ethnic and cultural minorities,’ yet his only example of how he promotes this type of empowerment comes from his experiences in the classroom. As an instructor he is able to share his views on English language learners and the problems they face with his own students, but admits that he does not speak about any forms of inequality outside of the classroom.

As our conversation continues, I ask Aaron why he thinks so many white people still live in segregated communities, object to affirmative action, and rarely have meaningful conversations about race. He brings power and the need for a redistribution of that power into the conversation.

I mean, it’s a very sensitive topic and I think, I believe that ultimately if you talk about race, you’re going to have to address the inequities. You’re gonna have to address that there are power imbalances. That is really scary for white people to talk about because I don’t know that a lot of people are conscious of that, but at the end of the day, if you engage in that discussion, it means, you know, it forces you to do something about it. It forces you to a place to change, to give up power or a lot of that power. So, I think, like, deep down, it’s scary for white people to talk about it. I can only address your questions from a white person. I don’t know, um, I suppose if I was a minority in this country, um, I would want to talk about it and I would probably be really frustrated that I can’t talk about it because people turn a deaf ear. They don’t want to listen. So, I think I would probably, honestly, I think that they, whites, need to be the ones to kind of be open to listening. I think whites have more of a responsibility simply for the fact that I think whites are generally in that position of power or in that position where, you know, they
are privileged. You know, if we’re going to talk about, um, you know, different levels of power and privilege or whatever, I think that the group with the power needs to be the one that, um, you know, if you’re really wanting equality, you know, it’s got to start with the people in power.

Aaron suggests that whites should be more open to listening (and thus perhaps eventually understanding the problems that still exist), and he even claims they have a “responsibility” to listen and understand. Aaron reasons that people in power must be the ones to begin working to eliminate inequality. For Aaron and so many other progressives like him this typically takes the form of passive action or trying to do no harm.

Mark is another respondent who recognizes some aspects of privilege. Here he describes how privilege has played a role in his life through the both the choices he made and the opportunities that were (and are) available to him.

I am white, and I’m a very privileged white person. You know, I grew up with parents who were college educated and in part, both of their, the advantages they had, was because they were white – in terms of going to college, completing college, you know. I fully appreciate the fact that I’ve had tons of advantages that have accrued to me through absolutely no effort, no hard work on my own, just because I’m white. I think most white people don’t think about that… In high school, I was practically failing a class every semester and I didn’t even try to get a scholarship. I knew my parents could afford [to pay for my] college. I knew I would go. I mean I had high SAT scores, but I didn’t really try.

In this example, Mark references educational and economic privilege. He admits that he sometimes feels guilt about how (positively) he is treated. For example, he tells me that he feels as he is often automatically seen as trustworthy regardless of how well people know him in situations both in and outside of the labor market. He also believes people, and employers in particular, give him the benefit of the doubt; give him more leeway; or give him a break in almost any situation regardless of his actual intent or effort. Research shows that these actual and perceived advantages are key mechanisms of inequality in
social relationships, education, and employment (Ridgeway 2011; Roscigno 2007). I ask Mark whether he feels that the advantages he describes are related to being white or being male and he says,

You know, you can’t really separate the advantages that have accrued to me because I’m white as well as the advantages that have accrued to me because I’m a male… I know it’s possible for me to go far in life because in almost every position of power that I’ve, you know, ever looked at growing up, the occupant of that position, of that position of power, has been a white male… It’s not unrealistic for me to think that I could, you know, run for political office or be a captain of industry or be some sort of community leader because I’m a white male. Excuse me; it’s not unrealistic for me to believe I can become those things because I’ve seen other white men do it. White men, you know, built such structures to enhance their own power, often on the backs of other people who weren’t them or who weren’t like them… It means that I don’t even have to question ‘is it realistic that I could advance to that position of power?’ because on that level, hell, I see people like me in them every damn day. People like me running the country. People like me in positions of great wealth and great influence… I never wonder, ‘when will a white person get to influence things?’ First of all, just having those assumptions, you know, those, I don’t want to call them role models, but I mean I guess in a way that’s what they are. You know, just, just, I don’t even have to question whether or not I’m held back by my race or by my gender. That’s the benefit. It actually kind of builds in a certain level of self-confidence that you don’t even know that you have to a certain extent. It means that I believe that I could potentially walk down the halls of power. I see other white guys do it. I don’t even have to think about that. I just see it. I just know it. I mean that’s how, you know, well ingrained, you know the racial and sexual power structure is in this country, you know. I’m a representative of those who rule, so that’s two less things I have to worry about.

Here Mark references a form of psychological privilege. He believes that since people who look like him are in every conceivable position of power he has a form of self-confidence that is not readily available to individuals without such role models.

Indeed, he has hundreds, if not thousands of examples of people like him in powerful, high status, high-income positions. The combination of having these role models builds a robust confidence and gives him a strong sense self. He understands what is attainable for people like him. These processes are mechanisms that translate cultural beliefs about racial or gender difference into shared ideologies that naturalize and justify the higher
status of dominant group members among dominant and subordinate group members (Ridgeway 2011). Aaron describes a similar feeling,

I totally recognize that like my family background, not that, I mean, I’m the first person to enter a PhD program from my family but I mean, just by dad always had a good job. My mom never had to work. We didn’t drive around in the Rolls Royces but we certainly had all the comforts. I think I was, I think the thing that I got from my dad that enabled me to have what I have is not so much like, the money, but just the idea that you will succeed. You can do it. And I don’t know that everybody gets that. If I hadn’t had that, like, had this, uh belief in my ability to attain certain achievements, I mean, if I hadn’t had a parent that had that belief, no way would I be here, absolutely not. That is totally the difference maker… [Do you think universities should consider this?] I think universities need to be more supportive of those students [minorities], recognizing that yeah, they did come from schools where like the minority was the majority and like, the teachers were like the bottom of the rung because they couldn’t get jobs at other places, whatever. They didn’t necessarily have those role models that told them they could succeed that were empowering them. And I think that well, recognizing that basically minority students didn’t, a lot of students may not have come in with the same kind of tools under their belt, than maybe from more privileged situations.

Aaron believes his confidence was passed from father to son rather that through the more general societal sense that Mark does, but both recognize their privilege here.

Returning to Dalton, he seems to have a more nuanced understanding of race than gender, but he does not see how institutionalized racism impact people of color. Instead he relates racial inequality to economic disadvantages. In a conversation about the different opportunities of blacks and whites, Dalton states,

I mentioned something about hiring, and I mean, I don’t think that’s as big of an issue as, well, I guess that’s an issue, but I don’t think that’s the issue. I think the issue is more – people don’t fucking take into account the fact that you need to have money to make money. You need to have money to do anything, and a lot of stupid people think that you can just pull yourself up by your bootstraps. If you start out with nothing, there is nothing you can do. I mean, yeah, there’s something you can do if you’re super lucky and happen to be extremely resourceful or happen to have someone who you know cares about you who can help you out in some way. But as far as opportunities, I think it comes down to money, which relates to race a lot. Um, and (pauses), um, yeah, so I guess it, really anything can be affected – what you have, what you can get, um, you know obviously getting a job. You have to have an address to get a job. Um you have to have an address already to get another place to live. Um, you have to have money to get any of those things, so I mean, I think that’s the bottom line. Yeah. Money relates to um race especially, um, [how so?] Well, because it relates to race mainly just because of
what’s there already. Um, I’m not saying someone’s ability to make money is directly
affected by race necessarily, but there are obviously more black people in poverty than
there are white people in poverty. So I mean that’s, that’s pretty much it. That’s how
they’re related.

Dalton seems to understand racial inequality from an economic standpoint, which views
the problem of blacks and other people of color through a class-based lens (Lawson, and
others, shared this same perspective as noted in Chapter 2). Understanding economic
inequality is clearly important because of its connections to race and some sociologists
might agree with Dalton, but most recently those claims have been challenged as not
fully explaining racial discrimination and continued inequality (Omi and Winant 1994;
recognize how racial inequality continues to be produced regardless of class. Although
class is often linked to race, class-based perspectives alone ignore the confluence of
segregation, race, and the history of slavery (Pettigrew 1988). Class-based perspectives
also ignore the white privilege that results directly from racial inequality.

*Recognizing Male Privilege*

If progressive attitudes toward gender, race and sexual orientation reflected any
knowledge of privilege, it was typically seen through a lens combining them, particularly
race and gender. Several men spoke about “white male” privilege rather than only white
privilege or only male privilege. Interestingly, discussions that started by talking about
male privilege often became discussions about “being a man” and the problems
associated with hegemonic masculinity (although not named as such specifically).
Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005:832) review the multitude of articles that have encompassed the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ or critiqued it. It has been used throughout sociological literature and come to be defined as

…the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. Men who received the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity. It was in relation to this group, and to compliance among heterosexual women, that the concept of hegemony was most powerful. Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion.

I incorporated their entire definition because it illustrates both the problems with hegemonic masculinity as well as an understanding of how men who may have created alternative masculinities are still complicit in maintaining inequality. Connell and Messerschmidt offer a few critiques of this definition including the need for a more complex model of this gender hierarchy and the agency of women; recognition of the geography of masculinities; a more nuanced understanding of local, regional, and global masculinities; a more specific understanding of privilege and power; and more emphasis on the ways hegemonic masculinity has and can change (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 for a full review of the criticisms).

I began this section with Garrett. He relates being a man with getting into leadership roles at a faster pace even though his arguments were not “as good or as convincingly made,” but he says this as an off the cuff remark and almost jokingly. In contrast, Lawson directly relates much of his success to being a man and says,
I think generally, had I been a female... I might not have had so much success or I might have had to work a little harder or the final products would have had to be a little better or I wouldn’t have been, I don’t know I guess, I feel like to an extent, some of the things I was a little lazier about it and a little flagrantly.

Blake finds that there is “clearly a glass, glass ceiling or still a fairly large presence of a glass ceiling, even in my own profession...I think people are unthinkingly prejudiced, uh, including myself unfortunately. I mean, I just, you know, try to be aware.” Blake goes on to say that, “I think I would subscribe to the idea that there’s, there’s institutional sexism as opposed to um, you know, personal sexism.”

Like Blake, Gabriel recognizes how men are advantaged over women. He specifically named women’s inequality as an issue to be addressed and when I questioned him about this he said,

Well, I think on gender... It’s hard to not grow up thinking [about] certain gender roles - that women will be better at some things and men will be better at others - and then when you’re hiring or thinking of a person to do something, it’s very hard not to have those things influence your thinking. It may feel like intuition to you, you know, or to me, that ‘oh yeah, this is... I just have the right feeling about this person,’ but where does that come from really? Mark Twain, I think it was, said that uh, ‘common sense was the accumulation of life’s biases’ or something like that. That’s a really rough thing to think about, but you know, we all have this sense of common sense or intuition, but what is it really? Some of it’s good, you know. It’s sort of wisdom, but there’s a lot of negative stuff that’s passed along through personal experiences and non-verbals from our parents and all that. I just don’t think most people are conscious of all that.

Gabriel clearly indicates that he believes women are often not treated fairly in hiring decisions because of non-conscious bias about gender roles, confirming the findings of Ridgeway (2010). He must make some of those hiring decisions, and he tries to be aware of his own bias, but knows that he cannot be completely free of it. When managers favor (and thus hire) people like themselves in terms of gender, race, or any other ascribed characteristic, it is referred to as homosocial reproduction (Kanter 1977; Elliott and Smith
2004). It is often associated with having a “gut” feeling about someone being a good worker or the best person for the job, and that person often happens to be of the same race and/or gender as the person doing the hiring. Since white men do most of the hiring, homosocial reproduction means that white men have an advantage in the workplace. Gabriel recognizes this disadvantage and consciously tries to work against some of his own unintentional biases against women.

Kevin, on the other hand, admits to using male privilege to his advantage. He is in his late twenties and currently works for a non-profit organization. He describes the inequality he recognized in his previous work at a restaurant.

I worked at this restaurant for a while and I saw that [differential treatment] a lot. One, my boss, who really was a great guy, but he was so much harder on women. [/Really? How so?] Um, well, anything they did was, that was wrong… or if they messed up at all, and it’s in a restaurant, you’re going to mess up, well, any work, people are going to make mistakes, but he would be really hard on them. He wasn’t buddy, buddy with them like all the guys, especially if you, I mainly talked about sports because that’s the main masculine thing that, I guess, I do and watch and everything like that, and I took advantage of it. I did. I mean, I got in close with him and got away with more. [/So you guys would talk about sports?] We’d talk about sports and become buddy, buddy, and I played basketball with him.

For some men, knowledge of sports or playing sports allows them to create advantageous networks, but women are often denied this route to success. Although women’s participation in sports has risen dramatically, male athletes and male dominated sports still receive most of the attention and money (Messner 2002). Hence, the perception that men are better athletes translates into male advantage in employment through socializing and networks (Kanter 1977; Williams 1992; Ridgeway 2011).

The privilege that comes with masculinity was sometimes recognized as a problem, but masculinity itself was also critiqued by these progressive men - even with
respondents who do not recognize male privilege per se, were able to articulate ways they rejected or disapproved of hegemonic masculinities. Nearly all of the men I interviewed describe themselves and identify in ways that contrast with the stereotypical ideas of masculinity. Colby illustrates this when he says,

I think, a lot of times, when I would say something is really masculine, that it would be something that I mean that I probably don’t like as much. You know what I mean? Like, I walk around campus and I see like all these like ‘dudes’ and they’re being ‘dudes’ and I kind of, and like, I think we’re always like, and when I say ‘we’re’ I mean me and my friends are, and we try and not be supermasculine because I think it has, I think it sort of has kind of a negative connotation… I think that as a culture we still have a general sense that like, males are like leaders. I think that’s still kind of like a general kind of, it sort of persists and it, I think it doesn’t persist because one person from one organization talks about it because I think that there’s still that kind of sense. I think that’s kind of you know, boys are blue. Girls are pink. That kind of stuff still kind of persists. Deep-seated kind of stuff.

Colby understands how activities promoted to boys are more likely to result in the skills (as leaders) that employers are looking for, and he relates this to the underlying ideologies that essentialize gender and promote gendered behaviors – which occur even through seemingly inconsequential behaviors such as putting pink on girls and blue on boys.

I ask Glynn about his views on masculinity and he states, “you know, everybody around me is, the sort of unthinking arrogance of being the, you know, because I have the excess testosterone that I have in my blood, means that I get to be, you know, special or whatever. That’s I think that’s the most negative aspect of the stereotypical masculine person to my, to my mind anyway.” Glynn understands how masculinity can be used as tool for special treatment but thinks that he can choose not to receive it by not behaving in a stereotypical manner.
Interestingly, talks about male privilege almost always included a discussion of masculinity. Lawson begins talking about masculinity by relating a story to me about going to a bar with his friend Rob.

I don’t want to go out. It’s a weeknight. I just don’t want to go out. He’s like, ‘you owe me one Lawson.’ He’s on the phone. ‘I’m coming. Sarah’s (Rob’s wife) is letting me. I gotta go. You gotta go with me.’ We pull up. I can’t believe - If I tell this story, it’s funny, but it still makes me look like an ass – His yellow truck pulls up. I get out of the passenger seat. Full window walk in. For some reason, I’m buying his beer. I’m drinking wine, again. Ok, and I’m paying. And I, and all of the sudden an hour and a half later, this kind of routine, we’re not thinking about it, and Rob’s from a small town. He’s from a small town, but he’s so secure, he doesn’t give a fuck what people think. He just doesn’t give a fuck, but all of the sudden I just realize that - we’re in kind of, like, sort of, a roughneck crowd – that we look completely gay. I’m drinking wine. He’s drinking beer…It struck both of us. I think he’s the one that mentioned it to me, but all of our behaviors just, like, were, we look like a couple. And he thinks it’s great, but I’m bothered by it. Why am I bothered by it? Well, I think I’m bothered by it because if it’s true, I’m the woman in the relationship. That’s what bothered me. Isn’t that great? Because if I had been like the one drinking the beer and the one driving the truck, I would have been more ok with it. Isn’t that weird? It’s one of those revealing stories that doesn’t make me look good. Yeah. I should be more ashamed of that than I am. You know what I mean? Isn’t that weird?

I ask Lawson why he thinks he got so upset about being seen as the “woman” in a gay relationship.

I don’t know. I don’t know. I guess. I don’t know. I don’t know. I think it’s bigotry. Probably pretty West Virginia redneck stuff there. I mean because if you think about that. If that’s true, I mean if that’s true, I don’t want to be the weaker one - and the association, what the fuck does that say about the woman in the relationship? And what does that even mean? I don’t know. It’s pretty heavy stuff. I don’t even know if I wanna know. I’m definitely not the hero in that story. I mean it’s funny. It’s funny. Those kind of jokes. Why is it funny? Cuz you can talk about it with your weird post-modern friends. Because it’s basically me looking like an ass, but it reveals something about, you know, society. I don’t know. I don’t know where it comes from. It’s wrong. Ignorance. Probably ignorance.

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) remind us that if individual men are to enjoy the full benefits of being members of a dominant group, they must not be seen as any other type of social being other than a heterosexual male. Lawson, for a brief moment, felt what it might be like to not have such privilege in two ways and it made him uncomfortable, but losing male privilege made him more uncomfortable than losing heterosexual privilege.
As a progressive, he also recognizes that being uncomfortable about perceptions of him as weaker (i.e. the woman) do not fit the identity he has created for himself. He outwardly supports the reduction of inequality and believes in the equal treatment of women, but when actually put in a situation that might reduce his male privilege, he is even more distressed. 

Most of the men I interviewed did not support the hegemonic masculine norm, and for the most part they related it to sports culture, even if they played sports at some point, usually in high school or currently continued to enjoy sports. Oscar states, 

> If you’re not within that [sports culture], then there’s something wrong with you. Sports defines a lot of men and their participation in sports, or their, uh yeah, it makes them feel more masculine. [Did you ever feel that pressure?] I think in high school I would. There’s a lot of peer pressure.

Oscar did not play sports in high school and thus felt some stigma because of it. Instead of being friends with athletes – with athletics often tied to who was “popular” or not - he informs me he “hung out with the hippie group.” Dalton has more negative views on sports than Oscar. I ask him to describe his thoughts on masculinity and he says, 

> Um, I don’t (pause)... I feel like when I hear the word ‘man,’ I attach more negative connotations to it as opposed to strong career oriented provider or whatever. I think more of like, I don’t know, scary, or uh, douchbag or is a fucking dumbass who likes sports and someone that I would not ever want to hang out with. Um, and I, you know, I know that’s not what that means. I mean, I’m a man and I’m proud to be the man that I am. I guess I don’t, I guess I just don’t think of myself as a man. I don’t really think of myself as anything. I guess I would think of myself as a guy, um, but I mean I don’t think of myself as a boy. Um, so I don’t know... I always thought sports, especially football, were fucking boring. My dad loves football and stuff; and I love my dad, but I don’t know what it was... I mean, I like to play around and wrestle and stuff, I just didn’t like organized sports...I had to have noticed at some point that all of the people that I hated at my school, like all the people that fucked with me or fucked with like people who were my friends were all into sports, like as far as guys.

Ray also mentioned sports when I asked him about his thoughts on masculinity.
Sports is a very, kind of the quintessential, in American society, the quintessential masculine activity. The masculine leisure activity anyway…Well America society praises sports. It’s just, it’s the industry in society, but no actual man, no male sitting in the audience can actually do any of that, has actually any sense of self ability to go out and do that. Like men in society are worshipping these sports Gods who themselves are extremely masculine. You know, you think of any sports start. They are extremely masculine in terms of having achieved the ability to go out and do this very masculine task, but that’s only like the handful of actual sports stars. The majority of men in the country are the ones that sit around with their hands down their pants, drinking a six-pack of per watching that happen. Society encourages that because it’s a business [/Where do you fit in that?] That is definitely not me. I’ve always been rather feminine, I mean I have a feminine side, so that makes me rather neutral.

Interestingly Ray associates sports with masculinity and discounts female athletes altogether. He clearly essentializes gender because in his mind, athleticism is a male activity and if females participate they are masculine. Since he does not participate in sports, he actually refers to himself as feminine or having a feminine side. According to Ray, it is not possible to like or play sports and still be feminine or vice versa. He believes that women who like sports are masculine.

Aaron has a different perspective on sports, which is not associated with a dislike of sports or the types of people who play sports.

I love sports, but I sucked at them. I mean, I was never good, so I wasn’t on any of the high school teams or anything like that, so that didn’t define us [his friends]. I wasn’t part of the in-group that you know could afford like the clothes of the year or you know to keep up with the fashions. We were the geeks, but didn’t have our collars all buttoned up.

Aaron still associates being popular with people who played sports and although he enjoyed sports and continues to enjoy sports, he did not and does not participate in any sports related activities. As a teenager, this left him feeling like an outsider and he referred to himself as a “geek.” With few exceptions, most of these men felt alienated from sports culture as teenagers, which often carried into adulthood. Although some of
my respondents, such as Aaron and a few others, still love sports and watch sports, for the most part, the men I interviewed did not. This was an interesting and unexpected finding, and it appears to be directly related to their views and support for sexual minorities as described in the previous chapter. Creating alternative masculinities outside the hegemonic stereotype may be an important step toward reducing the inequality experienced by sexual minorities and in some cases the inequality experienced by women, particularly in terms of their exclusion from important networks because of their lack of knowledge about sports. It is interesting to note as well, however, that conversations about male privilege often turned away from a discussion about privilege itself to a discussion of masculinity.

Again, nearly every man I interviewed, at some point in the conversation, spoke about some negative side of hegemonic masculinity regardless of their knowledge about male privilege. For the most part, these men did not fit the mold (as so few do) of a hegemonic male and felt uncomfortable in situations where their masculinity might be challenged. This often came in the form of friendships and what is appropriate friendship behavior for males. Josh explains how he treats his male friends

I’m very affectionate and I love being able to hug my girlfriends, my friends that are girls...You can’t just hug, for the most part, you can’t just hug your guy friends cuz a lot of guys aregrossed out by it. So, um, I’m not exactly grossed out by it but um, I hug one of my guy friends. I have one really close friend. He was one of my residents his freshman year and we’re really close. When we see each other, we hug, um every time, but a lot of my guy friends, like, it’s you know, you give a high five or you shake their hand. It’s fear of gay culture, like fear of being called gay. I think that’s pretty much the definition because like, it’s ok for women to walk around holding hands or giving each other kisses on the cheeks, but if a guy was to kiss another guy on the cheek, here in America, it’s considered very, very gay. You’re automatically questioned, are you gay? But if I’m, if you were to go to um many European countries, it’s common to kiss, to kiss people you meet on the cheek.
Here Joshua describes the gender policing that goes on among men. He is only “allowed” to hug certain individuals, mostly women, but does not hug others, mostly men, for fear of being called ‘gay.’ Earlier in the chapter, Seth had also linked male affection to homosexuality. It appears that the system of white male privilege is based not only on control (or persuasion) of minorities but is also linked to controlling the responses and emotions of other dominant group members. Again, views on sexuality and sexual orientation are certainly tied to views on gender, masculinity and femininity (Messner 1992; Plummer 1999; Pascoe 2007; Kimmel 2008) and this may explain the lack of action for some individuals despite the more overt discrimination gays and lesbians face. Indeed, these men are quite aware of how their masculinity is being policed, but often only resist it in private ways through their views and interactions with close friends rather than in public. Often their response is to shield themselves from criticism. They surround themselves with people who will not question their masculinity or who feel similarly to them about developing and showing alternative forms of masculinity, but activities associated with developing alternative masculinities, such as showing affection to other males, often occur in private.

Although recognizing and developing male identities that fall outside of the hegemonic norm is positive, it does not necessarily result in a similar understanding of male privilege. Indeed, women were often left out of the conversation as men moved from talking about racial privilege to the problems associated with masculinity. As hegemonic masculinity is so closely related to views on sexual orientation, and heterosexuality in general, I turn there next.
Heterosexual Privilege

Undeniably, many groups throughout history have been denied the full legal rights of citizenship. In modern U.S. society, homosexuals appear to be experiencing the most overt forms of discrimination. This was the one area where all forty men agree - supporting legal rights for gays and lesbians. Aaron was the only respondent to not support same sex “marriage” rights, but even he supported civil unions that would guarantee the exact same benefits, and they all support adoption rights and anti-discrimination rights in the labor market. Seth, as do most other respondents, describes marriage as an institution that “should be open to any loving partnership regardless of gender… Gay couples should be able to marry. They should be able to adopt. They should have full equal rights. I have gay friends. I’m open to talking about sexuality.”

Similarly, Adrian states,

I think that there should be full rights for same sex couples. I don’t think marriage should be a term that the state has control over at all. [/What about adoption?] I don’t think there should be any regulation to that based on same-sex couples. None of that…my views on this have gotten, it used to be like the most offensive thing that somebody could ever say to me, that like, they didn’t support same-sex marriage because I can’t see the argument for it, like, and I was raised religiously. [/Were you?] Yeah, really religiously in fact. Um, and like, I know what the Bible says about like, homosexuality. I know what it says. I was taught what it says. I was supposed to believe that when I was younger. Um, and like, it just doesn’t, like there just does not seem to me to be a Biblical argument for it, unless you take every word of the Bible literally, but nobody does that. Nobody takes every word of the bible literally… I am still emotional about it, but not nearly as much as I used to be…I softened up on that in part because one, um, gay friend of mine made a really great, like, he was just like, ‘I don’t want any part of their institution. Like that’s a straight religious people’s institution and I don’t want it.’ And I would fight back with him and be like, ‘but it’s denying you full membership in society!’ And he’s like, ‘what about my life is going to change when they say that I can marry people? I’m still going to be oppressed in all these other ways and these are much more important issues to me. Gay marriage is just like a flag waving, like, institution by rich gays to try to like assimilate into a culture that I don’t want to have any participation in anyway.’
Adrian grew up in a religious family, but now considers himself an atheist. He used to become extremely upset if people did not support marriage rights for same sex couples, but being friends with a gay man made him reconsider this. His friend taught him that not all sexual minorities want to participate in the same institutions in which heterosexual couples participate. Thus he learned to be a little more lenient about the issue and think more about what gays and lesbians might prefer.

Reese was not always a supporter of same-sex marriage, but he believes his change in attitude began in high school. He participated in several activities in which he was in contact with gays and lesbians. He goes on to say,

I had no problem with like, you know, I was well exposed, um, and then it just became, uh, and so, I think civil unions, right off the bat. I’m like, yeah that makes sense, and then the whole, like, uh, Defense of Marriage, like, you realize, I mean, there’s so… (pause). If people love each other just, there’s so few marriages that are actually working right now and a lot of the, a lot of like the, the, uh, and I have seen a lot of gay couples, same-sex couples that were more solid or you know, relationships than a lot of like heterosexual marriages that you see. And so, I think just piece by piece, it was like, ok. This is not going to damage, you know, anything. In fact, it may enhance some things and we should encourage people to be, be in stable relationships of all sorts, um whatever they may be.

As described in the previous chapter, unlike race and gender, support for the legal rights of gays and lesbians was virtually universal but almost always understood in terms of overt forms of discrimination. Ending overt discrimination is a “simple” task compared to changing people’s attitudes and behaviors and making homosexuality part of the norm.

As Adrian’s friend states, legalizing same-sex marriage will not end his oppression. This, however, was addressed by only a handful of respondents. I ask Seth how being heterosexual has shaped his life and he goes on to describe his experiences. Although
this quote is long, I think it is important to see how and when Seth moves from talking
about sexual orientation to talking about masculinity.

Um, wow. I haven’t thought about that as much. Um. I don’t know. At the very least, I’ve been saved from the burdens of dealing with a culture that doesn’t accept homosexuality, or alternative sexualities, but it’s hard because this, you don’t wear your sexuality on your skin, so it’s hard. It’s hard for me to sort of, it’s more difficult for me to understand what it’s like to be gay in American. I mean it’s difficult as it is for me to understand what it’s like to be a woman in America. But again, because it’s not, uh out there for everybody to see, it’s harder for me to sort of keep that in mind as I’ve been. It’s just not obvious… I think the negative things I do see in my immediate peer group is like the subtle uses of language that they should be careful of but they don’t really think about it… I’ve never had like a genuine homosexual experience…but that being said, I think amongst my closer guy friends, there are some that, I, I’m sort of more free with physically. Um, like one of my best friends from high school, I refer to him as my heterosexual life partner. We’re very close, and uh, like gestures that would make, uh, I think a hypermasculine guy, uh go out of his mind, we don’t think twice about, like, maybe I’d like tap him on the genitals, squeeze his butt, um you know stuff like that. Uh, and I, this is another, I mentioned before, I’ve tried to sort of thing about, try to be at least a little bit more aware of things that I say, Um, I’ve don’t this I think with sexuality as well. Um, I will refer to a guys as being good looking or not which is unnerving for a couple women I’ve like started dating. Like I’ll, it’s been kind of casual for me, I’ll just know you, an example, I’ll say like, do you think that guy is good looking? And just by me asking that question, or anyway, she would be like, ‘why are you asking this question?’ and it would like make her uncomfortable. /What do you think makes her uncomfortable about that/ Because it suggests that I find men attractive… my more recent ex-girlfriend, she remarked that uh, what did she say? That I’m probably the most feminine dude that she’s ever dated, and I’ve, I’ve, I kind of find that as a compliment because I, I, I don’t know… I mean at the end of the day, to each his own…I think in and of itself, I don’t think a masculine attitude is necessarily negative. It’s the context in which it’s embedded in and the effect it can have that are more negative. Um, I don’t have a problem with a dude, like, lifting weights and liking to scream when he gets excited and uh not liking the thought of intimate, being intimate with dudes or anything like that. It’s the context that that attitude can have, uh, that I think is really problematic. Uh, and I mean also it’s sort of the way that uh, the sort of the balance of these, uh, of attitudes about this in American culture. I think is an unhealthy balance. So again, the attitude embedded in a context where hypermasculinity is uh, masculinity is dominates. Hypermasculinity is sort of embraced uncritically and each gender has its roles. That type of uh, structure, I think is probably unhealthy.

Views on sexuality and sexual orientation are certainly tied to views on gender,

Even in the homosexual community, views on masculinity and femininity play a role in
behavior and self-identity (Anderson 2005; Hennen 2008). Like Seth, over two-thirds of
the men I interviewed openly challenged normative assumptions about stereotypical masculine behavior in some way and did not see themselves in through the narrow lens often prescribed by the rules of masculinity.

I ask Oscar his thoughts on masculinity and he states, “I think it’s pretty disgusting.” I push for him to explain.

I think that, that, that, the general macho man, like, I think that, that’s really done some damage for um, just for humanity. [How so?] Well, um, the way that men treat women, uh as subordinates. I think that’s, that’s pretty big. Uh, I think that, you know, I, my, my, my thought is that… being the boss. I think it is a big mentality that men have and they’re not comfortable with that if it’s a woman. Or uh, I think having lots of things also defines that. [Have you ever felt pressure to follow that path] Through sports. When I was growing up, you know, that was, that was the idea that sports is for boys, and if you wanted to tap dance or do dance class, that’s something a woman would do or uh, a gay man, right? It was never, and I mean never, I never got that encouragement to pursue different, like alternatives.

As previously discussed, some men might feel pressure to follow the rules of masculinity, but for the most part these men did in public but not necessarily in private or among their friends. However, that does not eliminate the privilege they experience as men. Some men acknowledge it and knowingly use it to their advantage, such as Kevin, but for many it works for them unconsciously.

Most progressive men have developed alternative or oppositional masculinities in relation to the hegemonic norm, but does that necessarily help to lessen the inequality experienced by women? After comparing their thoughts on masculinity with their views on gender inequality and domestic labor, my data would indicate that it does not. Instead my data seem to support Wilkins (2009) conclusions. Her main argument is that men who participate in “masculinity projects” ultimately uphold gendered power hierarchies.
She considers progressive men to have adopted “subculture” of masculinity with these men more likely to argue that boys need to be free to express their emotions and show affection. Rather than challenging dominant understandings of masculinity, alternative masculinities offer men a sense of social support, community, and shared meaning with affiliated others. Again, my data seem to support her findings and I argue that instead of challenging the status quo and patriarchy, developing an alternative masculinity is more likely to be associated with personal development rather than a crack in the Matrix of Domination.

Summary

My data reveal that the lack of awareness of privilege among self-identified progressives is structured and delimited by mainstream color-blind, gender blind ideologies and the ignorance of privilege. Although there were a few exceptions, they were not the norm. Structural forces continue to mask privilege and subvert progressive beliefs, particularly in the post-Civil Rights era where new forms of inequality have emerged. Thus, findings indicate that it is not only important to examine progressive attitudes toward inequality but privilege as well. Holding attitudes of fairness, equality and tolerance are part of the American tradition and they do not necessarily reflect of how people truly feel toward members of subordinate groups (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Cultural beliefs about difference are translated into shared ideologies that naturalize and justify the higher status of dominant group members (Ridgeway 2011). Progressive white heterosexual men are not completely self-interested. They have adopted feelings of
sympathy and are likely to recognize some forms of inequality associated with subordinate group members. Yet, they too are subject to cultural assumptions about race and gender in particular and continue to use colorblind, gender blind, and sexuality blind attitudes as prescribed and are unaware of how they benefit from our unequal social systems. It appears that the ignorance of privilege is something that cannot be overcome with education alone. For an understand privilege, education much be combined with socialization and personal experiences that reveal privilege in another manner.

My main goal was to explore whether or not these progressives incorporated any conceptions of privilege (whether male, white or heterosexual) into their identities as progressives and indeed there were several men who did. My data reveal that the knowledge of privilege does lessen the extent to which men use gender, race, and sexuality blind frames to discuss inequality, but there were far fewer men who recognized privilege than those who recognized inequality. The ideology of individualism not only works to not only constrain or dampen egalitarian ideals but also helps to hide privilege.

In addition to my results on privilege, some interesting findings likewise emerged concerning masculinity. Although it was not anticipated, and did not necessarily encompass an understanding of privilege, I was able to show how socialization and holding a progressive identity can lead to the development of alternative or oppositional masculinities. These men appear to have developed oppositional narratives to the hegemonic masculine norm due to their inability to receive privilege via their status as un-athletic, “geeky,” “hippy” or otherwise non-conforming males. They more easily recognize this inequality as a result of their own disparate access to societal resources,
but rather than challenging the status quo and male domination, they have developed subculture or alternative masculinities to account for it. This does not appear to open any cracks in the Matrix of domination, particularly in terms of the inequality women experience.

In the next chapter, I link the lack of awareness of privilege to what other scholars have indicated are additional constraints to taking action and theorize about why progressives are no more or less likely than anyone to participate in social movements or to commit to formal actions, although an understanding of privilege appears to be related to passive action and consciously trying to do no harm. I begin by reviewing the literature on what motivates other white heterosexual men to become activists and then examine how they are different from the progressive men I interviewed. I explore the generic processes that produce and reproduce inequality and discuss ways that my respondents challenge the system as well as support it.
Chapter 5: Inaction, Doing No Harm, Passive Action and Activism

In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I explored interest-based and exposure-based explanations for the creation of a progressive identity, and I examined a progressive identity through the lens of self, self concept, internalized role-identity meanings, through cultural and situation contexts, and how this identity shapes attitudes concerning race, gender, sexual orientation, and privilege. Education about inequality and privilege are not necessarily paths to action, but they are important first steps to reducing inequality and my data reveal that education, socialization, and personal experiences all help progressives to create an identity that incorporates feelings of sympathy and understanding. However, to move beyond silence and inaction, to at least passive action, these progressives almost always had to have an understanding of privilege, particularly if the discrimination and prejudice was covert, subtle and often non-conscious. If the discrimination was overt, an understanding of inequality combined with a strong sense of fairness and justice seem to be enough to move someone to action (or at least passive action). Either way, the formation of shared values and beliefs and the production of shared or collective identities (McAdam, 1986; Gould 1993; Koopmans 1995; Kim and Bearman 1997; Lucas and Baxter 2012) are seen as key elements that can guide actors to taking a more active role in reducing inequality – elements these men are lacking. Developing a knowledge of inequality and a knowledge of privilege are two important steps in moving toward the
more fair and just society these men state they would like to see, but knowledge alone is not enough to move someone beyond a passive response to inequality.

Much of what has been written about privilege - whiteness, heteronormativity, and male domination focuses on the need to reveal the invisible or “masked” nature of privilege (on race see Wildman 1996; Lipsitz 1999; Bush 2004). Calls for coalition building between progressive dominant group members and subordinate group members proliferate in this literature, with the support and efforts of these progressives characterized as foundational structures for social change. The assumption is that a recognition of how individual privilege reproduces group disadvantages will necessarily lead not only to an increased support for governmental intervention but also to personal engagement and participation in group efforts to end inequality. My data, however, does not support this assumption. My results document and explain factors that limit or hinder the active participation of progressive men in efforts to redress social injustice, despite their professed support for many social movement goals. I integrate social movement theoretical perspectives within my overarching theoretical perspective of intersecting status inequalities to inform the interpretation of my results.

Despite the dramatic accomplishments of women and all people of color during the Civil Rights, Women’s Rights, and Gay Rights Movements, equality of opportunity is far from being achieved in most sectors of U.S. society. Volumes of literature describe the disparities that still remain concerning gender, race and sexual orientation, yet particularly for race and gender, there are no current mass movements supporting these causes. Many scholars argue that further progress depends on many more dominant
group members learning about their privilege and coming forward to take positive actions to reduce this inequality. After the Civil Rights Movements, professional social movement organizations developed to take over the role active citizens once had, but both professional service organizations and grassroots movements face a longstanding problem of limited public support and participation.

Scholars working on social justice issues advocate for educating people about their privilege and then leveraging their heightened social awareness of privilege to build connections between dominant and subordinate social groups which result in working with those subordinates for social change. The logic of the argument holds that failure to recognize advantage is a key roadblock to social justice. In most situations, dominant group members do not recognize the array of status-based benefits they receive nor do they understand how centuries of slavery, segregation, and the subordination of the ‘other’ (women, people of color, gay and lesbian individuals, etc.) have resulted in their current socioeconomic benefits and our current unequal social systems. As a result they are less likely to have developed a group consciousness or sense of collective identity with people in subordinate positions (Gurin 1985). According to Melucci (1989), shared features of identification and a shared history of constraints can bring people together to form a sense of a collective identity. In the sociological literature, such an identity has been shown to play a key role in all aspects of social movements from recruitment to mobilization to interpretation of the outcomes (Polletta & Jasper 2001). It allows for empathic solidarity (Heise 1998:197), which is defined as “a reciprocated sense of merged consciousness and alliance, with faith in others’ commitments to shared
purposes.” Although middle class, educated, “enlightened” whites are more likely to recognize inequality than other whites (Bobo and Licari 1989; Quillian 1996), without the individual, interactional, and group level identities often created by just being a member of a subordinated group, they lack the merged consciousness and commitment to a shared purpose.

Feminist sociology, social movements theory, cultural sociology and many other areas theorize about collective identities, but often focus on the consequences for mobilization over the implication for self-definition and interpersonal judgment (Owens et al. 2010). Creating a collective identity comes from experiencing the same reality, developing similar emotions and behaviors; sharing a common destiny; and thus creating a shared identity (Owens et al. 2010). The data I reference in first four chapters demonstrate that none of my respondents have developed a collective identity with people of color or feminist women. At the end of this chapter I examine some of the obstacles that prevent white heterosexual men from obtaining such an identity.

Below I analyze if and when progressive attitudes toward subordinate group members translate into behavior. My interview data reveal two themes. First, men who think about their progressive identity as oppositional because of their inability to access hegemonic masculinity are more likely to use their progressive identity as a personal development project. On the other hand, there were many progressive men who not only understand inequality but also recognize privilege and act in small ways to either reduce inequality or at minimum are conscious to do no further harm. For all of these men, I
examine the various constraints that limit their motivation or desire to recognize privilege and/or become more active.

Most of the current literature on individuals doing anti-racist or feminist work concentrates on people who identify themselves as “activists,” yet most progressives would not describe themselves this way. Indeed, if activists made up the majority of the progressives then we would see major changes in our gendered, racialized, and heterosexualized social systems. We know throughout history there have always been some members of the dominant group who have come to embrace social justice and worked diligently to reduce inequality (Aptheker 1992; Kimmel and Mossmiller 1992). O’Brien (2001) and Warren (2010) specifically sought out white activists working toward racial justice in order to understand their paths to action, thus obviously some dominant group members have committed themselves to activism, so what is holding others back and what pushed the progressives in these studies to commit to formal action?

Regardless of their knowledge about inequality or privilege, most of my respondents are not taking action, and for those who do take action, it is mostly passive. I review the action and/or inaction of my respondents regardless of their knowledge about privilege (or inequality) and describe three most common responses to inequality, which include inaction, doing no harm, or taking passive action. I argue that all of these responses are rooted in an ideology of individualism. Inaction, doing no harm, and even passive action all allow the Matrix of Domination to remain firmly in place regardless of how these progressives see themselves and how much they would like to see society move in a more egalitarian direction.
I review the current literature about the specific mechanisms dominant group members use to maintain and reproduce inequality by exploring and adding to the theories of Schwalbe et al. (2000). Structural and institutionalized inequality exists, but it takes face-to-face interactions to maintain the current Matrix of Domination. Privilege is sitting and waiting for someone else to take action. It’s passivity. It’s silence. It’s trying to do no harm. The ideology of individualism controls the scope of what is and is not allowed to be contested and what can be considered “morally” just or socially acceptable. In my sample, appreciating and valuing a culturally pluralistic society and objecting to social and institutional policies that promote inequality in any way are much more likely for those who recognize privilege in addition to inequality, but as discussed in the previous chapter, it is much easier for progressive dominant group members to recognize the disparities experienced by minority groups rather than the privileges gained by being a member of the dominant group.

Research documents that ignorance of privilege allows systems of inequality to be maintained, and education about privilege would force people to change. My results, however, problematize this perspective. Although some of my respondents take action, none do to the point that they would call themselves activists. Indeed the most active man calls himself a faux-gressive or part-time progressive because he does not consider himself an activist. My respondents react passively, try to do no harm, or simply hold an identity as a progressive for other reasons not related to gender, race, and sexual orientation. At the end of the chapter, I argue for needed revisions to identity development model described in Chapter 3 to account for these differences.
In their groundbreaking article “Doing Gender,” West and Zimmerman (1987) articulate how gender is not something we are, but rather something we do. Gender inequality is dynamic; created and recreated throughout our lives through patterned social relations and structural forces. Deutsch (2007) acknowledges the contribution of West and Zimmerman, but also criticizes their conceptualization of gender because it suggests gender inequality is inevitable. Structural conditions have strong effects on the “gendering” and “racing” of people’s lived experiences. Nonetheless, social interaction opens up potential avenues of resistance and challenge. Everyday interactions at home, at work, in the neighborhood, with friends, and with strangers all can potentially undermine and change beliefs about difference and inequality, linchpins of the Matrix of Domination. Indeed, the contact hypothesis began as a study of how interaction could reduce prejudice (Allport 1954). I discuss all of these ideas and incorporate the findings from my data to hypothesize what might move progressives to action. Since interaction is a site where inequality is (re)created, it can also be examined as a site of change.

*Inaction and Doing No Harm.*

According to Pierre Bourdieu “individuals intention to change structure is not instrumental to social change. Rather, what people do unintentionally - without thinking-matters most.” Bourdieu describes human action as conditioned by “objective” situations in an intersubjective habitus. His account of human actions and power relations brings in the influence of objective circumstance, historical patterns of resource distribution and the trajectories of different actors through social fields. An individual’s identity
development is an important component through which the systems of dominance are maintained. This follows Bourdieu’s logic, which explains that there is much diversity within a group habitus - not all white heterosexual men think about social stratification in a similar manner. For Bourdieu (1980 p. 60), one’s ideology is a product of one’s social trajectory – “the habitus which, at every moment, structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, which are modified by the new experiences within the limits defined by their power of selection, brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences, of the experiences statically common to member of the same class.” Bourdieu finds that the habitus tends to “favor experiences likely to reinforce it” (p. 61). Thus, nonconscious behavior does matter. How these men react consciously or non-consciously to inequality matters.

Later in this chapter, I explore this further when I discuss those individuals who are more likely to recognize privilege and thus are more likely trying to do no harm or taking passive action. First, however, I begin by examining inaction. Since so few white heterosexual men are actively working against inequality, it can make the job of those who are doing the hard work even more difficult. Questioning privilege or calling out inequality can often result in a backlash. Feagin and O’Brien relate being a white male to being a member of a dysfunctional family. They argue that being passive observers or bystanders to offensive incidents shows their allegiance to the white collective. There is a preference for harmony (which includes protecting one’s resources) that few are willing to disrupt the status quo, usually out of fear. Feagin and O’Brien call this the white male “family secret” (236). Even when individuals are outspoken about what they witness or
about their knowledge of institutionalized inequality, it is usually to subordinate members who have been targeted by these offenses rather than to the offenders themselves.

In addition to ignoring privilege, the identity development model created by Rowe et al. does not discuss the pressure to remain silent even if an individual recognizes inequality through any type of achieved white identity. In terms of gender, Michael Kimmel (2008) describes how ideas about hegemonic masculinity, and the silence it often produces (concerning the unequal treatment of women), help to keep the system running. Almost all of the men I interviewed described themselves as non-confrontational and many remain silent even when they recognize instances of discrimination. They do not want to challenge other white men, so they do not stand up for subordinate group members even when given the opportunity (across multiple areas of stratification) regardless of whether or not their views on race (gender or sexual orientation) might place them in the reactive or integrative group. Kimmel (2008:67) argues that the “culture of silence is the culture of complicity,” so even if bystanders believe they are withdrawing their support, they are in actuality reinforcing the offensive behavior. Most often such behavior is done for them, so it is clearly about them, and their silence allows it to continue. In this example, Mark objects to the sexist practice of his boss. His boss jokingly calling the men on Mark’s all male team “ladies.” He also refers to the male anatomy as a way to describe someone’s boldness or to praise someone for taking initiative.

My boss will sometimes end a meeting, when it’s uh - my unit of four people, it’s all men - and we’ll have a meeting with my [boss], and he’s a man, and he’ll end the meeting by saying, ‘alright, thank you ladies.’ And it’s clear, first of all, that, you know, uh, that it’s a little dig at us that he thinks that it’s jocular, uh you know a little thing that we’re going to snigger at, you know. But, still, the fact that he is calling us ‘ladies’ as a joking put
down pisses me off cuz he’s...what he’s saying is, ‘I’m going to call you by a term that’s beneath your station. You’re men, but I’m going to call you ladies.’ I mean, that’s what’s inherent in what he’s saying. By calling us ‘ladies’ he’s putting us down. He’s giving us a little jab – doing so jokingly - and that offends me deeply. He makes other such weird [comments]. He seems to believe that uh, anytime, in the course of our job, you’re really forthright or if you’re really standing some ground, that you’re ‘showing some sac’ as he’s said before. First of all, I think that’s a disgusting expression, but in other words, you’re a man. You’re showing you have balls whenever you’re direct and you don’t take shit. You can, uh, you know, explain something about your job well or you can defend a position that’s work related. [[So how do you typically react to this?] Oh God, I’m pathetic. Yeah no. It burns me up and it pisses me off...It annoys me to no fucking end. You know, do I counter it? No, I haven’t. Uh, and I’m so ashamed.

Mark talks about how angry he gets when his supervisor addresses his all male group as “ladies,” yet he says nothing. Mark was not the only person to perceive sexist language in the workplace and then do nothing about it. Stan, a professional working in a male dominated field, talks about his experiences at one of the places in which he worked.

I used to have, well, my former boss was horrible in terms of sexual harassment or sexual jokes and stuff like that. He’d have his office, which was nicely situated such that his window would look out into the women’s restroom, so he could watch the women to into and out of the restroom. He would just sit there and notice people going, notice women, going in and out of the restroom and would say certain off-handed remarks on, ‘oh yeah, I saw Erica. She’s looking good today. Saw her going into the restroom.’ I actually saw him with a client once in which he was talking, he was making very sexually explicit jokes in terms of just asking how they, uh, he was trying to be funny and saying, ‘oh we hire women by putting them up against the wall, and if their tits touch before their toes do, then we hire them.’ You know, stuff like that, which is completely inappropriate. I’m almost embarrassed to be around him when he does stuff like that, but uh, somehow he’s managed to make it through the ranks while completely objectifying the female race, er, not race, female gender... I’m not in a position to tell him to shut up. We’re all sitting at a table. It was during a lunch-in, myself and another co-worker just kind of gave each other one of those looks like, ‘Oh my god, I can’t believe he just said that’, and I really don’t want to look the client in the eye right now. I’m just going to look away and hopefully they don’t think I’m associated with this guy.

In a situation where there are differences in power and therefore possibly high(er) negative consequences for taking action both Stan and Mark stay silent. They have both determined that the situation does not require action, which I argue happens because subordinate members are not present to witness the objective situation and the negative consequences for speaking out under such circumstances include the possibility of
retaliation or job loss. Yet, even when the consequences are not as high silence tends to dominate. For example, Garrett admits that he has a group of friends who would use the N-word, and I ask how he responds when he hears it.

I really don’t say anything because I know that people that have that mentality don’t respond to logic. It’s not a logical thing on their part and it’s, it’s either an emotional or a reflexive move, and I don’t think that that’s something that can really be argued against, you know. I just, ok, that person’s an idiot. I have no use for them. I’m going to go over here now and just avoid them.

When it comes to having conversations with other men about inequality, most of the men avoid it altogether. Mason, a teacher in his early twenties, states

My personality, my way of doing things that I, I, uh, I don’t open up to men as much. I don’t talk about a lot of more sensitive or serious topics. I don’t think I’d feel comfortable talking to most guys about inequality or something like that unless it was something that I walked into or it was, it was already, it’s not something that I would bring up, but I guess that’s just me being protective of myself.

Mason believes that talking to men about the unequal treatment of others might open him up to hostility or ridicule from other men. According to Donaldson (1993) heterosexuality and homophobia are the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity and the general relationship of men to women is oppressive. Yet, these men do not challenge it. They understand inequality and in many cases recognize privilege, but do not challenge these problems even if directly confronted with it.

Even in their own homes, some men are uncomfortable addressing issues of masculinity. Kyle, a professional in his late thirties, describes his abhorrence to the “rules of masculinity,” but does not know how to address them with his own son.

You know what’s strange, I see this [bullying] in my son and I don’t know what to do. He has a lot of anger, maybe about my divorce. I don’t know. I, I, well, he just gets mad and doesn’t want to talk to me. He’s gotten into trouble at school. He’s acting out. I don’t know what to do. It’s so strange to see this in him. He lives with his mom and I think her new boyfriend is not the best influence. How can I teach him about being kind and respecting others when I don’t see him as much as she does? I just, I’m so, I, I don’t know what to do.
There seems to be a particular problem with men talking to other men concerning issues of inequality. Kyle admits that he only speaks to his son about the specific issue at hand rather than talking about masculinity in general, although he clearly indicates that he thinks his son’s bullying is the result of being negatively influenced by another man, in this case his ex-wife’s partner, whom Kyle refers to as a “redneck.” Although Kyle tells me he is more laid back and has developed an alternative view of masculinity for himself, which includes “not watching sports,” thinking it’s ok to “showing his emotions,” and treating others with kindness, he is unable to talk to his son about it. Instead he only discusses with this son the individual infractions that occur at school and his “bad” attitude at home rather than talking about masculinity in general. In this case, a literal dysfunctional family remains. Kyle refrains from saying something or doing something about the “negative masculine qualities” he sees being adopted by his own adolescent male child. He gave me the impression that he is not used to dealing with the more hegemonic, bullying, angry type of masculinity he sees in his son.

Bowes-Sperry and O’Leary-Kelly (2005) analyze the potential routes to observer intervention for cases of sexual harassment and find that there is a complex decision making process involved in deciding to intervene and includes analyzing such factors as deciding if the situation requires action; feeling personal responsibility to act; deciding whether to take immediate action or waiting until a later time – all three outcomes are affected by other considerations such as the relationship between the target and the actor; the degree of perceived harm, the appropriateness of intervention and the consequences of such action, to name just a few. When progressives witness behavior they consider
offensive, it often happens without the subordinate group members present, so their inclination to take action is dampened. This appears to be the case with Stan and Mark. The consequences for taking action are high and there were no subordinate group members present to hear the offensive comments, so their perceived obligations to take action are low.

Calling attention to inequality or privilege can impact a person’s job, cause problems with friends and family, and lead to isolation. It’s an uphill battle with few role models, few immediate rewards and very little encouragement from others. Until the number of people interested in and actively working to reduce inequality reaches a critical mass and there is more support from others, there will be little encouragement for these progressive white men consider what is best for the community, people of color, white women or society as a whole.

Speaking out about inequality and differential treatment is difficult, but it is impossible if progressives are overtly participating in the discriminatory actions as well. Directly related to maintaining a masculine façade, men are encouraged to view women as sex objects, and I interviewed several progressives who see women this way. According to Donaldson (1993), it is another key element to maintaining the system of inequality. It is difficult to break the silence about how women are being treated if you are a participant in that system. As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, for some progressives, it appears easier to recognize the unequal system of dominance in specific arenas, such as the labor market, as opposed to within their personal lives. For example Gabriel tells me that on many occasions people have told him they thought he was gay
because of his laid back personality and his love of the theater. In response to this, he sometimes purposefully looks at women’s breasts when he is talking to them as a way to indicate to them that he is not gay. In this case, he objectifies women purposefully because he does not want to be seen as gay.

Reese is another example. He calls himself a feminist and states that he is “sensitive to women’s issues,” and he readily uses examples from his work to exemplify how progressive he is. He is working in politics and talks about the need for more women in politics. He believes that women do not “help each other succeed” the same way men do which can be a problem for women who are trying to move up the career ladder. Sociologists refer to this as a lack of career support networks (Granovetter 1973, 1983; Ibarra 1997). As the conversation shifts to his personal life and personal experiences, I ask Reese if he is in a relationship. He stammers and does not answer me directly.

Not really, I mean, yes and no. I mean, we’ve been together for a while, but um, well, my friends classify women into two different types, intelligent women and uh, like, um, non-intelligent women. You see, they’re all dating hot women because they don’t want to get married. I’m actually dating this woman, but she’s not very smart. Um, I mean, everyone’s always asking me if I’m going to get married and she’s even been hinting at getting married, but uh, well, you see, I would trade her for someone half as beautiful if she [the new woman] was twice as smart. I don’t mind the idea of marriage, but I imagine it to be with someone more like me, like, I don’t know. I don’t really see this going anywhere.

The assumption Reese and his friends make is that women cannot be both attractive and intelligent. They consider themselves too young for marriage – Reese claims his friends will not let him get married before he turns thirty-five - and thus they do not want to be in long-term committed relationships in their twenties or even early thirties. Instead he and his friends choose to date “hot” women who, at least for now, they would not consider
marrying. Although Reese states he does not see the relationship “going anywhere,” he indicates that his partner is already “hinting” at marriage. Thus he is in a relationship with a woman who clearly is not informed about his intentions to eventually seek out another partner, a future partner who he hopes to be “twice as smart” as his current partner. Interestingly, later in the interview, Reese declares that he thinks sexism is “worse” than racism because, “it’s still ok to be [overtly] sexist, but it’s not ok to be [overtly] racist.” Clearly developing a critical consciousness in one area is not related to developing a critical consciousness in another, and even understanding inequality in one institution, such as the labor market, does not mean that will translate into other arenas, such as the home or in personal relationships.

Bush (2004) finds that depending on the circumstance and context, it is not unusual for someone to both deny and acknowledge inequality within a single conversation. The women Reese and his friends currently date are clearly seen as sex objects. They are devalued as individuals and are being used as decoration, yet during the same interview Reese clearly demonstrates his understanding of labor market inequality. He acknowledges that women are not treated equally in the labor market and political arena, and he considers himself an advocate for women’s rights. However, he does not make the connection from women’s unequal treatment in one arena to his participation in the unequal treatment of women in another. Thus he not only remains silent about the treatment of women by his friends, but in this case also participates in their subjugation.
Even for those who have developed relationships that might move them to action, I found inaction to prevail. For example, Oscar recognizes many forms of inequality, but he admits that he is not actively working to help reduce or end them. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Oscar’s brother is gay, but this still does not motivate him to act.

I’m, uh, there’s nothing that I’m doing overtly to try to help gay people or lesbian people or anybody - even for that matter for like race or for, um, gender. [I’m] not, like, doing anything overtly except just trying to live. [Do you speak up if you hear derogatory things about any of these groups? You know, I just avoid it. It’s really just, I feel like it’s more of, like, people are set in their mindset and, uh yeah, and it’s really, really difficult to change that and I don’t think it’s my position to even force my ideas on anybody else either.

Oscar grew up hearing his father using the “N-word” and although he disapproved, particularly as he got older, he never addressed it. Like so many of the progressives with whom I spoke, Oscar tells me that he does not like confrontation and like many of my respondents, Oscar feels as if being aware of the issues and trying to do no harm is enough.

Passive Action

Not all action must be located within the context of a social movement but systemic change is unlikely without it. Recognition of inequality and privilege and taking passive action are an important first steps in moving towards the development of a collective identity with subordinate group members, but they are more likely associated with individualism than with collectivism or developing a group identity. The ideology of individualism masks the true hierarchical nature of society and allows dominant group members (and even influences many subordinate group members) to think that group demands are no longer valid. Even if some people recognize that problems still exist they
rarely do anything about them because they do not experience the problems directly. Simply doing no harm and passive activism are both situationally and contextually defined by these dominant group members. The only pressure they feel to act comes from their own moral code and the values they have developed through their progressive identity rather than through the development of empathy and a sense of obligation often derived from a collective identity.

After the Civil Right Movements, overt expressions of oppression decreased dramatically, but Bonilla-Silva and Foreman (2000) find that survey based research on racial attitudes conceal and significantly underestimate the extent of prejudice in the white population. Although prejudice remains strong and the effects of institutional discrimination continue to impact the lives of subordinate group members, it is much more difficult to recognize. Thus, Tyrone Forman (2004) and Paul Wachtel (1999) both find that the lack of sympathy and feelings of indifference have become common with these newer and more subtle forms of racial prejudice and Foreman discusses how racial apathy is one mechanism which allows inequality to endure. For white male progressives, it is not necessarily apathy or lack of sympathy that play a role, but rather identifying as a progressive is not the same as identifying as an activist. For those who do take action, it is much more likely to be passive than active.

Overt forms of discrimination can often be rectified by changing or passing a new law, but subtle forms of oppression are more likely to be masked under the guise of everyone being ‘equal before the law’ and are thus more difficult to resolve. Currently, the GLBT population still experience various forms of discrimination based on their
sexual orientation or gender identity. In some states a person can be fired for being gay or lesbian while in many more states same-sex couples are prohibited from marrying or adopting children. The laws vary from state to state and continue to evolve. All of the men I spoke with recognize this as a problem. If they participate in any action, it was typically rallies or parades that emphasize the need to pass laws upholding the rights of gays and lesbian individuals. Yet even with this support, the emphasis remains on an individual’s legal rights versus the impact of heterosexual norms on society and particularly on sexual minorities.

A subset of respondents who do have a deeper understanding of inequality combined with a knowledge of privilege are much more likely to be interested in doing no harm and seeking out other ways to support efforts that reduce inequality, including through passive action. They are more likely to be aware of how gender essentialization developed through gender roles might impact their hiring decisions and try to avoid it. This was clear with both Blake and Gabriel. Some progressives are aware of inequality in the workplace in terms of both gender and race while others recognize segregation to be a problem. Interestingly, Mark was the only one to recognize segregation as a problem and was trying to do something about it by moving into a community of color. He is trying to build relationships; is involved in his local community association; and works with his neighbors on community clean-up actions and other events. Others, including Mark, donate money to progressive causes and organizations, vote for political candidates they see as progressive, or volunteer for political campaigns during election seasons. These are very important steps that can reduce inequality in small ways and
their actions further socialize these men to respond to inequality even if it is not by taking formal action (yet).

Of all the actions taken by these men, donating money was the most common action and was most commonly associated to sexual orientation. Fifteen of the forty men I interviewed gave money to groups or organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which work to ensure that gay and lesbian individuals receive equal treatment under the law, while only two had donated to groups supporting racial equality, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In terms of gender, five men discussed their monetary support to organizations such as Planned Parenthood, but all giving related to gender focused on reproductive freedom. There was no other participation, monetarily or otherwise, in organizations working toward women’s equality in the labor force or in the domestic arena. Returning to the lack of action in terms of domestic labor, these progressives strongly support the status quo. The women in their lives continue to bear the burden of increased domestic labor while these men remain full recipients of the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 2002). They conform to patrilineal surname standards and avoid dealing with tension between holding a collectivist conservative attitude about family and family responsibility on one hand and their individual identity on the other. Giving up their individual identity associated with their surname is not even on the table for negotiation. Although Scheuble and Johnson (2005) find that women who marry later in life, are better educated, are employed full-time, have more income, held more liberal gender role values, and have higher levels of career commitment are most likely to keep their names or go by a
nonconventional marital name the same cannot be said for men, even among progressives. This is important to note because the gender frames that end up hurting women at work actually begin at home.

Looking at both men and women, Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) find that liberal political identification has been consistently positively related to holding pro-feminist attitudes. Janice McCabe (2005) found that political ideology was associated with a feminist self-identification label and stated, “and as expected, respondents indentifying as Republican, compared to Democrat, are significantly less likely to claim the feminist label.” In addition, McCabe found that urban residence, liberal political views, and political party affiliation were the strongest predictors of feminist self-identification. Again, although this is an important first step, my data reveal that in many situations, holding a progressive identity is far removed from actually working to reduce inequality even in ways often easily accessible to these men. There are no negative consequences related to doing more labor, outside of less free time perhaps, yet these men still remain inactive, or at least less active than their partners.

Returning to general forms of action, Colby responds to my questions about his actions or lack thereof.

I do think that there is, I think just being, just trying to be aware of the issues and living your life like you are aware of the issues, it already is something that helps. Um, that’s not to say that I couldn’t do more because I could. I could probably involve myself in organizations and activities that work towards those specific ends, but I do think that there is, sort of, potential change in individuals… I went to see my friends who were in the pride parade last year, which I think is, an, not, I mean, that’s like the closest that I’ve ever done to like actively working towards, um, I think I’ve been there to support my friends in that, but that’s really the most that I’ve ever done. I really don’t do much sort of, politically or socially, in terms of actively trying to change things, other than just my own opinions and the way that I try to live my life… I’m a voter. I would say I’m a voter. It’s not really, really important to me, but I am a voter and I do try and be aware of the issues that are specifically going to be on the ballot. Um, but I wouldn’t say it’s something that I value a lot because I do kind of, there are issues that are, that I think
Colby acknowledges that the way he participates, through voting, is not really going to enact the changes he deems as necessary, yet he still is not active in any other way.

Dalton discusses voting as well but questions if that really counts as action, “I don’t, I’m not someone who, I’m not politically involved in any kind of action really, other than voting, and I don’t, I mean I don’t think that really counts, maybe it does.”

Several men spoke about voting for progressive candidates as a way to reduce inequality. Others used their paid work as an example of how they are trying to move society in a more egalitarian direction. I ask Landon if he is doing anything to address some of the problems he describes and he says,

Um, not nearly as much as I would like, to be honest. Um, I, I, I, think probably the primary area where, where I engage that is there in my workplace. I taught in New York and especially my student base there was a lot more diverse and I was teaching at [a public institution]… I did do that in New York, you know, and I would like to say, you know, it was all, you know, from, through personal well-being and stuff like that, but I was getting paid for it too, so you know, I can’t really say, you know, it was out of the kindness of my heart… apart from that, just, you know, kind of trying to practice what you preach, at least in terms of, you know, living your life and letting other people live theirs, and give them the opportunity to excel as best you can and that’s what I feel my job is as a teacher. And I think I do a pretty good job at that.

Similarly Mark responds

I would like to say, uh… I think… uh, I mean, the way I, I would like to… I have a very distinguished career in public service. I, I haven’t worked for the private sector yet, but I’ve worked for the federal government, for the state government, for a labor union, and now again with the state. I’m working to try, in my little and own tiny way, to eradicate some of the inequalities and the legacy of injustice that, uh, that for me, the issue of race has caused. I did work to try to help Obama get elected, our first African American president, in November of 2008. I contributed money to his campaign. I took a day off from work on election day, and uh, worked polls in two different locations. So, I think that’s another way that I, I’m trying to come to terms again with the uh, injustice fallout, out of racial oppression. Um, what else have I done or what else do I try to engage in?
Well, off and on, I’ve been a member of the NAACP, but really that just consists of me giving money to the NAACP, paying a membership due, although actually I make a contribution to them periodically through, uh, work. Just sensitivity to issues that, uh, again, disproportionately affect African American and uh, I don’t know. Just, just being aware can, can help, kind of, fight against the, uh, uh, the legacy of, well, a lot of issues that have differential racial outcomes for different groups.

As with Colby, Mark believes that being aware of these issues is important, and to some extent they are right. I want to emphasize here that being aware of issues of inequality is clearly an important first step towards reducing inequality, but so few of these men have moved beyond that.

Here Lawson discusses his (possible) passive activism, but overall lack of activism concerning marriage rights for same sex couples.

I can’t remember doing anything specifically. Maybe signed petitions. Maybe sent a letter. I don’t know. Certainly I don’t think I ever stood around with any signs…I can’t remember joining any club or standing with a sign or giving money to anyone. I may have given money. I may have given money. It wouldn’t have been much. Hum... not specifically – activism. I feel like there are ways I could describe how I was active and activist about that issue, but when it comes down to it, it didn’t involve money, and it didn’t involve holding any signs or anything like that.

Many of these men talk about how they should or could do more. Some are even embarrassed that they are not doing more. These men are more likely than most to acknowledge that race, gender and sexual orientation are related to systemic inequalities in this country, yet there still remains a lack of action. Bush (2004) argues that acknowledging structural inequality (as opposed to just looking at unequal circumstances) will compel people to commit to doing something about it. However, I have found that even if structural inequality is acknowledged and privilege is revealed either inaction or passive action pervade. The economic and social costs remain too high and dominant group individuals are not directly affected by the consequences of not taking action. Kendall (2006) argues that one of the main problems with privilege is that
it allows individuals to forget about racism, (sexism or homophobia) whenever a person feels like it. They can leave it behind until the next uncomfortable incident.

Many of the men I interviewed were not able to offer any suggestions as to how they could work with others to challenge or reduce inequality (particularly in terms of race and gender), and most of these men were not actively involved in a group or organization working against racism or sexism, but several had participated or worked toward expanding rights for gays and lesbians which I speak about later in the chapter. When describing her feelings about trying to convince whites they should not only understand but work against white privilege, Kendall (2006:20) states, ‘I get tired, more tired and want to be out of the conversation…[but] letting the interaction go is a privilege that people of color don’t have. Taking time out is also a privilege…” Significant inequalities continue to exist and discrimination remains a substantial problem (Roscigno 2007), yet even when dominant group members recognize or understand those problems, they can choose to remain silent or apathetic and often do. This dominant group lassitude ensures that inequality is reproduced.

Ample research documents the type and amount of disparity linked to racial, gender and sexuality discrimination. However a gap remains in knowledge about the interactive processes through which inequalities are created and reproduced, and an even larger gap exists concerning how racial and gender inequality are currently being challenged or mitigated by dominant group members. Michael Schwalbe, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Schrock, and Shealy Thompson, and Michele Wolkomir (2000) analyzed qualitative literature written over multiple decades in order to
develop a theory describing the generic processes that occur in the reproduction of inequality. I add to their theory by expanding it to include the ideology of individualism, which I posit is key to producing the silence, fear, inaction and passivity of these progressive men.

Schwalbe et al. expand upon the theory of negotiated order, which typically been confined to the labor market in the study of occupational culture. Negotiated order has also been particularly prominent in various areas of the health field. According to Day and Day (1977:126), negotiated order “calls into question the more static structural-functional and rational-bureaucratic explanations of complex organizations. In their place it presents an interactional model involving a processual and emergent analysis of the manner in which the division of labor and work are accomplished in large organizations.” Within negotiated order people located at different hierarchical position in an organization, along with other factors, determine how groups are organized and which ones work together more frequently.

According to Weber’s theory of the rational-bureaucratic complex organization, rules and regulations are created to prevent conflict or handle conflicts once they have surfaced. However, individuals rarely have immediate knowledge of these extensive policies and regulations. In many situations, informal rules often develop with tacit agreements and unofficial arrangements that allow all parties to continue their work. These can be either sanctioned or ignored by management. However, both external forces and internal policies influence these negotiations. Power within an organization can be seen as situational, but it is created in concert with other facets of the organization.
such as coalitions and partnerships. Any “order which has been attained in the past is therefore always subject to change” (Day and Day 1977:131), and all individuals play a role in influencing the negotiated order through day to day interactions, agreements, refusals, and shifting situations. Conflict and change are seen as part of the structure of the organization and all rules, regulations, and informal agreements can be negotiated, even if that does not frequently occur.

Schwalbe et al. (2000) expand up the theory of negotiated order and apply it to the complex organization that is U.S. society. There are social rules and ideological pressures regarding not only behavior and action but also speech or as Bonilla-Silva refers to it, an organization map for how to act. For dominant group members, this is done through three generic processes: 1) othering – where the dominant groups create categories of difference and reproduce ideas about what makes groups dissimilar, thus reinforcing the idea of separate groups; 2) boundary maintenance – where dominant groups create symbolic, interactional, and/or spatial boundaries between themselves and subordinate groups; 3) emotion management – where dominant groups regulate discourse, condition emotional subjectivity, and script mass events. Emotion management takes the form of “imposing a set of formal or informal rules about what can be said, how it can be said, and who can say what to whom”(435).

As with Schwalbe et al., Mary Jackman (1994) uses the theory of negotiated order to hypothesize about how hierarchical relationships are maintained, although she uses the terms patriarchy and persuasion instead. Specifically focusing on race, gender and class, Jackman examines the varying ideological responses groups have to living in an unequal
social system. In addition, she makes the case that, “neither dominants nor subordinates actively seek open conflict and that hostility is rarely the active ingredient of exploitative relations. The ideological pressures created by dominant groups are more likely to be subtle and insidious rather than blatant or hostile” (2). Jackman calls for an abandonment of conflict theory with a redirection to the many ways that dominant groups subvert conflict by “befriending or at least emotionally disarming those whom they subordinate.”

Complimenting both Schwalbe et al. (2000) and Jackman (1994), I too argue that inequality cannot be understood apart from the processes that reproduce it. My research reveals that dominant group members do not just control the emotional responses of subordinate group members, but also the responses and actions of other dominant group members as well. This is done through ideology of individualism, which incorporates a fear of confrontation, silence, inaction and passive action - all of which helps individuals to view their personal responsibility for taking action low and the costs of taking action as too high. In negotiated order, conflict and change are seen as part of the structure of an organization, but in the case of controlling dominant group members (and particularly subordinate group members), conflict must be avoided. The best way to keep the status quo is to have people regulate themselves. I argue that for progressive dominant group members this is done through the ideology of individualism.

The ideology of individualism is a powerful mechanism that regulates discourse and controls the emotional subjectivity of not only subordinate group members, but also the actions, reactions, thoughts and feelings of those most likely to join with them to fight inequality and privilege. Interestingly, my respondents participate in the use of boundary
maintenance, othering, and to a lesser extent emotion management on the subordinate group members over whom they hold some power and privilege, including psychological privilege as described by David Roediger (1991). Yet, even if they recognize inequality or how maintaining these disparities privileges them, they turn to the ideology of individualism as an excuse to do very little, or even nothing, about them. The ideology of individualism produces silence and inaction from progressive dominant group members across all three categories – race, gender and sexual orientation, but it also produces individual passive action. Structural and institutionalized inequality exists, but it takes face-to-face interactions to maintain the Matrix of Domination. Power is situational and created in concert with other facets of society such as coalitions and partnerships. When these men do not object to, learn about, or fight for a reduction in equality, they are in essence working to maintain their own privilege.

Action but Not Activism

If there was any formal action taken by my respondents, it was mostly likely associated with fighting for civil rights for gays and lesbians. They tended to be much more vocal and active in this area than any other although even here action was not consistent. Gabriel acknowledges that working on racial inequality has become more difficult, and he describes it as being on a “different level.” He advocates for more education in the case of racial inequality whereas the problems surrounding sexual orientation are easier to solve by changing or passing a law.

I don’t think racial issues are really the thing, in the U.S., to focus on. I don’t know. Maybe I’m ignorant in that regard, but I just feel like that’s a different level now. I mean it should still be when someone makes uh, like there are opportunities to focus on it when
someone is blatantly racist or when there is an incident of discrimination that becomes clear or a law that infringes. Now, that obviously ought to be the focus, but in some ways, I feel like on racial issues, we’re getting beyond that and the interventions have to be different than a news story. They’re more in education. Unless the news stories are more like on, uh integration of neighborhoods and what’s happening in housing and are there still things happening that are causing segregation and prolonging the problems, but I don’t know. Most news is so superficial. I don’t know that they’re the same kids of things. It takes a lot of though and investigation and attention span to get it [racial inequality]. But not letting people get married, that’s pretty much a sound bite… I don’t know, I think gay rights, if you were going to pick a social issue, I think that’s a good one because it’s so clear, to me at least, that there’s injustice there… It’s a little harder thing to socially engineer, I think. And there’s not the political will to do it, so uh, I don’t know. Maybe it should be busing.

What Gabriel fails to mention is the systemic inequality that gays and lesbians will continue to face regardless of whether they are permitted to marry someone or can no longer legally be discriminated against in the workplace (Seidman 2002). Simply changing a law does not change hearts and minds. As Martin Luther King, Jr. ([1964] 2000:86) so eloquently stated, there is a “strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills.”

Here Mark describes some of the actions he took to support same-sex marriage rights.

I did participate in a protest of Proposition 8\(^3\), I guess maybe in December, or no maybe it was just later November, shortly after, uh, Proposition 8 passed in November - probably just a couple of weeks later. And it was very cold outside. It was bitter, but my girlfriend and I went down and participated in a public protest.

In terms of race and gender, Mark described himself as non-confrontational and even said he was ashamed for not speaking out. However, when the inequality was overt; the consequences for speaking out were low; and some remedies could be offered via jurisprudence, Mark, like many other progressives, was much more likely to be actively involved.

---

\(^3\) Proposition 8 was a California ballot proposition that overturned the California Supreme Court ruling and states that, “only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.”
In addition, most of my respondents understand and object to the role hegemonic masculinity plays in their lives even if they do not have the sociological terminology to describe it as such. In Chapter 3, I shared the story of Lawson who was uncomfortable with being seen as a “woman” rather than being thought of as gay while he was drinking wine with his male friend in a (non-gay) bar with mostly male patrons. He clearly understands that his reaction comes from being raised in a sexist society where women have less power, but he also sees himself as a progressive and is thus surprised by his reaction. After sharing this story, Lawson begins to analyze our entire conversation.

I think that they way that I’m talking to you right now is influenced by the idea that you’re a woman. If you were a man, I might not be so, I don’t know, I can’t think of any particulars, but it’s impacting what’s going on here. I mean it might, you know, I might be a little more embarrassed that I broke down and almost went to tears twice in this interview if you were a man. Which is fucked up.

In Lawson’s case, what came out in the interview clearly would have been more limited if I were a man due to his self-consciousness about appearing “unmanly.” This embarrassment stems from a fear of being seen unmanly. Kimmel (1994: 104) defines homophobia not as a fear of gay men or a repugnance to homosexuality but rather as, “the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear… We are ashamed to be afraid. Shame leads to silence…our fears are the sources of our silences, and men’s silence is what keeps the system running.” My respondents undoubtedly do not want to appear “feminine” to other men regardless of their views on masculinity. Thus, they do not challenge the rules of masculinity in public, which helps to maintain patriarchy and the system of dominance (Wilkins 2009). They are very aware of the masculine norms, and are often denied access to the privilege associate with
it, but instead of challenging the status quo, their preference is to form relationships and friendships with gay men and women and once again, avoid confrontation. This may show their support for these sexual minorities, particularly those who have adopted oppositional masculinities, and it certainly helps them personally, but it also helps to keep the system running.

Since so few white heterosexual men are actively working against inequality, it can make the job of those who are doing the hard work even more difficult. Questioning privilege can often result in backlash. It’s an uphill battle with few role models, few immediate rewards and very little encouragement from others. Until the number of people interested and active in reducing inequality reaches a critical mass, there will be little encouragement for these progressive white men consider what is best for the community or to think about society as a whole.

Turning back to Casey, one of the few respondents actually taking any action, he describes how people must “own” their white and male privilege.

To me, if you’re talking about privilege and things like that, you need to say, “us.” And you know, I still try to say ‘us,’ not that I’m any sort of model for this, but to me it’s important if you’re going to work against privilege – own it. You can’t work against something you don’t own. It doesn’t make any sense. And so um, how am I supposed to be resistant to walking into the room and everyone takes me seriously as a white male if I’m not aware and if I’m not identifying with the other white males who have that privilege and then able to engage them in that sort of dialogue or what have you.

Here Casey is referring to the anti-racist work he does with sororities and fraternities, but again Casey was the outlier. Regardless of the depth of understanding about the amount of inequality that exists, each man’s response to it is virtually identical – taking no action. First, I relate this to being unaware of inequality and privilege (seeking out knowledge). Second, for those who are aware, they lack deep meaningful relationships not only with
people of color and feminist women, but also with activists. Third, they have not developed a serious commitment to actions and show little willingness to sacrifice privileges, and finally there is not a commitment to action. Mark and Stan did not want to confront their bosses for fear of causing trouble or even possibly getting fired. Oscar did not challenge his father’s use of the N-word even after developing an aversion to the word. Most of the men do not even recognize how inequality in the domestic sphere impacts not only their lives but also the lives of those they love.

Casey, and to a lesser extent Mark and Adrian, were the only respondents I interviewed who are trying to educate other men about privilege or taking personal responsibility for some of the disparities that they know to exist. For Casey and Mark it was mostly related to white privilege and for Adrian gender privilege. Mark moved into a majority black neighborhood and is beginning to develop relationships with his neighbors. Adrian hosts a cooking night for his male friends so that they can learn to cook and not expect or depend on the women in their lives to do it. Although Adrian does more than others, his activism is limited to his friendship circles. Only Casey’s activism involves talking with strangers about inequality and privilege. In that capacity, he has accepted the consequences that may result from such conversations. He is often accused of being a race traitor or of being “black” (i.e. bi-racial) although his phonotypical characteristics are clearly associated with a white European background.

Unlike the other respondents, Casey was the sole exception to the rule in terms of not only understanding privilege, but also then attaching that to some form of activism outside of his own friendship circle. He has worked with both women’s advocacy groups
as well as with groups promoting an understanding of racial inequality and privilege.

Casey often speaks to groups of white men and women about privilege, and he explains the typical reaction he receives.

It’s a lot different coming from a white male to a white male, and you know, like with fraternities and sororities, um, I would talk to them about race and, you know, they were just like, they were asking me at the end if I was white, like I was seen as sometimes as a race traitor even talking about this stuff, which to me is kind of ridiculous. Why can’t we just have a conversation about race?

Casey comprehends the difference between a white person talking about race to other whites and a person of color talking about race to a group of whites. He acknowledges that he is taken more seriously than a person of color would be in such a situation, although in this case, the fraternity and sorority group members do question his racial identity because it is so rare for a white person to talk so eloquently and passionately about such issues. Whites, however, are not the only group surprised by Casey’s knowledge.

I was talking about spatial disparity and there was a black panther in the audience, uh, an ex-black panther. It was amazing. And the guy’s like, you know, he’s like, ‘this is structural racism, why aren’t you calling it structural racism?’ I was like, ‘I’ll call it structural racism, sure,’ and so we were talking about structural racism and we were talking about all of these critical race theorists and he pulled me aside afterwards and he was like, ‘I’ve never heard a white boy talk like you have.’ And, I’m like, well, I shouldn’t be an anomaly. That’s the problem that there aren’t more white men talking about this sort of thing… There’s not a lot of white straight males doing it who come from like, say, I had a protestant background. I do want to have a role model or somebody I can go to and talk about these experiences, but I’d rather not impose on a person of color to talk about these certain things. You know, but there’s not a lot [of white heterosexual men] out there for that… And you get resistance from both sides. I think that’s fine. I mean I’m used to it, but you know for somebody that is newer or just thinking about this stuff, like, I was when I was first thinking about it, had I walked into a room and a black panther had told me to call ‘spatial disparity’ ‘structural racism,’ I probably would have cried and left the room. Now it’s more like, ok, you know, let’s hear each other and have this conversation.
Casey was the only respondent who is even close to being seen as an activist, and his experiences clearly support Hughey’s (2012) work on the development of a white activist identity. Casey must adapt to the consequences of so few white heterosexual men speaking out about inequality and privilege. He often invokes uneasiness from both whites and people of color although obviously for different reasons, however that is not the only challenge he faces. He also struggles with his isolation from other whites. He has very few role models and would love to have a mentor to whom he could turn when he has doubts or questions, but instead he finds that he usually must “burden” people of color. Interestingly, Casey is also cognizant of how his isolation compares to the struggles of subordinate group members and after talking about wanting a mentor he states, “at the same time, I don’t want to make that like a poor me syndrome or what have you.”

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Lakoff (2006) finds that people who are directly affected by issues of inequity such as women, people of color, and gays and lesbians are more likely to hold a progressive identity directly related to these issues because such inequality affects their lives so directly. Casey does not want to always inconvenience people of color with his questions but finds that there are very few whites who understand the system of dominance and oppression as he does, so he often has no choice but to take his concerns to people of color. I ask Casey why he thinks most white men avoid talking about such issues.

Oh dear, that’s a doozy. Well, I mean, I mean it’s the whole concept of privilege itself. You know I think it’s, there’s that silly analogy you know trying to get a white male to describe it [privilege] is like trying to get a fish to describe the water it lives in. If society is constructed in such a way to sort of reify and positively reinforce your beliefs and
values, you know, it’s, it makes complete sense, you know, not to sort of challenge that or just sort of go with the flow. If you aren’t thinking critically about things or if you aren’t reflexive about your actions in such a way, you’re not going to think about it. I mean it’s, just, you know, Beverly Tatum. She uses this analogy where like, uh…what is it? So you imagine this conveyor belt, right? So, if you’re sort of just along for the ride and not thinking about race or gender or any sort of issue or what have you, you’re sort of going along the conveyor belt, right? And uh, you’re going in this direction. You’re being shot to the other side. And then there’s people who actually use sort of racist ideology or sexist ideology to advance themselves, and they’re walking along the conveyor belt, so they’re going like twice as fast, like, toward whatever their end is, but then she says that the people who do anti-racist work or challenge their assumptions or anti-sexist work, whatever, anti-homophobic work. They’re sort of like going against the grain of the conveyor belt and so it’s more difficult because you have to sort of reconceptualize your worldview. If I had talked to myself, like if I could talk to my twenty-three year old self, we wouldn’t be able to. We would be passing each other like [moves his hand past each other], because the way I make sense of my racial experience now, like, the terms wouldn’t be the same, you know, that sort of thing. It does take a lot of work to deconstruct your own reality. And, um, you know, I think some people find reward in that and some people don’t. I’ve talked to white males who have just sort of blown me off, sort of, ‘this guy’s crazy’ or whatever… I mean privilege has survived and thrived in this country since well before slavery. It’s like you have four hundred years of history going one way and you’re trying to go against that, or you try to think against that and it just doesn’t fit everything else.

Casey finds that it takes a great deal of work to “deconstruct your own reality” which is what he feels he has done. He could have been told what the Matrix is, but in order to truly understand it and then want to change it, he had to experience it for himself which meant deconstructing the reality he had been socialized to believe existed – one of fair and equal treatment regardless of the color of your skin, your gender, your sexual orientation. Despite Casey’s commitment to reducing inequality, he also describes himself as a “faux-gressive,” as noted in Chapter 2, because he feels like he could and should be doing more. Thus he does not see himself as an activist.
Activists and Their Paths to Action

There are many reasons for taking (or not taking) action, but two perspectives dominate the social movement literature: the rational choice perspective and the structural perspective. Rational choice models are based on individual personal characteristics and perceptions, otherwise known as biographical availability. This includes the costs of movement participation such as time, money, and energy in addition to an examination of risks whether legal, social, physical, financial, etc. (Hardin 1982; Chong 1991; McAdam 1986; Opp 2009). According to this perspective, before they decide to engage, prospective participants must make decisions about the cost of participation, the potential impact of their own contribution (as well as the group’s effectiveness), amount of time at one's disposal mostly related to time spent in professional activities, family tasks and obligations, and age (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006). On the other hand, structural models argue that network embeddedness and socialization (politically and/or socially) are more influential than individual determinants. Socialization is defined as the formation of shared values and beliefs and the production of shared identities (McAdam, 1986; Gould 1993; Koopmans 1995; Kim and Bearman 1997).

The empirical literature offers support for both perspectives but there is stronger support and evidence for the structural view. Individual perceptions can be strong predictors of engagement (Marwell and Oliver 1993; Opp and Roehl 1990; Passy and Giugni 2001), but networks and social environments are more likely to shape the opinions and choices of individuals. Indeed McAdam (1986) finds applicants to Freedom

---

4 Perception of time available is distinct from actual time available based on objective (actual) constraints and subjective (perceived constraints). See Passy and Giugni 2001.
Summer *more* likely to volunteer if they were married and engaged in full-time employment. Kitts (1999) also finds that being married, having children at home, and engaging in full-time employment were unrelated to levels of involvement. Passy and Giugni (2001) note that trust is also critical to political behavior, and close friends are more effective than family or strangers at convincing someone to participate in a given organization particularly in terms of time intensive activities. Thus, socialization to a cause or issue is also important as well as the structural location of individuals within a movement. Current members are more likely to recruit people they know. Although they did not specifically focus on race, gender or sexual orientation on either the participant side or the activism side, Passy and Giugni (2001) find that social and cultural characteristics such as middle class status, age, education, gender, left/right values, and the religious observation of individuals do not have a direct impact on participation once the effects of social networks and individual perceptions are added to the model. However, they only looked at reformist organizations that were more likely to cooperate with the state versus anti-systemic movements that are more critical of the state (Giugni and Passy 1998).

Turning back to the Civil Rights Movement, McAdam (1988) finds that, white participation in the Freedom Summer was influenced by three major factors: 1) organizational ties – political, religious, or social; 2) prior participation in some kind of activism; and 3) personal relationships with others involved in the movement. McAdam concludes that prior activist work seems to be the most relevant in terms of antiracist
action. Unlike some of their historical counterparts, these white ideological dissidents were not typically pushed to action solely through either ideology or religion.

More recently O’Brien (2001) shows support for McAdam’s findings. She states that religion and a progressive ideology may lead to an intellectual understanding of privilege and how discrimination and inequality affect subordinate groups, but more purposeful action typically arises from connections to activist organizations and activists themselves. She also finds that “those who have already done some activism on other ‘leftist’ issues with other whites (antiwar, environmentalism) could be more receptive to an antiracist agenda” (p. 37).

In addition to prior activist work, O’Brien (2001) borrows from Hogan and Netzer's unpublished work and discusses the three of the most likely ways for her respondents used as a reason for developing more empathy for subordinate group members and eventually moving to anti-racist action: 1) borrowed approximations - witnessing the oppression of people of color or learning about it through literature, music or scholarship; 2) overlapping approximations - drawing on a sense of oppression experienced in one’s own life and applying it to other situations; and third, global approximations – applying general ideas of fairness, equality and humanitarian ideas. Interestingly, O’Brien finds that her respondents rarely used global approximations as a reason for commitment to activism, and overlapping approximations were much more likely to be used by women whereas borrowed approximations were used by men and women alike. O’Brien’s overlapping approximations closely resembles Frankenberg’s (1993) discussion of how some white women are able to link their oppression based on
gender to another axis of oppression such as race. For white heterosexual men, there is very little room for overlapping approximations and for them O’Brien found borrowed approximations to be a more likely reason for action.

The borrowed approximations O’Brien discusses relate to the contact hypothesis put forth by Allport (1954). In her book, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Anti-Racist Activism*, Becky Thompson (2001) interviewed thirty-nine white racial activists and although it was not her goal to examine why these activists became so committed to racial justice, she finds that relationships to people of color were the central reason for their continued commitment. In his book, *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice*, Mark Warren (2010) tries to answer the “why” question about activism and explores how his respondents moved from simply being concerned about injustice to actually working against it. Based on his interviews, he finds that it only happened when whites develop deep, meaningful personal relationships with people of color. Warren argues that the caring that results from knowing someone, rather than simply knowledge about inequality itself, provides a more powerful force for commitment to activism. Warren describes the participants in his study as moving to action, “when their core values are engaged, when they build relationships [with people of color] that lead to caring and a sense of common identity, and when they can embed an understanding of their interests in a vision of a future, racially just society that would benefit all – that is, when the head, heart, and hand are all engaged” (emphasis added).

There is a paucity of research on women’s rights activism and much of it focuses only on women’s participation in social movements and issue movements, such as
supporting abortion rights (Duncan 1999). However in terms of supporting feminist goals, personal ties to feminist women seems to be the most important factor in influencing a person’s views on feminism (Tarrant 2008). Goldrick-Jones (2002) examine the background of men who believed in feminism and found that many of them shared stories about strong feminist mothers who consistently worked with their sons over many years to help them move toward a deeper understanding of gender inequality. As with race, gender encounters “with a purpose” help to create a common identity and seem to be more meaningful, at least for a pro-feminist identity.

Throughout social movement literature, social psychological literature, linguistics, and political sociology a recurring theme appears to emerge. Developing empathy for others through personal friendships and/or intimate relationships serve to help dominant group members form a collective identity with those ‘others’ and is foundational to any social movement activism (Lucas and Baxter 2012). When dominant group members move from having global approximations of wanting a more fair and just society for all of humanity to having some type of borrowed approximations through relationships and friendships, the reality of the everyday lived experiences of subordinate group members becomes clear. This appears to be directly linked with not only having close contact with subordinate group members, but also sustained discussions about inequality and the disparities that remain between groups. Gamson (1995) describes how for members of subordinate groups fixed categories are the basis for both oppression and political power, which means that progressive dominant group members must take their cues from subordinate group members in order to understand whether the goals of mobilization are
to deconstruct boundaries (Lorber 2006) or use fixed boundaries to mobilize members on the basis of shared characteristics (Jenson 1995).

Summary

Regardless of the goals of social movements, the majority of the men I interviewed clearly do not have deep meaningful relationships with either people of color or feminist women. For the most part, these progressives do not discuss race relations outside their immediate group of friends if it is discussed at all. Only two individuals live in minority-dominated communities and none live in mixed neighborhoods. The women in their lives do not appear to be strong feminists although some, such as Dalton’s partner who read and then implemented information from The Second Shift into their division of labor, have feminist inclinations. Indeed, one of the limitations of this study is that I was not able to interview the partners of those in committed relationships. Duncan (2010) reports that although many women today would not describe themselves as feminists education about feminism might strengthen the commitment of some of ‘weaker’ feminists and thus might lead to the education of their male partners. Duncan finds that empathetic socialization, in this case across gender boundaries, can have an impact on reducing inequality.

Thus, in addition to having very few relationships with people of color, these progressive men also do not appear to have friendships or relationships with strong feminist women. Although when they do, it can make a difference in how they practice and benefit from privilege. Returning to Chad, he demonstrates how having a partner
with feminist inclinations might play out. He labeled his wife a feminist and basically described how she told him that changing her last name to his last name was not even going to be on the table for discussion. Although having a hyphenated last name comes with its own set of problems, they both were involved in the discussion of how to create a family rather than one person (almost always the woman) responsible for putting family first by giving up her name. Outside of the family, these men do not discuss issues related to gender or racial inequality with friends much less with co-workers or strangers. If they do bring up these topics, it is more likely to be a discussion of events reported in the media, which tend to focus on overt forms of discrimination.

In terms of sexual orientation, most of my respondents know sexual minorities and a large group have gay and lesbians men and women in their either immediate or extended families, so not surprisingly, they are more vocal and active in their support for the civil rights of the GLBT community. However even when the discrimination and resulting inequality are overt, the actions of these progressives is mostly passive although there were more instances of activism in this category than in any other category. If they did take action it was often sporadic. A few men attended rallies in support of same-sex marriage rights and even more attended gay rights parades or donated to organizations pushing for social justice. Interestingly, as described in Chapter 3, overt forms of discrimination are easier to recognize and their “solution” is often easier to come by – mostly likely related to the passage of a law or ordinance. Of course, challenging and changing the beliefs of enough people to then change or pass such a law, particularly on the federal level, is a long difficult process, but the steps to equality are clear and thus
activities to improve the situation of such subordinated members of society are much more clear. Thus, it appears that a key component to understanding progressive action lies not only in the path to action but also with the type of oppression itself and the situational identities it engenders.

For my respondents, working to end inequality towards sexual minorities, and gay men in particular, works in their favor as well. They have interest-based reasons to support equal rights for gays and lesbians. None of men I interviewed could be classified as hypermasculine, indeed most shunned hegemonic forms of masculinity and did not see themselves through that lens. If some gay men create alternative forms of masculinity, it also reduces the pressure for heterosexual men to follow the rules of masculinity although they still may be stigmatized as “gay” if they do not. That is not the case for racialized and gendered social systems, particularly gender inequality in the domestic sphere. The benefits men and whites will receive are not as readily apparent. For the most part they are not active and they are not friends with activists. Although these men are definitely doing more to reduce the discrimination felt by sexual minorities even that is mostly passive.

Whites, men, and heterosexuals all play individual and collective roles in maintaining a social stratification hierarchy (on race see Frankenberg 1993; Roediger 1991; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bush 2004; Katzenelson 2005; Kendall 2006; Trepagnier 2006; on gender see Bem 1993; Benokraitis and Feagin 1995; Kimmel 1987, 2008; on sexual orientation see Ingraham 1994; Boldt 1996; Herek 2000). Whether acknowledged or not, privilege is the strategic way this occurs. Othering, Boundary Maintenance, Emotion
Management, and the Ideology of Individualism are all ways of maintaining privilege. Schwalbe et al. have not only presented a theory about the generic processes that reproduce and create inequality, but also a theory about the perpetuation of privilege. As such, it is vital include wording that discusses not only discusses the creation and reproduction of inequality but also the reproduction and maintenance of privilege. Knowing the generic interactive processes through which inequalities occur is important for recognizing how inequality in maintained and reproduced particularly regarding the new forms of racial and gender inequality, but understanding how members of the dominant group are challenging those processes or supporting them is also of equal significance.

Returning to Rowe et al. (1994) discussion of white identity development, most of the men I interviewed fit in the model, but Rowe et al. fail to account for the powerful social forces that might prevent someone from taking action even if they have developed an understanding of inequality and privilege. In this model there are two responses to inequality, either passive or active within each category, but I argue that if white heterosexual men truly object to social and institutional policies that promote inequality, I do not agree that a passive response is the same as an active one, and an active response seems to only occur with an understanding of privilege and having deep meaningful relationships with subordinate group members.

Thus, I argue that another type is needed in Rowe et al.’s model, which incorporates Hughey’s views on anti-racist activist identity development. If passive response to inequality would keep an individual in the reactive or integrative category,
then another category is needed for those committing to action. I argue that a commitment to activism is categorically different from other forms of passive action such as voting and donating money, even if such behaviors indicate an openness to possibly taking action in the future. Challenging the system takes work. It takes dedication. It is a constant battle. It is exhausting. Most people will disagree with you and you will constantly be challenged. In some cases it can even involve economic risks. Working actively is not the same as voting or donating money and there are many disincentives for challenging the status quo. There is significant leap between taking passive action (or trying to do no harm) and becoming an activist. Indeed, O’Brien notes that among the anti-racists activists she interviewed, it was much more rare for someone to use global approximations – developing an understanding of racial inequality through global ideas of equality and egalitarianism, as a path to anti-racist action. This fit squarely with how most of these progressive men see their world and their various roles and was particularly true concerning issues of racial and gender inequality.

Moreover, Allan Johnson (1997) argues that patriarchy is allowed to continue because so many men confuse being sensitive to women’s issues with actually challenging male privilege. He refers to this as the “luxury of obliviousness” (78), which leaves women [and people of color] doing the hard work of consciousness raising. Again, in some cases, a few men talked about how their jobs allowed them to fight racism in small ways, but no men had similar comments about how their occupations were helping to reduce gender inequality and inequality in the domestic sphere remains firmly in place for all of the men in committed relationships except Aaron. For these reason, I
argue that there needs to be another type of identity development that acknowledges the difference in active types of commitment rather than passive ones. I suggest future research look at identity development through the lens of both privilege and inequality and separate individuals who actively working to reduce inequality from those are trying to do no harm.
In the introduction, I introduced the concept of ideological dissidents as described by Bonilla-Silva et al. (2004). He vaguely defines ideological dissidents as “white racial progressives” (577) but does not then define exactly what it means to be progressive. In other texts, he refers to ideological dissidents as race traitors as well as liberal whites (2001). I had originally used the term ideological dissidents to describe any members of the dominant group who appeared to have developed a ‘critical consciousness,’ particularly concerning race, gender, or sexual orientation. I took holding a critical consciousness to mean having in-depth understanding of both inequality and privilege but I have since changed my views.

Frantz Fanon (1967) coined the term critical consciousness, but famed Brazilian educational theorists Paulo Freire is credited with developing the social concept further in his 1970s work Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He describes it as achieving an in-depth understanding of the world that allows for the uncovering of social and political contradictions. He also argues that developing a critical consciousness includes taking some form of action to eliminate oppression (emphasis added). Although I believe taking action is crucial to social change, I did not use action or activism as a qualifying component when selecting participants. Indeed, I wanted to explore if knowledge and action were associated in any way. I have come to see that knowledge and action are
unmistakably linked, but that I was missing many of the steps in-between, which I reiterate below. If a critical consciousness includes taking some form of action to *eliminate* oppression, then very few of my respondents would fit this definition. They are clearly concerned about inequality. They often even understand privilege and work to do no harm, but very few of the actions they take could qualify as working to eliminate oppression. Thus, instead of using the term ‘critical consciousness,’ I instead use the term ‘elevated consciousness’ throughout this text.

W.E.B. Du Bois’s spoke about the color-line as the problem of the twentieth century, and Wildman (1996) makes the case that “revealing privilege is the key to erasing this line so that race will not the be the problem of the twenty-first century.” My data does not support this theory. Instead, I found that knowledge of privilege is only the second step in a four-step process that leads to action. The first step is a recognition of inequality; the second a recognition of privilege; the third developing relationships with people of color and feminist women and a willingness to discuss issues of inequality in depth; and finally the development of a collective identity as well as an activist identity. The last two steps are clearly missing from the lives of all these progressives except for the few actually taking some action – Mark, Adrian and especially Casey. Although it is not definitive, it appears that meaningful relationships with subordinated group members involving discussion of inequality can be used to develop more empathic relationships (Heise 1998) and result in the borrowed approximations described by O’Brien (2001) which then lead to the development of a collective identity and result in social action.
It is also clear that socialization and personal experiences in addition to education play a role in developing such relationships. My data reveal that without the development of this collective identity, the most likely responses to inequality are inaction, working to do no harm, or passive action. Although passive action and trying to do no harm are important, these outcomes are not going to result in progress toward positive social change (Thomas et al. 2009).

**Developing an Identity as a Progressive**

Contemporary theories of identity “make clear that the boundary between personal and social identity theories is indistinct and ever-changing” (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010: 487). In this dissertation, I use sociological theories concerning the development of a *self* and *self-concept*, to examine the social processes, composed of individual acts and societal forces (Mead 1934; Stryker 1980) that lead white heterosexual men to develop a progressive identity. I also incorporate status characteristics theory into my conceptualizations of identity and work to discover when a progressive identity is more salient and likely to be invoked during interaction – allowing for both choice and agency (Owens 2010). According to Owens, the salience of an identity is influenced by the extensiveness of interactions with others who hold the same identity and a person’s emotional investment in relationships with others based on that identity. Although larger social systems such as race, gender, and sexual orientation have been shown to be the least influential in identity salience, my data reveal that they are quite salient for the progressive men I interviewed.
Building upon Stryker, Thoits (1986, 2003) discusses how multiple role identities impact a person’s psychological and emotional well-being by helping individuals to figure out who they are and what they should do. Brook et al. (2008) find that negative emotions that result from negative interactions based on a particular role-identity can influence whether or not a person holds that role-identity to be more or less salient. In addition, my data reveal, in terms of a progressive identity, that knowledge of privilege can also influence whether or not a person holds a role-identity to be more or less salient.

Goffman (1959) describes how we all work to present ourselves to others in a way that affirms the image we have of ourselves, comparable to an actor portraying a character on a stage. For white heterosexual men, holding a progressive identity, helps these men to interpret each others actions and behaviors as well as the action and behaviors of others all of which work to create meaning for each individual. In addition to understanding how social interaction and experiences influence how these men see themselves, I explore when they view their identity as salient, what attitudes result from their identity, and how the knowledge of inequality and privilege result from the situational and contextual location of these men.

*Fairness and Justice, Inequality and Privilege*

The United States was founded on ideas of equality and fairness even as some groups experienced differential, often extremely harsh and harmful, treatment resulting in vastly different outcomes for people often dependent on their ascribed characteristics. Americans have changed many of their attitudes about equality, at least symbolically, but attitudes about race, gender, and sexual orientation are difficult to interpret, and
sometimes there exists a disconnect between professed attitudes and actual behaviors. Modern mainstream individualistic ideology now promotes the *ideals* of fairness and justice even if those ideals are not a reality for most people of color and white women. Discrimination and inequality across various arenas remains strong although its form has shifted and changed as societal norms and attitudes about inequality have also shifted and changed as well (Bonilla-Silva 2001 2003; England 2010; Ridgeway 2011). Ball-Rokeach and Loges (1994) argue that looking at value systems offers a more stable framework for understanding how people orient their actions when given a choice. Lakoff (2002) agrees and has thoroughly researched the different underlying values, what he refers to as types of morality, which guide the attitudes of liberals and conservatives. He claims that empathy, caring and nurturance are the key morals that underlie a progressive ideology regardless of what issue is at hand. Knowing what identities influence how individuals interpret the self, self-concepts and role identities as well as how culture and situation contexts also shape emotions and behaviors are all key to understanding its affects on a person’s attitudes and behaviors. In other words, a person’s values orient their attitudes and behaviors to reflect those values.

At the same time, new color-blind, gender-blind ideologies have become dominant in modern U.S. society and impact nearly everyone’s views on inequality. For example, Stephens and Levine (2011) find that disparities between men and women in the workplace are more likely to be viewed as a product of choice and merely exposing people to frames about individual choice makes it more likely those individuals will believe gender employment discrimination no longer exists. Taylor and Merino (2011)
find that whites continue to be more inclined to believe individual rather than structural explanations of inequality and whites are more negative about programs that provide aid to people of color. In addition, Herek (1988) finds heterosexual men are more likely to have negative attitudes towards sexual minorities, particularly towards gay men.

On the other hand, liberals, progressives, and other left leaning individuals are often more supportive of continued civil rights advancements for people of color, white women, and sexual minorities and are more willing to support government intervention, but much of this research is limited to either white women, black men, or working class men (who feel the direct impact of an unequal distribution of wealth through a capitalist economy and can approximate that feeling in order to understand racism and sexism). Interestingly, the attitudes and behaviors of people who have the most status, power and influence are often ignored, particularly in terms of whether or not holding a progressive identity helps white, male heterosexual men to develop a more clear understanding not only of inequality but also privilege.

The men in my sample define their progressive identity in a manner closely associated with generic ‘American’ values rather than ‘progressive’ values. The most frequent responses to questions about what it means to hold such an identity resulted in three themes: having a desire for fairness and justice; seeing themselves as being open-minded; and wanting to see change (albeit in a positive more liberal direction). However, the majority of dominant group members, in particular whites, men and heterosexuals have little interest in changing the status quo, something that benefits them, and clearly this creates a tension for my respondents and I worked to understand when they will find
their identity as higher status individuals more or less salient compared to their identity as a progressive.

U.S society is moving toward a multi-racial future with increasing numbers of people of color and women challenging white male domination. Understanding individual, social, and collective identities is critical to understanding how a society functions, particularly in a society as diverse as that of the United States. Membership in categories such as race, gender, and sexual orientation involve very different attributes and life outcomes, yet they also incorporate many similarities specifically in the processes that create and reproduce the hierarchies found within them. Understanding the processes through which these various identities are created, maintained, or challenged serves as a framework for understanding how various forms of privilege and oppression throughout society are linked. My dissertation specifically examined how white heterosexual men view their identity as a progressive; explored the literature and some of their experiences in order to theorize about how they developed this identity; investigated how a progressive identity was linked to attitudes about inequality and the understanding of privilege; and finally examined what outcomes resulted from holding such an identity.

Knowledge of Inequality and Knowledge of Privilege

Much of the current research on whites, men, and heterosexuals is premised on the fact that dominant group members are not aware of modern forms of inequality and are also not aware of the benefits they receive from society’s unequal social systems. However,
white men hold most of the status, power, and influence in society. They are in charge of all the major societal institutions from the education system and the state, to the economy, family and media. Although the men I interviewed are not elites, they hold a higher status that comes from being member of a dominant group; they are highly educated and relatively stable financially, although they are not wealthy and thus could easily fall from their middle class status through long-term job loss. They are also currently in, will be in, or were in positions that give them the power to influence others such as through hiring decisions or through their positions as educators or other government employees. Even without an elite status, they are located in positions that would allow them to influence the attitudes of others, particularly other white heterosexual men.

In terms of recognizing the extent of the inequality in the United States and the underlying reasons for such inequality, I found that interest-based explanations helped to understand when mainstream ideologies are more salient while exposure-based explanations help to illuminate when they will work against their own interests and uphold a progressive identity. Education, socialization, and personal experiences with people of color, white women and sexual minorities all played a role in how their identities developed. Contexts were very important in determining if they referenced their progressive identity or their dominant group identity.

While early socialization and education were a more likely path to developing a progressive identity and understanding inequality, it was reversed for those who described having racist fathers (or less likely racist mothers) and a more conservative
upbringing. In this case, later education and socialization seems to play an important role in the development of their progressive identity. Again, all of these men have at least some post-secondary education and have chosen an identity more closely associated with caring about others and holding an empathetic view. Education can put individuals in situations where contact with others lead to new experiences which either reinforce or help them to adopt a progressive identity. For some, it also played a role in helping to understand privilege. Understanding privilege seemed to be more influential in keeping their progressive identity salient while in contrast having a progressive identity that only included an understanding of inequality allowed more mainstream views on inequality to become salient.

In the labor market, both a progressive and dominant group identity were used to explain inequality. Exposure-based explanations were evident when these men discussed the problems they recognized for people of color, white women, and sexual minorities. These men are highly educated or on the path to obtaining such an education, and to varying degrees, they are sensitive to the troubling racial experiences of people of color and were supportive of affirmative action. They also recognized the glass-ceiling, lack of networks support, lack of equal pay for equal work, and other problems associated with being a woman in the labor market. On the other hand, some of my respondents also used colorblind and gender blind individualism to explain at least some of the inequality that exists thus showing the pressure to conform to the mainstream ideological views. These mainstream views allowed them to minimize the impact of race and gender on
labor market inequality. In addition, some men also used more culturally racist frames to structure their attitudes about racial inequality.

Very few of my respondents acknowledged the problem of racial segregation. They benefit from racialized residential segregation, and although it was never directly stated, the literature shows us that even progressive whites avoid blacks – both at work and at home (Gaertner and Dovidio 2005). Previous literature posits that interest-based explanations are at play here such as viewing all white or mostly white neighborhoods as having better schools and less crime.

As with education, socialization also played a role in developing an identity as a progressive as well as helping these men to seek out knowledge. Some progressive men talked about the influence of feminist mothers, sisters, and friends during their early childhood and adolescence and this most likely had an impact on their universal support for a women’s reproductive choice. It may have also played a role in how they viewed labor market inequality, but one of my more interesting findings was how little a progressive identity impacted their views on inequality in the domestic sphere. Every man in a long-term partnership described having an equal or nearly equal division of labor, which on the surface seems to show that their progressive identity was salient in this context. However, after pushing for details, all of these men revealed that their perceived share of housework was different from their actual contributions. Upon this revelation, most of my respondents tried to either justify the unequal amounts of work or emphasized the work that they specifically do, such a mowing the lawn. Only two men were able to reignite their progressive identities and began to explore their lack of work
(or “laziness”) through the lens of gender inequality and gender-role socialization. One of the limits of this study is that in order to determine the actual amount of housework these men do compared to their partners, it would be necessary to interview each partner and also ask each couple complete time diaries, both of which were beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In another area of the domestic sphere, none of my respondents questioned the unfair practice of assumed patrilineal surname decent. Interest-based, mainstream ideological explanations for this attitude are clearly more salient here. Connell (2002:142) finds that patrilineal surnames give multiple advantages to men as a group and creates a “patriarchal dividend,” and Nugent (2010) finds that children’s surnames present a classic tension between commitment to self and others. In this case women are expected to commit to others while these men did not even question their commitment to self.

In terms of understanding fairness, all of these men had some knowledge of inequality and in terms of sexual orientation, and they all agreed that overt discrimination against gay and lesbians was unfair and unjust. They all supported same-sex marriage rights, or in the case of one respondent, civil unions. They all believed that in every other aspect of work and family, homosexuals should have the same rights as everyone else. However, only a small minority of respondents addressed the fact that even if gays and lesbians were to obtain the full rights of all citizens, they would still experience discrimination based on their perceived difference. Marriage laws, adoption laws, and employment discrimination laws can all be changed to be more inclusive, but once those
legal barriers are penetrated, it is likely discrimination against sexual minorities will resemble contemporary practices of racial and gender discrimination which are more difficult to recognize and thus more difficult to mount a united efforts against. This was much less likely to come up in my interviews. As the rights for sexual minorities increase, future research should examine if progressives move from a rights-based approach to understanding inequality to understanding the more covert nature of discrimination that sexual minorities currently do and will surely continue to face.

About one-third of my respondents recognized privilege with most recognizing both male privilege and white privilege although for a few it was category specific. Understanding privilege is not a prerequisite for holding a progressive identity and is more likely associated with exposure to people of color and feminist women; through processing encounters that dramatically change a person’s point of view; or through some other personal experience. I did not specifically ask my respondents how they came to understand privilege, thus I am unable to expand upon why some understand it while others do not. Almost all of the men in my study were highly educated, but obtaining a post-secondary education was not enough to have the same influence on understanding privilege as it appears to have on understanding inequality, more generally speaking. I highly recommend future research explore how progressive white heterosexual men come to understand privilege. Understanding privilege helped to make a progressive identity more salient in certain situations and these links should be explored further.

Finally a large majority of the men I interviewed have developed alternative masculine identities often in opposition to the hegemonic ideal. They are less likely than
other men who fit the stereotype to benefit from hegemonic masculinity and thus, they are clearly unhappy with how the current rules of masculinity guide and police their behavior. Many have developed alternative masculinity, supportive networks and progressive subcultures to encourage changes in behaviors although much of this is done in private. Thus, the development of these alternative masculinities does little to challenge male dominance or create cracks in the Matrix of Domination.

*Responses to Progressivism*

Thomas et al. (2009) find that *group* norms powerfully shape behavior and social and political action can only result when social norms prescribe action. When a person’s social identity is vague or not directly linked to promoting action, then action is unlikely. Beyond knowing about inequality and privilege, the large majority of respondents lack deep personal relationships with people of color, feminist women, and activists - relationships that have been shown to be key in developing a strong sense of empathy and eventually a collective identity with subordinate group members. Developing a collective or group identity has been documented in research as an important reason for behavior changes, particularly those that include a more active involvement in working to reduce inequality. Only two progressives mentioned the need for community, which I discuss further in this chapter and none spoke of holding a collective identity with people from subordinate groups.

Moving from simply holding a progressive identity to seeing how the knowledge, emotions and beliefs which support that identity more closely align in a *normative*
fashion with the beliefs and actions of people of color and white women rather than other
dominant group white heterosexual male elites is key to social change (Thomas et al.
2009). Thomas et al. (2009) theorize that when dominant group members change their
ingroup preferences to include people of color and white women, it is more likely to
result in a stronger commitment to the social change – a change that many of these men
state they would like to see. My data show that that holding only a progressive identity is
linked to understanding some forms of institutional inequality, but it does not necessarily
move dominant group members to understand privilege. More importantly, my findings
challenge previous notions that understanding privilege will necessarily force people to
change.

Unlike the literature on identity, the literature on activism is much more clear –
having in-depth personal meaningful relationships with people in subordinate groups
and/or knowing other activists are the only clear paths to the development of a collective
identity and working for social change. I have found that even if structural inequality is
acknowledged, multiple constraints prevent these men from speaking up and thus silence
pervades. At the same time passive action or trying to do no harm was more likely the
response to a knowledge of inequality and privilege, particularly as these individuals
continue to be removed from the consequences of not taking action. Kendall (2006) finds
that one of the main problems with privilege is that it allows individuals to forget about
racism, (sexism or homophobia) whenever a person feels like it. After conducting in-
depth semi-structured interviews with forty self-described progressive white heterosexual
men, I agree with this sentiment and connect this response to the ideology of individualism.

Was there ever a time when ‘love’ for our fellow citizens moved higher status individuals to action? Putnam (2000) argues that, yes, there was a period in our history when people were much more concerned about their fellow citizens and actively involved in their community. He refers to this group as the civic generation – born between 1910 and 1940, with the core being born between 1925 and 1930. The decline in (adult) civic engagement after this period is so dramatic, Putnam likens the succeeding generation’s lack of involvement to being exposed to, “an anticivic X-ray that permanently and increasingly rendered them less likely to connect with community” (p. 255). Thomas et al. (2009) recognize the need for sustainable attitude and behavior changes if prejudice reduction and discrimination reduction (and thus a more egalitarian society) is the goal.

American Ideals versus American Reality

Every person’s standpoint in the Matrix of domination impacts their access to resources, status, power, and influence, as well as their understanding of the system itself. Thus, I argue that scholars of social psychology and sociology must examine the attitudes of various groups separately based not only on their dominant group or subordinate group status(es), but also through the lens of identity. The men I interviewed were all shaped by different social environments and do not all see their progressive identity exactly alike, but there are commonalities as well and my dissertation explored their similarities and differences.
Individualism is a well-known characteristic of modern society, and it is often positively associated with things like ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom,’ but Mary Jackman (1994: 225) argues against such a belief and states that “individualism has been the hallmark cry of dominant groups under challenge in the capitalist-democracies, precisely because it offers a principled way of denying the moral legitimacy of egalitarian demands made on behalf of groups.” It also traps marginalized groups into protecting the few resources they have instead of making demands for a more fair distribution of resources. At the same time, it shifts the blame for this inequality away from the system itself and onto the individual. Thus, if you do not succeed, it is your fault. If you receive help, you are lazy and do not want to work. All the while, unequal unjust systems are allowed to remain firmly in place.

What are our social obligations, if any, in a free society? If you ask any citizen of the United States to define “American ideals,” the words freedom and liberty will surely arise at some point in the conversation and, indeed, it came up often in my interviews. I asked each of my respondents if they thought America was living up to its ideals and not a single man said, ‘yes.’ Rather, most suggest that this is a reason for their progressive ideology. I only reveal the words of Mark because they incorporate the sentiments of what so many of my respondents had to say.

As someone, you know, who believes in the ideals of ‘we’re all equal’ and not just, you know, in the eyes of God…but, you know, before our political system. How can we have such incredible disparities in education and wealth and income and health? Sociology really opened my eyes to this to a significant extent during my undergraduate years…Supposedly, one of the things, well the thing that makes this such a great country and why so many people trumpet this country, as the best country that has ever existed, and how we all have it so good, is equality before the law and the constitutional guarantee that we are all equals in that way. And it’s terrible hypocrisy that we aren’t; so if we’re actually going to live up to this ideal then we should actually care; and we should actually
be active about trying to live up to the supposed promises of what makes America so great. I just think, it’s not only hypocritical, well, it’s extremely hypocritical, but it’s just for, you know for people who realize that that’s not true, it’s just kind of antagonizing to see the reality but then hear what people, you know, what people throw around about why we are the greatest country. It’s ridiculous. There’s such a disconnect between the promise of American and the reality of America. And therefore, those of us who want America to truly be a great country, to truly be what is promised by the constitution, need to work to make it so, because, again, the promise is there. That’s one of the things that’s so frustrating about this country – the promise of equality before the law. The promise that everyone can have it good. The promise that everyone’s vote matters or that everyone can actually be something. We say that all the time. We, again, we hold it over other countries. We use that almost as a cudgel against other countries about why they’re so fucking bad. But it’s just extremely frustrating that we don’t actually live up to that promise.

In his book, Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for A Science of Culture, Marvin Harris (1979) describes hunter-gatherer societies through the sharing of resources, simplicity of the tools of production, and lack of inheritable private property, all of which he suggests contributed to egalitarian relationships. It would be futile to argue for the elimination of private property and a return to simple tools of production, however according to Harvey (2005), “contradiction arises between a seductive but alienating possessive individualism on the one hand and the desire for a meaningful collective life on the other.” Individuals are taught that freedom means the ability to seek out individual pursuits often with the emphasis on attaining increasing amounts social status and personal economic achievement. Freedom is typically not associated with individuals who want to bring about strong collective institutions or more cooperative forms of a market economy.

Harvey (2005) goes on to argue that a focus on individual freedoms through “free” market pursuits, “has the power to split groups that otherwise might come together to work for social justice.” He emphasizes that the power to change society lies in organizational cooperation, long-term planning, consistency of action, and in the
“political power available only through united action” (p.43). Indeed the “free” market capitalist economy is an economic form of individualism. It does not support collective action nor does it promote working toward a society that benefits most people, yet very few of these progressive men spoke about that specifically. It is taken for granted that a system in which each person works as an individual and benefits as an individual is the best way for an economy and society to function, but this focus often results in a starvation of the public, of our common good. Ryan and Jetha (2010: 180) argue that, “the sense of human nature intrinsic to Western, economic theory is mistaken”, and they contend that humans were not originally driven by self-interest but by a culture of sharing and empathy,” yet empathy is not enough to move someone to action.

Even if an individual recognizes or understands the breadth and depth of problems associated with inequality, the ideology of individualism often compels her to ignore them and focus on her own precarious situation. This precarious situation is often defined by economic insecurity, which Bellah et al. ([1985] 2007) use to define the middle class as the “anxious” class. The ideology of individualism works in conjunction with global economic dislocations and the economic decline of the middle class to shift the focus from structural inequities to individual failings, which heightens people’s fear of losing their current position.

The progressive men I interviewed only challenged discriminatory language if it came from peers, and since they tend to surround themselves with fellow progressives, this rarely occurred. When such language came from employers or those in a higher social position their response was silence. Speaking up or taking action might mean
losing their toehold in the middle class and becoming disadvantaged themselves. Indeed, this may make the threat of displacement more salient because they are less likely to believe that “hard work” leads to economic gains. In her book, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (1989), Barbara Ehrenreich points out that life in the professional middle class produces a serious amount of status anxiety. Unlike wealth and property, education credentials and a middle-class status cannot be guaranteed for the children of the middle class through inheritance (although legacy students often have an advantage in terms of college admittance). Ehrenreich asserts that professionalism remains the fundamental generator of middle class uncertainty because it was designed not only to keep people out, but also make each succeeding generation fight for admittance. In addition, the constant threat of job loss associated with an increase of “at will” employment and “right to work” legislation as well as the loss of labor rights associated with the decline of unionization, highlights the precarious nature of holding onto middle class status.

If disparities remain, individualism pushes for individual or even cultural explanations to account for the differences. Jackman (1994:317) finds that, “as subordinates decry the group basis of social life, ways must be found to deny and obscure it…” and this is done through the ideology of individualism. For example, racial group segregation means there will be little risk for “ideological softening” on the part of dominant group members. Cultural explanations can take the form of criticizing groups for their “lack of values” or “wanting something for nothing.” For gender, Jackman describes the “amiable condescension” (315) done by dominant group members – praising
women for being amazing mothers, cooks and house keepers - that accompanies essentializing the nature of men and women. Jackman (321) finds that, “loose-jointed belief systems are less vulnerable to attack, since one component can be given up or reformulated, if politically convenient, without jeopardizing other components that still prove serviceable” (321).

Racialized, gendered, and heteronormative ideologies continue to shape the views of most people in the United States. Dominant groups face the predicament of maintaining a social order which preserves their unequal access to material, social, political and even psychological resources (King 1995; Roediger 1991); but dominant group progressives, who recognize this inequality and unequal treatment, face the predicament of maintaining this same social order while also working to maintain their moral identity. Groups in power use various ideologies to rationalize social inequality which is can be linked to the hegemonic discourse and everyday thinking of ordinary people (Bush 2004).

Understanding how powerful actors resist or accept that everyday thinking; refrain from or participate in that discourse; and work against or silently support that ideology is crucial if patterns of inequality are to be changed and a more egalitarian society created.
References


268


Schellenberg, E. Glenn, Jessie Hirt, and Alan Sears. 1999. “Primary Title: Attitudes Toward Homosexuals Among Students at a Canadian University.” *Sex Roles.* 40(1): 139-152.


U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.


Urban Institute and the Williams Institute at University of California at Los Angeles School of Law. 2007. “ Adoption and Foster Care by Gay and Lesbian Parents in the United States.”

274


Appendix A: Methodological Appendix
Between October 2008 and March 2010, I conducted forty in-depth semi-structured interviews across two mid-western states. At the time of these interviews, these men lived in large cities with populations of at least 100,000 or within the suburbs of these large cities. Some grew up in small towns and moved while others grew up in large cities and although I confined my sample to two states, these men came from across the country. Although some were born and raised near the cities in which I interviewed them, most had moved from either out of town or out of state. Although my data is limited to two states, it appears to be more representative of progressive white men in general.

All of my respondents are highly educated men. For those with some graduate education or PhDs, they have had even more education. Although some are working at for-profit companies, they are not in the majority. Some of these men are still in school, but for those in the labor market, most of them work in not-for-profit organizations, in university setting, government settings, or for political campaigns. There is an obvious connection between the liberalizing effect of education and men who are employed in a university setting. For those directly working on political campaigns, it is also clearly evident how their work impacts their identity as a progressive. The connections are not quite as clear between a progressive identity and non-profit work or government work, but it seems worth investigating. Clearly most of these men are not in for-profit ventures. Admittedly selection bias and the use of snow-ball sampling impact the limited variety of occupations, but future research should explore how various occupational settings create very different opportunities and experiences for shaping a progressive identity,
particularly since most government positions or government contract positions tend to include a more diverse workforce.

I interviewed respondents in their homes, their workplaces, in coffee shops, or in my office. Their names and identifying information have been changed in order to protect confidentiality. The shortest interview lasted one hour and thirty minutes, while the longest lasted three and a half hours. The average interview length was slightly over two hours and fifteen minutes.

I wanted to look at multiple forms of privilege simultaneously, so I purposefully limited my sample to individuals who verified their status as white heterosexual men. In addition, I limited my sample to people who are more likely to show support for social justice issues. Previous literature has shown that people who consider themselves liberal, progressive, a democrat, or associate with other ‘leftist’ issues are often working on social justice issues, such as anti-racism (McAdam 1988; O’Brien 2001; Warren 2010); or a pro-feminist agenda (McAdam 1988; Kimmel 1992; Christian 1994; Goldrick-Jones 2002; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Janice McCabe 2005; Tarrant 2008).

I did not seek out self-identified conservatives or republicans because the literature does support evidence that their views would match with the baseline ideology I wished to establish. It is entirely possible there are white heterosexual men of a more conservative persuasion who may also consider themselves pro-feminist, anti-racist, and/or recognize and understand systemic inequality that remains in modern U.S society, however, the purpose of this study was not to compare two conflicting ideologies, but
rather to find the similarities and discrepancies in the beliefs those who claim to share a similar ideology, particularly surrounding issues of race, gender and sexual orientation.

Prior to the interviews I had multiple informal conversations with colleagues, coworkers, friends and acquaintances about their understanding of the word progressive (versus liberal or other leftist affiliation). I choose to recruit individuals through the use of the word progressive so as to not exclude individuals with no political affiliation as well as to include those who may have more radical views concerning their political ideology, but the focus was to recruit people who considered themselves to the left of center in terms of political ideology. The majority (thirty-one) of the men I interviewed associated progressive with being a “liberal,” “left of center,” or having “leftist political concerns.” These men also identified as liberal or very liberal on the demographic survey. The remaining nine also identified themselves as liberal or “slightly left,” but on the demographic survey marked that they were moderate (three), libertarian (two), radical (two), or did not give a specific political identification (two). Thus, using referrals from colleagues and friends and then through the use of snow-ball sampling I was able to identify forty men who fit the description of a loosely defined “progressive” and were willing to speak to me about their thoughts on both what it means to be progressive as well as their opinions concerning issues of race, gender and sexual orientation.

As a woman of color interviewing white men, I was quite aware of how an ethnic and gender mismatch might bias my results. In terms of race, the interviewer/respondent mismatch has been the focus of many articles examining possible bias in both the taking of surveys as well as in conducting interviews, particularly when the subject matter is
specifically about race or compares blacks and whites. For example Huang (2009) found biased results in testing situations when there was a mismatch between the interviewer and respondent with black respondents performing better when tested by a black interviewer. In another example, blacks were more likely to express warmth toward whites when they were interviewed by a white interviewer rather than a black one (Anderson et al. 1988). Similar biases have also been found in other studies, but they typically examine black respondents with either differently or similarly raced interviewers. Blacks have been shown to be more careful in their responses or more sensitive to their performance, language, or behaviors when working with white interviewers (Davis 1997; Cukor-Avila and Bailey 2001; Hill 2002). For race, much of the literature is focused on how black respondents react to white interviewers. Bonilla-Silva (2000) finds that for studying racism, white interviewers should be interviewed by white respondents. I could find no articles or information concerning the possible bias of white respondents with interviewers of color.

In terms of gender interviewer effects, Catania (1996) finds that males tend to be influenced by an interviewer’s gender when discussing sexual topics, while Kane and Macaulay (1993) find that male respondents offer different responses to female rather than male interviewers particularly concerning topics such as gender inequality. Similarly, Huddy et al. (1997) found a small effect in interviews that show men were more likely to express feminist attitudes when speaking with a female rather than male interviewer, particularly on controversial topics. In one survey, they found that these
effects were less likely among the well-educated and older respondents, but these results did not hold in the second survey.

Although much of the research shows bias concerning a mismatch between the race and gender of the interviewer, these studies do not include the political ideology of the respondents. Since scholars typically classify liberals or progressives as individuals who are more concerned about racial and gender inequality, I do not believe that bias played a role in the responses these men gave. In addition, I predicted these men to be much more liberal or progressive than they actually were, so even a small positive increase in their feminist or racial views would have had a negligible impact on the results. If anything, I am giving them more credit for their knowledge of inequality and support for reducing it even though I am highly critical of their responses. While I am not privy to the speech, actions and experiences of these men, firsthand, there is no reason to believe they would purposefully hide their knowledge or activities.

Although gender bias and racial bias may have played a role in their discussion of privilege, it is unlikely. In my sample, these men were much more likely to acknowledge inequality over privilege. If they were trying to appear more self aware, particularly concerning whiteness and masculinity, it did not come across in the interviews. Kimmel (1994) argues that men often police the attitudes and actions of other men and thus I argue that some respondents might be less inclined to discuss their feminist views with another man. Indeed, many of my respondents addressed issues of masculinity, and voiced their distaste for the rules of masculinity. Indeed, one of my respondents addresses this directly. He shed tears several times during our interview and admitted
that he would have been much more embarrassed, or even unwillingly to share some information, if I had been a man because he would have been more concerned about another man’s response to his show of emotion. Thus, although it is possible that bias was introduced due to an interviewer/respondents mismatch, I argue that it had minimal impact on my findings. Indeed, it may have helped me achieve improved results.

I personally transcribed each interview in its entirety and then content coded them using the qualitative data analysis software, Atlas Ti. Using a grounded theoretical approach, during the transcribing and subsequent readings of each interview, I made detailed notes about what themes emerged from the data. After going through my notes, I developed codes for possible findings and then re-read each interview coding sections appropriately, taking care to also search for outliers. Each area of interest was coded one at a time during multiple readings of each interview. Each interview was read at least three times during the coding process. The quotations associated with these codes were then used to develop my findings.

Despite the study’s strengths, it has important limitations. First, my sample is limited to middle class progressives. Working-class progressive white heterosexual men may have added insightful information into the study, but I wanted to control, as tightly as possible, the introduction of overlapping approximations – using the personal experience of oppression and translating it into an understanding of how others might be impacted by a different form of oppression. In this case, progressive working class men might recognize their economic inequality through their personal experiences and thus have more sympathy toward women and people of color. Indeed, working class whites
have often been recommended as possible allies in much of the literature on coalition building. My goal was to find out how progressives, with no ascribed characteristics that would lead to overlapping approximations, understood issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

I did not select a specific type of progressive as listed in Chapter 2, most importantly because most progressives do not identify with a type but rather with issues and Lakoff (2006) argues that all progressives are tied together by an underlying sense of caring and empathy. I was more interested in understanding how this might relate to their views on race, gender and sexual orientation rather than at looking at specific types. Although I did not purposefully avoid or include activists, none of my respondents considered themselves activists and none admitted to friendships or relationships with other activists.

I used an open-ended interview guide and just generally directed the conversation to the subjects of race, gender and sexual orientation rather than asking a series of questions about each subject area. This is often recommended in qualitative research conducted using a grounded theoretical approach. In this approach, data is collected prior to making hypothesis. Data is then analyzed and key points are marked with a series of codes. These codes are then used to extrapolate concepts and create themes. These themes then become the basis for understanding the data. The data is then reexamined according to these themes and either adjusted or reconsidered as negative cases become apparent.
One serious limitation of this approach is that I did not ask every respondent about every issue that came up within the interviews. Thus it is very difficult to make comparisons across the entire group. Rather I report what themes emerged most frequently rather than percentages comparing how many respondents agreed or disagreed with a certain point of view. In addition, I wanted to know about the attitudes and behaviors of these individuals and it did not become apparent until after the interviews were conducted that an inclusion of why they became progressive could have revealed important information about the development of a progressive identity. Due to this limitation I can only report the findings of other research and report information as to why these men are progressive if it came up during other conversations throughout the interview. I recommend future research consider asking progressives why they have adopted such as identity.
Appendix B: Demographic Information and Views on Stratification
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Racial Inequality</th>
<th>White Privilege</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>75-34K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant/non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>26-33</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>100-149K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aidan</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>25-34K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>46-52</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant - United Methodist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avery</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>75-34K</td>
<td>Domestic Partner</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>75-99K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameron</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>25-34K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Semi-Radical</td>
<td>25-34K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant/non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Very Liberal/Libertarian</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colby</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalton</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>35-49K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>18-23</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>35-49K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>100-150K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>spiritual agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gimmy</td>
<td>36-43</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>35-49K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>35-49K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant - United Church of Christ</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>25-34K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>76-85</td>
<td>Some Graduate</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>35-40K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>18-23</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Protestant - United Church of Christ</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>75-90K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landon</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>35-49K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawson</td>
<td>36-43</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>Some Graduate</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant/non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant/non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>56-63</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>46-53</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>75-99K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reese</td>
<td>76-85</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>26-33</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Protestant/non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Radical/Left</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>75-99K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Very Liberal</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>atheist/realist/humanist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>50-74K</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>agnostic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>PhD/Professional</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>100-149K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Protestant/non-denominational Christian</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>26-33</td>
<td>Some Graduate</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>&lt;24K</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>_</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* "X" denotes the presence of an understanding, "_" denotes its absence, "n/a" denotes information not available.

Table 1: Demographic Information and Views on Stratification

Continued

287
Table 1 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labor Market Inequality</th>
<th>Division of Household Labor</th>
<th>Reproductive Choice</th>
<th>Male Privilege</th>
<th>Problems w/ Hegemonic Masculine Ideal</th>
<th>Inequality for Sexual Minorities</th>
<th>Heterosexual Privilege</th>
<th>Passive/Active Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>Passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

288