

'Not hiding, not shouting, just me': Gay men negotiate their visual identities

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Abstract

This study explored how British gay men make sense of their appearance and clothing practices, and the pressures and concerns they attend to in discursively negotiating their visual identities. A convenience sample of 20 mostly young, White and middle class self-identified gay men responded to a qualitative survey on dress and appearance. The participants clearly understood the rules of compulsory heterosexuality and the risks of looking ‘too gay’. In the data, there was both a strong resistance to the notion of gay as a ‘master status’ and an orientation to the ‘coming out’ imperative in gay communities. Analysis revealed the overriding importance of discourses of authentic individuality for making sense of visual identity and the reported cultivation of appearance and clothing practices that communicate the message that: ‘I’m not hiding (too closeted), I’m not shouting (too gay), I’m just me (an authentic individual who just happens to be gay)’.

Key words: Adornment, appearance, clothing, dress, compulsory heterosexuality, metrosexuality, qualitative research, qualitative survey, sissyphobia, thematic analysis

Introduction

Clothing is a cultural meaning system that serves an expressive as well as a practical function, communicating information about the wearer and their socio-cultural location (Rudd, 1996). Fashion theorists have argued that clothing has played an important part in articulating sexual desires and identities, particularly those associated with marginal sexualities that would otherwise be invisible, and in producing sexuality as an important aspect of identity (Entwistle, 2000; Wilson, 2003). Although identity formation and maintenance is a key concern of psychological research on gay men (Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs, 2010), little research has examined the visual aspects of gay men's identities (Cole,

2000; Hutson, 2010). Most research on gay male appearance has focused on heterosexuals' perceptions of gay male appearance, and gay men's body image and clothing consumption practices. As we now explore, research in these areas suggests that gay men face a range of appearance pressures.

Heterosexual Perceptions of Gay Male Appearance

A small body of research published in the late 1970s and 1980s explored heterosexuals' perceptions of gay male (and lesbian) appearance. This research examined the relationship between homophobic attitudes and gender atypical appearance and behaviour. Research generally found that male homosexuality was associated with feminine and physically unattractive men, and female homosexuality with masculine and physically unattractive women. Furthermore, homophobic participants were more likely to associate homosexuality with physical unattractiveness (Laner & Laner, 1979; 1980; Unger, Hilderbrand & Mader, 1982). This led one team of researchers to conclude that gay men and lesbians should adopt gender normative appearances to reduce the prejudiced attitudes of heterosexuals (Laner & Laner, 1980). More recent research on heterosexuals' perceptions of gay male and lesbian appearance has found that the accurate judgement of sexual orientation on the basis of visual cues is underpinned by a gender inversion model of homosexuality (Johnson, Gill, Reichman & Tassinari, 2007). Freeman, Johnson, Ambady and Rule (2010) showed that both computer-generated and real faces that were judged to be more gender inverted were more likely to be judged as gay or lesbian. Furthermore, the use of stereotypic gendered cues to judge sexual orientation increased the accuracy of perceiver judgements, except when judging photographs of gender atypical targets. Judgements of gender atypical targets were consistently less accurate than chance. Altogether, research on heterosexuals' perceptions of gay male appearance suggests that more feminine-appearing gay men are more visible to others and potentially more at risk of homophobia than gay men who appear more

gender-typical (Cameron, Collins & Hickson, 2009). As such, one of the concerns that gay men may orient to in negotiating their visual identities is a heteronormative pressure to avoid looking 'too gay'.

Gay Men's Body Image

As well as examining outsiders' perceptions of gay male appearance, research has also examined gay male appearance from an insider perspective (Clarke, Hayfield & Huxley, 2012). Research on gay men's body image was prompted by clinicians who observed that gay men were overrepresented in eating disorder treatment programmes (Atkins, 1998; Rothblum, 2002). Socio-cultural approaches to gay men's body image highlight the emphasis on physical appearance in the gay community (Batholome, Tewksbury & Bruzzone, 2000; Deaux & Hanna, 1984) and the lack of a critical discourse within gay male communities of the mesomorphic ideal (Wood, 2004). The mesomorphic somatotype combines muscularity and low body fat in a defined muscular but not too large body (Tylka & Andorka, 2012). Because of the idealisation of this somatotype, gay men are thought to experience both a drive for thinness and a drive for muscularity (Tiggemann, Martings & Kirkbride, 2007).

A meta-analytic review of 20 studies comparing gay and heterosexual men's body satisfaction found a small effect size, with heterosexual men slightly more satisfied with their bodies than gay men (Morrison, Morrison & Sager, 2004). However, many of the early studies included in this review used body image measures developed for and validated on women (Tylka & Andorka, 2012) that did not 'distinguish between 'bigness' due to fat and 'bigness' due to muscle mass' (Tiggemann et al., 2007: 15). As a result, according to Tiggemann et al. (2007), this review may *underestimate* the levels of body dissatisfaction gay men experience. However, Kane (2010) argued that this review is likely to *overstate* the extent of gay men's body image concerns because of methodological flaws in both the

original research and the meta-analysis. Among other criticisms, Kane noted that Morrison et al. did not code the 20 studies they reviewed for quality, and eight of the studies used problematic recruitment practices likely to result in samples with higher than average levels of body image concerns.

Some scholars are critical of the pathologisation of gay men in the body image literature and resulting reinforcement of stereotypes of gay men as obsessed with their appearance (e.g., Atkins, 1998; Duncan, 2007; Kane, 2009; 2010). Furthermore, it is argued that this literature tends to feminise gay men by simplistically equating gay men with heterosexual women, and thus, implicitly drawing on, and recycling, a gender inversion model of homosexuality (Kane, 2009). Nonetheless, the body image literature suggests that gay men face unique appearance-related pressures because of their desire to be attractive to other men (Tylka & Andorka, 2012), and these pressures may shape how gay men adorn their bodies. As such, another appearance pressure gay men may attend to in negotiating their visual identities is the pressure to conform to gay body ideals.

Gay Men's Clothing and Appearance Practices

Appearance research has also examined gay men's clothing and appearance practices. Because of gay men's supposed interest in clothing and grooming products (Rudd & Tedrick, 1994), and high levels of disposal incomes (see Freitas, Kaiser & Hammidi, 1996), consumer researchers have been particularly interested in the construction of gay identity through clothing and appearance (Reilly, Rudd & Hillery, 2008). The consumer studies literature indicates that different appearance aesthetics operate for gay and straight men (Rudd, 1996). Gay men show more 'fashion interest' and 'fashion awareness' than straight men, but are not necessarily involved in 'cutting-edge' fashion (Sha, Aung, Londerville & Ralston, 2007). Other research shows that being fashionable is important for being viewed as attractive, but

'leading-edge' fashion is associated with urban neighbourhoods dominated by gay men ('gay ghettos'), rather than the majority of gay men who are integrated into the wider society (Sha et al., 2007). Schofield and Schmidt (2005) argue that clothing is central to the development and maintenance of gay male identities, particularly in relation to developing a recognisable gay identity distinct from straight masculinity or developing a specific gay 'tribal' (or sub-cultural) identity (see also Freitas, Kaiser & Hammidi, 1996; Kates, 2002; Rudd, 1996). Gay tribal identities include identities such as the gay 'bear' identity – large (fat or muscular) hairy men who present an image of rugged masculinity (Hennen, 2005; Monaghan, 2005).

Outside of the consumer research literature only a handful of qualitative social psychological and sociological studies have explored gay men's narratives of their visual identities (see also Cole's [2000] social history of gay fashion). These are all small-scale studies – Clarke and Turner's (2007) sample includes 4 gay men, Huston's (2010) 9, and Holliday (1999; 2004) does not specify the number of gay male participants in her study, only that people in 'queer communities', including gay men, made 15 video-diaries. Both consumer and social science research has identified an 'effeminate' image as the visible marker of gay male sexuality in straight society. As such, many gay men have used 'effeminacy as a template for identity construction' (Schofield & Schmidt, 2005: 316; see also Cole, 2000) to affirm their developing gay identity and communicate it to others, and to gain entry to the gay scene. At the same time, for many gay men 'coming out' is associated with the freedom to express their sexuality, and freedom from heterosexual appearance pressures (Hutson, 2010; Kates, 2002). However, this 'freedom' is constrained by the operation of coercive appearance mandates on the gay scene and the importance of 'looking good' and 'looking the part', and the hegemony of 'tight shirts, tight pants, and a well-groomed presentation' (Hutson, 2010: 225; see also Clarke & Turner, 2007; Kates, 2002). Furthermore, expressing *individuality* (rather than sexuality) becomes more important as men

become more secure in their gay identity (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Schofield & Schmidt, 2002). Unsurprisingly, given the limited literature, the reliance on very small samples, and contextual variations in appearance norms, there have been calls for further research in this area (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005).

Overview of the Current Study

This study aims to contribute to the small body of literature on gay male clothing practices by exploring how gay men make meaning of their visual identities, and particularly, the concerns and pressures they attend to in discursively negotiating their visual identities. These include pressures to 'look good' and 'look the part', and look like an authentic individual, and the simultaneous risks associated with looking recognizably gay. Our interest is not with gay men's *actual* clothing practices, but rather with how gay men *explain* their clothing practices and visual identities in ways that 'makes sense' – can be heard as coherent and justifiable – in relation to the various pressures they face *as* gay men. As such, this research is informed by research on the social construction of visual identities (Clarke & Spence, 2013; Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and on the discursive negotiation of identity more broadly (Clarkson, 2006; Dickerson, 2000; Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2005). This tradition of research views identity work as a fundamentally *social* (rather than psychological) practice and seeks to examine the broader socio-cultural discourses that underpin individual accounts of identity.

Method

A convenience sample of 20 self-identified gay and bisexual men completed a qualitative survey about gay men's dress and appearance.

Qualitative surveys

Qualitative surveys are a relatively novel method. Although they lack the flexibility and organic qualities of interviews, such as opportunities to prompt and probe and follow up on anticipated insights, they nonetheless have unique advantages for qualitative researchers (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). In this study, qualitative surveys enabled the collection of sizeable data-set from a geographically dispersed and 'hidden' population. Furthermore, the potential greater anonymity afforded by qualitative surveys (the precise level of anonymity is determined by the distribution method), compared to face-to-face interviews, means that they are ideally suited to populations – such as some members of LGB communities – with concerns about anonymity (Clarke et al., 2010). Although survey data can be 'thin', and lack the depth and richness of interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the participant group was in general highly motivated, and many participants wrote detailed responses to the survey questions. The survey was developed on the basis of a review of the relevant literature and our own interests in conducting the research (see the Appendix for the survey completion instructions and main questions).

Participants and Recruitment

The participants were recruited in the UK through university LGBT student groups, UK-based gay websites, the University of the West of England (UWE) Department of Psychology participant pool, and snowballing through the authors' personal and professional networks. Participants recruited via the participant pool received a small amount of course credit. The participants were mostly gay, White and middle class university students/young adults. Eighteen identified as gay and two as bisexual. They were aged between 18 and 41; all but three were aged 18-25 years (mean age: 22). As such, they are arguably part of the 'post-closet' generation (Seidman, 2002) – individuals who have grown up in a period of increasing acceptance of homosexuality, in which many non-heterosexuals live outside of 'the closet' (Hutson, 2010). Seventeen identified as White, 1 as mixed-race and 1 as Chinese

(and 1 provided no demographic data other than sexuality and age). Thirteen identified as middle class, 5 as working class, 1 as upper class. We asked participants who they were 'out' to. All who answered this question were out to friends, and most were out to everyone or to their friends, to some or all of their family, and/or at university/work. We also asked the participants whether they were members of LGB groups and spent time on the gay 'scene'. About half of those who answered these questions said they were members of LGB groups and most said they spent time on the gay scene.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the UWE School of Life Sciences Ethics Committee. Potential participants were given information about the study and how their data would be used, and were asked to read and sign a consent form before completing the survey. Participants either completed a 'paper and pen' version of the survey (distributed and returned by hand or by post) or an electronic version (distributed and returned as an email attachment). The survey responses were typed up or cut and pasted into a Microsoft Word document and collated by question in preparation for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). At this stage, the data were not 'corrected' in any way (e.g., spelling and grammatical errors and typos were not amended). The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) approach to thematic analysis, which is comprised of 6 phases of coding and theme development. Because thematic analysis is theoretically flexible, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that researchers clearly specify the theoretical assumptions underpinning their analysis. Because of our interest in the discursive negotiation of gay male visual identities, our use of thematic analysis was underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology that views meaning as the product of social processes and interactions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burr, 2003).

The analysis was conducted by the first author who read and re-read the compiled data making a note of any initial analytic observations (TA phase 1). She then engaged in a process of systematic data coding, identifying features of the data relevant to the broad research question of 'how do gay men make sense of their clothing and appearance practices' (phase 2). Through coding and initial theme development, this question was refined to 'what concerns and appearances pressures do gay men attend to in making sense of their clothing and appearance practices?' As Braun and Clarke (2006) outline, coding happens at two main levels – semantic (the surface meaning of the data) and latent (the underlying meanings). Because the analysis was underpinned by a social constructionist theoretical framework, the analysis did not take the participants' accounts as face value (Burr, 2003), but rather employed a critical lens or 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to look beyond the data surface. The aim of the analysis was not to stay 'true' to how participants' made sense of their worlds, but to employ the researcher's interpretative resources to interrogate the assumptions, and systems of meaning, underpinning the participants' overt sense-making.

At this point, we also explored whether there were any meaningful differences in the accounts of the 2 bisexual participants compared to the rest of the sample. The only difference was that one of the bisexual participants felt invisible as *bisexual* man because of his membership of a gay male 'tribe'. When coding was completed, the codes were examined for broader patterns of meaning or 'candidate themes' (phase 3). After a process of review and refinement (phases 4 and 5), 1 over-arching theme, 2 main themes and 4 sub-themes were generated (see Table 1). The writing of this paper constituted the final phase (6) of analysis and involved selecting illustrative data extracts and the weaving together of theme definitions (5), and other analytic notes, into a coherent analytic narrative.

Results and Discussion

Our analytic process generated an over arching theme that captured the ways in which most of the participants made sense of their visual identity as ‘not hiding, not shouting, just me’ (this is presented as our analytic conclusion at the end of this section). Nested underneath this are two main themes: ‘the gay look’ (which includes the sub-themes ‘camp and trendy gay men: myth or reality?’ and ‘appearance matters on the gay scene’) and ‘the pleasures and dangers of looking gay’ (which includes the sub-themes ‘the pleasure of being myself’, the ‘pleasure of fitting in’, ‘the danger of the loss of individuality’ and ‘the danger of being [and looking] ‘too gay’’). The sub-themes form the substance of the analysis and each are illustrated with relevant data extracts. Spelling, grammatical, and other errors in the data have been corrected to aid the readability and comprehension of the data extracts. Each participant has been given a pseudonym and data extracts are tagged with the participant’s pseudonym, age and self-identified sexuality. Any editing of the data (to remove unnecessary detail, for example) is indicated by ‘[...]’. We do not provide frequency counts when reporting our results, but as a general rule, ‘few’ refers to less than a quarter of the participants, ‘some’ to less than a half, and ‘most’ to around two thirds or more.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The Gay ‘Look’

Our data supports the view that there are distinctive appearance norms in gay male sub-culture, which centre both on particular ‘looks’ or styles and on a strong investment in physical appearance. Gay men were often associated with femininity and camp, and with fashion and grooming; however, there were competing views on whether these associations reflect media stereotypes or have some basis in reality. Furthermore, some participants felt under pressure to conform to gay sub-cultural appearance mandates. We now explore the sub-

themes 'camp and trendy gay men: myth or reality?' and 'appearance matters on the gay scene' in more detail.

Camp and trendy gay men: Myth or reality? The most common image of gay men in the data was the camp gay man who, according to the participants, wore tightly fitted clothing that revealed and displayed his body to other men. He also wore colours conventionally linked to femininity ('bright colours' and 'a bit of pink', Stuart, 18, gay), and engaged in a level of styling and grooming typically associated with (heterosexual) women (Holliday, 2001). The camp gay man was described as 'flamboyant', 'loud' (Ed, 19, gay) and 'extravagant' (Martin, 32, gay), and as occasionally dabbling in drag:

A bit more girly than normal men, probably tight fitted jeans and t-shirts, looks less rugged than a straight man. (Chris, 21, gay)

Bleached hair, piercings with cropped tee-shirts (Adrian, 25, gay)

Tight t-shirts, likes to wear a lot of bright colours, sometimes cross dresses. (Stuart, 18, gay)

They looked like they were trying to be women, but weren't... as if being gay makes you want to be a woman. Very feminine mannerisms. (Sean, 19, gay)

For Sean, the camp gay man experienced a 'hermaphroditism of the soul' (Foucault, 1978: 43), and effeminacy was expressed both through the way in which the body was adorned and through gesture, body posture and gait. None of the men explicitly described themselves as camp in terms of clothing and styling, but a few described themselves as 'putting it out there' or looking recognisably gay (cf. Hutson, 2010). In addition, some actively chose to 'look the part', and conform to gay appearance mandates, when out on the gay scene (Clarke & Turner, 2007), or conceded that they may unconsciously 'camp it up' after a few drinks.

The other common image of gay men in the data was the styled, groomed and fashion conscious gay man (Clarke & Turner, 2007), the gay godfather of the 'metrosexual' straight man. The trendy gay man was clearly invested in his appearance:

Very well-groomed, neat in appearance, trendy and fashionable. (Jacob, 20, gay)

Clean shaven, not too many split ends basically like you take some pride in what you look like (Nick, 19, gay)

I think if I was straight I would be described as 'metrosexual' ... because I do like to look after my appearance! (Sean, 19, gay)

Whereas none of the men explicitly described themselves as camp in appearance, some reported 'taking pride' in their appearance, like Sean. Although not as feminine as the camp gay men, the trendy gay man is nonetheless more feminine than the conventionally masculine (heterosexual) man because of his engagement with 'feminine' practices such as fashion and grooming. Both the camp and the trendy gay man were implicitly and explicitly contrasted with the 'ruggedly' masculine straight man. The 'manly' man had an altogether more 'sober' (Martin, 32, gay), or scruffy (Kates, 2002), appearance, and wore baggy clothes and the dark colours associated with hetero-masculinity (Holliday, 1999). According to the participants, for the 'rugged' straight man, the practical and functional aspects of clothes are key, rather than their aesthetic qualities.

As Kates (2002: 389) argued, 'the stereotype of the heterosexual slob is a useful fiction' for gay men in constructing a (positive) visual identity, distinct from that of heterosexual men. Indeed, identity work often hinges on contrasts between the self and others (Dickerson, 2000). The participants deployed the categories 'camp gay man', 'trendy gay man' and 'straight slob' as contrasts to their more 'measured' engagement with gay

appearance norms. Furthermore, signalling what they were not was just as, if not more, important in negotiating their visual identities, than articulating what they were.

The participants were divided over whether the camp gay man and the trendy gay man were simply media perpetuated stereotypes or had some basis in reality. For some they were media creations. In the following quotations Josh refers to the original British version of *Queer as Folk*, set in an urban gay ghetto, and Eric to the 1970s and 1980s British sitcom *Are You Being Served*, which is famous for the camp and effeminate character Mr Humphries:

The stereotypical gay men portrayed on TV, wearing tight leather trousers, skin tight shirts screaming things like 'oh my god', being really camp, always shopping, wearing the latest fashion and having perfectly styled hair. (Michael, 22, gay)

Stereotypical like on TV programmes such as *Queer as Folk* etc. e.g. tight t-shirts, bleached/dyed hair, fashionable etc. (Josh, 19, gay)

The kind of men you see on TV, like *Are You Being Served*. Very camp and effeminate. (Eric, 20, gay)

There was a striking contrast in some of the men's accounts between this 'pre-conceived idea' (Adrian, 25, gay) of what gay men look like and 'normal every-day gay men' (Adam, 22, gay), who look 'like everybody else' (Alek, 23, bisexual) (Schofield & Schmidt, 2002):

I've never really seen gay people as being any different to any other person. (James, 21, gay)

All individuals are different [...] Everyone is different, so I did not believe there was any point in stereotyping. (Berni, 21, gay)

For participants like Adam, Alek and James, 'normal' (straight-acting) gay men are not marked by their appearance and their clothing practices are not integral to their gay

identity. George (40, bisexual) and Tom (18, gay) also viewed the camp and trendy images as media stereotypes, but this was because they had 'always known' gay men (George, 40, bisexual), so they had 'insider knowledge' of what *real* gay men look like before coming out as gay themselves. Others had 'no *real* images of what an average gay man would look like' (Berni, 21, gay; emphasis added), and 'no *real* source of reference for what was and wasn't 'gay'' (James, 21, gay; emphasis added), before coming out and meeting other gay men, and thus did not regard the media as a reliable source of information on what real gay men look like. However, a few thought that media images of the camp queen and the gay style guru were based on the reality of the gay scene. For Adrian (25, gay), his 'worst nightmare' was a club full of camp gay men: 'The typical gay club is full of men dressed like my worst nightmare, unfortunately'.

Appearance matters on the gay scene. There was a broad consensus in the data that appearance matters in the gay community, and gay men are generally more invested in appearance than straight men (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010; Kates, 2002):

Most of my gay friends stick to one sub-culture in their preferences towards gay men, and that is the current EMO trend. (Tom, 18, gay)

There is a lot of fashion attitudes on the gay club scene and if you don't look a certain way then you won't 'fit in' to that crowd. (Josh, 19, gay)

One of the ways the emphasis on appearance on the gay scene was evident was, as Josh noted, through the policing of appearance norms (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Holliday, 1999; Hutson, 2010; Kates, 2002). Some participants discussed the importance of 'fitting in' with appearance mandates and, as noted above, actively managing their appearance to look gayer (a Greebo is a person who listens to rock music and does not follow fashion trends):

I was around the gay scene more so wasn't really where I could wear Goth / Greebo type clothing without looking really odd. (Nick, 19, gay)

Some of the men discussed making changes to their appearance after coming out as gay and 'going out on the gay scene' (Jacob, 20, gay) (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010). For some, these changes involved 'tak[ing] more care' (Mark, 24, gay) over clothing and grooming. For others, like Tom, the changes involved conforming to the thinness ideal within the gay community in order to secure a 'second look':

I have also joined a gym and gone on diets to make myself thinner as in this modern day world no one really give you a second look unless you are the size of a cotton bud. This has also made me a lot more happy in myself as well. [...] Most gay men want the typical stereotypes of gay men. (Tom, 18, gay)

As well as having the 'right' clothes, the men also had to have the 'right' body under their clothes, particularly if their clothes displayed and revealed their body to other men. The participants mentioned two body ideals – the 'small, thin guy' (Tom, 18, gay) (c.f. Kates, 2002) and the 'big burly muscle man' (Tom, 18, gay).

Some participants mentioned the mainstreaming of gay style, and the emergence of the 'metrosexual' straight man, and questioned whether an interest in style and grooming remained a distinctly gay concern (Clarke & Turner, 2007):

I have used hair products which I didn't used to do, but I see straight men using those too [...] A lot of straight guys dress cool to go out, so it's difficult to tell who is gay and who is just trying to look good for the ladies. (Adam, 22, gay)

In this day and age, with role models like David Beckham, more straight men are comfortable dressing smartly and taking care of themselves. (Mark, 24, gay)

I do think that these days many straight people like to take care of their appearance.

(Stuart, 18, gay)

The figure of the metrosexual allowed the participants to signal an interest in clothing and grooming (and so conform to gay appearance mandates) without that marking them out as different from (and inferior to) straight men.

Very few of the participants were overtly critical of the emphasis on 'looking good' on the gay scene. Some were critical but nonetheless signalled an investment in gay appearance mandates. For example, Mark (24, gay) described gay men as 'a very shallow bunch sometimes!' but emphasised the importance of appearance and looking good. Similarly, Tom (18, gay) highlighted the narrowness and extreme nature of gay body ideals (being 'the size of a cotton bud' or being 'a big burly muscle man') and criticised gay men's investment in appearance ('too many gay men these days are too fashion orientated'), but emphasised the importance of conforming to the thin ideal in order to secure a 'second look' and to feel better about himself.

To summarise the theme 'the gay 'look'', the participants made sense of 'looking (recognisably) gay' in terms of conforming to the image of the camp and trendy gay man and/or being invested in physical appearance. We now consider the pleasures and the 'dangers' that the participants identified in looking gay.

The Pleasures and Dangers of Looking Gay

Participants identified two main pleasures of conforming to gay appearance mandates: (1) feeling 'free' to express their sexuality through their appearance and achieving congruence between their inner and outer selves; and (2) the pleasure of belonging to, and being an authentic member of, the gay community. However, there was far more emphasis on the dangers or risks of conformity to appearance mandates. These risks centred on: (1) the

potential loss of individuality resulting from conformity to gay sub-cultural norms (Clarke & Spence, 2013); and (2) the potential for looking 'too gay' and being a 'bad gay'; a gay man for whom his sexuality has become a 'master status' (Becker, 1963), eclipsing all other aspects of his identity. We now explore these sub-themes in more detail.

The pleasure of being myself. In line with existing research (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010; Schofield & Schmidt, 2002), the main pleasure the participants described in conforming to the gay look was achieving a fit between their 'inner self-values' and 'external appearance' (Hutson, 2010: 220). Some spoke of actively making changes to their appearance after coming out, and for many of these participants the changes were in accordance with the 'gay look' discussed above. These changes included: looking neater; wearing bright colours; and 'tighter, fitted clothes' (Jacob, 20, gay); accessorising ('I own an extensive [...] scarf and sunglasses collection', Jacob, 20, gay); having tattoos and piercings (particularly those coded as gay); straightening and dying their hair; and in general displaying more of an interest in fashion and style (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010). These changes reflected the freedom the men experienced to be (and to express) themselves:

I feel more comfortable in what I wear and I feel I can dress in a more neat way and I can experiment with different clothes as well. (Stuart, 18, gay)

I'm more comfortable about wearing clothes than indicate I'm gay than I was before [...] before I was ready to come out, I'd never have dared wear anything that [might] indicate I was anything other than straight. (James, 21, gay)

Shortly after coming out I began dying my hair, wearing flared trousers, tight tee-shirts and having my navel and nipples pierced. Also had a star tattooed on my hip. [...] I felt that after coming out, I had a blank canvas on which I could 'create' a new me. (Adrian, 25, gay)

For a few of the participants, coming out as gay or bisexual gave them the freedom to resist heteronormative constructions of masculinity and to change their gender presentations (Hutson, 2010), adorning their bodies in ways that marked them as gay. Furthermore, as the quotations from Stuart and James indicate, many spoke of feeling more comfortable in their clothes; however, this was not a physical feeling of comfort but rather a *psychological* one, resulting from closing the gap between their inner and outer selves (Holliday, 1999).

'Dressing gay' was also a way to signal the participants' comfort with their homosexuality, especially in gay contexts (Clarke & Turner, 2007), and when feeling particularly 'out and proud' (Chris, 21, gay). However, very few participants discussed the political dimensions of visibility (Freitas et al., 1996), and the importance of communicating sexuality to the wider world and standing out as different (cf. Hutson, 2010; Schofield & Schmidt, 2002). Jacob, Sean and James were exceptions:

Very comfortable with my sexuality so it's good to 'put it out there' and show other people I'm comfortable. Perhaps a political element, higher visibility = higher awareness. (Jacob, 20, gay)

I am proud to be gay... and I want other people to know I'm proud... and I want other gay men to know I'm gay! (Sean, 19, gay)

If I'm in a situation where I'm making a political statement, and may wish to be more obvious about it (James, 21, gay)

In general, as we discuss further below, there were rather negative views expressed about gay men who 'put it out there' and toward the desire (or 'need', as it was often framed) to 'show everyone in the world I'm gay' (Michael, 22, gay), or to 'advertise' sexuality.

The pleasure of fitting in. Looking gay also allowed the participants to 'fit in' on the gay scene, and be an authentic member of the wider gay community. Thus, 'dressing gay'

afforded both a feeling of belonging and a way of managing the appearance pressures on the gay scene (Hutson, 2010; Kates, 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2002). Moreover, dressing gay allowed the men to secure the right kind of 'second look' from other men when out on the scene – a cruising gaze that conveyed sexual interest (and confirmed that they 'fit'), rather than a policing or disciplining gaze, that signalled a failure to 'fit' (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Holliday, 1999):

How other gay men dress rubs off on other gay men... like the fashion thing, if other men are all wearing one thing, then automatically you will want to wear it if you think it suits you! [...] To look good and to feel good... and to look similar to my friends so we all fit in together... and to impress other men of course, I want other men to like me!!" (Sean, 19, gay)

Sean's response signals the importance for some of the men of looking like the men they desire (Holliday, 2001). These men discussed evaluating other men's appearance and seeking to emulate the clothing choices of the men they found most desirable, in order to be desirable to those men (Holliday, 2001):

I liked the way some other gay man was dressed. I would incorporate that into my own 'style' [...] I'd want to appeal to other men and fit myself in to an attractive image. (Ed, 19, gay)

I think that other men look sexy in good clothes, and so that makes me feel good wearing nice clothes. (Peter, 41, gay)

Thus, the participants learnt what was stylish and attractive by looking at other men (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Kates, 2002). Looking gay also provided an indirect way of coming out, and signalling sexual availability to other men, and avoiding the social awkwardness of verbal declarations (Holliday, 2004).

The participants described a number of 'dangers' or risks associated with looking gay. As previous research has highlighted, one of the most obvious risks associated with looking gay is exposure to prejudice and discrimination (Cameron et al., 2009; Freitas et al., 1996). However, only one participant highlighted the risk of being vulnerable to verbal abuse and physical assault:

I'd rather not appear gay because I don't want any hassle or trouble off people. Especially if I'm out in town and there are lots of drunks guys. I feel very vulnerable. (Ed, 19, gay).

Most of the dangers the participants highlighted were psychological rather than physical in nature. We now discuss these psychological dangers or threats to identity.

The danger of the loss of individuality. There was a clear orientation in the data to the loss of individuality associated with conformity to gay appearance mandates (Kates, 2002). Very few men indicated conformity to gay appearance norms without some sort of caveat attached. Many indicated that they liked the clothes they wore and that they were an authentic expression of their inner self. Thus, signalling the importance of being true to oneself (Vannii & Franzese, 2008). Tom and Sean provided vivid examples of this:

I do admit I have taken things from different sub cultures I like to make it seem as if I were following the latest trends, but at the end of the day I have changed 'cus I have really like what I have seen. [...] if I did that [use clothes and appearance to emphasise my sexuality] I wouldn't have my individuality. I don't go out of my way to buy this that and the other, if I do like it sure I will buy it but I don't go out of my way to emphasise my sexuality. (Tom, 18, gay)

Yes A LOT [made changes to my appearance after coming out]! I have definitely paid more attention to how I look... because you have to really as a gay man if you want

other men to like you. It's like other communities I suppose... you have to conform to a certain extent if you want to fit in... I'm sure other groups are exactly the same. So I don't feel bad about changing my appearance... I've enjoyed it, and I like keeping up with the trends. (Sean, 19, gay)

Note that Sean attended to a potential criticism of changing his appearance after coming out ('I don't feel bad about changing my appearance'). We can speculate that this might be centred on the loss of individuality and authenticity resulting from conformity to appearance mandates. The fact that Sean emphasised his enjoyment in the changes he has made, and in being 'on trend', suggests that conformity to 'fit in', without this reflecting an authentic desire or part of the inner self, is problematic. Similarly, Tom (who explicitly contrasted emphasising sexuality and individuality) accounted for his conformity to appearance mandates in terms of *appearing* to conform, but really he was expressing his authentic desires. He was also careful to state that he does not make a special effort ('go out of his way') to conform to appearance mandates. This lack of 'a huge special effort' (Chris, 21, gay) to look gay was echoed elsewhere in the data, and it suggested that if the men *happened* to look gay this was an expression of their authentic self rather than a deliberate and effortful cultivation of conformity. An emphasis on 'being themselves' and liking the clothes they wore, and an implicit or explicit denial of 'sheep-like' conformity, was also common. There was a relentless 'quest for authenticity' (Kates & Belk, 2001: 419) in the men's accounts of their clothing practices:

I have learnt over the years not to wear clothes purely because of fashion, but because I enjoy wearing them. [...] I also love to wear natural fabrics that feel good, such as cotton and corduroy. (Peter, 41, gay)

If I am going out for the night, I will make more of an effort and try and buy into the fashion as set by the high street stores but normally because I like the clothes – not so that I 'fit in' with anyone else. (Josh, 19, gay)

Another caveat attached to conformity was, as noted above, *choosing* to 'look the part' (Kates, 2002). Some of the men discussed knowingly and strategically conforming to gay appearance mandates ('camping it up') when out on the gay scene:

I don't think I am [visibly gay] – except occasionally when I go out and 'look the part'! (Josh, 19, gay)

Sometimes though if I'm going to a gay club I might dress a bit more gay. (Andy, 23, gay)

It's fair to say I enjoy 'camping it up' on a gay day! (Adrian, 25, gay)

Those men who *had* made changes to their appearance after coming out managed a potential conformist positioning, and a subsequent loss of individuality, by highlighting other reasons for the changes they had made. Tom initially conceded that the changes he had made to his appearance were the result of coming out 'on some levels', but concluded his answer by stating that coming out was not the real reason for the changes:

On some levels I would say it is due to me coming out but I also felt these feelings that I should better myself appearance wise anyway, so this was really a good push into doing just that. But I would honestly say that it wasn't really the fact that I came out that I have made these changes. (Tom, 18, gay)

Others constructed the changes they had made as part of a broader process of growing up and 'searching for identity' during teenage years. For example:

I came out at the same time as I went to university, so I was doing a lot of growing up anyway. It certainly wasn't just because I was gay, although that was of course part of it; I was discovering who I was and establishing my own identity (Mark, 23, gay)

Men who reported making no changes to their appearance after coming out and meeting other gay men emphasised the importance of (psychological) comfort and being true to themselves, rather than 'following the herd':

I've never been much of a one for following the herd and I certainly won't change the way I am just to fulfil some arbitrary quota. I am who I am and you can like it or not. (Mark, 24, gay)

I know some gay men like to dress fashionable all the time and think they have to have the latest trends. But you can choose to ignore it and just dress however you want. [...] For comfort and style, I pick clothes that suit me and that I will feel comfortable wearing. [...] I dress how I want to dress, I don't dress according to a gay man stereotype. (Eric, 20, gay)

I haven't learnt anything from others. I have made my own decisions about what to wear. [...] I feel more comfortable dressing in what I like. Gay men all have different tastes, I've learnt that. (Andy, 23, gay)

These men retained a strong sense of individuality by positioning themselves as rebelling against, and refusing to conform to, gay appearance mandates (see also Duncan, 2007). They positioned themselves as free agents, unbound by social pressures (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Holliday, 2001) and 'completely *socially dislocated*' (Gill et al., 2005: 14, emphasis in original). Contrasts with other (gay) men were common; the men compared their independent choices with those of 'sheep-like' conformist gay men who have forsaken their personal agency and become consumed by the gay scene (Kates, 2002). The image of the

conformist gay man (like the image of the heterosexual slob and the metrosexual) functioned as a useful discursive tool for some of the men in negotiating a sense of an authentic visual identity. Finally, according to some of the participants, the gay *norm* was (ironically) 'being yourself' and expressing your 'individualised styles' (Jacob, 20, gay) (Freitas et al., 1996; Kates, 2002).

The danger of being (and looking) 'too gay'. Related to the risk of the loss of individuality the other main risk highlighted in the data was the danger of being and looking 'too gay'. Camp was clearly aligned with being and looking 'too gay' (Kates, 2002), and with sexuality becoming a 'master status' (Becker, 1963); a lens through which all other aspects of the personality was filtered. Some of the men emphasised that other aspects of their personality and personal interests shaped their clothing and appearance practices, and throughout the data the men emphasised that their sexuality was only one aspect of their personality:

I make no secret of my orientation, but it is only part of my complex and multifaceted identity. (George, 40, bisexual)

There are many other aspects to me that are important. Being gay isn't the only one. (Stuart, 18, gay)

I want to be taken as I am, not by the definition of my sexual preference – I'd rather people judge me based on my personality, than assume my sexual orientation by my clothes. (Berni, 21, gay)

One of the dangers of being too gay was flouting the rules of compulsory heterosexuality and being a 'dangerous queer' rather than a 'good gay' (Smith, 1994). The good gay adopts an assimilationist position in relation to heteronormativity and conforms to the rules of compulsory heterosexuality; they 'know their place'. Dangerous queers 'flaunt' or are 'militant' or 'missionary' about their identity' (Millibank, 1992):

I don't need to wave the flag to be gay. Besides, one of the things people don't like about some elements of the gay community is the way some of us throw our sexuality around and make bold statements about it. I'm not the kind of person to go round wearing a T-shirt that says 'I'm not gay, but my boyfriend is'. (James, 21, gay)

I personally do not want to come across as stereotypically gay as I feel sometimes the 'scene' and archetypal gay people are too OTT [over the top]. (Ed, 19, gay)

The gay slogan t-shirt is, as Kates (2000: 499) noted, 'battle gear', a way of communicating gay pride and rage at the oppressive status quo. For most of our participants such items of clothing were simply 'too gay'.

Not Hiding, Not Shouting, Just Me

Just as one of the risks of conforming to gay appearance mandates is the loss of individuality, one of the dangers of an emphasis on individuality is the failure to conform to the 'coming out imperative' (Rasmussen, 2004). Coming out is often viewed as necessary in order to be considered a 'happy, healthy homosexual' (Kitzinger, 1987) with a mature, fully developed and integrated gay identity (Cass, 1979). Thus, some of the men who positioned themselves as 'straight-acting', or who did not conform to gay appearance mandates, emphasised that they were not ashamed of their sexuality and oriented to potential critiques that they were deliberately concealing it from others:

I'm very straight acting because that's who I am – it's not a pretence (Mark, 24, gay)

I don't want to paint myself as 'gay' even though I'm not ashamed of it. It doesn't need to be advertised. I am very open with my sexuality, now (Stuart, 18, gay)

I'm not ashamed of who I am, but I don't feel the need to show everyone in the world I'm gay. (Michael, 22, gay)

Ironically Mark constructed his 'straight-acting' look as an authentic expression of his inner self. Stuart contrasted being open about his sexuality with the extreme act of 'advertising' it to others, or being 'too gay' (Kates, 2000: 500), and thus used the image of the 'flaming' gay man as a tool to construct his 'ordinary' gay identity. This account of being 'gay, but not too gay' captures the way most of the participants made sense of their visual identities. They were not 'shouting' (too gay), nor were they hiding (too closeted); they were just being themselves – ordinary men who happened to be gay.

General Discussion

The participants attended to a range of competing pressures and concerns in negotiating their visual identities – including pressures to 'look good', to be out and open about their sexuality, to 'look the part' (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010), to remain individual (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005), and to avoid looking 'too gay' (Kates, 2002). It is important to note many men identified *both* pleasures and dangers in looking gay, and for some there was a sense of vacillation between the pleasures and dangers. The way most of the participants made sense of their visual identity – as 'not hiding, not shouting, just me' – arguably reflects the final stage of Cass's (1979) classic 6 stage-model of homosexual identity formation. 'Identity synthesis' is achieved when homosexuality is integrated with other aspects of identity and is viewed as an important, but not primary, aspect of identity. Gay men who 'advertise' their sexuality could be said to be at stage five – 'identity pride' – in which gay identity is paramount. Whereas Hutson's (2010: 223; see also Schofield & Schmidt, 2002) participants all felt 'comfortable appearing as readably gay', our participants, like those in Clarke and Turner's (2007) study, were mostly reluctant to communicate their sexuality through their appearance because this was associated with a failure of individuality. They indicated that clothing choices should ideally reflect one's 'self-values' (Hutson, 2010), however, the knowing cultivation of a gay 'look' for certain contexts

was deemed acceptable. Our participants' accounts of their identities placed a huge emphasis on the importance of being an authentic individual, reflecting the accounts in Gill et al.'s (2005) research on young men's bodily practices. Gill et al.'s (2005: 21) descriptions of their participants' accounts as 'saturated by the assumption of individualism' and 'structured by a *grammar of individualism*' (emphasis in original) are equally applicable to our data. Furthermore, Gill et al.'s (2005: 9) observation that their participants were united by a somewhat paradoxical 'conviction that they were *different* from other men' (emphasis in original) is also an apt description of our participants' stories. In negotiating a position of authentic individuality our participants drew on, and often distanced themselves from, different categories of gay and straight men. The two most commonly deployed images of gay men were the camp gay man and the trendy gay man.

The trendy gay man is an image evident in much consumer research on gay male appearance (Kates, 2002; Rudd, 1996). Many of our participants' accounts reflected those in Clarke and Turner's (2007) study, which indicated that clothing is not always a reliable indicator of a man's sexuality. This is arguably the result of wider shifts in heterosexual men's relationships with their clothed and unclothed bodies (Edwards, 1997; Mort, 1996; Nixon, 1996), and the mainstreaming of gay style (Freitas et al., 1996; Rudd, 1996). The term 'metrosexual' (sometimes spelt 'meterosexual'), a combination of metropolitan and heterosexual, was coined by the British journalist Mark Simpson in an article in *The Independent* newspaper in 1994 to capture the emergence of a new type of man, one who is heavily invested in his appearance. It has been argued that the metrosexual is part of a broader trend of men having more feminised relationships to their clothed and unclothed bodies (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). The increasing visibility and popularity of metrosexual style (the British footballer David Beckham is widely regarded as the metrosexual 'poster boy') meant that, as our participants indicated, gay men now use speech, gesture, body posture and

gait to read sexuality rather than clothing. Interestingly, research examining the accuracy of people's judgements of sexual orientation has shown that the most accurate judgements of men's sexual orientation are based on video clips, which show 'dynamic nonverbal behaviour' such as gestures, rather than static aspects of appearance such as dress (Ambady, Hallahan & Conner, 1999). The image of the metrosexual straight man permitted our participants to signal an investment in fashion and grooming without appearing 'too gay'. The participants' accounts of the emphasis on appearance in the gay community endorse the findings of social-cultural research on gay men's body image (Wood, 2004). In particular, the idealisation of both thinness and the muscularity associated with hyper-masculinity (Clarkson, 2006) supports the finding that gay men experience both a drive for thinness and a drive for muscularity (Tiggemann et al., 2007).

Echoing previous research on gay men's appearance (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010; Kates, 2002; Schofield & Schmidt, 2005), and the historical association of male homosexuality with femininity (Clarkson, 2006; Cole, 2000; Nardi, 2000), the most common images of gay men in the data was the camp and effeminate gay man. This category of gay man was often presented by the participants as extreme and 'too gay'; and as something most of the participants actively sort to distance themselves from. In an analysis of discourse on Straight-Acting.com, Clarkson (2006) noted a similar contrast between straight acting gay men ('everyday Joes') and camp gay men ('pissy, bitchy queens') (see also Sha et al., 2007). As Nardi (2000: 5) noted, the role of effeminate men in political struggles and media images has often been questioned, and complaints about such gay men 'ruining the struggle for equal rights' are commonplace. There was more than a hint of what has variously been described as 'sissyphobia' (Bergling, 2001; 2006) or 'femiphobia' (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012) – negative attitudes towards feminine men (Clarkson, 2006) – in the data. A number of masculinity scholars have noted a hierarchical organisation of gay masculinities based on the valorisation

of hyper-masculinity (Levine, 1998; Nardi, 2000). Explanations for sissyphobia or anti-effeminacy vary – one explanation is that it reflects negative feelings about being gay or ‘internalised homophobia’ (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012). For example, Sánchez & Vilain (2012) found that most of the gay men they surveyed rated masculinity (for themselves and their partner) as important and wished their behaviour was less masculine and more feminine. There was also a relationship between anti-effeminacy and negative feelings about being gay. Such explanations seem to be underpinned by the assumption that self-loving gay men are willing gender non-conformists.

Other explanations suggest that privileged forms of gay male masculinities, like normative (straight) masculinity, ‘depend upon the subjugation of women and non-straight-acting men’ (Clarkson, 2006: 192; see also Nardi, 2000). In deriding looking ‘too gay’ (Kates, 2002), our participants clearly communicated that they understood and conformed to the rules of compulsory heterosexuality, and the importance of adopting conventional gender identities and adhering to heterosexual norms (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). The notion of a ‘post-closet’ generation (Seidman, 2002) connotes images of freedom from constraint; however, discourses of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity acted as powerful constraints for our participants in constructing their visual identities.

Limitations of the Study

This study, like other research on gay male appearance (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010), is limited by its reliance on a relatively privileged sample of predominantly young gay men. This group may negotiate their visual identities in ways that are specific to their social positioning as predominantly young, white, middle class gay men. Other groups – for example, bisexual men, and older, non-White and working class gay (and bisexual) men – may attend to different concerns and pressures in negotiating their visual identities. Our sample included only two bisexual men and only one other study on LGB visual identities

has included any male bisexual participants (Holliday, 1999). One of our bisexual participants indicated that his conformity to the appearance norms of a gay male 'tribe' (gay bear) rendered him invisible as a bisexual man. Research on bisexuality more broadly indicates invisibility is a common theme (Barker & Langdridge, 2008). Thus, further research should explore whether invisibility constitutes an additional pressure that bisexual men attend to in negotiating their visual identities.

There was little emphasis on gay tribes in the data, and only a few participants articulated a tribal identity (such as gay bear); this may reflect the fact that our participants were younger than those in Schofield and Schmidt (2005)'s study. Indeed, most appearance research has relied on samples of university students (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Hutson, 2010; Rudd, 1996); however, students typically have access to less discretionary income than professionals and may have less access to gay 'tribes' or subcultures (unless they attend university near an urban gay ghetto), both of which may impact on their appearance and clothing practices, and the ways in which they negotiate their visual identities.

Explorations of non-White gay male masculinities (Eguchi, 2011; Han, 2009) indicate that non-White gay men's negotiation of their visual identities involves the management of gay racial stigma in addition to appearance pressures around 'looking good' and 'looking the part'. Furthermore, some studies have hinted at the role of social class in gay style (Clarke & Turner, 2007; Freitas et al., 1996; Holliday, 1999), but there has been little sustained examination of the ways in which social class shapes gay men's appearance and clothing practices, and the image of the affluent DINK (double income, no kids) gay household persists in the gay consumer literature (Freitas et al., 2006). Future research on gay and bisexual men's appearance practices should focus on the experience of men who occupy alternative or stigmatised masculine identities within the gay community, and the intersections of age, race and social class in the negotiation of visual identities.

In conclusion, the participants attended to a range of competing pressures in negotiating and making sense of their visual identities. Most of the participants managed simultaneous and competing pressures to conform to gay appearance mandates and a coming out imperative, and to present themselves as an authentic individual. They did so by telling a story of their visual identity as not concealing or hiding their sexuality, nor shouting about it. They were not too closeted, nor too gay; they were simply ordinary men who happened to be gay. This position of 'gay, but not too gay' was contrasted with the 'too gay, gay man' who exhibits sheep-like conformity to gay appearance mandates and the straight slob, who is insufficiently invested in their appearance. As such, being 'gay, but not too gay' can be viewed as a mid-point on a continuum between these two extremes of male embodiment. In this way, the participants carved out for themselves a visual identity that 'made sense' in relation to the competing pressures they faced; a visual identity that was both ordinary and individual.

More broadly, these findings raise questions about what it means to be *openly* gay for young gay men in contemporary British society. This supposed 'post-closet' generation group of young men were clearly constrained by heteronormative discourses of compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. As such, it is important for research to examine not only how instances of overt homophobia shape the lives of gay men, but also how more subtle discourses of compulsory heterosexuality inhibit the ways in which gay men articulate their identities.

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Table 1: Overview of themes and sub-themes

Overarching theme	Not hiding, not shouting, just me		Example of data	'I'm not ashamed of who I am, but I don't feel the need to show everyone in the world I'm gay' (Michael)	
Main themes	(1) The gay look	Examples of data		(2) The pleasures and dangers of looking gay	Examples of data
Sub-themes	-Camp and trendy gay men: myth or reality?	-'Very well-groomed, neat in appearance, trendy and fashionable' (Jacob)	-The pleasure of being myself	-'I feel more comfortable in what I wear and I feel I can dress in a more neat way' (Stuart)	
			-The pleasure of fitting in	-'to look similar to my friends so we all fit in together... and to impress other men of course' (Sean)	
	-Appearance matters on the gay scene	-'There is a lot of fashion attitudes on the gay club scene' (Josh)	-The danger of the loss of individuality	-'I dress how I want to dress, I don't dress according to a gay man stereotype' (Eric)	
			-The danger of being (and looking) 'too gay'	-'There are many other aspects to me that are important. Being gay isn't the only one' (Stuart)	

Appendix: The Qualitative Survey on Gay Men's Dress and Appearance

Instructions – please read carefully

- To complete this survey you must be a gay man aged 16 or over.
 - If there are any questions that you'd prefer not to answer, please leave blank.
 - If you run out of space, please continue on the back of the survey and clearly indicate which question you are responding to.
 - Please answer the questions as honestly and fully as possible.
 - Thank you for taking part in our research – We hope it is a fun and enjoyable experience!
- 1) Before you came out as a gay man (to yourself and/or to others) what did you think the average gay man looked like?
 - 2) Have you many any changes in your appearance after coming out as a gay man?
Please explain.
 - 3) Were these changes because of coming out as a gay man? Please explain.
 - 4) What have you learned from other gay men about what a gay man 'should' look like?
 - 5) Why do you dress as you do?
 - 6) Please describe your favourite outfit.
 - 7) How recognisable or visible as a gay man are you in terms of your appearance?
 - 8) Is it important to you to be recognisable or visible as a gay man in terms of your appearance? Please explain.
 - 9) How important are other people's impressions of you (based on your appearance)?
 - 10) Do you make judgements about other people's sexuality based on their appearance?
 - 11) Do you use clothes and appearance to emphasise your sexuality?
 - 12) Do you use clothes and appearance to de-emphasise your sexuality?

13) Is there anything else you'd like to add? Anything we should have asked about but didn't?