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## **Conceptual and Spatial Migrations: Rural Gay Men's Quest for Identity**

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### **Chapter Abstract**

This chapter explores the link between the construction of sexual identity, expressions of masculinity and mobility practices between rural and urban spaces in two countries, France and the United States. These countries are used for comparative study because both constitute postindustrial societies where rural spaces have undergone significant changes, and whose rural spaces are sources of rural romanticism promoting heterosexuality and marginalizing other sexual orientations. Also, while both countries manifest diversity in rural areas, heterosexual norms and traditional masculinities continue to culturally define them.

Based on the life narratives of 30 self-identified rural gay men, this chapter defines how gay men (mostly White working- or middle- class) build their sense of self through back-and-forth movements between urban and rural settings. By contrasting French and American case studies, we present the significant, but nonetheless ambivalent, role of the city in the building of their sexual identity. We argue that the sexual identity construction of our research participants does not happen through experience in the city, but rather, it is a process occurring through their movement within and between rural and urban spaces. In conclusion, we highlight, in contrast to previous studies, that the impetus to rural return for these men is based in the adapted values, traditions and representations of the rural space.

### **Introduction**

Migration is a process of distancing, both conceptually and spatially, and includes not only departure but return (Annes and Redlin, 2011; Gorman-Murray, 2007). That is, migration is integrally involved with both the rejection and formation of identity, and the

disposal and retention of one's life experiences across space and time. It is culturally formed, but individually driven.

This contribution is based on a larger study examining the intersecting role of gender, sexuality, and space in shaping rural gay men's subjective identity. We examine not only factors such as race, ethnicity, age, and class, but also incorporate geographic location as a decisive factor in constituting identity (Andrews, 2009; Inness, 2004; Knopp, 2006). Here, the notion of the "quest for identity" is central to our argument. Following, Knopp (2004), we define it as "personal journeys through space and time ... that are constructed internally as being about the search for an integrated wholeness as individual humans living in some kind of community (if not society)" (2004, 123). Moreover, "it is an effort to create order out of the chaos that is fractured identity combined with structures of power that discipline ... identity" (2004, 124). Following this argument, we acknowledge that "quests for identity" are a common phenomenon for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals in general, and for rural gay men, in particular.

In interviews with self-identified rural gay men in both France and the United States our research participants struggled with their homosexual desires and experienced difficulty in creating themselves as integrated persons—that is, both gay and rural. Disciplined by heteronormative rural spaces, our participants, in their "quest for identity," encountered challenges. In order to overcome these challenges, most of these men followed two distinct strategies. That is, they conceptually and emotionally distanced themselves from the images and the actions of effeminate gay men, and they temporarily and spatially distanced themselves from the heteronormative place where they grew up.

## **Research Population**

The informants were 30 self-identified rural gay men—15 grew up in the North American Great Plains, and 15 grew up in the Southwest of France whether in rural towns, in villages, or on a farm<sup>1</sup>. All American and French participants spent, at least, their entire childhood and adolescence on a farm or in a rural town with less than 5,000 inhabitants. The men, ranged from 19 to 62 years of age, and were mostly white and middle class. Distribution across age and social class was similar for American and French informants. All were involved, at least occasionally, in LGBTQ organizations located in rural towns of the American Midwest and in the Southwest of France. Initial participants were reached by using these existing networks of LGBTQ organizations. As a result of the research design, the research population does not contain men who grew up in rural areas and who have sex with other men but do not identify themselves as gay, or who identify themselves as gay but are not involved in existing regional LGBTQ organizations. Data were collected from June 2007 to February 2008. Through semi-structured interviews, participants provided an account of their life story. Life story interviews were relevant in this research as they give “rich evidence about impersonal and collective processes as well as about subjectivity” (Connell, 2005, 89). Moreover, identity, states Woodward (2002), is a lifelong and dynamic process with possibilities of shifts and contradictions occurring in the mundane context of everyday life (Robinson, 2008). Using this interview technique allowed us to better grasp the complexity of our participants’ “quests for identity.”

It is important to note that there is a wide variety of rural contexts in which LGBT individuals live and that we are not trying to create a universal and uniform experience of the rural. We recognize that non-heterosexual experiences are plural and sometimes contradictory. Therefore, this study emphasizes the situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) of self-identified gay men and, consequently, only reports on participants’ own perspectives and representations.

## **Beginning the Quest: Growing up in the Country**

Both France and the United States constitute postindustrial societies where rural spaces have undergone significant changes including a shift to a more diverse population base (Brown and Schafft, 2011; Perrier-Cornet, 2002). However, these spaces remain highly heteronormative emphasizing nuclear (heterosexual) family lives and stereotypical gender roles and interactions which remain unquestioned (Little, 2003; Little and Panelli, 2007). As shown by Campbell, Bell and Finney (2006) in the Anglo-Saxon context and Saugères (2002) in the French one, they are still closed environments where traditional hetero-masculinity is pervasive. Recent studies suggest that today the invisibility of homosexuality in rural areas is changing (Gray, 2010). However, during the time period when both the American and French informants grew up (i.e. 1950s to 1990s), it was not the case. For the majority of our interviewees, insults such as “fag,” or “*pédé*” were clearly disparaging yet the meaning of homosexuality was undefined. Most older participants (who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s) had not heard these terms until college. Even among the youngest respondents, the meaning of these terms was unclear into their teenage years<sup>2</sup>. For example, Guillaume<sup>3</sup>, a French respondent in his early 20s recalled: “‘Pédé’ for me was just an insult. Because of the way and in the circumstances it was said, it couldn’t be anything else than an insult. I did not identify myself with being gay. Homosexuality? I don’t remember my parents ever mentioning it.” Tyler, an American respondent in his early 30s, also recalled being more confused about his feelings because same-sex attraction and desires were not spoken of: “Later I realized, you know, it had to do with my attraction also, and it was maybe teenage years, and you know. . . there was a little bit of confusion, because nobody was talking about it, there was not a lot of open discussion or acceptance.” Not knowing about homosexuality contributed to Tyler’s isolation, as it did for Dan, another American respondent in his late teens. Dan described his

feelings when he first self-identified as gay: “I don’t know. . . sad, lonely, maybe because I didn’t know any other gay people, like my friends knew about it and they were cool with it, but... they weren’t gay. . . so I was hanging out with them and everything, but I didn’t know any other gay people. . .” Like Dan, all participants--regardless of nationality or age -- suffered from a lack of role models when growing up in the country. Jean-Pierre, a French respondent in his late-30s, said: “I think I would have liked to have somebody to listen to me and to whom I could tell that there was something that was worrying me, to ask if I was normal or if I was not. Somebody who could have told me that homosexuality was not a disease or the end of the world; somebody who could have answered all the questioned I had.” The experience of Guillaume, Tyler, Dan and Jean-Pierre emphasizes that despite the relative visibility of homosexuality in both French and American broader society in the 1980s and 1990s, it remained invisible in rural families. In the rural areas where they grew up, heterosexuality was socially constructed in everyday social interactions, whereas homosexuality was left undefined.

As a result, most participants internalized homosexuality as something unreal that only happens “far away.” When asked how he learned about homosexuality, Sam explained: “Through movies and through TV shows and I think a lot of it too was because of gay jokes. Nobody ever made the joke at me, and it made that thing being so out there, like something they only do on TV, it is made up, it is in the books, it is not real.” Like Sam, all participants formed their initial understandings of homosexuality and its representations through popular culture artifacts. Popular culture—that is, television shows and movies—became a major source of information for these young men eager to understand their same-sex desires. However, in most cases if not all, discourses carried by these Media presented homosexual characters as effeminate. Like other rural gay men whose experiences have been described in

the literature (Loffreda, 2000; Fellows, 1996) our participants struggled with the cultural message that homosexuality is effeminate. Tyler, a young American, explained:

I think when I was a kid I only heard about the negative aspects, people thought that those things would only happen in the big cities, and if I saw any representations in a movie or on TV, drag queens or men wearing tight pink things, that was really unappealing to me, and I was like “that’s not me, and I don’t want that, so how can I be gay?”

Yannick, a French man in his late 20s, also described his confusion when facing images and representations of homosexuality on television:

I learned what homosexuality was through television—it was really my window to the rest of the world—with gay pride parades that they were showing. ...That was always a big moment at home because it gave everyone opportunities to be openly homophobic. For me, gay pride parades were giving a negative image of homosexuality. (...). [What I felt watching gay pride parades] is complicated. I could identify with the whole thing, but the images that were displayed—only men dressed up as women—and these images did not reflect who I was. So, if you like, I could identify myself with the context, but not with the form...So, it was complicated because I was thinking that I might be gay, but at the same time I might not be because I don’t dress up like a girl.

As suggested by Eribon (1999), subscribing to artistic, literary and cinematographic models to build one’s homosexual identity can represent a way out of social and family models overwhelmingly shaped by the heterosexual order. However, the discourse that conflates effeminacy and homosexuality in these models (or at least the ones to which the participants had access) did not help them to accept and make sense of their desires. This intermingling of effeminacy and homosexuality reflects the dominant discourse existing in both French and American societies, whether through homophobic discourses or cultural representations (Eribon, 1999; Halperin, 2007). Among respondents too, this image of “*la folle*” in France and “the queen” in the United States was central to their understanding of homosexuality. Consequently, this image is experienced as an imposition, a forced identity which they not only did not recognize in or as themselves but one from which they needed to distance themselves conceptually (Le Talec, 2008).

In heteronormative rural spaces, social interactions also reminded participants that effeminacy was not appropriate for boys. In this sense the conceptual distancing in which they engaged was reinforced through real and immediate experiences. Yannick recalled a particularly painful episode of his teenage years when other boys threw stones at him calling him a “fag.” He explained: “This kind of episode only happened once, and this was really the most difficult episode to handle, but most of the time it was comments, and it was always once in a while, but it was always there, always underlying.” For Yannick, these comments constituted a permanent underlying pressure reminding him of his difference and of the threat of effeminacy. When reflecting on his teen experience, Martin, an American in his mid-30s, explained that he also understood the indirect message that masculine norms should be observed and maintained. He reflected: “I got a very strong sense that it was wrong for a boy to [*sic*] being artistic. Like I said, I just felt pressure that if I was to be accepted I had to act like this, I had to act the way every other boy I knew acted.” When asked how he could tell that it was not appropriate for a boy to be artistic, Martin mentioned that “it was just because of the comments” and how “people were looking at you and speaking about you.” Therefore, whether openly stated or not, expressions or behaviors denigrating effeminacy were clearly coercive and all our informants understood and internalized that message.

In these heteronormative rural spaces—where homosexual practices are almost invisible and available representations conflate homosexuality and effeminacy—there was an inherent contradiction between accepting one’s same-sex desires and creating an integrated gay sexual identity.

### **Conceptual Migration: “Becoming gay” but not “Effeminate”**

The first migration noted in these respondents was that of conceptually distancing themselves from the most common signifier of being gay—effeminacy. While a significant



number of participants interacted with effeminate (assumed gay) men during high school, others recalled that observing how these individuals were ostracized encouraged them to distance themselves from effeminate males.

Jean-Pierre, a gay man in his late 30s, remembered a high school counterpart who was the subject of (mainly male students') derogatory comments: "At this time, I did not accept who I was, and, because in my class there was another guy who was gay... He was very effeminate, so I think my difficulty to come to terms with my sexuality was also coming from the rejection of that, from the feminine appearance of this guy, of this individual." Guillaume, a younger man in his early 20s, also recalled a similar experience. "I remember this student, because he was effeminate, because he was gay, it was not accepted by others, so... obviously it did not encourage me to say I was gay. He was called a fag, a girl, all the usual insults that we hear about homosexuals." Jean-Pierre and Guillaume did not identify with these two students because they perceived themselves as masculine, even as they started considering the possibility of being gay. For them, being a man and being effeminate meant being constituted as appropriate targets for others' criticism because effeminacy in men was viewed as a departure from traditional gender expectations.

When asked if he had ever been involved in a relationship with an effeminate gay man, Thierry, a student who recently came out to his family, answered:

Yes, it already happened to me... I don't know... I don't know if we can speak about degrees because... I don't know... but to the point to bring someone effeminate home...if I am really in love, I think it would bother me, but I would do it. It would bother me because it would be someone who would be stigmatized because of his sexuality and people would see him only through that. I think it's mainly because of that [that it would bother me to bring him home].

Here, being effeminate means being identified and recognized by others as being gay, and eventually being rejected. It also means being visible as gay and therefore confronting rural heteronormativity. With this perspective, most participants developed negative feelings toward effeminate gay men. For example, Michel, a closeted gay man in his mid-50s who still

works the land with his parents, gave the following definition of a 'queen:' "It's someone really "*maniéré*" (mannered), I don't know how to put it...someone really mannered, yelling, just acting crazy! Personally, I don't do it. I am manly and I would not like to be effeminate. If a man is effeminate I don't flirt with him, I don't like him." Michel's perception of a queen reflects the general perception of other French informants. For them, "*une folle*" is a gay man whose behavior is ceremonious, precious and at times dramatic. "*Les folles*" are eccentric individuals who do not follow traditional gender expectations, and therefore who disturb "normal life."

Not finding effeminate gays attractive was not specific to French interviewees. The majority of American informants also expressed their reluctance to get involved with an effeminate gay man. As John, a man in his early 50s, explained: "I was entertained by the drag queens, but I had no inclination in dressing up like a drag, and I was not attracted to the drag queens or the very effeminate men in the bars. I wanted a man, I wanted somebody with hair, and blisters, and dirty clothes...and even smelly." This distancing from effeminate gay men was expressed by men from different generations. Jordan, a young man in his mid- 20s, described a character from *Another Gay Movie*:

That guy who has all these little outfits, that kind of guy, not to be stereotypical or anything... but... I don't know. I am not attracted to a guy who would be wearing a feather boa or wears a big triangle shirt or who is extremely, extremely effeminate. I like guys who are guys, who are masculine. If I wanted extremely feminine or whatever I would date women.

Jordan echoes the ideas expressed earlier by French participants. He is not attracted to effeminate men because he is not attracted to women—for him an effeminate man does not behave like a man, but a woman. The fact that masculine men are perceived as "normal" whereas effeminate men are perceived as "abnormal" is also stressed in Tyler's comment when asked to describe his boyfriend:

He is... very normal. He is not effeminate at all. He wears T-shirts and shorts like any college town guy, some of his mannerisms and speech patterns are sometimes a little bit gay, but his interests are similar to mine. We are both interested in art,

music, language, culture, and not so much at...well he would do better than me at watching a football game.

Tyler considers his partner (Sam) “very normal,” a typical college student, despite some mannerisms and speech patterns. Even if Sam enjoys “art, music, language and culture,” interests not necessarily associated with traditional rural masculinity (Campbell, Bell and Finney, 2006), he is also able to enjoy a football game. Therefore, by stressing traditional masculine interests and behaviors, Tyler defines Sam as fitting the image of what constitutes a “normal” masculine guy.

All participants in this study identified themselves as masculine men, and distanced themselves from effeminacy. This distancing often left them with little recourse to establish an integrated identity as rural and gay, prompting desires for spatial migration.

### **Spatial Migration: Experiencing Urban Gay Space**

Cities have become catalysts in the construction of contemporary gay cultures whereas rural places have commonly been contrasted as cultural vacuums where homosexuality is maligned and/or marginalized (Aldrich, 2004; Knopp, 1998; Mort, 1995). Indeed, the association between homosexuality and the city has become so widespread in Western culture that the rural-urban distinction has become embedded in gay consciousness (Binnie, 2004; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010). Parallels between socio-psychological and geographical journeys have been drawn whereby isolated and lonely rural gay men move to urban centers to explore their same-sex desires and come to feel part of a community in urban space (Eribon, 1999). The binary construction of the urban and the rural was a recurring theme in the data.<sup>4</sup> Moving permanently to the city had crossed the mind of all gay men interviewed, and all had been to the city temporarily. Their past and current experiences ranged from having sporadic excursions urban gay spaces to staying and working in the city for several years.

For the vast majority of our informants, moving to the city became a major objective, for some even an obsession. Throughout high school, when dealing with his same-sex attraction and desire, Sam fantasized about life in the city:

After high school I came here [rural college town], and it was so weird because during my senior year in high school I kept telling myself “I have got to deal with this, I have got to come out, I have got to...” I don't know why but I had this fantasy, I wanted to move to a big city and there I would be happy, I would find people that would be accepting of it and I would be fine...

For the French participants, the city represented not only the possibility to explore same-sex desires, but also was constructed as the *only* place where it was possible to come to terms these desires. According to Yannick, going to an urban center was a necessary rite of passage for finding one's identity. He noted: “Fucking hell, actually it was like an obsession. I worked all summer long to be able to buy me a car and my only goal was to take the car to go out. It was very stressful, you know, because you don't know where you are going, I was just leaving the place where I grew up, and then you discover your first gay club.” Consistent with previous studies (Chauncey, 1994; Valentine and Skelton, 2003), interviewees perceived the city's racial, cultural, and social diversity as contributing to an openness for difference, including for the gay lifestyle. According to informants, this appeal is also due to its potential for anonymity, something not possible in the country. In the city, participants assume that the anonymity resulting from the larger population makes life easier for gay men-- that they can separate professional and private lives to have two or more distinct and separate social identities (e.g. professional, religious, sexual). Contrasting his experience living in a large metropolitan center after growing up in a village of 650 inhabitants, Yannick, a French informant mentioned above, explained:

It's [rural space] different from the city because of the close-mindedness on certain issues, and also the fear of others' opinion. In the country, there are fewer inhabitants, you know anything you say is going to spread in an afternoon. There's always this fear, this pressure... There's a very strong pressure on your private life, because you know that everybody is going to be aware of it. In the city...it's not that there are no

bonds between people, but you just don't give a shit what your neighbor does! Not in the country.

Like other American and French informants, Yannick feels that it is possible for gay men to “disappear” into the urban space, a feat not possible in a small town or a village. Furthermore, like them he was drawn to the city not only because of the presence of a visible number of gay *men*, but also due to the invisibility of the individual gay *man*. Thus, they go to “a large urban area to develop [a] gay identity,” as bluntly stated by Marc, an American participant. Echoing findings from Valentine and Skelton (2003), the existence of a gay scene with a gay community and easily identified gay spaces (bars, bookstores, clubs) gave our research participants an alternative gay cultural framework where they could express their identity, and have it validated by others. Thus, they were able to negotiate both becoming visible as members of a group while remaining invisible as individual gay men.

The city does not stand as an end point in informants' life itineraries (Annes and Redlin, 2011). The relationship that these men entertain with the city in general, and the gay scene in particular, is ambivalent, in that the gay scene which provides the freedom to explore sexual identity may also “precipitate a forced transition to a lesbian or gay sexual identity” (Valentine and Skelton, 2003, 857). In our study, both French and American interviewees also found aspects of the city and the gay scene (which they perceive, at least initially, as completely imbricated) as negative. As explained by Knopp, “queer migrants to large metropolitan areas...do not arrive as *tabula rasa* when it comes to their various forms of resistance,” on the contrary “they bring with them world views, values, traditions, memories and experiences...” (2003, 422). The learning of norms and codes governing the urban gay scene was challenging for men who grew up isolated in a heteronormative space, and, in some instances, went against the value systems they internalized growing up in the country. While in many ways benefiting from the search for an integrated gay identity through spatial

migration, these interviewees were confronted, yet again, with a construct of “gayness” in which they did not recognize themselves.

### **Evolving an Integrated Identity through Distance and Migration**

It is important to understand that both conceptual and spatial migrations are concurrent and mutually influential. That is, we can see in these life stories the transitory nature of both spatial and conceptual migrations through which our informants integrated rural and gay identities.

Once moving to the city (whether temporarily or definitively) and exposed to the gay scene, our research participants both explored and rejected what they found. For American informants, urban gay life and community were often perceived as superficial, emphasizing short-lived sexual encounters and physical appearance (that is, clothing and haircuts). This perception of the urban as superficial challenged their attempts to create themselves as "gay men," and complicated their acceptance of non-heteronormative masculinities. This was a theme which emerged in John's narrative, who spent his childhood and teenage years in small rural towns, but migrated to a large city in the American West to start vocational school.

There he started to look for a gay life:

When I started venturing around [the city], I learned at that point where the gay bars were, and where the gay guys hanged out, so I started going to those places, started meeting guys, so it would be at that point, I was in my early 20s, that I had my first intimate relationship. There was still a lot of alcohol involved, but it was more than playing around. It felt like love to me. It is what I thought love would be or should be. We cared about each other, and had no qualms about being real close and holding and touching, playing around, experimenting.

At the same time when John reflects on his first experiences in the gay community he is dismissive of what he describes as the ‘silliness’ of the scene saying:

So I dropped out of vocational school, I got a job as a waiter, earned very very good money, started going to the gay bars a lot, buy all kind of clothing, started to fall into the whole routine of being a young gay men and trying to be attractive, paying a lot of

money for haircuts and hair styles, and clothes, even having a degree of competition with a couple of other guys that I knew from the bars, showing up in the bars with the most recent fashion, and all this silliness that takes so much time.

All American informants emphasized the perceived pressure to conform to a particular dominant gay masculine identity, mainly based on body image and appearance.

For French participants, the perceived effeminacy of the urban gay community proved the greatest obstacle to involvement and identification with an urban gay identity. Michael describes this ambivalence—he believes that, on the one hand, living in the city would have made it easier to be gay and to accept one's homosexuality, but on the other hand, living in the city would have rendered him effeminate. He posits: “I think if I would have grown up in a city, I would have come to terms with my sexuality earlier, but I would have become a queen. When I went to Paris, I came back looking like a queen. I think that if I had grown up in a city, I would have become an effeminate gay man.” The perceived deterministic nature of the city appears clearly in this comment. According to Michael, the city “makes you” effeminate, and being an effeminate gay remains unacceptable in his eyes. For him, the urban gay culture does not reflect how he sees himself—as a man like any other. Many French informants concurred with this deterministic discourse in that they felt their identity in the city was being altered rather than freely expressed. Most altered their physical appearance to reflect norms existing in the urban gay community. Speaking about coming out to his mother, Michael explained: “[When] I told my mum, I was just coming back from my trip to Paris. I had been to several European cities, but Paris...it was my first vacation on my own. I stayed near the gay district, so I discovered all the places and I came back with an entire different look. I dyed my hair, I was wearing tight clothes, I was the perfect queen!” The experience of transforming one's old (rural) physical appearance and adopting the one privileged in the newly discovered gay community was also described by Thierry: “Let's say that when you start being involved in the gay community, you...you become quickly really...you become a

complete cliché, so you start getting rid of your old clothes and you buy new ones. More and more I started looking like a clone of what I could see in clubs. It's only when I met my partner that I came back to what I was, I left all of that.”

As noted by Thierry, for many of our interviewees, time in the city was a necessary evolution in gay identity formation, but engagement with the urban also required another form of distancing or migration. For many, in order to solidify and integrate both rurality and homosexuality in their sense of self, time in the city resulted in the desire to come back to “what I was” by returning to rural community and rural space. Such a finding highlights Gorman-Murray’s (2007) critique of unidirectional approaches to gay migration which suggests a singular and simple movement from the rural to the urban. Despite the city’s importance in the initial development of gay identity for most (and in particular for older informants), the city is better identified as a transitional space, rather than one which creates or “fixes” sexual identity. Gay identity development seems to rely on back-and-forth movements between different scales and environments<sup>5</sup>, and both gay subjects’ departure from and their return to rural areas are important in the process of identity construction (Knopp, 2006).

### **Conclusion: Migration and Return**

The migrations of the gay rural men described in this chapter reflect both conceptual and spatial traversing of multiple oppositional dualisms in Western discourse. They move through various forms of acceptance and rejection of common tropes about rurality and urbanity, masculinity and femininity and heterosexuality and homosexuality. At the conclusion of this research, 18 of the men had returned to rural areas. These men attested to reaching equilibrium in their sense of identity, in that they had created an “integrated whole” across dualisms. Many asserted both gay and rural identities, a homosexual identity in a



heteronormative space. Perhaps most importantly, they noted that this equilibrium was often achieved through a successful long-term and exclusive relationship. In this way, many of these men integrated both rural heteronormative values with gay visibility in their daily lives.

However imperfectly, their integrations performed in the quest for identity reflect larger social constructs, as well as personal migrations. According to Rubin, “modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value” (1984, 151). In this hierarchal value system, marital, exclusive and reproductive heterosexual relationships occupy the top part of the pyramid, whereas unmarried, promiscuous, non-reproductive homosexual ones stand at the bottom. She writes: “Stable, long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability, but bar dykes and promiscuous gay men are hovering just above the groups at the very bottom of the pyramid” (Rubin, 1984, 151). Wanting to be involved in long-relationships and emphasizing the conformity between their sexual and gender identity could be interpreted as a way to “move up the scale of values” in order to gain legitimacy. In this way, these men demonstrate not only their acceptance of a gay identity, but also their acceptance of rural norms and values.

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<sup>1</sup> The major goal of this study is to assess how, *growing up* in the country, gay men build their sense of self and subjectivity. Therefore, at the time of their interview, some informants no longer lived in the country. Nonetheless they spent their entire childhood and adolescence in a rural environment.

<sup>2</sup> Overall, younger participants tend to have learned about homosexuality earlier than their older peers, even if they did not know much about homosexuality when they were growing up in the country. This is mainly because homosexuality became more visible in the broader society and also because they could also more easily access a wider variety of information through the Internet.

<sup>3</sup> For this study, the names of all the participants as well as the places where they grew up and currently live are confidential, and all participant names are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> In this way, rural gay men themselves often perpetuate the rural-urban dualism.

<sup>5</sup> For a complete discussion of the idea of the city as a transitional space, rather than one which creates or "fixes" informants' sexual identities, see Annes and Redlin, 2011.