

# ENGAGING DIVERSE MEN

## *An Intersectional Analysis of Men's Pathways to Antiviolence Activism*

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*Despite the demonstrated utility of intersectionality, research on men allied with women's rights movements has largely focused on white, heterosexual, middle-class, young men. This study illustrates the importance of attending to men's intersecting identities by evaluating the applicability of existing knowledge about men's engagement pathways to the predominantly African American members of a Muslim men's anti-domestic violence group and a gay/queer men's gender justice group. Findings from a year-long qualitative study highlight how these men's experiences differ from those in the literature. While the Muslim men's experiences add dimension to the existing knowledge—especially regarding age and parenthood, online interactions, and formal learning opportunities—the gay/queer men's experiences are not accurately represented within it. Their pathways begin earlier, do not rely on women's input, do not create a shift in gendered worldview, and lack a pathway narrative because they connect to gender justice through their own intersecting identities and experiences. This suggests that a marginalized identity is not in itself sufficient to alter engagement pathways; the particular type of marginalization matters.*

**Keywords:** *masculinities; intersectionality; violence against women; allies*

Men's involvement in the antiviolence and women's rights movements has increased in recent decades, and there is a growing consensus that men's involvement is a key part of the project of ending domestic and sexual violence (Casey and Smith 2010; Collins 1990;

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DeKeserdy, Schwartz, and Alvi 2000; Flood 2006, 2011). State and non-governmental organization (NGO) funders have been increasingly calling for projects that engage men; existing men's groups work on projects like public education campaigns, marches, newspaper editorials, political advocacy, and fundraising for women's organizations (Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015). Antiviolence groups, however, struggle to find, involve, and retain men allies, and this problem is compounded when trying to work across difference (Casey 2010; Flood 2006, 2011). As intersectional feminist researchers have shown, when the antiviolence scholarship fails to attend adequately to difference, it fails to serve entire communities of women and tends to produce knowledge of and for women of relative privilege (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 1986, 1990; Crenshaw 1991).

In this article, I contribute to the literature on men as allies by detailing how men's intersecting racial, class, gendered, sexual, and religious identities shape the ways they interact with feminist/antiviolence work, as well as the possibilities for engaging them. Specifically, I argue that Muslim and gay/queer<sup>1</sup> men's pathways to involvement in the United States differ from those of the men already represented in the literature, and I advocate for integrating an intersectional lens to studies of men's allyship generally, and to models of ally development specifically. In doing so, I illustrate how such intersectional analysis of men improves our understanding of men's varied political relationships to women.

The early literature on men's engagement with antiviolence suggested the importance of intersectionality (Brod 1988; Christian 1994; Shiffman 1987) but was rarely empirical. Conversely, recent empirical research in North America and Europe has tended to focus, implicitly or explicitly, on white, heterosexual men (Bridges 2010; Casey 2010; Casey and Smith 2010; Coulter 2003). Given the critiques of feminist scholars on intersectionality and the early research on the importance of social location in engaging men, more intersectional awareness is necessary (Alcalde 2014; Dworkin 2015; Dworkin, Fleming, and Colvin 2015; Flood 2006, 2011).

This article presents findings from participant observation and interviews with two antiviolence groups in Atlanta, Georgia. These groups are specifically directed toward and draw membership from socially marginalized communities—one group of Muslim men and one group of gay/queer men. The majority of the members of both groups are African American. I find the previous research/models of men's allyship partially describe the experiences of the Muslim men but fail to adequately describe the experiences of the gay/queer men. While the Muslim men's engagement pathways are guided by the women in their lives and lead to

a significant shift in their worldview, gay/queer men's engagements stem from their own life experiences and therefore are nonstory, not a pathway, and do not create a significant shift in gendered meanings.

## MODELS OF MEN'S ANTIVIOLENCE ENGAGEMENT

Allies work to end systems of oppression that are not typically understood as targeting their own identities (e.g., white antiracist activists; heterosexuals who work for gay rights). Because they are seen as working on issues that are not "theirs," their pathways to involvement are of interest to researchers and activists alike<sup>2</sup> (Bridges 2010). Men's engagement in antiviolence work parallels ally development in other social justice causes, such as white antiracists, where substantial model-building has described the process of ally engagement (Broido 2000; Casey and Smith 2010). The existing literature suggests that these pathways tend to include learning about and reflecting on structural inequality; some personal experiences of being in the minority or being marginalized; a specific invitation to participate, often through existing social networks; and the development of self-awareness about one's own location and participation in a social structure of privilege and oppression (Bishop 2002; Broido 2000).

Coulter (2003) found that young men's antisexist involvements were influenced by relationships with teachers, parents, authority figures, and peers; seeing or hearing about violence against women they knew was an important part of the entry pathway for many of these boys. Casey and Smith's more detailed model of men's involvement pathways found that men's engagement is a long-term process that usually begins with a sensitizing experience, most often the "disclosure of domestic or sexual violence from a close female friend, family member, or girlfriend or witnessing violence in childhood" (2010, 959–60). The next two steps on this path are an opportunity to become engaged, and a shift in the meaning of gendered experiences in their lives, in either order. The engagement opportunities included being formally invited, being encouraged by friends, or looking for a job or volunteer opportunity. Changes in gendered meanings were evidenced by "a deep shift in [the men's] thinking about their own experiences or behavior or in the level of comprehension of the ongoing vulnerability of women" (Casey and Smith 2010, 962). Changes in gendered meanings and opportunity experiences lead to anti-violence involvement.

Existing allyship models are limited, however, because they lack an intersectional analysis. Born of the lives and analyses of women of color, intersectionality is the idea that various social differentiation categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality are coconstitutive, inseparable forces that work to shape human experience (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 1986, 1990; Crenshaw 1991). Intersectionality theorists critique the use of unitary categories, asserting that “the term ‘women’ actually functions as a powerful false generic” (West and Fenstermaker 1995, 11). Intersectionality therefore also calls into question any claims about men as a unitary category and has proven to be a useful lens for analyzing the different ways men experience gender (Alcalde 2014; Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2003; Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015; White 2006a, 2006b, 2008; White and Peretz 2010).

Theoretically, what is at stake in understanding diverse men as feminist allies is how intersectionality and privilege meet each other. Multiply marginalized communities often are studied intersectionally, but social locations that multiply privilege or blend privilege and oppression are also intersectional and significant for both theoretical and practical reasons (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 1986, 1990; McCall 2005). So far, there has been little “research that examines issues of privilege and intersectionality” or concentrates on the workings of intersectionality at social locations where people are both privileged and oppressed (Ferber and Herrera 2013, 84).

McCall (2005) argues that there are three types of intersectional research: anticategorical research deconstructs categories; intracategorical approaches focus on the experiences of individuals and groups at particular social locations; and intercategorical approaches study the shifting, unequal relationships between different categories. In this article, I primarily use an intracategorical approach, in that I focus on allies who benefit from male privilege but are marginalized because of their racial, religious, gendered, and sexual identities. Crucially, my focus also is intercategorical in its implications for alliances between individuals and groups with different marginalized identities.

## INTERSECTIONALITY AND MEN’S ANTISEXIST ENGAGEMENTS

Early writing on men’s antisexist involvement, while rarely empirical, hinted at an overrepresentation of Jewish and gay or bisexual men among male activists, suggesting that intersecting identities factor into men’s

gender justice engagements (Brod 1988; Christian 1994; Messner 1997). One descriptive study surveying attendants of a national conference of profeminist men found that “gay men constituted nearly half of the respondents and bisexual men accounted for nearly 20%” (Shiffman 1987, 301). As research on men’s antisexist involvement progressed and became more empirical and analytical, this awareness of intersecting identities faded. Recent studies often fail to adequately attend to the importance of men’s other intersecting identities, either by ignoring other axes of inequality from analysis or because of overly homogenous samples. In Bridges’s study of men’s involvement in marches protesting violence against women, for example, “almost every marcher . . . observed was white,” “heterosexual identit[y]” was assumed, and other axes such as religion and class were not discussed (2010, 12, 17). Intersectionality usually goes unremarked unless the study is specifically about one group, such as Latino men (Alcalde 2014) or black men (White 2006a, 2006b, 2008; White and Peretz 2010).

This trend also applies to research on men’s pathways to antiviolence allyship. In her study of boys doing gender equity work, for example, Coulter (2003) spoke with 10 boys ages 15-20, all of whom identified as heterosexual and nine of whom were white. Casey and Smith’s (2010) pathway study was based on interviews with 27 men, 26 of whom identified as white, and the sexuality of participants was neither reported nor discussed in the analysis. The authors note that their results “largely reflect White men’s antiviolence ally development” and assert that a “glaring gap in both the findings presented here and research about male antiviolence allies more generally is the experiences of men of color” (Casey and Smith 2010, 970). In both studies, homogenous sampling limited the researcher’s ability to observe differences among men, and intergroup differences were insufficiently analyzed.

Recent writing on the involvement of men in women’s rights work argues that “adopting an intersectional approach is urgent” (Dworkin, Fleming, and Colvin 2015, 134; also Alcalde 2014; Dworkin 2015; Flood 2006, 2011; White and Peretz 2010). In this article, I find that the entry experiences of a group of Muslim men who work against domestic violence and the entry experiences of a group of gay/queer men who organize for gender justice highlight the divergences between these men and those represented in the existing literature. This study thereby illustrates how intersectional analysis improves our understanding of allyship and may have wider implications for men’s involvement, commitment, and effectiveness.

## METHODS

I selected both the methods and the groups for this study in order to integrate intersectional analysis with existing knowledge on men's engagements. Groups were selected for their antisexist/anti-gender violence aims (as defined and stated by the group), their real-world activities (not only online) to allow for participant observation, and their specific focus on men of a particular marginalized identity. I created an initial shortlist from online research and my existing knowledge of men's pro-feminist networks. After initial contact via their Internet presence, some groups were rejected as logistical or human subjects challenges, insufficiently active, or insufficiently independent from a women's organization. The remaining groups were Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence (MMADV) and the Sweet Tea Southern Queer Men's Collective.<sup>3</sup> MMADV and Sweet Tea are small grassroots groups (membership fluctuated between 3 and 8 members for each group) located in Atlanta, GA.

The study began with participant observation, which informed the interviews by suggesting topics of interest and appropriate language to use with interviewees. During eight months of participant observation, from October 2011 through May 2012, I attended all group meetings, conference calls, and public events, such as the annual Muslim day against domestic violence and a community celebration of queer social justice organizers called Queers Run Amok. I also regularly reviewed the groups' online presences and spoke with individual members privately. I assisted with organizing and preparing events and group meetings and appeared publicly as a member of each group. This involvement allowed me to build rapport and observe details not accessible through other methods. I carefully navigated contributing as an "outsider within," declining to participate in ways my presence might overly impact the research (Collins 1986). For example, when MMADV asked me to present a training session for them, I encouraged them to look for trainers within the Muslim community or create a training themselves, and offered to assist with either project. I took jottings during field visits and wrote fieldnotes soon afterwards; in both groups I acted as secretary during meetings to take notes less conspicuously.

I conducted 12 semistructured theorized life-history interviews, eight with Sweet Tea members and four with MMADV members. I interviewed all four current members of Sweet Tea and four previous members, and three of four current members of MMADV and one previous member. Ten interviews were conducted in person, one was begun in person but concluded by phone, and one was conducted via video call. The interviews

ranged from 1.5 to 4 hours in length, with an average time of about 2.5 hours, and were recorded with permission. Informed by participant-observation experiences, interviews covered a broad range of topics, including personal life history with social justice organizing and issues of sexism and gender-based violence, engagement with and experiences within the group, motivations, intersecting identities, and masculinity. Examples of interview questions this study draws upon are “Could you please tell me how you got involved in (group name)?” and “When did you start to see the group’s concerns as things that mattered to you?”

Of the 12 interviewees (see Table 1), 10 were African American, one was white, and one was of South Asian descent. The MMADV interviewees were mostly middle-aged, working-class Muslim men (mean age of 47.5), and all were heterosexually married; with the exception of one childless member, all had three or more children. Most MMADV members had been involved with the group for a few months to a few years; a few had previous organizing experience, although usually not related to gender or sexuality. Sweet Tea members tended to be younger professionals (mean age 37.5) with no religious affiliation. All identified as gay or queer, most were single, and one had an adopted daughter. All of the Sweet Tea members had been involved with the group since its inception several years before, though one had left the group relatively early for personal reasons, and four left at different times as a result of geographic relocation. All had been involved previously and intensively in social justice organizing, sometimes professionally, and often in fields related to gender or sexuality (e.g., HIV/AIDS services; reproductive justice; gay/queer community groups).

An intersectional feminist approach informed the research design, including the research question, the selection of groups, and my specific awareness and focus on how race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and age came up both during fieldwork and while analyzing the results (Collins 1986). I conducted data analysis using grounded theory techniques (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Following open coding to identify themes, my constant comparative analysis set new observations and interview data from each group against the other and against existing engagement models to inductively derive such conceptual categories as “formalized feminist education,” “engagement as non-story,” and “finding language for own experiences.” During analysis, I specifically compared the existing concepts to those used by Casey and Smith (2010) and explored the fit of their conceptual categories to these men’s experiences. I conducted four member checks to increase trustworthiness, two with each group.

**TABLE 1: Demographics of Interviewees**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Family Structure</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>
<b>MMADV</b>							
Man	Black	Heterosexual	63	BA	Married	5	Muslim
Man	Black	Heterosexual	55	Junior College	Married	3	Muslim
Man	Black	Heterosexual	39	Some College	Married	4	Muslim
Man	South Asian	Heterosexual	33	MA	Married	0	Muslim
<b>Sweet Tea</b>							
Man	White	Gay/Queer	62	MSW	Autonomous	0	None
Man	Black	Gay	52	MSW	Single	0	None
Man	Black	Queer, bisexual	40	MA, MA	Partnered	1	None
						(adopted)	
Man	Black	Gay	32	BA	Single	0	None
Man	Black	Queer	32	BS	Single	0	None
Man	Black	Queer	31	BA	Partnered	0	None
Man	Black	Gay/queer	26	BA	Single	0	None
Queer man	Black	Queergay	25	MA (student)	Single	0	Agnostic

My own experiences as a man in feminist spaces affected and informed the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. Because of our shared commitments to men's antisexist activism, interviewees may have been more likely to identify with me or to have felt more comfortable telling me about their experiences. My race and religious background (Middle-eastern, Jewish) could have affected the comfort level of the African American and Muslim interviewees in sharing information with me. I attempted to mitigate this by displaying comfort with discussing racial and religious difference; learning group norms and jargon during participant observation and before conducting interviews; and emphasizing our similarities, that is, linguistic similarities between Hebrew and Arabic, and shared experiences as members of racialized groups in the United States. Similar to other researchers of men's engagements in anti-sexist work, I found my respondents quite eager to share their ideas and experiences (Coulter 2003).

The small and local sample of this study means the results are illustrative, not representative, and sampling limitations constrain generalizability. While suggestive of impacts beyond entrée, this article is limited to discussion of engagement pathways. Like most studies of

men's antisexist activism, this study works backwards from men's groups; it can only recognize activism that occurs in organized groups of men, and can only speak to how these men joined, not why other men do not. A study design that reaches a larger sample, including men engaged in different ways, should be considered for future research.

### MAKING ANTISEXIST MEN'S GROUPS

MMADV was formed when Umm Kulthum, the founder of a Muslim women's antiviolence organization, found that men as allies could circumvent resistance in Muslim communities; she recruited the first members, some of whom trained with the local antiviolence organization Men Stopping Violence (MSV). They appreciated MSV's feminist analysis, but they felt they could not take the MSV training directly to Muslim communities because it included things like dating/cohabitation and premarital sex (Douglas, Bathrick, and Alesia Perry 2008). The group focuses on educating and advocating around domestic violence and assisting women who are victim/survivors. Their activities include giving *Khtubah* (sermons) against domestic violence, co-organizing an annual Muslim day against domestic violence, producing and wearing T-shirts with antiviolence messages, and providing financial and logistical support to women leaving abusive relationships.

Ita, a queer African American man, founded Sweet Tea after finding the MSV discourse "very hetero-centric" and insufficient for critiquing sexism in queer communities. He brought together the members of Sweet Tea, who then wrote and published a queer feminist men's manifesto; later activities included producing a "Coming Out" event to debut the manifesto, speaking in women's studies classes, and organizing community events like a brunch for gay/queer men to discuss male privilege.

Both groups meet and organize primarily in private residences and over the phone or the Internet. Both groups understand themselves to be antiviolence, but whereas MMADV narrowly focuses on the kinds of interpersonal physical, psychological, and financial harm common to domestic abuse, Sweet Tea takes a broader (and more self-consciously feminist) perspective that includes a continuum of violence, from harmful stereotypes through interpersonal violence to state violence and structural oppression. And, as described in the following sections, the engagement experiences of MMADV members roughly mirror those represented in the literature, while the engagement experiences of Sweet Tea members do not.

## Muslim Men against Domestic Violence

Three themes were found for the members of MMADV. First, entry to the group and to the work is almost entirely through women in their lives: both their sensitizing experiences and their opportunities for engagement come almost exclusively in the form of seeing or hearing about a woman's experience of violence or being asked by a woman to help. Second, these experiences and opportunities often are related to fatherhood or mediated over the Internet. Third, if they wish to deepen their engagement and understanding, members do so through formalized education, such as trainings, internships, and classes. Notably, they do not tend to see their involvement as directly linked to their own experiences of oppression.

Because so many of MMADV members' involvements follow a similar pattern, I first detail the entry experience of one typical member, Waleed, a 55-year-old African American who had been with MMADV for a few months. Then, I note where others' experiences differ. "How I really got started with this," Waleed said,

There's a website called "Understanding Islam," and years ago, I used to just go to the website to see what kinds of questions people would ask. It had nothing to do with domestic violence, just about Islam. It was an open forum. But I noticed that there were a lot of women writing in about domestic violence, and I don't know why I was drawn to it, but I started responding to them and letting them know that this was not acceptable, you don't have to put up with this type of behavior. And maybe it was because I have all daughters, that it was quick with me. So I started responding to them, and one day I received an e-mail from the editor, the owner of the website and some of the editors, asking me if I would become an editor of the website, because so many women were responding to me about domestic violence. So, I did it until I got to the point where I was saying, "Am I giving them the right information? Maybe I need some training." And that's when I found Men Stopping Violence. . . . I did a six month course with them . . . and it was a big eye-opener for me, it also helped me in dealing with my wife and watching how I spoke to her and how I treated her.

In this story, Waleed described how his involvement was motivated by factors related to his intersecting religious, age, gendered, and sexual/familial identities. His religion was a direct cause of his involvement, but notably he did not credit it with motivating his engagement, only with providing the opportunity. The sensitizing experiences he mentioned are related to parenting ("because I have all daughters") and communicating

online with women who were experiencing domestic violence. He also mentioned the importance of formalized training through MSV, which shifted his understanding of the meanings of gender in his life (“it was a big eye-opener for me”) and his behaviors around masculinity (“helped me in dealing with my wife”).

Mahmood, a 63-year-old African American MMADV member, told a similar story that also highlights his sexual/familial, gender, and religious identities: “Well, I’m a father and a grandfather, I have four daughters. . . . Just reading, I think Sister Umm Kulthum, she does a lot of stuff on Facebook . . . so just reading some of the stories she had posted on Facebook of some of the women and children who needed help, it just seemed like something I would like to do.” Mahmood described Umm Kulthum’s online posts about domestic violence (“women and children who needed help”) and his own parenting experiences as sensitizing him to the issue.

The fact that many of these men’s sensitizing and opportunity experiences occurred online should be understood in reference to two characteristics of their group identity as Muslims. The first is that the Muslim community in the United States is very small—less than 1% of the U.S. Population—and dispersed among a much larger non-Muslim population (Pew Research Center 2011). Online communication therefore becomes one of the primary ways that American Muslims can communicate with substantial numbers of other Muslims. This is especially true of African American Muslims, who are unlikely to live in a co-religious immigrant enclave. The second is that Islam discourages social contact among unmarried men and women. Fewer and less intimate social interactions make it less likely that Muslim men would have the opportunity to hear about women’s experiences of violence in person or build close relationships with influential women, both of which are common sensitizing experiences in the existing literature (Alcalde 2014; Brod 1988; Casey and Smith 2010; Coulter 2003; Messner, Greenberg, and Peretz 2015; White and Peretz 2010). Islam also reduces the likelihood of close female friends or mentors encouraging or inviting men to become engaged, thus shifting a greater proportion of both sensitizing experiences and involvement opportunities to the digital world.

Waleed and Mahmood also draw our attention to the importance of age as a factor in the ways men become involved. Motivated by his daughters, Waleed started editing for the website “about a year and a half ago,” when he was already in his fifties. Before then, “domestic violence “was never anything that had ever crossed [his] mind.” The older a man is, the more

time he has had for potential sensitizing and involvement opportunities, including forming friendships, romantic partnerships, and families. The importance of parenting in the entry and motivations of older men are largely absent in a literature that tends to focus on younger men's involvements, despite a number of movement groups (including Men Stopping Violence, MenCare, and Founding Fathers)<sup>4</sup> that base praxis around fatherhood (Crooks et al. 2006).

As Waleed told me more about his increasing involvement, he mentioned more and more the ways that women had been important. When he became interested in becoming more educated to improve his responses on the website, his ex-wife directed him toward resources, first the violence prevention and education organization A Call to Men, and then Men Stopping Violence (MSV): "She's the one who kind of pointed me." After the MSV training, he wanted to share some of what he had learned with the Muslim community more widely, so "I wrote an article, sent it off to [a Muslim] magazine, my wife was really pushing me to do it, and they published it." He then joined MMADV when Sister Umm Kulthum asked him for help. When asked what keeps him motivated in the work, Waleed said, "There were some people that we knew personally who were in a domestic violence situation, my wife was telling me about it . . . and that motivated me to keep the ball rolling in myself." Waleed's current level of involvement, then, was based on the direct input of his wife, his ex-wife, and Sister Umm Kulthum, and the less direct motivation from his daughters, women online, women in his community who he found out were experiencing domestic violence, as well as the editors of *Understanding Islam* and the staff at MSV. That is, his intersecting heterosexual (wife and ex-wife), familial (daughters), and religious identities all motivated his involvement *through* his various relationships to women.

Although not all the members of MMADV mentioned this many specific women in their pathways, they all mentioned a few, and Sister Umm Kulthum was an important part of the story for each of them. The first sensitizing experiences of Abdullah, MMADV's 39-year-old African American coordinator, came from listening to recordings of "the early teachings of Malcolm X" as a teen, but he had never done gender justice work until seeing the things Sister Umm Kulthum posted online about domestic violence in the Atlanta Muslim community: "I was on Facebook one day and I saw the page for it, and I was like, 'Wow, that's something I'd never heard about before,' and that's when I contacted Sister Umm Kulthum through Facebook and asked her, 'How can I get involved?'" Abdullah's racial identity sensitized him through Malcolm X's influence,

but only when it intersected with religious community and knowledge of women's experience did he engage directly. When he needed to deepen his understanding of the issues, Umm Kulthum began conducting formal weekly educational phone calls with him; I observed these calls, which primarily involved her discussing chapters from the MSV training manual with him and them discussing examples from the Muslim community.

Sayed, the Indian American ex-coordinator of MMADV, was perhaps the most self-motivated in his involvement, but his sensitizing experiences and engagement opportunity were still heavily influenced by women. He said that a close friend "had married another man from Iran and he had been very abusive towards her. I actually got into this work because of her, I wanted to help people like her from an Islamic perspective." He did not actively engage until a few years later, when his work on a Muslim suicide survivor's organization introduced him to both Umm Kulthum and another woman named Anjali. Anjali was the executive director of a South Asian community organization Sayeed supported, and as he related it, "Anjali calls me one day and she's like . . . 'There's a group called Men Stopping Violence, have you heard of it? . . . I want you to do the[ir] internship program, because we need more Desi men to speak out against domestic violence.'" Sayeed applied for and completed the internship, which shifted his understanding of the world so much that he told me, "I don't think any other experience has changed me more than my involvement in MSV." This MSV internship gave him the tools to deepen his involvement in MMADV to the point where he traveled nationally to give talks on domestic violence in the Muslim community. Umm Kulthum invited him to a MMADV meeting, where he committed to the group. Sayeed's story does not involve online interaction or directly relate to the importance of age and parenting experiences, but he did experience common gendered sensitizing experiences with religious inflection ("I wanted to help people like her from an Islamic perspective"), engagement opportunities through direct invitation by co-ethnic women ("we need more Desi men"), and a shift in gendered understandings through formalized education.

Clearly, the involvement pathways of all four MMADV interviewees relied on the active involvement of women, both in terms of sensitization experiences (Waleed, Mahmood, and Abdullah's online experiences, Sayeed hearing about his friend's abusive husband) and opportunities for involvement (Umm Kulthum asking Waleed and Abdullah to join, Anjali asking Sayeed to apply for the MSV internship). The thin dispersion of Muslim men and their disinclination to socialize with unmarried women increases the likelihood that these experiences

occur online (as with Waleed, Mahmood, and Abdullah). Age and parenting are both areas for future research, based on their importance as sensitizing experiences for Waleed and Mahmood. The shift in MMADV members' gendered understandings of the world occurred through formalized training or educational programs, specifically MSV's internship (for Waleed and Sayeed) and Umm Kulthum's telephone-based trainings (for Abdullah). These pathways relied on intersecting gendered, religious, ethnic, racial, familial, and sexual identities. Masculine, heterosexual, and familial privilege interact with racial, ethnic, and religious marginalization to create sensitization and opportunity experiences in ways unexplored in the literature. While these findings add dimension to our understanding of men's engagement pathways by including the experiences of African American Muslim men, they do not substantially contradict existing knowledge, unlike the differences found in gay and queer men's pathways.

### **Sweet Tea**

Unlike the men of MMADV, Sweet Tea members tended to explain how they became sensitized to issues of gender inequality and became involved in the group through reference to their own intersecting identities and experiences as gay/queer men of color. This shapes the four themes identified in their engagement pathways: their opportunity experiences do not reference women; the stories they tell of their pathways to involvement begin when they were much younger, often in childhood; they have a much harder time telling a story about their trajectory of coming into gender justice work, tending instead to speak about how they had always had these understandings; and they did not describe experiencing a shift in gendered meanings, as the literature would suggest, but instead described feminist educational experiences as learning a language for things they already knew (Bishop 2002; Broido 2000; Casey and Smith 2010). Their own experiences of marginalization along the axes of sexuality, race, and, in some cases, gender expression intersect with masculine privilege, sensitizing them to issues of gender justice without need to directly draw on women in their lives, and eliminating the need for transformative gendered learning experiences.

Sweet Tea members often drew very clear and direct linkages between the oppression experienced by women and their own gender-based marginalization. Some of the members who have effeminate gender expressions understood the negative social repercussions as stemming from the same sexism that women experience: "Sexism and homophobia are flip sides of

the same coin,” per one Sweet Tea member. Sweet Tea members with more masculine gender expressions were less likely to express such direct links between sexism and homophobia, but still they understood sexism through their own experiences of oppression. To the extent that they discussed specific sensitizing experiences at all, Sweet Tea members did so without reference to specific women (with rare exception for their own mothers), but instead with reference to their own lives as African American gay men.

A notable difference in how Sweet Tea members discussed their entry was that their stories tended to start much younger than those of MMADV members or the men in the literature on men’s engagement. Mark, a 32-year-old African American, began describing the path that led to his involvement with Sweet Tea by saying, “It starts with being a little gay black boy.” This statement provides not only a temporal marker—it began during my childhood—but also an explicit link to the way that Mark’s intersecting gayness, blackness, and young masculinity set the foundation for his later antisexist work. This sense of developing the moral foundations of their work in their youth was a common theme. As Ita, a 31-year-old African American stated,

I remember being very young and thinking very clearly, “Hmm, this thing that these guys and men around me are doing does not seem right to me.” . . . I was like seven years old, but I remember thinking, “How you are doing life, or how you are, just does not make sense to me.”

Ita’s emerging critique of normative masculinity (“this thing that these guys and men around me are doing”) was vague at this young age, but clearly foreshadows his later anti-gender violence ideologies. When describing how he first became sensitized to gender inequality, Deshawn, a 26-year-old African American, spoke of a very early understanding of power and injustice, and he specifically linked them to his own intersecting race, sexuality, and gender expression. He related his experiences of marginalization:

Being a black gay man in America, I’ve been confronted with the intersections of racism, homophobia, and sexism all my life . . . certainly from a very young age. It can be very low level or it can be high level, right, you can have these conversations about systems of oppression, patriarchy, compulsory heteronormativity, and all that is great, and it’s also about the young boy who wants to play with barbies being called a sissie-boy on the playground. Those are all cut from the same cloth.

Because their sensitization experiences are tied to their own marginalized identities, Sweet Tea members described their pathways as beginning very early in their lives.

Members talk about their entry to Sweet Tea in a way similar to Jeune, a 25-year-old African American member who simply says, "I was just invited to be a part of the collective by Ita," or Mark's "I got involved through [another member]." Not one member told a story of an engagement opportunity where a woman asked him to take a stand or become trained in the issues. Indeed, because of their own previous life experiences as people marginalized on the basis of their gendered or sexual identities, Sweet Tea members never spoke of having had to learn about the issues, being surprised about the prevalence of sexism or gender-based violence, or having a significant shift in gendered meaning because of their involvement.

Feminist educational experiences were described by Sweet Tea members as not having shifted their worldview (like MMADV members), but as having finally provided a lens or a language with which to understand things they already knew and had experienced in their own lives. Reminiscent of common coming out stories, they told of having been aware of inequality when they were very young and eventually finding terminology for their experiences. As Dwayne, a 46-year-old African American, explained,

We develop a lexicon for being able to talk about feminist work and theory, but for a lot of us, we already know the concept. I knew when I saw my father take precedence, in terms of his voice, in terms of his physical prowess, over my mother, and sort of make decisions, some of them which were not best for the family, that there was something called patriarchy. I didn't have the word *patriarchy*, didn't have the word *sexism*, but I knew and understood what that was, and I knew that it wasn't right, I felt that it wasn't right.

Dwayne described understanding injustice in his family of origin, and told of having later "develop[ed] a lexicon" for this ethical understanding. Dwayne told me, "In college, I was taking women's studies courses . . . that [experience] was like, 'Wow, there are these terms that really define stuff I already know.'" Ita similarly explained that "there were a lot of things about race and gender that I had seen happening in my family, in my community that a black feminist analysis really gave me a way to hold all of it . . . other political analyses just weren't robust enough for that." He

suggested that his own experiences as a queer-identified African American man required an engagement with black feminist analyses because no other perspective was sufficient. Although two MMADV members had been involved with MSV and others had taken Women's Studies classes, they described formal knowledge about feminism as helping to contextualize their own life experiences at the intersections of privilege and marginalization, with no attendant shift in gendered understandings.

Unlike MMADV members or the men represented in previous research, Sweet Tea members linked their own identities to their understanding of feminism, connection to the issues, and camaraderie with women. This discourse also tends to start very young, although it also continues into later educational and activist experiences, as one member illustrated,

I guess it's easy for me to think about the ways in which folks are marginalized due to sexualities or marginalized in some sort of gendered way, because I grew up being questioned all the time. As this very feminine boy, then my sexuality was in question, [people were concerned that] I would grow up to be gay or something. Or because of the way I spoke, I speak like a white person but I am so dark skinned [sic] that you can't question my blackness. So there was always this question for me, as this very young child, so it was very easy for me to connect to the issues that Sweet Tea brought up.

This member linked his own marginalized gendered and racial identities ("very feminine boy," "dark skinned [sic]") and the social experiences they caused ("being questioned all the time") to his affinity for gender justice work ("very easy for me to connect to the issues"). Dwayne took this one step further and described his understanding of feminism as a necessary step he took to understand his own life:

[In college], women's studies and feminist studies was the only place people were talking about queer work, so in order to develop an understanding for what it means to be queer or LGBT, you pretty much had to go to the women's studies departments . . . so it was kind of through my interest in developing some tools for coming out as a gay, bisexual queer man that I actually came upon feminism.

Because of the dearth of literature and discussion about the lives and experiences of queer people, Wayne's sexual and gender identity "as a gay, bisexual queer man" led him to feminism. Another member also said, "I had been very influenced in my formative years by feminist theory,

because I needed some way to understand myself, and there was at that time very, very little written by gay men about gender.” For Sweet Tea members, their understandings of gender, violence, and oppression are informed by both their own and women’s experiences of gender-based violence and oppression, *and by the similarities between them*.

This bond between their own intersecting gendered, racial, and sexual identities and their antiviolence allyship explains why the stories of Sweet Tea members do not rely on the direct input of women, why their stories begin so early in their lives (whereas other men’s stories start much later), and why their opportunities to get involved in the work seem more mundane, to the point that many had trouble recounting them as stories at all. This also explains the important difference in the way feminist engagements changed their worldviews, giving them a language to describe their own experiences rather than initiating a significant shift in meaning-making, as MMADV members and the literature on allyship pathways would suggest.

Existing models of men’s pathways to antisexist allyship, because they have focused on white, heterosexual men’s experiences, fall short of describing gay and queer men’s experiences. Gay and queer men’s pathways are much more commonly and directly influenced by their own life experiences and by understanding their own experiences of violence or marginalization as similar or analogous to women’s. This linking of one’s own experiences of oppression to the oppression of women appears elsewhere in the literature (i.e., Brod 1988; Casey and Smith 2010; Christian 1994), often in reference to sexuality (though also in reference to race, as in Alcalde 2014; Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2003; White 2006a, 2006b, 2008).

### **Pathway Divergence**

As the literature on ally engagement would predict, all participants described their engagement as a process over time, occurring at multiple levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental), involving some form of emotional involvement and/or personal identification with the issues, and facilitated by existing interpersonal relationships (Bishop 2002; Broido 2000; Casey and Smith 2010; Coulter 2003). Their different intersecting identities, however, led to some pathway divergences, especially where those identities also involved differing ways of relating to women. Whereas the sensitization experiences of straight, married Muslim men were heavily dependent on the input of women (often online, because of their higher degree of gender segregation), the men of Sweet Tea described themselves as having been sensitized simply by virtue of their own life

experiences as people marginalized based on their race, sexuality, and/or gender presentation. The Muslim men, older on average, describe their sensitization as based in part in their parenting and other life experiences, showing the importance of age in men's pathways. The involvement opportunities showed a similar pattern: the Muslim men told elaborate stories of being invited or encouraged by several women, while the gay/queer men were simply asked by a friend if they'd like to come to a meeting. The biggest pathway divergence was found in the meanings men attached to gendered experiences. Casey and Smith (2010) found that anti-violence engagement entailed a shift in men's gendered meaning-making, which was true of the Muslim men in this study; the gay/queer men, however, described having an organic understanding of gender and of injustice from their own experiences and beginning at a very young age.

The pattern of linking one's own experiences of oppression to the oppression of women suggests that there may be a special salience to sexual and gender-based oppression: a nonnormative sexual or gender identity not only invites investigation and explanation but encourages these *in reference to* gender. Whereas the data on Muslim men add nuance to and extend previous pathway models, gay and queer men's experiences demand a *fundamental revision* of those models.

## CONCLUSION

Men's pathways to antiviolence allyship are shaped by their other intersecting identities, not only by their identity as men. Social locations that blend privilege with marginalization are impossible to understand without an intersectional lens; locations that multiply privilege also are intersectional and must be understood as such. This article demonstrates how attending to men's intersecting identities and the differences among men improves our understanding of men as allies to women's rights movements and may also have implications for men's involvement, commitment, and effectiveness. These intersecting identities shape the types of relationships men form with women and their likelihood of understanding and identifying with women's experiences of sexism and gender-based violence, their pre-existing understandings about gender, oppression, and violence, and their opportunities for involvement. Future research in the area should take men's other identities into consideration, both through diversified sampling and intersectional analysis. Also, studying men's allyship experiences as intersectional highlights the important ways that

improved understandings of one social location can clarify our understandings of its relationship with other social locations. Understanding the experiences of feminist allies who benefit from male privilege but are marginalized as a result of their racial, religious, gendered, and sexual identities (intracategorical) has implications for alliances between individuals and groups with different marginalized identities (intercategorical) (McCall 2005).

Beyond the contributions to intersectional theorizing, this study has some practical applications. Practitioners and organizations attempting to engage men from diverse communities should be especially careful to keep men's intersecting identities in mind, to ensure that their strategies and messaging are relevant to target audiences. Both MMADV and Sweet Tea were formed in part because they found MSV's work important but ill-fitting for their communities. All interviewees were specifically invited to be involved by someone they already knew, confirming previously published accounts of the power of a personal invitation (Casey 2010). In the American context of widespread homophily, where many people's primary social contacts are within their own identity groups, practitioners may need to put extra effort into building relationships across difference (Smith, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin 2014). Groups looking to involve men of a particular demographic may benefit from working with women's organizations or key women in those communities and asking those women to invite men. Groups that engage men as allies and wish to keep them engaged for longer periods of time might consider talking with men about the ways that gender justice is implicated in and would improve their own lives.

## NOTES

1. In making a distinction between gay and queer, I follow the usage of my interviewees, who tend to use "gay" to describe men who are primarily interested in romantic and sexual relationships with other men and "queer" as an umbrella term to include lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered, genderqueer, and intersex people. "Queer" also was used often as a political identity, so one can be both queer and gay.

2. Questioning men's entry into work related to gender-based violence and sexism can stem from the dangerously flawed assumption that these gender-based violence and sexism are inherently women's concern, but, if approached without that assumption, this research may also provide useful information on engaging men.

3. While all individuals are given pseudonyms, the actual names of the groups are used. Interviewees were aware that because of the small size of the group, they might become individually identifiable; most were unconcerned, given that they already publicly identify themselves in connection with the group. Still, I have altered or omitted identifying details or in some cases.

4. Men Stopping Violence, mentioned previously, has a program called “Because We Have Daughters,” which aims to teach caring nonviolent parenting skills to fathers and teach them about their daughters’ life experiences. MenCare is a global campaign run by the antisexist NGOs Promundo, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenEngage Alliance, which promotes gender-equal parenting and women’s and children’s rights. Founding Fathers, run by Futures Without Violence, asks men to sign a pledge to stand up against violence against women.

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