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“Spitting Glitter”: An exploration of gay men’s socially contextualized performances of “gay”

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores how gay men navigate and interpret varying social contexts, and adapt their performances of “gay” in response. The findings are drawn from 27 qualitative interviews with gay men, sampled primarily from Calgary, Canada. The data suggest that stereotypical, gender-inverted performances of gay are one of many variable performances and, taken together, these performances reflect a gay hierarchy within the broader masculine hegemony. This thesis further suggests that the stereotypical gay performance has implications for gay male performativity, characterizing the set of behaviours that gay men manipulate so as to signify, or fail to signify “gay” to others. Gay men’s highly attuned capacities for performance and gender self-reflexivity are also discussed, and the concept of “social categorization strategies” is introduced to describe the assessment processes that inform gay men’s performance decisions. Ultimately, a case is made to consider “gay” in performative terms, distinct from a homosexual orientation.

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“It’s strange because sometimes,

I read a book,

and I think I am the people in the book”

– Stephen Chbosky

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Chapter One: Introduction

There was a profound moment, sometime around the middle of collecting data for this thesis, where I sat in the comfortable living room of Cliff and Chris, a mature gay couple. During what would become a lengthy, four-hour interview, Chris recounted a memory, from a time not so long ago, involving his partner, Cliff. Chris said:

I remember when my dad was on his death bed and I got this phone call from my brother saying: “you need to get here now”. We raced up – we lived in Lethbridge at the time – we raced up to the Calgary airport and phoned our friend who was a flight attendant “can you get me a ticket?” I said. “Can you get me on this flight right away? I’ve got to get home”. Cliff races me up, I’m having to pack stuff, I’m having to pack my suit because I know that there’s going to be a funeral. It’s an awful time. And there we are, standing there in the airport, we’re saying goodbye to each other, and after having been together for 8 years, because we were in this public place and I was leaving Cliff, I was going to face all of this on my own, we shook hands. We knew that we had to touch, I needed that support. I needed to say goodbye. That was the only safe way we felt we could touch. We shook hands, and I left to see my dad before he died.

Chris and Cliff’s story is just one of the many I heard during the interviews that were conducted for this study, and it is one among many that are troubling. What Chris described is similar to the stories of many gay men who have contributed to a sizeable, decades-long body of literature

around stigma and impression management (see, for example: Cain, 1991; Goffman 1963; Shippee, 2011; Woods & Lucas, 1993). It is this literature that catalyzed this study.

In reading works of scholars like Erving Goffman (1963) and James Woods (1993), I found a great deal of my own story. In their theories were the words describing some of my own experiences as a gay man. Admittedly, however, in the beginning, it was harder to locate myself in my own research. It was not until I had the language, used to describe others' experiences, that I was fully able to recognize my own circumstances. In this regard, this study has been as much an exploration of gay male performativity as it has been an exercise in self-discovery, for which I am grateful.

This burgeoning self-reflexivity, guided by understandings of impression management, made it apparent to me that what was being described by other scholars was more a symptom of a broader phenomenon, than a phenomenon itself. Indeed the outcome was, and is, impression management, but at the root of that impression management are gender performances. Many of the techniques described by others (Cain, 1991; Goffman, 1963; Herek, 1996; Woods & Lucas, 1993; Woods & Harbeck, 1991), for controlling information about one's sexuality, rely on the manipulation of a gender script. As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, much of what is involved in being perceived as "not gay" is about being perceived as masculine, and hegemonically masculine at that.

Understanding impression management as a particular gender accomplishment invites notions of gender fluidity to the fore. What is evident is that managing impressions about one's

sexuality is really more of a (gender) performance management, and it is a distinctly gender-typical, normative performance. What much of the literature has focused on is how that performance is used by gay men to be read as something other than gay. Absent in other works, however, are those behaviours that gay men recognize in themselves and their (gay) peers as being read as gay; also, notably underrepresented in previous studies are explorations of those behaviours that comprise an even more emphasized gay performance. Indeed, if engaging in impression management is to undertake a particular style of performance, it is just one of a plurality of performances and is characterized by gender conformity, placing it at the end of the gender spectrum, opposed to performances characterized by gender-inversion. Of course, this latter performance is reproduced, and understood, in culture as the archetypical, effeminate gay man, and it is a particular type, or style, of performance that was commonly referenced by the men in this study.

Any study of gay men inherits a great deal of language with a number of attached interpretations. This is particularly problematic, and at times cumbersome, for a study that seeks to appropriate that language and reconceptualize “gay” as a gender performance, rather than a (homo)sexual orientation. To borrow from West and Zimmerman (1987), gay is an accomplishment, a “doing.” This is murky; for many, including this study’s participants, gay is thought of as a way of “being.” There is a long, hard fought for, and continuing history of arriving at a place that acknowledges that “being gay” is not a choice, and this is not something I am endeavouring to challenge. Instead, however, I would contend that there is a difference

between homosexuality, defined by a same-sex attraction, which is not something one chooses or decides upon for oneself, and the performance of “gay.” The lens through which I have approached this work makes the distinction that homosexuality is a way of *being*, and gay is a way of *performing*. Within this framework one could make the claim that you do not need to be homosexual to perform gay, though the two are often intimately associated and many times homosexual men *do* perform gay; both performing gay and being homosexual have implications for the way people experiences their worlds.

Indeed, a gay performance does not constitute an externalized representation of a naturalized fact (being homosexual). Rather, gay is a stylization of behaviours and the body, which many may have attached to homosexuality in the same way that we have attached, for example, long hair to femininity, and femininity to the female sex. Judith Butler (1990) asks the question: “what are the categories through which one sees?” (xxiv) and the answers must undoubtedly include “gay.”

It is not my aim to address, with any certainty of completeness, the many lenses through which gay men view themselves, and through which non-gay individuals view gay men. I posit that these views, however, like all other things, exist in a societal structure characterized by heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the normalization of a heterosexual orientation (Ingraham, 1999), which Butler considers to be both an origin and a product of the heterosexual matrix (discussed further in Chapter Two). In this social environment, homosexuality is subordinate to heterosexuality and, largely as a result of the equating of “gayness” with homosexuality, gay men are similarly subordinate to straight men. This has elsewhere been

described in terms of hegemonic masculinity (see, for example: Connell, 1987; Connell, 2005), and is something I describe in more detail, and return to throughout this thesis.

Omitting homosexual men from the masculine hegemony has had a number of consequences, many of which are discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. These consequences present themselves on innumerable occasions in gay men's lives, requiring decisions to be made about performing gay. In response to this, I, like many impression management scholars, maintain that gay men amend their performances of gay to control information about their homosexuality. These adaptations involve replicating culturally recognizable signifiers of hegemonic masculinity in such a manner as not to be read as gay, a phenomenon that I explain by drawing upon Butler's theory of performativity. The theoretical implications of this work are important in their own right, but it is the everydayness of these occasions in men's lives – from being asked: “are these flowers for your girlfriend?” to embracing a loved one in an airport during a moment of crisis – which truly grounds the importance of this study.

To explore gay male performativity, I conducted 27 qualitative interviews with gay men. These interviews involved discussing the men's own perceptions of what a gay performance, for all intents and purposes, “looks like.” These discussions draw on important gender issues, like masculinities and femininities and, particularly, the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity that exists in the broader culture, but is also replicated within gay culture. What started as an investigation of performance management strategies came to include an investigation of the gay masculine hegemony, and of how gay men manipulate their performances within that hegemony for purposeful means.

This thesis also includes an investigation of the criteria utilized by gay men to evaluate the various social contexts they navigate in their lives. The outcome of this investigation is a description of what I have termed social-categorization strategies, whereby gay men classify social contexts based on the agents operating within those contexts and respond accordingly through performance management. It is my aim with this section to better describe the outcome of performance management via the processes through which that outcome is informed. Taken together, these discussions shape how the thesis unfolds.

In Chapter Two, I will discuss previous research that has been done on impression management, as well as gender performance. In this section I also introduce Butler's theory of performativity, which ultimately provides the lens through which much of the data has been interpreted. In Chapter Three I turn the discussion towards the methodological underpinnings of this research. Included in this section is a detailed description of the recruitment and interview processes, as well as the logic, informed by previous works and a series of decisions, that informed these processes. Then, in Chapter Four, I unfold the findings of this thesis that emerged from the qualitative data. Because of the interconnectedness and synchronicity of the many components of this discussion – gender, performance management, performativity, the cultural intelligibility of gay – the decision has been made to present these findings in one, large chapter, rather than several shorter chapters. This serves to demonstrate the complexity of the discussion and its many interwoven pieces.

Finally, I conclude this thesis in Chapter Five by providing an overview of the ideas that have been presented herein, as well as the broader theoretical implications of reconsidering gay as a performance. I also make suggestions for future research in this area, and discuss the limitations of this research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism (SI) focuses on the dynamism of social activities taking place between persons, which is, in essence, the very nature of interaction (Charon, 1979). Blumer (1969) writes: “Symbolic interactionism... sees meaning as rising in the process of interaction between people. The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing” (p. 4). In the context of this thesis, the focus is on the relationship between SI, as an understanding of meaningful (and meaning making) behaviours, and the accomplishment of gender performances through interactions that rely on those meanings. It is not my intention to provide a complete description of SI; there are works elsewhere that are better suited to that purpose (see, for example: Blumer, 1969). Instead, what I propose to accomplish is a sampling of the literature on symbolic interactionism so as to outline

it as a guiding perspective, one that informs the threads of thought regarding gay male performativity that are stitched throughout this thesis.

Interaction cannot simply be reduced to engagement. Instead, interaction takes two forms: one, a “conversation of gestures” (Mead, 1934) or “non-symbolic interaction” (Blumer, 1969); and two, “the use of significant symbols” (Mead, 1934) or “symbolic interaction” (Blumer, 1969). The former may be considered a more instinctual or automatic response to action (e.g. pulling one’s hand away from a hot stove), whereas the latter rests upon the interpretation of action (Craib, 1992).

Such interpretations rely on how one defines a situation, where our definition of a situation rests on our ability to understand symbols (Charon, 1979). Mead refers to symbols as “meaningful” gestures, suggesting that symbols carry a shared meaning between people: he/she who undertakes the gesture and he/she who is audience to it. Mead (1934) further suggests that “What is essential to communication is that the symbol should arouse in one’s self what it arouses in the other individual” (p. 149). Communicating relies on the replication and recognition of these shared meanings; an actor must engage in meaningful behaviour in such a way that the behaviour may be appropriately interpreted by those with whom he/she is in communication. Successful communication occurs when the meaning that is intended by an actor is the same meaning that is taken up by an audience.

Shared meanings form through processes of definition. Blumer (1969) writes: “The meaning of objects for a person arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts.... Out of a process of mutual indications common objects emerge

– objects that have the same meaning for a given set of people and are seen in the same manner by them” (p. 11). Shared meanings also persist over time, as we recognize similarities between our current experience and our past interactions; it is for this reason that we interact towards consistent objects in consistent ways. Our ability to categorize and transfer past situations to new situations depends on this capacity to generalize (Charon, 1979). This also explains why, when faced with unfamiliar circumstances or contexts, we may feel uneasy or unsure of how to interact. Goffman (1959) writes:

When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc... Information about the individual helps define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him... If unacquainted with the individual, observers can glean clues from his conduct and appearance which will allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them or, more important, to apply untested stereotypes to him. (p.1)

What counts as meaningful, then, is taken from the experiences of individuals themselves and individuals collectively. Meanings are further modified and handled through processes of interpretation utilized by each individual in dealing with the symbols one encounters (Craib, 1992). For the symbolic interactionist, meaningful behaviour must be interpreted while considering the encounter or the context – be it contemporary or historical – in which that behaviour occurs. This is because it is precisely that context that frames the interpretation of the situation, thus guiding one’s actions and presentation of self (Charon, 1979; Goffman, 1959). As William Thomas and Dorothy Thomas (1928) write: “If men [and women] define situations as

real, they are real in their consequences” (p. 572). Our realities and how we orient ourselves to, and within, them are dependent on such “definitions of the situation.” Symbolic interactionism, then, sees meanings as social productions, created by and through the actions of people as they interact; and, human beings act towards things based on the meanings that things have for them (Craib, 1992).

The most regular criticism of SI is that it ignores wider features of social structure, preferring to focus on micro-interactional processes that cannot say anything about broader issues of conflict, power, and change (Craib, 1992). I would argue, however, that SI does implicitly comment on features of social structure. While it may not be readily apparent, the shared meaning of common objects and the manner in which individuals interact with those objects – which in turn creates the basis for all meaningful action – *are* simultaneously both products of, and constitutive of, social structures. Common objects come to be imbued with shared meanings through a continual reproduction of those meanings, and the site(s) of that reproduction are broader social structures. Relevant to this thesis is the manner in which gender continually imputes meaning *on* gender. It is, as Butler would argue, the iterative quality of gender that produces its shared meanings, and also, simultaneously, reproduces gender as a broader social structure. To ignore a symbolic interactionist perspective on gender reproduction, as a site of meaning-making, is to ignore the micro-processes that are involved in creating gender, as will be outlined in my subsequent discussion of West and Zimmerman’s, and Butler’s theorizations of gender as accomplishment.

Performances Accomplished Through Interaction

Contemporary gender theorists have reconceptualised gender as being irreducible to a simplistic masculine/feminine binary, as being distinct from sex, and as being a product of interaction.

While these first two points are important, it is the third that I will focus on in this section. The interactional accomplishment of gender performances – and as I will argue later in this thesis, gay performances – invites the consideration of social themes, and the contextual frame in which those performances are produced. West and Zimmerman (1987) formulate gender as “an emergent feature of social situations: both an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society” (p. 126). Gender is both a product of our interactions, and also a constituent factor that influences those interactions, and, in both cases, gender is full of meaning.

For West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is accomplished through a process of “doing,” one that involves socially guided interactions. Key to this “doing” is the production of configurations of behaviour that are perceived by others as normative gender behaviours. Doing gender consists of managing occasions in such a way that the outcomes of those occasions are deemed “accountable,” or, in other words, gender-appropriate (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This has elsewhere been described (Kessler and McKenna, 1978) as successfully completing the “gender attribution process,” whereby gender is assigned to an identified gender category (i.e. masculine or feminine), and ultimately attached to the sex-category that it signifies (i.e. male or female).

There are normative conceptions of normally sexed persons. These conceptions are captured in Butler's (1990) formulation of the "heterosexual matrix," defined as "that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (p. 208). What Butler terms a grid is, however, better considered as a series of linear associations. For example, within the heterosexual matrix the male sex is presumed to have a naturalized, masculine gender, and a heterosexual, oppositional sexual desire. There is no grid per se, because there is no room for deviation from this linearity. This construction of coherence conceals the deviations that are possible, common, and exemplified by non-heterosexuals, at least in terms of oppositional sexual desire (Butler, 1990). The heterosexual matrix does, however, capture the normative *belief* in gender attribution. These beliefs, of course, have a variety of implications in how these conceptions influence the accomplishment of gender and sexual identities, some of which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Conceptions of gender and sexual identities, widely held, form the foundations of those identities or, at the very least, expectations about their performances. West and Fenstermaker (2002) write: "Such conceptions underlie the seemingly 'objective,' factual,' and transsituational character of gender in social life and, in this sense, are experienced as exogenous" (p. 42). What are then considered to be the truths of identities are those beliefs about them that exist prior to and outside of identities, that transcend the immediate context in which those identities are accomplished. This does not mean, however, that context is unimportant to identities, as the "meaning" of conceptions about identities is dependent on the context in which they are

employed (Fenstermaker, West & Zimmerman, 1991; West & Fenstermaker, 2002). Identities, then, are given meaning in the moment in which they are accomplished, where those meanings are informed by larger conceptions of normative gender and sexual identities that circulate in broader social structures and are captured, in essence, in the heterosexual matrix.

The importance of normative conceptions of identities is well depicted by Butler's (1999) theorization of authority. She writes: "The anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures the object" (p. xv). For Butler, the anticipation of meaning is synonymous with normative preconceptions about gendered behaviour. It is the anticipation, the gender discourses that exist in the background to action, the transsituational context of identities, which gives meaning to the accomplishment of those identities. The anticipation of gender is what enables a successful gender attribution process, if purely by providing the criteria of attribution. That is to say, normative gender conceptions provide the labels that we impose upon identities, and it is through interactional occurrences and social exchanges that those processes of naming are conducted. It is through interaction that our identities are accomplished, but those interactions rely on recognition – a point to which I will return shortly.

To understand identities as accomplishments, West and Zimmerman propose an interactionality, or a "doing." Butler (1990) similarly proposes "performativity" as a conceptual and theoretical model to understand the same phenomena. Performativity refers to the replication and recognition of cultural signs of gender identities (Butler, 1990). Butler (1993) writes:

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (p. 95)

The performative involves a repetition of significant acts. These acts, in their repetition, signify culturally recognized signs of gender. Gender, considered in the performative sense, is constructed under what Butler calls “constraints,” where those constraints are defined – or guided – by established conceptions about gender. It is arbitrary to consider performativity without considering these constraints, for their historicity “constitute[s] the power of discourse to enact what it names” (Butler, 1993, p. 187). In this sense, performative gender requires a context defined by gender discourses, and gender is brought into existence through acts of ritualized performance that occur within the context of, and subsequently reproduce, those gender discourses.

Gender performances are not, however, constituted by a singular act. An act in its singular form, as if occurring for the first time, precedes a label or a naming, is unable to be recognized, and thus such an act precedes identification. Gender, rather, is constituted in a series of acts, what Butler terms a “process of iterability” or “repetition.” An initial act, once repeated, can be recognized as a repetition of that initial act. For Butler, the accomplishment of performances places a significant burden on this recognition. It is in the process of recognition

that subsequent acts can be named, or identified, and attributed to the “performer” of the repetitious acts in such a way as to identify them.

The constraint under which gay performativity operates is that of the cultural depiction of a normative “gay” performance, one that Connell (1992) argues is now so readily available and easily read by homosexuals and heterosexuals alike that it is easily applied to people. As Butler writes (1993): “Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. 2). The cultural intelligibility of what constitutes a gay performance is a commonplace enough discourse; “gay” is recognizable, identifiable, and thus easily attributed to those individuals whose performances signify “gay.”

Gender performances, or gay performances, should not be conflated with performativity, however. Performance refers to how we act and present our selves, our identities, in everyday life. For Goffman (1959):

A performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. (p. 26)

Performance, in the Goffmanian sense, calls upon the dramaturgical. It is more explicitly associated with an act or a series of acts, undertaken on the part of the actor. Performativity, however, calls into question the very socio-cultural context in which those performances occur. According to Butler (1993):

In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the 'truth' of gender; performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'; further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (p. 234)

Performativity goes beyond performances, placing those performances within an interactional process of ritualistic repetition that is constrained by an environment of culturally recognized signifiers of those performances. A performative lens acknowledges that performances occur as they do as a result of the constraints that contextualize the performance. If, for example, "gay" is a performance on a stage, then gay performativity is everything in and outside the theatre, and indeed all that has occurred culturally before the theatre that has enabled that performance to have meaning for the audience. Of course, a performance that is appropriately attributed, recognized, identified, or labelled is "always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (Butler, 1993, p. 12).

Throughout this thesis I suggest that "gay" is a performance, similar to a gender performance. I further suggest that gay is performative, for the set of behaviours that are attributed to a gay performance operate within broader social contexts of reproduction and recognition. Gay performances involve activities that are undertaken by individual men yet they equally involve processes of attribution by which those activities are labelled as gay. Indeed it is these labels that give meaning to the action, but it is only with the action that meaning is meaningful.

Hegemonic and Embodied Masculinities

Contemporary discussions of masculinity have redirected the conversation away from a monolithic ideal of masculinity and towards a more pluralistic conceptualization of masculinities. Not all masculinities are perceived as equal, however; some constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, in that they represent the configuration of masculine gender qualities valued within a social field (Connell, 2005). The relation of hegemony to the cultural dominance of a particular performance of masculinity implies a differential power structure, one that values particular masculine qualities, often at the expense of others, and certainly at the expense of femininities.

Western contemporary masculinity makes the distinction of dominant and subordinate between, amongst other categories, heterosexual and homosexual men (Connell, 1992). Homosexuality is associated with the negation of hegemonic masculinity, with effeminacy perhaps being primarily associated with gayness (Connell, 1992; 1995). By simple virtue of one's being gay, one is of a lesser masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is not only defined by compulsory heterosexuality, but also by specifically and unequivocally repudiating homosexuality. The process by which gay becomes the "other" masculinity, however, does not inhibit homosexuals from internalizing hegemonic narratives of masculinity in the same way as their heterosexual counterparts. Through the life course, males are subjected to cultural messages about masculinity through various socializing agents, such as families, schools, sports, and popular media (Duncan, 2010; Frommer, 2000; Wilson et al. 2010); gay men are engaged as boys in the construction of hegemonic forms of masculinity – "entering a set of interpersonal and

institutional practices that connects [them] to a public world and gives [them] a masculine position and stance within it” (Connell, 1992, p. 741). It has been suggested (Chauncy, 1994) that gay men retain this masculine messaging, and that gay men are alert to the constituent characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, having internalized male gender roles, particularly in relation to the physical body (Miller, 1998).

Drummond (2005) suggests that gay men are subject to “early and continual bodily masculine introspection,” that results in a greater capacity to reflect on their bodies than heterosexual men, and a greater awareness of masculinity (p. 277). The bodies of gay men are continually subjected to the male gaze – their own, that of potential partners, and that of other men (both straight and gay). Men’s bodies are a space where identities experience an intersection of self, masculinity, sexual identity, and visibility (Duncan, 2010). Bodies become fields of masculinity, where strength, power, size, and the ability to occupy space manifest. Drummond writes, “[I]t is his body that reflects his perceived masculine identity of the culture in which he lives” (p. 271). This proves true, as I discuss later in this thesis; bodies are sites of performance and performance management, where much of what signifies a man’s gayness is linked to his bodily presentation and its cultural interpretation.

The embodiment of gay masculinities and the contemporary emphasis on hegemonic, manly bodies is the product of a shift in embodiment that parallels evolving gay identities and what Sandfort (2005) terms the “masculinization of culture.” The gay liberation movement of the 1960s marked a turning point for gay visibility, redefining a predominantly private homosexual identity as a public one. Heterosexual domination was to be undermined by activists who

endeavoured to eliminate the homosexual's fear of discovery, advocating instead for a moral mandate of disclosure of one's sexuality (Rosenfeld, 2009). Promoting the disclosure of one's minority sexual orientation intimately tied the welfare and political power of gays to public exposure (Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009). The politics of pride became embodied, and that embodiment took the form of the muscular male body (Duncan, 2007).

Prior to the gay liberation movement, the predominant images of gay men as gender-inverts dominated discourses on homosexuality (Duncan, 2010). Encouraged in part by Freud's "gender inversion theory," gay men were viewed as more similar to heterosexual females than heterosexual males (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009). The dominance of these discourses came to project the flamboyant, feminized homosexual as the embodied signifier of a visibly gay performance (Bronski, 1998). The rise of bodybuilding in the 1960s depicted both a path to manliness and the eroticization of the male form, where its portrayal in print consumed by homosexual men helped redefine the well-built body as the sexual archetype of homosexual desire (Bronski, 1998; Duncan, 2010). Bronski (1998) describes how the momentum of gay liberation encouraged gay men to reject commonly held conceptions about themselves as being less than "real" men and in doing so promoted the development of public identities that corresponded with these sexualized images of hegemonic masculinity.

The publicity of a visual gay performance, one distanced from effeminate gay performances, mirrors the valuation of masculine male forms. The choice of men as a sexual object is "not just the choice of a-body-with-penis; it is the choice of embodied-masculinity" (Connell, 1992, p. 746). Masculinity is a part of the package. The sexualization of the

hegemonic masculine form reaffirms an elevated awareness of masculinity as being both produced and consumed by gay men as a trait valued in both themselves and potential partners (Lumby, 1978). Being associated with femininity, or being demasculinized, is a fear that may further lead some gay men to pursue other men who exemplify this bodily ideal of masculinity (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Annes and Redline (2012) refer to this as “effeminophobia,” a recurring theme from their study of rural French and American gay men, with straightness and masculinity – two qualities intimately linked – being desired, contrasting against, and disparaging effeminacy. Glick et al. (2009) describes this as a defensive reaction to masculinity threat, whereby men (both straight and gay) demonstrate more negative affect toward effeminate gay men than toward masculine gay men. The negative perception of effeminate gay men returns me to the point that hegemonic masculinity is intrinsically anti-feminine. Furthermore, considering the above conversation about the internalization of masculine norms by gay men, it would seem plausible that anti-feminine, masculine discourses have been included as part of their socialization as men, even when these “effeminophobic” sentiments are directed at gay men, by gay men. Later in this thesis I will discuss how hegemonic masculinity reproduces a “hierarchy within a hierarchy” amongst gay men, one that sees effeminate gay men subordinate to masculine gay men, and gay men subordinate to non-gay men in general.

Gender-Inversion and the Subversion of the Heterosexual Matrix

“Gender role orientation” has been described as “behaviours, expectations, and role sets defined by society as masculine or feminine which are embodied in the behavior of the individual man or woman and culturally regarded as appropriate to males or females’ (O’Neil, 1981, p. 203). There

is a tendency to view objects who are alike in one way, as being alike in others (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009). This may lead some individuals to assume that because women and gay men have the same sex-object choice (men), that they will have other similar characteristics. This equation has had the effect of sponsoring a culturally dominant stereotype of gay men as being effeminate. Connell (1992) writes:

...the familiar heterosexual definition of homosexual men as effeminate is an inaccurate description of men... who mostly do 'act like a guy.' But it is not wrong in sensing the outrage they do to hegemonic masculinity. A masculine object-choice subverts the masculinity of character and social presence. This subversion is a structural feature of homosexuality in a patriarchal society in which hegemonic masculinity is defined as exclusively heterosexual and its hegemony includes the formation of character in the rearing of boys. (p. 748)

This perception of gay men as being effeminate is consonant with what Freud (1905, 1953) called "gender inversion," whereby the homosexual man possesses gender qualities more often associated with the opposite sex. There is disagreement in the literature, however, as to how much truth Freud's theory holds. Storms (1978) suggests that the relationship between masculine/feminine traits and sexual orientation is extremely weak, whereas Pillard (1991) found that gay men describe themselves as being just as masculine as straight men, yet they also attest to having higher levels of feminine traits. Lipka (2005) similarly found that gay men have more interest in feminine activities than heterosexual men. Blashill and Powlishta (2009) found in their experimental study that, in the main, stereotypes regarding sexual orientation are similar to those seen in studies 20 years ago, and that traditional perceptions of gay men as being more feminine, and less masculine, than heterosexual men are still prominent. Thus, despite the lack of clarity supporting a gender inversion theory of homosexuality, there is some agreement that

suggests *belief* in gender inversion is not uncommon (MacDonald & Games, 1974; Millham, San Miguel & Kellogg, 1976; Taylor, 1983).

The belief in gender-inversion, whether grounded in actual gender performances or not, aligns with Connell's contention that gay men subvert hegemonic masculinity. This is further supported by Butler's conceptual model of the heterosexual matrix, which she describes as follows:

A hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990, p. 151)

The heterosexual matrix implicitly asserts that individuals who fall outside of the linear and assumed linkages between hegemonic genders and heterosexuality are non-traditionally gendered (i.e. men who are feminine) and therefore presumed to be homosexual. In effect, this says less about the actual gender performances of homosexual men than it says about the heteronormative world in which those men operate, and the assumptions about their gender performances that they must negotiate. These assumptions, pervasive as they are, have enabled the reification of "gay" as an external typology, one characterized by effeminacy that serves as a readily-available label to be applied to, and inform discourses about homosexual men.

This last point is one that is important and is borne out in the theoretical implications that are stitched throughout this thesis because performance alone is insufficient to explain "gay," without considering the socio-cultural context in which those performances are enacted. It is, as Butler (1993) states, that "reading of 'performativity' as willful and arbitrary choice misses the

point that the historicity of discourse and, in particular, the historicity of norms... constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names” (p. 187). That is to say, to understand gay performativity in its various permutations requires an understanding of the field in which those permutations occur. That field is, of course, the Western socio-cultural context, which both constructs and is constrained by, amongst other things, hegemonic genders, heteronormativity, and presumptive heterosexuality.

Performance Management

There is a long history of identity management literature that focuses on gay men. In the main, much of the work both cites and stems from Erving Goffman’s (1963) famous work, *Stigma*. Goffman labels a stigma as a blemish, a marker of social undesirability. Certainly, at the time of his writing, and indeed for much of the 20th century, homosexuality has occupied a stigmatized place in society. Gay men, like many stigmatized groups, hide parts of their lives from others. For those individuals who fall into invisible minority categories, identity management strategies are one way of achieving this. For Goffman, this may entail “passing” or strategically exhibiting (or concealing) different markers of identity. It seems to me, however, that the goings on of identity management are more accurately described as a “performance management.” Indeed, much of the work that occurs in passing and other forms of identity management is about manipulating the elements of one’s performance for the purpose of making a particular impression. In performative terms, passing behaviours function by enabling the passer to have their performance signify something other than gay.

Passing is one type of performance work, where individuals, endowed with some personally discrediting information about themselves, choose to keep that information undisclosed to others with whom they interact (Anderson & Holliday, 2004). The act of passing necessitates that individuals present a version of themselves by engaging in a series of acts involving various cues related to their behaviour, body language, speech, or physical appearance (Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009). Furthermore, this performance often follows a script which, for gay men, is derived from socially prescribed gender roles. Wilson et al. (2010) found that, for gay men, maintaining more masculine appearances and behaviours served to be advantageous in hostile situations. This involved, more than anything, concealing effeminate characteristics. In this way, the passing performance is successful when others recognize and interpret the performance in such a way as to place the performer within an unblemished social category. To accomplish this, passing may be an intentional activity whereby an individual consciously attempts to pass as a member of the majority, or an inadvertent, unintentional miscategorization that then goes uncorrected (Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009).

For gay men, intentional passing is an active attempt to appear straight by monitoring their self-presentation. The act of passing requires management of the self and identity, which may be constructed with an increased awareness or “dramaturgical consciousness” (Rosenfeld, 2009, p. 619), making the act of passing an elaborate, situational role-play. Furthermore, passing, like other performances, involves an ongoing control of information, whereby only information that is consonant with the desired impression is presented and contradicting information is concealed. To this end, passing, as a form of performance management, is

purposefully conducted to impress upon the audience a particular concept about one's self and to distance that concept from any characteristics that may be recognized and associated with homosexuality.

Performance management strategies are not limited to passing alone. Scholars have identified a number of other strategies, which vary in their degrees of performance manipulation. These include: *dissociation/camouflaging*, where one behaves as if they are not part of the stigmatized group by engaging in performances, such as modifying one's mannerisms, avoiding contact with other stigmatized individuals, or remaining silent while one's group is being publicly disparaged (Kanuah, 1999; Woods & Harbeck, 1991); *omission* or *dodging*, where one changes the subject or diverts social interactions away from one's stigmatizing condition, or leaves key details or clarifications out that would result in disclosure (Kanuah, 1999; Woods & Harbeck, 1991); *mutual pretence*, or using accomplices who are integral to maintaining a façade, such as bringing an opposite-sex partner to a work function as a date (Kanuah, 1999). Other strategies that have been identified include: *self-distancing* from others or issues of homosexuality (Woods & Harbeck, 1991); *counterfeiting*; *avoidance*; *integrating* (Woods & Lucas, 1993); *fabrication*; *concealment* (Herek, 1996); and *discretion* (Herek, 1996; Woods & Lucas, 1993; Chrobot-Mason, Button & Diclementi, 2002).

Performance management strategies are driven by context and are situation specific, unlike being in the closet, which is a stable way of being that generalizes across situations (Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009). The decision to engage in processes of performance management involves a cost-benefit analysis, or a "weighing-up" of whether revealing that one

is gay is worth the bother (Cain, 1991). Shippee (2011) suggests that this information about one's self is subjected to filters that involve "a creative mobilization of situational and cultural awareness, structural considerations, self-appraisals, and sense making" (p. 120). Cain's (1991) study of gay men in Montreal revealed that:

Respondents decide how to handle [personal information about being gay] based on an assessment of a variety of personal, situational, and relational factors... decisions were made according to particular situations and particular types of relationships; deliberations about how to manage personal information were enacted within a social context. (p. 72)

There has been mention elsewhere (Wilson, et al., 2010) of the contextuality of gay men's performances of gay. The literature, however, is scant on providing details that elucidate the decision-making processes that guide these performances. In particular, there is a paucity of research on the manner in which the social composition of these contexts factor into these considerations.

A number of scholars have identified varying reasons why one might engage in such behaviours: attempts to reduce the likelihood of stigmatization based on sexual orientation that could lead to status loss, discrimination, or stereotyping (Clair, Beaty & MacLean, 2005); removing the onus on stigmatized individuals to account for their differences (Shippee, 2011); maintaining or obtaining societal power and privilege that might not otherwise be afforded to sexual minorities (Fuller, Chang, & Rubin, 2009); avoiding having to publicly disclose one's homosexuality, which could be potentially dangerous (Rosenfeld, 2009), or lead to harassment or embarrassment (Shippee, 2011), negative social interactions, or physical harm. Performance management strategies are utilized by some gay men as mechanisms to reduce the potential consequences of stigmatization.

Much of the literature focusing on the motivations gay men have for concealing information about their sexuality, or toning down their gay performance, focuses on these negative consequences of being perceived as gay in a social setting. What is notably underrepresented in previous studies are those occasions where gay men may partake in performance management strategies, not out of self-preservation, but out of deference to others. Cain (1991) terms this “deferential concealment,” where the emphasis is on respecting the feelings or beliefs of, or evaluating the costs of disclosure for others, rather than the personal risks for the gay man (p. 71). Kanuah (1999) mentions such occurrences, and Anderson and Holliday (2004) identify that 39% of their 40 participants expressed some sentiment about passing for the sake of others, but in each of these studies the focus remains on the negative consequences of being stigmatized.

Though managing one’s performance may reduce the risk of negative consequences associated with being stigmatized, engaging in such behaviours carries potentially negative outcomes for the gay man. The active, intentional, and conscious nature of managing one’s presentation of self requires a significant amount of energy and work. Individuals can experience a “passing bind” (Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009), whereby, in denying their sexual minority status, they reify that status as a central element in their lives. Furthermore, gay men have reported “feeling like a fraud,” or being inauthentic, and may experience a fear of unwanted disclosure that is often more deleterious than disclosure itself (Clair, Beaty & MacLean, 2005). Maintaining control of information about one’s self can require a constant vigilance, denial, and concealment of true feelings (Anderson & Holliday, 2004); as such, relationships with others can

be kept distant out of a necessity to keep information private, encouraging isolation and losses of intimacy (Clair, Beaty & Maclean 2005; Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009). Also, individuals concealing information about themselves may experience occurrences of homonegativity on a closer scale, observing uninhibited displays of discrimination directed at others that may not otherwise occur if an individual were open about their sexual orientation (Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009). Individuals who are managing information about their sexuality also limit the visibility of the LGBTQ community, diminishing the power of non-heterosexuals in political arenas and the capacity for normalizing homosexuality and educating heterosexuals (Cain, 1991; Fuller, Chang & Rubin, 2009; Rosenfeld, 2009).

Disclosure

The lives of gay men present innumerable occasions on which they must manage information about their sexuality. As such, revelation of their sexual orientation to others is a critical part of any homosexual's life. The transformation of the private self into a socially public reality is very complex. Yet, regardless of the challenges that disclosure engenders, many scholars (Armesto & Weisman, 2001; Cass, 1979; Cass 1984; Clausell & Roisman, 2009; Coleman, 1982; Harrison, 2003; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Monteflores & Schultz, 1978), see it as positively impacting gay men's identities, and the literature on the subject generally accepts that self-disclosure is more desirable than the alternatives: identity management, concealment or "passing" (Clausell & Roisman, 2009; Cain, 1991). Ragins, Cornwell and Miller (2003) make a distinction that racism and sexism are readily addressed issues but homophobia, and discrimination based on sexual orientation, remain marginalized prejudices. In societies that often punish those outside the

(hetero)normative order, the choice for the individual becomes one between acceptance by society or personal authenticity.

Every new situation provides a new dilemma of having to consciously decide between disclosure and utilizing performance management to control information about one's sexuality. In forming a new relationship with another, one must always decide how much intimacy is desired (Morin & Schultz, 1978). For homosexuals, this can prove to be a continuously problematic characteristic of maintaining a gay identity. Wells and Kline (1986) state that, "Disclosure to accepting individuals, in the face of negative societal forces, is paramount in affecting positive identity development" (p. 192). Disclosure and conducting an uninhibited performance of one's self has the effect of acquainting others with, and requiring a response to one's gay identity. These responses can range from curiosity to respect to judgmental withdrawal (Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). The reactions to a gay person's identity are an important factor in determining how subsequent situations will be navigated in regard to disclosures of homosexuality (Harrison, 2003).

Previous research suggests that gay men are most comfortable performing gay among "safe" siblings or close friends, typically of the opposite sex (D'Augelli, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1995). The degree of self-esteem that an individual has may influence their decision to perform an un-censored version of themselves among family members (Garofalo & Katz, 2001), and the amount of cohesion within the family generally corresponds to the likelihood of positive reactions to these performances (Merighi & Grimes, 2008; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Research findings with regards to familial reactions to revelations about homosexuality are

inconsistent but generally show that, within the family, initial disclosure is usually received negatively (D'Augelli, 1998; Harrison, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1995) and that this trend is particularly evident in ethnic minority households (Armesto & Weisman, 2001; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998).

There is a great deal of affect associated with disclosing one's sexual orientation, ranging from the personal (e.g. self-esteem) to the inter-personal (e.g. relationship quality). It is this range of impacts, resulting from disclosure/non-disclosure, which brings an urgency to gay performance, and performance management specifically. How gay men *act* gay influences how people perceive men as *being* gay. For gay men whose performances reflect the hegemonic stylizations of masculinity, their performances may result in them being misrecognized as not being gay, presenting numerous occasions where decisions about disclosing must be made, and misrecognitions corrected.

Conclusion

In general, it is clear from the literature that gay performances are heavily invested in social interactions. The dynamic occasions that occur between individuals and groups of individuals are complex and draw from broader normative social conceptions about what it means to be, amongst other things, a man, gay, and homosexual. It is these prevalent discourses that come to be attached to gay performances through processes of signification, and have an array of implications as a result. These range from the requirement to account for one's difference from hegemonic forms of gender identities, to the performance expectations placed on gay men by non-gay individuals, to the perceived need by gay men to continually evaluate social contexts

and make decisions about how best to manage or disclose their identity, and then the energy intensive processes of performance management and the ensuing consequences. The complexity of “gay” provides a colourful opportunity to study performativity, and one that undoubtedly has broader implications for our conceptions of gender and social interaction.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research opens up possibilities for recognition of the known and exploration of that which is unknown. The attractiveness of qualitative work lies in its usefulness to investigate those things that are more open ended and require more involved research strategies (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). As Kvale (1996) says: “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” (p. 1) Qualitative research, and interviews specifically, try to understand the world from the viewpoint of the individuals under study.

The qualitative interview goes beyond common conversation, however, and incorporates structure and purpose to create an exchange of questions and answers (Kvale, 1996). The interaction between researcher and participant is an intentional one, orchestrated to transfer knowledge from the participant to the researcher. The interviewee puts into words their experiences, and the meaning of those experiences (Packer, 2011). In research such as my own,

the everydayness of these experiences can mean that some individuals are not even aware of the intellectual value of their accounts.

It seems reasonable, in most research situations, to begin with a question or line of inquiry and select the best methodological approach to investigate that topic. This being said, to utilize interviews as a method carries some underlying theoretical assumptions about how one approaches knowledge acquisition, which, in part, reflect one's epistemological view of the world. Unlike positivism's reliance on objective, quantifiable data, interviews privilege a more postmodernist view of reality, texts, and their meanings (Kvale, 1996). Further, while the interview method has a long and evolving history, it is a history that has arguably been influenced by postmodernist trends (Borer and Fontana, 2012). The postmodern approach decentres the relationship between the sign and its signifier, emphasizing constructive knowledge that is the product of the individual and the respective experiences and interactions of that individual. Choosing interviews as a research method situates the researcher within an ontological view of the world as being constructed of subjective, meaning-full interactions. Interviews, then, are best suited for answering (or indeed encouraging further inquiry into) those questions that are concerned with uncovering and gaining insights into the everyday experiences and lived worlds of individuals.

Interviews

To get a sense of the make-up and social characteristics of gay men's everyday environments and how they adjust their performances in response, I utilized a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews (Appendix I). Interviews are useful to explore voices and experiences

(Silverman, 2006) and, as Byrne (2004) suggests, “provide a particular representation or account of an individual's views or opinions...” (p. 182). It was my goal as the interviewer to guide each interviewee down a path so as to help him provide those accounts. To this end, the intersubjective experiences of the study's subjects are both what is of interest and what comprised the qualitative data for this project.

Unlike in positivist research, my concern was in obtaining validity in “the truth, the correctness, and the strength of a statement” (Kvale, 2009, p. 246), where that statement represents an authentic account of a subjective experience as expressed by the individual who experienced it, namely the research participant. The interviews were designed to gain an understanding of the social characteristics of the participants' environments, the different categories of people with whom these men interact, and ways in which the men interpret these interactions. In essence, the interviews sought to better understand how the participants constructed their “definition of the situation.” Furthermore, the interviews addressed how these men understand what it means to look, act, sound, and be gay and how these understandings intersect with their interpretation of the situation, and influence their gay performances through processes of interaction, viewed through a performative lens. The interview schedule was designed to be approximately an hour in length and participants were recruited under the premise that the interviews would last between 60 and 120 minutes. In actuality, interviews ranged from just under an hour to over four hours, this latter example comprising a group interview with three participants. In each instance, interview duration had more to do with the organic pace of the interaction than time dictated by the clock. All except three interviews were conducted in person,

the exception being those that were conducted via Skype because the participant's locations outside of Calgary.

The Interview Encounter

Prior to the interviews, the participants were given several options as to where the interview would occur. Because I was unaware in advance of how sensitive discussions around sexual orientation might be for my participants, I felt it was best to allow each interviewee to select the location based on his comfort. In some of the interviews this consisted of a neutral work-room. In these situations I utilized a number of props to set the tone of the encounter. In all situations I preferred to utilize a room with a table rather than another configuration in order to maintain a degree of professionalism in the encounter. Most of the participants, however, opted to have the interviews conducted in their own homes. In these cases, and for the Skype interviews, I had little input into the physical setting of the experience, deferring instead to the interviewee for direction. No participants opted to have the interviews take place at my home or in a public setting (such as a café) despite these options being offered.

Before the interviews commenced, I would engage in a period (5-10 minutes) of informal conversation. This served to personalize the encounter and establish a sense of rapport with the participants. In each case I would conclude this stage with an initial preamble and the informed consent process. This familiarized the participants with the project and helped them to understand in greater detail how the interview would progress, thus enabling them to understand their role both within the interview encounter and the broader study.

The interviews began with a series of demographic questions to create a better participant profile of the men involved. In addition to this, I felt that answering some commonly-asked demographic questions would be a good lead-in to the interview for the participants, making the men more comfortable with the encounter that was about to unfold. The demographic questions also served the important function of revealing to me what social settings were relevant to each respective participant. It made little sense for me as the interviewer to ask participants about their religiosity if they had never practiced religion, or to inquire about interactions with their romantic partner if no such relationship existed. In the case of the former example, my questions revealed that religion was not significantly relevant for any of my participants. In the latter example, this revealed that 9 of the men (33%) were in relationships, four of which consisted of two couples who were interviewed together, and all of which were described as monogamous.

Asking about partner relationships allowed me to address public displays of homosexuality in a way that was not as easily accessible with non-partnered participants. Participants gave serious consideration to how they interacted with their partners in public, often managing public displays of affection to such a degree as to make relationships appear more like platonic, heterosexual friendships than romantic homosexual relationships. There is perhaps no measure which affirms one's homosexuality as poignantly as a romantic interaction – like kissing – between two men. If there is any doubt about an individual's homosexuality, it is quickly resolved when that individual starts kissing another man. Inquiring about these relationships when they were relevant thus provided an interesting layer of insight that was not

as accessible in non-partnered participants. This is only one example of how the early demographic questions were essential to the subsequent interview questions.

The series of demographic questions was followed by an intentionally broad question that was designed to get participants thinking about how gay men are perceived. The participants were asked to describe what they thought non-gay individuals imagine gay men look like. This question often resulted in descriptions of what some of the men identified as a culturally stereotypical gay man and provided a useful jumping off point to individually address some of the finer details around gay performances, such as bodies, poses, language, dress and so on.

The varied responses provided by the participants resulted in the interviews transitioning towards being “interviewee-guided” (Reinharz & Rayman, 1992), which meant moving away from the interview schedule and following the lines of thought developed by the participants. This model of interviewing has been advocated by feminist scholars, amongst others, as a means of dismantling the traditional power dynamics that elevate researchers over their participants (Kirsch, 1999; Reinharz & Rayman, 1992, Seidman, 2013). This approach allowed the participants to speak freely in their own words by destabilizing the traditional “interviewer as expert” narrative, privileging instead the agency and expert knowledge of these men, their identity, and representational practices (Borer & Fontana, 2012). The interview became, as Dingwall (1997) suggests, “a situation in which respondents [were] required to demonstrate their competence in the role in which the interview casts them” (p. 58). The semi-structured interview format, as opposed to a structured interview, left room to do this. It also required a great deal of

effort on my part as the interviewer, having to both listen to the responses of the participants and simultaneously consider the next question as well as my comments.

In order to maintain consistency across the interviews, and capture the desired data, I would occasionally direct the participants' thinking towards certain thematic areas of interest derived from the interview schedule, thus reaffirming these interviews as being semi-structured versus unstructured. To this end, the interview took a flexible format that resembled a guided conversation (Berg & Lune, 2012; Kvale, 1996), though the role of guide was a fluid one, passed back and forth between myself and the participants. Allowing the interviews to be interviewee-guided, and to digress from the planned questions, resulted in the variable interview durations of between one and four hours, which is consistent with this style of interviewing (Reinharz & Rayman, 1992).

Coming-out as an Insider

Interview relationships involve complex negotiations of power (Seidman, 2013). As Cook (2012) contends, "all interview participants, particularly those occupying socially marginalized positions, have the potential to be discredited" (p. 335). This is perhaps particularly salient with groups such as homosexual men. Goffman (1963) identified groups, such as homosexuals, who occupy a marginalized position as a result of the stigma attached to what others might consider a moral deficit of character. For many homosexual men, their sexual orientation is both stigmatized and concealable. For this reason, it is entirely possible for homosexuals to avoid the discrediting blemish of their social stigma. Thus, the potential for gay men as interview participants to be discredited is compounded by the fact that they might otherwise be able to

avoid such experiences. It is within this asymmetrical balance of power that these interviews took place, and it is within this field of power that it becomes important to acknowledge my role in the interview process, and indeed this research as a whole. A discussion of power would be incomplete without revealing myself to be a gay man somewhere within the pages of this thesis. In my being a gay man I have inevitably brought certain interpretations, experiences, and existing beliefs to this research. In recognizing this, it has been important for me to reflect upon my place within this research and the manner in which I have undoubtedly influenced it.

I do not know that I will ever fully grasp the extent to which discussing the intimate nature of one's sexual orientation was made easier for the participants by my being a homosexual man, if it was made easier at all. What did become obvious to me through the course of these interviews were the "intangible gratuitous rewards" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 140) experienced, or the appreciation expressed by many of the participants for having an attentive ear listening to their accounts of topics that were arguably significant for them. Early on, this led me to start prefacing the interviews by stating that while they were not therapy, they might be found to be therapeutic. On a personal level, I can understand this catharsis while, at the same time, I was aware of the need to separate, as Kirsch (1999) implies, friendship and friendliness.

Managing my own expectations about the kind of interactions I wanted to have with these men meant, for me, maintaining a degree of separation that was at times difficult to attain. While in the majority of instances the participants disconnected from me after the interview encounter, in a couple of cases the men proceeded to follow up after the fact, contacting me weeks and

again months later. These occasions occurred through e-mails which often began by discussing or inquiring about my thesis work and then they would quickly go on to more personal details about their own lives, such as changes in their careers, acquiring a new pet, or moving houses.

In other cases, the relationship between the interviewees and myself was (and is) more complex. Because some of the participants were drawn from a convenience sample, these individuals are people with whom I still interact. As a result of us sharing this experience, and them sharing with me some personal details about their lives, these relationships have been fundamentally altered. In many cases what were acquaintanceships have developed into friendships. Kirsch (1999) has argued that interviews represent artificial, staged performances and while in many of these interviews that may have been true, I maintain that in others still the interviews became very real, earnest encounters. I feel this is evidenced by the fact that now, a year after, those individuals who participated in this study whom I still encounter, choose to discuss their participation and recount their experience in a manner not so different from the way one reminisces nostalgically. For this reason, and because of the agency exerted by participants from outside the convenience sample to “keep in touch,” I am more apt to side with feminist scholars such as Cotterill (1992) and Oakley (1981) who posit that interviews open the possibility of genuine relationships that may lead to friendships.

My being a gay man provided me an insider status and a number of advantages in conducting this study. Firstly, my involvement in the gay community enabled me a significant amount of access to a population that others have identified as being problematic to sample from (Brekhus, 2003). When I approached the individuals, or “gatekeepers” (Berg & Lune, 2012),

who had the power to authorize or decline my requests to post recruitment materials at their sites, I made sure to mention that I was approaching this subject as a member of the gay community. In one instance, this resulted in an offer (which I declined) to publish my recruitment materials free of charge in “Gay Calgary” magazine, a widely distributed gay publication in Calgary.

Secondly, my being an insider was advantageous in designing this study. Having a level of familiarity with the subject area and the lifestyles of many of the potential participants was useful. Berg and Lune (2012) contend that “Knowledge about the people being studied and familiarity with their routines and rituals facilitates entry as well as rapport once the researcher has gained entry” (p. 213). Thanks to my regular exposure to gays, I was able to listen with an informed ear to the everyday conversations and stories that went on in casual social settings. This helped in knowing where gay men hang out, the types of people gay men spend time with, as well as some of their everyday experiences; these details were useful in shaping the interview schedule. Additionally, my insider status allowed me to discuss ideas with participants in their own words, using their own language. It is my belief that this knowledge contributed to the comfort of, and my rapport with, the participants.

Finally, familiarity with the language and colloquialisms, or “argot,” unique to the gay community permitted me to pick up on nuances that others might miss or need to seek clarification on (Berg & Lune, 2012). This said, it was not uncommon for the participants to just assume that I had knowledge about the subject that they were speaking about, leaving me having to seek clarification in order to ensure that the data I was capturing were their accounts and not

simply my assumptions. I am unsure if this is a disadvantage of the participants' assumptions about my insider understanding, a downside of the interview method, or a combination of both.

Recruitment

For this study I sought out participants who self-identified as gay men. At times this distinction was more difficult for some respondents than I had imagined. It seems to me that the vocabulary some use to describe their sexuality has shifted away from the exclusivity of the terms “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” and “bisexual” to include a greater range of sexual orientations. For example, some of the study participants preferred to self-identify as “queer.” These participants, however, often seemed to lack the language to describe to me what a queer orientation entailed without resorting to familiar hetero/homosexual descriptions.

A 2003 study by Statistics Canada¹ surveyed 135,000 individuals and found, on average, 1% of those surveyed identified themselves as homosexual. D'Augelli (2006), however, argues that contemporary measures of the homosexual population likely underestimate its size. The reality is that social customs, the invisible nature of sexual orientation, and the fact that some individuals may be secretive or guarded about their homosexuality, make it impossible to obtain reliable information about homosexually-identified people as a population (Kinsey, 1948; D'Augelli, 1989). For this reason, gay men have been identified as a complex group to sample

1 Statistics Canada. (2003). *Canadian Community Health Survey*, Public Use Microdata File, Statistics Canada, Cycle 2.1. Ottawa

from, and attempts to research such a group will be unable to rely on a probability sample (Renzetti & Lee, 1993).

Sampling: Social Media and Snowballing

Sampling for this study began through informal conversations with gay men drawn from my own personal network over a six-month period, prior to this study taking place. Through these conversations a group of potential respondents was identified. These respondents expressed interest in the study and the subject matter and a willingness to participate; in total this amounted to five men. In addition to the convenience strategy used to gather this initial wave of interviewees, posters (Appendix II) soliciting potential study participants were placed at a university campus LGBTQ centre. The initial intent of these recruitment measures was to generate a sample large enough to then utilize an indirect snowballing approach. Snowball samples are useful when the population of interest is difficult to reach, hidden, elusive, deviant, or rare (Berg & Lune, 2012; Lee, 1993; Platzer & James, 1997) and an indirect snowballing approach was identified as a preferable method to satisfy ethical guidelines that discourage researchers “cold calling” potential participants, particularly ones who have been deemed members of a vulnerable population. Also in this case, my insider knowledge of the gay community led me to believe that study participants would likely have expanded social networks that included other gay men, and thus this method would ultimately create a sample sufficient to satisfy the needs of this study. This sampling strategy was, however, subject to significant revision as the research experience actually unfolded.

The final sample was generated primarily as a result of online, social-media recruiting. Posting recruitment images identical to those used in the campus LGBTQ centre on online Facebook groups that targeted the gay community resulted in an additional 21 study participants. In terms of creating a diverse sample, Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) recommend using multiple starting points, thus three Facebook groups were targeted: two that catered to the university age group and one that catered to the broader Calgary gay community. Additionally, these images were also posted to my own Facebook profile. This move to online recruiting provided instant results, bringing the sample number to 26 in no more than 10 days. The end result was a sample of 27 participants: 5 from the initial convenience sample, 21 from the online social media recruitment, and one who responded to the hard copy of the recruitment poster. The speediness of the recruitment process enabled a brief data collection period. In total, the recruitment and interview phase of this research project lasted only three weeks.

A number of writers (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 2013) have identified saturation of information as that point in a study where no new information is being reported. While more than 40 people responded to the materials altogether, a sample of 27 satisfied this point of saturation. Indeed, there is a likelihood that I could have completed this study with fewer participants but I opted for a greater number in part because of the availability and willingness of people to participate, and also because of the fear of not achieving “enough” to complete this study, a fear which I am sure is not foreign to many novice researchers.

Recruiting in this manner essentially modernized the snowball approach by taking advantage of some of Facebook's features. In the first place, the ability of individuals to "share" the recruitment images (from either my own profile or any of the group pages), allowed those images to be broadcast to their own personal networks, exponentially increasing the number of potential viewers. Furthermore, the ability of Facebook users to "like" the recruitment images also resulted in those images being broadcast to their own personal networks while attaching the Facebook equivalent of a word-of-mouth referral.

This method of recruitment also took advantage of the notion that Facebook is already integrated as part of many individuals' daily routines. Previous studies have suggested that Facebook users spend between ten and sixty minutes on Facebook daily (Muisse, Christofides, & Desmarais, 2009; Ross et. al. 2009). Thus, this recruitment method utilized something that potential participants were already doing versus requiring something outside of their daily routine. Dillman (1983) argues that where perceived non-tangible costs (read effort) are reduced, the likelihood of potential participants becoming involved increases. In this sense, costs are also reduced inasmuch as potential respondents are viewing the recruitment materials on the computer, making it easier to respond to those materials electronically by e-mail. This stands in contrast to potential participants pulling a tag off the bulletin board at the community site, putting it in their pocket, and remembering to take it out and respond to it prior to sending their pants through the wash.

As a result of the expansive reach of the internet, the sampling procedures employed in this study effectively cast a recruiting net that defied the geographic boundaries of the Calgary

area. What began as a Calgary population ultimately expanded to include a small number of respondents from other urban centres in Canada who were easily accommodated using Skype software.

Participants

The age range of participants was from 19-59 years, with 41% (n=11) falling between 20-29 years of age, 15% (n=4) between 30-39 years of age, and 33% (n=9) between 40-49. Two participants were 19 and one was 59 years old. The sample was predominantly Caucasian; four individuals were members of visible minority groups and, of those, two were foreign-born (one Middle Eastern exchange student and the other an immigrant from the Philippines). The remainder of the sample were Canadian by birth.

The sample was also quite educated. One participant had a high school education while just under 50% (n=13) of participants held or were pursuing a bachelor's degree, 22% (n=6) held a graduate degree, and the remainder of participants had some college or other post-secondary training. The high level of education attainment is consistent with other studies involving samples of homosexual men (Allegreto and Arthur, 2001; Black, Gates, Sanders, and Taylor, 2000) but could also be, in part, a result of the university sampling locations utilized. The vast majority of the sample identified themselves as having a white-collar job or being a student, while only two individuals identified as being employed in blue-collar or labour professions.

Participants were asked if they considered themselves to be religious. Nearly all of the participants said that they did not, though some preferred to identify as spiritual. A few of the

participants identified as having a religious upbringing but, in all cases, those individuals no longer considered religion to be an important part of their everyday lives. None of the participants currently attended any sort of religious service. Overall, it seemed that religion was not a significant part of the lives of any of these gay men and therefore it is not widely discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Sensitized Induction

Given that this study is qualitative in nature, the importance of grounded discovery to this study warrants special note. It is important to identify the lack of a predetermined typological classification system being imposed upon the data. While such a system may have yielded considerable information regarding underlying patterns, those constructions would be incapable of describing the manner in which respondents define their own positions and experience their social worlds. The discoveries from these data are not aimed at generalizing to anything more than a hypothetical population. Validity in this sense should not be interpreted in the positivist sense, but rather as an intention to refer to the close approximation of the participants' own subjective interpretations. More importantly, the findings discussed in subsequent chapters attest to the study of the subject matter in its own terms. As Phillipson and Roche (1974) have pointed out:

Until we at least partially understand how members make inter-subjective sense of their worlds and accomplish social interaction, conventional sociological descriptions will remain vague short-hand accounts which rely on the reader filling in unstated common-sense meanings for their comprehension. Conventional methodology and analysis assumes an underlying pattern to events which is idealized in unclarified ways by the inter-relationships between sociological concepts. However, these very concepts impose a spurious order on

social life unless they are derived from members' 'typifications,' the particular underlying patterns which sociologists invariably 'reveal' arise from the very concepts and techniques used by sociologists in locating them. (p. 151)

The point here is that I am investigating the very way in which gay men create meaning and interpret their experiences. To impose some externally designed form of classification would be to presume to know the manner in which respondents make sense of their world and attribute meanings fundamental to the navigation of the heteronormative social order in which they exist.

The lack of an external typology does not, however, mean that this study was designed without some guiding ideas. Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that "any researcher, no matter how unstructured or inductive, comes to fieldwork with some orienting ideas, foci and tools" (p. 27). Truly, without some form of conceptual background, I would not have known what questions to ask. To this end, the interview schedule was designed after background research into the areas of performativity, homosexual identities and identity management. The resulting interview questions focused on the following target areas: respondent's demographics, sexual orientation, performativity, characteristics of social contexts and interpretation of those contexts. Instead of taking a purely inductive approach, my research was guided by existing theories and substantive literature. At the same time, this study was far from deductive; a great deal of the data collected emerged through exploratory research that took advantage of the semi-structured interview format, integrating emergent themes as they appeared.

Coding and Data Analysis

The 27 qualitative interviews were digitally recorded and then later transcribed in full. All of the interviews were coded electronically using NVivo 7 to organize excerpts of the transcripts. First,

transcripts were open coded to condense and categorize the massive amounts of data (Neuman, 2000). These categorizations, or emergent themes, were those naturally occurring classes, similarities, dissimilarities, and patterns within the data (Berg & Lune, 2012; Patton, 2002). This process resulted in 36 broader themes (e.g. social categorization), which were then broken down into sub-themes (e.g. social categorization – age; social categorization – gender). In essence, this process involved analyzing the manifest content, or the visible, surface material (Babbie, 2001; Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002), and then the latent content, or the underlying meaning (Babbie, 2001; Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002) present in the transcript data.

An initial wave of data analysis was split equally between manifest and latent content. The former provided valuable information about the social-categorization strategies that gay men utilize in evaluating their social contexts. In particular, this revealed the actual emphasis placed on the social make-up of “safe spaces,” and the characteristics of individuals occupying that space. Latent content was at this stage much more nuanced.

The first wave of analysis was conducted prior to returning to the relevant sociological literature. This decision was made to enable inductive discoveries to occur to the greatest extent possible, so as not to colour the authenticity of initial findings with themes from the literature. The second wave of data analysis was conducted following a return to, and expanded review of the literature. As was expected, this second wave revealed much more latent content than was induced in the initial analysis, with particular emphasis on the interactional themes emergent in the data. As Patton (2002) notes, data analysis requires multiple readings. The first readings are

necessary to develop categories for coding, whereas subsequent readings are necessary to more systematically code the data. Analysis of this data involved several passes, through which different categories or themes emerged, were evaluated, removed when deemed irrelevant, or considered in more depth when determined to contain significant content. Finally, key citations from the transcripts were selected for inclusion in the following chapter. These citations include verbatim quotes, selected based on their ability to capture the sentiments expressed by the participants that characterized each of the themes. Efforts were made to include quotations from all of the participants, but ultimately the best citations in each theme were privileged.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) at the University of Calgary prior to conducting the study. Homosexuals as a group have been identified as a potentially vulnerable population so attention was paid to ensuring that this was a minimum risk study (Berg & Lune, 2012). There were some particular considerations around the online sampling method utilized. Because information about one's homosexuality is private and potentially discrediting, and participant recruitment via social media is a relatively new approach, extra steps needed to be taken to prevent inadvertently “outing” participants online. Thus, while participants were able to view the recruitment materials online, they were advised that only responses received via e-mail would be considered for participation. This proved effective at discouraging potential participants from responding via Facebook where it was impossible to control the audience that could see their response and who could possibly deduce the homosexual orientation of respondents.

Prior to participation, each participant was required to read and sign an informed consent form (Appendix IV) that included the purpose of the study, the type of participation required, the information that would be collected, as well as what would happen with the information provided. Participants were also informed of the risks and benefits of the study, as well as their right to refrain from answering questions or to withdraw from the study at any point, at their sole discretion. These required areas of informed consent were also reviewed verbally to better ensure participants were aware of what they were participating in. For the Skype interviews, the participants were provided with and asked to read the consent materials in advance of the interview appointment, at which point a verbal consent was obtained and recorded prior to the interview beginning.

Care was taken to protect the identities of participants at all times. During the informed consent process each participant was able to select a pseudonym. Because a number of participants had selected identical monikers, some had to be reassigned at my discretion. All digital recordings are kept securely on a password-protected flash-drive and secured in a locked filing cabinet, along with all informed consent materials that contain the participants' original names. Additionally, any identifying information presented herein has been vetted to ensure that it is appropriately vague, utilizing broad job categories instead of employees' specific job titles or employers' names, as well as broad ethnic categories instead of specific nationalities when necessary.

Conclusion

The aforementioned methodological processes were fundamental to conducting the work required to complete this thesis. In the main, this work followed a predetermined research plan that was established after much consideration. This plan was, however, subject to multiple changes as the research process unfolded, perhaps the most notable of which was the large shift in recruitment strategies utilized. It is my contention that successful research is adaptive research. In the following chapter, I will discuss the results of the methods described herein.

Chapter Four: Socially Contextualized Performance of Gay

Introduction

Stereotypical portrayals of gay men are commonplace in media and popular culture. In the main, these portrayals depict gay men as being characterized by the effeminate performances captured in Freud's gender inversion theory. An effeminate gay performance is, however, but one of a plurality of performances. Rather than being an all-encompassing representation of gay men, I posit that the gay stereotype is a single performance comprised of a particular set of behaviours. This performance is ubiquitous, having filtered into the mass consciousness, informing many people's views about who a gay man is and how he behaves. Importantly, the gay stereotype informs cultural intelligibility and, in the context of performativity, forms the basis for recognizing gay performances.

The data in this study suggest that gay men too perceive the performances of both themselves and their peers as being "more or less than" the cultural stereotype. The stereotype

then, in this case, becomes the referent. The stereotype, as it appears here, is utilized as the referent category deduced from the interviews with the study's participants. It is not a type that I have imposed upon the men, but is instead drawn from the way in which the participants referred to themselves and their peers based on their proximity to representing a stereotypical gay performance.

Perceptions of the Stereotype

The characteristics of stereotypical gay performances were almost unanimously described by the men in this study, which attests to the cultural penetration of this performance. Boris stated:

I think the average Joe expects a somewhat effeminate, campy type gay... a guy that is a little bit more like Jack from "Will & Grace" [a popular television show that aired between 1998 – 2006]. You know, with having mannerisms that would be slightly effeminate. Whether it's being very expressive, having slightly looser wrists, wearing very fitted clothes, having a slight lisp – maybe not always, but probably.

Boris's description captures many of the qualities of the gay stereotype – expressive, limp wristed, inflected speech, effeminate – many of which are manifest in the character of "Jack," a common example used by the participants. In the television series "Will and Grace," the character "Jack" is gregarious, quick-witted, animated, and often seen prancing and bouncing around the set. He has an affinity for theatre, frequently bursts into song and dance numbers, and is unashamed of his adoration of gay icons, such as Cher. Jack, like the stereotype that he portrays, is, for all intents and purposes, an effeminate and campy gay man.

The frequency with which descriptions of this type of gay performance were mentioned is indicative of the ubiquity of the stereotype. The idea that gay men are "effeminate" and

“expressive” is well integrated into normative conceptions about what it supposedly means to be gay. According to the participants, however, this meaning is a categorization of gay that straight individuals are more inclined to impose upon gay men, rather than one gay men adopt for themselves, and it has far more to do with *acting* gay than *being* gay. As Trent stated, “I think the general public tends to see the stereotype, the more colourful members of the community. The more flamey guys, I think that’s what people generally think of. I think that’s what the media tends to portray.” Trent’s comments touch on an interesting notion of visibility. For Trent, the stereotypical “flamey” guys are more visible, as they engage in a style of performance that is clearly differentiated from the hegemonic, gender-conforming performances by men, which are largely normalized and hence go unnoticed. This implies that amongst the participants there is a perception that what is culturally discernable for non-gay individuals as being recognizably gay is limited to those performances that are substantially different from normative accomplishments of gender.

What is recognizable as gay for gay men, however, is much more nuanced and encompasses a much greater range of performances. When asked about himself, Trent said: “One of the biggest conclusions that I’ve come to in my own head is that there isn’t any one thing [that’s gay]. I’ve kind of gone through a spectrum of change in my life. I don’t see that there’s any one kind of gay guy, which I think is good.” Brook shared that opinion:

Maybe straight people think that there’s an average gay stereotype... but when you are actually gay and you know a lot of gay people you start to realize that’s like asking: ‘what’s the average woman like? The average man?’ There’s so much variation within each category, you can’t really say an average.

In this sense, the participants maintain that there is a level of performative literacy amongst gay men that is more attuned to the variability of gay male performances. This is important, particularly in a later discussion of the perceptions of gay men amongst non-gay individuals, where I further explore the implications for gay male performativity that result from the presumption that gay men reflect the stereotype.

Effeminophobia

The variability in gay performances mirrors the structural hierarchy of hegemonic masculinities. Often this results in a disparaging of those who are perceived to be effeminate. This has elsewhere (Annes & Redline, 2012; Glick et al., 2009) been referred to as “effeminophobia.” Emergent in the interview data from this study is the notion that while one’s *being* gay may be a non-issue, one’s *acting* gay is negatively perceived. Many of the men have adopted the assumption that an effeminate gender performance, or a deviation from hegemonic masculine performances, is an affront to the sensibilities of others. As a result, many of the men expressed sentiments that aligned with being effeminophobic, sharing a general distaste for men who perform gay effeminately. The participants were quick to distance themselves from these men, and from being labelled as gender-inverted themselves.

One participant, Jeff, exemplified the distance he placed between himself and feminine-acting gay men by frequently using othering language when referring to gay men who represent the stereotype: “They’re very dramatic. Over the top. Out of control in a sense, they’re crazy.” Jeff, like a number of the men in the sample, undertakes a policing of gay performances, creating

“us/them” boundaries that reflect the hierarchical organization of hegemonic masculinities, placing masculine men at the top and effeminate men at the bottom. Like several of the men I interviewed, Jeff described his peer group as being largely homogeneous and composed of primarily gay men. He was also sure to point out, specifically, that the gay men with whom he was acquainted were anything but effeminate. Like several of the men I interviewed, Jeff has no concerns about surrounding himself with men who are homosexual, so long as they are men that do not act gay.

In another interview, one of the participants discussed one of “the most effeminate gay guys [he’d] ever met in [his] life.” Boris recounted a story from when he was traveling abroad with some friends. During this time he and the partner of his friend stepped aside to go to the washroom, and Boris says: “all I could think of was the way he was acting and walking, it was just endless flaming behaviour. I was like ‘oh my god, I bet everybody in traffic knows we’re gay. I remember having that thought because this guy was so obviously gay and it was so embarrassing.” When I asked Boris why it was embarrassing, he replied:

It’s embarrassing because at the time it would imply that I’m gay, or that that’s somebody that I would be attracted to. That behaviour and being attracted to that would be mortifying to me, being associated with it. That would be pretty much it. It was just that mantle of that much effeminate behaviour would be placed onto me somehow.

Boris’s example demonstrates a powerful disdain for effeminate performances, and a devaluation of femininity amongst gay men that parallels straight, hegemonic masculine hierarchies. Further, as Boris states, the very thought of being associated with someone who conducts himself in such

a manner is undesirable. While none of the other participants articulated this sentiment as explicitly as Boris, it was a thread that was stitched through a number of the interviews.

When I asked the participants about performing gay in public spaces, a few of the men made comments about their peers that were equally revealing. For example, when talking about his friends, Tristan said: "... I think about how flamboyant they are being, is it going to draw attention?" James commented that peers who are "really obnoxiously gay" and "making overly boisterous gestures" give him pause for concern while they are out in public. He went on to describe a first date situation that he ended abruptly as a result of the undesirable attention his new date was attracting, saying: "They were quite boisterous, or gay per se, and it made me feel uncomfortable. I don't like to draw attention to myself for that reason." Unlike Jeff, both Tristan and James went on to discuss how they maintain friendships with men who perform gay effeminately, but both of the men also discussed how they manage what venues they frequent when in the company of such friends, opting for locations they perceive to be more private or more tolerant of non-gender conforming performances.

Underlying all of the above examples is the men's awareness of how their companions are performing gay at a particular moment, in a particular setting. Yet, while Jeff was put off by effeminate performances more generally, the other men were more concerned with the type of attention from others that those performances might draw; what seems chiefly important for these men is the presence of an audience who might recognize some sign of gay in the performances of their peers. The concerns raised by the men, which were so explicitly described by Boris, are underpinned by effeminophobia and the assumption that effeminate gay

performances will be perceived negatively by others. Further, it seems that the blemish of a non-traditional gender performance by a gay man is so potent that it may colour the way that more conventional gender performances are read, leading non-effeminate gay men to also bear the stigma of gender-inversion by association. The result of this is a deliberate effort to control how one's own gay performance is read (a notion I return to later), either by avoiding stereotypical gay men altogether, or strategically manipulating the contexts in which they associate with such a performer.

Expectations

Performing gay stereotypically is tenuous. While a number of the men in this study overwhelmingly denounce stereotypical performances, some going so far as to condemn them as damaging and negative, others identify how the existence of the stereotype and portrayals of it in the media result in expectations held by others – particularly straight women – that they behave in a similar fashion. Ethan discussed his older brother's girlfriend:

She had a lot of expectations with me as far as being gay and my interests in her clothes and shopping, and makeup that I just don't share with her... she would ask my opinion on clothes or make-up or hair and I wouldn't notice anything different. She'd ask to go shopping and I'd much rather do something else. It kind of baffled her that I had anything better to do than shopping.

Some of the men discussed how the performance expectations also influence the type of relationships that they have with women. Sam identified how “[g]irls seem to think that you can be their bestie... you're with a group of girls and they find out you're gay and suddenly you're besties. It's like, not really.” Kenzie also identified how his being gay seemed to automatically qualify him for best friend status: “They just assume that because I'm gay I'm free game to be

their best friend, or they just assume that I want to talk about fashion.” The popularized stereotypical performances of gay men often emphasize feminine qualities, such as friendship and fashion. These images are perhaps even more prolific with regards to women’s interactions and relationships with gay men, where such relationships are characterized as involving more traditionally feminine activities, which may colour women’s expectations of gay men to behave effeminately.

Kenzie talked about how he finds the expectation that he enact gay in a particular way to be “fairly shallow. I don’t like talking about shallow subjects. I’ll talk about women’s baggage and spandex and all that stuff, but it’s not who I am.” Kenzie and Ethan, like a number of the men, maintain their distance from the stereotype, claiming that it is not reflective of their identity. Yet, while Kenzie states that this performance is not “who he is” he will readily act it out to satisfy others. Unlike Ethan, Kenzie’s willingness to play along was a trend among the participants. The men were quick to criticize the style of gay being requested of them but, at the same time, they were prepared to provide it. This further indicates the degree to which the gay stereotype has become familiar territory for gay men, as well as the degree of cultural literacy that exists among gay men which enables them to replicate the signifiers of that gay performative. It also prompted me to question the degree to which participants fail to recognize their own reification of the stereotyped performance, and expectations of those performances.

When I asked Alexander whether he felt rewarded or praised for performing gay, he replied: “I don’t know. That’s what everybody expects. They just expect it. It’s not as much

[praise] as it is that I feel I get chastised or lose status if I don't play that role... everyone has a role in a group, my role is to be the humor[ous], bitchy, gay guy. So that's what I do." Like Kenzie and a few of the other men, Alexander draws on the dramaturgical, referring to gay as a "role" or a front-stage self, where the audience for whom he performs gay is composed of a particular group of friends. Also, like Kenzie, the front stage performance of gay is not to be mistaken for his back-stage self, or his authentic perception of who he "really is." The theme of a front-stage performance and a back-stage self was a prominent one that emerged in the data.

Derek recounted one such experience:

There was a time when a good friend of mine, and his boyfriend at the time, Max - and Max is really feminine acting and he carries it really well - and we were having a party and he decided to put on some high heels and do a bit of a runway fashion show. All of us just jumped in and started doing the same thing, so yeah, I can honestly say that I can play it off really well. I'm comfortable with it, I'm not ashamed. But after that party it's back to my normal self, I'm not going to be like that. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Derek makes a clear distinction between his "normal self" and his performance of gay in a particular moment and time, with a particular group of people. In this case, that performance was arguably effeminate, characterized by feminine footwear and the replication of an effeminate profession - runway modeling - that is often appropriated by gay culture through acts like drag or voguing. Derek expressed confidence in being able to "play it off really well," reiterating the notion that he possesses a capacity to reproduce the particular style of performance in question. A number of the participants referenced a similar capacity to enact gay performances that depart from the "default setting" that they felt aligned with their actual self.

In the main, the men felt as if they were being rewarded for providing this style of gay performance. Jackson felt that it is “usually appreciated,” and, as James put it:

I think when I do act that way [people] think it’s great... they’ll find it funny. I think it’s still fairly new for a lot of people... so I’m sort of a rare treat almost, a new kind of humour and a new kind of teasing that they’re not used to and they think it’s funny. They’ve heard about it, they’ve seen it on TV, and they’re like “oh shit, it’s actually true”.

The novelty of “gay” could partly account for the production of the expectations held by others. The lack of referents available for non-gay individuals to draw upon limits the array of possible gay performances. Tristan believed that people’s expectations come from media portrayals but also, “from their background; maybe in high school or any kind of school and they see some kid who is maybe gay and they notice the way that they act and it kind of becomes an expectation for any other gay person they will see.” Brook acknowledged that some gay men might capitalize on this novelty status:

Some gays seem to enjoy being the only gay in the Village. Like that’s their thing, that’s what they do, ‘I’m the gay guy’, so they turn it on *a lot!* And they’re way gayer than you would normally expect someone to be. It’s their niche, it’s their thing. It’s what defines them and sets them apart. It’s like why somebody who has really fantastic hair, makes sure that their hair is always really fantastic. Or somebody with great boobs plays them up all of the time. It’s what people know them for, because it’s different.

It is not unrealistic to posit that the homogeneity of gay men depicted in the media, combined with a potentially small or non-existent gay constituency in people’s social networks, may perpetuate an expectation that gays reflect this homogeneity. This, of course, would only be further accentuated if individuals are in fact doing as Brook and the other participants suggest

and undertaking an emphasized gay performance, whether to differentiate themselves from their non-gay cohorts, satisfy the perceived desire held by others for such a performance, or make their being gay visible by contrasting it so sharply with gender-typical behaviours. In any case, Brook's comments reflect a similar theme of role-playing within social groups, where that role is the "gay guy."

The role of the "gay guy" can be understood in dramaturgical terms as a "front stage self," or what Goffman (1959) would consider to be the version of self that we present in public to an audience. This then raises the question of what a gay man's "backstage self" is and, in particular, how that differs. What is stitched through the statements of these participants, however, is the manner in which "gay" can be an intentional performance, purposefully undertaken by some men. Further, the certitude with which these participants speak about their ability to accomplish a gay performance that is recognized (or read) as gay by others attests to the degree of acculturation that gay men have in reproducing the cultural signifiers of "gay." That is, some gay men are able to undertake a performance, put on a front stage self, to the pleasure of the audience, in such a way as to be legitimately read as not performing at all.

This said, a few of the participants expressed how their performance differed significantly from the stereotype and failed to satisfy the expectations, held by others, of what gay "looks like." In some instances the lack of clearly identifiable gay signifiers left some non-gay individuals confused about the sexual orientation of some of the participants. Trent commented on how his acquaintances' expectations left them stumped when he revealed himself to be gay. He said:

I don't do anything to hide [my being gay]. If I see an attractive guy walk by I go “oh, look at that guy”, like that. Sometimes that throws people off, because it's not what they're expecting. Especially in, I used to work when I was in school, I worked for several automotive dealerships in the service departments. Very masculine, very “guy’s guy” kind of shit going on. I never hid who I was and it threw people off but it also helped challenge that stereotype that a lot of people have. That I had to be “x, y, z” and I was completely different than what they thought I should be.

Trent demonstrates how he muddies the waters of cultural expectations about what a gay man should be; Trent, while completely acknowledging his homosexual orientation, performs gay in a way that is characterized by qualities that have little, if anything, to do with femininity. The surprise that Trent encounters when he fails to represent a gay stereotype is something Ethan identifies with as well: “anytime somebody meets me and finds out about my sexual orientation and says ‘oh, you're not really gay because you don't act like it’.” In these instances, the view held by others that Ethan’s performance differs from what is expected of a gay man challenges the very notion that he may be gay. According to these individuals, Ethan is not really gay, despite the fact that Ethan is indeed a homosexual. So while Ethan defines his orientation by making same-sex partner choices, he does not necessarily perform gay. Like Trent, Ethan’s performance is so detached from what is culturally recognized as being gay that his homosexuality is called into question which, in turn, highlights the strength of the association that some make between sexual orientation and gender performance.

The cultural penetration of the gay stereotype into normative conceptions of what it means to *be gay* are far reaching. At the heart of this is the mistaken assumption, emphasized in Butler’s “heterosexual matrix,” that because a man is homosexual he will act effeminately, or

that the performance and the sexual orientation are one and the same. This assumption is troubled by those men, like Trent and Ethan, whose performances do not signify gay to others, and further troubled by those other men, like Alexander and Kenzie, who attest to intentionally providing a gay performance on demand. What emerges from this is a reconceptualising of gay as a way of *performing* and homosexuality as a way of *being*. One *is* a homosexual and one *acts* gay, but the two are not necessarily the same.

Gay, of Great Import

Many of the participants demonstrated a conflict between their self-definition and gay performance. The men in this study all identified how their *being* gay is core to the way they view themselves. When asked where they would place “gay” on a list of words that identified them, nearly all of the participants place it in the top five, with more than half placing it in the top three. Kenzie who, at 46, was one of the oldest participants in this sample, maintained that over the years his being gay had become less important to his identity, yet still he placed it third on his list. For Christian, being gay is important enough to his sense of self that he said he “always feels an urge to tell people [he is] gay.” Trent claimed that “it’s very important, it’s a very large part of [his] identity” but not the largest, most dominating, or most important thing.

A number of the participants shared the sentiment that it was important, for example, for them to be “Jim who is a carpenter who is gay” instead of “gay Jim the carpenter.” As Tristan said, “gay is just another part of who I am. It’s not explicitly who I am, but it’s definitely a part.” When Jackson described his identity he made the statement:

I'm a comic book geek. See comic book geek would go above gay. But then people would say 'well, what kind of comics do you like?' and I like a lot of gay comics... so it all blends together. I have a good sense of humor, but every single one of them are informed and shaped by the fact that I'm also gay. It's like: I'm me, and I also happen to be gay.

So while being gay is central to their sense of self, it is also important that it not be the quality that defines them. It is okay to be gay, so long as gay is not all you are.

Despite the strong views of the participants that discourage their being defined, either by themselves or by others, by being gay, it is evident from the data that being gay is of great importance for most of the men. The importance that the participants draw from their being gay is different for many of the men. For Sam, being gay has opened a lot of doors, both professionally and personally. He said: "a gay man is more likely to help a gay man, than a gay man to help a stranger, because they're part of the community." Sam also felt that being part of an identifiable group is a benefit that others are missing out on. For Kenzie, being gay has afforded him a lot of independence and for Ethan, being gay comes with a lot of permission, which was a theme reiterated by several of the participants. Ethan said:

I think having the permission to be masculine and feminine is the best thing about being gay ever... I'm allowed to be almost anything I want to be, because if I'm being effeminate, if I'm being masculine, it's because I'm a gay man. I'm allowed to sort of sample everything that society has to offer, to take what I like and leave what I don't.

Another participant, Jackson, said: "It's very important. Very important. Because it's not just who I sleep with or who I find attractive, it informs virtually every opinion. It informs every

opinion I have, in one form or another. I mean it's part of my personality but it's also flavoured and shaped my entire personality."

In many of the early interviews, the participants would identify what about their being gay is important for them and yet, in none of their responses, did they ever mention the fact that they are homosexual, or have sex with men. In response to this trend, I questioned the latter half of the interview participants about whether their same-sex object choice is important to their conception of gay. While some of the participants stated that unequivocally, homosexuality is critical to what being gay means, many more of the participants expressed the opposite. For example, Jackson said the following:

You know, wow. You know, I don't think it's the most important. My perception, my experience of being gay, it's not the most important. Who I happen to have sex with is definitely a significant part [laughs], can't be gay without it. But it's not... it's not the most important part. It's more like the extra flavour crystals. It's the added bonus. Yeah. Sexuality is not the most important thing about being gay.

James similarly expressed how his having sex with other men comprised "maybe 25%" of what gay means to him, stating that "it's a small part, but it starts there." From much of the interview data surrounding what it means for these men to be gay I get the sense that how they negotiate their world and present themselves within it is deeply complex and irreducible to homosexuality, but that, in essence, "gay" more closely resembles a gender orientation, positioned within a plurality of genders, than it does a sexual orientation positioned in a hetero/homosexual dichotomy.

Gay Performativity

If we are to consider gay in performative terms then we must rely on two assumptions, both from Butler. The first of these is that an individual can reproduce culturally accepted signifiers of a particular gender, or, in this case, a gay performance. The second is that those signifiers are recognized, or read, by others as signifying a gay performance. It is this latter assumption that is more easily satisfied, aided in large part by the cultural intelligibility of gay signifiers that are proliferated by depictions of the gay stereotype. Thanks to the commonplaceness of gay men in the media there arguably exists at least a small degree of performative literacy around what a gay man, for all intents and purposes, “looks” or “acts” like.

The first assumption, that gay signifiers are reproducible, is more complex to describe. As I have alluded to previously, gay performances exist on a spectrum of variability; on one extreme is an emphasized gay performance, and on the other are those that are undistinguishable from performances accomplished by other, non-gay men. What follows, then, is a discussion of some of those signifiers that were mentioned with the greatest amount of frequency and consistency by the men in this study as signifying a gay performance, notably talk, walk, and aesthetics.

Talk this Gay

Some of the participants, like Trent and Ethan above, shared that they do not accomplish a recognizably gay performance; a number of the participants, however, expressed that they did. Furthermore, nearly all of the participants were able to describe in sufficient detail the qualities that make up such a performance. These qualities emerged from the responses of participants to

several questions, including: “How do you know when someone is gay?” One theme throughout the responses was the existence of a distinctly gay voice and style of speaking. Brook, for example, maintained a certainty that “there’s speech patterns, particularly, definitely speech pattern[s]” that characterize gay talk. To a similarly phrased question inviting the participants to reflect upon their own performances, I asked:

Interviewer: Are there things that you do that you think might come across as gay?

Tristan: Mostly speech. Definitely speech... I’m trying to think of a way to describe it without doing an impression. It’s when you get to that point of “like, oh my *gawd*” [phonetics mine], and that outfit, and you get really excited and start talking fast. Then you start to... I don’t know, I want to say speak gay, but I’m trying to describe what that is.

Both Brook and Tristan were adamant about there being a way of “speaking gay,” and the certainty with which they spoke on the subject is indicative of the frequency with which the subject was broached by the other men in the study.

Equally prominent within the data is the overwhelming consensus describing gay speech. Very nearly all of the men characterized gay speak as being more feminine. Brook went on to describe speaking gay:

I guess it would be having, adopting a feminine register. Whether or not that is actually what feminine are like [*sic*], it’s the feminine register. There’s a whole list of things: it’s how assertive you are, or how you phrase your sentences, how you tone the words in your sentence with your voice.

The overall impression given by these responses is that to speak gay is to speak effeminately.

Other participants also described how speaking gay is particularly animated. For Mody, “if you move your hands a lot that’s considered gay.” James similarly mentioned how he “use[s] [his]

hands a lot to talk,” and how that is a behaviour he strives to adjust when he is concerned about being read as gay.

The animated nonverbal cues that accompany gay talk align with the sense of enthusiasm that the majority of the participants stated is present in gay speaking behaviours. A number of the men said that speaking gay was particularly passionate. Kenzie commented, “I suppose just the way I speak at times [comes across as gay]; I speak quickly and I speak with a lot of happiness and passion in my voice.” Tristan too mentioned the excitement in his voice, and how it is “very dramatic,” or perhaps as Jason says, “over the top.” Additionally, at least half of the men mentioned that speaking gay means speaking quickly. Sam calls it a “cliché”, but feels that gay speak is “very faster” [*sic*].

Some of the participants, like Ethan, did not explicitly identify which behaviours are inherent in speaking gay, instead capturing them referentially by describing how their own performance differs. In response to the same question asked of Tristan above, Ethan said: “I think there’s definitely qualities. I do tend to take up space and definitely talk with my hands... but I mean a lot of the other qualities that I’m told are not very stereotypical are things like my voice isn’t high pitched or squeaky or inflective, I have a very deep voice.” So Ethan identifies that there are elements to voices that some may recognize as gay, but that, in the main, these do not accurately describe his own performance.

A key element of gay performativity is the notion that it is recognizable, and thus categorizable, as signifying “gay.” Though Ethan identifies as a homosexual man and provides a

description of characteristically gay performative qualities that are synonymous with the descriptions of other participants – attesting to his own gender literacy – his own performance, at least in regards to speech, is not congruent with a gay signification. Ethan represents a few of the participants who similarly expressed that their performances align poorly with what is culturally intelligible as gay speaking, as Jeff said: “every gay guy isn’t spitting out glitter when he talks.” Cases such as Ethan’s serve to reify the distinction between gay as a sexual orientation, and gay as a gender performance.

As in Ethan’s case, another participant, Ray, did not recognize any signifiers of “gay” in his voice, either:

When I hear my voice in my own head when I talk now, it sounds neither feminine or soft or masculine, but then when I hear a recording of my voice later I’m like ‘oh Jesus, is that really what I sound like?’ Which is fine, but I think that’s why, I think that I apparently – from what I’m told – have a soft and more effeminate tone. When I’m speaking normally I can get pretty animated.

Ray, like Ethan, does not recognize in himself the style of speaking that signifies gay; he does, however, accept that others recognize an effeminacy to his voice that he too is able to realize, externally, when he hears his own recorded voice.

In and of itself, speech is a social activity that we use to communicate and share meaning with others. Our voice alone does not have a context in which to interpret it. Voices, rather, need a social context in which they are given meaning. To have a gay voice requires that it can be labelled as such, that it can be identified as gay. As Ethan and Ray identified, this recognition relies on an external agent interpreting and attaching meaning to the voice. That meaning then

results in the categorization or identification of being gay being imposed upon the individual, which is to say that they have performed gay in such a way so as to be congruent with an assumption of *being* gay, defying the presumption of heterosexuality.

Walk this Gay

In addition to a particular pattern of speech, a number of the participants described a gay style of movement. For Christian, there were many facets to gay performances, one of which includes a particular way of walking: “there’s just a walk, that’s more like a runway model than somebody that keeps their feet a foot apart.” Another participant, Sam, mentioned early in his interview, that the way that a man “walks and talks” are the two things he relies on most often when making an initial decision about whether a man might be gay. In fact, the overwhelming majority of participants mentioned, at some point during their interviews, the manner in which gay men walk, leading me to believe that a significant amount of a gay performance is accomplished in the way that men move.

Take, for example, the following exchange that occurred between two participants. Derek and Jason, a couple, described a man who works at their gym during their interview together.

They enthusiastically described this individual in tandem:

Derek: There’s a walk... it’s hard to explain, I’ve seen a lot of guys that are [pauses], they walk funny and the first inclination is “oh yeah, he’s gay,” but not really, we’re just saying that. They walk with the hips. [To Jason] You know what I mean?

Jason: No.

Derek: [laughs] You know that guy, the instructor for Zumba?

Jason: Oh yeah!

Derek: Do we know actually that he’s gay?

Jason: No.

Derek: But we think he's gay because of his mannerisms...

Jason: ... One of them being the way he walks!

Derek: And he's got a limp wrist...

Jason: ... and the way he talks, it's a more feminine nature when you hear him talk with other trainers.

Derek: A *lisp* [camp]

Jason: A bit higher pitch.

In this portion of their interview, Jason and Derek describe how, in addition to a “limp wrist” and a “feminine nature” or “lisp” in his voice, the way that this individual walks leads them to suspect that he may be gay. For them, the Zumba instructor at their gym accomplishes a performance that signifies gay and is recognizable as such, thanks in part to the way he moves his body. Nothing, however, is known about the sexual proclivities of the Zumba instructor that aids Jason and Derek in drawing their conclusion.

Another participant, Sam, also finds the way men walk at times leads him to wonder whether they are gay:

I know when I'm driving I see people walking and I wonder if he's gay, because there's a quick walk. Hand movements, like a cigarette in the hand. A little sashay, that sort of deal. Obviously I'm generalizing but straight guys tend to have a little less rigid walk, it's a little sloppier in general. In contrast, a gay walk would be very quick, very kind of like a cat.

Sam discusses gay movements that include a particular positioning of the wrists, “like a cigarette in the hand,” that is consistent with the description provided by Jason and Derek, and indeed was frequently mentioned by a large majority of the participants. Similarly, an emphasis on a swaying hip movement, what Sam and Ethan, referred to as a “sashay,” Alexander called “more

hip swagger," or what Kenzie referred to as "a bit of a swish," was another recurring description that emerged in the data.

As with gay talk, a number of the participants equated gay movement with femininity. Mody said "they walk really femininish, as in walking in high heels or something, like as in you're wearing high heels except they're not really wearing high heels;" Tony similarly says "I walk with some sass, and like a walk that's got a lot of femininity to it." Tony was one of the only participants to speak about himself when referring to a gay walk. The fact that many of the participants referred to other real and hypothetical men when describing a gay walk indicates the distancing that can occur between gay men and either their recognition or acknowledgement of the notion that they too may perform gay. For example, Derek states: "I don't notice it at this point but I can notice it on other people, it's almost like they've got a soundtrack in the back of their mind and they're walking to that instead of a normal clomp-clomp-clomp pace."

The Gay Aesthetic

Among the most prevalent signifiers that contribute to a gay performance is a particular aesthetic. The participants described in variable detail what this aesthetic entails, but amongst their descriptions were several themes, including an attention to detail, a general sense of being "put together," an emphasis on tighter clothing that emphasized certain body parts, and a propensity for well styled hair.

Dressing the part of "gay" includes a degree of specificity. For example, a pair of pants is not just a pair of pants, Alexander said, "There's cranberry pants. No straight man is going to look for cranberry pants, or, if they do, they won't be 'cranberry' they will be 'maroon'." In this

sense, the amount of detail that is paid to particular choices differentiates gay costuming from non-gay costuming. In another interview, Mark acknowledged that he makes deliberate choices about his attire when he knows he will be in the company of other gay men, "I know the gay crowd will appreciate that the pants that I'm wearing, that the jeans that I'm wearing, that the shirt that I'm wearing, that the jacket that I'm wearing, the cuff-links I'm wearing are 'x', made by so-and-so. I know that, so I'll make sure that I put that on." Similarly, Alexander stated that he cannot wear "just any old shoe", he has to wear the "Feragamos." For both of these men, the aesthetic that is put forward is an accessory of a front stage self, selected for a particular audience and based on the assumption that other gay men will recognize and appreciate that aesthetic.

Of the aforementioned elements of a gay performance, the gay aesthetic is the most unreliable. A number of the participants discussed how the "look" of gay men has been appropriated by modern, urban, straight men, or the "metrosexual man." The idea no longer holds weight that any man who looks as if he crawled out of the pages of GQ Magazine might have been labelled as gay. While this point was discussed to various depths by many of the participants, Will who, at 59, is the oldest in this study, spent a great deal of time reflecting on how the male aesthetic has changed in his lifetime. Will said:

A lot of men nowadays want to look clean, and sharp, and in style. In the past if someone was too well put together they must have been gay. I think that image has changed. You look around now at the young men all wearing new clothes, and nice shoes, and their hair and everything is in place. When I was younger I'd buy something and it would be in fashion and I'd be scared to wear it – it would stay in the closet. I was scared I'd be queered out, that I'd be called a fag. Nowadays it's different... In the past, people who

were too immaculate, too polite, were either James Bond or they were gay. Nowadays you can be ‘metrosexual’ – guys can be in fashion, care about their health, their looks, be sensitive, and still be men.

The description of a metrosexual male that is provided by Will is an astute one. In particular, the notion that men can be all of these things – fashionable, healthy, sensitive, put together, etc. – and “still be men” is an important one. It implies that these qualities have been appropriated; that appropriation, however, is not by men per se, but by masculinity. From Will’s comments it is evident that these qualities, this aesthetic, were already enacted by gay *men*. What has occurred, then, is not an adoption of forms from women by men, but from femininity by masculinity, implying that masculinizing these qualities has given them an elevated status. This bears significance when compared to the descriptions provided by many of the participants of the gay male aesthetic, and in Will’s own retelling of the literal closetedness of that aesthetic in the younger years of his life. Elsewhere in Will’s interview he revealed, “When I was younger people used to yell at me, call me faggot, throw beer bottles at me based on how I dressed.” The gay aesthetic then, which previously had been a stigmatized look for men, and had previously signified one’s being recognizably gay, has since been resignified, adopted by masculinity, and subsumed within the masculine hegemony.

Toned down “Gay”

This discussion of various constituent behaviours of gay performativity focuses on the production of cultural signifiers of gay. Key to this discussion is that these signifiers are read by others as gay. Throughout the interviews it became apparent to me that the vast majority of the

men, in describing how one is perceived as gay, also understood how to amend their own performances so as not to signify gay. In the main, many of the participants talked about how, rather than enacting particular behaviours, they scale back the behaviours that they feel signify them as being gay, thus affecting the impression they make. One participant, Tony, said: “For me it's easy, like I said, it's not like I have to put a mask on or be a different person. It's easy to just be a dude that's not gonna make other people think ‘this is a gay dude’.” Tony’s statement captures two important themes.

First, a number of the participants clearly distinguished between trying to be perceived as straight versus trying to not be perceived as gay. Suggestions are that the former, or “putting on a mask,” is seen as being inauthentic, whereas trying to reduce the impression that one is gay by scaling back how one behaves is considered a variation of the self. As Christian said: “There’s times where I’ll scale it back, but if someone asks me if I’m gay I’ll tell them. I don’t lie. I can’t lie. But I won’t put it out there either.” For Christian, manipulating his performance to be assumed straight was seen as a lie, a sentiment that James shared in conversation:

Interviewer: When people ask about your personal life what do you tell them?

James: I’ll tell them the truth. There’s been once or twice that I’ve lied about it in the past, but it’s important for me to be real.

The emphasis on feeling authentic is shared by Jackson, who commented on how his gay identity was hard fought for and, as such, he was not about to try and convince individuals otherwise: “once you come out of the closet you sure as hell don’t go back in.”

Jackson's comment above marks an important point for elaboration. In each of the participants' cases they were out, self-identified gay men. All of these participants had gone through the process of "coming out" to most (though for some of the men, not all) people of significance in their lives, and for some of the men, particularly those older men, this was a process that was accomplished a long time ago. There is a distinction, then, which frames this discussion of impression management, where manipulating one's performance so as not to be perceived as gay is, in the main, different from being either "not out" or "closeted." Where being in the closet refers to a rather continual state of being that transcends social contexts, impression management – or controlling information about one's being gay – occurs within specific contexts. To return to the dramaturgical, to undertake impression management is to take on an act of performance for a particular social context, or audience, which draws on the familiar nuances of repetition and recognition emphasized by Butler's performativity, but where those actions of repetition are undertaken to signify, or be recognized as something other than gay.

Maintaining a feeling of authenticity, however, did not mean that the men were above manipulating their presentations of self for intentional and strategic purposes. Many of the participants, like Christian above, admitted to there being occasions where they would "scale it back" or tone down those qualities that they felt identified them as being gay. This was emphasized by comments like Tony's, when he explained how he asks himself:

Do I have to contain myself and be this – and it's fine, and that's still me, and I honestly don't feel like that's a mask or any sort of – that I'm hiding behind anything. It's totally me still. It's just, I'm more observant about what I talk about, or how I say things, or what I do, or my actions.

In essence, then, scaling it back is different from intentionally behaving in such a way so as to come across as straight. Intentionally managing one's own impression by putting on a "straight mask" is viewed as being inauthentic, reiterated by comments like the one made by Jackson: "If they're pretending, that's gross. It just means that they're trying to hide from themselves if they're acting like straight men, if they go out of their way to be perceived as straight men."

The second theme that emerged around toning down one's gay performance was that it is easy. Many of the men expressed little difficulty in scaling back their behaviours that they feel signify them as being gay. This demonstrates a well acculturated sense of self-reflexivity on the part of the men; they are aware of how they are behaving and, further, how those behaviours can be interpreted (as gay). On top of this, understanding how particular signifiers are read by others demonstrates a significant degree of gender literacy. The men know what aspects of their own performances may be accurately read as being gay, and how they should conduct themselves if they want to change that perception. In essence, this means that the men are intimately aware of the small details of certain behaviours that signify "gay," and how those differ from gender-conforming, hegemonic behaviours; this awareness translates into a propensity to monitor one's performance for such behaviours. Take, for example, Tony's comment that it is not just what he talks about, but how he talks about it, which is particularly poignant when considered in light of the previous discussion on "speaking gay."

To build on this example, several of the participants mentioned how part of amending their performances includes being more attentive to what they are saying. When I asked Derek if he changes what he says, he responded:

More what I wouldn't say. I wouldn't say things like "fabulous" because an inflection comes off of it... I'm very careful about selecting whether or not I say boyfriend or partner, depending on my company, if I'm trying to be more *straight acting*, or whether I'm trying to make whoever I want to feel comfortable, I'll try not to say boyfriend because it is still such a contested idea.

Similar to other participants, Derek avoids certain language that he feels is associated with performing gay. Alexander also said that he amends how he speaks, commenting that he is "quieter, won't say as much, not nearly as pointed or funny. [He is] more serious, more thoughtful in [his] responses." Similarly, Ray said: "I just watch my words and sort of be, not the strong silent type, but try to be intelligent and careful in my selection of words, versus being just giggly, fly off of the handle." In these instances, again, the participants demonstrate how adapting their performance is about subtracting behaviours rather than adding them. The participants also reveal the consistency with which they engage in self-monitoring.

The degree to which the men spoke about self-monitoring and toning down their gay performances varied. Some of the men felt that their performances are already so distanced from the gay stereotype that they are seldom read as gay in the first place, thus reducing the impetus to monitor and/or amend their performances. Trent commented how he seldom thinks about how he is conducting himself, how he "[doesn't] do anything to hide it," and yet he is still generally read

as not being gay. Kenzie, on the other hand, felt that he is “hyper-aware of all that stuff, all the time,” stating the following:

I think it’s a major shortcoming of mine and I have problems staying out of my head with regards to all that... I’m always wondering, you know, ‘when I just laughed, did I sound gay?’ or, ‘wow, do people just assume I’m gay because of this t-shirt I’m wearing?’ or I’ll just think, ‘that movement I just made or that action I just made looked really gay’.

What is evident from these quotes is that different gay men undertake different degrees of self-monitoring, which can range from being very minor, as in Trent’s case, to very consuming, as in Kenzie’s.

“Straight-Acting”

The term “straight-acting” that has previously appeared in excerpts from the transcripts is one frequently used by many of the participants. In fact, the term came up so often during the interviews that I began asking the men about it; the responses I received and the conversations that emerged around the term were laden with meaning. The almost unanimous familiarity with the term attested to its cultural penetration amongst gay men, and despite its ubiquity, a number of the men expressed a negative view of the term “straight-acting.” When I asked Kenzie about it, he responded:

I hate that term. I would never use that term myself... It totally gets under my skin. It’s very derogatory towards gay people in the sense that you have gay people saying “yeah, I want a gay person but I want someone that can pass for being straight because being gay is shameful.

Kenzie’s derision of the term was echoed by a number of the participants, many of whom also alluded to the term being used to reference a style of performance sought after in potential peers and partners. The use of the term to indicate partner preferences was seen as being

discriminatory towards those gay men whose performances do not resemble that of straight men.

What I learned from the participants, however, is that “straight acting” has very little, if anything, to do with heterosexuality.

Men who are “straight acting” are gay men who embody gender qualities most often associated with hegemonic masculinity. As Kenzie said, “...when I do hear people say [straight acting] I think what they’re referring to are people with masculine qualities.” Similarly, when I asked Boris if he felt straight acting men were having sex with women, he responded: “No, no, no, no. That’s the thing, it’s guys who are gay who are only into guys but who like to do things that you would do with your [straight] buddies... like go out to a hockey game, go for a beer, just hang out without having to go to a fashion show.” Another participant, Jason, provided a similar description, saying that, “you’re interested in sports, you’re handy around the house, you’re fit, you have a deeper voice, you’re more masculine, you like the stereotypical things that the stereotypical male would enjoy or interact with.” “Straight acting” is, for all intents and purposes, less about being straight, and more about reproducing signifiers that are culturally associated with being straight – signifiers which synonymously signal masculinity. “Straight acting”, then, is as performative as “gay” is.

To further illustrate this point, I have drawn the following excerpt from my interview with Jason, who self-identifies as being a “straight acting, gay man”:

I think it's pretty much the opposite of saying “oh, you're being gay”. It's just the opposite. Anyone – they may be gay, they may be not gay – they could act really manly, or what people would consider straight acting. There could be people that say: “yeah, I'm straight acting”, but it's also a behaviour that society has deemed that “this is what

straight acting is”. So it doesn't make a difference if you're gay or straight, you can be straight acting. Or you can be gay. Or really gay. But your sexuality really could be anywhere. It's just a degree of – for myself, yeah I'm gay, I would consider myself, and society would perceive me to be a little bit more straight acting. The way I carry myself, the career path that I've chosen, the people that I surround myself with, the things that I do – people would consider that straight acting. But I'm still gay.

In essence, being “straight acting” is about embodying those gender qualities that are often intimately linked with heterosexuality, minus the actual sexual orientation of opposite-sex attraction. Furthermore, accomplishing a “straight” performance does not necessarily require opposite-sex attraction. When I asked Derek if a gay man could be straight acting, he responded: “Um, straight acting just refers to the mannerisms of a straight guy. Being manly, being handy, and being masculine. Yeah, of course. I know a lot of guys that are like that. I know a guy in the RCMP who is very manly, you would never think that he is gay, but he is gay. So yeah, definitely.”

To fully understand the significance of “straight acting,” consider this point by Alexander, who was responding to my question about what straight acting is: “It’s not significantly or noticeably different than your straight friends, than the average person on the street. Nothing about them triggers a question.” For Alexander, “straight-acting” is about fitting in and not giving anyone reason to call one’s being gay into question. It is less about acting straight as it is about not acting gay. Implicit in this description is the presumption of heterosexuality normalized within Butler’s heterosexual matrix. If “straight-acting” is, as Alexander suggests, not triggering any questions, then one might make the logical conclusion

that “gay-acting” does just that – triggers questions. In this sense, “straightness” becomes the categorical norm, whereby one is assumed to be straight unless there exist some criteria to challenge that assumption. Considered in the context of the earlier discussion of toning down one’s gay performance so as not to signify that one is gay, it would seem that this presumption of heterosexuality is precisely what operates to enable such impression management. By not “triggering a question” one is read as straight.

“Straightness,” then, is more similar to a gender orientation – in the same way that gayness is – than it is to a sexual orientation. In essence, one can *perform* “straight” and/or “gay” and *be* heterosexual or homosexual. As Trent said:

I think some people can be as straight as you want or don't want. I don't think that straight or gay, or masculinity or femininity for that matter, really have all that bearing on sexuality. I think that a lot of people have trouble with accepting that. For me, I've come to terms with that. I'd like to think that I'm a fairly masculine guy. I was raised by heterosexual parents so I have a lot of the traditional man roles just drilled into my head... I think there's a lot of good things that come with being masculine... Whether you're gay or straight I think you can still have that. I think a lot of us struggle with that though.

A number of the participants identified themselves as being more closely aligned with a straight performance than a gay performance, with the single caveat being that they maintained a same-sex sexual attraction. It is not difficult to accept, given the gender literacy demonstrated by a number of the participants, that gay men are at least as acquainted with, or perhaps arguably even more acquainted with, the gendered world of masculinity than any other man; these are *men who desire men*, after all.

Many of the same men expressed that “straight” performances are very much an attractive quality in a partner. Boris said: “It is [attractive] to me... Because I'm gay I like that sort of thing, but it's more – there's a physical component to it... I don't know why that's appealing to me, but I'm attracted to it.” Trent also shared the same attraction to “straight” performances, saying jokingly: “I actually think that it's very gay acting.” As one participant, Derek, said: “ultimately the reason why we are homosexual is because we are attracted to that same sex. You are attracted to masculinity, you're drawn to it. The manlier you are, the more attractive you become.” In essence, the valuation of such “straight acting” performances demonstrates that, as among many non-gay men, there is an elevation of hegemonic masculinities among gay men.

It may be fair to argue, then, that gay men spend a great deal of their lives concerned with the male gender, and so it should come as no surprise that gay men have also acquired the gender literacy to recognize the signs of hegemonic (read straight) masculinities and, beyond this, replicate those signs. Aided by the presumption of heterosexuality naturalized within the heterosexual matrix, this performance requires little more than avoiding, subtracting, or toning down those qualities, such as a walk, talk, or aesthetic, which would indicate to another that one is gay.

With this in mind, I questioned the participants about times where they might engage in such impression management. The resulting conversations focused on the participants' concerns about the potential for experiencing negative consequences as a result of their potentially being perceived as gay. Through these conversations it became clear to me that these men rely on a

few strategies that they employ to evaluate social contexts and assess whether those contexts are appropriate places in which to engage in an obviously gay performance. These strategies largely draw upon the gay men's social-categorization of individuals occupying a space, and the anticipated responses of those individuals to the participants' being gay. In the main, the data suggest that gay men are more inclined to amend their gay performance by "toning down" the gay until (and if) a context is perceived to be favorable towards gay people, or to be a "safe space."

Safe Spaces

"Safe space" was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. While not all of the participants used that language (though many of them did), there was a general feeling amongst the participants that there are places that are more accommodating or tolerant of gay people. These are places where gay men are unconcerned with being read as gay, and they stand in contrast to "unsafe spaces." Unsafe spaces, by comparison, are generally considered by the participants to be spaces that have not already been given the designation of being safe. This is not to say that the participants feel that every space is unsafe, but rather that all other spaces require a period of evaluation before they can be labelled as safe, and before the men feel comfortable presenting themselves in such a manner that may signify their being gay.

Also, safety, as it is used here, should not be interpreted to exclusively mean spaces that offer a protection from injury, but rather a protection from any number of acts that may constitute a negative experience for a gay person. Certainly, physical injury or harm might fall within the scope of these experiences, but so too do more symbolic forms of violence, such as

shaming, embarrassment, homonegativity, or discrimination more broadly. What is central to how the labels “safe” and “unsafe” are used is the potential for negative experiences, where those experiences are directly related to, or perhaps a result of, one’s being read as gay. When I inquired about what characteristics distinguished a safe space from an unsafe space, the responses overwhelmingly called upon social identifiers.

Safe spaces may be geographically bounded, physical spaces, which are static through time and space, such as particular restaurants or bars. The participants, however, seldom drew upon the physical construction of the space to define its safety, instead focusing on the social environment within the space. The exceptions to this in the data were a few specific gay bars, but these too can arguably be categorized by their social composition inasmuch as they are defined primarily by their catering to a gay clientele.

In the main, the men draw upon social categorization strategies to inform their decision-making about whether a space is safe, and thus how to conduct themselves within that space with regard to performing gay. That is to say, the men are more likely to consider who is in a space than the space itself. In this regard, what the participants consider to be a “space” may have very little to do with a physical place at all, but infinitely more to do with the people occupying, or the social context created within, that place.

The Feeling it Out Process

Gay men make assumptions about how tolerant others are towards gay people, based upon the social characteristics of those constituents within any given space. One participant, Alexander, stated: “It’s totally context and absolutely, when you make split decisions it’s going to be

stereotypical. If I'm wrong, I apologize that I had to make that stereotype, but I did.” The process of feeling out a situation, however, is more complex than relying on social categorization strategies alone. As James said, “It depends on the combination of factors. It’s almost like a decision tree; you start at the top and trace your way down.” The data from the respondents suggest that stereotyping others based on the social categories they fit into is only one branch of this tree (to be discussed later). Gay men also employ other strategic and intentional methods, including actively observing or listening for, as well as solicitation of, information from individuals. While a number of the participants spoke of these strategies independently, my overall impression was that gay men use a combination of these in any given situation, not necessarily relying on one technique to determine how best to conduct their performance.

The process of feeling it out for some men includes actively observing and listening to others as a means of evaluating their perceptions of gay people. One participant, Tony, commented that he would “sit back and just watch and listen” in unfamiliar settings. A few of the participants similarly shared how they refrain from interacting with individuals they do not already know while listening for indicators that might distinguish someone as being more politically conservative, strongly religious, or – more obviously – having an unfavorable view of gay people. A couple of the participants took this further, maintaining that they are cautious around individuals who are negative in general. Derek, for example, mentioned how listens for discriminatory or “bullying” comments more broadly, whether they target gays or not, implying that individuals who are inclined to “bully” others are perceived as being likely to bully gays as well. Some of the men in this study demonstrated tendencies to use broad strokes, drawing upon

stereotypes and assumptions when evaluating social contexts. In general, the participants spoke of this resulting in increased self-monitoring of their own performances, ensuring that those performances consist of more passive, toned down behaviours, as well as generally refraining from interaction, both in unfamiliar territory and with individuals they do not know, while they continue to assess the situation.

“Testing the waters” was another recurring theme in the interviews. A number of the participants commented that they will utilize probes in conversation with others. One illustration of this came from Mody, who said: “I’d touch on the subject, maybe mention the word gay. I’d see what their reaction on the word gay was and if they turned out to be accepting.” A number of the men mentioned similar strategies of hinting at homosexuality or similar topics and gauging a reaction. I interpreted this as a more active approach to evaluating social settings, versus the more passive strategies described above, like observing/listening for intention. However, regardless of whether an active or passive strategy, or combination of both strategies is utilized, I received a broader sense from the participants that they initially err on the side of conservatism with regard to performing gay, reaffirming my belief that spaces, or social contexts, are perceived to be inherently “unsafe” until labelled otherwise.

In social settings that are more temporary, the process of evaluation can be much more abrupt and lead to quickly drawn conclusions about the actors within those settings. In other settings that are more static fixtures in the lives of gay men, the period of evaluation can be much greater. In the main, two themes arose out of the data: work and relationship value. A number of

participants commented on how work environments require a more thorough and deliberate process of evaluation and many of the men had established strategies for going about doing this. James, for example, said he monitors the – “primarily male” – work environment to first get a sense of how being read as gay may impact his work life. Upon starting his most recent job, James also took measures to alert Human Resources of his sexual orientation as a pre-emptive means of combatting discrimination, which may arise as a result of his performance being associated with his sexual orientation. Jackson mentioned how he took several months to feel out his office environment, during which time he monitored his own performance so as not to be read as gay. Mark, likewise, said he waits at least three months in feeling out new working situations, during which time he is less inclined to present a recognizably gay performance. In Alberta, during the first three months of probationary employment, an employer can fire employees without cause. Mark had previously felt victimized as a result of this policy; he stated: “the owners didn't like the way that I was dressing and they were like ‘he dresses too nicely’ and the manager was like ‘well it's probably just because he's gay he just dresses better than people’ and they were like ‘ohhh’, and then I got fired the next week.” In Mark’s case, his aesthetic was recognized as gay by his employers, and Mark believes this led them to make assumptions about his sexual orientation – despite the fact that he kept his being homosexual private – that resulted in his employment being terminated.

For most of the other men, their evaluation strategies were less specific or deliberate than those described above, involving instead a gradual testing of the waters, with successful tests reducing the impetus to self-monitor whether/how they were performing gay. Because work is

such a permanent (and financially necessary) fixture in people's lives, I did not find it surprising that the participants take extra care in evaluating the context. The permanence of the work environment and this level of diligence speaks to the next theme, relationship value.

Previous research (Woods and Harbeck, 1991) has suggested that gay men are more likely to manage their performances in both high and low value relationships. My data suggest, however, that testing the waters, like observing/listening, were techniques that are more likely to be employed in situations involving high value relationships, but not in low value relationships. High value relationships include those that are more permanent in gay men's lives – such as families and work – and the data support findings in previous studies, which attest that familial and workplace relationships are more likely to involve an amended gay performance.

Conversely, low value relationships are more likely to be temporary and may be characterized by a transactional relationship, such as with a grocery store clerk. In these interactions, my data fail to support previous findings that gay men manage their performances. For example, in a conversation about an interaction with a flower store clerk, Jason recounted: “She asked if these [flowers] were for my girlfriend, and I corrected her and said ‘boyfriend’. In cases like that I just let it go, because it's not worth my time to care what they think. I'm never going to see them again.” Another participant, Brook, also emphasized how low value relationships are not worth the effort required to amend his gay performance. He did, however, divide low value relationships along lines of power:

In places where I'm spending like no time it's wide open, there's no expectation. In say, somewhere like a restaurant, the only person I expect to interact with is the server and

maybe the hostess. If the server doesn't like me, I don't care. I don't care if they don't like me. I am the one who has all the power. I am the one in a coffee shop who has all the power. I don't care what they think about me. But in other situations, especially if you need them to do something for you and [being gay] might alter their behaviour, then I'll play it down a bit. Definitely.

In general, the sense among the participants was that low value relationships characterized by brief encounters are not worth the energy or effort necessary to evaluate the setting or make performance amendments. The exception to this, however, may be in those cases where the gay man is reliant on another individual and concerned about the consequences of being recognized as gay.

Social context is evaluated, or felt out, using multiple complex and intersecting criteria. The men in this study shared how they simultaneously evaluate the relationship value of those with whom they are interacting, and the significance and longevity of the interactions (such as in work), while also listening to the dialogue and observing the actions occurring within those interactions, and, possibly, probing or testing the waters to better gauge perceptions of gay people. The data also suggest that these processes of evaluation are further complicated by what I have identified as social-categorization strategies. These strategies rely on preformed assumptions about individuals – and the social contexts involving those individuals – based on individuals' socio-demographic characteristics.

Social-Categorization – Age

An examination of the data from the respondents' discussions about how they evaluate social circumstances revealed that gay men critically evaluate situations where older individuals are present. In general, the participants felt that individuals who were older than themselves were

more likely to think negatively about gay men and, as a result, the men were more inclined to tone down their gayness. Interestingly, the perception of age held amongst the participants was relative to the participant's own age. For example, Tristan who, at 19, is the youngest participant, felt that individuals of "[his] generation would be okay with [his being gay]" whereas it is "[his] aunts and uncles and parents that [he] worr[ies] about more." Kenzie, however, who is 54, felt that individuals "75 or older" gave him reason to monitor how he was performing gay, stating: "I don't want to risk it, it could be so much trouble." The general comment amongst the participants was summed up by Brook: "the older the worse, usually."

When pressed about why the participants felt that older individuals are more inclined to view gays in an unfavourable light, many of the men shared the opinion that there are generational differences in terms of the amount and style of exposure that older individuals have had to gay men. The participants seem to share the belief that negative views towards gay men are a product of the times in which people grew up. The age span that characterizes what the various participants identify as being older, however, attests to the internalization of a narrative by gay men that previous generations have a disdain for gay men. Furthermore, because this narrative traverses the many generations of the participants themselves, I am led to believe that the tendency to amend one's performance is more a response to this narrative than to the actual age of the individuals in a given social setting.

In addition to perceived generational differences, there are other social norms that complicate interactions with older individuals, as Brook continued:

...you're supposed to be deferential to older people, you're supposed to be polite to older people, and there's all those other rules that you have to be managing when you're talking to somebody who's a lot older than you. When you add into the fact that you don't know if they think that you're an abomination, you want to... I don't know... you want to keep [being gay] to yourself I guess.

A number of the participants expressed how their performances of gay conflicted with how they felt they should interact with individuals older than themselves. For some of the participants, this results in a tendency to engage in “deferential concealment” (Cain, 1991), choosing to tone down their own performance for the sake of not making others uncomfortable, operating on the assumption that an identifiably gay performance would do so. Ray captured this sentiment more broadly: “I think there's something to be said for understanding that you being comfortable, your desire to be comfortable does not give you the right to make others feel uncomfortable.” Jason and Derek both expressed a similar feeling, tying it to their relationships with their elderly grandparents, claiming that they might feel awkward if they “acted gay” around them. Alexander similarly said: “I'm not flamboyant to begin with, I don't think – I don't gay it up. If I were super-duper gay, I would be respectful of elders, who may not be as comfortable with it.”

Conversely, responses differed as to how gay men interpreted social contexts in which individuals younger than themselves were present. The sentiment expressed by Tristan about his generation being more comfortable with gay people was shared by other participants. As an illustration, Sam shared that “[he] would probably find younger people to be far more open,” going on to state that he “probably wouldn’t care about managing information about [his]

sexuality around them.” In response to a similar question, Tristan said that people younger than himself provided an opportunity to “teach them, or show them that it’s okay to be gay.”

If these men have internalized a narrative of caution around older individuals that gives them cause to amend their performance, then it appears that they have also accepted that younger people, generally speaking, are more inclined to accept gay individuals. Youth, similarly to seniority, was characterized in a context of generational differences that related to exposure. The logic follows that as exposure increases so does tolerance, and for this reason some of the men feel that it is important to perform gay amongst young people. For example, Mark said, “I’d rather be myself. If I’m myself around [youth] they look up to me.” Like Mark, some of the men do feel it is their responsibility to project gay in a favorable light when presented with the opportunity.

Social-Categorization – Gender

Just as gay men evaluate the age range of individuals occupying a space, so too do they evaluate the gender composition of the group(s) in that space. In the main, many of the participants expressed that women are easier to act gay around than (straight) men. For example, Tony stated that “girls are always going to be fine with it. Girls love meeting gay guys, it’s fun for them... they love that they can go shopping, or you know, just like have this dude that nobody’s boyfriend can ever be jealous of, right?” Tony’s comment draws on familiar themes raised by the other participants about women enjoying the company of gay men for effeminate activities, like shopping. Whereas previous discussions focused on how gay men feel that women expect gay

men to be interested in those interactions, here the participants' emphasis is on how women are more approachable specifically because they can bond over those interactions.

The men in this study expressed how there is more permission to act gay when in the company of women, versus men. Mark claimed that women get “a more uncensored version of [himself].” Mody claimed that with men there are “limits between flaunting your gayness, and hiding – no, not hiding it, just showing it less.” These comments reflect my earlier assertion that the participants made a distinction between toning down their gayness, and turning off or hiding their gayness altogether. A number of the participants commented about being “more careful” or “more reserved” in the company of straight men. This could entail “talking less,” being “more deliberate with what [is said],” “not going in depth in regards to the topics [of conversation]” or “how much [gay men] will divulge [their] information on a personal topic.” These examples, all taken from the participants' interview transcripts, demonstrate how, in the company of straight men, there is a perception that one's performance needs to be amended by subtracting behaviours that may signify to others that one is gay.

A couple of participants mentioned that being gay made them something of a novel acquaintance for some straight men. Tony felt that he got an elevated status as a “little buddy” with some of his straight male friends, whereas Brook was of the opinion that it was “in vogue... to have a gay friend.” Both of these participants, however, further elaborated that their straight friends would frequently make efforts to affirm their own heterosexuality by frequently discussing women with them despite the gay men not being interested. These participants also

commented that their straight male friends would downplay their homosexuality, as Brook explained: “they’d always be pointing out how straight looking I was, or that the things I would do would be [straight], or stuff like that.” It seems that in these few instances where being gay gave them a privileged status as a friend, it did so under the condition that their being gay would need to be frequently attended to so as to not threaten the straight masculinity of these men. In these contexts, the participant’s being gay does not seem to bother the straight men, provided that they are able to affirm that the participant is not acting gay.

Based on the comments made by the men, the conclusion can be drawn that, in the main, social contexts that are largely composed of straight female audiences are perceived as being more tolerant, and thus less disabling, or perhaps even enabling, of gay performances. Contexts that are largely composed of straight male audiences, however, require more self-monitoring and restraint with regard to performing gay. Yet, as Mody commented, it is not about hiding the fact that one is gay, as much as it is about showing it less. Considered in conjunction with the comments made by Tony and Brook above, it could be that amongst straight men, gay men endeavour to enact a performance that is more congruent with, and therefore less of a threat to hegemonic masculinities.

Social-Categorization – Religion and Ethnicity

Generally, respondents do not consider what the religious affiliations are of individuals in social situations. The men did, however, express that someone having a strong religious affiliation, regardless of the particular religion, was an indicator that they used when deciding how to perform gay. Some of the men attested to listening for comments that might align someone with

a religious group, such as mention of church attendance. Other men commented how overt symbols of religiosity (“if they have a big ole’ cross hanging from their neck”) may cause them to tone down their performance until that person’s opinion on homosexuality can be ascertained. In one instance a participant commented: “I’m not concerned that people are Arabic, but instead that they might be Muslim... and only because I had exposure to that culture.” This comment was one of the few exceptions that identified a specific religious affiliation as being a cause for concern as opposed to the more general sense shared among the participants, which strategically categorizes religiosity, broadly speaking, to include guiding sets of ideals that the participants feel may frame homosexuality negatively. This perception, then, gives the participants cause for amending their performances so as not to signify to those who are religious that they are gay.

Ethnicity, as another social identifier, is similarly unimportant when it comes to how gay men evaluate their social contexts. Aside from the above participant, only visible minority participants mentioned ethnicity. Two of these participants called upon ethnic identifiers when discussing how they evaluate social settings. In the first case, the participant equated a particular ethnicity with his family, which may have more to do with the notions around relationship value and deferential concealment outlined above than it does with ethnicity. In the second, a recently immigrated participant equated a different ethnic group with an unstable political context. For both of these participants, as with the participant who equated being Arabic with being Muslim, the ethnic composition of a social group is not of concern in and of itself, but rather for what it is

assumed to signify. A third visible minority participant had this to say about ethnic categorizations:

I mean I'll be honest, I'm not as concerned in other minority type of places. I don't worry if I'm in a Chinese or Vietnamese restaurant... because they've been persecuted too. They have the same feeling of being a little less comfortable in a crowd. It's totally context.

In this regard, social contexts involving ethnic minorities are viewed as a favorable and permissive space to perform gay because of shared experiences of being ostracised.

Social-Categorization – Education and Class

During conversations about safe spaces, a few of the participants discussed the competing examples of a “dive bar” and a “swanky bar.” Generally speaking, the men cast the patrons of a dive bar (or some other similarly described location) as being of a lower socio-economic status and the inverse for patrons frequenting a swanky bar. Upon reviewing the transcripts it was evident that a number of the participants evaluate contexts involving lower class individuals as being situations in which to tone down their performances. To illustrate,

Alexander: ...walking into a swanky bar versus walking into a dive bar, I feel comfortable in one and not so comfortable in the other.

Interviewer: What is it about the ‘dive bar’ that makes you uncomfortable?

Alexander: It just feels lower class, like lower educated. I think we all believe that a more educated person is going to be more tolerant of gays.

Interviewer: And what about the ‘swanky bar’ makes you comfortable?

Alexander: [The patrons] are dressed like me. They look like they've embraced some of the ‘media positive qualities’ of gays so I'm less concerned about what's going to happen.

The participant, Alexander, affiliates education with class, and assumes that individuals who have little of both are less tolerant of gays. A similar exchange happened with Mark:

Interviewer: Do you feel out new places when you go to them?

Mark: Of course. It would depend on the place. If it was like a dive bar I'd try and act more straight because there's typically tougher, grungier, scarier people than there is at a fancy, rich bar.

Interviewer: What's different about them?

Mark: Well, the martini bar, even though they're probably still straight, they are probably more oriented towards... if they're at a martini bar they're probably well dressed, really into fashion and such, more Cultured with a capital "C" than people in the dive bar. Does that make sense?

Both participants used the language of the "dive/swanky" bar without my previous mentioning of the words, and, likewise, both participants used the locations to differentiate between individuals based upon their perceived class. Mark, like Alexander, felt that wealth is more strongly associated with acculturation, which acts as an indicator of tolerance. When I asked another participant, Ethan, about his views on religion, he replied: "I think more important than religion though is education. Meaning that people who are undereducated, maybe high school or not much past that, aren't going to think fondly of gays." Ethan's comments, though not related to class, do reiterate the perception that individuals who are educated are more tolerant of gays. The data would suggest that, in the main, both the perceived class and education levels of individuals are social categorizations that gay men consider when evaluating social contexts and adapting their performances as a result.

The Comfortable Peacock

Gay men undertake complex assessments of the varying social contexts that they navigate in their everyday lives. These assessments employ multiple concurrent strategies to evaluate the perceived atmosphere of tolerance towards gay men, resulting in occasions when gay men decide how they will conduct themselves. The majority of the participants communicated contexts that

they perceive to be incompatible, if not inhospitable, to being gay, which result in decisions to amend their performances in favor of a more toned-down, conservative iteration. That said, a number of the interviews elicited stories describing those times (and contexts) where gay men would enact an emphasized gay, or “peacocking” performance. One participant, Marko, said:

I have sort of a spectrum of how I embody my sexuality and masculinity. The majority of times I’d say I’m very straight-acting, but in a comfortable setting I tend to be less straight acting because I don’t feel the need to project a masculinity in the same way... In a comfortable setting I consider myself to be more of myself and less of a façade, or projected, or even performed identity. Whereas when I’m uncomfortable I’m performing an identity to sort of fit in.

Drawing on his own understanding of the dramaturgical, Ethan shared how his being comfortable enables him to feel he is being truly authentic. For Ray, comfort is about “not being afraid of what other people think... it’s like a free pass.” Tony shared a similar statement, saying: “I think that with the things that I do, it’s easier to be myself. Like the [recreational group], it’s a group of gay men so I can just be whoever. It’s easy there to just go in and, you know, be a little gay dude.” Likewise, Alexander shared how if “[he is] in the right environment... with a bunch of friends who [he is] comfortable with” he is less inclined to put up a “façade.” Many of the participants expressed how they feel enabled when they are comfortable in a social setting. Alexander continued, “When I’m comfortable, all bets are off, a different side of me comes out. Not that it’s a fake side, no, it’s if I’m comfortable with people I get a bit more open.” The common theme amongst the participants’ comments is that outside of comfortable social settings they are more restricted in their performance options, and thus

presumably more conservative in their behaviours. Thus, comfortable social settings allow the men to be more fluid in their performances and less constrained by self-monitoring.

A common thread through many of the participants' discussions of comfort is the recurring theme of relationship value. Above, Alexander stated that comfortable settings included being amongst friends, a sentiment Sam echoed, saying that: "If I'm with a lot of friends who know me very well then it all comes out." Similarly, Derek – who you may recall was adamant about his being more straight acting – shared how "[w]hen [he's] with certain individuals that are close to [him], [he] tend[s] to act gay." Interestingly, however, when I turned to his partner Jason – who also self-identifies as being straight acting – and inquired if he thought he could do "gay acting," he replied: "No. I find it makes me uncomfortable." These statements by the men reveal that high-value, static relationships may also be enabling of emphasized gay performances. It seems, then, that while relationship value is an important criterion considered by gay men when evaluating social contexts, its influence is not limited to decisions to tone-down a gay performance, but perhaps also to decisions to emphasize a performance as well.

While comfortable settings enable an emphasized gay performance, the question remains as to what behaviours change as part of that performance. As previously mentioned, toning down one's gay performance entails subtracting behaviours and so it is fitting that the participants discussed how, conversely, emphasizing a performance is more about accentuating existing behaviours and enacting new ones. As one of the men said, "When a gay performance is intentional it's definitely played up." Alexander reflected how, when comfortable, he gets:

...a little pitchier [sic], language becomes less like a collegiate graduate and more like a high schooler... I'll dress up a bit more, show off more. I become more social... more open with commentary. I'm quick witted, a bit bitchier. I'm not intending to be mean, but funny. In different company it would just be a smirk on my face, and holding back, not saying a thing.

Similarly, James commented how, though it may be temporary, he will make campy jokes.

Kenzie said he also enacts more campy behaviour: "I snap [my fingers], oh god do I snap! Just like a diva. Lots of talking with the hands, lots of hip moving." In all cases, the accentuation of these behaviours, which the men identify as signifying gay, draw upon behaviours reified as gay by the cultural stereotype, further reaffirming my observation that the men in this study are well acculturated to reproducing those behaviours, both with ease and on command.

While a number of the men talked about their capacity to enact an emphasized gay performance, many of them made comments about undertaking this less and less as they have aged. Trent, provides an excellent example:

When I was first coming out, I came out when I was 17, I didn't really have a really good sense of who I was and what I was comfortable with and stuff like that. So I relied on those stereotypes, and I thought I had to act a certain way to fit in with the community. There was times when, I went through this period and when I look back at it I just kind of laugh... there was a period when I thought I had to dress a certain way and act a certain way, be very flamboyant, wear feather boas. Some of my friends, Brent looks back at it and just shakes his head. He's like "why were you like that?" and I'm like "I thought that's what I had to be." I didn't know I could just be myself, whatever that was.

Trent's comments capture a strong theme that emerged in the data: change over the lifespan.

Many of the men shared Trent's experience of enacting an emphasized gay performance in their earlier years, especially upon first coming out. Like Trent, a number of the men held the belief

that fitting into a “gay community” required a particularly flamboyant performance, and thus the participants would undertake such a performance in order to belong. Ray said, “I did that. When I first came out I thought you had to go to pride and do the thing and wear the rainbow and all the stuff.” Similarly, Ethan recounted, “I’d just come out. I was 14 and I was trying to negotiate what that meant so I sort of embodied all of the gay stereotypes that I had seen: tight, bright clothing with sort of a more feminine aesthetic and feminine qualities. After a while I definitely didn’t feel like myself, that I was performing an identity that wasn’t authentic.”

Another participant, James, similarly discussed how exposure to other gay men influenced his own performance. During James’s interview he expressed a propensity for enacting an emphasized gay performance as a form of novelty or “rare treat” for his peers. James said: “I learned that when I was working in retail; there, and from things like watching *Will & Grace*. A lot of the gay men that I was exposed to were very flamboyant, that’s the right word for it.” A number of the participants talked about similarly having limited exposure to other gay men prior to their coming out, or shortly thereafter. As Ray says, “I went blindly into a world as an uneducated and ignorant person; this is how you see [gay] people so I thought that this is how you had to be... I was ignorant about the variety of men in the gay world.” For these men and others like them, the amount of exposure influenced their understanding of what a gay performance is, or can be, resulting in a propensity for the men to draw on culturally produced stereotypes to inform them about how to behave like a gay man.

In performative terms, this amounts to a reproduction of a homogeneous performance based on a limited cultural literacy about the full variability of gay performance possibilities. If gay men are exposed to only one style of performance, with a limited set of associated signifiers, then that will be all they are able to reproduce. In turn, as their performance reflects the stereotype it further serves to reify that stereotype, casting gay men as being innately effeminate. This trend amongst the participants echoes the one identified earlier in my discussion of non-gay individuals' expectations of gay performances, demonstrating that limited exposure to gay performances may well result in a limited cultural literacy around gay performances, regardless of sexual orientation. If, in fact, this is the case, then there is a compelling argument to further support my postulation that gay is more closely aligned to a gender orientation than a sexual orientation, inasmuch as "gay" is learned, adopted, and adapted through social exposure to other gay individuals, rather than being a naturalized fact attached to a homosexual orientation.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter has presented a number of discussions around gay performances, performance management, and the broader social contexts in which those performances take place. Taken together, these contribute to theorizing gay in performative terms. As has been discussed, “‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Butler, 1990, p. 190). The contingencies upon which performativity rests are rooted in socially defined discourses, which have their own histories of development, and dictate the cultural intelligibility and the accepted-as-truth beliefs about what constitutes “gay.”

Many of these beliefs stem from the normalization of heterosexuality, and the associated gender performances detailed in Butler’s heterosexual matrix. As discussed in Chapter Two, Butler (1990) explains that, according to the heterosexual matrix, our biological sex equates with our gender, which is then in turn equated with an oppositional sexual desire. The naturalization

of these linear associations creates anticipation that a particularly sexed person, e.g. a male, will behave in a particularly gendered way, i.e. masculine, and sexually desire women; the inverse is true for women. One outcome of this structuring is the presumption of heterosexuality. Further, presumptive heterosexuality is given authority, and legitimized, by the frequency with which heterosexuality is confirmed. That is to say, that there are enough examples of individuals whose sex/gender/sexual orientation apparently comply with the heterosexual matrix to validate it, serving to reify heteronormativity and common discourses around gender performances, while pathologizing those individuals, such as gay men, who fall outside of those discourses. It is to this end that Butler (1990) contends that “the naturalized knowledge of gender operates as a pre-emptive and violent circumscription of reality” (xxiv).

Within this naturalized knowledge of gender is a long and evolving history of gay men that sees them occupy an interesting, if marginalized, position in the gendered hierarchy. As has been discussed, the belief in gay men as gender-inverts serves as one of the contingencies that constructs the meaning of “gay.” Effeminate gay performances figure prominently in broader culture and the findings from this research suggest that this “type” has meaningful implications for the lives of gay men. Some of the men in this study indicated an internalization of expectations that their own performances reflect that effeminacy, which at times they responded to by providing. In performative terms, this amounts to an anticipation of a particular type of performance based on a naturalized assumption about a known piece of information about a person, in these cases, their being homosexual resulted in the anticipation that they perform gay effeminately.

This relates to another finding that some men in this study, most often upon recently coming out, only knew how to perform gay effeminately. Similarly viewed through a performative lens, this indicates that the limited cultural intelligibility around gay performances results in a limited ability to recognize variable gay performances; further, the lack of recognition disables the reproduction of other performance types. That is to say, that when one only recognizes one way to act gay, then that is the only way one can act gay.

There is evidence to support the argument, however, that as exposure to variable gay performances increases, most notably through time spent with other gay men, the range of recognizably gay performances increases, as does the ability to reproduce those performances. This was, interestingly enough, perceived by the men to also apply to non-gay individuals. My contention is that while the expectation, held by non-gay individuals, of an effeminate gay performance may be felt prominently by gay men, this expectation results from limited exposure to a variety of gay performances and, as exposure increases, so too does the ability to recognize variable performances of gay, thus decreasing the expectation of effeminacy.

Indeed, the variability of gay performances was another strong theme throughout this thesis. While some of the men certainly characterized themselves as being effeminate, others expressed that only parts of their performances were effeminate, and others shared that they did not think they performed gay stereotypically at all. This finding does serve to trouble the belief in gender inversion theory, outlined in Chapter Two. This also served to support one of my other

contentions for this thesis: that gay men reproduce a hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity amongst gay men, which is, in essence, a hierarchy within a hierarchy.

Also in Chapter Two I introduced Annes and Redline's (2012) concept of "effeminophobia," and in Chapter Four I provided evidence to support their notion that masculine, "straight acting," gay men are desired and contrasted against effeminate gay men. A number of the participants in this study provided examples of disparaging effeminacy amongst gay men, and many of these examples are reminiscent of the work of other scholars (Connell, 1992; Glick et al., 2009) who found hegemonic masculinity to be privileged amongst gay men. In essence, this shows that while gay men occupy a marginalized place in the gender order, they do not contest their place entirely. Instead, a number of gay men choose to engage with the masculine hegemony, reproducing its structures of feminine subordination.

I am more fully convinced of gay men's engagement with masculinity after my discussions, in Chapter Four, of performance management. Much of this section was informed by the work of previous scholars, such as Erving Goffman (1963), and found similar themes of gay men managing information about their sexual orientation by manipulating their presentation of self. This section did, however, go further into explaining the manner in which performances were managed and, in particular, how performance variation relied upon signifiers of hegemonic masculinity. What is particularly poignant about this line of inquiry is the propensity for gay men to have a highly attuned sense of self-reflexivity with regard to their own performances. Many of the gay men expressed a certain sense of mastery over reading their own performances and, in turn, understanding how their performances will be read by others. In many of the cases, the men

shared how they could manipulate their performances to control how they will be read by others, often with the intent of being read as “not gay.” This was done, in the main, by toning down or subtracting those qualities that signify “gay,” and effeminately gay specifically, and emphasizing qualities that signify masculinity.

There is a great richness to the material on performance management. In performative terms, the participants in this study demonstrated how they are able not only to recognize culturally accepted signs of masculinity and femininity, but also how they are able to recognize in their own performances the signs of “gay.” Further, the participants’ accounts describe how gay men are able to reproduce the appropriate signage to control how their own performances will be recognized by others. In essence, this reveals an exceptional amount of gender literacy.

The comments made by the participants about their capacity to undertake performance management also serve to trouble the linear associations outlined in the heterosexual matrix. Butler (1990) captures this sentiment in her discussion of drag, writing: “This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities” (p. 188). The parody that gay men participate in, both in terms of emphasized gay performances, or “peacocking,” and hegemonically masculine performances, or “straight acting,” calls into question the naturalness of performance, more broadly, and gender inversion, specifically.

Future Directions

Certainly further work can be done to add to the description of gay performativity. This thesis has broached a number of important issues around the subject matter, such as the cultural intelligibility of gay, the embodied characteristics of gay performance, and the social-categorization strategies that inform decision making about performance management, but each of these areas could use further investigation, and ultimately form a thesis in and of themselves. Also, a plethora of themes emerged from the data that were related to, but beyond the scope of this thesis. One example is how gay men perform gay online, and on Facebook specifically, and how they manage those performances in a virtual social context.

Additionally, social media became a very prominent feature of this research during the recruitment stage. There was, however, a paucity of literature on using social media recruitment for social sciences research. Much of the existing literature on social media recruitment has focused on its role in business (see, for example: Qualman, 2012). It would be both interesting and useful to further investigate the methodological implications of employing such a strategy in future social sciences research, particularly in studies sampling from hard-to-reach populations, such as LGBTQ communities.

Limitations

While it is among my goals for this research to contribute to the literature on gay men's identities, I recognize that this research is not without its limitations. As with any exploratory study, the findings presented herein must be understood within the scope, parameters, and design of the research. As with most, if not all, studies of gay men, it is impossible to generate a

representative, random sample (Brekhus, 2003). As a result, the findings in this study are limited to describing the meaningful experiences of the participants in this study. It is my hunch, however, that much of what has been discussed in this thesis might be applicable to other gay men's experiences as well, and though this may have been better demonstrated by more quantitative methods, it is my view that they would not have been appropriate given the topic of study – gay male performativity.

Further limitations associated with the qualitative interviewing method that I used for this study may include social-desirability bias (Fisher, 1993). Because some of the participants were drawn from a convenience sample there is the possibility that their responses were filtered to impress upon me, as the interviewer, a favorable view of themselves. It is entirely likely, if this did in fact occur, that an interviewer unknown to the participants may have elicited some different data. While measures were taken to reduce the reliance on a convenience sample, the fact remains that about 20% of participants (N=5) were known to me in advance of being interviewed.

An additional limitation associated with the sampling methods is a likelihood that the indirect snowball sampling approach, both online and offline, may have resulted in an overly homogenous sample. This could be, in part, a result of what Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) call “homophily,” or the “degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar with respect to certain attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, etc.” (p. 526). Thus, participants may have referred individuals like themselves to participate in the study. In general, there was a lack of diversity in the sample; the majority of participants were Caucasian,

educated, and employed in white-collar, middle class jobs, and although there was variability in the age range captured in this sample, all but one of the participants fell between 19-49 years of age, and no participants were over the age of 60. It would have been interesting for comparative value to have a more heterogeneous sample. The use of social media and the internet, which eliminates those people who do not have access to a mobile device or computer, or do not connect with social media, may also have had implications for sampling.

Finally, the very nature of graduate thesis research creates some limitations. This work was conducted with limited human and financial resources, within a limited time frame, under the constraints of conflicting priorities for time, by a novice researcher. It is entirely possible that a similar study with more researchers, time, and money might have been able to produce a more detailed and encompassing study. It is my belief, however, that any larger study would still have found familiar iterations of the findings and themes that emerged during this research. There were, in all likelihood, some mistakes made by me as a researcher along the way. Certainly the size of the sample ($N=27$) was unnecessarily large, which, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, resulted from an amateur's fear of not gaining enough data to complete a thesis. This fear was further realized in the open-endedness of the interviews, where I permitted the participants to speak at great length, which ultimately produced a tremendous amount of interview data, all of which was transcribed by myself at a great investment of time. Such is the life of learning as a new researcher.

Conclusion

It is my hope that this work can contribute, in some way, to a fuller understanding of the lived experiences of gay men, their gendered realities, and managed identities. It is my aim to contribute to a sociological understanding of the meaningful interactions that constitute our many performances. Further, I wish both to utilize Butler's theory of performativity which, for more than twenty years, has been applied to a diverse array of topics, and to demonstrate its applicability in altering our conceptions of "gay." Most importantly, I intend to share the learning that I know that I, myself, have accomplished in researching this piece, in talking to my peers, and in analyzing and writing about their stories. I believe that there are some answers written in these pages, but I believe there are even more questions that arise out of them. If one of those questions encourages someone, gay or otherwise, to reflect upon their own circumstance and invite change, as slow as it may be, then I will have considered this a success.

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Appendix I – Interview guide

Demographic Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. What do you do for work?
 - a. What is your employment? Job?
 - b. Do you attend school? What are you taking there?
3. What is your educational background?
4. Do you identify as a member of any particular cultural group?
 - a. Race? Ethnicity?
5. Do you consider yourself to be a religious person? Do you identify with any particular religion?
6. What do you consider your sexual orientation to be?

Sexuality/Performance Questions:

1. Do you think people can tell that you're gay?
 - a. Why or Why not?
2. Do you think some gay men act more "gay" than others?
 - a. Why might they do this?
 - b. Do you ever do this?
 - i. Tell me more about that.
3. Do you think some gay men are more "straight" acting than others?
 - a. What makes them more straight acting?
 - b. How is that different than "gay" acting?
 - i. How do you consider yourself? What about your friends?
 - c. Is being "straight" acting something that is attractive? Desirable?
4. Have you ever been interpreted as straight? Can you give me an example?
 - a. What did you do in that situation?
 - b. Do you typically correct people who make wrong assumptions about your sexual orientation?
 - i. Why or Why not?
5. Do gays ever intentionally pose as straight?
 - a. How does one do that?
 - b. What do you think about that?
 - c. When would they do that?
 - d. Why would they do that?
 - e. Do you ever do that?
 - i. If so, when? Why?

Specific Social Context Questions:

1. Does it ever matter if people think you're gay or straight?
2. How do you act with regards to your homosexuality when you're at work/school?
 - a. If it's different, why so?
3. How do you act with regards to your homosexuality when you're with your family?
 - a. What about your extended family like aunts, uncles, and grandparents?
 - b. If it's different, why so?
4. Does a person's age change how you display your sexuality to them?
 - a. How so?
5. When you're with your friends do you behave differently?
 - a. Do you ever act "more gay" or "less gay"?
 - i. What about "more straight"? Is that any different?
 - b. Does it make a difference what the sex of your peers is?
 - i. If you're out with the girls? Out with the guys?
 - ii. What if the guys are gay? What if they're straight?
6. Does how you portray your sexuality change when you're with strangers?
 - a. What about when you're out in public?
7. Do you change how you portray your sexuality when you're with your cultural group?
 - a. What about your religious group?

General Context Questions:

1. When you meet someone for the first time do you automatically inform them that you're gay?
 - a. What things might you consider beforehand?
2. Do you ever consider how "gay" you're acting in certain places?
3. Are some places easier to be "gay" in than others?
 - a. Why do you think that might be?
4. Can you give me an example of a place where you may be concerned about being perceived gay by others?
 - a. What is it about that place?
 - b. Can you think of any others?
 - i. Is there anything that they have in common?
5. How might you act differently when you're in these types of places?
 - a. Why is that important?
6. Do you ever consider that someone you're with may be perceived as gay by others?
 - a. How does that make you feel?

- b. Does this have any influence on what you do with your friends?
 - i. Where you go? Who you go with? Who you specifically don't go with?
- 7. Have you ever felt unsafe/at risk because of your sexuality?

Appendix II – Recruitment Posters



The poster features a central illustration of a white unicorn with a vibrant, multi-colored mane and tail. The unicorn is depicted in a dynamic, rearing pose, holding a large, detailed assault rifle in its mouth. A bright rainbow beam of light emanates from the unicorn's horn, extending towards the upper right corner of the image. In the background, several fighter jets are shown flying in formation, leaving long, colorful smoke trails that mirror the rainbow. The top of the poster is decorated with a horizontal bar composed of various colored squares. The background of the illustration is a dark purple field with white, five-pointed stars.

WHAT DOES **GAY** LOOK LIKE?

INVITING GAY MEN (AGE 18+ ONLY) TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO ACT GAY.

I am a Masters student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary and I'm researching what it means to be and "act" Gay. I invite you to share your insights and experiences.

Volunteers will be asked to participate in a single one-on-one, interview lasting between 60-120 minutes in length. All interviews will be audio recorded and participation will be kept anonymous.

INTERESTED?
CONTACT ME VIA ANY OF THE FOLLOWING

 **PHONE**

 **EMAIL**

 **TWITTER**

THIS STUDY HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY CONJOINT FACULTIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD.

 **UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**



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Appendix III – Informed Consent



Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Brian Hansen, Faculty of Arts, Department of Sociology

Supervisor:

Dr. Fiona Nelson, Department of Sociology

Title of Project:

Performing Sexualities: Gay Men's Strategies for Managing Perceptions of Sexual Orientation

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to explore how homosexual men make decisions regarding displaying/performing their sexual orientation, based on their evaluative judgments of their physical and/or social settings. The objectives of this study are to generate a clearer understanding of: what it means to be gay or straight acting; to explore notions of what it "looks like" to be straight or gay; to describe what different performances mean to homosexual men; and to investigate how some gay men may adapt how they display their sexual orientation as a strategy to manage impressions of their own sexuality as it is perceived by others. I am interested in how gay men understand the manner in which they act out their sexuality in social settings. The aims of this research are to contribute to the literature on queer and homosexual issues and identities, and to provide an increased understanding of this aspect of homosexual men's everyday lives.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, personal interview that will be audio-recorded. The interview will take approximately 60-120 minutes depending on the amount of information you wish to disclose.

The interview will include questions about your demographic information, such as your age, work, and education. I will also ask questions about your sexual orientation, how you navigate your social relationships and how your homosexuality intersects with those relationships. I'll ask you about how you perceive homosexuals and heterosexuals, and how you make decisions about portraying your sexuality publicly.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any (or all) questions at your own discretion and may withdraw from the study at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study during the interview you will be given the option to include any data you have provided up to that point or have that data destroyed completely. Once an interview is complete there will no longer be an opportunity to withdraw the information you have provided.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to disclose information about your gender, age, ethnicity or cultural background, educational level, sexual orientation, and the type of profession in which you are employed.

You will be asked to select a pseudonym (a false name) by which you will be referenced in any writing, publications, or presentations of the data. This is to ensure your anonymity.

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: _____

You may quote me and use my pseudonym: Yes: ____ No: ____

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

By choosing to participate in this study you will be able to share your experiences and provide insight into matters that pertain to the homosexual community. It is my hope that this information will assist in an awareness-raising about the everyday lives lived by gay men. The primary personal benefit is that you will be able to share fully your thoughts and feelings with an attentive listener who has a genuine interest in those things that you wish to say.

There are no risks associated with your participation. If any of the topics discussed make you feel uncomfortable you may decline to answer them at your own discretion.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

The data is being collected, in the first place, for the purpose of writing a Master of Arts thesis in the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary. Additional uses of the data may include academic presentations; academic papers, chapters or books; reports or columns in popular media; and reports or policy papers for organizations serving the LGBTQ community.

Participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the interview. The information that you provide will be kept indefinitely in a secure filing cabinet in my home office. The only individuals who will have access to your personally identifying information (name and contact info) will be my supervisor, Dr. Fiona Nelson, and I, Brian Hansen.

Any audio-recordings or written transcriptions of those audio-recordings will be kept indefinitely on a password protected USB flash drive and secured in a locked filing cabinet. All transcribing will be done by myself, Brian Hansen.

Any writings, publications, or presentations of the information you provide will utilize only the pseudonym that you select. There will be no personally identifying information to link you to the data as it appears in any produced form.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time during the interview. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Mr. Brian Hansen
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts

-or-

Dr. Fiona Nelson
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.