

PLAYING IT STRAIGHT:  
PERFORMING SEXUALITY  
IN ENTERTAINMENT

by

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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

While film and television help provide a window into the processes of actors' personal and professional lives, we still have yet to hear of the experiences from our own local theatre companies. Further, while there has been discussion of straight men playing gay roles, Americans have yet to hear the experiences of gay men playing straight roles.

Utilizing a grounded theory approach, this research focuses on the experiences of nine self-identified gay male actors at a large southeastern university. Results concluded that gay actors encounter a great amount of heteronormativity in personal life and the theatre. Further, the entertainment sphere and its audiences were found to be influencing factors in the maintaining of gender/sexuality binaries. Consequently, actors tend to reinforce stereotypes of gender/sexuality binaries in order to have "readable" characters with audience members.

Research also revealed complex decision making processes gay actors encounter through personal and professional lives. Decision making processes revolved around several concerns arising from integrating oneself with his environment. As a result, all of the participants outlined several performance strategies to help resolve such concerns.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Mary Sydney McDonald, who remains a constant influence and inspiration.

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	6
3. METHOD .....	18
4. RESULTS .....	22
a. The Self.....	25
b. The Environment .....	36
c. Concerns.....	51
d. Shifting.....	79
5. DISCUSSION.....	94
6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY .....	102
REFERENCES .....	106
APPENDIX.....	114

## LIST OF FIGURES

4.1 Theoretical Model for Performing Sexuality in Entertainment .....	24
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I was known as the only straight guy in the theater department. [Laughter] I became really good at it, became really, really good at it.

*When you say, 'really good at it,' what is the 'it'?*

At passing, you know what I mean?

*Acting masculine?*

Right. Right.

*Which entailed what? The way you walked? The way you talked?*

Exactly. (Johnson, 2008, p. 510)

Passing is known generally as “being accepted for something one is not” (Blackmer, 1995, p. 50). Although the phenomenon spreads across several layers of categorization and difference, the passing of one’s sexual orientation/sexuality/gender expression is no exception. When E. Patrick Johnson interviewed “Stephen” for *Sweet Tea* (2008), he brought to light a young gay man’s journey in managing his sexuality in the theatre—both on and off stage. Through the course of coming out to friends and directors, Stephen still played “straight” in his personal life. In short, this passing as “straight” or “masculine” was to aid in playing straight roles on stage.

Americans have heard stories of actors playing different sexualities. Such films as *Milk*, *Capote*, and *Brokeback Mountain*, all have central gay characters that are played by straight actors. With many of these straight men gaining Academy recognition for their portrayals, there

are concerns for what it means to “perform” sexuality; to “pass” as gay. Further, although straight actors’ performances are lavished with praise, high critic ratings, and even Academy Awards, gay actors portraying straight characters do not receive the same amount of attention. Indeed, such phenomena seem to be largely uninvestigated. Why have we not heard about the gay actors playing straight roles? *The New York Times* of September 28, 2008 points out: while some gay actors have come out in the open while playing heterosexual characters on television, such as Neil Patrick Harris (*How I Met Your Mother*) and T. R. Knight (*Grey’s Anatomy*), the experience of coming out for most gay actors is not that simple—and several choose to remain closeted. Thus, several performances of playing sexuality often go unrecognized. In *The Sunday Herald* of April 22, 2007, Gross, author of *Contested Closets: The Politics And Ethics Of Outing* stated:

...actors [are] making a career out of being a mainstay in the heterosexist system...They are still held in their closets...Coming out is a risk with little benefit if any...the pressure from the institutional side is saying ‘If you come out, we’re dropping you.’ There’s no question it’s absolutely explicit as that. They will spell it out. (Ross, 2007, p. 12)

Those who come out in the entertainment industry are less likely to land jobs. Thus, non-heterosexual actors are faced with several daily decisions that revolve around managing and performing sexuality in the workplace. Many who have come out in the past are still dealing with its negative effects. Yet, the stories are few and far between. The *Sunday Age* of August 26, 2007, Rupert Everett elucidates: “It was a mistake if you really want to have a career in show business...I would have thought twice about coming out...knowing what I know now...you can’t be dancing in a club with your shirt off and then pretend you’re married. It wouldn’t work.” Everett went on to explain that since his coming out, he has had trouble landing several roles,

including James Bond (lost to Daniel Craig.) With some actors refusing to come out, and others dealing with its negative affects, there is much concern how images of male sexuality are enacted, performed, upheld through the entertainment sphere. What does it mean to “play straight?” How do gay actors go about playing straight roles? How do both actors and audiences come to conclude what it means to be gay or straight?

Yet, the few stories to come forth are from celebrities in Hollywood, and the case with Stephen from *Sweet Tea* is a minute tip of the iceberg that deserves to be explored. While film and television help provide a window into the processes of high profile actors’ personal and professional lives, we have yet to hear of the experiences from our own local theatre companies. Do gay actors in local and regional theatres encounter any of these same claims? How does an actor play heterosexuality? Thus, I find it significant and imperative to understand these interactive processes by speaking directly with those who have had these experiences firsthand.

The main purpose of this paper is to understand and present a grounded theory concerning the process of performing sexuality for actors who identify as homosexual in the United States. Such a theory is guided by the following research questions: What is the process by which a gay actor plays a straight role? How does a gay actor manage his sexual identity in order to have a successful career? Aptly, I should clarify a few terms that may hold some ambiguity. For the purposes of this paper, the term “gay” refers to a homosexual male, unless stated otherwise. While there are certainly lesbian actors, for the sake of time, space, and scope, this paper focuses on the gay male actor’s experience.

Before getting into the bulk of the analysis, it is important to position myself on my assumptions, values, and potential biases. First, because I am interested in the experiences of others, and I cannot possibly know what it is like to be another person, I am acknowledging that

there are indeed multiple realities to acknowledge and examine. The subjectivity of experiences are not only evident but significant and deserving of our investigation if we are to answer the previously stated research questions and understand the central phenomenon laid within. Second, from an epistemological perspective, this study is based on single hour-long interviews with nine participants from the same southeastern university. Thus, it is important to recognize the immense subjectivity and superficiality in such a basic response. For this study to achieve some type of stability, several more interviews with several more people from various locations would be required to achieve a sense of saturation in identifying a conclusive understanding of the central phenomenon.

Finally, I should also discuss some of my own personal biases and assumptions coming into this research process. Having a strong background in theatre, there are often several questions that come up through the process of not only how to play characters, but the politics that lie within the workplace. The original concept to encourage this research was after watching a recent theatre production. In my opinion, an openly gay actor was clearly having difficulty playing a straight character and establishing an attraction with the female lead. Discussing this with a fellow actor and director, he replied, “You would be surprised to know how difficult it is for some guys to play straight.” Really? I wondered. How difficult could it be? This then led me to consider: While straight actors and their processes playing gay character are highly publicized, why have we not heard about gay actors’ processes in playing straight characters? Are those processes difficult? And are they laden with inherent double standards? Thus, coming into this research, I expected that gay actors have a different process in developing characters than straight actors. This might also be an opportune time to state: I identify my sexuality as heterosexual and that I am generally attracted to women. One might question how my

heterosexuality may influence the study. This is a particularly significant bias because I have not had similar firsthand experiences to those I have interviewed. Additionally, my participants may or may not have chosen to disclose certain aspect of their experiences, depending upon their perception of my sexuality. Nevertheless, in a society that treats heterosexuality as the standard or the norm, being gay is sure to be a different experience, which is why I find the gay actor's experience so appropriate for further study.

In order to answer the previously stated research questions, it important to: First, review previous research and literature pertaining to the area of study; second, clarify the methodology and approach; third, walk through the findings; and finally, consider the limitations and avenues for potential future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Investigation and scholarly work on managing sexualities in the workplace suggests that several variables influence the decision making process of coming out or dealing with being outed. Although the entertainment industry is stereotypically known for being a “haven” for gay men (Fisher, 1995), actors who are gay still make daily decisions of whether to conceal or reveal, to whom, and at what time. Therefore, it becomes imperative to not only explore the literature concerning sexual identity management in the workplace, but also call a focus to future research, in the hopes of shedding more light in understanding the process of sexual identity management for gay actors in the United States. The experiences of gay actors seem to be a fairly uninvestigated topic. While broader, general themes have been explored, study into the management of one’s sexual identity or career in the theatrical or cinematic setting is lacking. Because this study focuses on how homosexual actors are able to portray characters in a presumed heterosexual environment, it is important to acknowledge previous work in hegemonic masculinity.

#### **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Much work on hegemonic masculinity seeks to understand how images of men are encoded, performed, and reified through social interaction (Brickell, 2006; Hanke, 1990; Ingraham, 1996; Trujillo, 1991). The concept of masculinity has the tendency to change with concern to context, such as time and space (Hanke, 1990, p. 245). Thus, making observations on specific case studies of masculinity may prove to be more effective. While this study does not

seek to define new images of masculinity, it does seek to understand current conceptions of masculinity and how performances of gender and sexuality are used to conform to or deviate from said norms.

### **Masculinity.**

Masculine studies focus on images of men and how they affect the definition of “what it means to be a man.” One of the most prominent works belongs to Trujillo (1991). Through his work on images of Nolan Ryan, Trujillo (1991) identifies five common themes of hegemonic masculinity found in American culture: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and heterosexuality (p. 291). With these themes in mind, one might question how an actor might portray a “masculine” character in line with the societal expectations of a heteronormative environment.

Briefly, the first component, physical force and control, marks the male body to represent power through physical strength (Trujillo, 1990). This is also to distinguish the male body from the female. Connell (1983) argues: “force and competence are...translations into the language of the body of the social relations which define men as holders of power, women as subordinate [and] this is one of the main ways in which the superiority of men becomes ‘naturalized’” (p. 28). With this in mind, do actors enact displays of strength and force when playing straight roles?

The second tenant, occupational achievement, constructs professional success as a symbol of masculinity. Trujillo (1990) defines: “masculinity is hegemonic when it is defined through occupational achievement in an industrial capitalistic society” (p. 291). Success is also defined by being able to provide for the family financially. In other words, the male is a “breadwinner” who works outside the home, while women upkeep the domestic side (Messner, 1988, p. 205). Actors may encounter several stage roles that fit this image of success, but what

about his personal life? Arguably, a successful actor who is consistently cast and employed may be looked upon as more masculine than the actor struggling to get recognized.

Patriarch of the family marks the third component of hegemonic masculinity. In this case patriarchy refers to the domination over women and children. In terms of the family, the father is glorified as a family protector and strong whilst women are “sexual” objects and “nurturing mothers” (Trujillo, 1990, p. 291). Due to a history of gender inequality, images of men and masculinity are associated with being the “man of the house” who “wears the pants” in the relationship. Thus, patriarchy and being the head of the household defines hegemonic masculinity. How do might actors approach familial roles on stage? How do they interact with and treat female characters?

The fourth tenant contributing to hegemonic masculinity is frontiersmanship, which is “...symbolized by the daring, romantic frontiersman of yesteryear and of the present-day outdoorsman” (Trujillo, 1990, p. 291). Further, Trujillo (1990) utilizes the pervasive image of the cowboy in media to help unpack his idea of the masculine hero on the great frontier; he continues to define the cowboy as a working-class white. Thus, the images of the frontiersman, the outdoorsman, the working-class man, and the cowboy all come to represent this facet of hegemonic masculinity.

Trujillo’s fifth component, heterosexuality, is the most resonant this study. Hegemonic masculinity reinforces the idea of the sexual binary, in which heterosexual and homosexual are mutually exclusive (Brickell, 2006; Sedgwick, 2008). Such a dichotomy further stratifies and entrenches gender with male sexuality. To be masculine is to be heterosexual. To be feminine is to be homosexual. Brickell (2006) points to Sedgwick’s work *Epistemology of the Closet*, in which she maintains that the hetero/homo binary has been the “master term” since the 19<sup>th</sup>

century, and reinforces several other perceived binaries, including masculine and feminine (2008, p. 11). With gender so intertwined with sexuality, hegemonic masculinity not only masculinizes heterosexuality, but further feminizes homosexuality. In sum, to be masculine—to be a man—means to be heterosexual.

Trujillo's model is ideal for identifying performances of hegemonic masculinity in a presumed heteronormative environment. By using this model, one may better understand how actors make performance choices that conform to or deviate from hegemonic masculinity. Yet, as Hanke (1990) reminds: "hegemonic masculinity *changes* in order to remain hegemonic; significant social change in the direction of gender equality will require more than the 'new view of manhood'" (p. 245, emphasis in original). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is dynamic—not static. With the idea of hegemonic masculinity constantly changing, new models or observations since Trujillo's work (1991) would be helpful to this study.

Though some scholars seek to understand the complex, contradictory, and liminal spaces between hetero and homo (Brickell, 2006), paying particular attention to the construction and reinforcement of this binary may aid in understanding how actors' performance strategies are formulated. Brickell (2006) reiterates that the primary frame surrounding study on sexuality is "a social constructionist one," (p. 425) in which meaning is understood through experience, and potentially changes from one context to another. Often this approach is contrasted with essentialism, in which the basics of subjective experiences are inherently the same and "continuous over time" (p. 425). This research does not seek to essentialize the homosexual experience, nor the heterosexual. Rather, I am more concerned with how societal and environmental constructions of sexualities influence performance choices. What are audiences'

expectations of sexuality and its representation? How do directors guide these images? How and in what ways do gay actors adopt these ideologies on and off stage?

### **Heteronormativity.**

Considering this popular binary, hegemonic masculinity also normalizes heterosexuality. According to Ingraham, “heterosexuality circulates as taken for granted, naturally occurring, and unquestioned” (1996, p. 169). By doing so, heterosexuality becomes the understood standard by which homosexuality is defined as “abnormal.” Yep (2002) explains: “the equation ‘heterosexual experience = human experience’ renders all other forms of human sexual expression pathological, deviant, invisible, unintelligible, or written out of existence” (p. 167). Deconstructing heteronormativity unveils a skewed power dynamic, and calls attention to potentially silenced voices—such as sexual minorities. Yet, heteronormativity not only affects our conceptions of “gender and sexuality in popular culture” (Herman, 2003, p. 144), but the rhetoric used to support such ideology affects “society’s cultural, legal, political, religious, scientific, and social understandings of human sexuality” (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006, p. 428). The pervasiveness and invisibility allow heteronormativity to seep and bleed over into any interactive layer of society.

The aforementioned scholarship will help provide a context in which to understand how acts of gender and sexuality are constructed, performed, and decoded. How do actors pay attention to constructions of normative behavior? How do you they employ these constructions into their work onstage and in their daily lives?

### **Queer Theory**

Raymond (2003) identifies queer theory as “category in flux,” in which categorization is not easily defined, and “a body of knowledge connected to but not identical with lesbian/gay

studies” (p.98). Rather, such scholarship seeks to give voice to marginalized groups (that may otherwise have none) by moving said voices towards the “center” (p.99). Queer theory works to disarm the power structure of hegemony by “seeing affirmed otherness and difference, and the importance of attending to marginalized, minority, and oppositional groups and voices previously excluded from the cultural dialogue” (Kellner, 1995, p.24). Without queer theory, hegemony and unfair power structures would perpetuate without exposure. Indeed, scholars are better able to understand concepts of hegemony, such as masculinity and heteronormativity, through the lens of queer analysis.

I have identified four themes emerging from queer studies relevant to this research: stigma, management, gaydar, and coming out. Each area indubitably has a rich background. Yet, in the context of this research, they are spheres within a process of decision-making that every gay actor may typically encounter.

### **Stigma.**

One question that may come to mind is: Why would gay actors have to worry about their sexuality in their workplace? The short answer: stigma. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (p. 3), and he specifically points to homosexuality as one of the “blemishes of individual character perceived as weak” (p. 4). When gay men violate established gender norms, particularly dealing with hegemonic masculinity, they are more likely to be perceived as deviant and consequently, stigmatized. Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001) point to Bohan’s work *Psychology and Sexual Orientation*, in which she argues that the “LGB [or lesbian, gay, bisexual] identity carries a stigma, albeit usually an invisible one; this identity is likely to elicit condemnation” (p. 93). Additionally, the stigmatized identity, if revealed or “outed,” may result in the individual being discredited, or even worse:

“the stigmatizing quality assumes primacy, anchoring a ‘master status’ or ‘transsituational identity’ so that the stigmatized identity is deemed salient even where it is irrelevant” (Bohan, 1996 p. 93). In other words, once an individual identifies himself or someone attaches him to a stigmatized label, the stigma consumes the rest of the identity. Furthermore, Bohan (1996) explains that this stigma often leads to feelings of homophobia and homonegativity (p. 94). Such notions contribute to a heteronormative environment, and discourage employees from being open about their sexuality. However, in an industry in which gay men are prevalent, one must ask: When does sexuality become an issue in the entertainment setting? Also, is there a sense of homophobia in the business theatre or film? Are there forms of self-directed homophobia?

Stigmatized identities also come with several levels of emotional and psychological baggage: “The stress associated with concealing a stigmatized social identity is amplified by the fact that disclosure is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon but occurs, rather, on a continuum that takes place in work and nonwork settings” (Ragins, 2008, p. 194) Baggage also comes from remaining silent. Bowen & Blackmon (2003) utilized Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence theory in order to understand how the fear and threat of isolation contributed to majority politics remaining dominant and minority sentiments diminishing in the organizational setting. A key implication that Bowen & Blackmon (2003) identify is the idea of “jumping on the bandwagon,” or in a sense, succumbing to the perceived dominant cultural norm. Thus, the idea is perpetuated: until a gay actor is in a position of higher credibility and power within the entertainment industry, he must negotiate his identity silently—or with the help of a trusted publicist. With actors being in the national spotlight and the media being able to spread information like wildfire, the pressure to negotiate identity becomes insurmountable.

## **Management.**

Because stigmatized identity has an evitable power to discredit an individual, it is important to answer the question: For gay actors, what techniques are employed to control information surrounding their stigmatized identity? Study on sexual identity management in the workplace is gaining attention. In fact, previous research has pointed to the fact that sexuality is much more complicated than a simple closeting or outing (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001). The authors outline three management strategies proposed by J.D. Woods in his work *The Corporate Closet: The Professional Lives of Gay Men in America*: 1.) counterfeiting, which involves “constructing a false heterosexual identity...and carefully avoiding interests or mannerisms that are stereotypically associated with being gay,” 2.) avoidance, or “to reveal nothing about their identity and thereby appear asexual,” 3.) integration, in which “the individual reveals his or her true sexual identity and attempts to manage the consequences” (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001, p. 323-324). Because a career in entertainment depends so heavily on selling performances, the self, and performance of the self, it is important to look into what ways gay actors manage their sexual identity in their workplace and social settings.

Blinde & Taub (1992) provide a rich study in stigma management regarding female athletes. Particularly concerned with the stigmatizing label of “lesbian,” the authors point out techniques for managing such stigma. The first is concealment, in which one simply conceals sexuality. Methods for concealment were three-fold: “self-segregation, passing, and use of disidentifiers” (p. 528). The second technique outlined by Blinde & Taub (1992) was deflection, in which individuals would “reduce the salience of a discrediting attribute” (p. 528). The final technique the authors shed light upon is normalization, in which individuals “directly confront

the stigma” and attempt to redefine and reeducate (p. 528). Techniques utilized by these athletes may provide a model or resemble types of stigma management for gay actors.

Blinde & Taub (1992) point out: strategies for managing a stigma may very well depend upon how visible or perceivable it is (p. 527). The authors point to Goffman’s (1963) definitions of the discredited and the discreditable. Simply put, the discredited individuals are marked by easily identifiable attributes, while the discreditable individuals’ attributes are not easily identified. While the discredited manages the inevitable “tension” by being clearly marked, the discreditable manages information surrounding the stigma (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Because sexual orientation is an attribute that is not always easily identified, individuals employ techniques to better manage its impact. In other words, gay actors may very well fly under the radar and “pass” if they successfully control the flow of information. The question thus arises: How do actors manage such information about sexuality? How does such decision making affect character choices on the stage? Career moves? Which roles to take?

### **Gaydar.**

Considering the social identities constructed through hegemonic masculinity and the hetero/homo binary, there must be thought for how such assumptions may be made about sexuality. What societal identity markers are often associated with gay men and straight men? When it comes to their personal experiences, is there such a thing as “gaydar?” What other forms of stereotyping are present? What do gay actors have to do to negotiate such notions of behavior and stereotyping? Before moving on, I should clarify: the term “gaydar” is an in-group term accepted and used by the participants of this study. The term refers to stereotyping or identifying someone as gay through verbal and/or nonverbal cues. Because this is a term that participants used and referred to, I believe it is important to unpack such phenomena under said term.

With homosexuality typically being categorized as an invisible identity, Nicholas (2004) argues that “gay and lesbian identity recognition processes thrive in societal contexts where ‘invisibility’ dominates as the norm for gay and lesbian cultural affiliation,” and thus, “Gaydar is, in a sense, somewhat reliant on an environment of heterosexuality” (p. 64). While the sexual identity may be invisible, what cues or codes typically “set off” gaydar? Pointing to symbolic interactionists, such as Blumer (1969) and Mead (1934), Nicholas (2004) argues that meaning surrounding cultural identity affiliation is an interpretive and interactive process in which said meaning is constantly shared, modified, and reinforced through verbal and non-verbal behaviors (p. 64). Two levels of study are gender differences in intonation and nonverbal behavior. Gaudio’s study (1994) suggested that: “(1) listeners had fairly consistent judgments about what speech sounds ‘gay’; and (2) listeners’ judgments were largely accurate with respect to identifying male voices as belonging to gay or straight men” (p. 54). If there is a sense that Americans know what “sounds gay,” how does this affect the choices that actors make in portraying characters? How does this affect decisions for casting? Some researchers have even gone so far to say: “Remaining purely descriptive, [the study] showed a correlation between nonverbal behavior and sexual orientation and it also showed that this correlation is probably more complicated than some would expect” (Knöfler & Imhof, 2007, p. 203). My aim is not concerned with the validity of gaydar, but rather how such stereotyping affects the actor’s performance choices. Clearly, our culture has a few assumptions about sexual orientation and behavior. Thus, the actor must be literate to these social constructions. If he is to have a successful career, he must be aware of his impressions and manage them accordingly. Goffman (1959) discusses this dynamic: “The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the

expression that he *gives* and the expression he *gives off*” (p. 2). Because an actor’s career depends on auditions (which center around first impressions), he must be familiar with the norms and expectations of behavior in and outside the casting process.

### **Coming Out.**

Recent research has focused on the complexities of the coming out process in the workplace. King, Reilly, & Hebl’s study (2008) focused on how important the conditions affected the coming out process, and revealed that both situational and contextual factors influence disclosure. The results indicated that positive disclosure experiences occurred when there was a positive climate, and recipients of disclosure had positive experiences when disclosure came after a period of time (King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008). This finding would suggest to gay actors that establishing a successful career before coming out could be a favorable management strategy.

With the threat of disrupting the work environment, employees often question: Who is “safe” to come out to? In the case of the entertainment industry, in which each working entertainer has a public image to maintain, the process of coming out is typically either too complicated to manage or simply not an option at all. Yet, some exceptions to the rule are emerging. With the outings and coming outs of well known actors, one has to wonder whether politics surrounding sexuality have changed. In light of Ellen DeGeneres’ coming out, research points to the possibility of new options. Shugart’s work (2003) offers a rich case study concerning the process of Ellen DeGeneres’ coming out on national television. Such work is invaluable to the focus of the study, since it offers a detailed analysis specifically dealing with a homosexual actor managing stigma within a heteronormative environment. The article sheds light on a “contemporary case of a lesbian passing as a heterosexual woman in order to gain

greater insight into the strategic rhetorical performances employed to that end” (Shugart, 2003, p. 32). Such study is relevant and worthy of pursuit. With more similar case studies, one can begin to understand the “strategic rhetorical performances” gay actors employ to market themselves within a heteronormative environment.

Shugart (2003) also acknowledges that while typical avenues of disidentification involve adopting fake heterosexual partners, Ellen was never “connected romantically with a man” (p. 36). Yet, the television show presented the character as heterosexual by involving her with a number of male interests. In other words, in addition to real life romance, performing heterosexual characters on stage could be seen as a form of disidentification—furthering the performer from the stigmatized identity.

Performances of ambiguity entail playing up to dominant hegemonic and culturally sound signifiers and codes, while not necessarily disidentifying with the “hidden” identity. Shugart identifies this strategic performance as “conjecture.” The performance invites the audience into the assumption that the performer identifies with the heteronormative system. The previously cited scholarship will help deconstruct the participants’ experiences articulated in the interviews. My aim through this research is to not only build upon these scholastic foundations, but help assemble bridges to new areas of research; to recognize the complexities, contradictions, and exceptions of gender, sexuality, and performance within society.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

Because the focus of my research questions relied heavily upon personal experience, I chose the grounded theory approach. Such an approach would allow participants to articulate their first hand experiences. Since I am interested in lived experiences and the phenomena therein, it was important to employ a method that would be able to yield an optimum amount of information upon which to draw. Unlike phenomenology, I am not interested in solely describing the “essence” of an experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 26). My fear would be essentializing or generalizing my participants by limiting their unique and complex experiences. Grounded theory seeks to demystify the “actions, interactions, social processes of people” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63) and thus, demystify the interactive process that surrounds being gay and playing heterosexuality. Through identifying this central phenomenon, I hope to provide some type of “framework” for further research, which makes grounded theory suitable for this study (Creswell, 2007, p. 27). Through the grounded theory approach, I hope not only to identify the central phenomenon, but also particular causal or influencing factors that affect the decision making process in response to the phenomena.

#### **Participants**

The project involved nine participants. The amount of participants was determined upon availability of applicable participants and at which point saturation was met—the point at which no new information or insight is being brought to the table (Creswell, 2007). Ages of the participants were nineteen and older, and were selected upon the criteria that he was: male, had

stage experience, and identified himself as gay or homosexual. Because sexuality is a potentially sensitive issue to approach, (for fear of assuming or accidentally outing someone,) participants were selected through recruitment e-mails. Recruitment e-mails were sent through the theatre department at a large southeastern university. In the event that more participants were needed, recruitment e-mails would have been sent out to local theatre organizations. These e-mails specified the aforementioned criteria and prompted any applicable and interested participants to respond. For the purposes of keeping identities confidential, participants were given the opportunity to assume their own aliases or pseudonyms. Thus, the cast of participants were: Gary, Lee, Bruce, Dion, Chris, Phillip, Ewen, Jason, and Alexander.

### **Data collection**

Face-to-face interviews were recorded with a sound recorder program on my personal laptop computer. For this researcher, using a computer made organizing and transcribing audio more accessible and efficient. The interviews were conducted in various locations and times. Because the availability of the participants was limited, there was no set place and time for conducting the interviews. However, certain conditions, such as the comfort of both the researcher and the interviewee, were made a priority. Distracting environments or places in which the interview could be potentially interrupted were avoided. Typical venues for interviews were vacant classrooms at the university or local coffee shops.

The interviews transpired for approximately one hour, and consisted of a series of predetermined questions that are available in the appendix section of this paper. Considering that the conversations would inevitably vary, there was room for a number of improvised follow-ups. However, focus remained on the predetermined questions and interviews were not complete until every predetermined question is answered in some way. Because the experiences discussed in the

interviews had potential to be very unique and complex, it was important to give justice to these experiences. Thus, the recordings were transcribed post-interview with minimal notes pertaining to subtext or body language. Interviews were literally transcribed (which included notes on hesitation, nonverbals, et cetera.) I found including these notes concerning subtext to be helpful in understanding how the participants unpacked their experiences; how they formulated their explanations. Because no new information was being brought to the table, saturation (Creswell, 2007) was met after nine interviews. No follow up interviews were conducted, though they were certainly warranted. Some participants' experiences could have been more specifically unpacked and detailed, but such participants were limited in their availability. Follow up interviews may have yielded a richer text from which to draw and analyze. Follow up interviews may have also facilitated better relationships between researcher and participants—which in turn, may have promoted more disclosure and specific detailing of personal experience. Thus, it is important to recognize this study as more general and less specific analysis of the phenomenon.

Collectively, transcripts in their entirety amounted to 200 double spaced pages. Minimal notes were taken during the interviews because I wanted to remain as present in the moment with the participants as possible. Too much writing during conversation is distracting for both parties. I also kept a small journal to reflect on the interviewing and analytic processes. Entries were made before, after, and in between interviews. Many of the considerations in the entries will be discussed in the discussion and limitation sections.

## **Analysis**

The analytic process was grounded theory marked by its defining characteristics: sorting, coding, and comparisons. The first stage was open coding, in which sections are broken up by thought and subject matter and then analyzed for significant words, sentences, and phrases. Open

coding is that which “fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories, their properties and dimensional locations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). For this project, open coding involved stringing together similar patterns of experience articulated by the participants. The second stage of analysis will be axial coding, which puts data “back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). Axial coding involved taking common patterns of experience (open codes) and defining subcategories that fall under each pattern, like sub-points fall under main points in a well-structured speech. The final stage consisted of selective coding in which “selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). By this time, the central phenomenon was identified, and patterns of experience were arranged in such a way that illustrates their relationships to the central phenomenon. Through this, I was able to identify causal and influencing factors that affect the decision making process in response to the central phenomenon. Areas covered in the literature review are not previously determined codes. Codes emerged and were selected based on their functionality and prominence with in the interactive process. Codes went through a process of filtration and refinement during all three of these stages. This means that some patterns of experience fell by the wayside, while other patterns continued to be fleshed out so that they could be more fully articulated in the discussion.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Utilizing a grounded theory approach, this research focused on the experiences of nine self-identified gay male actors at a large southeastern university. Results concluded that gay actors in the theatre encounter a great amount of heteronormativity in personal and professional lives. Further, the entertainment sphere and its audiences were found to be influencing factors in the maintaining of gender/sexuality binaries. Consequently, actors tend to reinforce stereotypes of gender/sexuality binaries in order to have “readable” characters with audience members.

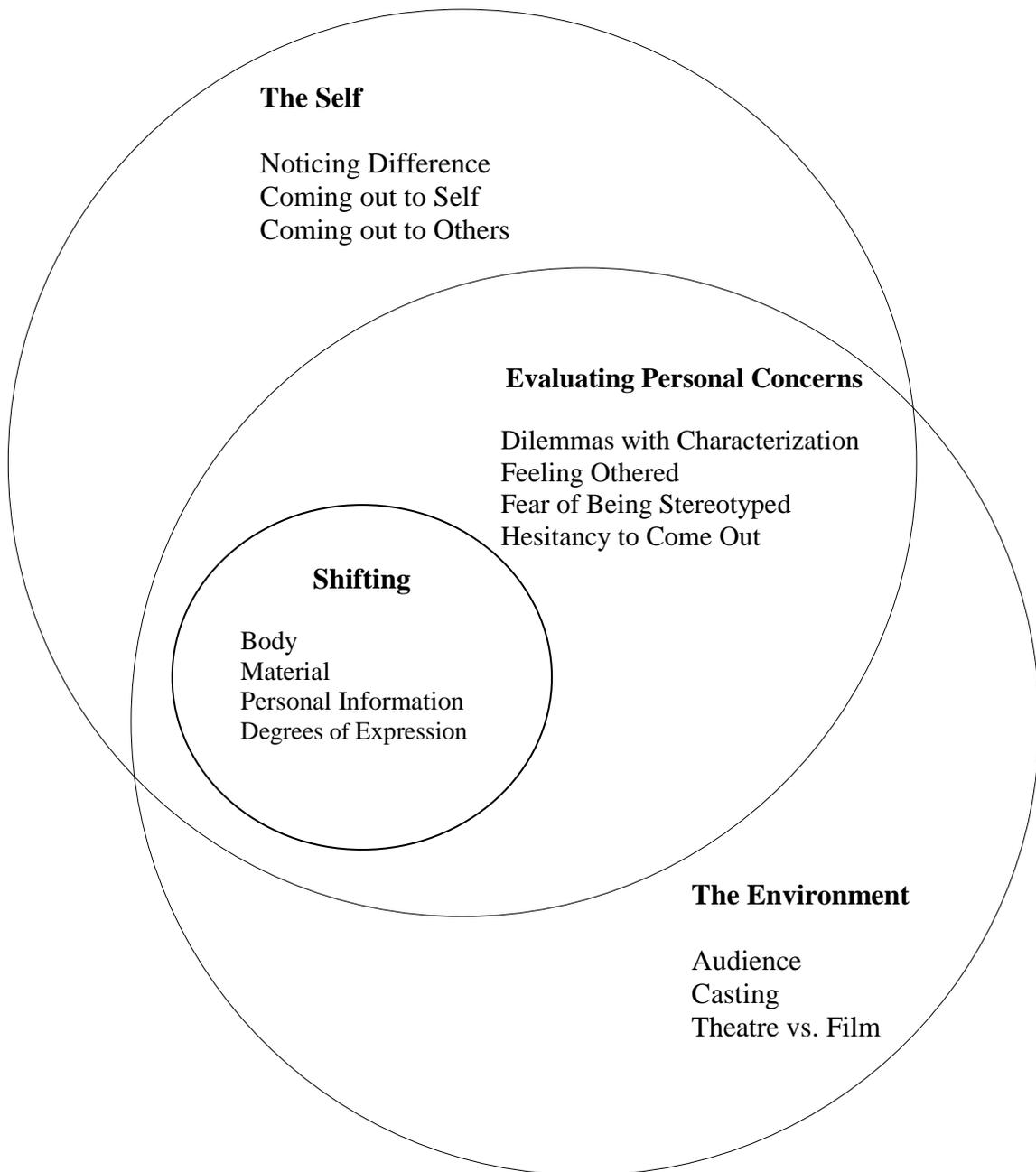
Grounded theory seeks to demystify the “actions, interactions, social processes of people” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). Appropriately, research revealed complex decision making processes gay actors encounter through personal and professional lives. Decision making processes revolved around several concerns arising from integrating oneself with his environment. As a result, all of the participants outlined several performance strategies to help resolve these concerns. Through the course of this results section, I hope to better articulate this interactive process and more clearly answer the previously stated research questions: What is the process by which a gay actor plays a straight role? How does a gay actor manage his sexual identity in order to have a successful career? Ultimately, the interactive process of performing sexuality as a gay man in theatre is marked by four main components: knowing the self, knowing the environment, evaluating personal concerns, and shifting.

Before getting into the analysis, it may be beneficial for the reader to better understand the organization of the results. Because grounded theory emphasizes an interactive process

marked with a central phenomenon, I have mapped out the four main components in such a way that illustrates this process (see Figure 4.1). Providing a visual depiction of the results, perhaps with a model or chart, is a defining quality of the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, I present a theoretical model for performing sexuality in entertainment. With this figure, I hope to not only provide a clearer picture of the interactive process, but to provide a visual depiction of the interrelating concepts so that the reader may more easily follow along. Typically analyses of abstract processes can get convoluted or even disorienting.

Briefly, The Self, focuses on the individual, his experiences, and personal attributes. The components of The Self include: noticing difference, coming out to self, and coming out to others. Next, The Environment, focuses on the nature and cultural norms of the theatre and the actor's job, which includes: audience, casting, and theatre versus film. Evaluating Personal Concerns, articulates the apprehensions participants experienced once they have integrated themselves within their environment—in this case, the theatre. Personal Concerns includes: dilemmas with characterization, feeling Othered, fear of being stereotyped, and hesitancy to come out. Finally, the central phenomenon in the process, Shifting, looks into the strategies actors undertake to reduce or eliminate personal concerns. Shifting includes: body, material, personal information, and degrees of expression. The focus of this study is to provide a clear portrait of a gay actor's *process* in playing a straight role and maintaining a successful career in the theatre. In order to do so, each component must be thoroughly investigated.

Figure 4.1 The Theoretical Model for Performing Sexuality in Entertainment



## **Knowing the Self**

Before understanding the entire picture of the interactive process, it is beneficial to first look at the contributing factors to the central phenomenon. The first main contributing factor is The Self. When it comes to performance choices on stage and real life, the actor must first know himself and later understand the environment in which he is playing.

The first contributing factor is The Self, which refers to not only the individual himself, but his experiences and the meanings attributed to such. To better understand how meaning is formed through interaction, a brief overview of symbolic interactionism is warranted.

Herbert Blumer (1969), who coined the term "symbolic interactionism," set out three basic premises of the perspective: First, human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things; Second, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society; Third, these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters (p. 2). In short, humans attach meaning to symbols through their interaction with these symbols. Thus, the way one interacts with the world helps one formulate and make sense of one's self and the environment in which one lives.

When contextualizing symbolic interactionism within this study, the experiences that participants have had with certain symbols, objects, or ideas will inevitably affect the meaning they associate to them. Thus, experiences that men have had in the past help reinforce how they perceive themselves and their environment. Yet, symbolic interaction depends on interaction between people and the meanings they bring to the same symbols (Blumer, 1969, p. 4). In short,

other individuals are involved in the processing of meaning toward objects. Further, symbolic interaction is ongoing process that continues to shape and reshape meanings to objects that humans act toward. Blumer (1969) also points out that symbolic interactionism is an interpretive process that is defined by two steps: First, “the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting” and second, “handling meanings” (p. 5). Blumer continues: “The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroupes, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he placed and the direction of his action” (1969, p. 5). Thus, symbolic interactionism is ongoing process, in which meanings are assigned by the individuals to the objects that which they act toward.

The personal histories of the participants contain the framework by which they understand themselves and their environments. Interactions they have experienced have helped shape their conceptions of identity, sexuality, masculinity, and other co-constructed meanings. These experiences also help form a sense of identity. This section, *The Self*, largely focuses on how personal identity is formed through symbolic interaction, and how it functions in the grander scheme of the interactive process. This section also seeks to illustrate how self-identification and self-awareness are integral steps in the process of becoming a successful actor. As Bruce pointed out “I feel like to bring an emotion and a life into a character, you have to understand yourself first. Before you can bring all that plus more. You have to be yourself. Whole. Rounded. And understand how you work.” Because knowing the self is so important to an actor’s process, many of the participants cited a process of identity formation. Richard Troiden (1993) observes that several homosexual identity formation models bear “strikingly similar patterns” (195). Borrowing from several models and theorists, Troiden provides an “ideal-typical model of homosexual identity formation using a sociological perspective” (214).

Through out this section, I hope to utilize his model to more clearly frame the identity formation of the participants.

Before diving right into the The Self, however, it is important to shed light on the self-definition of the participants. All of the participants in some way self-identified as a gay man: “I’m gay” (Ewen), “I am a homosexual” (Alexander), “Fagtabulous is often the term I use” (Phillip). One of the key criteria to selecting participants for this study was self-identified homosexuality. With the consideration of sexuality being largely an invisible identity and cited as potentially fluid or mutable (Rosario et al., 2006), it was important for the participants to claim their own identities. One participant was not fully committed to being identified as exclusively gay.

And a lot of my life, I don’t even think of myself as gay. I’m still attracted to women. Not all women. I could easily get together with a woman again. I just can’t have a relationship with a woman...I can be physical with a woman, but it’s the deeper intimacy...I’ll jump off the fence and say I’m a gay man. But even that makes me uncomfortable...if I identify as a gay actor, and then people find out that I came out so late and people think I lie and that I’m lying, when I say I didn’t know. I’m sorry. I didn’t know...And even Oprah...said to one of her guests...if you’re a gay man, you only like men. Okay first of all. Have you even heard of Kinsey scale, which some people don’t believe in but whatever. But why are you trying to compartmentalize? (Gary)

Gary’s refusal to contain or limit his sexual identity exposes the societal tendencies to dichotomize and the hetero/homo binary which Sedwick (2008) and Brickell (2006) frequently cite. In fact, Gary exposes the fallacious assumptions within this study. One criterion for the

study relied on self-identified homosexuality. This automatically mutually excludes homosexuality and heterosexuality. Gary challenges this assumption, and reveals the details in sexuality and identity can be much more complicated. For example, the Kinsey scale refers to levels of sexuality that cascade in a spectrum, rather than exclusive identities (Kinsey et al., 1948, p. 639). Although as some research suggests: sexual behavior and identity are not always concurrent and have a tendency to be discrepant (Ross et al., 2003). Regardless of scientific proof or trends with sexuality, American audiences typically observe behavior through the binarized gender/sexuality lens—therefore separating reality from the stage.

Most importantly, however, is that each of these men has the opportunity to tell their own stories and create a self-defined standpoint. One way to facilitate this self-identified standpoint is for participants to identify themselves as gay men, and then for the researcher to utilize the experience articulated in the interviews to bring about a collective consciousness. As Collins (2000) points out: For marginalized groups, gaining collective consciousness can be problematic since dominant groups have tried to suppress such thought. It is my aim not only to help facilitate this specified standpoint, but help lay the groundwork for future research and discussion. As the political and social norms continue to change across the cultural landscape in the United States, it is important to maintain and update this consciousness so that actors may better navigate themselves through their respective environments.

In order to better understand how a young man's personal identity formation affects character choices, one first has to understand how sexual orientation identity is formed—how it is understood, validated, enacted, and negotiated in various contexts. The formulation of identity through interaction was reflected through out several areas of the interviews and manifested into three main spheres: Noticing difference, Coming out to self, and Coming out to others.

### **Noticing difference.**

The first subcategory, and perhaps most applicable to symbolic interaction, was noticing a difference. All of the participants cited that they have noticed differences in behavior and have attached varying meanings to such behavior through their lives. While it is easy to resort to “gaydar” as the answer, it was more important to understand what interactive processes these men had that allowed them to associate meaning to such performances.

For many, the earliest recognition of a difference in behavior came at a young age. The most common answers were all in range of pre-pubescent adolescence to puberty to sexual maturity. “in sixth grade,” “sometime in high school,” “probably middle school,” “elementary school,” “11, 12, in that area...when kids started thinking about sexuality, I guess,” “I really met my first gay that I was aware that they were gay and all that...my freshman year of college.”

Sexual orientation was not particularly relevant because sexuality was not yet introduced or fully developed. However, once the men began reaching ages of sexual maturity, several questions or dissonances arose. Those who noticed a difference at a young age noted disparities in performances of physicality, gender expression, verbal expression, et cetera. This also marked the beginnings of when meaning was attached to the words “straight” and “gay.” Although each participant certainly has his unique and respective identity formulation process, this process of attaching meanings to words dealing with identity is founded upon the individual’s interactions with society—Blumer’s second premise of symbolic interaction. Thus, many assumptions were attached to being gay, such as “...if you hung out with girls and only girls you were gay,” says Dion. The popular associations with gayness were appearing effeminate and having a majority of female friends. Popular associations for straightness were lower voices, ruggedness, and

participation in sports. As I will explain in the next few sections, childhood, teenage, young adult, and even current experiences have and continue to shape the sense of self and the environment. In fact Troiden (1993) suggests that all of these experiences, but particularly the earliest ones help individuals retroactively make sense of their own identities.

Noticing a difference also marks the individual feeling different than the norm. Many participants noted feeling a dissonance between himself and other men that were perceived as straight or “normal.” Noticing a difference means the beginning of an identity formulation process drawn off of interaction and social comparison, which is defined by ranking oneself by others to gain more information about the self (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006).

Once meaning has been associated to certain symbols such as “straight” and “gay” or “manly” and “girly,” one begins the process of locating himself in this spectrum of meanings and identities. Some use these newfound meanings to help explain or sensitize feelings of difference. This marks the beginning of identification. While many participants did not speak at length about their sense-making processes, many if not all that applied made connections from their past experiences to their personal identification of self, and eventually coming out to oneself.

### **Coming out to self.**

Despite the early sense-making process between behavior, identity, and performance, many years transpired before most participants came out personally to themselves. Perhaps this is due to the nature of sexual identity formation, which usually takes long periods of time to understand (Cass, 1984) and has the potential to change over time (Rosario et al., 2006). Further, sexual identity is ongoing—continuing to take shape and develop (Mohler, 2000; Troiden, 1993).

Some participants noted that while they had identified with many socially constructed qualities and meanings associated with homosexuality, they reacted with resistance, as if to

question their feelings. This questioning is what Troiden (1993) calls identity confusion, in which there is “inner turmoil and uncertainty surrounding [one’s] ambiguous sexual status” (p. 199).

...I didn’t want to think about it as anything but a phase. Then in tenth grade: I guess I am gay. At least I’m not straight. It’s pretty clear. But hated myself. And...I wasn’t gonna act on anything. It wasn’t like it was a problem because I was never gonna be gay. I was just gonna be with girls. (Lee)

...I’ve known for as long as I can remember. But I never really admitted until—probably like the end of my senior year, or when I came here. I always thought: oh, I’m attracted to girls still, and—I just like guys. And it’s probably just a phase. And that’s just what everyone says, especially in Catholic school. “oh it’s just a phase. And you’ll get over it.” I thought I’d get over it just get married and have kids. (Bruce)

In fact, the “phase” was a popular rationalization for identity confusion. Because many presumed they were heterosexual, they initially doubted or dismissed feelings of homosexuality. Troiden (1993) cites “denial” as of one of the many reactions gay men have in dealing with identity confusion (p. 201). Many had dated women, and presumed that they were going to end up with women. However, once identification came into the picture, conceptions of the future and reality began to shift.

you have this image in your head of what a perfect life should be. And that image was a wife and kids...and suburban America, with a white picket fence, and mow the lawn every Sunday...And I like that image and I still sometimes desire that image...[it’s] just...relaxing with who I am and knowing that I’m normal in a

way. But when you start coming to grips with the fact that you're gay, that you have to shift that image to something else because you know that won't happen anymore. (Alexander)

However, over time each participant found his sense of sexual identity. For almost all the men, coming out to oneself occurred around late high school and early college years. Troiden (1993) calls this step identity assumption, in which "homosexual identity becomes both a self-identity and a pre-sented identity, at least to other homosexuals" (204). Coming out to the self marks the furthering of identity development. Now that identity has been acknowledged and accepted, there often come questions about how to enact this identity. Many marked the importance of the stage in which one knew his own sexuality but had yet to come out to others.

#### **Coming out to others.**

Coming out to others marks the next step in personal identity development. Several homosexuality identity formation models posit that coming out is perhaps one of the most significant steps in realizing one's personal identity because it internalizes and externalizes identification (Troiden 1993). As noted before, the coming out process is inextricably complicated and not a one-step act. Coming out has been noted as an ongoing process as one traverses from one environment to another. As Troiden (1993) argues: "in the final analysis, homosexual identity is emergent: never fully determined in a fixed or absolute sense, but always subject to modification and further change" (212). For the participants, the difficulty coming out to others varied from one case to another.

After coming out to themselves, majority of participants allowed some time to pass before coming out to others. However, once coming out to others, some participants had a newfound comfort in their bodies and sexualities.

I think there was a difference between when I came out and when I hadn't. Because when I was acting in a straight role before I came out to myself...I always felt uncomfortable in my body and I never knew why. Uncomfortable, uh...with girls. I felt like girls never wanted me. Onstage or off. And I always felt that disconnect between sex and sexuality. But after I came out, I knew why I couldn't connect with girls. And I actually found it easier to connect with girls though. You have to figure out a way to, now that you know why you can't do it naturally. (Alexander)

One might attribute this dissonance to presumed heterosexuality, thus leading to identity confusion, which in turn, creates a great amount of discomfort. Many noted that being comfortable with one's sexuality was important to having a career in performance.

I just feel like you can tell if someone's uncomfortable with their sexuality. Even if they're out—if they still don't like to talk about it...And I think that directors would much rather work with someone who is comfortable with their sexuality. Because that's less of a struggle for them to work with....someone who's gonna be like, "I'm uncomfortable. I need this. I need that." you know? (Dion)

Clearly, the development of one's personal identity is vital not only in getting a better sense of self, but also in eliminating unnecessary discomfort, which in many ways proves to get in the way of one's work onstage. Troiden (1993) argues and points to previous literature that supports the idea that gay men and lesbians who are out are generally happier, and have more self-esteem in regard to their sexuality.

One of the final benefits of coming out was having a support system. Support systems can range from friends and family to mentors and those in leadership positions to coming out

support groups; such groups lend themselves to aid someone through the coming out process (Savin-Williams, 1989, Signorile, 1996). A few participants also spoke of disclosing with other actors who were out, and found the disclosure to be beneficial—to get affirmation, advice, and support. A support system was also a way of becoming more comfortable with one’s self: “When you first come out...it’s kind of like, you’re alone, and so...you don’t have a comfort zone and then when you get around other gay people, you realize that they’re kind of a comfort zone” (Dion). All of the participants found their personal theatrical environments generally supportive of their sexualities. Being out in the theatre allowed for gay men to trade off on tips and experiences—not only in theatre, but in life. Lee explains:

you manage to find yourself cooperating in these groups, um, a lot more easily and...I think that the phrase “community” for the GLBT community is appropriate just because...You have this entire background of experiences to draw on for conversations. For relationship advice. For anything. And that’s also relevant to a show, if you have an enormous amount of information to draw from.

(Lee)

This support system allows for the self to be more fully realized. Gay men and lesbians are cited to sustain self-esteem when integrating and identifying with the larger gay community (Crocker & Major 1989). Since coming out allows for more comfort and sensitization, those who choose to remain closeted may experience discomfort, shame, or even resentment (Seidman, Meeks, & Traschen, 1999). Discrepancy between public and private lives can lead to feelings of isolation and inauthenticity (Goffman, 1963). Further, because one’s sexuality may not be publicly displayed or validated, identity is not given an opportunity to grow, flourish, or more fully realize. In other words, coming out to others is an effective step in more fully knowing the self.

In this section, I have outlined how individuals attach meaning to symbols through Blumer's symbolic interaction. Further, I coupled this theory with Troiden's ideal typical homosexual identity formation model to better understand how ideas of personal identity and sexuality are formulated through such interaction, particularly in a heteronormative atmosphere. In the next section, I will delve into the heteronormative nature of the theatre environment, and extrapolate on the social norms that participants spoke of in the interviews.

## **Knowing the Environment**

The self accounts for only half of the motivating factors to the central phenomenon. Knowing the self is not enough. Before getting to the concerns and the concept of Shifting, one must be familiar with and understand the dynamics of the actor's environment—the laws of the land. With every environment come expectations, procedures, and rituals unique to that specific culture. Fine (2005) identifies these as norms, which “constitute a ‘frame’ within which individuals interpret a given situation and from which they then take direction for their responsibilities as actors in that domain” (p. 140). In order for actors to better integrate themselves in to the acting world, they must form literacy to that culture and its norms. Through the course of recounting their experiences, the participants pointed out three main features to characterize the actor's environment: audience, casting, and theatre versus film.

### **Audience.**

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the acting environment is the audience. With audience members bringing in the money to fund shows and pay actors, patrons are the life force of the theatre. So how does one keep audiences attending? Typically, safe shows with successful performers. But what exactly defines a successful performer? In short, it is someone who fulfills the audience's (and the director's) expectations for the role. When considering sexuality, this means that a performer should appropriately read straight in a straight role.

...one thing I came back with this semester was, I was gonna play more manly roles...I was going to stop, get away from the boy roles...all the time I was told...break away from, you know, boy roles and stuff. You only get typecast.

And I really just feel like that was a way of telling me to butch up, or I won't get cast in these parts. I won't get to move on and do other things. And, I mean, it's not sad. I don't find it sad at all. It's part about being an actor. And changing and doing things. But it's just kind of the fact of the business. People don't wanna see Nelly Joe on the screen or the stage trying to play a part. They want to believe it.

(Chris)

Indeed, believability is paramount to an audience buying a performance and/or the performer himself. Yet, note that Chris discusses "butching up" to be better perceived for "manly" roles. This echoes Trujillo's (1990) first tenant of hegemonic masculinity, physical force and control. Displays athleticism, toughness, and being "butch" reinforce this idea of what it means to be "manly" and masculine. In doing so, audience members individually and collectively bring their own personal gaydars to the performance. In short, if performances are not necessarily "butch" enough, they may not be "straight" or "masculine" enough.

This is not to say that all audience members purposely seek out gayness or scrutinize every performer's sexuality. However, it is to say that some qualities associated with homosexuality, particularly stereotypes, have the tendency to overpower a performance. Such qualities could detract from the performers' messages or characterizations. Thus, performers utilize what they know from their own experiences of gaydar and gender construction in order to provide the most believable and viable performance.

Now, the term "gaydar" may be crude and absurd to many, so I should clarify its use: Because nearly all of the participants subscribed to and utilized the term, I believe it is important to refer to the phenomenon as the participants have named it. Further, from my perspective as the researcher, I define "gaydar" in terms of social construction and stereotyping. That is, gaydar is

in no way inherently or absolutely validated, but is a term and phenomenon that accepted by a great number of performers and audience members alike. The notion of gaydar innately binarizes and categorizes human behavior and performance of sexuality. Thus, it is an effective and appropriate lens for understanding how both audiences and performers frame, interpret, and identify performance of sexuality.

But what perpetuates this notion of gaydar? The Self has revealed that personal interaction may reinforce some of these notions, but the popularization is also due to television and its ability to reach a widespread audience. Much of this construction is arguably due to many of the tenets Trujillo (1991) points out in hegemonic masculinity. If society frames masculinity with heterosexuality (which Trujillo outlines as his final tenet), anything outside the model may be regarded as “gay.”

With the existence of this “gaydar” and stereotyping, there is intrinsic judgment placed on performers. Do they really live up to the expectations of the role? If the audience members know the performer is gay, can he play “straight” enough for them? In sum, the audiences not only hold the power keeping the theatre alive, but at the end of the day, they are the ones who make the final judgment call on an actor’s performance. Actors who wish to be successful should be savvy to the powerful role of the audience in the acting environment.

### **Casting.**

As one colleague had pointed out: Casting is a discriminating process. Categories of difference such as race, gender, sexuality, and ability tend to sway or dictate how directors cast their shows. Yet, some call attention to this unnecessary form of discrimination and encourage “nontraditional casting,” in which there equal opportunity for all actors (Eisenberg, 1988). In short, the actors’ instruments are their bodies, voices, and personalities. The subjectivity of the

casting process can be personal or systematic. With number of roles, availability of actors, body type, style of show, et cetera; there are several factors that influence who receives which roles.

As Phillip pointed out:

I was pretty lucky in that I learned fairly early on that you can audition for a show and someone else will get chosen over you. And it can have nothing to do with you, it can have everything—you know, it's—so that was one of the lucky lessons that I learned early on is to not get all worked up over not getting or given a part. (Phillip)

Because casting is a discriminating process of discerning bodies, voices, and personalities, gaydar seeps into every nook and cranny of this procedure. To better understand the casting process and how gaydar factors in, three main areas will be explored: judgment, type, and competition. These spheres are by no means mutually exclusive. Rather, like any other components to an interactive process, they tend to overlap and intersect.

### ***Judgment.***

The first component is judgment. While this was touched upon in the audience section, there is a great amount of judgment in the casting process itself. A director is presented with the daunting task of sifting through great numbers of actors to find his cast. The audition process itself is very subjective in that actors have limited amount of time to make their impression on the casting director. Because of this, several judgment calls are made from sound bites of an actor's ability. Thus, the slightest impression has the potential to make the world of difference. Judgment can range from age, body type, race, gender, acting ability, demeanor, personality, and other discriminating features. Because sexual identity is largely recognized as an invisible identity (Sanlo, 2002), there may very well be judgment based on behavior and *impressions*

associated with stereotypical images of homosexuality. For instance, if a director is casting for a straight romantic male role and he is down to three choices, questions of body type experience, believability and authenticity may all come into question. Think of an interview for a job—only way more personal.

When it comes to impressions of sexuality, there may be discrepancies between the personal identity and the impressions audience members receive (Simmons, 2008). In other words, just because one is gay, does not mean one will come off gay. Just because one are straight does not mean one will come off straight. Phillip, who has been in a directing position before, explains that there is a difference of “reading gay” and being homosexual:

*...we do have a sense of someone's sexuality? Like there is a gaydar? (Oh yeah. Oh yeah.) How does that affect casting?*

*...it absolutely does...I've been guilty of it, too...where I'm casting something and if someone's gay, and reads gay. And the character shouldn't, I'll immediately say, “aw man, no.” And I feel bad because...you wanna support the people, but...(So tell me the difference between is gay and reads gay.)* There are straight people that read gay...And sometimes, it's just a case of, well, they're not out to themselves yet, (*laughs*) but other times—it's just something that you look at it and you're like: oh, the entire audience is gonna think they are flam-ing. Because at the same [time], again, Neil Patrick Harris doesn't read gay at all. There are plenty of gay actors out there that don't read gay, but are openly—Chad Allen. Openly gay but don't read gay. (Phillip)

Thus, judgment is not necessarily made on the fact of sexuality itself, but on what “reads” well with audience members. Thus, gaydar is based on detecting stigmatizing qualities stereotypically

associated with homosexuality—not sexuality itself. Recall Goffman (1959) discusses this dynamic: “The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he *gives* and the expression he *gives off*” (p. 2). Thus, regardless of sexuality, if one is trying to manage his potentially stigmatizing impression, he must ensure that expressions he gives matches the impressions he wishes to make on the audience. Judgment is made on whether a performance will fall into the categories of “straight,” “gay,” or “ambiguous.” In the end, directors have to consider and judge personal attributes, behavior, and ability to gauge whether or not an actor is right for the part.

### ***Type.***

Another aspect of the casting process closely tied to judgment is type. Through the course of citing their stage experiences in the casting process, many of the actors referenced “type.” Type refers to a number of identifiable character personality types which are frequently found in plays: “Writers often employ recognizable character types...called *archetypes*...[which] live in the collective unconscious. They exhibit physical and vocal behaviors related to a strong psychological and emotional disposition” (Deer & Dal Vera, 2008). In other words type, or archetype, depends heavily upon predictability and identifiability. Because television has a way of reaching a widespread audience, it may be safe to say that television programming, such as Disney, subconsciously promotes certainly ideologies through archetypes (Wasko, 2001). Physicality, vocal qualities, and personal demeanor often contribute to one’s type. According to the participants, type is a category of where one falls all the spectrum of roles and personalities. Type is largely concluded from the impressions directors and audience members read from the actor’s personal attributes and abilities.

Three main types cited from participants were the leading man/ingénue, the character/supporting, and the ensemble. The leading man is often the attractive romantic interest. A straight man (not only heterosexual, but the straight man in contrast to comedic relief). The leading man, many cases, fulfills several of the masculine ideals found in Trujillo's (1991) model, such as the frontiersman, the patriarch, and professional success. Yet, character roles, which are known for being more unique and dynamic tend to fall outside these limiting tenants of hegemonic masculinity.

I get the ingénue roles...The young, good looking, male...The love interest. I don't have a lot of experience in the character roles, which is probably why I enjoy doing it cause it's new...It's fun coming up with different kinds of physicalities...When I'm doing a love interest, or an ingénue role like that. I always just kind of approach it in a straightforward way...But when doing a character role...you have more license to do things. Because the focus isn't on you all the time. And you have more opportunities to do more things...when the characters are bigger or weird or have the potential to have interesting physicalizations...[but with ingénue,] the choices are much more limited. (Chris)

The character actor is typically a supporting character often providing a side storyline, comedic relief, or antithesis to the protagonist. Dion names a few, "There's like the comedic relief best friend of the lead. (*The supporter?*) Yeah. And then there's always character actors, but there are different types of character actors. There's always the butchy burly man. And then there's always gay best friend. And then there's always the awkward kinda weirdo." Finally, there is the ensemble. The ensemble or as Ewen refers to it "The big gay chorus," is usually found in a musical. Members of the ensemble move together as a unit and in many ways become

a character of their own. “And all you’re really doing is dancing and singing. I mean dancing is...even if you are straight, you have to be effeminate in the way you move. Because it’s about being graceful,” says Dion. Dion and Ewen make valid points: the style of the show or type of role greatly affects how one may approach their performance. While musicals call for performers to be “effeminate” and “graceful,” other shows like straight plays may call for their leading men to enact my hegemonic notions of masculinity.

In light of ensemble members typically being effeminate and graceful, those with effeminate bodies may be typecast into the chorus. When considering those whose homosexuality is a prominent part of their identity expression, Jason argues that limiting what directors see could mean limiting opportunities.

[I could see them] being in the chorus of something...where it’s a lot of cheesy tapping or being someone who is just a soldier... If you’re just flamboyant, and that’s the way you act in life, and that’s the way you act on the stage, then you are going to be limiting yourself, in the roles that you can get. So you’re going to be getting character parts. Funny. You’re gonna be getting Comedic Sidekick type stuff. But you aren’t going to be able achieve that leading role status. And I’m mean, that’s what everybody wants, nobody wants to settle...(Jason)

Jason makes an interesting point. While several of the actors categorized themselves as character actors, and a good number cited being cast often as the leading (and typically romantic) men, all of the actors acknowledged a sort of “hierarchy” when it comes to being cast in certain types of roles—ensemble being the easiest and leading man being the most difficult. Further, the leading man roles typically fit a number of hegemonic masculinity’s ideals (Trujillo, 1990), such as the strong forceful muscle, the patriarch (the father or head of household), the frontiersman (the

hero), the professionally successful, and in all most all cases, the heterosexual dealing with females and romance. Although it may be a stretch to conclude, it may be safe to say that gay performers pride themselves on achieving leading man status—an affirmation that he can, indeed, play “straight enough” for his audience.

However, type is not just relegated to directors and performers. Even as audience members, there is a tendency to attach type with certain performers. For instance, an Adam Sandler movie is going to conjure a different image than a George Clooney film. Sandler, known for his comedic abilities may be better suited for character roles, while Clooney, known for a being a leading man, may be better suited for an ingénue role. While this is an example from a film or Hollywood scope, it still resonates with audiences in theatre.

Of course, bodies play just as much a factor as personality. (Many might agree that George Clooney is more attractive than Adam Sandler.) Personal body type often influences an actor’s perception of self and the audience’s perception of the actor. In fact, representations on stage and screen affect society’s notions of body type and personal character. Over the years, Disney has perpetuated the standard of female beauty by presenting princesses as consistently attractive and beautiful whilst villains are extremely thin, lanky, or overweight (Wasko, 2001). Thus, an actor’s personal body type already communicates a certain identity. While some may have the personality for a leading man, it does not necessarily mean that they are suited physically. This is also to say that a person’s body, voice, and personality may lend themselves to a great range of type than others. Then there is the aspect of acting—of course. And do not forget the power of makeup. Yet, this “typing” of bodies and voices, while good for finding suitable, identifiable actors for particular roles, continues to categorize what “straight” and “gay”

mean; what they look and sound like. Typing does not promote ambiguity. In fact, ambiguous performances, in some contexts, are downplayed or discouraged. Bruce elaborates:

But then I feel like if you just like remove the gayness and don't try to add straightness, you're just a neutral character...it kinda becomes bland. And it might be confusing to an audience. I don't know. I'm afraid that would be too confusing. But if you're like a character in an ensemble or character that doesn't have a love interest, I don't guess that would be too much of a problem. (Bruce)

Bruce characterizes the dilemma of ambiguous performance as the audience getting “confused” or not being able identify the gender/sexuality of the character in relevant contexts. Such a dilemma further exposes the simplification and collapsing of gender and sexuality to one master binary (Sedgwick, 2008). Simmons (2008) argues that audiences and dominant ideologies have a desire compartmentalize sexual identity—thus leading to binaries. In other words, when sexuality is relevant to a character's story, he is going to read either one of gay or straight. But Bruce also points out that there are some spaces, such as in the chorus, in which ambiguous performances maybe accessible—especially if the sexuality of the character is not relevant in the play.

Finally, “range” is also a term used to describe the actor's ability to play a number of different roles, types, or styles. While some exhibit range by playing a number types, some display range by playing outside their usual type. Take Jim Carrey's performance in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Known for his comedic style and performances, Carrey exemplified his range by going outside his traditional comedic type to play a dramatic role. Range is also embodied through performing different conceptions of gender, such as masculinity: “If you're not very masculine, but you can achieve playing that masculine character,

then that just adds to your range of characters you can play. And so I would...feel like that gives me an advantage because I can do both ends of the spectrum of...of masculinity” (Jason).

Jason’s body may have an effeminate affect, but if he is able to play in and outside traditional images of masculinity (Trujillo, 1990), he is viewed as versatile—an actor with a wide range.

Actors should not only be aware of the ways in which they are being judged, but be literate to the casting process and how bodies, voices, and personality communicate identity associated with certain types.

### ***Competition.***

The final aspect of the casting process worth discussing is its competitive nature. Phillip noted the immense subjectivity of the casting process and how decisions can be completely or by no means personal. When it comes down to it, if there is someone better suited for the role, or is a better actor, they may very well get the part. However, when it comes to gay men playing straight roles, there is often a ranking system or comparison with other actors.

It’s just like comparing myself...to the other gay actors. Like—am I not straight enough? Where all these other gay actors can get roles, But I can’t? like--(*Oh, so you kind of...Rank yourself in a way? Like, I definitely know he can play as straight as him, and he got cast, why not me?*) Unfortunately. (Jason)

Social comparison plays a large role in actors understanding themselves and their environments. In fact, this phenomenon of receiving negative feedback while others receive positive feedback over the same characteristic (in this case, homosexuality) promotes what Salovey & Rodin (1984) call “social-comparison jealousy.” Subjects under this condition experienced more anxiety and depression. In short, actors must be prepared to be rejected—a lot. The competitive

aspect of casting may send an actor to question why he did not receive a particular role. But there are only so many roles that can be filled, and as Gary reiterates, “Entertainment is a business.”

### **Theatre Versus Film.**

Throughout the course of describing the environment several of the actors pointed out differences in expectations from one territory to another, particularly dealing with the differences between theatre and film. Each cultural context has its own respective norms and expectations. While most of the actors’ interaction has resided in the theatre arena, many had clear ideas of the film world having different expectations. If an actor is to be successful in the acting world, he must be literate to each respective set of environmental expectations.

While the power of the audience has been discussed, each environment has a particular audience with its own set of values and expectations. For theatre, it is generally assumed that there is a specific culture to theatre-goers. Some suggest they are more liberal, “forgiving,” and even embracing of gay men and queer/ambiguous performance.

I feel like in theatre there’s this overall concept that: Yeah, some of these people are probably gay...I feel like the theatre audience is more accepting than a film audience because more people go to see film than theatre. so I feel like people who are more—I don’t wanna say more liberal people, but in that sense, I feel like people who go to see theatre kinda have a better understanding. (Alexander)

Alexander brings up a good point: the size and scope of the audience has a particular influence on the audience’s cultural values. Because film is so widespread, representations in movies and television acts as indicators for what way of life is recognized and acceptable. Even when gay images and stories reach the widespread film and television audiences, they are

contained and domesticated (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). Thus, the film and television audience is typically more heteronormative.

Television provides cues for actors and potential performance choices. Gary explains, “Just...watch television. Turn the volume off...and just watch what is presented. What stereotypical gender characters are presenting—okay, that’s what it is...men are a certain way and women tend to be a certain way.” Because television has the influence to shape how we see the world (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2008), widely represented ideologies such as hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1990) and the master gender/sexuality binary (Brickell, 2006; Sedgwick, 2008) create the social norm of gender behavior and the illusion of “naturalness” (Butler, 2008, p. 190). Thus, actors use such images in television to help inspire performance choices that reflect these ideologies.

Many pointed out that because film reaches an audience that is much larger than that of the theatre, the content is usually more appealing—more heteronormative—to the general national public. Because the theatre and its audience are specific sect of society, they come with a more specific set of values and expectations. Lee explains:

Broadway is such a microcosm. You have a very limited theatre. And you have a very specific audience. You have theatre goers. Movies...are all across America. It’s not just whoever gets in a plane and goes to Broadway. It’s like Ma Kettle. And people out in the Midwest... people like in very liberal areas. Bigger cities...[and] towns the size of [a] coffee shop. That still go to see movies, but they have an entirely different set of sensibilities. So movies and their personnel have to try to reflect with what is okay with the nation at large. And I right now I don’t feel like the entire nation is 100% okay with gay people being icons. (Lee)

Lee's comments illuminate the power of social norms of marginalized groups that exist within dominant groups. Indeed the social norms of marginalized or special interest groups, such as the theatre world, may have their own set of expectations, norms, and licenses for creativity. Recall the power of the audience. In many ways, audiences determine what is acceptable in the economy of performances (Simmons, 2008). Interestingly enough, the theatre is still heteronormative in many ways—due to its abundance of straight roles and internalized homophobia. Thus, it is important to recognize the variances in ideology from one environment/audience/scope to another.

However, after reviewing the differences in audience expectations, it is easy to see how the film arena is much less forgiving of performances that fall outside predictable heteronormative ideals. Again, the audience has the money, and the money keeps the theatre alive. The audience holds a great amount of power in the life of a performance. If the audience is not buying, the performance dies. Actors should be literate to not only how important the audience is, but what the audience's particular cultural values and expectations are.

### **Assessing the Situation.**

Briefly, when the self and the environment converge there are a number of questions that may arise for the actor. There is a process of finding one's place in the environment and bringing the self to the role.

A number of questions that may arise when locating oneself in the environment are:

What is my personal body type?

What type do I communicate?

Do I have a personal master status?

What are my personal mannerisms?

What is my range or acting ability?

A number questions that may arise when bringing the self to the role are:

How is this person human?

How can I identify?

Is sexuality relevant? If so, in what ways? Are there any relationships?

What type is this character? (i.e. leading, character, ensemble?)

What is the genre of the show? (comedy, drama, both?)

What is the style of the show? (musical or straight play?)

How is this character similar or different from me?

How can my body better communicate this character?

Obviously the considerations extend beyond personal identification with the role, but also with the environment, such as style of show. In this section, I have expanded upon three social norms the participants pointed out in their experiences: the audience, casting, and theatre versus film. Clearly, in a place that is supposedly a “haven” for gay men, there are still prevailing forms of heteronormativity, particularly due to the immense power of the audience. When the self and the environment come together, and the actor begins to assess his situation, there are number of concerns that typically arise. In the next section, I will outline and unpack the concerns that participants have as gay men both on and off the stage.

## **Evaluating Personal Concerns**

Once a performer has integrated himself to the environment, there are a number of concerns that inevitably arise. Surprisingly, despite the subjectivity of each participant's personal experiences, many shared a great number of the same concerns. Granted, all of the participants were recruited from the same location, but their personal experiences, before arriving at this location, varied. When discussing particular personal concerns, I found many of their experiences overlapped—as if to not only affirm a common experience, but to provide new angles to the central phenomenon.

Evaluating personal concerns mark the first phase of the interactive decision making process surrounding being a gay performer. While many straight actors spend time making character choices and getting lines down, several gay men spend a great deal of time trying to alleviate certain concerns. Much like trying to blend in, negotiate, or closet in real life, several decisions have to be made in order to ensure that the performance reads as intended.

This decision making process creates an overload of thoughts and considerations that occupy much of the performer's psyche. Many characterize this phenomenon as psychological noise, in which the sender or receiver's cultural attitudes, biases, et cetera influence the sending and processing of messages (Berlo, 1960). An overload of psychological noise can have an immense impact on the communication and the communicator. As a straight man with a background in theatre, I have not had to go through the same series of considerations as many of these men have. I have not had to worry about whether I did not receive a role was because of my mannerisms, that I read "too lightly," or because of my presumed sexuality. Yet, these

considerations are not limited to just gay men, but rather men who read as “gay.” Some study has been done about unintended gender expression, regardless of sexuality. Jake Simmons (2008) was often identified by others as a gay man while he identifies as straight: “My body fails to communicate my preferential desire...My body is a ‘liar’” (p. 332). Simmons (2008) points out that not all bodies necessarily signify desire or identity, and proposes that ambiguous performances “of” and “in” sexuality should be more widely accepted, especially in our personal lives. Unfortunately, due to the binaries that heteronormativity creates, actors do not have many opportunities to be ambiguous with their own performances of sexuality. The human body is his instrument. If signification is lost in translation, he may end up without a job. Further research on gendered bodies and mis-signification is certainly warranted.

In short, while many young gay actors develop literacy for their environment and begin to navigate the waters, they also encounter a number of concerns, difficulties, and quandaries. These concerns often have young men questioning themselves, how to fit into the environment, and by what means to do so.

Concerns also describe the thought process behind what it means to be a gay actor. Granted, not all gay men have the same experiences, and as Gary points out: “...just because you’re gay, doesn’t mean that you understand all gay people.” From the symbolic interactionist perspective, experiences are deeply personal and vary from person to person and place to place. With regard to type, several of the men cited varying type to which they identified. Some may have worried about emotionally connecting with a romantic female, while others were more concerned about their expression of gender. “Am I playing this masculine enough?” Significantly, while the following concerns were common for many of the participants, this

information is not meant to essentialize the experience of what it means to be a gay actor. In fact, it is more beneficial to examine the diversity of experiences.

Similar considerations have been made surrounding other marginalized groups. For example, Collins (1990) made a compelling point with regard to black feminist thought: “Other factors such as ethnicity, region of the country, urbanization, and age combine to produce a web of experiences shaping diversity among African-American women. As a result, it is more accurate to discuss a Black *women’s* standpoint than a Black *woman’s* standpoint” (emphasis in original, p. 24). In the same way, it is more beneficial to look at the diversity of responses with gay men in performance careers. Their stories are rich with complexity, contradiction, and overlapping themes. Such diversity allows the dialogue around this standpoint to grow and take shape over time, rather than constrain to a rigid definition. Further, it allows for gay men to tell these stories. As stated before, the self definition of these men allows men to identify themselves and their respective experiences. By doing so, the power of heteronormativity is removed. To essentialize these experiences would be boiling them down into the very stereotypes that many spend every day trying to combat, embrace, and transcend. Thus, the attention should be focused on: first, shedding light on a gay *men’s* standpoint rather than a gay *man’s* standpoint in entertainment, and second, viewing this information as a starting point for further research. With that said, the actors cited four main concerns: dilemmas with characterization, feeling Othered in a heteronormative environment, fear of being stereotyped, and hesitancy to come out.

### **Dilemma playing characters.**

What makes performing sexualized characters difficult is the dilemma of what characterization to perform. Because representations in plays do not necessarily reflect one’s real life experiences, several performers have to change their perspective of what sexuality means. In

fact, since hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity influence much of society's notions of sexuality, definitions of "gay" and "straight" are typically defined by the heterosexual and heteronormative audiences. Thus, actors are forced to play the straight man's definitions of what it means to be a man—straight or gay. Even then, however, fulfilling such expectations can be difficult.

Heteronormativity also promotes the domination of straight roles and heterosexual stories. Domination occurs through "the construction and maintenance of a particular order of discourse...[and] the deployment of non-discursive affirmations and sanctions" (Therborn, 1980, p. 2). All of the participants acknowledged dominance in straight roles and stories, and expressed concern for how to perform them. Because characters in plays are written to be predictable and identifiable to a dominant (heteronormative) audience, gay performers have to reflect these ideals in their performances. How does a gay actor play a straight role when he has not lived the life of a straight man?

Thus, many participants arrived at the dilemma that: The perspective as a gay man in personal life does not parallel or translate to the stage very well. Actors are not expected to show the contradictory aspects of sexuality and cultural norms that they may have grown up seeing or experience. The butch gay man will not read well to the presumed heterosexual audience since it does not fall into a compartmentalized ideal of the gender/sexuality binary. Therefore, the audience plays a key role in the character performance choices made by actors. If the audience changes, so do the expectations. As already covered, expectations change from context to context; audience to audience.

This is also to say: If an actor was dealing with a primarily gay audience, the audience may desire to see *their* story reflected in the performance. This story could range from the

struggles of homosexuality, the contradictions and complexities of sexuality itself, to predictable caricatures of what it means to be “gay.”

Thus, the audience plays a role in the social construction of what “gay” and “straight” mean. With heteronormativity playing a huge role in the casting and characterization processes, it makes it very difficult for minority dialogues and representations to be brought to the table. As Jason explains, “Cause definitely in like media aspects, if there’s going to be a gay character, that has to be—generally that has to be part of it. They have to have some kind of effeminate attribute. Or a way of acting. And that’s like the funny little joke. About how you know about it.” So, minority characters maybe present but only under the supervision of heteronormative writers, producers, and audience members. Minority characters are filtered through a heteronormative lens, which allows for stereotyping and the compartmentalization of Other cultures.

This also implies that the more gay friendly an audience is, the more latitude performers may have in the stories they tell. All of this is to say: socially constructed notions of intertwined gender and sexuality make performing characters (in some situations) a tight rope to walk, especially for gay men combating stigma and stereotypes. This further illustrates how much social norms, the societal expectations of sex and sexuality influence our entertainment sphere—what sells, what is acceptable, and what way of life those in power want to promote to the rest of society.

### **Feeling Othered in heteronormative environment.**

Feeling Othered in a heteronormative environment was perhaps one of the most prominent and complex themes to emerge in the concerns. *Othering* is a form of marginalization that “serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself” (Weis, 1995, p. 17). Othering can be used to uphold and replicate positions of domination and subordination (Fine,

1994). In other words, Othering is used by mainstream groups and ideologies to maintain the status quo. Feeling Othered, in this case, refers to experiences gay actors have had working within an uneven playing field. Not only did participants feel set at a disadvantage, but from their perspective, straight actors had an inherent advantage. In order to fully understand the dynamics of this environment, it is important to first, look at the perceived advantages of being straight, and then, take a look at disadvantages that participants have experienced.

### *Advantages for Straights.*

First and obviously, working as a straight man in a heteronormative environment has its advantages. One is able to go along with his daily life without strategically monitoring his behavior or disclosure of personal information. There were four main advantages articulated in the interviews: more straight roles, a trusting audience, the stretch is rewarded, and choices are not as limited.

The first advantage is that there are more straight roles. With more straight roles, straight actors have a higher percentage of getting cast because the roles speak to their culture and their way of life. As Ewen points out, these roles are very close if not identifiable with the typical straight man's experiences: "...there are so many more straight roles in the myriad of roles there are out there...They are able to draw more directly from personal experiences when creating those roles. For sure...I think that they have it a lot easier." Thus, experiences of straightness, such as the romance and dealing with women, may be more clearly understood by a straight actor than a gay man who has not had the same experiences. This lack of experience or connection could be the reason for many gay actors' difficulty connecting with a female interest on stage. Yet, a number of participants dismissed this as a legitimate concern. "It's just acting."

While many cited difficulty connecting to a female interest, they also spoke of finding ways around it.

The second perceived advantage is that the audience “trusts” straight or “straight acting” actors. Many participants felt that directors and audience members were more likely to support straight actors for straight roles because they “trust” that the performance would be genuine and real. Thus, believability and authenticity often play roles in the audience’s perception of a performer and his performance.

Yet, “straight acting” gays still have an opportunity to do well. Alexander referred to “developing a trust.”

Develop a trust with a director. Like I feel like [one director] does not trust me because he has not worked with me yet...but, I feel like I developed a trust with [my director]. I feel like he can trust me with a role, and I feel like [the other director] hasn’t really—I don’t think the opportunity has been there yet. *(So if an actor has been able to develop a trust...chances are, they’re going to get more--?)* Yeah I feel like [one of my castmates] has done that. I feel like he has developed a trust with all the directors. *(Is developing a trust with the audience here important?)* I think he has, because audiences that do come to see theatre here on a regular basis will recognize his face. People saw [show]. They go, oh, who’s that kid? And then they see everything he was in, and they recognize him. And even though some of them know he’s gay, they recognize him and treat him almost as if...They trust him, and so it doesn’t matter if he’s gay. (Alexander)

This “trust” seems to put the straight acting gay actor in an exceptional status. Building a trust or credibility allows the performer to buy or maintain some type of privilege with the

heteronormative audience—despite the stigma surrounding homosexuality. This also suggests that privilege is something that could be *lost* with an audience. The advantage for heterosexual actors is that they do not have to consider this. Their privilege is inherent—until their identities or performances are stigmatized in some way. Yet, gay actors still have a chance to do well by building a trust. Similar to the case of Ellen DeGeneres, audiences may embrace a talented gay actor if he or she has developed a trust with the audience, or as Shugart (2003) puts it, “retain a degree of heterosexual privilege” (p. 48). Perhaps developing a trust is one of the many ways to pass in the heteronormative environment. One might see this case to be true currently with Neil Patrick Harris. His longstanding performance career and his relationships with past audiences have “won over” the approval of many current straight audiences. This may be because he has done so well with so many straight roles, and like Ellen, he can “pass as a heterosexual, or at least, not *not* heterosexual” (Shugart, 2003, p. 48). Building a trust greatly resembles Ellen’s case in legitimizing herself in the context of the mainstream media. Those actors who wish to build a trust should consider the many techniques that Shugart (2003) outlines in her article.

The third advantage for straights is being rewarded for “the stretch.” The stretch refers to an actor going outside the realm of his usual personality, persona, or repertoire. In this case, the straight actor is going to the “Otherside” of sexuality—the straight man playing the gay role. Because straights are out about their straightness and their general personality, they are often rewarded for going outside their particular box, and by doing so, are able to more easily exceed the audience’s expectations. “He played gay so well!” Because the performance involves “acting,” it is one of the few spaces in which performances that fall outside stereotypical images of the hegemonic masculine male are rewarded.

Participants felt that because audiences were more likely to trust straight actors, their credibility makes it easier to perceive them as a great actor. Further, the authenticity of their straightness makes the gay performance “safe” and sanitized—mainly because it is assumed that the performer is “acting” and that this performance would never take place in real life. The lopsided dynamic of the environment offers straight actors the advantage of playing a number of roles that speak to their way of life. In turn, the environment rewards actors for stretching outside of its social norms.

This lopsided dynamic leads to the fourth and final advantage: Straight actors are not as limited in their choices for roles and performance. As we have already discussed, there are more straight roles, there is trust, and stretches are obvious and often rewarded. All of these interlocking factors contribute to the availabilities that straight actors have. Because the general portion of society is heterosexual and heteronormative, it is more easily to be accepted. Further, heteronormativity does not always have the stereotypical and limiting nature with which homosexuality is often stigmatized.

### *Disadvantages for Gays.*

The advantages to being a straight actor may be so understood and taken for granted that they are invisible to those in power—reflecting the very nature of heteronormativity. However, discussion surrounding the environment would not be complete without addressing the systematic disadvantages to being a gay actor. In fact, there is not neutral or standardized arena in theatre. With so many contributing facts and subjective processes, everything is biased, prejudiced, skewed. One is either put at an advantage or a disadvantage. Thus, it is important to look at the perceived disadvantages cited by the participants: less gay roles, scrutiny from the audience, the stretch is not rewarded, and not fitting ideal body type

The first disadvantage is the lack of gay roles. With straight roles dominating the percentage of work for actors, gay men often spend more time being concerned with roles that are distanced from their own personal experiences—which often makes characterization difficult. Several of the men cited experience in which they had difficulty connecting with a female interest on stage. Many cited because they have not had romantic relationships or sexual desire towards women, they experienced a particular sexual “disconnect.” However, many also cited alternatives means to establish a connection with a female interest. (See Shifting.)

The second disadvantage is extra scrutiny from the audience. Unlike gay actors, straight actors have the comfort of being out and not seeing their sexuality as a contributing factor to an audience’s perception of them. Several men cited a concern to remove gayness in their performance for fear of the audience being caught up in their sexuality.

I’ve talked to [a castmate] about this, actually. Cause [my friend’s] like “I hope I don’t come across as gay.” And it’s something I guess we all worry about...with an audience. We don’t want people to look at us and go: There’s another gay theatre kid. Let me look at this actor who can actually tell the story...we don’t wanna put a block between the audience because we know there is one with society—that if they see you as a gay person, they’re like, okay you’re gay. And they’ll look at someone more interesting. (Alexander)

The concern of receiving extra scrutiny from the audience is a concern of being stereotyped, which will be discussed in further depth later in this Concerns section. However, Alexander brings stereotyping and gaydar to the center of successful passing. Stigmatizing qualities that fuel stereotyping and gaydar have the tendency to overpower one’s identity (Hughes, 1945).

Thus, if an audience suspects or knows of sexuality, such stigmatizing qualities in performance

may result in failed passing as straight. “I think I had seen enough people that were there that I knew were gay playing straight...and it is true. You do watch shows that you’re like: that person can’t play straight to save their life” (Phillp). Since information on certain stigma may cue audiences into extra scrutiny, it is easy to see why some performers may wish to withhold personal information about themselves to the public.

Participants also cited that the audience was not likely to want to see genuine or authentic homosexuality on stage. Of course there are many shades of gray with this statement. In fact, the men were unanimous in the following assumptions: First, a gay performer would be more likely to be accepted in theatre, a musical, or a comedic role. Second, a gay performer would be less likely to be accepted in film and television, a straight play, or a dramatic role. Thus, homosexuals or homosexuality would likely be accepted for comedic relief. As Jason explained, audiences do not want to be exposed to genuine homosexual relationships/homosexuality:

It’s like a ...safer, candy coated version...a stereotype that people can attach to and it’s less intimidating...The issues of things are not being thrust in your face, but they’re funny. “Oh, that’s the funny person and they’re gay. But I don’t have to see him kiss anyone. I don’t have to hear about all of their romantic issues”...they don’t have to see any of the things that they see as taboo. Or immoral. They just get to see the funny gay person. (Jason)

As previously mentioned, because heteronormativity promotes contained and domesticated versions of homosexuality (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006), many of the gay characters that gay performers encounter are riddled with stereotypes. One of the many ways homosexuality is contained in this case is through humor. However, humor is also a way for some performers, like Ellen DeGeneres, to pass or receive heterosexual privilege (Shugart, 2003). The article further

points out that DeGeneres's humor was "genderless" and neither "gay or straight" since it "related to everybody" (Shugart, 2003, p. 39). This example sheds light on how humor, in many cases, can de-sex a performer, or at least let the humor (which may be more relatable) overtake the presumed sexuality. However, much of the performers concerns are for how humor is used in a degrading, stereotypical way just for gay character to receive legitimacy for visibility.

The third disadvantage is that "stretch" is not as apparent or rewarded. Not only is this due to the representational imbalance surrounding gay/straightness, but gay men playing straight roles is not often seen as acting and typically taken for granted. In fact, gay performers are used to playing many more straight than gay roles. The double standard surround "the stretch" is painfully obvious. While straight actors can enjoy being out about their straightness, reap the benefits of having majority of roles catered to their culture, gay actors may choose to stay closeted or ambiguous (Bragman, 2009; Gross, 1993). Because of this, while gay actors may stretch themselves much more often to play straight roles, the audience may take the performer for granted as straight. Therefore, the stretch does not read. In fact, gay actors are used to playing a multitude of straight roles. So what does a gay actor have to do to get an Oscar or an award? As Phillip quipped, "I think we'll have a lesbian win before we'll have a gay man win... Because a gay man playing a gay man isn't challenging...it would have to be a gay retarded man. They would have to play a gay retarded man. Or a gay disabled man. Or a gay vet." In short, Hollywood and the Oscars appear to be rewarding to performances outside personal identity. However, if aspects of personal identity are closeted, the audience will not read the stretch.

The closetedness speaks to why the stretch is not read by an audience. But what about gay actors who are out? The popular example is Neil Patrick Harris's Emmy nomination for his straight character in *How I Met Your Mother* (Atkin, 2008, p. 26). Because he is out among the

public the stretch reads—and is well-received. Although he is publicly out and one might assume this would contribute to a master status of “being gay,” Harris’s reputation and acting abilities to pass a straight allow his stretch to be rewarded. Cases similar to this gives many participants hope that they can be out in their respective environments and still exhibit range and versatility by stretching to play straight.

Arguably, however, the case with Harris is one of the first. Thus, it will be difficult to tell if more diverse acts of stretching will be well-received. All of this is to say: gay actors should expect to stretch and play many more straight roles with less reward. One must consider, however, whether versatility or typecasting would be more suitable for his career. Additionally, homosexuality is much easier to stigmatize and stereotype than heterosexuality. Due to this constraining nature, gay actors frequently feel set at a disadvantage.

Not fitting ideal body type is the final disadvantage.

Well just I see [the alpha male] as being someone who’s like wider and more muscular than I am, kind of...Like while I’m tall I’m not super tall...And I’m not very built, I’m just kinda skinny...It’s not really the alpha male body frame that one thinks of. I don’t think I’m gonna be in Streetcar anytime soon. (Jason)

With society’s tendency to couple personalities with body type, it is easy to see why effeminate and effeminate-looking men often feel marginalized because their bodies are not able to communicate the “masculinity” that so many straight roles may call for. Many who do not fit into ideal images of masculinity find themselves questioning how to resolve this issue.

...I’m not very self conscious about my body—until this semester when people told me it was bad. That I needed to change part of it, and that I am too effeminate. Like my body is too effeminate...and I also feel like everyone has

known about me, and...Why hadn't someone told me this before? And this is why I'm not getting roles, that I feel like more masculine people would get. Which makes sense in a way. Because [my masculine looking castmate] is going to get different roles than [me]. Just because he looks like a man, a father, he looks like an adult. (Alexander)

Alexander's issues with his body being too effeminate simultaneously suggests that his body does not communicate the "physical force and control" that defines hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1990, p. 291). Thus, there is concern for how the body communicates gender, and in turn, because of the binary (Sedgwick, 2008), communicates sexuality. In short, effeminacy or lack of physical force could suggest homosexuality. The effeminate body thus becomes problematic when trying to embody hegemonic ideals of what it means to be masculine: First, the effeminate body does not communicate physical control, and second, the effeminate body does not communicate heterosexuality.

When actors do not feel like they fit into the ideal body type, there are many questions that arise. For Alexander, it was "Why hadn't someone told me this before?" Others may ask: How can I resolve the way my body communicates? How can I or should I change the way my body appears to be better perceived for straight roles? Because homosexuality is often stereotyped with effeminacy, some gay actors may find themselves trying to compensate or compromise their gendered bodies.

For the previously cited reasons, the subjectivity between presumed straight and gay actors is clear. Because of this imbalance, participants were unanimous in the assumption that casting and performance were easier for straight actors. Some participants went even so far to

say that straight actors take their advantages for granted, and perhaps, have not even questions this imbalance.

...I think a lot of straight actors take for granted how easy it is to play love scenes... because, like, when I watch a movie or when I watch play...if it's a love scene...and I know the actor is straight. I intently watch to make sure—Okay, I need to steal that. because that's accurate for a straight—I need to do that...Because I know that...gay relationships in real life are not—it's kinda like a transposition in a way—but it's not that exact same as a man and woman. (Chris)

Phillip argues one of the reasons for this taken for granted nature is: “I think it's just because so many straight actors just haven't fully explored their own sexuality...” As a straight man involved with theatre, I can agree with this statement. Granted this is not to say that straight men have not questioned or reflected on these imbalances. However, until one has experienced disadvantage or known someone who has, it is easy to remain oblivious. This taken for granted nature further affirms how heteronormativity continues to seep into our entertainment sphere, and presents a vicious cycle. As Yep (2002) points out: “The power of heteronormativity as an ideology is its invisibility disguised as ‘natural,’ ‘normal,’ ‘universal’—its ‘it-goes-without-saying’ character” (p. 168). When heteronormative audiences maintain control of what way of life is represented and normalized, it is difficult for Other performers to have a say.

Additionally, participants agreed that many gay actors or actors with “gay qualities” had to work harder. Yet, despite this statement, most of the men said that while there was a disadvantage, there will always be a disadvantage for every person. Consider Dion's statement:

...every actor is gonna hit a point in their life where they're gonna be hit with a challenge...And I feel like a lot of straight actors haven't been hit that yet. And I

feel like I'm being hit with it right now... That this is what I need to work on now. And this is what I need to do to get where I need to go. And... I don't think straight actors have to think about that stuff yet. I think one day they will. Just cause I think, in art, as a whole, there's always gonna be a wall that you hit at some point in your life. It's just a matter of time when you hit it. (Dion)

While acknowledging the imbalance that is often presented with heteronormativity and straight roles, many actors embrace the subjectivity of their perspective and the uniqueness of their person. Lee agrees: "I hate to use the word fair. It doesn't seem fair. But I guess everyone has different obstacles that they have to overcome. So I think it's terrible thing [sexuality] has to be an obstacle. But I think everyone has at least something." The subjective nature of casting provides everyone a place in the spectrum of roles. However, as cited before, it depends on which roles one is seeking, and whether one would like to be perceived as versatile or one-dimensional.

Despite that actors acknowledged that everyone has disadvantages to overcome, homosexuality was still an attributing factor when casting did not pan out as expected. Whether it was getting a different role or not getting cast at all, several participants questioned whether or not they read "too lightly." Thus, with "gayness" being stigmatized by audiences, directors, and fellow actors, one might understand why someone would be concerned with hiding or downplaying his sexuality.

However, amongst all this talk of disadvantage, the actors still spoke of certain advantages to growing up with their Other perspective.

... You have to learn to, right? We have to learn these strategies to make ourselves attractive. And we have better opportunities for personalities to shine

through... We understand the different avenues where we want to get to. And we understand humor more... You wanna get a woman to bed? Make her laugh.

Right? But a straight guy probably doesn't get that right away. He probably thinks he has to come off as macho. The breadwinner. The big cock guy. (Gary)

Gary explains that living with an Other perspective in daily life promotes one to learn performance strategies to negotiate wants and needs in a heteronormative world. Gary further proves the pervasiveness in heteronormativity with heterosexuals' notions of masculinity. Images such as the "breadwinner" or "macho" fall in line with Trujillo's (1990) patriarch and physical force tenants. Thus, the idea of recognizing and evaluating dominant ideologies in personal life allows for the actor to make better performance choices when enacting masculinity/heterosexuality on the stage. When asked how it will feel to change behaviors for his work in the future, Chris replied: "Familiar. It's what I've been doing all my life... I've been sitting in a classroom when I've heard a teacher say that You've gotta butch it up, or you won't get cast." Many actors expressed that because they had recognized, deciphered, and replicated behavioral expectations for gender roles, they were better able to understand how to perform in certain situations for certain audiences.

The advantage goes beyond just imitating, understanding, and changing behaviors. It also encompasses the exploration of one's sexuality, how attraction works, and how to communicate desire. Many actors cited that they were not able to be comfortable with their bodies until they were able to develop their own sexual identity. Troiden (1993) supports this by arguing that fully committing to a heterosexual lifestyle is defined by self-acceptance and comfort. Realizing one's personality allows the performer to be more comfortable in themselves. Coming out is not only significant to one's personal life but to the work that one would bring to the stage. This

questioning of sexuality proved to be not only a useful tool, but an integral part to one's identity development—which is why some joked: “Maybe they're just not out to themselves yet.”

Because presumably straight actors do not live in a world that challenges their straightness, and merely takes it for granted, it is much easier to assume heterosexuality.

Despite the systematic disadvantage perpetuated by our societal expectations with gendered behavior, participants have found ways to embrace and utilize their Other perspective. One upside is that society is a natural training ground for gay men who seek a career in performance. Performing in real life, in many ways, prepares one for performing on the stage. This is not to say that society is morally or ethically justified, but participants have found ways to embrace their perspective and use it to their advantage.

#### **Fearing of being stereotyped.**

Dyer (2000) refers to the word stereotype as “almost always a term of abuse” (p. 245). With societal norms tending to identify sexuality by gender expression, gay actors seem to worry most about their level of expressed masculinity. Some young men identified themselves as more effeminate and also cited it as a potential stigma or stereotype that may consume other's perception of him. This consumption of identity is not only found with stereotyping, but also a concept known as master status.

The term “master status” was first proposed by Hughes (1945), who noted that certain traits or characteristics of a person have the tendency to “overpower” one's perception of his identity (p. 357). A tendency to compartmentalize personal identity often fuels this master status. With casting sometimes being confined to “types,” many actors run into a gamut of choices that must be made in order to avoid (or encourage) a certain master status.

...if you make a few choices in a row like uh...Jack McFarland. [Sean Hayes] claims to be straight. But...he did Billie's Hollywood Screen Kiss, a big gay movie. And then he did Will and Grace...but he tried to break out of it and do ...The Dean and Lewis movie, and he played Jerry Lewis, and he was really good at it. But you're still like—well you're gay now. Whether you are or not. (Phillip)

Phillip's comments point to how a pattern of roles contribute to an audience's perception of a performer's personal identity—regardless of their actual sexuality. If a performer makes a certain series of choices he may be relegated to a particular image or master status that overpowers other dimensions of the performer (Hughes, 1945). Once being stereotyped or achieving a particular master status, actors trying to break away from this status may create confusion or dilemma of status (Hughes, 1945). All of the interviewed actors expressed a concern of being stereotyped not only in the roles they play, but in their personal lives.

Sometimes I know when I find myself getting too giddy or whatever? I'll have to...get on to myself. I'll go: Don't do that...Because people look at you more when you do that. If a straight man does it, then it's just funny. But if I do it, it's real. And I become stereotyped. So I'm always constantly on the lookout to okay, I can't do this. Gotta watch this. Because people are watching more closely and judging me more harshly because of it. (Chris)

Chris's main concern of here is to monitor his personal behavior. With flamboyance or “giddiness” being stereotypical images of gay men (Dyer, 2000), the fear of enacting those stereotypes becomes present. Thus, stereotypical images of gayness in personal life and in other spaces are stigmatizing and could result in an overpowering master status (Hughes, 1945). Stigmatizing images are also defined by going outside dominant ideology expectations—in this

case, the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo, 1990). Yet, at the same time, they all agreed that “if you’re good enough,” an actor can do whatever he wants. In fact, while there was discussion about fearing master status, some actors noted the option to embrace typecasting.

...some have made a living off of it—like Nathan Lane...I think if you’re really good, you can do whatever you [want]. But yeah, for the average actor out just trying to break in, yeah they have to have the versatility to pull it all off. Or they can be like Nathan Lane, they can make millions off of being hoomosexual.

(Phillip)

When encountering auditions and stage performances, actors must make a conscious decision about what type of identity or conception they would like their audience members to have. As already covered, a pattern of choices influence the overall identity. One make a variety of choices and seen as versatile, or one can make establish a pattern that will promote a master status, which in turn, leads to typecasting (e.g. Nathan Lane). Hughes (1945) proposed a few solutions to encountering master status, and challenged readers to reevaluate society’s tendency to socially segregate. While that is a nice thought, audience members may not be aware or as forgiving about tendencies to categorize. In fact, as previously mentioned, the ability to categorize is what makes characters identifiable (i.e. archetypes). Because of well-established norms and ideologies, gay performers grow increasingly concerned about being contained to a stereotype.

In the context of theatre and casting, actors often feel the urge to combat or neutralize certain identifying characteristics or mannerisms that tend to overpower their identity. This is what I refer to as “personal master status.” Lee explains: “so I guess is my greatest fear is that the

first impression someone has of me is gonna be: He's the gay kid. Or he's that guy that does the loser roles. Or he's the guy that does the romantic lead. I don't want to be any of those things."

With stereotypical homosexuality having its own set of stigmatizing qualities, many of the actors attempt to "remove" gayness and/or acquire heavy masculinity which Americans culturally tend to identify as "straight." With casting processes tending to put actors in certain type, the common concern shared by all participants was being immediately thrown in a particular box, especially the stereotypical gay character. Such typecasting tends to constrain, limit identity, and limit the perceivable range that an actor could exhibit.

Listen to Jason as he discusses being typecast:

...I did four shows in a row with [a theater company], and in every show I played a gay character, and so I felt like they thought there was nothing more that I could do than just do that. Like they wouldn't give me larger roles or different roles. That's just what the stock thing I was being presented with. So that kind of made me feel like [sexuality was] something that needed to be separated from the aspect of performing...cause some people, they'll see that and...they'll think you can't do other things—even though you know you can, but you'll never get a shot because they have that idea of what *they* think you're perfect for. (Jason)

Thus, the fear of being stereotyped goes beyond the personal life, and onto the actual stage. Phillip's example with Sean Hayes greatly parallels Jason's story: being typecast or assigned a master status could be severely limiting in future endeavors. In order to avoid this master status, many of the actors have considered several avenues to combat this stereotype—which will be discussed later in *Shifting*.

What makes master status particularly difficult to navigate is when an actor has come out among his peers and directors. With audiences knowing the fact of someone's homosexuality, such information can fuel the overpowering nature of master status (Hughes, 1945). All of the participants stated or alluded to being out in their respective environments. Many commented on how being out further affected their performance processes, especially with regard to reading "straight" enough.

I feel like I've had more to prove this year than I ever have...cause I was really scared about coming out and what it would do to me here. And so it's like I'm just out to prove that stereotype wrong...because also, this past [show]. [A friend] came up to me and she said, I came in watching the show...and I expected to see you be really feminine because I heard that ever since you came out, that your work had got really feminine. (*Whoa...wow*) And she said...I didn't see any of that...I don't know why people are saying that, I didn't see that at all. (*Wow. Wow. That's such a—okay...*) ...that's the kinda thing I'm talking about. (Chris)

Here the master binary appears. Since Chris's coming out, some have coupled homosexuality with effeminacy or femininity. Thus, being stereotyped means to be entangled in contradicting and arbitrary social identities. Being stereotyped means that an audience's perception of a performer is possibly changed—due to the emergence of stigmatizing information. As stated before, stigma is a "deeply discrediting" attribute (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Newly outed gays especially often deal with feelings of extra scrutiny from the audience, as if to "prove" or maintain credit that they can still act straight enough. Through Chris's story, it easy to see how the actor may become worried that the audience is too focused on identifying gayness in performance and whether or not he can actually play straight. Thus, questions of homosexuality

begin to overpower the messages in a performance, which create a great deal of psychological noise for both sender and receiver (Berlo, 1960). Even after or during the complicated coming out process, actors may deal with assigned identity and stereotyping. In the minds of the actors, just the information or the fact of homosexuality may influence an audience's perception of the performer.

Some commented on how odd it was to worry about playing straight enough when the casting directors or members of the audience knew that they were gay. Indeed, sometimes performance choices were not to quell suspicions of someone being gay, but trying to make the audience "forget" their sexuality—or passing (Blackmer, 1995; Blinde & Taub, 1992). This concern was particularly unique in that gay men who were out in their environments aimed to exhibit their range by performing masculine straight characters in contrast to the personal (in some cases, effeminate) gay identity. This is why so many, if not all participants argued: "If you're good enough, you can do whatever you want." This phenomenon of making people "forget" or suspending belief seems to be the very nature of the job description. Of all people, actors should be the most skilled at passing for what he is not. Some noted that this convincing the audience of straightness in several ways mirrored performance choices in their personal lives.

### **Hesitancy to come out.**

Hesitancy to come out was the fourth and final concern. In fact, the previously cited concerns fuel the main concern of how to come out, to whom, if at all. Hesitancy to come out does not necessarily refer to choosing to stay closeted. Rather, it points to the complex process of coming out. It points to the hesitation, the need to analyze the situation, the need to consider the circumstances and potential consequences of coming out. Several actors considered and agreed that aspects of an actor's personal life may influence their career, or their audience's perception

of them. Some participants noted how difficult it was to keep personal and professional lives separate.

While there was hesitation in the beginning, all of the actors are at least minimally out to their friends and peers. Many actors noted that the degree of hesitation correlated with the environment in which they were working. Many noted while the theatre was generally embracing of gays in personal life, they did not feel the same about television and film. The hesitancy to come out also deals with how high the stakes are for the actor himself. A few actors who did not perceive their identity being compromised were not as worried about the coming out process as those who were seeking larger roles.

But I do distinctly remember having the fear that this was going to affect my career, my casting. Because I didn't want professors to think differently of me. ...even if you don't say oh no that'll never happen. There is a distinct impression that comes along with homosexuality. And people can get it in their heads where I had once played these parts before. Once they know I'm homosexual and open now, they're like oh, and even on a subconscious level, they start to think:

Feminine, not leading role, not masculine, and they start to push it aside. (Chris)

Chris's story points to how coming out directly affects audience's perception of the performer. The "distinct impression" echoes the stigmatizing nature of homosexuality and its tendency to overpower as master status does. Yet, Chris's story also points to authenticity. Does sexuality really matter when it comes to playing characters? In this passage, homosexuality is described as a stigma, a discrediting feature, to playing a straight role—much like Trujillo's (1990) fifth tenant requires for men to be heterosexual in order to be masculine. In other words, there is a fear

that audiences will not accept a homosexual playing a straight role simply because of his sexuality.

The coming out process is also ongoing, especially for college students (Herdt, 1993; Rhoads, 1994). From one environment to another, actors are met with new people with different sets of sensibilities. However, with better familiarity with the particular audience's expectations, actors may be better able to navigate how to manage personality, and thus, better able to alleviate the hesitancy or concern for coming out. Still, as some participants point out, some environments are more crucial than others. One interviewee spoke of his uncertainty in wrestling with how and when to come out to his family.

There are thousands of people that I can audition for, whereas I have one family...I know that—I'm probably not going to be able to have it, but I would love for my family to be okay with my lifestyle...because I love my family so much, and I would hate to see them—like I can't get a feel for whether they would abandon me or embrace it and adapt to it. (Participant)

While all the actors are minimally to largely out, there is still consideration for the consequences. Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi (2001) call this step integration, in which “the individual reveals his or her true sexual identity and attempts to manage the consequences” (p. 324). Coming out could mean altered perception, extra scrutiny, being treated differently, not getting cast the same way, et cetera. For these reasons, actors often have second, third, or fourth thoughts about coming out. The measures or methods by which actors choose to come out are an entire labyrinth in of itself. While some chose to come out in their personal interaction with friends, some let it come in their ambiguous performances, which will be discussed in Shifting.

Lack of self awareness.

A number of the participants also spoke of a lack of self-awareness—either for themselves or their peers. When self-awareness is achieved through interaction with others (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) it may take a great deal of interaction to know who and how one is and comes off to others. In fact, self-awareness is an ongoing process as one continues to interact through the landscape of people, places, events, and time.

Without trying to pass judgment, it appeared that the more experienced actors understood this phenomenon, and not only saw it with in themselves, but also in young actors recently out to themselves. “I don’t think that a lot of gay actors at my age understand they’re gonna have to butch it up...I think that there are a lot of new gays, when they first come out, don’t understand how gay they actually are...I don’t think they understand how they come off to people,” says Dion. A lack of self awareness can often result in a lack of concern. Where many of these actors go through a number of the previously cited questions, perhaps some of the younger gays may not feel such notions apply to them—or perhaps they have not even questioned the possibility. Without self-awareness and literacy to the environmental expectations, changes cannot be made in order to better maneuver through the labyrinth of integrating the self with the business of entertainment.

Whether it is dealing with the dilemmas with characterization, the uneven playing field, the fear of being stereotyped, the hesitancy to come out, or having a lack of awareness, there is much to consider. As cited before, the overload of psychological noise can have an adverse affect on one’s health, perception of self, and self-esteem. Much of the previously cited concerns point to dealing with stigma (Goffman, 1963) in a heteronormative environment (Yep, 2000) and living up to unrealistic expectations of masculinity (Trujillo, 1990). Of course the levels of

consideration are completely subjective and unique to each actor's particular traits and experiences. Further, dealing with stigma is different for every individual with their own set of respective variables (Blinde & Taub, 1992). While Gary may worry more about his physical characteristics, Ewen may be more concerned with how he manages information surrounding his identity. Alexander and Dion may be more concerned with changing the appearance of their bodies to read more masculine, while Chris is more afraid of being stereotyped and potentially typecast in subsequent shows.

The diversity of concerns illustrates how complex and relative this phenomena has potential to be. These concerns serve as motivation to change behaviors. Without these concerns, there would be no need for any shifts in performance, body or personality. Appropriately, the attempts and measures utilized to alleviate these concerns are just as diverse and demand closer investigation. These measures mark the core experiences of what it means to be a gay actor in theatre.

In this section, I have outlined a number of concerns that participants cited while bringing the self to the environment: dilemmas with characterization, feeling Othered in a heteronormative environment, fear of being stereotyped, and hesitancy to come out. Through the course of expanding on each of these, it is easy to see dilemmas one has as a minority group member in an environment that is still heteronormative in several ways. Further, conflicting and discrepant meanings over what it means to be "straight" and "gay" arise. This consequently sends the actor into questions of how to perform these characters/sexualities. As stated before, the amount of noise that develops from said concerns can significantly impact an actor's performance. But what do actors do to resolve these conflicted feelings?

The next section is arguably the most important section of this study. Up to this point, I have provided explanations for how meaning and identity is formed, covered the social norms of the acting environments, and also expanded on the concerns that many gay actors have. While these sections describe much of what it means to be a gay actor playing a straight role, these are only the internal battles. The next section, *Shifting*, sheds light on the central phenomenon of this study—the strategies that gay actors employ to relieve said concerns, to combat stigma, and to be good enough to play the part.

## **Shifting**

The original use of the term “shifting” belongs to Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2004), who explored the many ways that black women deal with multiple layers oppression and ensure survival in society. Through the course of their research, they identified the phenomenon, “shifting,” as accommodating difference in class, gender, and ethnicity (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 7). Further, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) argue: Black women are “relentlessly pushed to serve and satisfy others...From one moment to the next, they change their outward behavior, attitude, or tone, shifting ‘White,’ then shifting ‘Black’ again, shifting ‘corporate,’ shifting ‘cool’” (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 7). This accommodation or shifting is a strategy in quelling the many personal concerns that black women deal with on a daily basis concerning their race, gender, class, et cetera.

Similarly, while black women certainly deal with multiple layers of oppression (Krenshaw, 1989), the term “shifting” also seems befitting to the experience of gay men in performance careers. But the parallels go behind the performative aspects of this phenomenon. Both black women and gay men use such performance strategies in response to the hegemonic system in which they live. Each performance is a means to “placate” others, while attempting to fulfill a personal interest (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 7). This research particularly focuses on the ways in which gay men are oppressed and the strategies they employ to combat or appease domination—or “Shifting”. So how do gay actors shift? With consideration to changes in “behavior, attitude, or tone” (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p.7) and physical demeanor, actors are paid to shift from one character to the next. Too, they are cast and more widely

accepted in their environments by their abilities to “shift” outside of their personal identities; their ability to suspend our belief; their ability to pass. Yet, because personal and professional lives can be intertwined, what forms of shifting take place both on and off stage? How does shifting in personal life help prepare for shifting in theatrical performance? Therefore, I would like to use Jones & Shorter-Gooden’s term “shifting” (2004) to refer to the choices that gay men in theatre utilize to achieve a particular purpose. Some shifts may refer only to changes in the body. Other shifts may manage the flow of personal information to a particular audience.

Importantly, I should clarify that while the original use of the term “shifting” referred to behavioral changes in personal life, I will attempt to use “shifting” to refer to changes in personal, public, and theatrical performance lives. Shifting is not only the act of change, but is a response, a strategy in dealing with previously cited concerns. Shifting is an effort to reduce the severity of concern. Shifting is a coping mechanism and a navigation tool.

Further, the original use of the term “shifting” was to describe the experiences of black women. Clearly there are distinctions between the marginalizations of black women and gay men. The most obvious and important distinction is that gay men are shifting an invisible identity (sexuality), while black women are shifting a visible identity (race). In short, while a gay man can play another sexuality, a black woman cannot play another race. Also, shifting with black women often involves intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and class (Krenshaw, 1989). Gay men, on the other hand, primarily shift when it concerns sexuality or gender. Thus, it is important to recognize that the definitions of shifting are not identical, and change from group to group.

Finally, this is also an opportune time to clarify: The borrowing of the term “shifting” is not an attempt to co-opt from the experiences black women. I find the term shifting useful in

referring to performance strategies that marginalized members take to minimize or neutralize their minority status to achieve a desired purpose. Perhaps there is a more appropriate term to identify the shifting in gay men as opposed to the shifting in black women. Unfortunately, such an ideal term has not presented itself. In order to avoid the co-opting and generalization of the term “shifting,” I suggest that a new term be coined to help distinguish and clearly identify to these performance strategies to compromise identity. Until then, however, I find “shifting” an effective term to utilize in this analysis.

So in what ways do gay men shift in order to play “straight” characters? How do they shift their bodies to communicate the desired sexuality, gender, body type? How do they shift the flow of personal information from one particular audience to the next? In short, how is personal identity managed? Also, there has to be a conscious decision to shift. Some participants expressed difficulty in deciding how to go about shifting. With so many choices, which might be the most suitable for the given situation? In response to the number of previously cited concerns, there were four main types of shifting actors employed: Body, Material, Personal Information, and Degrees of Expression.

### **Body.**

Because the term “body” has the potential to be ambiguous with its polysemic nature, “body” refers to the physical body—which includes the human body itself, and the ways in which it is expressed, performed, compromised, and re-inscribed. The primary mode of shifting dealt with altering personal physical and vocal characteristics that may not be suitable for the character. Not only was there concern for removing personal quirks, but performing recognizable notions of gender and sexuality. Motivations for shifting the body ranged from better fitting the character to comments from directors. In fact, in addition to personal life experiences, directors

played a key role in the actor's personal awareness of their bodies. Directors were the personal gender barometers, and in short, if the actor was reading "too lightly" for a certain role, the director would often provide comments to guide the performer in the right direction. In order to avoid being stereotyped or contained into some type of "gay" or effeminate master status, several of the actors shifted their bodies. Shifting with the body occurs on two fundamental levels: physically and vocally.

The first element of the body that actors tend to shift is the physical. Perhaps some of the most expressive aspects of the body are the mannerisms. Mannerisms, in this case, refers to idiosyncrasies, or specific ways of verbal or nonverbal behavior. When it comes to stereotypes of gay behavior or colloquialisms, flamboyance and the limp wrist were frequently cited. Flamboyance was often noted as a stigmatizing "gay quality." In effort to reduce this appearance, several men developed literacy to these mannerisms and developed personal techniques to combat them. In response to flamboyance, several men cited reducing expressiveness of a character or performance—unless the situation called for it. A reduction in gestures was also noted. The implication that too much expressiveness could mean too much flamboyance, which could, in turn, cause unwanted associations with homosexuality.

The infamous limp wrist syndrome was frequently cited as a stigmatizing symbol. "If you're naturally effeminate, and you can't get rid of it, sorry. You're gonna have a hard time playing it straight," says Gary. Stereotypically, the limp wrist has been a symbol associated with gay or effeminate men (Dyer, 2000). The limp wrist itself is not the entirety of the mannerism though. The limp wrist syndrome extends to the performer's gestures. Several participants not only point out the limp wrist's stigmatizing nature, but noted a few ways to combat it. Consider Lee's example: "I'll have like certain hand movements...I'll toss my hand usually and kinda

leave it in that position...It's not something you'd want for like a Trigorin in The Seagull...I would have to make him a little more staid. I'll have to firmen up my wrist a bit." Many acknowledged the limp wrist as a stereotypical symbol and its stigmatizing nature. In short, the limp wrist for many does not encourage "manliness." The reduction of stigmatizing symbols such as flamboyance or the limp wrist are forms of physical shifting as an effort to reduce mixed or unwanted signals—which tend to overpower messages in performance.

Another popular expression of the body discussed was posture and the physical act of walking. Much like the case with mannerisms, actors develop a literacy for which postures communicate which supposed identity. Two modes of shifting were eliminating undesired signifiers and acquiring more masculine attributes. First, actors often noted having to neutralize personal posture. For some, it meant "don't rest your weight on one hip." To acquire a more desirable posture, some shifted by standing taller with feet more apart. Some described feeling more grounded, less light on the toes, and having a heavier center of gravity. Inspiration for these body and posture choices were usually drawn from watching other actors' movement choices. "I'm definitely more perceptive to how people hold themselves...so when I watch people on stage, I wanna see what they're posture is. And how they are conveying to me who they are. So that I can take something from that and apply it to myself," says Jason. Perhaps actors pay attention to the social norms of gender to behavior as social cues for enacting masculinity on stage. Much of the literature on passing as heterosexual (Blackmer, 1995; Blinde & Taub, 1992) suggest that gay men use real life examples to help aid in assimilating or blending in with the dominant (heteronormative) culture.

Also, the act of walking itself needed to shift at times. Dion: "I just know I have a very swooshy walk." Efforts to combat this personal quirk were to draw off of stereotypes and people

he knew “no-neck football player that waddles with their shoulders.” In fact, some actors train specifically in movement which can sometimes deal with walking and other presentations of the body.

Everybody has like their own character walk—everyone has a distinct walk. For some reason gay men seem to all have a similar aspect in the way they walk. Um, so if they don’t have that aspect, it’s just automatically assumed they’re straight. So that’s kind of like...as opposed to trying to layer on straightness. It’s kind been more of taking out the gayness. (Dion)

Posture and walking are two ways the body acts and communicates. Often, these young men feel they consistently have to “play straight”—not just as an actor but as an openly gay man attempting to suspend the audience’s belief.

However, changing the way the body is expressed is not the only form of physical shifting. Some of the men have considered or already have physically altered their bodies by working out and trying to build more muscle mass. Because muscularity, athleticism, and the Adonis figure are often associated with masculinity (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), some actors are attempting to appear either more masculine or “neutral” by adjusting their physical body type. Indeed, the Adonis Complex, or the struggle to achieve the “perfect” body (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), even affects actors. While the reasons for this physical adjustment vary, the overarching motivation is that the given body is not communicating the desired identity. Consider Dion’s story:

I realized that my physical appearance also inhibits my ability to play straight because I am so skinny and lanky that I’ve been working out, Trying to gain muscle, which hasn’t been successful, but I’m gonna start a new workout plan

soon. ...I mean some people might say that's taking this to the extreme, but I really wanna do this for the rest of my life. So it's kinda like well I'll do it. To get there. (Dion)

While these cases were not common or widespread, they still speak to the lengths that some actors undertake to maximize their casting opportunities. The goal is not necessarily to be as straight as possible, but "I just try to present myself as most as I perceive that part to be." Yet, physical shifting surrounding mannerisms, walking, and especially the desire to change the physical appearance of the body, fulfills Trujillo's (1990) first tenant of hegemonic masculinity, physical force and control. In order to reach audience's cultural expectations of what "masculine" is, each of the men altered their behaviors and bodies to display physical force and toughness.

The second avenue of bodily expression that actors claimed to shift was vocal characteristics. This occurred mainly through pitch and diction. The first of the popular vocal shifts was in the pitch of the voice. Several of the men cited lowering or deepening the pitch to not only to sound masculine, but to avoid a high "boyish" or "gay" sounding pitch. Several experiences with directors in the past have helped to influence this shift—particularly during teenage and high school years. One consideration may be that not all the participants may have fully developed physically—thus inhibiting their natural ability to sound more "masculine."

...I think part of it was I was really young. My voice had kinda not changed. and she was having me play all these ridiculous characters that were like 20s and 30s where—I don't know if she necessarily meant it as like: You sound gay. Or you sound too young. Um...I can't remember specific things other than just like: Lower your voice. You sound too high pitched. (Bruce)

According to the participants, altering the pitch or lowering the register was the primary voice quality shift. However, some participants cited other voice quality shifts associated with strength and dominance such as increased volume (yelling), gravelly qualities, and aggressive tones. Such shifts in tone and quality are attempts to acquire a more masculine voice associated with physical force and control (Trujillo, 1990). Study on hegemonic masculinity may want to extend their research to verbal and nonverbal communication choices—not just popularized images or archetypes.

The second primary vocal shift dealt with diction. Diction in this case refers to inflection, intonation, articulation, and enunciation. Shifts in diction occurred in several ways. The popular shift was avoiding the “sibilant S.” Participants did not go into detail this shift aside from reducing the elongation or the sound of the letter “S” altogether. “Don’t push that sibilant S.” With the sibilant S being one of the stereotypically consistent voice qualities associated with homosexuality (Crist, 1997), actors try to avoid this particular enunciation.

Another aspect of diction discussed was intonation or the lilt of the voice. Coupled with the sibilant S, there is often a melodic or more expressive intonation. Gaudio (1994) focused on what sounds “gay,” and found that several factors influenced this judgment. Gaudio also pointed out that there is a tendency to dichotomize intonation as masculine or feminine, but as Coates (1986) found: women often code-switch their intonation to fit into a male dominated society (p. 10). So how do gay men code-switch their intonation to read less “gay” and more “straight”? This of course depends upon the individual’s location in the spectrum of voice and diction qualities. However, for some interviewed, it means toning down the variety of intonation. Chris spoke of landing points to sound strong. Coates (1986) describes men’s intonation tending to have lower pitch, more intonation falls, and few rises (p. 10). While research tends to focus on

gender what sounds masculine and feminine, few have made connections to sexual orientation. Consequently, sounding “gay” is often associated with sounding female or effeminate. Regardless, performers often code-switch their intonation in order to be better perceived as masculine and/or “straight.”

Finally, there was some discussion concerning accent and dialect. Because the sample of participants was drawn from a large southeastern university, accents were brought into question. As Phillip put it: “...you kind of get a little more freedom there because the British all seem gay...You’re like: I have no gaydar at all with you. And I’m finding that, too, somewhat in the South...there’s a gentility to Southern men that sometimes just completely baffles my gaydar.” When it comes to either the Southern American or European English accent, the expressiveness and intonation could be seen as “sounding gay,” according to some participants. There is room for future on dialect and perceived sexual identity, especially with regard to the Southern dialect. Accents were an interesting ground to tread. If one has a particularly genteel Southern accent, he may be perceived as sounding gay. To combat this, it would be safe to assume that the actor would attempt to neutralize his accent so that it would not become a distraction to the character. Thus, actors across the board will benefit from being savvy to an identifiable general American dialect. On the flip side, however, accent also provides an avenue to exercise ambiguity or flamboyance. Those who have character roles may have more of a license to play with vocal and physical expressions that are not as restricted or contained as that of leading man roles.

...whenever I’m doing...a love interest, or an ingénue role like that. I always just kind of approach it in a straightforward way. They are characters...And they unique and individual to their own person. But when doing a character role...I

guess you have more license to do things. Because the focus isn't on you all the time. And you have more opportunities to do more things. (Chris)

Thus, it is important to keep in perspective: there are many influencing factors and conditions to shifting. Shifting is a subjective process laden with variables, double standards, and many, many obstacles. However, across the board, when it comes to vocal performance choices, participants consciously shifted vocal qualities. Because heterosexuality is a one of the key defining features of what it means to be masculine (Trujillo, 1990), and certain vocal qualities such as the sibilant S are stereotypically associated with gay men (Dyer, 2000), participants specifically shifted and even eliminated such stigmatizing qualities. What is interesting is that stigma appears in a much more highlighted fashion. In other words, it is much easier to identify what sounds “gay” than what sounds “straight.” Thus, performers are much more concerned about eliminating stigmatizing vocal qualities in order to pass as straight or masculine.

### **Material.**

Another mode was shifting the material that the actor used. Not only did shifting involve changing the body and how the text and subtext were being expressed, but some actors made a conscious choice to change the actual text that they were using. Many who feared being looked upon as effeminate made a conscious decision to pick more masculine roles and audition material. By doing so, they hoped to be able to showcase their masculine attributes, and thus, exhibiting a range in their performance abilities. New material was often “masculine” or “hyper-masculine” in nature, which included aggression, dominance, and reference to women.

I picked, a scene...where I played an extremely straight person, and did a whole scene about how I'm interested in women...about all of us being straight together. Yeah, it's

really great butch time. I always pick material ever since [my director spoke with me], that would be a fight...more angry, or more masculine, more butch. (Alexander)

Earlier participants spoke of altering their bodies—how their bodies communicated identity. Alexander’s shifting of text, however, shows how potentially effective subject matter can affect perceptions of masculinity. The fighting, aggression, and dominance could easily be read as physical force (Trujillo, 1990). But the potential for other tenants to be fulfilled such as the patriarch (father roles), the frontiersman (rugged hero roles), or professional success (business or leadership position roles) open the door for actors to take advantage of both subtextual and textual levels of communication.

Another motivation for showcasing masculinity was the fact that there are typically more straight roles—thus exposing the heteronormative nature of the textual material. Obviously, this again varies from location to location and audience to audience. However, as Dion pointed out: “There aren’t many gay characters in the plays we do here.” By highlighting masculine attributes through “masculine” text/material, actors try to increase their odds of being perceived as “straight enough” for the part. But the goal is not just about appearing masculine: heterosexuality, as stated before, is one of the key defining factors of what it means to be masculine (Trujillo, 1990).

Choosing material was also a way to combat master status. As I have already covered, a certain series or pattern of roles could send an actor into being typecast. Choosing a variety of material can increase the potential of being perceived as versatile. When an actor is perceived as versatile, he may have more options from which to choose. Versatility ties back to the mantra: “If you’re good enough, you can do whatever you want.” I argue however, that it is more than that: “If you’re good enough [and strategic enough], you can [eventually] do whatever you

want.” Being a great actor does not necessarily mean that you are guaranteed a ticket to stardom. There are several considerations to make, especially with regard to the next section, personal information.

### **Personal Information.**

Perhaps the one mode of shifting most closely tied to actors’ private lives is the managing of personal of information. From person to person and place to place, there is constant decision making as to what information to disclose, as well as how much and at what times. This mode of shifting also reflects much of the previous research on sexual identity management in the work place.

Withholding information could mean not being completely out, remaining ambiguous, or not even approach the subject. “ ‘Closetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it” (Sedgwick, p. 3). Withholding information is one of the attempts to reduce the perception of master status. As some have pointed out, the significance of one’s sexuality being a part of one’s identity can range from essential to incidental. Yet, most participants claimed that their sexuality was not a huge part of their expression of personality.

Ambiguity was a popular mode of shifting. Ambiguity is neither confirming nor denying sexuality. Ambiguity also means maintaining a sense of “mystique”—almost to suggest that the less the audience knows, the better. Ambiguity also extends to the performance choices in auditions. “*So in order to open yourself to as many roles as possible. You try to maintain that mystique? ... (Kinda remain in neutral. I’m a nebula.) Let people see who you might be? (Yes. Exactly.) Okay. (Which is a fun place to be.)*” explains Lee. In order to be perceived as versatile

or avoid being thrown into a typecast, many actors may choose to manage their personal lives and information more than usually. However, ambiguity also involves letting the audience assume what they will. With theatre actors having a bit more “mystique” than Hollywood stars, their personal lives may be able to remain more private.

### **Degrees of expression.**

Much talk on shifting has been in terms of toning up or toning down certain performance choices. One might easily assume that it is a simple process of turning off gayness and turning on straightness. Yet, there was much discussion and consideration for how complicated the shifting process was—particularly with the degrees of expression. Managing the degrees of expression points directly previous work on stigma management (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001; Blinde & Taub, 1992). Indeed, from context to context, different levels of expression are monitored and appropriately tailored. Due to a tendency to dichotomize and mutually exclude qualities such as masculine and feminine, gay and straight, it is easy to see to conceived of performance choices being relegated to one box or another. However, the men spoke on the complexity of performing gender and sexuality—that it was not always a simple expression of one quality or another. Furthermore, there was also concern to what degree a quality should be expressed (i.e. How masculine should this character be expressed? How “gay” should this character read?).

Considerations for degrees of expression were motivated by role, environment, audience, and other various factors. For example, when considering the difference between stage and screen, Phillip explains: “It’s also 20 feet and lights. You know, so if you’re a little bit bigger...20 feet and lights is very forgiving. 1000 feet and lights, even more so. (*But a close up on a camera?*) Yeah, you can’t get away with it. You can get away with much less.” In fact,

participants were unanimous in this assumption. Thus, consideration for degrees of expression affect the performer's choices and the audience's perception of said choices.

Whether it is managing bodily expression, material, or personal information, the concern to what degree to express spreads across the entire gamut of shifting. This managing degrees of expression further illustrates the multiple intersecting aspects of identity that are considered, altered, and compromised. Depending on the uniqueness of the actor, he has to sort through who he is, where he wants to be, and to what degree of a shift he needs to make to get there. Often, this process can prove to be confusing and difficult to navigate, especially with regard to several of the previously cited double binds. For instance, even in gay roles, gay actors have to consider how "gay" to make the character. In fact, several actors cited difficulty gauging how much gayness to portray or how to approach the character at all. The same can be said for straight roles.

I do have to monitor my conversation a whole lot sometimes. And you know, that's something—you have to do that with every situation. You have to censor yourself, and—But, um, it's really hard to act straight. Because...it's hard to pick out the parts of yourself that aren't straight. Like, I don't know that there's like a 50/50. This is the gay part of [me]. The just guy part of [me]. (Lee)

Shifting takes a great deal of strategy and is by no means a simple process for majority of gay performers. Again, shifting is the process of managing performance choices or personal information, and the expression levels of those choices. The more identity qualities intersect, the more difficult shifting can be.

### **The Ongoing Process.**

Finally, many actors also made mention of how their shifting process is ongoing. This is to say that the process is not fixed, but fluid—continuing to take shape through the course of one’s life. For many of these young men, they have only been out to their friends and loved one for a few years. Some are still waiting to come out to their families. “...while I would love to say [to my family]...I’m gay...I don’t think that I’m at a point in my life where I can do that yet. There’s more questions I have to answer for myself before I can answer them for other people.” Some are still testing and experimenting their way through their personal shifting process.

Shifting parallels the ongoing process of personal identity development. As Dion pointed out, “What’s so weird about theatre is that personal life and business are so intertwined. Like, you draw from your personal life for your work, you know?” This is clearly exemplified in Shugart’s (2003) article on the passing of Ellen DeGeneres. The larger the audience becomes and the higher the celebrity, the more public and private lives begin to intertwine, which has fueled many to come out (Shugart, 2003; Bragman, 2009; Wright, 2007). However, private lives serve as foundation and inspiration for stage performance choices. As we are met with new people, situations, and events, we better understand ourselves. For many of the younger men, the process of shifting is just beginning.

With new environments come new rules and expectations that must be deciphered and met. Some participants were answering questions for what seemed like the first time. There was certain hesitancy in the ability answer some questions, and some answers were not fully formed. As Dion explained, “I don’t have all the answers to this because I’m still figuring it out.” Because this was the first time that many of these men were asked particular questions about their identity and their process, some experienced hesitancy in articulating their experiences. For

some, it took a while for them to “put their finger on it”. Here some tensions arose. While some participants embraced the exploration of new territory, trying to unlock or understand more of their identity, other participants grew uncomfortable. Some appeared to wrestle with how they felt or what they thought. For some, the answer just was not there—or it just was not that simple.

This may help explain why some of the older actors had an easier time answering questions. They had the experiences from which to draw and explain their views and opinions. Clearly, throughout our lives the more we experience, the better we know ourselves and the world in which we live. For some of the younger participants, finding concrete examples for their answers, feelings, and attitudes may be more difficult than the experienced veteran who may feel more solidified in his thinking. Given the complex nature of the subject matter, perhaps some participants may have benefited from receiving their questions beforehand, or responding to open-ended questions on a written survey. However, I personally enjoyed the revealing of stories from these men—stories that would not necessarily be told in a survey.

There is, also, a huge consideration embedded in the process of shifting: variables. There are an innumerate amount of variables that have potential to sway, change, damage, or even destroy a career. Actors, such as T.R. Knight, have been involuntarily outed by the public or co-workers, as some pointed out in the interviews. Such variables make the management of sexuality even more complicated in the entertainment industry, and those young actors dealing with their personal sexuality should know not only themselves, but the business in which they are playing.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This project first began as a guilty pleasure in answering my own selfish questions—questions that could not easily be answered. I never thought the picture of this phenomenon would turn out as large or complicated as I have found. While the aim of this research was to understand a decision making process, it is not set on making a conclusive assumption. Rather, the benefits of this research are: a.) to move a marginalized voice to the center, b.) to provide a starting point for future research, and c.) to expose continuing contradictions and paradoxes between identities and environments.

Since queer theory seeks to demystify hegemonic or dominating power structures, this study has been able to further advance exploration on how and why hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity are so prevalent in the theatrical context. This study affirms quite clearly that Trujillo's (1991) tenets are still relevant nearly twenty years after its publication. Repetitive and canonical images of men cue these actors into what performance choices they should make to play straight. Further, physical force and heterosexuality could be two of the most relevant tenets of hegemonic masculinity. When an actor desires to change his body to appear more muscular in order to appear more masculine and thus appear more heterosexual, it is easy to see how inextricably entangled gender (masculinity) and sexuality (heterosexuality) have become—especially when it comes to performing sexuality.

Yet, the only way that one would even have access to these stories and experiences is if they came directly from those who have experienced such phenomena. Thus, grounded theory

has proven to be very useful in this study. Such a method has facilitated agency for marginalized, silenced voices and has allowed these men to self-define their identities and experiences. While there are a number of inherent limitations to this study, such as my personal status as an out-group member, I still feel strongly in the power of moving marginalized voices to the center. Doing so allows society to better understand the experiences of others and how invisible but powerful ideology seeps into multiple contexts of everyday life.

For passing, this study confirms that there are many variables and layers of reality to consider when attempting a successful pass. Variables include personal body type, personality, audience, environment, the amount of information that is public and so on. As explained previously in shifting, the visibility of an identity plays a key role in a pass. While a gay man can play straight, a black woman cannot play white. However, this study also contributes to passing the idea of managing multiple layers of reality and audiences. To clarify, a young man who may be out to a few of his peers may not be out to the public. Thus, during a performance, the actor must play a sexuality convincingly not only to an unknowing audience, but to those who know of his sexuality. This encapsulates several of the participants' experiences in feeling that they have to "prove" that they can play straight. Variables such as audience, information, and context should be further taken into consideration with study on passing.

After interviewing nine self-identified gay actors, transcribing, coding, and analyzing their experience, it is very clear that heteronormativity continues to reinforce the gender/sexuality binary. With a generally heteronormative audience and even a more "liberal" theatre audience, performers often resort to radical or canonical images of gender and sexuality because they tend to "read" well. Ambiguity may "confuse" the audience, especially if the character's sexuality or gender displays are important to the character. In short, performers are

often left to turn sexuality into a commodity—they are selling *performances* of identity. It is clear the actor's job is not to provide the contradictions and complexities that one encounters in society, but to display the predictable, stable, status quo constructions of gender/sexuality appropriate behavior. Butler (2008) points out that these performances and adherences to dominant ideology are exactly what keep polarized binaries in place:

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction 'compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (p. 190)

In other words, actors contribute the formation of social norms, particularly the gender/sexuality binary (Sedgwick, 2008; Brickell, 2006). Their action and replication of predictable gender/sexual images are indeed a construction, but they reinforce the binaries and further compartmentalize sexual identity. The very “reproduction” and “regulation” of such values keep them in place and maintains the status quo of the dominant ideology (Butler, 2008, p. 184). In short, while the audience has the power with money and expectations, actors also play a part in the maintaining of compartmentalized, simplified, and binarized sexualities/identities.

Trujillo's (1991) has provided a convenient road map to analyze which characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are enacted in performance spaces and continue to restabilize this gender binary. However, it would be useful to have a similar model for queerness. As queer characters and performers continue to gain visibility in the mainstream, it would be beneficial to examine how queerness, specifically male homosexuality is often displayed. While displays and constructions of masculinity are largely due to widespread televised images of athleticism in

sports, it is important to also examine how television has and continues to construct “what is means to be a gay man.” One might suggest a possible model would be the antithesis of Trujillo’s (1991) tenets. Yet, through this homosexuality is solely highlighted by the dominant ideology of heterosexuality. Such a model would limit observations concerning recent popularized images of what it means to be gay.

But again, there is a desire to compartmentalize sexuality. In fact, this study was skewed in its own axiology—by often defining performances as straight or gay, feminine or masculine. Through the course of this research it is clear that society’s desire to label, categorize, and contain identity stabilizes this binary. Because clearly defined constructions of sexuality are often needed to sell a performance to an audience, there is very little room for ambiguity—unless one is in the chorus of a musical.

Many attribute this desire to keep heterosexuality and homosexuality exclusive to biphobia—which refers to:

...a parallel set of negative attitudes toward bisexuality and those identified as bisexual. Although heterosexuals often reject both homosexual- and bisexual-identified individuals, bisexual-identified women and men also face rejection from many homosexual individuals. Thus, bisexuals experience ‘double discrimination’” (Knox & Schacht, 2009, p. 251)

The dialogue surrounding homosexuality has certainly made steps in the past few decades, and as Bragman (2009) points out: Thanks to actors like Neil Patrick Harris and T.R. Knight, “The stigma is disappearing now that gay actors are playing straight people credibly and openly” (p. 206). However, in many ways, bisexuality is still struggling to be legitimately recognized or taken seriously on the social sphere (Rust, 1995). With the current socio-political standards

continuing to contain sexuality, performances on stage and screen, for the most part, will continue to follow suit. Thus, representations in performances will continue to give visibility to the heteronormative ideology and power structure. Constructions of marginalized groups will continue to be defined the dominant group's standards. Often, minority characters are limited to tokens, stereotypes, and comedic relief (Cummings, 1988). When it comes to selling performance, there is not enough mainstream audience for contradiction and complexity.

Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli (2008) reaffirm that the frequent consumption of images on television are often assumed to reflect real life. When applying this concept to this study, heteronormative performances reinforce the binary. Audience members may assume that performances on stages are reflective of real life, which presents a number of problems. Namely, it continues to marginalize homosexuality in a space that is supposedly a "haven" for gay men. If gay characters or even performances of flamboyance and "gay qualities" are treated as tokens or comedic relief, this ideology may very well creep into the public sphere. While television shows like Modern Family have succeeded in providing gay characters with a main storyline, they are frequently used for comedic relief—which raises concerns if stereotypes are helping the image of gay men (Calindas, 2009). While this may be positive for visibility, it may not be the type of visibility members of the queer community are seeking. A few of the actors interviewed expressed as interest in seeing gay/queer characters that are more reflective of their experiences. These characters, however, may only be found on the fringes of the mainstream. Until bisexuality and other representations of the queer community gain legitimacy, binaries and other dichotomizing categorizations will continue to influence the performance choices that actors make.

Through this study, it is clearly seen that commodifying performance is more invested in profits than the interest of marginalized groups.

Well, if I were investing 5 million in a Broadway show, I'd want my money back...I'm not trying to bring you down to the lowest common denominator about the dollar. But it factors in...It's not about the art...I wish it were different, but I have no problem with it because that's the nature of the industry. (Gary)

Because of this gay actors often consciously or subconsciously manage, alter, and compromise several avenues of identity in order to fit the role and successfully play the part.

While there is a large amount of research focusing on the process of coming out in the workplace, the parts of the entertainment industry seems to discourage this practice in several respects. Therefore, a scholarly focus on actors managing and performing sexual identity is applicable and beneficial. Because researchers have made it clear that sexual identity management cannot be boiled down to a simple blanket statement, further study must be encouraged, particularly within the theatrical context. Specifically, this study confirms the great amount of variables and multiple layers of reality to considering when performing or managing sexuality identity. The heteronormative and subjective nature of the entertainment industry leaves the closeted gay actor with only so many options. Qualitative researchers, especially, should begin to specifically examine how actors of various genders and sexualities manage such identities. While the dialogue concerning sexuality with those in entertainment and leaderships positions is becoming more visible accepted, there must also be consideration for the ethics of outing and protecting invisible identities. Should journalists and other media have the right to publicize rumors of such information?

Another area of research that is lacking is discrimination within entertainment. What exactly does it mean when a casting director says, “You’re just not right for the part?” Could the process of casting have inherent and widely accepted forms of discrimination? If so, what makes entertainment casting the exception from different hiring processes? This gray area deserves investigation in order to ensure that entertainers are not being subjected to unjust prejudice. With more light shed on the inside politics of the entertainment industry, one may be able to deconstruct its inner workings of heteronormativity, and work towards a process of change.

## CHAPTER 6

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

The findings of this study have the potential to be quite illuminating. As Yep (2002) argues: “Interrogating heteronormativity demystifies its mechanisms of power by making it visible and bare for critical analysis” (p. 168). However, one must also consider how the limitations affect the results, and how they act as prompts for future study. The first and most obvious limitation, as stated before, is the fact that this study is based on single hour-long interviews with nine people. Thus, it is important to recognize the immense subjectivity and superficiality in a handful of responses for such a short amount of time. For this study to achieve some type of stability, several more interviews with several more people would be required to warrant a sense of saturation in identifying a *conclusive* understanding of the central phenomenon. Those who wish to take on such an endeavor have several possible routes for future research, such as: How do the experiences differ geographically? Or in respect to age? The second limitation in this study deals with gender. The main focus has been on the gay male’s experience. However, a fairly unexplored, but valid avenue is the experience of the lesbian actor. What are the assumptions surrounding gay women in the entertainment industry?

A second limitation to consider is that the participants are all from the same large southeastern university. Most of these men are around the same age and they are experiencing the phenomenon in an isolated environment. That is, this study is based on the phenomena that have occurred with these specific men in their specific locations, unless stated otherwise.

Perhaps much of these experiences may be due to their specific geographic location. Until more research is conducted, there is no conclusive way of knowing.

There were also tensions that arose during the interviewing process, particularly due to be my status as an out-group member. One tension dealt with jargon and vernacular. What terms were acceptable for me to use as a straight man? While one participant may have been fine with me using the term “gay,” another participant may have preferred me using another term, such as homosexual or queer. There were also concerns about the term Gaydar. None of the participants seemed to reject the term or become offended in any open way. But secretly, is the notion of even asking the question offensive?

I also felt self-conscious while trying to label or name someone’s experience with sexual identity formation. I asked questions such as: “When did you come out to yourself?” I would refer to the experience as “uncovering” or “understanding” “that part” of his identity. As an out-group member, I often felt concerned that I was not using the right terms or respecting their experiences by the proper label or name. And in the moment of conducting the interview, I was afraid of asking what terms they were comfortable with me using—mostly because I felt like it would draw attention to the interview, and take away focus from us having a conversation.

Another limitation was the openness of the participants. While some participants may have responded like an open book and grew into a tree with several branches of side stories, other responses did not sprout or bloom as well. In fact, a few participants grew nervous during the course of the interview. Thus, concerns arose for how to quell this anxiety. I found that I would have to find alternate routes to get to the heart of the experiences. For some there were roadblocks along the usual line of questioning, which prompted me to improvise and find alternative questions that could still get us to the destination we needed to reach.

One final limitation was the organization and scope of this study. Because there are so many variables that tend to influence the central phenomenon, it was difficult to maintain specific focus. The limitation here is that while this researcher would like to illustrate the entire portrait of the men's experiences, the study does not facilitate such. Rather, grounded theory primarily seeks to understand the central phenomenon at hand. Therefore, sections such as Evaluating Personal Concerns and Shifting certainly warranted more focus than Knowing the Self and Knowing the Environment. Again, follow-up interviews may have aided in a more specific detailing of the central phenomenon, Shifting.

Aside from the tensions I experienced personally, there are a number of implications and avenues for future research. One prompt is examining how different layers of overlapping oppression further the complicate the process of shifting. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), "intersectionality" was a term originally used to help explain the difficulties black women experienced in relating and identifying with feminist and anti-racist discourse. Crenshaw posited that different layers of difference, such as gender and race, should be taken into account in order to understand how such oppression is multi-dimensional and complicates further with each category of difference.

In a broader sense, intersectionality has been referred to as "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 68). While this study has focused solely on gay men shifting sexuality in various contexts, there is much room for examining how multiple layers of difference are negotiated in the theatre. As Lee explained:

I'm vaguely ethnic. Which is interesting because that already kind of sets me at a certain place in casting...So it's interesting for me that I have to work around a couple of things, it feels like. I have yet to find roles that, you know, fit the kind of [ethnic] gay but not flamboyant young man. I'm waiting for someone to write that one. But that's where acting comes in. (Lee)

With casting being an inherently discriminating process, it is important to explore how actors navigate and negotiation through gender, race, ethnicity, body type, ability, and other categories of difference.

Another implication is what this study does for several notions surrounding gaydar. This research further affirms that the concept of gaydar—in the theatrical context—is socially constructed and more closely linked to stereotyping. This is to say that gaydar is not absolute or “accurate” in reading actual sexuality, but rather, identifying qualities that society has deemed as stigma. Yet, many of the participants have noted some indicators for gaydar that go beyond stereotype. Thus, more research needs examines how gaydar is perpetuated not only within the community of gay men, but also out-group members, and society at large. Actors, of all people, are the ones who must be literate to the ever-changing constructions of what it means to be a straight man (Trujillo, 1990) and a gay man.

The next implication deals with the ever-changing nature and connotations of masculinity. In fact, “manliness,” or the popularized notion of masculinity, was a central theme in this research. As Hanke (1990) reminds: “hegemonic masculinity *changes* in order to remain hegemonic; significant social change in the direction of gender equality will require more than the ‘new view of manhood’” (p. 245, emphasis in original). Many of the actors detailed their perceptions of what society deems as manly, where they personally fall along the spectrum of

masculinity, and what strategies they might use to achieve a more masculine appearance.

Because physical force and heterosexuality were primary features of masculinity (Trujillo, 1990), some actors felt the desire to achieve a more muscular appearance. This desire to achieve the athletic, the perfect, or more acceptable body is what defines The Adonis Complex (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). The hegemonic system promotes unreasonable expectations for bodies when attempting to perform definitively masculine roles. Masculinity is too intertwined with athleticism (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000), and homosexuality is too entangled with the frail, AIDS-stricken appearance (Mann, 1998). As a result, those who do not fit into a masculine/athletic body ideal, fall into an either ambiguous area of body identification, or raked in with the effeminate/homosexual body identity. Either way, unrealistic expectations concerning body type continue to affect several actors. Until more diverse images of masculine bodies become widespread, the hegemonic/heteronormative system will continue to promote these unrealistic expectations—expectations that actors will continue striving to meet.

With this said, another implication is the concern for the actors' power for agency. One might think that the very performers in entertainment would have a say in the way that identities are represented. But as previously covered, the power lies in what is acceptable to the audience. The directors are then guide their actors to live up to these expectations. Thus, the actors are merely puppets. They are scripted bodies. Much of the power lies in the writers. After all, it is domination of discourse that helps to maintain hegemony. Recall Therborn's (1980) definition of domination, which occurs through "the construction and maintenance of a particular order of discourse...[and] the deployment of non-discursive affirmations and sanctions" (p. 2). The construction of discourse, such as the scripts and texts within which actors work, is produced by the playwrights. The playwrights write the very words and stories that are performed onstage.

Thus, playwrights are, in several respects, responsible for the existing dialogue in performances. Further, affirmations and sanctions to support this discourse are provided by the audience. If the audience approves, the performance is praised and moved to the center. If the audience disapproves, the performance is dismissed and cast to the side. With playwrights and audiences fueling this domination of heteronormativity, it is very difficult for actors to achieve any type of agency or power for themselves. In short, the actors are merely puppets on a stage. Unless they are playwrights themselves in some fashion, they do not have the ability to compromise these heteronormative expectations.

Yet, as many of the actors noted, there are indeed playwrights who shed light on gay issues and values. But this discourse requires affirmation from a widespread audience to achieve some type dominating force. Unfortunately, the current politics surrounding homosexuality in the United States is too stratified to promote significant change. Until more diverse dialogues are written into performance, and such performances achieve widespread support, heteronormativity will continue to seep into the procedures and rituals of the theatre and acting culture.

One final implication or road to future research is the idea of non-traditional casting. Because some have expressed concern about being stereotyped, some directors have considered colorblind or genderblind casting (Eisenberg, 1988). Such notions challenge the way Americans construct and reinforce archetypes and other predictable identities. These casting choices could lead to the deconstruction and demystification of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity in the theatre. But in turn, it could also challenge what it means to play straight. Because performances, particularly on the television, influence the way viewers see real life (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2008), more diverse casting choices could very well lead to a more inclusive, pluralistic, and even ambiguous ideology. However, as covered before with

domination, it takes not only a dialogue but a substantial audience to support such ideology.

Thus, I encourage not only for researchers to further explore the implications of non-traditional casting, but also how it challenges the dominating power structure that promotes hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity.

Because of time, space, and scope, there were many nuances and complexities that were left not fully examined, such as the “talent crush,” which refers to a great admiration or affection for a performer in a romantic, spiritual, or sexual nature. Some of the performers noted talent crush as a means of building an attraction to a female interest character. Through the course of the process, researchers have the potential stumble upon very interesting phenomena along the way. I highly encourage any researcher to use this study as a starting point for other endeavors. Quite frankly, investigation of performing sexuality in the theatre is severely lacking.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

- 1.) How long have you been acting? What sort of roles have you played? Type? Have you played characters with different sexualities?
- 2.) What do you identify as your sexuality? What is it like playing straight characters?
- 3.) Do you consider the sexuality of every character you play?
- 4.) Is sexuality important? In your opinion, is there a correlation between sexuality and behavior?
- 5.) How do you build relationships with other characters?
- 6.) When did you first notice that there was a difference between gay and straight?
- 7.) Does being openly gay affect an actor's work/opportunities? Do you feel that actors don't necessarily come out to the public or the community for fear of their career being in question?
- 8.) Have you had experiences in which sexuality came into question? You were hesitant to come out in theatre? Or made you think your sexuality may affect your career?
- 9.) Is there Gaydar? If so, how can you tell? Do physicality or mannerisms communicate sexuality? How does this affect the audition process?
- 10.) When playing a straight role, do you feel like there are certain expectations you have to fulfill? What are those? How do you "play straight?" Have you had situations where a director or fellow actor asked you to tone up or tone down your approach to a character?
- 11.) Do you feel because of your experience and perspective that you may have an advantage over the average straight actor?
- 12.) How do you feel about straight actors being rewarded for playing gay roles?

13.) Is there a difference between theatre and film? Musicals and straight plays?

14.) Does your personal life affect people's perception of you? Do you feel like you have to manage how people perceive you? Is there a public image that needs to be kept in check?

15.) At what point is it "safe" to come out? To whom?