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This study examines the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men by analyzing the website entitled, Straight-Acting.com. The straight-acting rhetoric emerges because some gay men want to achieve hegemonic masculinity to overcome gay effeminate images. Also, gay effeminate men are unattractive to straight-acting gay men, because they violate normative gender-performative expression valued by the "straight-acting" men. This attitude is called, "sissyphobia." Last, some website members view straight-acting as fluid, while others view straight-acting as stable. By exposing this topic, this analysis aims to further understand the role of gender in gay men's identity negotiation and their interpersonal relations.

Keywords: Straight-Acting Gay Men; Masculinity; Heteronormativity; Identity Negotiation; Performativity

Gender is the major aspect of social interactions. Borisoff and Victor (1998) concur when writing that gender "simultaneously creates expectations about how women and men ought to act and to respond in various contexts and relationships" (p. 105). Women and men are socially and culturally expected to develop, negotiate, and perform the prescribed scripts of gender in their communications with others (Borisoff & Merrill, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005; Wood, 2003). Thus, the hegemonic ideology of what women and men should be and should not be stands at the core of our communications. Furthermore, this hegemonic gender ideology functions as a source of conflict in communication processes, especially when women

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and men break culturally acceptable boundaries of their prescribed gender performances in any given context (Borisoff & Victor, 1998).

Society encourages men to communicate with others according to the symbolic performance of hegemonic masculinity (Borisoff & Merrill, 1998). Men must express themselves as heterosexual in order to be perceived as masculine. Chesebro (2001) notes that people will consider a man less masculine if he has another male sexual partner. In other words, gay men are not considered masculine enough because they break the boundary of heteronormativity–heterosexuality as normal. Thus, society pressures gay men to negotiate who they are according to hegemonic masculinity in order to compensate for their same-sex sexual preference.

The rhetoric of straight-acting was born among gay men in the context of this societal condition. Clarkson (2005, 2006, 2008) maintains that straight-acting gay men perform who they are to conform to similar hegemonic masculine stereotypes. It is noteworthy that these straight-acting gay men do not express themselves according to the gay male effeminate stereotypes. Clarkson (2006) further explains that ''a straight-acting gay identity is positioned in opposition to cultural stereotypes of gay men that conflate femininity with homosexuality'' (p. 192). To further highlight this view, straight-acting gay men are referred to as butch or the every day joe type; at the same time, effeminate gay men are oftentimes labeled as pissy, bitchy, or queens within the gay community (Clarkson, 2006). Christian (2005) also observes that ''fem describes the stereotype for effeminate gay men, and fem men were also referred to as 'sissies''' (p. 167). Thus, these gendered semantics communicate that the power struggle of gender is also at the core of the gay male identity negotiation processes and their everyday interpersonal relations.

We can perceive that the rhetoric of straight-acting may play a dual role in both producing and reproducing homophobic and anti-feminine communication among gay men. In other words, the traditional power structure of hegemonic gender may be co-constructed and co-shaped by the rhetorical strategy of straight-acting among some gay men. Therefore, it is very important to critically examine the rhetoric of straight-acting to generate a better understanding of how hegemonic masculinity functions in the gay male identity negotiation processes.

This analysis will utilize the qualitative method of ideological rhetorical criticism to examine messages in the popular website, StraightActing.com to explicate ideological values and beliefs of gender, sexuality, and body among gay men. Clarkson (2008) maintains that analyzing StraightActing.com is highly valuable ''because the online space functions for self-proclaimed straight-acting gay men to make themselves visible to other gay men'' (p. 369). This analysis will explore how members of Straight-Acting.com use the rhetoric of straight-acting to produce and reproduce hegemonic masculinity. Also, this analysis will pay attention to the patterns of how members of StraightActing.com talk about effeminate men in relation to the rhetoric of straight-acting. Since identity is relational (Jackson, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1986, 1989, 1999, 2005), looking at the relationships between straight-acting and effeminate gay men plays a significant role as we further our understanding of the rhetorical strategy of straight-acting. Thus, this analysis aims

to examine how hegemonic masculinity functions in social interactions particularly among gay men.

Before moving on to an analysis of the rhetoric of straight-acting, this analysis first introduces the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, and internalized homophobia.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of masculinity has been expressed uniquely and differently across cultures. Chesebro (2001) opines that "masculinity is profoundly and ultimately a communication concept, a socially and symbolically constructed notion, that every culture and every era revisits and redefines in different ways" (p. 36). For example, the Ancient Greeks viewed same-sex sexual behavior and practice as necessary for men in order to develop their masculine identity (Katz, 1996; Silenzio, 2003). Also, in some Latin cultures, men who engage in a penetrative role during sex with men have been historically considered to be masculine; at the same time, men in a receptive role have not been considered masculine (Potoczniak, 2007). Moreover, in the current societal condition of the United States, men must be heterosexual to be considered masculine because homosexuality challenges the traditional ideology of heteronormative gender roles and norms (Chesebro, 2001; Connell, 1990; Franklin, 1984; Kimmel, 1994). Given these differences in conceptualizing masculinities across time and space, the concept of masculinity can be viewed as a fluid and unstable symbolic product of communication.

Particular symbolic images and features constitute a definition of the contemporary U.S. cultural concept of hegemonic masculinity—"the culturally idealized form of masculine character" (Connell, 1990, p. 83). In particular, Connell (1990) asserts that the U.S. rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity emphasizes toughness and competitiveness; furthermore it requires women's subordination and the marginalization of gay men. The U.S. social perception of hegemonic masculinity is being co-constructed according to physical strength and characteristics, occupational role, patriarchy, and heterosexuality (Chesebro, 2001; Kimmel, 1994; Nylund, 2004).

A certain type of physique is associated with the U.S. hegemonic masculine concept of physical strength. For instance, bigger body sizes with a high proportion of muscles showing upper-body force communicates a hegemonic masculinity (Chesebro, 2001). Also, other physical characteristic such as facial hairs, a deep voice, and the size of one's genitals also communicates masculinity (Chesebro, 2001). Expanding upon the concept, men are expected to play physical sports to develop their physical strength to communicate their masculinity. In this way, physical sports function as a cultural site for producing and reproducing the hegemonic ideology of masculinity (Hughson, 2000; Nylund, 2004).

Heterosexuality is the foundation of constructing hegemonic masculinity in the United States. Franklin (1984) says that "if a male chooses another male as a sexual partner, many people will automatically question his masculinity" (p. 130).

In particular, a man is culturally expected to function as the strict father and as moral authority in the family, while taking care of his wife and children (Lakoff, 1996). Butler (1993a) maintains that the heteronormative system of gender cannot be defined without gay and lesbian identities. In other words, say for men, the oppositional concept of what a gay man is shapes what a heterosexual man should be.

In this sense, the social perception of gay men has been historically associated with their effeminate behavioral performances in social interactions (Edelman, 1994). In the United States, gay male stereotypes are linked to the traditional feminine qualities such as physiques, traits, roles, and occupations (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Page & Yee, 1985). Specifically, gay men are perceived as feminine, outspoken, sociable, talkative, and concerned about appearance (Madon, 1997). Thus, these effeminate stereotypical images play a major communication role in defining what hegemonic masculinity is and what it is not. In other words, the images of gay effeminate men communicate the failure of negotiating the hegemonic masculine performance in order to co-create and co-shape the power structure of sexual politics.

Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Internalized Homophobia

The rhetoric of oppression in same-sex attraction, behavior, and practice helps to normalize the heteronormative ideology of masculinity. For instance, intolerance of same-sex attraction, behavior, and practice signifies heterosexism and/or homophobia. Blumenfeld and Raymond (1988) view heterosexism as a ''system by which heterosexuality is assumed to be the only acceptable and viable life option'' (p. 226). In addition, homophobia is defined as the irrational fear and/or hatred of gays and lesbians (Weinberg, 1972). Kimmel (1994) insists that ''homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood'' (p. 127). The social constructs of heterosexism and homophobia are sites of communication that provide an opportunity for men to evaluate their own masculinity and to confirm their self-concepts of being men (Stein, 2005). Thus, they learn heteronormative masculinity by participating in heterosexist and homophobic rhetoric in their everyday social interactions. In other words, internalizing the rhetoric of hatred toward same-sex attraction, behavior, and practice facilitates how men alter, shape, and reinforce who they are in order to develop their heteronormative masculine images.

Living in a heteronormative society, gay men also experience internalized heterosexism and homophobia. These become a source of conflict for gay men during their identity negotiation process. For example, internalized homophobia is defined as ''dissatisfaction with being [gay] and as being associated with low self-esteem and self-hatred'' (Ross & Simon-Rosser, 1996, p. 15). As such, some gay men may be pressured to work out their body images in order to act, behave, and perform who they are according to hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005).

Given the tense relationship between gay men and hegemonic masculinity, Messner (1997) maintains that gay men who act exceedingly masculine tend to reject the stereotypical images of gay men. In other words, they reject the perception of gay

male identity as an effeminate phenomenon. In this view, Ward (2000) is concerned that gay men who perform in such a masculine way may discriminate against effeminate gay men as a result of their gender performance. Specifically, masculine performing gay men may also participate in producing and reproducing the power structure of hegemonic masculinity that eradicates women and subordinates gay men and men of color (Clarkson, 2006). Thus, the hegemonic ideology of gender is constantly produced and reproduced through a person's rhetorical, repetitive performativity of masculinity and/or femininity in social interactions (Butler, 1990, 1993a).

For these reasons, gender-performative expression has a strong aspect of how each gay man negotiates a sense of self in his relationships with others. We can thus see that gender-performative expression is a critical aspect of gay men's identity negotiation process. With this background established, this article will now examine what the rhetoric of straight-acting mirrors.

StraightActing.com

This analysis will look at a single cultural artifact, StraightActing.com. The website started in April 2000 in order to create a cyber space in which those gay men who did not fit into the gay effeminate stereotypes could communicate with one another. The website offers quizzes, discussion boards, personal pages, or home pages. Since the start of the website, the straight-acting quiz that they offer has become quite popular. Among the questions, this quiz asks, ''How straight-acting are you?'' The quiz result indicates test takers' levels of straight-acting, along with other masculine traits as: level 0, the ultimate in straight acting, level 4 somewhat straight-acting, level 5 somewhat feminine, and level 10 queen status. A variety of media such as newspapers, radio, and print publications have featured this website. As of April 2009, the website re-launched this straight-acting quiz on the ubiquitous social networking site, Facebook.

The website's bulletin board, Butch Board, is used for the purpose of this analysis. The Butch Board allows the website audience to publicly view and observe various discussions without logging in as website members. However, the audience must obtain free membership when they want to participate in the discussions. This bulletin board offers various discussion themes. These topics include: straight-acting men, effeminate men, stereotypes, health and lifestyles, politics, dating, commitment and relationship, and travel, food and leisure. Thus, the website members are able to communicate their beliefs, values, and assumptions about the social world as it relates to gay men in general and ''straight-acting'' gay men in particular.

Theoretical Frameworks

This analysis utilizes identity negotiation theory and gender performativity as theoretical frameworks for exploring the rhetoric of straight-acting that is embedded in StraightActing.com.

Identity Negotiation Theory

The current theoretical discourse of identity negotiation was first established in the discipline of communication in the late 1980s when communication scholar Stella Ting-Toomey first discussed identity validation model (Jackson, 2002, 2009). Ting-Toomey (1986) maintains that identity is constantly co-created and co-shaped while being negotiated "between the self and relevant others" via social interactions (p. 123). Then, Ting-Toomey continued to examine this theoretical approach of identity and communication processes and finally developed the identity negotiation theory.

Identity negotiation theory assumes that the self is a product of a communication processes (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005). Ting-Toomey (2005) contends that two levels combine to form identity. Cultural and ethnic memberships, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and disability form what Ting-Toomey (2005) refers to as social identities. At the same time, personal identities are based on an individual's unique attributes. The theory assumes that identity is "reflective self-images constructed, experienced, and communicated by the individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). It follows that an individual constantly produces and reproduces a sense of who they are in their communications with others. This transactional social interaction process evolves from the theoretical assumption of negotiation. Ting-Toomey (2005) claims that "at the same time the communicators attempt to evoke their own desired identities in the interaction, they also attempt to challenge or support the others' identities" (p. 217). Thus, identity is relational (Jackson, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1986, 1989, 1999, 2005). Therefore, identity negotiation is a mutual communication activity between people.

Performativity

In her book, *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993a) claims that gender is socially constructed as social agents repetitively perform their gender. In particular, Butler (1993a) emphasizes that "performativity must be understood as not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (p. 2). Additionally, Butler (1997) asserts that the performativity is "one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations" (p. 160). As such, performativity is a communication process in which social agents present a performative mode of gender. Thus, Butler observes that gender is an assignment that communicates the dialectical interaction of a gendered body's domination and subordination.

Butler (1993a) also discusses the role of sexual identities in theorizing gender performativity because the intersection of gender, sexuality, and body constitute to define a normative gender. In her view, the binary notion of heterosexuality and homosexuality discursively combine to characterize the normative script of

gender performativity. In particular, social agents are positioned to imitate the normative script of gender in order to communicate their gender identity. In this process of imitating gender, heterosexuality is necessary to define what normative gender is because we live in a society in which one is expected to desire a different gender. Thus, the visual inscription of gay and lesbian identity is necessary because it differs from heterosexual performativity. In other words, this dialectical tension between heterosexuality and homosexuality co-constructs the heteronormative script of gender performativity.

Based on these theoretical frameworks, this analysis utilizes a qualitative method, ideological rhetorical criticism, to examine the website, StraightActing.com in order to explore the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men.

Ideological Method of Criticism

This analysis seeks to determine if a specific ideology representing "...a pattern of beliefs that determines a group's interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world" (Foss, 2009, p. 209) is embedded in the website, StraightActing.com. I will particularly search for the cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions that an artifact communicates. The following two research questions guide this analysis: (1) in what ways do hegemonic masculinity shape the rhetoric of "straight-acting" among gay men?; (2) what strategies are adapted by gay men in negotiating their "straight-acting" masculinity?

In the process of this rhetorical analysis, I first identify the elements that are presented as assumptions or premises behind the artifact and how they represent its ideology. In particular, I look at major arguments, particular words and metaphors, and evidence that are within the text of StraightActing.com and list them. Then, I continue to identify the suggested meanings that cluster around the presented elements because these meanings often function as the source for ideological tenets. After making the list of elements, I proceed to discern what major ideological themes emerge.

In particular, I raise three specific questions to clearly articulate the ideology found in StraightActing.com: (1) what is straight-acting and what is not?; (2) what ideological values and beliefs are suggested for straight-acting?; and (3) what does the website communicate that is socially and culturally acceptable, positive, desirable, or significant? Then, I continue to raise three other questions to analyze the functions of ideology: (1) how does StraightActing.com influence the audience to alter, shape, and reinforce their beliefs and values?; (2) does StraightActing.com communicate something as natural and normal to the audience?; (3) does StraightActing.com represent a marginalized perspective that the audience should consider? By answering these questions, the function of the ideology manifested in StraightActing.com emerge. Thus, in the following sections, I will describe the rhetorical strategy of straight-acting adapted by gay men in negotiating their gender, sexuality, and body in the heteronormative society.

Masculinity versus Femininity Dialectic

Several blog postings on StraightActing.com reveal that the rhetoric of straight-acting clearly emerges as opposed to the stereotypical perception of gay male identity as an effeminate phenomenon. In particular, straight-acting gay men perform hegemonic masculine traits and features. They do not feel at ease linking who they are to the gay effeminate stereotypes in social interactions.

Gay men are generally perceived as effeminate (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Madon, 1997; Page & Yee, 1985). In other words, gay men are considered as less masculine than straight (or heterosexual) men (Chesebro, 2001; Franklin, 1984; Kimmel, 1994). Under this societal condition, the social perception of gay effeminate stereotypes becomes a source of conflict for straight-acting or masculine gay men in negotiating a sense of self in their communications with others. A member of Straight-Acting.com, "Glas_scot" rejects the stereotypical effeminate gay male image. He says the following:

> No way in [heck] am I going to "act" feminine just because I'm [gay]. My sexuality is a small part of who I am and I will not put up with people who think I need to act "gay" just because of this.

For him, being gay does not mean that he has to perform who he is according to gay effeminate stereotypes. This social perception also becomes problematic for some gay men to discursively name their persona with the term, gay, because it does not express who they are. "Clopresti78" mentions the following:

> I've been struggling with my sexuality for quite some time. I know on the inside that I'm gay, but I identify with straight guys for some reason. I'm masculine [and] athletic. I have no desire to go to gay clubs and I have no gay friends. All of my friends are straight and when I go partying, it's either over a friend's place or a straight club. Is there anyone else out there like myself?

To paraphrase this case, he recognizes his same-sex sexual attraction, behavior, and practice. However, the social perception of being gay does not resonate with him when negotiating a sense of self because he is "masculine and athletic," oppositional images to gay effeminate stereotypes. In other words, negotiating the intersection of gay, masculine, athletic, and male identities challenges him. Thus, straight-acting gay men must negotiate who they are by coordinating the meanings of the masculinity–femininity dialectic. Therefore, the dialectical tension of masculinity versus femininity constitutes the construction and the meaning of straight-acting rhetoric among gay men.

Straight-Acting Gay Male Traits and Features

Gay men use the rhetoric of straight-acting to signify that their personas are more masculine than feminine. The rhetorical usage of straight-acting reinforces the culturally idealized masculine form, hegemonic masculinity. "Schlodesss" writes that "I like building/working on cars [drag racing] and actually racing them, as well as

restoring vintage off road MX bikes.'' Also, ''Solitaryman1969'' says that ''I enjoy house repairs, re-did my basement after a flood a few years back.'' Moreover, ''BtonJay'' mentions that straight-acting gay men are attractive, saying that ''I like a guy who wears flannel shirts, drinks beer, and can work on a car.'' Last, ''Blu'' contends that straight-acting gay men wear baggy clothing. These performative expressions communicate what a hyper-masculine stereotyped man should be in this society. In other words, straight-acting gay men negotiate their masculine identities through these aforementioned activities and self-presentations.

Straight-acting gay men deal with their emotions according to what a hyper-masculine stereotyped man is socially and culturally expected to do. For example, the website member, ''CollegePepper'' says that he was pressured to imitate the stereotypical ''strong, silent, unemotional'' type to perform his straight-acting persona. Borisoff and Merrill (1998) maintain that ''because [men] are taught to value the logical, practical, and intellectual to the exclusion of the emotional, many men find it difficult to communicate emotions other than anger'' (p. 14). They further assert that another example of social perception of masculine roles is ''the stereotype of the 'strong, silent type''' (Borisoff & Merrill, 1998, p. 15). In this view, the rhetoric of straight-acting is often used to characterize masculine gay men's personas that are an imitation of hegemonic masculine performance. The rhetoric of straight-acting reveals that the difference between straight [or heterosexual] men and straight-acting masculine gay men is only based on their sexual preferences. In other words, both types of men negotiate who they are by internalizing and performing hegemonic masculine gender scripts in their communication with others. Thus, the prescribed scripts of an ideal masculinity combine to discursively form the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men.

Straight-Acting Gay Male Responses to Effeminate Gay Men

The rhetoric of straight-acting is clearly co-created and co-shaped with gay male effeminate stereotypes. For example, ''Dabonsteed'' observes that:

> effeminate gay men are like ''a loudly dressed man in women's tight, frilly clothes, hips swinging, lips smacking, limp wristed, lip gloss wearing, obnoxious, self-important, attention seeking, high-maintenance, shrill, whiny, selfish, ego-centric, show-tune singing fashionista.''

Another website member, ''SpendingSomeTime'' supports the view that '''effeminate' is attached to a lot of very superficial things, [i.e.,] mannerisms, catch-phrases, fashion.'' These semantics of effeminate men communicate that effeminate men act and behave in ways that men are not socially and culturally expected to. In other words, effeminate men are perceived as men who perform like *women*. Thus, the notion of gender performance discursively creates the boundary between ''straight-acting'' gay men and effeminate gay men.

The rhetoric of straight-acting also mirrors the observation that effeminate men are perceived as unattractive and undesirable in male same-sex coupling due to their

violation of gender performance. For instance, ''Phoenix6570'' responds to a blog question that explores whether or not to date effeminate men. He mentions the following:

> I said maybe only because it's possible that I could meet a feminine man that I liked. However for the most part I would say no. I feel that if I wanted a woman I would date women but I like men. With that being said masculinity is what I like by far. I partly think this is due to my experiences with feminine men. At my college I always see a gay extremely feminine guy. He mainly bothers me because I find him loud, obnoxious, and in no way shape or form manly. I believe it's possible that I could find a feminine man that I could connect with but I doubt this.

In this sense, he sees effeminate men as unattractive because they are not manly enough. In other words, he defines his same-sex attraction in terms of how he is to be attracted to men who posses masculine traits and features. Given his attitude toward effeminate men, he also feels bothered by effeminate male gender performance in public. Another blogger, ''Chico'' also talks about his experience of dating effeminate men. He says:

> Yea I actually had to end [the relationship with an effeminate man]. I mean I thought as long as he's a caring guy it wouldn't matter. He had everything else going for him, good job, educated, cultured, sweet, caring, all the things I like, but even with all that, the attraction just wasn't there, partly because of his femininity. He was pretty stereotypically gay with gestures [and] shopping. Don't get me wrong I like to rock nice clothes, but my identity isn't based on it. I guess I was thinking I could overlook my lack of physical and sexual attraction to him because the other things were so great, but my heart wasn't in it, and it would be wrong for me to lead him on and act like it was.

For him, the gay effeminate stereotypical perceptions play as a turn off in his same-sex attraction. In other words, performing stereotypical gay effeminate images is something that he may not be comfortable with. ''BrChsr'' who identifies as a masculine acting gay man does not think that he can date effeminate men either. He relates the following:

> I'm not open to everyone in the world, only to some family and friends. I think that even being seen in public with a feminine guy would make me ''gay by association.'' I've been called a faggot by people driving by in their cars when I was standing outside of a gay club, but it's a little different when you're at the mall. At a club, you've got the protection of your fellow gays. Out here in the real world, we really are on our own. Most people are straight, [and] some people are gay. The hard part is finding that some.

His comment reveals how being gay is tolerated in the heteronormative society as long as sexuality is normalized. In other words, the ideology of straight-acting normalizes and blurs gay men because they conform to the heteronormative masculinity. However, effeminate gay men are penalized because their gender performance reinforces the images attached to male same-sex sexuality. Madon (1997) maintains that ''bias against gay males might arise more from the negative

perception that gay males violate what it means to be a man than from the positive perception that gay males posses favorable qualities associated with women'' (p. 682). In this view, straight-acting gay men may also internalize homophobia as living in the heteronormative society. Thus, disassociating from effeminate gay men may be a rhetorical strategy for some straight-acting gay men to negotiate and/or cope with the oppression that is attached to their sexuality. Therefore, gender is strongly embedded in the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men.

Sissyphobia

Given straight-acting gay men's perception of effeminate men, it is apparent that some straight-acting gay men have developed negative attitudes toward communicating with effeminate gay men. Bergling (2001) calls this stigmatization of effeminate gay men as "sissyphobia." For example, a website member, "Learning" explains that "sissyphobia focuses on negative thoughts and feelings related to effeminacy." Then, he continues by mentioning the following:

> Today, a high school student was talking about another gay student and said, "I don't have a problem if someone is gay, but I don't like when guys act like a girl."

"Michaelk69" also comments regarding the sissyphobia topic:

> When I was in my teens and first coming to grips with my sexuality, I definitely suffered from sissyphobia. In fact, "phobia" is a great description, as I was terrified of drag queens and really feminine guys. I was terrified to talk to them, to see them, to be around them...even to see them on TV was kind of distressing. I even felt a little violent to them, like I wanted to smash their faces in or throw them off a bridge, just to get them the hell away from me.

These comments clearly link to Julia T. Wood's discussion of gender socialization. Wood (2003) maintains that boys "are more likely to be admonished 'Don't be a sissy'" (p. 22) and they "are reinforced for strength, independence, and success" (p. 22). In other words, while growing up, boys learn what it means, and how, to become a man as opposed to effeminate images. In this situation, homophobia importantly plays a role in the heteronormative gender socialization. Kimmel (1996) opines that "homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men" (p. 127). In this sense, men must reject femininity in order to be masculine (Kimmel, 1996).

Thus, the notion of sissyphobia has emerged in this analysis as a form of internalized homophobia. Gay men are also pressured to act and behave according to hegemonic masculine performance standards. In other words, repudiating femininity is the way for some gay men to achieve and embrace their masculine images in this heteronormative society. Therefore, the rhetoric of straight-acting is co-created and co-defined with the gay effeminate stereotypical perceptions.

Straight-Acting as a Fluid or Stable Concept

In this analysis, I observe that members of StraightActing.com discuss whether straight-acting is a fluid or essentialized concept. Some website members believe that straight-acting can be achieved by adopting hegemonic masculine gender performance roles. In particular, gay men can learn how to portray who they are according to hegemonic masculine-prescribed scripts. Other members of the website believe that masculine and feminine men are born with those traits that guide how they act and behave. They portray straight-acting as the natural behavior that men carry from birth. In other words, they are just who they are. Thus, I will explore how the website members talk about the concept of straight-acting as fluid or stable in the following section of this analysis.

Some members of StraightActing.com think that straight-acting is a fluid concept and men can work on their gender-performative expressions in social interactions. For instance, "Alteregoron" says:

> I admit I work at [straight-acting]. I especially have to remind myself to uncross my legs. Sometimes (and this IS embarrassing) I catch myself singing a showtune...whoa! Sometimes I have to resist the urge to buy candles! Seriously, straight-acting is a role I try to believably play [be]cause I like seeing myself all jockified.

He carefully performs who he is as a masculine man in his relationships with others by correcting a performance that may not be stereotypically masculine. "Creature" also discusses how he develops masculine traits and features. He says that:

> I've altered my voice when speaking to certain people. I've spent hours at the gym to have a great body and even juiced myself up with steroids to be bigger when the gym alone wasn't enough. I've made sure that I'm at the top of my game with job, clothes, and general personal appearance. The zeal in which I pursue all of that is far from passive.

Some masculine performative traits and features can be achieved by the repetitive performance of becoming a masculine man. Some cultural settings may also influence how some gay men act "straight." "ElChico124" says:

> Being in the military, I do conduct myself differently at work than among friends. Not to say I put up a facade, I just wear my "workface". Among friends, I am queen of the faggots.

In a work environment that does not support gay civil rights, he cannot perform who he is according to stereotypical gay male images. Performing like a stereotypical effeminate gay man can cost him his job. He gradually learns how to perform similar to the heteronormative masculine traits and features. Thus, some gay men in this website believe that the concept of straight-acting is a social construct that a man can learn to perform. This is clearly what Judith Butler (1993b) maintains when writing that [gender] "is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself" (p. 313).

In contrast to these ideas, other website members believe that straight-acting is a stable concept. In particular, they view that gay men are just who they are regardless of their masculine or feminine gender performance and expression in social interactions. For instance, "Davy" comments that "masculine and feminine men are born not made." "Rune" also says that "I just act however I act." Moreover, "HoosierFuzz" suggests the following:

> I don't work hard at trying to "act" in any manner. I just go about my day being myself. That just happens to fit into the [images] of straight guys more so than of gay guys.

Similarly, "PhillyAgenda" thinks that his masculine expression of who he is *natural*. He opines that:

> I personally don't try to act "straight" at all. It's just the way I am. I'm a masculine guy and I don't have any feminine mannerisms that I know of. As far as I can tell, when I told people I was gay, they seemed pretty shocked. Not that I'm an athletic jock type with lots of girlfriends or anything that fits into that popular image of male heterosexuality, they just didn't suspect. I've never had to modify the way I speak or my mannerisms.

These comments suggest that some masculine gay men are not trying to perform straight. In other words, gay men trying to perform straight are not really masculine because they must act out the hegemonic masculine persona in social interactions. Straight-acting gay men in this category may reject the notion of performing their masculinity. For them, sexuality does not define who they are. In particular, sexuality is just a one dimensional part of who they are. Therefore, some straight-acting gay men believe that the rhetoric of straight-acting functions to just indicate their masculinity as opposed to the stereotypical image of effeminate gay men because they are not trying to be straight-acting.

Discussion and Implication

Through the examination of StraightActing.com, this analysis has showed that hegemonic masculinity shapes the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men. Also, the rhetoric of straight-acting mirrors the way gay men face challenges in negotiating hegemonic masculinity as they make sense of who they are in this heteronormative gendered society. Particularly, the gendered power dynamic of masculinity and femininity clearly impacts the production of the rhetoric of straight-acting because gay men are also socially pressured to adopt hegemonic masculine behavior. In this sense, straight-acting performative traits and features are defined as they relate to hegemonic masculine stereotypes. Furthermore, these straight-acting performative traits and features are co-created and co-shaped as opposed to the gay effeminate stereotypes. In this sense, some straight-acting men have negative attitudes toward communicating with effeminate gay men. That is what is meant by the term, "sissyphobia." Last, some gay men on the website believe that straight-acting is a fluid concept that gay men can learn to perform; at the same time, some

other gay male website members believe that straight-acting is a stable concept that masculine gay men naturally possess. Thus, the rhetoric of straight-acting is a product of the heteronormative gendered society's communication.

Some critical questions have emerged out of the findings of this analysis. Whether the concept of straight-acting is fluid or stable, the hegemonic ideology of gender system is the basis of producing the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men. In this sense, it is very interesting to continue to further examine how gender-performative expressions produce and reproduce power structures and hierarchies among gay men and these behaviors have impact their everyday interpersonal relations.

It is also crucial to examine the possibility of how gender-performative expression affects interpersonal same-sex coupling among gay men. For instance, if masculine and feminine dynamic same-sex coupling occurs among gay men, do they reproduce and reinforce the heteronormative gender dynamic through their relationships? In particular, do these same-sex couples organize their relationships according to the heteronomative gender system? Perhaps, gender dynamics may not influence their relationships because they are both men regardless of their gender-performative expression.

Moreover, it is quite interesting to consider how race, ethnicity, nationality, and class function in constructing the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men. Let's say in the U.S. culture, Asian American men are likely to be perceived as feminine, at the same time, African American men are viewed as hypermasculine (Chesebro, 2001). Given these racial perceptions framed by Whiteness, it is very significant to examine how the rhetoric of straight-acting functions in intersections across cultures such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and class. Does the rhetoric of straight-acting emerge out of the notion of Whiteness since ''the most visible members of the gay community, and its norm for interpersonal relating, are Euro-American' (Haldeman, 2007, p. 76)? Is the rhetorical strategy of straight-acting universal across cultures? Furthermore, how does the rhetoric of straight-acting function as a survival communication strategy for gay men in some heteronormative contexts such as certain workplaces and religious organizations? Researching the rhetorical strategy of straight-acting across various specific cultural contexts will further provide many possibilities to improve our understanding of gender, sexuality, and body.

Last, queer communication scholars Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) assert that some gay men are seeking to assimilate into mainstream culture by normalizing their sexuality as similar to heterosexuality. Given this theoretical concept, it is very curious to see how the rhetoric of straight-acting serves as the assimilationists' agenda. How does the rhetoric of straight-acting function as a communication strategy for gay men to normalize their sexuality and to gain acceptance into the mainstream culture? How does the rhetoric of straight-acting influence gay men to produce and reproduce the power structure of homophobia, internalized homophobia, and anti-femininity by normalizing who they are? The research community should further study the rhetoric of straight-acting among gay men.

Conclusion

Gender is a source of conflict in social interactions and processes because its ideology pressures individuals to perform who they are according to their prescribed heteronormative gendered scripts. When they are performing who they are outside their gendered norms, they are socially and culturally penalized. In particular, according to hegemonic masculinity, gay effeminate stereotypes communicate the failure of being men. Given this social perception, some gay men, who perform as masculine, show their negative attitudes toward effeminate gay men. However, all gay men suffer from the heteronormative gender which marginalizes who they are at some point in their lifetimes, regardless of their gender-performative expressions. In this sense, gay men are gay men whether they are straight-acting or not. Thus, it is the hope that gay men work toward fighting against that heteronormative gender ideology fragments their community. In other words, gay men collectively resist and challenge internalizing the heteronormative gender. Therefore, it is the right time for GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community members to build bridges among them to communicate with one another and to seek social change in the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgements

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