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Tying It All Together: An Autoethnographic Exploration of LGBTQ Forensic Competitors

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Tying It All Together:

An Autoethnographic Exploration of LGBTQ Forensic Competitors

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ABSTRACT

It is a common held belief amongst the intercollegiate forensic community that it breeds a culture of affirmation towards marginalized identities. However, as a competitor I never felt confident portraying my LGBTQ identity while at a forensic tournament. This prompted me to employ interviews of former LGBTQ competitors to explore how they managed their identity. Using grounded theory and autoethnography I uncovered themes related to gender, sex, sexuality, and gender identity performance as they confronted and interacted with forensic competition.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I can remember everything about the moment and little about the day. I was seventeen years old the first time I wore a tie. Like many formative moments to happen in my life, I was at a speech tournament. I remember waiting for awards to happen when my father came back from judging a final round. He looked exhausted. It was a strange realization for an admittedly self absorbed teenager. I would learn later in life that judging a speech tournament can be quite exhaustive. He had loosened his tie. I have always had a strange fascination with ties. I have been buying them for my father as long as I can remember. When I was younger they were horrible novelty ties. God bless any adult wearing a Mickey Mouse tie. However, I remembered when I saw the tie my father was wearing in the store I was drawn to it as if there were a retractable string connecting us. It was a glistening gold with geometric configurations. The quintessential “power” tie. The tie made a statement. This was the tie draping my father’s neck after this long day of competition. How do you tie that? I blurted. My father ever patient with my inquisitive nature showed me how to tie a tie. Proud of the knot that I had gleaned I showed off my accomplishment. I wore it throughout the award ceremony. I do not remember my showing at that tournament. My high school trophies have long since sat in a box collecting dust however I have that tie prominently displayed in my home. My father and I could not have known that this would be a defining moment in my life as it was happening, but it was the first time that I wore a now signature staple in my wardrobe. I associate much of my identity to the ties I wear as if they are an extension of myself that stretches through the years passed in my life.

When I began competing in collegiate individual events I was soon aware that my style of dress was more than just unique, it was defiant. Over time my ties were increasingly problematic amongst my coaches. It was commonplace to have a sit down meeting before large national tournaments with my coaches to discuss my wardrobe. Although, I wore the obligatory skirt suits, my coaches disapproved of my neckwear. The meetings were concurrently polite and condescending. *We just want you to consider softening your look*. It was explained to me that there were certain conventions for women's dress in intercollegiate forensics that were not to be taken lightly. It was repeatedly suggested that I change to a more contemporary gender performance; camisole and pearls. The insistence bothered me. *Why would I want to be like everyone else?* It seemed counterintuitive to be the best at being the most like everyone else. Assaulting my choice to wear ties to tournaments or otherwise was more than an affront to my sheer vanity and uniqueness. It was an attack on my identity, gender, and personal history. I stood my ground for years, until one day when I decided to wear pearls with a conservative camisole underneath a pearlescent light blue skirt suit to the American Forensic Association National Individual Event Tournament my senior year. My coaches, much like Henry Higgins, were bewildered yet pleased with my choice. They clearly did not think it was funny. They thought that I had finally succumbed to their advice. Thankfully there are not any pictures.

As my day progressed, I was shocked at how many compliments I received from competitors and coaches alike. The compliments awakened feelings of self doubt. Is this what I am supposed to look like? My joke had backfired. I wasn't funny. I was normal. Well, as normal as a linebacker would look in a tutu. I learned a valuable lesson. When it comes to issues of assimilating, it is not amusing to conform. It isn't funny to look normal. It is expected. I soon questioned my previous clothing choices. Would I have had more success as a competitor if I

looked more feminine? Did I look too lesbian? Is it wrong to look too lesbian at a speech tournament? That also must mean that surely it is possible to be too lesbian at tournaments? I had many questions and no one to ask. This project is as much concerned with the investigation of other experiences as it is with the processing of my own. My experiences are simultaneously immovable and fluid within this examination.

Reflecting on my competition years I have begun to reconcile the dominant messages of inclusivity with my understanding of self. If competitive forensics is an accepting community than why was I encouraged to hide my lesbianism? Why was I encouraged to be someone I was not? Rogers (1997) observed how subdominant groups felt disenfranchised within the collegiate debate community. I felt outcast within collegiate forensics. Certainly, forensics seemed perfectly comfortable with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, but for some reason I felt like I was going about being gay the wrong way in forensics. There were few people I resembled at tournaments. I felt as if I was *THE* lesbian in collegiate individual events competition. I was often told that my feelings about sexuality were irrelevant because there were clearly "so many gay people in forensics". There was simply no room for me to express a contrary opinion because there were many isolated members of the LGBTQ community to point out. My knowledge claims were delegitimized.

Rationale

Rogers (1997) identified gender as one of the aforementioned disenfranchised subdominant groups within debate. Murphy (1989) contended that individual events were born from debate and although they have independently grown into their own subculture, norms that came with them have been supported with more enthusiasm in individual events. The forensic

norms that were established in debate have infiltrated individual event speaking and are enforced staunchly. However, the norms are regulated without discussion, making them conspicuously powerful. There have been multiple quantitative studies in forensic scholarship to express gender discrepancies e.g., Billings, 1999; Brushke & Johnson, 1994; Freidley & Nadler, 1983; Freidley & Manchester, 1985, 1987, 2003; Greenstreet, 1997; Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, & Piercy, 1998; Logue, 1986; Murphy, 1989; Sellnow & Ziegelmueller, 1988; Stepp, 1997; White, 1997. There are reoccurring themes apparent in this research in regards attitudes towards women in competitive public speaking and debate. There have only been two studies in forensic research that attempted to uncover how women experience intercollegiate forensics differently than their male counterparts: Greenstreet; 1997 and Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy, 1998. There is an overall lack of qualitative research regarding the forensic experience. Many scholars color their research experiences into their scholarship, and there is a strong sense of community identification with forensics that asserts a common forensic experience e.g., Carmack & Holm, 2005; Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oomen, & Steele, 2009; Friedley & Manchester, 2005; Greenstreet, 1997; Paine & Stanley, 2003; Kuyper, 2010. Among all of these studies, however none explore, or even consider, that an unwitting limitation of their research could be gender or sexuality. Granted, those identifiers are harder to differentiate than biological sex however, when no research has been dedicated to those identifiers, then research in this field is glaringly incomplete. If I were to assert myself into the frame of the normative forensic experience, I could notice how I was treated differently.

Studies to identify gender bias in forensics have only scratched the intersectional surface of how sex discrimination is operationalized within intercollegiate forensic competition. White (1997) observed, “When discussing gender differences in communication styles, one should

understand that most of what is believed to be true about male and female communication traits is rooted in what society has dictated as acceptable behavior for men and women" (p. 33).This observation suggests that notions of masculine and feminine communication styles are determined more by social constructs rather than biological imperatives. Yet it is critical to understand that much of the research regarding men and women in forensics treats gender and sex as the same function when they are different. Gayle Rubin's (1984) significant work *Thinking Sex: Notes Towards a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* contends that although sex and gender are related, they are not the same. This distinction framed sex and gender as two different practices. Reframing gender as separate from sex places gender as a socio-cultural reproduction, as opposed to an essentialist description of behavior. Forensic scholarship has yet to release much of its research from essentialist frames of biological sex.

Murphy (1989) contended that prejudices in forensics are similarly linked to prejudices within the real world, and are just as entrenched. To put it simply, the forensic community does not exist in a vacuum. Biases for masculine and feminine communication styles that exist in forensics are inherent because of a false heterosexist interpretation of gender and sexuality promoted in dominant discourse. They reflect part of a larger narrative of LGBTQ exclusion within forensic research. The subculture of forensics is greatly influenced by contemporary society and is subject to its trappings and the conventions of contemporary society have placed the LGBTQ community on the fringes. Rudoe (2010) argued that although there is not a categorical rejection of all LGBTQ individuals in society, there is an assertion of natural heterosexuality that permeates the prevailing Western discourse of sexuality. The dominant assertion of heterosexuality is so entrenched that it superfluously manages behavior in ways that commonly go unquestioned.

I have felt apprehensive to even initiate conversations about gender identity in forensics out of concern for my credibility as a coach and educator. I have been left to wonder if I am alone. I wish to see if gender and power within the organizational culture of forensics influenced other members of the subdominant LGBTQ community in similar ways. Clair (1993) argued that investigation of sequestered voices within organizations is necessary because these voices do not receive the same exposure, legitimacy, or respect. This is apparent not only in the absence of LGBTQ issues from forensic research but also how forensic competition has sequestered the voice of competitors to rounds and even then certain messages are promoted to outrounds. In this regard, there is a way for LGBTQ competitors to make their messages and themselves palatable.

I am aware that this conversation may sounds like "van talk" however discussions regarding gender and sexuality in forensic research have thus far been relegated to less than "van talk"; it is arguably closeted. Yep (2003) contended that the communication discipline has largely ignored inquiry of sexuality. Forensic competition is not exempt from his observation. I wish to build upon research regarding heteronormativity, homonormativity, and gender identity performance examining how these ideologies intersect with the human body. With this in mind I wish to research the following question:

RQ 1: In what ways do normative conscriptions of gender influence gender identity performance of LGBTQ intercollegiate forensic competitors?

In order to examine this question, I conducted qualitative interviews of former competitors and coaches who also identify as members of the LGBTQ community. My interest in this research is inextricably attached to how I competed in forensics and how I still perform my gender as a judge and coach within the community.

Forensic competition, whether it is debate or individual event speaking, has traditionally rewarded normative masculinity. Let me preface that forensic research thus far is limited in academic scope considering heteronormativity, homonormativity, and gender identity performance. Friedley and Manchester (1985) found that judges were more likely to rank males higher at individual event nationals than females, and in a later study conducted by Friedley and Manchester (1987) it was found that judges also treated male competitors more favorably than their female counterparts in ballots and rapport. Although this was a significant improvement in forensic research recognizing differences between male and female competitors, these studies missed a dynamic representation of gender. Friedley and Manchester (2003) noted the imbalance in the portrayal of masculinity and femininity in regards to competitive success:

> Perhaps it is most interesting to note that males who cross sex-role typing into perceived "feminine" activity of the interpretive events are rewarded ore than females who cross sex-role into the perceived "masculine" activities of debate and limited preparation events (p. 33).

It seems only natural for me to wonder if this sex bias in competitive success could be related to sexuality and gender performance. However, no such consideration has been made in forensic research to date. Maybe more gay men within the forensic community feel comfortable expressing themselves in interp, or maybe heterosexual men feel more comfortable and are even rewarded for nurturing their feminine side, while clearly the same is not true for women. Being blind to or unaware of embodied gender, sex, and sexuality as an indicator of success is an omission rife with heteronormativity. As a competitor, I frequently would receive ballots that would question my literature choices suggesting maybe I was choosing too many LGBTQ topics. Regardless of performance genre, I would be criticized for doing different "gay" topics. I found

these comments to be particularly unsettling. Not only are there multiple issues pertinent to the LGBTQ community but as my role in forensics shifted from competitor to critic I have yet to hear another competitor, judge, or coach extend a similar comment to a heterosexual competitor for doing too many "straight" topics. I would argue that there are many dynamic representations of the LGBTQ community to be found in literature and social issues. To choose to highlight those significant differences would not be one dimensional performance, rather it could be performances intended to uncover unique perspectives of a marginalized group within society.

Throughout this project I will weave my experience in with the collected experience of participants. Fasset and Warren (2007) argued that through autoethnographic writing one is able to look inward and think critically and reflexively about experiences. Miller (2005) justified his autoethnographic approach to forensic scholarship that I wish to emulate: "describe, understand, and critique" (p. 2). I must admit that my unique experience in forensics is centrally linked to multiple intersecting issues of sex, gender performance, sexuality and frames of power, that are constantly bargained.

I felt increased pressures to conform my gender performance in order to meet the normative gender expectations within individual event speaking. Fox (2007) articulated that autoethnography can serve as "a narrative blueprint" that when made public establishes audience immediacy and can function as a model. This project could act as a springboard for LGBTQ research not only in forensic scholarship but also diversify research of organizational culture to critically explore ways in which dominant gender expectations are socially enforced within organizations.

There is not only sparse queer scholarship within communication studies, but there is also limited forensic scholarship. Croucher (2006) called for increased individual events research in order to bring more legitimacy to forensic research. Therefore, I intend to build both fields through this thesis. My second chapter will function as a guide through an extensive interdisciplinary literature review. In my third chapter, I will justify my methodological approach to my project. My fourth chapter will explain, interpret, and analyze gathered research. I will conclude the fifth chapter by drawing conclusions from my research and suggest further areas of research to be taken in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The literature review for this particular project is expansive because I need to address multiple ways in which gender is framed within intercollegiate forensics and how that cultural framing hegemonically insists upon embodied performances of gender. Dimock and White (2007) argued that forensic tradition is imposed onto the bodies of forensic competitors. The ways in which forensic competitors are dressed reflects this imposition of forensic culture. Greenstreet (1997) described that female competitors, more often than males, felt their appearance was related to competitive success. This mirrors societal expectations of dress in relation to gender. Forensic culture necessitates that women not only dress in business attire, but that attire should be distinguished as feminine. I was encouraged by my coaches to make my gender performance match with the forensic norms. Understanding norms is a critical aspect of grasping an organizational culture. Forensic culture is demonstrative of a societal penchant to promote patriarchy through gender identity performance. Therefore in order to investigate how the LGBTQ community fits into forensic competition I will first delve into literature surrounding forensic norms, then I will review work exploring the concepts of heternormativity and homonormativity, before finally analyzing literature surrounding gender identity performance.

Forensic Competition Norms

Within any competitive activity there are rules and regulations, but there are also norms that dictate the appropriateness of actions in a particular field. This is no greater demonstrated than in the Adam Sandler film *Happy Gilmore*. Happy is a working class buffoon with a newly discovered talent in golf, however his dress and demeanor are unconventional for the sport which

garnishes negative attention towards his behavior to the nascent professional golf player. The humor of the movie is heavily reliant on how the simple minded hockey player struggles with the norms of a “gentlemen’s sport”. Although the film is a fictional raucous comedy, it demonstrates the way that norms are not only observable, but how the norms are enforced. Similarly, in forensic competition norms are constructed and adhered to as a means of understanding the activity. Therefore, it is essential to delve into how norms relate to competitive forensics and how the norms dictate gender identity performance within forensics.

Gibson and Papa (2000) defined that communication of organizational culture is framed through metaphors, stories, vocabulary, ceremonies, rites, heroes, and legends. The individual events community within forensic competition, has its’ fair share of storytellers but it is commonly accepted that the best place to become acquainted with forensic norms is the tournament experience. Forensic competition is not scrutinized merely on rules, but also by many norms. Like any organizational culture there are explicit and implicit rules (norms). Paine (2005) distinguished that rules in forensics are enacted for particular events by a governing body while norms are habits and practices that are self imposed by members within a community. Forensic competition follows rules that are primarily established by national organizations and by tournament directors for local tournaments and forensic culture is perpetuated through many rituals and norms. The forensic world is its own cultural microcosm filled with demanding norms that dictate how performers should look and act. Intercollegiate forensics is in fact so shrouded in norms that often competitors and critics treat the norms as juridical doctrine. Many forensic scholars have highlighted the ways in which norms alter competition e.g., Billings, 2002; Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003; Cronn-Mills & Golden, 1987; Epping and Labrie, 2005, Gaer,

2002; Morris, 2005; Ott, 1998; Paine, 2005; VerLinden, 1996. Paine (2005) stated that norms regulate more than how events should be performed, they infiltrate all aspects of forensic culture.

Cronn-Mills and Golden (1997) painted a cynical totalitarian picture of how forensic competition norms are enforced. However, the ways in which norms are enforced is no laughing matter to some. Forensic competition is an almost inescapably subjective activity. Scott and Birkholt (1996) articulated that forensic judges are subject to inconsistencies in judging paradigms that stem from personal bias. In this vein, forensic norms are culturally inscribed and culturally constructed, often through ballots. Epping and Labrie (2005) expressed how norms are particularly scrutinized by a forensic audience while a student is performing, i.e. body movement, pacing, off stage focus, and topic selection. Ott (1998) pointed out the enforcement of norms writing: “judges police and thereby reinforce these traits through their judging practices” (p. 54). Therefore, members of the forensic community are socialized to adhere to norms or they risk being unsuccessful. Gaer (2002) alluded to formulas for success that students follow to meet the unwritten rules of the activity. Students and coaches, in many ways observe what wins and begin to copy models of success instead of inventing new models or deriving success through individual understanding. Billings (2002) described how he integrated students into forensic culture before even coaching students in events by introducing them to the norms of the activity. This model suggests that if students want to become successful they need not learn the skills of textual interpretation or speech writing rather they need to predominantly learn forensic norms.

Tretheway (2000) framed that for members of an organization, the sense making process of an organizational culture establishes “reality-constituting” practices. Sense making of forensic organizational culture can mean one figures out what a winning competitor looks like, acts like,

carries themselves, and speaks about. For new individual event competitors, it is essential to become socialized to norms within the activity, not just in jargon but in presentation of identity. Carmack and Holm (2005) developed key identifiers for the socialization process within forensics:

> 1) Students come to understand the written and unwritten rules of the activity, 2) learn how to research or cut literature, and 3) make the switch from high school forensics to collegiate styles or internalize the standards of excellence expected by the team. (p. 34)

The first identifier explicitly states that the student learns the norms of the activity in order to gain social acceptance, which is no easy task. The second identifier is concerned with demonstrating specific knowledge students' gain in regards to research skills and literature comprehension. However, the third identifier demonstrates an integral aspect of how norms are not only understood, but how and why they are reproduced. Norms within forensics are not merely replicated they are reproduced. Hall (1997) articulated that cultural reproduction differs from replication because replication would be mere copying of culture. However, when replications are introduced into different audiences it thus interpreted in different cultural contexts. When the replicated culture takes on a new meaning and interpretation it transitions from replication to an entirely new reproduced message. Hall (1997) elaborated that the reproduction assumes power position relations while masking it. Within the cultural context of forensics, situations of gender and power are reproduced without question.

Carmack and Holm (2005) signified that socialization is at the forefront of group interaction, in forensic competition, because there are frequent shifts in team, competitor, and judge dynamics. Even though the dynamics are shifting, Croucher et al. (2009) stated that

socialization to forensic participation could deeply influence an individual's sense of identity. Forensic competition in many ways shaped my identity because it provided and impetus to become an educator and coach. My identity is also immutably lesbian. As a constituent of multiple identities, I felt motivated to uncover modes of power within societal structures that I am apart in order to better contextualize my own identity.

Intercollegiate forensics is a niche group that participants often have a profound sense of community. Paine (2005) described the satisfaction that competitors often feel as they master forensic norms and become celebrated within the activity. This is probably due to the internalization process of the norms suggested by Carmack and Holm (2005). Also, mastering the norms is a way to demonstrate integration within forensic culture. Becoming acculturated is not merely about modeling behavior, but also posturing. Valdivia-Sutherland (1998) argued that competitive forensic culture ignores minority members until they assimilate to the dominant cultivated culture. To perform non-normative gender, means to run the risk of not being socially integrated into forensic culture.

One of the most prevalent norms is the enforcement of dress. Although, it is never stated in the rules that contestants wear suits to tournaments, it is expected that competitors will wear professional attire, to be specific non distracting suits. Competitors are also encouraged to wear non-distracting colors. Paine (2005) discussed how one of his female students opted to wear a taboo green suit. This sort of scrutiny placed on suits in forensics may seem trite to people outside of the forensic culture but it is commonplace in the forensic community. Some teams have strict policies of acceptable tournament dress. In this way, norms are more than internalized; they are reproduced in the performance of the body. These norms are often gendered to the point that women are regularly encouraged to wear skirt suits and hard to

maneuver heels, although never stated explicitly within the rules. Although, few teams hold this standard, many still insist that it is a more appropriate choice without questioning the motive behind their preference.

Although norms are cross cultural, forensic norms dictate behavior, dress, and all aspects of performance at an individual events tournament. They play a crucial role in the development and progression of forensic culture. Understanding how forensic competition can influence performance is critical before delving into ways in which gender and sexuality can influence performance.

Heteronormativity

As soon as I began to identify as a lesbian the way in which I viewed societal messages of love and happiness changed. It seemed as if to be myself meant to be contrary to what I was intended to be; a beautiful wife and mother. I realize now that I can still be those things I just won't fit the archetype of the wife and mother. The archetype for a successful woman in Western culture is dominated by an almost exclusively heterosexual perspective, or the idea of heteronormativity. It is in this way that societal expectations for gender and sex are woven into the public sphere. In order to recognize heteronormativity I need to define heteronormativtity, then examine its' societal effects, and impact what it means for the LGBTQ community.

The subtle way in which the hegemonic preference of heterosexuality is woven into Western institutions and culture is heteronormativity. This idea has been discussed by numerous scholars; Adam, 1998; Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Berlant & Warner, 2000; Butler, 1988; Cooper, 2002; Elia, 2003; Jackson, 2006; Jagose, 1996; Jeppesen, 2010; Johnson, 2002; Seidman, 1995; Yep, 2003. Understanding the dominant messages of heterosexuality is therefore

critical to understanding how Western society influences people to not only be straight but how society influences members of the LGBTQ community to hide their non-normative sexualities.

Berlant and Warner (2000) warned against framing heteronormativity as a mere ideology for that undermines the ways in which it is culturally inscribed and enforced. Perhaps the most powerful rhetorical tool of heteronormativity was the construction of heterosexuality as the presumed default sexuality. Jagose (1996) articulated that heteronormativity, short for normative heterosexuality, is the exclusion of LGBTQ people through explicit and/or implicit messages of a heterosexual biological determinism. Heterosexuality is often framed as the normative construction of sexuality through a false assertion of innateness. Assertions of normative gender identity and sexuality are commonplace within Western culture. Foucault (1980) pointed out that discussions regarding heterosexuality are woven into the cultural frame of discourse situating the attraction to the opposite sex as natural. In reality, only conversations surrounding heterosexual sexuality are approved within public discourse. Butler (1988) posited that anthropologically the "success" of the species and culture is promoted through child birth and thus bodies became eventual acts of conscripted masculinity and femininity. Marriage, procreation, and inequitable division of labor were cultural roles that became enfleshed, expected and enforced. Jackson (2006) contended heternormativity in this way functions as a taken for granted assumption in Western culture.

Yep (2003) articulated that Western culture organizes sexuality into a false oppositional dichotomy of heterosexual/homosexual, with a clear privileging of heterosexuality. In other words, to be heterosexual means to self-promote a master status of non-homosexual. Heternormativity thus functions as a kinship that means to impart preferential treatment to others that express the same kinship. That kinship is founded in the notion of normal sexuality with

everything else in opposition. That kinship is promoted by establishing discussions of sex and sexuality as taboo. Often discussions of sexuality in the public sphere are described as private matters that should only be discussed in the bedroom. This excludes non-heterosexuals from entering conversations of normalcy. Epstein, O'Flynn, and Telford (2003) maintained that there is a:

> tremendous amount of work that children and young people, regardless of their own sexual identifications, must do in dealing with, resisting, coming to terms with, negotiating or adopting normative versions of heterosexuality. It does not matter who you are, or who you wish to be, you will have to be/come that person within the frame of the heterosexual matrix". (p. 145)

Essentially, the ways in which we choose to identify are a conscious process that we have been negotiating since childhood with dominant cultural messages about masculinity and femininity promoted, yet rarely discussed in the public sphere. We are forced to process this without being able to talk about gender and sexuality. The only way one can navigate is to either feel the sting of social rejection or reluctantly conform. The decision to accept or deny social expectations of gender and sexuality thus aids in a conflicted construction of the self. Slagle (2003) contended that sexuality is inextricably linked to self identity and impossible to remove from communication and decision making. Therefore, the ways in which people present themselves reflects their standpoint. Jackson (2006) articulated that "heteronormativity defines not only a normative sexual practice but also a normal way of life" (p. 107). When someone identifies as heterosexual they are not merely identifying the type of sex they are interested in, they are reflecting aspects of their sociocultural status; normal.

Sexual identity is clearly more than the sexual acts in which someone engages, but rather a multiplicity of layers that make up significant portions of one's identity can attribute to one's identity. Klein (1990) argued that sexual identity is not merely limited to gay or straight, but a statement of emotional preference, fantasy, social preference and lifestyle. In mainstream culture, heterosexual relationships are not only shown in a positive opposition to LGBTQ relationships, they are also shown more frequently. Seidman (2001) further argued that the fundamental purpose of heteronormativity is not to erase homosexuality, rather to keep a clear distinction between heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality. To erase the homosexual would also erase the privilege of subjugating non-heterosexuality. Therefore, heteronormativity presents a positive social depiction of itself and marginalizes LGBTQ representations. Cooper (2002) claimed that portrayals of non-normative gender, such as female masculinity or transexuality, are portrayed as a "denigrating spectacle" or "an aberration at best" (p. 45). These renderings still paint LGBTQ members as strange, different, and deviant. I did not notice a difference in how I was received by society after I came out of the closet. My peers and speech team were very accepting, however when I cut off my hair it was a different story. I began to receive stares from strangers just because I appeared less feminine. I did not drastically change my style of dress. I cut off my hair during a speech hiatus and when I came back one of my coaches told me "Look at you. You look so cute when you try to look like a lady". The interpretation of my gender and sexuality were complicated when I wore a skirt suit in front of a team that had never seen me in tournament attire before. I felt humiliated for dressing how I was 'supposed' to dress, as if I was somehow being myself incorrectly.

Atkinson and DePalma (2009) argued that heterosexuality is not a monolithic structure rather it is an unstable entity that needs to conform to attempts to subvert its control. The

malleable nature of gender and sexuality are thus not inherently cut and dry. Halberstam (1998) further elaborated that gender, sexuality, and sex are not precise sciences, but they are treated as over simplified fact by society at large. Over simplification makes the assumption of heterosexuality seem as if the gender binary is the natural order, when it is merely a preferred frame of processing gender. Hall (1997) contended that cultural reproduction not only assumes power relations, but also masks them. In this instance, heterosexuality is positioned as the *natural* order, and it is unquestioned. The dominant messages are thus produced and mainstream media outlets reflect cultural ideology that is then reinterpreted and reinforced. At best the process is circular logic, however this is the way in which normative sexuality maintains cultural supremacy. Cooper (2002) concluded that people who transgress gender are used in dominant media outlets as arguments to purport normative gender and sexuality than to subvert it.

The ability to defame a community is exemplar of power within society and what portion of society has it. Discussions of gender and sexuality are thus emblematic of how heteronormativity shuns and shames the LGBTQ community. To exist outside of the unquestioned norm means to be other. Stein (2003) argued that "Shame is the function of the preoccupation with an 'other,' shame reparation and reduction involves the relation" (p. 106). Meaning that power is upheld in heteronormativity by not only disallowing conversations about gender and sexuality that reflect "deviant" behavior, but also by guaranteeing enforcement through shaming members that engage in "deviant" behavior. Seidman (2001) characterized the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality since the 1950's in the United States as one of domination and subordination; establishing heterosexuality as the socioeconomic haves and all other forms of sexuality to the have-nots.

Yep (2003) constituted that heteronormativity is both ubiquitous and an invisible force institutionalizing societal preference of heterosexuality as legitimate, authentic and prescriptive. Tierney (1996) described the nature of heterosexual assumption, “Thus, from this perspective, heterosexuality is one unstated common code that we all share and it is an unchanging, static attribute of our individual and collective selves” (p. 25). To identify as a non-normative sexuality thus disrupts the collective frame of contemporary American society. In this vein, the LGBTQ community literally is tearing apart the cultural fabric of America. Although, this may sound absurd this is a common argument heard in opposition to the LGBTQ community, and I can attest that such ideology is hard not to take. The internalization of socially enforced norms denies LGBTQ legitimacy and can promote negative mental health and self image.

Massey (2009) further elaborated that often members of the LGBTQ community can be integrated within a group and still be subject to homophobia or heterosexism through attempts at humor. Although, humor can be a way to bridge intersecting identities, it can also be used to support heteronormativity. Although, I do not only research and promote the ever illusive yet ubiquitous “homosexual agenda” my forensic peers and academic colleagues have often made me feel that way. Jackson (2006) framed “When either men or women breach heteronormative conventions, however, they are equally susceptible to being defined by, reduced to, their sexuality” (p. 115). These jokes often make me feel as if my academic pursuits are futile and have made the writing process incredibly difficult.

Slagle (2003) posited that queer criticism is rooted in unmasking the cultural conventions of heteronormativity as the only normal form of sexual expression. To stray beyond the label of conventional gender means to risk being misunderstood or worse outcast from society at large.

Elia (2003) contended that heterosexuality is a culturally supremacist ideology that maintains legitimacy through discrimination and "systematically" erasing queer representation in society.

Homonormativity

The LGBTQ community largely foregoes discussions of gender when they are exploring issues of identity. Sexuality and gender although intrinsically linked are not the same. Therefore many gay men and lesbians are capable of demonstrating and enforcing heteronormative gender performance. This phenomenon was coined homonormativity. This means someone who performs non-normative gender can feel outcast from both heterosexual and LGBTQ members. There are expectations for gender performance in heteronormative culture that have spilled over into the LGBTQ community. Understanding hierarchal structures within a collective identity such as the LGBTQ movement can better explain necessary feelings of former LGBTQ competitors to look, act, and perform gender in a particular way. The LGBTQ community also has hierarchal normalization that is either unknown or greatly misunderstood beyond the LGBTQ community. In this section, I will identify homonormativity, explain how it functions in contemporary society, before uncovering how it effects societal interpretations of the LGBTQ community.

Miller (2005) argued that promulgated media during the inception of the gay movement, was grounded in attitudinal acceptance and establishing gay safe spaces. However, as societal expectations and representations of queer changed, so did the images portrayed by the gay community. In recent years there has been not only increased visibility but also increased egalitarian legislation to protect rights and privileges to the LGBTQ community. Dow (2002) claimed that institutionalized and cultural representations of change were piecemeal changes intended to mask discrimination towards the LGBTQ community. Chesboro (1994)

contextualized that the gay movement was treated similarly to past social movements that could be amended by making a few incremental neoliberal policies. However the nature of homophobia is not only grounded in policy making it is rooted deeply in the heteronormative psyche of our era. The era of neoliberal change for gay men and lesbians is highly reliant on reinforcing the gender binary. Ghaziani (2011) articulated that "underneath this veneer lies a troubling politics of normalization" (p. 103). Normalization is at the root of the homonormative ideology.

Bryant (2008) further characterized the current political climate towards gender and sexuality as:

> In an era of increasing tolerance toward gays and lesbians, the ways in which antigay sentiments are expressed have been transformed. Such transformations concern not only a retrenchment and reorganization of strongly anti-homosexual conservatism, but also emerging forms of more 'tolerant', less overt homophobias. (p. 469)

Within Western society there are specific frames in which the LGBTQ community is understood. In the public sphere the frames that are portrayed in a positive light are LGBTQ members who are palatable in the neoliberal media. The favoritism of an acceptable "gay" in media was coined by Duggan (2003) in her book *Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy,* as the "new homonormativity." Duggan defined homonormativity as "a politics that does not oppose dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 50). Similar to heteronormativity, homonormativity assumes that there is a normative and acceptable presentation of a gay identity. This gay politic assumes that

heteronormative constructions are idyllic and that the LGBTQ community should try to demonstrate “normalcy” by being active consumers and producers of neoliberal objectives. Chesboro (1994) contextualized that the push for neoliberal change could be understood by the American population at large as ‘ideologically pure’. Framing arguments for “rights” and “liberties” could distract the greater population from the thought of sexual deviance.

Bryant (2008) described homormativity as a pro-gay homophobia. This elucidates the ways in which one can identify as a member of the LGBTQ community but still attach a sense of distaste towards other identified members of the same supposed community. Stone (2010) further contended that the push for homonormativity was a response to the religious right actively painting homosexuality as a societal abomination. The LGBTQ community responded by demonstrating how they contribute to the American political system, and in extreme cases, appealed to left-wing bashing in order to align with conservative reason. McDermott (2011) warned that “The marginalization of social class from sexualities research raises epistemological questions about whose experiences are being used to generalize understandings of sexual and intimate life” (p. 75-76). The ways in which policies addressing the LGBTQ community are being constructed are aimed to promote normative archetypal members of the LGBTQ population.

The dominant discourse in regards to the collective agency of the LGBTQ community is portrayed as a unified front, however the LGBTQ community cannot even agree upon a name for their marginalized group, much less a unified sociopolitical front. The “gay agenda,” as it is often dubbed by critics, is a representation of the goals of an elite few within the LGBTQ community. Stone (2010) stated that in reality “The LGBT[Q] movement is composed of diverse individuals, organizations, goals, and types of activism” (p. 465). Murphy and Spear (2010)

argued that although the fight for sexual rights initially challenged traditional family structures, it eventually responded by reasserting normative gender roles and mirroring the conventional heterosexual nuclear family. This shift was motivated by a call out from Vaid (1995) who wrote, "More than ever, it seemed reasonable to suggest that much of gay America's hope resides not in working-class revolt but in its exact opposite—a trickling down of gay positive sentiments from elite corporate boardrooms into shops, farms, and factories" (p. 54). In part this is how the LGBTQ community was co-opted by an oligarchical few. The homonormative view dictates that complimentary gender roles be performed by members of the LGBTQ community. Normative neoliberal representations of the LGBTQ community frame gays and lesbians as every day, white, middle class heroes who participate in the American economy and have beautiful children. This normative perception suggests that all members of the LGBTQ community are pushing for the same legal representation, which simply is not true.

Duggan (2003) argued that ingroup monitoring of homonormativity happens as a self-correcting measure intended to promote a unified message of inclusivity. However, this usually takes a utilitarian approach that silences members who do not fit into the homonormative frame. Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2007) observed in regards to social movements, how dominant groups will establish dominance by denouncing the plea of subordinate groups. Stone (2010) added that "professional movements suppress dissent, radicalism, and (in a contradictory fashion) diversity" (p. 469). Seidman (1999) effectively explained the politics of homonormativity before there was a term for it:

> Rallying around a shared 'minority' identity has contributed to gay political empowerment. Yet, there are considerable costs attached to identity politics – for example, the repression of differences among lesbians and gay men, a narrow focus on

> legitimating same sex preference, the isolation of the gay movement from other movements, and as queer perspectives argue, normalizing a gay identity leaves intact the organization of sexuality around a hetero/homosexual binary. (p. 10)

In this instance the neoliberal homonormative is affluent and has more access to media outlets, literally and strategically shaping how the LGBTQ community is presented to society at large. The LGBTQ movement can thus be portrayed as a unified front when necessary and members can be omitted for the convenience of getting increased legal representations for members at the top. Additionally, homonormativity is further masked by Western society's aversion to class discussions. Members of the LGBTQ community who are not affluent also do not fit into the neoliberal agenda perpetuating homonormativity. McDermott (2011) argued that issues of class are often underrepresented as decision making factors for members of the LGBTQ community. The homonormative standard is thus perpetuated superfluously with a "Keeping up with the heteronormative Jones's" standard that makes sense in a capitalist society. In this way homonormativity operates a neoliberal agenda through the LGBTQ community to encourage for gay and lesbians legislative recognition and normal citizenry.

Duggan (2003) argued that the definition of queer is in support of "flexible, anti-normative, politicized sexualities" (p. 58). Homonormativity silences the political voices of LGBTQ community members that do not ascribe to the neoliberal frame; mostly self identified transgender and queer people. Not fitting into the homonormative paradigm has consequences. Hierarchal power structures frame the featured social movements of the LGBTQ community to fit the goals of the privileged. Cole and Cate (2008) described that any additions to the LGB label are as "afterthoughts" in the political ideology of the queer community. Political issues that benefit the gay male and lesbian majority of the LGBTQ are favored in media representations

because it is easier to explain in a democratic society how “normalized” gays are being denied civil liberties.

Styker (2008) developed another comprehensive term for homonormativity to further express how homonormativity works within the LGBTQ community: “an intuitive, almost self-evident, back-formation from the ubiquitous ‘heteronormative’, suitable for use where homosexual community norms marginalize other kinds of sex/gender/sexuality difference”’ (p. 147). A critical facet of homonormativity is the exclusion of abnormal gender identity. Homonormativity is just as concerned with normative performance of gender as heteronormativity is. When a member of the LGBTQ community is politically marked by their embodied performance it could paint the “gay community” as non-normalized citizens, not warranting civil liberties. The ways in which repressive gender and sexuality norms afflict heterosexuality are very present in this new hierarchal presentation of gays and lesbians. This representation delegitimizes anyone defining themselves as: Transgender, Transexual, Transvestite, Butch, Dyke, Queer, Fairy, Drag Queen, Polyamorous, or Sissy Boy. To alternatively perform gender means to defy the neoliberal agenda of homonormativity and to distinguish oneself as an “other” even within the LGBTQ community.

An assumption of living within the homonormative paradigm is that the gender representation will not divulge the queerness of the LGBTQ individual. They could hypothetically live a closeted life in which their sexuality is never questioned. Goffman (1963) articulated that this as the choice to “let on or to not let on” a stigmatized identity. The process of not letting on one’s stigmatized identity is academically and colloquially referred to as passing. Passing involves someone presenting themselves publicly as contrary to their actual identity. Berger (1990) defined passing as the social practice of presenting the self as heterosexual.

Johnson (2002) articulated that the notion of citizenship in Western culture is heteronormatively gendered, which often encourages members of the LGBTQ community to pass as heterosexual. Passing is generally favored in a homonormative paradigm because it presents a picture of the LGBTQ community as "normalized" citizens. Spradlin (1998) stated that to pass means to distance from a stigmatized identity and suppress normal exchanges of information about identity. This can mean presenting the self as heterosexual or not talking about loved ones or changing conversations to adapt to heterosexual favorability. Johnson (2002) elaborated that passing is yet another form of promoting heterosexual privilege. To actively not present the self as an identifiable LGBTQ person assumes that to do so is inherently abnormal.

Identity is a murky terrain, constructed and deconstructed in many ways; identity is constantly performed and interpreted. The ways in which we construct identity are conscious and unconscious choices. Cerulo (1997) identified gender based social movements, such as the LGBTQ community as collective identities constituted by many aspects of hierarchies. Thus to identify as a member as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer person, means to inherently identify as part of a collective group, and actions taken there in part are emblematic of that group. The nature of the homonormative agenda is to limit the representations of the LGBTQ community to palatable gays and lesbians.

Gender Identity Performance

If we accept that social norms, gender, heteronormativity, and homonormativity are socially learned behaviors rather than biologically determined than how are they managed? They all play into facets of identity construction. Identity construction is maintained through a process

of daily enacted performance. In order to understand identity performance it is paramount to investigate performance theory, gender performance, and bodily texts.

Tretheway (2000) claimed that the body is the most 'real' material aspect of our identity. Our physical bodies aid in the construction of our identity and our gender is a key aspect of identity performance. Butler (1988) declared "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (p. 527). In other words, gender identity is a performance of the body that aids in the production of self. Fox (2007) argued that the performance of the self has the potential to alter how one perceives their position in the world. Fox is speaking less to a Ralph Ellison *Invisible Man* scenario, and more to how one interaction or daily performative instance can reframe how one sees the self, in relation to the world. Butler (1988) noted that because gender is acted out daily that it functions as a societal fiction. Even so, the fictional reproduction of gender is so superfluously woven into the cultural frame that it is treated as an act of naturalness prescribed for bodily performance. Effectively, humans literally embody culture.

Our bodies are not blank canvases. They are interpreted by society and we are interpreted by each other. Warren (1999) framed the body as a performative site that is marked by political, ideological, and historical inscriptions that act as an interactive canvas of alternative experiential knowledge. LGBTQ members often cloud the gendered embodied canvas of masculinity and femininity. Tretheway (2000) explained the nature of social discourses ascribe meanings to "masculinity" and "femininity" that are related to every day organizational practices of culture. To practice gender is thus a means of either fitting into culture or to existing outside of it. Becoming acculturated is not merely about modeling behavior, but also posturing. For someone to perform gender differently means to run the risk of being perceived as an outsider. Butler

(1988) stated that “gender is in no way a stable identity” (p. 519). Gender is a fluid aspect of identity that is performed daily. Butler (1988) elaborated that the ways in which gender is stylized through repeated gestures and movement is so mundane that it is often overlooked as identity practice.

Butler (2004) argued that the body exposes gender and sexuality to others. Exposed in this instance is a term for the ways in which gender is confronted by those on the fringes of gender performance. Gender identity is not just expression it is an act of doing. Tretheway (2000) claimed that the body is the most ‘real’ material aspect of our identity. Our bodies aid in the construction of our identity. Gender is a key aspect identity performance. Butler (1988) declared “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (p. 527). Gender identity thus, is a performance of the body that aids in the production of self. Queerness is embodied differently by members of the LGBTQ community. Robinson (1994) articulated that the observable ways in which bodies are interpreted as binary racial or sexual opposites as a readable identity. Reading bodies means that bodies cue readings as heterosexual or white, which contradicts assumptions of biological identifiers. To pass means to blur the biological readings of the body. Warren (1999) stated that the body is often ignored as a significant location for pedagogical attention and educational praxis. In this way the body functions as a frame for others to gauge their own identity performance.

It is a cultural norm used to enflesh gender performance in an expected way. Lorber and Moore (2011) pointed out that breaching gender is not necessarily a strange occurrence, and most people challenge daily varying degrees of gender norms. However, there is a distinct difference between playing within the accepted norm and defying the norm. The interpretation of

what is acceptable is determined by the dominant paradigm. Warren (2001) stated that a society does not notice a norm until it is challenged. For example, the gender binary seems inherent in Western society until confronted with someone who does not adhere to the norms of performative gender, as with a butch lesbian or transgendered person. The accepted norms for any society are often fluid but are rarely understood as such.

Gender for many years was considered a biological imperative however it can more accurately be described as an embodied performance. Butler (2004) established gender as an aspect of everyday performance that she called performativity. Performativity is method of identity construction that could critique other performances and is often associated with political rehearsal. In this instance the choice to perform gender differently than the accepted norm criticizes and complicates the status quo. Butler (2004) argued that gender embodiment is played out with the flesh. The body is then a corporeal canvas of gender expression that is only understood through the process of "doing" gender. West and Zimmerman (1987) contended "that the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production" (p. 126). Therefore, performances of masculinity and femininity are trapped by normalized societal expectations. Heteronormativity and homonormativity are hostage to the cultural production of gender, buying into the fiction of biological sex as an essential indicator of behavior. So much so that people within these paradigms often think that they are attracted to the same or opposite sex, when their attractions are truly located in the gender of their partners. In order to attract a partner in this scenario means to typify traditional gender performance.

Valdes (1996) distinguished three frames that outlined the ways in which sex, gender, and sexuality are misunderstood: conflation of sex and gender, conflation of gender and

sexuality, and the conflation of sex and sexuality. These confusions are part of the cultural web of gender identity. Each cultural inscription, sex, gender, and sexuality each has a performative expectation within society. The expectation of gender performance is indicative of hierarchal cultural indicated through identity performance. Skidmore (1999) argued that sex, gender, and sexuality are consequences of cultural power relations. To identify with a dominant identity means to be perceived as an agent of power. This is how normative portrayals of identity are established. Normative presentations of masculinity and femininity become the idealized structure and to deviate means to be identified as a lesser social agent. Skidmore (1999) articulated that members of the LGBTQ community will often try to mask queer identifiers by acting in a heterosexual manner, or passing. Clothes, gestures, and even vocal tone in this way are often camouflaged by LGBTQ people in order to fit into normative gender performances.

Homonormativity uniquely complicates discussions of gender identity performance that can be demonstrated through clothing applications. Skidmore (1999) outlined three distinct levels of desire communicated in queer clothing: broad messages, ambiguous messages, and secret messages. Homonormativity would impose that LGBTQ members wear clothes that hide or ambiguously perform gender in order to pass. Taylor (2000) critically discussed her role as an "exemplar lesbian" as one that often unintentionally appeases normative gender typing. I have felt similar pressures to ascribe to familiar gender performance in forensic competition even from other lesbians. I remember in my first year of individual event competition reviewing ballots after a tournament. I was excited to read my ballots after meeting one of my judges during awards. She came out to me and we had a very enlightening conversation about how I could improve my poetry program. When I finally received my ballots I immediately searched for her ballot eager to read her encouragement. My excitement soon turned into confusion. She

applauded my use of strong lesbian authors but she criticized my choice to wear a skirt suit as contrary to my lesbian gender performance. I was frustrated. It felt that I could not appease anyone with my gender performance. My coaches thought I should deny my lesbian identity more and I was being told that I had an obligation to perform a more out lesbian identity from the first lesbian critic I had encountered in individual event speaking. I did not understand my new lesbian imperative. I also was not completely aware of my lesbian body. A twenty year old figuring out how my sensuality made me markedly different during a Bush era presidency. At the time I thought I was performing my events at tournaments, not my sexuality. I recognize this moment in my life as the first time I questioned how my lesbianism was communicated through my body. Wearing a skirt suit did not make me any less of a lesbian in the same vein wearing a tie didn't make me more of one.

Goffman (1963) identified that people who live outside of normative conscription are stigmatized for abominations of the body, blemish of character, and discrediting of lineage. It could be argued that being a member of the LGBTQ community fits all of those attributes, which adds to the complexity of intersectional understanding. To perform gender normatively while identifying with a stigmatized group can mitigate aforementioned internalized homophobia and a paranoid fear of being discovered or "outed". Foucault (1990) articulated within *History of Sexuality Vol. 1,* that the act of confession within the Catholic church functioned as a societal control mechanism. Foucault expressed that confessing a secret creates a power dynamic between the confessor and the knower, granting power to the knower. Being closeted is an internalized manifestation of the queer secret. Coming out, or worse being outed, in a homophobic society can function as telling a secret. To be discovered means to be identified as an abnormal citizen. When abnormal sexuality is discovered their relation to society is

irrevocably altered. Goffman (1963) elaborated that passing is a complex psychosocial experience that affects individuals differently. To perform the identity contradictory to identification can cause a psychological schism. Often the oppression that is experienced by a marginalized person extends beyond the realm of the corporeal and into the realm of the mind. Boal (1990) coined this intrapersonal monitoring as "The Cop in the Head." Boal argued that hierarchal structures can and will manifest themselves within the smallest possible enforcement mechanism; the self. Presentation of the self can become a stage in which the Cop in the Head is enacted.

Halberstam (1998) stated that to perform ambiguous gender often relegates marginal performers to an 'otherized' status. To exist outside of the unquestioned norm means to be other. The choice to fit into a stigmatized identity or to hide it is a choice the directly faces every member of the LGBTQ community that can be overwhelming and isolating. Taylor (2000) contextualized the feeling of isolation experienced in non-normative gender performance:

> All of this performing is a lot of work in a world that regularly attempts to deny the reliability of my life and experience, but, so far, it is the best way I have found to make space for myself and maintain my integrity in the face of all that denial. (p. 60)

Much of my internalized struggle was directly linked to trying to ascribe to a heteronormaitve and homonormative gender performance that I felt inexplicably uncomfortable enacting. The nature of heteronormativity and homonormativity insists that there is no other option than to hide a queer identity, however there are realistic impacts to performing transgressive acts of gender that the LGBTQ community is left to negotiate daily. Fox (2007) explained the performative reading of his body as a queer text. I feel a familiar gaze in my

gender performance particularly at forensic tournaments. Now when I wear a suit to tournaments it feels more like costume than attire. It seems appropriate because I am more aware of my performance while at individual event tournaments. Adorning a suit, dancing into the nylons, applying make-up at 6am, all serve as ritualistic signs that I am on my way to a tournament. In some ways this performance is not indicative of my identity and in other ways it is my epitome. In many ways my gender performance is teaming with contradictions. I identify as a soft-butch lesbian, which simultaneously marks my lesbian existence, and excludes me from involvement in homonormative neoliberal politics. Butler (1988) may have contended that the gender binary is fiction; however that fiction is actively performed and expected in contemporary society and subsequently forensics.

The nature of heteronormativity and homonormativity insists that there is no other option than to hide or alter my queer identity, because there are realistic impacts to performing transgressive acts of gender that I am left to negotiate daily. Identity is an act of being. Performance is an act of doing. And gender identity is the interstitial crack between being and doing. My gender identity is an extension of being and doing. I do not dress in men's clothes to defy conventions. I dress and look the way I do because it is an undeniable aspect of who I am. The first time I wore a tie I had awakened a part of my identity. When I wore pearls and a camisole I relinquished some of that identity and I was praised for it. In this way, I felt the sting of heternormativity and homonormativity as a forensic competitor.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Venturing into the world of qualitative interviewing was an admittedly new terrain for my academic pursuits, however Kvale (2006) elaborated that "the marginalized, who do not ordinarily participate in public debates, can in interview studies have their social situations and their viewpoints communicated to a larger audience" (p. 481), which warranted me to broaden my research horizons. The aim of my research is to analyze and potentially identify the (conscious or unconscious) decision making processes regarding LGBTQ forensic gender performance. I am choosing to search for the ways in which my experiences are simultaneously within and outside the experiences of other LGBTQ community members. With this research it is important that the lived-experience of gender performances within forensic competition has silenced the LGBTQ community through omission of research. The omission is most conspicuous considering that there is no shortage of self identified LGBTQ members within forensics. Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) argued that queer knowledge is often overlooked because queer researchers disregard their own queer knowledge of language and the body that is shared with participants. In this vein, I cannot queer forensic scholarship without acknowledging the ways in which my lesbianness has shaped my identity.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) assessed that qualitative researchers who are able to connect the personal and political motivations inherent to culture and effectively incorporate those into research move qualitative research from knowing a distant "Other". Qualitative research is more grounded in the development of self understanding. These sorts of investigations can evolve into improved perceptions of misrepresented or underrepresented cultural groups. I also believe this places a moral imperative on academic research. Knowledge claims in scholarly research have

existed in a contested theoretical plane between positivist and interpretivist perspectives. These perspectives are often framed as antagonistic in terms of data accretion. Creswell (2003) affirmed that positivist thinking dominates discussions that deem knowledge valuable. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) elucidated that positivist research is concerned with investigations of "truth". Positivist investigations hinge upon a researcher objectively testing, experimenting, and observing phenomenon to predict future outcomes. Creswell (2003) stated positivist knowledge examines potential outcomes. This paradigm of analysis aims to isolate and operationalize causal relationships of observable phenomenon. Walliman (2005) elaborated that positivist research highlights unwavering aspects of society while ignoring subjective knowledge. Subjective knowledge would, can, and often does, interrupt conclusive knowledge expounded in positivist research approaches.

Quantitative research used in forensic scholarship thus far omitted even the existence of LGBTQ competitors in forensic competition, so I saw fit to utilize a different approach to forensic research: the qualitative interview. Meho (2006) articulated observational data is concerned with developing objective factual representation of a socio-cultural phenomenon. This however, is interpreted through multiple frames of subjectivity that is often ignored in quantitative analysis of data. So far existing representations of forensic research, especially in regards to gender, are lacking in a fully dynamic spectrum of experiential knowledge. Further, Gergen, Chrisler, and LoCicero (1999) elaborated that experimental methods dominate interdisciplinary studies that are trying to assert legitimacy. This criticism can be extended to forensic study. As a self-identified soft butch lesbian and former forensic competitor I am effectively omitted from this research because my unique perspectives towards gender and sexuality are currently absent from research inquiry. Quantitative methods have effectively

silenced the subjective experiences of LGBTQ competitors within forensics, or at least mine. If I were not asking myself these questions, I don't think anyone else would think to inquire.

Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) suggested that as queer researchers, they had unique access to process and harness the language and experiences of fellow LGBTQ research participants. This articulation describes how much of the language and feelings described by a participant are better understood by someone with a similar marginalized identity. My experiences as a soft butch lesbian in forensics functioned as a means to translate the experiences of others into a societal frame that a nonqueer researcher might not consider. Since my inquiry was concerned with revealing the deliberation of gender identity performance of former competitors I decided to use qualitative interviews to uncover experiential knowledge. This chapter will justify my use of qualitative email interviews, address my interview coding procedure, and defend my autoethnographic approach for this project.

Qualitative Email Interviews

This omission of subjective knowledge can be reconciled through a qualitative approach to research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) framed the qualitative investigator as a researcher interested in questions that ask how cultural knowledge is given meaning. Qualitative research is thus concerned with subjective knowledge that examines how experiences are produced, valued, and understood. Within my literature review I demonstrated how norms influenced intercollegiate forensic culture, the culture of heteronormativity, and homonormativity, and gender identity performance. Those social constructs effect members of the LGBTQ community and qualitative interviewing can be used to reveal how culturally bound knowledge impacts individuals. Kvale (1983) articulated that qualitative research interviewing is "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to

interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 174). Perspectives regarding LGBTQ forensic competitors thus far have been relegated to hearsay.

Interviews were ideal for my investigation because of how they expose a different form of intellectual knowledge; the knowledge of experience. Stelter (2010) argued that “first-person account forms the basis for the creation of meaning, and meaning expresses the relationship of the individual to specific material, social, and cultural contexts” (p. 860). By gathering perspectives from multiple individuals I was hoping that I could gather a more complete picture of how gender identity performance related to LGBTQ competitors. Hamilton and Bowers (2006) further contextualized this idea writing, “Interviewing is in essence a method of language. Although, quantitative researchers attempt to reduce a phenomenon to a measurable quantity, qualitative interviews attempt to expand on any given experience seeking complexity and depth of thought” (p. 821-822). Interviewing thus provided an exploration of lived-experience of former LGBTQ competitors. This exploration provided me with a better understanding of how gender identity is corporeally performed at speech tournaments and how forensic norms are culturally embodied.

Davis et al. (2004) posited that “people enter into an interview with some awareness of their role as a social actor with privileged access to personal experiences that they can make available to others” (p. 5-6). In regards to this project, I needed to find former forensic competitors that self identified as some combination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. Their intersecting identities as forensic competitors and LGBTQ members meant that they would have a vested interest in both represented groups. In order to find these specific participants I sent out a call for research on the forensic individual event list-serv. I asked for

former forensic competitors who identified as part of the LGBTQ community to participate in asynchronous email interviews.

There are many potential ways to conduct an interview. Face to face (FtF) interviews are the most common. FtF interviews are often preferred and easily understood because they allow for nuance inherent to natural conversation. Opendekker (2006) elaborated that FtF interviews are open to interpret social cues such as voice, tone, nonverbal, which are interpreted along with the question answers. However, I did not have the time or financial means to track down enough FtF interviews. Geographical challenges limiting research is not a new topic explored in research methods (Davis, Bolding, Hart, Sherr and Elford, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Kvale, 1996; McClelland, 2002; Meho, 2006; Oppendekker, 2006). However, computer mediated communication, via the internet, opens up new populations for interview investigations. As fun as it may sound, there is not a congregation of former LGBTQ forensic competitors in order for me to interview. Intercollegiate forensic competition happens across the country and subsequently potential interview participants live across the continental United States and beyond. However, through email I could connect with former competitors no matter their location. Davis et al. (2004) suggested that the internet has become an emerging tool in conducting qualitative research methods, concluding that email interviews provide the best opportunities within the frame of computer mediated interviewing for reflection and clarification. I was most concerned with revealing the deliberation of former competitors in regards to their identity construction. I wanted in depth responses that were more likely from asynchronous email intverviews, than in other computer mediated modes of communication.

Oppendekker (2006) argued that nonverbal cues are not completely absent, they are communicated with emoticons that lack the same emotional affect. It became easier to gather

information through email interviews when I personalized messages to participants. The lack of nonverbal communication increased the time needed to establish meaningful interview dialogue. In a conversation, ideas could be free flowing and a conversation could be dictated by multiple varying factors. I did not have my usual safety net to operate my conversation. I had to make my questions lead into other more in depth questions, as to mimic conversational development.

Davis et al. (2004) expressed that the need for follow ups or turn taking can often interrupt the flow of interviewing that would not be as punctuated in FtF interviews. Follow up interviews extend the length of total time it takes to conduct an interview by abbreviating the conversation in unexpected ways. This made it difficult to get a full picture of how participants constructed gender identity and presented sexuality because I had to send questions, wait for responses, read responses, send follow ups, and subsequently wait for follow ups, if they happened at all. Meho (2006) expressed that if an email interview is too involved it will increase the dropout rate of participants. I experienced significant dropouts from people who initially communicated interest in participating but failed to respond as well as participants who did not respond to follow ups. I gained increased understanding of participants' perspective in my follow up interviews but was limited in that understanding for a majority of participants.

In my call out letter I asked for forensic coaches to pass my call out to alumni networks or to directly send the call to former students. I also personally contacted participants through facebook messages. I was hoping the rapport that I had established with people within the forensic community would help build my participant pool. Hamilton and Bowers (2006) stressed that an appropriate participation sample is one that can best serve to inform research questions. I was therefore less concerned with how many people I was able to interview and more concerned that I was able to gather a sample of participants who could accurately describe their feelings and

experiences related to forensic competition. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argued that an effective sample for qualitative interviews is reached when there are enough participants to gain authentic insight of experiential knowledge. For my project I needed to find participants who were willing to share their personal experiences with gender identity performance. I had hoped that being an LGBTQ member and a forensic coach would establish a sense of trust and immediacy with potential participants. The connection to participants allowed me to ask questions that might be inappropriate coming from someone not a part of the ingroup. My experiential knowledge provided a means of understanding the cultural narratives provided by my participants. Kvale (2006) warned, the power dynamics in research interviews, and potential oppressive use of interview-produced knowledge, tend to be left out in literature on qualitative research. I was aware that my position as a researcher put me in a position of power over interviewees. Gergen, Chrisler, and LoCicero (1999) argued that a qualitative interviewer is just as capable of being perceived as being in a position of power as a quantitative researcher. However, my identity location as a lesbian provided a check against interview domination.

I conducted a series of interviews with 18 former intercollegiate forensic competitors who self identified as members of the LGBTQ community. After I gathered my interviews, I analyzed the responses to each question and categorized the responses into themes. I cross referenced the responses to each participant's gender and sexuality. Of my participants, 10 identified their sex as male and 8 identified themselves as female. Among participants 9 identified as gay men, 3 identified themselves as lesbians, 3 identified as bisexual, 3 identified themselves as queer, and 1 identified themselves as a pansexual. One of my participants identified themselves as both bisexual and queer. The process of identifying gender and sexuality is a varied process. I anticipated the feeling of limited gender and sexuality identifiers. I myself

have noted that I identify as a soft butch lesbian, only one of those identifiers were available in my demographic information. I therefore provided a section for participants to elaborate on their personal identity. Responses were playful, political, and sometimes poetic. One bisexual female described herself as “hetero-flexible”. Another participant elaborated that although she is a biologically female bisexual, she is also a masculine gender. My personal favorite elucidation on individual identity was simply “I’m a work in progress, I suppose”. These fluctuating responses are demonstrative of the varied experiences of the LGBTQ community. The responses are also indicative of the multiple, and at times conflicting, experiences of the former LGBTQ competitors interviewed.

Coding Procedures

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described the task of the qualitative researcher as one that “stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together” (p. 5). Grounded theory is thus a means to achieve that description. Grounded theory is a form of processing empirical data into a format to cultivate interpretive motifs of culture. Corbin and Strauss (1990) identified that grounded theory uses interviews in conjunction with multiple knowledge sources in order to develop coherent analytic themes. Geertz (1983) described this as sorting out structures of significance. This means that the researcher functions as an interpreter of collected experience. Charmaz (1983) explained that coding is a means to sort observational data through portraying crucial links between the collected data and implicit information woven into the subtext of the data. Codes thus serve to paint a more explicit depiction of how people interpret society.

Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) suggested that positioning with participants removes the veil of power that could stimulate more in depth exploration of shared knowledge. By revealing and discussing my perspective as an LGBTQ competitor during the interview process I gained a

sense of immediacy with interview participants which I feel lead to revelatory reflections among interviewed participants. Charmaz (1983) suggested that identifying categories in grounded theory is a step beyond mere labeling of instances, but serves to develop a greater systematic language of participants.

In order to code I developed a master script of my interviews. I had base questions that I asked every participant. I put every response on the master script. As I looked through the master script I could see how people answered specific questions but I struggled to know when I found a theme. Opler (1945) identified themes as observable interrelated cultural systems that can be determined by how often a phenomenon appears, how pervasively a phenomenon stretches among cultural identifiers, how people recognize phenomenological violations, and how the phenomenon is controlled. Charmaz (1983) stated that it is the goal of a grounded theorist is to examine not only the content of responses but to order them. Using this frame I was able to see minor themes within certain questions, however as I looked at responses splayed out before me in the nearly inevitable thesis analytical process. I was able to see the connections in responses and how I would arrange them. This was done through the process of coding.

Glaser (1978) articulated that coding can be categorized in a two step process of initial codes and focused codes. The initial process is an analysis of the collected data and look for discoveries. I did not know what to expect in the initial sweep. I started by highlighting what I found to be interesting in my master script. As I explored the responses, I uncovered themes such as types of dress, coaching advice, and forensic norms. Charmaz (1983) suggested that after initial codes are developed that a researcher should study emergent data. As I compared the initial codes I found that they seemed to fit within a larger cultural scope. When a greater sense of codes fit into larger identifiable themes then I began the process of focused coding for my

processing of interview responses. Charmaz (1983) articulated that “Focused coding forces the researcher to develop categories rather than simply to label topics” (p. 116). If I were to have not moved into the next critical phase of focused coding than my responses would have not only lacked cohesion they would have lacked depth.

I was left to interpret interview codes through the lens of my experience. It would be impossible for me to remove my experience as a self identified butch lesbian and former forensic competitor while engaging in the coding process. Charmaz (1983) stated that “The assumptions that participants hold provide a fertile field for coding. Seeking to discover, identify, and ask questions about these assumptions keeps the researcher thinking critically and defining what is implicit in the data” (p. 112-113). There was a potential risk in my analysis of the interviews that I could have projected my experiences as a frame for categorizing narratives. Charmaz (1983) suggested that a grounded theorist’s observation could be sharpened through analytic interpretation of collected data. This suggests that theoretical knowledge claims are not isolated from experiential knowledge but that the more a qualitative researcher engages grounded theory the more complex and in depth the analysis will be. I used my interviews as a means for developing a more textured understanding of gender identity performance within the LGBTQ community and forensic culture.

Autoethnographic Procedure

My junior year of intercollegiate forensic competition I was socializing in between rounds at the AFA-NIET and one of my friends demanded that I not move a muscle as she snapped a picture. The blurred background is of indistinguishable forensicators biding their time for breaks yet to be posted. In focus is an extreme close-up of my face, with my “distracting” piercings in frame. My visage: a pale mess of freckled pimply imperfection. I had yet to succumb

to wearing foundation, blush, or lip gloss. I had however started to wear mascara which draws attention to my blue eyes staring outside the shot. My bleached blonde faux hawk prominently featured as a full spectrum prism of color splashed across my face. This photo is not only emblematic of how I view the world but the inverse of how the world views me. At the time, I did not know the rainbow was literally on my face nor was I consciously aware of what my gender performance actively and passively communicated about my identity. Similarly, some of the participants in my study were not aware of how their experiences may have related to gender identity. That picture demonstrates how my experiences provided a necessary frame for the snap shots provided by participants.

During the interview process I found many stories that resonated with my forensic experiences. At other times I felt like a passive reader, perplexedly ingesting the experiences of others. Inescapable from my processing of experiential knowledge was my own intersectional locus. Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) framed that individual experiences of participants are autonomous reflections that could be used to conceptualize queerness. To put it frankly, there is no universal understanding of queerness. Because there is no one perspective to dictate the LGBTQ experience, or the forensic experience for that matter, interviews were used to develop a body of knowledge on the subject. Stelter (2006) framed that the best way to understand first-person narrative as a qualitative researcher is to ask questions that relate experiential knowledge back to feelings expressed in the corporeal body. Interviews thus can be used to expose how queerness and gender identity are embodied by individuals. I not only could speak and interpret the language of marginalized LGBTQ identities, but I also understood how queer identities are played out on the body. This meant that my experience ciphered the gendered performance of the interview participants. Mizzi and Stebbins (2010) stressed that because qualitative research

emphasizes uncovering marginalized narratives it is especially valuable to the queer community as mode of understanding.

There are forms of tested knowledge in forensic research. In fact when I began to develop the idea for this thesis investigation my advisor although supportive of my enthusiasm, qualified that my type of project was not the intended purpose of my degree. I however saw a critical flaw in the objective claims of prior forensic research that intrigued and eventually persuaded her support. My observation of the hole in research was a symptom of my perpetual disappointment of being left out of critical perspectives within "objective" research. Henwood and Pidgeon (1995) argued that reflexive writing is critical to breaking objective knowledge claims. Therefore writing myself into the research functioned as more than mere catharsis but also as a means of contesting previous research conducted about forensic experience.

Snyder-Young (2010) argued that "as qualitative researchers, kinesthetic learning and personal transformation are part of our experiences in the field" (p. 887). Part of interviewing former forensic competitors about gender, sexuality, and forensics helped for me to gain improved insight to my own experiences. Walliman (2005) posed the greatest challenge to research lies in the inability of the researcher to be a neutral observer of society and culture. We are constant producers of culture. Our experiences thus cannot be effectively removed from our analytic observations. Tedlock (2007) clarified that it is critical that researchers process their experience in order to engage in autoethnographic research. I soon realized as I embarked on this academic journey that I was irrevocably connected to my research. Subjective analysis would be impossible. Therefore, I had to take on an autoethnographic approach to my theme analysis.

Gingrich-Philbrook (2005) described that performance studies helped to develop the procedure beyond the ethnographic collecting of stories towards a means of incorporating a

researcher's narrative within the collected narratives to truly come to a transformative examination of identity. In this way, autoethnography is a way for the qualitative researcher to attempt to move away from the veil of subjectivity and instead attempt to see how scholarship directly influences, interacts, and alters the researcher. For some it may be hard to distinguish how autoethnography differs from autobiography, however Gingrich-Philbrook (2005) explained that autobiography highlights writing aesthetic over epistemology. Autobiography is an exploration of self that is not concerned with reflection or cultural critique. The cultural critique however is combined with other research methods in order to provide a sense of multiple interpretations of a particular phenomenon. O'Byrne (2007) articulated that an advantage of combing autoethnography with other research methods is that a researcher can triangulate truth-discovering perspectives to overcome possible flaws in the interpretation of just one individual. In this project I used qualitative interviews to provide a multiplicity of voices to fill in the gaps, vocabulary, and experience that I did not have by myself.

Tillman (2009) posited that the identity is critical to processing knowledge and autoethnography serves as a means to center identity at the root of knowledge construction. Understanding how others perceived their forensic experience provided me with new cultural frames to understand my own. My forensic history is not a fiction. It is a personal story that shaped my identity and my understanding of the world. However, critical aspects of my story were shaped by larger cultural messages in society that were upheld within forensic culture. Denzin (2006) described how he inserted himself into his autohethnographic writing as a means of re-experiencing. While interacting with other competitors I was reminded of my own experiences. I began to see how my life story was not just isolated incidences of homophobia or

sexism, rather I could see larger systemic interplays of power woven into my experience and the experiences of others.

My research provided previously unrecognized perspectives in forensic scholarship an opportunity for recognition. Eisenberg, Murphy, and Andrews (1998) encouraged researchers to process interviews not as a doorway back in time that accurately portrays a moment, rather to reflect on the assignment of significance to past events. I therefore could gain more from analyzing why particular moments stood out to participants instead of stating the moment as a factual representation of the past. Denzin (2006) described references interspersed into his autoethnographic writing were vehicles to perform his writing style. My analytic frame functioned similarly. Fasset and Warren (2007) argued that the purpose of autoethnographic writing invites the experiential knowledge of others to be shared and through the process allows a researcher to become lost in those experiences mixing into their cerebral senses. While I processed the experiences of others I was forced to reexamine and reflect on my personal history. It was so entrenched with bittersweet feelings of unrequited validation. That thirst still spills into desire to be seen as an academic and a coach. This research endeavor shaped me into a more adept and aware educator, coach, mentor and person, becoming more prepared for the continuing process of life. Denzin (2006) argued that critical pedagogues can use autoethnography as a means to challenge not only the prescribed methods of teaching but to also to performatively break down societal norms to perpetuate a new vision for our culture. In this instance I am not only speaking about the LGBTQ culture or forensic culture, but the academic culture towards LGBTQ issues.

Fasset and Warren (2007) described that autoethnographic writing as a process that allows the author to be critical and reflexive through in and within similarities. Through

processing the personal significance I developed a conscientization of my forensic past. Friere (1973), articulated conscientization as the liberating process of oppressed people communicating their oppression through dialogue. The creation of dialogue with interview participants established a personally profound liberating consciousness. No longer the neurotic self evaluation of forensic experience, finally proof that others have indeed seen and experienced this dubious display of gendered difference in forensic competition. Throughout my processing of the interviews if I felt connected to the response I described, inserted, and blurred myself into the apparent themes of my participants. This format of autoethnographic insertion helped me reconcile my initial inquiry. *Is it just me?*

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis

I began collegiate forensics as a policy debater. I was told that debate was a place for the analytic mind and my coaches saw potential. I was initially made to believe that debate was more welcoming to lesbians. At the time I didn't identify as a lesbian, but the joke my coach had made was "Gay men do speech. Lesbians do debate." I spent an arduous year in policy debate and even though I had learned more in that one year of policy debate than I had in my 18 years of life prior, I had yet to see the lesbian promised land that my coach had described. In many ways, I felt the feelings of gendered isolation Rogers (1997) had articulated. It was not until I left debate and joined individual event competition had I felt a sense of belonging. I used this anecdote not to disparage the debate community but to demonstrate that I was told that my lesbian identity would not be accepted in i.e. competition, but it was the opposite in my experience. Although, few people at an individual event tournament looked like I did, I felt that I could explore facets of myself in a more progressive way than debate had allowed. This was how I fell in love with individual event competition. However, as I have become more honest with my observations I have had to realize that individual event competition is not the open arms community I had idealized it to be as a competitor.

A necessity for my research inquiry was that participants be honest about ways in which the intersection of forensic competition and sexuality influenced gender identity performance. During the interview process I uncovered a variety of experiences that ranged from inspirational to disturbing. Needless to say the forensic community has a bevy of LGBTQ related issues that can finally be brought to light.

Due to the textured and at times intersectional perspective of participants, it is critical that I in some instances provide gender and sexuality identifiers in my analysis of responses. This helped me uncover themes. No single question asked divulged an obvious theme, however themes could be contextually grasped through responses to different questions as the interviews progressed. Therefore, when explaining themes, it is often necessary to contextualize the responses with the specific question which prompted the response. Apparent themes found in responses were Social Acceptance, Gender Identity Performance, Heteronormativity, and Homonormativity.

Social Acceptance

Overall, the general attitude the participants had towards LGBTQ acceptance in forensic competition was positive. I will discuss how the interviews demonstrated that most of the former competitors found a place to not only be LGBTQ identified but also found the forensic community affirming of that socially marginalized identity.

When I asked “Did you feel like forensics was a welcoming place to be a member of the LGBTQ community?” 11 participants answered yes without reservations. Participant 2 claimed it was the first place they had ever “encountered gay men”. Two participants explicitly stated that forensic competition was the most accepting group towards LGBTQ identified people they had found. Another participant mentioned that they lived in a region of the country where it was dangerous to be a member of the LGBTQ community and forensic competition was where they found a feeling of belonging with LGBTQ members. However, one participant also felt that the forensic community was welcoming to all forms of identity and not exclusively LGBTQ people.

This prompted me to wonder if the former competitors felt comfortable discussing LGBTQ issues within forensics. Overwhelmingly, participants discussed how forensic competition had become a forum to freely argue for LGBTQ rights. Speeches seemed to function as a mild mode of resistance to social limitations of the LGBTQ community for many of the interviewed competitors. All of the competitors I interviewed had at one point selected speech event topics that either explicitly addressed or dabbled in LGBTQ awareness. I identified dabbling as potentially discussing LGBTQ issues in impromptu or throwing an implication in a rhetorical criticism or informative speech that dealt with LGBTQ issues, but the speech itself was not entirely LGBTQ focused. This meant that forensics functioned as a means of discussing aspects of competitor marginalized identities that they might not have felt comfortable discussing otherwise. One participant described how having a gay character in a DI allowed him to explore his identity as a gay man before he even knew how to identify himself. In this way, the forensic community made these participants feel comfortable enough to talk about LGBTQ issues with a more receptive audience than hometowns, schools, or family. There was a sense from many of the interviews that forensics provided an albeit temporary weekend escape; an escape nonetheless from the difficulties of being LGBTQ identified in less socially acceptable places. 10 competitors when asked “Were you ‘out’ as a competitor?” said yes and another 3 clarified that they were out on their teams but not necessarily at home or in the forensic community. However, this indicates that a majority of the former competitors felt comfortable being out in a forensic community.

When I asked “Were there any other LGBTQ members on your forensic team when you competed?”, 14 of the participants stated that there were other LGBTQ members on their team. Many participants seemed to find humor in this question, one participant simply stated “my team

was very gay". Another participant even discussed how their team would often joke that they were the "gayest team in the nation". Although team memberships fluctuate every year I was fortunate enough to also be on many teams that shared the same inside joke about being the "gayest in the nation". It was almost a humorous badge of honor. It felt nice to be part of a social group that was not necessarily politically queer, but still had many opinionated LGBTQ members that I respected. It was exciting and fun to be a part of a group that took pride in LGBTQ people. I not only had many LGBTQ identified teammates throughout college forensics including a transman, a drag queen, a butch lesbian, a go go dancer, a stripper, two bisexuals, and at least five gay men, but I also had many LGBTQ coaches. My coaches helped shape my queer identity in life and as a performer. I was lucky to have so many strong LGBTQ peers and coaches as a competitor. 12 out of 18 participants stated they had LGBTQ coaches, and one participant even felt the need to clarify that although they did not have LGBTQ coaches they affirmed his gay identity after he came out. Many participants felt that forensics, or at least their teams, were a safe place to be an LGBTQ member.

My team thrived on its' diversity as a competitive strength, although we were diverse in more than just sexuality and gender. That atmosphere provided me with tools to be more open to making friends outside of my team. One participant articulated the forensic competition helped him establish emotional competence to make friends and understand others. When I asked "Did you have any LGBTQ friends that competed in forensics?" I received many encouraging light hearted responses. One participant responded with a hearty "HAHAHAHAHA" and told me to refer to the previous question about LGBTQ coaches. This competitor clearly had a similar and maybe more so close relationship with coaches that helped mold him as a competitor, student, and person. Another participant elucidated that he "had more LGBTQ friends in forensics than in

any other ‘friend’ group”. Another participant simply answered “Yes, possibly a bazillion”. Perhaps most telling was the participant response “It’s hard not to”. This demonstrated that many of the interview participants felt that they could not only be themselves on circuit but they could be themselves and develop emotional bonds with others who identified similarly. However, this prompt seem to spark an interesting observation from many participants without further prodding from myself.

Many of the female participants observed that they had significantly more identified gay males as friends in forensic than any other member of the LGBTQ community. One responded, I had “several gay male friends but I don’t think I knew any other lesbians on the circuit” another stated, “several [LGBTQ friends] but more gay men than lesbians” and finally, one explained, “Yes, tons. Mostly gay men. Some were rumored to be lesbians”. This indicates that although female members of the LGBTQ community felt belonging because of the presence of gay men, they did not seem to readily find other female LGBTQ members. This was the first hint of complex gender underpinnings in my interviews of former LGBTQ competitors. The attitude of social acceptance from former forensic competitors mirrored my own initial feelings and attitudes towards sexuality and gender identity performance within forensic competition. Individual event competition seemed to be a place that respected gay arguments and stories. However, as I began to truly reflect on my story as it layered with the responses of my interviewees, I uncovered inequity, contradictions, and disappointment. Many of the participants seemed to lack the vocabulary to describe their experiences. It was as if they did not know if they could offer a narrative of difference in relation to their LGBTQ identity and their forensic experience. It was demonstrative of the nuance of perplexity concerning gender, sexuality, and sexuality even among LGBTQ community members.

Gender Identity Performance

Gender performance is a very distinct and observable act of identity. My literature review contextualized that the ways in which gender is performed are so inscribed in popular discourse that to many the performance does not even seem like a conscious choice. The ways in which individuals present their bodies is an often overlooked discretion to most, but to some the presentation of the body can be a highly contested terrain. It was difficult for many participants to clarify how their sexuality was a component of performance, but expectations for gender were more apparent among female participants.

Attire. It should come to almost no surprise that participants, for the most part, thoroughly enjoyed describing their tournament attire. The norm of dress in individual event competition is to present the best professional representation of the self possible. It is not merely an act of vanity. One participant articulated that although they were initially confused by the rules of how to dress, they grew to understand “if a judge didn’t have to critique my appearance they could give me real criticism”. Similarly, it was explained to me that I needed to dress in a manner that would not warrant too much attention because the judge should be focusing on what I am saying and not what I was wearing. Although, I must admit that I loved getting ballot comments about my shirt tie combos. To be honest I still take pride in my shirt tie combos and often work with my own students to perfect their own ensembles. Teaching them the importance of having a tie that makes a statement without being too loud. Tutoring their tying techniques. Ties are so knitted into my personal corporeal history and forensic history that I ritualistically give ties to students as sign of affection. Students know that I have accepted them when I give them one of my ties. I cherish seeing them wear my ties. It is as if I can give them a piece of my legacy. Although, female competitors normatively are expected to fuss over their appearance,

however I try to impart the same neurotic tendencies onto my male students. Recently one my male students confided that he did not understand my obsession with dress when we first met. He thought I was shallow. However, he recently admitted that he had began to adopt my approach to attire because he said he felt more confident taking pride in the way he looked. I take pride in this accomplishment. Fashion is not just a refuge for gay men.

I asked all participants to describe their tournament attire. There was little variation among male competitors so I will analyze their responses first. Male competitors wore a variety of suits. Some branched out in color. One participant described that he "even [had] a sage suit" that he wore. Another participant clarified that he had a stylish slim European cut suit. Another competitor took extra care to wear brightly colored button up shirts. A few competitors paid particular attention to matching the shirt tie combinations. One competitor stated he had his more fashionable male teammates pick out what he was going to wear. Another competitor stated that he meticulously chose his competition wear depending on the events in which he would be competing that day, breaking out "jazzier" ties for days he was competing in After Dinner Speaking. One competitor insisted he would wear white shirts and bright ties but his signature piece was a "fierce Louis Vuiton bag". Men had little wiggle room with professional attire in this regard. Although, none of the participants discussed how their choices were influenced by their sexuality, it was clear that the competitors were interested in representing their personal identity through their dress.

Similarly, female competitors felt the need to express themselves through dress, but as indicated in the introduction there are different gender expectations of dress in society that are played out in forensic competition. One participant described the difference between their normal dress and tournament attire as a "transformation". Of the 8 female participants 6 stated

that they had worn skirt suits throughout forensic competition. Although, most were complicit with gender norms proudly proclaiming they “NEVER” wore flats and some of the participants indicated an interpersonal struggle with coaches and teammates and some even an intrapersonal conflict about wearing skirts in competition. One competitor who wore skirt suits confessed that “the activity does have a pretty archaic standard for female dress code”. 4 of the female participants stated that they wore pants suits and felt pressure to wear skirts, one even articulated that “skirts just made me feel exposed”. Another argued that she had tattoos on her legs so skirts would actually make her look less professional. Eventually, she compromised and wore skirts and heels. One competitor described how her teammate told her that “women who wore skirt suits were taken more seriously than those who always wore pants.” She elaborated, “The more and more I looked around, I realized that there did seem to be something to that. I don’t know how to explain it.” She began her forensic career observant of what winning competitors looked like and few winning competitors actively perform their LGBTQ identity.

Some female competitors played up their femininity. In particular, one participant who competed in limited prep admitted purposefully showing more cleavage. She discussed that the tactic was not to show off her feminine wiles rather, it was intended to display that she was undeniably female in an event that had historically ranked women down (White, 1997). This former competitor argued that sexism was a reason for her to play up her feminine gender performance. Another competitor discussed how her coach told her “without make-up you look like a kid”. She explained that after time she grew into feeling more confident when she put on tournament attire. Applying the make-up and wearing heels made her feel prepared for a tournament. I felt similar confidence when putting on a suit and make-up. To this day, forensics is the only consistent activity for which I will wear a skirt. Another competitor described how

she had fun picking out suits that were different styles, colors, textures and fabrics, however she also posited an interesting self evaluation; “I truly wonder if people would have treated me the same had I not worn skirt suits and heels”. Other female competitors, myself included, described how tournament dress had indeed influenced our treatment. Of the female participants interviewed only one identified as masculine and only one other wore ties to tournaments. However, it is important to note that although I share some of these described traits or styles of dress, all of our forensic competition experiences in regard to gender performance were significantly different.

Demeanor. I asked participants to “Describe how your coaches advised you to present your LGBTQ identity as it related to competitive success”. Most participants indicated it was a non-issue. One respondent stated although he was not coached to do so, he would attempt be more masculine or flamboyant in his introductions to show character distinction and development in his performances. He also noted that once he became more confident as a performer he did not feel the need to that. One participant stated he performed his gender and sexuality as “strategically ambiguous”. He was not out as a competitor and thought it was important to appeal to both gay men and heterosexuals. He was aware of the fine line of gay acceptance in forensic competition but he also wanted the privilege of claiming heterosexuality if need be.

One participant noted that his coaches were very supportive of how his sexuality shaped his identity and said that he was very flamboyant and was never advised to present himself in the contrary. Another participant articulated that he felt fortunate to be on such a supportive and accepting team. Even though I myself would say that I was on a socially progressive team I have to say that these experiences were very different from my coaches who wanted to *soften* me up.

One female participant stated that she was never coached to appeal to a more flamboyant audience. She also went on to state, “that may have been due to the fact that queer women are stereotypically more masculine and less flamboyant”. Another female participant stated that her coaches warned not to be singled out as “being the gay kid”. One particular story shared by a participant communicated how her straight duo partner should play a lesbian in a duo about lesbians

> My senior year, I had a lesbian duo with another female member on the team, and I remember us making character choices that were so exaggerated that no one could possibly extrapolate that this performance was rooted in real experiences. I think it was important to my straight duo partner that no one confuse her to be associated with my lesbianism.

This experience demonstrated that the participant’s duo partner had a cursory knowledge of gender identity, because she did not want to be associated with it. Although this is framed in the negative, it suggested that there might be a stigma to presenting a non-normative gender or sexuality within forensics, which is contradictory to the seemingly affirming messages from other participants.

Not every female participant interviewed had negative experiences with gender identity performance and coaching. One participant however had coaches who encouraged her to play up her androgyny because she could be more memorable. In this way, playing up her masculinity was ‘edgy’ and a potential strength. This experience was the exception and not the norm. Although, one competitor conveyed that he was out when he joined his team and his coach approached him with the choice to either “maximize” his gay gender performance or “tone it

down". He chose to tone it down so he could play a wider variety of characters. This conscious choice provided by a coach to perform sexual identity both inside and outside of rounds is indicative that his team ideology neither praised nor vilified LGBTQ performance but was aware of how it could be positively or negatively performed if it was not a performative choice.

Overall, participants articulated how normative gender and sexuality was performed in forensic competition and some conveyed how those norms were enforced; predominantly women. Women seemed to understand unwritten rules and norms in a more complex way than men, but this could be due to societal expectations of gender that carry over into forensics. For example, When I asked the follow up question "Could you ever tell another competitor was LGBTQ just by looking at them?" most of the male participants dodged the response by talking about 'gaydar' and suspecting someone was gay however one female participant clarified: "For the most part I believe that people play it pretty "straight" in speech. Men look like "men" and women look like "women." I only remember seeing a few competitors in my history that complicated gender roles with their appearance". The awareness of gender representation was more apparent in my female participants however one male participant shared a story worth mentioning:

> There was one instance in which a coach advised me to not focus so much on gay literature and gay topics in my junior year, because they were afraid it would pigeonhole me as a "gay" competitor. I remember being taken back by this at the time, because I thought to myself; I am a gay competitor and this is a topic that I feel passionate about. While I understood what the coach was trying to convey and they had good intentions, I wondered why it really mattered.

This story expressed a feeling of confusion about a stigma seemingly associated with being identified as an LGBTQ member. There seemed to be assertions of normative gender insisted upon LGBTQ competitors. I believe this the first of many instances of heteronormativity expressed by participants.

Heterornormativity in Forensics

Heteronormativity was rarely explicitly communicated in my interviews however it was apparent in the decision making processes of some of the participants. I will elaborate upon blatant heterosexism and homophobia expressed by participants, by addressing heteronormative pressures, the norming role of judging, and coaching LGBTQ identity.

Heteronormative pressures. Heterosexism in forensic competition paralleled research in the literature review. Bullying and blatant homophobia were outliers, however there were moments in the interview worth mentioning. Some of the participants expressed how they dealt with discrimination outside of forensics. One participant explained that her dorm room was vandalized and another described

> I am a boyish girl who grew up in [the Midwest]. When men find out that I am bisexual one of the first things the first questions that follows is if I have ever had a three some with two girls and one guy or if I would kiss another girl in front of a guy. It's like people assume that my sexuality exists for their entertainment and I find this extremely offensive.

Experiences like this signify that although the world seems to be getting better a frame of heteronormativity still exists. When I asked if the forensic community was a welcoming place for the LGBTQ community two participants indicated that it depended on what region of the

country they were performing. This functioned as an important reminder that forensic competition does not exist in a vacuum. Tournaments are subject to the judging pool they can supply.

One of the places where heteronormativity played out in interview analysis was in relation to sharing hotel rooms with competitors. When I asked the question, “Did you ever face discrimination from teammates because of your sexuality/ gender performance?” I found many of these responses particularly unsettling. Whereas one participant stated, “Nothing serious. Typical homophobic comments that usually stopped and died down once they realized one of their teammates were gay,” another participant described intense bullying from teammates and graduate teaching assistants. The participant revealed that they were made to sleep on a balcony because teammates didn’t want to be “molested”. One participant described on a less severe level of homophobia, “Guys were uncomfortable sharing a bed”. Although, I have been privileged enough to not have experienced this form of torment, I can point to instances in the past where I self policed my behavior to avoid potential conflict. The cop in my head would advise me to avoid particular scenarios. I often slept on the floor instead of opting to share a bed at tournaments. I never wanted someone to even suggest that I made unwanted advances towards them. Another participant felt similar apprehensions about sharing a room with teammates. She explicitly felt uncomfortable coming out because she did not want her teammates to think badly about her. These reservations are not contrived. They are based in a fear of very real social rejection. All of these accounts resonate with the socialization rituals outlined by Carmack and Holm (2005). If a student does not yet understand team culture it would only make sense that they would feel apprehensive sharing a room or divulging intimate details about sexuality or feelings, especially when homophobia is expressed by other teammates.

Some stories conveyed stigmas associated LGBTQ identity. For example, when I asked "Did you feel forensics was a welcoming place to be a member of the LGBTQ community" one participant articulated that they felt "like forensics has always been much kinder to the "freaks" or queers of the world than most other places". The association of the participant's queer identity with being a freak was upsetting to hear from another person. So often, I have attributed negative characteristics of myself to my lesbian identity and thought I was being merely self-aware, however to hear someone else convey a similar opinion resonated self-loathing. This is indicative of internalized dissatisfaction with the self. Another participant when asked about discrimination illuminated that although he never had faced explicit homophobia, he felt essentialized at times: "When someone calls you their favorite gay it is simultaneously heartwarming and demeaning". This is probably more telling of the person calling the participant their favorite gay than the participant, but it is a reminder that the participant is markedly different from normative sexuality. The assertion thus demonstrates power over the participant, even while expressing an affinity for them.

Norming role of judging. I asked participants if they could describe a time when they felt evaluated differently because of their sexuality/gender performance. 13 of the 18 participants indicated or shared that they felt that they had. One participant clarified that discrimination he faced from forensics "didn't play out in obvious ways" so he never felt comfortable discussing it with anyone. Although one competitor could not point to ballot comments, she did say that competitors treated her differently after she performed a politically queer program. Another participant could not think of judges evaluating him differently but now as a coach he is aware of the potential stigma and assists students who want to explore sexuality in their pieces. Another student described his awareness of being evaluated differently and described his overall effort to

curb such comments writing, “I will say that frequently I was concerned with how my sexuality affected my characters, or my gestures/voice in PA and LPs”. Another participant indicated that she was judged differently when she didn’t wear normatively acceptable professional dress. One participant diplomatically responded: “Honestly, I probably say I was always evaluated differently because of my sexuality”. However, his answer was more analogous to the argument that his sexuality was immovable from his performance therefore he inherently must have been judged differently. Many former competitors seemed aware that their sexuality was just as much an integral aspect of evaluation as their topic selection. Multiple participants replied by quoting particular stinging ballot comments that demonstrated this form of knowledge. One reported the comment, “your performance is good but I don’t relate to her story” another was criticized for doing a “stereotypical gay” selection and one respondent was asked to “cut out all mentions of a character’s love interest because it was not believable coming from [the respondent].” Most alarmingly homophobic was the participant who was told on a ballot, “This is inappropriate. God condemns homosexuality. Read your Bible”. These ballot comments suggest an almost ubiquitous heteronormative tone. Ballots have two critical functions to evaluate the round and to suggest educational improvement. Ballot comments such as this seem to do neither.

Another disturbing trend in heteronormative comments came while analyzing issues of topic selection. I asked a follow up question concerning LGBTQ topics: “Were you ever told that you did too many gay topics? Do you think it is possible for someone to do too many gay topics? If so, what is the limit?” This got participants riled up. Some competitors answered with a very sharp “never”, and another was told that she was “on the brink” of having too many “gay topics”. Another competitor expressed that she had teammates that joked about another teammate having too many gay topics. Another participant was teased by teammates who told

her, that if people didn't know she was gay before [doing three gay pieces in a year] they would now. This sort of attitude suggests that there is a "minority card" to be played as a member of the LGBTQ community. One participant passionately summed up:

> I do not believe it is possible to do "too many" gay topics. That kind of thinking makes me crazy. "Gay lit" "Feminist topics" "Black/Hispanic/Middle Eastern lit" - all of those terms are bigoted and completely ignore the overwhelming privilege students who are heterosexual or white have in our community. Until we start calling everything else "white lit", I refuse to tell a student that talking from the perspective of their culture is a hindrance to their competitive success. And every time I see it on a ballot, I rage. We need to be much more vocal about this issue and educate judges.

The ways in which topics are monitored in forensic competition is sometimes fickle and often contingent upon the values, attitudes, and beliefs of one particular judge. Some participants thought of the "gay topic limit" as a double standard. One pointed out:

> I enjoy the forensic activity very much. I do think that some judges, however, do say to black students and gay students quite often…."can you do something less black or gay?" We see this from you all the time, but yet, the same stigma is not heralded at the white girl who plays the same drunken character EVERY year.

Although I would argue the forensic community in some ways, does call out the same "drunk girl" every year but criticism to consider branching out is more focused on performance choices and not identity. When a judge claims that people "do too many gay topics" that is more than a criticism of a performance choice because it is a performance choice inextricably linked to

the performer's identity. However, this consideration would probably not be made by a judge or even a coach that is on the fringe of an LGBTQ identity.

Coaching an lgbtq identity. It is often difficult for someone that is not part of a marginalized group to truly understand how identifying with a marginalized group can alter awareness to cultural constructs. Coaches, although mentors in many ways, sometimes fail to understand what it means for a student to "come out" as an LGBTQ member. One participant reflected that after she came out her coach had a sit down talk about how her sexuality did not define her. However, when someone comes out, a critical part of their identity is changed. The participant expressed frustration with being told what her identity was, especially by a straight person in a position of privilege and power. In this regard, her coach was insensitive to how "coming out" and identifying as LGBTQ shaped others opinion of her, but her opinion of herself. This story particularly struck a heteronormative chord with me because in many ways, even by LGBTQ coaches I was told what, when, and how to be a member of the LGBTQ community. However this participant's story is truly emblematic of the benevolent coach trying to impart wisdom that is hurtful or misdirected. The coach probably felt they were guiding the student toward a more universal path, but in the process was denying a new critical aspect of the student's identity: queerness. It displayed that although the forensic community may have many LGBTQ members, and may be a place to share disenfranchised stories of the LGBTQ community, that we are far from truly understanding each other and how our differences uniquely shape not only our performance perspectives, but political view points.

Homonormativity in Forensics

A homonormative perspective suggests that there is a right way to be a part of the LGBTQ community, which is to stay straight acting. One participant particularly identified

himself as a masculine gay man. One participant observed “I was once judged harshly because the type of gay man I was portraying in ONE of my poems was “too stereotypical”. The judge was gay”. The gay judge was indicating that he did not agree with the participant’s portrayal of an overtly gay man. This is one way which a homonormative paradigm can be socially enforced in forensic competition.

Homonormativity can also be internalized from other outside expectations for lesbians and gay men. Another participant when asked to respond to the question “Could you describe a time when you felt you were evaluated in forensics differently because of your sexuality/ gender performance?”, could not recall a time this had happened yet then quipped he often felt that he wasn’t masculine enough to do well in public address events because of his “gay dialect.” The suggestion that he speaks in a gay way is demonstrative of internalized homophobia. He did not feel masculine enough because he had what is colloquially referred to in the LGBTQ community as an O.G.T. (obviously gay trait). He indicated that he disapproved of his voice. The same competitor also described that he was less drawn to compete in interp events because gay men who were more feminine did better. Friedley and Manchester (2005) found that male competitors were more likely to be rewarded for playing feminine roles in their analysis of AFA competitive success. This observation falls in line with their findings, however the competitor went on to state he “never felt the pull to become a flaming gay”. This suggestion passes judgment on and enforces a stigma against effeminate identity performance often associated with gay men. This participant clearly wanted to distinguish himself as separate.

Some participants observed a group of popular LGBTQ competitors and described feelings of isolation from the in group. One participant described that he hadn’t come out until later in his speech career so he felt that he wasn’t accepted by the gay clique at national

tournaments. Also within this group there seemed to be a sense of who was allowed into the group and who wasn't. One participant described an unwelcoming feeling from other female LGBTQ members: "few out women were willing to be open until they had known about her own sexuality". This indicates that someone has to be a known LGBTQ member in order to function in certain LGBTQ circles in forensic competition. Furthermore, when I asked "Did you feel like forensics was a welcoming place to be a member of the LGBTQ community?" One participant gave a very pointed observation about how he felt forensic competition:

> I feel like forensics believes it is, and for all intents and purposes, it is a safe space for a lot of individuals. At a communal level, forensics is a welcoming place. However, part of this is that it can afford to be, knowing full well that all that is needed to keep queer pieces/performers out of rounds is a single ballot. Then it becomes a matter of "Oh, I guess that one judge didn't like it, we have to accept that." So while the community welcomes LGBTQ members, competitively there are a lot of hurdles, expectations, and issues that have to be faced, that is not discussed because the judge is allowed to remain faceless in this activity. I feel like a very specific gay agenda is forwarded within the forensics community, one which falls in line with organizations like the HRC. The LGBT identity that is acceptable in forensics is one which still centers around the gay white male.

The participant above explicitly discussed the underlying theme of homonormativity indicated throughout multiple interviews. Many participants felt that the forensic community although it has many LGBTQ members, presents a very limited view of acceptable members of the LGBTQ community and acceptable messages.I can relate with this participant's perspective. When I competed I was coached to tone down my lesbian identity. Although my lesbianism was often

treated as a hurdle I had to overcome, I was also taught to make my weaknesses my strengths. I found ways to appeal to the white gay male perspective. So much so, that my teammates and I joked about how my gender performance in ADS was more of an effeminate gay man than a lesbian. I was coached by gay men to act like a gay man to appeal to gay male judges. In many ways, I developed a tournament persona around that identity that still haunts me. I have difficulty developing friendships with gay men or straight women without taking on that persona. The persona is a homonormative function that flares when I need a defense mechanism. When I present myself in a more androgynous body I over compensate with an accepted gender performance by the dominant group.

Heteronormativity and homonormativity can play itself out in a multitude of ways. One of the means of control instituted is the insistence of heterosexuality when someone is ascribes to a normative gender performance. In this way bisexuals threw a wrench into the gender identity performance analysis. Although, many cultural ascriptions can be placed on effeminate gay men or butch women, there are almost no performance indicators for bisexuals. One participant stated that she was out on her team, however she assumed everyone outside of her team assumed she was straight. It is this situatedness that could provide a unique perspective because they could see how they were in a unique position to pass as heterosexual, but understood the mechanisms of control that limited the gender and sexuality performance of other identities. The self-identified bisexuals I interviewed in many ways were more vocal about their sexual identity because it was less obviously performed and more frequently challenged as a true deviant sexuality.

There was an unsettling trend among bisexual participants. Many claimed that they were not treated as “real” LGBTQ members. Bisexuals discussed how bisexuality was often evaluated as less marginalized because it was a passable identity. One participant directly stated that “I

mean, it's pretty hard to come out as "bisexual." One participant described the forensic community as accepting for LGBTQ people but distinguished that she did not feel like the community was as accepting towards bisexuals. She described how she got ballot comments about a bisexuality program she performed that stated that the judge "didn't believe in bisexuality". Judgments about bisexuality being a less marginalized group, or even existing, is less of a judgment about topic, and more directly an evaluation of identity. The judges in this instance told the competitor that her intersectional identity was illusory. The ability to deem what is and is not an LGBTQ issue is an exertion of power, even if that person is a member of the LGBTQ community.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

I began this project attempting to see if other competitors had felt influenced by gender norms to act, dress, perform, and be a specific way in forensic competition. RQ1 asked: In what ways do normative conscriptions of gender influence gender identity performance of LGBTQ intercollegiate forensic competitors? As it turned out this was a loaded question without a specific answer. Normative gender indeed alters the forensic experience of LGBTQ competitors, but the extent to how was, and is, invariably unknown. I did find other people that felt the sting of people told to limit their identity. Overall, participants that identified as female seemed to have a more critical understanding of how identity was shaped through dress and gender performativity. Perhaps this is indicative of other modes of power in society more largely recognized by women. Or perhaps people that transgress norms are more aware of how their identity is related to acts of evaluation. Whatever the cause, it is apparent that the interviewed participants, much like the rainbow that symbolizes their community, cross the spectrum.

To keep with the rainbow motif, colors in a rainbow are not distinct. In fact, they blur into each other creating hues that are often subsumed by more perfunctory labels such: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Labels in many ways help to establish frames for people to better understand cultural constructs, but labels in many ways over simplify complex issues of identity. In some instances, participants carved their own path identifying themselves outside of the paradigms I initially set out. Other times participants seemed more than fine attributing labels, qualities, and characteristics to their sexuality and gender identity. This tenuous division seemed to ebb and flow depending on the questions I asked. It was apparent in

the interviews that many LGBTQ competitors felt that they were not listened to unless they fit a particular accepted norm of what forensic evaluators deemed suitable.

The process of collecting the experiences of past LGBTQ competitors and combining them with my own has helped me reconcile my past with my future as a coach in this community. I realize that other students had coaches that nurtured and developed LGBTQ identities of their students and that I have the ability and choice to be that for prospective students. I do not want to dictate heteronormative or homonormative cultural frames onto my students. Therefore it is essential that I move the processing of this project from what happened to what can be done. This chapter will shift from understanding past narratives into shaping future ones. I shall discuss limitations to my research in this project, expound upon my increased understanding of forensic competition and gender identity performance, before finally developing future areas of research for forensic scholarship and the communication discipline.

Limitations

There were many limitations to my investigative approach. The limits functioned on multiple tiers. First there were problems with my research approach and my limited sample.

Research approach. The means in which I had to conduct my research was admittedly not ideal. Email interviews are a relatively new qualitative method. It was difficult to maintain a working relationship with participants. Some of the initial responses were very simple or formulaic responses. It was often difficult when I was familiar with participants because there were cues that should have or could have been easier to draw upon if we were able to communicate face to face.

Kazmer and Xie (2008) claimed that mutual disclosure between interviewer and interviewee can build a transformative rapport. Therefore, my intersecting identities placed me in a unique position to gather interviews and engage politicized queer communication scholarship. In this instance my situatedness as a lesbian could make participants more willing to discuss issues of gender complexity with a member of a similar marginalized group. Hall and Callery (2001) suggested that identification with interview participants can serve to establish reflexivity within grounded theory. Reflexivity of experience can thus be built from how well interviewer and participants relate to each other. This was particularly difficult with asynchronous email interviews. I needed to insure that my responses were carefully constructed and sincere. Email conversations that I had in the past were either sterile disseminations of information or directed towards people I would see around school. This was a significantly different process of crafting, monitoring, and editing responses. Email interviews have limited initial sentimental attachment to the narratives uncovered. At first, it seemed the lack of transcribing interviews would make the interview process significantly easier, but other challenges soon presented themselves. Oppendekker (2006) stated that email interviews present a limited understanding of responses due to a lack of nonverbal communication. Davis et al. (2004) stated that the responses in email interviews were not as long as FtF (face-to-face) interviews. This was attributed to a probable lack in nonverbal cues that would normally prompt dialogue. It is often more difficult to be engaged in conversations without nonverbal cues. At times, I had participants simply answer "yes", which was particularly frustrating. Those responses would be fine in a survey however I specifically needed in depth answers which sometimes were more difficult to uncover. I began my interview with pointed questions that participants could answer with a "yes" or "no" with the hope of preparing participants to answer later questions more in depth. However, with some

participants this level of reflection never came to fruition. Even though I made a concerted effort, follow up questions were still necessary in most cases.

Interviews were difficult to manage and in many ways throughout the process developed more into open ended surveys. A critical part of the interview process would have been for me to disclose to my participants about my experiences. However, I became so caught up in their experiences and gathering their stories that I forgot to provide a balanced discussion with them about my experiences. I was more concerned with gathering information, that I limited the discussions that could have happened in the interview process and in a way I missed the opportunity to truly get the depth of interviews that I had initially sought out to uncover.

Sample. The project was not only limited in enacted procedures but limited by the sample population. I also realized that some of my participants had a more complex understanding how intersectionality played into conscriptions of biopolitical power. However, I could not attempt to code why this happened because I made the crucial mistake of omitting race or ethnicity identifiers from the discussion of identity. In the same way that sexuality and gender are inextricably linked to identity, so is ethnic culture and race. Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality and defined it as the way in which multiple cultural identifiers shape an individual's sense of self. The more marginalized identities that one experiences the more specific their location in understanding social constructions of power. One participant preemptively apologized to me for her responses. She said in jest "Damn heteronormativity!" In this way, she was aware that her gender performance was normative and that she did not experience discrimination in the ways that she assumed others would when they responded to my call out. It would have been fascinating to ask about her racial or ethnic identity in regards to modes of discrimination. The body is just as much of a contested space for racial identity as it is

for gender. Maybe she could access the language of biopolitical power in that way, but due to my privilege of whiteness, I did not initially think to consider that aspect of identity as a potential characteristic to influence experiential knowledge.

My sample was also limited by the age of participants. There were only two participants who did not compete within the last decade. This means that there is a limited perspective of former LGBTQ participants within my research. I either competed with or judged 16 of the 18 participants. This means that the opinions expressed were not as reflective or varied as I had originally hoped with this project. If the forensic culture indeed is reflective of larger cultural frames than maybe the LGBTQ forensic experience would have been inherently different from the 1970's to the 2000's. Generational differences would provide critical insight that I simply could not obtain. This could be that a majority of competitors from a few decades ago are no longer attached to the forensic world and therefore harder to find. Maybe they are also less concerned with following up on email. Kazmer and Xie (2008) discussed an inherent digital divide when conducting email interviews. Therefore, the scope of my project was limited by the medium and those that had access to it.

Although there have been no studies to conclude how many participants in forensic competition identify or identified as LGBTQ members, I had a relatively small sample. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argued that small sample sizes can allow for a depth over breadth approach to research. However, my nascent research attempt at complex asynchronous email interviews required that I be a more seasoned interviewer over a more difficult medium. In this way my small sample and a restricted amount of information provided what I believe to be a somewhat skewed representation of the LGBTQ community in forensic competition. I would like to eventually develop focus groups or face to face interviews to provide more textured and

rich experiences to draw from for analysis. For example, 17 of the 18 participants interviewed were still actively involved with forensic community in some way. This logically assumes that they would see their involvement with forensics as positive. However, if I were able to find more people that are no longer involved that could potentially provide a more critical picture of how their LGBTQ identity was managed in forensic participation. This is true for many variables, including age and era of competition. My interviews much like the rainbow simply did not address every perspective within the LGBTQ spectrum. I had no participants that identified as transgendered or transsexual. This means that even my attempt to thwart heteronormative and homonormative ideological frames within forensics, is homonormative because it excludes a missing perspective. Although there are many limiting contextual factors to this, i.e. there are fewer transgendered or transsexual people in society. However forensic culture could also play into the limited number of Trans participants. Without research this is mere conjecture.

Increased Understanding of Forensic Experience

After collecting the experiences of other forensic competitors I feel that I have developed a greater sense of how my LGBTQ identity was performed and managed as I competed. Through the process I could not help but reflect on observed experiences. Reading between the lines I gathered a sense of how feminine gender identity performance was unique to forensic culture and how the organizational culture of forensics operationally is managed by a dominating LGBTQ group: the gayocracy.

Feminine gender identity performance. Overall, women seemed to grasp the ways in which their bodies functioned as performative sites of identity. However, there wasn't a clear discernible reason for this. If I were to fill in the gaps I would suggest that this has to do with

conscribed patriarchal expectations for the female body and presentation. My first year in collegiate forensics, my team had a two time national champion competing in her senior year. She had won a national title in After Dinner Speaking delivering a speech about how women were not encouraged to wear pants suits in forensics. It was clever and smart. She even *wore* pant suits to tournaments. Our coaches supported this political act of resistance towards forensic norms. Yet, they repeatedly attempted to fix my performance. What was different? Although there are many differences between that former competitor and myself it is important to distinguish that she was identifiably heterosexual and beautiful, like "Naomi Wolff beauty myth but graduated cum laude from law school beautiful". No one questioned her sexuality when she wore pants; however I presented myself as unmistakably queer. Observers of my body could witness my non-heterosexuality.

Witnessed acts of transgressive gender identity performance are noticeable because there is an expected cultural script for women to perform their gender in a patriarchal society that women continue to perform. Butler (1988) articulated that:

> The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed; much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (p. 526).

At some point women are taught what it means to be a woman and part of that master narrative is how a woman is supposed to look and act. I always understood this expectation and despite my mother's best efforts I never really accepted this expectation as an extension of my identity. My intersectional identities thus provided me with a location to view the norm differently. The

awareness that the female participants demonstrated might be indicative of how intersectional identities understand mechanisms of power differently. I believe that a necessary component of intersectional awareness lies in empirical contradictions. Clearly the LGBTQ women interviewed witnessed layers of patriarchal rationalizing in regards to gender performance in forensic competition, even if they were unaware of how it shaped their own identities. Crenshaw (1991) argued that women have throughout years of oppression found ways to communicate how social constructs had limited or delegitimized their experiences as women. This established a communal sense, or a female intuition, woven into cultural understanding of phenomenon. In this way, I believe that patriarchal expectations for gender identity are so discreetly entrenched in perceptions of femininity that it is commonly unquestioned by society at large.

If patriarchy is an unquestioned motivator of identity performance than in forensic competition it would only seem natural to instruct women to present themselves as feminine in order to maintain credibility. Although many of the female participants were aware of this norm they were not necessarily questioning the compulsory notion that women need to show their legs in order to be credible. This sentiment seems like a patriarchal application of gender identity performance within forensic competition warrants more scholarly attention.

Gayocracy. Homonormativity was densely woven into the responses of interviewed competitors. This is partly because some competitors so easily ascribe to a homonormative paradigm it is often difficult to see modes of power conspicuously tiered within a marginalized group. One participant observed that “It was one of the first places where I saw gay men in positions of power, running amazing collegiate programs and fostering competitive success”. This is true in forensic competition. Gronstal (2008) described this phenomenon as the forensic “gayocracy”. It is often joked about in forensics. Many of the female participants pointed out that

there appeared to be more gay men in forensics than other members of the LGBTQ community. There are also ramifications both implicitly and explicitly mentioned by participants.

Although Gronstal (2008) may have alluded to the gayocracy within forensic hierarchal structure as part of her analysis of metaphors used in forensic culture, I contend from the interviews that the gayocracy is a perceived reality among forensic competitors of all sexes, genders, and sexualities that is more apparent to people that are able to read the cultural codes of the LGBTQ community. Of course, no one can conclusively know that another is gay. Participants indicated this as well. Maybe it is possible to suspect, but to truly know is not possible. However there are certain distinguishable acts and linguistic identifiers that can be understood by in-group members. Participants were not willing to admit these identifiers, or heavily qualified them, which I think warrants more investigation.

A critical aspect of assuming somone is gay has to do with the cultural expectations for gender identity performance. Therefore the ways in which performance identity is constructed in forensic competition is fascinating. I was intrigued by people that talked about their “gay accent”, or butching up their intro, or coming out in speeches, or coming out within their team, or not coming out at all. All of these individual choices are effects of not only heteronormativity but also homonormativity within forensic culture. The difficulty of researching these constructs was that the narratives uncovered were bound to the cultural constructs of gender. However perceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality are foggy and misunderstood by members of society, the LGBTQ community included. The conflation of gender, sex, and sexuality, impacts the decisions made by all people to present their identity. However, there are unique pressures placed on members of the LGBTQ community. One participant expressed that an unwritten rule to being gay in forensics is to perform gay topics:

> I feel like if you are gay in forensics it is expected that you are out and that you do gay lit/topics I think that it is expected for gay men to be "pretty" and "swishy" I think that lesbians are expected to be "butch" and have short hair and not wear make-up I don't know if these are necessarily unwritten rules, but I think that they perpetuate many of the societal issues that surround gay and lesbian stereotypes.

When it came to addressing "gay topics" in forensics many of the participants expressed frustration with the essentializing nature of competition performances insisting there is such a thing as "too many" gay concepts. However, there was a very real sense of a limit expressed by others. This would mean that some are getting a clear message that it is possible for someone to be too performatively gay. I expressed this concern during my introduction when discussing my own forensic experience. I worry that this might be believed by non-LGBTQ members of forensics and it is therefore worth exploring more intersecting issues of gender and sexuality within forensic study. Maybe the forensic community could take on different standards for events that do not evaluate or discriminate competitors on topic selection regarding race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and sexuality. One of the respondents articulated that a litmus test for topics should be if the student is "growing and changing as a performer." I think many people in the forensic community would agree to this standard, however why is it that people feel that they can comment on one gay topic as if it is the only gay topic that one can do? Many participants pointed out that "gay" community is such a broad area that covers many issues. A near universal response to this answer argued that it is possible to do too many of the same topic but "gay topics" are not all inherently the same. One participant was quite eloquent in his distinction, "I think it is possible to do too many gay topics on the same thing, but there are so many issues facing the LGBTQ community without being repetitive".

In regard to the ways in which heteronormativity and homonormativity were apparent within performance was indicated by how "straight" people performed LGBTQ identities in interpretation events. I noticed that many of the participants seemed to dance around how they performed LGBTQ characters but quite often non-LGBTQ members are also encouraged to perform progressive literature. I therefore asked "Do you think straight people performing LGBTQ topics are judged in the same way as LGBTQ competitors?" Some indicated that they felt that they were judged the same. However, other participants shared differing opinions. One participant suggested conditionality to the notion of topic selection stating "some topics should be reserved for the LGBTQ community as they are the ones directly impacted by the issues or themes discussed by the pieces." However, other participants expressed that they felt that non-LGBTQ competitors were treated differently. One participant felt that this was to an unfair benefit for straight competitors.

> No. I think that when straight folks take on LGBTQ roles it looks like a great undertaking in character development. How amazing that they were able to portray a lesbian and make it feel so real even though it must have felt so foreign to them! Like I mentioned before, LGBTQ identified competitors who choose to perform queer lit get a lot of flack for playing or even abusing their "card".

Another participant described the frustration that she had when one of her straight students performed a piece stating:

> I don't! I feel that if a straight person does gay lit they get such backlash because they are not gay and they don't know "how it feels" or people talk about them and are always asking "are they gay"? I have had this happen to a student I was coaching. He found a

> piece of lit that he loved so he did it. He was a straight person performing as gay and his ballots got lots of hits because people thought he was playing a stereotype and not being realistic. I had other coaches asking me if he was gay.

Although it is beneficial to hear that the student was dedicated to trying to portray a realistic or truthful performance of a gay man. I feel the alarming sentiment of this response had to do with the evaluation of the student's performance. When a judge calls a portrayal stereotypical it is a signifier of privilege. If gay judges expressed that the straight man was performing a stereotype the judge is also stereotyping. Similarly if the judge identifies as an LGBTQ member to state that the straight performer was performing a stereotype is a statement edifying how the judge sees his/her own gay identity. I am willing to agree that there is no one gay identity, but I also think it is problematic to insist that another performance is a stereotype of a gay identity, because someone realistically identifies and performs their sexuality and gender identity as such. Therefore the discussion of stereotypes within forensic performance is not only complex but it is also textured with hierarchal structures of power of whom can determine stereotypical behavior. There are unspoken power dynamics held by a judge that can always be wielded and protected by the forensic culture.

Future Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that qualitative research can be a springboard for experimental research. My qualitative project warrants further critical research into forensic culture. It is essential to collect more experiences of marginalized voices to capture a greater sense of the forensic experience because Corbin and Strauss (1990) articulated that investigators do not create data, rather they utilize data to create theory and then theory is tested through other

research investigations. Thus far there is little applied theory to forensic participation. Leaving me with little to build from in this research process. However, the experiences I collected have caused me to reflect and critically ask more questions related to gender, sexuality, and identity within forensic competition.

All of the interview participants expressed very positive feelings toward forensic competition and expressed that they learned many invaluable life lessons. Many communicated that they were still involved with forensic competition in some form. When I asked participants to describe their overall feelings towards forensic competition, I received overwhelmingly positive feedback: “It’s wonderful and I miss it every day”, “It is my passion, and I believe consistently changes the life of those competing”, “Forensics was the best thing that I did with my college career. Period.”, “For 10 minutes people HAD to listen”, “I love forensics. It was the reason that I decided to become a graduate student, and it holds the potential to do so much”. It was clear among participants that forensic participation changed their perception of the world and themselves. One very touching response described suicidal feelings stating “Forensics saved my life. If it weren’t for forensics I’d probably be straight or dead”. It may be this transformative experience that can attribute to how participants could notice discrepancies in treatment and still sing the absolute praise of forensic competition.

As a potential career coach I want to impart that I believe in the value of forensic competition. I do not doubt the power of forensic performance or the pedagogical value of forensic competition. I am saying that blind praise of forensics presented contradictory information in my interviews. Most participants, even ones that experienced blatant homophobia, heterosexism, and homonormativity could only recall instances of them, and failed to point out consistent forensic culture as the agent enacting those cultural constructions. When I asked

participants if they could change anything about forensics they failed to address LGBTQ issues as something to be addressed. Many pointed to “politics” or norms, but much like me, they couldn’t place themselves or issues as something that the forensic community should value enough to change. Participants felt like part of a larger but I was confused. Most of the participants stated forensics taught them “advocate” and “to love themselves” while concurrently ignoring the lack of genuine acceptance in the forensic community towards their own marginalized identities.

It seemed that participants communicated a gratitude to the lessons forensic participation taught them. One participant described how he became more emotionally adept, which helped him better process his eventual coming out process.

> Forensics allowed me to be more emotionally competent. There were times when I struggled with the darker side of the gay life and had wished there were folks that would have reached out to me and tried to help me through the bad times, but those times made me stronger today.

Many simply stated that they appreciated their improved critical thinking skills. Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt and Louden (199?) provided the academic grounding to support that sentiment communicated by participants. But it seemed troubling to me that so few of the participants were able to notice the cultural conscriptions of heteronormativity woven into the descriptions of their forensic experience. Which forces me to reiterate, if we as a community are an educational activity than it is time we start asking more critical questions about what exactly are our competitors learning?

Many participants spoke to a greater sense of community. I understand this feeling of communitas within the forensic community. However this feeling seemed to be responsible to supplying a blind endorsement of forensic competition without critical reflexivity. The LGBTQ forensic experience in this regard is treated as an individual experience or isolated instances of heteronormativity and homonormativity. Participants seemed to dismiss ways in which hegemonic influence was supported as individual moments, instead of recognizing systemic issues within the forensic community. Forensic norms in many ways functioned as operative structures to enforce both heteronormativity and homonormativity. These cultural frames are is rarely explicit, rather they are insisted. However, many of the participants seemed to rationalize the means to justify the ends. Heteronormativity and homonormativity seemed to be tolerated in order to meet the greater purpose of forensic competition. The most precarious forms of homonormativity were typified by what participants were not discussing or realizing in their responses. For example one participant personally felt that there was a limit to how many "gay" related events a competitor can have. This former competitor clearly internalized comments about topics and now holds a perspective that similarly limits other competitor topics. One competitor described how her gay coaches limited herself presentation to fit normative dress standards. "My coaches adored me, but did work very hard to keep me more "normal." Mostly so that I could be competitive…." This is an instance of heteronormativity and homonormativity enacted in the name of competitive success. Our modes of normalization had subsequent manifestations by participants.

Furthermore, forensic research could benefit from branching out into critical organizational culture. Research regarding organizational culture in forensics has far functioned as identifying the ways in which intercollegiate forensics is an organizational culture. However,

this study has demonstrated that it is time for forensic research to move beyond mere labeling of culture and move towards a scholarship of uncovering. In particular forensic culture could benefit from understanding the ways in which messages in forensics are processed by different cultural groups within forensics. Forensic culture seemed to establish multiple perspectives from the participants interviewed. There is no correct way to experience a particular culture; however there are different frames that can be used to provide a context for a critical examination of an organizational culture.

Martin (1992) developed a set of approaches to highlight ways organizational culture attempts to establish unambiguous messages through perspectives of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. An integration perspective helps to establish what values are shared within the organization. Eisenberg, Murphy, and Andrews (1998) explained that this approach tries to eliminate ambiguity in cultural messages and focuses on concrete aspects of culture communicated within an organization. Martin's next perspective is differentiation. Eisenberg, Murphy, and Andrews (1998) stated that a differentiation perspective challenges organization wide agreement. Martin (1992) stressed that different sub-cultures within an organization can agree but there are levels of discord between and among subgroups. Ambiguity exists outside of each sub-culture group in a differentiation model, but not within. Eisenberg, Murphy, and Andrews (1998) described a fragmentation approach as inherently grounded in ambiguous communication. The nature of fragmentation is embedded in ambiguous processing of communicated messages. Therefore, there is no presumed consensus within an organization, even within sub-groups. Consensus however is inevitably reached within organizational cultures and riddled with mixed interpretations. I think it would be curious to see how portrayals of gender are communicated within the organizational cultures of forensic competition.

This project demonstrated how issues of gender are ambiguously understood, enacted, and enforced within forensic culture. All of the participants demonstrated a cursory knowledge of gendered expectations in forensics, but since there are no explicit rules to dress and demeanor they are ambiguously understood through a standardization of norms. Norms are vague, often misunderstood, and determined by those in power. Clair (1993) stated that hegemony suppresses marginalized members of society and can be analyzed through perspectives of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. The simple act of uncovering the stories could be a transgressive act for the forensic community that favors the integration perspective of forensic organizational structure. However, analyzing through this frame could conclusively demonstrate power relationships that thus far were merely hinted at by the participants I interviewed. I would conclude from my interviews that forensic culture certainly communicates ambiguous messages in regards to LGBTQ identity. Are messages of heteronormative and homonormative power communicated by the identified "gayocracy" of forensic completion? It would therefore be interesting to further explore what these ambiguous messages are and to see if they fall in line with Martin's frame.

Charmaz (1983) articulated that grounded theory can function as a sense-making process for social and cultural constructs. I experienced that sense making process and even though I answered my research question I am left with many more to consider as I matriculate and move forward in my academic pursuits. I realized how my experience fit into a cultural frame and I realized that I at least was not alone. Many experiences that I had initially thought of as individual seemed to be interconnected to how other participants practiced and understood.

My research has been the first critical step in this *queer connect the dots*. I found as many differences as similarities among the former competitors I interviewed. However, I did sense that

there was more going on than merely performing speeches. Some participants seemed frustrated by forensic culture but managed to still argue for continued participation. One participant summed:

> While it has its flaws just like any other community, it is where I continually choose to be. I think we are the cutting edge for a lot of things and have been an amazing voice for lots of causes, specifically LGBTQ issues. I think that what you learn from forensics is not replaceable by anything else in life. I know that everyone thinks what they do is the best, but I'm no exception. What we do is the best.

I couldn't agree more. I personally found some of the stories expressed as beautiful contradictions. I keep processing the heartbreaking stories of gay men not being able to share beds or even rooms with competitors and the blasé description of those events as "typical". Is homophobia so inscribed in the cultural narrative that we describe it as "typical"? Murphy (1989) argued that forensic competition is bound to greater cultural norms; however we simultaneously try to argue that the forensic community is socially progressive. I wonder how many interviews would I need to conduct to make the community question its' assertion? My literature review and interviews swirl around my brain spinning tenuous webs that I see splayed out before me. Perhaps forensic competition exists in a dialectic trying to be progressive with limitations. Whatever the case, it is crucial that a community that claims to include all voices actually becomes critical of the voices that it chooses to value.

The exploration and collecting of narratives ultimately helped me gain an understanding of how biopolitical exertions of power were enacted through gender identity performance in forensic competition by LGBTQ members. Perhaps Hinck (2003) summed up the need to

explore norms in forensic culture best stating: “When our practices lead students to engage in cultural behaviors for the exclusive sake of winning, of appealing to standards of performance that reflect a closed system of unwritten and unjustifiable expectations for performance, we have lost our way” (p. 64). This sentiment captures how I feel about LGBTQ identity and forensic culture. I understand the necessity to be professional however I do not understand how performing an LGBTQ identity is mutually exclusive. To insist that people should perform and act contrary to their identity seems antithetical to all of the genuinely positive reasons stated by the former competitors stated to do forensics in the first place. I feel I have carved a niche for myself in the forensic community, but I often worry that the niche I have carved as THE quintessential lesbian. It is for that reason I encourage more research to uncover the intersections buried within forensic culture. For if we are to accept the premise that forensics is a co-curricular activity, than it is crucial to ask what lessons students are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, learning from our organizational culture in regards to gender performance and contemporary society because to merely accept the frames of power as they exist now means to perpetuate an oppressive standard that has gone uncontested in forensic competition for far too long.

I continue to wear ties, not as a tribute to my father, or the moment in which it began. I wear ties because they are an undeniable extension of myself. It is not a phase that I will grow out. It is part of myself that I have grown into. I imagine years from now experiencing the post tournament exhaustion, mirroring the image of my father waiting for awards so many years ago. A student coming up to me perplexedly asking about my tie, teaching them how to proudly glean their own knot, passing the story on.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Call For Participants

Dear Colleagues,

I am a graduate teaching assistant in the department of communication studies at Minnesota State University Mankato, working under the direction of Dr. Leah White. I am working on compiling research for my Master of Fine Arts Thesis. I am asking former individual events competitors who self-identify as members the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgenderd and Queer (LGBTQ) community to participate in an email interview asking about their experiences related to gender identity while members of the forensic community. Answering initial questions should take about 30-40 minutes. Participants may be contacted for follow-up questions to their initial responses. Please forward this request for participants on to alumni networks that may exist for your team or anyone that you think would be qualified to take this survey. This project is significant to understanding how LGBTQ competitors experience forensic competition. I am aware that many of us have very busy schedules therefore any help with research investigation, even if you choose not to participate, would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Reid

Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Participant Consent Form

Your participation is requested in research on self-identified members of the LGBTQ community and your gender identity in former forensic competition to be conducted by investigator Alyssa B. Reid and supervised by Principal Investigator, Dr. Leah White. The initial email interview should take roughly 30 minutes to complete, acknowledging the delay posed by internet correspondence. Follow-up emails may be requested to promote understanding of initial interview responses. Participation is completely voluntary and responses will be kept anonymous through the adoption of pseudonyms. Because the internet poses the risk of compromising privacy, your extracted email interviews will be kept in a separate folder to be stored off-line to ensure confidentiality and/or anonymity.

Risks to your physical, emotional, social, professional, or financial well-being are considered to be minimal. Participation is voluntary and you may abstain from responding to any questions that you choose. Additionally, participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with the research investigators or Minnesota State University, Mankato. Submission of the completed interview responses will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and that you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age. There are no benefits for participating in the study with the exception of reflecting on past experiences and potentially understanding them in a new light.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact investigator Alyssa Reid via email at Alyssa.reid@mnsu.edu. Principal investigator Dr. Leah White may be contacted via email at leah.white@mnsu.edu. If you have further questions about the treatment of human subjects, contact the IRB Administrator at (507) 389-2321. Finally, if you would like more

information about specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact Minnesota State University, Service Help Desk for the Office of Information and Technology, at (507) 389-6654.

Consent to Quote from Interview

I may wish to quote from this interview either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. (A pseudonym will be used in order to protect your identity)

Do you agree to allow me to quote from this interview? Yes / No

Please read and initial the following statements

_____ I understand that this research is intended for the study of the LGBTQ community that competed in collegiate individual events speaking, which is part of the research for by Alyssa Reid's Master of Fine Arts Thesis in Communication Studies at Minnesota State University Mankato

_____ I understand that the use of this interview may include a published paper, or papers, the Master's thesis, and the possibility of turning the thesis into later publications.

_____ I have received a copy of this consent form.

I approve of the use of my personal information as agreed upon with the above conditions.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____

Printed Name

Appendix B: Initial Interview Script

Demographic Information

Sex:

Male Female Other

I have competed in college forensics for:

1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years

I identify as:

Heterosexual Gay Lesbian Bisexual Queer Other

Interview Script

Please answer the following questions thoroughly and thoughtfully.

How long did you compete in forensics?

What years did you compete in forensics?

What events did you compete in?

How do you personally identify your sexuality and gender?

Describe your typical tournament attire in detail.

Describe how your coaches advised you to present your LGBTQ identity as it related to competitive success.

Were you “out” as a competitor?

Did you feel like forensics was a welcoming place to be a member of the LGBTQ community?

Were there any other LGBTQ members on forensic your team when you competed?

Did you have LGBTQ coaches?

Did you have any LGBTQ friends that competed in forensics?

Did you ever select LGBTQ topics?

Could you describe a time when you felt you were evaluated in forensics differently because of your sexuality/ gender performance?

Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your sexuality/gender performance?

Did you ever face discrimination from teammates because of your sexuality/ gender performance?

What is the most valuable lesson forensics taught you?

Describe your overall feelings concerning the forensic activity.

What did you like about forensics?

If you could change anything about the activity what would it be?

What did you like about forensics?

If you could change anything about the forensic activity what would it be?