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Affect in the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus

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by

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The Dissertation of Aaron W. Gurlly is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Recent LGBT political victories in the U.S. call for an examination of gay pride, an examination which necessitates an exploration of the shame against which gay pride operates. I begin this project with an exploration of literatures of gay shame to illustrate how that concept is based on a specific, limited type of gay experience. Silvan Tomkins's affect theory suggests that we should understand shame more broadly than it is conceived in the gay shame literature. I argue that Tomkins's ideas regarding shame allow shame to maintain its utility even in a time of apparent social and political progress.

I then explore literature on queer publics to show how those publics maintain a complex relationship with privacy. I do so in order to encourage the exploration of a type of queer public that has received only scant scholarly attention: LGBT choral organizations. Because LGBT choruses exist specifically to enact public performances, their relationship to privacy differs from those of other forms of queer publics. This project examines manifestations of gay shame and pride in the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. Interviews with SDGMC members reveal a rift in thinking between members of the group, some of whom report not having experienced the kind of gay shame discussed by other members, but who, in the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, come to identify *with* those men and their personal accounts of shame.

In the following two chapters I use analytic autoethnography to explore my experiences in SDGMC over the past five years; first, to discuss experience of performing a canonical gay shame narrative in front of audiences, and, second, to discuss performances of failed masculinity, performances enacted as part of my participation in choral activities. The dissertation ends with a discussion of the implications of identifying with shame and the current pride movement. I claim that the productive possibilities of shame are realized through interactions and performances facilitated by membership in a gay men's chorus, where interpersonal connections and conventions of theatrical performance encourage members to establish personal connections to narratives of shame, highlighting the importance of affective, rather than biographical, connections to gay shame narratives.

Chapter 1: Reading through Shame to Understand Pride

In the wake of the landmark US Supreme Court cases *United States v. Windsor* and *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, decided June 26, 2013, the American gay pride movement claimed major success. For the decade leading to those decision, the mainstream gay pride movement had made marriage its rallying cause, and these decisions—the latter overturning Proposition 8 in California, thereby clearing the way for statewide recognition of same-sex marriage, and the former striking down much of the Defense of Marriage Act, allowing the national government to recognized same-sex marriages performed in those states were such marriages are legal, and thereby according federal marriage benefits to same-sex married partners.

There was much cause for celebration; a set of major legal victories had been won by the small but significant number of persons who worked directly on those cases, by the larger group of activists who engaged in much social political activity, and by the millions of Americans who simply agreed that gay persons should have the right to marry. These victories, along with the wave of legislation and state judicial action allowing for same-sex marriage in 18 (then 17) states suggests that the gay pride movement has been successful in achieving its goals of establishing equality for LGBT persons in a largely heteronormative society.

These successes follow—and build—upon a series of other successes earned by the gay pride movement. In the 2010, Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed; in 2011, the US military changed its policies to conform to the new legislation. DADT was itself a compromise designed to allow for the possibility for gay, lesbian, and

bisexual persons to serve in the military, as long as their sexual identities remained hidden. This compromise replaced an earlier outright ban on lesbians, gays, and bisexual persons serving in the military, a ban facilitated by administrative power to seek out information that might reveal a soldier's homosexuality. DADT removed that power, but left a ban in place that served to silence queer soldiers until the 2010 repeal and subsequent policy changes.

Eight years prior to the DADT repeal, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Lawrence v. Texas* that laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual activity were unconstitutional. This civil rights victory was won through the overturning of *Bowers v. Hardwick*, a decision delivered only 17 years earlier that upheld states' rights to prohibit consensual same-sex sexual activity, rendering sexually active queer persons in those states criminal and stripping them of basic legal protections.

Outside the realm of major civil rights legislation, queer persons saw a shift in the thinking about the nature of homosexuality itself. Conventional thinking had, for generations, held that same-sex sexual desire was a manifestation of some sort of personal defect, either of the mind or of the soul. This thinking was supported by religious doctrine and by the psychological and psychiatric communities. In 1973, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* was revised to remove homosexuality from its listing of mental disorders; this change led to a series of smaller changes that "normalize" homosexuality. As far as arguments about the soul, religious responses to changes in perceptions of queer persons and same-sex desire have been mixed, with some institutions maintaining traditional stances against the

supposed sin of homosexuality, while others bless same-sex unions and ordain queer clergy members.

The activism of Larry Kramer, ACT-UP, and other fiercely vocal advocates of queer persons living with HIV/AIDS brought attention to the plight of those persons at a time of near governmental silence on the issue. Initially identified as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency because of the manifestation of rare secondary infections in sexually active gay men in the urban US, AIDS maintains the aura of a "gay disease" in the popular imagination in this country, despite the near non-existence of such an idea in places around the globe where HIV/AIDS is most prevalent (i.e. sub-Saharan Africa), and despite ever increasing numbers of straight persons in the US being diagnosed with the disease. That said, the stigma of AIDS, driven at least in part by its being tainted by its association with gay men, seems to have been somewhat mitigated, with mainstream programming and advertising touting the benefits of regular HIV testing—and the institutional funding that makes widespread testing, often free to clients, available in most major cities—suggest that attention is being paid to a crisis once greeted with stony silence. The prevalence of the red ribbon as an icon of that struggle similarly suggests that AIDS is seen as something to be addressed rather than ignored.

Mass media has similarly amended its approach to LGBT persons, their depictions, and their issues. The Hays Code, the de facto censorship system of classical Hollywood, forbade any depictions of "sexual depravity" and required that any characters implied to have engaged in such (off-screen) activity be met with a

punishing fate (usually on-screen). Television offered no sympathetic (or neutral) depictions of gay persons until the 1970s, after the first waves of gay liberation began. Now, major and minor networks routinely offer programming that feature LGBT characters; Bravo and LOGO identify and target a queer audience for much of their content. These changes in the television industry demonstrate a shift in thinking that not only conceives of LGBT persons as a topic about which content might be produced, but also as a market segment to be courted rather than ignored or denigrated. Gay dollars, it was ultimately recognized, are still green.

These successes are, of course, the result of changes in oppressive conditions. To win legal equality in terms of relationship status requires that one's relationships have been delegitimized. The enshrining of the legal status of same-sex sexual activity only matters because those activities had previously been criminalized. Declarations of homosexuality as a normal variation of human sexuality only make sense in light of long histories of pathologizing homosexuality as sexual deviance. Widespread awareness of HIV/AIDS and the availability of free HIV testing and counseling are wonderful in their own right, but are remarkable given the relative silence with which HIV/AIDS was confronted when it emerged as a major health crisis for gay men in the US in the 1980s.

In focusing on the relative successes of the gay pride movement, it is important to remember the relationship between those successes and the conditions that necessitated the wave of activism that led to those successes. Those conditions shaped the experiences of generations of queer persons and constitute the foundation upon

which systems of community support and pride are built. Those experiences of denigration, of criminalization, of pathology, and of inequality can hardly be understood as fertile grounds for the emergence of gay pride. In order to fully understand gay pride, then, one must explore its implied opposite, gay shame.

In the introduction to their anthology *Gay Shame*, David Halperin and Valerie Traub discuss the role of gay shame in the context of a post-gay pride moment. They ask, "What are the residual effects of shame on gay and lesbian subjectivity in the era of gay pride?" (4). Further, they inquire into the productive possibilities of reclaiming gay shame, asking whether or not such a reclamation might serve as a basis for establishing community. The shame to which the authors refer is the shame associated with a pre-gay pride America, before parades and marches, before ACT-UP demonstrations, before nationwide debates on same-sex marriage and state-based legalization of the same. It is a shame akin to that depicted in iconic queer works such as the 1970 film, *The Boys in the Band*, a shame based, at least in part, on the legal and social exclusion of gay men from the American mainstream. As those conditions shift, and as social acceptance grows, the focus on negative affect associated with queer sexuality has been supplemented with, though not supplanted by, a proliferation of artistic and entertainment media that celebrate gays and lesbians, and depict members of those identity groups as important members of society. Though problematic in its tendency to simplify and render queer sexualities palatable and relevant for predominantly heterosexual audiences, the contemporary wave of popular

mainstream films (from *In and Out*[1] to *Brokeback Mountain*[2]), songs (from Katy Perry's "I Kissed a Girl"[3] to Lady Gaga's "Born This Way"[4]), and television shows (from *Will and Grace*[5] and its presentation of friendships between gay men and straight women, to *Glee*[6] and its portrayal of romantically involved gay and lesbian teenagers) taps into a social acceptance of homosexuality that did not seem to exist in the pre-Stonewall era.

Why, then, focus on shame and other negative affects when looking at the contemporary gay community? David Halperin's other work suggests two related reasons for such a focus. One, queer studies has essentially avoided the topic of gay male subjectivity, focusing instead on gay identity formation based on social and political exclusion (*How to Do the History of Sexuality* 2). This focus privileges examinations of social and political conditions as a way of understanding gay life, rather than privileging the notion of a kind of essential gay male way of being in the world. Two, scholarship on gay subjectivity would have needed to take as its point of a departure a body of psychological and psychoanalytic theory rooted in a history of treating non-heterosexual desire as deviant (*How to Do the History of Sexuality* 3). Thus, focusing on political and legal inequalities served the dual purpose of avoiding

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[1] A 1997, Academy Award-nominated comedy
[2] A 2005, multiple Golden Globe and Academy Award-winning drama
[3] Released in 2008, the single simultaneously garnered popular success (certified 4x Platinum) and critical disapproval for, among other things, its rather pedestrian appropriation of queer sexuality
[4] Released in 2011, this song earns its spot in pop music history by matching existing records or setting new records in the pop charts and in sales.
[5] The NBC series ran from 1998 to 2006 and won 16 Emmy awards.
[6] The currently running FOX musical comedy series debuted in 2009 and has won numerous Emmy and Golden Globe awards.

the pitfalls of psychological theories that present gay subjectivity as inherently flawed and positioning gay people as a marginalized social group alongside racial minorities, allowing those groups to engage in a discourse of civil rights with the goal of changing the legal structures that discriminated against them[7].

This project follows Halperin and Traub's suggestion to study the residual effects of gay shame in this current moment of gay pride by examining the deployment and use of shame in the current gay pride movement. I argue that the kind of shame that gay studies literature has posited as central to gay identity is based on what Erving Goffmann termed stigma. I further argue that the stigma associated with being gay is diminishing in the US, minimizing the attendant shame associated with it, thereby challenging the notion that shame currently is—and will continue to be—central to gay identity. Because studying the entire gay movement would be beyond the scope of this project, I will focus specifically on one organization, the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. Because of its involvement in the official San Diego PRIDE program, along with its 28-year history of support for gay causes and attempts to give

[7]Halperin also claims in "Sex before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens" that sexuality need not be defined by object choice. Ancient Greece defined sexuality by activity role; sex of object choice mattered little. Women and "boys" were basically the same. Men could legitimately seek out women and "boys", and it was assumed that men would be active; women and boys would be passive. Therefore, homo/heterosexuality as we understand it doesn't apply there, and can't, then, be thought of as eternal or universally applicable categories. As such, the claim, then, for a notion of an eternal sexual essence based on those categories seems incorrect. I care because this underscores his claims about the challenges of defining a gay subjectivity; this difficulty helps to explain why, as he argues in How to Do Gay History, why political identity became the thing around which gayness coalesced, rather than around some notion of shared or universal subjectivity.

voice to gay issues in southern California, I suggest that the chorus is a fruitful object for studying contemporary gay phenomena.

Another important reason for considering pride through an exploration of shame is outlined in the work of Judith "Jack" Halberstam, who, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, advocates for queers to embrace failure, that is, to revel in the opportunities opened up to us when we stop trying to find a place in the normative mainstream.

> …I refuse triumphalist accounts of gay, lesbian, and transgender history that necessarily reinvest in robust notions of success and succession. In order to inhabit the bleak territory of failure we sometimes have to write and acknowledge dark histories, histories within which the subject collaborates with rather than always opposes oppressive regimes and dominant ideology. And so in chapter 6 I explore the vexed question of the relationship between homosexuality and fascism and argue that we cannot completely dismiss all of the accounts of Nazism that link it to gay male masculinism of the early twentieth century. (23-24)

> Queer studies, like any other area of study that agrees upon principles, modes of historiography, and sites of investigation, also has a tendency to solidify into what Foucault calls a "science," or a regime of knowing that depends absolutely upon commonsense narratives about emergences and suppressions. In some queer theoretical narratives, for example, the psychic abjection of the homosexual must be met by a belated recognition of his or her legitimacy. In other scholarly endeavors the gay or lesbian subject must be excavated from the burial grounds of history or granted a proper place in an account of social movements, globalized in a rights- based project, or written into new social contracts. But in more recent queer theory the positivist projects committed to restoring the gay subject to history and redeeming the gay self from its pathologization have been replaced by emphases on the negative potential of the queer and the possibility of rethinking the meaning of the political through queerness precisely by embracing the incoherent, the lonely, the defeated, and the melancholic formulations of selfhood that it sets in motion. (147-148)

So much of the critique elaborated in Halberstam's work (critiques also offered by Lee Edelman, Leo Bersani, and others) is leveled at the radical link between gay sex and

politics (or at the radical delinking of gay sex and politics, given the extent to which gay sex has historically been implicated in the radical politics of some gay liberationists. What I find interesting, and what radical queer scholars and activists decry, is how decidedly not radical gay pride has been in recent years, in its calls for, say, legal recognition of long-term monogamous relationships, parental rights, and inclusion in the armed forces.

> The differences between Hirschfeld's version of homosexual emancipation (the recognition of sexual minorities by the state) and the masculinist version (the elevation of male friendship to a principle of state power) prompts Hewitt to offer up a new set of questions about homosexuality: "We must therefore be sensitive to the strategic function of an emerging homosexuality. Rather than asking What was homosexuality? (or, in Foucauldian terms, When and how was homosexuality?), we need to understand what homosexuality was (and is) for. (Halberstam 157)

This line of questioning opens up a conversation with Lee Edelman, who argues that non-normative sexualities are for standing outside of and threatening normativity. Halberstam doesn't go as a far as that, arguing instead that failure, defined as the inability to occupy a mainstream position, offers up wonderful opportunities for exploration of non-normative structures. The shame related to this conception of failure is the shame that has historically been associated with homosexuality, the failure to "just be normal". Edelman writes:

> To figure the undoing of civil society, the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive; such being is not to the point. Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the drive. As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, therefore, and on queering ourselves and our investment in such

> organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. And so, when I argue, as I aim to do here, that the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, Imaginary identities foreclosed by our constitutive subjection to the signifier, I am proposing no platform or position from which queer sexuality or any queer subject might finally and truly become itself, as if it could somehow manage thereby to achieve an essential queerness. I am suggesting instead that the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself. It is only, after all, to its figures of meaning, which we take as the literal truth, that we owe our existence as subjects and the social relations within which we live—relations we may well be willing, therefore, to give up our lives to maintain. (17-18).

The queer, for Edelman, is essentially non-identificatory (and, therefore, essentially non-essential). His polemic provides an analytic but not a plan of action for any sort of practical politics. To be fair, Edelman does say he does not consider his ideas as a prescription for a way of life, but rather as ways of understanding. That said, I do wonder about the ethics of a theory that posits that people--real, live, people--might opt to occupy an inherently oppositional position, and that such a choice constitutes an improvement on current realities where queer persons, by and large, do make life choices that serve the interests of the Child, that is, of futurity as construed by the mainstream. Is there room in a real life version of this theory--which, again, Edelman does not insist upon--for queer persons who want to live simple, quiet lives that do not oppose social and political structures, and that, perhaps, replicate some structures and conditions such as family, relationships, and community, albeit configured around non-traditional sex and gender relations?

> By denying our identification with the negativity of this drive, and hence our disidentification from the promise of futurity, those of us inhabiting the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of queerness to someone else. The structural position of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain. By choosing to accept that position, however, by assuming the ‘‘truth’’ of our queer capacity to figure the undoing of the Symbolic, and of the Symbolic subject as well, we might undertake the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself), which can only return us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction. (27).

I admire the reasoning here (it's a bit like the homespun notion that "everybody's got to have a nigger"), but I would prefer a different way of opting into the structural position of queerness, one that was not configured around sexual practices but rather around the desire to occupy a position of opposition. That is, let the rebels and the anarchists be just that, but let us not insist that all non-straight people--or other minority groups—are compelled to do that work for us all simply by virtue of their non-majoritarian or non-normative identities.

My quibble with Halberstam, and my major concern with Edelman, is the extent to which their ideas prescribe specific values and actions for people. For Halberstam, these suggestions (that failure can offer up new, interesting ways of being in the world) are offerings, and, as such, can be graciously accepted or denied. Edelman’s polemic suggests that, because queering is an inevitable process—that is, somebody has to occupy that position—we should relish the radical aspects of the denial to reconcile with the mainstream. I think that both positions require revision in light of the ongoing, but still incomplete, mainstreaming of LGBT persons. Both

positions assume that persons with non-normative sexual identities are inexorably constrained to the margins of a heteronormative society, but I wonder if that intellectual position, based on a well-documented history of the marginalization of queer persons, accounts for the rapid push to the mainstream effected by the contemporary gay pride movement.

Heather Love offers another explanation of the benefit of inquiry into the negative aspects of gay experience despite and because of the supposed successes associated with gay pride. Love indicates the inherent link between politics of progress and liberation and negative histories that created the need for liberation, pointing out the difficulty of determining proper uses of those histories (1). She further notes:

> Homosexual identity is indelibly marked by the effects of reverse discourse: one the one hand, it continues to be understood as a form of damaged or compromised subjectivity; on the other hand, the characteristic forms of gay freedom are produced in response to this history. Pride and visibility offer antidotes to shame and the legacy of the closet; they are made in the image of specific forms of denigration. (2-3)

Love further argues, in a response to Edelman that parallels my critique, against the fatalism inherent in the call to turn against futurity. She rather explores manifestations of ambivalence toward a (supposedly positive) future, but resists reconciling that ambivalence into either the optimism associated with gay pride movements or into the sort of nihilism expressed in Edelman's polemic. As she indicates, "I am more interested in the turn to the past than I am in the refusal of the future itself, and this concern puts me in a closer dialogue with critics working on shame, melancholia,

depression, and pathos—the experience of failure rather than negativity itself" (22-23).

I am similarly interested in a turn to the past as that turn is manifest in gay pride activity. This project explores current uses of gay shame rooted in the past, a past of widespread legal, institutional, and social shaming of non-normative sexual identities and practices. This exploration seeks to shed light on the use of shame in the service of pride, a goal that marks my intellectual departure with Love, who argues for the refusal of triumphant notions of progress in favor for a decision to live with the injuries that constitute us as a marginalized group and form, therefore, the basis of queer identities. I wonder, instead, how uses of shame can further the project of pride.

Literature Review

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this project, I will divide the literature review section of this chapter into five subsections. The first section will discuss theories of affect, with a particular focus on shame, in order to explore how affect has been discussed by other scholars in the social sciences. The second section will consist of a brief exploration of literature on gay history and gay identity formation. This section will also follow Halperin and Traub's claim that the era of gay pride has supplanted the era marked by shame because of its political and cultural successes. The third section will forge a link between shame and queer sexualities by exploring the work of queer and LGBT studies scholars who have taken up shame as an area of focus. The fourth section will explore literature that argues that shame is not simply

linked to queer sexuality, but is constitutive of queer identities. The fifth section will highlight the work of numerous scholars who challenge the notion of gay pride/liberation has success. The work cited in this section will explain limitations on the notion of constant progress in the gay movement.

The variety of ideas surrounding the idea of gay identity, shame, and progress suggest that a project that seeks to explore these concepts should be undertaken with caution. It is for this reason that I limit both the scope of my claims as well as my object of study. A project that explores affect in a particular gay men's chorus cannot be assumed to reflect ranges of experience had by all, or even most, queer persons. The specific location of the chorus being studied in this project structures the conditions experienced by its members; it is understood queer persons in other locales may experience wholly different affective responses to a somewhat different set of social and legal conditions. Further, this project provides information about a relatively short period of history in an organization that has existed for decades, and whose membership, which has changed significantly over time in terms of both demographics and individual participation, is comprised of persons who differ from one another in terms of age, relationship status, HIV status, and personal feelings regarding their affiliation with a gay community and regarding their individual articulations of gay identity. It is the potential for shedding light on this variety of experiences that drives this project. Again, I have no interest in claiming that the stories included in this dissertation reflect "everyone's" feelings of shame. I rather

suggest that a variety of experiences of shame calls for a reconsideration of the notion of shame, a reconsideration that comprises the next section of this chapter.

Affect

In "Invoking Affect," Clare Hemmings responds to the explosion of scholarship on affect in cultural studies by explaining that, although she sees value in the study of affect because it offers a response to theories of power that amount to social determinism without falling into poststructuralist paralysis. However, she cautions us not to blindly accept the affective turn without establishing the limits of the study of affect, and without exploring postcolonial and feminist theories and their contribution to the agency-structure debates. The variety of ways in which affect is used in cultural studies, I think, is emblematic of Hemmings's concern that affect theory might be seen as a 'catch-all' theory. To clarify what I mean here, I will explore some uses of affect theory.

Much critical scholarship of affect is based on the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. She reinvigorates interest in the work of Silvan Tomkins, despite, what she calls, its apparent 'scientism' (*Shame and its Sisters* 2). Because much critical theory prior to the affective turn had moved away from the body because of the supposed reductionism of older body-based cultural theories, Sedgwick found refreshing Tomkins relatively brash claims about affect being a bodily fact. This is significant

because much of the early era of the affective turn in cultural studies assumed or otherwise treated affect as essentially discursive[8].

For Silvan Tomkins and his followers, affects are physical responses. Emotions are the product of cognitive labor. Much research has been done on emotion, in large part because discussions of emotion fit into longstanding paradigms that privilege analysis of language rather than studying the body. We have a well-developed language for talking about emotion. Affect theory seeks to establish a similar kind of language for discussing bodily responses to external stimuli, responses that serve as the basis for, but do not by themselves constitute, emotion.[9]

Tomkins divides the affects into three broad categories: positive, neutral, and negative. This project will focus on shame, one of the negative affects. The full list of negative affect includes:

- Anger—Rage
- Disgust, Dissmell (reaction to bad smell)
- Distress—Anguish
- Fear—Terror
- Shame—Humiliation

Four of the negative affects are described not as singular isolated states, but rather as continua, where the first term represents the lowest level of response, and the second

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[8] See the work of Ann Cvetkovich, whose *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* and *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* serve as examples.

[9] Sigmund Freud and Wilfred Bion offer psychoanalytic theories of affect, but, since I have argued that scholarship on gay male identity has largely avoided psychoanalysis in favor of political approaches, I will forgo discussing those theories now.

term represents the highest level. Tomkins also associated each of the affects with a specific set of bodily responses. They are as follows:

- Anger—Rage: frowning, clenched jaw, red face
- Disgust: head forward and down, lower lip raised and protruded
- Dissmell: head pulled back, upper lip raised
- Distress—Anguish: crying, sobbing, arched eyebrows, mouth lowered
- Fear—Terror: frozen stare, pale face, coldness, sweat, erect hair
- Shame—Humiliation: eyes lowered, head down and averted, blushing

Shame warrants particular attention in this project, given the upcoming argument that it plays a critical role in shaping the conditions upon which a gay political identity has been based. Arlene Stein writes of the relationship between shame and secrecy that defined queer sexuality prior to Stonewall, and of the mitigating of shame made possible by a post-Stonewall, coming-out-of-the-closet approach to sexuality that rendered public the private, secret sexual attitudes harbored by queer persons *Shameless* 10) . Though discussing heterosexual marriage in particular when she writes, "Increasingly, relationships are entered into for their own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with one another, and continued only if they deliver sufficient satisfactions for each individual" (*Shameless* 11), a similar point could be made about contemporary associations between members of gay community groups. If, because shaming conditions for queer persons as such are being diminished, the days when "people stayed together because they had no choice"

are ostensibly over—for marriage and for social arrangements among queer persons—then the continued deployment of this particular affect warrants scrutiny.

About shame, Tomkins writes:

> "In contrast with the idiosyncratic shame theories which are the result of the cognitive organization and summarizing of one's own past shame experiences, every individual is ordinarily vulnerable to shame experience whenever he violates the social norms which he inherits by virtue of his membership in society or whenever he violates the norms of a particular ideology to which he may be committed (Tomkins 412).

This is a particular subcondition that can trigger shame, but it is this understanding of shame—resulting from the violation of social norms—that underscores the understanding of shame in much of the gay scholarship I cite later in this chapter. However, it is Tomkins's more general definition that I find interesting. According to Tomkins, shame is triggered by the "incomplete reduction of interest or joy" (353). To exemplify this point, Tomkins uses the example of the feeling one gets when one smiles at a friend only to discover that the person on at whom the smile was directed is not actually a friend but is a total stranger. Shame is the product of having anticipated enjoyment (or having become interested) but experiencing something other than enjoyment (or having the source of one's interest suddenly taken away). We can understand shame in the particular sense in which it is most commonly invoked as the result of having one's anticipated enjoyment shaken when forced to reckon with the fact that the pursuit of one's pleasure contravenes social norms, for instance, when one feels pleasure as the result of desire for someone of the same sex, and that feeling of pleasure is brought into conflict with social, cultural, legal, or religious proscriptions

on same sex desire, that is, when one recognizes in oneself a failure to perform according to dominant norms.

Elspeth Probyn makes a tactical point that clarifies Tomkins approach to affect, and to shame in particular. She points out the deceptive obviousness of Tomkins claims about the inherent link between interest and shame, noting that one must be interested in something in order to be ultimately shamed (*Blush* x). She further claims:

> Tomkins's insistence that shame flags the incomplete reduction of interest and joy is a crucial insight that propels my own argument. It describes shame as an ambiguous state of feeling, emotion, and affect. It gestures to shame as the fine line or border between moving forward into more interest or falling back into humiliation (xii).

And later:

> Whether shame is an emotion or an affect is a point that divides much research. In general, the humanities and social sciences lean toward emotion, and the sciences tend to privilege affect. In other terms, and as another rough way of understanding the division, those interested in cognition, social expression, and the interpretation of cultures tend to study emotions. Those interested in the workings of the brain and the body study affects or the affect system. Very few writers cross the divide between the social and the biological. More often than not, one camp ignores the other. Rejecting the possibility that there are biological, neurological, and, more generally, bodily aspects of shame is as reductive as bald statements that ignore the cultural context in which affects are expressed and used within societies (xv).

Here Probyn makes a point that I will address in chapter 6, that much can be gained by understanding shame, and affect more broadly, from multiple perspectives. Because I am not prepared to argue the nuances of various psychological definitions of affect, I will defer to Probyn's claim that the benefit of affect theory in cultural studies lies in how such theory allows for new, productive understandings. Constantina Papoulias

and Felicity Callard echo this sentiment in their discussion of the turn to affect in the humanities and the social sciences, as does Brian Massumi in his work that seeks to bring focus to the of embodied experiences of affect in cultural studies.

Teresa Brennan's work on the transmission of affect offers a link between affect and group dynamics, a link that benefits my project. However, she does seem to work with the idea that, in general, information, and, therefore, specifically affect, are sent from a sender to receiver. What I will argue is that affect within groups is mutually co-constituted by and mediated through group members and their environment. This mediation is, of course, performative rather than 'simply' discursive. Brennan writes of her theory of the transmission of affect in groups:

> But it is also a theory of the group based on what is produced by the "group," as well as the individuals within it: the emotions of two are not the same as the emotions of one plus one. If I emit one emotion and you emit another, we may both of us take onboard the effects of this new composite. This should yield the basis for a contribution to group psychology, because we are beginning with an idea of how a gathering is constituted, in part, through the transmission of energetic affects (which may add up to something more than the individual affects of the group's members). (51)

When I discuss in this dissertation the deployment of shame as/and negative affect in SDGMC group activities, it is with Brennan's claim in mind. I do not assume that negative affect manifest by one person necessarily triggers negative affect in any other person. Instead, I invite examination of those moments where negative affect is manifest, an exploration of the deployment and management of that affect in and by the group.

In addition to the caveat about Tomkins's affect theory too closely paralleling the old hypodermic model of communication theory, Sneja Gunew offers another warning about the appeal to affect theory in cultural studies. In "Subaltern Empathy: Beyond European Categories in Affect Theory," she rightly cites the critiques of psychoanalytic theories as essentialist and blind to cultural difference. For Gunew, affect theory, in its tendency to similarly ignore cultural difference, risks making the same elisions. This type of warning about the ignoring of cultural difference will be repeated by other scholars cited in this chapter, who make parallel arguments about the limits of the theories I explore here when I discuss gay history and identity. Further, I point out that Tomkins's theory of affect avoids the cultural specificity of psychoanalytic theories because it separates the relatively simple affective responses from the much more complex and culturally mediated phenomena of feelings and thought patterns. Gunew's warning holds, however, for scholars who essentially trade emotion for affect in their work, without regard for differences between the two.

Gay History and Gay Identity

> "Sexuality is not a somatic fact; it is a cultural effect. Sexuality, then, does have a history-though (as I shall argue) not a very long one" ("Sex before Sexuality" 257).

If, as David Halperin asserts here, sexuality is not an enduring fact but rather one with a history (and therefore an origin), then the notion of a gay identity as an enduring fact falls on its face. This matters because it explains why the very notion of gay identity is a contested terrain. As many have argued, and as I will show here, gay identity is a socially and politically useful concept, but one that is essentially empty. Robert

Padgug furthers Halperin's claim when he writes, "Sexual categories do not make manifest essences implicit within individuals, but are the expression of the active relationships of the members of entire groups and collectivities" (58). Padgug critiques Marxist approaches to sexuality by saying that, not only do those approaches reproduce bourgeois capitalist notions of distinct private and public spheres, they obscure the results of examining sexuality as social relations. Implicit in Padgug's writing is the idea that we can think of gay people as a group of some sort of social significance. Not all collections of people are considered to be a collectivity; for instance, we tend to think of Muslims as a collectivity, but perhaps not persons whose family names begin with the letter 'S'. We could conceive of groups based on either of those traits, but we tend not to treat the latter as any sort of group bound by any sense of cohesiveness or possessed of any social significance, but we routinely treat that former as such. This idea of treating gay men as a collectivity sets the foundation for the imagined notion of a gay community, to use Benedict Anderson's concept.

John D'Emilo's work charts the formation of this imagined community in the US, taking the two decades before Stonewall as his point of departure, and treating the social upheavals of the 1960s as a catalyst for the coalescing of that community into a politically-engaged movement. As D'Emilio writes when discussing his experiences working with others in the early movement:

> Bring those shared characteristics together in the context of a radical liberation movement and one can begin perhaps to apprehend how easily politics came to infuse the very essence of our queer souls. By politics I don't mean elections and candidates and campaigns and voter mobilization. Rather I mean it in the way that word was most often used by radicals of the sixties and early seventies: as collective action

> for the purpose of changing institutions, power relationships, beliefs, and social practices, whether at the level of the national government and the corporation or at the level of family relationships, schools, and neighborhood institutions. (*Sexual Politics* ix)

D'Emilio further describes the formation of numerous community organizations created to address the social conditions facing gay persons. These organizations have antecedents in groups such as the Daughters of Bilitis or the Mattachine society, early organizations that sought to invigorate the notion of a gay community decades prior to the Stonewall Riots, but that moment of social resistance triggered a wave of creation of similarly gay-themed groups. Some of those organizations acted politically to change institutions and policies, others sought to serve the constituents of the burgeoning gay community more directly, by constructing institutions built to serve gay persons as distinct from the rest of society by creating cultural artifacts that gave voice to gay persons and their situations, or by providing education and support for gay persons struggling with self-acceptance or social acceptance.

Steven Epstein argues for an understanding of gay identity along the lines of Michael Omi's and Howard Winant's analysis of race not as a product of social construction simply conceived, but rather as a process of both individuals and societies grappling with multiple, sometimes conflicting ideologies. For Epstein, sexual identities, like racial identities, then, are complex, ever changing things that resist understanding through overly deterministic theories of social constructionism (46-47). Gay identity is, therefore, not a simple a product of state or societal oppression, nor is it something that freely determined by individuals. This explanation of gay identity signals the possibility of multiple, potentially conflicting understandings of gay

identity, troubling any notion of a simply defined and reproduced conception of monolithic gay identity.

Arlene Stein writes:

> To gain adherents and influence public opinion, social movements seek to define themselves….All movements seek to define their boundaries and develop a sense of collective consciousness and identity. They wish to construct a conception of themselves that might appeal to potential adherents and aid the process of mobilization.
>
> Social movements construct a sense of injustice, collective identity, and agency by engaging in "frame alignment processes." Movement leaders try to galvanize adherents through acts of cultural appropriation, in which they draw upon highly resonant themes and attempt to associate them with movement activities (*Shameless* 131).

Stein explains the actions of the aforementioned gay organizations of the Post-Stonewall era as socially and politically expedient; that is, the creation of the idea of a gay community based on some notion of gay identity serves a useful purpose when geared toward political action. She further notes that the deployment of the concept of injustice further serves that purpose, and that social movements choose themes and symbols to perform the function of linking persons to the movement. Later in this chapter, Stein explains the use of queer holocaust symbols as a strategy of linking gay persons to the liberation movement, a strategy that borrows the notion of "never forgetting" as a way of further linking adherents to the gay community. Such a strategy encourages gay Americans in the 1970s to see themselves as linked to queer Europeans during the holocaust; the call to "never forget" suggests that the historical experience belongs, in a way, to the later group.

> In the early 1970s the contemporary gay liberation movement in the United States and Europe adopted the pink triangle, the symbol worn

> by homosexual concentration camp prisoners during World War II, as a symbolic marker. Through such symbols, lesbian and gay activists recalled the historical memory of the Holocaust, exhorting them to "never forget" their slain brothers and sisters, and positioning themselves as the historical heirs of the lively pre-World War II homosexual rights movement that was extinguished by German aggression.
>
> "During the early 1980s, as the AIDS epidemic unfolded in many urban gay communities, the Holocaust frame again appeared in gay activist literature, deflecting responsibility for the disease and assigning blame to conservative activists, government bureaucrats, and health professionals. Early in the trajectory of the disease, conservatives suggested that gays were carriers of AIDS, and that they should be quarantined, lest they contaminate the rest of the population (Stein, *Shameless* 134)

Stein notes the re-emergence of holocaust discourse in the gay movement after the onset of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. She links the then current notion that the "gay problem" required containment akin to the strategies of internment and genocide used in pre-World War II Europe. Again, this reclamation of the horrors of the Holocaust as part of a gay social movement serves to encourage a conceptual link between current and past gay persons, to claim that there is some inherent link between their experiences.

That link, as Patrick Moore argues, is shame:

> Our connection at the moment is shame. We are a community of shame. Shame defines our view of a sexual past that segued into AIDS, confirming to us our worst fears about ourselves and lending the condemnation of bigots a truthful echo. Shame motivates our forward movement as we fearfully suppress image of gay people as sexual beings, encouraging instead nonthreatening roles (parent, homeowner, or campy friend) that prove "we're just like you." In our community of shame, we believe that by actively forgetting the past we can erase it, and many important parts of our legacy are now being lost or willfully abandoned. (xxi-xxii)

While Moore and Stein disagree in regard to the role of memory—Stein argues that gay movements explicitly make appeals to the past while Moore argues that "our" past is routinely forgotten—both indicate that shame serves to link gay persons and, therefore, constitutes a viable basis for the concept of gay community.

Gay Shame

If shame, then, is understood as the underlying link upon which gay identity is based and gay community is built, an exploration of shame is in order. I consult Erving Goffmann's work on stigma to unpack the notion of shame in order to understand how shame has functioned socially and politically in terms of gay community and, in particular, how it has undergirded gay pride as a social movement.

> Three grossly different types of stigma may be mentioned. First there are abominations of the body—the various physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as week will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, *homosexuality* [emphasis mine], unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior. Finally there are the tribal stigma of race, nation and religion, these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family. (13-14)

Goffmann places the stigma of homosexuality in the second category, the category of perceived individual personal failings. There is a basis for this categorization of homosexual stigma. Religious proclamations of homosexuality as sin treat it, directly or indirectly, as a personal shortcoming. Criminal proscriptions of homosexuality in the form of sodomy laws treat homosexuality as matter of individual deviance. Longstanding bans on gay persons from military service furthered the notion that gay persons were unfit for certain kinds of work. The Briggs Initiative

similarly held gay persons as unfit for teaching careers, and perpetuated the myth that gay persons threatened the well-being of children. Films such as *Cruising* conflated certain specific same-sex sexual activities with homosexuality writ large, thereby nurturing the image of gay men as sexually promiscuous, salacious, and dangerous. Alan Bérubé writes, when discussing cultural depictions of queer persons, "Homosexuals were sick people and homosexuality itself was an illness" (*Coming Out under Fire* 148). Interestingly, Epstein's work, cited earlier, argues for rethinking homosexuality as part of Goffmann's third category in order to invigorate movements for social and political equality. I argue that this frame has been adopted by much gay pride activism, in its invocations of concepts such as gay culture and gay community writ large.

The conception of homosexuality as illness has a long history, one too long to be accounted for adequately in this project. There exists history of clinical psychology's treatment of homosexuality as one that transitioned from conceiving of homosexuality as personal deviance, to disease, to unfortunate condition[10]. For the past four decades and after much political work, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the official text of the psychology industry, has considered homosexuality to be normal from a clinical standpoint, but the history of the official treatment of homosexuality as mental illness stands, and its impact on the gay liberation movement is still felt. That said, the emergence of AIDS reinvigorated the

[10] See the work of Nardi et al for an example of personal accounts of persons who explore that conception of homosexuality as illness

notion of homosexuality as diseased, but in this case, the nature of that disease is pathogenic rather than psychological (Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”).

These and countless other social phenomena served as stigmatizing conditions that created an idea what a gay person was; that is, they served to construct a kind of gay identity formation, albeit one that was irredeemably stigmatized. It is for this reason that much gay scholarship has posited the centrality of shame to gay identity and experience. That scholarship has also posited that shame, when seen as central to gay identity, is cast as something to be reckoned with, to be gotten over in the process of achieving liberation, be that liberation personal or political.

Michael Warner argues that ignoring shame is unethical. The appropriate course of action for any gay social movement, for him, is to acknowledge it and figure out what to do with/about it. This, rather than seeking legitimation as a way of mitigating shame, is, to Warner, preferable. The pursuit of a gay gene, which Warner takes as an attempt at legitimating queer sexuality, is problematic because (1) the actual realities of sexual practices are never enduring but are always historically situated, and (2) struggling against the homogenizing force of civilization has been good for liberal causes. He argues, "Sex does not need to be primordial to be legitimate. Civilization doesn't just repress our original sexuality; it makes new kinds of sexuality. And new sexualities, including learned ones, might have as much validity as ancient ones, if not more” (*The Trouble With Normal* 11). Warner suggests a middle ground between the call for total hedonism and further repression through seeking a "normal"; asks for the end of repression of new forms of sexuality as they

arise, while allowing people to stick to the old norms if they want to. Normal not bad per se, but the pursuit of legitimized normalcy can crush the very liberation the pursuit seeks to enshrine.

Noreen Giffney, in the preface to Sally Munt's *Queer Attachments*, asks what it might mean to move beyond shame.

> The failure to successfully recognise and mourn shame leaves the split subject in a melancholic state, projecting much of what is uncomfortable onto Others or else turning those feelings inwards in an effort to punish the self for one's failure to achieve what one perceives as an inability to connect. Pride as the inverse of shame is facilitated by shame at the same time that it operates as a defence mechanism employed by the subject to protect itself from recognising shame's all-pervasiveness. Queer Attachments urges us to reconsider shame and accept its role in our self-identifications and attachments. By extension, Munt insists that we cease denying shame's presence, which merely transforms our feelings of vulnerability and fear into disgust and hate, in the process simply abjecting them onto those marked out as Other. Instead of rejecting or repressing shame, Queer Attachments confronts us with it as a primary object and asks us to reclaim, embrace and possibly transgress or move beyond shame in a reparative gesture toward self-healing. (x)

Giffney suggests that, if not productive in itself, the recuperation of shame has productive value because it sets the stage for finally moving past shame. While her argument is prefaced upon the notion that moving beyond shame is ideal, her work suggests that this is only possible by staring shame in the face, rather than blithely ignoring its existence.

Arlene Stein focuses on the internal aspects of shame, paralleling Halperin and Traub's discussion of shame as something that isolates and draws inward. Stein argues that shame can be productive in its tendency to encourage modesty, discretion, and an adherence to social standards (*Shameless* 6). But, basically, shame is

something to get over, according to this view. "On its heels, the gay and lesbian liberation movements urged those who had ever harbored same-sex desires to come out of the closet and declare their sexual identifications proudly and publicly, to counter the shame and secrecy associated with homosexuality in our culture" (*Shameless* 10). The mainstream gay liberation movement, then, can be understood to be in line with gay pride. Both gay liberation and gay pride assume that publicly claiming one's sexuality leads to freedom. Both assert that shame, felt by all those labeled as gay, could and should be countered with pride.

> 1980s San Francisco: "But even in freewheeling San Francisco, discussions of what lesbians actually did between the sheets were few and far between, and the fact that there might be myriad differences, sexual or otherwise, among us was a difficult subject to raise in public. We were expected to pay allegiance to some mythical lesbian "community," and be happy, shame-free representatives of gay life. But residues of shame persisted. Shame wasn't built in a day, and it couldn't be torn down in one day either" (*Shameless* 18).

In this passage, Stein describes shame as a vestige of pre-Stonewall gay life. Her explanation, however, does not relegate shame to a historical footnote; it rather argues that shame has remained despite gay pride precisely because gay pride failed to give voice to the diverse identities and practices masked by the public face of the gay liberation movement. That is to say, pride does not counter shame. Stein's thoughts are of critical importance because they explain that shame lingers, and that lingering matters.

Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips also comment on the lingering of shame even in the midst of supposed gay pride in their account of the Gay Shame conference at the University of Michigan in 2003. They note that, despite abundant critiques of

normativity that served as the basis of the conference, little mention was made of actual anti-normative sexual practices. That is, shameful sex was not substantively discussed in the context of a shame conference. Further, AIDS went unmentioned, despite its centrality in the kind of gay liberation and pride struggles that made, for instance, made possible the conducting of a gay themed academic conference at a major research and educational institution. They note:

> Peculiarly, AIDS was not mentioned in any of the talks. I say "peculiarly" because AIDS became a major shame-inflicting weapon—a gift, as it were, sent from God—in homophobic assaults from, principally but by no means only, the Christian right on the homosexual "lifestyle." However morally repugnant we may rightly judge such attacks to be, it is difficult for HIV-infected gays not to be also infected by the shame-inducing judgment that AIDS is a punishment for their sexual sins. If, as the gay-shame theorists forcefully argue, shame is necessarily constitutive of gay subjectivity in a society that trains us from early childhood to think of homosexuality as unnatural and even criminal, to be stricken with a life-threatening disease as a direct result of having sex with another man can hardly fail to reactivate at least some of the shame that even the proudest gay men probably felt when they first discovered their sexual tastes (31-32).

Bersani and Phillips point to a limitation of some efforts to explore gay shame as something to move beyond in the pursuit of gay pride. Because of the silence on AIDS, which the authors treat as a major post-Stonewall shaming mechanism, such efforts fail to account for contemporary function as AIDS as a stigmatizing, shaming condition for gay persons.

These literatures share a common thread of discussing shame in the context of gay experience. They take as their point of departure a notion of shame that dovetails with Goffmann's definition of stigma. The shame they discuss is a feeling triggered in relation to ideological formations that a kind of personal failing, be that failing

moral/spiritual, physical, mental, or performative. Where these scholars differ is in their view of the role of shame in a post-gay liberation, post-gay pride moment. That difference, I argue, is of value precisely because it leaves open the question of how gay shame is currently being used. This question is what drives the project of this dissertation. The importance of this question is suggested by a generational shift I explore in chapter 3, where I argue that the younger gay men interviewed for that chapter claim personal experiences that do not resonate with the assumptions about gay shame made in much queer scholarship. Mary Gray's *Out in the Country*, an ethnography of rural queer youth, offers parallel insight to my claim. In that text, Gray notes that young queer persons coming of age in rural Kentucky in the early 2000s report experiences that bear some connection to traditional accounts of gay shame (feeling alone, lacking nearby social support systems, negative religious doctrine, traditional cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity), but differ from older experiences of that shame because these young people have access to a wide range of mass media depicting a variety of gay experiences, and because they are able to avail themselves of network technologies to build, or otherwise participate it, support systems that are less geographically bound than the safe spaces created by older generations of (usually urban) LGBT persons. My project is based in urban southern California, understood rightfully—but, in many ways, wrongly—as a far cry from the rural south, and my interviewees hailed primarily from urban and suburban locales rather than from rural communities. But, as subsequent chapters will indicate, I do claim that changing social conditions, made possible by changes in media and

politics, created a different world for younger gay men, whose experiences of pride and shame might differ significantly from the canonical story of gay pride as the nullification of the type of shame that forms the basis of the gay shame scholarship I have addressed above.

Shame as constitutive of gay identity?

Above I have discussed scholarship that treats shame as part of the supposed "gay experience." This section of the dissertation will explore scholarship that argues that shame is not simply part of gay experience, but is rather constitutive of that identity. Let me be clear here. I am not arguing that the kind of contextualized shame as conceived in the above-discussed literature is constitutive of gay identity. I am saying that the existing literature makes such an argument, and that such an argument compels further inquiry. That said, I begin by picking up on a nuance in Patrick Moore's work that suggests that gay shame is not simply part of the imagined gay experience, but is rather constitutive of, and is therefore necessitated by, gay identity and experience. The kind of shame that Halperin and Traub discuss can be understood as a product of stigmatizing conditions. Being vilified as criminal and/or deviant, as evil or immoral, those conditions lead to shame. They write, "Gay pride has never been able to separate itself entirely from shame, or to transcend shame. Gay pride does not even make sense without some reference to the shame of being gay, and its very successes (to say nothing of its failures) testify to the intensity of its ongoing struggle with shame" (3-4). Halperin and Traub discuss gay pride here implicitly as the opposite of shame, and point out some of the limits of gay pride as the basis for

political and social change. Their reasoning aligns with that of Wendy Brown, who argues that:

> In its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity and because the formation of identity at the site of exclusion, as exclusion, augments or "alters the direction of the suffering" entailed in subordination or marginalization by finding a site of blame for it. But in so doing, it installs its pain over its unredeemed history in the very foundation of its political claim, in its demand for recognition as identity. In locating a site of blame for its powerlessness over its past, as a past of injury, a past as a hurt will, and locating a "reason" for the "unendurable pain" of social powerlessness in the present, it converts this reasoning into an ethicizing politics, a politics of recrimination that seeks to avenge the hurt even while it reaffirms it, discursively codifies it. Politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics and can hold out no future-for itself or others-that triumphs over this pain. The loss of historical direction, and with it the loss of futurity characteristic of the late modern age, is thus homologically refigured in the structure of desire of the dominant political expression of the age-identity Politics" (406).

Brown argument about the productive aspects of pain explains why gay pride requires shame in order to make sense. Political claims based on historic marginalization require a memory of that marginalization in order to maintain salience. Without the presence of stigmatizing conditions and/or the lingering shame associated with those conditions, politicized identities lack a reason for being. Gay pride without gay shame would, then, be a movement without a cause. Cathy Caruth's theorizing of the role of history in her study of trauma similarly suggests a place for painful histories, arguing that a lack place for such histories "necessarily lead[s] to political and ethical paralysis" in the face of post-structural and deconstructionist critiques of theories of identity and society (181).

Halperin and Traub also write:

> "We wondered if it would ever be possible to create a queer sociality that could take account of those incorrigible, inwardizing impulses that drive sexual pariahs to want to have nothing to do with one another Originating as they seem to do in the shame of social rejection, those inveterate queer tendencies to disassociation and disidentification offer the greatest resistance to group cohesiveness, coalition building, political alliance, emotional and social support, erotic bonding, mutual appreciation, and queer solidarity. Even from the perspective of a gay pride agenda, it is important to confront those antisocial queer tendencies, because they pose some of the most insurmountable obstacles to the realization of gay pride. And in fact gay pride has never managed entirely to overcome the mutual hostility and self-imposed isolation of the shamed" (4).

Halperin and Traub focus on elements of gay life that have been left out of popular discourses of gay pride because of their associations with shame. In fact, shame, as understood here, is antithetical not only to the achievements of the gay pride movement, but also to the notion of community itself. Shame, in this instance, prevents persons from coming together, at least those persons left behind by the focus of the gay pride movement on normative gay sexual and social practices. That is, unless gay pride can make room for gay shame.

Shelly Munt writes, "It is my contention in this book that shame, working at different levels, performs culturally to mark out certain groups" (2). This quote places Munt's scholarship alongside the work of others who have addressed the use value of shame. For Munt, shame creates the boundaries between people that politics polices, thereby delineating the distinctions between the kinds of stigmatized groups about which Goffmann writes, and the "normals" who, in his work, constitute the non-stigmatized.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick makes the point even more clearly for gay shame in particular:

> Shame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimates the place of identity-the question of identity-at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but does so without giving that identity-space the standing of an essence. It constitutes it as to-be-constituted, which is also to say, as already there for the (necessary, productive) misconstrual and misrecognition. ("Queer Performativity" 14)

And:

> I want to say that at least for certain ("queer") people, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that has its own, powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities. ("Queer Performativity" 14)

Shame, in this understanding, is formative of gay identity because it is the primary experience of identity recognition. Shame is, therefore, useful. It is useful not only because it serves as a practical catalyst for social action, but also because it provides the basis for a kind of political identity without requiring that all who belong to that identity formation be essentially the same. This argument is of critical importance because it allows for the legitimate practice of some kinds of identity politics as well as for the study of those identity politics. Furthermore, tracing pride through shame can help account for changing social and political conditions that (thankfully) minimize stigma associated with LGBT identities and sexual practices, while still allowing LGBT mobilization in the political realm, an important possibility in an era marked by claims of success, progress, and equality in liberal locales, but lingering injustice in others.

Limits of pride/liberation discourse

Let me make it clear that, when I talk about the minimizing of stigmatizing conditions facing gay persons, or when I claim that social progress for gay persons is being achieved, I am addressing the popularity of discourses of LGBT progress; I am not arguing for the veracity of the claims. If I, for example, reference the popularity of the "It Gets Better" meme as it relates to childhood and adolescent bullying, the success of legislative and judicial action in establishing marriage equality and the concomitant discourses of celebration surrounding those achievements, the proliferation of gay characters in mass media, the coming out of gay athletes, etc., I do so because those things are emblematic of a significant shift in the cultural treatment of gay male identity, even if they do not signify a shift in the treatment of actual gay men, particularly those experiencing intersectional exclusions and oppressions based on race, citizenship status, age, HIV status, perceived masculinity, experiences of poverty, etc. These actual lived experiences vary greatly, and that range of experience is too vast for me to address here.

The discourse of progress itself is significant because it, among other things, serves to frame the situation in such a fashion as to render feasible progressive cultural changes. The recently popular cultural opposition to the bullying of gay youth (or youth who are perceived by bullies to be gay) does little to prevent actual violence against gay youth--to say nothing of the meme's ineffectiveness in redressing any violence already committed. The popularity of the idea, by itself, is no guarantee that young persons will not continue to suffer. That said, the new meme constitutes an improvement over the older meme of "smear the queer," which validated and

valorized violence against gay males by legitimizing and carving out a space for that sort of activity. When the popular discourse supports--or outright encourages, violence against gay persons, pushing for changes in violent cultural practices is unlikely to result in any sort of legal, cultural, political, or social change. However, when the underlying assumptions of the cultural debate changes --in this case, from "violence against gays is legitimate" to "violence against gays is terrible"--it becomes possible, then, for the push toward progress to gain traction. The push to minimize violence, on a practical rather than discursive level, would then fit within popular discussions of societal values. Without the discursive shift, a proposed shift in cultural practices of violence would lack a place in the extant popular imagination.

The shift in discourses surrounding queer sexualities should be understood not as proof of definitive progress and/or the elimination of all, or even most, forms of legal and social discrimination against queer persons. However, a failure to account for those changes renders us blind to potentially important lived experiences among queer persons, who are not monolithic in their experiences, and who, for myriad reasons, might feel differently about their position within social structures. This point is important because discourses of pride and shame presume a common set of social and political experiences; that notion, as Halperin reminds us, is the thing that forms the basis of gay male identity in the first place. My concern—both intellectual and personal—is that this presumption of a particular type of contextualized shame might leave certain members of the "community" feeling cold. That is, I wonder how queer persons whose biographies differ from the now canonical story of queer persons as

victim of exclusion, ostracization, and denigration because of their queerness might connect to stories that purport to tell their stories as queer subjects, but efface important aspects of their lived experience.

Again, let me be clear here. I am not suggesting that happy queer experiences have come to constitute a new normal. Nor am I suggesting that the contexts of shame as historically established and embedded in the important gay studies literature is no longer relevant. Nor am I suggesting that the lived experiences of persons who experienced those struggles in real, direct ways should be understood only as artifacts of history. Those experiences form the basis of the thing that we call queer or LGBT community. Further, I argue, the polemics of gay shame have functioned as tools for addressing the structural and social mistreatment of queer persons. Arguing that discrimination against queer persons harms those persons has been persuasive both culturally and legally[11]. Those shame narratives demonstrate a significant effectiveness that cannot be ignored even by those who might otherwise see little value in explorations of shame.

Further, I suggest that a reconsideration of shame in light of Tomkins's work suggests another basis for the utility of shame during this time of rapid social change. Because, for Tomkins, shame precedes the kind of cognitive and emotional activity that undergirds the highly contextualized shame narratives upon with gay shame literature is based (again, those are forms of shame based on experiences of moral/spiritual, mental, social, and performative failure vis-à-vis normative notions of

[11] See the decision in Windsor v. United States for an eample of this in action. According to the Court, institutional denial of Edie Windsor's rights of inheritance created financial harm. That harm is what their decision addresses.

sex, sexuality, and gender), shame can still be a useful tool. Because, in this framework, shame can be better understood as a response to unmet expectations of pleasure, queer persons who perhaps did not experience the implicitly closeting conditions of a pre- and early post-Stonewall America, and who did not have firsthand experiences of the worst years of the AIDS crisis, could still be understood as experiencing a kind of shame when they find themselves confronted with structures that maintain related, but importantly different, relations of inequality.

Limits of visibility and community

In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory,* Michael Warner asks "What do queers want?"(vii). Much gay liberation and gay pride movement activity has been predicated on the notion that visibility, in and of itself, constitutes a significant, legitimate goal. While that visibility has arguably brought about numerous structural and cultural victories, there are critiques of the notion that visibility is an unmitigated good. Thomas Brennan articulates the value of "strategic comings-out," where well-timed, well-orchestrated declarations of same-sex identity can serve to gently reveal to the straight public that certain respected, valued persons are also gay (69-70). This approach, because it requires maintenance of the closet and encourages persons to remain inside of that closet, seems accommodationist when compared to the mandate to be "out and proud" given by the gay liberation and gay pride movements, but Brennan (and countless others) have suggested that the strategic approach is effective in changing negative sentiment regarding gay persons.

Andrew Kirk furthers this idea in his critique of the notion of the importance of coming out in the gay liberation/gay pride movements. In "Embracing Ambiguity in a Critical/Queer Pedagogy," Kirk argues that, because both movements have been predication upon the notion that public declarations of sexual identity are critical to social progress for queer persons, the movements have ignored ways in which the ambiguity inherent in the closet can challenge heteronormativity. I will not go as far as substantiating that specific claim, but I will note that Kirk's argument has a lineage in the debates about coming out, debates that emerged on a grand scale post-Stonewall, and that are articulated today in debates about whether or not, for examples, celebrities should come out.

The scholarship cited in earlier sections of this chapter have constructed an idea of gay community both as constituted by a commonality of identity among gay persons and as a structure that has undergirded the gay liberation and gay pride movements. David Woolwine's study of community among gay men in New York suggests that formal community for gay men tends to happen through organizations rather than through imagined bonds between otherwise disconnected gay persons. While his work does not suggest that this form of community is the most important for the men in his study—in fact, friendship and interpersonal connection seem to establish community more than anything else—where a formal sense of community is established, it happens more through community organizations than through an imagined sense of formal community (31-32). By that I mean, for the men in Woolwine's study, imagined community constitutes a less powerful notion of

community than do actual interpersonal relationships between and among gay men. The invocation, then, of an overarching gay community that supposedly exists at, the state, national, or perhaps global level, seems problematic. But it is precisely this kind of invocation that "gay liberation" and "gay pride" make. Those concepts tend to assume a broad community of LGBT persons without a basis for the links that would make that community real. This is where an exploration of gay community organizations is useful. In particular, an exploration of how organizations perpetuate links between people, links that serve as the basis for community, is in order for groups that see themselves as part of the gay liberation/gay pride movements.

More recently, Martin Holt has explored the notion of gay community (termed gay community attachment in his work) on techniques of HIV prevention education. Such work was predicated on the assumption that involvement in the gay community correlated with increased use of HIV prevention methods by gay men. Holt found, however, that the men in his study had ambivalent ideas about the idea of a gay community and their connection to such a community (865-866). For his work, such a finding signals challenges for future HIV education programs; if gay men do not take gay community as a given, then education methods predicated upon the value of gay community risk failure.

For my work, this revelation by Holt's research participants suggests that, perhaps because of the social and political gains made in and by the gay liberation and gay pride movements, gay community attachment, as Holt terms it, is no longer the primary basis for gay identity, but is vestigial, with personal communities created by

common affinities taking its place. If so, I wonder about the appeal for contemporary gay organizations for (mostly younger) gay men. If the concept of a "gay community" of men already bound to one another because of shared identity holds less sway than it once did, will there continue to be a perceived need for such organizations? Deborah Cook's question about the relationship between needs and interests and their role in the establishment of solidarity is instructive here. Cook argues against the Habermasian notion that solidarity is predicated solely upon need, suggesting instead that shared interest might also facilitate solidarity (106). As support for same sex marriage comes from an ever growing majority of the population, as varied cultural depictions of gay persons proliferate, with sodomy lows struck down and bans on gay persons in military service have been rescinded, will younger gay men—who perhaps come of age in an era where personal connection rather than imagined bonds linking persons who happen to share an identity marker—I wonder if Cook's argument rings true. Further, I wonder if younger gay men will see gay community organizations, created in an era of marked by gay shame, as legitimate sites for establishing the interpersonal connections they value?

Intersectional critiques of mainstream LGBT politics

The incremental progress outline above has been experienced unequally by persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender. Persons marginalized in LGBT spaces because of race, class status, HIV status, national origin, geographic location, or for myriad other reasons find the inequalities they experience in the world at large reproduced and rearticulated in gay spaces. Intersectional

analysis, popularized by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, offers a way of understanding both how important differences within a particular identity formation get glossed over in problematic ways, and how we might address in positive ways those differences that are often rendered invisible. Her article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" suggests the theoretical and practical limits of any kind of simple identity politics, and cautions against the blind acceptance of solutions to complex social problems that are based on monolithic notions of identity.

Progress has been problematically limited in ways that intersectional analysis can elucidate. The benefits that have accrued to a mainstream gay male community have not been universally and/or equally made available to all men who carry a gay identity marker. In fact, the inequities in access to these benefits parallels, and, in some cases, exacerbates, inequities that exist in the larger world, inequities that are articulated through difference in factors including, but not limited to: race, nationality, citizenship status, socioeconomic class, HIV status, and geographic location

Civil benefits of marriage do not accrue to undocumented persons. Given the recent and current focus on immigration reform in Congress, this point is not insignificant. Likewise, until summer of 2013, there was no federal marriage benefit offered to same-sex transnational couples whose marriages were recognized by states. That some states still deny marriage benefits meant that such couples, if unable relocate to any of the same sex marriage-granting states, were still in this bind, Finally

of course, none of the political gains reaped in the struggle for legal recognition of same-sex marriage are experienced by unmarried gay persons.

Naisargi Dave writes about the supposed incommensurability of Indian and lesbian identities, a conundrum facilitated by the prevalence of the notion that lesbian equals White/Western, a notion that created a feeling of being torn between sexual and national identities in persons who had not previously felt torn along those axes (660). While her understanding of affect in that piece differs greatly from my own, her point about incommensurability is important because of how it manifests a central tenet of queer person of color critiques of LGBT scholarship and activism. The Indian and lesbian claim, and the implicit understanding that the two cannot go together, suggests that the mainstream LGBT movement has not properly accounted for the experiences of, or even the presence of, persons who are either not White or not Western. This calls to mind Margaret Cho's commentary on this phenomenon of casting queerness as a white/western phenomenon. As Maythee Rojas states in revisiting Cho's comedy routine:

> In broken English, Cho mimics her mother leaving a message on her answering machine asking Cho why she has not discussed the matter with her. "You have a cool mommy. Mommy is so cool and Mommy know all about the gay," Cho's mother assures her. "There are so many gay. So many gay, you know, all over, all over the world...so many gay, so many gay all over the world, but not Korea, Not Korea!" (98)

As Cho (and, by extension, Rojas) notes, there continues to exist a notion that LGBT persons, causes, politics, and scholarship are, at their core, centered on Whiteness. For further examples, see the work of Kobena Mercer or E. Patrick Johnson, who point out the limits of and argue against the centering of whiteness in gay male scholarship,

politics and art; their work suggests the need for a queer scholarship that carves out space for the subject position of black men, rather than treating such positions as marginal to an implicitly white gay frame. David Eng, Gilbert Caluya and Han Chong-Suk each offer parallel critiques of the whiteness of gay male scholarship and politics, highlighting ways in which Asian male perspectives are decentered and/or ignored.

Hiram Perez writes about a particular manifestation of this decentering of brown bodies and their experiences from gay male scholarship. While participating in the Gay Shame Conference at the University of Michigan in 2003, Perez was accused of 'hijacking' when attempting to bring into focus concerns of queer persons of color and the lack of focus on those concerns at the conference. Perez writes:

> "The very presence of dissident bodies [At the aforementioned Gay Shame Conference]—or rather the unacceptable metaphysics of this presence as distinguished from objectification as spectacle—also constitutes a hijacking. Brown bodies must never improvise on their brownness. Whiteness experiences such improvisations as the theft of something very dear: its universal property claim to the uniqueness of being. Queer theorizing, as it has been institutionalized, is proper to—and property to—white bodies. Colored folk perform affect but can never theorize it. Actually, shame seemed strangely disaffected at the conference; U.S. race discourse stipulates that gay shame, as an experience both visceral and self-reflexive, be recuperated for whiteness. The charge of "hijacking" contains my dissent as fanaticism. But it also foregrounds queer theory's own indivisibilities—its own unacknowledged stakes in identity. Those stakes not only include whiteness, masculinity, and even heteronormativity but perhaps also do so in uniquely American formations" (174).

Here Perez asserts that mainstream gay studies tends to invoke shame as integral to gay history, but as an artifact of gay history, something that was done in the past, addressed, moved beyond. Even if it takes shame as integral to gay identity itself, it is

still because it is fixed in history, not ongoing. Perez further notes that cosmopolitan gayness has a place for bodies of color, but only as objects against which its own concerns are set (sensuality/sex, shame, etc.) and constructed against those brown bodies for the benefit of whiteness.

José Muñoz's work on disidentification is of particular use here. The preceding paragraphs have taken the elision or mistreatment of persons of color from white spaces resulting from practices of exclusion or domination by white thinkers directed at persons of color as its point of departure; Muñoz recognizes the basis for that point of departure, but also considers the disconnect between white and racial minority positions vis-à-vis gay identity from a different critical position:

> The cultural performers I am considering in this book must negotiate between a fixed identity disposition and the socially encoded roles that are available for such subjects. The essentialized understanding of identity (i.e., men are like this, Latinas are like that, queers are that way) by its very nature must reduce identities to lowest-common-denominator terms…. (6).
>
> Following Connolly's lead, I understand the labor (and it is often, if not always, work) of making identity as a process that takes place at the point of collision of perspectives that some critics and theorists have understood as essentialist and constructivist. This collision is precisely the moment of negotiation when hybrid, racially predicated, and deviantly gendered identities arrive at representation. In doing so, a representational contract is broken; the queer and the colored come into perception and the social order receives a jolt that may reverberate loudly and widely, or in less dramatic, yet locally indispensable, ways (6).
>
> The version of identity politics that this book participates in imagines a reconstructed narrative of identity formation that locates the enacting of self at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit. Such identities use and are the fruits of a practice of disidentificatory reception and performance" (6).

For Muñoz, disidentification occurs at those moments of rupture between poles of identity thought incommensurable when using essentialist or naïve constructivist notions of identity (think Indian and lesbian). Further:

> The processes of crafting and performing the self that I examine here are not best explained by recourse to linear accounts of identification. As critics who work on and with identity politics well know, identification is not about simple mimesis, but, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us in the introduction to *The Epistemology of the Closet*, "always includes multiple processes of identifying with. (8).

Muñoz cites Sedgwick in highlighting the potential usefulness of a slight modification of the concept of identity (the shift that explains his use of the term disidentification as a response to the limits of identity politics): we can understand identity not as a process that marks people as the same, but rather as a process wherein people, diverse in various ways, establish links between and among themselves along axes of similarity or shared interest. That is, they do not identify as the same as one another, they identify with one another. As Sedgwick earlier noted, "People are different from each other" (Axiomatic 323). This seemingly simple point called into question the very basis of essentialist and social constructionist notions of identity while leaving room for actual practices of identification between persons in the world.

A note

I fear that as we seek to refine scholarly and political thinking on gay identity, our legitimate concerns regarding conceptual coherence may, at times, impede our politics. That is to say, the critiques I have addressed in this section are of importance to me. I have written about them in other works, and I will continue to do so. The real experiences of those of us excluded (because of race, disability, citizenship status, or

any other reason) from these mainstream marches toward progress are important, particularly when our exclusion constitutes the violation of the rights to equal protection under the law, equal opportunity, and personal autonomy. However, an unfortunate eventuality occurs when our legitimate claims are taken up in the conservative discourse. Our valid expressions of dissatisfaction lend themselves to being co-opted by those who would set back progress for all gay persons. When we argue, for instance, that granting marriage equality to gay persons achieves nothing, or even risks exacerbating negative conditions for some segments of the gay male community (those whose interests have been ignored in the singular push for marriage above all, for instance), we risk aiding and abetting those who might argue that gay men will never be happy until we are granted "special treatment" or are otherwise successful in advancing the "gay agenda," whatever that is. When we are perceived as complaining in the face of apparent success, even (perhaps especially) when those complaints are valid, we lend credence to the notion that equality is not what we are asking for.

This is a terrible position to be in. It is, however, not an unfamiliar one to those of us acquainted with histories of oppression based on race, gender, (dis)ability, etc. One of the spoils of privilege is that one may dismiss valid claims of injustice by insinuating that those who experience said injustice are complaining simply for the sake of complaining. "We give them marriage equality, and they're still angry." "We allow gay kids into the Boy Scouts, and they're still not happy." "What else could they possibly want?" These kinds of rebuttals, though wrongheaded in their assumptions,

maintain currency among those who most strongly wish to see our contingent, incremental gains set back.

The San Diego Gay Men's Chorus

The San Diego Gay Men's Chorus is a viable space for an exploration of pride through shame. As of 2014, the chorus has served an active role in the mainstream LGBT community in San Diego. The group is a regular fixture at the annual tree lighting ceremony hosted on World AIDS Day by Mama's Kitchen, a local non-profit organization that provides meals for people affected by AIDS. The tree lighting ceremony is the only non-concert performance in which all chorus members are required to participate. The group also performs annually at the Harvey Milk Diversity Breakfast, a major civic event that honors Milk's legacy. The group also performs at San Diego's annual AIDS Walk, the fundraising gala hosted each year by the city's LGBT community center; and in the annual Pride Parades and festivals sponsored by the city of San Diego and by the neighboring communities in South Bay, East County, and North County. The chorus donates portions of proceeds from its three annual concert productions to a range of service organizations in San Diego County; past recipients have included the Sunburst Youth Housing Project for young queer persons who lack adequate housing, and Stepping Stone, a residential treatment program for queer San Diegans struggling with substance abuse.

In recent years, the group has been involved in rallies and events in support of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, marriage equality, anti-bullying efforts, support

for HIV/AIDS organizations, and other *causes célèbres* of contemporary mainstream gay politics. Because the organization exists to put on public performances, this support has been expressed publicly, through song, for audiences assembled to bear witness to the struggles experienced by queer persons and to celebrate when progress is made toward the elimination of those struggles.

When the chorus was founded in 1985, known then as the San Diego Men's Chorus, simply existing as a gay-identified group was risky endeavor, evidenced, in part, by the lack of an explicitly gay marker in the Chorus's name at that time. The risk of existing as such, however, offered a place for open expressions of gay identity at a time when such opportunities were few and far between. Today, these opportunities are somewhat less rare, particularly in coastal southern California. At the most recent Harvey Milk Diversity Breakfast in San Diego, where SDGMC performed the Star-Spangled Banner to kick off the event, more than 1200 civic and community leaders were in attendance, including the city's mayor. This is a far cry from the Reagan era, where the former president famously failed to adequately address the burgeoning AIDS crisis known at the time to be decimating the gay male population of the US, and that would go on to claim numerous lives of persons of all backgrounds and sexualities. To say that San Diego's gay men suffer silent, invisible lives because of the stigma of homosexuality seems incorrect. To suggest the public knowledge of those men's sexual identities currently constitutes the same kind of risk that it did decades ago seems similarly incorrect, given the visibility of out gay men in so many venues, and the official recognition of gay persons and communities by the

local government. The stigmatizing conditions described above are changing. How, then, does a group like SDGMC ensure that its existence causes people (potential members, potential fans, etc.) to *feel* something—be it allegiance, pride, fear, or revulsion—akin to the way its existence fostered such feelings in the group's early days in the mid-1980s? In particular, how are those feelings related to histories of shame? I suspect that a strategic deployment of shame associated with the political and social histories mentioned above offers SDGMC a way of connecting persons to one another and to a history replete with the kind of negative sentiment that inspired the LGBT pride movement.

When talking about SDGMC and its articulation of gay identity, it is critical to note a series of historically significant moments in the organization's life. As previously stated, the chorus was initially formed as the San Diego Men's Chorus (without the word 'gay' in the title). In 1992, a small group of SDMC members left the chorus to form the Gay Men's Chorus of San Diego; this is the chorus I initially joined. This rift was triggered, in part, by disagreements over the desire to mark the group as explicitly gay in its name, marketing strategies, and performance programming. Both organizations continued to operate in the San Diego community and as members of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, but GMCSD remained the only one of the two to explicitly identify itself as a gay chorus in its name. In 2009, the two choruses performed a joint concert, and, in January 2010, merged to form the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus.

Another reason for considering the importance of negative affect in the functioning of a group like SDGMC is because the use of negative affect here parallels its use in other areas of identity politics. The histories of minority groups in the US are often understood as histories of struggle, discrimination, and oppression. I, therefore, and because of the organization's self-description, consider the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus (SDGMC) as a gay-identity-based community organization, rather than simply as a men's chorus that just happens to be composed of gay members. The chorus's mission statement reads:

> To create a positive musical experience through exciting performances which engage our audiences, build community support and provide a dynamic force for social change (SDGMC.org).

The vision statement reads:

> We connect, inspire and challenge:
> -Our chorus members, by nurturing artistic and personal growth, while building a musical family.
> -Our audiences, by broadening cultural awareness of important social issues and the bonds that unite us all.
> -Our communities, by serving as a catalyst for individual and social transformation. (SDGMC.org)

The values statement reads:

> **M**usical Excellence: Dedication to the highest artistic standards.
> **U**nity: Fellowship and fun with a commitment to collaboration and communication, both within the chorus and in harmony with the larger community.
> **S**ocial Responsibility: Commitment to equality, social justice, arts advocacy and service to underserved segments of society.
> **I**ntegrity: Affirmation of *our gay identity* with honesty, respect and just treatment of all [emphasis mine].
> **C**ollaboration: Innovative partnerships that advance mutual interests". (SDGMC.org)

These statements suggest that, in addition to prioritizing its artistic functions, SDGMC views itself as an organization based upon a gay identity formation, and as an organization obliged to engage in community work.

To be a singing member of SDGMC, one must be comfortable being identified as a gay man. There is no specific rule that states that members must self-identify as gay; we have, as of 2013, had singing members who do not identify as gay. However, the group views itself and presents itself to the world as a gay men's chorus, not as a gay-friendly chorus or as a gay-and-allies chorus[12]. The organization currently doesn't allow as singing members persons who do not identify as men (or are not comfortable being identified by others as such, regardless of one's own gender/sex identity), but during my time as a member, there has been no group discussion of this point. When I spoke to the Artistic Director, who has been affiliated with the group since its second year of existence, I asked about rules regarding gender identity but he did not recall any instance where the current policy has been questioned. I bring this up because I do question the facile link between the categories initialized in the LGBT moniker. Despite the currency of that term, and despite the well-established history of transgender support for gay and lesbian causes, gay and lesbian support for transgender persons and causes has not been consistent. Ann Cvetkovich and Selena Wahng discuss this point in their account of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and its inclusion, in 1999, of a "womyn-born womyn" admission policy, a move that

[12] There is a basis for each of these listed strategies. Member organizations of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses take these and other options regarding the determination of who is eligible to perform.

sparked much discussion about alliances, transphobia, womyn's identity, and justice. During my time with SDGMC, no similar conversations have, to my knowledge, taken place.

SDGMC's existence as a community organization can be understood on two major counts: its reliance on volunteer members who share their time and talents with the group without monetary compensation; and on its mission to serve the LGBT (and mainstream) communities of the city and county of San Diego. SDGMC advertises auditions three times per year. The audition serves to ensure that potential members are at least semi-skilled musical performers. The group is not a professional one, and it sets no professional barriers to entry. There are dues (currently 75 dollars per concert) and costs associated with membership. Because those costs can prevent community members from participating, the organization formally offers scholarships and deferred payment plans. Semi-formally, there is a culture of giving within the chorus; group members contribute to a Buddy Fund that provides financial assistance to members facing financial burdens that would preclude their membership and participation in chorus activities that incur significant costs, such as the organization's annual retreat.

In addition to being open to the community as members, SDGMC can be understood as a community organization based on its involvement with the larger San Diego community. In addition to its tri-annual concert performances, where the group raises funds to donate to community partner organizations, the chorus performs at numerous civic and county events, such as the opening of the new library in

downtown San Diego. The group also performs regularly at events put on by or that affect the local gay community, such as the various PRIDE events that take place in the county, the Harvey Milk Diversity Breakfast. The group also performs at various politically-significant events for the gay community, such as at the celebration for the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and at the rally held at the LGBT community center while awaiting the decision in the two landmark Supreme Court cases of 2013.

Key to the group's success is its cadre of non-singing members who participate in all aspects of the organization except vocal performance (volunteers can and do participate in performances in other ways). SDGMC has a team of volunteers who perform work essential to the day-to-day running of the organization. There is also an Executive Board tasked with the management of nearly every aspect of chorus management except making artistic decisions. Participation on both of those teams is open to any local resident who wishes to offer her services to the chorus.

The next section will discuss the use of shame as a part of SDGMC's regular functions (during rehearsals, at official events, and during performances). This discussion will outline recent deployment of historically-grounded shame, as discussed earlier. This will not be an in-depth presentation and analysis of the manifestation and management of shame in choral activities. Rather, this section serves only to introduce some of the activities of the chorus. A more careful consideration of these manifestations takes place in chapter three, which is devoted specifically to that topic.

Broadly speaking, this dissertation considers shame when manifest in three different types of choral activities: during "talks," or moments where someone addresses the chorus with a message, in moments where the group works on musical and stage repertoire, and when the group presents itself to the public in non-musical ways. An example of the first manifestation of shame is when the Artistic Director takes a moment during rehearsal—often because of the material the group is rehearsing or because of some current news event—to discuss the chorus's relationship to the AIDS crisis, usually limited to the era from the mid-1980s through the late 1990s, or about the trials of coming out publicly. The Director has, on many occasions, talked about how the chorus lost numerous members to AIDS, how the chorus agreed to sing at funerals for members and loved ones, in many cases where the families of those persons had abandoned them. He also often mentions (and frames the conversation around) the times when coming out meant losing families, and how the chorus provided a stable support system for many people who lost theirs when their homosexuality became known.

Choral repertoire also, at times, directly takes on gay issues that relate to the experiences of exclusion, mistreatment, disenfranchisement, and vilification that many gay men have experienced, and that is outlined above. Moreover, some repertoire gives voice to more recent explorations of topics that could be understood as formative of gay shame. In April 2011, SDGMC performed "Through a Glass Darkly," a one-act rock opera depicting a gay man's struggles with crystal meth addiction and how his addiction affects those around him, primarily his partner. Other work has

addressed the effect of having gay relationships devalued and the struggle for legal recognition for those relationships.

The chorus presents itself to the public in many ways, one of which I will focus on here. To inform prospective members about the organization, SDGMC hosts a tri-annual Info Night, where chorus members speak about their experiences with the chorus. I have attended each info night since May 2009; at each one, a chorus member, usually one who has been a member for at least ten years, speaks about how the chorus has filled some sort of empty space caused by the stigmatizing conditions of gay life.

These kinds of moments are not rare. Because they happen with some frequency, I wondered what function they serve. It is my guess that such moments are serve to remind members of the shame that forms the basis of gay identity, thereby reasserting that identity and encouraging investment in it. This is particularly true for younger members and those without firsthand experience of those conditions. The notion of gay shame as constitutive of gay identity relies on the notion that gay men experience the shame of the stigmatizing conditions that supposedly define gay experience. Younger members, born in the 1990s, do not and did not necessarily experience the same kind of cultural silencing of gay voices, unquestioned legal subjugation of gay bodies or the terror of the early AIDS crisis. Further, members who are in my age range occupy a middle position vis-à-vis these stigmatizing condition. For instance, I was in elementary school when AIDS was identified and dubbed a ‘gay disease’. I was too young to know I was gay and too young to worry

about getting a disease through sex. I was also too young to worry about getting arrested for violating sodomy laws, or to worry about job protections in the mid-1980s. I know this firsthand because I was alive and aware during it the time, but my affective response to it might well be different from someone who was a gay adult at the time.

This dissertation elicits information about how SDGMC uses shame. That is, I am interested in knowing what the chorus *does* with shame, both for its members and for the broader community. SDGMC's sees itself as playing a role in LGBT activism particularly, but also in the chorus's participation in the gay movement more broadly defined. That is, the chorus sees itself operating with a kind of progressive gay male identity, and participates in the narrative of struggle against, and ultimately success over, oppression of LGBT persons. That story is a commonly told one. It taps into a tradition of configuring gay history as a series of successes and setbacks against legal and cultural mistreatment. As outlined earlier, there exists a canonical gay history in the US, one that begins in a pre-Stonewall era of silence and near invisibility, explodes into sight with the Stonewall Riots and the subsequent struggles for gay liberation, is shaken by the crisis of HIV/AIDS and, and has coalesced into a relatively successful movement for equality. The mainstream gay pride movement finds its *raison d'être* in this history. SDGMC and similar organizations see themselves as part of this history.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two, Pride Shame and Queer Publics, explores the concept of queer publics, first as counterpublics, and then as publics that seek, through gay pride activism, to position themselves within the social mainstream. In that discussion I interrogate the tension between public and private in queer activist and LBGT pride politics, as manifest in approaches to sex as a public/private matter as articulated in and through public sex spaces. I then take a brief look at studies of Queer Nation as an example of a queer counterpublic that, unlike public sex spaces, uses sex explicitly as a public declaration, rather than resorting to public sex as an attempt to ensure privacy. I then turn to the relatively small body of scholarship on LGBT choruses to configure a different kind of queer public, one that is not well understood by examinations of queer public sex spaces nor by analyses of queer oppositional public activism. In that chapter I argue that LGBT choruses, because they are publicly-oriented public groups that provide opportunities for members to reckon with gay shame as part of an explicitly gay pride paradigm, they call for scholarly attention

Chapter three, Pride, Shame and the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus, outlines the history of the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus, the current incarnation of the first men's chorus that represented San Diego in the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses. Through interviews with the Artistic Director and with other chorus members, I explore how the group has provided opportunities for working through gay shame associated with the closet and with HIV/AIDS. I also draw upon information that has been made available to me as a longtime member of the chorus. I argue that

the chorus operates with a set of narratives of gay shame that it periodically recounts during rehearsals and other chorus events. Because, as the interviews included in that chapter suggest, younger members do not necessarily identify with those narratives, created as they were from conditions that preceded the maturity (and in some cases, the actual birth) of younger members, I inquire as to the effect of those stories on those members.

The fourth chapter, Performing Shame: "I Want More Life," examines SDGMC's performances of Michael Shaieb's "I Want More Life," a choral setting of a speech from Tony Kushner's Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. In this chapter, I offer my experiences as a chorus member with little prior experience with AIDS as a personal matter learning to perform the story of someone wanting to live in the face of death. In 2011, SDGMC performed the piece during the first act of its "Friend me" concert, which consisted of a series of contemporary songs addressing the importance of and the challenges associated with friendship, community, love, and acceptance. The 2011 performance was for a general audience; SDGMC later performed the piece at the 2012 Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses Convention in Denver. This performance was held for an audience consisting almost entirely of persons who identify as LGBT, and who themselves participate in the LGBT chorus circuit.

Chapter five, Performing Shame: Failed Masculinity, explores moments of SDGMC activity that are based on modes of performance often associated with gay male identity and its supposedly failed masculinity. I explore my own challenges—

and discuss challenges voiced by others—in performing choreographic repertoire that challenge the boundaries of normative masculinity. I do so as an exploration of gay shame associated with failed masculinity, but of a performance of that shame that takes place within the context of a pride-oriented exhibition.

Methodology

Chapter three will be framed around a collection of interviews of a small cadre of chorus members who were involved with the organization during each of its major phases. Questions were designed to elicit narrative responses from participants, rather than foreclosing their input. I begin by confirming when they joined the chorus and I ask what prompted their decision to join. From there, participants describe their experiences. When they ask for clarification, I explain that I'd like them to share with me their memories of participation. I did not prompt participants to share their feelings about those memories; when they engaged the language of affect and emotion, they did so of their own accord.

Because members have such varying experiences of participation, the only real standard part of the interview is the beginning, where I establish the basics of their participation as singers in the group (month and year of initial membership, which section they sing in, if they perform in other capacities. In most cases, that portion of the interview simply confirmed factual information I already knew.

When they began discussing their experiences in depth, the sessions moved in myriad directions. I did ask participants about their involvement in other gay

organizations, but because that involvement varies, how I link that participation to their tenure in the chorus also necessarily varies.

Interviews were conducted face to face in all cases except one, where I conducted the interview over the phone. I did not record the interviews. I anticipated doing so because I feared being unable to take notes while participants were speaking, but typing notes proved to be simple enough. Also, some participants did voice concern about being recorded; they reported feeling a sense of pressure to "say the right things", a pressure that seemed to be eliminated when I took written notes instead. Paul Thompson's work focuses primarily on how oral history can change the discipline of history, but offers useful advice to non-historians about how and why to collect histories. He also suggests, "Of course oral evidence once recorded can and indeed should be used by lone scholars in libraries just like any other type of documentary source. But to be content with this is to lose a key advantage of the method: its flexibility, the ability to pin down evidence just where it is needed" (Chapter 1). I heeded this call to be flexible both in looking for models for interview structure and content, but also in how I conducted interviews. Lisa Power's work provides a similar model for eliciting information from people, and her work focuses specifically on involvement in gay organizations.

Though these interviews do not constitute oral histories in that they do not seek to account for entire lifetimes of experience (see Robert Perks's and Alistair Thompson's *The Oral History Reader*), I approached them with a perspective shaped by the oral history tradition because the interviews did encourage participants to

reflect on experiences that unfolded over time, rather than relaying information about a recent event.

I take care not to overvalue interviews or oral histories as research tools. Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont rightly argue against what they call the "interview society" of some social science departments. The interviews used in this project do not stand on their own; the insights they offer are intended to be read in conversation with the material provided in chapter two, along with the analyses offered in this chapter and in chapters four and five. Micaela Di Leonardo also argues for the combined use of oral history and ethnographic methods, which I display in this project. I also want to acknowledge the insights provided by Linda Shopes regarding oral histories and the challenges presented by institutional review boards. Her work provided both philosophical insights into how to prepare interviews, but also practical insights into how to navigate institutional requirements for human subjects research. The University of California, San Diego Human Research Protections Program granted approval for the human subjects portion of this project on August 8, 2013.

(Auto)ethnographic Methods

In this section I review basic approaches to ethnographic research. Because chapters four and five address uses of shame within SDGMC that are not part of the organization's self-narrative, historical research methods are insufficient for the task. For reasons I will address below, oral histories also provide limited access to the information necessary for the desired analysis, so other methods are called for.

The first set of sources will discuss uses of ethnographic research, and some limitations of that type of research. The second set of literature will discuss autoethnography as an alternative to traditional ethnography. Because neither standard ethnography nor standard autoethnography provide a serviceable framework for this specific project, the third set of literature will discuss analytic autoethnography as a kind of middle ground between those two methods. This middle ground serves as a model for the approach used for chapters four and five of this dissertation.

Ethnography

Clifford Geertz's work has served as a model for ethnographic work for decades. He offers a model for how to enter into and explore cultures different from one's own, and argues for the use of thick description in accounting for observed cultural phenomena. Thick description is called for because, in Geertz's estimation, it serves to provide a textual translation of complex cultural practices. A broad critique of Geertz is not my goal here, but his approach is insufficient for this project for a few reasons. Diedre Sklar's ethnographic work on dance, traditional in its adherence to standard modes of ethnographic observation and description, argues that textuality as the primary or essential way of knowing fails to properly account for the phenomena she observed. Given that her subject was dance, a kinesthetic rather than linguistic practice, her criticism of traditional ethnography's privileging of textuality is particularly salient. I would argue that my project, though focused on SDGMC's self-description and self-presentation, which is at least partially linguistic, will also focus on practices that make use of non-linguistic performative strategies.

Dwight Conquergood's work more richly explains this point. He cites Zora Neale Hurston in offering another way in which textuality in cultural description risks failure.

> "In addition to the ethnocentrism of the culture-is-text metaphor, Geertz's theory needs to be critiqued for its particular fieldwork-as-reading model: "Doing ethnography is like trying to read [...] a manuscript" (150).
>
> Instead of listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity with the protest performances of the people, as Douglass recommended, the ethnographer, in Geertz's scene, stands above and behind the people and, uninvited, peers over their shoulders to read their texts, like an overseer or a spy. There is more than a hint of the improper in this scene: the asymmetrical power relations secure both the anthropologist's privilege to intrude and the people's silent acquiescence (although one can imagine what they would say about the anthropologist's manners and motives when they are outside his reading gaze)" (150).
>
> "In Hurston's brilliant example, vulnerable people actually redeploy the written text as a tactic of evasion and camouflage, performatively turning and tripping the textual fetish against the white person's will-to-know. "So driven in on his reading," as Williams would say, he is blinded by the texts he compulsively seizes: "knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing" (Hurston [1935] 1990:2). Once provided with something that he can "handle," "seize," in a word, apprehend, he will go away and then space can be cleared for performed truths that remain beyond his reach" (150).

Conquergood's insights are of value because they highlight two major potential pitfalls of ethnography: the above-mentioned overvaluation of text and the improper power dynamics established in the traditional ethnographic model, dynamics that accord undue privilege to researchers at the expense of those being studied. Textuality not only fails to account for non-linguistic practices, it also can mislead ethnographers for the reasons Conquergood and Hurston note. Lyall Crawford's admonition to

accord appropriate respect to the relationships established between researchers and participants serves to insure that Conquergood's points are kept in mind. Further, Crawford suggests that researchers insert themselves into their research as a way of negotiating that power dynamic. For this reason, and for others that will be explored in the next section, I am treated as a participant in this research project.

The now-traditional expectation that the job of the social scientist (or cultural critic) is to "make the strange familiar and the familiar strange" seems to fall apart in circumstances where the researcher is embedded in the community being studied. The practices are not strange to such a researcher; they are already quite familiar. The goal is also not to complicate understandings within the community of practice; it is to shed light on those practices from a scholarly perspective. That is, the product of this project is not aimed at the community of practice being observed; it is aimed at a community of scholars. My goal, then, in this project, is to provide fruitful analysis of practices within SDGMC that link shame and gay identity as part of the organization's self-positioning within the gay pride movement. Such a project does not seek to answer all questions about gay pride or gay identity, nor does it seek to explain the organizational culture of SDGMC in its complex totality. Instead, it seeks to simply make use of existing theories to offer some insight into a narrowly-drawn issue, to, as Stuart Hall suggests, advance knowledge 'a little further on down the road'" (qtd. in Slack 114).

Autoethnography

Paul Atkinson writes, "All ethnographic work implies a degree of personal engagement with the field and with the data (that are always made and not "given"). Autoethnography is, it would appear, grounded in an explicit recognition of those biographical and personal foundations" (402). He acknowledges explicitly what is argued above, that researchers are always personally connected with the communities they study, and that those connections should be accounted for in their projects. He offers autoethnography as a corrective to the notion that the ethnographer is an objective observer, even while the ethnographer is, by necessity, a (usually temporary) participant in the communities being observed.

Carolyn Ellis has written extensively about and through autoethnography as a viable method for studying social practices. In her work with Tony Adams and Arthur Bochner, she notes:

> When researchers do Autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences. (Autoethnography: An Overview)

This claim identifies a major methodological distinction between ethnography and autoethnography. Because ethnographers attempt to introduce an entire culture to a group of scholars, they are encouraged to 'write everything.' Autoethnographers, on the other hand, work with specific moments of insight that call or analysis and elucidation. Autoethnography is not suited to broad cultural description. It is

equipped to offer carefully selected nuggets of experience up for analytical consideration. They further argue:

> Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research (RONAI , 1995, 1996), interviewing cultural members (FOSTER, 2006; MARVASTI, 2006; TILLMANN-HEALY , 2001), and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts (BOY LORN, 2008; DENZI N, 2006)." (Autoethnography: An Overview)

Here, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner provide a methodological template for my dissertation. Chapters three, four and five are built upon the types of material sources they describe. Chapter three includes interviews with fellow chorus members, interviews that provide a background against which my observations can be read. Chapters four and five are built around epiphanies I experienced, put into conversation with cultural theories of gay identity and performance, and read through an analysis of the artifacts of theatrical performances in which the chorus has engaged during my time with them. Though my methods of analysis differ from theirs in that my approach places more faith than they do in Leon Anderson's reliance on complete member researcher status, my work is similarly guided by a belief in the importance of epiphanies.

Because autoethnography is based on telling stories of the self, it is important to note its differences from autobiography. Chang Heewon offers an explanation of autoethnography that highlights this distinction. For Chang, autoethnography differs from autobiography because the former requires cultural analysis—that is, theory-

based explanations that account for the social bases of the stories included in the project—while autobiography has no similar requirement. For examples of autoethnography that demonstrate this analytical commitment in various ways, see the work of Norman Denzin, Kevin Ells, Wendy Weingold, Stephanie Young, or Donald Pelias. These scholars use traditional (or evocative) autoethnography, where analysis is implicit in the mode of presentation of research. Their work takes the form of narrative, poetry, and performance, in ways that are, at times, at odds with the norms of conventional scholarship. Carol Rambo's autoethnographic work separates itself from normative social science research in that it argues against the need for any sense of analytical closure. Rambo's work is an example of an evocative ethnography that makes no claims to resolve a particular question or problem, but rather explores concepts in their complexity. While my inclinations differ from hers on this point, her work serves nonetheless as an example of the possibilities of autoethnography grounded in theory, where story of the self--or even the idea of the self--is presented and interrogated.

The autoethnographic work described above is largely evocative in nature. For examples of autoethnography that renders explicit its analytical frameworks, see the work of Loreen Olson, who weaves strands of analysis into her personal accounts of the experience of abuse, Stephen Pace, who argues for grounded theory as a basis for autoethnography, or Ragan Fox, whose "auto-archaeology" makes use of autoethnography framed by an analysis of artifacts of her teen years as a gay student. Her work demonstrates autoethnography structured in an explicitly established

theoretical frame, which sets her work apart from that of the scholars mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Given my interest in understanding how shame is used in the context of an organization, Maree Boyle and Ken Parry's work is also of interest to me. They recommend the use of autoethnography in organizational research as a tool for exploring links between organizations and their individual members. While their call for evocative prose is not necessarily one I intend to take, their claim that the reflexive nature of autoethnography allows it to bring to the fore emotional aspects of organizational activities is one that appeals to me. Likewise, Lisa Tillmann argues that autoethnography is a useful tool for communication research because it offers a way of tempering the tendency to erase emotion from scholarly work.

There are concerns about the use of autoethnography as a means of scholarship. Sara Delamont has, on numerous occasions, called out autoethnography for its supposed lack of rigor. Specifically, her claims are that:

> 1. It cannot fight familiarity
> 2. It cannot be published ethically
> 3. It is experiential not analytic
> 4. It focuses on the wrong side of the power divide
> 5. It abrogates our duty to go out and collect data: we are not paid generous salaries to sit in our offices obsessing about ourselves. Sociology is an empirical discipline and we are supposed to study the social.
> 6. Finally and most importantly 'we' are not interesting enough to write about in journals, to teach about, to expect attention from others. We are not interesting enough to be the subject matter of sociology. The important questions are not about the personal anguish (and most autoethnography is about anguish (Arguments against Autoethnography 6-7).

To Delamont's claims, I offer the following responses:

1. Familiarity, in and of itself, is not academically problematic. While a lack of analytical reflexivity when examining the familiar can pose a legitimate scholarly problem, the familiar, when properly considered, can provide fruitful grounds for research. The aforementioned evocative autoethnographies provide examples of this.

2. Autoethnographic research often involves telling stories that involve others, so there is a basis for Delamont's concerns. This is particularly significant when the stories involve intimate or deeply personal topics. However, there is no reason to believe that autoethnographers cannot consult with those persons and gain permission before publishing personal stories. Carolyn Ellis work on relational ethics addresses this very concern, and guides my approach to this project. She offers methodological considerations, if not clear guidelines, that include considering the implications of your publications on the people implicated in your work, and sharing your thoughts and work with those persons before submitting work for publication, thereby allowing them to reflect on their involvement in the work before it is released.

3. Work can be both experiential and analytic. Again, the collective works of Olson, Pace, and Fox illustrate this point. While I agree that experiential work is not necessarily analytic, I argue that dismissing experiential work as non-analytic without considering the possibility that research can be both highly evocative of experience and analytically rigorous is fallacious.

4. This claim about power is a potentially persuasive one. I earlier cite Conquergood precisely because of my concerns about inappropriate power dynamics in social research. For this reason, I am sympathetic to Delamont's claim. However, she

ignores the possibility that a researcher might be on both sides of that power divide. That is, she assumes that researchers wield power over a vulnerable subject population, without acknowledging that some researchers belong to the very populations they study, and that their belonging might be salient to their work. In my case, for instance, for the past five years I have been a member of the group I study in this project. When I claim to belong, I make that claim not simply because I share the identity markers of gay and man that members of the chorus share; I make it because I am a member of the chorus. I make music with them. I create performances with them. I do outreach with them. I share memories with them. I learn with them. I share joy and pain with them. I was doing these things for years before I developed this project, and I plan to continue doing those things after this project is done. In short, I am what I am studying, and that fact is a possibility that Delamont's arguments do not account for.

5. While I agree that the goal of social research is to use data to answer questions about the social, I disagree that autoethnography amounts to "sit[ting] in our offices obsessing about ourselves". Delamont seems to assume that researchers exist only as researchers, and reside only in the academic world. I argue, for the particular reasons argued immediately above, as well as for reasons that are obvious, that researchers live in the world. We inhabit social worlds that are interesting and, sometimes, worthy of study.

6. I won't disagree here with Delamont's claim that academics (when writing about themselves as such) do not make worthy research subjects. Setting aside studies of

academic culture because, I assume, Delamont would allow for such a project if it were framed as such, I will disagree with her position that academics are unworthy subjects for research that focuses on people. I argue that, despite many claims to the contrary, academics are people. We participate in cultures. We belong to organizations. We experience traumas and injuries. We do all the things that other people do, and as such, we are no more or less worthy of study than the people we might otherwise choose to study. Furthermore, her claims about anguish ignore the importance of anguish, a point I've established earlier by using the work of scholars who argue for the important role of shame in gay experience, but also by numerous scholars who've made similar claims about other marginalized groups.

Despite my admittedly vociferous rebuttals to Delamont's arguments against the value of autoethnography, I will say that autoethnography's tendency toward the evocative at the potential expense of the analytical is something that troubles me. Craig Gingrich-Philbrook speaks against my concern in his essay on autoethnography. He argues that the evocative power of autoethnography is itself of scholarly value, and he argues against attempts to 'legitimize' autoethnography by rendering its analytical aspects transparent in traditionally scholarly ways. He claims, "Autoethnography's devotion to transparency not only divorces it from literary history, it also compromises its commitment to retrieving subjugated knowledge" (312). The claim about the link between autoethnography and literary history is not of grave importance to me, but his claim about subjugated knowledge connects his ideas to those of Conquergood and Sklar as cited above.

Analytic Autoethnography

According to Leon Anderson, analytic autoethnography consists of a blend of traditional ethnography, where a research seeks to learn about a group of which she is not a part, and autoethnography, where a researcher works with narratives of her own experiences in order to shed light on some phenomenon. Analytic autoethnography possesses the following characteristics that, to Anderson, separate it from other autoethnographic methods:

> (1) Complete member researcher (CMR) status
> (2) Analytic reflexivity
> (3) Narrative visibility of the researcher's self
> (4) Dialogue with informants beyond the self, and
> (5) Commitment to theoretical analysis (378)

Andersons's model is an appropriate fit for this project for the following reasons: (1) I am a member of the group upon which I base my observations, and I have been since May 2009, long before I began this project, (2) in order to do the project, I am required to subject my analytic perspectives to scrutiny, (3) my presence is revealed clearly in the stories of choral experience I describe in chapters 4 and 5, (4) chapter 3 offers insights from other chorus members who participated as interviewees in this project, and (5) because the project is concerned with an exploration of the concept of realizing pride through shame, I do not frame the project as a simple exploration of the chorus as a social entity, but rather as an exploration of pride and shame using SDGMC as a basis for observation. These points highlight the distinction between this project and traditional/evocative autoethnographies, and, also, between my work and standard ethnographies, which, as I stated earlier, benefit from researcher

reflexivity, but do not require, or adequately account for, points 1, 2, and 3 on Anderson's list.

Because I am a member of the group I plan to study, I can take advantage of my complete member researcher status (to use Anderson's term) to not only gain access to information that an outsider might not get, but also to provide an analytical framework that takes into account the perspective of a group member who understands the shared meanings and practices undertaken by the group. Analytic reflexivity is accounted for in my reflections on how my position as a researcher influences my perspectives on choral activities, and how my position as a choral member informs my research. Throughout the dissertation, I account for my role in the observation and analysis of choral activities. I also include other voices in the dissertation, rather than considering my voice to be the only one of interest. Finally, I offer theoretical analyses of my observations. The literature review included in this chapter addresses scholarship on affect, gay identity, and shame. Each subsequent chapter builds upon that scholarship, and makes use of cultural theories that shed light on the phenomena included in them.

My goal as an analytic autoethnographer is not to make a foreign set of practices legible to a detached researcher, but rather to use my experience as a group member along with my status as researcher in order to explain a phenomenon of which I am only one part, but of which I am a part nonetheless. That is, I do not plan to situate myself as a member of the community being studied, because I am already thusly situated. Instead, I plan to construct and deploy an analytical framework for

understanding how group activities foster a sense of group allegiance in ways that resonate with my experiences in the group and that satisfy my goals as a researcher who seeks to understand a phenomenon that is, in truth, much larger than my own experience.

This dual purpose is particularly important given this project's use of affect theory as a tool of analysis. Affects are recognizable as physical responses that correspond to the patterns outlined in Tomkins's work; feelings and emotions, the products of the cognitive processes that make sense of affects, are "internal," in the sense that they are not expressed in a precognitive way, but are rather expressed idiosyncratically by individuals and informed by those individuals' personal experiences and habits, as well as by their cultural training. Because of the constraints of analytic autoethnography, and because I am trained as scholar in communication and not as a clinician in any of the psychology-related fields, I am not positioned to engage in analysis and discussion of other people's feelings and emotions. What I intend to do instead is to discuss my affective responses and place them in a framework constructed around relevant cultural theories.

Sara Delamont raises a critique of analytic autoethnography, but her critique seems to gloss over the specific qualities of Anderson's model. She names Anderson and uses the term analytic autoethnography, but she returns to her critique of traditional autoethnography. Because she does not address any of the five standards Anderson sets for analytic autoethnography, I am left to wonder what Delamont makes

of analytic autoethnography, as conceived by Anderson, as a method for social research.

Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner voice their support for this approach to autoethnographic work. Though their evaluation of analytic autoethnography makes use of traditional autoethnographic approaches, they support the use of Anderson's model, particularly for doing the kind of work outlined in this project. Kevin Vryan voices a similar support, along with a call to lighten the restrictions Anderson places on the model. Vryan specifically notes:

> In the context of trying to learn about a group or social world consisting of members with different experiences, interpretations, and so on, his argument is persuasive. And in my largely autoethnographic, partially evocative, and highly analytical dissertation, I chose to include interviews of other people significantly involved in my (and the other former impostor's) life as well as other data sources such as official records and media accounts. But if I had chosen to carry out the project based exclusively on self-produced data, it still would have been possible for me to carry out effective analyses and develop concepts and models of significant social processes in new ways, and to call it analytic autoethnography (406).

Vryan suggests that requirement 4, dialogue with informants beyond the self, is not always essential for an analytic autoethnographic project. I tend to agree, though, in this case, I do use dialogue with other SDGMC members to contextualize my observations and analyses.

Potential Roadblocks

I acknowledge the difficulty in striking a balance between self-reflexivity and analytical rigor in research that is based on personal experiences. I argue that a commitment to the acknowledgement of the researcher's subject position, while

unable to allow for 'objectivity'—as if such a goal were attainable in any setting—can properly contextualize the researcher's perspective. Stein offers more insight here when she reflects on her experience of researching the material for *The Stranger Next Door*:

> Although hardly a spokesperson for LGBT rights, I certainly have opinions, values, and worldviews that make their way into the process of researching and writing, and I refuse to apologize for having them; nor do I think any sociologist should. The loss of objectivity is beside the point: our task is to develop a "highly disciplined subjectivity," writes Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000). We all write from a particular perspective at a particular moment in time and as a particular ethnographer (*The Stranger Next Door* 12).

Stein explains that claims to objectivity obscure what is true of everyone who studies social phenomena, people, or events; we are all situated in some way relative to the things we study. Claiming otherwise is disingenuous (and, in the case of projects like hers and mine, it would be frankly silly to attempt such a claim), and obscures the underlying responsibility of social research. Later, she writes:

> Faced with these kinds of ethical minefields, what is a principled ethnographer and aspiring public sociologist to do? Option one: she could stick to "safe" subjects, portray them in a flattering or at least bland fashion so as not to upset informants, and figure—probably accurately—that they will not make it through the entire book. That would certainly insulate one from the kinds of opprobrium I received, but I do not believe it would make for very good writing or critical, compelling public sociology. Option two: she could adopt the stance that the only thing you can write about in good conscience is oneself—or one's significant others. This is the stance Carolyn Ellis took after the flap about her book about fisher-folk. Faced with the ethical risks about writing about others, she began to write about her own life and her relationship with a fellow sociologist who was dying of emphysema, eventually becoming an influential proponent of "auto-ethnography" (Ellis 1995). Option three: she could become a historian and limit herself to writing about dead people who have little capacity to talk back. Although none of these options is quite right for me, I

> certainly respect those who make such choices. (*The Stranger Next Door* 12-13)

Stein gives voice to many of my own ethical concerns here. I admit feeling pressured to present the subject in a flattering light. Not only do I wish do avoid conflict with those who have been kind enough to offer me their assistance with this project, I am also invested in the success of the organization I'm studying. I also admit that my choice to conduct a somewhat autoethnographic project was governed in part by my realization that writing about my own thoughts would be safer than writing about others who might challenge my portrayal of their thoughts. It is one thing to acknowledge my own attempts to reassert my own normative masculinity/maleness (as I do in chapter 5), despite my desire to be seen as a forward-thinking, self-accepting liberal gay man. It is another thing entirely to make that claim about someone else who may be similarly invested in that type of self-perception.

Stein further argues that "giving up the illusion of anonymity could offer us the opportunity to shift the focus back to our subjects," when conducting social research (14). The promise of anonymity, at times, eclipses the possibility of offering complete descriptions. Stein's position is based on her experiences, where promised anonymity was lost. Will Van den Hoonaard's arguments about the impossibility provide a theoretical explanation for Stein's lived research experience. Because, as he claims, anonymity precludes the possibility of research, it should no longer be the goal of social scientists to offer anonymity to research subjects. While I am not willing to go that far in my claims about anonymity, I agree that, particularly in case of my object of study, anonymity is unlikely. I take heart in the fact that my community of study is an

organization with a public face; members appear on stage for public performances, at community outreach events with attendees sometimes numbering in the thousands, and in videos posted on the internet. Their involvement in the chorus, though not officially a matter of public record, is a fact that is widely known. Their participation in this project, however, is not a widely known fact. This is a particular problem for people who serve the chorus in an official capacity (the artistic director, the accompanist, section leaders, choreographers, etc.) Because, at any given moment, there is typically only one person who serves in each of those capacities, guaranteeing anonymity becomes difficult. The preservation of anonymity for lay members, of whom there are currently approximately 150, will be a smaller, but still significant challenge. The challenge lies in allowing anonymity for Stein faced a similar challenge in writing *The Stranger Next Door*, an ethnographic account of a small town embroiled in a political battle over gay rights. Stein offered anonymity to her informants not only by providing individuals with pseudonyms, but also by using a fictitious name to identify the town. Because her attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, her experience sparks an important conversation about the practicality of ensuring anonymity in circumstances where the idiosyncrasies of a given group make it readily identifiable. SDGMC faces a similar predicament. Its large size and its historical trajectory make it unique among GALA member organizations. Its uniqueness makes it highly identifiable to those familiar with LGBT choruses, and makes it nigh impossible, then, to ensure that its high-profile members cannot be identified. I, therefore, defer to the suggestions given by Robert Roy Reed and Jay

Szklut, who recommend separating information provided by and about public figures functioning as such from information given by and for those individuals when not acting in their official capacities.

Chapter 2: Pride, Shame, and Queer Publics

This chapter will examine scholarly explorations of queer publics as sites where pride/shame is manifest. Much research has been done in that area, but that research consists primarily of studies of gay bars, cruising areas, public activism, and queers in the mass media. After exploring the scholarship of each of these types of queer publics, I will argue that those publics are configured around a notion of the private that, though effective for studies of those venues, does not adequately explain histories of LGBT choral activity as manifestations of a queer public. Further, I also suggest that much existing scholarship of queer publics does not account for gay experiences that are not defined by traditional notions of shame, and, therefore, bear an interesting relationship to pride as it has been conceived by mainstream gay pride activism, gay liberation, and even more queer oppositional politics.

Publics, Counterpublics

> The difference shows us that the idea of a public, unlike a concrete audience or the public of any polity, is text-based —even though publics are increasingly organized around visual or audio texts. Without the idea of texts that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine a public as an entity that embraces all the users of that text, whoever they might be. (*Publics and Counterpublics* 51)

Inspired by Michael Warner's words cited above, the "text" to which I refer in this dissertation is the discourse of gay pride, which, for the better part of four decades, has argued for the value of LGBT persons as such, and our rights to participate freely, fully, and equally in public life. That is to say, the private realities

of our sexual choices are understood to be illegitimate barriers to our participation in civic and social life, as well as in our institutional and economic lives. The causes served by gay pride activism—the striking down of sodomy laws, ending the tyranny of police forces that unjustly infringe upon LGBT persons and their rights to assemble peaceably, establishment of employment protections in those locales that provide such protection—suggest that the movement is has largely based itself on the notion that private sex should not come to bear upon public life.

This position differs from an oppositional queer politics, which rather argues against social and institutional structures that have taken the heterosexual unit and its reproductive capacity as their points of departure. Queer politics, as explained by scholars such as Siobhan Somerville, seeks to dismantle or otherwise oppose normative sexual systems rather than carving out space within those systems for LGBT persons.

> With public speech, by contrast, we might recognize ourselves as addressees, but it is equally important that we remember that the speech was addressed to indefinite others; that in singling us out, it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity, but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone, and therefore in common with strangers. It isn't just that we are addressed in public as certain kinds of persons, or that we might not want to identify as that person (though this is also often enough the case, as when the public is addressed as heterosexual, or white, or sports-minded, or American). We haven't been misidentified, exactly. It seems more to the point to say that publics are different from persons, that the address of public rhetoric is never going to be the same as address to actual persons, and that our partial nonidentity with the object of address in public speech seems to be part of what it means to regard something as public speech. (*Publics and Counterpublics* 58)

Publics are not the same as people. Warner's distinction between the two is of critical importance. His articulation of this point explains the possibility of distance between

the real, lived experiences of individuals hailed as members of a public, and the discursive assumptions about the experiences of the persons so hailed. "Americans" are an imaginary construction; the ideas about what constitute an "American" might will differ from the facts of experience had by many of us included within that category, and I, for example, can understand that my personal experiences of life in the US might differ from the canonical understanding of what an American is, while simultaneously understanding that I am still part of the American public.

Such is similarly the case with queer sexuality. When addressed as a member of the public by gay pride discourse, a discourse that assumes a kind of liberation predicated upon the resolution of deeply-held shame, I can understand the appeal being made by that discourse, and I can understand that it is addressed to me for "my" benefit, while also recognizing that the shame it seeks to overcome may not be a shame that I have personally felt. Warner's critique of traditional theories of communication that base themselves upon "sender-receiver" and/or "author-reader" models of information exchange explains this point by noting that, because publics endure across space and through time, they consist of ongoing opportunities of exchange. "It is not texts themselves that create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time" (*Publics and Counterpublics* 62). For gay pride, the texts that link to one another are the appeals for liberation, the stories of secrecy and shame, coming out stories, narratives of illness and death due to AIDS, reckonings with religion, conflict with families, tales of friendship and alternative family structures, and ways in which gay experiences have been talked about.

As society has responded with general, but limited, acquiescence to gay pride's appeals for social and legal equality for LGBT persons, the rift between mainstream LGBT pride-based politics and queer oppositional politics has grown. Homonormativity, as Lisa Duggan calls it, threatens to perpetuate the subjugation of queer bodies in its conformity to normative attitudes about sex and sexual expression. LGBT persons, according to this logic, become enemies of queer activists seeking to destabilize a system of dominance in which increasing numbers of LGBT persons have become complicit through their adoption of lesbian or gay versions of the traditional practices of monogamy, private sex, and the maintenance of the nuclear family as the basic social unit.

While pride discourse seems to call for the inclusion of LGBT persons within a larger mainstream public, queer political rhetoric revels in the position of queer persons as a counterpublic.

> A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one. And the conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions, but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public and to the hierarchy among media. The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom, but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness. (*Publics and Counterpublics* 86)

> Counterpublics are "counter" to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger-circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership and its affects. As it happens, an understanding of queerness has been developing in recent decades that is suited to just this necessity; a culture is developing in which intimate relations and the sexual body can in fact be understood as projects for transformation among strangers. (At the same time, a

> lesbian and gay public has been reshaped so as to ignore or refuse the counterpublic character that has marked its history.). (*Publics and Counterpublics* 87-88)

Pride shifts LGBT communities away from the notion of being a counterpublic. Queer politics, on the other hand, is predicated precisely upon being a counterpublic. I will intellectually punt here by claiming that, given our still tenuous legal position as gay and lesbian persons, and somewhat still problematized position vis-à-vis cultural depiction, LGBT persons currently, at the time of this writing, constitute a counterpublic, without making an enduring argument on the matter. More interestingly, I think this tension between pushes for mainstream inclusion and oppositional counterpublic politics implicitly hinges upon differences in real, lived experiences between those who had to fight for basic rights and recognitions in a society that blatantly denigrated and criminalized homosexuality and those who came of age in a world shaped (for the better, as far as I am concerned) by those struggles. The radical aspects of queer politics are not simply an intellectual choice; they are a response to the real conditions facing queer persons who had little legal or social protection for their relationships, their livelihoods, or even their lives. When the simple revelation of sex could easily result in the loss of life, liberty, or property, the public insistence on sex would have been a truly revolutionary act. When the overwhelmingly vast majority of Americans claim to know at least one gay person personally, and when the large majority of Americans report acceptance of homosexuality, is the status of LGBT persons such that the maintenance of the counterpublic position still necessary? To what extent are such practices still

considered liberating, considering that gay sex is not now seen by most people in the US as inherently problematic?

Queer publics as counterpublics

Above, I enquire about the value of maintaining a queer politics predicated upon the conception of LGBT persons as a counterpublic. Here, I explore studies of a variety of spaces that have historically served as venues for that counterpublic, and I discuss changes to those venues that reflect multiple, and at times conflicting, LGBT attitudes toward those spaces. For each of the spaces I discuss, I interrogate ways in which debates about public/private distinctions are bound up in shame and constitute portions of pride discourse, and how those debates highlight the rift between mainstream LGBT politics and queer politics. The section ends with a discussion of how contemporary social conditions refract pride discourse and its quibbles with queer politics.

Public Spaces, Private Matters

Here I briefly discuss gay spaces notable for the ways in which they bring sex, typically conceived as a private matter, into public and semipublic venues. While Foucault might argue that the extreme cultural, social, and legal restriction of sex belies its ultimately public nature through incessant discourses of sex and disciplinarity, sex-negative discourse argues, despite itself, that sex should be constrained to the private realm. In this section I address not the talk of sex, but rather acts of sex. I will argue below that queer public sex spaces, considered by radical

queer activists to destabilize sexual norms, highlight the extent to which we think of sex as private, an ideology implicit in gay pride and its struggles for legal and social equality. In "Sex in Public," Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant explain the relationship between private sex and public activism in the radical queer movement. They write:

> [M]odern heterosexuality is supposed to refer to relations of intimacy and identification with other persons, and sex acts are supposed to be the most intimate communication of them all. The sex act shielded by the zone of privacy is the affectional nimbus that heterosexual culture protects and from which it abstracts its model of ethics, but this utopia of social belonging is also supported and extended by acts less commonly recognized as part of sexual culture. (555)

> Queer and other insurgents have long striven, often dangerously or scandalously, to cultivate what good folks used to call criminal intimacies. We have developed relations and narratives that are only recognized as intimate in queer culture: girlfriends, gal pals, fuckbuddies, tricks. Queer culture has learned not only how to sexualize these and other relations, but also to use them as a context for witnessing intense and personal affect while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation. Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation. These intimacies do bear a necessary relation to a counterpublic—an indefinitely world conscious of its subordinate relation. (558)

While I would argue that the non-normative intimate relations Warner and Berlant describe do, in fact, occur among straight persons, the rest of the argument holds. Stigmatizing conditions forced queer persons into illicit relations, illicit not only because, in many locations, actual queer sex was illegal, but also because those sex acts took on other qualities that allowed them to be read as shameful: they took place in public and semipublic spaces, and were shrouded in a kind of open secrecy.

In "History of Gay Bathhouses," Allan Bérubé explains the queer political push to predicate the legal argument for gay bathhouses upon the legality of persons to gather for sex, rather than on the more mainstream argument about individual rights to privacy. Bathhouses had, for many years as of Bérubé's writing in 1985, provided safety, privacy, and sociality for men seeking sex with other men; those spaces served as venues for queer men to assemble. In the wake of the AIDS crisis of the mid-1980s, New York and San Francisco, the two largest urban gay centers in the US, pushed for the closing of gay bathhouses as a matter of public health. This line of reasoning came about after an earlier push to close bathhouses in the 1970s, prior to the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the US. That earlier push, lacking a terrifying medical mystery to serve as its justification, was predicated upon the notion that these semi-public sex spaces perverted the natural role of sex, because, on one hand, they valorized gay sex, and, on the other hand, they brought sex out into the open. In defense of gay bathhouses, the argument was raised that gay men, like everyone else, has the right to peaceably assemble and to engage in legal activity. In locations where sodomy laws had been struck down (i.e. San Francisco) that argument was sound. As Bérubé notes, these arguments held sway in that jurisdiction in the late 1970s, where gay bathhouses remained open as semi-public venues for sex, despite the appeals made for their closure.

For his dissertation, Shaka McGlotten interviewed men who frequented Austin's gay cruising areas. Those cruising areas were a kind of public secret; people knew where they were because they sought them out or because they were told to

avoid them because of the sexual activity that takes place there. The police crackdowns on those areas in the 1990s imply a high level of awareness of the existence of those places among the public. The public/private nature of those open spaces led McGlotten to enquire:

> Perhaps the straight, married, and queer men frequent these places because of homophobia, and not internalized homophobia, the stigma that makes one do bad things, but the homophobia that happens at home, that makes it difficult for a straight or married man to say he'd like to get it on with another man. Isn't heteronormativity's first defense the cultivation of the closet? Most men, I would, suggest participate in this public inappropriateness out of a desire to protect their privacy (Humphreys 1999[1970]) (51-52).

> The tension between the desire to be out and proud and the desire for secret pleasures is one of the charges released in discourses around public sex. Queerspaces clearly have a problem with going too public. Media accounts and the law, in their efforts to suppress public sex, must necessarily produce public sex as a category for public consumption and contemplation. But the bad publicity, the blinding overexposures of shame, instantiated when the media and the Law make sex-in-public public, is echoed by some of my informants, who point out that the problem of sex in public also has to do with queer excesses: "we drew too much attention to ourselves . . . dirty queers leaving condoms lying around . . . we just got too bold having sex right out in the open on the rocks at Hippie Hollow . . ." (*Queerspaces and Sexpublics* 54).

Cruising areas are, particularly in McGlotten's study, highly public spaces. The ones he studied are located in parks, public land owned by the city and open to all residents, unlike the semi-public spaces described above when I write about bathhouses. When sex happens here, in these public spaces, it is a public affair. The illegality of the act, however, suggests the underlying assumption that the sex should be a private matter that takes place in a private space.

McGlotten's analysis suggests reasons for the public expression of private sexual desire. Sex in these public spaces, undertaken, of course, in dark, shadowy corners of public spaces, (hopefully) outside the gaze of a disapproving public and/or an enforcer of the law, could be read as a destabilization of sexual norms. A radical queer activist reading of those acts might suggest such an interpretation. I think, however, reading those acts in such a way ignores the possibility to which McGlotten alludes. He points out that sex in public, paradoxically, can ensure privacy more reliably than private sex might. To bring a same-sex partner into one's own private sphere—one's home—risks having one's sexual proclivities revealed to neighbors and family, which might include an opposite-sex spouse, children, and/or parents. In a sometimes violently homophobic society, it might make sense to risk the unlikely but ultimately overwhelming exposure of one's same sex desire by pursuing and participating in queer sex in a public space rather than taking a chance on the much more likely eventuality that someone might see or hear signs of one's same sex sexual desire manifest in one's home.

I wonder if changing social and legal conditions alters the role of sex in queer public and semipublic spaces. In 1986, the US Supreme Court decided[13], in a line of reasoning that oddly parallels queer activist arguments about the right of persons to engage in bathhouse sex, that the right to sodomy was not guaranteed to anyone in the constitution and that, therefore, states could criminalize the act in any setting, public or private. That decision was overturned seventeen years later, when the court

[13] Bowers v. Hardwick

decided[14] that same-sex sexual activity—like other consensual sexual activity—was properly understood, in a legal framework at least, to be a private concern. As such, the court opined, there was no compelling basis to legally restrict such activity. That argument flies in the face of radical queer politics, but it has the benefit of removing the specter of criminality from the lives of millions of persons who simply wished to engage in sexual activities with mutually desiring partners.

The line of reasoning used by the court argued, essentially, that LGBT persons who engage in consensual, private sex should be left alone, which has been an argument central to much gay pride activism. An effect of that argument has been to remove sex from discourses of sexual identity. I exaggerate here, but I do claim, as do Michael Warner, Leo Bersani, and a host of other scholars, that the mainstreaming of LGB (I omit the T here deliberately because of their continued exclusion in the wake of burgeoning acceptance of queer cisgender persons) identities effected by gay pride has de-sexed a movement that began with public manifestations of sex.

Sex-oriented festivals such as the Folsom Street Fair hearken back to the earlier waves of gay liberation, where extreme public declarations and manifestations of same sex sexual desire disrupted generations of silence and invisibility. Started in 1984 for the San Francisco leather community, the event brings the trappings of sex, and sometimes sex itself, into the open rather than cloaking it invisibility. While not strictly a gay event, Folsom does facilitate and valorize queer sex. As of 2013, the event still takes place outdoors, on a cordoned-off, six-block section Folsom street, an

[14] Lawrence v. Texas

area technically and legally open to the public. The website's FAQ for the event includes the following questions and answers:

> Can I bring my Dog? Can I bring my Child?
>
> Folsom Street Events STRONGLY discourages people from bringing either children or pets on to the fairgrounds. The organization feels that it is not an appropriate environment for them. We post this message at our gates with signage, and our gate volunteers reinforce this message upon entry. Given that we produce an event that is on public streets, we cannot prevent someone from entering into the fairgrounds (if you choose to bring a child or a pet). Additionally, our security volunteers repeat this message for anyone found on the fairgrounds to be in conflict with our policy
>
> What is the policy on lewd behavior?
> Folsom Street Events encourages all fairgoers to express behavior that is safe and within the law. We encourage everyone to take personal responsibility for providing a positive communal environment for the adult alternative lifestyle community. Lewd acts will be disrupted by our security volunteers who reinforce this message for anyone found on the fairgrounds to be in violation of our policy.
>
> At the suggestion of SFPD, we have implemented a more aggressive graduated policy for violators of the lewdness policy.
>
> **Step 1:** Verbal warning
> Inform the fairgoer that the behavior is not allowed and that they will face ejection from the fair on the next occurance.
> **Step 2:** Reminder
> Fairgoer will be reminded of the first warning and given a personal escort off the fair grounds with notification to gate volunteers not to allow re-entry. Warn the fairgoer that on the next violation of this policy we will escalate to SFPD.
> **Step 3:** Turn over to SFPD
> SFPD will be called to assist and requested to cite the fairgoer who has violated the lewdness policy.
>
> Lewd behavior in second and third story windows on the fairgrounds will be referred directly to SFPD for intervention.

> I'm 20 years old (or 18 or 19), can I come to the fair?
>
> Of course you can. We look forward to seeing you. While we don't have any age restrictions at the gates we do inform attendees of the adult oriented nature of our events. We also strictly enforce the 21 or over restriction on beer and liquor sales. So if you are under 21, please don't try and purchase alcohol. We will card you. (Folsom Street Fair)

The fair occupies a tenuous position; its focus on sex risks appearing to bring the private realm out onto the public streets, and its public location requires a commitment to a public larger than the one that participates in and/or supports the more adventurous aspects of the event. Its inability to, for instance, strictly limit admission to the event based on age (it says children should not enter, but there are no age restrictions), and its lack of a definitive statement about public sex suggests an ambivalence regarding the public and private aspects of the event.

Similar events include The Black Party Expo, hosted annually in New York City, and Blatino Oasis, hosted each year in Palm Springs, California. These events feature outdoor, public sex acts performed by men, but, as the name suggests, Blatino Oasis decenters whiteness and, instead features men of color. Since 2007, Blatino Oasis has brought throngs of men to Palm Springs to, as the website says, "…help us relax, enjoy ourselves and one another, in the beautiful, welcoming, very gay friendly and legendary Hollywood vacation resort getaway to the stars, Palm Springs, California" (Blatino Oasis).

I point to these contemporary examples of queer public sex because of the extent to which they are not shrouded in secrecy. I know about them not because of any personal familiarity (except for the Folsom Street Fair, I know people who've

been and I've heard it talked about in the mainstream media), but because finding out about them online took all of two minutes. That they facilitate sex in public is their reason for existing. In this way, they further the earlier traditions of treating queer sex as political, and therefore, as a public matter. Their relationships to pride discourses, however, are varied. Blatino Oasis officially declares itself "not a pride event."

Phil Hubbard writes, in reference to queer public sex acts:

> As has been shown, these have chiefly revolved around attempts to 'queer' public space, making the needs and wants of specific sexual minorities visible through transgression onto the heteronormal street. In essence, such tactics seem driven by a concern that a lack of publicity deprives sexual minorities of full rights in a society where citizenship is focused on the maintenance of the procreative nuclear family. In seeking this recognition, however, sexual dissidents have often sacrificed their own rights to privacy; by equating privacy with political inaction and publicity with political empowerment, they appear to have fallen into a trap whereby they are left with neither. (67)

In "Sex Panics, Sex Publics, Sex Memories," Christopher Castiglia writes:

> Attempts to authorize sexual conservatism by normalizing gay memory rely on a strategy I call counternostalgia, a look back in fury at the sexual ''excesses'' of the immature, pathological, and diseased pre-AIDS generation. Counternostalgia operates within a wider discursive assertion that death necessarily marks a gay man's future because sin has characterized his past, a blame game that makes illness proof positive that the afflicted have lurked in the dark dens of perversion, relinquishing all claims to compassion, comprehension, or credibility. Under pressure from AIDS activists and critics who challenge this narrative of blame, the story shifts from individual victims to the practices of sexual culture more generally, a supposedly less cruel because more abstract gesture. Even if individual gay men are not genetically or psychologically programmed for self-destruction, this story goes, these men have produced a culture, centered on reckless perversion and unthinking abandon, that contains the seeds of death and dissolution. A morbid and pathologizing essentialism is displaced from individuals to the collective, but the causal logic of blame still prevails. (161)

Castiglia writes against the reconceptualization of queer sexual history implicit in LGBT pride discourse of the present day. Counternostalgia, as Castiglia argues, exacerbates the shame associated with queer sex practices by reifying traditional sexual mores in the present day, and looking at queer sexual practices of the past—practices that, at the time, were considered radically productive—as aberrant, perverse acts that confirm the worst thinking about queer persons.

Queer social networking bears an interesting relationship to the public/private divide. Participation in those social networks requires users to produce a profile or an ad that will be shared among any number of other site/app users, and could ultimately end up in anyone's hands. While sites might post restrictions on the copying and dissemination of user information, there is almost nothing site administrators can do to prevent such unauthorized activity. While the use of primarily text-based queer social and sexual networking (e.g. Craigslist's men seeking men section) can facilitate the maintenance of privacy through secrecy, the proliferation of image-based technologies challenge such notions. Sasha McGlotten writes:

> New, social media based forms of interaction change the terrain of queer intimacy and its relationship to the public, but retains some essences of past, particularly in regard to shame. "Then there are standbys such as sexual shame (and its respectable effect, sexual propriety) that forty years after Stonewall doggedly cling to queer sex, materializing in persistent social stigma about sexual practices… (*Virtual Intimacies* 3)

The use of photographs simplifies the process of determining mutual attraction and, in an era where most cell phones and computers come equipped with cameras, users can only provide alternative justifications for not having a picture on their profiles. Such

activity is not totally public, but when faces are shown, one never knows where they will end up[15]. This point is of particular concern to users still facing the shame of the closet, who, because of that shame, reasonably fear the kind of exposure I describe. Other site users are subject to different kinds of shame related to the lack of sexual propriety: risking the appearance of promiscuity and/or infidelity. Such concerns seem valid in the wake of an LGBT pride movement that has so vociferously argued for the legal legitimation of same sex monogamous unions based on their stability and longevity.

Public Faces, Privacy Rights

Not all queer public spaces are sex-oriented. LGBT and queer activist organizations constitute an alternative queer public where different ideas about public/private matters are manifest. I treat queer activist spaces as public-oriented queer publics because the nature of activism is to make public declarations, to change the minds of the public, and to spur the public to change in some way. While semi-public queer sex spaces can be understood to be about the private act of sex, queer activism and LGBT activism are necessarily focused outward. In her post-mortem of Queer Nation/San Francisco, Mary Gray notes the rift between radical queer activists and their broad critiques of institutional power and gay and lesbian activists pursuing a liberal agenda of civil rights based around stable categories of identity.

> San Francisco's gay and lesbian community establishment achieved electoral power and a degree of legitimacy through its mobilization of

[15] See Roberto Arango's troubles with Grindr for an example, or see Douchebags of Grindr (http://www.douchebagsofgrindr.com) for an example of a site that, as a matter of course, collects user profiles and publishes them for a wider audience.

> predominantly middle-class white voters who felt strength and took refuge in the stability of their identities. This constituency saw no common cause with the disenfranchised margins of color, gender, class, and anti-authoritarian politics that many core QN/SF members identified with early on. In the shadow of a concentrated and legitimized gay and lesbian community powerbase, QN/SF's identity talk and broader critique of who is de-legitimized in the name of gay and lesbian legitimacy seemed not only far from newsworthy but incompatible with representational politics. (229-230)

Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman earlier wrote of Queer Nation and its politics:

> The key to the paradoxes of Queer Nation is the way it exploits internal difference. That is, QN understands the propriety of queerness to be a function of the diverse spaces in which it aims to become explicit. It names multiple local and national publics; it does not look for a theoretical coherence to regulate in advance all of its tactics: all politics in the Queer Nation are imagined on the street. Finally, it always refuses closeting strategies of assimilation and goes for the broadest and most explicit assertion of presence. This loudness involves two main kinds of public address: internal, for the production of safe collective Queer spaces, and external, in a cultural pedagogy emblematized by the post-Black Power slogan "We're Here. We're Queer. Get Used to It." If "I'm Black and I'm Proud" sutures the first-person performative to racial visibility, transforming the speaker from racial object to ascendant subject, Queer Nation's slogan stages the shift from silent absence into present speech, from nothingness to collectivity, from a politics of embodiment to one of space, whose power erupts from the ambiguity of "here." (156)

Queer Nation, as described above, conceives of queer publics, but the oppositional nature of those publics suggests that Warner's term counterpublic might be a more apt fit. This counterpublic, though striving for some internal goals (i.e. the creation of safe spaces) is oriented toward a broader, heteronormative public, with the purpose of challenging and destabilizing that public. That imagining of a queer public as an oppositional space echoes Lee Edelman's figuration of queer identity as inherently outside of and opposed to normative and normalizing structures. In this figuration,

queer sex is a political statement, and, therefore, can be understood as a kind of public declaration, even if the act itself takes place behind closed doors. I ask, along with those LGBT activists advocating for a place for queer persons within the social mainstream, is gay sex stripped of its declarative power when increasing numbers of people view queer sex as a normal, if not normative, variation of human behavior? Does this normalizing of queer sex, and its accommodation of queer sex within the private sphere, mitigate the need for a sex-oriented queer public? Further, I ask if the oppositional politics of queer activism provides a mechanism for working though shame, or if it simply displaces shame onto its targets? That is, I wonder if saying "fuck you" to hegemonic heteronormativity works through gay shame, or if it ignores shame.

Mass media (for the very limited purpose of this brief discussion I include web technology as part of mass media) offer yet another site for examining the notion of queer publics. This kind of queer public can be understood as public in the sense that it is possible to reach a wide audience via the mass media, but interactions with that media often occurs in private. Gay porn serves as an apt example of this point. Though there exist venues where gay porn is shown semi-publicly, the construction of an audience for gay porn is not, and has not for decades, been predicated upon the availability of those semipublic spaces. Porn is usually watched in private. Home video facilitated the transition from the use of theaters to the use of the home for that purpose, and the popularization of the web cemented that transition.

Of course, porn is not the only media created for and marketed to a queer audience, or that depict images of queer identities. The proliferation of LGBT characters on television and in mainstream movies is a well-documented phenomenon whose history I will not recount here. Instead, I will briefly discuss the creation of queer publics as markets for media content other than porn. The wave of premium cable series centered on gay experiences (The American version of Queer as Folk, the L Word, etc.) explicitly targeted queer audiences, but networks found that their actual audiences included throngs of straight persons. In her study of network, cable, and online broadcasting, Eve Ng describes "gaystreaming" as the production and marketing of media for a queer audience. She notes:

> However, LGBT content was not simply aimed at LGBT viewers, but also at particular segments of the straight audience. (261)
>
> The shift to gaystreaming, by definition, involves a decrease in the LGBT specificity of programming. Commenting on the mainstreaming of LGBT content in print, television, and film, Logo marketing executive Claudia Gorelick argued that ''the need for niche is shrinking'' (personal communication, June 8, 2009), a key consideration spurring Logo's recent rebranding strategies. (274)
>
> It is no surprise that networks like Logo are engaged in LGBT programming not primarily to advance the cause of ''gay rights,'' but because it can prove profitable, in various configurations aimed at predominantly straight, LGBT, or mixed audiences. (276)

Ng indicates an important point regarding the purpose of gay television program: to make money, rather than to engage in social activism. The popularity of gay-themed content among broad audiences, not its potential for progressive cultural politics, spurred its proliferation among cable networks. This popularity, Ng argues, was

triggered in the dismantling of a specifically queer audience and replacing it with a gay-friendly—or at least gay-tolerant—audience composed mostly of straight persons.

This elimination of a specifically queer public formed from a queer television audience is mitigated by the ability of mobile social networking to bring actual queer bodies into interaction with the spaces depicted in queer and "gaystream" media. Candace Moore challenges the notion that mass media representations are public in terms of dissemination, but private insofar as they lack a way of bringing people into the public actively. She notes that the contemporary relationship between mass media and social media blurs the public/private distinction as people and places popularized in mass media are highlighted as places where regular people might go. For instance, Foursquare tracks locations in *RuPaul's Drag Race* and encourages users to "check in" there, allowing members of the public to, symbolically, at least, participate in the production-related aspects of the show.

Private interaction with queer media forestalls the processing of shame; as long as that interaction remains private, no one has to know what you happen to enjoy watching. That point is of particular significance when considering the use of gay pornography, for instance. When discussing mainstream media, gay shame is rendered invisible through sanitizing of queer images and the dissemination of those images to a mostly straight audience. Think of *Modern Family*, *Glee*, or *Will & Grace*, all major network programs that, in order to avoid running afoul of the FCC and their corporate sponsors, significantly de-sex their gays. A person's interest in these shows, famous because they feature gay characters, can hardly be taken as a sign

of queer sexuality, simply because most fans of these shows are not queer. If, for some reason, shame keeps someone in the closet, the revelation of that person's love of these shows is unlikely to unlock the door.

Public Publics – LGBT Choruses

Thus far, I have explored the concept of queer publics through a discussion of queer spaces that highlight the tensions between public and private spheres. Sex-based queer publics trouble the notion of sex as a private matter, either through bringing sex acts into public spaces, or by advocating publicly for the right to engage in private sex. In this section, I discuss a different kind of queer public, one that operates out in the open and engages in activities that, unlike sex, are commonly understood to be publicly oriented. LGBT choruses, understood as queer publics, are particularly well-suited to the process of reckoning with shame on the way to pride for three primary reasons. One, LGBT choruses provide safe spaces for queer persons to interact with one another and to form social support systems. Two, their public orientation as queer publics requires them to face, rather than ignore or deny, the realities of shame caused by histories of denigration. These two functions are served by myriad queer activist groups and community organizations that have a public face, so LGBT choruses are not unique in that respect. However, the third reason LGBT choruses are well-suited to dealing with gay shame is that their public performances invite participants to engage in the processes of performing reckonings of pride and shame, and to do so in front of audiences who are invited to witness those reckonings. The elaboration of that point serves as the basis for the subsequent chapters of this

dissertation. Here, I offer some information about LGBT choruses to provide background for those chapters.

Anna Crusis Women's Choir is recognized as the pioneer of the LGBT choral movement in the US. Founded in the early 1970s and well-established as an important component of Philadelphia's musical scene by 1975, Anna Crusis is, per its description, a feminist organization that sees its lesbian advocacy as inspired by its feminist leanings. In 1977, the Gotham Male Chorus emerged in New York City; two years later, women joined the organization, which was then dubbed the Stonewall Chorale. The following year, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus emerged, giving its first (impromptu) public performance at a vigil for slain city supervisor and celebrated gay rights activist Harvey Milk. Over the next few years, LGBT choruses emerged in Boston, Dallas, Seattle, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses).

In light of the burgeoning wave of LGBT chorus formation, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses was created in 1981 and 1982. Known informally as GALA, the association exists to support and maintain the legacy of LGBT choral music in the US and across the globe. GALA's mission web page reads:

> Mission
> GALA Choruses, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, leads the North American LGBT choral movement. Our more than 170 member choruses and their 8,000 singers look to us for support and leadership. We are dedicated to helping choruses become more effective, both artistically and administratively. We assist emerging choruses and facilitate networking and training for established groups. Currently, GALA Choruses is putting special focus on the implementation of programming that will assess and improve the sustainability of our member choruses. GALA Choruses' signature

> event is our quadrennial Festival, which brings together over 130 choruses and 5000 singers for the world's largest LGBT performing arts event.
>
> Core Values
> • We are CATALYSTS. We provide enthusiasm, resources and tools to inspire our member choruses to use the power of music to create social change.
> • We are HARMONIZERS. We are diverse people who employ the power of song with respect and understanding. We bring our communities together to experience musical excellence, collaboration, cooperation, acceptance, transparency, and opportunities for all.
>
> • We are LISTENERS. We listen to our members, our colleagues, and each other in order to understand the issues, define our roles, and serve the common welfare of our movement.
>
> • We are LEADERS. We offer strategic direction to the movement we serve. We work effectively with partners around the world who seek to achieve complimentary goals. We strengthen our association by nurturing effective leadership and ensuring robust, sustainable financial resources.
> Vision
> A world where all voices are free.
>
> Mission
> Empowering LGBT Choruses as we change our world through song.
> (Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses)

GALA sees itself, through its member organizations, as having a significant cultural and political impact on the world. The outward-focused commitment to social change is stated several times in this document. Every four years, GALA holds a convention for its member organizations. At the most recent convention, held in Denver, nearly 6000 singers from LGBT chorus came together for five days

There is scant research into LGBT choral organizations. That near-total lack was my inspiration for this dissertation. Here I address the bit of scholarship that does

exist: Craig Gregory's dissertation on the Turtle Creek Chorale, and Russell Hilliard's articles about the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus.

Gregory's project, focused as it is on the study of institutional longevity of a choral organization, offers little insight into LGBT choruses as a queer public or the manifestation and management of gay shame, but it does include information I find useful in the pursuit of such an inquiry. I borrow information Gregory gathered from interviews with members of the Turtle Creek Chorale that offers opportunities for an exploration of gay shame and the group's public focus:

> The mission of the chorus from the inception is to be the best men's chorus in the world. Gay was not an issue other than the membership happens to be predominately gay men.
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> Tim Seelig at the 15th Anniversary Founders Dinner:
> Umm, I just didn't get it. It was a difficult time in my life but I don't think that really affected my work. I just didn't get it why this gay chorus….here I was, outed in front of 20,000 people at this Houston Baptist church and teaching at a Baptist University and here I was with this gay men's chorus in Dallas and they were more in the closet than I was. It just didn't sink with me. I didn't want to drag the chorus out of the closet – that wasn't the point. What is this hang-up – it's OK. I lost employment for being gay – so I just didn't get it. However, as the organization grew in size and quality and began to gain notoriety, the gay and lesbian activist wanted to see the "g" word in the name of the chorale. As longtime supporter Bud Knight suggests, "Not our problem - we did what we did for our community."
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> Two term president, A. G. Black caught the brunt of this issue during the GALA conferences of 1988 and 1992:
> And we were expecting to be kind of on the grill. Especially because during the GALAs at that time you had sessions where the presidents and the business managers, and the executive directors would come together for the choruses and just have a brief work session – well, not really work session – a session. I remember going into that one thinking, "somebody in this room is going to stand up and ask… why does the Turtle Creek Chorale not have gay in their…?" I just… Because, we knew it was kind of an under the surface issue with GALA

> – even when we went to Seattle. I think the reason it didn't surface in Seattle is because we had never performed at a GALA. They wanted to see what we were all about and they wanted to hear us.
>
> Gregory
> But, it's the Seattle Men's Chorus. Did they get the same grief?
>
> Black
> Umm, no. It was because we wouldn't be a part of GALA for so long that they
> thought there was, that we thought there was some kind of a stigma thing about it. And then when we finally showed up at the GALA in Seattle, all of a sudden "Whoa! They are a great chorus; they really do know what they are doing." All of a sudden we do kind of become comparable with like the Seattle Men's Chorus and some of the others, or Twin Cities. But we had that period from Seattle to Denver that it became very politically and all of sudden, we were beginning to have recordings coming out and then all of a sudden it was like GALA wanted us to take it on and fight the fight for all of GALA. And we said, "No, we were not going to do it." Denver was, Denver was not a good experience for me personally. (58-59)

In these exchanges, we see different approaches to dealing the shame of the closet. Tim Seelig's point suggests visibility as queer as a step toward mitigating that shame. He does, however, allow for the possibility that others might not be prepared to take that step. He also describes pressure from GALA for the Turtle Creek Chorale to explicitly brand itself as a gay organization. As the organization grew in importance, people questioned their lack of a gay marker in their name. But that "problem" belonged to someone else, according to Bud Knight. Others with a more activist bent than the Turtle Creek Chorale was willing to adopt would not sway the organization to exit the closet.

Gregory's dissertation also addresses the shame of AIDS and its effect on the Turtle Creek Chorale:

> HIV/AIDS began to devastate the chorus. For a time in the mid '90s there were
> funerals and memorial services once a week, sometimes more.
>
> Former public relations person, John Shore:
> I think we realized that AIDS was going to kill us as an organization if we didn't really embrace it as a daily fact of life and learn to pull together and share, cry, bitch, be angry, and that we had a choice in all those things. We could hold our heads up high and go forward or bury our heads in shame. This was before any drugs were really on the market as far as AIDS inhibitors. There was so much discrimination against AIDS and ignorance towards HIV and AIDS. We embraced what we had at the time. I think it was happening so quickly, I didn't have time to fear of what is this going to do to the organization. (61)

The concern expressed there was inward. John Shore does not speak of engaging in AIDS activism or consciousness-raising; he discusses it as a threat to the membership of the organization. His words reflect the role of that organization in providing a way for its members to address the crisis among themselves. Because, as I elaborate more extensively in the next chapter, choruses serve important social functions for its members, it is not surprising that a member would respond as such when speaking of his experience in a gay men's chorus during the later stages of the AIDS crisis.

The Turtle Creek Chorale functions as a community support system for its (mostly) gay male membership, and the organization's public functions could serve as the basis for emergence of a queer public, if only the public knew the group was queer. The lack of a queer signifier in its name, however, should not be taken as proof of the organization's inability to constitute a queer public. The organizational website advertises its repertoire, which includes Alexander's house, a story depicting the coming together the two separate worlds of a man who had been closeted up until his death, and the site touts the chorale's membership in the Gay and Lesbian Association

of Choruses. In performing a work like Alexander's house, chorus members have the opportunity perform, for a broad audience, a story of gay shame. Such performances, as I will argue in chapters four and five, offer an opportunity for performers to reckon with a narrative of gay shame, one that might not match one's own experiences, but are understood as indicative of queer experience.

Far less ambiguous in its public image as a queer organization is the San Francisco Gay men's Chorus. About the chorus, Hilliard writes:

> Within the gay community of San Francisco, the chorus has become an institution; its offices are located in the heart of the gay district on Castro Street. For the larger society, the chorus has been raising a consciousness that gay people exist and are productive members of society. Dr. Hill stated, "Typically, the only awareness of gays to the larger society is through sitcoms like Will and Grace and movies like The Next Best Thing or something where they see a stereotypical image of gay life as the powers that be want them to see it. Most people are pretty surprised when they see the Gay Men's Chorus, and they make comments such as, 'Well, they look normal to me!' " (S. Hill, personal communication, March 8, 2000).
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> In addition to raising awareness, the chorus has served to facilitate tolerance and understanding between lesbigay and nonlesbigay communities. Bob Emery stated, "I think it is a great thing to have some music that is gay directed that we can really understand, and I think the straight community hearing it understands it too. They may not have lived it, but they understand it. I think it has made a positive impact on the straight community all around" (B. Emery, personal communication, March 8, 2000). (San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus 92)

According to Hilliard's correspondence, SFGMC acknowledges a publicly-oriented mission. In fact, the organization's mission statement reads, "The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus creates extraordinary musical experiences that inspire community,

activism, and compassion" (http://www.sfgmc.org/about/). In a subsequent article, Hillard writes:

> The word "gay" has been in the title of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus since its inception. Some members of the chorus came out to their loved ones by inviting them to choral performances, and others specifically joined the chorus to make a political statement through music. At one point, several members of the chorus asked that the name of the group be changed to exclude the word "gay." Some choral members were in the military or were not open about their sexuality to business colleagues, family, or friends. After a debate and a vote of the members, it was determined the word "gay" would remain in the name of the chorus. As a result, the group faced challenges with funding and underwriting of concerts, especially in the early years (Hilliard, 2002). (Social and Historical Perspective 347)

By being an "out" queer organization with a public focus, SFGMC offered members relatively simple ways of negotiation the shame of the closet. To come out, all one would have to do is invite friends and family to a performance. Such an invitation focuses attention on aspects of gay identity that are not immediately tied to sex (as would, perhaps, introducing a lover to one's family), but that also exerts a type of control on the kinds of associations an invited friend or relative can make to prevailing notions of what gay men are like (see Stan Hill's words quoted above). Bringing ones loved ones to a public performance where gay men engage in the creation of relatively innocuous music gives those loved ones an image of gay men that can supplant other images of gay men as deviant.

> When asked "Why did you join the chorus?," the largest group of respondents (n =47) ranked "wanted to sing in a chorus" as the primary reason. When asked "Why do you stay in the chorus?," the largest group of respondents (n =38) ranked "I enjoy singing in a chorus" as the primary reason. The second most selected reason for joining the chorus was wanting to belong to a gay men's organization, and the second most selected reason for staying with the chorus was feeling a

> sense of pride singing with the chorus. Paul Antinello (1994) asked similar questions of the members in his study nearly 10 years earlier. In that study, 69% reported joining the chorus to be in a gay group and 63% remained in the group because of its musical excellence. (Social and Historical Perspective 350-351)

Here, Hilliard notes that, as of 2002, the largest percentage of members cite a desire to sing, rather than a desire to participate in a system of queer support, as their primary reason for joining and remaining in a gay chorus. This constituted a shift from Paul Antinello's earlier findings from the mid-1990s, where a large majority reported joining a gay chorus primarily because they wanted to be in a gay organization.

> The support of the social system within the chorus has been invaluable to many of its members. Brian Weart said, "I would have never been able to survive the things I have without my brothers in the chorus. Singing with this group has made all the difference to me; I don't know where I would be without them" (B. Weart, personal communication, March 15, 2003). For others, the chorus provided an outlet for their political voice as well as a social support system. Marty O'Connell said, "My social outlet was the chorus; my political statement was the chorus" (M. O'Connell, personal communication, March 15, 2003). (Social and Historical Perspective 354)

Here we see a multi-pronged use of chorus involvement, where the organization's ability to provide a system of social support is balanced with its ability to provide an outlet for political and social activism.

> Brian Weart who joined the chorus in 1986, recalled, "People didn't know what was going on, and when I came to the chorus, being the age I was, it was something that you couldn't put your arms around. It was such an unusual situation that was happening to people that were older than me. As the chorus began losing so many people, I was like, 'oh, this could be me.' No one really fathomed how much AIDS could decimate our ranks" (B. Weart, personal communication, March 15, 2003). (Social and Historical Perspective 358-359)

Finally, Hilliard provides an account of the shame of AIDS. In a story that will be echoed for the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus in the next chapter, the disease ravaged the community out of which the chorus sprang, and that constituted its membership. As Hilliard's interviewee suggests, his experience of AIDS was older than that of the older men who had become his chorus brethren. His experience reflects what I take up in the subsequent chapters, a taking on of the shame of others as a way of understanding one's self as a queer person. As someone who identifies himself as someone too young to have experienced HIV/AIDS in the same way that older chorus members had, this interviewee identifies with that experience by imagining himself in the position of those other men. I wonder if conceptions of pride/shame based upon experiences largely foreign to a younger generation of gay men, whose experiences of secrecy, coming out, and HIV/AIDS differ from the experiences faced by older gay men, can be rendered legible to those younger men through this process of identifying with, to bring back Eve Sedgwick's term. The need to address that question is highlighted by Hilliard's discovery that, over time, a declining number of men report desire to belong to a gay organization and expressions of gay pride as primary reasons for men to join gay men's choruses.

Chapter 3: Pride, Shame and the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus

The previous chapter demonstrated ways in which LGBT choruses position themselves as mainstream gay pride organizations by explicitly invoking narratives of their participation in struggles that lead to triumph over the stigmatizing conditions that created gay shame. This chapter focuses on how SDGMC in particular makes use of these kinds of narratives. I will argue that SDGMC connects members to the project of realizing gay pride through a reckoning with gay shame in a way that encourages members to take on the canonical "gay narrative" as their own. That is, members are encouraged to identify with histories of the negative treatment of gay men even when those stories do not correspond with their own personal histories.

I chose to focus on this particular point when, while conducting interviews, younger members of the chorus prefaced comments on their experiences with comments that suggest that they see significant disconnects between their own experiences and the stories they hear about gay experience. Prior to that recognition, I was not settled on a particular question, but realizing that some members, younger ones in particular, were indicating that they lacked personal experiences of the type of gay shame that served as the foundation upon which gay identity is supposedly based, and upon which the need for organizations such as SDGMC is predicated, I saw this as an important area of inquiry.

This chapter begins with an account of the ways in which traditional gay shame has function in SDGMC. An interview with the Artistic Director serves to flesh out stories of gay shame experience that are routinely shared as part of the

chorus's rehearsal processes and social events. In this account, I address the group's struggling with how to deal with gay identity publicly in the 1980s and 1990s, and I address some of the ways in which AIDS came to bear upon the organization, and left an imprint that remains on the group and influences its current commitments.

The following section will consist of an analysis of four interviews of chorus members whose accounts of their experience with the group indicate an initial feeling of disconnection from the canonical gay story, but who nonetheless express a feeling of connection to that story because of their involvement in a gay organization. For some of them SDGMC is that organization. For others who have significant prior experience in other gay community organizations, that feeling of connection was inspired by that initial involvement but is perhaps carried on through their current membership in SDGMC. Each of the participants whose experiences are relayed below claim that their sense of identifying with traditional narratives of gay shame/gay pride developed after, not before, joining a gay community group. This revelation contradicts the notion that people join these organizations because they are seeking either a safe space or a place to freely express their gay identities; for these participants, the recognition of those functions as functions only came after they began participating in gay organizations. Further, each of the participants indicates that, as far as they are able to say, the reason for their different position relative to gay organization is because their experiences coming to terms with their sexuality, while still fraught with some difficulties, were unlike what they understand the experience to have been like for older men in previous decades in that the younger men's

experiences lacked the same degree and kind of shame associated with the traditional story of gay experience, a shame triggered by supposed failures of masculinity, of moral impurity, of mental or emotional defect, of criminality, or of any other aspect of the then mainstream stigmatization of queer persons, a shame explored in much greater depth in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Experiences of Shame

> To create a positive musical experience through exciting performances which engage our audiences, build community support and provide a dynamic force for social change (SDGMC.org).

This section outlines the history of the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. The information contained in this section is taken primarily from information shared informally during rehearsals and other official SDGMC events. I use this information to demonstrate SDGMC's depiction of itself as belonging to the mainstream gay pride movement in ways that parallel the strategies employed by the LGBT choruses described in chapter two. Because this information has been passed along in bits and pieces and in informal ways, I interviewed the Artistic Director, who joined the San Diego Men's Chorus (the initial incarnation of SDGMC) immediately after its first public concert, to corroborate the facts contained in the chorus's historical narrative. Where information comes from other sources, those sources are specified below.

The San Diego Men's Chorus was founded in 1985 and premiered its first public performance at the First Unitarian Church the following year. Approximately

fifty men sang in that concert. The Artistic Director reflects on the early days of the chorus:

> I joined in 1986, right after first concert. Didn't see first one. I was at a party at friend's house. A guest started talking about chorus, it sounded like exactly what I needed. I'd been of school for 5 years but had done no performing. Did some musical theatre in San Diego but not much else. I went and auditioned. It was similar to how it is now. Then, it was at old MCC on 30th street behind Carl's Jr. I didn't know anyone there. I had been in SD for about 7 years. I was fairly involved in gay life. I got involved in GSDBA [the Greater San Diego Business Association, a network of LGBT business persons and professionals], which was new then, so I was networking with other gay business people. **** ******* [A longtime chorus member] was around then. It was the only gay group I joined but I was involved in it.

To provide some context for his entry into the chorus, I asked the Artistic Director to describe his experiences of gay life in San Diego. After providing that context, he recounts his initial experiences with the chorus:

> When I first came out to SD, I wasn't really politically active, but one of the first things I remembered after moving was the Briggs initiative [Officially titled California Proposition 6, a 1978 ballot measure that would have banned gay and lesbian persons and their vocal allies from teaching in public schools] that would have prevented gays from teaching. That stuck in my craw and awakened some kind of activist gene in me that had been lying dormant. I was much more aware after that.
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> Gay life in SD was, for a newbie… was all about going to the bars. After a few years I learned that there was a gay democratic club, a gay center [The San Diego LGBT Community Center]. I didn't get involved but knew about it. There were gay friendly politicians that I supported. Everything was still very much asleep in terms of gay life. I remember when the Crest Café opened, the first gay restaurant. It was a big deal. I watched hillcrest completely gentrify over the next 10 years.
>
> The chorus was probably a key factor in bringing things out into the open for me. SDMC and large group of guys from GMCLA [The Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles and did a joint concert here and birthed SDMC. I don't know the behind the scenes stuff, but I knew all of the founders. It was important to them that there be a safe place for gay

> men to come together and express their unity and their, sort of, uniqueness in a group setting. Like every other gay chorus what was brand new, to put a public face on homosexuality that people could relate to. Most of the world would have said, "I don't know any gay people." Gay choruses changed that.
>
> I thought that it was a really noble lofty goal that I wasn't sure I was comfortable lending my support to. My first time singing with the group was at a political event or something. I remember singing at an outdoor evening event and there were news cameras, and… I guess they were gonna show something on the news. I found a place at the end of the back row where I couldn't be seen. That was my frame of reference. It changed fairly quickly. Out is out. There are no degrees of outness, if you join a chorus that professes to be a gay chorus.

The Artistic Director's comment here is of particular significance for two reasons. First, his concerns about being outed reflect a common trend in much gay shame literature, and in much gay liberation/pride discourse in general. As noted in earlier chapter, gay liberation and gay pride were predicated upon the notion that coming out affords the possibility of overcoming the shame associated with the stigma of homosexuality. Being free, according to this logic, requires the public declaration of queer sexuality in response to generations of silencing and erasure of queer experience from mainstream view. In 2014, it could be easy to take for granted the exposure that comes from participating in a self-professed gay organization whose *raison d'être* is to enact public performances that implicitly (and, in some cases, explicitly) claim some type of gay identity for its members, but to do so would obscure the complexities of both self-acceptance and public acceptance upon which such exposure is predicated.

The second reason I highlight the Artistic Director's point is because disagreements over the idea of being out as a chorus eventually led to a major crisis

within the organization. Here, the Artistic Director addresses an early manifestation of that conflict:

> There were lots of deeply closeted people [when AD joined the chorus in 1986]. There was a small degree of ambiguity about the chorus's gay identity. Places like Salt Lake City have large numbers of members who think people don't know [this is a reference to the Salt Lake Men's Choir, a GALA chorus located in Utah]. I worked for them years ago for a board retreat…tried to get gay into their profile. They looked at me with this horrified look on their faces. "People might think we're a gay chorus." In SDMC's early days, we had a summer concert in Balboa park. Elderly couples bought tickets, saw the program statement, and walked out before the concert even started. We don't want to acquire audience members by deceit. "Don't tell them you're gay, let them come in and see how wonderful you are first." But that doesn't feel right.

Here, the AD highlights important differences of opinion held by chorus members regarding the importance of that type of queer visibility. While he expresses an apparent comfort with visibility, he acknowledges the contrast between his views and those of his fellow chorus members. In the AD's estimation, open expressions of gay identity serve to subvert mainstream notions of queer deviance by publicly performing gay identity. Chorus members who disagree with him, however, suggest the possibility of an important kind of subversion that could take place by a strategic deployment of the closet, a possibility explored in the work of Andrew Kirk, whose arguments for the benefits of ambiguity of identification I cite in chapter one.

The AD went on to describe a later concert held during a series of performances in Balboa Park, where he introduced the Chorus to the audience by mentioning, among other things, that SDMC belongs to the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses:

> The Chorus was singing at balboa park evening concert series. I say we're a GALA group, [an SDMC member] gets hostile and says why do you always have to do that? Why do you have to tell the audience that we're a gay chorus? The goal is to bring audiences and members into a world of honesty. It's not a safe place to hide, but a safe place to be who we are.

Again, the AD notes the differences between his approach to the use of visibility as an antidote to the shame of the closet and approaches suggested by other chorus members who disagree with such a strategy. This type of disagreement carried on for years. In 1992, a group of SDMC members left the chorus to found the Gay Men's Chorus of San Diego. The Artistic Director led this group, which, in short order, became a member of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses. Because of the new chorus's name, there was little room for debates about whether or not to present the fact of the members' sexuality to the public. The decision to include such information in the name of the organization was not a politically insignificant decision, nor is it a decision that is settled today. A (somewhat small) number of current SDGMC openly currently question the value of an explicitly gay marker in the organization's name. Moreover, in addition to the aforementioned Salt Lake Men's Chorus, several other GALA choruses have neither direct nor indirect references to queer sexuality in their names. That list includes the two GALA choruses that represent my hometown of Saint Louis, Charis: The Saint Louis Women's Chorus and the Gateway Men's Chorus. The AD discusses the debate and subsequent over the word 'gay' in SDMC:

> The Twin Cities Men's chorus had recently voted to add gay to the name [now the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus]. And somewhere else in the Midwest. The [SDMC] Board didn't want to talk about it. Members didn't want to talk about it, mostly older guys who had been chorus leaders. It came to a head when I said I'm not gonna let this rest

> until you do a non-binding straw vote to see who would be in favor. They did it one night… at the time maybe 70 members, the vote was 38 in favor, 32 not, approximately. Really close.

Here, we see how the rift in thinking between chorus members who wished for visibility and those who preferred the limited safety of the closet led to the dismantling of the chorus in its then current form. The San Diego Men's Chorus did continue to exist and to perform and participate in GALA events, but it no longer stood as the men's representative of the city in the burgeoning national choral movement.

> The Board forbade any further discussion. No name change. Shortly after, my contract [as Artistic Director] came up and the Board voted not to renew it. I think that aside from any other job performance issues, I was seen as a threat to the safety of the name. I think that people were uncomfortable with my agitation over that issue. It was very clear to the 11 GMCSD founders that they could be successful with gay in the name. The mayor event was the proof.

The "mayor event" that the AD references is a story he sometimes shares during rehearsal. My memory of his recounting of this story is one of the things that inspired this project. In 1992, shortly after the above-mentioned rift and the formation of the Gay Men's Chorus of San Diego, an interesting political event occurred that shifted thinking about the use of the word 'gay' in the chorus's name, according to the AD:

> Susan Golding was elected mayor of San Diego. The convention center had had its grand opening…the inauguration was there. Her staff wanted to pick some performing organizations, and she requested a gay men's chorus. There were two, but she knew politically that she would make the statement that she was inclusive by inviting the one that called itself gay.

The potential pitfalls of self-declaration of gay identity, in this case, seemed to be mitigated by the potential utility of such a declaration. While I will not argue that the early 1990s in San Diego provided a welcoming, affirming for queer persons in

general, it is interesting to compare the outreach efforts of a local (republican) political figure in 1992 to the silence on homosexuality exhibited by the President a few years earlier, or, perhaps, to the negative consequences of a perceived supportiveness of homosexuality on the campaigning efforts of Barry Goldwater during his bid for the presidency.

This shift in the perceived function of a gay identity marker in the organization's name did nothing to stem another crisis that had been plaguing the chorus, the spread of HIV/AIDS. SDMC was founded in the mid-1980s as information and misinformation about the disease were spreading along with the virus itself.

> Over time: for a lot of us, the AIDS epidemic either derailed personal paths, or accelerated them. For me, being in the chorus barely a year, AIDS was thrust upon us. I really focused on being the best conductor, but suddenly found I had to learn an entirely separate set of skills that I wasn't prepared for. I had to learn how to sit by someone's hospital bedside and listen to them talking about possibly dying. I think that my role morphed very quickly form being an artistic leader, to being under crisis, under fire. All my GALA colleagues were the same way. I set aside nights to visit members in hospitals… had to meet with boyfriends and parents to plan memorial services. I came out on the other side of it much better prepared to be a leader than from any training. Baptism by fire.

This anecdote parallels those often recounted by the Artistic Director during rehearsals. In particular, when working on repertoire that he thinks ties directly into the group's mission of working toward social change, the AD will remind members of these moments of crisis in the group's history, when the group was faced with the task of singing at funerals and memorial services of chorus members and their loved ones on a far too frequent basis. He often frames that history around the rehearsal

experience, stating that there were times when he did not know who would make it to rehearsal from week to week because they were too ill to attend, or because they lost their battles with disease. I say 'remind' because a small but significant number of current chorus members were members at the time, and they know that history firsthand, and, at times, retell that story themselves. This telling and retelling of these personal accounts of fear, illness, loss, and shame, because they occur frequently during moments when chorus members reflect on shared experiences within the organization, constitute a kind of unofficial group history. Other current members had not joined the chorus at the time, but have personal experiences of the early AIDS crisis, either through their own diagnoses and treatments of HIV infection, or through the experiences of partners, friends, and family who have been through and, perhaps, have lost that struggle. Some members are fighting that battle today. Other members, however, were somewhat unacquainted with these experiences, either because of the relative brevity of their recent membership, or because they lacked involvement in the larger gay community at the height of the crisis during the eighties and nineties. This point is potentially of particular importance for younger members of the chorus who, because of their youth, had not yet come of age during that time. I am numbered among that group; members who were not of age in that era are far less likely to have experienced the crisis in that way than are men who were in a position to have social and romantic networks consisting primarily of gay men, the group hardest it during that phase of the AIDS crisis in the US.

This age-based difference in experience seems to manifest itself in the chorus in other ways. The AD notes that, as of 2009 when GMCSD and SDMC decided to merge, the debates of the use of the word gay had been settled. Given that the combined chorus is called the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus, it is clear in which direction the debate was settled. I was a member of GMCSD when the merger took place, and I, like all members at the time, was involved in the process of choosing a new name. There was discussion, but the primary alternatives were the name that was ultimately chosen versus a name that focused on the musical aspects of our existence. That alternative was quickly shot down[16], and the name was chosen without much ado.

In addition to the perceived minimization of concern over the chorus being labeled as gay, a concern anticipated because of the earlier rift, the Artistic Director notes another trend among the membership regarding his perception of their attitudes about gay politics and history, and members' involvement in those two things:

> I don't see as much anymore because of where the LGBT movement is. The good news is that marriage equality isn't much of an issue for younger people. The natural curiosity about LGBT history isn't there anymore . People in their 40s are still interested in learning about Harvey Milk and his legacy. People in their 20s, not so much. It's probably the same for young black kids and the Civil Rights Movement and the catalyzing events. 20-somethings aren't drawn to projects like the Berlin show[17]. When I was coming out in my 20s, that would have

[16] Most choruses in GALA have names that consist of some combination of: the Chorus's geographic location, its composition (women's, men's, or mixed), perhaps some sort of marker of sexual identity, and an indication that the organization is a chorus. The choice of "The San Diego Gay Men's Chorus," then, is a somewhat facile one because it easily situates the chorus among its GALA colleagues.

[17] The original plan for the Spring 2014 show was a collection of cabaret music from 1930's Berlin's emergent gay scene. That plan has been scrapped in favor of doing a 90s-themed show instead. I cannot say for certain what that shift has meant for the group, but after announcing the plan for the 90s show, SDGMC attracted more auditionees for a single concert than it ever has before.

> been fascinating. For better or for worse, that's not there. For a lot of the 20-somethings, all that's left is "let's do something fun." It makes keeping the chorus relevant difficult as an agent for social change. The things that young people used to be very inquisitive about in terms of our movement are now somewhat settled and passe. "Why is it important for me to know so much about Harvey Milk?" Maybe it's because I'm Jewish and it's drummed into our heads… "Never forget." The old adage. That's why I'm not willing to walk away from the part of our mission about being not free, not equal.
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> Thinking back, being a gay group, it was important. For people like [a former chorus member who works on social justice causes], it's just as important, the music and the advocacy. Young members seem to care a lot about the entertainment. I need to take more time to talk about the non-musical reasons to participate.

The Artistic Director's comments about his perceptions of younger members of the chorus and their supposed lack of engagement with gay history and politics corresponded with my own thoughts on the matter. The social and political climate in which queer persons found themselves was, and is, in flux. It is not surprising, then, that the Artistic Director might identify differences of perspective between older and younger gay men regarding gay issues. The stigmatizing conditions that constructed narratives of shame around gay identity were being addressed by the structures created by and in the gay liberation and gay pride movements, creating a somewhat altered set of conditions in which younger gay men come of age.

Alternative Voices

Thus far, I have provided information about the chorus's past in order to demonstrate the role of shame in the organization's history. The following discussion will exemplify the shift in thinking around shame that I indicate at the end of the

preceding section. The interviews included below are taken from the subset of younger (under age 35) SDGMC members. I focus specifically on that group because their responses corroborate what I suggest about the concept of gay shame and how its current articulation does not adequately account for contemporary experiences of gay identity. Again, and as I state throughout this dissertation, I do not, at any point, intend to suggest that any conceptions of gay identity apply universally. Gay persons experienced a range of treatments prior to stonewall, during the gay liberation era of the 1970s and 1980s, and gay persons' experiences similarly vary during the ongoing Pride movement, in relation to AIDS, marriage, and other major and minor social and political issues. What I do continue to suggest here is that the "good enough" approach to understanding gay experience through a framework of the particular kind of shame associated with pre-gay liberation and gay pride US society is becoming problematically less apt for organizations that seek to further their social activism in the current social and political moment. I argue that the traditional narratives of shame that constitute the basis of mainstream gay pride, by themselves, may lack resonance because of the success of the social and political movements that have fought to improve those conditions.

That said, I do not think that the narratives are useless. My claim is that, by themselves, the narratives do not necessarily motivate involvement in gay pride activism. As demonstrated in the interviews presented below, I argue instead that the narratives can continue to be useful, provided they are presented in a manner that facilitates an affective connection between persons whose experiences diverge from

those embedded in the narratives and persons for whom those narratives ring true. Organizations such as SDGMC provide a setting for that type of exchange to occur. Because members work together, and because the organization fosters social connections between members, the sharing of the personal experiences of shame remains personal.

The discussion of the use of these narratives will come through information gathered through interviews of (mostly) current chorus members. I will provide a brief explanation of the interview structure and my rationale for choosing interviewees. After that, I will include information they provided. I wanted their insights not only because they filled in a few gaps in my knowledge of chorus history, a history that is only partially written, but is shared among members informally, but also because their insights are independent of my own. As you'll see when I discuss the interview structure, I provided very little prompting in terms of questions. Instead, I asked members to generally offer their thoughts regarding their experiences as members of the group. I wanted to see how they talked about their impressions of the chorus's historical narrative, to see if their thoughts reflected any of the assumptions I made about:

- The reasons people join (are they looking for support/safety, or for reasons less directly connected to such feelings?)
- The deployment of affect (that is, did they feel anything when engaged in these storytelling processes?)

- Thoughts/feelings associated with that affect (did anything about them change as a result of that feeling?)
- Maintenance in the service of establishing bonds between members and/or a greater sense of allegiance to the organization
- A greater or altered sense of "gay identity" in the political sense discussed in chapter 1

I could have framed a project solely around an analysis of the stories that the chorus tells about itself. I know the stories well. They are shared during meetings and rehearsals, in conversations I've had with at least a hundred members over the last 5 years, in our public addresses at community events, and, at times, during our concerts. For example, SDGMC's Info Night for the summer 2013 concert included a speech where prospective members were told that belonging to the chorus connects members to a much larger tradition of community and support for gay men. In his presentation, the speaker (a long-time chorus member) noted:

1. Gay men are a community because we need to be
2. The world has been a tough place for us
3. We share a common trait that makes us targets
4. Being with one another makes us safe from that (April 2013 info night speech)

This outline highlights traditional understandings of gay community as one based upon shared experiences of oppression, a point established in chapter 1. An analysis of the chorus's self-talk, on its own, could provide useful insight into how a living, breathing group of people manifest ideas about affect, identity, and political activism.

I wanted to do more than that. I wanted to see if those ideas are actually held among any of the members of the group I study.

To be sure, I did not expect to find, nor did I attempt to find that *all* members of the group feel the same way. That is clearly not the case. Groups are always diverse, and members always express a range of feelings about any given topic. Furthermore, membership has fluctuated significantly during my nearly five years in the group, so gathering a "snapshot" of the organization might not reflect any enduring facts about the chorus. Moreover, this is not a quantitative project. I do not seek to determine statistical significance to corroborate any findings. I rather seek manifestations of experience that connect to the ideas I have been reading for the past several years, and that I cite in the preceding chapters of this dissertation. That is, I wanted to seek out a *liason*, however limited, between the theories I value and the practices in which I and my fellow chorus members engage. To do that, I could not simply observe members of the chorus; I had to talk to them about their thoughts and feelings.

That, in and of itself, provides a host of challenges. Because nearly everyone in the chorus knows me (my role as dance captain puts me in front of the entire group fairly often), and many of them know that I am a scholar studying these kinds of issues, it is difficult to ensure that potential participants in this project know enough about it to make an informed decision about participating in interviews, but not so much about my research questions that they attempt to confirm my thinking for me. I wanted their honest answers, not their attempts to tell me what they thought I might

want to hear. Because of this concern, I did not interview anyone with whom I'd previously had any deep conversations about my research. This decision precluded the possibility of interviewing some of my closest friends in the group, persons who indicated on numerous occasions, their willingness to participate.

Given the tradition of having experienced chorus members speak about their experiences joining and belonging to the chorus, I'd had ample opportunity to hear insights from some of the older members of the group. Therefore, I made a special effort to include as participants members under the age of 35, and persons who have been in the chorus for less than five years. For similar reasons, I wanted to include members who come from diverse geographical areas and who belong to different racial groups.

After conducting the interviews, I found that, to a person, members younger than I am (age 34 as of this writing) offered identical insights into the shame narratives they hear in the chorus and have heard in other places. They each indicate that the canonical gay shame story with which they have become acquainted and they associate with "the gay experience" does not resonate with their own personal histories. I chose to include the following four interviews because they exemplify nuanced ways in which younger members make use of the chorus's narratives of gay shame. Further, they demonstrate that such narratives are taken on as part of their own identifications as gay men. In various ways which will be made clear, each interviewee explains how he comes to personalize narratives of gay shame-based on

experiences that, strictly speaking, are not his own but are rather considered canonical to gay identity.

"Alexander" – age 28

> "Joining the chorus teaches us about our past and where we came from"
>
> I joined for GuyTunes (summer 2011). [A former chorus member] got me to join. He knew that I could sing, he got me to join because he was super excited. At the time he joined, I was still finishing my master's thesis and was preoccupied. When auditions came again, it was when everything was wrapping up. I defended the 3rd week of rehearsal. I could start dabbling in extracurricular and was graduating…I swam with different strokes [a gay swimming club] for a month but it wasn't as rigorous so started training on my own. I was in some school groups here and there. Chorus has been only other thing, except the Young Professional's Council, but that was after the chorus. I got more connected after joining the chorus.
>
> I didn't really think much about social implications of being in a gay chorus, or the social impact that I could have on the community. Joined for my own pleasure, and as I got more invested, I realized how it was much more than that.
>
> Now I think it's important. I think being in an organization that reaches out to the community...before I joined, I thought we'd perform three times a year...didn't know about outreach and singing at local events where we can share through song a message that depends on the event, like the tree lighting [Mama's Kitchen's annual tree lighting ceremony on World AIDS Day], a message of remembrance and hope. It still gives me personal satisfaction, but in a different sense. Before it was because I like performing, but now I see how performing can touch other people. As someone who wants to be a doctor, that matters to me. That's important to me.

Alexander's words indicate a shift in his thinking that occurred after joining SDGMC. Rather than seeking out involvement in an organization that offered either safety or an opportunity to work toward improving social and political conditions for gay persons—a goal expressed in the mission, vision, and values statement of the chorus—

Alexander sought out something in which he would find pleasure. That difference in purpose, however, did not preclude Alexander's connection to the aspects of chorus experience that more directly connect to its community focus.

> I came out in my second year of grad school. Friends and siblings knew, but I came out to my parents then. Before joining, I never wanted it to define me. I wanted to be defined by who I was as a person, my achievements... I didn't want that to be the only identifying thing about me. But when I joined, I realized that it's something...it is a part of me and it's important to embrace that. Especially as we go out and perform, it's important to show that we are proud of who we are because there are still closeted people and young people who need role models, so they can look at us and see that you can be successful and happy and normal.

Alexander starts out with a certain kind of disidentification with gay identity. His resistance to being defined by his sexuality forecloses the possibility of simple identity politics. Despite this, he comes to feel a sense of responsibility for performing a successful, happy gay identity because, to him, doing so can benefit others.

> Listening to a lot of the older people got me thinking. Especially [the Artistic Director]. He teaches us a lot about music and about history. I've learned a lot about LGBT history from some of the older folks, who've experienced much harsher times. We've all experienced some kind of adversity but listening to the older guys, listening to their coming out stories. They had a much more difficult time.

Here, Alexander marks what is, for him, an important distinction between his experiences of reckoning with his queer sexuality and parallel experiences had by an older generation of gay men. He says that his experience differs from what he imagines is/was a much harder one.

> I'm usually thankful that I was born when I was. It's hard to put yourself in that position...had I grown up then, I would have done something different. It would be difficult...I know it was hard for me growing up when I did, so I can imagine it would be that much harder

> then. I'm always interested. When people talking about growing up in the 60s, 70s 80s, it makes me want to learn more and ask questions. It's even triggered within me a lot of my own research...I read *And the Band Played On*. I think a lot of younger people should take advantage of that. I'm also interested in geriatric medicine, growing up with my grandparents, older adults are able to… a lot of people our age might see them as stuck in their ways, there's a lot of ageist attitudes, but there's so much to learn from them and their histories, their stories. I took that from my grandparents, and now it's a whole different group when you talking about gays who grew up in a different time, it's like talking to a minority during the Civil Rights Movement, and hearing how those changes affected them. It's hard when you group up now, you don't have that experience of how it made you feel personally unless you grew up in a really backwards town, it might not be on your mind.
>
> The 60s show is a great example. It was so heavily focused on a changing time. We talked a lot about LGBT history of the 60s, connecting that with the music was very powerful. I hope that the younger people in the audience were able to take something away from that.

Alexander's involvement with the chorus gave him a commitment to actively participating in the improvement of social conditions for gay persons. That commitment, as he states early in the interview, is not one that inspired him to join a gay community organization; it is rather one that manifest after spending some time as a member. For him, attending to the negative stories told by the older gay men with whom, because of the chorus, he now has a personal relationship served as a catalyst for this shift in thinking.

> In the young professional's council...we need to learn the history in order to understand the community. Having experienced a lot of those detrimental times like stonewall and the general attitudes has shaped how the older gays feel about current issues. One problem is that the really young people don't think that older guys have anything to contribute...they're just stubborn or make inappropriate comments. For the people who are genuinely interested in a cross-generational conversation, there's a lot that the younger generation can learn from

> the older LGBT community. And the older can learn from the younger, like looking to the future. They can get caught up in the past, but they should realize that progress is being made.

Alexander ends with a reminder that, in taking on his somewhat newly found commitment to gay causes, he is not identifying *as* essentially the same kind of gay person he hears reflected in those stories of struggle and triumph. He is instead identifying *with* them, in a way that significantly shapes how he thinks about his actions, but maintains the distinction he sees between himself and the others depicted in those stories.

"Daniel" - age 26

> "Joining the chorus teaches us why we are the way we are."
>
> I was in the military, got to my first duty station in sept 2011… met some people in the chorus and decided to join. I hadn't had a musical outlet. People had been suggesting it. I found the info online. Missed auditions for GuyTunes, but came for the next one [the winter holiday show of 2011]. My first opinion of the audition…had my music book, didn't know the level of professionalism. I sang "Not a Day Goes by," my favorite song. [The Artistic Director] was at the piano. My first thought was "yes!"...he could transpose, hadn't worked with anyone like that since leaving NY. Appreciated the talent. At info night sat next to you, singing tenor. I was back in music and loved it. Another musical family. It wasn't until later that the chorus became bigger.
>
> It went from just being a musical outlet to a social outlet to a social system... it led me to my husband. When going through chemo it got me out of the house. Became a life support, a lifeline and a musical outlet at the same time. It lets you care about things other than yourself. And that saved my life. I love the chorus.
>
> I was looking for a place to have fun rather than a professional outlet. What could be more fun than sitting around singing with a bunch of gay people? I'm around straight people all the time, an old idea of straight. And I needed something else after being stuck at work all day.

Like Alexander, Daniel indicates a desire to enjoy himself as the inspiration for his decision to join SDGMC. For him, the choice also takes into account his professional training in vocal music, which is why he compares the chorus to a professional outlet. Daniel also indicates a desire to sing as a primary motivation, with socializing with other gay men as a secondary benefit of membership.

> The chorus shows the community as it should be. As people. There's every different kind of person. And we're just people. We share 3 common things, we're gay, and we want to sing. And we're men. We erase gay stereotypes through our unity and gayness. You don't see them as gay or straight, but as men. As friends. It equalizes gay men. We as gay men have this hierarchy. This is the idea of what's hot, masculinity as defined by the straight world...it demeans feminism in the male, which I despise. I feel more expressive and who's to say that that's not masculine? Who defines it? In the chorus, those boundaries are erased. We can't change our sexuality or our sex and I define everyone there as masculine.

Because Daniel is particularly involved in chorus activities—he routinely participates in a minimum of three chorus activities per week—I asked him why he remains so engaged:

> A few different reasons. Last year has been tough...I do everything in the group. Rehearsing 3 days a week for a year. It's taxing. It's partly for responsibility. Also to see my friends, that's another big reason. Mostly because I love the music. That's why I keep coming back. I love the performance and the music. I think it's how we deliver the music. When people ask me what I do, I say I'm a performer. I take musical works and bring them to life on stage. But what the chorus gives, it holds so much more than just the genre of music we're doing. We stand for so much more. The history of the AIDS epidemic… and from that we bring the idea that men can be married and women can be married, and it's vast. It's enriching to be able to do that. You won't get that anywhere else. There's no play or musical out there that can do all of that. With any kind of song we sing.

I also asked for his impression of the stories that we hear in the chorus about the experiences of older gay men, in particular those stories that discuss the effect of AIDS on the group:

> What I like most about it is seeing how it impacts different people. Many of the older basses were adults during the aids epidemic. I was not. I don't know anyone personally who's died. I'm HIV positive, since my second semester with the chorus. So I always pay attention to it. To see how somber everyone gets, you can almost feel the pain and loss and fear. It becomes tangible. To me especially because I'm newly infected, and the community now where all you have to do is take a pill. I'm glad the feeling is there because this stuff is real. Kids don't get that. The chorus...I said I want to do something in the community after I got infected. The chorus does that, through my favorite thing in the world, music. I've just never seen music at the forefront of social and political change. I realize that's what the chorus is. It's encompassing a lot of things that artistic and intellectual people care about. It's a great avenue for that and it brings them together.
>
> Pre -Truvada and the new generation--those who don't know anyone who died—both sides have voices that need to be heard. But neither one can be dominant. The older generation...you can feel the somberness and the fear and the need for them to protect and survive. When I became positive and was going through classes at ***** hospital, there was an individual there who lived with HIV for at least 30 years. Being newly positive, that's great to hear. It's not like it used to be, but we have to know what it used to be. But stop acting like you're going to die. It's not emotionally healthy for newly infected folks to think they are.
>
> But it's also important that people know that you can't just take a pill. They forget. They become careless. Especially because of prophylactic medication. My husband takes it, it's great. But I'm afraid that people will become careless. I'll never judge, but don't come to me when you end up getting it. It's not something to be played with. My generation neglects that. They only start caring is when they have to take their meds for the first time. I don't know how to bridge that gap. I sit in the middle. I like hearing the old stories because it reminds me of the gravity of the situation. But I also want to enjoy my life. I don't want to wake up everyday and mourn. I don't want to go through 2 years of depression before I realize I'm not going to die. I already know that. I still hear people focus on death. The face of HIV has changed.

> We'll never forget those who've died, but thing have changed. But that's all people focus on. If we want to get to zero [new infections], stop talking about death. That just depresses people. And if sex is someone's thing, that's what they're going to do. It's a difficult thing for a community to deal with. The first step is to move away from the somberness of the past. We should celebrate their lives. Too many do that in silence. I'm not telling people to go scream their status. I think the stigma from before… the potency of the stigma hasn't lessened, but fewer people have it. I just didn't give a fuck. Being co-infected was a bigger deal. I understand the fear and loss of the early generation. Hepatitis C is just as deadly, but it's slow and doesn't get the attention. It's not until the liver jumps out of the body and dies that people see it. I understand about the men who died, that is their experience, but I so much want people to feel peace and calm that comes with only have to take 3 pills a day. The peace that comes with knowing you're healthy. Be okay with you, you're not going to die. Respect it. Hope for a cure.
>
> I will say I have had a great experience because I've had a great support system. Not everybody has that. I didn't have to deal with months of stigma and rejection. Two months after I was diagnosed I started dating my husband. I was scared. His response was, "so?" "We just have to be more careful." It makes you feel like yourself again. There are people who go 30 years. There are blindly optimistic people. But I firmly believe that everyone can have a good experience. The risk is from people who never get tested because of the stigma.

Because of Daniel's personal experience with HIV, he frames an understanding of the differences of experience between older and younger gay men around his HIV support group rather than around the Chorus. He does note a generation gap there, similar to the one Alexander indicates, where early experiences of stigma and trauma with few mitigating factors creates a different kind of shame-based identity than similar experiences had after certain advances (medications, legal changes, increased social acceptance) have taken hold. Daniel identifies with a younger group of HIV positive gay men, who, according to Daniel, understand HIV/AIDS through a frame of

treatment and maintenance, unlike older men who, to him, necessarily understood HIV through a frame of stigma and death.

Our conversation turned to a discussion of coming out, where Daniel again points to a generation gap between older and younger gay men by talking about the chorus:

> When [a guest conductor] talked about his story about the Vietnam draft and the gay thing, somebody said, "Who cares?" Do you understand that that man [was] a teacher? If word got out, he couldn't work as a teacher. Anywhere. It was either that or go to Vietnam. You can only understand the world through your experiences. I was born after the gay [liberation] movement. I grew up in a place where people made fun of you, but when I was 18 I moved to New York City. Nobody cares there. That's the attitude I took on. A lot of people had to choose to either be really out or really be in in order to survive, and that's hard to erase. For the older community, depending on their background, maybe it's not a big deal, or maybe they're gay and proud. And that's how they survived. Others had to bury their heads in the sand and float under the radar. Think about Matthew Shepherd. I'm glad the world is changing, but people grew up in that world, so homosexuality becomes all they are out of fear. That breaks my heart. That's what causes people to be addicts, or prostitutes, etc. They can't express who they are. But people find ways to survive. I think age reflects the severity of the survival mechanism. Coming out isn't easy. Everybody's story is filled with value and life lessons. It'd be interesting to look at age and location. I think you'd see more polar opposites at that age. With my generation it's more varied. I guaranteed people will disagree, but I see a future where sexuality really doesn't matter. Where people really don't think about it. Some people will say that's crazy. Others will say it's already like that. I'm not that foolish, I'm in the military. In the 3 years I've served, to see that change is great. People see your work value. They don't care if you're gay. It's a non-issue. I think that's what's going to happen.

Daniel echoes his hunch that different experiences faced by older and younger gay men can lead to vastly different understandings of gay identity. He even argues that he sees another rift on the horizon, between a generation that thinks of sexuality as a

significant part of identity, and a coming generation of people who consider sexuality trivial as a matter of identity. It is this perceived rift that I find interesting. As I argue in chapter one of this dissertation

> If my support system were a house, the chorus would be the foundation, along with *****[18] hospital. The social side is the chorus. Everything else grows from that. The husband is my everything and I met him through the chorus. We have the same love of music and dance. And my friends are in the chorus. Those who I've opened up to and have seen my shit over the past two years. And then the music and the performing. For a performer, that's the way I can truly express myself. Through song. I don't know how or why, but for some reason the world is its most clear when I'm on that stage singing a song, whether it's with 139 other men or just myself with a microphone. It's healing. The negative emotions that come from being HIV positive have to be processed. If you don't process that stuff it will kill you. That's what support systems are about. And the chorus offers it all. The house is [the husband], and the chorus is the foundation. It's like the military. I might hate the guy next to me, but damn it I know he'd jump in front of a bullet to save me. That's what the chorus is like to me.

Far from being just the fun activity he was hoping to find, Daniel has discovered that the chorus functions both as a valuable support system for him, but also as way to represent what he considers to be an ideal image of gay manhood.

"Mitchell" - age 31

> "It's a great way to meet people."
>
> I was living in Philly, single and unhappy. I had joined a few gay orgs. Philly was the first place I was out, I hoped to meet some gay friends, a boyfriend. Joined gay country western dance club, and other people were in Philly's chorus. I heard of it but didn't know anyone. I had never sung, was an instrumentalist, so I didn't think I'd like it. There was a concert a few weeks before I moved to San Diego, the show was Guytunes. The first set was a 50s and 60s thing, my favorite type of music. I was having a blast in the audience, tapping my feet, singing along, the person in front moved away. I thought about joining in SD.

[18] The name of the hospital was omitted to respect Daniel's privacy.

> I had similar hopes for meeting people. I wouldn't have joined a non-gay chorus. Only wanted a gay group.
>
> Chorus auditions happened 2 or 3 weeks after I arrived in San Diego. I hadn't even moved into my apartment yet. I didn't want to wait.
>
> I hadn't given much thought to how I fit into group's history. I wasn't here for the AIDS epidemic, when people were living in fear, discrimination in general... all those things still happen, but it's not an ever present level of dread or some negative emotion. For better or worse, my time is as a performer. I don't connect to idea of us being a mission driven organization. That's what they want, but being young enough to have missed the important work the chorus did… that was that chapter, and I'm post- that time.

Given that Mitchell began by saying that he was uniquely interested in joining a gay organization, I found it surprising that he hadn't considered any of the broader implications of being in such a group, or that he didn't think much about the socially activist aspects of the chorus's mission. He indicates rather his desire to ensure that he has an outlet for casual socializing with other gay men, but, for him, that is distinct from any sort of socially-transformative work.

> I feel kind of detached when the stories come out. In square dance, there have been 35 years of national conventions. The hotel staff serving the banquet wouldn't touch people and would wear gloves because of the stigma of AIDS. People tell that story. There are people who've been dancing ever since then. I guess I feel connected to those stories more than to similar stories in the chorus. Not sure why. There's a pink bandanna policy at convention...they take pictures at conventions, but some people don't want to be identified as gay, so they wear pink bandannas. Photographers make sure not to take their pictures. That happened at first convention I went to but not since then… don't know what happened to the policy. Why more connected? When you're dancing you're touching people. Singing is more individual. You have to work constantly with other people or it falls apart, and we hug at the end of every dance. Maybe that's what's different.

Mitchell's first experiences of a formalized gay community were in a square dancing club. For him, the deployment of touch as physical intimacy fostered a sense of connection to AIDS stories, a connection he does not feel when similar stories are told in SDGMC. He also references the square dance club's treatment of concerns about the public exposure of closeted members, a theme addressed earlier in reference to the chorus.

> I had a good time at GALA [2012 convention]. Didn't connect to other choruses, felt like I was there for my performance, and to listen. Didn't go to parties, or talk to other people I didn't know. I said to my parents I wasn't expecting to cry so many times. There was lots of emotional music and moments there that caught me by surprise. They say what happens at GALA is life changing, but that's not true for me. I had a great time had great performances--would go again--but I don't think I'm a different person. I see how LGBT are a nationwide, worldwide community thing. The same thing happened at my first dancing convention. A difference is that you actually dance with other people at convention. Structure of GALA doesn't lend itself to meeting people in other groups.
>
> There was really pretty music. A lot of times it was that they had some really emotional content that I didn't know we'd experience. We had "I Want More Life," which made me cry... I didn't know other groups would do that. Dan Savage, the skit with the father who hadn't come out to his son and son didn't know that's why he wasn't part of his life, I guess a straight person might not have had much of a connection...in that sense there's a community aspect there.
>
> The father and son thing was just so sad because neither was a part of the other's life... the mom kept them apart. They missed out and it was so pointless that there's all this happiness they could have had, but because of someone's homophobic attitude they missed out on this chance. Dan Savage's...people's coming out stories. People get physically assaulted, emotionally abandoned, kicked out of their homes. None of those things happened to me but I could feel empathy for those stories because that's what you hear in the gay media all the time. Now they focus on stories with happy endings. But what you hear is what made me scared to come out…."I told someone and it ended poorly." I missed out on chances at happiness because I was scared those things

> would happen to me. When I came out it wasn't easy but I wasn't cut out of the will or thrown out of the house. I didn't experience any of those things but I can connect with them when I see them portrayed in a movie or a song.

Mitchell expresses an important point about the distinction between seeing oneself as fundamentally changed by connections forged to the gay community and simply recognizing and appreciating the existence of such a community and feeling a connection to it. His words serve as a powerful corrective to the tendency to overstate the power of identifying practices. I, once again, reference Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick admonishment to remember that people are, in fact, different, and that there exist many different ways of identifying with; it is not a singular process. As José Muñoz writes in elaborating on Sedgwick's point, "Identifying with an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on, means also simultaneously and partially counteridentifying, as well as only partially identifying, with different aspects of the social and psychic world" (8). Mitchell's response exemplifies the complexity of this process.

Mitchell also connects his own story to the story told in the performance about the father and the son by pointing out that his own experience, to his mind, not as bad. He then moves from the particular narrative contained in that performance to the more common narratives of rejection and violence associated with coming out as gay. He reiterates that he never experienced those things, but the negative stories served as a reminder that he might. In an addendum to his interview, Mitchell, indicated that, not only did he not experience rejection or violence, he, based on his family and

community of residence, never felt that he had any immediate reason to fear such a response.

> I haven't really thought about groups as politically active. It seems strange to me to think of the chorus singing at someone's campaign event or us having a musical sit in somewhere. Maybe I don't know the breadth of political activity, but I would be weirded out if we did.

"Kirk" - age 30

> "Community can sometimes grow out of strife and struggle, but I don't know that that's what allows the community to continue."

Kirk came to SDGMC after having been a member of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. He also works with gay men's issues as part of his career. I include his interview because his experiences differ in this respect from the other participants. For him, joining SDGMC served less as a catalyzing agent for changing his thinking about gay community, but rather as another venue for exploration.

> I Joined for YuleTube [winter holiday concert of 2011]. I had sung in [the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus] through grad school and I had a great experience there. The music really helped me to be less stressed, so I couldn't imagine it being a bad idea to join during my internship here. I had been in San Diego two months. I moved here right before GuyTunes and saw the performance.
>
> I did stuff through LGBT student life in college, helped friends with projects, gender studies majors. We staged same sex weddings on the steps of the dorms at rutgers to get reactions from students wandering by. That was an interesting project. We did other small activist-type activities that occurred through friends or through the office. Not so much in grad school despite having an area in LGBT issues.
>
> I had heard about [SFGMC] after forgetting about it for a year. Passed an info table… joined less because it was a gay chorus, more because it's a men's chorus. My voice fits better in a men's chorus than in a mixed chorus. It's hard to sing in a mixed chorus. I'm not a bass so I don't fit easily. It was great that we do all the other stuff we do.

> There are people I didn't know, people I knew peripherally, and people I knew well…160 guys, so that's what you expect. You fall in with the guys you get along with. You bump into people all over town. I had a friend who said, "you can't swing a dead cat in the Castro without hitting a chorus boy." It rapidly expanded the group of people I knew. In my first year, I only hung out with people in my program. But during break they'd go home, and I'd be alone. Joining the chorus changed that. Joining the ensemble changed it even more because I was working with 7 other guys. I joined because I already hung out with all those other guys. My experience being there was like being in the big chorus multiplied because I got to know those guys really well, and I learned how to interact with them and to sing with them. We worked on all those things that make a group sound amazing. And we laughed and had fun. And made up songs.

Here, Kirk discusses the importance of what Patricia O'Toole calls "musicking," participating in the creation and performance of music with others, where the interaction structures the music rather than the other way around. O'Toole notes, As a result, through the act of musicking we affirm, explore, and celebrate our identity; musickers are saying, for right now, "this is who we are" (p. 5)" (30). Traditional rehearsals are structured around preselected music; the moments Kirk describes at the end of that section are primarily relationship-driven.

> I think SFGMC had a clear idea of what it's mission was and how we can be a force for social change and how to have a social presence. We did a lot of community performances, some we were brought in, some was us just saying we need to do this. We sang at so many marriage rallies. We weren't paid, we just went and supported our community. We worked on the political piece as we could. The California Freedom tour was another experience. After Prop 8 passed, the chorus decided that instead of going to the Gay Games to represent the us, we should be working on our presence here at home, so we went to the parts of California where Prop 8 got the most support….Chico, Redding, Fresno, Bakersfield, Vacaville. We took music that was relevant to us as a chorus and a community and to what was going on to say that we want to be treated like everyone else...to change hearts and minds through music….I'd never been to Fresno before that...we sang and went out after that to a local gay bar. So many people had seen us sing

and were so grateful to have us there. It was amazing to see the outpouring of gratitude….some of the towns had had gay choruses, but….we went to these places to raise awareness.

I feel like I don't get the same experiences here, not to the same extent. I don't think we have as much presence in San Diego. I don't believe that we've made our voice known in San Diego. I don't know how to change that. But we don't have that same presence. We get asked to sing at events put on by the [LGBT] center. That's great, but that seems to be all we do. We're not as out there with our presence. The only example that I think of is around ticket sales. Our presence there was such a big factor in ticket sales. Every Christmas, [SFGMC] would stake out a table at 18th and Castro, and sell tickets to the holiday shows and just be present in the community where we were trying to sell tickets. I don't know if that's possible in San Diego. But we had a presence, people would stop by, they'd know our members. It's hard not to know us. We don't do stuff like that here. We don't set up tables by the flag on Normal Street to sell tickets to our show. That would be a neat idea. We'd always have speakers….we did it once outside Mo's. [SDGMC's Membership Director] brought his speakers. Things like that would help us have more of a presence.

It's hard to say what we should address...I want to say that we should address the things that affect how we're seen in the larger community. But half of our audience is our community. I think we also have the ability to address problems within our community...and we do to a certain extent. But I think we could do more. I think *Through a Glass, Darkly* is the biggest thing. Our issues: tendencies to fall into addictions, the over-focus on things that don't matter—looks, appearance over the quality of the person—I see so many wonderful people distressed about things that don't matter because they matter to everyone else. That's why I did my dissertation. I feel like these are things we could be addressing somehow. We should.

I never really thought about where my assumptions about community come from. I think of community as people bound together by some status. Where I find actual community is in groups where people come together for some purpose. My sense of community tends to come from being with like-minded people who do things together. Found with SF Bears, SDGMC, SFGMC, not the bears here. I find myself often saying, find what you enjoy, find people who do it, you'll find people like you there. That's what creates community. Finding people who share this thing that brings you all together...you might be very different in other ways, but that makes for a great diverse group of

> people. I don't know about you, but I get bored if everyone is the same. I like having a diverse group of friends. That's what I like about the chorus. We all have something in common, we all like singing. We all like standing with a group with gay in the name. But we have differences and those differences make us great.
>
> For a lot of people the bad stuff is what brought people together, marriage, AIDS, rights… people who wouldn't have come together otherwise. I've spoken to many other people about how many lesbian friends they made because those women came in to help so much. Community can sometimes grow out of strife and struggle, but I don't know that that's what allows the community to continue. It may be the spark, but it's only the thing that gets people in to the room. It takes more to keep things going. If that weren't the case, if when people were dying, the community would have fallen apart. If when we gained marriage equality, the community would have fallen apart. The struggle brought everyone to the same table but it isn't what kept them there.

When I asked Kirk about his understanding of his place in the struggles he mentioned above, he said:

> I didn't live through most of it. For my generation it's been the marriage equality struggle. I was too young to know about the HIV crisis at its height. I was living outside of a major city where it was centered, but it wasn't part of my life. For me it's about understanding what the community has been through. The marriage struggle I'm more connected to because I was old enough to vote when Prop 8 happened… Being part of the struggle for a fundamental right that everyone should have was my part in the struggle as a community.

Given that, I asked how Kirk came to learn about the gay community in the first place:

> I've had so many contacts with the community. My high school chorus teacher was gay, and I learned about the HIV epidemic from him. I learned about our struggles with substances in college. I learned about Stonewall at the Stonewall Inn from someone who was there. I got a lot of the historical stuff from people who lived it. People who survived, people who lost so many friends and relatives and loved ones in the HIV epidemic, which was the defining struggle of the generation before mine.

> It's hard to say how this knowledge comes to bear because I'm so involved. It comes up a lot in a lot of different ways. I wish I could come up with something specific. It fills in the background that allows me to understand the community. It allows me to approach my work and music differently. It allows me to look at where we've been and where we're going.

During Feeling Groovy, our 60s themed concert held in summer 2013, Kirk performed a monologue written from the perspective of a gay man reflecting on his experiences coming out in the wake of the Stonewall Riots:

> What I put into the piece were the stories from people I've known. You really can't sing in a gay men's chorus without making intergenerational connections. I knew lots of people in SFGMC who were in SFGMC through the AIDS crisis. I knew so many people who had lived the experiences in that monologue...not necessarily stonewall, but I know people who grew up in the Midwest and couldn't come out and be who they are where they grew up, so I put that that into the monologue as best I could. To lend their voices to the monologue as best I could.

This anecdote addresses another use of the kind of identifying-with processes I argue take place here. Thus far, I have addressed identifying-with as a process facilitated by membership in a community organization where personal bonds can be established among persons with diverse personal experiences in such a way that can inspire the feeling of having a common cause despite those differences. The particular kind of identifying-with that Kirk points to above is the kind of identifying-with I will address in the next chapter, when I delve into my experiences of performing shame narratives for an audience, and, in particular, the challenges of performing a borrowed shame narrative, one that is considered common to gay experience, but is unlike my own personal experience.

Conclusion

SDGMC implicitly describes itself as part of the gay pride movement. As such, it makes use of much of the traditional gay pride discourse that assumes gay shame as its point of departure. This discourse had an impact on the chorus in its early days, and, because of that impact, is discussed within the group as a significant factor in the group's history. This sharing of the shame narrative is, of course, met with a range of interpretations, one set of which is made by members who, by virtue of their relatively young age, lack personal experiences that correspond to the stigmatized experiences assumed by those gay shame narratives. What those members do claim to possess, however, is some sense of connection to those narratives. Further, they claim that that connection is fostered by the relationships they have with others who do and did experience those things. For some members, SDGMC offered the initial and/or primary basis for this type identifying with the experiences of another. For other members who already had established close bonds with older gay persons whose lives, in some way or another, contained experiences of gay shame as traditionally conceived, find that SDGMC offers another venue for such relationships to be forged and such identification to take place. This suggests that the sharing of shameful experiences serves to foster allegiance to the missions of these organizations who strive for social change. I posit that the sharing of this information within the context of the kinds of personal relationships forged by participation in a community organization functions differently from the acquisition of the same type of information in a less personal way. Participants indicate having had familiarity with experiences

of gay struggle before joining gay community organizations, but they indicate that getting to know people—by engaging in leisure activities together, by dancing together, or by singing together—made personal their understanding of experiences of the stigmatizing conditions of the traditional framing of gay experience.

Chapter 4: Performing Shame: "I Want More Life"

The preceding chapter was based on a series of interviews I conducted with members of the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. Those interviews reveal a kind of disidentification on the part of younger chorus members with experiences of gay shame. That chapter of the dissertation fulfills the fourth requirement of Leon Anderson's model for analytic autoethnography, dialogue with informants beyond the self. Reprinted here is Anderson's list of requirements.

> (1) Complete member researcher (CMR) status
> (2) Analytic reflexivity
> (3) Narrative visibility of the researcher's self
> (4) Dialogue with informants beyond the self, and
> (5) Commitment to theoretical analysis (378)

In this chapter and the following one, I provide information and analysis that fulfills the other requirements of Anderson's model. I discuss my own membership in SDGMC. I joined the Gay Men's Chorus of San Diego in May of 2009, and I participated in the final two concerts held by that organization before it was reconstituted as the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. These chapters are framed around narratives of my experiences as a chorus member, and those narratives are supported by analyses of gay shame associated with HIV/AIDS and with performances of failed masculinity.

This chapter takes up the notion of identifying with gay shame as a matter of theatrical performance. I consider SDGMC's performances of "I Want More Life," a choral piece composed by Michael Shaieb. The piece is a setting of text from Tony Kushner's Angels in America: Perestroika. In the text, Prior Walter, a character

struggling with social and health crisis associated with AIDS professes that, in the face of his own suffering and the suffering of others, he wishes to continue living. This chapter will provide a brief discussion of Kushner's play and its depiction of gay characters and themes. The next section provides an analysis of Shaieb's setting of the text. The next two sections will address the two occasions on which SDGMC has performed the piece, the first during SDGMC's spring 2011 concert titled Friend Me, which featured another of Shaeib's gay themed choral compositions, and the second at the 2012 GALA convention described in chapter 2. I participated in both performances, and base my discussion here on that experience.

The shame that I discuss in this chapter is the shame described in the gay studies literature I explore in the first chapter of this dissertation. It is a shame triggered by stigma, a shame resulting from a sense of failure vis-à-vis dominant ideologies of sexuality and gender performance. In particular, that shame is shaped by conditions of secrecy imposed by those ideologies upon queer persons, and reinforced by the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS and its early—and lingering—association with gay men

I argue below that performing "I Want More Life" called upon me to take on Prior's shame as my own, to, in a sense, identify as a gay man facing death because of AIDS. As I have indicated earlier, I consider AIDS to be a canonical gay theme given its central position in the gay liberation movement since the 1980s, and therefore a key structuring factor in gay shame as experienced after the discovery of the disease in the US. Learning this piece required me to perform—through my singing of the lyrics

provided for me—an experience of AIDS-related shame with which I personally had no previous experience. In a sense, I had to speak words that were not my own, in the service of telling a story that was not my own, but one that, because of the conventions of stage performance, I had become responsible for telling. As I discuss the experience of performing the message of the piece, I will note how acquiring a frame of reference for AIDS as gay crisis, a frame provided by my relationships with other SDGMC members, facilitated my performance of the piece by offering me an affective basis for my entry into the piece. In the preceding chapter I wrote about the chorus as a site for sharing experiences of gay shame and pride among persons who feel personally connected to one another as a means to foster connections between contextualized narratives of gay shame and persons who might lack firsthand experiences of that context . Here, I supplement that idea with a discussion of my experience performing someone else's shame as a way of establishing an affective connection to a set of experiences that one has not actually had. At the end of this chapter, I will suggest that the fostering of such a connection both represents the continued utility of those narratives

Angels in America

This section begins with a brief discussion of Angels in America, focusing on how the play positions the emergence of AIDS critical to understandings of gay identity in the 1980s. Much of this discussion centers on the character Prior Walter, because it is a speech delivered by him that serves as the text for the piece of music I

discuss later in this chapter. In the play, Prior is suffering from full-blown AIDS. I say suffering because his health crises constitute major plot points. He is contrasted with other characters who are similarly HIV positive, but whose level of health vary. About Kushner's work, David Roman claims:

> "His project, as rendered in the cultural practices of the theater, demands that as gay men we persevere in locating and claiming our agency in the construction of our histories. Kushner insists that we recognize that the procedures of our lives in response to AIDS not only matter (the subject of traditional AIDS plays) but that these procedures also hold insight and concern into the current U.S. political landscape—again, subtitled a "gay fantasia on *national* themes." Angels in America calls into question the concept of an official history. The play asks us to make distinctions between official and lived history, to notice what is documented and to bring forth into the public sphere what is not" (42).

Roman points to Kushner's implicit call for action to gay men in response to AIDS, which is categorized as a national, rather than as a "community" issue. This suggests that the lived histories Roman references are thought to be of great significance, and it is for that reasons that gay men are deemed responsible for bringing those histories out in the open. In this way, AIDS serves as a catalyst for public declarations of gay experience; the crises provoked by the disease, according to this thinking, compels gay men to act in response to it by laying claim to the stories that construct conceptions of gay male identity and sexuality.

James Fisher reiterates this point. "For example, all of the major male characters in Angels are gay--some are "out" and others are "closeted"--but all must deal with their sexuality as a central part of the action Kushner provides. In the age of AIDS, sexuality cannot be hidden any longer" ("Angels of Fructification"18). Fisher

argues that the centrality of AIDS, both to the experiences of queer persons, but also the broader social understanding, sexuality necessarily comes to the fore. In Kushner's work, sexuality, gay male sexuality in particular, is highlighted not only in Kushner's depiction of multiple gay characters, but in those moments where those characters talk openly about their sexualities, and where the problems of the closet are interrogated. See Kushner's fictionalized—but historically established—account of Roy Cohn for an example of a male character, whose depiction reflects the attempts at concealing, rather than reckoning openly with, gay male sexuality.

Fisher further uses the experience of AIDS to provide a basis for another challenge to dominant understandings of gay experience. At various moments in the play, Prior Walter seeks pleasure in drag and camp performance to mitigate his physical and emotional suffering. Fisher notes, "Some critics of Angels similarly found the camp to be too stereotypical, but Kushner believes that there is something empowering for gays in drag and a camp sensibility, in the deconstruction of stereotypical images of gays" ("Angels of Fructification" 18). Fisher argues that this reclamation of supposedly negative ideas about gay men and our supposed lack of masculinity is productive in that it allows those men to manipulate those ideas. Fisher also states:

> Prior dons Norma Desmond drag to escape his deep depression as he experiences the frightening realities of his illness; this exhibition of a stereotypical camp sensibility is employed by Kushner as a mode of empowerment. Drag permits Prior an escape from his pain, while Kushner identifies in this masquerade a vein of broad humor that both plays on and rejects gay stereotypes. (*Understanding Tony Kushner* 45)

Gay men perform in a variety of ways; Prior's use of camp and drag do not speak for the experiences of all other gay men, but they do serve to highlight an established place for such performances in the lives of many gay men. For Prior, those practices are life-saving. Fisher suggests that Kushner is asking gay men to consider the problem of feminine stereotypes not as inappropriate representations of gay men, but rather as problematic in that those stereotypes are deployed to devalue men who are deemed not to measure up. Such a position offers space for discussing such practices as they occur rather than foreclosing discussion by assuming either that all gay men are "like that" or that gay man should avoid being "like that." This is a point that I will revisit in the next chapter where I discuss drag performance in more depth.

When the play begins, Prior is in a long-term relationship with Louis, who does not have HIV, and who struggles with maintaining his commitment to caring for his ailing partner. David Krasner argues that Louis's struggle reflects an ambivalence toward the post-Stonewall notion of constant historical progress. For Louis, who wishes to believe that the conditions of gay life are improving, the severe suffering of his partner challenges his desired beliefs. Louis's inability to accept Prior's seemingly imminent but prolonged demise reflects the limits of his thinking. He cannot accept that progress is not assured. Louis's torment is contrasted with Prior's own handling of his ill health. Throughout the play, Prior experiences material and metaphysical challenges (the play juxtaposes realism and fantasy) that challenge, but ultimately steel his resolve to continue with life, with no guarantee of progress or improvement.

His moment of resolution serves as the basis for the musical composition I will now discuss.

Learning Shaieb's Composition

> But still. Still.
> Bless me anyway.
> I want more life. I can't help myself. I do.
>
> I've lived through such terrible times, and there are people who live through much much worse, but...You see
> them living anyway.
>
> When they're more spirit than body, more sores than skin, when they're burned and in agony, when flies lay eggs in the corners of the eyes of their children, they live. Death usually has to take life away. I don't know if that's just the animal. I don't know if it's not braver to die. But I recognize the habit. The addiction to being alive. We live past hope. If I can find hope anywhere, that's it, that's the best I can do. It's so much not enough, so inadequate but...Bless me anyway. I want more life. (*Angels in America: Perestroika,* Act 5, Scene 5, pp. 135-136)

In January of 2011, I was handed those words and told to learn them. They were to a song included in our rehearsal packet. I recognized some of the other songs, but this one was different. The rest were pop songs. Coldplay, Jason Mraz, Destiny's Child…their works were familiar to me. This piece stood out among them. It didn't take long for me to recognize the words, however. I read Angels in America shortly after I moved to Boston in 2002. I was in film school at the time, and when I had to choose a scene for my directing class, I didn't even have to think about it. I knew I wanted to do a scene from Angels. I chose the scene where Joe and Louis stop "just being friends", but the actor I cast as Louis dropped out. So my friend volunteered to act in the scene, but since she wasn't quite right to play Louis, I switched to the scene

where Harper confronts Joe with her concerns about his sexuality. Shooting that scene was one of my most memorable experiences at BU. Anyway, this is all to say that I like the play. I bought the DVD of the HBO miniseries, and I watched it all in one sitting. But I never even thought about being in a production. I like acting. I've done a bit of it over the years. But actually performing Angels? That never really crossed my mind. And I certainly never thought that being in the chorus would lead me in that direction. Of course, singing a song is different from actually being in the play, but the words are the same. The character is the same.

When I learn new material, I usually approach it from a technical standpoint first…learning lines and stage directions when I'm acting, or, when I'm singing, lyrics, notes, rhythms, that stuff comes first. Then after I have a feel for the piece, I start thinking about what it *means*. So that's what I did here. That's not surprising, because that's usually what we do in rehearsal. With rare exception, like when a piece is in another language, we start with the musical nuts and bolts, and then, if there's time, we talk about the meaning behind the song. So, about this piece:

It starts in G major, when Prior is asking to be blessed with more life. The key wanders through e minor starting at measure 24 before settling in F sharp major when Prior asserts that "I can't help myself. I do [want more life]." The piece continues to wander through major and minor keys as Prior notes terrible things he's seen and experienced, but ultimately, and resolutely, states his desire to continue living. If we think of key as a way of focusing a piece of music around a tonal center, this piece shows manipulates us by repeatedly changing that focus, not just between the "happy"

major mode and the "sad" minor mode, but between different tonal centers from phrase to phrase. Each new key takes us into the text in a different way, which is fitting, given that the piece takes so many approaches to life/death contemplated in the text.

The piece is in $\frac{4}{4}$, for the most part. Measure 67 adds two quarter notes (making it $\frac{6}{4}$) when Prior identifies and acknowledges "the addiction to being alive". The shift in meter adds unexpected time to this declaration. It adds a quarter note to the measure where Prior states "so inadequate...but". It offers a hesitation, focusing us on the last moment where Prior acknowledges the real limits on continued existence, but ultimately settles on the repeated message "Bless me anyway. I want more life." There's also a long section of three against two, or hemiola, where the piano plays series of triplets against the chorus singing eighth note passages. This, in addition to making it hard for singers to sing the proper rhythm, sets up a tension between the music and the lyrics. This piece is not settled; it reflects the real conflict in Prior's thoughts between insanity of living and the inability to simply die. I'm cheating a little here. I already know this because I know the source material.

The tempo marking indicates that the quarter note is taken at 80 beats per minute, giving the piece a moderate tempo. The direction given is "contemplative". Though not a tempo issue, this piece got more choral contemplation during rehearsal than any other single song. As I said, I tend to be a bit technical in my approach. A bit cerebral, I like to flatter myself to think, and I don't often consider the emotional side of this stuff until really far into the process. This time, things were different. Part

of it was familiarity with the piece, or at least with the lyrics, but there were other reasons. Rehearsals of the piece often resulted in people crying. That's not been typical, at least based on my observations of 5 years of rehearsals. The piece got some extra discussion from the artistic director and from members of the chorus. We talked about what the text means and the kinds of images the words created in our minds. We talked about how we might, vocally and musically, convey those images. Those kinds of discussion are not rare, but they're also not typical of our rehearsal strategies, particularly in the shows I've done, which have skewed more toward pop music and away from art music.

I'm not much of a crier, but I get that other people are. Their tears made me feel something, but I can't quite tell you what that feeling was. I can say that I think I paid attention more than I otherwise might have because I could see that, for whatever reason, this piece meant something to my chorus brothers.

When the rehearsal season started, I didn't know anyone personally who was adjusting to an HIV diagnosis. I'm blessed to say that, as of this writing, I don't know anyone who has died of AIDS complications. For years I've known HIV positive people, but none have succumbed, and none of them seroconverted (to my knowledge) during the time of our friendship. So HIV/AIDS has been an issue that I'd been able to hold at arm's length. I understood why the gay community focused on it, but it never felt like my issue, or much of an issue for anyone I knew, and that included the people I knew with HIV. Before I joined the chorus in 2009, I was certainly aware of the history of the AIDS crisis as outlined in the interview with SDGMC's Artistic

Director included in the preceding chapter, and I understood that many members personally experienced the crises of the 80s and 90s that he so frequently mentions during rehearsals and to which he alluded in the earlier part of that interview. My understanding, however, had been more academic than personal. Before becoming a member of this organization, I had no awareness that anyone in my circle could have been so directly affected by those things. I certainly had not had close friends who experienced the AIDS crisis in the way it was described to me in SDGMC. In 1982, when the CDC first named the condition Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, I was 3 years old. My social circle consisted of my nuclear family and the other toddlers who lived on my block, not sexually active gay men. The people I knew seemed healthy and active, even those whom I knew to be HIV-positive. The superficial appearance of health among my friends, and my fortunate lack of personal acquaintances who might have succumbed facilitates the notion that the crises of HIV/AIDS were something I could see as distant from my life. My friends outside of the chorus spoke little about HIV or AIDS, and when they did, it was in abstract ways. Other People suffered. Other People needed help. Other People couldn't afford treatments. We fundraise for Other People. We do community service for Other People. That's the inclination I had. AIDS was a real, serious, important issue. For Other People. I care about Other People. I genuinely like helping Other People. But that doesn't change the fact that one doesn't personally know Other People. Other People aren't ones friends. Or so I thought.

At any rate, I found the arrangement of the piece to be quite beautiful, and I though the poetry was wonderful, and I enjoyed the piece, but it wasn't until, during one rehearsal, we had an extended conversation about the line that calls life a habit, an addiction. It took being required to spend time reflecting on this concept for the piece to transition from being a gorgeous piece of music to a meaningful message for me. It took ten years, but my acting classes finally kicked in. I finally, for the first time, started thinking about what it might be like *if* it were me. Here's where I trot out Stanislavski. The Magic If. Imagine if I really did experience what Prior speaks of. I appreciated Stanislavski, and his work shaped the techniques used by my acting teachers in undergrad and in film school, but I didn't really give them a ton of thought. In this moment, however, I couldn't help but think, "what if?" Perhaps that was because there were people around me talking about their own experiences and fears.

When we stopped to talk about "I Want More Life," the Artistic Director told us about how AIDS had so ravaged the chorus in years past. He had told that story before, but this time it was different. This time, other people began speaking up, and telling their stories as survivors of the crisis, of not of the disease itself. Tears (not mine) flowed when a chorus member talked about a fallen fellow chorus member who had been his best friend. Another spoke of having lost a lover. Others mentioned memories of empty chairs at rehearsal, chairs that a week prior had been filled. Again, these aren't histories I didn't know about. It's just that I had never heard them from people I knew and cared deeply about. My experience contrasts with that of a friend with whom I had dinner during the most recent concert season. I, like Daniel, my

interviewee profiled in chapter 3, have, as of the time of this writing, never lost anyone to AIDS-related complications, but this friend, a man who joined the chorus in the early days, lost most of his social support system to the disease in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He himself has been HIV-positive for many years, and has survived series of health crises parallel to those to which his closest friends succumbed. An experience like his is one that I could have gone a very long time without having any real feelings about because, until hearing his story, I wouldn't have known that I already cared about someone who'd been there.

Hearing these stories got me to start thinking about what "I Want More Life" might mean as a performance piece, not just for the audience, but also for my chorus brothers and their varied relationships to HIV/AIDS. We spent a lot of time just talking and listening to one another. The Artistic Director picked out a particular line that he said he really wanted us to think about:

"It's so much not enough…"

What on earth does that mean? Well, at that point in the piece, we're talking about hope. "If I can find hope anywhere, that's it, that's the best I can do." Seems simple enough. A guy is facing despair/death…looks for hope…maybe gets it…that's all there is. Hope. But it's not enough. But, as the AD pointed out, it's not just not enough. It's *so much* not enough. I don't think I'd ever thought about what it might feel like to feel that way about anything. Not just not enough. But exceedingly not

enough. So vastly insufficient (well, he says inadequate in the next line). To feel that the simple hope to continue living isn't enough is something I find overwhelmingly depressing. But the piece isn't depressing. Not even a little bit, at least to me, because of how the piece ends. Right after that moment of recognition that hope is not enough, Prior asks for it anyway. He wants it anyway. I started to imagine that it might feel that way for someone who's stared death in the face. Someone with no reason to believe that his pain will cease. Someone with no reason to believe that his suffering will end. Someone in that position can still want to, as we say back home, keep on keepin' on. Looking around me, I see people who've done just that. I was sitting in a group of people I consider my friends, and there were people who'd been on the AIDS battleground. There were people who witnessed the people they loved die. There were people who'd wondered whether they'd live another day. There were people who'd wondered if they even wanted to. And I'd spent the past two years singing and dancing and talking and laughing with them, and I didn't know. In this moment, the crisis of HIV/AIDS—rather than the simple awareness of the existence of the disease—felt personal. That relationships are strained, that people life in fear, that people die, those are things I already knew. But now, I could see that some of those people, those Other People, were my friends, and I had never realized it before. These are things that I could not have known until it was revealed to me by those who had lived and were living it.

"We live past hope"

Perhaps Krasner has a point when he critiques the notion of constant progress. The semi-activist in me wants to challenge his critique. I want to think that things are basically just getting better. But there is value in recognizing the limits of progress, and the inevitability of struggle. Prior's words show us that. And we can continue on anyway. Lee Edelman's call to imagine a queer existence that eschews the futility of hope seems to resonate here, when Prior claims that we live past hope. Edelman's invigoration of the concept of the queer death drive, however, does not offer much of an explanation for Prior's addiction to life.

During tech rehearsal, we met Michael Shaieb, the composer. He gave a reminder of the importance of the message of the piece. Most of his talk to the chorus focused on his larger composition, Through a Glass, Darkly. That work similarly focuses on a health crisis that affects people of all walks of life but disproportionately affects younger gay men, crystal meth addiction. The piece explores the problems of crystal meth as it affects personal and romantic relationships. The piece assumes a special connection between meth and the gay male community, much the same way that AIDS has long been treated as a gay cause in the US (with, of course, the recognition that the disease can affect anyone). He talked specifically about the importance of the work for our audience which will, almost certainly, include people directly affected by the work.

This point echoes a point made by our artistic director and by our frequent choreographer. Before nearly every show I've participated in, they remind us that the

show will be "the first time someone sees a show, and the last time someone sees a show." That admonition is a general one to remember that our performances are important. More specifically, they pointed out during this show that there would be people in the audience who see their experiences reflected back at them in our work.

Without these reminders, I don't know that I would have felt much of a connection to the material of *Through a Glass, Darkly*. I've never had a problem with drugs. I've never done drugs of any kind. I don't even drink alcohol. A show about the ravages of substance abuse certainly didn't feel like my story. Until we began working on that show, I didn't know I knew anyone who had ever been on that road. That is, until, one by one, some of my fellow chorus members began talking about that experience. I can't describe what I felt sitting there listening to people I considered friends talking about these hidden parts of their lives. I can only imagine how other members felt. We lost over a dozen people in the process of doing that show. Certainly, a measure of attrition is normal for us, but each week another person failed to show up. Occasionally a departing member would send the group a message telling us that the material hit home a bit too closely. Another felt that the show was too triggering, and he didn't want to risk his sobriety. I had never, ever, thought about the possibility that crystal meth had been a part of so many of my chorusmates' lives. For me, meth was on TV, or in movies, or in the news. As far as I was concerned at the time, that was a shame that belonged to someone else.

Much is made about the flow of affect in performing music; making music together forges spiritual connection or something of the sort. At least that's what we

say[19]. I don't disagree with that at all, but I'd also say that the talking we do serves a purpose, too.

2011: Performing for a General Audience

We performed this concert to a packed audience. That's less impressive than it sounds; we did it at the smaller of the venues where we typically perform. Equipped with at least some sense about how to approach "I Want More Life," I spent the dress rehearsal dedicating a lot of head space to the rest of the show. I realized I'd been singing "Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk" wrong the entire time. My voice was a bit tired, and when that happens I lose my low notes; the low Bs were too much for me to handle, I guess. The guy standing next to me—one of the super-talented guys—exchanged confused glances with me while we were rehearsing the second act. We managed to figure out when I knew the music and he should listen to me, and when he knew it and I should listen to him. The Artistic Director cut a song. We cut choreography. I'm not a fan of last-minute changes, but I roll with the punches.

We got a short break before the show. My worries about the show kept me from fretting over sharing a dressing room with a guy I had a huge crush on. I used to be a serious perfectionist. I've mellowed out over the years in many aspects of my life. Performance is not one of those aspects. I want to get everything right. I ran through music and choreography in my mind the entire time I was in the theater. I reminded the boys in my dance about our emergency changes (a guy got hurt, so we

[19] See Mark David Jaros's dissertation on affective flow in choral rehearsal settings for an alternative explanation.

changed a major stunt in the routine). I made sure they all had their costumes for our dance. I made sure I had my costume. All technical stuff, but it had to happen.

The director of the show, a guy who, by this point is a friend of mine, gathers us and gives us notes from dress rehearsal. I don't remember all of what he said because, I admit, I wasn't paying that much attention. But he said something about focus. Something about making sure we all look into the audience and sustain connection with the audience during the tender moments of *Through a Glass Darkly*. He pointed to me and said I did that beautifully. So at that point, I started listening in earnest. He repeated his reminder about the concert being someone's first experience at a show, and someone's final experience at a show. I respected that idea before, but, this time, I really felt responsible for it. I felt like it was my job to really use that wisdom. Alf Gabrielsson and Patrik Juslin write about audiences' abilities discern performance intentions, arguing that even relatively complex intentions driving musical performance can be read by audience members. For us, this makes clear the need to think about what we're doing up on that stage, rather than just barking notes. This concert was the first time, as far as I was concerned, that I'd ever performed truly powerful music with this group. To be sure, we'd sung meaningful songs before. But just from looking at my chorus mates, I could see how special this show could be.

Mark Mattern describes three forms of "acting in concert"[20]: confrontational, deliberative, and pragmatic[21]. When I joined the chorus, I expected to engage in the

[20] 3 forms of "acting in concert": confrontational (protest), deliberative (debating identity and commitment), and pragmatic ("occurs when members of one or more communities use music

first form, singing protest songs at rallies for, say, marriage equality or the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." This concert felt much more deliberative. The music asked us to think about who we are. By that, I mean both the types of identity formations we assume, but also who we number among our ranks. We started the show in a non-traditional way for us. When the doors opened and audience members came in, a few chorus members were waiting in the house to greet them. As the minutes passed, groups of other chorus members came from backstage into the house and also greeted audience members. At the Saturday night show, I chatted with the parents of a fellow chorus member and talked to them about the past concerts they'd seen. Gradually, we trickled back to the stage and, once assembled there, we started the show.

That approach, for me, underscored our attempt at inclusion. For that show, more than we usually do, we wanted to make the audience feel like they were a part of us. We told them that we'd be singing to them about friendship, community and togetherness:

> "If we all stand together this one time, then no one will get left behind. Stand up for life. Stand up, here me sing. Stand up for love."
>
> "I just need a friend…"
>
> "…I'll be your friend, your other brother, another love to calm and comfort you. And I'll keep reminding, if it's the only thing I ever do, I will always love you."

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to promote awareness of shared interests and to organize collaborative efforts to address them" (30))

[21] See Ray Pratt's description of negotiated politics for a similar alternative explanation of the uses of music to establish a basis of intergroup communication.

We're a close group, so we say these kinds of things to one another all the time. But in this case, we're saying them to our audience. We're saying it to the people in the audience who see themselves as part of our community, and to those we see as part of our community. But we're also singing it to everyone else in a pragmatic way, to use Mattern's term. "Stand[ing] up for Love" doesn't require you to see yourself as one of us. You just have to want to stand with us. You don't need to be us. Just be our friend. Those are powerful words when I consider singing them to someone who might be struggling to accept her sexuality or the sexuality of a loved one, or when I consider the possibility of singing them to someone who has lived a life fearing that no one would be there for him.

Those lyrics are from the songs that prepared the audience for our rendition of "I Want More Life." I joked earlier about the theater being one of our smaller venues. That's no joke, it really is. But it is an intimate performance space if you're used to performing on big stages. At this venue, the audience is right in front of you. When we got to the end of that piece and my fellow singers and I belt out that B major chord when we sing the word "life!" I don't have the words to describe it. Some of the singers couldn't contain themselves. So many tears flowed, on stage and off stage.

Marvin Latimer described gay choral singing as "driven by [the] need to communicate a positive personal and corporate identity as gay men" (33). This concert was the first time I overwhelmingly felt that way. For me, this was driven less by a concern with constructing and/or maintaining a "respectable" image of gay men (a task that would have been undone anyway when we performed the second half of

the show, with depictions of drug use, infidelity, and deceit). Because of "I Want More Life," I really, really wanted to honor a set of experiences that, though not mine, had become very meaningful for me.

"I Want More Life" at GALA 2012

Friend Me was the spring installment of our 2011 concert season. As such, it is open to the general public. While our audiences do include large numbers of persons who identify as LGBT, straight people make up the bulk of our attendees. Performing "I Want More Life" at GALA 2012, then, was an altogether different experience. Approximately 6000 singers from LGBT choruses across the globe descended up on Denver to come together in music. The framework provided a safe space in the general sense that our audiences consisted primarily of other LGBT chorus members. This framework was buttressed by the inclusion of many other gay-themed performances at the convention. I personally attended mini-concerts held by The San Diego Women's Chorus's, The New York City Gay Men's Chorus, the Youth Pride Chorus and The Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus. I saw others too, but I remember those in particular because, sitting in the audience for each one, I turned to people next to me and we talked about laughter and tears, how the performances made us feel so much.

New York was on Sunday. They're a darn-near-professional group, so I expected them to be quite good. And they were. The theme of their mini concert was "Accentuate the Positive: telling new stories about living with HIV/AIDS." That the

theme surrounded HIV/AIDS wasn't a surprise. We were planning an AIDS song. Lots of other groups did AIDS songs. There was an ad hoc chorus especially for persons with HIV. NYCGMC performed "Sure on this Shining Night," which we had recently performed in concert. I was sitting with a few of my chorus brothers, and we shared a bit of snark about how they stole our song. They did it better, and because their mini-concert was built around a skit involving a man coming to terms with his HIV infection, the song took on meaning that it didn't have for me when we did it. As the main character experiences different moments, the songs comment on them in humorous and poignant ways. When he has to reveal to person after person his diagnosis, he does so through a tap dance. He carefully and tentatively dances around it before finally revealing the heartbreaking news. And it is heartbreaking to watch. He has to repeat the dance for each important person he tells, but each time, the dance gets shorter, and a little bit easier. That is, until he meets a guy he likes. They spend time together and enjoy one another's company. And he knows he has to tell him. So he does, in what is quite possibly the shortest tap dance ever performed on a stage. Bah-dum ching! That's it. And it's hilarious in a bittersweet way, because we know how afraid he is to come out with it, and we know how tired he is of having to come out with it. And we cheer when the guy does his own tap dance, because, finally, our hero has found someone to dance with.

About 5 months before GALA, one of my dearest friends in the chorus texted me during rehearsal. He was on leave because his work schedule changed, so he couldn't regularly make it to rehearsal. I didn't see the text for a while, but when we took our break around 8:30, I saw it and we messaged back and forth for a few minutes. I asked how he was doing and told him his section needed him back. Then we started rehearsing again. About 40 minutes later I glanced at my phone:

I'm HIV positive

I'm scared Mr. Gurlly

I texted him back…We have a rule against texting during rehearsal, but, that night, I broke the rule. I sit in the front row, so I know the AD could see me. I don't really remember what else we did that night. I can't remember what songs we sang. I sang along, but I couldn't for the life of me tell you what I sang. At the end of rehearsal I apologized to the AD for texting. He said "If you were texting, it must have been important." I said, "It was." And I left.

When I got outside I called my friend so I could hear his voice. He sounded as okay as I think anyone could. It was late, so we made plans to meet for lunch the next day. I made it about halfway home before I started sobbing. That's less heroic than it

sounds since, at the time, I lived about 2 blocks away from the church where we rehearse. So much for me not being a crier.

So when I saw New York's performance, I didn't just think of Other People. I didn't think of a cause. I thought about some of the people who are closest to me. I didn't cry. I just teared up a little.

I'm glad that performance came early during the convention. It primed me for what turned out to be a roller coaster of emotion. After that show, I ran over to see the youth chorus block of concerts. I could talk forever about how impressed I was by the talent exhibited by those kids (Youth Pride Chorus, I'm looking at you), but I almost couldn't handle the sincerity of their music. I'm quite shy, so I don't typically strike up conversation with people I don't know, but I ended up talking to the very nice lady sitting next to me when I handed her a tissue so she could wipe away her tears. We laughed—while she was still crying—about how we felt so touched by what we were seeing and hearing.

For me, what happened at GALA was life-changing.

I spent a lot of time in Denver with my chorus friends. Let me clarify that. I spent a lot of time with people who became my chorus friends, and I got even closer those who were already my friends. We had all our meals together. We hung out at night together, except when someone would go on a date with some other conventioneer. Then we waited for him to get back and pressed him for info. I repeatedly wondered if Grindr could handle all the activity. But, most importantly, we

talked. We talked about all the wonderful shows we were seeing. We talked about how it felt to be surrounded by other gay singers, to look around and see so many other people wearing those silly badges that let us know that we were all together.

We performed on Tuesday afternoon. I couldn't decide if I was nervous or not. I don't usually get nervous before choral performances (I reserve my stage fright for solos), but I was keyed up about performing in front of so many other GALA chorus members. They were all talented. Some of them had previously sung the exact arrangements we were planning to sing, so they'd know if we missed a single note. I didn't need to worry, and I knew that. Not because I thought we were going to be flawless, but because I had seen firsthand how supportive everyone was. The people in the audience wanted us to do well, not just because they wanted to hear good music and see good "choralography," but because we were all connected. Furthermore, we were singing music that belonged here. We had fun music from GuyTunes, we had songs of fellowship, and we had "I Want More Life. I get the feeling that we could have completely flubbed our set and we would have gotten applause just for what we were trying to sing. We also had the love and support of our sisters in the San Diego Women's Chorus. With them in our corner we couldn't help but shine.

I felt a strong sense of identifying with the other conventioneers. John Croft, from the Boston Gay Men's Chorus and Coro Allegro, attended GALA 2012 and posted this on his blog the week after the convention, upon reflecting on the performance of Perform OUTKC, the youth GALA chorus from Kansas City:

> It's easy to talk about being part of a "movement". It's a lot harder to get people to *feel* like they are part of a movement, to feel responsibility

> for each other, to feel like they share a common cause, to feel *love* for each other. But last week I felt it. I *felt*, deep in my core, what it means to be part of the LGBTQ Chorus *movement*, I felt the cause is righteous, and I *knew* that we can use the power of music to change lives. It was an experience I will carry with me for the rest of my life, and I'm certain that the youth on that stage will remember it always, too.

Those words could have come from me.

My understanding of community changed. Not so much my intellectual understanding of community; reading Benedict Anderson in my first year at UCSD shaped that understanding, and it hasn't changed much. What I mean is that my personal feelings about community—and the possibility of there being personal value in such a thing as a gay community—was profoundly changed. It seems weird to say this now, but, until recently, I never had much faith in such a possibility. To be sure, I was involved in "the community" inasmuch as I belonged to the chorus where I'd made gay friends; I participated in community service and outreach. Since I teach in Dimensions of Culture, I get to talk about sexuality in terms of social justice. I guess if there were something like liberal feminism but for gay people, that's what I would be into. Investment in important causes, concern about media representations, keeping an eye on legal and political issues—those things constituted my primary interest in the community. Yeah, I have friends, and I have fun, but I'm not sure I felt a strong sense of identifying with gayness before joining the group. That's not to say I wasn't out (I have been since I was 18), or that I feel excluded from the gay community, though there are a lot of reasons why a working class black dude from the 'hood might feel that way. So I wouldn't say that I disidentified with gayness. I'd rather say that my reasons for affiliating were largely political. I was taught growing up that, because

blackness is devalued, it is essential that I valorize my blackness, that I never make it seem that I do anything less than value my blackness, otherwise it might look that I agree with those who would devalue it. I feel the same way about my sexuality. If, perhaps, being gay wasn't problematized at all, I might not think it was important to "be gay". But that's not the world we live in. Maybe, one day, it will be. I do believe that, as the pride movement suggests, and as has been encapsulated in the anti-bullying meme, it gets better. I've been arguing for years that it has gotten better. But I'm not quite dumb enough to believe that it will stay better if we don't work to keep it that way.

With our performance behind us, I got to kick back and enjoy the rest of the convention. Wednesday morning was the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus. Their performance would be their last with their longtime conductor, whom I've known for a few years now. I raced over in time to see their show. It was titled *Out of My Range (and other Age-Related Performance Issues).* It was a sort of musical inside joke about belonging to a gay men's chorus. It poked fun at the way we sometimes self-segregate within our groups in terms of age, and showed some explanations for that. There are some real differences of interest and experience between older and younger gay men. There are some also, frankly silly reasons, and that's what made the show fun. The serious stuff made it illuminating. Younger men do, sometimes, seem dismissive of older men and their wisdom of experience. Older men do, sometimes, treat younger men like brainless beauties. Younger men do, sometimes, think that they know better than those who've been in the game a lot longer. Older men do,

sometimes, think that younger men don't have anything of value to contribute. But if we allow ourselves, we can truly be together in our choruses.

I call it an inside joke because you kind of need to be in a LGBT group to know what these experiences feel like, at least in terms of how they're addressed here. But much of the convention felt like an inside story. Unlike our concerts, where we sing for audiences of queer persons, straight persons, allies, loved ones, friends, and a few people who wander in by mistake, here we sing for people who get it. We sing for people who do the same kinds of things that we do as a chorus. Their experiences might not be exactly like ours, but there is a common cause that we participate in. To sing a song like "I Want More Life" for this audience feels wholly different. Performing that song in concert causes me to feel a strong sense of responsibility. I need to tell the story right because I assume, rightly or wrongly, that many people in the audience will be hearing it for the first time, and that others in the audience (and on stage with me) are counting on me to present it properly so that those unacquainted will learn something. At GALA, I did not feel that way. Instead, I felt as though I was adding my voice to a story that is already being told by the people around me.

In this chapter, I reflect on moments of choral participation that foster an affective connection to stories of gay shame based on experiences of stigmatization that became real to me through the performance of an AIDS narrative that reflects struggles and emotional triumphs. Prior to the rehearsal and performance of "I Want More Life," and prior to the spark of affect triggered by a friend's revelation of his new HIV status, it was easy to maintain the notion that AIDS was not my problem.

As I state repeatedly, I certainly thought of it as a problem, and I thought of it as a problem that deserved more attention than I thought it was getting, but those thoughts are not particularly personal. Involvement in the chorus, because it comprises theatrical performances that invite this type of personalization, and because participation fosters close personal relationships between people who vary in their own direct experiences of AIDS—a point articulated by other chorus members in the interviews contained in chapter three—provided a mechanism for personalizing shame for me.

Chapter 5: Performing Shame: Failed Masculinity

This chapter continues the use of analytic autoethnography, but, instead of focusing on performances of gay shame related to AIDS, I explore other experiences of shame. Here I address experiences of shame related to the performance (theatrical and day-to-day) of aspects gay male identity that occupy a less privileged position in the discourses of gay pride and liberation. Halperin and Traub, Stein, and Bersani all gesture to the kinds of experiences I discuss here, as does the work of Judith Halberstam. I am referring to the shame associated with the performance of queer practices that fail to conform to the "respectable" mainstream of gay pride, but are rather situated on the shakier terrain of queer experiences. Here I talk about experiences performing images of gay male identity fail in their maintenance of normative gender lines, fail in the simple reification of masculinity, and fail in erasing romantic and sexual aspects of queer life from the sanitized images that gay pride has made commonplace. The shame implicit in those modes of performance are the shame of failed masculinity and/or the preference for femininity in and among men in a society that seeks to enforce masculinity as both normative for males and as desirable compared to femininity. As I explain later, the experience of performing failed masculinity was new for me.

My experience with the use of dance in SDGMC performance is particularly suited to this kind of analysis. In addition to singing, the entire chorus also performs choreography. Also, for each concert a small cadre of dancers are chosen from among group members (singers and non-singers), who then perform in a variety of dance

styles as a complement to the music performed by the chorus. I have been part of this cadre since my first concert, and I have danced each show since then. I have also served as dance captain, assistant choreographer, and, for the winter 2011 concert, choreographer. Because I have occupied these positions over such a long period, I have had ample opportunity to reflect on our use of dance. Furthermore, being in those positions has required me to talk about choreography with my fellow chorus members in many ways.

Jane Desmond writes, in the introduction to *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*, an anthology of articles that explore the representation and performance of sexual identities in dance, that, "How one moves, and how one moves in relation to others, constitutes a public enactment of sexuality and gender… Perceptions of such enactments are always calculated in relation to the perceived biological "sex" of the mover and in relation to the dominant codes for such signs" (6). Her argument serves as my entry into this chapter; when I discuss choreography below, I do so because I am interested in how that choreography (I consider costuming part of choreography when specific wardrobe choices are made in light of the choreography to be performed, and I consider rehearsal and outside preparation to be an interesting part of the process) challenges normative understandings of masculinity, and because I am interested in the productive aspects of that challenge.

When considering the use of dance in SDGMC, there are two explorations of negative affect that seem to offer useful insight. On one level, the use of dance itself

triggers a negative response from some chorus members. We do not audition chorus members based on ability to dance, and, until recently, we did not discuss dance or choreography as part of what we do when recruiting new members. Though our recruitment video now includes a brief discussion of what we call "choralography," and includes several snippets of chorus members dancing on stage (much of it my own choreography), we are, first and foremost, a music group, and those of our members who are least inclined toward dance perpetually remind us of that fact.

On the other level, dance performance serves as another mode of embodying gay identity during our performances. Vocal performance certainly goes a long way in the telling of stories, but choreography takes performance one step further and requires performers to actually *do* the kinds of things we might otherwise sing about. This is particularly true of our small group dances, but large group choralography occasionally moves past simple handclaps, finger snaps, and side steps, and includes material that draws about camp sensibilities.

Because there is so much potential material for me to discuss regarding dance, I build this chapter around a few significant experiences. The first account is of a drag performance of "Mickey" during my first concert with SDGMC (then GMCSD), titled Really Awesome '80s. The second account is of my experience preparing for a drag performance of ABBA's "When I Kissed the Teacher" during our summer 2010 concert. Finally, I will discuss my experiences performing in Soundsations, an intramural choral group composed of SDGMC members who perform show choir arrangements of songs at our annual retreats.

The second set of experiences I document stem from the performance of camp choreography. I will introduce this section with an account of our performance of camp choreography set to Madonna's "Material Girl." The rest of this section will be devoted to a conflict that arose within the chorus related to disagreements over a parody performance of "Winter Wonderland" that, for some members of the chorus, rekindled old misgivings and inspired new sets of concerns about camp, stereotype, and gay performance.

Following that, I discuss experiences of same-sex partner dancing, beginning with an account of a waltz I performed with a fellow chorus member during my second concert. This discussion will discuss the affective differences of discursive versus embodied performances of gay romance. I follow this with a discussion of two other experiences of partner dancing, one dealing with my own choreography of a routine to N'SYNC's "Bye Bye Bye," and the other exploring the experience of partner dancing in our 2012 holiday show titled "Ice and Spice."

The chapter ends with SDGMC's use of the go-go boy paradigm of dance as erotic activity. In that section I explore my challenges in having to perform as an erotic object in front of an audience, challenges that stem from my own concerns about my body, but also about the tricky politics of sexual desire, which when not framed around the institution of marriage, are decentered from much of gay movement discourse.

The politics of respectability that has undergirded much of the mainstream gay rights movement, particularly in the push for marriage equality, tends to silence voices

from the normative image of gayness the movement seeks to perpetuate. Michael Warner argues this point when he says:

> Even after fifty years of resistance, loathing for queer sex, like loathing for gender nonconformity, remains powerful enough to make the lesbian and gay movement recoil, throwing up its gloved hands in scandalized horror at the sex for which it stands. The movement has never been able to escape some basic questions: How is it possible, for example, to claim dignity for people defined in part by sex, and even by the most undignified and abject sex? Is the demand for dignity, propriety, and respectability hopelessly incompatible with the realities of sex? Is it entirely unreasonable that so many gay men and lesbians have seen the demand for respectability as a false ethics, choosing instead to explore in defiance all the taboos of abject need and shame? (*The Trouble With Normal* 48)

He goes on to suggest, when comparing participants in radical queer sexual culture to the mainstream image of the "respectable" gay couple living out the stereotypical suburban American Dream:

> The problem comes when it is said that this makes [the latter group] more respectable, easier to defend, the worthier pillars of the community, and the real constituency of the movement—"the rest of us." Through such a hierarchy of respectability, from the days of the Mattachine Society to the present, gay and lesbian politics has been built on embarrassment. It has neglected the most searching ethical challenges of the very queer culture it should be protecting. (*The Trouble with Normal* 49)

A kind of gay shame, we see, is, even within the gay movement itself, deployed as a policing mechanism to constrain the actions of those who might challenge the implicit goal of creating an image of gays and lesbians that render us as essentially the same as heterosexual persons. This has been a major cost to the kind of social and political progress for LGBT persons to which I have referred throughout this dissertation. Warner specifies two practices, sex and gender nonconformity, in his critique of

respectability politics; those are the two practices, in various forms, that I will address below.

Looking Like a Girl

For Brian Brown, drag is a reification of gay masculinity distinct from normative masculinity. He consults with Jeremy, a drag performer, about his process for becoming Asia, Jeremy's drag persona. Further, Brown describes Jeremy's transition into Asia for the professional drag scene as a kind of play of gender norms that allows masculinity to value and identify with femininity without altogether rejecting masculinity. As Brown notes, the focus on Jeremy as a gay man in particular complicates older notions of drag as simple gender play irrespective of sexual identity because Jeremy frames his experience both of performing Asia and of his involvement in the drag scene as a gay male experience, not simply as a male experience.

Brown's argument valorizes drag and its relationship to gay male culture. Keith McNeal explores the ambivalence of gay male identity's relationship to cultural norms about gender performance. McNeal writes:

> This delicate relation between parody and self-parody is made possible, perhaps even necessary, because of the interconnection of homophobia and sexism, which has conspired to stigmatize gay men for what they are told they are; that is, gay male stigma derives not only from transgressing the hetero-normative bounds of masculinity, but also because femininity is considered inferior in sexist culture. Gay men have responded to this situation not only by poking fun at the world, but also by poking fun at themselves and at women who occupy a similar, though not equivalent, psychocultural position in relation men concerning matters of desire. (347)

And:

> The enculturation of gender models is powerful and pervasive for U.S. men and women, and the influence of these models is also revealed in the persistent cultural logic associating male homosexuals with femininity or femaleness. Yet the material presented in this essay suggests that gender ambivalence and dynamic conflict seem to be the most salient motivating factors for an interest in, fascination with, and enjoyment of seeing and participating in drag. (367)

For McNeal, the stigmatizing of male homosexuality—and the resultant shame associated with it—is enacted through the implicit linking of homosexuality with femininity, which is itself already devalued. Because this link is understood to exist, drag as interaction of gay male identity and performances of femininity seems an expected outcome, one that that allows for a contestation of that devaluation at the same time it replicates and reinforces normative ideas about femininity and gay male sexual identity.

Drag performances have been incorporated into nearly every concert in which I have participated, so I limit my discussion to some moments where I have taken to the stage in drag (and to the preparation for those moments). There are chorus members who do drag outside of SDGMC, and a few members are extensively involved in San Diego's drag scene, both socially and professionally. Many of those members perform in drag regularly for SDGMC, but their use of drag exceeds the scope of this project. We also have members who have announced their unwillingness to do drag, but their specific concerns are not addressed here.

My first time doing drag came during my first concert, *Really Awesome 80s*. The show included a set made of songs popularized by now-iconic music videos. The set opened with an excerpt from Toni Basil's "Mickey." The video was cheerleader-

inspired, so our stage director/choreographer wanted a group of guys to do cheerleader-y stuff and wear cheerleader costumes. I was not initially chosen to be a cheerleader. One of the few guys in the group that I had gotten to know was chosen, and he was assigned a cheerleading skirt and sweater as his costume. He supplied his own wig. He, however, had a few other obligations during the show, and he was concerned that he would take too long to get into costume for the set. He asked me if I would take his place, since the number had only been sketched out and there was no clearly-defined choreography. He asked me during our tech rehearsal, approximately 24 hours before we were scheduled to open. I wanted to be helpful and fit in, so I agreed before I could talk myself out of it.

Because I had so little time to worry, I prepared for the performance without thinking much about how I felt. I hate to improvise on stage, so even though we were told to just do some cheerleader stuff, I came up with some simple choreography to fill some of the counts. Another guy chosen to be a cheerleader came up with 2 eight-counts of movement to get us on stage, which we would basically repeat at the end to get us back off stage. With so little lead time, I did not get to practice very much, so while we danced the number on stage, I thought a lot about each step. It didn't feel natural at all. It felt like I was thinking my way through the piece.

It was only after finishing the first act of the show that I remembered that some of my department colleagues bought tickets to see the show. After our shows we go out and greet our audience members as they exit the theater, so I went out to ask my

colleagues what they thought of the show. They said all of the usual nice things, but they also said how great/hilarious/surprising/funny it was to see me dressed like a girl. That response got me thinking about what it might mean to be looked at when performing outside of expected gender norms in such a clearly defined way. Because this opportunity came up with such short notice, I had little time to contemplate such things. When it came up again, I had a lot more time to think, and a lot more to think about.

The following summer SDGMC performed *ExtrABBAganza*, a show, not surprisingly, full of music by ABBA. We did a rendition of "When I Kissed the Teacher," and our director/choreographer set the performance in a classroom. The dancers were to perform as schoolboys and schoolgirls. I was a schoolgirl. Plaid skirt, white shirt, socks, Mary Jane shoes with a short heel…a stereotypical school girl. I was a bit worried about being seen on stage in drag, even though I'd done it before. This time we were at the Birch Theater in North Park, a bigger venue, (hopefully) a bigger audience, and I had a lot more time to think about it beforehand.

I also had to acquire a lot more stuff for this performance. For "Mickey", everything was given to me. For this show, I'd have to get my own makeup and the shoes I described, along with a wig to complete the look. I have been performing for a long time, so I have purchased my own makeup before, but I usually got stage makeup, ordered from places that specialize in selling makeup to performers. Furthermore, when I used makeup in the past, it was "men's makeup." Even though men's makeup is exactly the same as women's makeup, I could tell myself that they

were different. Because I look different in southern California than I do in the Midwest or the northeast where I was used to performing, I needed to go to an actual store and test out the makeup to see what it would look like on me.

I went to the MAC store because of its reputation of being both gay friendly and having good selections for persons of color. If I was going to have to buy blush and lipstick and mascara and eye shadow, I sure as hell wasn't going to Wal-mart to get it. I wanted to go somewhere I could tell myself they'd be used to having men come in and ask for those things. It didn't matter if I was correct or not in my assumptions; I just needed to convince myself that I was.

So I went to the MAC store downtown on 5th Ave. The very nice person who worked there sat through my overly complicated explanations of the concert and helped me pick out makeup that would be suitable for the show and the numerous costume changes I would have. As I explained, there were drag numbers in the show, but those were bookended with moments where I needed just basic stage makeup to match the other guys I'd be singing with. She explained how I could minimize the exaggerated drag look to make it easier to transition between "guy Aaron" and "girl Aaron" backstage, and advised me as to which particular products I should buy and how to use them.

Hair shopping provided the next major obstacle. I had never bought a wig before. I didn't know where to buy a wig. I had no idea what to say when looking for a wig. A friend from the chorus pointed me in the direction of the wig shop in North Park on University Ave, a few blocks from the theater, and around the corner from

where I lived when I originally moved to San Diego. I remembered the place after he pointed it out to me. Many times I had walked by, but I had never gone inside. Based on his recommendation, I guessed that the lady who worked there was used to male-bodied clientele, so I wasn't too worried about being seen there. Despite how at ease she seemed to be, I offered ample explanation for my reason for being there. I still felt embarrassed about asking for a wig that would make me look like a pretty girl, but she was quite helpful, and pointed out the perfect wig for me, a crinkly, curly, dark brown one that made me look like my little sister, if I had a little sister.

Last stop, shoe store. I had wanted to order shoes online, but I waited a bit too long and didn't want to risk having them not show up. Wigs and makeup, I could handle going to buy those things. Those are bought at specialty stores. I didn't know where to get shoes besides a shoe store. A regular old shoe store where men buy men's shoes and women buy women's shoes. Of course, people—moms especially—buy shoes for other people, so I could just let them assume that's what I was doing. There was a problem with that plan. I'd need to try the shoes on, and I didn't want to be seen doing that. So I went to Ross's downtown because I thought I might be able to use the fitting room to try them on, but they didn't have any shoes that looked right. That's also why I didn't go to costume shops. The shoes I needed were very plain and simple. I had already looked at the Capezio dance supply catalog and considered buying character shoes, simple, black ones with a low heel designed for dancing, but I couldn't afford them, even if I avoided shipping costs by picking them up in person at the store in La Jolla. Since I was already downtown, I headed toward the Payless that

used to be across the street from Horton Plaza. I knew the price would be right if only I could find a shoe that would work. So I went in and did not ask for shoes. I did not ask for assistance of any kind. I looked and found a simple pair of black Mary Janes with a short heel, exactly what I was searching for. They had them in a variety of sizes. I grabbed a pair of nines (a decade and a half of buying dancewear taught me how to convert shoe sizes, so I knew that my size translates roughly to a 9) and headed to the counter. I maintained a stoic silence as the lady behind the counter rang up my items, and, unceremoniously, I left. Mission accomplished.

When faced with having to perform everyday tasks that go against the grain of normative gender practices, I alternated between over-explanation and silence regarding my reasons for exactly why I was buying these items. I didn't want anyone to think I wanted them for my personal use. Being in the show provided a reasonable explanation that distanced these articles of feminine performance from my "real" identity. I kept quiet when doing so seemed like the way to go. What's funny is that, when I did speak up, I reported being in the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus. I didn't hide behind a generic "show" excuse. I happily outed myself as gay and indicated the significance of my sexuality on the transaction I was in the process of completing. My concerns cannot be simply understood, then, as being motivated by gay shame. Rather, I argue, against my own desired self-concept as a courageous person who advocates for free gender expression, those concerns express the kind of ambivalence Warner and Bersani each criticize. My own feelings about gay identity were much closer to the normative position on gender performance than I wanted to believe. I did

not mind being seen as a gay, as long as gay was framed as basically normatively male, as normal, as Michael Warner might put it. Having total strangers think of me as crossdresser or as one of those guys who wears makeup was something I was unprepared to deal with, so I deflected as much as I could, to my own surprise and disappointment in myself for having done so.

Since then, I've done drag many more times. I have also spent quite a lot of time working backstage at shows hosted by active members of San Diego's drag community. There, I've learned a lot about how various performers create illusions of a broad range of female and feminine performance. I've seen, up close, strategies for creating the appearance of an hourglass figure, makeup and prosthetics employed to create lifelike cleavage. I also still set my own limits, limits that continue, despite my intellectual leanings, do the work of indicating that "I'm not really one of them." I still don't shave my legs for shows (pantyhose suffice for me). I do very little makeup (lips and nails, yes. Eyes and lashes, no. Translucent powder, always. Foundation and blush, sometimes). I rarely do breasts. I never pad my hips, nor do I cinch my waist (that's partly because of the limits on breathing and movement that such techniques impose, but it functions as a limit nonetheless). Even in my decisions to construct a drag persona, I eschew many of the trappings of drag as it is commonly performed in this city, and, instead, reassert my maleness and the traditional ways in which I value it. And that surprises me. When Ann Cvetkovich discusses her experiences performing as a go-go dancer, she explains the boundaries she sets for herself; because she is concerned about the public performance of lesbian sexuality

being appropriated as entertainment for straight men rather than as performance between and for lesbian women, she, when dancing for mixed audiences, renders her performances as less overtly sexual and more as challenges to social and aesthetic norms (more "wacky" than seductive, as she says) ("White Boots and Combat Boots" 333). I could make a similar argument claiming that my stripped-down approach to drag is a response to the problematic ways in which cisgender gay men appropriate as theatrical performance the very strategies used by some transwomen for mere survival in a society that threatens them with subjugation and violence if they fail to be read as women, but if I made that claim, I would be being disingenuous. I do it as a way of distancing myself from the old tropes about gay boys and men and our derogated masculinity. I do it as a way of avoiding that shame, even as I have to confront that shame in my very participation in a gay drag number. I never said that I was logical.

As a chorus member, I perform not only for outside audiences, but also for my chorus brothers. We have a group retreat every October, and that retreat features a talent show. For the past two years, a group of approximately 16 members have gotten together and spent dozens of hours preparing songs and dance numbers for that talent show. Dubbed the Soundsations, the group performs typical, almost cliché SATB[22] arrangements of show choir fodder. For both performances, I've been an alto.

Because in "straight" choirs altos and sopranos are typically women, in Soundsations, men who sing soprano or alto perform dressed as women, while the tenors and basses dress as men. Oddly enough, these drag performances have been

[22] Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. These are the traditional divisions of voices in mixed choruses and choirs.

more nerve-wracking for me than our concert performances. Part of this can be explained by the fact that this performance mode blurs the lines between drag and female impersonation. Drag often, certainly not always, but often makes its point by juxtaposing exaggerated femininity against masculinity and/or mannishness. At drag shows, one often hears baritone voices emanating from bodies with highly made up faces, complete with false eyelashes, architecturally complex wigs, and clad in gowns that simultaneously impress and amuse. And that's all part of the fun.

Our SATB performances, on the other hand, require us to sing as beautifully as we can, mimicking the vocal stylings of the women whose voices are included on our rehearsal tracks. We do traditional, almost cliché, show-choir themed performances. Think *Glee* meets *High School Musical*, meets every high school's show choir ever. We partner men with women (never men with men or women with women). Our songs draw upon the age-old stereotypes of men as strong and women as delicate and pretty. None of the fun gender play that constitutes high drag is to be found in our performances. Our goal is to create the illusion of men and women singing together, not to highlight, poke fun at, or challenge the gender norms that underlie the SATB chorus as it exists. Because our audiences consist of other chorus members, it's a safe space.

This lack of contestation makes the performances all the harder for me. By this point I've grown more comfortable performing work that challenges gender and sexuality norms, and that asserts gay identity in an affirmative way. What Soundsations asks of me, however, is that I perform as a woman, in terms of my dress,

my hair (I've acquired a number of wigs over the years) my shoes, my makeup, and, importantly, my voice. Not as a man performing as a woman, but as a woman. I don't get the critical distance the former would provide. I often talk about how the G of the LGBT community routinely ignores the T (and the B and the L, but those are stories for another time), but reflecting on the time I've spent with Soundsations has revealed to me how wide that rift can be. Susan Stryker writes:

> Most disturbingly, "transgender" increasingly functions as the site in which to contain all gender trouble, thereby helping secure both homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable and normative categories of personhood. This has damaging, isolative political corollaries. It is the same developmental logic that transformed an antiassimilationist "queer" politics into a more palatable LGBT civil rights movement, with T reduced to merely another (easily detached) genre of sexual identity rather than perceived, like race or class, as something that cuts across existing sexualities, revealing in often unexpected ways the means through which all identities achieve their specificities (214).

I routinely encounter Trans persons standing in solidarity with cisgender gay men, whether or not those trans persons identify as gay men or stand to benefit directly from gay male activism. As the conception of a mainstream homosexual identity gains acceptance, it does so at the expense of those still deemed problematic vis-à-vis dominant ideologies surrounding gender and sex. Stryker explains above that the (growing) rift between cisgender gay persons and transgender persons who, in the earliest days of the gay liberation movement, were allies, but who currently find themselves differently positioned regarding contemporary notions of gender performance. This argument explains what I was feeling at the time, a desire to assert my manhood/maleness/masculinity, while at the same time asserting my gayness by identifying as a member of a gay men's chorus. That part was never held back. I

didn't mind outing myself to half the salespersons in San Diego, but heaven forbid they think of me as non-normatively masculine, even as interpreted through homosexuality. I think this surprised be because I didn't realize the extent to which I found comfort in my cisgender identity and my masculinity, as contingent as it may be. I also note an important distinction here between performing drag as theatre and transgressing gender boundaries in "real life." Buying high heels and donning a wig in the context of a staged performance constitutes a kind of depersonalized choice unlike that, perhaps, of a person whose modes of day-to-day gender performance transgress norms in ways that, still, can unfortunately endanger them in very real ways. In my case, I have the protection of the stage and its conventions; transgender persons living workaday lives do not, and, for this reason, it would be a mistake to equate our experiences. The shame of failed masculinity that I might feel in those brief moments of artifice are wholly unlike an experience of one's very existence as gender non-conformist in a world that uses a range of disciplinary tactics to police gender boundaries and to punish those who blur those boundaries. When the curtain falls and the show is over, the kind of gender non-conformity I perform ends. I say this not as a disavowal, but rather as a reminder that similar practices undertaken by people operating in a shared hegemonic structure can experience real differences in relation to that structure. I'll quote Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick again here, "People are different from each other" (Axiomatic 323).

Looking Like a Sissy

Arguably, much of SDGMC does could be called camp. What I describe below are only two examples that allow for an exploration of the topic. First I offer a bit of insight into another moment that occurred during *Really Awesome 80s*, where we performed a snippet of "Material Girl." Following that discussion is a more extensive exploration of a debate over camp choreography during our next concert, the holiday themed *Cool Yule*.

The camp to which I refer in this section is connected to the camp explored by Susan Sontag because of its extravagance of gesture, less because of its distinctions from high culture and/or its success as a dramatic work. This extravagance of style, with, perhaps, a less serious focus on substance, is, Sontag argues, a cultural production particularly associated with homosexuality because "Homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness" (64). If Sontag's claims are correct, I wonder what to make of gay critiques of camp, or at least those modes of camp that make fun out of social conventions surrounding gender. These are real debates that take place between those who valorize camp and those who condemn it. As Leo Bersani claims, "no one wants to be called a homosexual" (Homos 1). Camp's association with gay persons facilitates such labeling of persons who engage in camp practices.

Mark Booth more directly establishes a link between camp and male homosexuality in his refinement of Sontag's piece. He notes, "The primary type of

the marginal in society is the traditionally feminine, which camp parodies in an exhibition of stylised effeminacy. In the extent of its commitment, such parody informs the camp person's whole personality, throwing an ironical light not only on the abstract concept of the sexual stereotype, but also on the parodist him or herself" (69). It is this final point, where the performer himself is implicated in the performance that I will address when I discuss the use of camp in the rehearsal of SDGMC performances.

I didn't think too much about the camp value (or devaluing associated with camp) when we started rehearsing the piece. It was a short snippet from "The Girls," a themed set from the 80s show where all songs talked about women in some way or another. I'd been the only male member of a dance troupe in undergrad, and I'd been given femme choreography before. I also didn't give it much thought because I was more focused on getting everything right than I was on how I felt. I also did not ask other members what they thought because I was new, and I didn't know what level of importance dance would take in the group. I recognized the level of camp in the choreography, particularly in moments where we pantomime the action of putting on our opera gloves and put the finishing touches on our oh-so-elegantly coiffed 'dos. We were fabulous, but that goes with the territory of being a material girl.

I chose to describe that experience because, at the time, it seemed so inconsequential, but further reflection revealed something that would have escaped superficial analysis. I remember joking with a fellow chorus member about that dance that, after seeing me camp it up in this show, no guy in the audience would want to

date me. I said that with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek, but I was joking while being serious. I was single at the time, and I guessed (accurately) that there would be quite a few gay men in the audience. What better way, I wondered, to get a guy to look at me than to get up on a stage in front of him? Unfortunately, I suspected that our camp choreography might turn off potential suitors. Jonathan Bollen suggests that dance is a way of "doing" queer, or performing non-normative sexuality. His research on club dancing suggests that "girly" dancing, when it is performed, tends to be limited to interactions not geared toward seduction (305). Bollen situates this claim alongside his observation that, when using online dating sites, nearly half of gay men express a clear preference for men they deem masculine, while they, and others, similarly express a negative preference for men they deem feminine. My own research on gay male online dating suggests a similar trend. Because my life is not a study, I did not seek to substantiate this hypothesis by asking audience members out on dates and track their responses, but I offer this moment of reflection to highlight real concerns about performing effeminate choreography for an audience.

In *Cool Yule*, my second concert with the chorus, and the first time since the rift in 1992 that the San Diego Men's Chorus performed with the Gay Men's Chorus of San Diego, we were to perform an arrangement of "Winter Wonderland." I had some personal concerns about the level of camp in the choreography. Instead of doing the traditional second verse, we were to sing a parody version titled "Walking 'Round in Women's Underwear," a piece full of tongue-in-cheek jokes about crossdressing,

sex, and queerness, complete with a full set of campy dance moves that essentially pantomimed the lyrics.

A lot of people expressed varying degrees of concern about the piece, necessitating a group meeting after rehearsal one night. In the meeting, some people argued against the piece for a variety of reasons. They argued against the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about gay men as sissies, against the problematic conflation of male homosexuality with trans practices, and against the assumption that camp should occupy a privileged position in our performance group. In short, the piece risked making us look like that old, potentially dangerous image of what queer men supposedly were.

In his confrontation of Oscar Wilde over Wilde's questionable relationship with his son, John Douglas, Marquess of Queensbury, is purported to have said regarding Wilde's rumored homosexuality, "I do not say that you are it, but you look it, and pose at it, which is just as bad" (qtd. in Ellmann 421). The fact of the scandal need not be established. Simply looking gay in this problematized way suffices. The arguments of the men opposed to the camp performance echo that underlying sentiment. Looking, to quote one of the men, "like sissies," is damning.

Defenders of the piece argued that camp performance is "what our community does." Their claim was that, as a self-titled gay men's group, we should take part on our community's performance traditions. Some even argued that reticence to perform camp suggested internalized homophobia, privileging of traditional masculine identity, and denigration of femininity. Such arguments echo Michael Warner's interrogation

of the pursuit of normativity among mainstream gay persons, as well as David Fisher's arguments about the use value of camp.

I didn't speak up during the meeting. I certainly had things to say. I could have given my generic argument about how, as performers, our job is not to choose the material but to figure out how to perform it. I felt a bit of fear and frustration at the piece because I felt pushed beyond my comfort zone. However, I also felt that as a performer my job was to find a way to bring the piece to life regardless of those concerns. My dogged determination, however, failed to address the source of my fear and frustration. My personal focus on making the show go on did nothing to address my thinking about the performance of camp as a concept. That is, even though I approached the rehearsal process with an open mind as a performer, I didn't approach it with an open mind in terms of what I thought about camp, performance and identity. I left that more challenging question aside. Only looking back at it later am I able to interrogate my concerns and those expressed by my fellow chorus members about looking like sissies.

Leo Bersani's words serve as an appropriate ending for this discussion of these competing ideas about the "appropriate" image for gay men, either as normatively masculine and, therefore, essentially like straight men, or as heirs to an established gay identity that, though fraught with peril from a conceptual and practical standpoint, is ours:

> "Gay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared into their sophisticated awareness of how they have been constructed as gay men and lesbians. The discrediting of a specific gay identity (and the correlative distrust of etiological investigations into homosexuality) has had the curious but

> predictable result of eliminating the indispensable grounds for resistance to, precisely, hegemonic regimes of the normal. We have erased ourselves in the process of denaturalizing the epistemic and political regimes that have constructed us. The power of those systems is only minimally contested by demonstrations of their "merely" historical" character. They don't need to be natural in order to rule; to demystify them doesn't render them inoperative. If many gays now reject a homosexual identity as it has been elaborated for gays by others, the dominant heterosexual society doesn't need our belief in its own naturalness in order to continue exercising and enjoying the privileges of dominance. Suspicious of our own enforced identity, we are reduced to playing subversively with normative identities--attempting, for example, to "resignify" the family for communities that defy the usual assumptions about what constitutes a family. These efforts, while valuable, can have assimilative rather than subversive consequences; having de-gayed themselves, gays melt into the culture they like to think of themselves as undermining" (*Homos* 4-5).

When we foreclose the possibility of moving beyond the primacy of traditional masculinity in favor of fighting to be seen as normal, we risk supporting a hegemonic structure that, at its core, enacts punishments for those who are othered by it.

For those interested in learning the outcome, the piece was ultimately cut from the show.

To revisit the concept of not wanting to look like a sissy, I will now discuss my experiences of same sex partner dancing in SDGMC. Such a topic might seem relatively innocuous, given that the choreography I discuss in this section is pretty tame. In it, we are not scantily clad, nor do we engage in any particularly sensual or overtly erotic physical activity. It passes what the Artistic Director calls “the Grandmother test.” But, as I will suggest below, dancing as a man with another man in the contexts I will describe, draws upon tropes of failed masculinity.

Before joining the chorus and finding myself on stage in that context, I would not have thought that I had much emotional investment in my masculinity. Like a good liberal gay academic, I routinely question normative gender ideologies. I watched *The Butch Factor* and was aghast at how some masculinist gay men treat their glitter-wearing brethren. I have been known to dismiss as self-hating those gay and bisexual men who describe themselves as straight-acting. In short, I thought I was good on "the whole gender nonconformity thing," to paraphrase former US Representative Todd Akin. That feeling was facilitated, I think, by the fact that I routinely choose the ways in which I argue against normative masculinity. I use my words to make that argument rather than other modes of embodied performance, modes that might get me cast as a sissy in the spectacle of life. Unlike what other gay men experienced, at least according to the canonical story, I never got called a sissy growing up, despite not being the toughest kid on the block. My peer group knew the word sissy. They knew what it referred to. They did not use it on me, but they did use it on others, so I know they were operating with a sense of what a sissy was. But I, at least to them, was not one. I played with Transformers and watched the Ninja Turtles religiously. I played video games and read comic books. I rode my bike daily and tracked dirt into the house. I played sports. I was no good at most of them, but I played. And if anyone ever picked on me for any reason, I fought back with my words and with my fists. I was, in that respect, "like the other boys." Even when I started dancing in high school, I never got called a sissy. Let me clarify that point. When I started dancing *at* school, in my high school's dance program, which required us to

perform at concerts and assemblies open to the entire student body, I never got called a sissy. If anything, dancing shifted my reputation in the direction of cool from its then current place in the nerd camp.

I point this out not to argue that I grew up blissfully unaware of normative expectations of gender performance. To do so would be dishonest. Because, as I have consistently claimed, I grew up in a world that deployed words like "sissy" and "punk" in order to police norms of masculinity, I understand the structuring power of gender ideologies, and I understand that there are a range of negative affective responses structured through expressions of those ideologies. I also knew that I did not want to be seen as a sissy or as a punk, so I was thankful to have avoided such labeling. What I do suggest here is that my experience—certainly a lucky one—was free of direct exercises of violent reinforcement of traditional norms of masculinity. Stated more plainly, I was never bullied for being non-normatively masculine. Again, I was never called a sissy. I was never beaten, harassed, or tormented. Those things, which happen to a still terrifyingly high, but thankfully lessening number of young persons, never happened to me, despite what anyone might assume about life in my home town (actually, a metropolitan area of nearly 3 million residents, but the Midwest is all backwoods and farmland in the minds of some). I say these things to highlight an easily ignored distinction between someone like me, who, thankfully, never directly experienced violence, and persons who have been brutalized in real, not abstract or metaphorical, ways, people who carry what might feel like unspeakable traumas resulting from the abuse they suffered. To suggest that two such disparate

experiences are affectively equivalent would be an injustice to those persons, and it would be intellectually dishonest to ignore those important differences in actual lived experience when exploring relationships between affective responses and normative gender expectations, expectations that, of course, operate on a broad social scale, but are articulated in a variety of individual and localized ways.

That said, the first time I ever partnered with a man was in *Cool Yule*, the concert during whose rehearsal period the group experienced that large debate about camp choreography. I was partnered with someone I had only spoken to on one or two occasions before, and we were to dance a romantic waltz, along with another couple on stage. I had performed waltzes before, but only with women as partners, and I, as you might expect in those cases, was the leader, and my female partners followed. That is the tradition in dance. In this case, however, I was asked to follow. Not only was I asked to perform a romantic dance with a man in front of nearly a thousand people, I had to play the part of "the woman," without the benefit of a wig, high, heels, a dress, and makeup to complete the masquerade. Though I am a bit embarrassed to admit such things, I was quite reticent about looking effeminate. That should seem like an expected outcome, given that we are a gay chorus, and we frequently sing about love among men to our audiences. But, for me, there is a difference between speaking/singing words and being led across the stage with a man's arm around my waist as love songs play in the background. I was concerned about looking "gay," and I was chagrinned to be cast as the feminine one in my pretend relationship with my dance partner.

Life can be funny sometimes. Since then, I've done partnering work in nearly every concert, and, in nearly every concert, I am cast as the follower. The one who gets lifted. The 'girl.' In *ExtrABBAganza*, a show full of choreography, this point came up a lot. The other assistant choreographer came up with two routines for the show, both featuring a significant amount of partner dancing. In our rehearsals we used the words "boys" and "girls" a lot to describe the different roles. We were divided into boys and girls. Boys had girls as partners. Girls grouped together and did did stereotypically girly things. Boys grouped together and did boy things. And then the boys and girls would come back together. I was a girl. But it wasn't really a girl part. It wasn't a drag number or a skirt role. We were all dressed the same, boys and girls. We weren't supposed to convince the audience that we were girls. The language served as shorthand to remind us of who was supposed to do what, which is what gendered language does off stage, in the real world.

For the same show, I choreographed a number to "Winner Takes it All". The piece was a modern *pas de deux* between two trained dancers: me, and another member who joined when I did. My dance training was mostly and ballet/modern, but I performed in a jazz dance group for years. My partner was strictly a ballet man. I choreographed the piece to our strengths, or, more truthfully, to my strengths, but with his input regarding his preferred movement quirks, such as which side he's stronger on, or which direction he prefers to turn. He wanted to do a lot of lifts because that's what professional male ballet dancers do, and that's what he's good at. That, of course, would mean that I would have to get lifted a lot, which is what female dancers

do far more frequently than do male dancers. I didn't mind that bit of traditional partnering gender distinctions because I was mostly trained by women, and because I am somewhat small bodied, flexible, and graceful, and not possessed of significant upper body strength.

. Working on this piece felt good for the most part. My biggest concerns were more about the piece itself than about the apparent gender roles reflected in it. I was fearful that the piece would fail artistically, or that my injury would hamper the performance (I pulled my hamstring the week of the show). I didn't worry about the gender norms because they actually played into my strengths as a dancer. I'm not strong, I'm not great at lifts, and my dancing typically drew compliments because of how well I performed the norms of ballet and modern in non-traditionally gendered ways. So there was a bit of gender play, but only to the extent that it played into my hand rather than pushing me into unfamiliar or uncomfortable territory.

Unlike the experiences I have described in the preceding sections, this experience fit with my desired self-concept as someone who is comfortable outside of the bounds of traditional masculinity. I even posted a picture of us in a fish dive on Facebook, and, for a while, I used it as my profile picture. In light of this number, I could think of myself as someone who can embody a role that is not just a copy of my own identity, but is rather distinct from me. That is an easy thing to do when performing a role tailor made for you, by you. This role, and my actions surrounding it, provided a convenient illusion of comfort with challenging traditional gender expectations without asking me to do much of anything that I was not already used to

doing.For example, the Facebook picture comes with a convenient explanation. It was us 'performing', doing a show. My family and friends who use Facebook all know that I dance in my spare time. I could contextualize the image in any comments that were posted. I could do the kind of impression management that Erving Goffmann describes in *Stigma* and in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. When I frame the partnering in this way, I highlight its artifice. It's just for play. Play that, to be sure, presents a kind of same sex relationship based around dominance and submission, but is still play nonetheless.

The following summer, SDGMC put on another large-scale pop music concert, *GuyTunes*. I include accounts of this show because there was a lot of conversation between me and the other dancers. I, along with a friend, choreographed the closing number of show, a rendition of *N SYNC's "Bye Bye Bye." Because the song details the breakup of a somewhat dysfunctional relationship, I wanted to dramatize the interplay between a long-suffering protagonist, and the protagonist's narcissistic partner. It was a group number, but it consisted entirely of sections partner work alternating with sections where a group of members embody the protagonist and the other group embodies the narcissistic partner. When leading rehearsals and corresponding with members about the piece, I tried to move away from talking about gender. Instead, I referred to leaders and followers rather than to men's and women's roles. The choreography was based on hip-hop traditions rather than on ballet/modern or ballroom, which has a much shorter, and therefore less established, history of encoding gendered meanings onto movement patterns. But such gendered patterns do

exist, and I found myself slipping into gendered norms. For instance, I ended up explicitly drawing on masculine and feminine norms in pairings by casting taller members as leads and shorter members as followers. Because the role of the lead partner is derived from the masculine role performed by the singers of the song, the lead partners performed more typically masculine movements inspired by the original choreography in the music video. The following partners did movements inspired by the sort of *femme fatale* character I had in mind, the kind of character who lures and entices the hapless protagonist for her own enjoyment. That I did not have in mind any sort of "*homme fatal*" character to draw on speaks to the extent to which I approach choreography from the normative gender roles ingrained in my thinking.

At no point did I subvert or play with those norms. Frankly, at no point did it occur to me to do so. There were no couples consisting of two 'masculine' or two 'feminine' characters. The story I had in mind, the story I thought I could effectively communicate to our audiences, was based on the most traditional of binary gender distinctions. Even when filtered through our sexuality as gay men, the story still presents the notion of "masculine partner leads feminine partner." Further, given the theme of the song, another layer is added; when the story begins the following partner wields power over the protagonist, but as the song resolves, traditional order is resolved as the protagonist asserts himself and takes his rightful place as the assertive member of the relationship, even if only to call an end to it.

I was not alone in thinking about this piece. Some guys did bring up the gender distinction issue, but the discussion was surprisingly multifaceted.

No one voiced any intensely negative response to their assigned role, but one member did ask why we continue to (implicitly) split the group into men and women. Other members argued that they felt that such performances serve to subvert gender expectations, in ways that are addressed by the scholars I cite in the preceding two sections. That, in itself, became a point of contention between members: those who like traditional gender roles, and those who seek to challenge them. There were also members who don't much care because they either are not terribly invested in gender norms or in subverting them, or because they do not see themselves reflected the relatively simple gender binary the rest of us were debating. We may be a gay men's group, but, as one member pointed out, not everyone in the group is equally attached to the idea of being a man.

So much of dance is based on traditional gender norms. Not only did I not know how to break away from those norms and make my choreography legible to the members of the group--let alone to an audience—I did not realize my own blind spots in terms of the implicit valuation of normative masculinity, both in society at large, and among gay men. By that I do not mean the type of masculinity championed by those who valorize the concept of "straight-acting," but rather the kind of masculinity that Brown explores when talking about Jeremy, a kind of masculinity that takes homosexuality as its point of departure, but positions it neatly against conceptions of femininity.

Looking Like a Pervert

In SDGMC, we often joke about knowing what our audiences pay to see: eye candy. To ensure that the audience gets what it pays for, as the joke goes, but also in affirmation of our collective identity as a gay chorus, we routinely include in our concerts scenes where men, for lack of a better way of expressing it, get to be sexy. While "the Grandmother test" to which I referred earlier is an actual policy, SDGMC does not seek to construct a squeaky-clean image of itself, but rather it seeks to stage music, theater, and dance that represent a range of gay experience. In the previous chapter I briefly mention our production of *Through a Glass, Darkly*. That production featured drug use, deceit, and profanity in an amount and of a degree that was unprecedented for the chorus. The show depicted romantic love juxtaposed against drug-fueled sexual lasciviousness, complete with a bit of (admittedly accidental) nudity.

Compared to what I just described, the phenomenon I describe next is somewhat tame. The chorus makes frequent use of the go-go paradigm in its staging, choosing a member or a small group of members to nearly bare it all on stage, and, while doing, perform some bit of choreography that is designed less to display technical skill than it is to prove a reason for the dancer to be looked at. David Boden's work on erotic dancing highlights the relationship between being looked at and the performer. Boden argues that the sexualized performance is driven by expectation on the part of the dancer of what the audience is thought by the dancer to want, rather than being driven by the dancer's drive to perform any particular them or

movement set. To explore this point, I will discuss two performances: one, a choreographed number to the song "On and On and On" during *ExtrABBAganza*, and one set to "My Strongest Suit" from our Elton John-themed concert *Rocket Man*, performed in April 2013. The number was locker-room themed, with performers clad only in towels wrapped around their waists. I did not perform in My Strongest Suit, but one of my interviewees from chapter 3 did, and we talked about the experience during that interview.

"My Strongest Suit" comprised the largest number of chorus members ever chosen for one of these shirtless novelty dance numbers. Typically, such numbers include between two and six guys, but there were approximately twelve in this one. Also, members are typically chosen for their physiques; in particular, low body-fat counts and visible muscularity are the typical criteria. For "My Strongest Suit," however, the choreographer added to his list of usual candidates for this type of number by including a number of members who do not conform to the normative notions of gay male sexual desirability. For a clearer outline of what those notions include, see Dwight McBride's work. My interviewee indicated first his confusion at having being added to the list, wondering "why am I up here with these guys?" and stating "I'm going to look ridiculous." He specified that his concern included, in addition to his worries about his perceived lack of athleticism and fitness relative to some of the other performers, a fear that his relative hairiness would be seen as unsexy. After this revelation, he notes that his concerns were diminished when he saw everyone else who had been chosen. The choreographer had chosen men of varying

body types, athleticism, and body hair, in a subversion of the chorus's usual choice to present in this way only the most mainstream of images of physical desirability. This time, as it was told to me, "there would be someone [on stage] for everyone," not just for those whose preferences privilege youth, athletic fitness, whiteness, and relative hairlessness.

Below I describe the process for putting "On and On and On" on the stage. About two weeks before the show--about a week after we began learning the basic choreography for the song--the choreographer pulled me aside and told me he wants to have half of the guys do a striptease in the middle of the dance. The piece was built around the use of huge strips of blue fabric that represent the ocean, and the dance is a sort of beach-themed party dance. Half of the guys handle the fabric, creating huge waves that billow across the stage and in the audience, and the other half dance in between the strips. Then we do a section of the dance where everyone puts the fabric down and dances together on stage. Then some of the guys resume working with the fabric while six guys dance behind it, their bodies nearly totally obscured by the fabric. Behind the fabric, they remove their clothes, making a big show of discarding each item. Then the fabric is pulled away, and those six guys are revealed to the audience--bare, except for a tiny pair of white shorts. They'd dance for a bit, then run off the stage into the audience and continue dancing in the aisles for the rest of the song.

That was the plan, at least. Since the choreographer pulled me aside ahead of time, I took myself out of consideration for one of the stripper roles immediately,

before the idea was presented to the troupe. But, as dance captain, my responsibility was to learn all of the choreography anyway, so that I could review it for the dancers in the choreographer's absence, and so I could fill in if someone needed to step out of a number that I wasn't already in (or to switch roles with someone if I had been assigned an easier role, and their assigned role was too difficult for them). The choreographer and I talked about who we thought would be willing to bare-it-mostly in front of a thousand people, and we came up with a list of 6 people, with the understanding that I'd step in if someone balked.

When everyone showed up for rehearsal, we presented the idea to the group. The six nominees were asked, and they all initially said yes. But one person's yes was tentative. His reaction surprised me because he had been shirtless in two previous shows during my time with the chorus, and was considered by several members of chorus to be one of the hot guys. He explained that he' s usually happy to show a bit of skin because he enjoys doing so, and he knows that our audiences tend to enjoy it too. But in this particular instance, his family and coworkers would be in attendance, and he didn't want to do anything that might appear scandalous in front of them. I talked to him one-on-one to see if I could persuade him to reconsider. I pointed out that his family had seen videos of his earlier performances. I explained that his coworkers know he's in the group and might expect such a performance from him. That was a bit of a reach, but I really wanted him to say yes. He said he'd think about it but really didn't want to.

So I took one for the team, as it were. By this point, I had done a lot on stage. I'd been dancing for 15 years. I'd acted and sung in a variety of roles, some of them quite emotionally charged. In retrospect, "on and on and on" was a pretty simple number. All I had to do was dance some really simple choreography and look like I was enjoying myself. Not exactly a big challenge. But the idea of being scantily clad, being so thoroughly exposed on stage, in that setting, petrified me. Earlier, I wrote that the chorus cares less for presenting sanitized images of itself than it does about representing a breadth of gay experience. I think that is true, but, at least in terms of anything that I would deem remotely erotic or sexual in terms of how I present my body, I was never part of anything that wasn't squeaky-clean. Now, I was being asked to bare my body, and to look like I was enjoying it.

There are two major explanations for the degree of fear I felt. Leaving aside the body image issues that tend to plague dancers, I was nervous about being the object of the audience's sexualized gaze for two reasons. One, I was afraid of having to perform as the object of male desire. Though our audiences include large numbers of women of a range of sexual identities, the piece (and the general context of a gay men's performance) imagined our bodies as objects of male desire. In a sense, we were asked to perform homoerotic desire by being the objects of that desire. That's not something I'd ever done before, at least not publicly. As a socially active, sexually active gay man, I certainly did present myself as an object of male desire, but only ever at the interpersonal level, in private. Not on stage. Not in front of a sold-out crowd. Not in front of video cameras that recorded the performance for posterity. I

had never declared the sexual, erotic aspects of my homosexuality in such a public way. Certainly people who knew I was gay understood that actual, physical, male-male desire was a part of my life, but that's because they figured that out on their own. Not because I showed them. The shame here is the shame associated with a somewhat puritanical society's negative attitude toward sex; this point is particularly significant for gay persons, whose public image has gained respectability by taking focus away from the actual practices of sex that mark us as distinct from the mainstream in the first place. For that reason, I would not call this a gay shame; it is rather a shame associated with making sex a public matter.

The second reason for fear stems from the first. Being seen as a male object of male desire was nerve-wracking enough, but the other degree of fear came from the realization that I might fail in that attempt. That I might fail at being seen as desirable was an idea that literally caused me to lose sleep at night. As far as I was concerned (and still am), I was not "one of the hot guys." In my estimation, I was simultaneously too bulky and too slender to be read as desirable in that context. I was too short. I was too black (or, frankly, too non-white of any race). I've seen quite a few gogo dancers in my time, and--except possibly for height--they aren't built like me. They don't look like me. I'm leggy, with a short torso (hence looking bulky), a near total lack of upper body muscularity coupled with extremely long arms (hence looking slender). I don't look white or even white-ish. Dwight McBride[23] offers a critique of what he calls "the gay marketplace of desire". In that hierarchy, I'm nowhere near the

[23] See David Eng, Han Chong-suk, or Gilbert Caluya for similar arguments made about the devaluing of men of Asian descent in queer spaces.

top (except possibly for my age; I was a very young-looking 31 at the time). I felt fear and shame. Shame at my presumed inability to function as an object of desire when I wished to succeed in that role, not just as a dancer, but as a person. Fear of being exposed. Or, I could experience the flip side of that possibility, racial fetishization. Until the current rehearsal season began, the chorus had never, at least during my time in it, had more than five Black members at a time. We typically had only three. While I agree with McBride when he argues that black men are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy of gay male desire, I also am aware of the kind of racial overvaluation about which Kobena Mercer writes. Baring so much of myself in that setting risks drawing the attention of those who might feel entitled to laying claim to me. In doing this dance, I might, I feared, subject myself to the gaze of those who would reject my attempts at performing eroticism because of my blackness at the same time that I draw attention from men for whom my blackness serves as *the* basis for their desire, to the exclusion of everything else about me.

Further, my concerns included a fear that, in the event of a successful performance of sexual desirability on my part, I might be seen *as* the role I played on stage. That is, I might be seen as someone who enjoys being viewed as an object. I would not claim to believe that someone might actually think of me as a sex worker, but, I did have to wonder if audience members might think of me as "that kind of guy." Those concerns were exacerbated by my above-mentioned concerns about racial fetishization and the problems of racial representation associated with it. If I succeed, do I reify the notion that sexual desirability is the only good thing about

Black men. Audience members do not know that I am a scholar. They do not know that I enjoy conversation, or that I play with Legos. All they know is what they already "know" about black men and what they see me do on stage. George Gonos's work with go-go dancers in the 1970s suggested some sort of inherent link between their underlying identities and the selves they performed in front of audiences; I suggest an alternative view here. I felt that my "true self", to use Gonos's term (210), was not being revealed in that staged moment, but I feared having people think that it was.

Something else happened here that has carried on into other performances, but none that have required me to bare my soul--or my body--in quite the same way. The admonition to "be sexy", made as a joking suggestion during our dance rehearsals for ExtrABBAganza, has become part of our lexicon in the dance troupe. Whenever it is said to me, I always respond by saying "I don't do sexy." That's my way of defusing fear and shame. I joke to make the situation less scary, and I claim an inability to perform sexiness as a way of changing my expectations. Remember, Tomkins offers us an explanation of shame not as guilt, but as the product of unmet expectations. If I expect unsexiness from myself, then lacking sexiness doesn't result in shame.

The experiences I reference in this chapter were chosen because they reflect my responses to a kind of gay shame, but not necessarily the canonical type of gay shame. For instance, when I talk about my reticence to be seen in a way that might suggest my own lack of (or failed) masculinity, I had no real concerns about being seen as gay, as such. This seems to differ from the earlier notions of gay shame,

where being seen as a homosexual, in and of itself, constituted the basis of shame. As George Takei has been telling us on Facebook for the past few years, "It's okay to be Takei." Being non-normatively gendered, however, is not necessarily okay, at least not according to currently prevailing ideas about gender. People of a wide range of sexual identities continue to malign sissy boys, butch women, and pretty much any transgender person in sight. Engaging in practices that challenged me to fail by borrowing, if only for a brief moment, the kinds of shame associated with those still denigrated modes of queer performance highlighted this distinction for me.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation makes use of interviews and analytic autoethnography to explore a limited set of manifestations of gay shame in an organization invested in the project of gay pride. The San Diego Gay Men's Chorus offers opportunities to explore narratives of shame associated with the AIDS crisis and the political and social conditions that constructed the closet out of which pride-oriented queer persons are supposed to emerge. Because SDGMC offers such opportunities, this study has explored:

- Important links between pride and shame in the LGBT pride movement
- LGBT Choruses as formations of a queer public distinct from other queer publics that, at their core, reify notions of privacy
- Gay male experiences that do not neatly line up with canonical stories of gay shame and redemption through pride-based organizations

Sylvan Tomkins's explanation of affect as distinct from emotion, for me, helps to explain how a group like SDGMC can operate with some sense of shared feeling despite the diverse histories of its members. Speaking more broadly, I suggest that this understanding helps to understand the solidarity that undergirds much contemporary gay pride activity. I have argued that there exists a canonical narrative of gay experiences that has driven that activity. This narrative is of a particular subset of shameshame, where persons who identify as gay (or are identified as) experience shame resulting from the vilifying, pathologizing, criminalizing, and stigmatizing of homosexuality. The US has a long history of treating homosexuality as evil, as

psychologically deranged, as felonious, and as associated with depravity and disease. Given those conditions it makes sense that gay identity formation would be shaped by, or arguably created out of, that specific type of shame. If, as has been suggested by scholars, activists, and regular people for decades, that large numbers of people face those stigmatizing conditions because of their non-normative sexualities, it also makes sense, then, that this narrative frame would be a dominant one within gay circles. Erving Goffmann's work on stigma certainly suggests this; he lists homosexuals among the groups he considers to experience social stigma because they are thought to engage in actions that violate significant social norms.

When Tomkins elaborates on shame as distinct from other negative affects, he invokes the particular type of scenario that Goffman describes, where shame is experienced when a person's anticipated conformity with social mores meets the realization that said person fails to meet those mores. While, for Goffmann, stigma is essentially a relationship, affect is rooted in the personal. Affect is certainly structured by social relations, but it is a response that triggers feelings and emotion, while stigma is a social condition about which a person might feel a range of emotions. This distinction is critical. Tomkins's affect is not bound by social conditions in quite the same way Goffmann's stigma is. Remember, shame is, in Tomkins's approach, a much more broadly defined experience than Goffmann's stigma. The specific type of shame that corresponds neatly to stigma is only one type of shame. Shame, in general, simply refers to the failed fulfillment of anticipated interest or joy. Expecting to

experience (or continue to experience) positive affect and having that expectation dashed is what triggers shame, according to this paradigm.

This presents a few important implications for the notion of gay shame as it has been theorized by the scholars cited in this dissertation and for how it is used, explicitly as well as implicitly, in the ongoing gay pride movement. That notion of shame as constitutive of gay identity is based on Goffmann's notion of stigma. That is, it is specifically the kinds of stigmatizing conditions I list above that create the shame that we all supposedly experience, and it is that commonality of experience that links us in our gay identity. That notion leaves little room for alternative experiences, where, perhaps those conditions do not (or did not) hold. The extensive histories of gay experience recounted in the work of David Halperin, John D'Emilio, Michael Warner, Arlene Stein, and countless other scholars seems to corroborate the nearly universal experience of those conditions, but they do so for what soon will be a bygone era. According to the American Enterprise Institute, currently a majority of Americans express approval of gay and lesbian persons and relationships by claiming moral acceptance of same sex sexual activity, supporting for the (since 2003) legal status of same sex sexual activity across the nation, declaring personal comfort with gay persons, and indicating that they would vote for a qualified gay person for political office. Not only has homosexuality been seen as a normal variation among psychologists since 1973, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Medical Association all condemn medical, psychological, and psychiatric practices that assume otherwise. In 2013, California

banned all conversion therapies for persons under 18. Gay persons can serve openly in the military. Nearly three-quarters of Americans believe that homosexuality should not disqualify a person from being a schoolteacher.

I bring these things up because they reflect a massive shift in public sentiment regarding gay persons. There is no longer majority support for the belief in the criminality, immorality, pathology, or deviance of homosexuality. While such beliefs continue to exist, and the exercising of those beliefs continues to do harm to queer persons, they are no longer dominant beliefs. I suggest that it is becoming more and more common for persons to develop with a self-identification that is not based on the old shame associated with conditions of the (somewhat still recent) past. I think this is suggested by my own experience and by the experiences described by my younger interviewees. I do not think that shame in the old sense describes what I felt growing up as a gay teenager and young adult. I spent much of my youth in church, and, while there, I never heard anything about Christian doctrines that condemn homosexuality. I learned that from watching television. I never thought of myself as sick or evil or dirty or wrong. I never had a problem accepting my sexuality because I was never taught that it was a moral problem. I would not say that my parents were particularly forward-thinking when I was young, nor would I say that I grew up in a gay-friendly community or church. I would say that homosexuality just was not talked about very much, for good or for ill.

The somewhat rosy picture I paint here is not one that, I argue, provides no basis for shame at all. I argue instead that the shame I experienced, and the kind of

shame implicit in Kurt and Mitchell's interview is Tomkins's shame associated with the failure to experience anticipated joy. In general, I hoped to be treated well in life. What I learned about the negative, and, at times horrific, experiences of gay persons challenged that hope. As a teenager in the 1990s I observed the agitation around Don't Ask, Don't Tell, around Hawai'i's experiments with same-sex marriage, and the increasing visibility of gays in mainstream media, phenomena that taught me that there exist persons who think ill of gays and would do them harm, through legal and sometimes extra-legal means. Shame, as Tomkins would call it, resulted from the dashing of my expectations of a just world, where I might be treated well, regardless of my sexuality. Kurt and Mitchell's experiences seem to reflect a similar point when they indicate that they, too, did not personally experience the canonical gay story of vilification and rejection, but feared felt that they might one day be subjected to mistreatment. This kind of shame, though genealogically linked to the canonical notion of gay shame because of the histories of stigmatization of queer sexualities—histories sustained through force, both political and physical—constitute a common understanding of gay identity, is wholly different because it lacks the internalization of stigma as a point of identification. I—and I dare say my interviewees would say this about themselves as well—did not feel that my sexuality made me a bad person, but I did fear that it might cause other people to do bad things to me. This distinction is crucial. A feeling of fear is not the same as a feeling of shame, though both are forms of negative affect. While I will stop far short of arguing that such a feeling is universally shared among gay men, I will claim that a fear of being mistreated because

of one's sexual identity and/or gender performance does not require that one feel shame, at least not in the way in which shame has been conceived in existing gay studies literature, and as it is described in the stories of members of SDGMC who belong to an older generation and/or those who directly experienced the kind of stigmatizing conditions on which I elaborate in chapters one, two, and three of this dissertation. Those alternative stories, told by mostly younger chorus members could perhaps be understood as manifestations of a differently-contextualized shame, where, perhaps, the struggle over marriage equality constitutes a basis of shared negative affect, rather than a mainstream, prevailing notion that gays are evil, sinful, diseased, or criminal serving as that shared basis and thereby structuring gay identity as experienced by those persons.

This feeling links my understanding of my gay identity to what I believe to be the experience of some of my participants vis-à-vis gay shame. In that sense shame is vicarious; other people's shame, in the old sense, constructs an experience for me that triggers shame, in the Tomkins paradigm. What I think happens in SDGMC, where members forge emotional bonds with one another, that process of borrowing shame is facilitated. When sitting in a room, practicing in a rehearsal space, or performing on stage with others about whom you care dearly, bearing witness to their accounts of shame, it is easy to take on that experience personally. I do not suggest that one comes to identify *as* the person whose experience is being shared; rather I claim that one comes to readily identify *with* that person. Kurt, Alexander, Mitchell, and Daniel

each seem to indicate that personal experience with persons who share experiences of shame facilitates their own understanding of and identification with those experiences.

Heather Love offers insight into the observations I share in the two chapters dedicated to discussions of performing shame. Love writes, "the survival of feelings such as shame, isolation, and self-hatred into the post-Stonewall era is often the occasion for further feelings of shame. The embarrassment of owning such feelings, out of place as they are in a movement that takes pride as its watch word, is acute" (4). When exploring my own experiences of the performance of gay shame as related to AIDS and to failures in the performance of masculinity, I note the difficulty of reconciling those feelings with the understanding that I am supposed to be, at least according to the pride paradigm, a proud queer man. The added complication manifest in those moments is the fact that those performances are theatrical or undertaken in the service of theatrical performance. In that way, the shame is not really my own; I take on that shame as part of my participation in SDGMC. I do so when bearing witness to the performances of shame undertaken by other members whose histories are rife with the experiences of shame that have come to constitute common knowledge regarding the "gay experience," and I do so when concert repertoire calls for the telling of those stories and the performance of those experiences. I, along with Heather Love (14) argue for the need to pursue the use of negative affect in the political and social work undertaken by those seeking to achieve social progress, but I also suggest that such an undertaking is facilitated when persons

establish an affective relationship to stories of shame that they might otherwise think of as external to their own lived experiences

There are important implications that arise from an approach to pride that explores shame. The study of gay shame can be invigorated by this slightly modified understanding of shame. In particular, scholars who enquire into the productive aspects of shame, as well as those interested in the role of shame in gay identity formation, can cover new ground that accounts for the experiences of younger generations of queer persons, who might experience life in such a way that makes the old conception of shame foreign to them, but for whom shame might still be a useful concept. I wonder, for instance, how might Tomkins's conception of shame explain the experiences of a young gay person raised in an open an affirming church in costal California, in a neighborhood with gay families headed by married parents, in schools with gay teachers, in a district with gay political candidates, but who wishes to attend college in, say, North Carolina, which lacks a host of legal protections that this young person would have grown up with? Or if that young person comes to learn of a series of hate crimes targeting queer persons? How might we position such experiences within the history of scholarly literature on gay shame? If we understand pride as constituted upon shame, then we should expect pride to manifest itself differently for a generation whose experiences of shame differ from those of previous generations of queer persons.

Similarly, this project explores the potential of examining queer publics that are not intimately connected to notions of the private sphere, either by focusing on the

private aspects of sexual relations, or by bringing sex into the public as a means of disrupting the conventional social orders. To be sure, other types of LGBT organizations are ripe for such exploration (LGBT theatre/dance groups, for instance), but LGBT choruses, for four decades now, have maintained a dual purpose of activism and entertainment that maintain a public orientation for its own sake, and not only as a means to addressing private matters. Even if the political goals of the mainstream LGBT liberation and pride movements are achieved, and even if significant cultural shifts occur that de-problematize queer sexualities to the extent that "failure" to be straight is no more problematic than failure to be right-handed, LGBT choruses would still have music as the basis for a public orientation.

This project also furthers the use of the personal in academic research. Leon Anderson's model of analytic autoethnography offers scholars a method for conducting research into social phenomena in which they already participate and into social groups to which they already belong. While I promote the use of analytic autoethnography as an alternative for scholars who wish to study the worlds they inhabit in their "off time," I do not want to go as far as supplanting traditional or evocative autoethnography as a means to do similar research. Carolyn Ellis's approach to autoethnography is a viable one, and those scholars who perform similar work offer insights into social and cultural phenomena that privilege the study of things such as the role of affect in those phenomena. That type of work is instrumental in creating a body of scholarly literature that embodies the social practices that it studies (i.e. ethnographies of dance that privilege kinesthetic

experience not only as an object of study but also as a means of reporting information, or analyses of experiences of trauma where the writing itself evokes the types of feelings it describes). Analytic autoethnography is another tool of which scholars might avail themselves when exploring topics about which they already have a great deal of personal knowledge.

To be sure, preexisting knowledge of group activities, practices, and customs is, by itself, no substitute for rigorous analysis of those activities, practices, and customs. Being a member of the group provides access and familiarity; it does not provide a scholarly framework. The "observations" of an analytic autoethnographer need to be put in conversation with appropriate cultural and social theories that explain the content of the researcher's observations and moments of reflection. A recounting of an experience of shame associated with the concern that one might be seen as socially deviant requires some theoretical explanation of social deviance and of the specific conditions that led to the affective experience. That is what I sought to do here, by explaining shame by using Tomkins's affect theory and Goffmann's theory of stigma, and in an exploration of the theories of gay shame explored in the work of Halperin and Traub, Stein, Bersani, and a host of other gay, lesbian, transgender, and other queer scholars. Furthermore, that is why I enquire into the experiences of gay men (including myself), to ascertain the extent to which the conditions of shame taken for granted in the gay shame literature hold for those men.

As I stated in the introduction to this dissertation, this project is not a quantitative one, where I might, for instance, seek to find evidence to support the

claim that, in general, gay men in their 20s and 30s do not experience shame as it is traditionally understood. Such a project would be a viable and important one; in fact, I think such a project is called for given what I discuss here. What I sought to do with this project is to explore, and possibly determine a need for, new ways of thinking about gay shame as productive, ways that account for new experiences of queer sexualities in light of recent changes in the social, legal, and cultural status of queer persons.

Because I think these changes, still in progress, only go so far in eliminating the complex web of stigmas associated with gay men, shame is still a viable frame for understanding identity and experience. However, the nuts and bolts of that shame differ in important ways from the shame that has been studied by scholars and challenged by activists for the past few decades. While I would still argue that perceived femininity is men is still seen as troublesome by many (an unsurprising perspective, given our continued denigration of women), large scale public acceptance of mainstream forms of queer sexuality, as evidenced by the information I provide above, suggests that the kind of stigmas—the social relations that serve as triggers for shame—have shifted. This shift requires scholars to rethink the notion of gay shame if their work is to resonate with the lived experiences of LGBT persons in a world where strict anti-gay sentiment is more readily associated with the fringes of society rather than with "middle America".

This shift in thinking should not occur only among scholars. Across the nation, thousands of organizations exist to, ostensibly, meet the needs of queer persons

in a variety of ways. To be sure, some of those organizations will, and should, continue to operate as they have been. For instance, Lead the Way, a UCSD affiliated research program, freely offers the Early Test to persons who visit their clinic in Hillcrest. While the test is available to any person who wishes to be tested, the program chose to locate itself in the area of San Diego that has the largest number of gay men, and the group specifically reaches out to that demographic with information about testing. Because gay men are still significantly overrepresented among those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in the US, and because, as far as our current scientific understanding suggests, gay men engage more frequently in higher-risk behavior, it makes sense for that group to continue doing what it does. The numbers explain the reasoning behind the organization's choice of location and target demographic.

Other groups, like SDGMC, however, might benefit from rethinking their basic assumptions about the aspects of gay identity that lead persons to seek and maintain membership in gay organizations. When SDGMC and some other LGBT choruses indicate a mission or some other type of commitment to queer persons, they either explicitly or implicitly invoke the conditions of the old days, where such organizations might serve as the only support system that a queer person would have. In a world where widespread homophobia called for parents to cast their queer children out into the street, where religious institutions, even those with a stated commitment to healing those in need, turn queer people away, or where legal structures hinder the most basic actions taken by queer persons who simply wish to live in society and absolve the police of their obligation to protect and serve, queer persons might simply need a place

to offer them safety, shelter, and fairness. Those are the conditions that led to the creation of thousands of groups, including SDGMC.

I would say that I could only image what it might be like to experience the shame associated with those conditions, but the gay shame literature explains that experience, as do the choruses cited in this project. Thankfully, I do not have much personal experience of those conditions, nor do the younger participants in this project. As they indicate, their reasons for joining LGBT organizations had little to do with their own shame, but rather had much more to do with their desire to socialize with other LGBT persons. The groups fulfill a want, not a need. That young people continue to join suggests a reason for the continued existence for LGBT community organizations, but that reason is different from the reasons for which those organizations were founded.

Interestingly, joining the organizations provided experiences for younger members to contend with gay shame in its more traditional sense. My participants (myself included) reported that being in an LGBT organization with persons who did experience those stigmatizing conditions offered them an understanding of gay shame associated with a history that, though not their own, becomes important to them and how they reflect on their own places in the gay liberation and gay pride movements.

What I find interesting is that the experience of belonging to a group with members who experienced traditional gay shame offered younger members a new understanding, but not necessarily new knowledge. The younger participants did not suggest that they were unfamiliar with the historical stigmatizing of homosexuality as

manifest in a pre-Stonewall America, during the AIDS crisis, or, even more recently, in light of the struggles for marriage equality and bringing to light the problem of bullying. They knew all of this before they joined, as did I. However, those facts seemed to take on more resonance for them, and for me, when provided in the context of interacting with people with whom one already shares a bond. Historical struggles are interesting; the struggles of a friend feel more personal.

This suggests that the idea of shame is still productive in organizations, after members have joined. Getting them in the door, and getting them to stay long enough to forge relationships, then, become the primary challenges. Remember, it seems that members might be joining SDGMC, and perhaps other LGBT organizations, less out of a sense of need and more out of desire. Organizations could shift to self-branding strategies that highlight shared affinities rather than offering "support" that might not be needed. In a sense, SDGMC, as a music-based organization, already does this. As most of my younger participants indicated, they joined because they wanted to sing; being in a gay group was a secondary desire (for Mitchell, the trajectory was reversed; he joined because he wanted to be in a group of gay men, but, after joining, found that SDGMC has not had much effect on how he thinks of gay experience). I joined for similar reasons. Participation in a unique study on campus rekindled my desire to perform, so I started looking for opportunities to get on stage. I saw a sign advertising GMCSD auditions, so I decided to join. Being a member has certainly shifted my priorities; I now care very much that the group is a gay men's group, but that fact was not what got me to join. Continued study of SDGMC members would shed further

light on this phenomenon; should similar trends be found among persons who join in the future, the benefit of this reconceptualization of shame and its place in gay experience would be highlighted. Likewise, observation of and interaction with members of other LGBT choruses, particularly in areas that have not experienced the social and political trajectory of gay pride victories that have taken place in the relatively liberal areas of coastal California might indicate that older conceptions of shame might better explain the activities engaged in by members of those choruses. For instance, Salt Lake City has a new LGBT chorus dedicated to bridging the perceived gap between gay Utahns and the Christian churches that wield power in that state. Formed in late 2012, The One Voice Choir claims that "the vision of the choir is to build bridges between religious & LGBT communities through the beauty of sacred music. We seek straight and gay individuals from any faith community who share our vision, who by singing together can promote mutual understanding and love and share the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (The One Voice Choir). Despite the uncritical distinction between religious groups and LGBT persons, a distinction that precludes the notion of LGBT persons being already engaged in organized religion, the One Voice Choir exists in a cultural and political milieu quite different from San Diego's, and, because of that difference, an exploration of the One Voice Choir potentially offers insight into uses and experiences of gay shame that differ significantly from what my project reveals.

This project also addresses performances of gay shame, first manifest in intrachoral activity where stories of gay shame are shared, and, second, in the

preparation and performance of repertoire that invites members to tell the stories of shame related to AIDS and to failed masculinity. When these opportunities are taken by members whose personal biographies do not include experiences of gay shame as it has been conceived both in gay shame scholarly work and in pride activism, those members have the chance to experience gay shame in personal, rather than strictly academic, way. Because of the transformative effect of acquainting oneself with experiences of gay shame within SDGMC, I would argue that shifting very strongly in the direction of privileging affinity rather than an identity formation based on shame would be an unfortunate choice. I will not discuss the potential challenges of maintaining organizational unity, coherence, solidarity, etc. in an affinity-based organization because that exceeds the scope of this project. Instead, I suggest that offering opportunities for younger gay persons to acquaint themselves with gay shame facilitates their involvement in a still-ongoing struggle for social and legal equality. I have been arguing that things are getting better, but the struggle that has forced things to get better is not yet over. Here I cite the traditional aphorism, "Lord, we ain't what we want to be; we ain't what we ought to be; we ain't what we gonna be; but thank God we ain't what we was." Homosexuality is not the same sort of stigmatizing phenomenon it once was, and, therefore, the shame associated with it now is not the same shame that was once associated with it. But there is still shame. My participants indicate that they felt concerned about their sexuality and how it might impact their lives, but they considered their experiences distinct from the stigmatizing conditions they associated with the lives of older gay men who came of age in what they consider

a more repressive era. Likewise, my experiences of shame outlined in chapters four and five indicate lingering traces of shame, and shame associated with aspects of queer sexuality that have not benefited from the mainstreaming of the LGBT movement. Despite the improved conditions under which younger gay men are growing up, all is not well. Until sexuality is genuinely of no legal or political consequence for any of us, there will remain a need for activism, despite the appearance of things getting better, and despite any legitimate bases for that appearance. This is the reason that shame, when packaged for younger queer persons, remains a viable object, both for analysis and for social activism.

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