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## Sticking It to the Man by Standing by Your Man: Social Support as an Act of Resistance

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Sticking It to the Man by Standing by Your Man:  
Social Support as an Act of Resistance

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Sociology

by

Andrew Middleton Wallace

B.F.A New York University, 2003

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize literatures on stress, social support, symbolic interaction, and de Certeau as they pertain to the recovery of a homosexually-identified individual from a homophobic interaction. A model of the initial stressful interaction as well as the interaction between a homosexually-identified individual and his socially-supportive network is posited with the consumption of culturally-disseminated roles and the salience of role-identities as the mechanisms by which it works. The model is then considered as a form of resistance in the light of broader gay liberation social movements. The study focuses on white, middle-class, American, homosexually-identified males in order to control for variations that might occur from variables of race, class, nationality, and gender. Queer theoretical, essentialist, and postpositivist realist perspectives on identity are considered. The thesis concludes with possible future directions for an empirical study using the model outlined above.

**Key Terms:** Homosexual, Role-identity, Salience, Stress, Coping, Symbolic Interactionism, Social Support, De Certeau, Social Movement, Queer Theory, Essentialism, Postpositivist Realism.

## Introduction

In contemporary America relations of power extend through all levels of society, influencing the way that individuals interact in everyday life. Those power relations depend, in part, on hierarchical systems of classification to justify the disproportionate distribution of power and resources among the privileged. Individuals who identify as homosexuals are among the many populations that receive social sanctions as part of a socially-constructed sexological system of classification. This thesis concerns itself with the stress that these social sanctions cause as they play out at the individual level and with the support that might occur in the aftermath of such sanctions.

The phenomena under study are the processes involved during and after a homophobic interaction. The first part of the model being created is the homophobic interaction itself. For the purposes of this study, I define a homophobic interaction as a contact between a homosexually-identified individual and a stimulus that evokes negative affect in reference to that individual's homosexuality. These stimuli can include direct contact with homophobic individuals, examples of which include: being called a fag, being fired or being kicked out of one's home explicitly based on perceived sexuality, or an act of violence based on sexuality. It is also possible for the homosexually-identified individual to interact directly with the structural or cultural aspects of homophobia. Structural aspects of homophobia include various laws such as the Defense of Marriage Act, state constitutional amendments banning gay marriage, and the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. An example of direct interaction with structural homophobia is being denied visitation rights with a partner because of a discriminatory hospital policy. Cultural aspects of homophobia include widely disseminated beliefs and attitudes such as the idea that homosexuality is a choice, the idea that gay men are more likely to be pedophiles, or the general negative affect toward homosexuals and homosexuality that exists in a heteronormative

culture. An example of direct contact with cultural aspects of homophobia is listening to a pundit blame the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on the tolerance of homosexuality in New Orleans.

Homosexually-identified individuals also encounter structural and cultural homophobia indirectly. Homophobic individuals are socialized into their attitudes based on structural and cultural models of homophobia. When a homosexually-identified individual is called a fag on the street they are in fact indirectly encountering cultural homophobia as it is embodied by the homophobic individual. The ways in which cultural homophobia are internalized, by both the heterosexually and the homosexually-identified, are important to understand as part of the process by which homophobia is maintained in American society. This maintenance is dependent on the influence that structure and the individual have on each other. Homophobic individuals are often socialized into those attitudes and beliefs through interaction that uses culturally-disseminated heteronormative memes. Those individuals then act upon that internalized homophobia in interaction. The totality of those homophobic interactions then become codified and repeated in structural and cultural homophobia.

Given the interconnections between structural, interactive, and internalized homophobia, it could be argued that considering one aspect of the process in isolation is inaccurate or unproductive. I argue that it is both possible and useful to isolate one portion of the process in which structure and interaction influence each other because it illuminates one part of the cycle I outline above. If that part of the cycle is better understood, then it might be possible to disrupt the pattern of socialization into and reproduction of homophobia. Furthermore, this process is a cycle from which it is possible to isolate one portion because structure and the individual are not interwoven like a piece of cloth where it is difficult to see where one thread ends and another begins. Structure and the individual are much more like an anthill. In an anthill, individual ants interact with each other and their individual actions combine in the creation and maintenance of a physical structure. The individual ant's actions help to build the hill and the structure of the hill in turn affects the individual ant's actions. But an ant is unlike a

thread in that it is easily isolated from the whole and studied on its own. Also, the interactions of two ants (outside of the mound) are more easily observed than the forces that two threads exert on each other in a piece of cloth. In the same way, observing a portion of the cyclical process of influence that homophobic structure and homophobic interaction have on each other is both possible and potentially useful.

This understanding of the relationship between structure and individual is further informed by the ideas of structural symbolic interactionism and Julie Bettie. An analysis of the relationship between interaction and structure from the symbolic interactionist perspective is put forward in that section. Bettie describes the interplay between structure and an individual's identity in a way that fits in well with my thinking on the consumption of identities in our society. She says that

on the one hand, we are all always performing our cultural identities, and the performance *is* the self. Performance is all there is, because no identities are natural; they are all constructed. But, on the other hand, those constructed subjectivities are institutionalized, made into structures that have a provisional, temporal "real" self... But there is a *temporal* fixity, bound by the context of history and culture, and these identities are routinely embraced as real by social actors (i.e., I am Mexican-American, I am white, I am a girl) and are real in their consequences. (Bettie 2003:52-53)

Out of all possible elements of homophobia as described above, this study focuses on the interactive aspects of homophobia in particular because I am concentrating on the everyday experience of it by homosexually-identified individuals. The origins and maintenance of structural and cultural homophobia, while important to understand, will not be studied in depth at this time. As stated above, I am not claiming that homophobia in interaction and homophobia as it exists in the structure or culture of a society are unrelated and independent of each other. But by isolating the interactive element of homophobia it becomes possible to study it and the possible ways of resisting it. I am not claiming to provide a complete account of homophobia in contemporary American society and all possible ways to resist it. I am instead trying to theorize the mechanism by which a particular aspect of American



homophobia works and how some homosexually-identified individuals and their social networks might seek to resist it.

The second part of the model being created is the supportive interaction that can occur between a homosexually-identified individual and his social network. There exist many types of social support, from a helping hand or a sympathetic ear to the giving of information or even just the sense that one is welcomed and can depend upon the group. The composition of the support source can vary greatly as well. Interactive support can occur in dyads, triads, or greater numbers. The supportive members of the interaction can be of any sexuality-based identification, not just homosexually-identified.

These various types of support are outlined in more detail in the section on social support theory, but for the moment it suffices to point out that the types of social support that this study is concerned with are the types most likely to be given in interaction. And interactive social support is more likely to occur if members of a stressed individual's social network notice his condition. The social network can also be prompted to support an individual in two different ways. The individual can ask for support directly or he can use indirect means such as recounting a narrative of the homophobic interaction. And as Sheldon Cohen, Lynn G. Underwood, and Benjamin H. Gottlieb point out

Some stressors are more visible to network members, allowing them to intervene earlier and without being asked to do so. Other stressors may be invisible to the network, either because they are actively concealed because of the embarrassment or stigma associated with them or because they are chronic in nature and therefore less likely to be noticed and interpreted as a cue to render support. (Cohen, Underwood, and Gottlieb 2000:8)

The categories I have outlined are open to criticism on the basis of their inability to adequately explain the experiences of those who experience multiple types of stigma. For an African-American, homosexually-identified man who is called "fag" on the street, it may be impossible to separate the homophobic aspects of this interaction from the racial aspects of the interaction. In contemporary

American society masculinity and sexuality are inflected by racial categories (among others, of course) and the experiences of multiple, simultaneous oppressions might make separating out which particular marked status is under fire both theoretically useless and practically impossible. Patricia Hill Collins views these oppressions as interlocking and describes “these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (Collins [1990] 1999:554). In talking about Black women’s experience, Collins proposes the matrix of domination to help us understand how these various oppressions interact.

Race, class, and gender constitute axes of oppression that characterize Black women’s experiences within a more generalized matrix of domination. Other groups may encounter different dimensions of the matrix, such as sexual orientation, religion, and age, but the overarching relationship is one of domination and the types of activism it generates. (Collins [1990] 1999:556).

With this matrix of domination, Collins is attempting to replace “additive models of oppression [that] are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought” (Collins [1990] 1999:555).

For this reason, I am narrowing down the target population to American, white, middle-class males who identify as homosexual in order to control for the ways in which nationality, race, class, and gender influence experience and life chances and thus are likely to influence the coping strategies of homosexually-identified individuals. Access to supportive networks and resources are likely to vary along these axes which will in turn influence an individual’s coping style. By focusing on one point within the matrix that Collins describes, I can better define the ways in which the target population copes with the stress under study.

This thesis focuses on the effects of these stressors on individuals who identify as homosexual instead of covering all individuals who experience homophobia. It is certainly true that heterosexually-identified individuals (along with those of every other type of identification) also fall victim to acts of interactive homophobia, but there is a particular reason I concentrate on those who identify as

homosexual. As I elaborate on later in this text, I consider the act of supporting a homosexually-identified individual to be an act of resistance to heteronormativity. Using the ideas of Michel de Certeau, I show how everyday interactions can be used as a tactic in fighting against sexuality-based oppression on a front other than the political arena.

To reiterate, the process under investigation is how a homosexually-identified individual might recover from an incident of interactive homophobia. The intention of this study is to reframe the processes of stress perception, social network support, and coping utilizing the insights of symbolic interactionism combined with the theories of Michel de Certeau. While I do not take a queer theoretical stance in this thesis, I do subscribe to a social constructivist perspective. This perspective is the basis for my usage of the term “homosexually-identified” instead of “homosexual” to describe the subjects of this study. Sexological categories are historically and culturally specific, but they remain in wide usage, even among those who are classified as deviant by them. To this end, I identify the individuals under study by the terms that they would employ to describe themselves, remaining critical of the limited descriptive power of these terms.

I assert that the identity of a homosexually-identified individual plays an integral role in the support and recovery processes that follow a homophobic interaction. The homosexual identity of the individual will increase in salience at two points in this process. First, in the initial homophobic interaction, the salience of the homosexual identity is raised in a negative context. This interaction has negative physical and emotional impacts on the individual. Second, in interaction with a supportive social network the homosexual identity again becomes more salient, but this time in a positive context. As well as reframing of the meaning behind the incident, this second context allows the individual to recover from the incident in a way that would be difficult in the absence of that social support. A supportive network can render any number of different types of support which can be a very important part of the coping process.

De Certeau's conceptualization of tactics, strategy, and consumption are important to the model I am creating to describe the two interactions outlined above. De Certeau conceives of tactics as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (De Certeau 1984:36-37). The support of a homosexually-identified individual falls under this type of resistance. Strategy is "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships" that takes place once a group in society has carved out a space from which to resist (De Certeau 1984:35-36). Strategic resistance has been exercised by various GLBT groups since the late 1960s. These two concepts provide the political context of the supportive interactions under study. De Certeau's conception of consumption as a form of production, when used in combination with symbolic interactionist concepts, helps us to understand how the supportive process works. Thus in the model I outline later in the text, stress and social support theory provide the micro-level context for the interactions I am studying while symbolic interactionism and de Certeau provide the mechanism through which they operate.

The theories I draw on to conceptualize this phenomenon are somewhat disparate. The body of this study expands upon the connections I see between these theories and also addresses relevant theories that I choose not to use. In the first part of the literature review, I cover the critiques and insights that queer theory, various essentialist theories, and postpositivist realism offer in the interest of thoroughly covering the relevant schools of thought on matters of identity. I then explain how I came to the decision not to draw heavily from these three literatures for this research, despite some interesting ways in which they are relevant to the topic at hand. In the second part of the thesis I cover the schools of thought that I am using for this paper which are as follows: (1) stress theory, (2) social support theory, (3) symbolic interactionism, (4) the tactics described in Michel de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and (5) social movement theory. In the third part of the thesis, I present the model being created to explain how the interactions under study work. I conclude with a section that reiterates the

importance of the connections I draw between these theories and outlines possible further avenues of research.

In the model I am creating in this study, and at various points in the literature review as well, I am taking certain things as given for the purposes of providing conceptual clarity to this study. With regard to the possible coping styles that could be used in the aftermath of a homophobic interaction, I take the position that those styles that involve social support are preferable due to their connection with positive health outcomes. This is not to say that the strategies of coping with homophobic stressors that involve social support are the *only* possible way to recover from a homophobic interaction. Further, this study is not putting social support forward as the most viable coping option in all situations. If a homosexually-identified individual should find an alternative style preferable, then that individual should use it. What would be ideal is for an individual in a stressful situation to have a wide variety of coping strategies from which to choose. Social support should be one of those options because of its potential health benefits.

Additionally, with regard to possible tactics and strategies of resistance, I take the position that resistance in the cultural arena needs to be accompanied by resistance in the political or structural arena. I take this position because, while resisting discourses of power can affect structural change, change might come about faster if other types of resistance are used in concert with discursive resistance. I assert this need because political resistance is a more direct and possibly a more efficient route to structural change. This position is addressed further in the section where the model of interaction is presented.

## Literature Review

The review of the various literatures involved in this study begins with queer theories, essentialisms, and postpositivist realism. Any discussion of the literature on homosexuality, and homosexual identity in particular, would be incomplete without examining both queer theoretical and essentialist perspectives on the matter. I am not using a strictly queer theoretical or essentialist perspective for this study, but it is still useful to review their positions in order to understand where this study fits into the current literature on homosexuality. The perspective on homosexual identity that I use for my model is in the symbolic interactionism section. The insights and deficiencies of postpositivist realism follow the first two sections.

## Queer Theories

To speak of queer theory as though it were a monolithic, univocal theoretical movement is not only inaccurate but also runs counter to the intent of many of those who might be categorized as queer theorists. Donald Hall states that “simply put, there is no ‘queer theory’ in the singular, only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called ‘queer theories’” (Hall 2003:5).

Nevertheless, some general trends among those queer theories can be found. Adam Isaiah Green identifies two types or strains of queer theory in his attempt to outline a post-queer theoretical stance: radical deconstructionism and radical subversion.

The predominant strain of queer theory – what I refer to as *radical deconstructionism* – embraces a social constructionist project seeded by French post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Scholars of this variety draw from Foucault, challenge the scientific basis of sexual identity and reduce sexual classifications (e.g., heterosexuality, homosexuality) to the effects of discourse.... A second, related strain of queer theory – what I refer to as *radical subversion* – targets homosexuality and other non-heteronormative practices, identities, and representations as sites of queer subversion. In this formulation, the very fact of non-heterosexual desire connotes transgression and rebellion. (Green 2002:524-531)

Looking at some of the seminal works that are considered queer theoretical, this taxonomy makes sense. Judith Butler, one of the founding mothers of queer theory writes: “I’m permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble” (Butler 1991:14). Thus it is apparent that Butler fits within the radical deconstruction strain of queer theory while a writer such as Michael Warner would fit into the radical subversion strain. “Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer” (Warner 1993:xiii). For Warner, this reflection on social location leads easily to a subversive mindset. “The preference for ‘queer’ represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse

of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner 1993:xxvi).

This distinction, while not perfect, is useful in helping to frame the various theorists who have found themselves under the queer theory umbrella. While Butler, for example, does talk about the possibility of gender performances such as drag “to explain the constructed and performative dimension of gender[;] [it] is not precisely *an example* of subversion. It would be a mistake to take it as the paradigm of subversive action or, indeed, as a model for political agency” (Butler [1990] 2006:xxiii). Butler herself is differentiating in this example between political subversion and discursive subversion, placing drag firmly in the second category. While some might argue that discursive subversion *is* a form of political subversion, Butler does not agree and thus falls more squarely into the deconstructionist camp. She characterizes drag as displacing “the entire enactment of gender significations from the discourse of truth and falsity” (Butler [1990] 2006:186-187). If Butler thought of this as “a model for political agency” then she might fit in more with Warner’s version of subversion that views queer practices as *necessarily* politically subversive.

Green notes the benefits to social science of the application of queer theoretical ideas to their research.

Sociology, in particular, has stood to benefit from queer theory by adopting a more critical application of conceptions of heterosexual and homosexual “identity” and “community.” Rather than conceive of these as monolithic empirical units of analysis – as points of arrival for our research agendas – sociologists have been challenged to sharpen their analytic lenses, to grow sensitized to the discursive production of sexual identities, and to be mindful of the insidious force of heteronormativity as a fundamental organizing principal throughout the social order. (Green 2002:521)

But he also takes issue with the ways in which queer theory itself can impose its own conceptions on the subjects it purports to be describing.

*‘Radical deconstructionism’* – superimposes a postmodern self-concept onto the homosexual subject, thereby glossing over the enduring institutional organization of sexuality.... *‘radical subversion’* – superimposes a politically marginal self-concept onto



the homosexual subject, thereby grossly oversimplifying complex developmental processes attendant to sexual identification.... Taken together, these deficiencies have the ironic effect of erasing the homosexual actors in these studies, either by contesting the epistemological grounds upon which their sexual identities are formed (in the first strain), or by inventing a transcendental queer that exists outside of culture and social structure (both strains). (Green 2002:523)

This is the crux of the problem of applying a queer theoretical stance to the line of research proposed in this study. To the extent that a homosexually-identified individual deconstructs discursively-produced systems of identity and attempts to live his life in a post-identity fashion, describing him in those terms is appropriate. But sexological terms used in essentialist ways are still common among the homosexually-identified population of the U.S. and thus a descriptive research project is not the place to impose a deconstructive narrative on the lives of the subjects I am describing. It would be a very interesting project to explore and attempt to test the ways in which the act of interacting with social networks in the context of support helps subjects to create and perform their homosexual identities. It is possible that identity salience plays a large part in that process as well. But this project is more focused on the act of choosing social support as a coping method (as opposed to the other coping strategies available to the individual).

The approach I am taking could be criticized from a queer theoretical perspective in that social support involving a homosexual identity reifies the sexological typology that is the instrument for homosexual oppression in the first place. Because the supportive interaction under study does not criticize the basis for the homosexually-identified individual's identity, this process has the potential to allow the homosexually-identified individual just enough comfort to allow him to survive in a homophobic society without ever letting that individual get uncomfortable enough that he is incited to change that society. I would counter this criticism with the argument that if the individual is socialized into political consciousness then he does not have to come to it spontaneously through an excess of discomfort. As I state in the section where the model of interaction is outlined, supportive interaction as

a form of resistance is most effective when combined with other types of resistance that are more directly political.

As the above paragraph suggests, I am not unsympathetic to queer theoretical ideas. In general I take a social constructivist stance on identity. But I am leery of radical deconstructionist theories that focus solely on cultural levels of discourse production and purport to promote change simply by deconstructing those discourses. I agree that challenging conventional ways of knowing can be a useful part of a political enterprise geared towards change. But deconstruction is not an effective strategy for fomenting social change on its own, especially when the ideas put forward by the deconstructionists do not gain significant traction outside of the ivory tower. Deconstructionism has its place in a concerted effort to bring about social change, but it should be used in combination with other, more directly political measures. Deconstructionism is very useful for challenging the cultural practices that support and lend meaning to the structural and political systems of inequality in our society. But in order to be most effective, this cultural initiative should be coupled with a political initiative that directly attacks the structural bases for oppression.

I agree that the homosexual identities of those individuals I am describing are socially constructed. I do not agree that this has the significance that some of the radical deconstructionist strain of queer theory think it does. Sheldon Stryker quoted William Isaac Thomas as saying that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Stryker 1980:31). Green applies this line of thinking to sexual identity. “Even if we accept that categories of sexual orientation are invented, the fact of social construction by itself does not make a given cultural artifact (e.g., “gay,” “masculinity”) less salient in organizing self-understandings than a ‘natural’ characteristic” (Green 2002:528). The discursive production of identities involves more than simply a meaning-making process. Those meanings are then reified on the structural and individual level. Without addressing the various apparatuses that are involved in that process, a deconstructionist project lacks claws. “Deconstructionist analyses that expose

the epistemological basis of categories of sexual orientation do not in and of themselves change the power of those categories in shaping sexual identities and social exchange” (Green 2002:539).

In the conclusion to his proposal for a “post-queer study of sexuality,” Green states that research of the type he proposes

...will keep sexual classifications at the center of our analyses as long as these continue to exert influence on sexual actors. Yet their “truth” need not be taken for granted; on the contrary, a more sociological, post-queer study of sexuality must retain a critical distance from the reigning categories that constitute identity so as to be mindful of the ways that individuals may use, negotiate, and resist these constructs.... In the meantime, rather than circulating our fantasies of a sexual revolution, perhaps we are better off to look for subversion in its less overtly spectacular forms, in the subtle disruptions and local disjunctions that pervade social interaction. (Green 2002:540)

Again, while I do not see a strong queer theoretical stance as appropriate for this line of research, I see its potential utility, both political and academic. It would be very interesting for a researcher to approach de Certeau’s concept of tactics from a standpoint of a practice of queering. As Green states, “these homosexual men do not simply reproduce the social order, but uneasily, clumsily, and often unwittingly rework it in the process of their daily lives” (Green 2002:539). I leave that work to other researchers.

Queer theory is a much younger perspective, influenced by postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. To understand what queer theorists are reacting against one must look to the more traditional perspective of essentialism.

## Essentialisms

“In philosophy, the term essentialism is commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity” (Morton 2003:73). Applying this to human sexuality, Steven Seidman states that “essentialism is the notion that sexuality is a basic and essential part of being human. Constructionism states that sexuality is a learned way of thinking and acting” (Seidman 2003:27).

As I state above, I generally fall within the constructivist camp on identity. I agree with the idea that the particular meanings attached to sexual object choice are historically and culturally specific and that individuals within a culture are socialized into those meanings. But I also acknowledge the biological origins of some aspects of sexuality. Nature versus nurture may or may not be a useful dichotomy in helping us to understand the roles that society and biology play in the formation and evolution of an individual’s sexuality over the life-course. What is definitely needed is more rapprochements between biological scientists and social scientists over the roles each of their disciplines have to play in the study of sexuality.

That being said, I have found in the literature three types of essentialism that can be brought to bear on the subject of homosexual identity. I discuss each in turn and why I have not incorporated them into this line of research.

The most common type of essentialism I have come across is biological essentialism. The idea that there is some biological determinant, genetic or otherwise, that causes one to become a homosexual and by extension adopt a homosexual identity informs most of the biological research on sexuality as well as most of the sociological and psychological research on sexuality until recently. The most famous contemporary advocate of the biological essentialist approach is Simon LeVay. In 1991, he “published a report in the journal *Science* on differences in brain structure between heterosexual and

homosexual men” (LeVay 1996:ix). It could be argued that LeVay is falling prey to his predisposition to find biological differences that would be politically beneficial to homosexuals and thus his interpretation of the data is biased. A healthy dialogue can be had on the validity and meaning of data purporting to show biological differences between homosexual and heterosexual individuals. But it is hard to argue that this data is not politically effective, at least temporarily. Much of the critique of homosexuality in contemporary American culture (whatever its structural basis) rests on religious or moral explanations of homosexuality as a “choice.” It is worth quoting LeVay at length when he asks the question

Does the belief that homosexuality is a matter of choice lead to negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians, and conversely, does the belief that it is not a matter of choice lead to favorable attitudes? Two psychologists—Julie Piskur and Douglas Degelman—set out to answer this question in a very direct manner. They took 105 college students and divided them at random into three groups. One group was asked to read a research summary that emphasized a biological basis for sexual orientation. Another group read a summary that did not support such a basis, and the third group read nothing. Afterward, all the students completed a questionnaire that tested their attitudes toward gays and lesbians. It turned out that the students who had read the “biological” material expressed significantly more favorable attitudes toward gay people than students in either of the other two groups. (LeVay 1996:3-4)

While this is compelling, especially given the influence of conservative religious ideology on contemporary American politics, it ignores two very basic problems.

First, there is no analysis of discourses of power in LeVay’s reading of this research. The negative attitudes of college students who did not read about a biological basis for homosexuality seem to spring out of nowhere. In reality, the negative attitude towards homosexuality is a product of heteronormative socialization. Biological determinism is an effective tool against that socialization because the arguments of religious heteronormativity rely on homosexuality being a choice (ignoring, as they often do, that this implies that heterosexuality is a choice).

Second, this approach ignores the possibility that a biological determinist argument could eventually be used against homosexuals. “[Eve Kosofsky] Sedgwick argued that the guiding impulse of the scientific rationality that LeVay champions could easily result in a programmatic effort to eliminate

lesbians and gay men altogether by altering whatever genetic or structural factor seems to cause ‘homosexuality’” (Turner 2000:179). In order to counter this, homosexual rights activists will either have to take a constructivist approach (which would be very difficult to convince mainstream America of) or to further entrench themselves in an ethnic minority approach—claiming that what Sedgwick describes amounts to genocide.

The second type of essentialism in the literature is cultural essentialism. Practitioners of this type of thinking believe that “a consciousness of cultural community provides the necessary strength for collective action to overcome oppression” (Norton 1997:3). Rictor Norton, in his 1997 book *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, attempts to refute the social constructivist arguments that originate in the works of Michel Foucault. These arguments claim that the modern conception of homosexuality was constructed in the nineteenth century.

Jeffery Weeks (1991) and other social constructionists have stressed ‘the vital importance of distinguishing between behavior, role, and identity in any sociological or historical approach to the subject of homosexuality.’ On the contrary, I believe it is vital to recognize the integrity, unity and ambiguity of the experience that is falsified by over-intellectual analysis. (Norton 1997:8)

Given my interest in the particulars of identity and its social construction, I obviously am not going to be incorporating a position that equates the homosexual experiences of Roman slave boys and twenty-first century circuit boys. The approach of those like Norton has much less traction in academic circles since the arrival of queer theory. However, the use of historical “homosexual” figures to promote pride and unity among homosexuals still finds traction in some activist networks. Like biological essentialism, it is easy to see the attraction of this line of thinking for the politically-minded homosexual activist. Although it might have some political or unifying utility, this approach is based on two misconceptions. First, Norton believes that because people in the past engaged in homosexual sex-acts they must think about them in the same way as people in contemporary times do. Second, if identities are historically and culturally-specific social constructions then they must be less significant because of that fact. “How can

one found an identity upon a known falsehood?” (Norton 1997:21) The idea that something that is based on social convention is somehow false represents a major misinterpretation on Norton’s part. As was pointed out in the queer theory section, if something is agreed upon socially then it has social consequences.

The third type of essentialism found in the literature is strategic essentialism. “The idea of strategic essentialism accepts that essentialist categories of human identity should be criticized, but emphasizes that one cannot avoid using such categories at times in order to make sense of the social and political world” (Morton 2003:75). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak put this conception forward as a way to describe a “short-term strategy to affirm a political identity” but warns that minority groups should be careful that “this identity does not then get fixed as an essential category by a dominant group” (Morton 2003:75). This strikes me as similar to Green’s (2002) post-queer approach to critically understanding sexological categories while acknowledging their effects on individuals in real time. I find that Green’s approach is preferable for a couple of reasons.

First, Spivak never intended this strategy to become a theoretical lens through which to analyze anything. She says that “a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory” (Spivak 1993:4). Strategic essentialism is most useful as a political means of resisting oppression. But even its political efficacy is limited. “Strategic essentialism is thus most effective as a context-specific strategy, but it cannot provide a long-term political solution to end oppression and exploitation” (Morton 2003:75). Despite its inadequacy as a long-term strategy, I contend that is nevertheless more of a strategy than a tactic because it operates from a politicized theoretical space that is characteristic of a movement that has already begun to assert itself. Strategic essentialism requires theoretical distance from the slog of everyday practice and does not arise organically in the way that a tactic might. To repeat, tactics are everyday practices that occur without the support of a base of power from which to strategize.

Second, Spivak's strategy uses essentialism strategically and temporarily but it does not critique the essentialist notions as they are used. In Green's post-queer theorizing, one can simultaneously critique the limitations of sexological categories while understanding that they remain in wide use as a self-classification system and that they have real effects on individual's lives.

So while I am not using Spivak's strategic essentialism I find it and some of her other ideas very interesting. She has said, for example, that "it is not possible to be non-essentialist... the subject is always centered" (Harasym 1990:109). I could be misreading her, but the idea that one always speaks from a subject position with an attendant identity attached to that resonates with me and troubles postmodernist theorizing of possible post-identitarian worlds.

Some contemporary theorists, finding neither postmodernism/poststructuralism nor essentialism to be satisfactory, have attempted to forge new theories that evade the weaknesses of either camp. One such theory is that of postpositivist realism.



## Postpositivist Realism

Postpositivist realism is based on the ideas of Satya P. Mohanty, a literary theorist, whose writings on identity are a reaction to the various poststructuralist and postmodernist critiques of identity that have arisen in the past few decades. Mohanty seeks an “alternative to current conceptions that see identity either in a deterministic way or as purely arbitrary (or, at most, ‘strategic’)” (Moya 2000:11). Paula M. L. Moya claims that, in his writings, Mohanty “shows how identities can be both real and constructed: how they can be politically and epistemically significant, on the one hand, and variable, nonessential, and radically historical, on the other” (Moya 2000:12).

The postpositivist realist take on objectivity, for example, is very promising. Discussing the possibility of objective truth, they assert that

(1) all observation and knowledge are theory mediated and that (2) a theory-mediated objective knowledge is both possible and desirable. They replace a simple correspondence theory of truth with a more dialectical causal theory of reference in which linguistic structures both shape our perceptions of and refer (in more or less partial and accurate ways) to causal features of a real world. And they endorse a conception of objectivity as an ideal of inquiry rather than as a condition of absolute and achieved certainty. (Moya 2000:12)

They take this position in an attempt to distance themselves from a postmodernist perspective. I do not know if a postmodernist would agree, but postpositivist realists claim that

what really distinguishes postpositivist realists from postmodernists (and, for that matter, modernists) is that realists have a different understanding of what “objectivity” is. The reason postmodernists deny the possibility of objectivity is that they have an impoverished view of what can count as objective. For postmodernists (as for positivists), objective knowledge is knowledge that is free of theoretically mediated bias. And because postmodernists rightly conclude that there is no such thing as a context-transcendent, subject-independent, and theoretically unmediated knowledge, they therefore conclude that there can be no such thing as objective knowledge. Defenders of a postpositivist conception of objectivity, by contrast, stake out a less absolutist and more theoretically productive position. They suggest that objective knowledge can be built on an analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias or interest. Such an analysis distinguishes those biases that are limiting or counterproductive from

those that are in fact necessary for knowledge, that are epistemically productive and useful. (Moya 2000:12-13)

While Moya's conception of identity, based off of this reframing of objectivity, neatly deals with postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of identity, it is insufficiently social and lacks an analysis of the interactive nature of identity. Also, because postpositivist realists position themselves as sidestepping the shortcomings of both positivism and postmodernism, they end up with an emphasis on the ability to "more accurately" make truth claims about the world while still admitting fallibility. This leads them to the odd declaration that "we can adjudicate the validity and usefulness of different identities by viewing them as theoretical claims that attempt to account for causal features of the social world" (Moya 2000:17). To discuss identity in terms of accuracy, validity, or usefulness seems to me to be not only judgmental, but also inaccurate. Because, as Moya herself points out above, linguistic structures (which would include identity categories) *both* shape our worldview and convey meaning through reference to real-world objects. To make truth-value claims about the accuracy of an identity ignores the performative aspect of an identity claim. Claiming a homosexual identity is not only a description of sexual preference but also a performative utterance of the type J. L. Austin describes in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962).

Austin distinguishes between statements that simply describe a state of affairs such as "The sky is blue," and those statements which alter affairs by their very utterance such as "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*" or "I do (take this woman to be my lawfully wedded wife)" (Austin 1962:5). I assert that identity claims, especially coming out of the closet, are performative utterances, not descriptive statements. Thus Moya's concern with validity is useful in separating her theory from a positivist standpoint, but it is inaccurate in the special case of identity claims.

Further, in the postpositivist realist account of homosexual identity by William S. Wilkerson, the author unintentionally retreats into an uncritical, essentialist perspective. Wilkerson analyzes the act of

coming out, comparing its effects to those of joining a consciousness-raising group. “When a woman joins a consciousness-raising group, she discovers that her feelings of guilt and depression were in fact a mistaken interpretation of her deeper and more pervasive anger at the situation of being a woman in a sexist society” (Wilkerson 2000:252). I would argue that this is a misinterpretation of identity processes.

Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, in discussing the interplay of environmental restraints and individual experience and their effects on self-formation, state that “[t]his interplay constitutes what we have called *interpretive practice*—the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality... is apprehended, understood, organized, and represented” (Gubrium and Holstein [2000] 2007:424). As they describe it, the act of “discovering” a new identity is in fact just a pop-psychological misinterpretation of the process of creating that new identity. When the woman described by Wilkerson felt guilty and depressed before going to a consciousness-raising group, she felt just that: guilty and depressed. The interaction with the group and a new frame of reference allowed her to create a new politicized identity that includes anger over sexism. This new identity provides a new lens through which a woman can view her previous experiences, but it does not change how she felt about those experiences as she was going through them.

Wilkerson is right that coming out is “the reinterpretation of homoerotic experiences, previously thought forbidden, as legitimate and positive” (Wilkerson 2000:252). But he is wrong when he says that “the crucial point is that this change of values and self-understanding changes the character of the experiences and so alters the very kind of experiences that motivate an individual to come out in the first place” (Wilkerson 2000:252). If coming out is similar to consciousness-raising, the individual may interpret their past feelings as misplaced anger, but in fact they (the feelings) were true guilt (internalized homophobia). I argue that this recharacterization of experience is a necessary fiction. If one’s previous interpretation of self as a sinner or sick individual is not in line with one’s current identity, a reformulation of these memories might be necessary to ease the contradiction.

But this necessary fiction does not excuse Wilkerson's analysis of identity as "both constructed and discovered from experiences" (Wilkerson 2000:252). An identity might be constructed using new experiences but it was not there all along. Wilkerson refers to "error" in reference to identity multiple times in his argument. By referring to interpretations of experience as possibly false, Wilkerson seems to be presuming an essential or true self or experience that can be described accurately or inaccurately by an identity. Wilkerson shares Moya's interpretation of identity in terms of accuracy and ignores the performative nature of coming out and the constructed (not discovered) nature of identity. In doing so he leaves himself no option but to conceive of identity as a description of essential characteristics of an individual that may not accurately reflect the "true" nature of that person. But identity is not so much a description of who one is/was (and therefore is accurate or not) but a frame of reference masquerading as a description that is applied to an individual's experiences and which the individual wishes others would apply to them.

And so, despite its promise as an approach to social science that avoids the pitfalls of positivism while offering an alternative to postmodernism, I find that postpositivist realism is not at this time sufficient as a basis for social research of the type I am doing in this study. Its stance on objectivity has potential but it remains to be seen if postpositivist realism's practitioners will expand upon that stance and bolster it against postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques.

Having covered previous takes on identity from the queer theoretical, essentialist, and postpositivist realist perspectives, it would be appropriate at this time to discuss the circumstances in which identity, as I see it, will become crucial in understanding a particular social process. In the following sections of the literature review, I provide an overview of the literature on stress and social support. This lays the ground work for the process I am describing. Identity is involved in many types of interactions. I isolate the stress and support interactions because they provide a clear example of how

identity and consumption converge in interaction. I elaborate on this point further in the section on de Certeau.

## Stress Theory

Sheldon Cohen is a major figure in both the stress and social support literatures. In 1995 he wrote *Measuring Stress: A Guide for Health and Social Scientists* with his colleagues Ronald Kessler and Lynn Gordon. This book, along with his comprehensive book *Social Support Measurement and Intervention* (2000), heavily influences my thinking on the processes of stress and social support. Cohen is a (social) psychologist and his analyses of stress and support tend to be insufficiently structural and lack an analysis of power. This deficiency is part of why I bring de Certeau into the analysis later in this study. The synthesis of de Certeau with symbolic interactionism make up in part for this lack of power in Cohen's theorizing. This being said, Cohen's perspective is still incredibly useful not only for the models of stress and support processes it provides, but for its concern with the connections between stress and negative health outcome. I share this concern with Cohen and thus am comfortable relying on his analysis of the literatures on both stress and social support. There are of course, parts of the literature on stress that he does not cover, but because they are unrelated to health outcomes, they are not of interest to this current study. If, for example, an industrial psychologist were to study the relationship between stress and productivity, it would not be useful to include in this study.

Thus I rely on Cohen et al. (1995) when they trace modern investigations on stress back to at least the 1930s and Adolf Meyer's work exploring the relationship of life events to illness (Cohen, Kessler, and Gordon 1995). In this literature there are three distinct traditions:

The environmental tradition focuses on assessment of environmental events or experiences that are normatively (*objectively*) associated with substantial adaptive demands. The psychological tradition focuses on individuals' *subjective* evaluations of their abilities to cope with the demands posed by specific events or experiences. Finally, the biological tradition focuses on activation of specific physiological systems that have been repeatedly shown to be modulated by both psychologically and physically demanding conditions. (Cohen et al. 1995:3-4)

Of these three, I place myself firmly within the psychological tradition. The biological tradition is interesting in its ability to point to some of the very real physical changes that occur when people become stressed (Levi 1972; Lazarus 1977; Anisman and Zacharko, 1992). However, it does very little to explain either the subjective experiences of stress that precede the implementation of a coping strategy (which would include seeking social support) or the mechanisms through which social support might help to alleviate the effects of stress. As a sociologist, it might seem as though the environmental factors of stress would be more pertinent as the object of my study and would lead me to use the environmental tradition. In this literature, however, the environment is looked at only as a source of stressors, not as a potential source of help relieving that stress. This is where the social support literature begins to blend with the stress literature in my conception of the social process under study.

Many definitions of the term stress have been offered by the literature. I find the one offered by Cohen et al. (1995) to be very useful. They describe stress as “a process in which *environmental demands tax or exceed the adaptive capacity of an organism, resulting in psychological and biological changes that may place persons at risk for disease*” (Cohen et al. 1995:3). The emphasis on stress as a process that involves a stimulus and a reaction is important as it opens the way for involving a symbolic interactionist viewpoint on identity processes which I expand upon in the appropriate section. Cohen et al. point out that

It is important to emphasize that stress appraisals are determined not solely by the stimulus condition or the response variables, but rather by persons’ interpretation of their relationships to their environments. That is, the perception that one is experiencing stress is a product of both the interpretation of the meaning of an event and the evaluation of the adequacy of coping resources. (Cohen et al. 1995:6-7)

There is a substantial amount of research on the negative health effects of stress upon both individuals and populations that is done in the environmental tradition. This is posited to occur through “direct effects on biological processes or behavioral patterns that influence disease risk.... Persons exposed to stressors or viewing themselves as under stress tend to engage in poor *health practices*.

They may smoke more, drink more alcohol, eat poorly, exercise less, sleep less” (Cohen et al. 1995:12). This only compounds the possible violence that is an aspect in many instances of interactive homophobia. It should be emphasized here that these are *possible* negative outcomes. Not every case of stress will necessarily lead to disease. In some cases the interaction between the individual and the stressor has negative consequences for that person while in others there is something that changes the process and diverts it away from a negative course. There are many possible coping strategies that might initiate that change in the process. This study focuses on coping strategies that involve social support. This support is one of many kinds of “moderators of the relation between stressors and disease risk” (Cohen et al. 1995:20). Cohen et al. state that

A number of investigators have proposed that relations between stress and illness vary with preexisting vulnerability factors (see reviews by Cohen & Edwards 1989; Cohen & Wills 1985; Kessler & McLeod 1985). That is, differences in social support systems, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and personality characteristics render some persons relatively immune to stress-induced illness and others relatively susceptible. (Cohen et al. 1995:20)

Cohen et al. (1995) believe that “the three traditions discussed earlier can be viewed as emphasizing different points in the process through which objective environmental experiences can influence disease” (Cohen et al. 1995:10). The authors present this process as a model that leads from stressor to disease. The model begins with environmental demands (stressors or life events) that impose themselves on the individual. This leads to an appraisal of the demands and the individual’s capacity to adapt to them. If the appraisal is benign, then the stress process stops at that point. However, if the demands are perceived as beyond the adaptive capacity of the individual then the individual perceives the situation as stressful. This then leads to negative emotional responses which can in turn lead to physiological or behavioral responses that increase the individual’s risk of physical or psychiatric disease. The authors are careful to note that this model “is primarily unidirectional (flowing from environmental



demands to disease) and does not include all possible pathways linking these concepts” (Cohen et al. 1995:11).

Applying this model to homophobic interactions there are a couple of possible paths for the process I am describing to follow. In the aftermath of a homophobic interaction, the homosexually-identified individual could experience a process of appraisal and response that leads to physiological or behavioral responses that put him at risk for physical or psychiatric disease, a direct jump to those physiological or biological responses, or some combination thereof.

Within this model there are multiple locations in which opportunities exist for intervention on the part of either the homosexually-identified individual or a social network from which he might receive support. I suspect that social network support will most often intervene between either the negative emotional response and the physiological or behavioral responses or between those physiological or behavioral responses and the increased risk for disease. If members of the social network notice either the negative emotional response or the one or both of the other two responses they might offer support without it even being asked for. Alternatively, after the negative emotional response, one of the behavioral responses might be to ask for support. Instead of engaging in what the authors deem “poor health practices,” the stressed individual might ask for support instead.

Not all perspectives on stress conceive of it in exclusively negative terms. Cohen et al. (1995) contend that

Although stressful events have been studied primarily as risk factors for disease, it is becoming increasingly clear that confronting and adapting to stressful events can result in positive outcomes such as personal growth, reprioritization of life goals, increased feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy, and strengthening of social networks. A greater emphasis on the benefits of stressful events for successful adaptors is likely in the future and would broaden our understanding of the stress process. (Cohen et al. 1995:6)

Other strands of stress theory emphasize the frequency and magnitude of the stress-inducing life events. One strand looks at the number of major life events “with more life events assumed to

indicate greater stress” (Diplacido 1998:140). Another approach is to examine “daily hassles” wherein “the cumulative effects of small negative daily events, or hassles, are assumed to lead to greater stress” (Diplacido 1998:140). Proponents of a “minority stress” approach favor this second conception of the more powerful causes of stress as it is an appropriate measure of their “assertion that minority status leads to more negative events for the minority member” (Diplacido 1998:140). The psychologists Gregory M. Herek and Linda D. Garnets assert that

Since the demise of the illness model [of homosexuality], a minority stress model has become the most commonly used framework for conceptualizing mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. It posits that minority group members are at risk for some kinds of psychological problems because they face unique, chronic stressors as a result of their disadvantaged status in society. (Herek and Garnets 2007:359-360).

The authors found in a review of the relevant literature that “nonheterosexuals appear to be at greater risk than heterosexuals for anxiety and mood disorder” (Herek and Garnets 2007:359).

The stressor is simply the first part of the process under study. As I assert in the sections on symbolic interactionism and de Certeau, there are two interactions that are crucial to helping us to understand how identity and consumption intertwine. The second interaction in the process involves social support.

## Social Support Theory

There are four traditions within the social support literature that attempt to connect social support with positive health outcomes (Cohen et al. 2000:5-10).

The Sociological tradition dates back to Emile Durkheim's classic work, *Suicide*. Durkheim looked at the social integration of members of particular religions and found that those networks that were more tightly integrated had lower suicide rates. "We thus reach the conclusion that the superiority of Protestantism with respect to suicide results from its being a less strongly integrated church than the Catholic church" (Durkheim [1897] 1997:159). Durkheim concludes that those societies where religion exerted more control over its members have the effects of controlling their impulses and providing support. "There is, in short, in a cohesive and animated society a constant interchange of ideas and feelings from all to each and each to all, something like a mutual moral support" (Durkheim [1897] 1997:210). This support is of a main effects type, which I explain in detail later in this section, and contributes to the individual's health by supporting the individual regardless of whether or not they are under stress. Durkheim wishes to avoid individualistic explanations of suicide and thus proposes a model wherein the stress caused by micro-level life events is not the deciding factor in a decision to commit suicide. Durkheim's explanation of the relationship between religion and egoistic suicide is worth quoting at length.

We see why, generally speaking, religion has a prophylactic effect upon suicide. It is not, as has sometimes been said, because it condemns it more unhesitatingly than secular morality, nor because the idea of God gives its precepts exceptional authority which subdues the will, nor because the prospect of a future life and the terrible punishments there awaiting the guilty give its proscriptions a greater sanction than that of human laws.... If religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction, it is not that it preaches the respect for his own person to him with arguments *sui generis*; but because it is a society. What constitutes this society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the

integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value” (Durkheim [1897] 1997:169-170).

While the Sociological tradition takes a structural view of the support that an individual can receive from their social network, the Cognitive tradition takes a more individualistic perspective. It is utilized by both epidemiologists and psychiatrists and this tradition argues “that those with strong social ties [are] protected from the potential pathogenic effects of stressful events” (Cohen et al. 2000:6).

Cohen et al. cite physician and epidemiologist John Cassel, who

...thought that stressors which placed persons at risk for disease were often characterized by confusing or absent feedback from the social environment. In contrast, the impact of the stressors was mitigated or precluded among individuals whose networks provided them with consistent communication of what is expected of them, support and assistance with tasks, evaluation of their performance, and appropriate rewards. (Cohen et al. 2000:6)

This mitigation effect is critical to the stress-buffering hypothesis in social support theory that I examine later in this section.

The Interpersonal Process tradition includes “research on the dynamics involved in the expression and receipt of social support for those in stressful circumstances. The earliest approaches involved attempts to develop detailed classification schemes of various aspects of support that is exchanged between people, in both dyadic and group contexts” (Cohen et al. 2000:7). Some of these classification schemes are quite interesting, grouping informal helping behaviors in ways that may be useful in relation to my research topic. Benjamin H. Gottlieb, in his 1978 study of informal helping behaviors, conducted a content analysis of taped interviews of low-income single mothers. He found that the 26 types of helping behaviors he identified could be classified into four different categories

1. Emotionally Sustaining Behaviors – Personal qualities or behaviors of the helper which *promote emotionally supportive conditions* for the helpee.
2. Problem Solving Behaviors – Ways in which the helper *supplements the helpee’s coping resources* by providing new information or a new perspective on existing information, and by personally intervening in the problem situation.

3. Indirect Personal Influence – The helper’s influence is not necessarily extended in an ongoing interaction, but rests on the helpee’s conviction that the helper or the helper’s resources are available when needed.
4. Environmental Action – Various forms of social advocacy taken on behalf of the helpee. (Gottlieb 1978:108)

In a later study attempting to develop a scale of social support, Manuel Barrera Jr., Irwin N. Sandler, and Thomas B. Ramsay use and expand upon these four categories to create the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors, a metric for measuring social network support (Barrera, Sandler, and Ramsay 1981).

Of the four categories that Gottlieb found, the first three seem the most logical fit with regards to aftermath of a homophobic interaction. In a homophobic interaction such as being called a fag on the street, the support of emotionally sustaining behaviors might help to ameliorate the negative emotional response to the stressor. Indirect personal influence could also help in that if the stressed individual perceives that the support of his network would be available if he needed it, he is likely to believe that the stressor is well within his adaptive capacity and the stress process will halt. In the instance of being fired from a job for being homosexual a combination of emotional support and problem solving behaviors would be most helpful. The emotional support would again help with the negative emotional response from this stressor and the problem solving behavior would help with locating a new job and possibly a lawyer.

The fourth tradition in the Social Support literature is the Intervention tradition. The basis for this tradition is the idea that researchers should “act on the epidemiological evidence linking social ties to health by planning programs aimed to augment the support people exchange with others” (Cohen et al. 2000:8-9). This tradition is primarily concerned with the application of the findings of social support research in formal programs and initiatives as well as informal natural social network interventions.

For the purposes of this line of research, my thinking is informed by the Interpersonal Process tradition in the areas of measurement and interpretation. As I explore in the section on symbolic

interactionism, the interactive level is where this research will find both sources of stress and ways of mediating that stress in everyday life. It is in the realm of the everyday that I seek out a different form of resistance. But in terms of the eventual application of this research the Intervention tradition is important to keep in mind.

Within the four different approaches described above for studying the connection between social support and health there is disagreement on how exactly that connection works. "In general social support is thought to affect mental and physical health through its influence on emotions, cognitions, and behaviors" (Cohen et al. 2000:10). Two different models exist for describing the mechanisms of the influence of social support on those emotions, cognitions, and behaviors.

The "main effects" model (also called the direct effects model) "proposes that social resources have a beneficial effect irrespective of whether persons are under stress" (Cohen et al. 2000:11). The idea is that

those who participate in a social network are subject to social controls and peer pressures that influence normative health behaviors. For example, their networks might influence whether they exercise, eat low-fat diets, or smoke. Integration in a social network is also presumed to provide a source of generalized positive affect; senses of predictability and stability, of purpose, of belonging and security; and recognition of self-worth because of demonstrated ability to meet normative role expectations. (Cohen et al. 2000:11)

This model presents both the possible physical and possible mental outcomes of social relationships.

The main effects model posits that the social relationships an individual engages in on a daily basis influence that individual socially and provide them with services and information. These relationships and the things they provide that individual affect the individual's psychological states (as well as the neuro-endocrine responses attendant to those states). These factors can in turn affect the choices of the individual that can lead to health promoting behaviors (e.g., medical adherence, diet, exercise) and in turn to health-relevant biological influences (e.g., endocrine, immune, or cardiovascular

effects). The positive effects of the influence of the social relationships along the pathways described can help to prevent both physical and psychiatric disease (Cohen et al. 2000:12).

Because the main effects model asserts that social relationships (including support) are beneficial regardless of the presence of stress, there is no place accorded for an event such as a homophobic interaction which might require the help of the network to mitigate. This approach is influenced very much so by order theorists such as Durkheim working in the Sociological tradition. And while it is an interesting theory, it is not as useful for this line of research as the second model of social relationships and health.

“The stress-buffering model proposes that support is related to well-being only (or primarily) for persons under stress.... In this case, support presumably operates by preventing responses to stressful events that are inimical to health” (Cohen et al. 2000:11). This model is central to my understanding of social support and the role it plays in the process I am describing in this study. Joanne DiPlacido states that “social support from family members, from relationship partners, and from the lesbian, gay and bisexual community can help to fend off the negative consequences of stress resulting from stigmatization, homophobia, and heterosexism” (DiPlacido 1998:145).

The stress-buffering model presents the same progression from stressful event to physical or psychiatric disease as the stress model described in the previous section. This model is different in that it points out the places in the process where support can intervene to halt the progress toward disease.

There are three places on the model where social resources (support) might intervene in the path from stressor to disease. The first opportunity for mitigation is located at the point in the process where the stressed individual appraises the demands of the situation on their adaptive capacities. Its buffering effect relies on “the belief that others will provide necessary resources [and] may redefine the potential for harm posed by a situation and bolster one’s perceived ability to cope with imposed demands, thereby preventing a particular situation from being appraised as highly stressful” (Cohen et

al. 2000:14). In the second opportunity, the perception or receipt of support “may reduce or eliminate the affective reaction to a stressful event” that occurs during the negative cognitive and emotional response to the stressful event (Cohen et al. 2000:14). And the third opportunity allows for the possibility that social resources, perceived or received, will “dampen physiologic responses to the event, or prevent or alter maladaptive behavioral responses” that precede disease (Cohen et al. 2000:14).

“Buffering effects of support are not always found... even when social support is operationalized in these ways [perceived availability of support, perceived emotional support, or as having at least one person in which to confide]” (Jackson 1992:363). In the stress-buffering literature, there is a hypothesis that attempts to explain why this occurs. The matching hypothesis posits that “support may reduce psychological distress only when a match exists between the source of support and the source of the stress, or between the support function and the recipient’s needs” (Jackson 1992:363). The second half of this hypothesis is the basis for my conjecture above (in reference to Gottlieb’s typology) that different types of social support will be more useful for different types of interactive homophobia. Work in this area has been done by Sheldon Cohen and Thomas Wills, amongst others. Their “analysis predicts that buffering effects will be observed when the support functions measured are those that are most relevant for the stressors faced by the person” (Cohen and Wills 1985:314). This analysis makes sense, but more work needs to be done to make sure that the conception of matching between stressor and support comes from the subject and not the researcher. Otherwise, connections between seemingly disparate types of stress and support might be missed. If, for example, an individual is fired for being homosexual, the researcher might expect that instrumental help such as a loan of money or help in securing another job would be the most helpful in light of the nature of this particular stressor. However, if the individual under stress feels financially secure and capable of finding another job what that person might need is more emotional support. So if the individual’s support network is offering instrumental support but the individual’s stress is not being buffered, this would present as an anomaly



to the researcher who does not let the data determine what constitutes a match between stressor and support. Thus, while the matching hypothesis is useful, it can suffer from the researcher's ignorance of the context of the stressed individual.

I expand on the role of identity in this process in the section on symbolic interactionism. At this point it suffices to say that the second and third opportunities mentioned above are the most likely to involve actual interaction. The perception of available resources involved in the first opportunity is based on interactions that occurred prior to the onset of the stressor, and thus less pertinent to the part of the process I am focusing on for this research. The second and third opportunities can involve perceived instead of received resources. Received resources are also important because

the actual receipt of support could also play a role.... Support may alleviate the impact of stress appraisal by providing a solution to the problem, by reducing the perceived importance of the problem, or by providing a distraction from the problem. It might also tranquilize the neuroendocrine system so that people are less reactive to perceived stress or facilitate healthful behaviors such as exercise, personal hygiene, proper nutrition, and rest. (Cohen et al. 2000:14)

A variety of coping strategies exist, some of which involve social support. And within those that involve social support, there will be some that will involve interaction. I am highlighting these particular strategies because those coping strategies that involve social support have a more direct link with positive health outcome than those that do not involve social support (e.g. the "poor health" choices referenced in the section on stress). This is not to deny the possibility that coping strategies that do not involve social support might lead to positive health outcomes. It is simply a matter of there being documented connections between social support and health.

There is another way of dividing the literature on social support that is pertinent to the overall model for this study. Three theoretical perspectives on how to measure the relationship between social support and health emerge from the literature.

The stress and coping perspective proposes that support contributes to health by protecting people from the adverse effects of stress. The social constructionist

perspective proposes that support directly influences health by promoting self-esteem and self-regulation, regardless of the presence of stress. The relationship perspective predicts that the health effects of social support cannot be separated from relationship processes that often co-occur with support, such as companionship, intimacy, and low social conflict. (Cohen et al. 2000:29)

Work has been done using the social constructionist perspective by those working in a symbolic interactionist framework.

The major premise of the symbolic interactionist perspective on social support is that the regularization of social interaction, rather than the provision of support per se, is responsible for the maintenance of well being.... Thus, according to the symbolic interactionist perspective, our social environments directly promote health and well-being by providing people with a way of making sense of the self and the world. Social support operates to create and sustain identity and self-esteem. (Cohen et al. 2000:40)

I explore it further in the next section, but this is where a new theoretical conception of the relationship between social support and health can be created. Previous work in symbolic interactionism uses a social constructionist perspective predicated on the main effects model of social support. A symbolic interactionist framework can be created using a stress and coping perspective to measure the stress-buffering effects of social support with identity salience as the mechanism through which the buffering occurs. The next two sections lay the next level in the foundation for the model I am creating for the process under study. The literatures on stress and social support provide the context in which the two interactions I am describing occur. Symbolic interactionism and de Certeau illuminate the mechanism by which the interactions have their effects.

## Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a major facet of the model I am building because identity is a crucial element of the process that I outline. This section will explain the various aspects of identity in interaction that are then applied to the model in its section. As I state in the first two sections of the literature review, neither essentialist nor queer theoretical perspectives on identity are sufficiently explanatory by themselves to be applied to this model. While essentialism reflects the ways that many homosexually-identified individuals think of themselves and can be politically useful when applied strategically, it does not stand up to scrutiny as a theoretical lens in the face of queer theoretical criticisms. To repeat, I take a social constructionist perspective in this study. However social constructionist perspectives on identity, such as those espoused by queer theorists, are not the dominant perspective among the homosexually-identified population. It is important to note both how the population under study refers to itself as well as the origins of the categories of referral. Symbolic interactionism is well suited to the process under study because it allows the researcher to describe the population on its own terms while noting the social nature of those terms. Sheldon Stryker founded the structural version of symbolic interactionism in his book *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version* (1980). His version of symbolic interactionism is being used for this study because of the emphasis he places on the influence that structure has on interaction. Symbolic interactionists in general note that an individual takes an identity in relation to others in interaction. Stryker (1980) expands on this to note the structural and cultural origins of the identity categories. As I state at the conclusion of this section, while Stryker's version of symbolic interactionism is a useful lens through which to analyze the interactions under study, it does have its shortcomings.

Stryker traces the origins of symbolic interactionism back to the Scottish moral philosophers (Stryker 1980:16). In Adam Smith's writings on sympathy, for example, we can find the reflexive self

taken as an object of study. "Sympathy is the ability human beings have to receive subtle and open communications from others; these communications alter who and what we are. It is through communicating with other that we first learn about ourselves; and we continuously change ourselves to win the approval of these others" (Stryker 1980:19). But it is George Herbert Mead who is given special credit with laying the ground work for what would become symbolic interactionism.

More than any other thinker, Mead showed the primacy of interaction in shaping minds, selves, and societies. He, above all others, established the symbolic character of human interaction. His treatment of the significance of language processes, his view of the self as a social product, and his vision of social behavior as including the indeterminate outcome of the dialectic between the 'I' and the 'me' are noteworthy as well. (Stryker 1980:48)

Mead's influence on Herbert Blumer, who coined the term "symbolic interactionism," should not be understated. "Blumer credits Mead with having thought through what the act of interpretation implies for understanding the human being, human action, and human association" (Stryker 1980:90).

Sheldon Stryker, whose version of symbolic interaction I draw on for this thesis, takes Mead as his starting point. But he goes beyond Mead's framework to include "role theoretic concepts and principles... in order to adequately deal with the reciprocal impact of social person and social structure" (Stryker 1980:52). The way that Stryker and other structural symbolic interactions conceptualize the relationship between self, identity, and role is critical for my conception of how social support affects a stressed individual.

The structural symbolic interactionists use the term "self" to connote a multifaceted, reflexive concept that is composed of different identities that are created in interaction and whose identities vary in salience based on context. Sheldon Stryker and Peter Burke describe identity as the "parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies" (Stryker and Burke 2000:284).

Some scholars in the literature on identity differentiate between “identity” and “social identity” to emphasize the relationship of some identities to particular groups in society. Laura Markowe quotes Henri Tajfel as saying that “social identity is defined as that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Markowe 1996:67). However, for the purposes of this thesis, social identity is not a critical distinction. Social identity is a combination of identity and identity commitment. Identity commitment can be defined by saying that

To the degree that one’s relationships to specified sets of other persons depend on being a particular kind of person, one is committed to being that kind of person. If the maintenance of ties to a set of others is important to the person, and dependent on being—say—a member of a sorority, that person is committed to being a member of a sorority. Since entering into social relationships is premised on the attribution and acceptance of positions and associated roles, then commitments are premised on identities. (Stryker 1980:61-62)

Identity commitment relates to my conception of the process that occurs in the aftermath of a homophobic interaction because commitment is a factor in identity salience. But the model of identity salience in interaction that I elaborate on in later in the study does not rely on commitment to explain the increase in salience of the homosexual identity both during a homophobic interaction and during a supportive interaction. Thus while social identity is a part of the identity literature and indeed a part of identity salience, it is not a concept that I will be using in my theorizing on the process I am describing.

“Identity salience is defined as the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation” (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). In that an identity is more likely to be salient if an individual is more committed to that identity, commitment is a factor in determining the salience hierarchy. Salience hierarchies are important in identity theory because if one identity amongst many is higher in a hierarchy of salience, behaviors associated with roles attached to that identity are more likely to be enacted.

Roles are important in this process because they introduce normative expectations into the mix, influencing how the process plays out. "Attaching a positional label to a person leads to expected behaviors from that person and to behavior toward that person premised on expectations. The term 'role' is used for these expectations which are attached to positions" (Stryker 1980:57). But roles are important beyond the expectations that others place on the individual in interaction. They also are central to how the individual views themselves in the interaction. A role-identity is "the character and the role that an individual devises as an occupant of a particular social location" (Stryker 1980:120). This concept is an important combination of the expectations of an individual in interaction and how that individual views how those expectations apply to him.

Mary McIntosh was one of the first researchers to apply role theory to homosexuality. Her 1968 paper "The Homosexual Role" was an important bridge between symbolic interactionism and the study of homosexuality and was a seminal social constructivist text in the study of sexuality. Her conception of the homosexual role includes not only the social construction of that role but also the power dynamics inherent in its creation. "The way in which people become labeled as homosexual can now be seen as an important social process connected with mechanisms of social control" (McIntosh 1968:184).

Kenneth Plummer continued this work, emphasizing that "while most researchers into homosexuality can assume that homosexuality constitutes some form of 'oddity...' the interactionist throws such assumptions into disarray, showing their socially constructed nature and the processes by which they become objectified into the 'truth'" (Plummer 1975:96).

Stryker's conceptualization of identity, role and salience are important both in understanding how the process I am describing works and what it means on a larger scale.

In terms of the interactive process under scrutiny, I posit that regardless of its position in an individual's salience hierarchy prior to the homophobic interaction, the interaction with the homophobe will raise the salience of the homosexually-identified individual's homosexual identity. Because the

stressor is tied into the individual's role as a homosexual, that individual's identity as a homosexual will become more salient than other possible identities as a result of the interaction. Focusing on white, middle-class, homosexually-identified men allows me to control for the other possible intervening identities that might occur with a homosexually-identified woman or a homosexually-identified man of color. The negative affect associated with the now more salient homosexual identity will be problematic for the individual. Once the interaction has been appraised as stressful, the negative cognitive and emotional responses as described by stress theory will probably begin.

Stress theory would predict possible negative health outcomes if the individual does not engage some sort of coping strategy. As stated before, there are many possible coping strategies available to a person under stress. Among the options that might be available for a homosexually-identified individual is to receive or to seek out support from one of his social networks, which is correlated with positive health outcomes. If that support is received, then it is probable that the homosexual identity, along with any other identities associated with the individual's role in the actively supportive network, will become even more salient. The important difference being that the identity is made salient in a positive context this time, reframing the identity as connected to positive affect and halting the progress of the individual towards disease.

There is research that analyses the connection between identity salience and stress. Kristen Marcussen, Christian Ritter, and Deborah J. Safron "examined identity salience and three distinct measures of commitment in an attempt to better assess the relationship between identities and distress... and found that higher levels of commitment and identity salience tended to exacerbate the effect of stress on self-evaluation and psychological distress" (Marcussen, Ritter, and Safron 2004:305). While useful in establishing connections between salience and stress, this research focuses on whether an identity is salient and what effect that has on stress evaluation. Because this study is focusing on the

role salience has in the interactive process, not on its evaluative potential this line of research does not fit with the model I am proposing.

Stryker's symbolic interactionism does more than just shed light on the process following a homophobic interaction in a way that expands upon previous models put forth by stress theory and social support theory. It also shows the structural implications of this type of interaction.

In any case, the important implication of the generic concept of social structure is that societies are differentiated entities, and that as a consequence of that differentiation it is only certain people who interact with one another in certain ways and in certain settings or situations. That is, the concrete interactions that are the ultimate referent of all sociological and social psychological constructs do not relate persons randomly, nor are the opportunities for and the circumstances of the relationships that take place randomly distributed. (Stryker 1980:66)

This is important to my topic because what I am describing can be thought of as a point of contact between two competing sets of patterned regularities. Symbolic interactionism thinks of those non-random, patterned regularities as the basis for social structure. "Thus, if the social person is shaped by interaction, it is social structure that shapes the possibilities for interaction and so, ultimately, the person. Conversely, if the social person creatively alters patterns of interaction, those altered patterns can ultimately change social structure" (Stryker 1980:66).

For the purposes of this paper, I conceive of a (very) simplified version of events in which there exist two separate sets of pattern regularities: one in which the homosexual role is negatively evaluated and one in which it is positively (or at least neutrally) evaluated. These sets of regularities can act as shorthand for the myriad complex interactions that produce both the heteronormative dominant culture and the subculture that is positive towards homosexuality.

The reason that I am not including this in my analysis of this particular topic is that social support works best as a tactic, not as a strategy. That is, when applied on a larger scale, social support of homosexually-identified individuals serves only to expand the supportive subculture, not to alter positively the meaning of the homosexual role in the dominant culture. Dismantling heteronormativity



belongs to the politically-minded, strategy-oriented wings of the homosexual liberation and radical queer movements. This idea is explored further in the section on the model of interaction.

Stryker states that “if groups are distinct systems of interaction, and if norms develop in the context of systems of interaction, it is possible that the norms developing in various groups in which any person participates may be quite different” (Stryker 1980:73). This is important to illuminate how the intersection of various role expectations within an individual may differentiate their experience of social support. The characteristics of the support networks an individual has access to might cause the individual to experience role conflict or role strain. “Role conflict exists when there are contradictory expectations that attach to some position in a social relationship” (Stryker 1980:73). Role strain is “a felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations” (Stryker 1980:76). If a support network is not completely accepting of the individual’s homosexual role, or values some other role (religious, familial, etc.) above that homosexual role, then social support may not play out as the homosexually-identified individual might wish. If that individual turns to his family, but that nominally supportive family values his role as a Christian highly, he might be both conflicted and strained in his roles. On the one hand he wants support for his besieged homosexual identity, but on the other hand he feels as though he can’t live up to their expectations of him in his religious role.

Social psychology, of which symbolic interactionism is a variant, has been rightly criticized for its inattention to the effects that the axes of oppression can have on the processes they attempt to describe. Bettie reminds us that “symbolic interactionist sociology and ethnomethodology have long been critiqued for tending toward a subject too readily construed as an active agent outside of the autonomy of social structures that preexist and produce various performances” (Bettie 2003:53). Matthew Hunt noted in the review of the literature for his article on beliefs about the causes of poverty that “much social psychological research makes the implicit assumption that the determinants of attitudes and beliefs are the same across large-scale social categories such as race and ethnicity” (Hunt

1996:298). Later, Hunt explored this assumption in collaboration with Pamela Braboy Jackson, Brian Powell, and Lala Carr Steelman in a content analysis of thirty years of articles in the *Social Psychology Quarterly*. While they found that the reference to race and/or ethnicity increased “from 8.0 percent in 1970-1974 to 41.3 percent in 1995-1999... the analysis of race in these articles is less common [10.1 percent between 1995-1999]” (Hunt, Jackson, Powell, Steelman 2000:355). So while there has been an increase in work that does not assume similarity across social categories, much more work needs to be done to highlight this deficiency.

The lack of context in much of the symbolic interactionist literature leads researchers to ignore the possible effects that the matrix of domination might have on the social processes they describe. While Stryker at least takes a more structural view of interaction, his analysis of the interconnections between structure and interaction lack a sufficient analysis of power. His interpretation of the influence that structure has on interaction does not adequately explore the implications for interaction of differential power distribution in society. This blind spot is at the heart of why it is so useful to bring in the writings of Michel de Certeau. De Certeau’s theories of tactics and resistance show the tensions and inequalities that run through the matrix of domination. His conception of consumption contributes to the model being presented through its interpretation of the act of taking a role-identity in interaction.

## De Certeau

The writing of Michel de Certeau is influenced by many things: his studies of classics and philosophy at university, Lacan and the Parisian *Ecole freudienne*, and de Certeau's travels as a Jesuit priest (Ward 2000). But it has been argued that the biggest influence on his thinking was the student-led riots in 1968. Ian Buchanan wrote in his analysis of de Certeau's theory and life that "it is now legend that in 1968, when the streets of Paris erupted in a paroxysm of student, then blue-collar, protest that de Certeau underwent some kind of personal transformation – a shattering, he called it" (Buchanan 2000:1). Graham Ward wrote in his introduction to *The Certeau Reader* that for de Certeau

The riots of May 1968 were a rupturing "event" (an encounter with the Real). What they expressed was not a revolution in history; in fact a social "normality" was resumed fairly quickly, but the events were, for him, a symbolic revolution. That is, they attested to what was lacking. Speech freed itself from the status quo. (Ward 2000:5-6)

I argue that this "symbolic revolution" laid the groundwork for his thinking about culture and resistance, presented in his most famous work *The Practice of Everyday Life* in which he elaborated his most widely used conceptions: "strategy" and "tactics."

I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as it *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. (De Certeau 1984:35-36)

If a strategy, which presupposes possession of some sort of power and authority, were the only possible method for pushing back against dominant systems of power then those with little to no power would have little hope for achieving their goals. The riots of 1968, which failed to produce any lasting physical changes in the status quo, would seem to signal a need to find an approach to challenging the order of things that requires no pre-existing base of power. This is the origin of de Certeau's interest in tactics.

“A *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus.... It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids” (De Certeau 1984:36-37). But Buchanan asserts that tactics are “not in themselves subversive... they have a symbolic value which is not to be underestimated: they offer daily proof of the partiality of strategic control and in doing so they hold out the token hope that however bad things get, they are not *necessarily so*” (Buchanan 2000:89).

With the idea of tactics de Certeau is attempting to expand our notion of resistance to hegemony beyond our normal conception of it as a direct confrontation with systems of power that requires some sort of power of its own. He locates tactics in many aspects of everyday life, repurposing them for his own theoretical needs. De Certeau “conceptualizes consumption as an *active* process, a secondary form of production in which people *use* urban space, televised images, or commodities in their own way , not escaping the dominant cultural economy, but adapting it to their own ends” (Langer 1988:123). This view of consumption as production attempts to cast the consumer as more than a passive recipient of cultural discourses and their artifacts. In de Certeau’s conception, an act of consumption can be a type of tactic in that using a cultural product in one’s own interest might be a form of resistance. De Certeau “concentrates on culture in the broadest sense and particularly on the ambiguous relationship between cultural products and cultural practices, that is, what people actually *do* with these products” (Clark 1986:706). The act of doing something with a product or practice is comparable to linguistic act—an enunciation. “By adopting the point of view of enunciation—which is the subject of our study—we privilege the act of speaking; according to that point of view, speaking operates within the field of a linguistic system; it effects an appropriation, or reappropriation, of language by its speakers” (De Certeau 1984:xiii).

I find his take on consumption to be very interesting, but I do not agree with the extent to which he finds consumption by the oppressed to be a form of resistance. Mark Poster states that

With the category of tactics, de Certeau extracts consumption from theories of mass society and repositions it as a form of resistance. Consumption is no longer victimization by the culture industry or irrational conformity to mass society but a play of heterogeneity, a disruptive intervention in the smooth operation of the system. (Poster 1992:103)

This conception of consumption as resistance allows for the possibility of fighting systems of oppression from a position of limited or nonexistent power. I would argue that the act of enunciating (or using) a product of the dominant culture only really acts as a tactic of resistance when the ends to which the consumer is using that product run contrary to the interests of the dominant culture and in alignment with the interests of the user. If consuming a cultural product acts in the interest of the dominant society and possibly against the interests of the consumer (e.g., fueling the economy by eating massive amounts of fast food) then that consumption does not constitute resistance. However, if true resistance does occur naturally, it questions previous totalistically deterministic view of society and domination. “Now instead of saying that subjects obey an internalized logic they can neither know or evade, de Certeau is saying cultural logic is like a menu from which subjects choose already worked-out actions according to their perceived needs” (Buchanan 2000:96).

While consumption as resistance is an interesting conception and provides a political context for the support under study, it is de Certeau’s portrayal of consumption as a type of production that is the most novel part of his theories and is the most helpful in illuminating how the supportive interactions work.

De Certeau defines consumption as the realm of the use of an object by those who are not its makers. But even in the realm of use there is a moment of production, of making, doing, or ‘poiësis’—a moment of active recreation. This moment comes into play at the gap between the received object and its appropriation. The model for what occurs is taken from language theory as the point of “enunciation.” (Poster 1992:102)

This productive consumption is utilized in the model that I outline in the next section.

In addition to the influence that the events of 1968 had on his ideas, the ideas of his contemporaries to understand influenced why and how de Certeau articulated his concepts of strategy and tactics. Chief among those who de Certeau was reacting against were Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu.

In reference to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, de Certeau thinks that "the truism that discipline has insinuated itself into every facet of daily life needs to be balanced against the fact that the everyday has not been reduced to a rigid set of regimes such as the notion of discipline implies" (Buchanan 2000:93).

De Certeau refuses utterly the passivity he discerns in the Bourdieusian actor, more or less prisoner of his habitus, his rich and varied cultural practices reduced to strategies for acquiring power. De Certeau can but dissent. For him cultural practices are largely gratuitous, a means of circumventing power rather than bidding for it. (Clark 1986:707)

De Certeau seeks to liberate the subjugated, subjectified individual from the theoretical constraints he believes are inherent in Foucault's and Bourdieu's ideas.

Foucault does offer a notion of resistance, but his version centers on opening up arenas for subaltern voices to create their own discourses. Mario Moussa and Ron Scapp contend that, contrary to some popular readings of Foucault, he does not characterize individuals subjectified by disciplinary institutions as completely passive. They state that

Contrary to his critics on the left, we think Foucault can actually serve to encourage "radical agency...." Foucault himself repeatedly declared he never wanted to establish timeless, acontextual truths. Instead, he hoped that his books would have the effect of hand grenades, scattering the accepted theoretical ideas about madness, social order, and sexuality.... We argue that this disruption of received wisdom constitutes Foucault's practical engagement, as a *theorist*, with real-world politics.... We contend his work aims at clearing a space in which the formerly voiceless might begin to articulate their desires—to counter the domination of prevailing authoritative discourses. (Moussa and Scapp 1996:88)

Brent L. Pickett has a similar reading of the possibility of resistance in Foucault's theories.

Though Foucault sees himself as politically engaged, he does not see himself as a new moral legislator. If he did, Foucault would be guilty of the error of the old, totalizing

intellectual. Instead he would rather open up spaces in which people can make their own decisions, form their own movements, and reach their own objectives. It is on this level that Foucault sees things actually getting accomplished. (Pickett 1996:463)

While this is interesting, at this time I am much more taken with de Certeau's notion of resistance in that it involves the adaptation of existing discourse to the individuals needs in everyday practice.

Foucault's resistance, while desirable in its own right, is not the type of resistance I want to highlight in this project. What the authors above are describing is the clearing of a social or cultural space from which to work, something that is the beginning of a strategy. As I have stated earlier, I am specifically interested in tactical types of resistance for this thesis, not strategic.

De Certeau is not without his own critics. It is possible that his theory of consumption as a type of production that works in the interest of the individual could turn out to be a utopian interpretation of how individuals resign themselves to disciplinary institutions through false consciousness. "This [theory of tactics] might be a healthy corrective to what he sees as an 'exclusive and obsessive' concern with mechanisms of repression, but carried to its own extreme, it simply becomes a conservative defense of things as they are" (Langer 1988:123).

De Certeau's argument that there are limits to the extent to which actors are ever wholly dominated by or integrated into centralized systems of control is indisputable. However, it is difficult to take much comfort from the examples of "resistance" that he provides [such as] that of colonized people who remain 'other' within the system they have no choice but to accept. (Langer 1988:123)

Additionally, his theory as presented in *The Practice of Everyday Life* lacks a gender analysis. "In ignoring the profoundly gendered nature of everyday life, de Certeau ignores the differential constraints imposed on users, and the ways in which dominant modes of representation and spatial organization assist in the continuing domination of some 'users' (women) by others (men)" (Langer 1988:123).

De Certeau has also been criticized for being insufficiently empirical in his approach. "Whereas de Certeau limits himself to circumscribing a problematic, a healthy dialogue between empirical data

and theory is more appropriate for developing a theory of resistance” (Lamont 1987:721). De Certeau’s followers are also subject to criticisms of his line of thinking. Buchanan points out that

In the hands of John Fiske (1988), for instance, de Certeau was to become a theorist of the little victories of daily life, which were in themselves treated as somehow revolutionary, albeit on a minor scale. Critics of this position... were quick to point out, and rightly, that a meaningful politics of cultural change can hardly be based on so weak a foundation as the glancing blows Fiske catalogued as “little victories.” (Buchanan 2000:87)

As I mentioned earlier in the study, I am bringing tactics into this line of research in order to provide a philosophical direction and context for what I think the process I have been describing means. One of the things that drew me most to the theories of de Certeau is “the possibility of theorizing daily life in terms of empowerment in an upbeat rather than defeatist fashion” (Buchanan 2000:87). The act of supporting an individual who has experienced oppression is more than a simple act of kindness or par for the course of a relationship with that individual. By engaging in the same acts of social support that are commonly applied to all members of a society, but directing them towards an individual who is the subject of domination by society, one is engaging in an act of resistance to that system of domination, even in the absence of a direct political agenda.

At this point it would be fruitful to compare this application of de Certeau’s concept of resistance with resistance as it is conceived of by James C. Scott. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Scott looked at the ways in which powerless individuals such as slaves in the antebellum U.S. South resisted the power of their slave owners. He theorizes that one form of resistance in oppressive situations is the use of *hidden transcripts*. Scott states that

Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. A comparison of the hidden transcript of the weak with that of the powerful and of *both* hidden transcripts to the public transcript of power relations offers a substantially new way of understanding resistance to domination. (Scott 1990:xii)



This conception of resistance is intriguing and would be very useful in analyzing resistance along racial or ethnic lines. But the resistance I am describing in this study operates differently from the type that Scott is describing. A supportive interaction involving a homosexually-identified individual is different because the supportive networks that these individuals draw upon are often composed of a mixture of heterosexually and homosexually-identified individuals. Scott's dichotomy of powerful/weak does not translate well to an interaction where a heterosexual-identified ally is comforting a homosexually-identified friend after a homophobic interaction. In the type of interaction under study, the groups are divided along the homophobic and supportive axis, not along the axis of homosexual/heterosexual. In as much as contemporary American society remains heteronormative, the homopositive members of society (homosexually-identified individuals and their allies) are in a sense the powerless and the support I've been describing is a kind of hidden transcript, but this analysis ignores a crucial factor. The heterosexually-identified allies in the interaction retain their heterosexual privilege in all aspects of their life. Heteronormativity does not affect heterosexually-identified allies in the same way it does their homosexually-identified friends and loved ones. To apply Scott's antebellum U.S. South model, if the homophobes are the equivalent of the slave owners, the homopositive members of society are not a one to one equivalent of the slaves. The homosexually-identified individuals are the equivalent of the slaves and the homopositive heterosexually-identified individuals are the abolitionists. While the abolitionists and the slaves certainly wanted the same thing, they did not necessarily engage in hidden transcripts on the plantation as Scott describes them. Social support of homosexually-identified individuals is not a form of hidden transcript because it involves mixed-privileged groups in a way that Scott does not. To apply Scott's model of resistance ignores the imbalance of privilege and power that exists in support networks such as those I have described. It implies that heteronormativity affects both the homosexually-identified and their heterosexually-identified supporters in the same manner.

This being said, de Certeau's theories are useful beyond their ability to place the interactions I am describing in their structural contexts in a way that Scott's cannot. His conception of consumption is integral to the model of interaction that I present in this study. In the following section, I outline the model of interaction that brings the previous literatures together.

## Model of the Consumption of Identity in Interaction

De Certeau and symbolic interactionism fit together well when the identity processes I described in the preceding section are considered in light of de Certeau's conceptualization of consumption as a form of production. The various identities that make up an individual's self are related to the roles that individual plays in interaction and to his social location. When a homosexually-identified individual takes on a role in interaction, that individual is doing more than simply asserting himself as a particular type of person in relation to the others involved in the interaction. The individual is performing a role based on culturally-disseminated archetypes that are adapted for the needs of the context in which he find himself. Bettie, in describing the identities of the young women she studied, says that

discourses, or public meaning systems (political, social science, popular culture, etc.), are the material for identity formation. We deploy these discourses to construct our identities but from a limited range of options. Consequently, some identities are readily made possible while others are not, and in this way we are somewhat overdetermined by the meaning systems that preexist us as individuals. (Bettie 2003:54)

Erving Goffman's conception of a line is related to this. A line that a person takes is "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (Goffman 1967:5). The line that a person takes in interaction is their performance of the role-identity they are taking. This performance is an active, productive process. More passive conceptions of socialization into role-identity ignore that it is not only something that one *is* it is also something that one *does*. Stryker touches on this production when he differentiates between conventional expectations and idiosyncratic variations on those expectations. "Conventional expectations—social roles—provide the structural framework for role-identities; personal [idiosyncratic] elaborations are variations on culturally established themes" (Stryker 1980:120). As noted in the symbolic interactionist section, Stryker's conceptions are useful but they lack a critical analysis of power.

Bettie notes above that there is a limited range of lines that an individual may choose to take in a particular interaction. These options are governed not only by the logic of the situation but also by the social locations of the individuals involved in the interaction.

In a homophobic interaction the homophobe consumes the heterosexual role. By taking a line that invokes hegemonic masculinity the homophobe imposes a homosexual role on the homosexually-identified man, forcibly raising the salience of that identity. But the homosexual role in this context presents a problem for the homosexually-identified individual. Many homosexually-identified individuals partake of some sort of bargain with hegemonic masculinity that allows them to include both a homosexual identity and a male identity in their self-concept. This is similar to the hegemonic bargains that Anthony S. Chen described in his article on the masculinity of Chinese-American males. In that article, the men Chen interviewed made one of four bargains with hegemonic masculinity to deal with not living up to it because of their race.

Four main gender strategies were evident in the interviews: compensation, which is meant to undermine negative stereotypes by meeting the ideals of hegemonic masculinity; deflection, which tries to divert attention away from self-perceived stereotypical behavior; denial, which rejects the existence of stereotypes or their applicability to the actor himself; and repudiation, which disavows the cultural assumptions about masculinity that make such stereotypes possible. (Chen 1999:591)

A homosexually-identified individual can use one of these bargaining strategies in order to allow himself a homosexual identity and a male identity without experiencing role-conflict. But in the homophobic interaction the roles as they are framed in the encounter become conflicted. There will also probably be other roles involved as well as the fear of physical violence that will add to the stress of the situation. Nevertheless, a large part of the stress from the situation can stem from the role-conflict engendered by a homophobic interaction. As stated earlier in the study, there are many options available to the homosexually-identified individual in the aftermath of the interaction. Socially-supportive interactions are especially well suited for aiding recovery from the stressful interaction because they allow for a

context in which a homosexual role and a male role are not in conflict and thus they permit the individual to recover self-esteem lost due to the conflict.

Considered in the light of de Certeau's perspective on resistance, the process of social support I describe above fits more into the category of tactics than into the category of strategy. In as much as this is an everyday activity carried out by those who may not connect it to a larger political agenda, it does not qualify as an aspect of strategy. There exists at least one organization dedicated to the act of support as an agent of change from a strategic location. It is, however, not pervasive in American culture in the same way that the strategy of heteronormativity pervades our society.

PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity. (PFLAG 2008)

So if members of a social network were organizing and working with PFLAG in order to counter heteronormative practices in American culture, then that network would be involved in a strategy. As I suspect that most of the support acts that occur are of a less political nature, I would venture that most of them should be classified under tactics. That is to say, there exists an outlet for those wishing to engage in strategic social support, but it is by no means the dominant form of resistant social support.

Additionally, social support of homosexually-identified individuals is a tactic that involves consumption because it utilizes pre-existing support structures and scripts in the interests of the oppressed. People learn common ways of supporting others in a variety of settings. The experience of helping a sibling in the wake of the loss of a parent might help that supportive person when it becomes necessary to support their homosexually-identified friend after that friend has experienced interactive homophobia. Larger, culturally-originated support memes can thus be enunciated in the service of the oppressed.

This is not to say that social support of homosexually-identified individuals could not become more of a strategy and less of a tactic, but that would require greatly expanding the influence of groups such as PFLAG. In the aftermath of the Stonewall riots in 1969, the homosexual liberation movements of the time galvanized into a more politically powerful force that was able to carve out a place for itself of the type that de Certeau would say a strategy requires. Contemporary groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation wield a significant amount of political power and are working towards equality for a variety of non-heterosexual and gender variant people (HRC, 2008; GLAAD, 2008).

In order to understand the place of tactical versions of support in a larger strategic struggle for the rights of the homosexually-identified, I look to some of the main issues and theorists in the social movement literature. Charles Tilly defined social movements occurring after 1750 as consisting of a synthesis of three elements

1. a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities (let us call it a *campaign*);
2. employment of combinations from among the following forms of political action: creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering (call the variable ensemble of performances the *social movement repertoire*); and
3. participants' concerned public representations of WUNC: worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies (call them *WUNC displays*). (Tilly 2004:3-4)

This definition would qualify these social movements as strategies rather than tactics. The very act of creating a special-purpose association creates the social space that a strategy requires.

This is not to say that the literature is in agreement over what constitutes the goals and techniques of a social movement. The literature has undergone a shift over the years resulting in two perspectives dominating the field. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper state that

For some time the field has been roughly divided between a dominant, structural approach that emphasizes economic resources, political structures, formal

organizations, and social networks and a cultural or constructionist tradition, drawn partly from symbolic interactionism, which focuses on frames, identities, meanings and emotions. (Goodwin and Jasper 2004:vii)

Barbara Hobson, referencing Nancy Fraser, describes this division as part of “a paradigm shift in claims for redistribution, those based on a fairer and more equal division of the pie, have been eclipsed by claims for recognition, based on respect and valuation for group differences” (Hobson 2003:1). Hobson places herself in the recognition camp, drawing on Alberto Melucci’s theory of collective identity formation when she says that “for Melucci, collective identity formation is a dynamic process involving negotiations among individuals within a movement and with outside competitors, allies, and adversaries in relation to a political system” (Hobson, 2003:4). Collective identity formation is a necessary element of the transition from a tactic to a strategy. When an individual is consuming an identity as a tactic they are thinking of themselves in terms of a role-identity. They conceive of themselves only in terms of the type of person they are in interaction. There is no sense of group attachment for an individual in this case. But when an individual has formed a collective identity (or social identity as Markowe would put it) they have achieved a political consciousness. To reiterate, while this identity formation is crucial to strategic efforts and hints at how tactical resistance can be made more strategic, the process under study remains mostly at the tactical level.

Underlying these two perspectives on social movements seems to be two different versions of what constitutes equality for the oppressed. The more structural redistribution perspective emphasizes material redistribution in order to achieve parity. The recognition perspective concentrates on more cultural goals and discursive authority for the oppressed. In working to fight heteronormativity an approach that includes both strands is most appropriate. I think that the use of social support as a tactic is an effective cultural tool for fighting the effects of homophobia and might be useful in a recognition struggle. But the use of larger political strategies is important in order to effect structural change in the long run.

In spite of my enthusiasm for support as a tactic, as a strategy support is only able to affect structural and individual homophobia indirectly. In as much as supporting a homosexually-identified individual allows that individual to remain “out and proud,” many acts of support over a long period of time might eventually lead to a larger presence in society of homosexually-identified individuals. This would in turn increase the ability of homosexually-identified individuals to demand recognition or to increase tolerance toward homosexuality by making homophobic individuals more aware that members of their milieu identify as homosexual. But it does not directly address the root cause of the problem: a hierarchical system of sexuality and the ways that system is articulated in everyday practice. To be more effective, I assert that supportive tactics must be a part of a larger concerted effort involving political and educational measures that directly interrupt homophobic practices. These strategic measures are already being used by groups such as the HRC and GLAAD that I describe above. Tactical support is meant to be a supplement to these other types of social activism. The model presented here is useful in that it illuminates a part of the cycle of homophobic influence described in the introduction. But social support only addresses the effects of the homophobic interaction on the homosexually-identified individual. In order to disrupt the cycle a more direct effort, tactical or strategic, that addresses the homophobic attitudes in the heterosexually-identified individual is needed.

The combination of my research topic and de Certeau’s theory and methods is not a perfect one, to be sure. De Certeau focuses more on everyday practices instead of the individuals doing those practices. “The focus here, de Certeau thoughtfully emphasizes, is on practices, not subjects; as such his investigations imply neither a return to a liberal humanist concern for the individual nor a reiteration of the structuralist interest in the production of discourses” (Buchanan 2000:91). While I concentrate more on the actors involved than he does, applying his ideas to my work is not too far of a stretch. My interpretation of his major ideas is in keeping with the spirit of his original conception and by using interaction as my major unit of analysis; I am not straying too far away from his focus on practice. I just



also happen to be concerned with what those practices mean for those involved and the effects of the practice on the individuals in these social networks.

## Conclusion/Future Directions

In this thesis I draw connections between the literatures of stress theory, social support theory, symbolic interactionism, and de Certeau. These literatures are used to create a model of interaction during and after a stressful homophobic event that is then viewed through the lens of social movement literature to consider the context and potential applications of the interaction described. Stress and social support theories provide the context of the processes during which interactions can take place. These interactions both initiate and then mitigate the stress process. To reiterate, the salience of an individual's homosexual identity is raised at two points in the process of a homophobic interaction and its aftermath. First, the identity becomes more salient during the homophobic encounter in a negative context, precipitating a stress process. Second, the identity is again salient when the individual receives social support. The positive context of the social support allows the individual to halt their progress towards disease that might be caused by the stressor. Symbolic interactionism and de Certeau provide the mechanism for how these interactions achieve their effects: culturally-disseminated role-identities are consumed in performance when an individual takes a line in interaction. Finally, social movement theory provides the political context for the tactical resistance of socially supporting a homosexually-identified individual.

Obviously there are many other types of homophobia that can and should be studied and this framework might eventually be applied to those types as well. Future studies should attempt to gather data on both the frequency with which a homosexually-identified individual will chose social support over other possible coping strategies as well as the reasons why an individual chooses to seek support when he does. One of the primary goals of future research designed on this set of ideas must be to find out under what circumstances an individual will chose either the "poor health practices" or to ask for social support. Measures should also be introduced into the eventual study of this matter to ascertain

the extent to which identity salience plays a role in the process in order to test my theory that it is central to the matter.

One possible future direction for this line of research is to compare the ways in which different homosexually-identified individuals cope with homophobic stressors. Will a lesbian tend to have a different coping style than a gay man? Will homosexuals of color cope differently than white homosexuals? And what are the common themes among all of these different groups?

As I state in the section on de Certeau, social support is not by itself a sufficient strategy for resisting oppression. An approach that directly affects heteronormative practices would be more efficient than one that bolsters non-heteronormative ones. That being said, supporting homosexually-identified individuals while homophobia still exists is important. And it can be done better. While I have no wish to judge individuals who choose coping strategies other than seeking social support, I think that good can be done by improving awareness in their social networks of the stressors homosexually-identified individuals face. This might make members of those social networks more likely to notice signs of stress and offer it earlier to the stressed individual. Also, it is possible that the social support that occurs naturally in social networks can somehow be made more effective. If the matching hypothesis of social support is correct and social support is most effective when the type of support matches the type of stress, then educating the support networks on how to best support their stressed members would be appropriate. Working with a national group such as PFLAG might be an efficient way to disseminate this information. Social support can be brought from the realm of the tactical to the realm of the strategic on a larger scale than is currently the case. This occurs to a certain extent naturally, but it can be helped along with careful planning and the involvement of groups such as PFLAG.

In exploring how this interaction takes place, future studies might further our understanding of how categories of social control can be resisted on an everyday basis. The ultimate purpose of this

project is to supplement existing strategies of resistance with ones that involve support. Social support can take its place alongside other cultural styles of resistance.

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## **Vita**

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