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“They hurt me Pauley:” Applying Queer Performance Theory within L.B. Hamilton’s Play *A Midnight Clear* to Understand Gendered Violence and Prejudice Against Feminine MSM

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“They hurt me Pauley:” Applying queer performance theory within L.B. Hamilton’s play *A
Midnight Clear* to understand gendered violence and prejudice against feminine MSM

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Abstract

This essay uses the theoretical lens of queer performance theory to analyze L.B. Hamilton's play, *A Midnight Clear*, to increase awareness of gendered violence and prejudice against feminine men-seeking-men (MSM). I first contextualize existing literature about sexual assault and the limited research about feminine men regarding sexual violence and assault. Then, I examine the components of queer performance theory, positing a metaphorical equation of combining both queer theory and performance theory to further understand the roots of queer performance theory. In this section, I also suggest the importance of representation and identity within a dramaturgical and theatrical-based lens from both an academic and personalized standpoint. Next, I provide an in-depth textual analysis of *A Midnight Clear*, using the lens of queer performance theory. In doing so, I specifically analyze the complex portrayals of sexual identity and gender performativity that both characters transition to and from within the play. This play challenges the social normativity of rape myths and assaults against feminine MSM and conversations that can occur regarding sexual assault experiences. My analysis includes mapping the changing gender performativity from masculinity to femininity and varied portrayals of sexual identities of both main characters within this piece, Luke and Paul. Each character creates portrayals that challenge the common hegemonic heterosexist society of both sexual identities and gender performance. The characters enact gender portrayals that range from masculine to that of a nurturing mother. Additionally, both characters display complex sexual identities that are not monolithic representations of sexuality but instead portrayals of sexual identity as fluid and dependent upon one's partner. Finally, I draw implications from the analysis of Hamilton's play in comparing the stereotypes of feminine performativity regarding the prejudice feminine MSM endure. I also consider limitations of this analysis regarding existing academic and

scholarly research on violence specifically targeted towards feminine MSM. I conclude with future research directions concerning the importance of additional research of sexual assault, violence, and prejudice for feminine MSM.

Introduction

L.B. Hamilton's *A Midnight Clear* was first produced into the world in April 1998 at the Copioh Coffee House Theatre through the Poor Playwrights' Theatre Production. The play was then invited onwards to be further developed at the 9th Annual New Play Development Workshop at the August 1998 Meeting of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education in San Antonio, Texas. After many alterations and workshop sessions, *A Midnight Clear* found its way to a staged reading at the Pulse Theatre on 42nd Street, in New York City, in September 1998 (Hamilton, 1998, p.1). Within the timeframe of six months, Hamilton created a show that would be performed by many companies, within many spaces, and portray an unique experience on interpersonal relationships between homosexual individuals.

Hamilton's piece offers insight into the life of two men, Luke and Paul, who rekindle a platonic relationship after an incident of sexual assault leaves Luke hospitalized. While this show does touch on relationships between identities and allyship within the LGBTQ+ community, the show proposes another question. Why does Luke become a victim? Unfortunately, it's a simple answer. Luke presents as a feminine gay man, a trait scrutinized by heterosexual society as abnormal and performative. In understanding the stigmas and prejudice feminine MSM, or "men-seeking men" (Bull, 2001) face, we must propose a research question. How can queer performance theory, through L.B. Hamilton's play *A Midnight Clear*, assist an audience in understanding gendered violence against feminine MSM? This research paper will discuss the research question through a review of literature with understanding prejudice and stigmata

feminine MSM face, defining the theoretical lens of queer performance theory (QPT), analyzing Hamilton's work in association with queer performativity, and discussing the implications and limitations this research paper possesses for future scholarly work.

Literature Review

There is an assortment of information to discuss before digging into critical analysis of *A Midnight Clear*. This section will provide a synthesis of combining background information on the topic of gendered violence and prejudice against feminine MSM and afterwards, and the importance of representation that theatre and dramaturgical analysis plays into academia and scholarly work. While the scholarly research behind *A Midnight Clear* is copious, and equally raw in emotion, there is a comparison to be made as to why feminine MSM fall under such harsh stigma as they are forced into a grouping similar to AFAB (assigned female at birth) individuals. Let's look into how feminine MSM face disgrace through ideologies of performativity with oneself, uncomfortability with masculine-presenting individuals, and incapability of reaching out for support after a traumatic incident. However, it must be stressed that comparing feminine MSM and AFAB individuals is not a copy of the same situation. Rather, a parallel that has unfortunately taken place where feminine MSM are seen as the issue by a stereotype of being too performative, which successively, makes them blameworthy of any form of gendered violence.

First, feminine MSM are labeled to be too performative, or unnatural, further segregating them from a heteronormative society. In a study of several heterosexual-identifying participants, according to Kiebel (2020), "feminine gay men elicited a unique pattern of essentialist beliefs: They were viewed as less universal (natural), and more discrete and inductive (entitative), than masculine gay men. Moreover, these essentialist beliefs predicted greater sexual prejudice toward, and more discomfort with, feminine versus masculine gay men... Similarly, these

patterns were not driven primarily by heterosexual male perceivers, but were displayed comparably strongly by men and women.” Feminine MSM were seen with discomfort by a study of heterosexual participants. The mere presence of feminine MSM within media or real life portrayal can invite feelings of unwantedness.

So why do individuals feel uncomfortable with feminine MSM? One reason is that masculine-presenting individuals may feel uneasy with feminine MSM. “Our research highlights that heterosexual men, compared to gay men, are less likely to implicitly associate feminine gay men to themselves, and are also more likely to have implicit negative attitudes toward them... to remain faithful to their principles, or to cope with a perceived threat that elicits anxiety, discomfort, and other negative feelings” (Salvati, 2021). Feminine MSM create discomfort because they present a version of humanity that is not commonplace. When a male-presenting individual creates an unnatural identity, natural individuals feel the implicit need to stay away from them. With this performative subjectivity in mind, there needs to be stress applied that feminine MSM are at a substantially higher risk for gendered violence, specifically through sexual assault. “Through a community sample of 120 gay men, 61% reported some form of lifetime sexual assault” Javaid (2019) states. With over half of gay men in this study being sexually violated or assaulted, it is important to showcase the true horror that makes gay men more susceptible to this form of gendered violence.

However, this citation forgets to mention one critical piece of information as the sample uses only MSM who have *reported* the instance. This claim coincides with a concept that MSM are less likely to report any circumstance of rape as the looming fear of hegemonic masculinity takes presence over and ‘strips’ male-presenting beings of their masculinity. “Whereas gay men are suffering in such a way because of their rape, they are also degraded as “faggots” and

“queer” while being subjected to dehumanizing and degrading epithets usually invoked against women” (Javaid, 2017). When a male is sexually violated, their internal belief is that the body has now become effeminate and fragile, reducing males to a husk of what once was there.

Male rape victims are led to believe they can be scrutinized and shamed like female rape victims often are. This circumstance is further supported by the fact that the perpetrator regains an essence of power and control, implying the harmful stereotype that “gay men enjoy being raped” (Javaid, 2017) because of continued silence from the male victim. The perpetrator, regarding power and control about male rape, allows themselves to gain domination over their victim. “This, in turn, enables the rapist to attain and perpetuate their hegemonic masculinity, while confirming the subordinate role his victim plays” (Javaid, 2019). The concept of masculinity can wash away any state of affairs and places a figurative chokehold on the victim, making them believe that their incident, in turn, will force them to play a submissive role during and after the sexual violation.

There are two situations that create a gray area for gendered violence against feminine MSM. A discovered concept is the theoretical standpoint of “stranger danger,” a rape where the victim and attacker are unknown to each other (Javaid, 2019), plays a huge part in violating MSM. This circumstance is usually taken in a few contexts. First, the male victim of stranger danger attacks are attacked by multiple assailants (Javaid, 2019). However, the research on this topic is rare and possibly blends with the stigmatism of rape myths, a collection of information that is misinformative and quite harmful to sexual assault victims. “Such confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty may be exacerbated by stereotypes, myths, and negative attributions associated with male rape” (Javaid, 2017). But the myth of stranger danger is not necessarily falsified. For example, the concept of gay panic may play a portion in understanding why the assailant and

victim may not be knowledgeable of each other. “a male perpetrator might respond with aggressive violence and abuse when another man tries to express sexual interest in him... As a result, can facilitate hatred and contempt against gay men through the act of rape.” (Javaid, 2019). It’s important to recognize that stranger danger may seem like a concept blown out of proportion, but it can be a circumstance that can occur.

Secondly, when it comes to reaching out for assistance on support regarding gendered violence against feminine MSM, many queer individuals are stuck between limited resource options and possible subjection or victim blaming from authorities or even other individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. Many police or law-leading individuals, people who are supposed to be assisting and helpful to citizens in distress, have been recounted to do the complete opposite and harass or manipulate gay male rape victims. Provided is an excerpt from Christopher Smith, a male who was raped at gunpoint and when recounting his experience to the police, was treated with aggression and harmful ignorance (Javaid, 2017):

‘Do you have any friends who are gay? ... Why didn’t you just run? He wouldn’t have shot at you, it’s hard to hit a moving target. I would have just started running. Why didn’t you run?’ ... After being degraded and humiliated in so many different ways, I had reached the lowest point ever, I was convinced I was a terrible person. I didn’t even feel recognized as a human being.

This experience further perpetuates the harms that feminine MSM must stay silent on their sexual violence experience, because individuals, including those who are supposed to protect its citizens, are willing to listen to male survivors of sexual and gendered violence.

There is equally more ignorance and victim-blaming on the LGBTQ+ identity spectrum as there can be on the heteronormative side, creating an unsafe space for the victim to discuss or talk through the incident that took place. Within an series of 60 interviews, all with individuals

who have been survivors of several accounts of sexual assault incidents (Meyer, 2021), many of the LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, 41 in total, found other queer individuals as “blameworthy” for the way they presented and incited rhetoric that equates to a female-presenting individual ‘asking for it.’ Conversations of the sexualized queer man made many of the participants believe that as long as “they did not imitate this stereotype” (Meyer, 2021), they would not have to endure sexual assault again. Therefore, we can analyze and equate stereotypes of feminine MSM to being not only performative, but prone to more sexual violence because of the way they showcase their sexual desires.

After getting to explore the literature of why feminine MSM are subjected to stigmata and prejudice, it is paramount to understand theatricality and a theatrical point of view through dramaturgy, or analysis through performance and performance art (Khubchandani, 2016), as to help understand the importance of theater and performance studies within academia and scholarly-based work. Dramaturgy “necessitates an articulation of a work’s architecture” (Turner, 2016). To simplify, dramaturgy and performative studies explore the structure of a theatrical or performance piece. While dramaturgy can rely heavily on language and a piece’s text, there is also importance stressed on the entire work: setting, situation, language, or character (Turner, 2016) all play an essential concept for understanding the dramaturgical lens.

Not only does dramaturgy and performance studies help analyze the role of theatrical or performative pieces, theater can blend quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, it can be vital to assist in scholarly works like it will be for this paper. Theater creates an element of interactivity that involves the play, the audience, and the actors to take place in working together to compartmentalize a story. According to Collins (2022), “In this relationship of interactivity, the meaning is shaped by the interaction. Therefore, the role of the researcher as a present

instrument is integral to the notion of collecting data because the researcher is also forming the data. The presence of the researcher in the setting ultimately shapes the way in which the knowledge is produced. So, understanding and reflecting on the liminal space... may give additional insight into how to play these roles well with appropriate boundaries.” This comparison analyzes that the researcher, or through my interpretation, the audience watches a show and gathers or forms data from their experience of the show. Allowing the audience to explore their own feelings with the space on the theatrical stage can be used as appropriate measures for emotional and numerical data.

Scholars can take the audience’s experience and further analyze what was successful or faulty for said sample of audience group. The theatrical lens is important to analyze, because the concept of discovery through numerous research methods in theater “is akin to an actor who is portraying a character making a discovery in the moment. In research, these latent discoveries can influence the person doing the research and show again the influence between the scenes of interviewing and the processing as a researcher” (Collins, 2022). Theater should be utilized more often as a tool of analytical research within conversations and scholarly research, because it can be capable to do so and researchers can achieve the same amount of success with a performance as they can with an interview or survey. Theatrical artistry and analysis is very important in making discoveries as it is with citing evidence for future papers.

Theoretical Lens

This section discusses the basic structure and theoretical lens chosen for this gender and communication research paper. Said selected gender theory is queer performance theory. Understanding the basics of queer performativity will help apply knowledge of theatrical performance, a typically abnormal concept, to play an important hand in analyzing the artifact

chosen for this paper. This section will discuss the components, queer theory and performance theory, that make up QPT and its own terminology and definitions.

To understand QPT, we must define and recognize the building blocks of the theoretical lens. The two theories that encompass queer performativity and QPT are queer theory and performative theory. The first component to dissect is queer theory. Queer theory is seen as, “a critique of conventional categories of identity and cultural views of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal,’ particularly in relation to sexuality (Wood, 2018, p. 49). The concept of queer theory is that things with “being” are not trapped within a frigid space of who they identify as. Individuals are allowed to express gender and sexual fluidity within their identity.

According to Judith Butler (1990), queer theory began its roots in the arrival within the academic conversation of gay and lesbian studies. Their initial mission was to tackle the concept of heteronormativity, the idea that heterosexuality is deemed as normal and any other sexual or gender identity should be deemed as abnormal. However, modern society today could argue that queer theory does not pertain to the limited binary of gay or straight. Queer theory’s ultimatum is to comprehend what certain cultures and contexts are deemed as normal and abnormal within the theoretical lens of being queer.

There are two components that are essential to understanding queer theory. First, placing simple terms such as *gay*, *male*, *straight*, or *woman* on an individual will not be seen as beneficial since individuals have innumerable qualities that create their identity. Queer theory simply equates to someone representing an “abnormality” (Halperin, 2007) within a structured societal normality. For example, an AFAB being can present as female, but have distinct masculine qualities. A male-presenting person can have feminine qualities but still sexually identify as straight. The limitations are nonexistent for what people choose to identify with or

become. Second, concepts of gender and sexual identity are never instituted. Individuals may choose to maintain or alter their sexual identity whenever they feel like doing such. In any situation or circumstance, an individual may bend and shape their identity to how they believe is right. Our consequences, whether they be positive or negative, are equated to how we choose to express our identities.

After discussing queer theory as the first half of my theoretical lens, we move into understanding the second portion that assists in the creation of QPT and its key points. The next building block is performative theory. The definition of performative theory is that humans create their identity of gender through “performance or expression” (Wood, 2018, p. 49). What this entails is that gender should not be seen as a noun within a common societal structure, but rather a verb. “As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual... Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance.” (Butler, 1990). Butler goes on to explain their metaphor by a juxtaposition of comparing the actor as a way of performing the character, not being it, with individuals performing their gender identity. If there is no goal for an actor on stage, they are simply saying words. Just like if there’s no aspect of being, or performing, gender, then there is no gender present within the human body.

According to the rules of performative theory, we express gender conventions everyday. Topics like domination or submission within a conversation with a peer or crossing legs with the knee resting right over the other knee (Wood, 2018, p. 50) are some viewpoints of performative theory that human beings unconsciously do. It could be considered human nature, but the ideology of performative theory is that every single individual performs their own expression of

gender that they have learned to do. In hindsight, this theory could be correlated with familial traits and, in turn, be researched in tandem with social learning theory, “the theory of learning to be feminine or masculine based on teachings by others” (Wood, 2018, p. 42), for other researchers or scholarly work.

In addition to expression of gender through performative theory, another key claim to establish for this theory is that performances are never solo acts. Performativity is always done as a collaborative. What this means is that when the expression of gender takes place, it usually is done in the context of social spaces. An example, it’ll be unpacked within the analysis portion, is the concept of masculine men performing as an emotional pillar, or shoulder to cry on, because they are seen as anchors in many relationships for people to place and unpack their feelings onto. Understanding the essence of performative theory allows the understanding that no method of gender is born or inhabited, but rather played with and performed onto like an actor to the stage.

After discussing the two building blocks of queer theory and performative theory, we can now begin to understand what queer performative theory, or QPT, actually is. Through an academic definition, “queer performative theories allow us to understand transgressive presentations of self as political acts that point out the insufficiency of binary categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, gay/straight, and normal/abnormal” (Wood, 2018, p. 51). All of that academic language does not sit right with one’s research style so I’d like to place the concept of QPT into an equation. Queer theory discusses the topic of abnormalities and performative theory analyzes gender as a performance rather than an inhabited trait.

Therefore, QPT analyzes abnormalities of gender identity through the performative aspect of challenging commonplace societal norms. But why do we combine two theories and discuss them to fight back against normality? Why do we try to tilt the metaphorical Jenga game

on a society that has perpetuated the harms of our abnormalities? Communication scholar John Sloop (2006) explains it best. “Queer scholarship works against the ways in which gender/sexuality is disciplined ideologically and institutionally and works toward a culture in which a wider variety of genders/sexualities might be performed” (Sloop, 2006, p. 320). Through unconventional means and several different performative styles, people perform queer as the new normal.

An individual in a beautiful dress with stocky combat boots challenges the normality and queers the common cultural view. Feminine presenting men holding hands with masculine presenting men challenges the normality and queers the common cultural view. To conclude, QPT allows us to unpack the ordinary and dive deeper into more extraordinary and atypical situations by using abnormalities as a form of rebellion.

Analysis

A Midnight Clear is a ten-minute play following the story of Luke, a gay male who finds himself within a hospital room after a serious hate crime-turned-rape situation, and Paul, another male who once had a relationship with Luke but left the relationship with little to no answers, during a cold Christmas Eve (Hamilton, 1998). This play implements a huge importance within interpersonal relationships of LGBTQ+ identities and allyships as the play addresses themes of trauma and trauma responses for queer sexual assault survivors, identifying past issues of intimate relationships and allowing closure for said relationships, and discusses the true reality between heterosexual and homosexual companions. This portion will first discuss background information on my personal involvement with the show and further dive into an analysis, through QPT, on each of the separate characters before finally examining the dialogue and representation of the characters.

On the night of December 1st, 2022, family and friends got to enter the Oscar Larson Fishback Studio Theatre to sit and watch the event *An Evening of 10 Minute Plays* that involved a series of twelve shows, each with a student director and two to three student actors. The program ran for about two hours (Turner, 2022). The reasoning for explaining this within the paper is the opportunity I, the author, got to partake in. Getting to portray the character of Luke within Hamilton's piece while my scene partner, Grant T. Gunderson (Turner, 2022), portrayed Paul under the direction of Abigail Turner. Getting to understand the character through a literal performative-based view assisted me efficiently in composing a piece of analytical research, through a theatrical lens, in the manner how QPT depicts the stigma and prejudice against feminine MSM within *A Midnight Clear*.

We begin with a character analysis of the two representational beings of Hamilton's work. Our first character to analyze is Luke. We look at Luke through his performance of femininity, his reasoning for performing feminine, and his parody performance of masculine and heteronormative tropes. Luke, from the moment of lights up, showcases that he is an abnormal human being as his character performs fluidly in femininity. "Blue's nice. Blue goes with my eyes" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 2). His charm as a feminine-performing character is very effective as his presentation of sexuality and gender simulates that of a bratty elder woman. His remarks are always attempts to get under Paul's skin and he uses a lot of snark and witticism to efficaciously get around conversation points he in no way wants to be associated with. "Hell, don't worry about me, Sweetheart. I'm sure you have better -- well look at that, it's Christmas Eve!" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). Not only does Luke perform an aspect of femininity, he also performs this pseudo-childlike role by always trying to get underneath Paul's skin. Once again, Luke

queers another aspect of sexuality or gender performance by switching his objectives and tactics from feminine to childlike.

There is a catch, however, to Luke's absurdist performative styles. Within further analysis, it can be interpreted that Luke performs his femininity *knowing* that he places himself in a dangerous situation within a heteronormative world. In the moment before of the show's beginning, the audience knows that the theater set is only an examination table (Turner, 2022) that Luke and Paul both sit on. This scenic choice sets up the perspective that Luke, by performing a queer concept of presenting feminine, can risk being hospitalized again, and possibly even killed, if done to men who feel threatened or uncomfortable with Luke's feminal attributes. This is supported by the fact that Luke's humor usage becomes sharp and unkind towards the climax of the piece after Paul discovers the reason why Luke ended up in the hospital was gangrape. "Doing?" Oh, doing. Let's see, I was walking down the street naked - holding a sign that said 'Spread the joy of the season - fuck a fag'" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 4). These remarks only build as the piece progresses to a much higher and aggressive level. But the comments Luke makes are not solely because Luke believes the worst in people. His remarks start to become pointed, because his emotional wall is not just a trauma response. It is a wall of denial.

Luke denies the fact that the reason he was hurt and raped was because of his femininity. "I need to be in my own little bed, Paul. In my own little bed, in my own little room - in that little world I know best. Call a cab. Please?" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). He still will perform his feminine traits, but he doesn't acknowledge that his queering of male-presenting behaviors could be the sole reason he ends up hospitalized. This presents that QPT can deter an individual from

acknowledging that the way they can perform sexuality and abnormalities can also possess equal consequences for those who feel threatened by the usage of said abnormalities.

While Luke does perform in a natural feminine-base state, he also adds another piece of humorous intent within the piece through parody performance. His parodies are always taunting the normal heterosexual male through popular pop culture characters of the 1990s, whether it be John Wayne-like or Rocky-esque. “Ah well, ya know how it is in the wild and wooly Westside. Ah’m just moseying along and some cowboys sidle-on-up-longside me and get all bitchy-like, hurtin’ my pride - so’s I gotta teach ‘em a lesson” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 1). Through these several performances, Luke expresses the concept of masculinity within himself. However, in no way does Luke intend to seriously play these characters. Luke portrays and presents masculinity to be laughed at as he himself as dealt with too much masculinity within a typical heterosexual world. He wants to be the abnormality, with his masculine parodies representing that effectively.

Next, we analyze Paul, the second character within Hamilton’s interpersonal play. We look at Paul’s masculinity and the twist he places on it, his portrayal of the emotional pillar, and his usage of engaging in presentation of feminine qualities. While Luke from the get-go has a lot of spunk and quirk about him, Paul is the complete opposite. His performance begins with a lot of extreme masculine performativity. Lines like “What happened, Luke” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 2) create a fatherly-presenting figure that juxtaposes the childlike harshness of Luke. However, Hamilton’s work has a twist on Paul’s masculine performance as it is revealed to the audience Paul and Luke once had a relationship. This throws the whole extreme masculinity on its head as Paul never once attempts to harm or hurt Luke, but nurture him and his wounds like lovers would do. “We’ll get through this, okay? Lucas?” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 6). This showcases that

masculinity can be performed with queer input and still be just as effective as normal heterosexual performativity.

The most important aspect of Paul's character is the emotional pillar he plays for Luke. This representation of the pillar is an expression that many fathers do for their loved ones. When a child or mother feels emotionally vulnerable, the father attempts to be, metaphorically and literally, a shoulder to cry on. Luke snatches that masculine behavior and consistently tries to portray the emotional pillar for Luke. "Shhh. It's not your fault. Something like this isn't your... What can I do?" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 6). In portrayal of the masculine pillar, Paul showcases his affection that he still has for Luke and his feminine to childlike shenanigans. However, it is very much established that Paul will not consider going back to the relationship between him and Luke, because Paul changed his sexual expression from queer individual to preacher family man. "I'm going to be a father, Luke" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). This use of character demonstrates that identities and sexualities can switch themselves, gay to straight or feminine to masculine, if the host chooses to initiate in doing so. Paul was once happily in love with a man, but a decision he elicits creates a separation from him and his former lover while he chooses to become a commonplace heterosexual individual through performativity.

Just like Luke with parody humor of masculine individuals, Paul also engages in numerous forms of performativity within feminine characteristics. His presentations are never through parody humor though, but rather through care and caution. He performs from emotional pillar father-like masculinity to comforting and nurturing matronly femininity. "You need help?" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). This supports the concept of QPT that feminine and masculine behaviors can intermix themselves and create their own assessment of hybrids. Paul has masculine qualities

like a father, but still maintains them while he embraces his feminine qualities like a mother when comforting Luke.

Finally, within our analysis, we jump into the dialogue and representation that both Luke and Paul showcase when it comes to QPT. We can look at their relationship and dialogue through Luke's fear of heterosexuality and heteronormativity and Paul's limitations as an individual for the incident of Luke. To begin with, Luke showcases all of this snark throughout *A Midnight Clear*, but it is definitely alluded to that Luke's portrayal of masculine characters and parody performance might be as a defense mechanism not only against masculine norms, but Paul himself. However, Paul seems to recognize this circumstance and still attributes his presentation of feminine mother-like qualities to implicitly state he still loves Luke. (Hamilton, 1998, pp. 5-6)

LUKE: They hurt me, Pauley. They wouldn't stop... they--

PAUL: I know... I know. Shhh.

LUKE: I wasn't careful... I shouldn't have shot off my big mou--

PAUL: Shhh. It's not your fault. Something like this isn't your... What can I do?

LUKE: Nothing. Nothing, I guess. Just... just... talk to me.

This excerpt creates a form of suggestion within Luke's choice of words. Perhaps Luke performs a satire of masculine individuality because he is scared of Paul? Let's unpack that question. Paul and Luke once had a relationship. And Paul, out of nowhere, decided to up and leave because he wanted something different, leaving Luke feeling hollow and bitter towards masculine-performing individuals. Paul left Luke emotionally vulnerable, Luke questioned if his own performance of sexuality is what drove Paul off. Mentally vulnerable, Luke felt his only way to grieve was through masculine parody. And physically vulnerable, Luke was yearning for

physical touch as described in the stage directions, not shown, of the excerpt above. Beyond all else, when Luke was attacked by a group of men, he was left vulnerable in all the same elements alike his separation from Paul. While Luke is scared of Paul, Paul never backs away from trying to be as stable as possible, hence the masculine pillar presentation, to reciprocate comfort and care for Luke in his most vulnerable of states. Luke, now having his wall turned to dust and emotional ashes, releases an expression of feminine fragility. He has nowhere to turn except to weep into his once-lover's arms. However, the situation is muddied. While Paul tries to be the most affectionate and encouraging as he can, through his motherlike quality performativity, the audience recognizes that Luke and Paul will not be together. In fact, Luke and Paul will probably never see each other again. This can be tied back to the initial assault that placed Luke in the hospital.

Paul's support to the moment that initially placed Luke in the hospital will only be temporary just like his limited time reminiscing with Luke. While this perspective may be bleak and heart wrenching, it is important to recognize that the temporary support Luke does receive can be enough. By the beginning of the play, Luke constantly creates abnormal performativities to make fun of masculine men, and in hindsight Paul himself, because of his distrust with hegemonic masculinity and basic heterosexual societal norms that placed him in the hospital. By the end of the piece, Luke opens up his shell into his true self, performing his natural femininity, and reveals not only was he sexually assaulted, he implies that while he still loves Paul but is ready to move on so long as Paul is really happy. "I need to be in my own little bed, Paul. In my own little bed, in my own little room -- in that little world I know best. Call a cab. Please?" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). While the moment is temporary for Paul entering in on Luke's life, it may be a situation that still matters. Perhaps the support and pillar-presentation of Paul may be

enough for audiences and readers to understand that support, even if it is not able to be 100% full-time committed, getting to be there for the victims can mean that a triggering situation like sexual assault can become a time of conversation and reflection for anyone rather than a time of self-denial and loathing of masculine norms and traditions. This play creates a challenge of the male rape myth in arguing that men can be raped too, and in turn, creates a conversation in that people can find and receive support regardless of their gender, sexual, or personal identity. Because anyone can be taken advantage of.

Discussion

After getting to recognize the review of literature, the theoretical lens chosen for this paper, and an analysis of Hamilton's piece, let's discuss implications, limitations, and future nodes of research for queer performance theory. Let's first dissect the implications that this analysis had in association with the review of literature. The literature discussed aspects of harm and gendered violence against feminine MSM individuals. *A Midnight Clear* utilized the importance of QPT to understand the risks and challenges feminine individuals face by performing as such. Javaid (2019) states, "The data indicate that gay men are not ordinarily 'normal' men, inviting condemnation, othering them and gay male rape victims in the process. Compartmentalising gay men as 'abnormal' in this way could potentially manifest itself into rape, as the perpetrators may carry out rape to legitimate unequal gender relations between masculinity and femininity and amongst masculinities." Luke's expression of feminine qualities sets him up to be an abnormal spectacle that can be laughed at, sympathized with, or even hurt based on the context of people he is around when expressing his sexuality.

Luke's character also unpacks the character of trauma and trauma expression by presenting a voice for feminine MSM rape victims. His actions are never stereotypical, movie

trope movements. He makes fun of the people who sexually assaulted him through masculine parody presentations, because he knows that this will not be the first and last time he ends up hospitalized. According to Jarvaid (2017), “gay male rape victims, just as it is with anyone in our culture, “do” gender in various forms depending on dissimilarities pertaining to psychological and social characteristics, eras, contexts, social structures, and so on and so forth. Thus, it is important to remember that masculinities are enacted in different contexts and are shaped by gendered sexual scripts and definitions of masculinity.” Based on social characteristics and context, Luke plans to only perform and present as feminine as it is something he is comfortable with. This character gives audiences, specifically feminine-presenting assault victims, representation as there is little to no qualitative research present for feminine MSM sexual assault victims. Giving a marginalized group a lens that others can universally see through allows for the progression of future communication in regards to male sexual assault victims, specifically through the feminine eye.

As for Paul, we see that his character and performative stance challenges the way people can view masculinity by being queer-applicable and presenting traits of both masculine and feminine parental figures. It allows future scholars and researchers to understand that masculinity can be queered and detour itself from the typical heterosexual route. “Importantly... interventions aimed at reducing the stigma of femininity in gay men may focus on combating the unique essentialist beliefs that such men face, as these may fuel downstream negative evaluations, social sanctions, and interpersonal aversion.” (Keibel, 2020). Paul can be an effective character study in understanding the way to equally portray a performative masculine character with a heart of gold. His character teaches that masculine individuals do not have to

always show stigmata towards feminine MSM, but rather offers care and condolences for the betterment of feminine-presenting individuals.

My analysis should showcase that queer performative theory can be seen as a representational tool for those who feel like their voice is not the loudest voice in the room. For those who believe that their decisions, and not the ones who forced themselves upon, were the ones that were wrong. People perform their gender and sexual identity all the time. It is essential that we allow ourselves, through QPT, a perception on why representation truly matters.

A limitation that is encouraged for future scholars to examine further is the lack of male rape victim research that is present within current scholarly media. Javaid (2017) says it best. “Because victims of sexual violence are typically presumed to be only women, little work on gay men as victims of sexual violence has consequently developed. This lack of research can constrict us from challenging male rape and from understanding gay male rape victims’ experiences of rape, leaving such victims to endure pain on an ‘everyday’ basis, as is similar to female rape victims since rape.” We need to research more qualitative data on the experience of male sexual assault victims.

Conclusion

As this paper draws to a close, let’s rewind and ask ourselves the purpose of this research paper. How can queer performance theory, through L.B. Hamilton’s play *A Midnight Clear*, assist an audience in understanding gendered violence against feminine MSM? This essay opened up the research question through a review of literature with understanding prejudice and stigma feminine MSM face, defining the theoretical lens of QPT, analyzing Hamilton’s work in association with queer performativity, and discussing the implications and limitations this research paper possesses for future scholarly work. Within the future of this academic paper,

there is hope that queer performativity, especially through feminine MSM, can become the new normative. However, until said time arrives, let this paper serve as a reminder that regardless of what feminine MSM say or do, they will always be play as the laughing stock, who are scrutinized and violated for a good laugh, in the twisted stage of life. Let this paper remind the normative audience who see these stigmas taking place, and stand helplessly by, that pure and healthy queer representation requires participation in helping from not just our own community but others as well. Because feminine men are tired of being the joke.

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