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That's so gay!

Kristo V. Gobin
San Jose State University

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THAT'S SO GAY!

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kristo V. Gobin

August 2006

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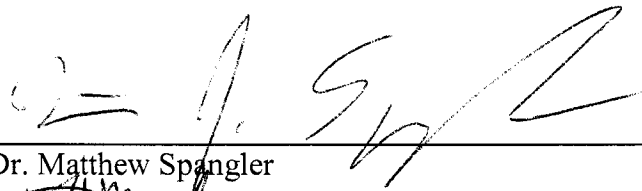
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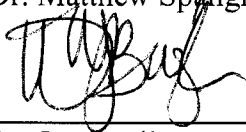
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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES




Dr. Matthew Spangler



Dr. Jay Baglia



Dr. Wenshu Lee



Dr. Phillip Wander

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



ABSTRACT

THAT'S SO GAY!

By Kristo V. Gobin

This thesis is a one-person performance titled *That's So Gay!* This performance explores the coming out of a first generation Croatian American, and took place at San José State on February 8-11, 2006. This original piece is a collection of stories that chronicled struggles, both internally and publicly, of coming to terms with one's sexuality. The central question this thesis asks is does this performance piece subvert dominant ideologies and work to expand possibilities for non-normative identities? *That's So Gay!* is an experience which insists that heteronormativity and its prevalence be examined; especially since coming out undermines and challenges dominant expectations about sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual performance.

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I. *Introduction*

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex communities face many obstacles in today's society. Those who occupy space in these diverse communities tackle hostility from the government, educational institutions, religious groups, employers, and exclusion from family and social networks. The reality is that homophobia is not just limited to verbal cruelty, but harassment, institutional oppressions, the silencing of voices, emotional abuse, and violence. Considering the impact of such widespread exclusion is an area that must persistently be interrogated by communication scholars.

The subject of this thesis is a one-person performance titled *That's So Gay!* Over four nights from February 8-11, 2006 more than four hundred students, faculty, staff, and community members gathered on the second floor of Hugh Gillis Hall at San José State University to watch a one-person show that explored the coming out of a first generation Croatian American. This original piece is a collection of stories that chronicles my own struggles, both internally and publicly, of coming to terms with my sexuality. For me coming out was mediated by conflicting intersections of my identity embodied by a white, gay, Catholic, male, first-generation Croatian American, from a working class background. Growing up in southern California, in my community, the two were never supposed to cross. This made for particular circumstances that forced me to compartmentalize parts of myself, which essentially placed being Croatian and gay in opposition to one another. I worked to write a performance piece that not only brought the two together, but also explored that struggle. I wanted to ask what it means to be gay,

at least, for me. What is sexuality? Is sexuality gender performance or is it a part of one's identity, or both? As I dove deeper into these issues, subsequent questions were incorporated into the performance.

The central question this thesis asks is in what ways did *That's So Gay!* subvert dominant ideologies and work to expand possibilities for non-normative identities?

That's So Gay! is an experience that invites audiences into a venue where this question is explored, often with a degree of parody. My goal was to carve out a space that permits the subversion of dominant expectations about sex, gender, sexuality, and coming out to open not only my own, but also the audience's views and understanding of non-normative identities. I will discuss aspects of the performance in four sections:

- why performance?
- script/text
- set and other technical aspects
- the embodied performance

I will discuss the ways I sought to challenge audiences to ponder what sexuality and coming out are, with the hope that this performance will prompt a closer examination of these issues and provide some sort of understanding of entire communities that are still marginalized.

Bettina Heinz (2002) provides a clear description of some issues crucial to the queer experience; much of which is overlooked.

In the United States g/l/b/t youth, for example have a higher risk of suicide, depression, alcohol abuse, violence/victimization, and extreme

violence...depending on federal, state, and local law, individuals who are g/l/b/t are legally discriminated against in terms of employment, health benefits, the right to marry, custody issues, adoption, military service, and other benefits or rights not similarly restricted for heterosexual people (p. 97).

In her article she calls for the field of Communication Studies to look at these issues for the reason that there are many who suffer because they are not understood, ignored, and/or still denied rights. Her article also addresses the need to work with students on these issues to create understanding early on, which I found useful because I was performing *That's So Gay!* on a college campus and much of the audience was students.

II. *Why Performance?*

Certainly the question should be asked, why performance? What would performance accomplish that writing a scholarly article alone could not? What is it about performance that makes it more powerful, engaging, tangible, evocative, and transformative than merely reading words on a page? In “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know For Sure,” Kristin Langellier (1999) states that “performance implies the transgressive desire of agency and action” (p. 129). *That’s So Gay!* is a critical autobiographical performance that interrupts the predominance of heteronormativity. What became very clear to me was that this performance is about a gay man publicly coming out, and for me, there was a particular awareness and sensitivity to the level of agency this would take to execute. I knew that this process would ask a great deal of me, but by bringing my experiences to live performance would push past what just reading these stories could never accomplish. I could circumvent the limitations that just writing often precludes, which is experiencing the personal live. This was personal. Performance is a complex site for scholarship because performance brings texts to life. The opportunity performance brings to ignite texts with emotion, in front of an audience, is a different experience than merely reading words on a page. There is more risk. Dwight Conquergood (1985) theorized that the “performance of a story can pull an audience into a sense of the other in a rhetorically compelling way” (p. 3). Stepping out onto a stage is a very urgent and risky task, as everything becomes heightened and often “uncontrollable.” The audience becomes a part of the experience and in this case a very personal experience.

Another reason performance is important according to Langellier is that “personal narrative situates us...among marginalized voices and muted experiences. Placed against the backdrop of disintegrating master narratives, personal narrative responds to the wreckage, the reclaiming” (p. 126). For Langellier this is one of the major functions of performance, admittance to experiences which are often overlooked, an integral perspective when seeking to transform conditions which exploit those struggling to speak or heard. The act of speaking is already a tremendous achievement for those silenced, but actually being heard is freedom. *That's So Gay!* is a performance that creates a space where my voice will be used to articulate what I have desperately longed to say.

But who am I and why is that even important? My perspectives guide *That's So Gay!* and the fault that there were no visible lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people in my world growing up had a big impact in shaping my identity as a gay man. This was complicated further with membership in a culture mostly due to its belief in Catholicism discipline/punished LGBT people. I was caught trying to navigate between being gay and Croatian and found myself torn and lost. Langellier says narrative is crucial because,

Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and social relations in which they are materially embedded: sex, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, religion, and so on. This is why personal narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities left out of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense (p. 129).

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, being both gay and first-generation Croatian American was not a possibility, thus the idea that I could be accepted as such was radical.

I wanted the performance to take portions of my identity that were essentially in opposition with one another and capture the tensions that exist within that dynamic. *That's So Gay!* situates and contextualizes my experience in order to examine but ultimately to alleviate some of these tensions by breaking my silence and engaging others to reconsider the possibilities of what exists beyond being heterosexual and even gay. Certainly, there are other LGBT Croatians out there, but I would be the first in my social and family circles to openly speak about it. This proved especially challenging because there simply was not the language or space to accomplish this.

I understood how performance was important for scholarship and how people can benefit from it, but I was overwhelmed by the infinite possibilities of executing such a piece. How do I conceptualize the nuances of each story in a way that adds to the level of engagement for a live audience? Langellier states that “personal narrative as performance requires theory which takes context as seriously as it does individual reflexivity, and which therefore examines cultural production and reproduction of identities and experience” (p. 128). By linking Croatian and gay I could challenge the conventional notions of what each are and destabilize both of them. This would help to see the ways in which my gay and Croatian identities intersect, or not. I could pinpoint moments when I had to hide myself within the dominant discourse.

Gender became a pronounced theme in the cultural production and reproduction of my identity. *That's So Gay!* focuses on the performances of multiple aspects of my identity. I wanted to unpack and look at the ways I perform my ethnicity as well as my gender. There were many layers and I found that gender became very crucial in

mediating and contextualizing much of my daily performances of culture and sexuality. In the performance I recount instances from my childhood when my gender performance was perceived as feminine by my parents. I was then instructed to play sports as though it would facilitate some kind of correction to my inappropriate behaviors. This ultimately led to verbal cruelty and physical sanctions by members of my football team. I recounted fag chants when my teammates would circle around me before practice and dance yelling words like: “faggot,” “sissy,” “pussy,” and “butt pirate.” The times when my football gear was stolen or when I sat on the floor of the bus because no one wanted to sit next to the team fag. It was stories like these that I felt could bring audiences to reexamine their ideas of what was acceptable, because these stories show some of the ways compulsory heteronormativity is problematic. In my case verbal and physical violence were utilized as sanctions by my peers to act as some kind of correction, the underlying implication being was that there was in fact something to correct.

When examining gender, I found Judith Butler, credited as one of the founders of queer theory as well as a pioneer in the field of gender studies essential. For Butler (1999) “performance is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (p. 178). Butler theorizes that performance creates the material and it is the same material that constitutes and reconstitutes identities. This is valuable because if examined closely, the rules that guide expected or acceptable performance can be made visible and thus scrutinized. Discussing gender in *That’s So Gay!* was key because I wanted to show the impact of how people used my gender

performance as the signifier for my sexuality. Gender as performance became an integral piece of my coming out, because I was different, and the difference was noticeable. The difference was egregious. No one ever asked me whom I was attracted to; my sexuality was read in my hand movements, the high inflection in my voice, my aversion to sports, which was a clear violation of what was already socially established and acceptable heterosexual male social performance.

For family members, peers, and teachers, their reading of my gender performance was a sign that I was clearly not heterosexual even though my attraction for other men was incubating and years from being pronounced. The first three stories that open the performance illustrate how gay was never supposed to even be an option for me. The stories focus on the phrase “that’s so gay!” which is a complex term. It is commonly used in today’s vernacular to mean “that is bad,” but “that’s so gay!” certainly means more than just that. It takes the idea of non-normative sexuality and names it: bad, inappropriate, disgusting, and or vile. The use of this phrase by family members constantly reiterated that gay was not an identity, but something that was undesirable and only worth mentioning in reference to something insidious. I wanted to juxtapose the acceptability of the use of that phrase, against my reactions to it, which were often of humiliation and fear. By subverting the use of that term in my performance I sought to sabotage the conventional and or accepted meaning of the phrase.

Butler explains in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) that subversion is “where the uniformity of the subject is expected, there might be produced the refusal of the law in the form of parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy

of the command” (p. 122). The title *That’s So Gay!* calls into question the acceptability of that phrase and all the taken for granted assumptions that go along with it. As a gay person I am already subversive, I challenge the expectations of heteronormativity, as do my stories. How could I create specific moments where I discuss gender and sexuality in a way that intentionally plays with normative expectations? At one point in the performance I place a pink hat on my head and alter the inflections of my voice to be stereotypically and overtly “feminine.” I also play with my family’s greeting; I take what was first described as a stout “Hey!” and raise the inflections of my voice and add a hand gesture, a fling of my wrist. By undermining the law of expected gender performance I take “the call by the law which seeks to produce a lawful subject, [and produce] a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be disciplining intention motivating the law” (p. 122). In the performance such a violation of gender performative norms was played in such a way that parodied possible sanctions and highlighted the ways normative gender performance reinforces and pushes us all into complacent, and compulsory heterosexuality.

By instantly altering my gender performance I emphasize that it is just an act that is clearly unacceptable. Thus, *That’s So Gay!* asserts throughout that gender is constructed by a series of repetitions guided by a system of agreed upon expectations and not dependent on sexuality. Butler (1999) states that

The gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative

character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (p. 180).

Sexuality is desire, attraction, not gender performance. Within *That's So Gay!* there is a discussion of and about the differences between sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual performance. Using my experiences I wanted to highlight the nuances of each category, and discuss some of the differences between them. When examining the differences specifically between sex and gender as each pertains to sexuality Eve Sedgwick (1990) presents a crucial analysis of the homo/heterosexual definition in *Epistemology of the Closet*. She discusses and expands on what Gayle Rubin (1975) calls the "sex/gender system." Rubin states that the "social organization of sex rests upon gender, obligatory heterosexuality. Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality" (p. 179). Sedgwick takes Rubin's definition and looks at how gender and sexuality are "inextricable from one another though they are in that each can be expressed only in terms of the other" (p. 30). This is a very important distinction, particularly because as I assert in *That's So Gay!* gender performance is primarily used as an automatic means of distinguishing someone's sexuality. Carole Vance (1995) sums up the relationship between sexuality and gender by stating that they are "separate systems which are interwoven at many points." This mode of thinking challenges our view of stereotypes or information shortcuts that keep us all from thinking critically about how complex sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual performance really are.

I wanted to use humor to diffuse the urgency to uphold rigid gender expectations. An example of this is during the “straight guy demonstration.” I bring onto the stage a predetermined volunteer, and place on him a red sash with “Heterosexual Male” spelled out in glitter, reminiscent of something a beauty queen would wear. The demonstration is a deliberate breach of acceptable physical contact between men: we hold hands, stand very close, and even hug. This moment creates tension because two men, one straight, the other gay, are breaking expectations of acceptable touching dictated by codes of masculinity and heterosexuality. During the “demonstration” I flirt with the straight guy, I am campy and push the boundaries of what is acceptable. As the physical contact becomes closer I ask my volunteer “Are you still straight?” I ask repeatedly. When I move from holding hands, to hanging on him, to the hug, I ask again. The point of the “demonstration” was to address a fear of contamination, the notion that somehow same sex attraction is contagious thus infecting or nullifying heterosexuality. It of course is not. Butler (1999) states that

Practices of parody can serve to reengage and reconsolidate the very distinction between a privileged and naturalized gender configuration and one that appears as derived, phantasmatic, and mimetic—a failed copy, as it were. And surely parody has been used to further a politics of despair, one which affirms a seemingly inevitable exclusion of marginal genders from the territory of the natural and the real (p. 186).

It was important to me for *That's So Gay!* to create a space that allowed for the examination of issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and coming out that prompted

discussion, dialogue, or some kind of unidentified change for audiences. I wanted *That's So Gay!* to have a strict balance of seriously poignant and jovially playful stories. The idea was that the more playful moments would serve to break up some of the tension of the more dramatic moments, such as the stories that recounted hate speech or violence.

Humor is also subversive. Taking the material produced by daily performances and subverting it permits *That's So Gay!* to become a site where play is encouraged with an invitation to the audience not only to observe, but to think critically about the concepts that are intentionally subverted. Ultimately, Butler states, “the loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality” (p. 187). The importance of *That's so Gay!* was to seize an opportunity and attempt to make urgent the examination of non-normative identities in a subversive, humorous way, to actually empower those who are exploited and harmed by heteronormativity. Breaking the silence that often shrouds those who are exploited is itself an act of subversion.

III. *Script/Text*

In *Sister Outsider* scholar Audre Lorde (1984) asks us to consider “what are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?” (p. 41). I was guided by these questions when writing the script for *That’s so Gay!* What are the tyrannies that I swallow each day? What do I need to say? What can grant me access to the many words that I do not have? For me these questions were complex and called for constant reexamination. They were questions that guided me through this process. How do I begin to tell my story, what should I include? What should I omit and why?

Words such as “disgusting,” “not normal,” and “vile,” put on me by dominant discourse painted an undesirable even wretched picture of what or who I thought I was. Della Pollock (1999) theorizes that stories and personal narratives can be utilized to provide agency and illuminate hidden histories. My stories “resist shame and silence, at least in part, by throwing off narrative norms,” which Pollock argues is essential for marginalized voices to “claim affective authority” (p. 7). Intentionally carving out a space to perform these stories subverts heteronormative ideologies, which provides agency for the kind of personal ownership that, in this case, seeks to alleviate any tension as a result of persistent silencing or exclusion by compulsory heterosexuality. By undermining the master narrative I was concerned with radically expanding the definition of identities to be more inclusive of non-normative individuals and communities. I also wanted to expand gay narratives. For this piece I knew that I was going to focus on

points where my Croatian and gay identities came into conflict, I wanted the tensions of being both first-generation Croatian American and gay to queer coming out narratives.

My coming out stories illustrate the complexity of negotiating and eventually coming to terms with my one's sexuality. Furthermore, it must be asserted that although there are similar and shared experiences between those who choose to, can, or are forced to come out, the process of coming out is highly individual and dependent on many personal circumstances such as, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, socio economic status, and social performance. Coming out is thickly contextual; every coming out story is unique. People do not have the exact same experiences, but we do have similar shades of experiences. By telling my stories not only would I own them but I would provide the chance for others to connect to my experiences which might bring comfort through identification or empathy.

In the article “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother” E. Patrick Johnson (2001) explains the need for “theory of and for gays and lesbians of color” (p. 3). Johnson wants to “quare” queer studies and include race, ethnicity, socio economic status, and religion in order to suture theoretical gaps. I was inspired by his call for the inclusion of intersecting identities and identified ways *That's so Gay!* does just that. For instance, I talked about some of the cultural celebrations in my family: enormous gatherings for holidays and religious sacraments. These stories help illustrate where I came from and what it was like to grow up essentially commuting between two cultures. The story that showcases this the most is the lamb story. During one of our family's parties, my Father hung a lamb from the

tree in front of our house to prepare it for roasting. We had just moved to the neighborhood, and some of the children from our block came out and saw the lamb dangling, my sister and I were mercilessly teased because everyone thought we were savages and ate dogs. It was stories like this that added textures in showcasing my identity.

Acknowledging my privileged position of white male and in order to avoid co-optation of quare, I will use “queer,” or “queering,” to explore the complications of my own intersecting identities. For example, the relationship between being gay and first-generation Croatian American has been integral to my coming out. Aspects of my identity were essentially in opposition and had to be compartmentalized growing up. The more dimensions of one’s identity one recognizes the more coming out narratives are queered, which in this case is necessary because gay Croatian narratives are largely absent from coming out narratives.

For specific aspects of the script, I wanted to have moments which played with gender norms. I wanted to highlight the ways we all buy into a rigid structure that I have on occasion found to be harmful. I wanted to discuss those instances. Carrie Sandahl (2003) defines queering as “the practice of putting a spin on mainstream representations to reveal latent queer subtexts; of appropriating a representation for ones own purposes, forcing it to signify differently; or deconstructing a representation’s of heterosexism” (p. 36). An example from the performance of queering the notion of attraction is when I tell the story of my first kiss. I begin the story by talking about how I met Billie my senior year of undergraduate, and the sexual connection was strong. The attraction was mutual

and nervous, exhilarating, and our time together was pleasant. I set the scene of our first date, going to dinner at a lively diner Ed Debevics and then sitting on the sofa watching late night television. The story builds to the very awkward first kiss. I focused on the tension of the moment, the way I repeatedly turned my head avoiding Billie's lips because I was scared. I focused on my experience, this connection to another person that turned out to be a woman. The stage was set for an entire show about coming out and now the audience is faced with what was a heterosexual dating relationship. I intentionally focused on telling that story about Billie knowing that the audience would most likely assume by the name that I was referring to a man. I, thus, queered the coming out process by showing the complexities of attraction and the possibility of a heterosexual pairing, at least in my story.

Writing the script was a challenge because I found myself trying to find a structure for the stories, at least some kind of order that brought a sense of continuity to the piece. I had a problem writing the monologue; initially there were huge blocks of text which were more explanations of what the scene was than actual lines. As I began writing the script, I identified three works that were valuable with its creation. For overall organization, function, and structure of the script works by both Paul Bonin-Rodriguez (2004) and Mercilee Jenkins (2005) have been quite useful. Bonin-Rodriguez wrote about his family, their complex histories; he was able to infuse the script with emotion that leapt off the page. Jenkins' piece deals with, among other things, her own mastectomy. She talks about walking along Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras experiencing in a new way, the celebration which includes the flashing of breasts. I

found both pieces carefully constructed, and was able to take ideas about how to discuss particular moments from my life that were paradoxical; such as when I discuss being both homophobic and gay. Bonin-Rodriguez and Jenkins created pieces that explored the complexities of identity neatly, yet thoroughly. Both pieces also included notes on stage direction, set, props, and transitions within their scripts, which proved quite useful when making similar notations to my script. When flushing out dialogue, sentence cadence, and breaks the works of Anna Deavere Smith (1993, 1994) were especially useful. I worked to find a way to make the script accessible for me, a script that was not just large blocks of text, but a reflection of what I wanted to say. When it was time for rehearsals, I was able to lock into my pace because the lines were written the way I would say them. In both of Smith's books she plays multiple characters, this was helpful when writing the parts of my parents. She was able to capture the nuances of speech patterns as well how unique each person was. All three scholars were crucial in showing me how to construct a script that captures the essence of each story and allows for clear structure and organization of themes and motifs.

Over the fall of 2005 the script took shape and I worked to bring my words to life. I quickly found a significant difference between writing words and then performing them. For instance, writing the phrase "That's so Gay!" and standing up in front of an audience saying it are two very different things. I already discussed how I intended the performance to subvert particular meanings, and on paper it looked as though it would work. But to actually execute it brought a whole other set of dynamics. I repeatedly said the phrase "that's so gay." In the opening of the performance I say "that's so gay!" four

times. What were the challenges of bringing ideas which look good on paper to the stage? How could I be sure what I was writing could do what I intended?

Through practice and constantly rethinking the countless ways to execute a line, I was brought to a very powerful place where bringing the words from the page to the stage took me past my limits. Embodying some of the words from the script provided a significant challenge, like in the story when I recount my experience on the junior varsity football team and I use some of the hateful language of my former teammates. I was describing my first week of football practice; the line was “move faggot!” When I wrote that section I passively thought about the details. I thought I should just write down what I could remember. It was an important moment that dramatically changed everything for me. It was when I go from the guy who does not want to be noticed on the team to being marked as a fag. At the end of the first week of summer football practice, I lean down to take a sip of water from a drinking fountain and I am pushed. I hear “move faggot!” Bringing those words into an active state prompted me to vigorously reexamine what was put into the script. Initially rehearsing that particular story made me cringe. I was honestly surprised by my reaction. Somewhere deep inside there was the same scared fifteen year old. Was I subverting dominant ideologies of hate, or was I reinforcing them by reperforming them?

As the scene was flushed out embodying that phrase meant mimicking the violent push, and yelling those words with force. The shift was significant; it was different from merely writing that story or constructing the order of things. Rehearsing this over and over, each time with more anger, more hatred actually disturbed me. It was not about just

telling that story, but actually reliving that moment, reconstituting it as myself and my bully. I found myself reexperiencing the mental and emotional anguish I felt on the high school football field. Embodying it also brought back the shame from that moment that I thought had faded long ago. I knew that telling these stories, especially some of the more difficult ones would be a challenge, but this was more than I could have ever imagined. I was reliving the same moments from different perspectives and this was very powerful for me.

As must be expected with performances, there will always be discrepancies between the shows in a particular run because each performance exists in its own unique time attached to its own particular set of circumstances. I am not sure how or why, but there were moments when I was pulled out of the choreography and surpassed my own guidelines, moments when I performed what was not in the script. This certainly begs a very important question: what exactly is the text? These moments of “excess” as Della Pollock calls them, have created essentially five different texts and there are discrepancies between the script and the four performances.

In an address at San José State University, Della Pollock made a case for “acting far beyond intentionality...on the currents of improvisation and re-invention into a place of strange joy and greater grief.” She shared the story of a student from one of her classes, the student unintentionally surpassed the expectations of the script and created a moment in which the “performance exceeded performativity, repetition breaking out of reproduction.” The result was performing beyond intention, reinventing moments outlined in the script, pushing past the limits of performativity in performance, propelling

the audience as well as the performer into a heightened state that repetitions do not easily allow access.

Pollock tells the story of Kate, who in an assignment for class pushed past the limits of her own performance. Kate stood before her audience blindfolded, shifting her body from blind justice to lady liberty in a performance about the military response to 9-11. She intended to pour herself a glass of red wine, but instead poured the entire bottle “inviting apparently fixed forms into the real of the improvisational and the possible.” Kate poured and poured, red wine flew down her arm, her body, and sloshed onto the audience, a pool of red wine crept across the classroom, she acted far beyond intentionality and her performance exceeded performativity. The act of performing, the leap from words in a script to an actual living breathing moment is challenging. Pollock suggests that going with instincts and expanding on moments in performance, pushing past the limits of intended performativity takes both the audience and performer to “new heights and forms of human being.” Certainly, Pollock is not suggesting a haphazard approach to introducing improvisation into a given performance, but careful consideration and a degree of responsibility must be used to mediate when “performing the wild twists and turns of impossible impossibilities.”

Within my performance there were moments when I exceeded the text, I will discuss two examples here. The first was when I was discussing being “out” at work for the first time. I came out only to a few friends and made the decision to be out at U.C. Riverside as a Resident Director, this was my first job after graduating college. I explain that I came out and my work environment was very supportive, but that support turned

into the presumption of a sort of expertise that was at time over utilized by the rest of staff. In the moment of performance as I told of my new working environment, my mind jumped past the script and I created a new line, “I became like the gay wikipedia.” I was intrigued by the possibility of creating dialogue in the moment of performance. That line got a big laugh, and I went with this instinct, a moment that was outside of what was rehearsed. I was enthralled in each moment during performance, each word was tightly holding onto the next. The idea that I was creating text amidst a live rigorous process of recollection was empowering and terrifying. The audience’s laughter was affirming and made me feel like I had not transgressed, but actually hit on something, something new, something deeper. This something in the moment was genuine and exhilarating, but it quickly led to the question of what exactly is the text?

The second instance of performance exceeding the script occurs at the end of the performance, it was actually the last thing I said to the audience. “Thank you for coming out tonight!” Again this was a moment when the audience really responded with laughter to the pun. It was also when the audience and I were able to interact, when people could approach me with questions, comments, or concerns. I decided to use the line for the rest of the run because it was the juxtaposition of the performance about coming out, which could not have happened if they weren’t present. The literal meeting was really an exclamation point of these two moments coming together.

IV. *Set and Other Technical Aspects*

Soyini Madison (1999) calls performance theory embodied writing. She writes, “it calls me forward shamelessly, across those hard edged maps into spaces where I must go. Terrains that are foreign, scary, uninhabitable, but necessary. I must go to them to know myself more, to know you, more. I enter performance as a witness and a doer” (p. 108). As I pieced together *That’s So Gay!* I found it urgent to share what I was learning from my readings, to find a place in the script for all the insights that were floating to the surface of my psyche. I wanted to bring out my struggle, not for spectacle, but because I understood in ways I previously could not, the power of what I was attempting to do. The idea that I will bring to life writing and take audiences through an experience that was marked by some of the changes I was undergoing seemed unbelievable. Everything that I was going to say and do had the opportunity to push past the limits of heteronormativity, past the foreign, scary, and uninhabitable. This was absolutely necessary.

Moving from the script to the stage brought a whole set of new challenges and considerations. Would it be feasible to execute certain elements? How would plans accentuate or hinder the flow of the performance? Would intended meanings translate once executed? Would the planned elements work to subvert heteronormativity? It was important that the set and props symbolically illustrated my coming out process. There were three significant components to the set: the signs that hung on the upstage wall over the stage, the clotheslines in the shape of a “V” meeting center stage, and the pink curtain

along the upstage wall. I will discuss each element and how they were important to the performance. (See Appendix A)

For the signs, I used four black and white pieces of poster board that hung over the stage fastened to the wall with Velcro. They read: “sex,” “gender,” “sexuality,” and “social performance.” Right below each sign was a poster board with the corresponding terms of each category: “male-female,” “masculine-feminine,” “heterosexual-homosexual,” and “top-bottom.” The signs were Judith Butler’s heterosexual matrix, outlined in the first chapter of *Gender Trouble* (1999). This was representative of dominant social structures that hang over and press down on all of us. For further discussion on Butler’s evolving theoretical framework and Gayle Rubin’s “sex/gender system” see *Sexual Traffic* (1994). I used these signs to discuss the rigid binaries and the elaborate system we all must conform to. Each section was unpacked and compared to the others to show where the gaps were. For instance, I discussed how sex is related to biological phenotypes and gender is related to performance. Sexuality is about desire, and sexual performance is what one does. Some of the stories I told during the performance were from my childhood which highlighted indiscretions and sanctions I received when I did not fit within the binaries. I told the story of when I was in the first grade and I was perceived as a “feminine” little boy. There was a parent teacher conference about how to “fix” that. In Kate Bornstein’s (1995) *Gender Outlaw* “the way we perceive another’s gender affects the way we relate to that person” (p. 26). She outlines characteristics of gender attribution: physical cues, behavioral cues, textual cues, mythic cues, power dynamic cues, and sexual orientation as cue. *That’s So Gay!* is an

amalgamation and synthesis of all these attributes and how others related or did not relate to me.

Two clotheslines were configured in a V-shape; they were fastened to the walls and were symbolic of airing laundry. Because being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender was not a topic openly discussed in my Croatian family, this was a symbolic way of putting it all out there or airing our dirty laundry. Hung along one side of the stage were six shirts with different puns and sayings and some of my own shirts, like my football jersey. On the other side of the stage were another set of five shirts, which were D'Augelli's (Trickett, Watts, & Birman 2004) model of gay, lesbian, bisexual identity development (pp. 325-328). This configuration mimicked the serious and jovial tones I hoped to balance throughout the performance. On one side of the stage were silly sayings facing the different stages of coming out. D'Augelli identifies six stages of coming out: existing heterosexual identity, personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status, lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity, lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring, lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status, lesbian/gay/bisexual community. Although the model seems to present a linear progression from reviewing existing heterosexual identity to entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community, there is room for one to move back and forth or even skip stages. The degree to which someone is out is always in play, and D'Augelli differentiates between internal (what he deems personal), and public (or social) modes of being out. The theory hinges on the notion of developmental plasticity, which states that individuals will progress through stages based on their own environment and circumstances (p. 320). I wanted the performance to capture how coming out is

something I have to do constantly. I talk about moving and starting a new job, or coming out to several friends. I also wanted to show how people in my life dealt with my coming out, how they accepted or rejected me and what that meant. My experiences are mine, and it must be reiterated that my experience is not universal that there are many factors that must be taken into consideration.

The pink curtain was the last major component. The pink curtain covered a mirror that ran the width of the stage. On the first day of rehearsal the production team went into the room and there was some discussion about what to do with the mirror that ran along the upstage wall. It is 22 feet long. What came out of the discussions was an idea to cover the mirror and reveal it at the end of the show. Pink fabric was used because when I was standing on stage there would be an immediate collision of the masculine and feminine. I wanted to play with the idea of juxtaposing masculine and feminine ideals as much as possible. Pink appears again when I put a hat on my head and perform exaggerated extremes of masculine and feminine. The pink curtain was a constant way of reminding the audience that gender is always in play, particularly because it is the backdrop for all of my stories that detail moments when I was sanctioned because of perceived inappropriate gender performance. The excess and parody worked to break down the importance behind major assumptions and beliefs in these rigid structures; one in particular is the belief that feminine little boys will grow up to be gay. I explicitly ask the audience what is so wrong with that.

With the set constructed, the next step was to figure out how to interact with it. I moved different shirts on each of the clotheslines and worked to block certain elements

so they would be smoothly executed. One of the more powerful moments in the performance utilizes the football jersey. I put on the jersey and tell stories from my football days. When I am finished, I take it off to reveal a white shirt marked in black ink with hate speech written all over my torso, the graphic words read: “fag,” “fairy,” “cock sucker,” “fudge packer,” “sissy,” “fruit,” “off,” “homo,” “smear the queer,” “pussy,” and “that’s so gay!” These were the words I was called by my teammates, words I could hide, but were always just under the surface. The revealing of the words, just like the title *That’s So Gay!*, works to sabotage their intended meanings. Healing then may begin, the audience is brought really close to the words verbally and visually. I wanted to wear the words and ask the audience to think about how these words can become a part of an unwelcome identity. An identity marked with such vile language. What are some of the ways these words use gender to mark breached gender expectations? When I am perceived as feminine and labeled a sissy, fruit or pussy, what does that say about our expectations of femininity? Taking off my shirt and revealing those words made them personal. This personalized the words for the audience because they were literally on me. My body became the site for how words shaped my identity during key phases of my coming out process and how I learned to work with, acknowledge, and accept them.

I wore the white shirt with black hate speech for the remainder of the performance. I wanted these words to be visible, to constantly reinforce and signify to the audience; no matter where I was in my development they are always in play. At the end of the performance I change shirts. I put on over the white shirt, a black one with the word FAG jeweled across the center of the chest. For me the meaning of that word has

changed. It looks different, it feels different because it is different. I wanted this change to signify to the audience that because of this performance, because of my stories, the use of such words has an incredible impact. Each person gets to decide how to use these words.

I utilized other components to engage the audience in play or parody. Embodying my parents and their accents made it possible to play with some of the structures in my family that influenced how I dealt with my coming out, as well as showcase a little bit of what it meant to be Croatian American in my family. For example, in the beginning of the performance I discuss the pressure there was for being what my parents called a “good boy.” This was never an option for me, because no matter how good I was, no matter how well I did in school or sports, I would always be gay. The performance of their accents helped to add texture when I recreated the conversations with my parents. I took conversations from old journals because I wanted them to be as authentic as possible. I wanted to focus on the ways my family struggled to have the words to deal with what was happening, to show the audience that there are misunderstandings about what sexuality and coming out entails. This is mirrored in my own misunderstandings about what gay is. I openly discuss how I had no idea what it meant to be gay, or to come out. I shared my own ignorance about the time I was a freshman in college. I just moved into the residence halls and went to a dinner where Charles, a gay man teasingly pulled my shoelace apart and I freaked out. This moment in the performance intended to show that there are not adequate spaces, nor adequate language to discuss coming out;

heteronormativity precludes it. At least for me this was a huge site of tension that I wanted the audience to experience.

As the performance progressed and the stories elaborate on the notions of Croatian, gay, male, coming out, the set begins to become transformed. The shirts on the clothesline are rearranged, because my story is unique and my circumstances queered D'Augelli's coming out process. By the end of the performance, the set is ready to be dismantled. Sections of the signs are pulled off to reveal that the dichotomies that rule us are incomplete and exclusionary. Beyond male/female exists intersexed, transgender, transsexual; beyond masculine/feminine is gender is bending, gender queer, drag kings, drag queens; beyond heterosexual/homosexual is questioning, bisexual, pansexual; beyond top/bottom is actions vs. orientation, sex is shared not a conquest. When I pulled down the signs there was a screech of tearing Velcro, the sound of resistance. I pulled harder, and laid all four signs on the floor. This symbolic act is a call to challenge these norms. They guide us entirely too much, which is dangerous because entire communities of people are not even acknowledged within the structure. The structure must change.

In the final moment of the performance I remove the pink cloth to reveal a mirror. The mirror makes the audience see themselves reflected in the performance. They see past the set and see themselves as individuals and as a collective mass. The audience is shown beyond the structure that has been ripped down, and left with themselves, with each other. I sat on the center of the stage looking out on the faces as the lights faded to black as the words from Pink Martini "*Que Sera Sera*" (1997) fade down. The whole

performance was working towards this moment. The lyrics from the song reinforce much of the major themes of *That's so Gay!*

*When I was just a little girl
I asked my mother what will I be
Will I be pretty
Will I be rich
Here's what she said to me*

*Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera*

*When I was just a child in school
I asked my teacher what should I try
Should I paint pictures
Should I sing songs
This was her wise reply*

*Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera*

The song asks what I could not. I could not ask my parents or teachers what I might be. I found this moment profound, and unifying. In that moment, which was repeated four times in performance, there was something that pulled me into that experience, something beyond words. By taking down the curtain, I was able to pull the audience past the performer audience dichotomy and merge the two. This was a moment of transformation, an instance where the performance became something bigger than it was. Telling these stories becomes a significantly powerful act, something beyond what was expected of or even thought possible. I learned by carefully considering the technical aspects of a performance that telling stories could be so much more. I was challenged to

think creatively about metaphors not only within the text, but thoughtful and dynamic ways of bringing them to life on stage that facilitate grabbing audiences in ways I had not imagined.

V. *Embodied Performance*

Lights illuminate the stage. Rows filled with people apprehensively waiting. The charged room marks the point when the words from the script will become alive. With the exception of rehearsals which is different, this was the first time I would execute the piece live. There would be no stopping, asking for lines, retracing steps, taking breaks. The reality of the moment was so succinct and permanent and overwhelming. Once I entered the room, this was the precise moment that marked the beginning; it was now my responsibility to keep the moment in constant flow.

The progression from words on a script to a choreographed and timed performance was already such an enriching and enlightening experience, little could I anticipate just how electric stepping onto a live stage would or could feel. I oscillated between exhilaration and fear, between knowing with certainty and forgetting each succeeding step that I was charged to execute. This all swirled through me. I became hyper aware of the present, in a way tethered to the present because every movement or utterance not only began but shaped the performance. Simultaneously the audience and I became anchored to one another; each audience became its own unique being.

The task at hand was to extend an invitation to the audience that granted them access into my world. Developing a positive rapport and relationship with the audience was urgent and crucial. Christine Logan (2005) states that “the performed self is not only provisional and emergent, s/he’s also dependent on the cooperation, even the collusion of the audience. These ‘shards,’ these traces of memory, of yearning, of regret, and of possibility, requires the audience’s collective focus and emotional collaboration” (p.

285). Would the environment I created be compelling enough for the audience to emotionally invest? How was I going to be sure to stay on course? Not only can a performance go wrong due to any number of technical difficulties, but the audience's reaction becomes an integral part of keeping the performance on track. The audience becomes a part of the heightened moment of risk, something I became keenly aware of walking onto the stage.

Conquergood states "performance is a way of having an intimate conversation with other people and cultures. The conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity" (p. 10). I knew the plans, and how the performance was supposed to go, but could I keep the audience locked in and make it all the way to the end? I knew that the compiled stories were my own, and the process of writing and conceptualizing the script was empowering that instilled in me an ownership that was not there before this moment. The possibility for resistance or hostility from an audience adds a level of uncertainty to the performance. My intentions for *That's so Gay!* were to diffuse the assumed neutrality of heterosexuality, which, for many, is still a moral and ethical issue. The urgency of building a relationship with the audience that embraced me and the performance was constantly mediated by my intent and impact. This would be the point where the audiences could be receptive and decide to engage or shut down. The intent and impact dynamic is vital to performance, and because I was center stage, from my vantage point, everything became contingent on a successful execution.

Peggy Phelan (2004) explains that “live performance might illuminate the mutual and repeated attempt to grasp, if not fully apprehend, consciousness as simultaneously intensely personal and immensely vast and impersonal” (p. 574). What connections were the audiences making while they were watching my coming out stories, which explored varying degrees of acceptance from different people in my life? My stories recounted violence, and there was lots of parody and play with hate speech, was this going to be adequate enough to balance the intensely personal and immensely vast and impersonal? I wanted the audience to think about the ways my experiences were different or similar to their own. I hoped people in the audience recounted their own experiences if they were in similar situations.

Nicole Krauss explains that “empathy is the capacity to participate in, or vicariously experience, another’s feelings. In order to do that, you need to draw on the memory of having experienced something similar” (p. 42). My stories were real, I was retelling them with fervor, and I wanted the audience to participate in that. I wrote a piece that was emotional, which meant that, as a performer, I had to work hard at being emotionally open. After the run of the show I found that the more emotionally open I was, the more the audience and I fed each other. We were anchored to one another.

For me each performance became a delicate dance of performing and constantly reading the audiences reactions to everything which was complex because not only was the audience reacting to my performance, but so was I. Phelan picks up this sentiment when she explains that “performance remains a compelling art because it contains the possibility of both the actor and the spectator becoming transformed during the event’s

unfolding” (p.575). The transformation is subtle and obvious at the same time, subtle enough to keep the performance going, and obvious because the audience and I were constantly reacting to each other, laughing at jokes, gasping, even crying.

This was unforeseen and incredible. There were particular moments that I was pulled to places that I had not expected to go. Phelan reemphasizes the importance of performance “this is precisely where the liveness of performance art matters. The possibility of mutual transformation of both the observer and the performer within the enactment of the live event is extraordinarily important, because this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical” (p. 575). For example, recounting my football experiences was compelling and ran deeper each night. It felt like an old wound that had healed over so long ago was ripped open and cleaned out in front of everyone. The process of repeatedly and publicly conjuring these feelings to recreate those moments was powerful, beyond words. The audience shared in that, there was an exchange and I could feel the impact of each story.

Was I able to bring the audiences into my experiences and prompt them to think critically beyond the boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality? Were moments of excess and parody enough to prompt the audience to deconstruct their own notions of this Croatian gay man? I know how I was feeling, and how performing these stories impacted me, which was deeply. I was most impressed with the fact that I was performing all these stories from different moments from my past, and yet, those memories were so alive in the present. The audiences gave those moments life in a way that casually telling them outside performance never could or did. I was able to feel the audience in a way that

cannot be explained, it was not logical, or even emotional, it was deeper than that. The laughter from the jocular moments that broke up the more serious ones became permission to take it further. I understood that if the audiences were willing to go there with me then I could keep engaging them, like when I exploited derogatory words that I have been called. I put an eye patch over my eye and asked everyone, “what’s a butt pirate?” I was aware of the possibility that some people from the audience could have used that term and here I am sabotaging that phrase in parody, even though it might not have been seen that way. I thought that if the audience is willing to go with me to the funny moments, even though the butt pirate joke came from a place previously of deep shame, they could trust me to go to the deeper more painful moments. Intuitively, this made sense for me, when I was in the moment I found my assumption to be true.

There were four performances in total and each one had its own texture, its own rhythm and pace, because as much as they were of the same script, they existed in particular moments separate from one another. I was also tethered to different audiences each with its own set of dynamics. From night to night different people from my life were scattered among the crowd, ranging from family, friends, even some characters that appeared in the script to students and faculty.

I was transformed by this experience and was able to take away a new perspective about healing, constructing thoughtful and subversive humor, connecting to people through shared struggle, and how to tell stories with a purpose. I believe Krauss’ thoughts on empathy were extremely helpful in keeping my purpose evident, to create an experience that people can relate to and begin breaking down or prompting and

examination into their own life. This performance was an experience for audiences to participate and experience my feelings. The responsibility of executing such a piece is awesome, which I take very seriously.

Weeks after the performance I am still presented with personal accounts of the impact some audience members have had. It might be someone who does not use “That’s so gay!” anymore, or someone who asked another not to use it. These are huge victories and I am in awe that I was able to facilitate that. I have also been told about a few life-changing experiences of students that have come out to their parents or friends since seeing it. This is evocative and awe-inspiring, but it makes those moments of working to build a relationship with the audiences during the performance absolutely necessary. Through performing *That’s so Gay!* I realized that I only scratched the surface of performance. This was one of the most empowering things I have ever done and shows how performance is a live experience and how it is vital because of the possibilities for change.

VI. *Script**That's So Gay!*

Good evening, my name is Kristo Gobin, and welcome to *That's So Gay!* The following performance is about me, my coming out, and how everyone I know dealt with it. I invite you to laugh, and enjoy yourselves.

Moja Familia

[Step in]

Picture it!

Clanking plates

the chime of silverware

platters of lamb

salads, pastas,

forty people yelling over each other, Croatian and English woven together in one conversation that can be heard from the street.

Welcome to my Croatian family.

This is the scene whenever my family gets together to celebrate a holiday, birthday, graduation, anniversary, whatever.

My very loud family even has their very own loud greeting whenever the doorbell rings everyone stops

the doors swing open and the whole room erupts in one big

“Heyyy!” [gesture left arm goes up]

They are swallowed up and there is all this hugging and kissing.

During these events

the grown ups usually eat in one room

and the “kids” in another.

At twenty seven

I still sit at the kids table

which is okay with me because that’s just the way it is.

I can recall so many meals with all of my cousins,

feasting on the good Croatian food

all our Mothers and Fathers spent days preparing,

and just

as everything seemed at peace

someone would say it.

“Hey Thomas did you see the Croatia game last week?”

“Yeah I can’t believe we lost, that’s so (fucken) gay!”

[Music cue, hang pink hat on clothesline sit down on stage]

Hollywood Screen Kiss

One time

I went to the movies with some of my cousins,

we watched that Adam Sandler movie *Big Daddy*.
 I remember sitting
 there all of us in one row
 feet up on the vacant seats in front of us.
 It was a funny movie,
 the audience constantly erupting in laughter.
 Then there was a scene where two male characters kiss,
 the audience reacts by heckling and booing.
 [That's gross, ewww, Oh my God that's disgusting, that's go gay!]
 I looked down the row and saw that my cousins were apart of this.
 I grabbed my armrest as tight as the shame grabbed my heart.
 I sank down in my chair.
 When we were walking out of the theater [stand up]
 there were too many comments
 about how disgusting that was.
 As one cousin so eloquently put it-
 "Two guys kissing, man, that's so gay!"
 [Music cue, pick up sash and hang on clothesline]

Wrong Turn

I was born and raised in Los Angeles,
 when I got my drivers license it became my duty to show any visiting family around.
 I was the family tour guide,
 you know
 take them to the Beverly Hills,
 show them the Hollywood sign,
 spend an entire day at a certain theme park
 nestled way out of the way in Orange County.
 I remember one particular trip with my cousins who were visiting from Canada.
 We were on our way to the beach,
 first time for all of them,
 very exciting.
 I was showing them all LA has to offer,
 the traffic,
 the smog,
 road rage.
 We were on Rodeo Drive
 and headed towards UCLA.
 I'm not exactly sure how this happened.
 My blue corolla
 turned onto Santa Monica Boulevard
 right in the middle of West Hollywood,
 LA's Castro.
 Lots of same sex couples

window shopping,
 holding hands,
 huge billboards of shirtless men
 with low body fat
 decorated the tops of buildings,
 rainbow flags
 lazily waved in the ocean breeze.
 My cousins
 they didn't appreciate the detour.
"Whoa this is so fucken gay!
Look at this,
fags everywhere!
Do you see this? Eh?"
 We hit every light on the way down that street.
 My cousin turned to me,
"Dude, this is so gay!"

Vernacular

According
 to a survey
 by the National Association for Mental Health (2001)
 the average American high school student hears
 "That's so gay!"
 or other homophobic epithets
 an average of 26 times a day.
 I did,
 sometimes I still do,
 even being up here in the bay area.

[Transition]

Croatian American vs. Croatians living in America

My parents
 came here in the 1970's.
 You know
 the American Dream and such,
 but mainly they came to escape persecution from the communists in Yugoslavia.
 They met in high school
 in San Pedro
 a Croatian enclave of Los Angeles.
 They married young
 and had three children, me, my sister, then our brother.
 Three Croatian American kids
 raised by two Croatians living in America

that would have made some great reality TV,
 let me tell you.
 Growing up in my family,
 there was a lot of emphasis
 on being a “good boy,”
 which essentially
 just meant
 go to school
 and get good grades. [phase into Dad’s accent]
 A boy should also play sports,
 and be good at sports.
 Girls should,
 clean the house,
 and learn to cook,
 good.
 When you get older
 go to a good college,
 get a good job,
 make good money,
 marry someone good,
 live in a good house,
 and have lots of good kids.
 Just be good.

Roasting a Lamb

One of the great things my family were *feštas*.
 The whole family comes over,
 music, food, it’s a holiday.
 I was nine years old, in the 3rd grade.
 My family had just moved from San Pedro
 where many other Croatian families lived,
 to Palmdale
 where we were the only Croatian family.
 Palmdale was strange because we moved from this tiny apartment to the suburbs,
 but they weren’t really the suburbs, the tree lined streets and manicured lawns were
 surrounded by desert.
 Instantly I knew something was different, it was us, we were different.
 So my parents threw this *fešta* for moving into our new house.
 A priest came to bless the house,
 and forty or fifty relatives and friends came over for some lamb.
 Well the way this works is the day of the *fešta* my Dad gets up early
 goes to a slaughter house,
 picks out a lamb,
 and brings the carcass back home.

So the kids in the neighborhood
 were already reluctant to come over
 because my parents were blasting weird music
 and had these thick accents,
 we all have these weird names.
 He hung the lamb from the tree in front of our house!
 The kids on our block
 left their Saturday morning cartoons
 and gathered across the street
 silently
 and just watched.
 Some kids
 even went to other neighborhoods
 to get more kids to gawk.
 A little audience formed by the time
 my Dad and Uncles came out with big knives to finish prepping the lamb.
 My Dad looks across the street to all the kids and in a loud bellowing voice
*"Ve are having parrrty,
 you come later for parrrty,
 we have lots of food!"*
 All the kids scattered like roaches
 and
 from then on
 we're the kids who ate dogs
 because we weren't weird enough.
 At school kids talked about it, they said we were weird because we killed animals in our
 backyard and hung them in front of our house, and then ate them.
 They didn't understand, and because of that we were mercilessly teased.
 "You are so disgusting, you had like five dogs hanging from the tree in your front yard.
 We saw it, there was blood all over your lawn. That is so gross, I can't believe you do
 animal sacrifices and eat raw animals. How come you don't eat peanut butter and jelly
 sandwiches like normal people. You eat such weird food. Our neighbors dog went
 missing I bet your family took it and ate it!" [Emphasis]

Dinner

Dinner time
 was family time,
 sacred time.
 We didn't answer the phone,
 the door,
 no TV,
 just the five of us.
 It was during meals that we would process the day,
 check in,

get lectured, whatever.
 Mainly this was the time set aside to make sure we were fed.
 At a Croatian table the first serving is just the appetizer,
 just the warm up;
 seconds are polite,
 thirds are a must,
 and fourths means you're being a good girl or boy.
 My parents are very blunt people,
 and it is so cute because they try to use English colloquiums that don't always work.
 "There are starving people in Croatia who would kill you to have food like this,
 and you waste it,
sram te bilo [shame on you]."
 You didn't get up until your plate was clean.
 There were the times Mom looked me up and down
 and said
 "you're getting fat" while she scooped another helping on my plate.
 Or when I would loose any weight she would say
*"You look so good,
 you used to be so fat.
 Didn't he used to be so fat?
 You look so good,
 now go eat something."*
 One time
 I got in trouble for talking in class,
 my teacher sent a note home.
 I told my Dad I was talking because everyone else was.
 He looked at me and with the most serious grimace said
*"I don't care if everyone else got up and started dancing,
 or playing football,
 if all of your friends were going to buy a bridge would you?
 You are going to school to be good,
 so be good!"*

[Transition]

Passive vs. Active Ignorance

Sometimes the best answer I can give is I don't know.
 I just don't know.
 Oddly this can bring me such a sense of calm.
 I realized many of us
 don't know a lot of things.
 For example I have the following conversation about once a month
"Umm excuse me is that the K Swiss symbol?" [pointing to the crest hanging from my
 neck]

“No, actually it is the Croatian flag.”

“Oh-

What’s that?”

“Croatia?

It’s a country,

it’s where I’m from?”

“Oh-

where’s that?”

“Croatia it’s between Italy and Bosnia,

there was a pretty big war there a few years ago,

all over the news.”

“Oh-

I thought it was the K Swiss symbol.

Oh!

Isn’t that really hot doctor on ER from Croatia?”

I don’t get offended or mad,

I don’t mind answering questions at all.

What I realized about this particular interaction was that these individuals genuinely do not know.

They are ignorant.

Either they have never been told,

or it’s never come up,

and they really just don’t know.

For this I offer the ignorance dichotomy.

Passive ignorance is when you just don’t know something.

And I am going to make a very bold claim,

if you do not know something

it is not your fault.

You have just never come into that particular state of knowing.

The other side,

is active ignorance.

“That’s so retarded!”

We are actively being ignorant when we say that.

That saying is hurtful

offensive,

and comes from a place of privilege.

We all know we shouldn’t say it.

But we are ignoring our better sense

and acting out our ignorance.

We must think about the things we do not know about.

The fact is we have blinders on,

we don’t know everything but we are supposed to pretend we do.

It can be seen as weak to admit that you don’t know something,

and that is just stupid.

It is our job to find out what we do not know
to confront our ignorance,
interrupt information shortcuts with knowledge.

[Transition]

The sex/gender/sexuality/sexual performance structure.

Male/Female

How did I know that being gay was not okay?

I want to take the time to explore some of the norms of sex/gender/sexuality/sexual performance.

Each section is unique and there is a difference between all four sections, but they are interrelated and shape each other.

First we have sex or the biological differences between male/female.

This category sets everything up,
it is the starting point for all of this.

The male/female binary of sex is concerned with biology,
genitalia,
chromosomes,
hormones.

Are you a dangler, or not?

Then there are phenotypes or characteristics associated with each sex thought to be factual, men have lower voices, are stronger, biologically think more logically.

Women have higher voices, are physically weaker than men, and think more analytically.

Some think this divide is based in "scientific" fact,
all sorts of beliefs have been concocted.

All men want to spread their seed and are by nature more promiscuous.

Women are naturally more nurturing than men because they bear children.

For this structure sex is the starting point for everything else.

There are differences and that shouldn't be ignored,
but to say that were so fundamentally different from one another,
makes us ignore our commonalities.

Masculine/Feminine

For gender we use different terms,
it is no longer female or male,
it is feminine and masculine.

Here we take characteristics belonging to each sex and formulate rules about how men and women should be treated.

Most babies born with a penis are wrapped in a blue blanket,
babies born with a vagina get a pink one.

Thus the colors pink and blue become gendered.

Not only do we have rules about how we should be treated
but there are also rules about how we should perform our sex.

For instance

if you have a penis it is not that great of an idea to cry.

If you have a penis and you cry, that makes you weak.

Crying has been designated as feminine,
we completely overlook the fact that men have tear ducts
that work, and crying is a biological function of the body.

"Suck it up, be a man, be a big boy, I'll give you something to cry about!"

The prevailing assumption is that men should not be weak,
and one is weak when acting feminine.

Some boys are even hit to stop them from crying, the femininity is beat out of them.

This is dangerous,
very dangerous.

If gender is a performance do I deviate from the script when I wear this? [take pink
beanie from clothes line and put it on]

I have a penis and I'm wearing a pink hat.

This isn't allowed.

Men should not wear pink.

How about if I alter the Croatian Heyyy! and "feminize" it, Heyyy! [in a higher pitch]

People will certainly react differently depending on which way I do it.

Gender is a performance

and there are all these rules or acceptable performance to ensure that men stay masculine
and women feminine.

When I was kid I wasn't allowed to wear Chap Stick.

My Dad thought it was inappropriate

because it was too close to wearing lipstick,

and why would his son want to wear lipstick?

Wearing Chap Stick does not a good boy make,

so I was the kid with chapped lips.

Breach gender norms and there is a good chance you will be sanctioned,
especially when you are a child.

One of the most utilized ways of regulating and sanctioning appropriate performance is
linking someone's gender performance to their sexuality.

Heterosexual/Not Heterosexual

Sexuality is who one is attracted to.

Are you attracted to men, to women, or both?

Sexuality or sexual orientation is not about having a penis or wearing a pink beanie,
waving your hands around while you talk,
or having a high voice.

It is predicated on the object of one's affection.

What we are concerned with here is desire.

Not anatomy or biochemistry.

Not whether someone is performing ascribed masculine or feminine traits.

The thing is we often use gender performance as an indicator for sexual orientation,
when the two really have nothing to do with each other.

Men must be masculine, and heterosexual.

One of the strictest codes of masculinity is to avoid being perceived as feminine,
because then you are weak, which in itself is already bad but worse when feminine is
read as gay.

Gender performance does not dictate sexuality,

because gays and lesbians are spread across the gender spectrum,

you have lesbians that are very masculine and feminine in their gender performance.

In addition, you have heterosexuals who vary in their gender performance just the same.

There is also an actual performance competent.

I know when to "butch" it up,

and I know when I don't have to be so rigid in my performance.

Last semester I was walking across campus there were those Marines set up asking
people to do pull ups, when one of them asked me,

*"Are you interested in joining the fight for your country? Ever consider becoming a
Marine?"* [slightly exaggerated, stiff movements, deep tone, salute]

Without missing a beat, "Oh my gosh! I can't join the army, that's crazy!" [exaggerated
"femininity," high voice, hand movements]

"Sir we're the Marines."

"Is that different?"

They were not amused, and I walked away very quickly.

When I knew I was gay.

I was in the 8th grade the first time I became acquainted with my own feelings regarding
attraction.

It was a frigid November morning,

it was so cold our lawn was frozen.

I don't know why but I was really early to school that day,

hardly anyone was around,

it might have been the cold,

I'm not sure.

I had math 1st period and my teacher was really ill and just took leave,

our class had a series of substitutes

each more crazy then the one before.

The door was propped open and all the lights were on but the room was empty.

I took my seat and doodled on the brown paper bag protecting my textbook.

When I saw him it felt like my breath got knocked out of me. [posture changes 14 years old, arms elongate, chest becomes concave, nervous, twitchy]

Hundreds of butterflies awoke in my belly and flapped frenetically.

My palms got all sweaty and it became very, very warm.

I couldn't stop looking at him.

I couldn't stop fidgeting and shifting in my seat.

Adrenaline swirled through me, a rush like I was sprinting.

Everything tingled.

It was our new teacher, Mr. Grundhoffer.

I had seen some of the boys in my class act the same way-except they were looking at girls.

WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON!

Why was this happening to me?

What did I do for this to happen?

Is this what it feels like when you like someone?

Then I had the scariest thought, what if I liked him?

Mr. Grundhoffer is a boy!!!

I panicked.

I didn't understand what was happening,

where did these feelings come from?

Inside my twelve year old head flowed a series of disjointed chaotic thoughts about the nature of this attraction.

I did not know what was going on

but I knew I had to keep it to myself.

Nobody talked about stuff like this,

at least nobody I knew.

What I had just experienced left me exhilarated,

but I knew I wasn't supposed to take pleasure in it.

I felt terrible for wanting to enjoy it.

This marks the beginning of a burden I was too young to carry,

incessantly I thought about eliminating these horrible feelings.

This was the moment when I realized what attraction was,

but it would be years before I understood who I was because of this attraction.

Was this gay?

Was this what a gay person is?

What is a gay person?

Am I a gay person?

When is it okay not to be heterosexual?

It has been my experience that who I am generally attracted to is usually met with disgust by the majority of society.

So I have to ask is it ever okay to not be heterosexual?

Surprisingly the answer is yes!

Within the sex/gender/sexuality binaries there are a few occasions where homosexuality is not only accepted but revered.

One example is when two skinny, often hairless, fem, glamorous, women are doing it.

And by “doing it” I mean having sex.

This is actually homosexuality, but often it is eroticized as entertainment.

I can recall a scene from the film *American Pie 2*, which captures exactly what I am talking about.

Two women meeting the previous description dupe two guys into kissing, so that the guys can watch them kiss.

When I watched *Big Daddy* the theater erupted in disgust.

Same sex affection between men in films is often a point of humorous tension, a ploy to make audiences uncomfortable by exaggerating and making it funny.

Not the same when it’s two women.

Top/Bottom

Even our sexual performance is gendered.

Men have to be masculine, heterosexual tops.

Women have to be feminine,

there are exceptions made for sexuality and women should be bottoms.

To use a sports metaphor this is often referred to pitching and catching.

Even the way we discuss sex is gendered.

I have been asked, “*With two guys...well which one of you is the girl?*”

The underlying assumption is that there has to be a top, and that the top is male, masculine,

heterosexual.

The bottom is female and feminine.

I always respond, “there is no woman, that’s what being gay kinda means.”

I have also heard

“If two lesbians have sex and there is no penetration with a penis then aren’t they virgins?”

Two women are hot,

two men are disgusting.

[pull out a black eye patch from back pocket and put it on, make a hook with hand]

What the hell is a butt pirate?

I know I don’t walk around saying Arrrrrh, I want some booty!

A huge myth regarding sexual performance is that only gay men have anal sex.

For some men anal sex with a woman is actually quite a significant conquest.

It is interesting how it the same act can be constructed in such opposite ways, because there are all these gendered rules about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate.

Straight guy demonstration, the fear of contamination.

For the following demonstration I would like invite an actual heterosexual male to join me up on the stage.

Introduction of person, give name. [place a sash with heterosexual/straight written in silver glitter]

I have just a few questions before we get started.

You are straight?

How long have you been straight?

How straight would you say you are?

Are you content being a heterosexual?

Are you still straight?

[grab hand]

Are you still straight?

[hold hand, hold moment]

Are you still straight?

[hug]

Are you still straight?

[Thank and applaud the volunteer]

The fear of contamination is both pervasive and ridiculous, it is important because it shows us how afraid, how homophobic we are. This fear keeps men from exploring deeper relationships with other men. If you are straight, you are straight.

And getting close to another guy is not going to undo that.

You don't have to sit at the movies with a seat between you.

It is okay to engage in activities that don't involve sitting shoulder to shoulder, like playing video games, or watching sports.

It is okay to enjoy a meal that doesn't always have to include some sort of seared animal flesh.

Because really you know you are gay when you find yourself in the following situation.

I recently had a huge ah-ha moment,

I was out at a club dancing when it hit me,

this is really the gays-est thing ever.

I know there is a lot of phobia about being perceived as gay and I hope that this helps curb some of that,

because you are not gay until you are dancing in a sea of shirtless men to the techno remix of *Don Cha Wish Your Girlfriend Was Hot Like Me!* can also be the techno remix of Whitney Houston's *I'm every Woman*.

Because the less contact you have with a group, the more reliant you are on secondhand often distorted information about them.

The less contact you have with gays,
 lesbians,
 bisexual,
 and trans folks
 the more dependent you are on the knowledge provided by episodes of *Will & Grace*,
 where the main character is a heterosexual man!
Queer as Folk,
The Real World,
 or even worse the news.
 Your own ideas of who LGBT people are becomes contingent on secondhand
 information,
 third hand information,
 biased information.
 We also allow other people
 with low or no contact to become assumed experts.
 My parents,
 the kids in my school,
 teachers,
 all told me about gay people.
 I thought I knew everything there was to know.
 The message was loud and clear.
 Stay away from them because you might become like them, and that would be very bad.

Synthesis of the pillars that define social norms

So there is sex/gender/sexuality/sexual performance.
 There is a difference between each one and yet they are all dependent on one another.
 Today as it stands we all have the need for men to be masculine, heterosexual, and a top.
 We need women to be feminine, not heterosexual (in certain circumstances it is revered),
 and bottoms.
 Our entire social structure is dependent on this.
 We, the collective, celebrate and are harshly sanctioned when not properly upheld.
 We force ourselves into these binaries; we force others to fit into these binaries.
 This structure actively shapes all of our lives.

[Transition-Put on jersey and move block on to the center of stage]

Marked Early

This is a memory I had about the first grade.
 It was so long ago and I can only remember bits and pieces, little details.
 It always upsets my Mom when I bring it up.
 My teacher Mrs. Fitzgerald called my Mom to discuss some important observations she
 had about my development.
 [Very stern mechanical conversation-sit]
"He's playing only with the other little girls from the class.

*He never plays sports with the boys,
 he never plays with boys.
 He plays four square,
 and hopscotch,
 and jumps rope with the girls.
 He's very sensitive,
 he cries when he's upset.
 I feel like it is my place to tell you because of the things I have seen I think this child is
 going to grow up gay.
 Mrs. Gobin you need to intervene now."*

The next year I was enrolled in soccer.
 I hated soccer, my coaches made me play the most useless position.
 I don't even know which one it was,
 but I know there was a lot of standing around.
 Then one time I got stung by a bee.
 Drama!

[Put on football jersey from clothesline, and place block on stage]

I got "worse"

When I was a sophomore in high school the decision was made that I would play
 football.
 In my family sports and boys were two things that naturally went together.
 All the men in my family were athletic and played all sorts of sports.
 Because I was chunky football seemed like a great fit.

"You are going to play futball, that vill toughen you up!"
"I don't know how to play football."
*"That doesn't matter, you vill learrn,
 there are coaches who vill explain everything!"*
"I don't want to play football."
*"Oh yes, you vill play futball, this will be good!
 You vil listen to your father and be a good boy!"*

I joined the football team and became a bulldog.
 Because everything was so new to me,
 I had no idea what to expect so I stayed pretty quiet and kept to myself.
 The last thing I wanted to do was draw attention to myself and be discovered for the
 poser I was.
 I had no idea what was going on,
 there was all this running around and grunting,
 pushing people or "tackling."
 It took me an hour just to get my gear on for the first time,

but I survived my first practice unscathed.
 My parents wanted to know all about it,
 I just wanted to go to bed.
 I thought if it goes like this I could handle it for six months,
 it's gonna be difficult but what choice did I have?
 The next day the coaches handed out our practice jerseys.
 For some reason I was at the end of the line and they ran out of white and gold ones.
 I was given a varsity cardinal one.
 You could always find me, I was the only purple dot on the field.
 About half way through the second day of practice something happened.
 I was waiting in line for the water fountain and when it was my turn someone pushed me
 out of the way and muttered "*move faggot!*" [Big movement, yell, angry, mean!]
 [Beat]
 I didn't know what to do.
 It was in that moment everything changed.
 That guy told his friends then they started to do it.
 Before the end of the first week half the team was calling me a faggot.
 Sometimes before practice when we were waiting for the coaches to come out,
 some of the guys would surround me and do fag chants.
 They would yell and scream and exaggerate feminine gestures.
 A few weeks later the verbal violence became physical.
 During tackling drills some of the guys would throw me to the ground,
 flip up my chest pads and start wailing on my ribs, on my heart.
 I got beat up quite a bit, they wanted to get their licks in.
 I tried everything to keep any attention off of me, but that dam purple jersey.
 I moved my locker to the other side of the locker room.
 It was broken into and my uniform and pads were stolen.
 On an away game I had to sit on the floor of the bus because no one wanted to sit next to
 the team fag.
 It wasn't the whole team, there was this one particular group of guys that made things
 very difficult for me.
 And they would go after anyone who showed any empathy for me, which kept me
 isolated from everyone.
 People ask me, why didn't you do anything?
 I was so scared.
 I was really alone, and I didn't believe I was strong enough to fight back.
 There were just too many of them.
 My life became a real life game of smear the queer.

My bruises would fade it was the words, the words they said that stuck with me the most.
 The words they called me made me fear them. [White t-shirt revealed with FAG written
 in big black lettering across the front. Stop let the audience take in the words. Stand up
 there silent for a few beats and just face them, facing the words.]

I was these words.
 This is what being gay meant to me.
 For me it meant you are disgusting,
 dirty,
 you will die of AIDS.
 I was not allowed to be a man.
 I was not a person worthy of love,
 respect,
 or dignity.
 This is what being gay was for me.
 These words were spit at me with such hate and I wore them all the time.
 They were always just under the surface.

Look at them.
 How hateful they are. [read the words]
 They all have a kind of link or fixation on the masculine feminine dichotomy.
 All the words associated to the feminine are deprecating, hateful, misogynistic.
 Pussy for instance is a derogatory term for a vagina.
 This insult is often shared between people to show that they are weak, or feminine.
"Man, you're such a pussy!"
 When the guys on the football team would call me that I would get so confused.
 Did they want me to show them I didn't have one?
 Isn't it gay if I show them my penis?
 There is something wrong with that.
 The vagina where life greets the world,
 but you wouldn't think that by the way that word is used.

As for football, I finished the year.
 I remember thinking about how fortunate it would be to "accidentally" break a bone so I
 would have to stop playing, but I never had the guts to throw myself down a flight of
 stairs, no matter how tempting.
 Our last game couldn't come faster.
 I endured six whole months covered in bruises,
 practicing daily how to hate myself.
 Those were the days I didn't say much.
 The following summer my parents sent me to Croatia.
 The war was over and it was safe.
 About a week before I was to come home, my Mom told me the coaches called to see if
 when I would be back for practice.
 I told her I wasn't playing football, and if they insisted I wasn't getting on the plane.
 [Pause]
 I joined the yearbook staff instead.

Going away to college-

When high school was over I moved away for college.
I went fifty miles away to Cal State Northridge and moved right into the residence halls.
It was my first time away from home and I was terrified.
My first night there I went to a dinner the resident advisor put on for the floor.
Everyone brought a vegetable we threw it a pot,
a real life stone soup party.
I brought an onion.
The room was filled with all these students from all over meeting and greeting.
I was sitting in a chair with my feet up on this stool and across from me was this guy,
Charles.
I remember Charles from freshman orientation,
he led a discussion on resources at CSUN, he kinda scared me.
Mainly because he was out, proud and loud.
At the dinner he was talking about the lacking LGBT resources on campus.
I sat there astonished,
he was talking about being gay,
to everybody!
I was still, very quiet.
I didn't observe for long because he started to ask me questions.
A lump the size of an orange formed in my throat and I started fumbling over my words.
I was afraid.
I was afraid that he was talking to me because he thought I was gay.
I was afraid he was going to ask me if I was gay.
Mostly I was afraid he was going to be able to tell that I was gay.
I had no idea,
and it was because of all this stuff I heard about gay-dar.
I thought gay-dar was when gay people were able to tell for sure.
All those feelings were so deep inside and that is where I wanted them to stay.
He was polite and friendly,
even a little flirty,
and I just sat there like a little gay deer caught in a strobe light.
A few people interrupted our dyad,
I was a bit relieved, but not by much.
Then something happened,
as a joke in front of everybody,
Charles grabbed my shoelace gave it a yank breaking the bow.
To say I freaked out is an understatement.
I got up,
flustered,
and excused myself.
A gay person just touched me!
I ran out of there as fast as I could,
without any stone soup.
I went to my room and just sat.

It wasn't until much later that I understood that was homophobia.
 I was afraid of him because he was gay.
 I was more afraid that I was gay.
 A few days later my RA followed up with me,
 I made up some excuse I don't even remember what.
 We both knew I was lying.
 The point I'm trying to make is that in order for me to get to a place of self acceptance I
 had to overcome my own homophobia.
 There you have it gay people are homophobic too,
 who would have thought?
 And I was homophobic.
 I was scared of gay people.

My own internalized homophobia came out in other interesting ways.
 Going to a book store was so stressful for me because I wanted to find books about this
 but I was so afraid to go near the LGBT Studies section.
 Can someone please explain to me why the aisle for LGBT Studies is right next to the
 aisle for books about religion?
 Right there!
 I would cross myself and scurry by catching only parts of book titles.
 I was scared that if people saw me standing in front of "those" books
 they would assume I was gay, or worse someone I know might find me standing in front
 of them.
 The thought of others thinking that about me frightened me,
 a rather sinister and shameful effect of homophobia.
 After a few weeks of doing that,
 I moved to swiping a book and going to the aisle for automotive care
 and I'd quickly shuffle through the pages.

Out of order

Existing heterosexual identity

Examining my deteriorating heterosexual identity became my full time job.
 I pretty much knew I was gay when that whole I met Mr. Grundhoffer, because it didn't
 stop with him.
 I'm a gay guy named Kristo.
 I'm a gay guy named after Christ, the blasphemous irony. [look up and cross myself]
 Imagine what that would do to a little Catholic kid to be gay and share the same name as
 Jesus.
 For me gay was still this word. [put hand on FAG written across chest]
 When I looked in the mirror I was so ashamed, so sad, because I didn't want this.
 If I were gay that would mean that everything negative I ever heard about gays would be
 true for me.
 If I were gay then I couldn't get married.
 I couldn't have a family.

I could never be normal,
or have a normal life.

Developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status

I didn't understand that being gay was apart of my identity until much later.

That it just is, like being left handed.

People often ask me do I think if being lesbian, or gay is genetic, or is it the environment.
I don't know.

What I do know is that I am, I didn't ask for it, I didn't choose it, I just am.

I also know that there have been folks with same sex attraction dating all the way back in the day.

I also know that straight people are the number one producers of LGBT people.

I mean I have a brother and a sister, we all grew up in the same house and I'm the only gay one.

It took being in college for a few years to understand that this is just a part of who I am.
Years of struggle and work to understand parts of this.

I contemplated every possible scenario, should I just keep it a secret?

Never tell anyone, marry someone and just pretend?

I decided that would the worst possible thing for me to do.

Also at this time I hated myself.

I was so unhappy and miserable because I thought there was something fundamentally wrong with me.

I thought I was defective, broken.

I used to wish it away, with everything I had.

Many years of that made me such a pitiful person.

I wish I could say there was a moment or something that turned everything around, there wasn't.

I just couldn't be that person anymore.

The end of my first year at CSUN,

I remember when I said the words "I'm gay."

Even though they were just in a faint breathy whisper,
they are the loudest words uttered in my life,

because that was the moment when I decided to deal with who I am.

This is actually when the real work began.

What did it mean for me to be gay, now that I was finally able to take ownership of my own identity?

This is how superficial my thinking was at the time.

Did that mean I had to do what other gays did?

Did I have to dress like them,

talk like them,

like the same things like music, or tv shows.

I was still calling them, them!

I had no idea.

And it sounds so silly but I didn't know what was expected of me,
and it was so limiting because this is the kind of thing everyone has an opinion about.
Did I not like sports because I was gay,
or because I just didn't like them?

My second year at CSUN I made a few friends and I got involved.
I went to a student conference,
It was actually here at SJSU,
I went to a few sessions LGBT issues. I wasn't out, in fact I was so paranoid that
someone from my school was going to see me there.
I was ridiculous.
By the end of my second year I was ready to start telling people.
So I started with my parents!

[Rearrange shirts on clothes line]

Becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring

It was two day's before Mother's Day.
Imagine how thrilled my Croatian Catholic mother and father were.
I was at school when my Mom called me at work, I was an office assistant in the housing
office.
*"You know you have been really upset lately,
I worry about you and if I ask you something vill you answer me?"*
"Yes."
*"It's something I have wanted to ask you for some time.
Are you gay?"*
The words just hung in the air.
I knew I had to tell her right then.
Tears streamed down my face and I cranked out a squeaky "Yes."
"Come home immediately."

I went home as instructed, by the time I got there she told my sister and my Dad.
For a while it was silent, except when my Mom would look up and cross herself.
Ime meni Isuse Bože sa ćuvi! [Oh my, God watch over us.]
My Dad sat with his fists clenched, throwing his hands up every so often.
"You need to go see and talk to a priest."
Because that's gonna help!
I was sitting on the steps of the wave runner/jet ski they stored in there.
I felt so exposed,
for the first time ever I felt real, because they were looking at me,
the real me.

The conversation was scattered, my Mom paced around the room shooting random
questions at me. *"How long have you known! Who else knows! Why?"*

My Dad sat in a chair and occasionally have these little outbursts, *"This cannot be, this is disgusting! How do you know, have you tried both?"*

Every one in a while my sister would chime in with a *"It's not that big of a deal."* To which both my parents pretended to ignore.

My parents live in Palmdale, in the desert, and I was sitting on a jet ski. In that moment that is all I could think about. That is exactly how I have felt about most of my life. It was unbelievable because I brought their world crumbling down, and yet for the first time in my life I felt like I was able to breath easier. In a single act I allowed myself to be honest about the one thing I never thought I could. But I did it. Their reactions made me feel horrible, but this was something deeper, because I wasn't being suffocated anymore and I wasn't focused on hiding it. And that is the truth of that moment that two such oppositional forces could exist at the same time.

Journal Entry

I was rummaging through some old journals, I found the entry that followed this conversation. [pull out folded paper from back pocket]

Dated 5-8-98 9:03 pm

Well I did it, I told Mom and Dad that I have always been attracted to guys. They hate me. I can feel it. They were so mean and vicious, verbally, that is. They called me sick, not normal, disgusting. Man I felt like all those bad kids made me feel when all that stuff in High School went down. I am not to tell Baba, or the rest of the family. I can't even tell Luka (my little brother) they are afraid I am gonna influence him. I mean they really don't want this to get out, I really embarrassed and shamed them. I really did. I didn't mean to. Why am I so horribly disgusting to these people? Am I really this horrible? Am I a different person now that they know? It feels like now I'm just gay Kristo. My Mom dropped her head in her hands, she just blurt out whatever came to her head, *"my son doing those disgusting things!"* My Dad asked me *"why do you want what you already have?"* I left myself open, all of me. I became less then human. I definitely wasn't their son, the one they knew. Dad cried, Mom is destroyed, did I make the wrong decision?

Afterwards

After I told my parent's things were pretty bad. There was cooling period of about six months, I was still away at college and it was clear that I wasn't exactly welcome around anymore. For almost six months we hardly spoke.

My family completely shut down,
 everything was a mess.
 I was pretty much cut out, while my parents digested the news.

We didn't discuss it.
 It was never mentioned.
 It is one thing for me to go through this and take ownership and grant myself the
 permission to be who I am,
 and more so love who I am.
 It is a whole different thing to ask this of others,
 particularly a collectivistic family like mine.
 My parents didn't ask for this.
 They had a son, and had a vision for who and what I should be.
 I know part of that vision never included me being gay.
 I know they don't want their son to be gay.
 And that is not fair,
 because who I am is not who they want me or need me to be.
 I know they want my brother, sister, and me to get married,
 and because I'm gay I altered the vision they had for their-for our lives.
 Their oldest son's wedding will not happen the way they imagined.
 They won't have two daughters in law and a son in law.
 They could very well have two sons in law and a daughter in law.
 They have to mourn that.
 They have to work at accepting that.
 Their plans and view of the life they thought they would have has permanently been
 altered.
 They struggle clawing just grasp for the least bit of understanding.
 I see it.
 I know how much I went through to get here,
 I cannot begin to understand when it is your child.
 I know they love me, without a doubt.
 No matter what they say when they express anger, of frustration.
 It is at times difficult to think that you are the cause of all this conflict and anger,
 when really all this is just conflict seeking some kind of resolution.
 The picture they had for what their family should be,
 is not,
 and cannot ever be.
 In a sense I took that away from them, and in turn I never got from them exactly what I
 needed parents of a gay child.

The subject was off limits for nearly two years, but we did eventually discuss it.
 This time it was Thanksgiving.

When my oldest son said he was gay I was destroyed. [puts hand on chest then up to God]

*I thought about everything I did wrong.
 Was it my fault?
 Did I cause it?
 Am I being punished?
 What did I do to make this happen?
 This is not my side of the family, this is his Father's.*

*I remember one time he said, while I was peeling potatoes,
 "you know Mama, when I'm around thirty-five I wanna have kids."
 The peeler scraped up my thumb, I was angry.
 "No! you can't have kids, I am afraid I won't love them as much as your brothers and
 sisters kids and they will pick up on it and it would just be bad.
 I don't want your child growing up in a gay environment.
 What are they gonna face coming from a gay household?"
 Is it fair?
 Is it right?
 I want him to understand, to make him see.
 "Who are you to bring a child into the world where they will be teased?
 What are you going to do get a surrogate?
 Is it right to deprive a child of its Mother?
 Who are you to do that?
 Are you going to adopt?
 Is it right to bring up a child in a gay household, into that lifestyle?"*

*I worry about AIDS.
 I worry about someone beating him up or killing him like they did that boy.
 Ime meni Isuse Bože sa čuvi! [Oh my, God watch over us, hand to heart then up to God.]*

*He jokes about it now, he thinks it's so funny. He brought this shirt home.
 [Walks over to green shirt hanging on clothesline, The fruit doesn't fall far from the tree]
 I told him, Sine [Son] you fell into a whole different orchard.*

Developing an intimacy status

By my last year at CSUN I had enough.
 I wanted desperately to respect my parents wishes, but I was suffocating.
 More than two years after I told my parents,
 it was time to take some steps forward,
 I wanted to start telling friends, but then I met Billie.
 Billie and I hit it off instantly and the attraction was strong.
 I asked Billie to dinner, for what is now known as my first date.
 We went to Ed Debevics, this restaurant where the servers sing and dance and are so rude
 to you.
 The date went perfectly.
 The date was awesome,

we didn't kiss,
 but the date went well that I knew it was gonna happen soon.
 See this was going to be my first kiss.
 A few days later we were sitting on the couch watching TV,
 holding hands,
 leaning on each other.
 We were laughing at something,
 I can't remember what,
 when everything just slowed down.
 Billie was blinking a lot,
 and I did one of those Hi smiles when you say Hi all breathy as you smile all sexy.
 It's one of my moves. [do it a few times, exaggerated]
 Billie leaned in and just as our lips were about to touch
 I panicked and moved my head back.
 We both started laughing and I was like,
 "okay, okay let's try this again."
 So I did another Hi smile,
 and we both leaned in,
 and just as our lips were about to touch on the TV blasts this psychic lady Miss Cleo.
 I can still hear her really fake accent.
 This went on for twenty minutes,
 I kid you not.
 I just couldn't get it together,
 and then it finally happened.
 Our first kiss,
 my first kiss.
 I was twenty one, and Billie was a girl.
 Okay stop everything!
 Billie was a girl!
 If that didn't confuse me even more, right?
 Actually,
 with no disrespect to her,
 it kinda made sure I was gay.

Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity

After Billie I wrote out a list of my friends and started telling people,
 finally opening up.
 All of my friends were so supportive,
 especially since they had watched me silently suffering for so long.
 I got a few "Oh I knew, I was waiting until you were ready."
 But what really threw people was that I told my parents first.
 One of my friends took me to a gay club.
 Let me share with you just how phobic of homos I was.

This is so humiliating, because it shows just irrational and afraid I was about LGBT communities.

This is truly shameful, but it is honestly how I felt.

The first time I went to a gay club I was so nauseous.

I honestly thought I was going to be molested, or assaulted.

All sorts of horrible thoughts were going through my head.

What if someone grabbed me or touched me.

What if someone wanted to dance with me, how do I tell them no.

What if they get mad and hit me.

Or the worse thought of all,

what if someone I knew saw me and I was outed to everyone!

I was a mess!

A Straight Guy Friend

It was the first day of training which would last ten weeks.

The professional staff met and we had a roundtable to discuss what communities we were apart of and how that would impact the organization.

I came out.

The support was instant and genuine.

A few weeks later when the student manager staff came, I told them.

I also made a friend Jerry.

Jerry was this straight-fraternity-jock-athlete, and it has been my experience that typically “people like me” and “people like him” didn’t usually mesh.

We both had a lot of preconceived notions about each other, but it was so weird because we talked about how strange to one another we were.

Our conversations were so real.

I told him about how I never had straight male friends before, and really how straight guys intimidated me.

How I was afraid, and apprehensive.

We were able to talk to each other openly honestly without judging each other, or shutting down; it was really a first for both of us.

He told me something that I think will always stay with me because it was brave, honest, and took an incredible amount of character.

He told me he was embarrassed to be seen in public with me because he was afraid that people were going to think he was gay because he was with me.

This was someone I was becoming friends with.

How does someone begin to unpack that?

I decided at that moment we had to keep working on this.

We had to push each other past our boundaries and teach each other.

When the rest of the staff came it was about a hundred more, we were working our butts off.

One day Jerry and I went to lunch and when we came back for session, and it was cross the line.

Now I was out but I hadn't had the opportunity to tell my staff, which I was working my way up to, there was some time conflicts.
 In this activity you self identify and I would have to come out but I was completely taken by surprise.
 Jerry saw how I lost my balance, okay I panicked.
 He stood next to me, asking if I was alright, if I was ready.
 On the other side of me stood Jason a mentor of mine.
 There the three of us stood and we knew which question was coming.
 "If you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, please cross the line."
 Jerry and Jason each pressed into my shoulders.
 I popped out,
 I walked across the room and turned to face a hundred or so people.
 I stood there in my truth.
 This was for real.
 I was crying.
 Jerry and Jason continued to press into my sides.

Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status

Knitting Guy

For much of my life I was afraid of my attraction to guys,
 but the more out I was the more I noticed guys,
 and the more okay I became with it.
 The more comfortable I became with myself the more I could talk with friends about my crushes.
 I had a few but one in particular garnered a great deal of attention or teasing.
 Those who know me know I spend a great deal of time at coffee shops.
 There was this particular coffee shop next to this school I worked at and this guy would sit out in front,
 every night with his friends and knit.
 I thought it was the hottest thing ever!
 I affectionately referred to him as "Knitting Guy."
 Isn't that the gayest shit ever?
 Nothing ever came from my little crush on Knitting Guy,
 and every once in a while I get a call from a friend who sees him sipping on a mocha and knitting.

Entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community

Fag Shirt

My time at Riverside played a huge role in being comfortable with my skin.
 Something events unfolded that marked a major shift.
 All of a sudden I was helping students who were coming out.
 For some I was the first person they told.
 This made me reexamine the ways I saw myself.
 I changed.

These words will always be apart of my story, and the meanings these words have for me have changed.

This shirt will always reflect what I came from in understanding who I am, but don't represent how I am now.

There wasn't a category for me growing up, so I had to create my own.

[change shirt to black jeweled with the word FAG across the chest]

I am Croatian and I am gay.

Writing and telling these stories breaks the strictest of cultural codes.

For many I am the first gay person they have ever met, and for some I am the first gay person they have ever known.

I was the first gay person I have ever known.

I am homophobic.

I live in a sexist homophobic society.

I am culturally Catholic, not religiously.

When Jerry asked me to be the best man in his wedding I was moved and conflicted.

How am I going to be apart of a ceremony I cannot have myself.

My family still tries to understand.

When my brother found out I was gay he told my Mom, "I have to call him and tell him I love him."

Whenever a Will and Grace commercial comes on the entire room still freezes.

They have come such a long way.

Their son is gay, and they are all still uncomfortable, but they love my gay ass!

Last summer when I was in the hospital because my appendix need to be taken out, they were up here.

They dropped everything, and yes I had my roommate David de-gay my room, but they were there, without hesitation.

Are my parents ready for me to bring someone home?

More stories to tell, more misunderstandings, more opportunities that challenge us to see past what we think we know.

I think about the next Croatian kid that comes out and their like minded family reacts just like mine.

I think about all the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans kids who were beat today because of this.

Or lost everything because they were outed, or thrown away.

That is our norm.

As we continue to navigate through the days, we must be reminded that there is always work to do.

Forget Everything I said before

Is it this? [pointing to the sex/gender/sexuality/sexual performance signs]

These categories don't even exist!

Male/Female-what about trans folks, intersex folks?

One in every one hundred babies born is born intersex.

Gender is a performance with a script, and costumes that can all be altered,

there isn't one right way to be.

What about bisexuals, omnisexual, pansexual, questioning folks who don't know what they are?

What about men who have sex with men but do not identify with gay at all?

Life is not black and white. [Move center stage]

There are people who don't fit in these binaries, who are struggling, ignored, violated, beaten, spit at with hate, institutionally disenfranchised.

Every one of us knows what it feels like to not fit.

Think about that.

See us!

Don't forget us!

[Pull down poster boards and put the color areas that challenge the dominant structure. Place on the floor. Remove Pink Curtain from Mirror, while Qué Sera Sera by Pink Martini is playing. When song is over lights fade to black.]

[Bow]

Thank you all for coming out tonight.

Thank you for supporting this work,
work that needs this much nurturing and love.

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APPENDIX A

Set

Picture of set: signs along upstage wall, clotheslines in a "V" to center stage with shirts, and pink cloth along upstage wall. Also pictured screen for slide show.

Photo provided by Jason Fithian

APPENDIX B

Song Lyrics

[Opening song lyrics]

*When I grow up
I'll be stable
When I grow up
I'll turn the tables*

Song by Garbage
Album Version 2.0
Song title *When I grow up*

[Song during football story, removal of jersey and reveal of hate speech]

*I cannot take this anymore
Saying everything I've said before
All these words they make no sense
I find bliss in ignorance
Less I hear the less you'll say
You'll find that out anyway*

Just like before...

[Chorus:]
*Everything you say to me
Takes me one step closer to the edge
And I'm about to break
I need a little room to breathe
Cause I'm one step closer to the edge
I'm about to break*

Song by Lincoln Park
Album Hybrid Theory
Song title *One step closer*

[Closing Song]

*When I was just a little girl
I asked my mother what will I be
Will I be pretty
Will I be rich
Here's what she said to me*

*Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera*

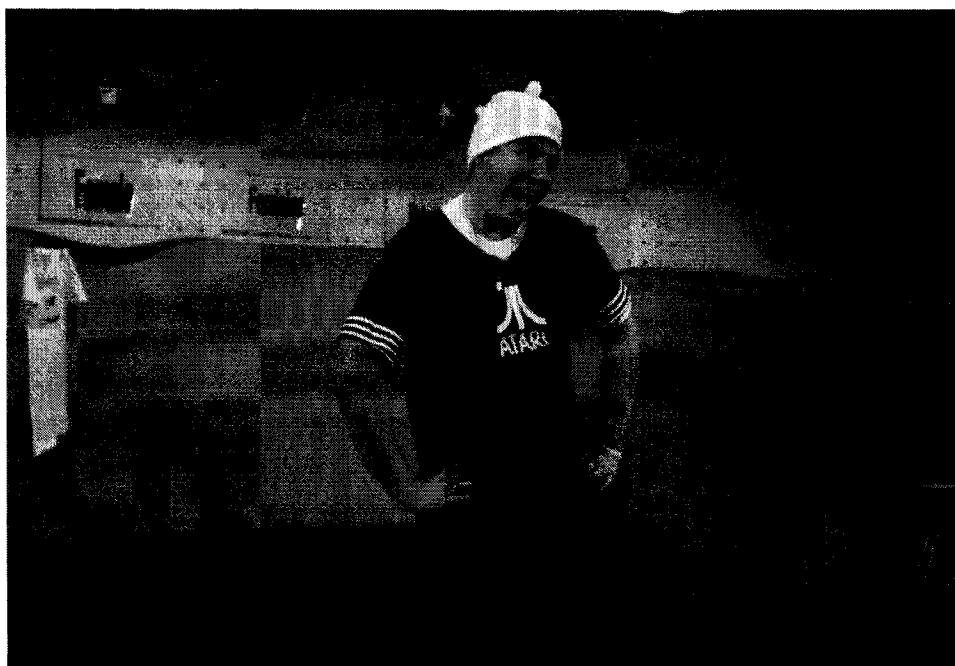
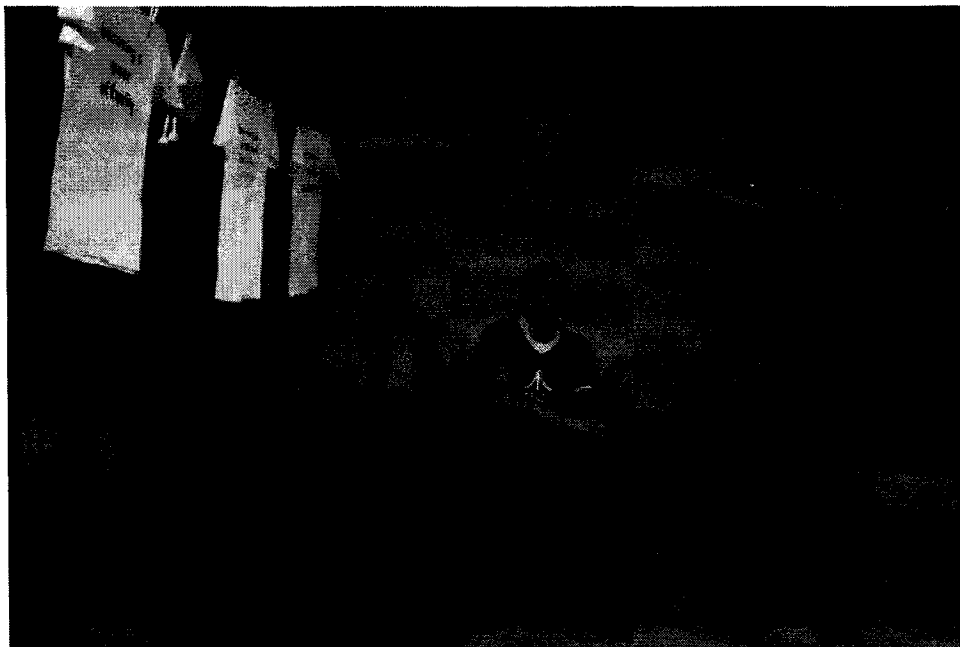
*When I was just a child in school
I asked my teacher what should I try
Should I paint pictures
Should I sing songs
This was her wise reply*

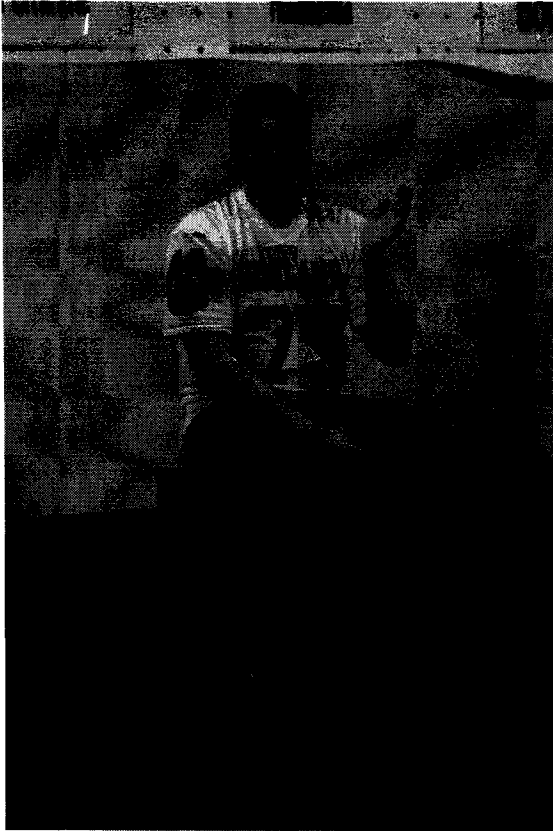
*Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera*

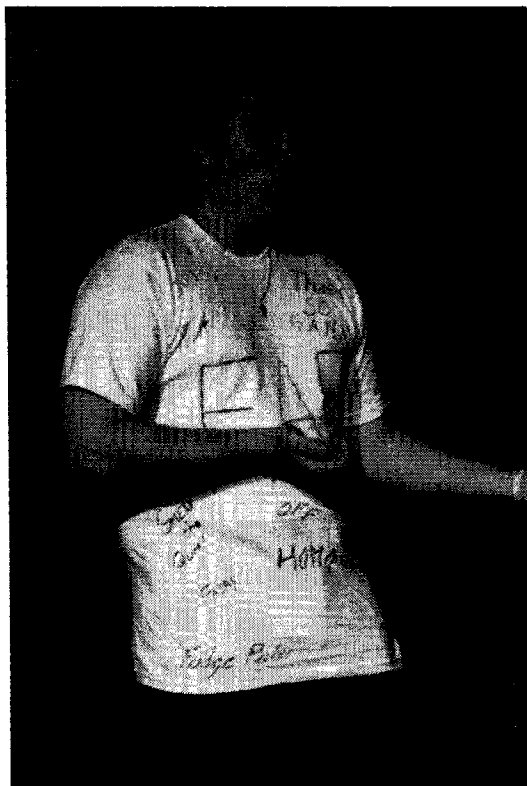
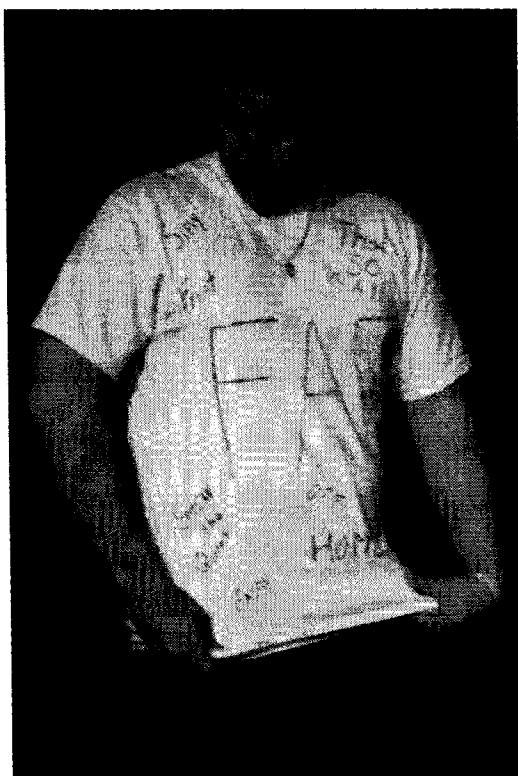
Song by Pink Martini
Album *Sympathique*
Song title *Que sera sera*

APPENDIX C

Additional Photos













All photos courtesy of Jason Fithian

APPENDIX D

Publicity

THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES AT SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS...

THAT'S SO GAY!



WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY:
KRISTO V. GOBIN

An original work about
...coming out
...and how he and everyone he knew dealt with it.

DATES: FEBRUARY 8TH-11TH, 2006

TIME: 8:00 PM. TICKETS OPEN AT 7:45 PM

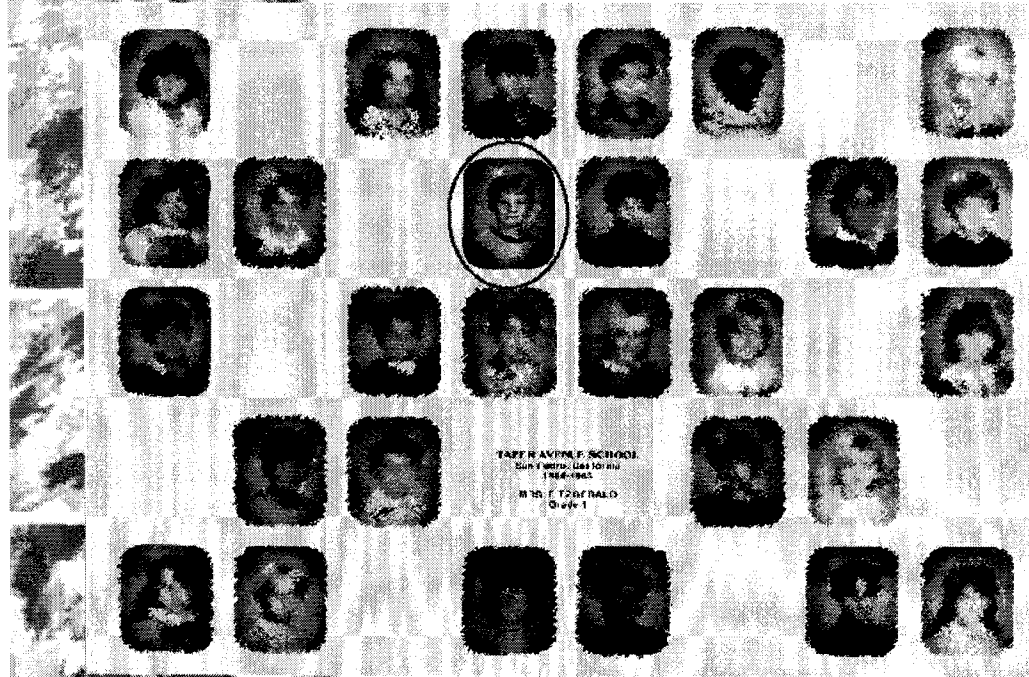
LOCATION: HUGH GILLES HALL 2ND FLOOR (THE SHOWCASE ROOM)

ADMISSION IS FREE



San José State
UNIVERSITY

IF YOU THOUGHT YOU'VE NEVER KNOWN ANYONE GAY, THINK AGAIN.



...present is wheelchair accessible. For more special accommodations, please contact k_gobin12@hotmail.com.

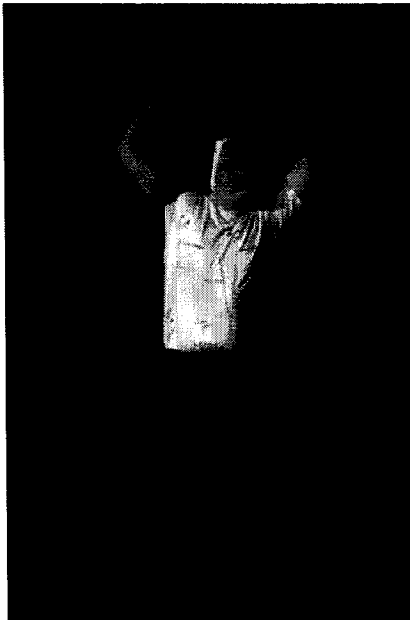
APPENDIX E

Spartan Daily Article

Campus play details struggle of sexuality

Play review By Andrew Torrez

Date: 2/14/06 Section: Entertainment/Spartan Daily



Media Credit: Felix Ling

Kristo Gobin, during the Friday showing of "That's So Gay" at Hugh Gillis Hall, removes his shirt, revealing another one covered with epithets that he was subjected to in his childhood.

"That's So Gay!" a play written by San Jose State University graduate student Kristo V. Gobin, opened Wednesday night in the crowded Showcase Room in Hugh Gillis Hall.

During his solo performance, Gobin told a biographical story about what it was like growing up gay in a strict Croatian-American family.

"It basically chronicles my life," Gobin said before the play opened. "(I use) different theories (on life) and it's a very academic piece."

Unlike other plays that use scenes and acts, "That's So Gay!" was structured using different phases and memories from Gobin's life. Throughout the play, Gobin shared his

humorous view on all of the difficult and sad moments in his life.

"Telling people about my life is very comforting for me," he said. "And hopefully the audience will connect with some part of the story."

The play, which lasted an hour and 15 minutes, was filled with many personal moments from when Gobin was in the first grade until his senior year in college as an undergraduate.

Gobin wrote the script for the play as a thesis for the communication studies master program.

SJSU's department of communication studies and the department of television, radio, film and theater sponsored the play.

The play started with Gobin explaining that the main goal in his family was to be a "good boy or girl." While portraying his parents, Gobin used a thick Croatian accent, which made the lines sound funnier and less serious.

The first phase that Gobin talked about in the play was his childhood. While in the first grade, Gobin said his teacher told his mother, "Your son is different from the other boys."

The teacher noticed that Gobin only played with girls and didn't play sports like the other boys in class. His mother was told that if she was not careful, Gobin might turn out to be gay.

At an early age, Gobin said, he felt like he was in trouble for being different and felt like his mother was mad at him for not being like other boys. Gobin then moved the audience into his teenage years. During this phase in his life, Gobin's parents tried to make him more masculine and tough.

"I wasn't allowed to wear ChapStick," Gobin said in the play. "My father thought that boys didn't need it, so I was the kid (who) always had chapped lips."

During the eighth grade, Gobin said he began to realize that he might be gay. He remembered being attracted to his male substitute teacher and said that he looked at the teacher the same way he saw other boys look at girls.

When Gobin entered high school, he said his parents made him join the high school football team. It is during this time that Gobin experienced hatred and violence from teammates who thought he acted femininely.

During his first and only football season, his teammates constantly beat him up and called him hateful and derogatory names like "fag" and "queer."

Throughout the play, Gobin would wear or show T-shirts with the phases of his life written on the front.

While in college, Gobin described himself as a "homophobic gay person." The actor knew that he was gay, but he tried to hide it and was afraid of how his family would react.

Gobin finally decided to come out to his parents before coming out to his friends. He said he took the opposite route that other people take when coming out.

"Why do you want what you already have?" he said his dad asked in response to Gobin coming out.

While his parents were not happy about his sexual orientation and were ashamed of him, Gobin said his friends were very supportive when he came out to them.

Gobin described how he used to hide being gay, but then became proud of his sexuality. He said he no longer saw it as something negative, and became comfortable enough to look for an intimate relationship.

There were no flashy set designs or major costume changes to help Gobin emphasize his story, and without the help of other actors, Gobin relied on his own talent and acting skills to get his point across.

Gobin's play was well written and he did a great job of keeping the audience awake with a constant flow of humor. With personal insight into his life, Gobin allowed the audience to see how hard it can be for some people to come out to family and friends.

ATTACHMENT

Video Recording Thursday, February 9, 2006