

Passing: Intersections of Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality

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Abstract for scholarly and general audiences

African American Literature engaged many social and racial issues that mainstream white America marginalized during the pre-civil, and post civil rights era through the use of rhetoric, setting, plot, narrative, and characterization. The use of passing fostered an outlet for many light-skinned men and women for inclusion. This trope also allowed for a closer investigation of the racial division in the United States. These issues included questions of the color line, or more specifically, how light-skinned men and women passed as white to obtain elevated economic and social status. Secondary issues in these earlier passing novels included gender and sexuality, raising questions as to whether these too existed as fixed identities in society. As such, the phenomenon of passing illustrates not just issues associated with the color line, but also social, economic, and gender structure within society. Human beings exist in a matrix, and as such, passing is not plausible if viewed solely as a process occurring within only one of these social constructs, but, rather, insists upon a viewpoint of an intersectional construct of social fluidity itself. This paper will re-theorize passing from a description solely concerning racial movements into a theory that explores passing as an intersectional understanding of gender, sexuality, race, and class. This paper will focus on contemporary cultural products (e.g., novels) of passing that challenge the traditional notion of passing and focus on an intersectional linkage between race, gender, sexuality, and class.

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General Abstract

The concept of passing (the notion of appearing as something, or someone, you are not) has been explored thoroughly in novels, memoirs, biographies, and films. Passing novels tend to look closely at the effects of passing on the passer and the motivation for passing. The motivation for passing differs but does include a desire to cross the color line. However, here, the traditional concept of passing was expanded and an intersectional passing model was constructed, which closely analyzed the stages a person must overcome in order to successfully pass. This model was then applied to a selection of six literary texts. These texts were divided into three separate chapters: gender, sexuality and class. The intersectional passing model illuminated several elements of the passing experience; however, certain stages did present unforeseen issues in the model. These stages were most applicable in Western constructions of gender, sexuality, and class. The stages of the model were intended to give a practical guide to mapping the experience of passing, not only in literary texts, but also for those who are interested in the concept of passing. The intersectional passing model can likewise be used as a teaching tool to illustrate the hurdles one must overcome to pass.

Dedication

This journey has been a long one and I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have steadfastly supported me over the years.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

African American literature engages many social and racial issues that mainstream white America marginalized during the pre-civil rights era. These social and racial issues include continual racial violence, isolation, segregation, and fear. The subject of passing was the muse for many prominent African American novelists including Harriet Jacobs' (1861) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Nella Larsen's (1929) *Passing* and (1928) *Quicksand*, James Weldon Johnson's (1912) *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Walter White's (1926) *Flight*, Jessie Redmon Fauset's (1928) *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, Langston Hughes' (1934) short story "Passing", Charles Chesnutt's (1900) *The House Behind the Cedars*, and more contemporary fiction Danzy Senna's (1998) *Caucasia*, Mat Johnson's (2008) *Incognegro* and (2015) *Loving Day*. The term "passing refers to the act of crossing the socially constructed 'color line' that separates white and black Americans, though the term has broad applications for other ethnic or racial groups, as well as for categories of gender, sexuality, or class."¹ Early African American fiction draws attention to a passing trope known in the African American community, but not readily exposed to the general populous. The use of passing fostered an outlet for many light-skinned men and women for inclusion. This trope also allows for a closer investigation of the racial division in the United States. These issues included questions of the color line, or more specifically, how:

the color line is a means of measuring an individual's identity and social sense of being strictly by skin pigmentation and racial origin. Of crucial significance is the term's dual

¹ William L. Andrews, Frances Foster Smith, and Trudier Harris, *The Oxford Companion of African American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 560. PDF e-book.

interracial and intraracial definitions as Blacks interact with whites and with members of their own race. On the interracial level, the color line connotes institutionalized racism and prejudices that were originated to segregate, oppress, and instill in Blacks a sense of inferiority to the dominant race. The color dividing line of American racism identifies the superior race as white and right, while the second-class race is recognized as dark inferiors whose burden of blackness is to experience the humiliating effects of Jim Crow and double-conscious identity.²

Therefore the significance of the color line to passing illustrates how the passer navigates social institutions created to exclude his or her presence. More specifically, the passer passes in order to cross the color line but must navigate various social institutions created to exclude male or female presences from certain social spaces. These social institutions, and spaces, include education, housing, employment, politics and law. All these social institutions deny access to certain bodies; thereby, continually marginalizing and thwarting efforts for social, economic, and political elevation. These social institutions also represent a denied space based on physical markers of race, class, sexuality, and gender. The creation of the color line is two-fold for the passer because he/she not only needs to navigate these social institutions created to exclude his or her presence, but also needs to constantly be aware of his/her position and the deadly ramifications that will result if their identity is disclosed. The notion that passer might endure death and the psychological effects one incurs while passing oftentimes insures that the passer will never return to his/her previous state of being.

Frantz Fanon's book³ further discusses the complex psychological effects on men and women who have been subjugated by white ideology and prompt the individual to pass. He states, "We understand now why the black man cannot take pleasure in his insularity. For him

² Ibid, 163.

³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world.”⁴ Fanon focuses on the men and women of Martinique, but parallels appear between African Americans living in America and those individuals living in Martinique because both societies value light skin over dark skin. Fanon’s psychological analysis of “the Negress and mulatto” shows insight into not only the people of Martinique, but also sheds light on mixed race Americans who choose to pass.⁵ Fanon describes “the Negress and the mulatto” and what both of these women are seeking: “The first has only one possibility and one concern: to turn white. The second wants not only to turn white but also to avoid slipping back.”⁶ These two types of women are not only seeking the advantages that are afforded to them based on their color, but they are trying to “turn” white permanently as a way of total inclusion into white society. As we can see, passing is not only a phenomenon that occurs in the United States, but reaches to any area where whiteness and colonial ideas of civilization are the ideal formation of society. The decision to pass for white not only affects the individual’s interpretations, and disrupts the color line but also has negative effects on the individual’s psychological well being. The passer must disconnect from his/her heritage in order to pass effectively, but must also align themselves with the color of oppression. However, passing does not only refer to racial passing as many narratives also include issues of class, gender, and sexuality.

Harriet Jacobs’ early slave narrative illustrates how the narrator herself loses all respect for a man who passes for white when she states, “everybody knew he had the blood of a slave father in his veins; but for the sake of passing himself off for white, he was ready to kiss the

⁴ Ibid, 51.

⁵ Ibid, 54.

⁶ Ibid, 54.

slaveholder's feet. How I despised him!"⁷ Jacobs equates passing for white as a vile form of white imitation and she rejects any and all association with the men who enslave her; therefore, she wants nothing to do with a man passing as a white man. Jacobs' narrative examines the concept of passing while she herself is a slave, but Charles Chesnutt's novel further explores the concept of racial passing in Post-Antebellum South Carolina and focuses on two siblings and their struggles to effectively pass.⁸ Chesnutt's novel is set in the 1900s, which was a period of great transition in America. Directly after the Civil War, great masses of ex-slaves began to migrate into the North for freedom and employment. However, the America South was still a volatile environment holding to the same ideology of black inferiority and fear of miscegenation. Chesnutt's choice of setting and time frame is a direct commentary on the lingering effects of not only slavery, but also race in the South. The novel's main characters John and Rena Walden use their light skin to pass as a white man and woman, respectively. However, where John is successful in passing as a white man, Rena's attempts end in her failure to secure a white husband. John Walden alters his identity and becomes John Warwick, a successful lawyer married to a white woman with a family. John Walden crosses the color line and the social structures created to separate ascribed stratifications when he navigates the institution of law, an institution which marginalizes, penalizes, and exploits black men and women. John Walden's success is only tempered by his sister's inability to effectively pass as a white woman. Rena's failure to pass results from her inability to distance herself from the black community and when her white fiancé notices her in this black neighborhood he realizes that she is indeed black. Indeed, successful passing depends upon a complete reconstruction of one's identity and an

⁷ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, eds. Nellie Y. McKay and Frances Smith Foster (New York: Norton, 2001), 81.

⁸ Charles Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars* (New York: Dover Publications, 1900).

amputation of his/her historical, and familial relationships. John Walden, aka John Warwick is successful passing as a white man because he disengages himself from home and family.

In Nella Larsen's first novel, *Quicksand*, the character of Helga Crane does not racially pass in the traditional sense, but nonetheless her character does embark in a search for a social identity that shuns white society's prescriptions of the black female body. Crane's constant search for positionality as a mixed race woman in white, and black, spaces occurs very early on in the novel and continues throughout. In the beginning of the novel, Crane is a schoolteacher at an all black school, Naxos, but she soon becomes dissatisfied with her role as a schoolteacher and with her students. Her dissatisfaction stems from the school altering its curriculum to conform to white ideology and how Naxos has become: "a show place in the black belt, exemplification of the white man's magnanimity, refutation of the black man's inefficiency. Life had died out of it. It was, ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man's pattern."⁹ Crane's unrest also stems from her feeling of disconnect from her Black brethren or as she states, "these people."¹⁰ Crane's reference embodies the men and women of Naxos who refuse to celebrate the uniqueness of blackness and to those who would rather conform to white's representation of blackness. Crane, at times, both loves and hates blackness because she cannot seem to identify with those around her. However, this does not mean that she wants to pass as white either which is clearly evident when she travels to Copenhagen. At first, Crane revels in her newfound status as an exotic 'other,' because "she took to luxury as the proverbial duck to water" and "took to admiration and attention even more eagerly."¹¹ However, this newfound contentment begins to wane when she encounters a Danish man, Axel Olsen, who prescribes her as an overly

⁹ Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* ed. Thadious M. Davis (New York: Penguin, 2002), 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 69.

sexualized creature. He states, ““You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, my lovely, you have, I fear the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest buyer. I should of course be happy that it is I. And I am.””¹² Olsen’s desire for Crane merely denotes the notion of conquering and acquiring of a commodity akin to the selling and impregnating of slave women by slaveholders, but Crane will not be owned by anyone. Crane’s interaction with Olsen, and her yearning to return to America, prompts her to divulge the most important question facing mixed race individuals and that is, “Why couldn’t she have two lives, or why couldn’t she be satisfied in one place?”¹³ Once Crane returns to America she feels a newfound kinship with heritage and embraces her black culture, but this feeling quickly wanes when she marries Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green and proceeds to birth five children whom she abhors. Crane’s quest for a single racial and social identity leads her to a life of dissatisfaction and a feeling of loss for what she could have if only she could leave her present life.

Larsen’s second novel, *Passing*¹⁴, explores the very tragic consequences of racial passing. Nella Larsen’s novel, like Chesnut’s novel, shows how white and black society abhors the concept of passing but for very different reasons. Larsen’s novel takes place in the mid 1920’s at the height of the Harlem Renaissance when African Americans were achieving great financial and artistic success in New York. The novel’s setting shifts from Chicago to Harlem, but the main action between the two major characters takes place in Harlem, New York where large communities of middle class African Americans thrived. This location is very significant because Harlem was an environment where blacks, and mixed women and men, did not have to fear the gaze of white society. This location also shows affluent black men and women so the

¹² Ibid, 89.

¹³ Ibid, 95.

¹⁴ Nella Larsen, *Passing* ed. Thadious M. Davis (New York: Penguin, 1997).

juxtaposition of a woman passing in this environment is difficult to grasp. The novel focuses on the tumultuous relationship between two women; one who chooses not to pass and one who does. The two main characters not only battle societal standards of whiteness, but also battle each other's viewpoints on acceptable identities.

Clare Kendry's decision to pass is directly correlated to her rootless childhood, and to her two white aunts whose very Christian beliefs subjugated their niece and her place within their household after her father died. Clare's father, Bob Kendry, was a violent man whose parents were a mixed couple. His mother was a black woman and his father a white man and because of this parentage, Bob Kendry was not afforded any status or financial gain from his parents union. It is highly questionable as to whether Bob Kendry's parents were legally married, but we do know that Bob was not married to Clare's mother and the text reinforces this notion when Clare's aunts, Bob Kendry's sisters, discuss how "“their darling brother had seduced—ruined, they called—a Negro girl. They could excuse the ruin, but they couldn't forgive the tar brush.””¹⁵ Clare discusses her childhood with Irene and states, "“It, they, made me what I am today. For, of course, I was determined to get away, to be a person and not a charity or a problem, or even a daughter of the indiscreet Ham. Then, too, I wanted things. I knew I wasn't bad-looking and that I could 'pass.'””¹⁶ Clare's perception of self is shaped by how her aunts treated her as a servant and how these two women reiterated their niece's place in society based on the biblical passages of Ham. Clare's perceived escape from the curse of Ham is to pass as a white woman and marry a white man. Irene's childhood, by contrast, is vague but Larsen does mention that Irene's parents were married and lived comfortably in Chicago. In fact, the beginning of the novel shows

¹⁵ Ibid, 26-27, 117. The term "tar brush" is directly linked to the darkness of the skin or more specifically "a reference to African ancestry; derived from the descriptive saying, 'Black as tar.'"

¹⁶ Ibid, 26.

Irene in Chicago visiting her parents. Irene's skin color does afford her opportunities to pass, but whether or not one, or both, of her parents are light-skinned is not information Larsen gives to the reader. However, what we can garner from Irene's childhood is a more stable, privileged, and community based relationship with her parents, and her black ancestry.

Both Irene and Clare base their decisions to pass on very different criteria, but the very ideas inherent in passing are something that both women adhere to in their lives. Once these two women begin to communicate with each other, we see the shifting perceptions of identity and the conflicts. Irene does not, no matter how many times she passes, believe that such a concept is useful and abhors everything that Clare has gained because she has decided to pass permanently. We can see Irene's discomfort with the idea of passing when she arrives at Clare's, where another woman, Gertrude is also passing. The conversation these three women have eventually centers around their children and how Clare and Gertrude are horrified over the prospect of dark children. Clare states:

No, I have no boys and I don't think I'll ever have any. I'm afraid. I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear that she might be dark. Thank goodness, she turned out all right. But I'll never risk it again. Never! The strain is simply too—too hellish.¹⁷

The very discussion of how dark their children could be illicit fear in both Clare, and Gertrude. However, Irene is horrified that these two women are concerned with the color of their children and even more infuriated that she is in a situation where two women are passing. Irene's hatred towards Clare is only amplified when Clare's husband, John Bellew, enters the room to discuss the color of his wife. Bellew begins his conversation by greeting his wife, "Hello, Nig," which

¹⁷ Ibid, 36.

elicits an immediate response from Irene and Gertrude.¹⁸ Irene responds, “how rude, how positively insulting, for him to address her in that way in the presence of guests!”¹⁹ Irene believes that John Bellew should have respect for blacks, but why would he? John Bellew does not associate with blacks and is completely unaware that his wife is passing. Clare’s reaction to the nickname is to prompt her husband to explain it to her friends, and Bellew’s response is, ““When we were first married, she was as white as—as—well, as white as a lily. But I declare she’s getting’ darker and darker. I tell her if she don’t look out she’ll wake up one of these days and find she’s turned into a nigger.””²⁰ Bellew is poking fun at his wife and her color, but in the next instant he clarifies his feelings toward Clare and her color: ““I know you’re no nigger, so it’s all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I’m concerned, since I know you’re no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be.””²¹ The overwhelming need for Bellew to keep his family lines pure from miscegenation is clear here, but Bellew takes it one step further. When Irene asks John whether or not he likes Negroes, his response is, ““You got me wrong there, Mrs. Redfield. Nothing like that at all. I don’t dislike them, I hate them. And so does Nig, for all she’s trying to turn into one.””²² Bellew’s feelings towards blacks are quite frightening, but these feelings are not an anomaly among white Americans during this time frame. Bellew is representative of a white supremacist ideology founded on racism and abhorrence for black men and women. This ideology can be traced back to the inferiority whites felt toward Africans before, during, and after slavery. Bellew’s white

¹⁸ Ibid, 39.

¹⁹ Ibid, 39.

²⁰ Ibid, 39.

²¹ Ibid, 40.

²² Ibid, 40.

supremacist ideology was reinforced by the highly visible Eugenics, a belief in hereditary traits passed down through the mother, campaign in the early 1920s and 30s²³.

Unlike Chesnutt's novel, Larsen kills off her passing character and therefore leaves the reader with the knowledge that passing is tragic and only ends when the passer dies. The death of Clare reflects the real danger mixed men and women undertook when they decided to pass, but also reflects the social anxiety whites were feeling over an increase in mixed-raced children, men, and women who disrupted the color line. The ending of Larsen's novel mirrors the very nature of passing as ambiguous; therefore, the reader is never sure whether or not Clare jumped to her death or was pushed by Irene. Another interesting facet of Larsen's novel is the notion that Clare can return to her African American roots without repercussions. However, Larsen shows the reader, through Clare's death, that the passer can never return to their previous lives.

Chesnutt and Larsen's novels are a reflection of historical passing narratives, but contemporary novels expand the concept of passing to include mixed race people and religious ethnicities. Matt Johnson's graphic novel,²⁴ set in the early 1930s around the same time frame Larsen set her novel *Passing*, uses the passing narrative to illustrate how one man uses his ambiguous identity to save his brother. A unique aspect of Johnson's graphic novel is not necessarily the trope of passing, but the visual images he depicts to redefine the perception of passing. The main character, Zane, describes his ability to pass as a "mask like Zorro or a cape like the Shadow," that allows him to infiltrate white society and report atrocities done to black Americans in the South.²⁵ Johnson fashioned his main character, Zane, after Walter White's crusade to shed light on lynching in the South in the 1930s. White was a blonde haired, blue eyed

²³ Alan Stoskepf, "The Forgotten History of Eugenics." *Rethinking Schools Online*. 13, no. 3 (1999): 1-5.

²⁴ Matt Johnson, *Incognegro* (New York: DC Comics, 2008).

²⁵ *Ibid*, 18.

African American who passed for white in the Deep South for the sole purpose of showing white America what was happening to black men. Zane is employed by a New York newspaper and uses the Incognegro alias to keep his true identity a secret from white Americans, so he does not use passing to acquire certain social advantages, but instead uses it as a form of social revolution. Johnson's graphic novel shows readers how the very idea of race is used to keep blacks "on the bottom," so his main character uses white societies' notions of race, and identity, to shatter the belief that everyone who is not white "is an odd deviation from form."²⁶ Through black and white images, Johnson allows the reader to see how color differentiation is almost impossible to detect and irrelevant until the major character enters the South. Zane, and his friend Carl, make the train trip to Mississippi so Zane can try to save his brother, who is charged with killing a white woman. Upon their arrival in Mississippi, they are immediately reminded of what it means to be a black man in the South when they see several white men harassing a young black man who wants to get on the train. Zane pretends he is a Klansman from the national office to secure the safety of the young black man, but also to establish his place in the town, as well as access to his brother.

Meanwhile, Carl has garnered an invitation to attend dinner with a very affluent white family in town. Carl's use of passing is more in line with Clare Kendry's need for social acceptance and advantages, but Carl gets himself into trouble. The dinner he attends is for whites only and the discussion turns toward travels. When Carl mentions that he has been to the Congo in Africa, one man responds by asking him, "Congo? Are them the ones what let you see their titties?"²⁷ Carl does not respond, and this silence gives way to another man showing him cards

²⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 73.

that he has acquired from the various lynchings he has attended over the years. This man represents a very dangerous element to Carl, especially when he mentions, “If there’s one think I knows it’s niggers, and I know a nigger when I see one. No matter how **pale** his skin might be.”²⁸ Carl never passed before his excursion into the South and decided to follow Zane without realizing the dangers involved with passing. Carl is mistaken for Incognegro and is lynched, but Zane does get his brother freed from jail. Passing in Johnson’s graphic novel does not just pertain to racial identity, but also gender identity. Through the narrative we find out that the woman killed is in fact the Sheriff’s deputy and that she was passing for a man to keep her position. No one in town knew that she was passing for a man, except the Sheriff who was in love with her. The very notion of passing is not just limited to racial identity and can include gender as well as religion. The use of gender passing in Johnson’s novel illustrates the fluidity of gender roles and the idea that socially defined gender roles, just as racially defined roles, challenges the color line on numerous ascribed stratifications.

These early and contemporary, passing narratives illustrate the complex nature of passing for this phenomena not only highlights issues of race but also gender, sexuality and class. These authors use the passing trope to deconstruct issues of inequality and the duplicity of the color line. Current literary critics and sociologists, who do look at the phenomenon of passing, tend to focus primarily on issues of race and regale issues of gender, class, and sexuality as the impetus to racial passing.²⁹ While this wave of intent focus on one aspect of passing creates some cause for clarity, human beings exist in a matrix, and as such, passing is not plausible if viewed solely

²⁸ Ibid, 75.

²⁹ These literary scholars and sociologists include W.E.B. Dubois’s “The Souls of Black Folk” 1965; Cutter 2000; Piper 2000; Ginsberg, 2000; Howarth et al. 2000; Tate 2004, and Wall 2003. The listed scholars are by no means the only writers analyzing the phenomenon of passing, but they are the most prominent members in their respective fields of study.

as a process occurring within only one of these social constructs, but, rather, insists upon a viewpoint of an intersectional construct of social fluidity itself. More to the point, passing cannot exist in a social vacuum only pertaining to race because we do not simply identify ourselves as black or white, but often include our gender, socio-economic status and sexuality as part of our identity. Intersectionality is often associated with, but certainly not limited to, feminist theory and involves the theorization of how gender, sexuality and race intersect to form social positionality and mobility within the matrix³⁰. However, intersectionality does not just present a dichotomous limitation of race and gender but allows for an infinite number of fluid positional locations and passing movements that intersect to form a social identity. These locations range from binary oppositions within race, gender, sexuality and socio-economic status. Such movements allow for a closer investigation of not only how the traditional passing trope evolved, but also how passing represents intersectional positions and takes places in a reality that reveals fully intersectional movements. Reality; therefore, simply reinforces our individual passing whether through race, gender, class or socio-economic status in our everyday lives.

This study looks to re-theorize passing from a description solely concerning racial movements into a theory that explores passing as an intersectional understanding of gender, sexuality, race, and class. The idea of race and gender informing identification and social categories led to the historical analysis of passing as an intersection of race and gender, but this study will focus on contemporary cultural products (e.g., novels) of passing that challenge the traditional notion of passing and focus on an intersectional linkage between race, gender, sexuality, and class. The use of popular cultural products of racial passing will establish the

³⁰ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw (New York: The New Press, 1995), 357.

traditional definition of passing, which encompasses characters whose light-skin enabled them to pass as white men and women. This initial devotion to traditional passing novels will include both fiction and non-fiction since the phenomenon of passing not only includes the literary trope, but also real-life experiences. The establishment of a “passing baseline”, if you will, allows for a historical description of passing experiences as one where the passer initiates the passing to overcome certain obstacles in society which include racial, gender, sexual, and class discrimination but also shapes the passers’ status. These varying experiences will illustrate a strong foundation to build upon the separate accounts of passing and show the overwhelming instances of passing as an intersectional phenomenon. More specific obstacles include a range of issues such as questions of racial superiority, fixed gender identities, heteronormativity, and socio-economic inequality. Racial superiority represents the overwhelming justification for passing in historical accounts of passing, but the relevancy of this particular motivation in more contemporary literary works needs more thorough exploration.

Another obstacle inherent in these historical accounts of passing addresses the question of fixed gender identities, or more specifically, qualities that identify one as male or female dependent upon physical, emotional, and interactional markers. Numerous accounts of passing literature address questions of how society determines what characteristics signify male or female identity, but also take these questions a step further and shows how an individual can self-identify as male or female at their own peril. The perils of passing include death in the extreme and social exclusion within particular racial, gender, sexual, or class groups. In Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, one of her main characters, Clare Kendry, passes as a white women and the

novel ends with her violent death³¹. Most of the passing fiction that delves into the question of gender identification shows the reader how a man or woman subverts the characteristics that are associated with masculinity or femininity and, in the process, redefine what gender means in society.

Most, if not all the passing fiction, includes elements of socio-economic elevation and in some cases only this, but with socio-economic status passing moves also becomes a multitude of passing combinations. For example, if a light-skinned man passes for white he achieves a job usually held by a white man who receives more income, better housing, and other amenities afforded his economic status. James Weldon Johnson's novel, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* explores the benefits and drawbacks of the narrator's decision to pass as white when he withholds his secret from his wife and children.³² Johnson's narrator does not find the choice of passing one of ease, but argues in the text how his choice relies on whether or not he chose the greater of two evils: a white man who lynches a black man or black man who suffers the brutal death. Johnson's narrator chooses to pass not because he will receive certain benefits, but because his very existence relies on passing. Finally, questions of sexuality are also present in these passing fictions and often allow the reader to question the validity of socially acceptable relationships. While Johnson's narrative fully explores the complex issues associated with passing, he seldom explores issues of his own heterosexuality. However, if sexuality just pertains to normative sexuality then Johnson's attraction and marriage to a white woman does stretch the historical boundaries of socially acceptable relationships between black men and white women. Ida B. Wells' campaign against lynching not only focuses on the brutality inflicted upon black

³¹ Nella Larsen, *Passing*, ed. Thadious M. Davis (New York: Penguin, 1997).

³² James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).

men, but also upon the supposed infringement upon white female bodies and the subsequent consequences.³³ Johnson's decision to marry a white woman rebels against the notion that white female bodies, and their sexuality, represent strictly white male domain and in the context of Johnson's narrative, he is not complete until he marries this white woman; therefore passing completely as a white man.

Previous sociological and literary scholarship on passing compartmentalizes race, sexuality, gender, and socio-economic status according to the benefits the passer would achieve in each of these positions or used these positionalities as locations for a strictly dichotomous evaluation of socially acceptable criteria for identity. This course of action, locating the position of the passer according to race, gender, class, or sexuality proves useful to illustrate the overwhelming need to group certain socially designated groups whose characteristics aligned in order to achieve a somewhat symbiotic relationship with societal norms. However, passing does not follow a simple dichotomous location that allows the passer to mimic socially normative groupings, but illustrates how the passing phenomena exists in an intersectional reality and this reconfiguration of passing opens the door to re-theorize passing as a fully intersectional phenomenon.

Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

Scholarship on the subject of passing is quite extensive and revolves around a wide range of topics dealing with the human condition. Narratives that employ passing discuss issues of sexuality, race, gender or class as the catalyst for the person's passing. For example, Nella Larsen's novel, *Passing*, discusses the relationship between two women, one of whom passes,

³³ Kenneth Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: UP of Cambridge, 1999).

but overarching issues of paranoia, female sexuality, and class status present in the novel expand the reader's understanding of this complex relationship.³⁴ Arguably the novel uses passing to show the complications of such a phenomenon through the relationship between these two women. The scholarship on Larsen's novel addresses these underlying issues in relation to passing as if these issues completely depend on passing. However, each scholar writing on passing has his/her own definition of the concept and therefore we must start with deciphering the varying degrees of such definitions to show how an intersectional definition of passing will both add, and divert, from such scholarship.

Elaine K. Ginsberg's definition of passing includes "the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing. Finally, passing is about specularly: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen."³⁵ Ginsberg's definition of passing allots for a variation of passing scenarios and does not limit the concept of passing to strictly race related incidents. However useful Ginsberg's definition of passing might be, there are still variations of passing definitions. Marion Rust's definition of passing questions the validity of subjecting the term passing to strictly racial incidences and tries to deconstruct the term itself. Rust states, "passing describes an act of simulation, in which two states, being and not-being, assumption and revocation inhere."³⁶ Rust and Ginsberg's definitions of passing seem somewhat similar on the surface, but where Ginsberg discusses anxiety as a motivation for such an action, Rust seems to understand passing as an intermediate state of being where simulation between two personas induces the action, but is the simulation prompted by anxiety or a feeling of dislocation from a social category? Rust does not delve too deeply into the

³⁴ Nella Larsen, *Passing*, ed. Thadious M. Davis (New York: Penguin, 1997).

³⁵ Elaine K. Ginsberg, *Passing and the Fiction of Identity*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 2.

³⁶ Marion Rust, "Speaking of Olaudah Equiano," in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke UP, 1996). 23.

motivation behind passing, so her definition focuses on a form of mimicry of a socially accepted category.

Samira Kawash's³⁷ definition of passing relies heavily on the notion that the passer has no alternative, and instead the passer uses passing "not as a deviation from the 'truth' of the social identity of race but as the only way in which a subject can take up a position of identity in terms of race. All race identity is, in this view, the product of passing."³⁸ Kawash's definition of passing relies heavily on the dynamics of racial identity that society associates with an individual. Hence, the passer uses race as a point of positionality in a society ruled by racial categorization, but this passing identity does not define the person's "true" identity and instead just questions the validity of racial identity.³⁹ Kawash's definition is in direct response to James Weldon Johnson's novel, *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, but the concept of passing is not just used as a trope in narratives dealing with racial identity.

In fact, Valerie Rohy's definition of passing encompasses not only race, but argues that the definition, "designates a performance in which one presents oneself as what one is not, a performance commonly imagined along the axis of race, class, gender, or sexuality."⁴⁰ Rohy's analysis of the term passing, and its corresponding attributes, relies heavily on the act of passing as strictly a performance and a deviation of what a person really embodies. This perception of passing is fraught with questions of identity and how one can identify oneself; however, the term "performance" is both problematic and the ideal description of passing. The idea that passing is

³⁷ Samira Kawash, "The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man: (Passing for) Black Passing for White" in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, edited by Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham, Duke UP, 1996), 59-75.

³⁸ Ibid, 70.

³⁹ Kawash further elucidates her definition of passing when she states, "My claim is that the passing narrative is not about the *representation* of blackness or whiteness; rather, it is about the *failure* of blackness or whiteness to provide the grounds for a stable, coherent identity," 63.

⁴⁰ Valerie Rohy, "Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and *Giovanni's Room*", ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg. (Durham, Duke UP, 1996). 218-233.

strictly a performance implies an act that ends when the audience departs from the theater, but as we have seen from the previous scholars, passing is not just an act performed for an audience. When the passer enters his/her home, does that mean that performance ends? If there is no audience present, is there really a need to perform? Rohy does address this issues of performativity and argues that “passing, in other words, is only successful passing: unlike drag, its ‘performance’ so impeccably mimics ‘reality’ that it goes undetected as performance, framing its resistance to essentialism in the very rhetoric of essence and origin.”⁴¹ While Rohy’s attempt to describe passing as a mimicry to a so-called reality implies the individual passing is successful in his/her performance, but there are of course numerous narratives that would argue against such a definition.

Looking again at Larsen’s novel we can see that the main character’s success at passing is fleeting at best because she is drawn back into the world that she previously exited and doomed herself in the process. Larsen’s novel is not the only instance where a character’s passing ends tragically, so Rohy’s estimation of successful passing demonstrates how well the passer can perform, but not how long the passer can keep up the performance successfully. Rohy’s explanation of passing as a “performance” is sufficiently an aspect of passing, but when she remarks that passing also concludes “what one is not” opens up questions of authentic identity construction.⁴² Who exactly determines a true self? When Rohy’s argues that passing is defining yourself as someone you are not, then who determines such identification? While Rohy’s use of certain terminology to set the boundaries, or rules of passing, seem a bit questionable, she does expand the phenomenon of passing to include gender, sexuality, and class

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 226-227.

along with race. The inclusion of these other factors expands Rohy's definition of passing and further explains how racial passing, "reveals the arbitrary foundation of the categories 'black' and 'white,' just as passing across gender and sexuality places in question the meaning of 'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'straight' and 'gay.'"⁴³ This analytical shift allows for passing to question all forms of identity and look closely at what society deems as authentic and inauthentic identity. While this shift is quite useful in expanding the terms associated with passing, there is still an overwhelming emphasis on passing as a racial phenomenon. Rohy herself does not delve deeply enough into how passing is used to subvert categorical definitions of gender, sexuality, or class. Quite frankly, her discussion seems heavily reliant on treating passing as an overwhelming tactic to overcome racial categories as opposed to delving more deeply into how gender and sexuality use passing as a tool to redefine themselves in society.

While Rohy's definition allows for the inclusion of a variation on the traditional notion of racial passing, Jacquelyn Y. McLendon's⁴⁴ definition seems to reiterate the notion that passing occurs as a " 'breaking away from all that was familiar and friendly to take one's chance in another environment, not entirely strange perhaps, but certainly not entirely friendly.'"⁴⁵ McLendon's use of passing here is not so much a performance, or mimicry, as first explained by previous scholars but a dislocation from what is familiar to the passer. McLendon's understanding of passing promotes the idea that such a break from one's familiar environment is violent and contingent on the extreme notion of a lack of options, which is also echoed by the previous scholars. However, whereas the previous scholars base their definitions on how the

⁴³ Ibid., 227.

⁴⁴ Jacquelyn Y. McLendon, *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen* (Charlottesville, Virginia UP, 1995).

⁴⁵ Nella Larsen, *Passing* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 157, quoted in Jacquelyn Y. McLendon, *The Politics of Color in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen* (Charlottesville, Virginia UP, 1995), 97.

passer attempts to change the self, McLendon takes passing to the very environment the passer occupies. Kawash does mention the positionality of the passer in society as the driving force behind the need to pass, but McLendon's explanation of passing shows not only the violence associated with changing one's self but also how the very environment the passer places him/herself in also incorporates a violent disruption. The performance of the passer not only incorporates the costume he/she wears, but also the set he occupies. It is not enough that the passer changes the way society perceives him or her, but for the act to be complete then there must be a complete relocation of that body.

The relocation of the body, or passing over into an environment more amicable to your needs at the expense of your comfort, shows a conscious resistance to your situation. An act of resistance is also another way to define passing. M. Giulia Fabi⁴⁶ looks at passing as traditionally a feminine tool used as a form of resistance from slavery. Many of the previous scholars defined passing according to literary narratives and Fabi is no different in her explanation of such a phenomenon. Fabi focuses her work on African American novels from the Harlem Renaissance, many of the previous scholars also used texts from this historical era, but instead of diving right into a literary analysis of texts she explores traditions of the tragic mulattoes and attempts to historicize the tradition of passing. Passing, in Fabi's estimation, "proves consistent with feminine ideals of passivity and gentility" and "relies on physical appearance more than on cunning, on silence more than on verbal skills."⁴⁷ Fabi reduces passing to a passive resistance of racial and sexual exploitation, but even more baffling is her association of passing as a feminine trope of resistance. This particular line of reasoning negates the usefulness of passing as a form

⁴⁶ M. Giulia Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*, (Chicago: Illinois UP, 2001), 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

of resistance for both genders. There are numerous male authors who use passing in their narratives, so does that mean that these men are effeminate? There are considerable dangers to identifying passing as a female interpretation of resistance to imposed racial identifications, and while passing historically leads to an assumption that more women utilized passing as a means to escape slavery, the use of passing has certainly evolved in contemporary scholarship. Also, attributing passing as an effeminate act also questions ideas about masculinity, femininity, sexuality in conjunction with the sexualization of black male and female bodies.

The above literary critics define passing in relation to the characters in the narratives they deconstruct and analyze, but do their definitions of passing greatly differ from the definitions of sociologists or historians? Sociologist Gunnar Myrdal stipulates, “for all practical purposes ‘passing’ means that a Negro becomes a white man, that is, moves from the lower to the higher caste. In the American caste order, this can be accomplished only by the deception of the white people with whom the passer comes to associate and by a conspiracy of silence on the part of other Negroes who might know about it.”⁴⁸ Myrdal’s use of words such as “deception” and “conspiracy” imply that the passer has no right to assume an alternate identity that is counterproductive to the identity that society has deigned to categorize the passer. What is the deception? If we look closely at that word in relation to the idea of passing, then the deception involves subverting the strict boundaries society has placed upon racial categorization. However, Myrdal states nothing further about passing as a manipulation of sexual, or gender categorizations. Furthermore, passing is regaled to a “simulation of whiteness, to conceal the

⁴⁸ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 683, quoted in Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity and Singularity in African American Narrative 1997*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 125.

truth under a false appearance,” but this terminology also presents more questions than answers.⁴⁹

The above scholars’ vast contribution to defining, and redefining, passing allows a gap for further discussion. The exploration of passing includes the unsteady definition of passing as evident from the above scholar’s unique interpretations of passing. I intend to not only look at passing as a trope whose definition is not static, but to use narratives, memoirs, and fiction to show how reality fosters us all to pass. A close analysis of these narratives, memoirs, and fictions cannot show all the facets of passing and I will therefore use intersectionality to conclude that passing represents our known reality.

The construction of an intersectional passing model also employs, and contributes to, the sub-field of the sociology culture; the sociology of literature. The sociology of literature closely examines cultural products as a way to reflect social issues and to create larger meaning using interpretation. Interpretation, in this sense, refers to “an occurrence that takes place in time and space” and “the interpretation depends on the subject.”⁵⁰ A full interpretation of the subject, cultural product, posits the idea that the interpreter must therefore recognize the position of the agent and his/her experiences to construct a pattern of meaning. This pattern of meaning includes coding cultural products to illustrate a shared experience of passing while also closely examining how the passers’ time and space informs their experiences. The combination of literary analysis and sociology allows for an interdisciplinary approach to culture through literature. Pierre Bourdieu describes cultural production as a “*labour of representation*” because the “agent”

⁴⁹ Samira Kawash, “The Epistemology of Race: Knowledge, Visibility, and Passing,” in *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity and Singularity in African American Narrative 1997*, ed. V.Y. Mudimbe (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 125.

⁵⁰ Charles A. Pressler and Fabio B. Dasilva, *Sociology and Interpretation: From Weber to Habermas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 91.

“continually performs in order to impose their own vision of the world or the vision of their own position in this world that is, their social identity.”⁵¹ The cultural products or texts, as in this dissertation, strive to illustrate how the agent constructs his/her social identity through the construction of a narrative that both situates and refutes a normative designation upon the agent. More specifically, the texts in this dissertation demonstrate how the author’s initial situated status within a particular social group, which is dependent upon criteria associated with that group, recognizes his/her place in the normative structure but endeavors to construct his/her social identity and meaning in opposition to the norm. The passer; therefore, destabilizes the normative structure when he/she passes and highlights the futility of constructed social groups. Clifford Geertz writing on the move toward theorizing culture, states that “believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”⁵² Geertz illustrates the validity in garnering meaning from an analytic perspective, but also cautions against the notion that such an experimental framework will somehow determine cultural signification, in any and all cases of interpretation. The study of sociology of literature includes a wide range of cultural products including music, novels, and theater. A few prominent sociologists who work with literary texts include Wendy Griswold, Marjorie DeVault, and Janice Radway whom all closely analyze fiction to construct an understanding of social practices.⁵³

⁵¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Cultural Power,” in *Cultural Sociology*, ed. Lyn Spillman (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 69.

⁵² Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *Cultural Sociology*, ed. Ly Spillman (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 63.

⁵³ Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers and the Novel in Nigeria* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000); Marjorie DeVault, “Novel Readings: The Social Organizations of Interpretation,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95,

More contemporary work includes Amy Singer's article which analyzes children's literature and social inequality or as she states, "this project examines how children's novels describe, challenge, or even subvert systems of inequality."⁵⁴ Singer, in her article, employs a sociological reading of three texts which "describes both a methodological approach to the analysis of children's books and the subsequent development of two analytical categories of novels."⁵⁵ These two categories divide children's books and look for "books whose narratives describe and support unequal social arrangements" and "those whose narratives work instead to identify inequality and disrupt it."⁵⁶ Singer's project focuses on children's novel published between 1930 and 1980 and views these "novels as sources of sociological data."⁵⁷ Singer also employs a coding system that informs the intersectional passing model where she uses "the novel for information about social ideologies and structured representations" but also focuses "on a text's willingness to resist reproducing dominant social arrangements that are based upon inequality."⁵⁸ This project contributes to sociology of literature in two primary ways; the intersectional passing model and the extensive qualitative analysis of socially constructed groups. Gender, sexuality, and class are all social constructs with socially identifying traits; therefore, a qualitative analysis will illustrate how these norms are identified by the passer for the successful transition to another social group. Each stage of the intersectional passing model denotes particular criteria and establishes a coding system to identify how the stages qualify passing experiences. The stages of the intersectional passing model pay special attention to the

no. 4 (1990): 887-921 accessed May 23, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1086/229380>; Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁵⁴ Amy Singer, "A Novel Approach: The Sociology of Literature, Children's Books, and Social Inequality," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 10, no. 4 (2011): 307, accessed on May, 23, 2017, <http://www.content.ebscohost.com>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 307.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 307.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 308-309.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 310.

determining factors that prompt the passer to pass and to correctly identify whether the passer is indeed passing. The model's stages are adapted from previous readings of racial passing narratives. More pointedly, the data in each stage allows for a deeper sociological analysis of how the agent, or passer, navigates his/her perceived social representation to construct a social identity of meaning. The qualitative data also allows for a deeper insight into how social groups, and categories, are constructed but also invites a critical perspective on how these categories impact individuals on a micro-level and macro-level. The impact on the individual illustrates an opposite reaction to the normative structure, but on the macro-level the individual conforms to social ideology. The goal of the model is to formulate a template to qualitatively analyze each text, but this analysis by no means posits the notion that every passing narrative is homogeneous.

Methodology

In the context of this project, a discussion of the advent of passing in literature as a reflection of the ever growing discontent of black America in relation to the continued subjugation of black men and women is vital. Historical literature will play a vital role in establishing the viewpoints of society about notions of race, gender, heteronormativity, and socio-economic status from the 1980s to 2012. This timeframe is significantly important, not only for the expansive coverage and mutation of the passing trope in fiction, but because in each era historical events fostered such a mutation. In the 1980s the AIDS scare and microscopic attention paid to homosexual communities and lifestyles bred homosexuals to pass for straight, but other events in this era include mass consumerism, wealth accumulation, distinct class division, and a redefinition of female sexuality in media, and business. All these factors in this one era allow for a starting point

rich in a reality of passing: passing for straight, passing for rich, and passing for female. As we can see, this one era represents a change in cultural, social, racial, and gender perception, but each subsequent era also represents the same changes which are reflected in the literature of each era. This expansive timeframe allows for an illustration of the widespread historical changes occurring in society through the selected readings, but also shows the necessity for an altered understanding, and application, of passing. Each novel, biography, and memoir chosen highlights a particular individual's experience whose motivation for passing varies greatly, but at the same time intersects with other individuals striving to adapt to social normativity. Louise Erdrich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (woman to man), Richard J. Novic's *Alice in Genderland: A Crossdresser Comes of Age* (man to woman), Martin Duberman's *Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey*(gay to straight), Timothy Kurek's *The Cross in the Closet* (straight to gay), Barabara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (upper class to lower class), and Frank W. Abagnale's *Catch Me If You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake* (lower class to upper class) will open a window to theorize passing as an intersectional phenomenon.

There are two forms of historical methods, social and cultural, but for my purposes cultural historical methods will effectively illustrate how culture impacts authorship and the intersections of passing. Cultural historical methods focus on the influence of a particular culture on history and will allow me to look specifically at certain groups and their particular outlook on historical events. Memoirs, narratives, and fiction produce in the 1980s reflect the cultural changes from an individualistic perspective, but also illustrate a wider concern with normativity and inclusion. For example, historian E.P. Thompson's work looked closely at the working class in England and illustrated the influence those from below contributed to history. Thompson's close examinations of these men's and women's lives unveiled rather mundane details of

everyday life, but also explained how these insights into these lives unraveled patterns that contributed to the meaning of their lives and the major connections to historical movements in England.⁵⁹ While Thompson's work focuses solely on workers in England in the 19th century, his work does shed light on how patterns within everyday activities can add up to a complete cultural shift. This particular result is also achievable when looking at the trope of passing. Society does not just inhabit just one cultural influence or even one cultural pattern, but the ever changing influence of cultural groups adds to the narrative of history. While using Thompson's model of the history from below, cultural history will allow me to analyze the patterns present within each sub-cultural group (e.g., gay culture, straight culture, white culture, black culture, female culture, and male culture) to note intersectional patterns. Cultural historical methods tend to rely heavily on documents, and texts to recount a person's particular place in history so there might be a tendency to view a singular text as a mirror to a historical period without any real criticism of the texts' authenticity⁶⁰.

The use of literary methods will allow me to view the texts critically without assuming that each text mirrors an entire culture's perception of society, history, and culture. Literary methodology focuses more on literary theories and the interpretations of the text. There are numerous literary theories but for my purposes the use of gender studies/queer theory, and feminist theory will allow me not only to critique the narratives presented within a particular time frame, but will also allow me to critique particular cultural influences on the text. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity allows a close analysis of not only the construction of gender and sexuality, but also an extension of Butler's concept to include other socially

⁵⁹ Dorothy Thompson, *The Essential E.P. Thompson*, ed. (New York: The New Press).

⁶⁰ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (New York: Longman/Pearson, 2010), 246-273.

constructed groups as well. More specifically, performativity in the case of passing does not just refer to gender/sexuality but also invariably explains the phenomena of passing. Butler's ideas about performativity highlight the very nature of passing as performative. Butler states, how "acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."⁶¹ The idea of performativity applies to all modes of passing because the passer manufactures recognizable markers on his/her body to correlate with the ideology associated with those bodies. Indeed, "these forms of recognition may begin with superficial markers such as skin color, speech, and dress, but these are only indicators of associative relations, ways of being in the world, and an imagined sharing of a common origin and iconic experiences."⁶² Therefore, the act of performativity is quite vital to successful passing because in order to avoid detection the passer must articulate the absence or presence of certain markers on his/her body in order to reconstruct signifying markers of gender, sexuality, and class. A passer passing as a woman, or man, recognizes the signs widely associated with gender and reconstructs the body, the surface, to adhere to these signifiers of gender. Butler's performativity is associated with gender and sexuality, but the challenge in this dissertation is to illustrate how all social constructs including class are performative. Literary interpretations include looking at the author's viewpoint, or voice, the rhetoric, setting, time, place, character development, and all these elements of interpretation lend meaning to the text. The combination of cultural historical methods and literary methods will show consistent patterns within the text, but will also allow me to assess the author's standpoint.

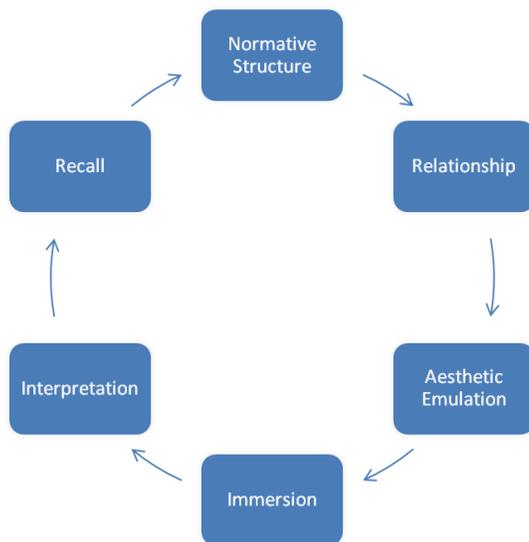
⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 173.

⁶² Allyson Hobbs, *Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge: University Press of Harvard, 2014), 14.

The last method I will use is the sociology of literature that will allow me to view these novels as a placement and reflection of social institutions, i.e. race, class, gender, and sexuality. The sociology of literature will allow me to view the functionality of the content in these novels and help me answer particular questions of do these novels engage the reader in a non-escapist manner or are they intended for purely entertainment purposes? I hope the use of this particular method will allow me to take passing and illuminate it as not only a trope of escapism for the reader, but in fact an engagement of the reader's own intersectional reality. The combination of these three methods will help me formulate a traceable pattern within the narrative or meta-narrative. Specifically, the pattern that I am hoping to uncover looks closely at the reality of intersectionality, but also shows how the author's own historical standpoint will differentiate patterns or re-establish commonly held norms on gender, sexuality, race and class. The overall goal in using these three particular methodologies is to expand the scope of analysis and include all elements of the narrative, but to also illustrate the very reality of intersectionality. As shown earlier, prior scholarship on passing has either focused on sociology or literature with minor historical context and while these methods have advanced a somewhat clearer understanding of passing, multiple definitions of passing illustrate the ever-changing concept of passing. It is my hope that using all three methods will allow me to theorize passing as an intersectional phenomenon. The ever changing definition of passing, as shown by the previous scholars, reiterates the need to look at passing as not a singular occurrence but as a phenomenon occurring in tandem with each other. Each method, while useful as a standalone tool for analysis, does not explain the concept of passing through multiple complex lenses.

Intersectional Passing Model

The analytic approach for this research project will draw from historical, literary, and sociological methodologies. More specifically, these three different methods will allow me to formulate a model of analysis when looking at the various passing novels, fictions, memoirs, and essays. The model desired here is quite specific, and I have assigned monikers to these particular positions of analysis within my study. The passing experience does not simply begin with the decision to pass, but involves several complicated steps.



Normative Structure

The first stage begins with the passer understanding the exact normative structure of gender, class and sexuality. When I refer to normative structures, I am emphasizing “how ‘it comes about that social systems ‘bind’ time and space, incorporating and integrating presence

and absence.”⁶³ Questions of race, for example, are addressed when the passer not only understands the normative structure of race (the existing racialized social structure), but begins to realize how this structure places limitations on his/her own place within society. For example, a Black man understands how the normative structure rewards white men simply because white men are white. Therefore, the Black man understands the restrictions placed upon him simply because of the color of his skin and this informs him of his displacement within the normative structure of race. A person of mixed race also understands the normative structure of race, but unlike the Black man, this man or woman feel a displacement within his/her own social group because he/she is neither Black nor white; according to the normative structure of race. This particular concept, in the model, is defined as “the normative structure” and will include the passers historical and sociological placement within our social structure, but also as an overall motivation for passing. Employing historical and sociological placement within the social structure involves an in-depth exploration of African-American history, and a sociological understanding of how race is formulated into a normative structure. This starting position will emphasize the overall nature of the normative social structure, but will also analyze such a structure within the novels, essay, fictions, and memoirs. In order to gain such a perspective on the normative structure and show how the author and characters are affected by such a structure, the author’s particular placement within the normative structure must be explored. Therefore, this step will not only look closely at historical and sociological methodology, but will also delve deeply into the literature. In order to code for normative structure in the novels, I will look for the characteristics of the major character such as gender, class and sexuality. Once these factors

⁶³ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*, (Cambridge, England: Polity, 1984), 43, quoted in Ruth Wallace and Alison Wolf, *Contemporary Sociological Theory: Continuing the Classical Tradition* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995, 371.

are determined, then I will evaluate whether the character understands his/her positionality within the normative structure. This attempt to garner the character's position is informed by the author's position as well, so further exploration into the author is also needed to understand the relevancy with the normative structure and passing. The elements of normative structure will rely upon the rhetoric the author employs with his/her description of the character, but will also rely upon how the author positions the character when he/she outlines the setting, tone, and character development.

Primary Relationships

This second stage begins with the passer's close relationships within his/her group. This stage resembles the previous stage of normative structures, but emphasizes how the passer relates to men/women within that structure and those outside it as well. However, this position, for the passer, informs the passer of his/her difference within these relationships. The passer is shown how these differences separate them from the group either by race, class, gender or sexuality. This position is directly linked to the normative structure and is reified in the passer's relationships. More specifically, a passer who is mixed race is informed of his/her differences within his/her social group, and these are often times presented in negative ways. For example, a young woman who is mixed often feels that she does not "fit" in with her Black friends or her white friends and these relationships push her to decide how she will identify herself within the group. This concept is defined as simply the "relationship" stage and will focus on how the passer interacts within his/her group. The close relationship within his /her social group or the role the passer occupies within this group informs his/her placement and status. This stage looks closely at the role the passer occupies within his/her group and in most cases the passer is not necessarily viewed as holding a significant role within the group. The dissatisfaction the passer

feels attributes to his/her need to find a role within a social group where he/she is not marginalized based on race, gender, sexuality, or class. This particular stage will also employ sociology, history, and literature. However, the purpose of this particular stage is to show how the passer's role within his/her group identifies the passer and the best evidence to support such a position is to show how the character within the novel, essay, fiction, or memoir interacts within his/her social group before committed to passing. To code for relationships, I will look closely at the character's interaction with his/her parents, siblings, and extended family. These relationships will be coded as primary relationships because these interactions shape how the character will feel about his/her identity. There are, of course, secondary relationships and these will encompass relationships with friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances.

Aesthetic Emulation

The next stage involves the passer's decision to pass and his/her preparation in such a task. This stage includes the alienation of previous relationships because the passer cannot fully pass until he/she forms new relationships within the group they hope to assimilate into. This stage is sometimes difficult for the passer because prior relationships still inform him/her of their position. However, through changes in location, occupation, dress, and manner this stage is vital to passing. The individual submerges themselves within the group they hope to emulate and therefore this stage, or concept, will be called "aesthetic emulation". I use the word aesthetic here because the process of passing is not completed with just the decision to pass, but involves the restructuring of one's overall physicality for success. These modifications include basic aesthetics and more complicated performative alterations. This particular stage will use all three methodologies previously outlined to show the significant aesthetic qualities associated with passing. The methodologies will allow me to look closely at the historical, sociological, and

literary significance of aesthetics. For example, historically, Black hair went from straight to more natural when the Black Power movement emphasized how Black is beautiful and how women were expected to wear dresses instead of slacks to prove their femininity. These aesthetic accouterments also emphasize your social group and categorize race, gender, class, and sexuality. These aesthetics are more easily visible in relation to gender, class, and sexuality because certain dress is associated with femininity, wealth, and sexuality. The authors of passing literature develop their characters and utilize these aesthetic accouterments to flush out the characters and bring the element of humanity to their characters. More pointedly, history has illustrated how Black men and women's bodies were viewed differently than white bodies; therefore a passer who passes for white incorporates the history of Black men and women and alters their physicality accordingly. The emphasis with this particular stage is to show how the passer changes, or alters, their physical appearance to conform to the criteria of the group. Of course there are many questions this stage will address as far as what it means to be white, black, a woman, a man, upper or lower class, and gay or straight, but the overall purpose of this particular stage is show the transformation of the passer. The use of all three methodologies will show how the passer transforms him/herself, but also show how important this stage is for the passer to fully integrate him/herself with the group. In order to code for aesthetic emulation, I will look at how the author describes his/her character once that character passes into another social group. These aesthetics will include hair, dress, accessories, and language modification.

Immersion

Once this stage is completed, the passer's immersion within the group he/she is passing into begins. This stage, or concept, is defined as the "immersion" stage. The "immersion" stage allows the passer to form new relationships within his/her newfound group but also allows

him/her to observe as well. This stage is tenuous and complicated because the passer is still constantly aware of his/her performance even though he/she has somewhat successfully immersed themselves within the group. In many of the novels, memoirs, and essays, the passer, in this stage, begins to question his/her decision to pass at all, which is grounded in fear of exposure. If the passer successfully avoids exposure, and controls any emotional responses to their prior social group then he/she has completely passed into his/her designated group. Once the passer is “immersed” within a particular social group the advantages of such inclusion are seen in his/her social “upgrade,” or in some cases “downgrade.” The advantages correlate with the group the passer immerses himself/herself in and therefore are not finite across all social groups. For example, a man who is mixed race and decides to pass for white has immersed himself in a group with distinct social, economic, and racial advantages inherent within that group. However, a man passing as a woman has arguably “downgraded” his social group status and while he might attain certain advantages passing as a female, he has in fact given up more of the advantages he would receive as a man. To illustrate how passing benefits the passer we must look at how the passer’s prior experiences in his/her previous social group lacked certain advantages and also show how the act of passing is preferable to their previous state. Again, the use of historical and sociological methodology will allow me to show how there are certain advantages within an alternate social group. In order to code for immersion, I will look closely at the passer’s new formed relationships, both primary and secondary, but I will also look closely at the passer’s rhetoric in association with his/her previous relationships. More specifically, does the passer reminisce about his/her prior social groups? How does the passer temper his/her language about his/her previous group?

Interpretation

Once the passer is immersed within his/her new social group then the passer interprets his/her experience with a greater understanding of their new social group. The passer's new found relationships within the social group allow him/her to alter their understanding of the normative structure and in some cases slowly alter that structure. This interpretation stage relies heavily upon how the passer navigates his/her new social position and how he/she reinterprets the normative structure. As stated previously, once the passer begins the journey of passing he/she repositions themselves within the normative structure and the interpretation stage will look at how the passer effectively processes this new position. How does the passer view his/her new position within the social group? What does the passer learn about his/her new social group? Does this newfound knowledge of the social group alter the passer's attitude? This stage will use both literary and sociological methodologies to show how the passer interprets his/her new position through the rhetoric associated with his/her current and previous social group. The rhetoric of the text will show whether or not the passer's knowledge of his/her new social group alters, or shifts, to allow for a greater understanding of race, gender, class, or sexuality. The rhetoric the passer associates with his/her new position will show the passer's new normative structure, but how he/she alters this normative structure will employ sociological methodology. How does one change the normative structure? Is such a change even possible? In order to code for interpretation, I will look closely at any changes in the rhetoric from the first step through the process of passing and then at the end of the novels to see if any significant attitude shift has occurred in the passer's overall perspective of race, gender, sexuality, and class. This evidence will be evident not only in the language the writer uses to emphasize the overall experience of passing, but also in the language the narrator's newfound relationships employ throughout their

association. This alteration of rhetoric will also inform me as to whether or not the passer understands his/her new position within the normative structure and if the passer will attempt to alter such a structure.

Recall

The final stage of this model looks at how the passer recalls his/her experience of passing through the narratives they write. The process of recall takes all of the abovementioned steps and allows the passer to not only articulate his/her experience to garner meaning, but also endeavors to relay that information to a wider audience who might similarly undergo such an experience. Basically, this step looks at how the narrator conceptualizes his/her experiences in the form of the narrative. After all, the passing experience as I have outlined it above takes all the factors to illustrate not only the individuals' personal experience with passing but to also generate an overall understanding for any individual who will engage in passing. This particular step is vital to not only understand the relevancy of passing but to also articulate the changes in normative structure and within social groups. The passer's ability to recall his/her experience allows the reader to broaden his/her own position within the normative structure and invites change. This stage will incorporate all three methodologies. First, the product of the passer's recall is in fact the narrative, so looking intently at how the passer shows us his/her experience and imparts such knowledge is useful to map the overall influence of such narratives. Second, the product is informed by his/her social experience within their old and new social groups, so looking at how the passer formulates knowledge about the normative structure is important to changing such a structure. Thirdly, these narratives are an addition to historical literature on the same subject and therefore lend a new voice to the subject of passing but also challenge the notion that the normative structure has altered in any significant way from previous narratives. In order to code

for the recall step, I must look at how these narratives impart certain knowledge about not only the experience of passing but also on the normative structure. The sheer number of these narratives will emphasize the overall recall method for these passers, but the authors will also illustrate how this experience has added to the knowledge of passing.

The above model covers an analysis of low to high passing, or minority to majority. Many of the passing narratives cover this particular mode of passing, but there are those passers from the so-called high who pass for low and in this case the model changes slightly. The alteration occurs at the starting point for the passer because he/she begins in an advantaged stage. In the first stage, mentioned above, the normative structure for the high passer is one that the passer is not comfortable conforming to and therefore he/she decides to initiate the passing process with the intent of changing the normative structure in some small way. For example, a white male who fits within the normative structure of race in society chooses to pass into another group for various reasons relating to class, or sexuality which don't conform to the normative structure. This white male; however, is imbedded within the normative structure, and in most cases reaffirms the normative structure, but the overwhelming need of this particular passer still recognizes the constrictions of such a structure and through his passing tries to alter the structure. This white male is still considered part of the normative structure in regards to race, but he might be lower class or a homosexual which does not fit within the normative structure of class and sexuality, so he passes. As stated above, the coding for these particular stages will alter slightly because of the passer's starting point, but otherwise the results should be consistent with my prior explanation. In fact, all of the other stages stated above will still apply when a passer from an advantage starting point passes for a disadvantage social group.

There are numerous novels written about passing, but I will choose to focus on a timeframe from 1980 to 2012. This timeframe is quite vast, but when looking at trends in history and sociology this will allow me to gather data pre-civil rights and post-civil rights and also highlight significant changing trends of the use of passing. Each novel, memoir, and biography allows for a variance of experiences, but each includes aspects of intersectionality that correspond with each other. The author's experiences reflect specific shifts in cultural attitudes about gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status which prompt each group to translate passing in a unique movement.

The first four chapters of my study will look at gender, sexuality, and class and use correlating contemporary fiction to illustrate the intersectionality of passing. Each chapter will use both literary methodology as well as sociological methodology to analyze each work of fiction and contextualize the formulation of intersectional passing. The last chapter of my study will theorize the applicability of passing as not just a racial tool of identification, but a tool of identification that cannot, and should not, be separated from other social categories of identity, i.e. gender, sexuality, and class.

Below is an outline of my proposed dissertation chapters and a timeline of completion:

- I. Chapter 2: This chapter will look closely at gender passing in two separate novels, Louise Erdich's *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* where the main character passes as a man and Richard J. Novic's *Alice in Genderland* where the main character passes as a woman. However, this analysis will also illustrate the intersectional reality of passing, so I will also highlight elements of sexuality, and class passing in this chapter as well.

- II. Chapter 3: This chapter will look closely at sexual passing and will focus on two novels where the main characters pass as both straight and homosexual individuals. In Martin Duberman's novel *Curses: A Gay Man's Odyssey* the narrator passes for a straight man and in Timothy Kurek's novel *The Cross in the Closet* the narrator relates his story as a straight man passing for a homosexual man.
- III. Chapter 4: This chapter will look closely at class passing and will focus on two novels where the main characters pass as both upper and lower class socio-economic statuses. Barabara Ehrenreich's book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* explores the author's experiences through various occupations, most of which reflect the lower class, which deviates from her upper class location. Another book that looks closely as class passing, Frank Abagnale's *Catch Me If You Can*, explores the distinct experiences of a lower class man who passes from one occupation to another and in the process forges millions of dollars in checks.
- IV. Chapter 5: Conclusion—Overall discussion of how gender, sexuality, and class are all constructs that intersect and contribute to my theory of passing.

Chapter 2

The Cassock and the Dress: Gender Passing

Louise Erdrich's (2001) *The Last Report of Miracles at Little No Horse* explores the fictional narrative of a young white woman who passes as a Catholic priest on an Ojibwe reservation and Dr. Richard J. Novic's (2009) memoir *Alice in Genderland: A Crossdresser Comes of Age* explores his journey with crossdressing as a woman. Both of these texts explore the intricacies of passing that diverge from the traditional racial narrative of passing. My overall goal in this chapter is not only to map how the intersectional model applies to the texts but to also inform how the concept of passing directly challenges fixed notion of gender normativity. Gender normativity refers to the ideology that women, and their place in society, is defined solely on the basis of historical notions of femininity; passive, virginal, and physical, emotional fragility. Louise Erdrich and Dr. Richard Novic's texts illustrate how an individual, whether man or woman, achieves passing. More specifically, the intersectional passing model allows us to see the difficulties involved with passing. Erdrich and Novic's texts test our understanding of gender normativity and show the reader how gender is created, and re-created, by the passer to accommodate his/her grasp of their own individual understanding of normality.

The ultimate goal in applying the intersectional passing model to these texts is to show how those who pass go through multiple, complex, and often challenging steps to achieve their own personal understanding of gender constructs. Overall, the application of the intersectional passing model also highlights how gender itself is not a fixed understanding of the body in society. These two accounts of gender passing allow the audience to question the validity of gender construction in their own lives, and to grasp the performative nature of gender. An in-

depth analysis and application of the intersectional passing model illustrates how gender normativity makes the passer question his/her place in society and also opens up opportunities for the passer to explore his/her own sense of gender normativity.

Text Summaries/Normative Structure

The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse

Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, explores the life of Agnes DeWitt and her gender passing as a Catholic priest on an Ojibwe Indian reservation. The novel takes place from 1910-1996 and begins with a letter Father Damien is composing to the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church in 1996. This letter discloses remarkable information concerning Father Damien's long held secret, he is really a she, and she has been passing as a man for over 80 years. A woman passing as a man is not a new phenomena and there are indeed numerous accounts of women donning men's clothing to fight in wars. Indeed, women in the United States during the Civil War dressed up as soldiers to fight for their country. For example, Sarah Emma Edmonds (1841-1898) in Laura Leedy Gansler's (2005) *The Mysterious Private Thompson: The Double Life of Sarah Emma Edmonds, Civil War Soldier* dressed as a man for two years to fight in a Union regiment, Loreta Janeta Velazquez's (1842-?) narrative *The Woman in Battle, A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States Army* (1876) fought for the Confederate States Army and DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook's (2002) *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* where over 240 accounts of women passing as men to fight in the Civil War for both Union and

Confederate armies are explored; including Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, and Jennie Hodgers.⁶⁴ Other accounts of women passing as men include Maria Sanchez and Linda Schlossberg's (2001) chapter entitled "Telling Tales: Brandon Teena, Billy Tipton, and Transgender Biography" in Judith Halberstam's (2001) book *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*. This chapter explores the lives of Brandon Teena (1972-1993) who passed as man in rural Nebraska until he was raped and murdered in 1993 and the life of Billy Tipton (1914-1989) a Jazz musician whose female gender was not discovered until his death in 1989.⁶⁵ These accounts of women passing as men also illustrate the varying motives behind gender passing. Billy Tipton passed as a man because she was not able to occupy the role of jazz musician as a woman and never disclosed the secret of her gender. Tipton's gender passing greatly resembles Father Damien's as he never discloses his secret to those around him until his death.

The normative structure in Erdrich's novel looks at how Agnes DeWitt is influenced, or molded, by societal norms surrounding gender. The normative structure examines how society's view of gender, and the roles designated as masculine and feminine, inform Erdrich's characters. This step also investigates how Erdrich uses rhetoric to describe her main characters and how they relate to one another. There are several examples of the normative structure within Erdrich's novel that illustrate how DeWitt navigates gendered roles.

Louise Erdrich's novel *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* illustrates how Father Damien began his life as Sister Cecilia in a Wisconsin convent. In 1910 Wisconsin, Sister

⁶⁴ Virginia J. Laas, review of *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* by DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 2 (2004): 441-442, doi: 10.2307/27648433.

⁶⁵ Elaine K. Ginsberg "Introduction: The Politics of Passing" in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 3.

Cecilia does not last long in the convent because she is overly committed to her music and decides to leave the convent after she realizes her devotion to Chopin interferes with her devotion to Christ. During 1910-1912, Sister Cecilia leaves the convent and reverts to her previous identity as Agnes DeWitt in Wisconsin. She meets Brendt Vogel a lonely German farmer who wants to marry DeWitt after convincing himself that she is his only hope for a family. In Allison Berg's (2002) *Mothering the Race: Women's Narratives of Reproduction, 1890-1930*⁶⁶ and Mary S. Blackwell, "The Republican Vision of Mary Palmer Tyler,"⁶⁷ they argue that the construction of true motherhood is to reproduce young women as future wives and the caretakers of continued virtuous behavior for generations to come. This explanation of female virtue as the key to the prosperity of future generations prompts Vogel's insistence upon marrying DeWitt and procreating to ensure he attains labor for his farm. Richard R. Harwood's (1990) chapter entitled, "A History of Sustainable Agriculture" posits that farming in the 1900s was competing with large expansion in technological advancements and the advent of industry diminished available farm labor.⁶⁸ In Sylvia D. Hoffert's (2003) *A History of Gender in America: Essays, Documents, and Articles* she elucidates how men depended upon their wives in order to sustain successful farm production. In fact, "to make one's living on a farm required the labor of both men and women. Farm couples tended to think of themselves as an economic and social unit and their work as a shared experience."⁶⁹ The duties of women on farms varied from "childcare, cleaning cooking and sewing as well as tending to the dairy, poultry, and vegetable

⁶⁶ Allison Berg, *Mothering the Race: Women's Narratives of Reproduction, 1890-1930* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁶⁷ Mary S. Blackwell, "The Republican Vision of Mary Palmer Tyler" *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no. 1 (1992): 11-35.

⁶⁸ Richard R. Harwood, "A History of Sustainable Agriculture" in *Sustainable Agricultural Systems 1990*, eds. Clive A. Edwards, Rattan Lal, Patrick Madden, Robert H. Miller, and Gar House (Boca Raton: St. Lucie Press, 1990), 5.

⁶⁹ Sylvia D. Hoffert, *A History of Gender In America: Essays, Documents, and Articles* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 526.

garden.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Agnes performs many of these duties on specific days of the week, “Monday she sewed. She baked all day Tuesday. On Wednesdays she churned and scrubbed. She sold the butter and the eggs Thursdays. Killed a chicken every Friday.”⁷¹ The tasks she performs in Vogel’s household are strictly performed in the house and therefore are defined in the confines of the female space. More specifically, all DeWitt’s tasks are performed in an effort to ensure Vogel’s comfort as befitting the man of the house. DeWitt’s understanding of her gender-designated role in society harkens back to her upbringing for as a woman “the heart of her gender is stretched, pounded, molded, and tempered for its hot task from the age of two.”⁷² Vogel and DeWitt’s relationship progresses from companions to sexual partners. Vogel is quite persistent when he tries to persuade DeWitt to marry him, but DeWitt maintains “that she must never marry again, for not only had she wed herself soul to soul to Christ, but she had already been unfaithful—her phantom lover the Polish composer—thus already living out too grievous a destiny to become a bride.”⁷³ DeWitt continues to fulfill her obligations in Vogel’s home, while still asserting herself in her constant refusal to marry Vogel. DeWitt’s vows to Christ as a nun are a bit contradictory here especially since her and Vogel continue to have sexual relations with each other outside of marriage.

DeWitt and Vogel continue their unconventional arrangement until Vogel is killed in a botched burglary; DeWitt loses portions of her memory as a result, and succumbs to depression and grief. One spring morning, DeWitt goes to town to deposit money in the bank for the mortgage payment, but when she arrives at the bank Arnold “the Actor” Anderson with his

⁷⁰ Ibid, 526.

⁷¹ Ibid, 18.

⁷² Ibid, 18.

⁷³ Louise Erdrich, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 17.

troupe of thieves are robbing the bank.⁷⁴ DeWitt is taken hostage and as the getaway car speeds down the road, Vogel catches sight of her and follows the car on his horse in an attempt to rescue her. The car gets stuck in the mud on the road and Vogel is able to catch up to the car. However, the Actor holds DeWitt in front of him with a gun to her head and threatens to shoot her if Vogel does not back down. Meanwhile, the inept sheriff charges towards DeWitt and the Actor. The Actor shoots DeWitt in the head but not directly because Vogel punches the Actor just as the gun goes off. The Actor takes Vogel's horse, who is exhausted after Vogel used him to chase after the Actor's car, and Vogel follows him through the muddy field. Vogel believes that DeWitt is dead and does not fear the Actor so he keeps charging him through the muddy fields. The Actor is struggling in the muddy field and after the horse keels over, he is stuck in the mud. Vogel pursues him and the Actor shoots him several times. Vogel finally reaches the Actor's body stuck in the mud and proceeds to suffocate him but also perishes from his wounds.

DeWitt's head wound "split and roped her scalp" and "though she'd lost portions of her memory, she had not lost her wits."⁷⁵ After Vogel's death, DeWitt became sole owner of the farm because in Vogel's will "he declared her his common-law wife and left her the farm and all upon it."⁷⁶ After a few days of not going to church, Father Damien Modeste visits DeWitt and tries to bring her comfort. He tells her that he will soon venture as a missionary to the Ojibwe reservation. Edward H. Spicer's *Cycle of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960* documents how Spain, Mexico, and America alter the native populations in an attempt to "civilize" them through religion and military

⁷⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 33.

intervention.⁷⁷ Spicer recounts how each country's approach toward civilizing these native populations relied heavily upon each country's interpretation of civilization. For example, the early Spaniards utilized "the missionaries, the military captains, and the colonial administrators" to fulfill a mission of civilization which included alterations in native "clothing to religious practice" and relied heavily upon "Spanish culture of the period" as the model for a civilized world.⁷⁸ Steven Newcomb's *Pagans in the Promise Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* recounts how the Spaniards created "the requerimiento" a document which requires indigenous populations to fully submit to royal authority and religious doctrine in order to acquire "freedom" or resist and risk enslavement.⁷⁹ The requerimiento gave license for the Spaniards to conquer indigenous populations because "the Conqueror model posits a central figure, such as monarch (whether king, queen, or pope), who is considered divine or whose power is considered to come from a divine source."⁸⁰ This document also posits the authority of a conquering country over the indigenous populations of America or more pointedly, Spain already owns the land and thereby can dispense dominion over said land. Jay P. Dolan's *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* explains how the Spanish devised a program to civilize the native population, or more specifically, the establishment of the mission.⁸¹

When Mexico took control of certain portions of America, the notion of civilization "still emphasized rectangular houses of some sort and men's trousers"; however, they also introduced

⁷⁷ Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico, and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533-1960* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷⁹ Steven T. Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008), 32-36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 32.

⁸¹ Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Double Day, 1985).

“individual landholding among the Indians” and an educational system devoid of any religious affiliation unlike the Spaniards who advocated for a Roman Catholic educational system.⁸² Spain and Mexico’s attempts to assimilate native nations into a growing country were at first abandoned when Anglo-Americans wrestled control of the United States. In fact, Anglo-Americans concept of civilization involved the exclusion of native populations with the belief that civilization was a concept reserved for the few as opposed to the many. Anglo-Americans went so far as to physically isolate native populations on reservations as a way to offset the need to expend any effort toward civilizing natives. However, this perspective quickly shifted when Anglo-Americans began to physically migrate closer to the reservations thereby prompted them to conceptualize their own notion of civilization which included “the English language, the agricultural technology of the United States at that time, elementary schools with religious instruction, the holding of land by individual title, and usually some one of the Protestant varieties of Christianity.”⁸³ The term civilization embodies variant definitions depending upon how the group in question utilizes context, or more specifically, the term encompasses a rationalization for dominance of a perceived inferior group. Indeed, all the aforementioned countries conceptualized the term civilization as a means to control and assimilate native populations.

The role of the missionary, in accordance with its countries designation and religious doctrines, is thereby to convert native populations. However, conversion to religious doctrine is merely a starting point for many missionaries. In fact, the goal of the missionary is coupled with the grasp for land ownership. Vine Deloria Jr.’s book (1988), *Custard Died for Your Sins: An*

⁸² *Ibid*, 5.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 5-6.

Indian Manifesto, explores the destructive influence of the missionaries on Indian populations.

He states,

One of the major problems of the Indian people is the missionary. It has been said of missionaries that when they arrived they had only the Book and we had the land; now we have the Book and they have the land. An old Indian once told me that when the missionaries arrived they fell on their knees and prayed. Then they got up, fell on the Indians, and preyed.⁸⁴

Although the underlying intent of the missionary is to save souls and bring non-believers into the fold, the stark reality of what the missionaries actually accomplished was to egregiously disempower native men and women in order to steal their land. Father Damien's goal as a missionary is not just to bring Catholic dogma to the reservation, but to ultimately attain the land in the name of Christ and the State. In fact, "when a tribe had been thoroughly subjugated, Army, trappers, and missionaries moved on and permanent personnel moved in to take control of Indian communities."⁸⁵ Therein, Father Damien's goal, as a white man and a priest, is to convert the men and women on the Ojibwe reservation but to also ensure that these same men and women will not resist the incoming colonization of the white man. Father Damien's role on the Ojibwe reservation is one of authority and dominion; he controls the salvation of these men and women.

After Father Damien's visit, DeWitt contemplates a new life away from the farm; a fantasy she constructs which includes a missionary life. She believes that such a life will allow her to do good works and assuage her own pain.⁸⁶ DeWitt's contemplation of missionary work is coupled with an ever increasing Red River due to a spring rainstorm which lasts five days and overflows the river banks near her farm. DeWitt is self-assured that her farm, and home, is safe

⁸⁴ Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 101.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 106.

⁸⁶ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 37.

so she loses herself playing the piano. However, she is so engrossed in her playing that she does not realize the water coming into the house until the current carries her out. DeWitt's farm is flooded and she is transported down river. After she safely navigates her way to shore, she begins to walk further North and notices debris along the way; "a tangle of rats. Skeletal twisted machinery from tattered farms. A baby carriage with no baby in it. Pieces of houses. A basket of eggs afloat. A priest hanging on a branch."⁸⁷ DeWitt recognizes the body of Father Damien Modeste and wonders if he was sucked upstream while driving the rectory auto or as he was walking on foot, but she never clarifies how his body was transported upstream.⁸⁸ DeWitt contemplates the meaning behind the appearance of Father Damien's body, but she soon concludes that his dead body is a sign from God that she should take his place as a missionary. DeWitt transform herself into Father Damien. DeWitt's decision to pass as Father Damien stems from her lack of placement or more pointedly, "she could think of nothing to which she was required to return" and "there was nothing to hold her back, now, from living the way she had dreamed of in the hot dark of her loss."⁸⁹ DeWitt's passing as a priest also provides her with a newfound respect from the driver, Kapshaw, who picks her up from the train station. She states,

That was another thing. Even now, the driver treated her with much more respect as a priest than she'd ever known as a nun. He was deferential, though not uncomfortable. Agnes was surprised to find that this treatment entirely gratified her, and yet seemed familiar as though it was her due. Robes or not, I am human, she said to herself. So this is what a priest gets, heads bowing and curious respectful attention! Back on the train, people also had given Father Damien more privacy. It was as though in priest's garments she walked within a clear bell of charged air.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 45.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 61-62.

DeWitt's newfound sense of importance, and deference, as a male priest also defies the very tenets of Catholicism which denies females the position of priesthood within the Catholic Church. DeWitt's passing thereby not only affords her the privileges associated with masculinity; mobility and autonomy, but also a revered position within the Catholic Church which she is fully aware as a prior nun that she could not obtain without passing as a male.

Father Damien/Agnes travels to the Ojibwe reservation where they navigate their new position as a man. They also interact with the men and women on the reservation. The narrative recounts numerous characters who come in contact with Father Damien, but the overall purpose of the narrative involves Father Jude's crusade to prove whether or not a member of the convent on the reservation is worthy of sainthood. Father Jude is a Catholic priest sent from the Vatican in 1996 to the Ojibwe reservation to determine the sainthood of Sister Leopolda. Father Jude's presence on the reservation prompts Father Damien to recount his own life and the narrative explores the numerous letters and diary entries that tell Father Damien's story. Father Damien does not disclose his secret to anyone on the Ojibwe reservation, nor does he tell Father Jude his secret.

Alice in Genderland: A Crossdresser Comes of Age

Dr. Richard J. Novic a white man's memoir, *Alice in Genderland: A Crossdresser Comes of Age*, delves deeply in the life of a crossdresser. The tradition of male crossdressing is quite extensive and G.G. Bolich's book (2007), *Transgender History & Geography: Crossdressing in Context, Volume 3* discusses the long history of crossdressing within Eastern and Western theatrical productions and society. Bolich's book posits that "crossdressing likely is as old as the

practice of dressing.”⁹¹ Early male crossdressing is most notable in Shakespearean plays where male actors performed both male and female roles because women were not permitted on stage. Katharine Cockin’s chapter (2002), “Introduction to Part One” in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, states how “the notion of a woman performing on a public stage in the role of a female character was widely unthinkable and undesirable.”⁹² Thomas E. Bevan’s book (2014), *The Psychobiology of Transsexualism and Transgenderism: A New View Based on Scientific Evidence*, explores the motivations behind crossdressing. Bevan argues that male crossdressing was not merely limited to the theater but also included variant motivations dependent upon “politics, adventure, religion, publicity, economics, and necessity.”⁹³ Peter Farrer’s magazine article (2006), “Letters on Crossdressing, 1867-1920”, explores male experiences with crossdressing submitted to numerous magazines and identifies these experiences in numerous categories ranging from private pleasure to punishment. Indeed, one male writer recounts how he was forced to wear female clothing because he “had become ill-mannered, noisy and wild,” so his aunt “came into my room, and told me I was to wear girl’s underclothing beneath my knickerbockers and jacket.”⁹⁴

Contemporary male to female crossdressing is evident in such films as *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) where an unemployed actor, Daniel Hillard, dresses as a female nanny to see his children after he is denied visitation rights from his soon to be ex-wife. Hillard not only crossdresses as a

⁹¹ G.G. Bolich, *Transgender History & Geography: Crossdressing in Context, Volume 3* (Raleigh, Psyche’s Press, 2007), 17.

⁹² Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 23.

⁹³ Thomas E. Bevan, *The Psychobiology of Transsexualism and Transgenderism: A New View Based on Scientific Evidence* (Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2015), 66.

⁹⁴ Peter Farrer, “Letter on Crossdressing, 1867-1920,” *Transgender Tapestry* 110 (2006): 48-55, accessed July 4, 2017, www.genderwatch.com.

woman but also alters his age and nationality in order to completely transform himself for the role of a lifetime. Other contemporary depictions of male crossdressing include the television series *Transparent* (2014-) where the main character, Mort, tries to tell his family his secret that he is transgender. The character is in fact dressing as a woman but his children are so self-absorbed with their own lives that they do not take notice of his/her changing appearance.

Dr. Richard Novic's memoir (2009) *Alice in Genderland* explores how his childhood codifies gender normatives. Novic's exploration of cross-dressing allows him "to rethink some of society's and my own most basic assumptions in order to be true to who I was."⁹⁵ Novic understands the strict definition of gender roles and endeavors to challenge those roles when he crossdresses. Novic's childhood in Buffalo, New York in 1963 sheds light on how gender normativity is enforced by his parents when he remarks upon how "naturally, from day one, my parents expected me to act like a boy and encouraged me to act like a boy."⁹⁶ The acts Novic refers to here revolve around activities designated as male; playing with "blocks and records than dolls and tea parties."⁹⁷ His parents expectations revolve around specific gender roles for boys and girls and the phrase "naturally" assumes that Novic's gender determine which activities he should participate in as opposed to which activities he actually enjoyed. He recounts a specific memory where he had "a trickle of girlish thoughts" and thereafter formulated a game when he was four years old to deter him from turning "into a girl."⁹⁸ Although Novic is not specific as to what these girlish thoughts encompass, the consequence of "stepping on a crack" and transforming himself into a girl entail horrific connotations for him.⁹⁹ Novic's mother is the

⁹⁵ Richard J. Novic, *Alice in Genderland: A Crossdresser Comes of Age*, (New York: iUniverse Inc., 2009), 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

driving force behind executing gender normativity, even though she believes in gender equality, Novic argues that

despite her good intentions, she enforced her sense of gender equality rather unequally. In our house, the traditional girls' chores were to be shared, but not the customary boys' duties. For instance, indoor work, like washing the dishes, was evenly distributed among my three sisters and me, whereas the outdoor work, like mowing the lawn or shoveling the snow, wasn't even up for discussion, because it so clearly belonged to me.¹⁰⁰

The division of labor Novic discusses here is clearly demarcated by gender and his mother, albeit a self-professed equal opportunist does not necessarily distribute chores equally. Novic feels that his sisters should also be included in any outdoor work. The notion that because Novic is a boy he is better equipped to handle all outdoor activities and that his sisters are more equipped to handle indoor "feminine" tasks is a rather antiquated gender division in 1971 Buffalo, New York. His sisters were not included in any outdoor labor exercises, but what is also interesting in this scenario, is that he was also expected to participate in indoor labor exercises. His mother's designation of indoor and outdoor activities for her male and female children is just one indicator of how the normative structure of gender is reinforced through societal expectations.

Another example of the normative structure is how Novic interacts with his school mates. He remarks upon how gender roles are enforced at home and any and all traces of feminine behavior is eradicated by his interaction with both parents, but even more so when he interacts with the boys at his Buffalo, New York school in third grade. He states, "although my parents didn't want to hear anything from me that might be less than hale and hearty, the people who really stamped out any sissyness I might have had were the other boys in third grade with me.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 5.

We all knew we weren't supposed to act in any way like girls and could be teased mercilessly if we did."¹⁰¹ Here, Novic argues that his parents expected him to push through any ailments he might have and project the appearance of male heartiness as opposed to succumbing to the more feminine weakness of submitting to illness or frailty. Novic's masculinity relies upon the notion of strength and any type of fragility is associated with female behavior and therefore a negative example of masculinity. His socialization with his male peers also reifies how masculinity is the absence of any feminine qualities and the way to accomplish this masculinity is to police and subvert any feminine behavior to the point that it is eliminated. Novic's observation of how any effeminate behavior is eliminated because boys at school jeered at such behavior allows for society to monitor, and in some cases excise, any sign of gender abnormalities. This self-policing, and peer evaluation, continues while he is in school and he remarks upon how, in high school locker rooms, any non-masculine behavior is quickly tamped down through "constant reminders of the humiliating alternatives."¹⁰² A young school boy avoids any associated feminine behavior and if he does not avoid such behavior his classmates will surely ridicule him. It is during this time at school that Novic begins to experiment with his cross-dressing and his reaction to these adolescent displays of masculinity reify that what he is doing is not manly and he strives to tamp down these "unmanly feelings."¹⁰³ While he previously fantasized turning into a young girl when he was four years old, his physical experimentation with crossdressing begins at the age of nine in 1972 at home. He wants to see what his body would like as a girl so he states how he "pushed my penis between my thighs and studied the precious little triangle of skin

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁰² Ibid, 10.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 10.

between my legs in the full-length mirror on the back of my bedroom door.”¹⁰⁴ He doesn’t physically begin to crossdress until 1974 at the age of eleven. Novic and his sister, Kathy, are traveling with their grandmother to Youngstown, Ohio for a bar mitzvah and upon arrival at their cousins’ house; Novic takes the opportunity to try on his sister’s underwear. He states, “I snuck a pair of my big sister’s ‘bikini underwear’ out of her suitcase. I knew it was wrong, dangerously wrong, and my heart pounded at the mere thought of getting caught.”¹⁰⁵ His understanding of masculinity does not include any associated feminine endeavors, so he constantly struggles to come to terms with what his cross-dressing means in regards to his masculinity. Novic understands masculine/feminine behaviors and characteristics solely upon stereotypical characteristics. Linda Brannon’s book (2005), *Gender: Psychological Perspectives, 6th Edition*, describes the specific meaning behind gender stereotypes as “beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity.”¹⁰⁶ Brannon also differentiates between the role gender roles plays in regards to formulating gender stereotypes. She states,

The concepts of gender role and gender stereotype tend to be related. When people associate a pattern of behavior with either women or men, they may overlook individual variations and exceptions and come to believe that the behavior is inevitably associated with one gender but not the other. Therefore, gender roles furnish the material for gender stereotypes.¹⁰⁷

Novic’s characterization of “manly behavior” correlates with his previous statement about how the other boys in his class suppressed any outward feminine qualities in each other. However, Novic’s reaction, and those of his classmates, upholds traditional stereotypes of men and women. The stereotypes of perfect womanhood were well established in the 19th century with the advent

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Linda Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives, 6th edition* (New York: Pearson, 2005), 160.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 160.

of *The Cult of True Womanhood* which dictated the ideal behaviors of women.¹⁰⁸ Feminine qualities included “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.”¹⁰⁹ These ideal attributes directly oppose those qualities that men possess. For example, the stereotypical male behavior includes, “active, independent, coarse, and strong.”¹¹⁰ These behavioral masculine attributes directly oppose female behavior and thereby any male exhibiting qualities that do not specifically correlate with what is deemed masculine suffer. Novic’s classmates recognize what is acceptable male behavior; behavior in opposition to their female counterparts. More importantly, Novic’s reference to “sissyness” also correlates with Robert Brannon’s (1976), *The Forty-Nine Percent Majority*, in which “No Sissy Stuff is one of the four themes of the Male Sex Role.”¹¹¹ This so-called “sissy stuff” refers to any behavior that would emulate female attributes or more pointedly behavior that would somehow turn young boys into young girls. Indeed, David Matteson’s (1975) *Adolescence Today: Sex Roles and the Search for Identity*, elaborates on the complicated construction of the male identity. He states,

As males become more firmly identified with the masculine role, they also become more rejecting of the feminine one. Masculinity appears to be bought at the cost of a hostility toward females which continues into adulthood....Boys learn masculine behavior in part by being punished for any display of feminine behavior. Playing with girls’ toys or doing things considered ‘sissy’ result in ridicule....Much of the punishment is inflicted on the boy by women. Since the learning is a negative experience, he rejects the teachers who provided him with that experience. The boy is led to reject not only the behavior that is punished but the punishers—in both cases this is a rejection of the feminine.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 161.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 161.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 161.

¹¹¹ Robert Brannon, “The Male Sex Role: Our Culture’s Blueprint for Manhood and What It’s Done for Us Lately,” *The Fifty-Nine Percent Majority* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1976), 12, quoted in Linda Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives, 6th Edition* (New York: Pearson, 2005), 162.

¹¹² David Matteson, *Adolescence Today: Sex Roles and the Search for Identity* (Homewood: Dorsey, 1975), 76-77, 82.

Novic's understanding of the masculine stems from his interaction with his male classmates, but he also defines socially acceptable behavior in direct opposition of his female counterparts.

Joseph H. Pleck's (1981) *The Myth of Masculinity* further argues that "in the traditional male role, masculinity is validated ultimately by individual physical strength and aggression. Men are generally expected not to be emotionally sensitive to others or emotionally expressive or self-revealing, particularly of feelings of vulnerability or weakness."¹¹³ Therefore, stereotypical masculine behavior dictates stereotypical feminine behavior or more specifically feminine behavior is the mirror negative of male behavior.

While stereotypical white masculine behavior revolves around the absence of feminine qualities, white feminine stereotypes revolve around the image of wife, mother, and submissive partner to their male counterparts. Indeed, Linda Brannon explains how the image of woman draws heavily from the Victorian era and continues to permeate contemporary society's construction of female behavior.¹¹⁴ These behavior traits include the idea that women should encompass certain attributes but not to the extent of the negative impact such attributes would have on men. Specifically, women should be patient but not overly timid while also exhibiting a responsible nature that negates any form of dependence.¹¹⁵ Therefore, women should inhabit certain characteristics but they should not overindulge in certain characteristics because men will view these attributes as an attack on their masculinity. The notion that women should indeed be responsible but not exhibit any form of dependence upon men certainly does not correlate with Victorian era stereotypes of female behavior. However, the stereotype of the Victorian woman also encompasses an almost infantile dependence upon first her father and then her husband.

¹¹³ Joseph H. Pleck, *The Myth of Masculinity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 140.

¹¹⁴ Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives*, 179.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 179.

Louise J. Kaplan's (1991), *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Emma Bovary*, recounts feminine stereotypes and an in-depth examination of female sexuality. Kaplan describes the construction of femininity and how a young girl uses her mother as a model for corresponding behavior; however, "if the girl discovers that this same powerful and beloved mother is a denigrated household slave or worthless female or is regarded by the father as a nagging witch, she starts to repudiate the feminine aspects of her own self."¹¹⁶ The warning here is that the daughter should not take unto herself notions of female empowerment because she would thereby illustrate her rejection of not only her mother's place within the household but also the very foundation of feminine behavior. This not so subtle repudiation of women's rights movements cautions young women against the negative stereotypes associated with women in the household, the wife's treatment by her husband and unseemingly aggressive behavior towards her husband. Kaplan further cites that the girl who goes along with gender stereotypes will discover that any grasp at "masculine wishes and masculine identification" go against the image of "virtuous, clean little girls who, if they want to catch a man, had better be finding their identities by developing relationships with others and by learning to cook, clean, and for others."¹¹⁷ Therefore, young women could not exhibit any qualities attributed to masculinity; power, control over their own sexuality, or intellectual ambitions. These attributes defied what a "normal feminine" woman should possess and some women mourn the loss while "other women decide to take vengeance on the world and their own bodies and minds by repudiating everything about themselves that is soft, tender nurturing, and merciful and instead fit themselves into a caricature of masculinity, becoming harsh, cruel, rapacious, tyrannical—even if it means being

¹¹⁶ Louise J. Kaplan, *Female Perversions: The Temptations of Emma Bovary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 183. PDF e-book.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 184.

cruel to their own body.”¹¹⁸ This description of the feminine and masculine articulates the pervading stereotypes of men and women.

In the mid 70’s, Novic attends the Nicholas school “from the fifth to twelfth grade” which is “an old private school just a few slate-shingled blocks from our home” in Buffalo, New York.¹¹⁹ While effeminate behavior is quickly monitored and eliminated through Novic’s socialization at school, his physical appearance is also critiqued in relation to his viability as a male from the girls at his school. Novic’s attractiveness, and confidence, as a man is dependent upon a certain body image which includes height and muscle weight. Novic notices that he is viewed, in school, as a geek in relation to the other boys because of his body and he argues how “looking wimpy wouldn’t help me win their respect nor draw rave reviews from the girls.”¹²⁰ Once he recognizes how his body also encapsulates masculinity, and attractiveness, he decides he needs to alter his appearance to garner acceptance from both genders. Novic’s assertion that his physical appearance correlates to gender identification is quite relevant in his construction of masculinity. Indeed, Miller and Swanson (1960) assert how:

American women and men, for example, differ in physical strength, gait, vocal inflection, posture, initiative taken in courtship, types of interest, and the like. Depending on a particular man’s characteristics in each of these areas, he may be classified as being predominately masculine, or predominately feminine, or in some intermediate group.¹²¹

The notion that masculinity correlates with physicality harkens back to the early 19th century when men revolted against the idea of the Victorian era man and set out to redefine masculinity.

In fact, Gail Bederman’s (1995) *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and*

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 185.

¹¹⁹ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 7.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 8.

¹²¹ Daniel R. Miller and Guy E. Swanson, *Inner Conflict and Defense* (New York: Holt, 1960), 88.

Race in the United States, 1880-1919, tracks the idea of “masculinity” and illustrates how the term “was adopted from the French and very slowly made its way into popular usage.”¹²² There are numerous definitions and variations on what constitutes masculine attributes, which Bederman spends considerable time discussing, but “by the 1930, ‘masculinity’ had developed into the mix of ‘masculine’ ideals more familiar to twentieth-century Americans—ideals like aggressiveness, physical force, and male sexuality.”¹²³ This coupling of physical attributes and correlating social behavior illustrate why Novic is so consumed with the alteration of his body and the rejection of any feminine bodily associations.

In order to build his masculine physique, and attract the opposite sex, in 1980 while a junior at the Nicholas School in Buffalo, New York he discovers “weightlifting” and pours his “teenage angst into building up” his body.¹²⁴ Novic not only worries about his body embodying masculinity, but he also stresses over the social stereotypical conventions associated with male/female interactions. He states, “I resented always having to take the initiative and hated the fact I never got hit on. The closest I ever came was once, when a girl at school inquired about me through an intermediary. I suppose most guys don’t care if they don’t get hit on.”¹²⁵ Novic’s statement over the social conventions when it comes to boys addressing girls and engaging in dating rituals are conventions that reinforce gender roles. Of course, girls are not expected to deviate from these conventions because then she is viewed as too aggressive, or arrogant. Social conventions concerning courtship are demonstrably geared towards illustrating how male bodies are produced as symbols of virility through physicality. Mako Fitts’ entry “Body Image” (2008)

¹²² Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 19.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 19.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

in the *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society, Volume 1* illustrates how the constructed of the bodies between male and females differ because “girls often develop a negative association with their bodies because femininity is defined through physical beauty and deference to male authority.”¹²⁶ Male bodies are therefore constructed about the notion of “figures that symbolize strength, endurance, and courage.”¹²⁷ Novic laments not only the expectations placed upon him because of his gender, but he also realizes that he abhors the pressure of trying to interact with girls at social events. Not only does Novic have to prove his manhood with how he interacts with girls during social events, but he also feels the need to prove this with sexual experiences. He argues how he is so desperate to “prove [his] manhood” that he seeks “out less attractive, looser women and finally had sex with a wild public school girl—but couldn’t come, which only made matters worse.”¹²⁸ Gender normativity encourages young men to engage in sexual activities as a rite of passage, but as Novic’s experience illustrates, he engages in sexual activity to fulfill what he sees are requirements to prove his manhood. In fact, Ray Raphael’s book (1988) *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* highlights how men validate their masculinity through their sexual experiences. He states how sexual relationships “easily masquerade as initiation rites, as proof positive of a manly status, but like many other freestyle initiations, they lack an intrinsic element of social recognition.”¹²⁹ The only way men can validate this rite of passage is to vocally illustrate the sexual prowess to other men because “only men have had the power to bestow manhood upon other men.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Mako Fitts, “Body Image,” in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society, Volume 1, 2008*, ed. Richard T. Schaefer (California, Sage Publications, 2008), 189.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 188.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

¹²⁹ Ray Raphael, *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passing in Male America* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 73.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

This need to prove his manhood does not disappear and when Novic attends Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1981, he states how he “needed to prove his manhood over and over again.”¹³¹ Novic is never satisfied with expressing how masculine he is and engages in what he deems are aggressive displays of masculinity, such as joining the rugby team at Harvard. This overwhelming need to express his masculinity is also reinforced by his fellow classmates at Harvard and even though Novic encounters a gay student, he states that “*as long as they keep their hands to themselves, [...], then who cares what they do to each other.*”¹³² Novic’s response to his gay classmates is a direct reflection of heteronormativity because while he abhors homosexual behavior, he reifies his masculinity and heterosexuality in accordance with societal norms of gender. This response is also a paradox; Novic does not associate himself with homosexuality but he does want to reconstruct himself into a woman in order to garner male attention. He is thoroughly adamant that he is enamored with girls and goes so far as to state:

I loved girls. I loved looking at them. Who needed art? I loved listening to them. Now *that* was music. I loved touching them. *So* warm and cuddly. When a pretty girl walked by, I could hardly maintain my train of thought. Women drove me mad. Men, on the other hand, never set off my radar. I experienced them as rivals, plain and simple.¹³³

Novic associated heterosexuality with his attraction to the opposite sex and his competitive nature with other men to garner a female’s attention. However, Novic’s attraction to women merely objectifies and romanticizes the characteristics of femininity.

Novic asserts his manhood by not only comparing his masculinity with other men, but also his interactions with women. Once Novic graduated from Harvard University, he applied to

¹³¹ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 16.

¹³² *Ibid*, 16.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 13.

Harvard Medical School and began attending school in 1986 while living in Boston's South End. He frequently dated women until he encountered Betsy through his association with Keith, a friend he met while living with a former girlfriend. Betsy was "a radiant Japanese-American woman with shiny dark brown hair and perfect skin."¹³⁴ Novic's relationship with Betsy progresses rapidly and he eventually proposes marriage to her. His treatment of his fiancée revolves around the notion that he needs to take care of her and that she is a fragile flower. Sheridan Prasso's book (2006) *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, and Our Fantasies the Exotic Orient*, discusses the prevailing stereotypes of Asian women as "submissive, obedient, and obliging—or the opposite—but rarely as well-adjusted mothers and professionals."¹³⁵ Novic fetishizes Betsy as the exotic other, but he also stereotypes woman in general when he states, "I wanted nothing more than to do things for her, take care of her, and please her. Everything she wore, from her shoulder-length hair to her pointy-toed shoes, seemed to say, *I love being a girl*."¹³⁶ Novic's perception of femininity, and in conjunction his masculinity, are predicated on the notion that he needs to take care of her because she is unable to take care of herself. Alishia Huntoon's entry "Gender Stereotypes" (2009) in the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, Volume 1* asserts that:

The Judeo-Christian virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness also fostered the belief that women are most virtuous when vulnerable, dependent, and weak. Apparently in need of protection and guidance, women are stereotyped as childlike, suggesting that they are immature, incompetent, and in need of assistance.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ibid, 27.

¹³⁵ Sheridan Prasso, *The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, and Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006), xii.

¹³⁶ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 28.

¹³⁷ Alishia Huntoon, "Gender Stereotypes," in *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, Volume 1 2009*, ed. Jodi O'Brien (California: Sage Publication, 2009), 379.

Novic's perception of Betsy and women in general, is rather antiquated in the extreme and quite insulting to women. He attempts to not only infantilize her but also places her on a pedestal with his out of date perceptions of how woman want to be treated which also positions these women in an unreachable status. More specifically, Novic's creation of the ideal woman ensures they will fail in ever achieving his definition of femininity. Not only do certain characteristics encompass femininity for Novic, but he also views Betsy's appearance as the embodiment of femininity and argues that her clothing sends the message of how much she loves her gender. However, this conclusion is only garnered from the clothing she wears which is another indicator of gender normativity, i.e. the clothing his fiancée wears encapsulates her gender. Therefore, he judges whether or not she is feminine enough based on what she wears. This notion that his fiancée's clothing is a reflection of her femininity also appears when Novic discusses his desire for his fiancée to wear more sultry clothing to bed. He states, "I asked if she would like to come to bed sometime in a lazy black bra, garter belt, and stockings, and she seemed to like the idea. But somehow she lacked the true enthusiasm to ever make it happen. I couldn't believe it."¹³⁸ Novic's critique of his fiancée's willingness to wear such clothing only confirms his fantasies of sexuality, but does not really reflect his fiancée's desires in the bedroom. Novic's male sexual fantasy does not incorporate his wife's and he even states, "*if I were a woman, I thought, I'd love the chance to be a sweet little sex kitten in my fiancée's arms.*"¹³⁹ Novic's desire to have his wife aggressively pursue him sexually affirms the sex kitten stereotype which contradicts his earlier assertion that he was attracted to Betsy because of her "childlike" features and disposition. This statement explains not only Novic's perception of female wants and needs, but also reifies societal perceptions of female sexuality. According to Novic, women should illustrate their

¹³⁸ Ibid, 33.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 33.

enjoyment of sexual objectification and when his fiancée does not adhere to these societal notions he infers how he wishes she would act and tries to enforce his sexual expectations upon her. Novic attempts to enforce his understanding of gender normativity upon his fiancée but when he begins to explain his love for wearing women's clothing his understanding of masculinity becomes blurred. He states,

It sickened and confused me to think I might be a guy who liked dressing up in women's underwear and having sex with men. And if that weren't disgusting enough, could my desire to feel like a woman mean I was destined to be gay or even transsexual? How could I live with that? I was the mountaineering medical student, the sailor from *Shogun*, a proud masculine man. That's how I saw myself, and that's how everyone else saw me.¹⁴⁰

Novic's aversion to his own preoccupation with feminine dress belies his overwhelming compulsion to reinforce this feminine ideology onto his fiancée. Novic also believes that in order for him to fulfill society's expectations in regards to masculinity that he must exude an almost hyper masculine identity. The activities he engages in are intended to fulfill this expectation, but when he begins to dress in women's clothing he negates society's view of normative masculine behavior. All the while Novic reinforces society's normative views of women's dress in regards to his fiancée; he challenges those ideas when he begins to adorn himself in those sanctioned trappings of femininity. Novic, along with his emphasis on feminine dress, also illustrates an obsession with feminine beauty standards. He states,

Why was *beautiful* part of it? Why not simply the Woman Fantasy? That's because I didn't fantasize about being an old woman; I fantasized about being a *beautiful* one. I tuned into an envy of women that followed the same lines. I didn't seem to covet anything more than the mere fact that they got to be sex objects—you know, drop-what-you're-doing, stop-and-stare, dying to touch sex objects.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 35.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 58.

Stefanie Iris Weiss' book (2000) *Coping with the Beauty Myth: A Guide for Real Girls* explores the standards of beauty for women from "the color of their hair, the shape of their bodies, and the texture of their skin."¹⁴² Weiss lists the criteria for Western white beauty by arguing that "the ideal female form is thin, tall, white, and blond. Small noses, long shiny hair, hairless limbs, big breasts, full lips, wide-set eyes, and flawless skin are thought to be close to perfect."¹⁴³ His emphasis here on beauty and the sexual objectification of women in society is an indication of not only how he views women's roles in society, as eye candy for men, but his assertion that women should enjoy sexual objectification infers a concrete detachment from the ongoing struggle women endure daily to obliterate this social view of their bodies. This particular viewpoint illustrates not only Novic's expectations of femininity, but also how he reinforces these normative beliefs from his masculine lens when he cross-dresses as a woman. The word fantasy, which is quite repetitive in regards to how Novic views feminine bodies, alludes to how the normative creates an idealized woman for men and an unachievable ideal for woman. This ideal is reinforced through Novic's numerous attempts to "create" himself as a desirable female body whose validation is only attained when a man sexually objectifies her.

Novic not only questions his masculinity when his fascination with women's clothing escalates, but he also begins to view himself as a failure when he confesses to his wife of a sexual relationship with another man. He states, "I had failed miserably as a man. I wished there was a war going on so that I could volunteer for hazardous pay. At least then, I'd have the

¹⁴² Stefanie Iris Weiss, *Coping with The Beauty Myth: A Guide for Real Girls* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2000), 7.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 12.

chance to redeem my honor.”¹⁴⁴ Novic’s infidelity with a man triggers a response to illustrate his manhood and equate masculinity to an overabundance of aggression. Novic’s reaction to his infidelity with a man correlates with his need to regain his honor and places value on masculinity. Novic is so torn between his masculinity and his overwhelming need to express his femininity that he seeks the aid of a professional therapist. However, the therapist does not alleviate Novic’s concerns but just compounds the issue to the point where Novic begins to view himself as an abnormality. Novic states, “He was very good at letting me know how abnormal and in need of his services I was. He wasn’t near as good at reminding me how basically healthy and functional I was. As he pushed me to explore the ‘perverse’ fantasies that fueled my problem, I started to feel more and more defective.”¹⁴⁵ Novic’s associations with his feminine proclivities to a perversion or a defect illustrate how gender normatives assiduously pervade the psyche of an individual for one is not “normal” unless he/she adheres to specific gender expectations and characteristics.

Challenging Norms:

Erdrich’s description of DeWitt both reaffirms gender norms and challenges societal notions of correct gender behavior. At the beginning of the novel, DeWitt’s character conforms to gender expectations because she is unmarried and regaled to a convent to live a life devoted to Christ. DeWitt’s position as a nun also defies male perceived notions of gender because she refuses to marry a man and fulfill her role as a woman. The socialization, or lack thereof, in regards to DeWitt’s character informs her recognition, and rejection, of gender roles.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 46.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 57.

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* explores the idea of socialization and self-identification specifically pinpointing the self and how "the self is a reflected entity, reflecting the attitudes first taken by significant others toward it; the individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others."¹⁴⁶ Berger and Luckman's assertion that the self identifies only when the reflection of the self is recognized by others is evident when we closely examine DeWitt's character. DeWitt changes who she is based on the recognition of others. For example, in the convent DeWitt is recognized as a fellow nun by the Mother Superior and that is how she identifies herself. The convent represents both a rejection from and affirmation to gender norms because women who are not suited to fulfill their role as wives or mothers are sent to the convent. Of course, this representation does not include women who willingly enter the convent upon the death of their husbands, but here again these women's usefulness in society is sorely diminished upon their husband's death.

When she leaves the convent and moves in with Vogel, he recognizes her as a desirable woman; therefore, she alters herself to conform to Vogel's expectations. DeWitt's character mostly adheres to Berger and Luckman's assertion about the self and the narrative does not allow the reader to delve too deeply into her childhood socialization, so if her adulthood involves an ever changing notion of the self then Berger and Luckman's assertion that the self is developed in early childhood seems somewhat limiting to the development of the self.

DeWitt's constant self-transformation reflects the narrative's minimalistic approach to her childhood development. Erdrich does not expand on DeWitt's childhood and the notion that

¹⁴⁶ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 132.

early development of the self involves a reflection of significant others challenges the notion of a stable normative structure. How does DeWitt formulate her understanding of gender roles without the reflection of others at a young age? We could posit that the limited interaction with DeWitt's parents still instilled a modicum of understanding when it comes to her role as a woman, but of course there is no substantial evidence to support such a claim because the narrative begins with DeWitt's full development as a young woman. A more relevant question in regards to DeWitt's development revolves around the idea that if we make the normative structural influences of others non-existent then how does an individual create the self? The answer to this question is evident throughout the narrative because DeWitt does not conform to gender norms, even when she passes as Father Damien she is still challenging the notion of masculine normative behavior. DeWitt constantly changes her idea of the self according to her interactions with others and this act in itself negates the importance of the normative structure. The normative structure society tries to enforce implies that gender identity, female and male, are strictly constructed to confine any and all deviations. However, DeWitt's fluid transition from female to male remark upon how the normative structure is an illusion and when one challenges such a structure, as DeWitt does, the cracks in the structure are quite evident. This particular conclusion is substantiated in the text when DeWitt leaves the convent and enters into a relationship with Vogel based on the notion of an exchange of power and labor, but more importantly when she decides to pass as Father Damien so she can continue her work in the Church.

Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* looks closely at how society determines a woman's worth through her biological functions. Beauvoir states, "the term 'female' is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her

sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman.”¹⁴⁷ DeWitt’s worth as a woman is non-existent when she is confined to the convent, but when she moves in with Vogel he begins to treat her as a sexual being who can help him achieve his goal: reproduction. Vogel does not view DeWitt as an independent being and his constant pleas for her to marry him reaffirm his need to control her sexually and socially employ gender norms. DeWitt’s time at the convent does not equip her to reject Vogel’s sexual attention and they do engage in a sexual relationship. However, even their sexual encounters are controlled by DeWitt and therein lies her rebuttal of the normative structure. DeWitt refuses to define herself according to Vogel’s perceptions of femininity and asserts her self-control by dictating the nature of their relationship. In fact, after DeWitt refuses to allow Vogel to buy her a piano she threatens to leave Vogel and move to town which prompts Vogel to submit to her wishes. This slight rebellion frees DeWitt to exert a modicum of control in her relationship with Vogel; however, he constantly tries to force marriage onto her and continues to manipulate her to reach his goal.

Erdrich denies the reader in-depth knowledge of DeWitt’s upbringing and as such the foundation for DeWitt’s understanding of gender norms is based on how she interacts with Vogel. In the novel, DeWitt’s refusal to marry Vogel is attributed to her marriage to Christ; however, another viewpoint on DeWitt’s behavior lies with her non-existent understanding of gender norms. De Beauvoir argues, “she herself is still profoundly affected by her bringing up, respectful of values affirmed by her elders, haunted by her dreams of childhood and adolescence; she finds difficulty in reconciling the heritage of her past with the interests of her future.”¹⁴⁸ This

¹⁴⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. by H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 698.

particular assertion concerning a woman's understanding of gender norms relies heavily upon familial influence and reification of gender, but Erdrich has excluded any mention of DeWitt's familial background. In fact, Erdrich's marginal mention of DeWitt's family lets the reader interpret how influential gender norms are within the text.

Novic's approach to gender norms varies greatly from Erdrich's representation. Novic's understanding of the self is indeed a reflection of significant others and he begins to form his understanding of masculine behavior in relation, or opposition from, his sisters at a very young age. Novic recounts a particular example when his mother divides labor according to gender appropriate activities. Novic is relegated to activities associated with the outdoors because men are more suited to manual labor than women; according to Novic's feminist mother. Novic's father also reifies these gender designated activities when he goes so far as to ridicule his son when he wants to perform chores inside the home. Novic's father states, "What do you want us to do about it? Dress you up in a sweater and skirt and march you off to school like your sisters?"¹⁴⁹ This comment shames Novic and also reminds him, quite harshly, that any attempt to challenge gender norms will result in mockery. Novic's mother, father, and sisters reify what is acceptable masculine behavior and therefore also adhere to Berger and Luckman's assessment that the self is relational.

Novic's understanding of gender norms is further reflected through peer association at school. The appropriation of masculine behavior and the relation of the male body is clearly demarcated amongst Novic's male and female friends. His male peers set the standard for acceptable male behavior and any and all "feminine" behavior elicits an immediate reaction. These reactions might include derisive behavior towards the offending "feminine" tendencies or

¹⁴⁹ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 5.

the more extreme violent reaction. Novic's peers help to reinforce correct gender behavior and the idea here is that any deviant gender tendencies heralds the broader societal reaction to such behavior. More specifically, we as a society police deviant behavior and quickly try to eliminate it so that we all conform to "correct" gender norms. Novic's behavior is relational to his peers but he also argues that this conformity also extends to the masculine and feminine body. He states, "I hadn't developed the powerful-looking upper body the other guys had, and I knew looking wimpy wouldn't help me win their respect nor draw rave reviews from the girls."¹⁵⁰ Novic's physique must adhere to the gender norms associated with the ideal male form; therefore, an underdeveloped form is not acceptable to either gender.

The language Novic's family and classmates utilize to reinforce masculine behavior also reify gender norms in an almost subversive way. For example, when Novic complains that he would also like to participate in more "feminine" activities, his father's response clearly illustrates how roles of masculine and feminine are clearly defined and any attempt to challenge these roles is quickly eliminated. The reification of gender norms does not stop in the home, but are constantly demarcated through peer association as well. The language Novic's peers use again illustrates feminine and masculine acceptable behavior. Feminine behavior is associated with "sissyness" and such behavior in a young man is quickly policed by his peers.¹⁵¹

Primary Relationships:

The next step in the intersectional passing model looks at primary relationships and focuses on how the passer navigates personal interactions before he/she chooses to pass. In most cases, the passer recognizes how he/she is marginalized by these relationships and passes to find

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 8.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 5-6.

a place in society. The exploration of primary relationships in Erdrich's novel is marginal, at best. Although DeWitt interacts with The Mother Superior at the convent before abandoning her position as a nun, this relationship is not developed and cannot constitute a primary relationship. Therefore, DeWitt's relationship with Vogel is the first primary relationship and this relationship offers unique insight into her interaction with other people and men. DeWitt's relationship with Vogel is brief, but the importance of this relationship lies in how she perceives herself in relation to Vogel. DeWitt and Vogel's relationship begins as merely an exchange of services, i.e. DeWitt performs duties in the house while Vogel pays her for those services.

However, the relationship between Vogel and DeWitt transforms into a more mutually satisfying sexual relationship without the bonds of matrimony. DeWitt engages in this relationship, but does not attach herself emotionally until Vogel is murdered and she is left to her own devices. Vogel's demise leads to DeWitt's emotional and physical depression and she slowly starts to detach from the activities that once brought her joy such as playing the piano. She becomes "dark and impenetrable" in the absence of Vogel.¹⁵² DeWitt's relationship with Vogel, and her subsequent loss of such companionship, leads her to formulate a fantasy of the missionary life.¹⁵³ Although DeWitt's relationship with Vogel is brief, the impact of his loss is more significant than the actual relationship they engaged in while he was alive because her grief leads her to pass as a Catholic priest. Vogel's death also reinforces the idea that DeWitt's placement on his farm is no longer desired without his presence. DeWitt slowly starts to disengage from life after Vogel's murder and none of her previous pursuits; reading, and playing

¹⁵² Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 34.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 37.

the piano, holds any joy for her. Her conversation with Father Damien awakens her religious devotion and sparks the idea that she should return to the service of Christ.

DeWitt's relationship with Vogel illustrates a marginal connection in regards to her overall motivation to pass as a man. Unlike DeWitt's limited personal relationships and the subsequent influence to pass, Novic's personal relationships vary between abhorrence of his cross-dressing to a grudging acceptance. Novic's family plays an integral role in how he not only perceives gender roles, but also how he comes to terms with how his relationships influence his need to achieve a place in society as both a man and a woman.

Novic's personal relationships are quite extensive in his memoir and he spends a great deal of time exploring the foundation for his cross dressing through an analysis of these relationships. He begins his exploration at a young age and his uncertainty about his place within a female dominated household prompts him to question whether or not "growing up among four females lead me to wonder about begin a girl? To eventually become a crossdresser?"¹⁵⁴ Novic's focus on the female members of his family and their influence over his perception of not only gender, but gender roles. The exclusion of any significant masculine influence at a young age is indicative of how he perceives not only his male/female relationships, and understanding of femininity, but also his confusion over his persistent fascination with femininity. Novic begins his memoir recounting his childhood and how his domineering mother instilled an unequal sense of gender equality in the family because "she made sure we knew that a woman could do anything she wanted to in the world."¹⁵⁵ However, when Novic stated that "most boys run faster than most girls, she got annoyed, then caught her breath and said, 'I mean

¹⁵⁴ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

the same in every way that matters’.”¹⁵⁶ Novic’s mother emphasized the importance of feminism but did not discuss how Novic should act as a man. Novic feels the divisions of chores he and his sisters perform are unevenly divided upon gender lines, but when he complains about this division in his father’s presence, his biting response is “‘what do you want us to do about it? he quipped back. ‘Dress you up in a sweater and skirt and march you off to school like your sisters?’”¹⁵⁷ Novic responds to his father’s suggestion with shame, but also makes him wonder what such an experience would feel like and sparks a certain level of excitement in him. Novic tries to adhere to an idea of masculinity that his father represents in this particular example; however, the notion of wearing female clothing and the possible feeling of equality wearing such clothing prompts him to feel excitement. In fact, Novic tries to rationalize his feelings by questioning his overall response to such a suggestion by stating, “Did it appeal to me because it would relieve me of extra chores? Perhaps that was part of it, but more likely my step-on-a-crack-get-turned-into-a-girl brain was already primed and readily triggered by the notion of any such transformation.”¹⁵⁸ Novic and his father’s relationship is based loosely on a representation of masculinity that is absent throughout most of his childhood. However, Novic does have relationships with his fellow male classmates in school but these relationships are more based on societal expectations of masculine behavior as opposed to Novic attaining any real comfort with his masculinity. In other words, Novic seems to pass as a masculine young man in school around his peers, but when he is home he begins to experiment with his femininity.

Novic’s experimentation with femininity also lends insight into his relationship with his parents. When Novic begins to wear his sister’s underwear and explores his sexuality, he begins

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 5.

to question whether such actions are right or wrong based on his relationship with his parents. He argues,

my secret proclivity for pretending I was a girl was confusing and utterly unacceptable. I suppose I judged it based on how people in my life would have judged it, for that's how I learned what was right or wrong, wholesome or sinister. My parents would have been shocked if they had caught me in panties, and instead of their usual pride in me, they would have been profoundly disappointed. My mother would have been terrified, and my father would have been furious.¹⁵⁹

Novic gauges his behavior, whether this behavior is masculine or feminine, based on how his parents would react and judge him. This preoccupation with how his parents would react to his behavior ultimately forces Novic to submerge his overwhelming urges to act out his femininity because he fears that he will be judged harshly for such activities. However, this fear also illustrates how his relationship with both parents informs his identity and his future relationships with women.

Novic's relationship with his parents illustrates an obligatory behavior toward normative gender roles and this is further demonstrated in his relationship with his fiancée, Betsy. Novic and Betsy's relationship begins with a chance encounter at a party and then quickly escalates when Betsy refuses to live with Novic without an engagement ring. However, Novic does recognize that his relationship with Betsy fulfills some fantasy that he holds of the perfect woman, but while this fantasy fulfilled societal expectations of normative gender roles, Novic does begin to have doubts as to whether or not he will be able to sustain the relationship long term especially when he cannot even divulge his sexual fantasies with his fiancée. Novic does try to slowly begin to intersperse his sexual relationship with Betsy and his need to explore his

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 9-10.

femininity, but such experiments tend to result in disaster. For example, one night he dresses in a bra and panties and when Betsy enters the bedroom he exclaims, ““Look, I’m a weight-lifting woman’.”¹⁶⁰ Betsy; however, does not find his cross dressing humorous in the least and implores him to never do such a thing again. Betsy’s reaction prompts Novic to rethink his impending nuptials and to engage in his first same sex intercourse relationship. Novic attempts to fulfill his fantasy of being with a man but instead this encounter only prompts him to fear contracting AIDS. He becomes so consumed with the idea that he has contracted AIDS that he eventually confesses to Betsy that he slept with someone else, a woman, because he wanted to get his sexual needs out of his system before they married. Eventually Novic does confess to Betsy that he slept with a man and she exclaims, ““It would have been better if you’d told me you’d killed someone.”¹⁶¹ Novic’s sexual liaison with a man shows his overwhelming need to express his sexual needs and fantasies and how repressed he feels in his relationship with Betsy. Betsy’s reaction to this affair also illustrates her unwillingness to accept Novic’s sexuality and eventually prompts Novic to seek psychiatric help. Novic’s therapy allows him to explore his feelings and verbalize his sexual fantasies, but he also encounters the overwhelming suggestion that he is somewhat defective. In fact, he remarks upon how his therapist “was very good at letting [him] know how abnormal” he was and how the therapist made him “explore the ‘perverse’ fantasies” but “wasn’t near as good at reminding me how basically healthy and functional I was.”¹⁶² The therapist tries to find the root of Novic’s proclivities towards women’s dress but does not help him. Needless to say, Novic’s early foray into therapy does little to help him understand why he feels the need to dress and act like a woman but only satisfies Betsy’s requirement that he seek

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 33.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 40.

¹⁶² Ibid, 57.

help for his issues. However, his therapy does prompt Novic to find his own answers and to do research into cross dressing and homosexual tendencies. His own research begins to fulfill his need to understand who and what he needs in his relationships, but this newfound information does not help his marriage. Betsy tries to repress Novic's cross dressing and she serves "as an emotionally armed and dangerous soldier guarding the frontier of Judeo-Christian culture, taste, and prejudice with regard to what was desirable or disgusting in a man."¹⁶³ In other words, Betsy reifies the gender norms for masculine behavior and Novic's attempts to unbalance this norm results in her ever increasing control over his sexuality. Novic eventually marries Betsy, but their marriage is filled with constant ridicule and her need to fix her husband. Novic explores his cross dressing while married to Betsy and even tells her that he is a cross dresser which only results in Betsy pushing her husband away. Novic's hope that his disclosure about his need to wear women's clothing will bring him and his wife closer together does not end the way he wants and he finally makes the decision to file for divorce.

Novic's relationship with Betsy demonstrates not only his need to engage in a relationship with a woman while having the freedom to explore his cross dressing but also emphasizes his need to include a woman in his life. Novic does not just want to cross dress as a woman and explore his feminine side in his relationships with men because he also needs the connection a heterosexual relationship will give him. Novic wants to be a woman and feel desirable but also craves what he can receive from a relationship with a woman. Novic's cross dressing, while minimal before his relationship with Betsy, comes to the forefront as he fully realizes what he wants and does not want from his disastrous relationship with Betsy.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 61.

Novic's next relationship with a woman helps him become more comfortable with his cross dressing. Novic is honest with Melissa at the start of their relationship and tells her that he is a cross dresser. Her response is not negative but more inquisitive as to whether or not Novic is a homosexual, which he assures her he is not. Melissa's acceptance of Novic and his cross dressing allows Novic to open up to her about his desires and needs which only strengthens their relationship to the point where he marries her. Melissa not only helps Novic's confidence as a cross dresser increase, but she also helps him buy feminine clothes and gives him information on how she feels as a woman which helps him understand his own perceptions of femininity. As Novic becomes more comfortable in his relationship with Melissa and his cross dressing, he tends to venture out into the cross dressing community and makes close ties with the cross dressers he encounters. These relationships allow him to have a stronger connection to Melissa because he is not afraid to experiment with her sexually in woman's clothing. Melissa's support; however, did have limits especially when Novic would flirt with other men in her presence dressed as a woman. This reaction did not have so much to do with Novic dressing as a woman and more to do with her feelings as a woman watching the man she loved flirt with someone else. Melissa tended to go out with Novic several times when he was dressed as a woman, but after this incident she did not want to participate in Novic's public cross dressing. Melissa absence from his public forays as a woman does allow Novic to begin his relationships with men. While maintaining his marriage to Melissa, Novic begins to forge serious relationships with numerous men. However, these relationships were never secretive and Novic and Melissa agreed upon certain conditions in regards to his possible relationship with a man. These conditions revolved around "*safety, priority, and discretion.*"¹⁶⁴ Even with these conditions, Melissa was

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 175.

always Novic's first priority and he never wanted to leave her for another man because he felt he was not a full-time woman.¹⁶⁵ Once Novic and Melissa agree upon these terms, Novic begins to distance his cross dressing from his life with Melissa. More specifically, he focuses all his energy on making Melissa happy in their life together and tries to separate his home life from his cross dressing life. He still cross dresses, but feels he needs to spend time with his wife as her husband and not a woman grilling another woman about how she feels, what she will wear, and how to apply makeup. Novic's relationship with Melissa encourages him to reach out to his family and tell them who he is but they react by trying to sweep the issue under the proverbial rug. Even though Novic's parents and sisters don't want to discuss his cross dressing, he does feel that he has forged a new relationship with his family that involves openness which allows him to find security in his identity as a cross dresser.

Primary Relationships: Navigations of Societal Expectations

The primary relationships of both DeWitt and Novic rely upon societal expectations and personal navigation. DeWitt's character's primary relationships expounds upon the liminal interaction she has with Vogel. Her relationship with Vogel operates upon the idea that as a woman her place, or occupied space, generates the meaning she garners about her gender. Vogel is very specific in how he views DeWitt's place within his household as his potential wife and the mother of his children, but DeWitt navigates this space and creates her own environment. In fact, de Beauvoir states how "one of the most basic problems of woman, as we have seen, is the reconciliation of her reproductive role and her part in the productive labor."¹⁶⁶ DeWitt will not be regaled to bearing Vogel's children or marrying him to gain respectability or worth as a woman.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 174.

¹⁶⁶ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 117.

DeWitt's place in Vogel's home generates a partnership which negates her reproductive role and focuses solely on her productive labor.

This primary relationship ponders the question as to whether or not societal expectations between men and women can solely survive upon the basis of a reciprocal labor exchange, but also reflects the way in which DeWitt will interact with men further in the narrative. Societal expectation regarding specific roles for men and women do not pertain to DeWitt because the narrative negates any prior influence from family and friends. DeWitt does not feel marginalized in her role as Vogel's partner nor does she abstain from her sexuality, but these elements deviate from societal norms. Therefore, DeWitt's passing is largely situated upon the death of Vogel and her displacement from the home she shared with him. The reason for DeWitt's passing incorporates the loss of Vogel so we can posit that the absence of Vogel is the deciding factor in DeWitt's passing and not any societal marginalization she experiences. Of course, the absence of Vogel does imply that DeWitt is socially marginalized because without him her purpose as a woman is no longer viable. DeWitt takes the absence of Vogel to extract new meaning in her life and her rebirth as Father Damien is a direct result of substituting femininity for masculinity.

While DeWitt substitutes Vogel to claim her masculinity, Novic substitutes his masculinity for his femininity in direct retaliation against the primary relationships that reinforce an ideal masculinity. Novic's primary relationships illustrate the feminine presence and the masculine absence. Novic portrays his early childhood relationship with his mother as a foundational reference for his understanding of women. His mother "wasn't especially interested in the trappings of femininity, but she had a keen interest in the women's movement. She brought us up with a solid serving of feminism and made sure we knew that a woman could do

anything she wanted to in the world.”¹⁶⁷ Novic’s relationship to his mother tries to reflect an equalization of male and female power but his mother also unwittingly reinforces a binary gender relationship when she demarcates feminine and masculine tasks. Novic states how “the traditional girls’ chores were to be shared, but not the customary boy’s duties.”¹⁶⁸ Novic’s mother is an advocate for gender equality but at the same time negates the very notion of equality when she categorizes outside work as men’s work. This primary relationship interprets the meaning Novic’s mother associates with gender equality but also evaluates Novic’s masculinity as lesser than the feminine occupants in his childhood home. Novic’s relationship with his mother, and his sisters, foster an understanding of femininity but is not until he embarks upon a relationship with Betsy, his first wife, that he feels torn between his need for feminine expression and societal expectations of masculinity.

Novic’s relationship with Betsy is fraught with both his expectations of masculine behavior and her overwhelming reification of gender norms. Novic is first attracted to Betsy because “her femininity was energizing and inspiring.”¹⁶⁹ Even though Novic’s attraction to Betsy conforms to gender norms, he still fantasizes about wearing women’s clothing but tries to rationalize these desires by stating, “I presumed my fantasies were fast becoming a thing of the past, so *no one* needed to know about them anyway.”¹⁷⁰ Novic represses his desires/fantasies of the feminine in his early relationship with Betsy, but soon realizes that these feelings will not go away. Novic’s relationship with Betsy also evaluates their fantasies of each other. For example, Novic’s analysis of Betsy and why she is attracted to him leads him to believe that Betsy’s preoccupation with her appearance stems from her past struggles with her weight and she

¹⁶⁷ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 5.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

therefore places her value on her ability to attract handsome men.¹⁷¹ Of course, Novic has his own illusions about Betsy and how her Japanese beauty fulfills the fantasy that he is “*plucking* the loveliest of flowers.”¹⁷² Both Novic and Betsy’s fantasies reify societal expectations of women and men, but it is also in these fantasies that we begin to see why Novic rebels against his relationship with Betsy.

Novic’s proposal to Betsy begins his masculine self-reflection and also heralds the demise of relationship. He questions whether or not his proposal to Betsy is the correct path to take and states, “I felt uneasy and started to worry about things I had never before paused to ponder.”¹⁷³ Although Novic feels uneasy in his future with Betsy, he slowly tries to integrate his need to dress as a woman into their relationship with disastrous results. Betsy’s response to Novic wearing a bra and panties is swift and she exclaims ““That’s not funny. Take that stuff off now, and don’t ever do it again.””¹⁷⁴ Her repulsive response alerts Novic to the type of relationship he will endure, if he stays with her. In fact, Betsy’s response to him wearing women’s clothing prompts Novic to enter into a sexual experience with a man. Novic’s experience with a man does not confirm his attraction to men as a man, but does emphasize the debilitating future he will endure if he marries Betsy.

Novic does indeed marry Betsy and also undergoes therapy to understand why he feels the need to dress as a woman. Novic’s relationship with Betsy slowly begins to deteriorate because she feels the need to conform to gender norms and attempts to make Novic do the same. However, Novic’s attempt to work out his issues in therapy only highlights many underlying

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 29.

¹⁷² Ibid, 28.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 31.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 34.

issues with female identification because even though Novic goes to a therapist to curb his female fantasies, the relationship between him and his therapist pushes him to recognize and act upon his need to cross dress. His therapist only confirms his gender abnormality in a society that values clear gender normativity especially since his therapist views his fantasies as “perverse” and that he is somehow “defective” as a man.¹⁷⁵ Simone de Beauvoir recounts how a man who is “a fallen god is not a man: he is a fraud; the lover has no other alternative than to prove that he really is this king accepting adulation—or to confess himself a usurper. If he is no longer adored, he must be trampled on.”¹⁷⁶ This particular assessment of masculinity is particularly effective in highlighting how not only Novic views himself but also how his therapist tries to reify masculine behavior. Novic’s failure as a man, in his relationship with Betsy, elicits a violent response upon his masculinity. His failure as a man draws immediate criticism from Betsy and her only recourse is to trample on him until he conforms to gender norms. Novic’s therapist also adheres to this particular assessment of masculine behavior and therefore claims that Novic’s preoccupation with female dress and his desire to become a woman in a relationship are abnormal in order to push him to adhere to gender norms. However, the combine efforts of his therapist and Betsy only confirm to Novic that his desires and fantasies need further exploration. Novic does eventually divorce Betsy and discontinues his sessions with his therapist so he can further explore his cross dressing. Ultimately, Betsy and his therapist only illustrate to Novic how he does not want to eliminate his cross dressing tendencies and that he will not limit himself according to societal gender norms.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 57.

¹⁷⁶ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 655.

Aesthetic Emulation:

The next step in the intersectional passing model looks closely at aesthetic emulation and how the passer undergoes numerous alterations to pass. This stage is sometimes difficult for the passer because prior relationships still inform him/her of their position. However, through changes in location, occupation, dress, and manner this stage is vital to passing. The individual submerges themselves within the group they hope to emulate and therefore this stage, or concept, will be called “aesthetic emulation”. The word aesthetic is used here because the process of passing is not completed with just the decision to pass, but involves the restructuring of one’s overall physicality for success. These modifications include basic aesthetics and more complicated performative alterations.

DeWitt’s aesthetic emulation begins when she finds Father Damien’s body hanging from a tree after a flood has carried her away, and destroyed her farm. DeWitt’s transformation or “the exchange,” as the section of the chapter it titled, begins when she uses “her heavy nightgown” as “his shroud.”¹⁷⁷ Once DeWitt has covered Father Damien’s body, “his clothing, his cassock, and the small bundle tangled about him, a traveler’s pouch tied underneath all else” is “put on in the exact order he had worn them.”¹⁷⁸ Not only does DeWitt transform herself physically into Father Damien, but the precise order of his clothing and the items he carried are artfully arranged in the exact order she took them off his body; thereby, reinforcing that she is meticulously putting on the persona of Father Damien. DeWitt takes “ a small knife in that traveler’s pocket” and “she trimmed off her hair and then buried it with him as though, even this pitiable, he was the keeper

¹⁷⁷ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 44.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 44.

of her old life.”¹⁷⁹ DeWitt physically changes her appearance, but she also buries herself with Father Damien. The shedding of her femininity allows her a sense of freedom and she argues that “there was nothing to hold her back, now, from living the way she had dreamed of in the hot dark of her loss.”¹⁸⁰ This newfound sense of freedom implies that her previous role as a woman held her back from conceptualizing a sense of purpose and that now she can gain a sense of purpose in life as Father Damien.

Not only does DeWitt alter her physical appearance when she dons the cassock and passes as Father Damien, but her status also alters. When she is traveling on a train to reach the Ojibwe reservation, she notices slight changes in how she is treated by not only the other passengers on the train but also how she interacts with men on the train. She remarks upon how “the driver treated her with much more respect as a priest than she’d ever known as a nun. He was deferential, though not uncomfortable.”¹⁸¹ The other passengers gave “Father Damien more privacy” and for DeWitt “it was as though in priest’s garments she walked within a clear bell of charged air.”¹⁸² Father Damien is afforded respect simply for the way he is dressed and the position he holds within the church; whereas, DeWitt as a nun did not receive any such deference. Father Damien’s newfound sense of self and the power therein, is reflected in how DeWitt views her positionality in society. This positionality allows her to have “an ease with her own mind she’d never felt before, a pleasure in her own wit she’d half hidden or demurred. As Agnes, she’d always felt too inhibited to closely question men. Questions from women to men always raised questions of a different nature. As a man, she found that Father Damien was free to

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 44.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 62.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 62.

pursue all questions with frankness and ease.”¹⁸³ Not only does DeWitt undergo a physical aesthetic emulation as Father Damien, but she garners a newfound sense of power in her own intelligence and an ease in the company of men.

Father Damien’s physical aesthetic emulation is also coupled with his behavioral modifications once he arrives on the Ojibwe reservation. In fact, Father Damien constructs a list of behaviors that he must emulate in order to complete his transformation from feminine to masculine. This list includes the following:

1. Make requests in the form of orders.
2. Give compliments in the form of concessions.
3. Ask questions in the form of statements.
4. Exercises to enhance the muscles of the neck!
5. Admire women’s handiwork with copious amazement.
6. Stride, swing arms, stop abruptly, stroke chin.
7. Sharpen razor daily.
8. Advance no explanations.
9. Accept no explanations.
10. Hum an occasional resolute march.¹⁸⁴

This list indicates not only what DeWitt believes is appropriate behavior for men, but also indicates how she will perform as a man. This list reaffirms her commitment to passing as Father Damien, but more importantly; this list also illustrates how masculine behavior highlights confidence. As a woman, DeWitt did not exert any confidence in her speech or interaction with

¹⁸³ Ibid, 62.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 74.

men, but the list stresses how interactions with both men and women as Father Damien demands assertive speech.

DeWitt's aesthetic emulation occurs every day and she remarks upon her transformation "with a feeling of loss that she finally defined as the loss of Agnes."¹⁸⁵ DeWitt's transformation to Father Damien and her aesthetic emulation is a daily exercise and she mourns the loss of her prior self. Once she leaves the safety of her cabin "her thoughts became Damien's thoughts. Her voice his voice, which deepened as his stride lengthened and grew bold."¹⁸⁶ DeWitt's transformation is thereby an exercise and a reminder of how Father Damien would talk and act once he encountered others around him. Not only does DeWitt's speech alter but "Father Damien tipped his chin out and narrowed his gaze, focused straight ahead. Men didn't use their hips as shelves and braces. Father Damien walked with soldierly directness and never swayed. Nor did he touch a finger to his tongue and smooth his eyebrows, or glance at himself in mirror surfaces. Sternly, he nodded up and down when he listened instead of tipping his head to the side."¹⁸⁷ These behavioral alterations complete DeWitt's aesthetic emulation of what she perceives as masculine physicality and behavior. However, with DeWitt's aesthetic emulation of Father Damien she admits that "Father Damien [is] her creation" and how "he would be loving, protective, remote, and immensely disciplined. He would be Agnes's twin, her masterwork, her brother."¹⁸⁸ DeWitt's description of how Father Damien is a creation of her idea of masculinity and how he is her twin infers that everything she knows about masculinity is a fabrication of societal notions of men.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 77.

DeWitt's aesthetic emulation of Father Damien is an ongoing process for her and she constantly alters her behavior to fit a more masculine pattern. For example, Father Damien writes numerous letters and also keeps a diary for personal reflection. DeWitt remarks upon her handwriting and states how "she had never written in a particularly feminine hand anyway. Now she stiffened her letters and stacked the words together with a neat solidity that matched, she hoped, the toughness of the priest she was becoming."¹⁸⁹ The alteration of her writing to adhere to more masculine scribing, and her indecision as to whether or not her handwriting is indeed masculine, reconfirms the notion that her aesthetic emulation is ongoing and that she has no outside confirmation on whether or not she is successfully emulating masculinity.

Many of the changes that DeWitt undertakes to successfully emulate her passing as Father Damien negate her femininity, but the narrative also discusses DeWitt's very biological difference from masculinity. DeWitt bemoans her femininity when she experiences her monthly menstruation and prays to God to eliminate the biological reminder for "she could more confidently pursue the work cut out for an active priest."¹⁹⁰ Once DeWitt's monthly cycle stops, "she felt a pang, a loss, an eerie rocking between genders."¹⁹¹ The disappearance of her monthly cycle correlates with the burial of her femininity, for without the reminder of her femininity she is Father Damien.

Novic's aesthetic emulation involves more in-depth alterations to not only his physicality but also his emotional responses to certain situations. Unlike DeWitt's subtle emulation to pass as a man, Novic's emulation is an extreme metamorphosis to the feminine. Novic begins his aesthetic emulation with safe outlets for wearing feminine dress. For example, he fantasizes

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 106.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 78.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 78.

dressing up as a woman for a Halloween party and states, “for the first time as an adult I allowed myself to imagine dolling up from head to toe and was intrigued by all the exotic things involved: not just a bra and panties, but a skirt and heels, and a purse and perfume. What would it all feel like?”¹⁹² Novic’s understanding of femininity is encapsulated with how a woman dresses and he feels these garments lend to the exotic nature of women. The unknown pleasure of wearing feminine clothing allows Novic to eroticize the female body and eroticize himself as a woman.

Novic slowly starts to experiment with women’s clothing in public, but also perfects his femininity in the confines of the home. He remarks how, “almost every day, I would find a way to learn more about being a woman. At the hospital and outpatient clinic, I would study every one I came across. And at home, I’d drill on my walk, my talk, and getting my clothes just right.”¹⁹³ Novic slowly starts to understand how women’s dress conveys femininity and how a woman’s body should also reflect sexuality. He states, “I wanted to create a body that spoke to me: soft round breasts that beckoned *Touch me*, a little waist that whispered *Throw your arms around me*, and a bubbly back side that teased *Take me from behind*.”¹⁹⁴ Novic’s understanding of femininity focuses on the sexualization of the female form and he even goes so far as to mention how when he is dressed as a woman and sees his form in the mirror, he “set off” his own “sex-object radar.”¹⁹⁵

Novic not only begins to wear feminine clothing, but also begins to shave both his legs and armpits to fulfill his aesthetic emulation. He begins to question his wife Melissa about his

¹⁹² Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 21.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 133.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 135.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 136.

eyebrows and whether to tweeze or wax them, but he also contemplates “hormones and plastic surgery” to achieve a more feminine form.¹⁹⁶ His physical transformation also includes make-up and he goes to a professional beauty consultant to achieve a more feminine face. The beauty consultant shows him how to apply base make-up to cover the shadow of his beard, which he cannot seem to eliminate even through shaving, but she also shows him the correct tones to use for his skin. Once he perfects his make-up, he also accessorizes with shoes, handbags, jewelry, and wigs. His wig completes his feminine form and he states, “without a wig, I looked and felt like a man in a dress. But each time I put one on and flipped my hair back, I was all woman.”¹⁹⁷

Novic’s physical transformation is coupled with the alteration of his language. He does not feel that the way he converses as a man is appropriate when he passes as Alice, so he attempts to alter his conversational skills to fit what he thinks a woman should sound like in public. He states, “I noticed how women didn’t just communicate; they engaged, they entertained. They spoke a lot about people and feelings and brought up little things I wouldn’t think of mentioning. They were sweet and supportive, at least on the surface, rather than overtly competitive. I emulated them.”¹⁹⁸ His understanding of how women communicate revolves around the notion that women are supportive and non-combative in social situations, but this is solely his male perception of how a woman should communicate with others in public. His assertion that he emulates them also indicates that he is simply mimicking a stereotypical notion of female communication. He further asserts that “I would put on my emotions and allow myself to be more perky, playful, sensitive, and sentimental. I’d keep my skepticism in check and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 136.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 141.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 143.

remind myself that it was always prettier to be a Pollyanna than a cynic.”¹⁹⁹ His mention of “emotions” and “sentimental” feelings reflects the normative notion of feminine behavior and his assertion that this is how women act is simply based on his belief that women should act this way as opposed to how women truly act. In fact, when he begins to play around with effeminate motions, the use of his hands and the tilt of his head, a female friend of his remarks that, ““maybe *some* people act this way, but not the women *I* know.””²⁰⁰ This particular piece of advice does make him re-evaluate how he emulates female actions but he continues to practice his body language and coy expressions.

Novic is not entirely satisfied with his female form and feels that his nose is too hooked to conform to his female beauty standards. He and his wife discuss whether or not he should get a nose job and why he feels he needs one. His wife does not like the idea of plastic surgery because she feels he will alter his masculine form, but they both come to a compromise and he gets the hook fixed in his nose. Once he has the surgery to fix his nose, he begins to take a low dose of feminine hormones because he wants a more “androgynous” body.²⁰¹ However, he slowly stops taking these hormones after he experiences low sex drive and his nipples become enlarged to the point that he is self-conscious when he takes his shirt off.

Gender Performativity through Aesthetic Emulation

Judith Butler’s book, *Gender Trouble*, argues that gender is performative and both Erdrich and Novic illustrate the application of this idea. Butler specifically states,

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 143.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 144.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 147.

that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.²⁰²

Butler's assertion that the public's reception of the body is based on physical clues and the absence or presence of these clues that inform societal perception of the body proposes that a particular aesthetic informs us about gender.

Hence, when DeWitt's character sheds her feminine self she shears her hair and masks her body in a cassock to present an absence of femininity and the presence of masculinity. The absence of any visible breasts and the length of one's hair illustrate the deceptive gaze of gender identification that DeWitt's character negates throughout the novel when she passes as Father Damien. DeWitt presents what she perceives to encapsulate masculine behavior which incorporates the absence of any feminine behavior, or aesthetic qualities. Not only does DeWitt eliminate this feminine physicality, but she also makes a list of masculine qualities she needs to appropriate in order to pass as a man. DeWitt's list includes perceived male attributes such as an authoritarian attitude which precludes men from asking, or requiring, permission to speak openly and to foster an appreciation for female accomplishment.²⁰³ This list also highlights DeWitt's absence of such qualities and the acts she must perform in order to pass. However, this list also brings about numerous questions as to how DeWitt even knew such qualities are attributed to masculinity? DeWitt's interactions with men is limited to Vogel and the men on the reservation; therefore, does her character inherently know what constitutes masculinity or does she recognize

²⁰² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 173.

²⁰³ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 74.

the absence of femininity in such acts or gestures? DeWitt methodically negates her femininity but she also offers Father Damien as a creation of herself—a mirror of opposites. DeWitt states how “Father Damien [is] her creation” and how “he would be loving, protective, remote, and immensely disciplined. He would be Agnes’s twin, her masterwork, her brother.”²⁰⁴ DeWitt’s conclusion that Father Damien is a reflection of herself posits the idea that we are both masculine and feminine; therefore, gender is a continual performance.

The notion that the body is both female and male inspires Novic’s aesthetic emulation in his memoir. Novic’s slow transformation to Alice highlights Butler’s idea of how gestures, acts, and enactments offer a false perception of gender. Novic’s slow aesthetic emulation revolves the presence and absence of anything associated with masculinity. Novic begins to don female clothing, wears high heels, stockings, carries a purse, and wears a wig to perpetuate the aesthetic of the female form. The female form he presents to the public offers the presence of all the items associated with femininity that society expects when they see a woman on the street and the absence of any acts associated with masculinity. Novic’s alterations are somewhat extreme especially when he gets plastic surgery to present a more feminine nose, or when he begins hormone therapy in order to have a more womanly figure. However, all these alterations are based on societal expectations of femininity and also on Novic’s own internalized societal norms about women’s bodies.

Novic’s passing as a woman is more difficult than DeWitt’s passing as a man because the absence of a hyper critical society allows DeWitt to pass smoothly as Father Damien. Novic, on the other hand, competes with the societal expectations associated with the feminine form. He recounts how passing for him is not possible because he does not fit the aesthetic of a woman,

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 77.

even though he tries to make his male form more masculine, there are certain elements to his form that omit him from passing effortlessly. Novic recounts how he changes the aesthetic of his body to fit societal, and his own, projections of femininity. For example, Novic shaves his legs regularly and even states, “cultivating my femininity even became worth some sacrifice to my appearance as a man.”²⁰⁵ Novic views his slow aesthetic emulation as a full departure from his masculinity and not an extension of the self the way DeWitt views her emulation. Furthermore, Novic argues that “femininity was starting to look like chemistry, a big broad field with its own substantial subdisciplines.”²⁰⁶ Novic’s assessment that women are mysterious creatures reaffirms the notion that such features are societal cultivations to emphasize the otherness of women. Specifically, the manufactured feminine is an illusionary body prescribed meaning from a society preoccupied with a need to assign meaning. Therefore when Novic explains how “people really cared how a woman looked and were often tough about it” he is reaffirming societal notions of acceptable female aesthetics.²⁰⁷ Novic goes on to state how “if a gal looked good, she could have impact. Men weren’t able to take their eyes off her. Women would notice her too, and they’d envy and admire her. From a visual standpoint, being a man just wasn’t the same. Although I had always been considered good-looking, I never wielded that kind of wallop. In terms of who had the sex appeal, straight life was a world of haves and have-nots.”²⁰⁸ Novic’s casual observation of the feminine form and the absence of visible qualities attributing to sexual appeal also mark the aesthetic differences between men and women. His casual reference to how women attract men based solely on her visual appearance illustrates the notion that gender is

²⁰⁵ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 133.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 133.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 134.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 134.

based on the surface of the body. Novic unwittingly reaffirms the aesthetics associated with femininity and tries to emulate them as he transforms himself into Alice.

Novic's cross dressing mocks the meaning of gender and the performance of Alice negates the notion of an original gender identity.²⁰⁹ In fact, Butler argues "that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity."²¹⁰ Novic's cross-dressing challenges the defined space of the feminine and masculine and also mocks the notion that gender is stable. However, he states, "with the exception of a few intersex conditions, the gender of your chromosomes (XY for male, XX for female) determines the gender of your body."²¹¹ Novic's conclusion that gender is based on biological differentiation presupposes that gender is not a choice, but a biological truth. Butler would certainly disagree with Novic's conclusion and argue that the very idea of gender as truth, of any kind, is how gender norms are perpetuated. In fact, Butler states "a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a 'natural sex' or a 'real woman' or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another."²¹² Therefore, as Novic subverts the very notion of a true gender identity when he cross-dresses, he also effectively adheres to gender fictions and further codifies the gender binary. Novic goes so far as to state how men and women differ in their personalities and how men's mannerisms include "looking out the middle of your eye, holding your head level, and speaking

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 174.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 174.

²¹¹ Ibid, 183.

²¹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 178.

in a relative monotone.”²¹³ However, women’s mannerisms include “looking out the corner of your eye, tilting your head, and speaking with an expressive lilt.”²¹⁴ These mannerisms are reflective of the gestures associated with either gender and it is only through the practice of these gestures that gender is reified. Butler’s argument that “the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”²¹⁵ Novic’s attention to how men and women vary their mannerisms is not merely for observations sake, but as a means to parody feminine movements and eliminate masculine attributes.

DeWitt and Novic’s attempts to emulate a man and a woman not only challenge the notion of a true gendered identity, but also reflect the absurd nature of gender based on purely aesthetic qualities. More pointedly, the absurdity of a true gendered body does not exist and the ease with which both DeWitt and Novic alter gender identities reflects the idea that gender is indeed a performance; one that is practiced and perfected for an awaiting audience tuned into recognizing gestures, acts, and mannerism as male or female.

Immersion

Once aesthetic emulation is achieved, the next step in the intersectional passing model is immersion. The “immersion” stage allows the passer to form new relationships within his/her newfound group but also allows him/her to observe as well. This stage is tenuous and

²¹³ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 183.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 183.

²¹⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 179.

complicated because the passer is still constantly aware of his/her performance even though he/she has somewhat successfully immersed themselves within the group. In many of the novels, memoirs, and essays, the passer, in this stage, begins to question his/her decision to pass at all, which is grounded in fear of exposure. If the passer successfully avoids exposure, and controls any emotional responses to their prior social group then he/she has completely passed into his/her designated group. Once the passer is “immersed” within a particular social group the advantages of such inclusion are seen in his/her social “upgrade,” or in some cases “downgrade.” The advantages correlate with the group the passer immerses himself/herself in and therefore are not finite across all social groups.

Father Damien’s immersion begins when he performs mass for the sisters on the reservation. At first, Father Damien is filled with doubt in his ability but once she states “the first words ...all followed, ordered, instinctive. The phrases were in her and part of her.”²¹⁶ DeWitt’s doubt in her ability to perform the holy mass as Father Damien are unwarranted and none of the sisters in the congregation regard her as other than the new priest performing mass. Sister Hildegard’s interaction with Father Damien also confirms DeWitt’s immersion as a figure of authority and her statement “‘I prayed for a priest just like you,’ she said, ‘young, with a tough fresh faith!’” confirms Father Damien’s immersion.²¹⁷ Sister Hildegard views Father Damien as a young priest with vigor for his faith and a welcome presence of the reservation.

Another example of Father Damien’s immersion is when he visits Nanapush and Fleur, two members of the Ojibwe tribe. Father Damien visits Nanapush and Fleur because they are both sick with a disease that has wiped out most of the members of the Ojibwe tribe and Sister

²¹⁶ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 68.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 72.

Hildegarde urges him to visit them both in the hopes that Father Damien will convert them to Catholicism. However, Fleur responds to Father Damien's presence in her hut will ill-concealed hatred and explains how "she hated priests," but this reaction only confirms that Fleur does not Father Damien as anyone other than a priest.²¹⁸ While Fleur hates Father Damien's presence in her cabin, Nanapush decides to trick and shock Father Damien with his tales of Kashpaw's multiple wives. Nanapush's goal here is to manipulate the priest into telling him that to have multiple wives is a sin, but Father Damien does not respond in the way Nanapush expects. However, the point of Nanapush and Father Damien's interaction is predicated on Nanapush's belief that Father Damien is a priest, and a worthy opponent, in the game of wits Nanapush sets up between them. Nanapush does, at one point, remark upon how "much younger, oddly feminine, and a good deal subtler than Father Hugo, but that his intentions were fundamentally those of a priest, Nanapush had no doubt."²¹⁹ Even though Nanapush notices how effeminate Father Damien appears, he does not question whether he is a priest or not.

Father Damien's interactions with members of the Ojibwe tribe confirm his immersion because these men and women view DeWitt as a male priest and while they question his masculinity, overall Father Damien's immersion as a priest is secure. For example, when Father Damien and Nanapush visit Kashpaw's tent there are many women present and one of these women, Quill, is quite distraught. Father Damien's presence soothes her restlessness where everyone else in the hut ignores her. Kapshaw remarks upon the power Father Damien possesses and states, "the young priest had calmed Quill and made her happy."²²⁰ Kapshaw does not question whether Father Damien is a true priest, or a man for that matter, but the evidence of his

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 101.

calming presence upon Quill confirms for Kapshaw that Father Damien is a man of power. Father Damien's confidence begins to grow while he is on the reservation and many of the men view his presence as "a combination of delicacy and shrewd toughness."²²¹

Father Damien's immersion is most evident when Father Jude visits the Ojibwe reservation in 1996 to determine the sainthood of one of the sisters in the convent. Father Jude is sitting with Father Damien as he sleeps on the porch and he suddenly sees Father Damien in a uniquely confusing way. Father Jude states, "In that instant a strange thing happened. He saw, inhabiting the same cassock as the priest, an old woman. She was a sly, pleasant, contradictory-looking female of stark intelligence. He shook his head, craned forward, but no, there was Father Damien again, tottering into the comfort of his room."²²² Father Jude shakes off the image of Father Damien as an old woman and views him as just an old man. However, this particular vision just confirms how Father Damien's complete immersion as a male priest is complete because even Father Jude cannot grasp the notion that an old woman is standing before him in a cassock. Of course, this incident plays on Father Jude's perception of Father Damien and in another scene he "watched Father Damien closely, that troubling sensation once more came upon him. It was a problem of perception. A distinct uncanny sense he could only name in one way."²²³ Father Jude asks Father Damien whether or not he has a twin, which is the only way he can try to justify the image he sees when he looks closely at Father Damien.

Another important example of Father Damien's successful immersion occurs when Father Wekkle arrives on the Ojibwe reservation to assist Father Damien with his work. Father Wekkle shares Father Damien's cabin and they both work together in bringing the gospel to the

²²¹ *Ibid*, 162.

²²² *Ibid*, 139.

²²³ *Ibid*, 146.

people on the reservation. However, the relationship between Father Damien and Father Wekkle begins to turn from simple masculine companionship to equal attraction. Father Wekkle is disturbed “at his own physical reaction to the proximity of Father Damien” and does not know how to handle his growing attraction to Father Damien.²²⁴ Father Wekkle’s attraction to Father Damien confirms, in his mind, “the awful and appalling joy of knowing he was one of those whom the Church darkly warned against, the ones who lay with men as with women.”²²⁵ Father Wekkle’s belief that Father Damien is a man, and the consequences of his attraction to him as a sin, confirms that Father Wekkle never saw Father Damien as anything other than a male priest. Father Wekkle and Father Damien begin a love affair, in secret, until Father Wekkle tries to push Father Damien to marry him and move out West to raise a family. Father Damien is immersed as a Catholic priest and will not, even for love, leave her position. Father Wekkle stresses how Father Damien is not a priest, but Father Damien repeats over and over, “I am a priest.”²²⁶ Father Damien sends Father Wekkle away from the Ojibwe reservation and does not read or write him once he leaves. The interaction between Father Damien and Father Wekkle reestablishes Father Damien’s devotion and commitment to the holy church as a priest.

DeWitt’s immersion as Father Damien is confined to the church, but Novic’s immersion involves a variety of social interactions with cross dressing communities. Novic’s immersion begins while living in Boston and occurs when he reaches out to a support organization called the Tiffany Club. Novic’s arrival at the Tiffany Club allows him to dress as a woman and apply make-up with the help of other cross dressers and he does acquire his new name, Alice, but he feels somewhat out of place in this club. He states, “for some reason, I didn’t fully relate to the

²²⁴ Ibid, 196.

²²⁵ Ibid, 200.

²²⁶ Ibid, 206.

people I had met. I didn't think I belonged among them. I felt like Phil Donahue, just an inquisitive guy who had done a talk show with these zany, but nice, people from a strange, secret society."²²⁷ Novic's experience with the Tiffany Club does not fulfill his expectations of a cross dressing community but he continues to try to find his place among this community.

Novic's move to Chicago, and divorce from his wife Betsy, allows him the freedom to explore his fantasies as a woman. These fantasies include dressing up as a woman and engaging in sexual activity with men. His encounter with Paul, a drag queen at a bar called Cheeks, allows him to dress as a woman and engage in sexual intercourse as a woman. Paul also assists him in dressing as a woman and shows him "how to fill each cup of my bra with scrunched-up pantyhose," and sits him "down for some hair-and-makeup magic in front of a big antique mirror."²²⁸ Paul makes him feel like a woman and while he engages in sex with Paul, Novic's fantasy of having sex as a woman is complete. At this point, Novic is still not comfortable dressing as a woman in public. He does attend another club meeting with the Tri-Ess, "a national organization that gives heterosexual crossdressers the opportunity to dress up and socialize,"²²⁹ but he feels shame when he looks in the mirror and see "a man in a skirt, a man who should know better."²³⁰ These feelings of shame begin to dissipate when Novic perfects his feminine look and starts to wear a wig. His relationship with Melissa also engendered confidence in his cross dressing and he begins to go out publicly as a woman. His first public appearance occurs at a club, THP, and he spends quite a bit of time shaving his legs and applying his make-up before he leaves to drive to the club. In fact, he is so overcome with anxiety about driving to the club that he maps out his route and consoles himself with the idea that if anyone sees him in the car as

²²⁷ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 69.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 89.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 95.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 111.

Alice that he will just slowly “inch ahead a little to break off eye contact with anyone who might pull up alongside me.”²³¹ Once Novic reaches the club as Alice, his anxiety dissipates and she begins to enjoy her night on the town because everyone she encounters sees her as a beautiful woman and not a man dressed up as a woman. This particular experience in a Chicago club bolsters Novic’s decision to be open with his cross dressing and to engage more fully with the cross dressing community. However, Novic’s full immersion does not really begin until he moves to Los Angeles to live with Melissa.

Novic and Melissa would often venture out together to the various clubs for cross dressers and, at first, Melissa enjoyed these social activities. However, after one particular night when they both dressed up as characters for a Halloween party, Melissa is uncomfortable when Alice receives numerous invitations from men and her involvement in Alice’s social adventures stops. Novic continues to explore clubs on his own, or with friends, and is encouraged by his friends to also engage in normal activities dressed as a woman. Novic is reluctant to do this, but he eventually goes to a Japanese restaurant with his friend Tina. The whole experience is somewhat traumatic for him because he feels “a wave of self-consciousness” and worries that his appearance as a woman is not subtle.²³² Once Alice and her friend Tina leave the restaurant and head to the Queen Mary, a trans club where Alice begins to feel included as a member to the trans community, she states, “the Queen Mary was where I finally began to let my guard down and evolved from being uptight to the polar opposite. I became as soulful and forthcoming there as I might have been at a support group.”²³³ The Queen Mary becomes an outlet for Alice to

²³¹ *Ibid*, 114.

²³² *Ibid*, 156.

²³³ *Ibid*, 161.

truly immerse herself as a woman and this newfound inclusion allows her to openly socialize with men and to even forge a relationship with a man.

Immersion: Successful Performance

Once DeWitt passes as Father Damien and travels to the Ojibwe reservation, her immersion begins. Of course, DeWitt's passing as Father Damien fills her with self-doubt and the narrative recounts how the first morning she is awakens as Father Damien "she reeled with her own foolhardiness and thought of leaping out of the caboose."²³⁴ Even though DeWitt's doubt makes her consider abandoning her passing, she continues on as Father Damien. She also gains a bit more confidence when the driver, Kashpaw, comes to pick her "more respect as a priest than she'd ever known as a nun."²³⁵ DeWitt begins her immersion upon recognizing that Kashpaw's treatment directly correlates with her gender and she begins to discern the difference in her newfound position which allows her to question Kashpaw. In fact, DeWitt states how "she'd always felt too inhibited to closely question men. Questions from women to men always raised questions of a different nature. As a man, she found that Father Damien was free to pursue all questions with frankness and ease."²³⁶ DeWitt's observation of this minor difference between men and women mark her understanding that these differences are easily emulated. However, DeWitt does not exactly achieve full immersion as Father Damien with Nashpaw and his observations point out how "the priest was clearly not right, too womanly."²³⁷ DeWitt's encounter with Nashpaw, and his conclusion about her femininity, illustrates how tenuous her position is and the lengths she must take in order to pass successfully as Father Damien.

²³⁴ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 60.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 62.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 62.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, 64.

The idea behind immersion is the performative nature of gender and expounds upon the ideas Judith Butler discusses in her book *Gender Trouble*. Gender is an act that “as in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.”²³⁸ The concept of ritual, repetition and reenactment are the very ideas that DeWitt must understand before she can successfully pass as Father Damien. Once she leaves Nashpaw and travels to the reservation, she begins to ritualize her actions and reenact masculinity by making a list of acceptable male behaviors. These behaviors follow what DeWitt perceives are mundane acts such as “stride, swing arms, stop abruptly, stroke chin and hum an occasional resolute march.”²³⁹ These observations seem minimal in regards to DeWitt’s success at passing for Father Damien, but these acts are indeed gestures that will effectively achieve her male performance. The reason why these acts will help DeWitt successfully achieve her passing as Father Damien is because these acts are not overtly obvious as simply masculine; therefore, these acts are interchangeable. DeWitt’s assessment that men walk a certain way and use their body a different way is based on her perception of masculinity. Although DeWitt believes that these particular acts will help her complete her performance as Father Damien and help her immerse in her newfound position there are still instances where her femininity is obvious to those who look closer at her act.

DeWitt becomes fully immersed in her position as Father Damien and therefore is secure in her identity. However, Nanapush deciphers what she is hiding and asks her, quite frankly, why she is ““pretending to be a man priest?””²⁴⁰ DeWitt realizes that Nanapush does not place any

²³⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 178.

²³⁹ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 74.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 231.

importance upon her passing as a man and he states, “so you’re not a woman-acting man, you’re a man-acting woman. We don’t get so many of those lately.”²⁴¹ Nanapush’s attitude towards DeWitt’s passing and his mention of previous passers establishes a different view of masculinity and femininity. He also interjects his beliefs concerning DeWitt’s passing and argues, “‘you’ve been tricking everybody! Still, that is what your spirits instructed you to do, so you must do it. Your spirits must be powerful to require such a sacrifice.’”²⁴² Nanapush’s ready acceptance of DeWitt’s passing as Father Damien and his assessment that she has effectively tricked everyone into believing that she is a man solidifies her immersion.

Novic’s immersion as Alice is a bit more complicated than DeWitt’s immersion as Father Damien because Novic must navigate his life as a man and a woman. Novic attempts to hold onto his masculinity at home but in public he attempts to perfect his act as a woman. Butler’s notion about the performativity of gender is clearly displayed when Novic begins to slowly practice his femininity. For example, Novic employs the help of his new partner, Melissa, to help him navigate the myriad subtleties of feminine dress and actions. He states, “at home, I’d drill on my walk, my talk, and getting my clothes just right.”²⁴³ His preoccupation with certain feminine acts enhances his performance as a woman and reiterates the repetition of gender. He also mentions how his form reinforces his performance as a woman and recounts how he:

put on various body parts, like breast forms and hip padding. I also put away various body parts. I minimized my midsection with a corset or a more comfortable waist cincher and learned how to tuck away my private parts so I wasn’t betrayed by an unsightly bulge beneath my clothes.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Ibid, 232.

²⁴² Ibid, 232.

²⁴³ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 133.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 139.

The act of emphasizing the presence of certain features associated with female gender and the absence of male features reiterates a legitimized social expectation of gender. As Butler argues, the very performance of gender relies on the ritualization and legitimization of characteristics associated with gender. Therefore, when Novic puts on features associated with femininity he is in fact reifying what he believes woman should look like and also performing societal expectations of femininity. This act is also present when he goes to nightclubs dressed up as a woman and practices his feminine gestures which he argues includes sensitivity, sentimentality, playfulness and perkiness.²⁴⁵ His observations of how women act in a social setting just confirm how gender is an act of social expectations and repetition.

Novic's immersion is a parody of gender or as Butler describes "this perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities."²⁴⁶ Novic's parody of femininity in certain public settings and his masculinity at home illustrate the fluidity of gender. Of course, Novic understands that he will never truly pass as a woman, but the enjoyment he receives from dressing up as a woman and exploring his femininity allows his audience to understand how gender parody invites questions about the stability of gender norms. Novic understands that his parody of femininity only works in certain clubs and that he will never truly pass as a woman. Even though Novic cannot pass as a woman, he still challenges the notions of a fixed gender identity. Novic's immersion is not necessarily the failure to pass as a woman in public, but the successful way he immerses himself in the clubs as Alice.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 143.

²⁴⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 176.

Novic's perfection of Alice and his gender performance allows him to immerse himself in the club scene, but also highlights his need for masculine attention. He states how "flirting with other crossdressers was fun but often left me feeling confused about the role I was playing. On the other hand, when a man came up and offered me a drink, he let me know exactly what I was. For all practical purposes, I was a woman."²⁴⁷ The unease that Novic feels when he is approached by other cross dressers, and the role he plays in this scenario, operates upon the idea that Novic not only understands that he is playing a part in this performance but also introduces the clear distinction between what elements work in the act and those elements that will ruin the play. More specifically, Novic's successful immersion as a woman relies heavily upon the male gaze he receives and not on other cross dressers. After all, Novic's purpose for acting like a woman is to gain male attention as a woman and other cross dressers interfere. He also knows that these other cross dressers are men dressed as women and he needs to fulfill the fantasy of masculine men vying for his attention.

DeWitt and Novic's immersion relies heavily upon the idea that gender is a performance perfected through repetitive acts and the reenactment of societal expectations of gender. DeWitt's passing as Father Damien relies upon the mundane actions and the absence of any feminine features. Novic's attempt to pass as a woman is more difficult because he needs to drastically alter his appearance to fulfill societal expectations of femininity. He does attempt to achieve this physical guise, but there are certain elements of his physicality that he cannot change. Why is DeWitt more successful at passing for a man than Novic is passing as a woman? Are societal expectations of femininity stricter than masculinity? DeWitt success at passing involves the absence of the male gaze for she is surrounded mostly by women. However, when

²⁴⁷ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 161.

Father Jude comes to interview Father Damien there are moments when he notices how feminine he looks, but these observations are quickly dismissed as a trick of sunlight. Novic interacts more intensely with society as a whole and therein lies the major difference between DeWitt's passing and Novic's failed attempt to do so. Novic is under constant scrutiny whereas DeWitt's place on the reservation isolates her from an overly judgmental gaze.

Interpretation

The next stage in the intersectional passing model examines how the passer interprets his/her experience with a greater understanding of their new social group. The passer's new found relationships within the social group allow him/her to alter their understanding of the normative structure and in some cases slowly alter that structure. This interpretation stage relies heavily upon how the passer navigates his/her new social position and how he/she reinterprets the normative structure. As stated previously, once the passer begins the journey of passing he/she repositions themselves within the normative structure and the interpretation stage will look at how the passer effectively processes this new position. How does the passer view his/her new position within the social group? What does the passer learn about his/her new social group? Does this newfound knowledge of the social group alter the passer's attitude? The passer interprets his/her new position through the rhetoric associated with his/her current and previous social group. The rhetoric of the text will show whether or not the passer's knowledge of his/her new social group alters, or shifts, to allow for a greater understanding of race, gender, class, or sexuality.

Father Damien's interpretation of his new social group, and his passing as a man, occurs through the letters he constructs throughout his time on the reservation, but also through an

interview with Father Jude. It is here, in his letters and the conversations with Father Jude that his most profound secret is exposed and his feelings about what he is doing on the reservation is illuminated. The text opens with Father Damien composing a letter to the Pope and asking for absolution of his sins and mysteriously confessing that he is “a sinner and also an imposter.”²⁴⁸ Father Damien then begins to tell the tale of a young woman, Agnes DeWitt and her slain lover, Brendt Vogel, in the letter he writes to the Pope. Father Damien mentions how Agnes is taken away by a flood on a piano and deposited on the river bed, but also how she assumed the identity of the priest who visited her after Vogel was murdered. The letter begins: “Your Holiness, I was the woman on the lid of the piano. Agnes.”²⁴⁹ Father Damien’s assertion that he is Agnes is also couched in his devotion to the church and his true belief that the death of Agnes was an act of God. He continues the letter with, “Blessed One, I now believe in that river I drowned in spirit, but revived. I lost an old life and gained a new.”²⁵⁰ Father Damien’s assertion to the Pope that he died as Agnes and was re-born as Father Damien is coupled with the many divine acts that Father Damien performs while on the reservation and stem from an acknowledgement that he has performed God’s will and in doing so has also fulfilled Christ’s work on the reservation. Father Damien lists all the acts he achieves on the reservation as a testament to the rightness of passing as Father Damien. He states, “I have vanquished the devil, who has come to me in the form of a black dog. I have also contained, discharged, influenced, and negated the dangerous pieties of a nun of questionable allegiance (this requires a separate letter).”²⁵¹ Father Damien believes that he has achieved a level of devotion as a priest that Agnes could not achieve as a nun; therefore, proving his devotion outweighs the sin he has committed. Father Damien’s interpretation of his

²⁴⁸ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 6.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 41.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 48.

passing, and his place within the normative structure of gender, is evident in the letters he writes to the Pope. Father Damien's rhetoric in these letters begs the Pope to understand, and accept, that Agnes's faith in God and her service to Christ, as a man, is the will of God. Father Damien's yearning for acceptance as a man, in the Pope's eyes, is couched in the many deeds he has accomplished on the reservation. Father Damien is compelled to extol upon all his deeds and submit that these deeds alone will absolve him and illuminate his true faith in Christ.

Father Damien's interpretation of his passing does not just occur when he writes his letters to the Pope, but also when Father Jude comes to the reservation to interview him. Father Jude's purpose on the reservation is to interview Father Damien in the context of gathering information to either nominate or eliminate a member of the Catholic Church into sainthood. The interviews involve Father Jude asking Father Damien questions about Sister Leopolda and at the same time divulging Father Damien's story as well. Through the course of their discussions, Father Damien recounts the uncertainty of performing his first mass and how his conversation with Sister Hildegard Anne makes him question his position on the reservation. In fact, she "was tempted, next, to confess the specifics of her identity, the nature of her calling, to this good nun. After all, she looks much more capable than I, she thought with a certain faint hope."²⁵² Father Damien's doubt not only involves his limited understanding of mass but also his limited interactions with other people. The fear Father Damien feels stems from Agnes' complete detachment with people, other than Vogel, and the sudden weight of her responsibilities as a priest. However, through the course of her passing as Father Damien, Agnes becomes secure in her position until she must confront her sexual feelings for Father Gregory Weckle.

²⁵² Ibid, 72.

The appearance of Father Gregory Wekkle challenges Father Damien's position on the reservation but also makes Agnes face her insecurities as a priest. The arrival of Father Wekkle awakens Agnes' sexual desires and she prays "that something would call Father Wekkle away immediately, that he leave precipitously, anything but risk again that jolt of pleasure in the immediacy of his presence."²⁵³ Agnes' interpretation of her feelings for Father Wekkle endangers her passing as Father Damien and also poses the threat of exposure. Her attraction to Father Wekkle makes her interpret her precarious position and prompts her to break down the physical barrier of books that separates the two of them in the tiny room they share. She states, "For it was through books that she felt her life to be unjudged. Look at all of the great mix-ups, messes, confinements, and double-dealings in Shakespeare, she thought. Identities disguised continually, in a combative dance of illusion and discovery."²⁵⁴ The barrier of books Agnes wants to breakdown between her and Father Wekkle also allude to the breakdown of her own physical façade to reach for something she wants desperately: physical contact. Agnes' loneliness prompts her to engage in a sinful relationship with Father Wekkle, but the dynamic of their relationship alters when Agnes refuses to leave with him. Father Wekkle's assertion that Agnes is a woman prompts her introspection,

the word seemed large in the dark cabin, its vowels voluptuous and thick with the burden of secret life. Both were silent but the word hung between them like a great flesh doll. They closed their eyes and the word spread open between them, hot and red. Gregory sank his head into his hands and tasted the word and there was nothing like its exalted spice. He wanted her in his mouth. But then she spoke, and said, 'I am a priest.'²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Ibid, 195.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 199.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 206.

Agnes' assertion that she is indeed Father Damien and not a woman prompts Father Wekkle to leave the reservation, but also allows Agnes to interpret her role. She contemplates whether she made the right decision and considers shedding her priest's robes for a pretty dress and bonnet. Her experiences with Father Wekkle force Agnes to contemplate her place on the reservation, but to also question whether or not her passing as a man is truly her path in life. Agnes' conclusion is founded in her belief in God and her defiance of gender norms. Agnes is Father Damien and after her affair with Father Wekkle she is more committed to the people on the reservation than ever before.

While Father Damien reflects on his passing as a man through his letters to the Pope and his conversations with Father Jude, Novic interprets his passing as a woman throughout his memoir. Novic's interpretation of his cross dressing begins with the acknowledgement that he is a cross dresser and his struggle to come to terms with his proclivities. However, once Novic embraces his cross dressing, he begins to liken his excitement to that of a teenage girl experiencing puberty for the first time. He reflects upon how,

most crossdressers keep that part of themselves locked away for years, perhaps forever, free only to fantasize about what might have been. I was fortunate to liberate myself while I was still somewhat young. I was determined to make up for lost time and explore all the new options available to me. I was tempted to pursue each to excess to find out how much I might enjoy. Like a teenage girl, I was immature and unsure of how to behave as a woman.²⁵⁶

Novic is not just interpreting how he feels as a man dressing up as woman for the first time, but his belief that starting over as a young teenage girl stumbling through her understanding of femininity is also now his rebirth as a woman. Novic's small steps toward expressing his

²⁵⁶ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 131.

femininity matriculate into a self-awareness of his ability to pass as a female in public. He quite extensively interprets what it means to pass as a woman and states,

most people would walk by busy with their own cares and concerns. That was passing. But often, a few heads would turn. That was looking good. But then, they might double take before going back about their business. That was being read. Occasionally someone would tug a friend's arm to signal. *Hey, look over there.* That, of course, was obvious. After being read by a few people in every crowd, I had to face facts—I did not pass.²⁵⁷

Novic's realization that he cannot pass as a woman in public prompts him to interpret how other cross dressers feel about passing as well. He argues, "obviously some crossdressers pass, but why do so many others think they do? Maybe it's just plain more fun to think so. After all, we aren't men who fantasize about being crossdressers; we're men who fantasize about being women."²⁵⁸ Novic has no illusions that he can pass as a woman in public, but his interpretation also reflects how he is passing as a man in a woman's body. His feminine fantasy, and his understanding that he cannot pass as a woman, allows him "to grow as a person."²⁵⁹ The growth that Novic alludes to here incorporates his urge to work harder at cross dressing and to become more comfortable in the clothes he wears as a woman. In other words, the knowledge Novic acquires from his inability to successfully pass as a woman allow him to explore his femininity deeper than if he was able to pass effortlessly. This assessment is somewhat contradictory especially since Novic's overall goal through his cross dressing is to achieve a femininity that accompanies clothing, make-up, male adoration, and feminine sexuality.

Novic's unsuccessful attempts to pass in public do not necessarily apply to the clubs he frequents on a regular basis. He points out that when he attends functions at these clubs he knows

²⁵⁷ Novic, 150.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 151.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 151.

the role he is playing when a man approaches him, but not when he is surrounded by other women. In fact, he states, “by the same token, flirting with other crossdressers was fun but often left me feeling confused about the role I was playing. On the other hand, when a man came up and offered me a drink, he let me know exactly what I was. For all practical purposes, I was a woman.”²⁶⁰ In the presence of other crossdressers, Novic’s confidence in the role he is playing diminishes and the implication that he is simply playing a role with these other crossdressers invokes Novic’s insecurity as a woman. Novic does not feel like a woman in the presence of other crossdressers but only in the presence of the men who approach him. His interpretation of his femininity is therefore reliant upon the acknowledgement of men and dissolves in the presence of other crossdressers because he knows these individuals are not seeing him as a woman. This particular episode reifies the notion that women are not necessarily feminine without a male gaze, or more specifically, Novic’s interpretation of femininity is not recognized without a male gaze. This assessment seems logical considering that Novic’s female fantasy cannot achieve fruition if he is not attractive to men. He craves male attention and the other crossdressers represent female competition.

Novic’s public life as crossdresser differs greatly from his private life as a husband and a father. In fact, Novic makes a conscious choice to separate Alice from his home life, so that when he is with his wife, he is simply Rick. This separation of private and public comes at the behest of his wife Melissa, who accompanied Alice in her early forays to clubs. However, after a few harrowing experiences where Melissa felt uncomfortable with Alice’s need for flirtation with other men, Novic decides to eliminate any mention of Alice at home. He states, “we talked all the time and functioned well as a team. And although our relationship had been built on

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 161.

sharing, we had also begun to understand the areas that might be better kept private. I realized that I needed to focus on Rick when I was with her, and although I was disappointed for Alice, I knew that this is what Melissa needed and what we needed as a couple.”²⁶¹ Novic’s agreement with Melissa works quite well at the beginning of their relationship and Novic’s confidence as Alice soars. He attends many club functions and recounts his experiences as Alice and how he feels like a sexual object. He states,

I had never really understood why so many women would complain, ‘We’re not just sex objects.’ It made me feel like shaking one and shouting, ‘Well, at least you get to be a sex object!’ I had always thought I’d love it and now I knew I did. I think most young girls take it for granted. But ask a woman who has recently put on weight, and she’ll tell you that the only thing worse than being a sex object...is *not* being one.²⁶²

Novic’s interpretation of femininity equates to how her body is a sexual object and reflects his male perspective on the female body. This understanding of femininity stems from his need for sexual objectification and does not necessarily reflect how women as a group feel about their bodies. This newfound sense of physical sexualization makes Novic rethink his relationship with Melissa only because he wants to explore his sexuality as a woman with men. He discusses his needs with Melissa, who is fearful that he will leave her for another man, but he also mentions how sex for him is quite different than Melissa understands yet when he does clarify how he feels about sex, he also demarcates how men and women feel about sex. He states, ““I know that for you sex and love are practically the same thing, but for me they can be different.””²⁶³Novic’s definition of sexual relationships and love come from a male perspective, but his sexual encounters with men will be as Alice and therein lays the contradiction. Novic is attempting to

²⁶¹ Ibid, 165.

²⁶² Ibid, 172.

²⁶³ Ibid, 174.

forge relationships as Alice with men, but still contends that Alice will know the difference between just sex and love. His interpretation comes from a male perspective while at the same time he is attempting to experience these sexual relationships as a woman. Novic's need to experience sexual relationships with men does not change how he feels about Melissa and they move forward with their relationship.

Novic's interpretation of women as sexual objects also leads him to interpret gender as well. He states, "getting to know Tim prompted me to think about gender in new ways. Although he had no desire to dress up and get into the female role like I did, in many ways he was much more feminine, as in the natural inflexion of his voice and the expressive way he gestured with his hands."²⁶⁴ These cursory observations lead Novic to delve deeply into questions about masculinity and femininity in regards to his penchant for cross dressing. He ruminates the various ways a body can be masculine and feminine with a list he compiled through his own reading and observation. His list begins with "the matter of the body" and whether or not a person is "born with a male or female body."²⁶⁵ The body determines, genetically speaking, whether you are a man or woman through your chromosomes. He then discusses the second step as gender identity and whether or not "you feel like a man or a woman" on the inside and then the "desired gender role" which inflects the desire to live your life as a man or a woman regardless of the body.²⁶⁶ The second step determines, for Novic, whether that individual wants to live his life as a woman part-time or live his life as a man all the time which makes him "*regular*."²⁶⁷ The third step reflects upon certain interests that are categorized as feminine versus masculine. Here Novic argues that masculine interests such as "you're strong, sensible,

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 182.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 183.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 183.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 183.

and goal-oriented” reflect a masculine personality whereas feminine personalities include “if you’re sweet, sensitive, and relationship-oriented” (183). Novic’s interpretation of masculine and feminine attributes reflects his desire to categorize the differences between his penchant for cross dressing and members of the trans-gender community. Novic believes that he is a man who prefers to live his life part-time as a woman and engage in a heterosexual relationship at home. The delineation of what makes a man “regular” conforms to gender norms and Novic’s interpretation of these norms allows him to interpret his cross-dressing as a normal deviation from these norms because he chalks the differences up to biological elements.

Interpretation: Lessons on Gender

DeWitt’s passing as Father Damien alters her understanding of gender norms and she gathers a greater understanding of gender through her interactions with the Ojibwe people. One encounter with Nanapush makes her realize that gender norms are ideas that hold little to no purpose on the reservation. In fact, when Nanapush asserts that she is a “man-acting woman” DeWitt realizes that a moment “so shattering to her, wasn’t of like importance to Nanapush.”²⁶⁸ This realization of the significance of gender norms and how these ideas of feminine and masculine do not necessarily apply to DeWitt on the reservation reinforce the idea that societal expectations of gender norms in Western culture do not apply to all cultural ideologies. In fact, attempting to essentialize notions of gender normativity across cultures implies a truth about gender that simply does not exist. DeWitt and Nanapush’s conversation confirm that idea that there are no essential qualities that reify gender and that the very idea of gender is merely an act that is formulated from legitimize social practice. Of course, a further interpretation of this conversation includes the differences between Westernized understanding of cultural differences

²⁶⁸ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 232.

and the Other that the people of the Ojibwe represent. However, that particular strand of the conversation steers away from DeWitt's interpretation of gender norms. Of course, she does formulate a more in-depth understanding of gender when she begins to pass as Father Damien. The subtle ways she receives deferential treatment from the nuns in the convent and how, when she does interact with the men on the reservation, her actions have become so artfully practiced that no one questions her gender.

DeWitt's presence on the reservation and her passing as Father Damien allow her to understand how her life has altered when she was reborn as a man. In fact, she realizes "that her happiness was composed of a thousand ordinary satisfactions built up over a life lived according to what might seem to others modest and monotonous routines. As a priest, as a man, after the long penitential years and the challenges of her own temperament, she was at ease."²⁶⁹ DeWitt's interpretation of her passing therefore highlights the idea that she is only gains happiness from her experiences as Father Damien. DeWitt's experiences as Father Damien have shown her the great influence and the peace she has brought to many of her friends on the reservation. She states, "as Father Damien, she had blessed unions, baptized, anointed, and absolved friends in the parish. In turn, Father Damien had been converted by the good Nanapush. He now practiced a mixture of faiths, kept the pipe, translated hymns or brought in the drum...He was welcomed where no other white man was allowed."²⁷⁰ Father Damien's influence is far-reaching and his purpose is far more important than DeWitt's previous accomplishments. DeWitt feels that her purpose, and her passing as Father Damien, not only changed the attitudes of the Ojibwe people but also allowed her to find her place.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 275.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 275-76.

The return of Gregory Wekkle truly illuminates DeWitt's interpretation of gender norms and makes her question her own actions around the women of the reservation. She states how, "he treated her as somehow less" and then she begins to wonder "did she patronize women too, now that she'd made herself so thoroughly into a priest?"²⁷¹ It is only the appearance of Gregory that makes DeWitt truly contemplate, and interpret, her role as a man on the reservation. Does Gregory's presence codify gender norms? The answer to this question is complicated because DeWitt is not overly conscious of the way she treats the other women on the reservation. As part of her passing, she interprets male behavior as confident and authoritative but in none of her interactions does she imply that she condescends these women. We can infer that Gregory's presence makes her question whether or not her passing as Father Damien is truly effective simply because he knows her true identity as Agnes. We can also infer that Gregory makes her conscious of her gender performance in a way that no other man has on the reservation. However, this moment of self-doubt allows her to interpret the so-called differences in their gender. Once Gregory dies, DeWitt continues to perform as Father Damien and does not alter her performance in the least.

Novic's interpretation of his gender performance as Alice both codifies gender norms and challenges them at the same time. His performance as Alice attempts to recontextualize gender norms, but at the same time he believes in the normative structure. For instance, his belief that women should embrace sexual objectification adheres to the notion that women's bodies are sexualized for men's pleasure. He argues, "I had never really understood why so many women would complain, 'We're not just sex objects.' It made me feel like shaking one and shouting,

²⁷¹ Ibid, 303.

‘Well, at least you get to be a sex object!’”²⁷² Novic’s perception of how women feel regarding their sexual objectification is reflective of his interpretation of the feminine. In fact, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* argues that man “becomes indignant when he treats her as a free and independent being and then realizes that she is still a trap for him; if he gratifies and satisfies her in her posture as prey, he finds her claims of autonomy irritating; what he does, he feels tricked and she feels wronged.”²⁷³ The interplay between Novic and the women he wants to sexually objectify indicate how he feels about his ineptitude approaching women, but also his interpretation of how women should feel when he treats them as sexual objects are indicative of the way he wants to be treated as a woman. He feels women should be grateful in their sexual objectification because he fantasizes his own sexual objectification. Of course, this female fantasy he wants to perform is simply that; a male fantasy of femininity.

Not only does Novic’s interpretation of women codify a masculine understanding of gender norms but his interaction with men also codifies feminine understanding of gender norms. More specifically, Novic believes that women should be jumping up and down when men view them as sexual objects, but he also codifies the male ideal. For example, he states, “I wanted a man who was well built and tall. He didn’t have to be great looking, and I didn’t care about race. Nevertheless, I felt a bit shallow until I realized my preference for taller men was something else I shared with real women.”²⁷⁴ The emphasis on the ideal man’s height and the inference that most women want a tall man infers gender norms concerning what constitutes a “real” man. Of course, he also mentions how “real” women want tall men which is another point of contention. What constitutes a “real” woman? Novic’s reification of masculine and feminine attributes is a

²⁷² Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 172.

²⁷³ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 718-19.

²⁷⁴ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 190.

result of his interpretation of gender. Of course, he does not attempt to answer what a “real” woman is but seems confident enough in his knowledge of femininity to expound upon what women want in a man.

Novic’s interpretations about gender norms culminate at the end of his memoir and he recounts four major lessons. The first lesson he remarks upon is how “we live in a culture that allows only two gender options. You can live as a man, or you can live as a woman.”²⁷⁵ The binary of gender norms is something Novic challenges when he states, “although on the inside I’m in between male and female, I’ve chosen to live primarily as man, husband, and father.”²⁷⁶ This particular assessment of gender implies that Novic’s decision to live as a man, and woman, is simply a matter of making a choice. The second lesson argues that he has brought meaning to his life “by taking his fantasies and curiosities very seriously.”²⁷⁷ The self-fulfillment Novic feels when he expresses himself as both a man and a woman decry the notion of a binary gender norm. He argues that expressing himself both as a man and woman fulfills him more so than adhering to one particular gender. The third lesson he has come to terms with is only occasionally dressing up as a woman because he knows that he cannot pass as a woman full-time.²⁷⁸ The fourth lesson he has learned through his experiences as Alice is that if he could one day wake up as a woman, he would enjoy his life but he does not feel deprived from expressing his femininity part-time. He states, “living as a man has felt right” because he enjoys “the casualness and independence of it: rolling out of bed and starting my day with no muss or fuss, wandering around alone day or night without having to worry about my safety.”²⁷⁹ Novic’s life as a man and his cross dressing is

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 234.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 234.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 234.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 235.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 236.

an example in contradiction because while he enjoys the superficial experiences of being a woman he still prefers the advantages masculine gender norms allow him. Novic's interpretation of his experiences are frustrating at times because his beliefs about women and how they feel, or should feel, just codify the male gaze. His experiences don't necessarily alter gender norms but reify them and the times he does mention how he feels about the transgender community are only minimal, at best. If Novic's goal was to alter gender norms through his experiences as Alice, then he has woefully failed.

Recall

The final stage of this model looks at how the passer recalls his/her experience of passing through the narratives they write. The process of recall takes all of the abovementioned steps and allows the passer to not only articulate his/her experience to garner meaning, but also endeavors to relay that information to a wider audience who might similarly undergo such an experience. Basically, this step looks at how the narrator conceptualizes his/her experiences in the form of the narrative. After all, the passing experience as I have outlined it above takes all the factors to illustrate not only the individuals' personal experience with passing but to also generate an overall understanding for any individual who will engage in passing. This particular step is vital to not only understand the relevancy of passing but to also articulate the changes in normative structure and within social groups. The passer's ability to recall his/her experience allows the reader to broaden his/her own position within the normative structure and invites change. This stage will incorporate all three methodologies. First, the product of the passer's recall is in fact the narrative, so looking intently at how the passer shows us his/her experience and imparts such knowledge is useful to map the overall influence of such narratives. Second, the product is informed by his/her social experience within their old and new social groups, so looking at how

the passer formulates knowledge about the normative structure is important to changing such a structure. Thirdly, these narratives are an addition to historical literature on the same subject and therefore lend a new voice to the subject of passing but also challenge the notion that the normative structure has altered in any significant way from previous narratives.

DeWitt's life passing as Father Damien illustrates not only an addition to the history of passing narratives that tend to focus on racial passing, but also leads to a re-structuring of the passing narrative. DeWitt's character leads a very long life as Father Damien, but at the end of her life she contemplates how "no matter if she'd betrayed her nature as a woman or violated the vows of the long dead original Father Damien, her life was vapor, a thing of no substance, one more in the endless music, one note that faded out before the listener could catch its shape."²⁸⁰ DeWitt's contemplation of the self and her impact as Father Damien reflects the very idea of passing: what does one accomplish when one decides to pass? The notion of recall makes the passer contemplate his/her decision to pass and the lingering lessons he/she wishes to convey through the act of passing. DeWitt's understanding of her experiences establishes the idea that her life as Father Damien is somewhat hollow because of the sacrifices she made, and that she still struggles with understanding who she is even at the end of her life.

Through the course of the narrative, Father Damien's persona prevails in public but when Agnes is alone in her small cabin she struggles with her passing as a man. The public sphere is where Father Damien illustrates how he interacts with people as a man, but the more private contemplations of Agnes illustrate how passing is a struggle for identity. The day DeWitt is taken to the reservation, she reflects on how "there would be times that she missed the ease of moving in her old skin, times that Father Damien was pierced by womanness and suffered. Still,

²⁸⁰ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 347.

Agnes was certain now that she had done the right thing. Father Damien Modeste had arrived here.”²⁸¹ DeWitt’s uncertainty in passing as Father Damien and her belief that her choice is the right one is constantly tested in the narrative. DeWitt’s recall of this particular moment lends weight to the overwhelming responsibility she is about to undertake as Father Damien and the loss she will endure leaving Agnes behind to take on this new journey. However confident DeWitt appears to be as Father Damien, the struggle she undertakes is re-emphasized throughout the narrative. It is here, in the struggle to pass as a man, where the concept of passing is finally understood. The idea behind recall is to illustrate how a person’s passing changes the normative structure but in the case of DeWitt, her isolation on the reservation as a priest challenges the idea that her passing changed the normative structure. The Ojibwe do not view gender normativity in the same way and Nanapush’s discussion with DeWitt re-emphasizes the different viewpoints on gender norms. Nanapush does not make DeWitt’s passing a societal issue but refers to her decision to pass as a man as a way to appease her gods.²⁸² Nanapush’s assessment as to why DeWitt passes as a man injects the idea that she is sacrificing her life as a woman to repent for past wrongs. DeWitt’s impact on the normative structure is dubious at best because the normative structure on the reservation does not adhere to Western ideology of gender norms. Passing is not necessarily viewed as a social deviance of defined gender norms and instead the idea that everyone is both female and male is emphasized through the views of the Ojibwe.

While the recall stage of the intersectional passing model in Erdrich’s book is more difficult to ascertain, Novic’s memoir tends to openly contemplate his place within the normative structure. In fact, Novic recalls how his experience with cross dressing has affected the way he

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 65.

²⁸² *Ibid*, 232.

feels about his relationships with family and friends. In the beginning of his memoir, Novic states that the purpose of writing his memoir is “my mission as a crossdresser speaking to other crossdressers. As one of our own who had worked out a very satisfying and balanced life, I aimed to give others hope. As a psychiatrist who had found positive new ways to look at the challenges we all face, I hoped to give others pride.”²⁸³ Novic’s introduction lays out the purpose of his memoir and also gives credence to the recall stage. Novic memoir hopes to challenge prevailing ideas of gender normativity by illustrating how full his life is as a crossdresser and how others can find the same fulfillment.

Novic’s memoir does illustrate to other crossdressers the trials of cross dressing in a society with clear definitions of gender norms, but his memoir also allows an insights for anyone “who has struggled to figure out who they are and how they want to live.”²⁸⁴ This more far-reaching idea that those who struggle with their identity will gain insight from his memoir encompasses the very idea of recall. Novic’s memoir aims to illustrate how he struggled to fit societal gender norms and then ultimately found his own idea of normativity. He states, “as I see it, I was allotted a number of cards in life: dark hair, *fine, whatever*; white skin, *sure can’t hurt*; nimble mind, *great*, the hopes and dreams of a girl, *what the hell?*”²⁸⁵ Novic’s list reiterates the advantages he receives in a society preoccupied with gender norms, but the mention of his femininity sparks an immediate reaction on his part to a disparity with gender normativity. He is fine with the qualities that are status quo and rebels against any indications that he will not fit in with society. This particular observation reaffirms how any demarcation from gender norms elicits an immediate and violent reaction. He further notes, “I was perhaps as stunned as any of

²⁸³ Ibid, ix.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, ix.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, xi.

you might be to have to deal with something like this. How could a traditional man, like me, face the fact he wanted nothing more than to indulge in the pleasures of womanhood? All the pleasures of womanhood. What a humiliating fate.”²⁸⁶Novic’s statement here is twofold; one he is disgusted by the idea that he wants to experience his femininity and at the same time reifies gender normativity with the idea that masculinity holds traditional values. When he states that he feels he was a traditional man, he unwittingly invites questions about gender norms. Also, he argues that the idea of being a woman is a degrading experience for a man but one that he gleefully explores in his memoir.

Novic’s introduction illustrates how he reifies and challenges gender norms, but later on in the memoir he tries to make his audience understand the importance of community and support. He states, “As a final thought to those of you within our community—or who think you might be—I would like to say, there is hope. I am Alice. I chased my white rabbit and took a long, horrifying fall. But I’ve landed gently in a world more wonderful than I could have imagined.”²⁸⁷Novic’s recall of events allows him to illustrate how he has found a balance between his masculinity and femininity and also how he did not have to sacrifice one for the other. However, the rhetoric Novic uses is at times quite contradictory and inflammatory. For example, in his last paragraph he states “To those of you who live outside Genderland, I hope you have enjoyed having your consciousness raised the way mine was and been touched by this rare glimpse into the life of a crossdresser.”²⁸⁸ Novic’s conclusion that some of us live inside and outside gender normativity is quite erroneous since everyone lives with certain notions of gender expectations. Novic himself mentions in his memoir how his family, wives, and friends reified

²⁸⁶ Ibid, xi.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 237.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 237.

what it means to him to be a man throughout his life and only through expressing himself as a woman did he feel that he was a full person. The use of “Genderland” infers that his world is separated from the rest of society, and in some cases this conclusion is correct, but we all live in a world occupied with reifying gender norms.

Recall: Meaning in the Text

The final stage in the intersectional passing model looks closely at the impact each text has on the idea of gender normativity but also on passing. Each text allows the reader to understand the experience of passing through the narrative and garner the information that will aid him/her in their own endeavors with passing. Erdrich’s text constructs the narrative to not only tell the reader about passing but show through the back and forth usage of personal narratives how the character struggles with her passing as Father Damien. There are numerous examples in the text where DeWitt presents herself as Father Damien in public but contemplates her life in private as Agnes. For example, DeWitt’s transformation into Father Damien occurs every morning and so:

She transformed herself each morning with a feeling of loss that she finally defined as the loss of Agnes. Ah, Agnes! She lived at night in the shelter of bedclothes. Disappeared in daylight, bandages wrapped as when she had been a nun. As she left the cabin, her thoughts became Damien’s thoughts. Her voice his voice, which deepened as his stride lengthened and grew bold.²⁸⁹

DeWitt’s physical and mental distance from Agnes illustrates the dichotomy in her passing as Father Damien, but also shows how the narrative functions as a tool to aid her passing. More specifically, Erdrich makes a point of highlighting the struggle DeWitt undertakes each morning through the rhetorical uses of personal pronouns and the shifting points of view in the narrative.

²⁸⁹ Erdrich, *The Last Report*, 76.

When DeWitt begins to tell her story, she begins as Agnes but the narrative shifts from her to Father Damien and finally to Father Jude who is hearing the story. This shift in narration also implies the ever changing point of view or perspective of who Father Damien is throughout the narrative. The reader always gets a different picture of Father Damien and emphasis how he is presented to societal inspection.

The act of recall is, in effect, to recount the story of the character's passing experience but to also alter the normative structure. However, since DeWitt mainly passes in isolation on the reservation, a more pertinent question to ask is if an individual is isolated from the normative structure can he or she alternately change that which is unknown? DeWitt's experiences as Father DeWitt and the notion she changes the normative structure on gender is missing one vital element: social groups. DeWitt does not alter the normative structure on gender because her audience does not adhere to Western notions of gender. The Ojibwe accept Father Damien for who he is, and more importantly, Father Damien does not assimilate any member of the Ojibwe tribe to Western ideology of gender. In fact, Father Damien is almost assuredly assimilated into the Ojibwe tribe and therefore notions of gender are no longer relevant.

Novic's memoir tries to challenge notions of gender normativity but at the same time reifies gender norms. The ideas Novic presents in his memoir about gender codify the notion that men and women are undeniably different and at times some of his ideas regarding women adhere to gender stereotypes. For example, when he discusses the differences between men and women and how their different interests reflect their gender; he states:

someone with a masculine personality will have professional interests like a business or technical career and personal interests that tend toward athletics; whereas someone with a feminine personality will have professional interests like

a people- or child-oriented career and personal interests that tend toward aesthetics.²⁹⁰

These particular observations are based on gender stereotypes of men and women, so why does Novic argue that these qualities determine masculinity and femininity? Again, Novic's memoir is rife with contradictions because the reader is lead to wonder if these are elements of gender normativity that he is fighting against or wants to keep in check. Of course, Novic's cross dressing defies such gender stereotypes and he does qualify such statements as his way of dealing with his cross dressing tendencies.

Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, deconstructs the notions of gender from a patriarchal perspective. She recounts how "the woman who does not conform devaluates herself sexually and hence socially, since sexual values are an integral feature of society."²⁹¹ We can see how Novic differentiates gender according to the tasks that are socially acceptable to men and women. The idea that men are more suitable to work in a business environment are antiquated ideas and are directed at keeping women in their place for "the individual is still not free to do as she pleases in shaping the concept of femininity."²⁹² No matter what women do to alter the perception of femininity, she will never achieve success in altering gender normativity. Therefore, does Novic alter the perception of gender normativity in regards to masculinity or does he just accomplish reifying stereotypes of women? His statement about how women are more interested in aesthetics than men re-emphasizes societal beliefs and also reiterates how a woman "knows that when she is looked at she is not considered apart from her appearance: she is

²⁹⁰ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 183.

²⁹¹ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 682.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 682.

judged, respected, desired, by and through her toilette.”²⁹³ Novic’s conclusion that women are more concerned with aesthetics is just a reification of gender norms. Although Novic tries to challenge gender normativity, he only illustrates the difficulty involved with changing a structure steeped in a fixed binary.

The effectiveness of Novic’s recall is somewhat limited and difficult to decipher because at some points in the memoir he makes statements about gender that infer that he wants to change the way gender is socially constructed, but then there are other times where Novic’s ideas just reify the normative structure. Is Novic successful in altering the normative structure of gender? No, his memoir does make one look at the fluidity of gender but his overall beliefs still adhere to gender norms and the reason is because he jumps back and forth between genders. Novic is able to extract the ideal feminine situations and still retain his masculinity. He is married to a wonderful woman, who he argues “legalizes” his sexuality²⁹⁴, and also reins in his sexuality so he “didn’t drift too far from being the kind of person she’d want to spend her life with.”²⁹⁵ At other times, he is able to have all the advantages of his masculinity and states, “I don’t think I’d want to live all my days as a woman, I would prefer to snap my fingers and go back and forth.”²⁹⁶ This statement implies that Novic’s attraction to femininity is based on the superficial trappings society associates with the feminine and none of the substance.

In one of his final statements, Novic’s hope in telling his story is to inspire people who have feelings that don’t necessarily adhere to societal expectations of gender normativity to

²⁹³ Ibid, 683.

²⁹⁴ Novic, *Alice in Genderland*, 185.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 233.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 236.

nourish and inspire them with the ultimate goal of making a difference.²⁹⁷ This notion is an idealized statement for how does Novic alter gender normativity when he still adheres to a patriarchal view of femininity and practices this image as well? He does argue that as his children grow he will try to educate them about his cross dressing with the hope that his teachings will negate “what society has a chance to ‘teach’ them.”²⁹⁸ Will Novic’s cross dressing illustrate that he deviates from gender norms or will it illustrate instead that his children can partake of both masculine and feminine qualities and negate society’s teachings of binary systems of gender? Novic’s memoir gives the reader hope that the future, and his children’s perspectives on gender, will change the binary system.

The application of the intersectional passing model illustrates a number of insights into the nuances of female to male passing and male to female passing, but also highlights a few issues with the steps in this model as well. Erdrich’s novel begins with Agnes DeWitt’s placement in society and establishes her understanding of gender sparingly. The development of DeWitt’s character in the beginning of the novel offers minimal insight into how DeWitt feels about her femininity or how her history influences her actions as a woman. However, DeWitt’s marginal development as a woman in the beginning of the novel allows the reader to inflect how she feels about her femininity and while this inflection is somewhat useful to the application of the intersectional passing model in some areas, this lack of information also makes the first step of the passing model rather challenging.

The first step of the model explores the nuances of the normative structure and notions of gender normativity. DeWitt has no real foundation in the normative structure because Erdrich

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 237.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 236.

begins her narrative in a convent and DeWitt is a young woman at this point. The convent does offer a rather interesting foundation for gender normativity in that the idea of a young woman in a convent enforces strict notions of gender normativity. DeWitt's place in the convent implies that this young woman could not, or would not; find a young man to marry her and life in a convent is her only alternative. However, DeWitt's place in the convent also implies that she made the decision to devote her life to Christ instead of her confinement in a loveless marriage for the sake of avoiding life as a spinster. The latter reasoning seems to apply to DeWitt because she repeatedly denies Vogel when he persists that she marry him. Gender normativity, for DeWitt, and the application of the normative structure step is fraught with issues because Erdrich never mentions DeWitt's parents in the narrative, so where does DeWitt's understanding of gender formulate? Certainly the nuns at the convent reinforce notions of gender normativity and arguably influence DeWitt a great deal since she only has contact with these women. Did Erdrich intentional negate any mention of DeWitt's parents and their influence upon her with regards to her understanding of femininity because the notion of passing evolves more fluidly without pre-conceived notions of gender? The answer to this question is rather difficult; however, the idea that Erdrich denies the reader any in-depth history about DeWitt's character does allow her to fluidly pass as a man. The exclusion of any fixed normative structure allows DeWitt's character to reject notions of femininity and to formulate her own understanding of masculinity. DeWitt's passing as a man comes from her minimal interactions with men, but this absence also shows how she constructs masculinity with an infusion of feminine characteristics. Therefore, DeWitt ultimately constructs Father Damien with both male and female characteristics from her limited perspective of these traits.

While Erdrich's construction of DeWitt's character allows for a re-interpretation of masculinity through her passing as Father Damien, Novic's memoir presents a rather complicated interpretation of femininity when he passes as Alice. Novic's placement as a man in the normative structure allows him a certain freedom in how he passes as Alice, but also in how he views gender normativity. Novic's memoir presents many complicated views of femininity because many of these views are based on a patriarchal understanding of what femininity means in society. Novic is so occupied with his physical interpretation of the female body and remarks upon how he wants men to view him as a sexual object when he dresses up as Alice. At the same time, in his own relationships with both his first and second wives, he treats them as sexual objects who should enjoy wearing feminine and sexual clothing to garner his attention. He resents that he must approach women when he begins to date, yet still expects this behavior when he goes out in public dressed as Alice. Novic's viewpoint of femininity is problematic and his desire to fully immerse himself as Alice further complicates his understanding of gender normativity. Novic's placement in society differs greatly from DeWitt's because Novic goes out into public dressed up as Alice and then goes home to his wife at night. Novic still retains his male privilege in society and when he dresses up as Alice is still perpetuates the stereotypes associated with societies understanding of women.

The application of the intersectional passing model highlights these two issues in both Erdrich and Novic's texts and illustrates how the data will differentiate according to the gender of the text. The first step of the model, the normative structure, relies heavily upon authorial influence and understanding of gender norms. Clearly, the writer of the text will influence how the character interprets notions of gender and also how the character will re-interpret gender. DeWitt's character illustrates how masculinity is created through marginal contact with men, but

also how the Ojibwe interpret gender as well. After all, when DeWitt goes to the reservation and passes as Father Damien she encounters various understandings of gender normativity that do not necessarily correspond to Western understandings of gender. For example, Nanapush's questions to DeWitt about why she is passing as a priest only spark a conversation about how the spirits require a great sacrifice and do not result in ridicule or banishment. The Ojibwe reservation's normative structure plays a very important role in how successful DeWitt passes as Father Damien. Novic's memoir, on the other hand, presents a very strict interpretation of the normative structure and his childhood is just reification of masculine behavior and societal policing of any behavior that does not conform to this norm.

Novic's position as a man and his desire to pass as a woman illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of the intersectional passing model. Many of the steps in the model apply quite fluidly to Novic's memoir; however, the last two steps—interpretation and recall—are rather difficult to apply because of how Novic interprets his passing as a woman and how he constructs his memoir. Novic's interpretation of gender, as he becomes Alice, does not alter pre-conceived notions of gender. In fact, Novic just reifies many of the stereotypes associated with women in society. He believes that women want to wear pretty clothes provocatively, flirt demurely, and subjugate themselves in the presence of men. These interpretations of gender do not re-construct gender normativity but illustrate how even when a man wants to dress up as a woman, he wants his interpretation of femininity to hold truth instead of delving into a deeper understanding of femininity. Novic's interpretation of gender is rather difficult to prescribe to and makes the application of this step to his memoir rather futile. This step coupled with the last step—recall—merge into a convoluted understanding of gender passing that is prescribed to his reader and others who are struggling with gender passing. Novic's recall is by no means a new perspective

on gender and his passing as Alice is somewhat marred by his personification of stereotypical gender archetypes.

Chapter 3

In and Out of the Closet: Sexual Passing

Timothy Kurek's memoir delves deeply into his religious beliefs about homosexuality and what it means to be a homosexual male. Kurek is prompted to pass as a homosexual male after a close friend discloses her sexuality and is rejected by her family. Duberman's memoir explores how he tries to negate his homosexuality through a series of failed relationships with women and a destructive psychotherapist. Duberman's refusal to recognize his homosexuality amidst a heteronormative society prompts him to pass as a heterosexual male in public spaces. Both of these texts explore the underlining beliefs that homosexuality is sinful, unnatural, curable, and somehow deviant according to heteronormativity. The success of sexual passing relies heavily upon societal notions of aesthetic indicators of heteronormativity. More specifically, Kurek and Duberman pass according to social markers associated with homosexuality and heterosexuality; however, these markers are merely superficial indicators the audience reacts to in order for the passer to achieve his goal of sexual passing. As we have seen in the previous chapter on gender passing, sexual passing relies heavily upon aesthetics and the transformation of the body to adhere to societal standards of masculinity and femininity. This chapter on sexual passing will not only highlight aesthetics and bodily transformation but will also focus on how these two men interpret behavioral modifications to the body as well which often relies heavily upon societal stereotypes of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

The goal of this chapter is to examine how, and why, sexual passing is sometimes necessary but also to illustrate the conceptual differences between gender passing and sexual passing. The application of the intersectional passing model will highlight similar aspects

associated with transforming the body to adhere to societal standards as the gender chapter but the model will also delve into the superficial nature of heteronormativity. In addition, these two texts allow me to fully explore how, and why, Kurek and Duberman navigate through their differing viewpoints on heteronormativity and the results of their sexual passing in regards to a deviation from heteronormativity. Ultimately, I hope to discover how Kurek and Duberman's sexual passing illustrates the fluidity of sexuality as opposed to the strict fixed point society dictates.

Text Summaries/Normative Structure

The Cross in the Closet

Timothy Kurek's, a white male Christian fundamentalist, memoir (2012) *The Cross in the Closet*, examines the intricacies passing as a gay man. The memoir begins with Kurek as a student at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia in 2004, when he confronts a member of a group called Soulforce, whose leader, Mel White, is a "real threat" to society.²⁹⁹ This perceived threat to society stems from the teachings of Jerry Falwell, the founder of Liberty University, and his rapacious aversion to homosexuality. Mel White's book (1994) *Stranger at the Gate: To be Gay and Christian in America* recounts his contentious relationship with Jerry Falwell from ghostwriting Falwell's biography to his impassioned letter entreating Falwell and other religious right leaders to meet with him to discuss how homosexuals are treated by the Church and Christians. White also demonstrates how Jerry Falwell's beliefs that "homosexuals 'have a godless, humanistic scheme for our nation—a plan which will destroy America's traditional moral values'" and how the "'goal' as gays and lesbians was the 'complete elimination of God

²⁹⁹ Timothy Kurek, *The Cross in the Closet* (Tacoma, Bluehead Publishing, 2013), 4.

and Christianity from American society [and] is being designed right now!’ embroiled White to speak out against the religious right and form the group Soulforce.³⁰⁰ The group White and his partner, Gary Nixon, began as a counter-protest group against religious persecution of gay men and women endeavor to illustrate the merging of Christian beliefs of forgiveness and love for the homosexual community. Falwell’s aversion to homosexual stems from his literal interpretation of the bible. Kathleen M. Sands’ chapter “Homosexuality, Religion, and the Law” clarifies the term homosexual and how this term is defined in Western cultures. Sands argues that “the term ‘homosexuality’ itself, a word of late nineteenth-century European provenance, bearing connotations that never were universal and that now are contested even in the West” are differentiated between “active” and “passive male homoeroticism.”³⁰¹ The perception of “true homosexuality” only refers to those men who are actively participating in homosexual relationships.³⁰² Here, Sands illustrates how homosexuality is often categorized only in conjunction with the activity therein, or more specifically a homosexual is only a homosexual if he/she actively participates in sexual relationships. Religious responses to homosexuality differ across cultural boundaries and religious dogma but many cultures regulate homosexuality through legal discourse.³⁰³ Christianity’s view of homosexuals and homosexuality revolves around the restriction of procreation and thereby sexuality.³⁰⁴ In fact, the Church not only conferred acceptable sexual behavior but also defined unacceptable behavior as, “nonprocreative sex, defined as unnatural” and “classed with bestiality and masturbation in penitential manuals,

³⁰⁰ Mel White, *Strangers at the Gate: To Be Gay and Christian in America* (New York: Plume, 1995), 224.

³⁰¹ Kathleen M. Sands, “Homosexuality, Religion, and the Law,” in *Homosexuality and Religion: An Encyclopedia 2007*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), 3. PDF e-book.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 3.

³⁰³ Sands’ article offers an in-depth discussion of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity’s view of homosexuality and the religious law that dictates how these men and women are treated. These descriptions are extensive; therefore, I only cover the relevancy of Christianity’s view of homosexuality in regards to Kurek’s memoir and as the basis for his viewpoints on homosexuality.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

and both its homosexual and heterosexual forms were forbidden.”³⁰⁵ The foundation for penitential manuals was to regulate sexual behavior and for clergymen to assign appropriate penance to the sinner for moral and religious transgressions. Pierre J. Payer’s book (1984), *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150* maps the height of these particular manuals which arguably focused heavily upon determining morally acceptable sexual conduct

and misconduct.³⁰⁶ Therefore, any and all sexual activity that did not result in the creation of an offspring was considered immoral, in the Church’s viewpoint.

Kurek’s viewpoint on homosexuality does not necessarily emulate modern Christianity but Christian Fundamentalism which is harkening back to traditional Christian beliefs and biblical texts. Karen Armstrong’s book (2000) *The Battle for God* explores the rise of fundamentalism in every religious denomination as a reactionary response to scientific advancements. Armstrong asserts that “the fundamentalists wanted to go back to basics and reemphasize the ‘fundamentals’ of the Christian tradition, which they identified with a literal interpretation of Scripture and the acceptance of certain core doctrines.”³⁰⁷ Of course, Armstrong also charts how these fundamental beliefs permeate other religious denominations including Protestant, Judaism, and Islam which illustrates how the majority of the world’s major religious denominations are rapidly eschewing modernity.³⁰⁸ Christian fundamentalists are sometimes considered radical in their beliefs because they “have no time for democracy, pluralism, religious toleration, peacekeeping, free speech, or the separation of church and

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 10.

³⁰⁶ Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 3. PDF e-book.

³⁰⁷ Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 2000), x. PDF e-book.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, x-xi.

state.”³⁰⁹ In fact, fundamentalists are often designated in popular culture as religious extremists because they reject all, or most, aspects of modern society. Indeed, many fundamentalists reject modern scientific discoveries, biology, and physics in favor of Biblical accounts of creation.³¹⁰ Armstrong’s in-depth research on fundamentalism also includes the emergence of Jerry Falwell and the Thomas Road Baptist Church. Falwell’s belief in Christian fundamentalism follows on the heels of prominent Southern fundamentalists Pat Robertson in Virginia Beach, and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker in southern California.³¹¹ The recount of Falwell’s rise to religious prominence and influence rests on his ministry which began in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1956. His congregation was small but within over the space of three years “the congregation had grown to three times its original size and by 1988 the Thomas Road Baptist Church had 18,000 members and sixty associate pastors.”³¹² Falwell also branched out his ministry to radio stations, television programs, and the creation of his own college, Liberty University.³¹³ In fact, Falwell created his own world and hoped that the students of his college would go out into the world and bring salvation into a morally corrupt society. David Snowball’s book (1991) *Continuity and Change in the Rhetoric of the Moral Majority* elaborates on how Falwell founded the Moral Majority in 1979 whose mission “was a conservative political action organization with conventional goals. It wanted to strengthen the Judeo-Christian foundations of the political system by generating popular pressure on elected officials and corporate executives.”³¹⁴ Falwell was not content to merely educate a new generation of Christian fundamentalists, but also endeavored to breach the political landscape and elect officials whose beliefs aligned with traditional Christian beliefs.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, ix.

³¹⁰ Ibid, ix.

³¹¹ Ibid, 267-268.

³¹² Ibid, 275.

³¹³ Ibid, 275.

³¹⁴ David Snowball, *Continuity and Change in the Rhetoric of the Moral Majority* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 2. PDF e-book.

Broderick S. Chabin's book (2014) *Adolescent Males and Homosexuality: The Search for Self* illustrates how Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, aligning with Christian fundamentalists, "are completely consistent with God's wishes" and these wishes denounce homosexuality.³¹⁵ Therefore, Kurek's normative view of sexuality aligns with a moral perspective, not a liberal societal expectation.

The normative structure in Kurek's memoir manifests itself as his conscience telling him what is acceptable behavior for him and for others according to his Christian fundamental belief system. Kurek's position as a white, heterosexual, Christian male who is adamantly against homosexuality manifests itself as "the Pharisee."³¹⁶ Kurek's use of the Pharisee as a manifestation of his inner voice is paradoxical because according to the King James Bible, the Pharisee represents the antithesis of Jesus' teachings. Dr. Ronald N. Hesser's book (2007) *The Pharisee in Us All: A Good "Bad Example" of a New Testament Church* defines the term as referring to the "'separated ones' coming from the Hebrew word 'parash' meaning to separate or distinguish from others. They devoted themselves totally to religious purposes and their numbers were about 6,000 at the time of Jesus' ministry."³¹⁷ The Pharisee's goal was to befriend Jesus and thereby use his own words against him to turn him over to the authorities.³¹⁸ The Pharisee verbalizes his feelings and beliefs about homosexuality and Kurek fights against this voice throughout his memoir. Therefore, Kurek is essentially fighting against himself and his religious indoctrination that teaches him to condemn homosexuals or more specifically, Kurek is fighting against religious condemnations of sexual deviance. This voice of the Pharisee doggedly appears

³¹⁵ Broderick S. Chabin, *Adolescent Males and Homosexuality: The Search for Self* (Los Angeles: Bravedog Press, 2014), 86. PDF e-book.

³¹⁶ Kurek, *The Cross in the Closet*, 14.

³¹⁷ Ronald N. Hesser, *The Pharisee in Us All: Pharisaism: A Good "Bad Example" of a New Testament Church* (Indiana: Author-House, 2007), x. PDF e-book.

³¹⁸ Lu 20:20 (King James Bible (KJB)).

throughout the memoir and before Kurek even begins his experiment as a gay man, the voice tells him that “it is your responsibility as a follower of Christ” to help people understand the teachings of the Bible and elucidate homosexuals on the sin of homosexuality.³¹⁹ The voice intones the underlying feelings Kurek has towards homosexuality and his continual struggle to overcome heteronormativity.

The Pharisee continually tries to negate Kurek’s experiment and reiterates the common religious beliefs about homosexuality. At one point, this voice tells Kurek that “homosexuality is unnatural. You might think you love your new friends, but you are forgetting that these ‘good people’ will be going to hell. You should be warning them of the consequences of their sin, not serving them coffee.”³²⁰ Kurek struggles internally with the voice of heteronormativity, and coupled with his religious beliefs about homosexuality, his experiment to pass as a gay man is a constant battle to overcome societal norms and religious beliefs about sexuality. Christian Kiese’s book (2006) *The Spectre of Promiscuity: Gay Male and Bisexual Non-monogamies and Polyamories* recounts the multiple definitions of heteronormativity. Kiese states that heteronormativity encompasses multiple elements. For example, “heteronormativity is a pervasive form of power which extends to the control and regulation of both sexual *and* social identities and practices. Secondly, although heteronormativity sets up discourses on proper sexual activity around an idealized image of heterosexuality, not all heterosexual practice is necessarily heteronormative.”³²¹ Heteronormativity dictates acceptable forms of social identities which include gender (male/female) and sexuality (heterosexual/heterosexual). Gayle Rubin’s book (2011) *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* enumerates the sexual acts that are conducive to

³¹⁹ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 13.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 78.

³²¹ Christian Kiese, *The Spectre of Promiscuity: Gay Male and Bisexual Non-monogamies and Polyamories* (Great Britain: Ashgate, 2007), 10.

normative heterosexual sex versus those that are viewed as deviant. Rubin cites Western cultures appraisal of sex acts which include “marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top of the erotic pyramid. Clamoring below are unmarried monogamous heterosexuals in couples, followed by most other heterosexuals.”³²² Rubin’s hierarchal categorization of acceptable sex acts invariably include those sexual acts performed within heterosexual marriages out of love and result in the procreation of children. Of course, Rubin clarifies sexual acts that even in heterosexual relationships are not considered normative; “sodomasochism fetishism, transsexuality, and cross-generational encounters.”³²³ Sexual acts performed within marriage by heterosexual couples are still deemed the normative while other sexual relationships, including homosexual relationships, are viewed as deviant.

Kurek’s encounter with a young gay man, a member of Soulforce, on Liberty University’s Lynchburg, Virginia campus in 2004 leads him to question his Christian beliefs especially after the young man professes his love for Kurek as his brother in Christ.³²⁴ After this altercation, Kurek begins to question the validity of his Christian education at Liberty University and a few months after the encounter, Kurek leaves Liberty University to return to his family home in Nashville, Tennessee. In the fall of 2006, two years after leaving Liberty University, Kurek finds himself, at his friend Josh’s insistence, in a small local bar in downtown Nashville, Tennessee where he mingles with young gay men and women. This experience is quite eye-opening for him because “the feeling of acceptance rushed over me like a tidal wave that I had not seen coming.”³²⁵ The overwhelming feeling of acceptance from the bar’s patrons prompts Kurek to keep going and over the course of two years he more regularly visits the bar than he

³²² Gayle Rubin, *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 149.

³²³ *Ibid*, 151.

³²⁴ Kurek, *The Cross in the Closet*, 6-7.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, 10.

attends church.³²⁶ In the summer of 2008, Kurek is confronted by a young woman, Elizabeth, whom he met while frequenting the bar on Tuesday nights. Elizabeth's family disowns her because of her sexuality and informs Kurek that she is leaving to live at a friend's house in Texas. His encounter with Elizabeth shames him because he verbally lacks the courage to condemn his Christian faith for the treatment Elizabeth receives from her family. His shame and cowardice in the face of blatant homophobia prompts him to "walk in Liz's shoes—the shoes of the very people I had been taught to hate. Live with the label of *gay*."³²⁷ Steve Epstein's chapter (1987) "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism" illustrates how "the pressure to define oneself sexually is particularly keenly felt. This is true in part because labels such as 'homosexual' are powerfully charged, carrying with them the risk of strong social disapproval."³²⁸ However, Kurek's use of the term *gay* resonates as a positive rhetorical progression in terms of identification for homosexual men and women. Indeed, Anne Maass and Luciano Arcuri's chapter "Language and Stereotyping" illustrates the progression of terms and their negative and positive connotations. In fact, "the term 'gay'" illustrates a "positive association" whereas the term "'fag'" coincides with "derogatory category labels."³²⁹ Kurek's use of the term *gay*; therefore, illustrates a conscious consideration of the identity he endeavors to perform in his passing.

Once Kurek decides to pass as a gay man on January 1, 2009 while still living in Nashville, Tennessee, he invokes the idea of coming out of the closet. Suzanna Danuta Walters'

³²⁶ Ibid, 11.

³²⁷ Ibid, 15.

³²⁸ Steve Epstein, "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism," in *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Reader 1998*, ed. Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider (New York: Routledge, 1998), 145. PDF e-book.

³²⁹ Anne Maass and Luciano Arcuri, "Language and Stereotyping," in *Stereotypes and Stereotyping 1996*, ed. C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor, and Miles Hewstone (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), 199. PDF e-book.

chapter (2017) “Immutability blues: Stories of queer identity in an age of tolerance” argues that “the phrase ‘coming out’...derives from referencing—by analogy—the coming out of a debutante into society” which prompts “us to frame coming out in deeply social terms.”³³⁰ The debutante’s introduction to society marks her as “eligible for marriage and therefore, in that world, signaling her adulthood.”³³¹ However, the act of coming out for a gay man signifies a “shift from a metaphor of social emergence to one of a deeply hidden personal trajectory at the same time that it reformulates the cost of social exclusion (homophobia) on the individual so hidden.”³³² Kurek’s use of “coming out of the closet” negates the historical relevancy of why gay men, and women, needed to disguise their sexual identities in a homophobic society. Indeed, the reason behind the closet coincides with hiding one’s sexuality especially if one did not conform to heteronormativity. In a social environment where heteronormativity is defined and regulated through legal, social, and religious institutions; coming out of the closet is a subversive act. George Chauncey’s book (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* maintains the importance of not employing a reductionist viewpoint of the closet when he muses how “before the 1960s, it is bracing—and instructive—to note that it was never used by gay people themselves before then.”³³³ He further elucidates the importance of using the term “more cautiously and precisely, and to pay attention to the very different terms people used to describe themselves and their social worlds.”³³⁴ Instead of using the term closet “many gay men, for instance, described negotiating their presence in an often hostile world as

³³⁰ Suzanna Danuta Walters, “Immutability blues: Stories of queer identity in an age of tolerance,” in *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History 2017*, ed. Ivor Goodson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 297. PDF e-book.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 297.

³³² *Ibid*, 297.

³³³ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 6. PDF e-book.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

living a double life, or wearing a mask and taking it off.”³³⁵ Kurek’s usage of these terms does invoke his isolation from society as he reiterates time and time again throughout his memoir.

Kurek’s decision to “come out of the closet” on January 1 2009 in Nashville, Tennessee is fraught with anxiety and he makes himself sick trying to decide the appropriate time to tell his friends and family. This experience is another example of the normative structure because of how Kurek rhetorically explains the situation. He states,

I don’t want to lose my friends, and I don’t want my family to hold me at arm’s length. I do not want to be the black sheep of the family, or the *different* gay brother or son. I want to be me. But having been raised in a conservative religious home, I know these hopes aren’t reasonable. Living in the culture of the “Bible Belt” makes the prospect of feeling simultaneously normal and gay likely impossible.³³⁶

Kurek’s use of “different” and “normal” imply that homosexuality, according to heteronormativity, is not normal behavior and the difficulties he faces with his family are a direct result of how masculinity establishes certain behavioral norms. Arthur Brittan’s book (1989) *Masculinity and Power* identifies how “Masculinism takes if for granted that there is a fundamental difference between men and women, it assumes that heterosexuality is normal, it accepts without question the sexual division of labour, and it sanctions the political and dominant role of men in the public and private spheres.”³³⁷ The notion of heteronormativity implies that men should act like men and sexual attraction is confined to the opposite sex, which is how society interprets normative behavior. Kurek’s use of “normal” reifies the notion that homosexuality does not adhere to the normative structure and that masculine normal behavior

³³⁵ Ibid, 6.

³³⁶ Kurek, *The Cross in the Closet*, 19.

³³⁷ Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 4. PDF e-book.

includes an attraction to the opposite sex. Kurek's use of "normal" implies an understood and acceptable behavior, but also opens the door to question what constitutes normality. Kurek himself questions what the word normal means at a very young age and strives for normalcy "even though I was not quite sure what normal really was."³³⁸ Kurek's quest for normalcy implies a certain ideal position in society that is achievable and in Kurek's case he feels his childhood upbringing in a very strict Christian household somehow denied him inclusion in normal activities. Kurek's understanding of normative sexual roles for men and women is not just founded in societal norms of sexual behavior, but also through his religious beliefs. Many of Kurek's friends, especially those from his church, do not respond favorably to Kurek's confession. In fact, his pastor all but banishes him from church and treats him as an abomination.

Kurek's use of the term normal continues throughout the memoir and when he enters a gay bar, his use of this terms amplifies what the normative structure on sexuality attempts to establish: homosexuals are not normal. His perception of gay men and women is evident when he enters a gay bar and remarks upon how he has "been told all gay bars were dens of iniquity, places where men gathered by the hundreds to pair up and have the fleeting one night stands indicative of those that are sexually promiscuous."³³⁹ This particular perception of gay men's sexuality reflects the narrative society has constructed to separate straight from gay. Kurek's assumption that all gay men and women are sexually promiscuous allows him to deny any and all similarities between himself and a group of men and women who are marginalized in society because of their sexual orientation. Kurek realizes that these men and women are not hypersexualized and states how "the crowd gathered tonight look like normal people, business men

³³⁸ Kurek, *The Cross in the Closet*, 22.

³³⁹ *Ibid*, 41.

meeting friends for a beer after work, wearing suits or business casual.”³⁴⁰ Again, Kurek shatters his own pre-conceived notions of homosexual men as stereotypical effeminate men who are only interested in casual sex; however, he still insists upon using the term normal to describe the men he encounters in the bar. He also bases his understanding of normal strictly on superficial aesthetics and negates the notion that normativity is simply an idea society tries to reify through identifying what is not normal.

Kurek’s interactions with gay men help him formulate a new understanding of homosexuality; however, he also remembers how he treated gay men before he decided to pass as a gay man. This particular encounter illustrates the normative structure quite violently because Kurek’s reaction to a gay co-worker when he was sixteen and working at a fast food restaurant results in verbal abuse. Kurek’s treatment of this gay man includes “gross lies against an innocent man’s character” and eventually progresses to “bullying on par with any you might read about in a newspaper.”³⁴¹ Kurek’s violent reaction to his co-worker’s sexual orientation establishes how heteronormativity encourages others to persecute anyone who deviates from the norm, but in this case Kurek’s reaction to his co-workers’ sexuality also leads to questions. These questions include Kurek inquiring as to why this man would “*choose* to be gay,” and why he would “want to be a *sissy*?”³⁴² These two questions are indicative of societal notions of homosexuality, in most cases, and present the idea that gay men/women choose their sexuality and that gay men are less masculine than men who are heterosexual. Of course, Kurek expands on the stereotypes associated with homosexuality when he remarks upon how he has:

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 41.

³⁴¹ Ibid, 79-80.

³⁴² Ibid, 80.

noticed that negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians are promoted almost as much by pop culture as by the conservative church. Television and Hollywood have taught us that every gay man is an avid fan of show-tunes, speaks with the effeminate voice of Jack from *Will & Grace*, and dresses in clothes that are always just a bit too tight. We are taught that lesbians are a bunch of butch, radically feminist man-haters.³⁴³

Kurek's statement illustrates the persuasive effects of the normative structure when creating a picture, or caricature, of homosexuals. The inclusion of popular culture in fabricating a deviant perception of homosexuality, and perpetuating the stereotypes associated therein, illustrate how his perception of these men and women are just a reflection of societal influence.

Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey

Martin Duberman's, a gay white male, memoir (1992), *Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey* explores the author's struggle to come to terms with his homosexuality and the overwhelming self-hatred he feels towards his sexual orientation. Dennis Altman's book (1971) *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* explores the foundation for many gay men's self-hatred. He states, how "from society's refusal to acknowledge homosexuality as a valid part of the human experience stems the most destructive aspect of oppression, the fact that it becomes internalized and affects the self-image of the oppressed."³⁴⁴ In fact, Duberman's self-hatred towards his sexuality stems from "the various attitudes—sin, crime, illness, curse—with which society brands" homosexuals.³⁴⁵ The criminality of homosexuality is well documented throughout history. Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock's book (2011) *Queer (In) Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT people in the United States* maps historical accounts of legal discourse against homosexuals. The authors illustrate how:

³⁴³ Ibid, 105.

³⁴⁴ Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1971), 61. PDF e-book.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 62.

From the first point of contact with European colonizers—long before modern lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identities were formed and vilified—Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and immigrants, particularly immigrants of color, were systematically policed and punished based on actual or projected ‘deviant’ sexualities and gender expressions, as an integral part of colonization, genocide, and enslavement.³⁴⁶

The persecution of the LGBTQ community commenced long before society employed labels for sexual identities and the legal system often worked in conjunction with religious dogma. Byrne

R. S. Fone’s *A Road to Stonewall: Male Homosexuality and Homophobia in English and American Literature, 1750-1969* examines how

From the Middle Ages to the early seventeenth century, religious and legal opinion tended to conceive of sodomy as an act that, though contrary to nature, anyone could commit. The sodomitical act was, strictly, anal penetration, but broadly it could apply to any act not aimed at procreation, thus it was associated with any number of nonprocreative sex acts including bestiality and homosexuality.³⁴⁷

Therefore the definition and parameters of the term sodomy do not simply apply to homosexual couples, but also include heterosexual couples who engage in sexual acts that did result in procreation. George Chauncey’s book (1994) *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* observes how “even the statutes against sodomy and the crime against nature, which dated from the colonial era, had criminalized a wide range of nonprocreative sexual behavior between people of the same or different genders, without specifying male homosexual conduct or even recognizing it as a discrete sexual category.”³⁴⁸ The

³⁴⁶ Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (In) Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 1. PDF e-book.

³⁴⁷ Byrne R. S. Fone, *A Road to Stonewall: Male Homosexuality and Homophobia in English and American Literature, 1750-1969* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 3-4. PDF e-book.

³⁴⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 172.

legal ramifications of homosexual encounters; however, is soon differentiated and categorized in 1923 when “the New York state legislature, for the first time, specified homosexual solicitation (a person ‘frequent [ing] or loiter[ing] about any public place soliciting men for the purpose of committing a crime against nature or other lewdness’) as a form of disorderly conduct.”³⁴⁹ The legal ramifications for sodomy; thereby, solely focused on the sexual act between gay men and punished them harshly for any transgression of the law. Therefore, many homosexuals fear the retribution of society for their sexuality and thereby “seek to spend as much of their life as possible as straight, seeking to deny the longing that determine their sexual lives.”³⁵⁰ The secret of Duberman’s sexuality, and the fear of homosexuality, is the driving force behind his passing as a straight male throughout his memoir.

Duberman recounts a time when he, as a young man of seventeen, attended a July 1948 annual Calgary Stampede in Canada with some of his young friends while on a Youth Hostel trip. He and his friends are “biking and backpacking” with “some twenty other teenagers” for the summer and Calgary is the last stop on their tour.³⁵¹ As the evening progresses, he decides to stay behind while his friends head off to bed so he can get his fortune read by a gypsy fortune-teller. The question he asks of the fortune-teller is whether or not he will always be a homosexual and the fortune-teller states how ““your particular trouble can be cured. But you must *want* to be cured.””³⁵² This response leads Duberman on a quest through psychoanalysis to find a cure for his homosexuality and the eventual self-acceptance of his sexuality. The progression of homosexuality as a sin, to a crime, and finally to a medical condition in need of a cure began to become evident in the early decades of the 19th century. John D’Emilio and Estelle B.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 172.

³⁵⁰ Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression*, 64.

³⁵¹ Martin Duberman, *Cures: A Gay Man’s Odyssey* (New York: Plume, 1992), 5.

³⁵² Ibid, 9.

Freedman's book (1988) *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* recounts several instances where young men, and women, were medically treated for homosexuality, or perceived homosexual tendencies and "American doctors, following the lead of Europeans, began to define same-sex relationships as perverse, and they debated methods for treating homosexuality as a diseased mental state."³⁵³ Even though homosexuality was deemed a medical illness, many physicians were still divided as to the root cause. Ronald Bayer's (1987) book *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* recounts how "those who sought to explain the 'propensity to the crime against nature' were divided between those who saw it as an acquired characteristic and those who viewed it as inborn."³⁵⁴ Many European physicians offered a wide-range of therapeutic solutions to homosexuality; however, Freud disagreed with this line of treatment and argued that "One must remember that normal sexuality also depends upon a restriction in the choice of subject; in general to undertake to convert a fully developed homosexual into a heterosexual is not much more promising than to do the reverse, only that for good practical reasons the latter is never attempted."³⁵⁵ Freud does not agree that the conversion of a homosexual into a heterosexual is neither attainable nor applicable in regards to psychoanalysis. However, many psychiatrists did not necessarily espouse to Freud's belief and still attempted to cure homosexuality.

The normative structure in Duberman's memoir manifests itself in the way he associates his proclivities for homosexual relations with a disease or a dysfunction. He stipulates how his sexuality, according to psychiatric consensus "in those days", is "altogether natural, an expected,

³⁵³ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 129. PDF e-book.

³⁵⁴ Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 19. PDF e-book.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

even necessary prelude to achieving ‘adult’ (heterosexual) identity.”³⁵⁶ Duberman’s reference here to psychiatric consensus in regards to homosexual development as a “normal variant of human sexuality” refers to Havelock Ellis’ (1938) book *Psychology of Sex: A Manual for Students* and Magnus Hirschfeld’s (1935) book *Sexual Anomalies and Perversions* where both authors illustrate a natural inclination towards same-sex relationships before these young men and women even know what homosexuality means in a societal context.³⁵⁷ Even though he posits that experimenting with his sexuality as a young man is a natural inclination before stabilizing as a heterosexual male in adulthood, he also states “my attraction to men had not disappeared over time.”³⁵⁸ While giving allowance for an adolescent experimentation of one’s sexuality, Duberman makes the distinction between what is considered heteronormativity and how he identifies himself. He also states,

I nonetheless refused, tenaciously, to put the obvious label on myself. That would have been tantamount, given the current definitions of the day, to thinking of myself as a stunted human being, one whose libidinal impulses had been ‘arrested’ at the stage of early adolescence. I still remember the overwhelming shame I felt when I came across a *Life* magazine picture gallery of ‘criminal types’ and saw that the one labeled ‘the homosexual’—a sweet, pretty blond—looked *exactly* like me.³⁵⁹

Duberman feels an overwhelming need to distance himself from labeling himself as a homosexual, but more importantly he feels shame associated with such a label. The *Life* magazine article, and the accompanying picture, illustrates how heteronormativity pervasiveness does not allow for an alternate sexual identity. More importantly, Duberman’s sense of shame associated with homosexuality forces him to distance any personal association with his own

³⁵⁶ Duberman, *Cures*, 14.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

sexuality and leads him on the path of self-hatred. The rhetoric Duberman's uses in analyzing his own sexuality illustrates his feeling that if he was to continue with his homosexual exploration then he is no better than a young man who has not sexually developed into a heterosexual male, which would alienate him from society. This alienation accumulates into labelling anyone with homosexual tendencies as a criminal. The benign, almost angelic visualization of the homosexual in *Life* magazine also illustrates how tempting, disarming, and enticing this young man is to homosexuals. This picture also illustrates how society at large is misled by an attractive face and also how society must be on guard against such aesthetic subterfuge. Duberman simply identifies with the image of the young man and associates his own face, and sexuality, with that of a criminal. Duberman's sense of shame permeates most of his sexual encounters with men and feeds his own homophobia in the process.

Duberman's memoir further explores the normative structure when he recounts his first sexual experience as a young man still in high school who vacations in Florida for his spring vacation. He recounts a trip to a local brothel where he intended to lose his virginity but instead deceives his group of male friends. Although he tries to engage in sexual intercourse with the prostitute, he is unable to get sexually aroused and implores the prostitute not to disclose this information to his friends. The prostitute helps him perpetuate the myth of his sexual prowess by giving him a visual indicator that he indeed performed for her. This visual indicator included some gauze and ointment on his penis to infer that he needed a form of protection because of his sexual intercourse. Once the illusion was in place, Duberman then began to brag to his friends about how enjoyable he found his sexual experience with the prostitute.³⁶⁰ This experience also mirrors his high school prom night where he again lies to his friends about the events because he

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 13.

is ashamed that he could not get sexually excited with his girlfriend Rachel. Duberman's need to fabricate the truth in both events mirrors the overwhelming pressure for young males to exude their sexual prowess at an early age because this behavior is indicative of masculinity. The notion that a man is not a man unless he can recount his numerous sexual encounters with various women forces Duberman to lie about his sexual experiences. In order for Duberman to accomplish the façade of a heterosexual male, he must engage in heterosexual relationships, or sexual conquest, and these are only valid if he proceeds to make these sexual encounters fodder for social consumption. More to the point, Duberman's sexual encounters with women are reified as the normative interaction between men and women and such male activities are expected of young men to establish their heterosexuality and social status as masculine men.

When Duberman enters Yale University in Princeton, New Jersey in 1948, he does experiment with his sexuality and has to go to great lengths to find other men who share his proclivities. One such instance shows Duberman walking to an area called the Green, which is a large park on the Yale campus well known as "a hangout for fairies."³⁶¹ Duberman decides to go there after trying to stifle his sexual needs and failing but when he gets there and sexually engages with another man he is interrupted by the appearance of a group of students and runs back to his dorm room. He then proceeds to "shower for hours, cleaning, cleaning. I actually washed my mouth out with soap, though I hadn't used my mouth—other than to make a prayerful pact with God that if He let me off this time, I'd never, *never*, go near the Green again."³⁶² Duberman's reaction to his sexual experience with another man is indicative of not only his shame, but also the normative structure's influence over any deviant behavior.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 15.

³⁶² Ibid, 15-16.

Duberman feels shame about his sexual experimentation because heteronormativity does not allow him to feel that these types of sexual relationships are normal. He feels that such encounters regale him to an undeveloped adolescent who should know better and who should already be engaged in heterosexual relationships.

Heteronormativity

Kurek's memoir illustrates the destructive results of a society consumed with heteronormativity. As a young man, Kurek's sexuality is reified by not only his socialization with other young men but also through his religious ideology. Kurek's young adulthood is filled with accounts of how his heteronormativity is validated through his devotion to Christ and how any alteration of this normative structure is viewed as a perversion, a sin, and an excuse for ridicule.

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* traces the intrusive theological discourse on sexuality. Foucault argues that,

The Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech. The forbidding of certain words, the decency of expressions, all the censoring of vocabulary, might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful.³⁶³

Kurek's adherence to theological definitions of heteronormativity is directly correlated with the notion of how, and why, sexuality is another avenue of control. The various discourses surrounding the policing of sexuality is a function of heteronormativity or more specifically the

³⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1990), 21.

goal of heteronormativity is to control sexual intercourse and eliminate any form of perversion that would disallow such a goal. Kurek reifies the discourse on homosexuality through his theology and his conscience urges him to teach the sinners about acceptable sexual behavior. Kurek, when confronted by a gay man on Liberty University's campus, states that "they were abominations, every last one of them and I would not be bullied by a fag lover who was most likely a faggot himself."³⁶⁴ Kurek's rhetoric illustrates the need to establish how this gay man's sexual behavior is a perversion of theological ideology at an institution, Liberty University that prides itself on following the teachings of Christ. Foucault's assessment that the normative structure is created by the authority of the church to categorize deviant behavior and eliminate any behavior that is not heterosexually productive is clearly evident in Kurek's violent response to this gay man. Kurek even goes so far as to state, "he was trying to humanize those I didn't want to see as human, but it would not work."³⁶⁵ Again, Kurek's need to separate himself from perversions is simply a reaction to the rhetoric this young man uses to humanize him and other gay men. In order for the discourse of sexuality to succeed, one must adhere to heteronormativity and not only distance themselves from perversions but identify those perversions for all to see. Kurek's theological ideology and his relationships with fellow church goers insure that he will continue to identify, separate, and eliminate sexual perversions. However, after Kurek's encounter with a gay friend who is ejected from her home only because she is gay, he begins to understand his part in reifying Christian ideology associated with homosexuality. Once he begins to understand his position within the normative structure, Kurek initiates steps to alter his discourse and knowledge of homosexuality.

³⁶⁴ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 6.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

Kurek's experiment passing as a gay man challenges his notion of a society based on heteronormativity. Kurek begins to make relationships with gay men and quickly comes to recognize that he cannot identify these men solely on the basis of their sexuality. While Kurek does make small steps toward restructuring his own ideas about the normative structure, his experiment is still based on stereotypical depictions of the gay community. For example, Kurek begins his experiment with the idea that all gay men are promiscuous based on the cultural depiction of these men. He cites *Will & Grace* as an example of the reification of gay stereotypes but even though he identifies such stereotypes he still models his behavior from these cultural depictions of homosexuality. As a result of such stereotypes, Kurek superficially passes as a gay man because he only mimics societal expectations of homosexual behavior. His rhetoric reifies heteronormativity especially when he is confronted by close female friends who are gay. At one point he laments his attraction to one gay friend and states, "she is a magnificent girl. Too bad she's gay."³⁶⁶ This particular response to homosexuality, while Kurek is passing as a gay man, infers that not only does he object to his friend's sexuality but he laments the fact that he cannot act on his own heterosexual attraction to a woman. While Kurek's response is disconcerting, especially in regards to his experiment as a gay man, it also illustrates the entrenchment of heteronormativity that Kurek must constantly battle in order to successfully achieve his goal of altering such a system of oppression.

Kurek's recognition of the normative structure and his place within that structure allows him to understand how heteronormativity demonizes homosexuality, especially since he participates in this demonization. Duberman, on the other hand, recognizes the normative structure and tries to conform to this structure because he desperately wants to fit in with a

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 9.

heteronormative society. Duberman accepts and codifies the notion that as a homosexual he is “a disabled human being” and he is “defective.”³⁶⁷ Foucault posits that the medical profession:

made a forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple: it created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of ‘incomplete’ sexual practices; it carefully classified all forms of related pleasures; it incorporated them into the notions of ‘development’ and instinctual ‘disturbances’; and it undertook to manage them.³⁶⁸

The intrusion of medicine to police and categorize sexuality is just another area of discourse where the rhetoric of sexuality is carefully monitored to reinforce heteronormativity. Duberman, himself, encounters numerous psychotherapists who argue exactly the viewpoints Foucault posits: “homosexuality as pathology.”³⁶⁹ In a society preoccupied with sexuality and controlling sexual perversions, Duberman reifies the notion that homosexuality is a disease with a cure. Although Duberman recognizes the overwhelming societal viewpoints on homosexuality, he still attempts to rationalize his own homosexual tendencies as simply an adolescent exploration which implies that this is a stage that he will grow out of into an adult heterosexual. This particular attitude toward homosexuality is continuously codified throughout Duberman’s memoir by the various therapists he visits for treatment, but also by the numerous medical publications during 1950’s.

Duberman mentions numerous medical publications throughout his memoir from the Kinsey report in the early 1950s to Evelyn Hooker’s work to undermine the medical foundation for homosexuality as an illness in the mid-fifties.³⁷⁰ Hooker’s work is a step toward re-defining how the medical community views homosexuality, but Duberman’s personal knowledge of her

³⁶⁷ Duberman, *Cures*, 20.

³⁶⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 41.

³⁶⁹ Duberman, *Cures*, 23.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 31.

work would not influence him and he still continues to seek therapy from psychotherapists who believe that homosexuality is an illness and that they will provide the cure. Duberman is fully entrenched in the belief that heteronormativity is achievable and that any form of behavior that does not conform to this ideology is “different,” “disturbed,” and “dangerous.”³⁷¹

Duberman fully accepts heteronormativity and strives to achieve heterosexuality while at the same time still engaging in homosexual relationships. Duberman’s treatment of other gay men also reifies heteronormativity and his self-hatred of his own homosexuality urges him to lash out at openly gay men. His homophobia is indicative of his need to conform to heteronormativity publicly while privately he engages in sexual intimacies with other men. His homophobic public attitude and clandestine private affairs with young men is indicative of the repressive structure of heteronormativity for the goal of societal conformity is to control behavior that is deemed dangerous to the health of a society. Duberman’s struggle to negate the effects of the normative structure is at times frustrating because he acknowledges the areas of discontent and the problems he encounters with his psychotherapists, but still seeks a cure. Of course, Duberman’s obsession with heteronormativity is a product of a society consumed with policing sexuality through religious, legal, and medical discourses. Duberman must wade through the various institutions that inform him that his sexuality is not normal or that he will get arrested for engaging in public sexual acts with other men.

Duberman battles with his own sexuality throughout the memoir and tends to see saw back and forth between what he feels and what his psychotherapists tell him to feel. Often times, Duberman knows that what he is told during therapy is anathema to how he feels about himself, but he continues with therapy. The institution of psychotherapy and psychiatry in this memoir

³⁷¹ Ibid, 37.

illustrates the power of the medical field to structure the discourse on sexuality and through Duberman's own experiences the narrative highlights the societal demonization of homosexuality.

Kurek and Duberman's sexuality passing also reiterates Butler's assertion that gender is performative. The idea behind performativity in relation to sexuality posits the notion that gender designation is definitively based on certain physical manifestations that assert masculinity or femininity, but of course this is merely an act that is constructed to restrict the body. Butler argues,

in its efforts to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the *effect* of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of 'man' and 'woman' are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of real.³⁷²

The construction of heterosexuality is dependant upon the notion that this state of being is in fact the origin of both man and woman, but Butler argues that the urge to replicate heterosexuality is grounded in the fear of heteronormative collapse. Duberman's quest to pass as a straight man and the reproduction of heterosexual behavior is rather futile; according to Butler's ideology. Simply put, the acts and gestures Duberman emulates in his quest to become heterosexual are based on the very idea that such a construction can never be achieved because there is no original state of heterosexuality. Butler states, "the parodic replication and resignification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original, but it shows that heterosexuality only constitutes itself as the original through

³⁷² Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader 1993*, eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 313. PDF e-book.

a convincing act of repetition.”³⁷³ The act of repetition and replication of heterosexuality is also an act of performativity invoking those Kurek’s attempt to pass as a gay man is fraught with his heterosexual fear of homosexuality but it is also important to point out that Kurek is merely parodying widely held stereotypes of homosexual men. Kurek is indeed grounding his passing as a gay man in opposition to what he knows to be heterosexual behavior. Therefore, his actions, gestures and repetitions of presupposed homosexual behavior are simply those fabrications which he, and in larger part society, deem associated with homosexual behavior. Prior to his passing as a gay man, Kurek believes that all gay men exhibit effeminate qualities, i.e. easily recognizable mutations of socially constructed “real” male behavior. Of course, Butler argues that the very act of heterosexuality is based on theatrics that attempt to establish a real corporeal state of being that is non-existent.

Primary Relationships:

The next step in the intersectional passing model looks at primary relationships and focuses on how the passer navigates personal interactions before he/she chooses to pass. In most cases, the passer recognizes how he/she is marginalized by these relationships and passes to find a place in society. The primary relationships in Kurek’s *The Cross in the Closet* are an inversion of the idea that the passer is marginalized, or more specifically, Kurek acknowledges that gay men and women are marginalized and wants to gain a deeper understanding of what these men and women encounter in society. The motivation for Kurek’s passing is a direct result of him questioning why gay men and women are treated differently in society, but also connect with his own personal persecution of gay men and women. Kurek feels that he needs to understand why

³⁷³ Ibid, 314.

his faith demonizes homosexuals and this urge to gain more knowledge motivates him to pass as a gay man for a year.

Kurek's perception of homosexuality begins to alter when his friend, Lizzy, tells him how her "dad told me to get my stuff out of his house, and that he wouldn't pay another dime for the education of a 'faggot daughter'! And my mom told me to come back when I was 'fixed'..."³⁷⁴ Kurek's feelings toward his friend reveal quite a bit about his understanding of homosexuality because he immediately feels the need "to reject Elizabeth" and he realizes that he "hated Lizzy" simply "because she liked other women."³⁷⁵ These violent and immediate feelings shock Kurek and prompt him to question his belief system but also imbue him with the idea to "walk in Liz's shoes—the shoes of the very people I had been taught to hate. Live with the label of *gay*."³⁷⁶ Kurek's relationship with Elizabeth, and his reaction to her homosexuality, makes him question why he should reject her simply because his faith dictates her life is a sin. Kurek's relationship with Elizabeth is considered a primary relationship because passing as a gay man is a direct result of how he feels about Elizabeth's situation and how his anger at her is completely irrational. Kurek's reaction to Elizabeth's treatment from her own family prompts him to begin his experiment because he begins to see Elizabeth as a young woman and not just as a gay woman.

Another significant primary relationship Kurek encounters is with his best friend Josh who encourages him to pass as a gay man. In fact, when Kurek questions whether or not he will be able to accomplish his goal of passing as a gay man, Josh states "if you don't do this, I'm going to find someone who will. This is the best idea you've ever had, and it needs to be done.

³⁷⁴ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 12.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

Tim, this is your chance to question everything you've ever been taught! It's your chance to grow a heart. This is going to change your life!"³⁷⁷ Josh's encouragement of Kurek's decision to pass as a gay man gives him the support that he needs in order to begin his experiment. Josh advises Kurek not to date women during the course of his experiment and states his reasoning when Kurek does not quite understand why he cannot interact with women socially. He states,

First, the duality of this experiment is hinged on the fact that while you're out as gay, you'll be in the closet as straight. You'll be completely imprisoned to this new life—repressed like gays and lesbians are, before they come out. It will bring you closer. Also, it minimizes the risk of being found out by everyone. People talk, and if you're dating someone, they won't be able to keep things a secret. Plus, you'd be cheating yourself out of the most important part of the story if you did. Relationships just complicate things. You wouldn't be able to handle it.³⁷⁸

Josh's speech about why Kurek should stay away from personal relationships, as a straight man, help Kurek fully immerse himself as a gay man once he starts his experiment. Josh also clarifies the importance of Kurek's isolation from anyone, or anything, which is familiar to him in order to successfully pass as a gay man. Kurek must eliminate any heterosexual relationships because these interactions will only present complications which might alter the outcome of the experiment. Josh's insight into the status of Kurek's personal relationships with women during the course of his experiment allow Kurek to focus solely on passing as a gay man and to fully experience his new status. This relationship also allows Kurek to have an established support system, which is not achievable with his own family since they do not know that his passing as a gay man is simply an experiment.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 23.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, 24.

Another vital primary relationship for Kurek is how he interacts with his brother, Andrew. Kurek's decision to come out to his brother is indicative of how important their relationship is to him, and his brother's reaction to this revelation alleviates Kurek's anxiety about telling people he is gay. Andrew responds to Kurek's coming out with "a beautiful look of sympathy and protectiveness,"³⁷⁹ but the most important aspect of Kurek's coming out to his family is how he correlates what he is doing with how others in his same position go through a similar experience. Kurek remarks upon how he "never anticipated that coming out as gay would feel this raw, this emotional, this terrifying. It isn't a fear that life won't go on; rather, that life won't resolve in some way"³⁸⁰ and these feelings that Kurek feels allow him to sympathize with those who do come out to their families. Andrew accepts Kurek as a gay man and does not disown him, as he feared, and his confession to his mother that he is gay elicits a similar response of acceptance and love.

Although Kurek's brother and mother respond with love and a somewhat begrudging acceptance of Kurek's coming out, he does not receive a similar response from his pastor. Kurek's religious devotion to his faith and church make his pastor's rejection of his sexuality all the more difficult to accept, but his pastor's response to his coming out is filled with vitriol and hate. His pastor responds by stating,

'Yes, this is a decision, not a 'gene.' You have read the Bible enough to know homosexuality is a sin. I will be praying that the enemy's spirit will be rebuked from you in Jesus name!! As you read this, the enemy will fight back...but you must stand up and break free! All this said, you are welcome as any other sinner to our church. We are a gathering of imperfect people who worship a perfect God. There is no sin greater than the other...lying, adultery, gossip, homosexuality, and more. However, I can understand the 'anonymity' issue with something like this,

³⁷⁹ Ibid, 19.

³⁸⁰ Ibid, 19.

which may make it easier for you to attend another church. Whatever...you've got to get back into church!'³⁸¹

This response from Kurek's former pastor and the similar response he receives from his Christian friends allow Kurek to understand the teachings he learned as a child to be nothing more than an allowance to reject others because their lifestyles differed from them. Kurek feels betrayed by his former pastor and his once active life in the Church, and his association with friends, illustrates to him how his newfound sexuality prompts a painful separation from those who once communicated with him openly and regularly.

Duberman's primary relationships include his dominant, conformist mother and a significant sexual encounter with a young man who fuels his need for conversion therapy followed by his overly intrusive therapist. He goes to great lengths in his discussion of his parents and their background but his mother has the most influence on how he views himself as both an academic and a homosexual male. He describes his mother as a "second-generation Austrian-American" who is consumed with eliminating any mention of the past and feels the need "to conform to mainstream values" while at the same time trying to outdo "the citizens of their adopted country in the national trait of present-mindedness."³⁸² His mother also has a "driving passion to become just like everyone else" and "she passed the goal of fitting in down to her son, along with the high spirits that would keep us both in a state of repressed rebellion, and this side of total capitulation."³⁸³ His father, on the other hand, was Russian and more reserved than his mother. In fact, Duberman describes his father as indifferent and in regards to his

³⁸¹ Ibid, 30.

³⁸² Duberman, *Cures*, 17.

³⁸³ Ibid, 17.

continued education his “father seemed not to care, about graduate school or about much of anything.”³⁸⁴ Duberman does not have a close relationship with his father and his mother’s influence emerges during some rather significant events in his life. When he attends graduate school at Harvard, he invokes his mother’s lesson about never walking “through a park alone for fear of the sick people who lingered within; I had *become* the person my mother had warned me about.”³⁸⁵ Duberman’s relationship with his mother often reaffirms his feelings towards conforming his sexuality to mainstream heteronormativity, but this relationship also becomes even more important when Duberman begins psychotherapy.

Before Duberman embarks upon almost two decades of psychotherapy, he engages in many casual sexual relationships. One such encounter with Ray results in not only a lifelong friendship but also is the driving force behind Duberman’s belief that therapy, or more specifically, conversion therapy will cure him of his homosexual tendencies. Ray is a fellow graduate student Duberman meets at a hidden gay bar in Boston and ends up having sex with but after the encounter tries to avoid. Even though Duberman tries to distance himself from Ray, Ray initiates a friendship with him and this friendship allows Duberman “to socialize with other gay people.”³⁸⁶ While Duberman’s friendship with Ray allows him to gain some confidence in his association with other gay men, this friendship also introduces Duberman to the idea of conversion therapy. Duberman and Ray are also Jewish men which make both men feel “guilty about being alive and at the same time to feeling superior in suffering” but also predispose “us to the psychiatric notion of homosexuality as curse and apartness.”³⁸⁷ These feelings of alienation,

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 19.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 21.

³⁸⁶ Ibid, 21.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 22.

guilt, and shame forge a tight bond between the two men, but their relationship is also based upon how they view their homosexuality.

Duberman's connection with Ray is also evident in how they look at their homosexuality through an academic, objective lens. Duberman states, "It might have been easier had we *not* been intellectuals. Priding ourselves on being the kind of superior people who based their opinions on so-called objective evidence (rather than popular superstitions or slogans), we put our faith in social science, hardly doubting that its products were 'value free.'"³⁸⁸ Duberman tries to look at his homosexuality through an academic lens, but many of the conclusions he comes to rely heavily upon social perception of homosexuals. He goes so far as to state how he and Ray

twist it into a new instrument of self-torture; in portraying homosexuality as a 'stage'—of adolescence, that is, not adulthood—the anthropological evidence (we decided) seemed to confirm the psychiatric view that 'fixation' at one stage of development precluded progress to the otherwise natural culminating point of human maturation: heterosexuality.³⁸⁹

Duberman's academic assessment of his homosexuality simply reifies popular social scientific conclusions of his day and Ray also allows him to have a partner who comes to the same conclusion. Duberman and Ray's shared academic understanding of homosexuality negates any subjective experiences the two might have in their personal relationships with other men because for these two; homosexuality is simply a phase one must go through in order to achieve heterosexuality. Duberman internalizes the belief that his homosexuality will pass and then he will be able to achieve complete heterosexuality; moreover, Ray solidifies this belief.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

While Duberman's relationship with Ray illustrates his belief in how academics can explain homosexual tendencies, his relationship with Larry makes him question the validity of a monogamous relationship. Duberman describes Larry as "muscular and compact in build, low-keyed, intense, essentially non-verbal. He was my somatic ideal, I was his intellectual one; he helped me learn about my body, I helped him learn about books and ideas."³⁹⁰ Duberman's relationship with Larry informs him of not only how their different backgrounds add to their attraction to one another, but also how these differences begin to make him question if a long-term relationship with Larry is a viable option in a society preoccupied with heteronormativity. Duberman is passionately committed to Larry, in the beginning of their relationship, but he begins to doubt their longevity. He states, "two people of the same gender, the culture had taught us, were not meant to spend their lives together and, should they be foolish enough to try, would soon learn that Nature intended otherwise."³⁹¹ Duberman's conclusion that his relationship with Larry will not survive because popular culture, heteronormativity, dictates that such a relationship is natural forces Duberman to analyze the validity of a monogamous relationship with Larry as a far-fetched possibility. Duberman and Larry's relationship lasts for two years and then they both begin to feel a waning of affection for each other, but more specifically, their sexual intimacies with each other decline in favor of other partners. Duberman states, "This deviation from the monogamous norm, in turn, further convinced me of my incapacity—generic, so long as I remained homosexual—for intimacy. Hadn't psychiatry long warned that homosexuals were condemned, by the very nature of their illness, to flee from relatedness to promiscuity?"³⁹² Duberman's relationship with Larry, his first real long-term relationship,

³⁹⁰ Ibid, 29.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 29-30.

³⁹² Ibid, 31.

prompts him to not only question mainstream beliefs about homosexuals but also internalize these beliefs. Duberman becomes consumed with the notion that Larry and he are not destined to have a monogamous relationship because society dictates that homosexuals are not capable of this type of commitment. This delineation between heterosexual and homosexual relationships is clearly designed to illustrate the dysfunction of homosexual relationships, but for Duberman this realization also highlights his overwhelming desire to fit in. Duberman's relationship with Larry makes him believe that the only answer to his growing need for inclusion in society is psychotherapy or more specifically "conversion" because he believes that this is the only way for him to find happiness.³⁹³ Duberman decides to begin therapy and illicit the aid of Dr. Weintraub to assist him in his conversion, but this relationship would set the precedent of Duberman's eager reliance upon psychiatry to guide him toward a heterosexual lifestyle.

Duberman's relationship with Dr. Weintraub is brief but his experiences in therapy eventually prompt him to seek out a more long-term psychiatrist. Dr. Weintraub's influence on Duberman prompts him to end his relationship with Larry because

the drama of our interpsychic struggle, Weintraub insisted, had become a stand-in for the more basic intrapsychic conflict I was unwilling to engage—the conflict between my neurotic homosexual 'acting out' and my underlying healthy impulse toward a heterosexual union.³⁹⁴

Duberman becomes so combative with Weintraub's advice to end his relationship with Larry that his therapist argues if he either ends his relationship with Larry or discontinues his therapy. Duberman does not respond well to ultimatums and ends his therapy sessions with Weintraub but his brief foray into therapy has a lasting destructive influence because Duberman believes

³⁹³ Ibid, 31.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 33.

that “only therapy could have saved me from a life of random, disconnected promiscuity.”³⁹⁵

Although Duberman believes that only therapy will help him conform to heterosexuality, he still continues to engage in random sexual encounters and laments how unsatisfied he is in these relationships and states how he is “all set for a return to analysis; must have a wife and family, only possible things that matter.”³⁹⁶ Duberman’s relationship with Dr. Weintraupt reaffirms mainstream ideology of heteronormativity and how the only way for Duberman to attain true satisfaction in his life is to engage in a strictly heterosexual relationship. This ideology also predicates that monogamous relationships between two men are not attainable because the preconceived notions of homosexuals are their promiscuity, a belief that has not altogether been eliminated from mainstream society today. In Duberman’s brief relationship with Dr. Weintraupt, the seeds for discontent in his life as a homosexual are planted and he not only continues to struggle with identifying himself as a homosexual but also feeds his homophobia when he tries to separate himself from this group. After going out one night to a restaurant that caters to the homosexual crowd, he states,

‘The place was filled with babbling queens,’ I wrote indignantly in my diary, ‘who, because they can afford to spend \$5 on a dinner, feel they are also entitled to talk at the top of their lungs. It was one thing to accept one’s fate as a homosexual, another to be queer; I wasn’t about to identify with any of that “‘girl’ crap.”³⁹⁷

The self-hatred and separation that Duberman chooses to initiate in the face of openly homosexual men illustrates his desire for normalcy and forces him to display his growing homophobic feelings towards the gay community.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 37.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 39.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 38.

Primary Relationships: Heteronormativity

The primary relationships for Kurek and Duberman rely heavily upon normalizing sexual behavior and identifying any perversions in order to eliminate such anomalies. Kurek's primary relationships revolve around those who follow his faith which include his family and friends. These groups of people collectively decide, according to Christ's teachings, to appropriate sexual behavior and deem any homosexual relationships as an abomination. Duberman's relationships vary from an overprotective mother, absent father, and a homophobic college lover. These two men's relationships within their social groups highlight the intrusive influence of heteronormativity and illustrate divisive power structures.

Kurek begins his memoir recounting his most significant primary relationship, his membership in a religious group. Kurek states how he is a student at Liberty University who follows "a lengthy code of conduct called the *Liberty Way*" and how his participation as a student would mold him into a "Champion for Christ."³⁹⁸ As a student at Liberty University, Kurek is inundated with testimonies about how advocate groups for the LBGT community are "the 'real threat'" to society.³⁹⁹ Kurek believes this dogma and even confronts a member of an LBGT group, Soulforce, whose members visit the Liberty University campus to run the "gauntlet of dogma" as part of "their training ground."⁴⁰⁰ Kurek's affiliation to Liberty University and his adherence to Christian dogma represent a power structure that prevents any deviation from heteronormativity. Michel Foucault illustrates how power structures such as organized religious groups reinforce sexual norms and states,

³⁹⁸ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 4.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix—no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. These then form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together; to be sure, they also bring about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of the force relations. Major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations.⁴⁰¹

Foucault's description of power structures and how they operate are directly linked to how Kurek confronts the LGBT group that visits Liberty University's campus. More specifically, the institution, Christian dogma, and Kurek's inclusion within this institution represent the idea that the power of heteronormativity begins within small organized groups. Liberty University's campus and the Christian dogma it enforces instill a dominant ideology which negates, and reproduces, heteronormativity. Kurek participates in this ideology and verbally challenges deviant interpretations of the power structure; heteronormativity. While Kurek's participation in redistributing dominant ideology is pervasive, he does begin to alter his Christian ideology in relation to homosexuality after his confrontation with the Soulforce member and after he learns that one of his friends came out to her parents.

Kurek's confrontation with the Soulforce member makes him question his religious affiliation, but his conversation with his friend Elizabeth and the knowledge that he failed her as a friend makes him begin a deeper inspection of his faith-based belief about homosexuality. Kurek's relationship to Elizabeth is not fully developed but the impact of her experience leads

⁴⁰¹ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 94.

Kurek to embark upon major changes in his understanding of homosexuality and his faith. Elizabeth tells Kurek that she came out to her family only for them to disown her and this event prompts Kurek to seriously consider coming out as a gay man to understand Elizabeth's dilemma. Kurek states, "I felt the idea growing, rooting itself in me, like the decision had already been made, and I could almost see the path that was in front of me. I was meant for this. It was a calling I neither wanted nor understood, but I could not ignore the overwhelming sense of divine affirmation in it."⁴⁰² Kurek's decision to pass as a gay man is counter to the power structure he affiliates with but the overwhelming acknowledgement that the institution he is a member of, and its proclamation of love, is an institution based on false claims of affection and acceptance. Kurek's awareness of the embedded hypocrisy present within this Christian institution isolates him from the pervasive social group he once associated with and he fights to counter the homogenized construction of homosexuality.

While Kurek's primary relationship is based on his affiliation with Christian dogma, Duberman's primary relationships are mired within the construction, and reification, of heteronormativity. Duberman's primary relationships begin with his interactions to family and friends. Duberman's mother is rather dominant while his father presents a passive representation of masculinity. Duberman explains how his father is dispassionate about him for most of his life, while his mother takes an active role in his upbringing and education. On one such occasion, Duberman is about to embark to graduate school at Harvard and his mother tries to convince him not to go while his father "seemed not to care, about graduate school or about much of anything."⁴⁰³ Duberman's father presence and absence in his life does not lead him to

⁴⁰² Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 15.

⁴⁰³ Duberman, *Cures*, 19.

homosexuality nor does his mother's ravenous intrusion into his life, yet his parents do reinforce heteronormativity. Even though Duberman's parents are not happy with their relationship, they stay married until both Duberman and his sister are old enough to fend for themselves. While this relationship does not overtly scream of heteronormativity, the implication that as a fully functional member of society one must adhere to the traditional family dynamic of a man married to a woman does invade Duberman's interpretation of a stable relationship. Duberman never retains a functional relationship because he believes that he must conform to a heterosexual relationship to garner a sense of purpose, and inclusion, in society. This conclusion is rather evident when Duberman has a sexual encounter with a man at Harvard, Ray, and immediately feels shame because the experience results in pleasure. Duberman forms a deep friendship with Ray, but this relationship endures partly because Ray feeds into Duberman's desire to conform to heteronormativity. Duberman and Ray believe that conversion therapy will allow them to embrace their hidden heterosexuality, so while both men struggle to come to terms with their homosexuality they also reify heteronormative ideology. The notion of heteronormativity is so ingrained in both men, whom they both realize through their academic perusal of sexual identities, yet they both still strive to conform.

Duberman's desire to conform to heteronormativity stems from his understanding of the categorization of homosexuality as deviant, unnatural behavior with an obvious cure; psychotherapy. Duberman's construction of the self is largely based on society's abhorrence of homosexuality and he internalizes his distaste for homosexuality and reifies the notion of heteronormativity. Duberman's relationship with his family and friends illustrates deep-seated homophobia, but his in-depth psychoanalysis illustrates the medicalization of homosexuality as a curable disease. Duberman's relationship with Dr. Weintraub reifies heteronormativity and

implies that Duberman's relationship with Larry, his first serious lover, blocks his progress towards heterosexuality. In fact, Dr. Weintraub argues that Duberman must end his relationship with Larry and therein planting the seed to Duberman's notion that any long-lasting relationship with a man was a futile endeavor. Duberman discontinues his therapy with Dr. Weintraub but his experiences with therapists pervade his memoir to illustrate Duberman's entrenchment in heteronormativity. Psychotherapy plays a large role in categorizing homosexuality as a form of deviant behavior and Foucault argues "since sexuality was a medical and medicalizable object, one had to try and detect it—as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom—in the depths of the organism, or on the surface of the skin, or among all the signs of behavior."⁴⁰⁴ Duberman's need for heterosexual conformity, and his entrance into the closet, stems from the overwhelming societal, and medical intrusion upon his sexuality. Duberman's primary relationships seek to reify heteronormativity and stifle sexual deviant behavior, but while trying to accomplish this goal Duberman internalizes the belief that his sexuality is abhorrent.

Aesthetic Emulation:

The next step in the intersectional passing model looks closely at aesthetic emulation and how the passer undergoes numerous alterations to pass. This stage is sometimes difficult for the passer because prior relationships still inform him/her of their position. However, through changes in location, occupation, dress, and manner this stage is vital to passing. The individual submerges themselves within the group they hope to emulate and therefore this stage, or concept, will be called "aesthetic emulation". The word aesthetic is used here because the process of passing is not completed with just the decision to pass, but involves the restructuring of one's

⁴⁰⁴ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 44.

overall physicality for success. These modifications include basic aesthetics and more complicated performative alterations.

Kurek's aesthetic emulation begins when he goes to a gay club called Club Play in Nashville. Kurek feels uncomfortable but tries to "act as gay as I know how with my demeanor and mannerisms."⁴⁰⁵ He incorporates "every stereotypical example of gay on television and movies" and "tries to adjust [his] behavior accordingly."⁴⁰⁶ His first outing in public as a gay man is not successful because he is still acting as a heterosexual male who is using caricatures of gay men to pass. Once he realizes that his foray into these gay clubs will open him up to flirtation with other gay men, Kurek seeks the assistance of his gay friend Shawn. Kurek informs Shawn that he is going to pass as a gay man for a year and wants him to play the role of his boyfriend for the duration of the his experiment. Shawn agrees to play the role of Kurek's boyfriend and also offers him sound advice on how he can achieve his aesthetic emulation as a gay man. Shawn states,

'You're going to get a lot of attention, and the attention you're going to get is a lot different from the kind you're used to. You can't act put off by it, or even uncomfortable. You have to learn how to embrace it. Just think about it this way: If a guy gives you attention, even if it's unwanted, it's a compliment. He's saying he thinks you're attractive and worth his putting himself out there, just for the chance of getting your number. If you think of it that way, you won't feel nearly as uncomfortable.'⁴⁰⁷

Shawn's presence as Kurek's boyfriend and his invaluable advice help Kurek become comfortable in social situations where he needs to pass as a gay man. Shawn tries to impress upon Kurek that the attention he will garner when he goes out and meets other gay men should

⁴⁰⁵ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 33.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 44.

not make him feel uncomfortable but should elicit a feeling of gratitude because that means that the man found Kurek attractive enough to approach. Shawn's advice about how Kurek should flirt also demystifies the difference between heterosexual flirting and homosexual flirting because for Shawn there is no difference between the two. He states,

The rules of flirting are virtually the same here as they are at a straight bar. Be suggestive without being too aggressive, and be playful. Flirting between gay men is almost more about validating that other person than it is about hooking up with them. Think of flirting as the ultimate encouragement.⁴⁰⁸

Kurek's interactions with Shawn allow him to gain a certain level of levity when it comes to his passing as a gay man. Kurek realizes that his presence in the gay community is to "be myself and to learn as much as I can from anyone I meet" and in order to accomplish this goal, Kurek must experience a level of discomfort.⁴⁰⁹ Shawn's instructions on how to "act" gay aid Kurek to complete his aesthetic emulation, and when he meets up with Shawn later on during his experiment the two enjoy each other's company instead of focusing on how Kurek can "act" gay. In fact, Kurek states:

I learned the language of the community quickly, in spite of myself, and I feel better for it. I am no longer a stranger to the gay community of Nashville. I am one of them—or as much as I can ever be without actually being gay. I know names, stories, and, even more satisfying, I am finally able to trust the people I meet. There is an unwritten code in our humble gayborhood. Shawn helped teach me that code, and now I feel like we are able to invest in our friendship and our relationship more than ever.⁴¹⁰

Although Kurek mention this new language that he has learned from Shawn, the text provides only perfunctory examples of his aesthetic emulation.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 47.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 154.

Duberman's aesthetic emulation does not necessarily rely upon changing his physical appearance but adheres more towards altering his sexual habits. He accepts a teaching position at Yale and lives in a small apartment and the overwhelming homophobia on campus aids his commitment to refrain from any sexual relationships, but only for a short time. He becomes so depressed at Yale that he ventures into New York on the weekends to engage in anonymous sexual relationships. After a year teaching at Yale, he is "elected a resident Fellow of Silliman College" which means that he moves to a more luxurious apartment and a "greater integration into the academic community."⁴¹¹ This integration allows Duberman to adhere to heteronormativity because he is suddenly expected to socialize with fellow faculty members and feels that this move deems him as "a presentable member of society."⁴¹² Duberman's preoccupation with his academic career, while engrossing most of his time, does not alleviate his overall sexual desires and he does frequently visit New York to assuage this need.

Another example of aesthetic emulation occurs when Duberman decides that he should try to engage in a relationship with a woman. Duberman's relationship with Nancy, a Doctoral Candidate at Yale, begins as a convenient friendship with no expectations of progressing into a long-term sexual relationship. Duberman and Nancy share very similar backgrounds from their "immigrant Jewish fathers" to their "personality traits."⁴¹³ Duberman and Nancy's compatibility prompts them both to believe that their relationship could progress to sexual intimacy but this type of relationship never develops. Although Duberman tries to muster some sexual attraction to Nancy, he cannot muster enough interest in Nancy to attempt sexual intimacy. At the time of Duberman's relationship with Nancy, he enlists the aid of another therapist, Dr. Igen, who

⁴¹¹ Duberman, *Cures*, 46.

⁴¹² *Ibid*, 46.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 57.

advises him to not disclose his sexual orientation to Nancy. In fact, Dr. Igen states how such a disclosure ““would be a disservice to both of you”” and that ““homosexuality may soon be a thing of the past with you, and to bring it up would be to sabotage any prospect for a different kind of future.””⁴¹⁴ Dr. Igen’s advice reaffirms Duberman’s aesthetic emulation of a straight man in a heterosexual relationship and Duberman does continue to hide his sexuality from Nancy. However, he also tries to disclose his sexuality to Nancy with subtle hints and then when those do not work to convince her of his sexual orientation, he decides to openly state the nature of his sexuality. Nancy responds to Duberman’s revelation by thinking that he is “a project” and that she can help him to ““break through’ into heterosexuality.”⁴¹⁵ Even when Duberman is completely honest with Nancy, she refuses to accept his sexuality and tries to convert him into a heterosexual.

Another example of aesthetic emulation deals with Duberman’s relocation to New York and his increasing homophobia toward any instances of open homosexuality. Duberman still enjoys his academic life at Yale, but soon discovers the theater and begins to write successful plays prompting his move to New York. Once he does move to New York, he begins to write a few successful plays and also appears on numerous PBS specials. During one particular appearance on PBS, he engages in a heated conversation with Paul Goodman and feels an overwhelming sense of anger towards Goodman because he feels humiliated by him. Duberman holds onto that anger and states

That residual anger undoubtedly contributed to the negative review I wrote in the *New York Times* a few years later of Goodman’s excerpted diary, *Five Years*. But what contributed still more was my homophobia. Goodman’s diary put explicitly

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, 59.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 59.

into print a sexual interest in men that he had never taken much trouble to conceal.⁴¹⁶

Duberman's response to the disclosure of Goodman's sexual exploits is reflective of his own desire to not only hide his sexuality, but also his growing need to fit the heterosexual mold that he tries to achieve in therapy. While Duberman attempts to perfect his aesthetic emulation of a heterosexual male, he becomes increasingly threatened by other homosexual men who accept their sexuality openly. Duberman still seeks out men to engage in sexual intimacies, and he states how "in New York it was possible at least to lead an active *underground* gay life"⁴¹⁷ but this life is still a secret from his active life in both academics and the theater.

Yet another attempt at aesthetic emulation occurs when Duberman attempts a relationship with a woman, for the second time. Duberman's relationship with Cynthia is prompted by his new therapist and therapy group members, but this relationship proves disastrous because once again Duberman cannot muster any sexual attraction to Cynthia. He states that his lack of sexual advances toward Cynthia "got me angry, but smarting as I was from *self*-contempt at my lack of 'manly' interest in her, my ire came out as a quiet reminder that none of us existed to meet the needs of others."⁴¹⁸ Cynthia, too, responds quite violently to Duberman's lack of sexual interest in her and tries to reduce him to the role of an intimate girlfriend hence de-masculinizing him.

Duberman states,

Late one night she called in a self-described 'panic' to say that she thought she was pregnant and didn't know what to do about it. Whoa, I thought, how come

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 79.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 83.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 101.

you're turning to me instead of to a girlfriend—or is that precisely the category you're trying to reduce me to, you contemptuous bitch?⁴¹⁹

Duberman's attempts at aesthetic emulation as a heterosexual male display his limitations as well. Duberman's forays into heterosexual relationships are superficial at best because he cannot muster any sexual attraction to these women, yet he still continues to try multiple times to emulate heteronormative relationships.

There are numerous examples of Duberman's aesthetic emulation in regards to his location and occupation, but there are very few examples of any physical alterations to his body. One such example refers to Duberman's "athletic carriage" and how his physical body "would help me conceal my sexuality."⁴²⁰ Duberman's reference to his physical body in relation to his sexuality infers the notions that men's masculinity is tied to their physical prowess or the visual exposure of the body to reaffirm masculinity.

Another example of Duberman's physical aesthetic emulation occurs when he throws an important party in his apartment and has to eject a rather drunk bartender. The bartender calls Duberman "a dirty Jew" and before he can "proceed to next epithet, I grabbed him by the back of his coat and, in a brusque macho gesture calculated to separate me from unseemly gay gropings, threw him out."⁴²¹ Duberman's particular emphasis on separating himself from the gay bartender and his use of accepted masculine actions solidifies in the eyes of his guests that he is indeed a man who can control any sort of outburst in an authoritative manner. Duberman is well aware that he must act in a rather "macho" manner in order to delineate himself from an open display of homosexuality, which the bartender has displayed throughout the night. His reference to

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, 102.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 17.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 114.

“groping” refers to the bartender’s tendency to grope Duberman’s guests, but also his need to clearly delineate himself from an association of homosexual behavior which includes unwarranted sexual advances. More specifically, Duberman ejects the bartender from his party not only because he is molesting his guests but also because this bartender’s open display of homosexual behavior makes Duberman fear his own exposure to a heterosexual audience.

Aesthetic Emulation: The Closet

Kurek and Duberman’s aesthetic emulation is largely based on space, location, and at times stereotypical depictions of both homosexual and heterosexual behavior. Kurek’s aesthetic emulation begins when he abstains from dating or flirting with women during his year-long experiment passing as a gay man. His best friend, Josh, solidifies Kurek’s need to distance himself from women because, as he states, “it minimizes the risk of being found out by everyone. People talk, and if you’re dating someone, they won’t be able to keep things a secret.”⁴²² Kurek’s detachment from women reinforces his need to go into the closet as a straight man in order for his experiment passing as a gay man to succeed. The closet Kurek enters relies heavily upon the absence of acknowledging his sexuality and while the closet usually refers to homosexuality, Kurek continually emphasizes this space as exclusion to his self. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s book, *Epistemology of the Closet*, describes the closet as “a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it.”⁴²³ Sedgwick’s inference that the closet is a lack of specific speech and relies heavily upon a performance that adheres to the discourse surrounding and differentiating the use

⁴²² Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 24.

⁴²³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: UP of California, 2008), 3.

of this speech lends insight into Kurek's occupation of the closet. Kurek, in order to pass successfully as a gay man, must defer to silence and keep his heterosexuality a secret while passing. This silence is vital to his successful passing and his occupation of this space illustrates to Kurek how stifling the closet is for homosexuals.

Another element of Kurek's aesthetic emulation entails his relationship to other homosexual males and this involves a rather conscious effort on his part to emulate speech and behavioral patterns. Kurek's attempt to pass as a gay man includes fostering gay stereotypes and he even states, "I try to act as gay as I know how with my demeanor and mannerisms. I think back to every stereotypical example of gay on television and movies, and I try to adjust my behavior accordingly."⁴²⁴ Kurek's knowledge of gay behavior is solely based on how society stereotypes gay men and this emulation is particularly troubling because Kurek is essentially homogenizing gay men based on heteronormativity. Kurek enlists the aid of his friend Shawn to play the role of his boyfriend, but this relationship also highlights further stereotypes of gay men's behavior. Shawn tells Kurek that in order to successfully pass as a gay man he needs to flirt with other gay men and while this particularly behavior is not limited to homosexual men; the inference that homosexuals are typically oversexed is still a stereotype of homosexuality. Shawn advises Kurek that "flirting between gay men is almost more about validating that other person than it is about hooking up with them. Think of flirting as the ultimate encouragement."⁴²⁵ Shawn's advice implies that in order to act gay one must continuously flirt with other men which reifies the notion that the only way to connect with another man is to follow baser sexual instincts.

⁴²⁴ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 33.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

Kurek's location also aids his aesthetic emulation and his position at Revive Cafe, a gay coffee shop, as well as his frequent visits to a local gay bar in Nashville assists his passing as a gay man. His position at Revive as a barista and the location of the café, a predominantly gay neighborhood, allows him to perform as a gay man. His interaction with the gay customers is mostly based on Shawn's advice of flirtation, but he does have in-depth conversations about his coming out which lends a greater weight to his experiences as a gay man. Kurek realizes, through his association with many of Revive's patrons, that gay behavior is not simply the ability to flirt with other men but is one of a shared experience. His first day at the café exposes him to the negative accounts of young men who have come out as gay only to end their lives because they received no acceptance from their supposed social support system. Kurek's experiences in the café and his forays as a gay man in gay clubs illustrates how his passing as a gay man relies more heavily upon the spaces/locations he frequents. When Kurek enters these establishments, his behavior shifts accordingly to emulate his social group but this behavior is not emulated when he is in his own personal space. Arguably, Kurek's performance as a gay man is completely reliant upon the public viewing him as a gay man. Butler looks closely at gender as performativity and this same theory shapes Kurek's performance of homosexuality. More specifically, Butler posits:

That 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.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 180.

Although Butler is referring to gender, Kurek's performance as a homosexual through social interactions reifies the notion that sexuality is an act denoting masculinity or femininity. Kurek's performance relies heavily upon re-configuring the ideology associated with masculine behavior and adopted a more readily accepted behavioral pattern within his social group.

Duberman's aesthetic emulation as a heterosexual male also relies heavily upon the acts, gestures, speech, and spaces associated with heteronormativity. As a young man, Duberman's heterosexual experiences were sustained through the act of consummation with young women in his age group. Duberman's public affirmation that he did indeed complete the act of sexual intercourse with women was validated through his verbal affirmation that the deed was completed. In both cases, when he visited a prostitute and when he escorted a young woman to prom, his sexuality was validated through the public acknowledgment that these acts of heterosexuality were performed by his peer group. Moreover, Duberman receives affirmation that these attempted heterosexual acts are indicative of his gender when he receives praise from his male peers, thereby completing the performance of heterosexual and the expected social behavior of a patriarchal society.

Duberman aesthetically emulates heterosexuality not only through sexually expected acts associated with his gender, but also through hyper-masculine gestures. In one scene, Duberman recounts a dinner party he hosted for several academic colleagues, and a particularly distributive encounter with a rowdy bartender. Duberman's reaction to this disruption illustrates how he emulates heterosexual behavior, but also how he reifies the ideology associated with masculine behavior. He states: "I grabbed him by the back of his coat and, in a brusque macho gesture

calculated to separate me from unseemly gay gropings, threw him out.”⁴²⁷ This gesture of masculinity is performed to illustrate Duberman’s masculinity, but he is also emulating what he perceives to entail socially acceptable masculine behavior; therefore, hiding and protecting his homosexuality. However, Duberman’s display of masculine behavior simply reifies the notion that in order to encompass heterosexuality one must display an almost brutish exercise in masculine force. Duberman’s gesture is performed to compensate for his lack of self-assurance with his sexuality and also cater to the expected response from his guests at the party. Duberman feels a sense of euphoria when he performs this gesture of force, but he also acknowledges that he feels this social interaction will lead to the exposure of his homosexuality. Although, Duberman’s gesture of aggression does not lead to the disclosure of his homosexuality, this one gesture illustrates the performative nature of sexuality and gender. Duberman believes his gesture is strictly associated with a heterosexual male’s response to a difficult situation and indeed that is the motivation for his gesture. Duberman’s aggressive response to the gay bartender also illustrates the performative nature of heterosexuality. Butler’s assertion that gender is performative also applies to behavior associated with socially acceptable sexuality, or more specifically, the reification of gender is performed through certain acts, gestures, and responses associated with the body. Duberman reacts aggressively towards the bartender because his audience, the party guests, expects a gesture of male dominance and Duberman responds according to socially prescribed behavior.

Duberman’s aesthetic emulation also appears in the spaces he occupies; his workplace. Duberman is a respected Professor of History at Princeton University, and this space represents a complete repression of his sexuality. At least, Duberman tries to suppress his sexuality but the

⁴²⁷ Duberman, *Cures*, 114.

space aids his aesthetic emulation because the space he occupies does not allow for a full disclosure of homosexuality. More specifically, Duberman recounts the story of a professor's sexual overtures towards a student and how the administration fired the professor and how "he never got another academic job."⁴²⁸ Therefore, Duberman's space dictates his sexuality and he emulates the faculty at Princeton by attending "closeted dinner parties."⁴²⁹ Duberman did not explore his sexuality in New Haven, but did travel to New York for sex and companionship. The space Duberman occupies dictates his aesthetic emulation of heterosexuality, but when he enters a new space where he is permitted to express his sexuality his aesthetic emulation of heteronormativity falters. Duberman's aesthetic emulation based on space/place illustrates how one's sexuality is viewed in the public domain as a policed entity. Duberman's fear of exposure, and dismissal from Princeton University, tempers his sexual desires but also forces him to create a new space where he can explore his desires without public dictation of acceptable sexual behavior.

Immersion

Once aesthetic emulation is achieved, the next step in the intersectional passing model is immersion. The "immersion" stage allows the passer to form new relationships within his/her newfound group but also allows him/her to observe as well. This stage is tenuous and complicated because the passer is still constantly aware of his/her performance even though he/she has somewhat successfully immersed themselves within the group. In many of the novels, memoirs, and essays, the passer, in this stage, begins to question his/her decision to pass at all, which is grounded in fear of exposure. If the passer successfully avoids exposure, and controls

⁴²⁸ Ibid, 43.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 42.

any emotional responses to their prior social group then he/she has completely passed into his/her designated group. Once the passer is “immersed” within a particular social group the advantages of such inclusion are seen in his/her social “upgrade,” or in some cases “downgrade.” The advantages correlate with the group the passer immerses himself/herself in and therefore are not finite across all social groups.

Kurek’s immersion begins almost immediately after he and Shawn discuss how he should act in the gay social settings, but also more directly when he begins to work at a local café named Revive. Following Shawn’s advice to openly flirt and socially engage with the men he meets, Kurek begins his first day at the day and encounters a gay couple, Jason and Scott. Jason engages Kurek in conversation and opens his conversation with, “Who are you, handsome?” and Kurek’s responds to this query with “I’m the new guy. I’m Tim, but you...’ I look at Jason coyly. ‘You can call me whatever you want.’”⁴³⁰ The ease with which Tim responds to Jason’s flirtation is coupled with how he thinks of these two men. He understands that Jason “is trying to be seductive, but any discomfort [he] feels is diminished by the humor in his tone. He is gentle, albeit aggressive.”⁴³¹ Kurek’s immersion as a gay man illustrates a mark difference in how he would have reacted prior to his discussion with Shawn. Kurek’s interaction and the ease in which he performs his role as a gay man are indicative with how fully immersed he is passing as a gay man. Kurek’s job at the café opens him up to socially interacting with other gay men and his relationships with his regular customers offer him comfort and familiarity. The importance of Kurek’s position at Revive does not matriculate until he finds out that the café will close because the owners cannot afford to keep it open. Kurek’s response is rife with bitterness and he states,

⁴³⁰ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 87.

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, 87.

“the beauty and life of a business is defined by the people who frequent it; Revive’s light will inevitably dim with the transition. I have never been more frustrated by straight people in my life as when I think about the changes that will kill this business.”⁴³² The café’s importance as a gay establishment serving a gay community and Kurek’s role there as far as immersing himself in the gay community comes to a halt when the business is taken over by a straight owned catering company. Kurek’s reaction illustrates how this job at the café fulfills not only his need to learn about the gay community but also his increasing alliance with the gay community to preserve safe havens for gay interactions.

Kurek’s immersion is also present when he goes to New York for a gay rally and stay with his ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend. After walking all over New York, Kurek and Amy finally return to her apartment and once her boyfriend Nick arrives, Kurek’s immersion as a gay man is indicative in the way he interacts with the two. First, he remarks upon how he is jealous of the openly affectionate nature of Amy and Nick’s relationship by stating, “I am not jealous that he is kissing Amy; I am jealous that he is allowed to kiss and know and love the person he desires. The closet has robbed me of that option.”⁴³³ Kurek’s reaction to this open show of affection laments the idea that he cannot engage in an open relationship with a woman because he is in the closet as a gay man, but also is illustrative of how a gay man would react to keeping the secret of his sexuality from society.

The conversation between Nick and Kurek about a man Kurek might like simply because he is gay is also an element of Kurek’s immersion. Nick proceeds to tell Kurek about a man named Dane that he thinks Kurek might like because he is gay and Kurek responds with “I

⁴³² Ibid, 191.

⁴³³ Ibid, 112.

appreciate you looking out for me, bro, but things don't really work like that. I'm sure you don't want to sleep with *every* woman you meet."⁴³⁴ Kurek's passing depends on how he reacts to certain interactions with others and this particular conversation illustrates how Kurek's persona negates the stereotype that all gay men want to have sex with each other.

Duberman's immersion as a heterosexual male begins at an early age when he fabricates the tales of his sexual exploits to his male friends and continues throughout his life as an academic at Yale. Upon receiving his position at Yale, Duberman remarks upon how he longs for sexual companionships but he makes the conscious choice based upon social events to hide his sexuality. He states that upon "arriving in New Haven I had taken the veil" to hide his sexuality and distance himself from the gay bar scene.⁴³⁵ Duberman's reasoning for this decision reflects the attitude of Yale towards homosexuality after a scandal erupts between a faculty member and a student where the faculty member made sexual overtures to a student. The faculty member was fired because he would not "deny the student's story as a fabrication" and this incident solidified Duberman's need to immerse himself in the heterosexual community at Yale.⁴³⁶ Duberman restrained himself from visiting the gay bars in New Haven, and instead made trips to New York to satisfy his need for gay companionship.

Duberman limits his excursions to New York by immersing himself in the academic community. In fact, he remarks upon the climate of homosexual culture during 1955 almost as an afterthought because he states,

Locked away in my Ivy League tower, I heard nothing of this internecine warfare among a handful of people on another coast. Even if I had, it's doubtful I could

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 113.

⁴³⁵ Duberman, *Cures*, 43.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 43.

have digested the news—I was too wedded to psychiatric dogma, too absorbed in my own tightly circumscribed routines, trying to get laid or trying to stay away from getting laid, ambivalently pushing ahead on a scholarly career I found only intermittently engrossing.⁴³⁷

Duberman tries to supplant his sexuality in favor of the academic community and uses his career to distance himself from current issues plaguing the gay community. Duberman falls back on his routines to negate his sexuality, but to also hide his sexuality from his colleagues at Yale.

However, he does not remain at Yale and quickly moves on to Princeton in 1962. Princeton provides Duberman with another opportunity to immerse himself in academics and he states,

Burying myself in Princeton and in my work, I tried to steel myself to a life of isolation, tried to make the best of the ‘bad hand’ dealt me, consoling myself for the lack of a ‘legitimate’ affective life with the notion that through scholarship and writing I would nonetheless manage to make some contribution to the general culture from which I was effectively barred—indeed, *determined* that I would.⁴³⁸

Duberman’s immersion relies heavily upon his absence from the homosexual community and his utter reliance upon heteronormativity to police his need for meaningful sexual relationships.

More importantly, the price of Duberman’s immersion is his complete alienation from a community that can provide him some semblance of comfort even if to alleviate his feelings of isolation.

Duberman also tries to forge a relationship with a woman in order to validate the possibility that his heterosexuality just needs a catalyst to appear. His relationship with Nancy is another example of immersion; however, he cannot sustain the relationship because he has no sexual desire for Nancy. Duberman does attempt to garner some sexual attraction to Nancy and they are together for more than two years, but in the end he cannot cope with the expectations to

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 56.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 67-68.

sexually perform. His therapist, Dr. Igen, tries to help Duberman salvage the relationship by arguing that homosexuality is simply a fad that will expire and that he cannot simply abandon his chance at a heterosexual relationship.⁴³⁹ Duberman believes Dr. Igen, to a point, and goes so far as to state

Such optimism, as I turned thirty, seemed increasingly fanciful, but I wanted to believe him. After all, I had known other gay men who had married, who had functioned well enough sexually to have children, and who had seemed content. Their strategies for dealing with homosexual urges varied from secret trips to the baths to celibacy (extending, after a while, even to their wives).⁴⁴⁰

Duberman's acknowledgement that he knows other gay men have lead successful heterosexual lifestyles bolsters his need to keep trying and also fuels his desire to immerse himself as a heterosexual male. His continual need to attempt a heterosexual relationship, at the behest of his therapist but also his own internalized desire to fit in, is the direct result of societal normalization of heterosexuality versus homosexuality.

Duberman's desire to find a heterosexual relationship and negate any homosexual tendencies manifests itself in his self-hatred of identifying himself as a homosexual. Of course, this self-hatred makes him lash out at any public acknowledgement of homosexuality, which is just another way he immerses himself in heteronormativity. One such example of his homophobia occurs when he reviews Paul Goodman's book, *Five Years*. His review is scathing and indicts Goodman's open discussion of homosexuality. Duberman accuses

Goodman of 'glamorizing' his homosexuality, of being overly indulgent of his 'frailties,' and of falsely claiming that his homosexuality was intrinsically

⁴³⁹ Ibid, 59.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 59.

connected to his general stance as a rebel, experimenter, and nonconformist—a connection, in Goodman and in others, that now seems stupefyingly obvious.⁴⁴¹

Duberman's vitriolic response to Goodman's open discussion of homosexuality stems from his own insecurity relating to his homosexuality, but more pointedly Duberman's outrage is a reflection of his internalized immersion of homophobic ideology. He further admits that his review of Goodman's book, and his subsequent violent response to Goodman's disclosure of his homosexuality, is "a form of self-sabotage, a public condemnation of who I myself (and Goodman) was."⁴⁴² Duberman is not particularly proud of how he reviews Goodman's work but he continues to lash out at any exposure to homosexuality because he feels this is the correct response in a heteronormative society.

Immersion: Public and Private Spaces

Kurek and Duberman's immersion relies heavily upon both denying heteronormativity and relying solely on heteronormativity to pass through the spaces they occupy and the relationships they forge as a gay and straight man.

Kurek's immersion as a gay man begins with his coming out and thereby occupying spaces that allow him to explore his sexuality. Kurek's position at Revive, a predominantly gay café, allows him to comfortably pass as a gay man because many of the men who visit Revive do not question, or negate, the validity of his sexuality. In fact, many of the gay men want to know how Kurek came out and he reflects upon the inclusiveness of this new community when he states

I never would have imagined that strangers would take such an interest in me, much less my family's reaction to me. The relational investment they demonstrate

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 79-80.

⁴⁴² Ibid, 80.

makes me feel like I have accidentally stumbled upon a sacred detail of the community. This cohesive empathy may be difficult for me to understand but it seems old hat for them, and I wonder how many people they have known who have gone through a much different experience than I have thus far.⁴⁴³

The acceptance Kurek receives from this small gay community encapsulated in the café is a reflection of this created safe space for the gay community. The café does not discriminate upon sexuality but the patrons of this establishment create a space where young men, like Kurek is passing for, can formulate relationships based upon shared experiences. Kurek's immersion as a gay man allows him to witness this created space and become a member of this tight knit community.

The café allows Kurek to occupy a safe space where he can explore what it means to be a gay man, but his frequent visits to gay clubs and bars allows him to fully immerse himself in spaces created for an exploration of homosexuality. While Kurek's immersion at Revive illustrates marginal examples for intimacy with other men, his interaction with other men at the gay bars and clubs he frequents highlights the marked differences between spaces created for homosexual interactions. More specifically, Revive represents a space that requires minor intimacy between its patrons; although, recounting one's coming out story does necessitate a certain level of intimacy, but Kurek's immersions in a club called Tribe challenges his notions of sexual intimacy and personal relationships with men.

Kurek's first experience in a gay bar highlights his discomfort because he does not know how to react to a young man who asks him to dance except to depart hastily from the bar. Kurek realizes after this encounter that he needs help to navigate the gay social scene so he enlists the aid of an African American gay man, Shawn, to give him insight into how to interact within the

⁴⁴³ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 89-90.

gay club scenes. Kurek discloses his experiment in passing as a gay man to Shawn and states, ““I don’t know how to act in gay bars and clubs, and I need to learn.””⁴⁴⁴ Shawn agrees to help Kurek and gives him tips on how to immerse in the gay clubs as a gay man. Shawn’s instructions allow Kurek to feel comfortable in a gay social environment where gay men will hit on him, but Shawn also instructs Kurek that his interaction with men is not any different than his interaction with women. Shawn’s instructions highlight the minute similarities between gender social interactions; namely flirting. Shawn argues that flirting with men is no different than Kurek flirting with women and states, ““be suggestive without being too aggressive, and be playful.””⁴⁴⁵ Kurek’s interaction, or immersion in the gay social scene, relies heavily upon his ability to redirect his heteronormative responses towards men. Kurek’s navigation of this social space reiterates the social atmosphere in a heterosexual setting, or more specifically Kurek is flipping his normative responses to men. Of course, this re-inscription of the body allows for a reconstruction of the reality associated with the body. More specifically, Butler states

This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the ‘integrity’ of the subject.⁴⁴⁶

Butler’s statement informs the construction of the body as a public, and social, apparatus which therefore garners interpretation from the social body. More specifically, Kurek’s reality as a heterosexual man is socially constructed through his interactions with other men, and the all-important interaction with women. However, when Kurek decides to experiment with his

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, 43.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁴⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

sexuality and pass for a homosexual male, his interactions with other men do not vary, necessarily, from his interactions with women. Shawn's instructions on how to mingle the gay social scene reiterates the importance of how others view Kurek's interactions. Therefore, Kurek is re-creating his body's inscription as a heterosexual male by inviting a male sexual gaze. Shawn even advises Kurek to "stop thinking about everything in terms of you, and think about it in terms of others. You aren't in church. You're on different turf, and it's not your place to be put off by an advance, no matter how unwanted it is."⁴⁴⁷ Shawn's advice re-emphasizes the importance of the space Kurek is now occupying and how Kurek needs to alter his perception of his body in this newly occupied space. Kurek's immersion allows him to negate his heterosexual body and allow for a new reality formulated from social and public interactions with gay men, but only in these designated spaces.

Duberman also relies heavily upon the spaces he occupies to immerse himself as a straight man and these spaces encompass his work environment. In fact, Duberman illustrates how his academic space insulates him from the highly politicized conversation about homosexuality. At one point he states, "locked away in my Ivy League tower, I heard nothing of this internecine warfare among a handful of people on another coast. Even if I had, it's doubtful I could have digested the news—I was too wedded to psychiatric dogma, too absorbed in my own tightly circumscribed routines...."⁴⁴⁸ Duberman's space, and his form of immersion, is not only to embrace heteronormativity, but also to ignore any progress related to accepting his own homosexuality. Duberman's academic space illustrates a conscious aversion to accepting his own homosexuality and embeds the need for heteronormative conversion. However, Duberman's

⁴⁴⁷ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 45.

⁴⁴⁸ Duberman, *Cures*, 56.

immersion in the academic space does not eliminate his relationships with gay men and merely forces him to create spaces where he can experiment with his sexuality. He gains no real satisfaction from these brief encounters and remarks upon how his loneliness simply results in his complete immersion in work and routine.⁴⁴⁹ Duberman also states how, “I made the obvious choice: to devote myself to what seemed most promising—my work” to avoid any unwanted sexual desires.⁴⁵⁰ Duberman creates, or immerses, himself in a space that will not tolerate homosexual tendencies and tries to curb his sexual needs through work projects. Duberman’s attempts to keep his sexual yearnings at bay are not successful and he does travel back and forth to New York in order to establish physical and emotional contact with other men. These encounters do not lead to long lasting relationships because Duberman believes that as a homosexual a monogamous relationship with another man is not feasible, or at least societal viewpoints reinforce this notion. In fact, his disastrous relationships with other gay men lead him to enter psychotherapy where he is assured that he can fulfill the societal pressure to marry and have children.

Duberman’s immersion begins with the spaces he occupies, but his deeper immersion involves a psychological inscription of heteronormativity. Duberman’s psychotherapy illustrates how evasive heteronormativity becomes in his life especially once he begins to believe that the only satisfaction he will receive is through a heterosexual relationship. Duberman’s psychotherapists encapsulate the medicalization of homosexuality and the notion of a cure. Duberman not only internalizes the notion that conversion to heterosexuality is achievable but also undergoes mental abuse at the hands of his therapists. Duberman’s relationships with

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, 60.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, 63.

women clarifies the lengths he is willing to go to fully immerse himself as a heterosexual, but these relationships do not result in his conversion to heterosexuality nor a lasting relationship with a woman. Although Duberman tries numerous times to garner some sexual feelings toward women, he cannot force himself to exhibit sexual desire for these women.

His first relationship with a woman, Nancy, begins as a mutual connection of backgrounds or as Duberman illustrates “immigrant Jewish fathers who became financially successful; dynamic, native-born mothers who had never been encouraged to use their gifts and had turned querulous—we also had many of the same personality traits.”⁴⁵¹ Duberman recognizes the importance of these shared traits as foundational elements of a relationship and endeavors to coax a sexual interest in Nancy from their common interests but Duberman interest in Nancy does not evolve in this manner. Instead, he states,

My lack of interest deeply puzzled me. Without doubt Nancy and I were ideally suited, sharing values, open and warm in our affection, comfortable and trusting; we did love each other. It seemed downright unfair—a comment on the malign illogic of the universe—that such entire compatibility would not be blessed with a little usable lust.⁴⁵²

Duberman and Nancy retain their relationship as friends but his initial attempt at a heterosexual relationship results in his frustration over not achieving full immersion into heteronormativity. Duberman’s desire to immerse himself in a heterosexual relationship with a woman leads him to attempt, through the guidance of his therapy group, another relationship with a woman named Cynthia. However, Duberman’s relationship with Nancy only results in a friendship, whereas his relationship with Cynthia is rather hostile because he does not attempt to sexually engage her through the course of their relationship thereby fueling her resentment. Cynthia’s reaction to

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁵² Ibid, 58.

Duberman's lack of interest is quite volatile but her placement of Duberman in an effeminate category kills any relationship potential. Duberman recounts her late night phone call over a potential pregnancy as a conversation she should have with her girlfriend and states, "Whoa, I thought, how come you're turning to me instead of to a girlfriend—or is that precisely the category you're trying to reduce me to, you contemptuous bitch?"⁴⁵³ Cynthia's de-masculination of Duberman is directly linked to the notion of the body and gender, but also reifies the purpose of heteronormativity. According to heteronormativity, the male body's function is to engage in sexual exploration of the female body, but in Duberman's case Cynthia has regaled him to a feminine companion because he shows no interest in her sexually. Butler argues,

acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.⁴⁵⁴

Duberman's lack of sexual interest in Cynthia marks his inability to reproduce acts and gestures associated with his gender and the heteronormative purpose for his body; therefore, he fails to truly immerse himself as a heterosexual male. Duberman's immersion as a heterosexual male is contingent on his ability to forge a successful reproductive relationship with a woman which is non-existent in his memoir.

Interpretation

The next stage in the intersectional passing model examines how the passer interprets his/her experience with a greater understanding of their new social group. The passer's new found relationships within the social group allow him/her to alter their understanding of the

⁴⁵³ Ibid, 102.

⁴⁵⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 173.

normative structure and in some cases slowly alter that structure. This interpretation stage relies heavily upon how the passer navigates his/her new social position and how he/she reinterprets the normative structure. As stated previously, once the passer begins the journey of passing he/she repositions themselves within the normative structure and the interpretation stage will look at how the passer effectively processes this new position. How does the passer view his/her new position within the social group? What does the passer learn about his/her new social group? Does this newfound knowledge of the social group alter the passer's attitude? The passer interprets his/her new position through the rhetoric associated with his/her current and previous social group. The rhetoric of the text will show whether or not the passer's knowledge of his/her new social group alters, or shifts, to allow for a greater understanding of race, gender, class, or sexuality.

Kurek's interpretation of passing as a gay man encapsulates much of his memoir and his insights into how he adjusts to passing as a gay man and also illustrates his understanding of the oppressive confinement of the closet. Kurek's interactions with the gay community allow him to reach a deeper understanding of how gays and lesbians are treated in society, but he also reinterprets his religious foundation as well. Kurek describes his encounter with a friend he meets and how his family rejects him based solely on what their religious beliefs state:

I think that's the problem with conservative theology: it allows one's beliefs to keep one from a relationship. And unfortunately, she has fallen into the trap. Will is her son, and by keeping his boyfriend at arm's length, she's keeping her son at a distance. I feel distraught for Will, and I wish his mom would love him without trying to change him. Even more, I wish the same for myself. Loving without motive seems like the more Christ-like way to go, but maybe it is more easily said than done. Maybe this year I'll get to a place where that is not only my mindset, but my habit, too.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁵ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 35.

Kurek's reflection about how his friend Will's mother denies the existence of his boyfriend and therefore denies her son because that is what her religious beliefs dictate she should encapsulates how Kurek himself has lived his life so far and Kurek's acknowledgement that this behavior needs to alter is his first step toward recognizing how men and women within his new social group should be treated with love. This assessment of his religious beliefs occurs rather early on in his experiment but his intention to recognize that love should be the guiding force in his experiment also prompts a more fluid acceptance of homosexuality.

Kurek's belief that homosexuality and religion cannot co-exist are challenged when he has a conversation with a gay man about creationism in a gay bar. Once the conversation concludes, Kurek states:

If it is possible that Ben actually has a relationship with God, then what the church has told me all along could be wrong—and the consequences of *that* are something I do not want to contemplate right now. I am not ready for it. I am still struggling to understand the effect of what I consider to be unrepentant sin on a relationship to God.⁴⁵⁶

Kurek's conversation with a religious gay man challenge every idea that Kurek has learned from his own religious experiences and certainly makes him uncomfortable challenging those ingrained notions of religion and homosexuality. Ben, the religious gay man, forces Kurek to question his belief system and this exercise in self-assessment throws Kurek into a religious quagmire. Kurek does not want to question his faith but his conversation with Ben makes him start to ask questions that he thought were previously answered by his pastor in church. Kurek concludes from his conversation with Ben that "one thing is sure; I have lived my life in a

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 59-60.

bubble. The fact that there are men and women who share Ben's beliefs demonstrates how broad the social spectrum is within the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community."⁴⁵⁷ Ben's beliefs and his place within the gay community allow Kurek to see how homosexuals do not encompass mainstream stereotypes associated with the gay community. Kurek's insight into how the gay community operates and how society views the gay community inform his understanding of these men and women throughout his experiment. In fact, Kurek concludes his interaction with Ben and the other gay men he encounters at the bar with a sudden sense of kinship:

I say my goodbyes to Ben and Phil and drive home in silence, stunned by the gaping holes in my assumptions. I do not just feel ignorant; I feel cheated, like I have been held back from people that could have spoken hope to me all my life, but I was not allowed listen just because of their orientation. Tonight, I found friendship. I found camaraderie and kinship. Tonight, I found fellowship. Tonight, I found pain and loneliness, but also hope. Tonight, I found a part of myself in a gay bar on Church Street.⁴⁵⁸

Kurek's newfound kinship with Ben and Phil at the gay bar allows him to not only understand what he will undertake as a gay man in his experiment, but also allows him to understand how his religious teachings have omitted the true meaning of Christianity.

Not only do Kurek's experiences as a gay man make him question his faith and how his beliefs vilified homosexuals, but once he begins to fully immerse himself in the gay community he begins to understand how gay men and women are treated in a society obsessed with heteronormativity. He remarks upon how he interprets his feelings as a gay man:

Being a second-class citizen feels like being a tenth-class citizen. If I really were gay, I feel like my life would become such an issue for people that I would be constantly exhausted. Gays and lesbians are looked at as different, perverse, and the label alone seems to illicit an association with the lowest dregs of society,

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, 61.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 63.

morally speaking. No one wants to be thought of that way! Is it really so unrealistic to let people's actions speak for them rather than the stigmatized label?⁴⁵⁹

Kurek's assessment of how he feels only after a few months of passing as a gay man allow him to feel how society marginalizes gay men and women based solely on their sexuality. His feelings of inferiority and the understanding how the labels associated with gay men and women are used solely for the purpose of separation and categorization show him how these labels are dehumanizing. Kurek's recognition of how detrimental these labels are also shows him how his own behavior contributed to making gay men and women feel inferior. He states, "experiencing the other side of prejudice is more painful than I anticipated. Worse, I feel as though I am constantly being faced with my own face in the mirror; the image of a Pharisee who has not thought to look past labels and orientation to see people for who they really are."⁴⁶⁰ This self-reflection, both figuratively and literally, illustrates how Kurek's experiment passing as a gay man teaches him how he should treat people and strive to negate the labels society forces us to use in relation to one another.

Kurek's interpretation of passing as a gay man continues throughout his memoir, but a key insight is when he admits that, "the label of gay has forced me to think more deeply about things I probably never would have otherwise. My homophobia has been replaced with questions."⁴⁶¹ Kurek's experiences as a gay man force him to confront his own homophobia and begin to question every stereotype he has ever used to marginalize gay men and women.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 72.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 82.

Duberman's interpretation reflects on how destructive heteronormative ideology stunts his acceptance of his homosexuality but also how he comes to the realization that his homosexuality does not make him a criminal. Duberman reflects upon how his understanding of homosexual relationships, more pointedly sexual relationships, adheres to the notion of the dominant male and submissive female. He states, "In some complicated way I think all my homosexual activity is an attempt (among other things) to identify with a masculinity I never was sure I had. Being entered by a man is perhaps the most direct way of incorporating and absorbing that masculinity."⁴⁶² Duberman's conclusion that his sexual intercourse with a man instills in him a sense of masculinity because he is the receiver of that masculinity is an attempt to rationalize his homosexual encounters. This conclusion also allows Duberman to illustrate how society defines masculine behavior; a man penetrates a woman and this action determines whether or not one is masculine or feminine. Therefore, Duberman sees himself as masculine but still finds the fantasy of possession "by—and thereby to possess—a real man and his qualities" an overwhelmingly strong reaction to male/male relationships.⁴⁶³

Another illustration of Duberman's interpretation of heteronormativity is evident in the myriad approaches his therapists take in order to convert him to a heterosexual male. Duberman interprets these psychoanalytical encounters in various ways and all of these encounters tend to emphasize the fulfillment Duberman will find if he will only convert to heteronormativity. For example, Dr. Igen remarks upon Duberman's relationship with one particular lover who Duberman cannot separate himself from as simply "an archetypal drama only incidentally related to Billy himself" posits the notion that Duberman's homosexuality stems from some relational

⁴⁶² Duberman, *Cures*, 26.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, 26.

defect he has with his father.⁴⁶⁴ In fact, the archetype Duberman supplies is indeed his father who was “a sweet but distant man” and “met my attempts at closeness, as a child, with vague indifference” (50). Dr. Igen concludes that all of Duberman’s relationships, whether those are with men or women, would suffer because he could not form any lasting emotional attachment to them because of his father. Duberman interpretation of Dr. Igen’s conclusion argues that

Igen never saw (or acknowledged) that some fair portion of my conflicts arose from therapeutic assumptions themselves about the pathology of homosexuality, and that it was the cautious climate of the day, rather than the needs of an individual patient, that dictated his automatic suspicion of risk-taking of any kind.⁴⁶⁵

Duberman’s recrimination of Dr. Igen’s assessment highlights the deficiencies within psychotherapy in treating homosexuals. In fact, Duberman posits the notion “that hostile/detached fathers do not ‘cause’ homosexual sons; rather, sons who appear to be different from the standardized model can cause their fathers to become hostile or detached.”⁴⁶⁶ Dr. Igen’s conclusion that parental behavior influences adolescent sexuality is erroneous, but Duberman still seeks the root cause of his homosexuality which is reflective of his need to cure himself.

Duberman continues to seek psychotherapy and through his own interpretations of homosexuality begins to understand the destructive nature of heteronormativity. Duberman states, “No small part of my discontent has sprung from the tension which analysis itself has set up. For six years now I’ve been made ever more aware of the difference between the way I act

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 50

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 50.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, 65.

and the way I *should* act.”⁴⁶⁷ Even though Duberman attempts to address his homosexuality in therapy, he instead realizes that his analysts are just trying to mold his behavior into what society finds acceptable heterosexual patterns. This particular interpretation is reinforced when Duberman undertakes therapy with a psychotherapist who believes he can convert him to heterosexuality.

Duberman’s therapist, simply referred to in his memoir as Karl, begins their first therapy session by stating, emphatically, that his “‘heterosexual yearnings could be unblocked’ so long as I was willing to commit myself to that goal.”⁴⁶⁸ Again, Duberman is lead to believe that his homosexuality is simply a choice that he has consciously made and that Karl can help him to choose to live a heterosexual lifestyle. Karl goes on to state how “his own experience with homosexual patients had been quite different; of the half dozen such men he had recently treated, all, without exception, had succeeded in making heterosexual adjustments.”⁴⁶⁹ Duberman is still skeptical because he believes his age will deter him from converting to heterosexuality, but Karl addresses that issue by arguing that he has helped all age groups successfully convert. Karl presents a particularly troubling claim when he attests to successfully converting homosexuals to heterosexuals simply based on their desire for change. Duberman wants to believe that Karl’s methodology will foster the conversion he so desperately craves but when Karl submits that the root cause of Duberman’s sexual confusion stems from his relationship with his mother; he begins to interpret Karl’s therapy tactics in a new light. He states,

What I *really* wasn’t ready to acknowledge was that seeds of doubt about Karl’s judgment had been planted, the spell of his omniscience weakened. Yet I couldn’t afford to explore those doubts, given my continuing goal of a ‘heterosexual

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 52.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 94.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, 94.

adjustment' and my continuing assumption that therapy was the sole instrumentality for achieving it.⁴⁷⁰

Duberman begins to interpret Karl's therapeutic methodology as rather intrusive because Karl wants Duberman to cut off contact with his mother. More importantly, Duberman's realization that Karl is somewhat antiquated in his methodology does not deter him from continuing therapy because Karl has convinced Duberman that he will be able to convert him to a heterosexual male.

Duberman's interpretation of his therapy with Karl illustrates how he begins to personally psychoanalyze his own actions with Karl's narrative of the defective homosexual. Duberman suggests his relationship with Karl reifies the notion of heteronormativity and argues,

The prime lesson of male gender training, of course, is to repress any impulse toward submissiveness. We are taught never to bend the neck or will, to stay on one side of a human pendulum that would otherwise swing naturally back and forth between assertiveness and compliance. Gay men, valuably, have often escaped full socialization into that male gender role. For many of us, varied impulses have never been successfully submerged into one; multiformities persist into adulthood, making for rich discordancies that *others*, more tightly bound, need to deplore as 'contradictions.'⁴⁷¹

Duberman's assessment of societal notions of heteronormativity infer that men do not display any outward signs of submissiveness in either their relationships towards woman nor their relationships with other men, but also illustrates the fluidity of homosexual males to toe the line of overt male gender socialization. This fluidity, and negation of strictly defined gender behavioral definitions, invites a societal need to marginalize discrepancies in accepted male behavior. Duberman does not adhere to strictly defined male gender behavioral patterns and this

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, 105.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 106.

particular rebellious attitude incites Karl to demean Duberman in group therapy. Karl argues that Duberman is so caught up in his homosexuality that he eliminates any possibility of a heterosexual life. Karl eventually argues for Duberman to completely distance himself from discussing his homosexuality with the group and states, “from now on, I don’t want to hear another word in here about your homosexuality. Not another word, is that clear? You’ve wasted enough of the group’s time, and your own time, on this ‘as if’ behavior.”⁴⁷² Karl’s refusal to address Duberman’s homosexuality in greater depth and his aggressive need to replace such discussions with Duberman’s possible heterosexual lifestyle as an achievable goal illustrates Karl’s belief that Duberman’s sexuality is a choice and he needs to begin choosing to live his life as a heterosexual. In fact, during one particular grueling group therapy session, Duberman begins to doubt Karl’s ability to convert him when one of the participants remarks that he still has intercourse with men even though he is married to a woman. Duberman’s belief that Karl is able to convert him is shattered, especially when Karl violently states,

‘What I *said* was that in therapy I had brought Dick—and indeed every other homosexual man who has sought my help—to the point where he could choose for himself whether he wanted to live a gay life or a straight life. For the first time, Dick had options, he could make a real choice—and what he chose was heterosexuality.’⁴⁷³

Karl’s belief that homosexuality is a choice, and his combative language towards Duberman, illustrates the stifling attitude of heteronormativity. This therapy session finally allows Duberman to recognize the futility of his efforts to achieve heteronormativity through psychoanalysis and also fosters a deeper interpretation of his homosexuality. This deeper interpretation includes Duberman’s acknowledgement that his deep seated fear in regards to his

⁴⁷² Ibid, 118-119.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 155.

homosexuality was the fear of eliminating the possibility of defining himself. He states, “I was less afraid of exposure (I was, after all, exposing myself in my plays) than of giving up a familiar way of thinking about myself.”⁴⁷⁴ Duberman did not want to abandon the ideal image of himself that he attempts to foster through his therapy sessions and align himself with how society views homosexual behavior.

The Closet: Public and Private Interpretations of Homosexuality/Heteronormativity

Tim Kurek interpretation of passing as a gay man varies greatly from Martin Duberman’s interpretation of passing as a straight man because while Kurek garners understanding of his newfound status as a gay man from his rejection of religious doctrine, and his version of the closet, Duberman’s passing illustrates how his struggle for heteronormativity reiterates the criminalization of homosexuality which forces him to remain in the closet for most of his life.

Kurek’s interpretation of passing as a gay man relies heavily upon his reconceptualization of his religious beliefs and re-categorizing who he views as a true Christian. One such instance at a gay bar highlights Kurek’s preconceived notions of the spaces true Christians reside when he overhears a conversational debate on creationism. He states,

Is this even possible? Are they actually debating young-earth creationism? The implications of this are overwhelming to me. I’m in a gay bar, for Christ’s sake! I wish my high school Bible teacher were here...though I doubt he would be listening. He used to refer to bars and lounges as ‘upholstered sewers.’⁴⁷⁵

Kurek’s assumption that young gay men do not adhere to Christian doctrine, or specifically that gay men cannot possibly be Christian because of their sexual orientation is challenged when he overhears this conversation. Kurek’s discussion with Ben illustrates the narrow-minded

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 160.

⁴⁷⁵ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 58.

viewpoint of religious doctrine which posits the notion that homosexuals believe in an all-inclusive notion of heaven and attend religious services where the congregation is mainly gay or lesbian men and women.⁴⁷⁶ Kurek's conversation with Ben allows Kurek to recognize the "bubble" he exists in and also refutes every stereotype the Church has taught Kurek about gay men and women. Kurek's kinship with Ben heavily relies on his shared religious belief system and not on the fact that Ben is a gay man and Kurek is passing as a gay man. However, Kurek's connection with Ben allows him to recognize how "nothing about their orientation feels unnatural" which allows him to interpret homosexual relationships far from the religious dogma that shaped his previous understanding of homosexuals.⁴⁷⁷ Of course, Kurek's religious dogma is based on the notion that sexual activities, proclivities, and the speech associated with such acts are under the purview of the Church.

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* explores the discourses attached to sexuality and illustrates how religious belief systems along with the legal system form a starting point of sexual repression and control. Foucault states, "On the list of grave sins, and separated only by their relative importance, there appeared debauchery (extramarital relations), adultery, rape, spiritual or carnal incest, but also sodomy, or the mutual 'caress.' As to the courts, they could condemn homosexuality as well as infidelity, marriage without parental consent, or bestiality."⁴⁷⁸ Kurek's reaction to Ben's religious belief system correlates with the Church's goal of separating those men and women who do not adhere to sexual conformity. Although Ben is a devout Christian, Kurek's indoctrination of Christian ideology does not make allowances for homosexuals and religious belief. Kurek attempts to re-interpret his Christian indoctrination

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 61.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, 63.

⁴⁷⁸ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 38.

through his acceptance of Ben's religious beliefs and thereby also analyzing the foundation for the Church's attempt to control speech, and acts, associated with homosexuality. More specifically, Kurek begins to realize that the Church's attempt to negate the inclusion of homosexuals as individuals who can, and do, hold conservative religious beliefs as a myth created by the Church to control sexual discourse associated with homosexuals.

Another element of Kurek's interpretation occurs when he discusses the closet he is forced to enter when he begins passing as a homosexual. Of course, the closet he enters does not necessarily correlate with the closet many homosexuals are forced to remain in because Kurek's closet maintains his heterosexuality while homosexuals are forced in the closet to maintain heteronormativity. Kurek mentions the closet several times through the course of his memoir and states how debilitating the closet has become because he is "cut off from a once-flourishing social life...and detoxing from the most potent drug I have ever know: estrogen."⁴⁷⁹ Kurek laments his closeted status because his sexuality is negated while he attempts to pass as a gay man. However, Kurek still holds the knowledge that when he concludes his experiment he will be able to return to his heterosexuality and indulge in the drug he is hooked on but this just confirms his status of power as a heterosexual male who can simply alter his status in the name of personal growth. Kurek does begin to understand the social significance of the closet, but only after a rather intense conversation with the patrons at Revive. Several gay men at Revive inquire about Kurek's coming out and how his family reacts to the news. The responses of these gay men illustrate what the closet means to the gay community when one of them states, "Tim, a really high percentage of suicides in this country are committed by people who are in the closet and feel they can't do it anymore. The closet kills people. And families can do a lot of damage

⁴⁷⁹ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 87.

early on, to those who've just broken free."⁴⁸⁰ This conversation helps Kurek realize his Christian ideology did not "consider the life of belittlement and degradation that one faces for the remainder of one's life after coming out."⁴⁸¹ Kurek does recognize the significance of the closet and how integral coming out of said closet is for gay men and women; however, his reference to coming out of closet but at the same time bemoaning his confinement to the closet as a straight man somehow demeans the significance of the closet. Should Kurek use the closet to reference his hidden heterosexuality? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* explores the social significance of the closet and states, " 'The closet' and 'coming out,' now verging on all-purpose phrases for the potent crossing and recrossing of almost any politically charged lines of representation, have been the gravest and most magnetic of those figures. The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century."⁴⁸² The use of the closet in Sedgwick's context refers to a tool used as a means to hide personal representation in a society occupied with self-representation or more specifically, for those individuals who don't necessarily correspond with politically viable representations of the self, the closet allows one to hide oneself until the opportune time where representations alter. In Kurek's case, his hidden heterosexuality somehow undermines the significance of the closet since heterosexuality is still the social norm but he also fails to understand how using the closet to reference his heterosexuality negates the oppression of the closet. Sedgwick does mention how the closet "is indicative for homophobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions" which certainly minimizes Kurek's feelings of oppression as a straight man in the closet.⁴⁸³ Kurek's act of coming out, and his perception of the closet, indicate he is merely subscribing to the

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 89.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 90.

⁴⁸² Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 71.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 75.

stereotypical description of the act and not delving deeper into the emotional turmoil associated with the closet. In this regard, Kurek's interpretation of the closet and the act of coming out of said closet reflect a superficial level to his passing as a gay man.

Martin Duberman's memoir explores how he struggles to conform to heteronormativity while at the same time explores his homosexuality. Duberman interprets his homosexuality negatively due in large part to heteronormativity but also due to his extensive psychotherapy sessions with numerous doctors who treat his homosexuality as a pathological disorder. He states,

Igen never saw (or acknowledged) that some fair portion of my conflicts arose from therapeutic assumptions themselves about the pathology of homosexuality, and that it was the cautious climate of the day, rather than the needs of an individual patient, that dictated his automatic suspicion of risk-taking of any kind.⁴⁸⁴

Igen's assumptions that Duberman's homosexual tendencies stem from pathology invoke a long-held medical understanding of homosexuality. In fact, Foucault maps the intrusive influence medicine has over categorizing, and controlling, sexual activity. He states, "medicine made a forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple: it created an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of 'incomplete' sexual practices; it carefully classified all forms of related pleasures; it incorporated them into the notions of 'development' and instinctual 'disturbances'; and it undertook to manage them."⁴⁸⁵ Therefore, Igen's response to Duberman's homosexuality not only dissects his homosexuality in order to properly control Duberman's urges but also attempts to reinforce heteronormativity by injecting the discourse of abnormality. In other words,

⁴⁸⁴ Duberman, *Cures*, 50.

⁴⁸⁵ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 41.

Igen is reiterating heteronormativity without examining Duberman as an individual because Igen views homosexuality not in terms of individual cases but as a widespread epidemic that can be controlled through medical/therapeutic intervention. Duberman's interpretation of his encounter with Igen simply reiterates his despair that he will successfully convert to heteronormativity and his continual disillusionment with psychotherapy. However, Duberman's feelings of discontent with Igen do not deter him from seeking a meaningful relationship with other men nor does Igen's belief that his life will fall into place once Duberman sets aside these homosexual tendencies alter his almost manic obsession with conversion therapy. Therefore, Duberman publicly attempts to control his homosexual tendencies through therapy while privately exploring those homosexual tendencies.

Duberman's interpretation of heteronormativity relies heavily upon viewing his homosexuality as a disorder, a disease, and a crime. This perception is continuously reinforced through psychotherapy and he states, "No small part of my discontent has sprung from the tension which analysis itself has set up. For six years now I've been made ever more aware of the difference between the way I act and the way I *should* act."⁴⁸⁶ Duberman's self-examination of acceptable and non-acceptable sexual behavior is wholly reliant upon normative views of such behaviors, and Duberman is constantly reminded through his therapeutic endeavors that his sexual behavior is not normal. Therefore, Duberman attempts to conform his sexual behavior, or in most cases deny his homosexuality in public spaces, and pass as a straight man.

⁴⁸⁶ Duberman, *Cures*, 52.

Recall

The final stage of this model looks at how the passer recalls his/her experience of passing through the narratives they write. The process of recall takes all of the abovementioned steps and allows the passer to not only articulate his/her experience to garner meaning, but also endeavors to relay that information to a wider audience who might similarly undergo such an experience. Basically, this step looks at how the narrator conceptualizes his/her experiences in the form of the narrative. After all, the passing experience takes all the factors to illustrate not only the individuals' personal experience with passing but to also generate an overall understanding for any individual who will engage in passing. This particular step is vital to not only understand the relevancy of passing but to also articulate the changes in the normative structure and within social groups. The passer's ability to recall his/her experience allows the reader to broaden his/her own position within the normative structure and invites change. This stage will incorporate all three methodologies. First, the product of the passer's recall is in fact the narrative, so looking intently at how the passer shows us his/her experience and imparts such knowledge is useful to map the overall influence of such narratives. Second, the product is informed by his/her social experience within their old and new social groups, so looking at how the passer formulates knowledge about the normative structure is important to changing such a structure. Thirdly, these narratives are an addition to historical literature on the same subject and therefore lend a new voice to the subject of passing but also challenge the notion that the normative structure has altered in any significant way from previous narratives.

Kurek's memoir attempts to restructure the normative structure by giving the reader an in-depth narrative of his experiences but also in how he interprets this knowledge for his audience. Kurek seems to focus on not only passing as a gay man but also how that knowledge can help

other Christians understand the gay community. He constantly reiterates how his passing as a gay man informs his understanding of his Christian belief and he attempts to restructure Christian ideology associated with homosexuality. He states, “never for a minute did my ideology consider the life of belittlement and degradation that one faces for the remainder of one’s life after coming out. It only claims one thing: Same-sex affection is unnatural and should therefore be rejected in all respects.”⁴⁸⁷ Kurek rejects this ideology and begins to realize that condemning a group of people based solely on who they love is an antiquated viewpoint that he will endeavor to alter. Kurek’s alteration of Christian ideology starts with his own perceptions of homosexuality and how the Church teaches their congregations how to hate individuals based solely on their sexuality. He reflects upon the rejection of homosexuals and states, “salvation is not a country club, and we do not have the right to deny anyone admittance. People and their relationships with God are their own concern, and no good can come from my shoving my theology down someone else’s throat.”⁴⁸⁸ Kurek’s personal steps towards negating his Christian belief system allows him to open himself up to a more inclusive viewpoint towards sexuality; the results of which inform his Christian audience as well.

Kurek’s alteration of the normative structure in regards to heteronormativity is somewhat lacking because he tends to just reify what is normal and abnormal when he repetitively uses the term “normal” throughout his memoir. His use of this term seems a bit ambiguous especially when at one point he states, “Life has reached a sort of plateau, and I feel a sense of ‘normal’ again. I even feel normal being known by the label of gay.”⁴⁸⁹ Kurek’s rhetoric illustrates how he views his acquisition of the label of gay as a step toward normativity; however, Kurek has only

⁴⁸⁷ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 90.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 135.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 81.

acquired a superficial understanding of homosexuality. He feels the moniker of gay is normal because he has not delved deeper into any form of physical intimacies with other men. Of course, one cannot limit the validity of Kurek's experiment simply on the fact that he did not engage in homosexual intercourse but his use of normal is still troubling. In fact, Kurek never clearly defines what normal means for him in the context of heterosexuality or homosexuality which is problematic. Kurek's preoccupation with defining homosexuality as normal is directly aimed at his Christian audience who do not believe that homosexuality is normal sexual behavior. However, the rhetorical use of normal to describe any behavior incites an either or mentality and just reifies the normative structure.

Kurek's experiment as a gay man, excluding his limitations with sexual intimacies, does illustrate a newfound personal understanding of the normative structure and an attempt to alter that structure as well. At the conclusion of Kurek's experiment he recalls the lessons he learned about the gay community and states, "I have heard the question posed, at what point can one be an ally to the queer community? I think for me being an ally means that I must shift my focus off of my perceived moral imperative and live in community and relationships with all people."⁴⁹⁰ Kurek's assessment of his experiment de-emphasizes his Christian beliefs system in favor of viewing all people in a collective society free from faith-based judgements. This particular conclusion is audience specific in regards to Christianity and its supposed moralistic teachings, but this perspective shift also applies to every individual regardless of their belief system. Kurek emphasizes the idea that people must see people without the labels and even states, "the world seems to be addicted to labels. Steve the lawyer, Josh the rapper, Renee the lesbian, Methodist minister...Every name has to be paired with something 'greater,' or more recognizable than

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, 327.

itself.”⁴⁹¹ Kurek’s analysis of labels and categorization of individuals based on his/her achievements encompasses the very flaws within the normative structure. The need to divide individuals into binaries and categorize these individuals according to gender, race, sexuality, or class solidifies the problem with the normative structure because all this structure achieves is a divisive society occupied with fitting every single person into a neat little box. Kurek accurately identifies the issue and tries to illustrate how he will adjust his view of individuals by ending his memoir with these words: “For years I’ve lived color-blind in a world of rainbows, ignorant to the beauty all around me. And for the first real time, the words from my favorite hymn have meaning and are alive to me. ‘*I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.*’”⁴⁹² Kurek’s experiment has clearly altered his perspective and his memoir attempts to reach a larger audience to illustrate why one should allow for a more inclusive viewpoint of homosexuality. Kurek thoroughly focuses on dismantling his own personal religious biases towards homosexuality and attempts to convey this message to an audience mired in religious beliefs; however, for those audience members who do not adhere to religious doctrine in regards to attitudes towards homosexuals he fails to illustrate how his experiment does not deviate from societal stereotypes of homosexuals. Kurek’s attempts to pass as a gay man are overly reliant upon the stereotypical characteristics society associates with homosexuality. Even though Kurek forges a relationship with a gay man to instruct him on how to act like a gay man, this instruction does not try to eliminate the negative connotations associated with homosexuality. In fact, Kurek uses this relationship to offset any overtly sexual advances he would receive from other gay men and essentially limiting his overall experiences as a gay man. Kurek’s fear of attracting the gaze

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 328.

⁴⁹² Ibid, 329.

of gay men even though he is passing as a gay man diminishes the overall effectiveness of his experiment.

Duberman's recall is quite different than Kurek's not only because he is a gay man passing as a straight man, but because of the time/space that Duberman's memoir encompasses. Duberman explores over 20 years of sexual repression, debilitating psychotherapy, and aversion to any inclusion with his own homosexuality identity. Duberman occupies a limited space of personal, and societal, homosexual exploration where his sexual identity is accepted or repulsed by those around him. More specifically, the spaces Duberman occupies determine his plausibility in passing as a straight man. While Kurek's memoir illustrates a straight man's perspective regarding homosexuality while at the same time reflecting on how a specific Christian audience can attempt to accept homosexuals over the course of a year, Duberman's memoir illustrates how the struggle to gain inclusion in a society preoccupied with policing sexuality and advocating heteronormativity almost destroys him. Duberman's quest to accomplish heterosexuality is manifested in his self-hatred of his, and others, homosexuality. He recalls a particularly homophobic book review he wrote and reflects upon his statement by stating,

I read that now and cringe. I had given the homophobes fuel for another auto-de-fé. It's perhaps ironic—and may yet bring fitting retribution down on my head—that here I am, twenty-five years later, writing a comparably explicit, personal book and doing so in the absolute conviction, which I could never have entertained back then, that we all *must* tell our secrets, must come out of our 'shameful' closets if a more humane, genuinely diverse culture is ever to emerge.⁴⁹³

Duberman remarks upon how in hindsight his experiences, both passing as a straight man and in the closet as a gay man, illustrate the importance of not hiding who or what you are. Duberman specifically recalls how his critique of a fellow author, and his personal sexual experiences,

⁴⁹³ Duberman, *Cures*, 80.

highlights his own homophobia and that he provided fuel for societies tendencies to demonize homosexuals through his own repulsion for such a personal insight into the author's sexual relationships. Duberman acknowledges his role in perpetuating homophobia and he also subscribes to the idea that full disclosure of oneself, and ones secrets, will allow for a more inclusive society.

Throughout Duberman's memoir he questions the normative structure regarding homosexuality and slowly begins to re-interpret what homosexuality means to him by posing the notion "that social definitions of 'normalcy' were not the equivalents of absolute truth, that the ways in which one deviated from majoritarian standards might themselves be a valid measure of individuality and the only reliable path to an authentic personal style—and were thus to be cultivated and prized, not repudiated and reviled."⁴⁹⁴ Duberman's recall of how individuality spurs personal growth and sparks a deviation from a so-called normalization of sexual behaviors ultimately inspires his personal reconstruction of the normative structure. Duberman's insights upon the subject of normalcy and his deviation from this structure rely heavily upon his foray into psychotherapy. After years of therapy, Duberman finally begins to question his therapist's promise of conversion to heterosexuality and confronts him during a therapy session. Through the course of Duberman's therapy, his therapist has vowed to cure his homosexuality while at the same time manipulating Duberman with feelings of inadequacy because of his sexuality. During Karl and Duberman's final therapy session, Karl implies that Duberman's lack of a monogamous relationship with a woman and his promiscuous lifestyle with men is a foil to avoid his true identity. Karl states, "Yes, promiscuity is tension-reduction as well as punishment. In any case,

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, 179.

it's keeping you from you.”⁴⁹⁵ However, Duberman has finally realized through his own self-exploration, and self-acceptance, that a monogamous relationship does not equal heterosexuality and his response to Karl's conclusion includes his physical and mental rejection of the medicalization of homosexuality. Duberman argues, ““meaning the heterosexual me you keep insisting is my ‘real’ self. But maybe that’s been a fiction all along. Maybe I’ve been keeping myself open to a nonexistent possibility.”⁴⁹⁶ Duberman's conclusion that a conversion to heterosexuality, and the promise that Karl can convert him, is a fictional construct enables him to fully grasp his homosexuality and also allows him to negate the pathology associated with homosexuality. Karl's attempts to manipulate and control Duberman's sexuality with the implication that elements of his homosexual lifestyle are a reflection of homosexuality, including his propensity for promiscuity, are indicative of not only the medical establishments need to collect, categorize, and cure but also of society's viewpoint on any individual who does not sexually conform to heterosexuality. Duberman's self-acceptance of his homosexuality rejects the narrative of heteronormativity, and the idea that if he does not conform to such ideals that he is somehow not his true self. Duberman's conclusion is quite significant in not only his own journey of self-acceptance, but to establish a narrative that rejects the normative structure regarding sexuality. The narrative of heterosexuality no longer appeals to Duberman because this particular fiction negates his individuality which he finally understands is not diseased or deviant, but simply different. Duberman's experience with psychotherapy ends when he confronts Karl and recognizes the false promises of heterosexual conversion; however, his acceptance of his sexuality is not simple and he struggles with his sexuality throughout the memoir.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, 189.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, 189.

Duberman slowly begins to accept his homosexuality and does eventually come out of the closet, but once he has made the leap to a public homosexual figure he finds the gay/lesbian community rather tedious. Duberman expresses his frustration with the gay/lesbian community and the gay movement, in particular, for focusing on sexual promiscuity as an element of liberation. Duberman repudiates promiscuity as a symbol of liberation and asserts that the gay/lesbian community should not “replace an older set of myths about sexuality with a new one.”⁴⁹⁷ He further urges “the gay movement ‘to remember that there are basic racial and class inequalities in American life, and if gay (or black or female) separatism now seems an essential stage in consciousness-building, it is not in itself the optimal goal. Eventually—and here the difficulties can hardly be overestimated—a coalition of the oppressed must be forged.’”⁴⁹⁸ Duberman’s inclusion of other marginalized groups, and his intersectional understanding of women and blacks, illustrates his understanding of how any form of liberation begins with all discriminated groups in society. Ultimately, Duberman’s goal of liberation for the gay community is not to eliminate the inclusion of other marginalized groups but to forge an overall understanding that in order to achieve liberation the gay community must align themselves, or more importantly recognize the intersectional underpinnings of the gay community to fully address the issues connecting these groups. While Duberman attempts to advocate for a gay liberation that includes women and blacks, he does not fully include lesbian groups in any of his writing. He laments how he “inadvertently helped to confirm the growing conviction in lesbian circles that gay men would never extend equal recognition and status to them” but does not attempt to rectify this division.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 262.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, 263.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, 263.

Duberman's writings reach a broad audience of individuals who support his coming out and enlist his aid in trying to come to terms with their own homosexuality but also invite other individuals to repudiate his homosexuality. A fellow colleague's rant about how "'many people will violate the established norm,' but felt that such 'purely personal behavior' could be tolerated 'only so long as it does not upset the norm itself'" directly situates the purpose of Duberman's memoir and how he attempts to restructure the normative structure.⁵⁰⁰ Duberman's responds by stating,

'the majority views sexual regularity as essential if society is to continue to function *as it is*—and it has the power to pass laws to that effect.' But I did not see, I went on, why we had to accept society as it is: 'You suggest that many people will violate the norms. Well then, why continue to honor the norm as desirable and immutable when it seems at odds with human nature (or the nature of many humans)?'⁵⁰¹

Duberman challenges the notion that society should conform to ideas of heteronormativity and legally enforce these notions which arguably lead to a stagnant society unwilling to alter normative ideology. He also argues that if these norms are violated then therein lays the underpinnings for altering such norms because if they are continuously violated by society then how can they propose to reflect the ever-growing alteration in human nature? Duberman's articulation of the normative structure as a broken system of repression illustrates to his audience how any societal repression of sexuality is essentially a repression of societal growth.

Duberman's challenge to the normative structure is evident in his memoir. He states, "what came, along with commentary, was intense anger at the way I'd been abused and cooperated with that abuse. I'd allowed myself to be treated, especially in therapy, as an abstract

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 265.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, 265.

collection of symptoms to be ameliorated rather than as a specific person to be actualized.”⁵⁰²

Duberman’s memoir highlights the abuse he endures but also illustrates how he eventually discovers who he is and how his writing provides a cathartic means to putting the expectations of society aside. Duberman’s recall convinces the reader that homosexuality, and the enforcement of heteronormativity on those who are homosexuals, results in self destruction because the individual is denying the self. Duberman stresses the importance of extracting the self from preconceived societal notions of identity, or more specifically, encourages the individual to defy the normative structure. Duberman’s entire memoir expounds on his own personal struggle with heteronormativity and his eventual acceptance of human nature.

Recall: Sexual Fluidity

The final stage in the intersectional passing model looks closely at the impact each text has on the implications of heteronormativity in relation to passing. More specifically, this intersectional passing model will help illustrate how Kurek and Duberman not only navigate passing as a homosexual man and a heterosexual man, but will also correlate their experiences passing with the oppressive nature of the normative structure. Each text allows the reader to understand the experience of passing through the narrative and garner the information that will aid him/her in their own endeavors with passing. Kurek’s memoir endeavors to illustrate how a straight man passes as a gay man, but his experiment highlights the embedded influence of heteronormativity and the insidious preoccupation with voyeuristic/intrusive documentation of the other. Kurek’s rhetoric oversimplifies, and reifies, societal impressions of homosexuality. For example, when Kurek enters a gay bar for the first time he relies heavily upon “every stereotypical example of gay on television and movies,” but this assumption exposes the

⁵⁰² Ibid, 274.

preoccupation with identifying homosexuals based on effeminate behavior.⁵⁰³ Is there a certain way gay men act that signifies homosexuality? Do only gay men behave in a manner that denotes their sexuality? Kurek relies heavily upon the normative structure that identifies gay men as overly flamboyant, effeminate, and hyper-sexualized individuals so when he further replies upon whether or not he is performing in the correct manner to pass for gay he is adhering to the posited societal notions of homosexuality.

Kurek's recall focuses heavily upon reaching a particular Christian audience and his passing as a homosexual male attempt to normalize homosexuality. However, Kurek's experiences tend to superficially explore what it means to be a homosexual male in so far as he relies on stereotypes of homosexual behavior. Kurek recalls the last days of his experiment with relief because as he states, "I want to know the feel of turning the key to my inner closet and letting straight Tim out again."⁵⁰⁴ Kurek's statement at the end of his passing experiment implies that not only did he not fully pass as a homosexual male, but that this shift from homosexual to gay is a simple task; as simple as turning a key in a lock. Also, Kurek's use of the term closet and coming out as straight, when heteronormativity is overwhelmingly the norm, infers that Kurek's experiment has indeed failed. Should Kurek choose the term closet to refer to his heterosexuality? Does Kurek's use of the term closet demean the overall experiences many homosexuals endure? Kurek infers that the closet represents a place where you hide the self and he even states, "my first coming out was daunting because I was going into the closet. This time around, I gain the freedom of being *me*."⁵⁰⁵ Sedgwick addresses the oppressive nature of the closet for homosexuals and further states how "vibrantly resonant as the image of closet is for

⁵⁰³ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 33.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 309.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 309.

many modern oppressions, it is indicative for homophobia in a way it cannot be for other oppressions.”⁵⁰⁶ Therefore, Kurek’s use of the closet as a way to reclaim is heterosexuality indicates not only his lack of understanding the meaning behind this term but also lends to negate the oppressions homosexuals endure daily. Kurek’s passing revels in the use of the term closet and coming out throughout his experiment as a homosexual man, but his assertion that he truly understands the pain, dejection, and rejection that many homosexuals incur upon such an action demeans this experiment as merely showmanship.

Again, Kurek reinforces how homosexuality is not who he is and that he can finally return to who he is once the experiment has ended. This overwhelming relief at the conclusion of his experiment implies that he did not fully immerse himself as a homosexual male. However, he does concede his privilege to so easily revert back to heterosexuality and states, “I am straight Tim, and my orientation is no longer a social stigma. None of my other friends will be so lucky. No one else is afforded this luxury.”⁵⁰⁷ He does recognize the ease with which he refits himself into normative society and acknowledges that his homosexual friends will not have the same opportunities. Kurek comes out to many of the gay men he met throughout his year-long experiment and all of these men praised him for trying to understand the struggles they deal with on a daily basis.

Kurek’s recall also occurs when, in his last chapter, he begins to sit down and write his memoir. He again refers to his coming out as a straight man and that after two years he is “only now able to process everything that happened.”⁵⁰⁸ Kurek’s contribution, and activism, in the LGBT community continues after his experiment ends and retains many of the relationships he

⁵⁰⁶ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 75.

⁵⁰⁷ Kurek, *Cross in the Closet*, 311.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 325.

forged while passing as a homosexual man. Kurek also emphasizes how his fellow Christian brothers and sister can live their lives in faith while also supporting the rights of others. He emphasizes how he “must sacrifice and serve without the condition of labels, and without worrying about how it will make me look.”⁵⁰⁹ His last parting words to his audience encompass a more inclusive relationship with others and an idealistic viewpoint to eradicate labels. This message is rather naïve considering that he still labels himself as a Christian which in itself separates him from other religious beliefs, but more importantly, Kurek’s position as a white, heterosexual male gives him the privilege to state that we should not have labels in a society where labels are devised by the same majority. Kurek’s passing fails to alter heteronormativity because his memoir simply reifies the stereotypical homosexual male and the tone of his memoir offers an anthropological reconstruction of the homosexual narrative. Kurek attempts to experience homosexual relationships, the closet, and societal oppression of LBGT communities but his interactions are constructed in a manner where his image of homosexuals fits the heteronormative narrative.

Duberman’s recall illustrates his navigation of spaces/places and also a personal realization of his sexuality. His passing, as Kurek’s, is limited to designated spaces which embrace particular behavior. While Kurek passes in bars and cafes as a homosexual male, Duberman’s passing as a heterosexual male is limited to his work environment. Both of these men explore the spaces/places where their sexuality is more readily accepted but Duberman exhibits what Wayne H. Brekhus explores in his book *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity* when he travels out of his environment to engage in sexual relationships with other men. Brekhus posits the idea that the distance one travels to

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, 327.

express their homosexuality correlates with the distance that want to place on their sexuality.⁵¹⁰ More specifically, Duberman travels quite frequently to meet other gay men and engage in sexual relationships with these men because he wants to negate his homosexuality. The distance he places between his heterosexual passing and his homosexual self allow him to formulate an alternate self in certain spaces/places. Duberman especially exemplifies what Brekhus categorizes as the chameleon because he is able to pass according to his environment. This chameleon-like quality is evident throughout Duberman's memoir but also reflects the aesthetic emulation process of passing. Duberman deciphers his persona based on his surroundings and adjusts his behavior, speech, physical mannerism, and personal interactions with others based on his audience's expectations. Duberman does alter his aesthetic emulation throughout the memoir, but overall his recall leans towards informing his audience to embrace their identity. Therefore, Duberman does not want his audience to experience passing as a heterosexual male so his recall leans heavily towards advocating for self-awareness and expression. He wants his audience to fully embrace their sexuality and rebukes those who deny the possibility of open homosexuality. Duberman does challenge the normative structure and attempts to alter heteronormativity simply by relating his experiences as a homosexual male and attacking the medical establishment whose narrative treats homosexuality as a disease. Duberman's personal experiences with his therapist reiterate the control of the medical field and the pathology of homosexuality.

The application of the intersectional passing model to Kurek and Duberman's memoirs about sexual passing illustrates mark differences between their experiences. Kurek is a straight man attempting to pass as a gay man for a year. The data collected from Kurek's memoir is

⁵¹⁰ Wayne H. Brekhus, *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity* (Illinois: UP of Chicago, 2003), 53.

rather frustrating because while some of the steps give insight into how sexually passing as a homosexual offer insight into the construction of the normative structure, Kurek's creation of a homosexual narrative is rather limited due to the overwhelming influence of the heteronormativity. Many of the steps in the intersectional passing model to Kurek's memoir offer superficial data especially in regards to his aesthetic emulation, interpretation, and recall sections.

Kurek's usage of stereotypical homosexuals as a model for behavioral modifications negates the individuality of the men and women he observes. Each step of the model illustrates how Kurek attempts to modify his sexuality in order to pass, but his experiment seems limited to certain spaces and places. While these areas are in fact spaces for passing, as evident in Duberman's memoir, Kurek remarks upon the spaces he invades at the beginning of his experiment as overly flamboyant and rife with overly sexed males on the hunt. However, Kurek's description of this space negates the similarities between gay clubs and straight clubs where most of the men and women are actively searching for a partner. Why does Kurek only associate overly sexual individuals to gay clubs? His characterization of this space reiterates the societal narrative, and the medical pathology, of the homosexual predator. Even while engage in his sexual passing, Kurek still views these spaces as threatening and enlists a gay man as a sexual proxy, if you will. This sexual proxy's role is to halt any of the other patrons in the gay space from illustrating and physical forms of sexual attraction towards Kurek. Kurek forms a physical barrier between him and the other men at the bar, but he also utilizes them to create a superficial gay persona for himself to emulate throughout the memoir.

Kurek's aesthetic emulation involves a minimal amount of alteration and while this arguably could connect to the private nature of sexual passing, the data collected illustrate how

Kurek merely mimics how heteronormative society views homosexuals. Kurek's behavior alters only in the areas of interaction with other men because he is instructed that gay men flirt obsessively with other men. This particular alteration merely conforms to widely held notions of homosexual behavior; however, Kurek argues that he is instructed to act in this way by his gay boyfriend. Again, one is left to wonder if his gay boyfriend is indeed instructing him to merely reflect societal notions of homosexuality or if Kurek is merely creating his own narrative of homosexual behavior.

Kurek's recall merely reiterates that he is only taking on the "label" of a homosexual in order to experience what it means to be a gay man for the sake of his Christian audience. Kurek's sexual passing is simply an experiment to alter his Christian ideology about homosexuals and his recall of sexual passing merely reiterates many of the platitudes that Christians follow. Kurek's memoir clearly leans towards illustrating to his Christian audience how they should dig deeper into Christ's teachings and judge a man, or woman, based on character and not sexuality. This notion is ideal, but his memoir does not delve deeply into the rejection of a society as a whole and instead focuses solely within his social circle. Kurek's recall tries to explain how his Christian brothers and sisters should treat homosexuals but this message comes from his rather safe haven of heteronormativity. He does become more aware of his treatment of homosexuals; however, the narrative he constructs creates a picture of homosexual men based upon stereotypical characteristics thereby marginalizing these men to mere caricatures of homosexuality.

Duberman's memoir, on the other hand, illustrates the destructive nature of heteronormativity and how the author attempts to alter the normative structure. The application of the intersectional passing model to Duberman's memoir elucidates the importance of space

and place in passing, interpretation, and recall. Duberman's memoir also shows some weak spots in the intersectional passing model especially in regards to aesthetic emulation, and recall.

Duberman's memoir explores his sexuality while at the same time trying to maintain a heterosexual public lifestyle. The demarcation between public and private illustrate similar trends in passing narratives and Duberman explores these two spaces when he goes to the city to engage in sexual relationships with men and goes home to maintain his heterosexuality. Duberman's heterosexuality is validated by his adolescent and adult relationships and because those individuals around him reinforce heteronormativity he engages in sexual passing at a very young age. The spaces, and places, Duberman creates where he can explore his homosexuality are far away from his everyday life as a Professor at an Ivy League University. Duberman learns quite early on that his work life and his private life could not cross over. The conscious division of space, and place, correlates with an overall aesthetic emulation because he does not necessarily alter his physicality to pass as a heterosexual male. Similar to Kurek, Duberman does not drastically alter his physical appearance to pass as a heterosexual man, but he does minor behavioral alterations which fit the normative structure for a heterosexual male. For example, he hosts a social function in his home and overly exerts his masculinity to contradict the gay bartender he hires to serve his guests. Duberman's display of hyper-masculinity is an over-exaggerated response to a potential disaster in a social setting but this incident also highlights how society views masculinity and appropriate responses to violence. Duberman's reaction to this encounter inspects the very idea of what constitutes a masculine response and why violence is associated with masculinity, or more specifically, heterosexuality.

Duberman's interpretation of his experience with sexual passing also deconstructs medicine and the pathology of homosexuality. Throughout Duberman's memoir he recounts his

experiences with numerous psychotherapists who ineffectively treat him because Duberman is fixated on conversion therapy. Duberman does indeed find a psychotherapist who recounts how he successfully converted numerous patients to heterosexuality, but these tales are not true. In fact, this particular therapist cites successful conversion as a homosexual man who marries a woman and no longer acts upon his same sex urges. However, when Duberman encounters this man and they discuss his success, the man confesses to still having sexual encounters with men thereby negating the therapist's definition of success. Duberman's therapeutic journey vilifies the medical establishment because these men only seek to reify heteronormativity and fault the individual for not conforming to sexual norms.

Duberman's recall section does attempt to alter the normative structure and when he ends his memoir he is on this journey. His recall begins rather close to the end of his memoir but once he accepts his homosexuality, and comes out of the closet, Duberman becomes an advocate for gay rights. He does recall how he slowly began to organize meetings with groups and he began to write articles about homosexuality along with several plays. However, Duberman's attempt to slowly enter this new community leads to issues with lesbians because he does not acknowledge their literary contributions or their influence in the fight for gay rights. This exclusion, he recounts, simply reifies the overly masculine inclusion of male achievements in the fight for gay rights and thereby Duberman accepts his homosexuality but still privileges himself over women. While he does exclude women in his quest to alter the normative structure, once Duberman finally comes out of the closet he does not hesitate to enlighten his straight colleagues on the need to violate norms.

Chapter 4

The Pilot and Fast Food: Class Passing

The fourth chapter will analyze Frank Abagnale's (1980) memoir *Catch Me If You Can* and Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001) *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America*. Abagnale's memoir delves into the various personas he acquires in the course of his fraudulent activities and Ehrenreich's memoir explores her experiment with class identity as she navigates multiple minimum wage positions. Both of these memoirs explore class passing and add onto the existing narrative of passing. My overall goal in this chapter is to apply the intersectional passing model and also explore the nuances involved with class passing. As with the previous chapters, passing is illustrated through an intersectional lens and navigates how the passer's decision to pass is influenced by the normative structure, as well as the other various elements of the intersectional passing model. Class passing will illustrate how the passer navigates lines of social and economic distinction to formulate his or her understanding of class. Class passing is an integration of the previous chapters; meaning class, gender, and sexuality all play a significant role in whether or not the passer successfully achieves class passing. Class passing differentiates quite significantly from gender, sexuality and even racial passing because the stakes of class passing do not involve the fear of death or physical destruction.

Gender, sexuality and racial passers always consider the ramifications of their passing in regards to personal and social consequences. These ramifications include personal violence against the passer that oftentimes leads to their death. Brandon Teena's 1993 case, where Teena Brandon was passing as a man in rural Lincoln, Nebraska and when his secret was found out, he was raped and killed by two young men illustrates the physical dangers associated with female to

male gender passing.⁵¹¹ The risks men who pass as women, cross-dressing, face also include death and exposure. The risks of exposure are so overwhelming for these men that they “most always ‘pass’ in ordinary social situations” and “live in fear about the consequences of being involved in a serious accident during which the removal of clothing (or in some cases, the accessing of identification records indicating legal sex or gender status) would seriously impair their ability to be unambiguously recognized in accordance with their gender identity.”⁵¹²The risks of exposure also weigh heavily upon homosexual men and women who pass as straight in all areas of their public and private lives. Homosexual men often passed as straight men “leading a double life” which “allowed them to have job and status a queer would have denied while still participating in what they called ‘homosexual society’ or ‘the life.’”⁵¹³Gay men also formed their own communication system, or “codes,” to determine whether a man was gay or straight because only gay men recognized these signals.⁵¹⁴ The lengths gay men went to in order to evade detection from straight men, and heteronormative society, was to protect themselves physically, legally, and emotionally. The legal system strictly enforced laws in the 1920s and 1930s to curtail open displays of homosexuality in public places and thereby erasing any public spaces for homosexuals.⁵¹⁵ The Matthew Shepard 1976-1998 case illustrates the violence openly gay men endure. Shepard, after meeting two young men in a local Wyoming bar on October 6, 1998, was “tied to a fence” and brutally beaten to the point of unconsciousness only to be “found 18 hours

⁵¹¹ Lisa Duggan, “Crossing the Line: The Brandon Teena Case and the Social Psychology of Working-Class Resentment,” *New Labor Forum* 13, no. 3 (2004): 37-44, doi: 10.1080/10957960490500906

⁵¹² Carla A. Pfeiffer, “‘I Don’t Like Passing as a Straight Woman’: Queer Negotiations of Identity and Social Group Membership,” *American Journal of Sociology* 120, no. 1 (2014): 1-44, <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu.lib-proxy.radford.edu/>

⁵¹³ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994): 7.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*, 187.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid*, 356-357.

later by a mountain biker.”⁵¹⁶The imminent threat of death is always present for those men and women who pass for straight but even the open display of homosexuality also illustrates a culture of violence. Therefore, many men and women who pass as straight do so to avoid a homophobic constructed society. The many racial passing narratives previously discussed illustrate the ongoing struggle to hide their passing. Fear of exposure and the threat of death are all too real if their passing is ever discovered from their new social groups. Indeed, black men and women do not talk to known passers and they do not reveal the passer’s secret to anyone.

Class passing illustrates a clear departure from the serious ramifications of gender, sexuality and racial passing because a class passer does not usually encounter death. In fact, class passers passing for wealthy are trying to increase their lifespan by passing for wealthy and gain access to previously denied social institutions. bell hooks’ book, (2000) *Where We Stand: Class Matters* elucidates the disparity between wealthy and poor classes in the United States but also explores her own experiences with class growing up as a young girl and the lessons her mother taught her about behavior befitting a young woman. Her mother,

was obsessed with teaching us how to do things right, teaching us manners and bourgeois decorum. Yet she had not been around enough middle-class black people to know what to do. She fashioned a middle-class sensibility by watching television, reading magazines, or looking at the ways of the white folks she cleaned houses for now and then.⁵¹⁷

The reliance upon media to instruct hooks’ mother on how to educate her children on social niceties of class and insure that hooks and her siblings would never illustrate a class status other than middle class is indicative of the importance of class, but also on the performative nature of

⁵¹⁶ Jennifer Peterson, *Murder, the Media, and the Politics of Public Feelings : Remembering Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr.*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1. PDF e-book.

⁵¹⁷ bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 21. PDF e-book.

class passing. Contemporary media perpetuates the notion of a poor man passing as a wealthy man to procure a female partner in reality shows such as *The Bachelor* and *Joe the Millionaire*. These programs offer the illusion of ‘the simple man’ entering spaces previously demarcated because of his class status, but these programs also offer the fantastical idea that anyone, man or woman, can enter these restricted spaces as long as they can pass.⁵¹⁸

The contributions of media and the illusionary nature of class is also an aspect of hooks’ own childhood as she reflects on how she was instructed to emulate certain class indicators by her mother. The memory of her mother’s instruction of how to appropriately act in social situations, especially as an active deterrent for social class distinction among other people, is illustrative of the slight alterations associated with class passing. This memory also illustrates how those with a class advantage can recognize slight differences in others who don’t share the same class position. Indeed, hooks mentions how

No one knows better than the rich the truth of class difference. Protecting their class interests so that the poor and working class do not engage in any form of class warfare that would undermine or in any way destabilize their comfort, wealthy people often covertly spend more time thinking about class and money than any other group.⁵¹⁹

The wealthy classes’ fear of encroachment by the poor and the tightly wound hold they have on their wealth makes class passing risky, but not tantamount to death.

The application of the intersectional passing model also highlights how class itself is not a fixed understanding of social status in society. Abagnale and Ehrenreich’s memoirs illustrate how their class passing as middle to upper class and lower class is predicated on whether or not

⁵¹⁸ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Class-Passing: Social Mobility in Film and Popular Culture*, (Chicago, Southern Illinois University Press, 2005).

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid*, 74.

they can aesthetically emulate attributes associated with a certain social status. This aesthetic emulation is also contingent on reproducing the “acts, gestures, and desires” associated with class which also extends Butler’s definition of performativity.⁵²⁰ Butler describes gender and sexuality in performative terms, but if those social categories rely heavily upon the “fabrications” through a signifying on the body of absence and presence, then class passing is also a form of performativity.⁵²¹ Class passing illustrates the presence of physical manifestations of desires; the accumulation of wealth and the absence of poverty. Abagnale attempts to maintain his upper to middle class status through an accumulation of wealth but also through his physical façade while Ehrenreich attempts to pass as a lower class wage worker through her disavowal of her upper to middle class accoutrements. These two accounts of class passing invite numerous questions about the validity and fluidity of class status in their own lives, and also illustrate how it is possible to pass as rich or poor without societal limitations. An in-depth analysis and application of the intersectional passing model illustrates how class normativity makes the passer question his/her place in society and also opens up opportunities for the passer to explore his/her own sense of socio-economic status. Class passing deviates from the physical threats associated with race, gender and sexuality because the stakes are more in line with a loss of socio-economic status whereas the other forms of passing end in death or destruction. However, class passing does involve the threat of poverty which ultimately determines physical survival.

Note: Abagnale’s conception of class differs greatly from Ehrenreich’s because Abagnale’s memoir focuses on the maintenance of his socio-economic status; middle to upper class. In this sense, Abagnale does not pass from low class to upper class but merely maintains his social

⁵²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 173.

⁵²¹ *Ibid*, 173.

status and, in some cases, marginally moves to upper class in his own right. Another interesting point to mention is the very nature of Abagnale's memoir; he is a con-artist and therefore his class passing occurs with each job he attempts. These short passing personas illustrate a rather interesting element of passing because an individual does not necessarily need to encompass his/her passing persona for any length of time to successfully pass. Ehrenreich's memoir illustrates a top down passing; meaning Ehrenreich's passing negates her own middle to upper class status to focus on investigating how the lower class manage to stay afloat on minimum wage. The variance in both of these memoirs in regards to a definitive understanding of class merely highlights the complications involved with class passing.

Text Summaries/Normative Structure

Frank W. Abagnale, a white male, memoir (1980), *Catch Me If You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake*, recounts the adventures of a con artist and fraudulent check passer but also as a young man passing for upper class, wealthy pilot, lawyer, and doctor. Abagnale's memoir begins with him looking at himself in a mirror at the Windsor Hotel in Paris and seeing "a darkly handsome young airline pilot, smooth skinned, bull-shouldered and immaculately groomed," but Abagnale is not a pilot; he is just passing as one.⁵²² Robert Gandt's (1995) book *Skygods: The Fall of Pan Am* illustrates the excellence of Pan Am at the airline's height of success in the mid-1960's to its untimely demise in the mid- 20th century. Gandt recounts how Pan Am pilots distinguished themselves from any other pilots in the mid-1960s with "their walk, in the way they bantered among themselves, in the appreciative look they cast on the nearby jet airplanes, there was a cockiness. To a man, they walked with a discernible swagger."⁵²³ Pan Am was

⁵²² Frank W. Abagnale, *Catch Me in You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake* (New York: Broadway Books, 1980), 1.

⁵²³ Robert Gandt, *Skygods: The Fall of Pan Am* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995), 3.

considered “the world’s most glamorous airline” and “also the most snobbish” but newly minted pilots clamored to attain a pilot’s position at the prestigious airline.⁵²⁴ Abagnale’s association with Pan Am, and his status as a pilot for the airline, aligns with the reputation the airline garnered in the mid-1960s. The image of the pilot, and the deference he receives due to his position, prompts Abagnale to recall his childhood and young adulthood in Bronxville, New York.

Abagnale was born in 1948 and raised in Bronxville, New York by his father, Frank Abagnale Sr. and his mother Paulette Abagnale. His parents met, and married, during World War II in Oran when his father was serving in the army.⁵²⁵ He describes his early childhood as a happy one and goes so far as to describe the household’s socio-economic status when he states how his,

Dad opened his own business in New York City after his discharge from the army, a stationery store at Fortieth and Madison Avenue called Gramercy’s. He was very successful. We lived in a big, luxurious home and if we weren’t fabulously wealthy, we were certainly affluent. My brothers, my sister and I never wanted for anything during our early years.⁵²⁶

This particular picture that Abagnale describes of his home life infers that his family was upper middle class and also informs the audience where Abagnale’s notions of socio-economic stability originates. Joseph A. Kahl’s (1966) book *The American Class Structure* looks closely at class categories and explains how “Upper-middle” class groups included “the moderately successful business professional men and their families, but less affluent than the lower-uppers. Some

⁵²⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵²⁵ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 6.

⁵²⁶ Ibid, 6.

education and polish were necessary for membership, but lineage was unimportant.”⁵²⁷

Abagnale’s father’s ownership of a small business does offer a certain level of social status but his father’s financial stability is quite tenable. Indeed, Dennis Gilbert’s (2015) book *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality* illustrates how “the upper-middle class” even

though rich, they cannot be considered members of the capitalist class because their incomes are not largely generated by income-producing assets, but by professional fees, executive salaries, or small business profits highly dependent on their own day-to-day efforts. Like the working poor, they have jobs and depend on them.⁵²⁸

Abagnale’s family’s social status is wholly dependent upon the success of his father’s business endeavors and therefore places him within a very tenable socio-economic position. However, he does believe that his father’s success affords him certain luxuries but he never really emphasizes how hard his father has to work in order to retain their social status. Paul Fussell’s (1983) book *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* argues that “nobody knows for sure what the word *class* means,” but nonetheless he does include three distinct interpretations of the idea including “*status systems*,” “*party*,” “*status*,” and “*caste*.”⁵²⁹ The varying definitions for class status, and the meaning therein, are quite indicative of an issue with boundaries that continually present restrictions on who is, and who is not, considered within the framework of certain class designations. Vance Packard’s (1961) *The Status Seekers* presents an informative perspective on the meaning of class and the restrictive nature of such a system. He elucidates how “the people

⁵²⁷ Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 26. PDF e-book.

⁵²⁸ Dennis L. Gilbert, *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2015), 258. PDF e-book.

⁵²⁹ Paul Fussell, *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 24. PDF e-book.

of the United States have, and are refining, a national class structure with a fascinating variety of status systems within it. These status systems affect a number of intimate areas of our daily lives and have some surprising and preposterous ramifications.”⁵³⁰ Therefore, the United States class system is not simply a division of rich or poor, but a micro-system set up to confine rich and poor from every aspect of social interactions. Specifically, when Abagnale’s father also enjoys the fruits of his financial success with membership to an athletic club as well as his constant travels to indulge in salt-water fishing he is also embarking on activities which are designed to illustrate his status, publically. Abagnale’s father’s association with men who held positions of power and wealth; businessmen, and politicians also invokes a clear demarcation between rich and poor intimate relationships.⁵³¹ When Abagnale also states how he would spend time with his father “in some of New York’s finest saloons” and learned that businessmen “not only enjoy three-martini lunches, but they belt out a lot of boilermaker brunches and whack out scores of scotch and soda dinners,” he unwittingly illustrates the how upper-middle class men have designated social interactions which may, or may not, include business deals.⁵³² Oddly enough, the type of liquor Abagnale Sr., and his associates, drank over lunches or dinners are a marker of social class as well. Fussell catalogues various actions associated with social class and in regards to alcohol consumption he states, “there is hardly a richer single occasion for class revelation than the cocktail hour, since the choice of any drink, and the amount consumed, resonates with status meaning.”⁵³³ The notion that men of wealth only drank during the “cocktail” hour clearly separates them from the men and women of lower classes who tended to spend an inordinate amount of time drinking at the local bar. In addition to his business acquaintances, Abagnale’s

⁵³⁰ Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* (New York: Pocket Books, 1961), 3. PDF e-book.

⁵³¹ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 8.

⁵³² *Ibid*, 8.

⁵³³ Fussell, *Class: A Guide*, 97. PDF e-book.

father also befriended “truckers, cops, clerks, cabbies, and contractors” without prejudice to their social standing.⁵³⁴ Abagnale Sr.’s association with groups considered low wage workers is quite uncommon in the upper-middle class because “many people find that trying to socialize across class barriers can be a strain, because ingrained habits, outlooks, tastes, and interest, especially if they are people of low curiosity, typically differ by class.”⁵³⁵ Therefore, Abagnale Sr.’s interaction with these men from a lower social class group indicates his utter disregard for social conventions and illustrates how he does not judge a man based on his class status.

Abagnale’s description of how his life was stable and that he and his siblings never wanted for any physical want or need informs the audience of where he and his family fit within socio-economic class structures in the early to mid-1950s. However, his ideal placement within the normative structure is ruptured when his mother, Paulette Abagnale, and father separate abruptly in 1960 thereby turning their once ideal home into a one parent household. His mother’s abrupt departure is attributed to her dissatisfaction in her marriage and once she leaves her husband she enrolls “in a Bronx dental college and started training to be a dental technician.”⁵³⁶ This is the last mention Abagnale makes about his mother in any great detail in his memoir.

Once Abagnale’s mother divorces his father in 1962 when he is fourteen years old, he opts to live with his father in Bronxville, New York because as he puts it, “Dad needed one of us.”⁵³⁷ Abagnale enjoys life with his father as he is free to do anything he wants and he begins “running with some loose-end kids from the neighborhood.”⁵³⁸ However, his association with the neighborhood kids also illustrates his separation from his peers and childish endeavors. He

⁵³⁴ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 9.

⁵³⁵ Fussell, *Class: A Guide*, 149-150. PDF e-book.

⁵³⁶ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 7.

⁵³⁷ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 8.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*, 9.

remarks upon young men his age and states, “what bothered me most was their lack of style. I learned early that class is universally admired. Almost any fault, sin or crime is considered more leniently if there’s a touch of class involved.”⁵³⁹ Abagnale’s reflection upon the behavior of the young men he associated with revolve around both their mannerism and their lack of social standing because with class comes an elevated social position. Abagnale associates class with good manners, dress, and for him these ideas encompass wealth and status. Packard cites how “historically, clothing has been one of the most convenient, and visibly, vehicles known for drawing class distinctions” and one must “be careful not to associate with the wrong clan of people.”⁵⁴⁰ Abagnale’s assertion that these young men do not possess any class does not refer to their socio-economic status but highlights the way these young men present themselves, socially. Fussell suggests that “One thing to get clear at the outset is this: it’s not riches alone that defines these classes....Style and taste and awareness are as important as money.”⁵⁴¹ Abagnale’s assessment in the manner in which he should conduct himself is indicative of his upbringing but he also upholds these criteria as the true markers of social status. Ironically, Abagnale’s discussion of class is coupled with his arrest for stealing a car and how the other boys attempting to steal the car had no finesse.⁵⁴² Abagnale is arrested, but his father bails him out and also expunges his record thereby illustrating the disparity between the boys.⁵⁴³ Lewis H. Lapham’s (1988) book *Money and Class in America: Notes and Observations on Our Civil Religion* reflects on the attitudes of the wealthy in relation to crime and feelings of entitlement. He states,

The rich find few reasons for not taking what they believe is owned them by right of their wealth. It is too easy to rig the stock price or buy the girl. Wealth

⁵³⁹ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 10.

⁵⁴⁰ Packard, *The Status Seekers*, 117, 156. PDF e-book.

⁵⁴¹ Fussell, *Class: A Guide*, 27.

⁵⁴² Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 10.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*, 10.

translates so readily into the pleasures of despotism that the rich come to imagine that they can ignore the civil as well as the moral law.⁵⁴⁴

Abagnale Sr.'s social status, and political contacts, imbues him with the ability to erase his son's transgressions and distance him from the other young men both socially and legally. Abagnale's brush with the law is also indicative of how the criminal justice system favors upper-middle class white men. However, Abagnale learns his lesson from his brush with the law and disassociates from these young men to get "a part-time job as a shipping clerk in a Bronxville warehouse."⁵⁴⁵ Of course, once his father gives him a car his attitude toward lawful behavior shifts.

Abagnale illustrates the normative structure when he remarks upon how his father gives him a Ford and a Mobil gas card in 1963 while still living in Bronxville, New York. This particular event is coupled with Abagnale's rant on how he never has enough money to buy gas and charm the ladies, so he begins to rationalize his behavior. He states,

The arrangement worked fine the first month. The Mobil bill came in and I bought a money order for the amount and sent it to the oil firm. But the payments left me strapped and once again I found myself hampered in my constant quest for girls. I began to feel frustrated. After all, the pursuit of happiness was an inalienable American privilege, wasn't it? I felt I was being deprived of a constitutional right.⁵⁴⁶

Abagnale's notion that he "deserves" to pursue his own self-interests and couches those interests upon the constitutionality of pursuing happiness reflects his class privilege. Abagnale believes his pursuit of women is a right, but this particular activity seems indicative of his understanding of his class status. More specifically, Abagnale discounts the idea of employment to fund his

⁵⁴⁴ Lewis H. Lapham, *Money and Class in America: Notes and Observations on Our Civil Religion* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 93. PDF e-book.

⁵⁴⁵ Abagnale, *Catch Me*, 10.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

pursuit of women, although he already works, but instead decides to pull a con using the Mobil card his father provides him to purchase gas. One afternoon, Abagnale stops at a service station that he frequents and propositions the attendant to get cash. He states, “I’ll buy a set of those tires and charge them on this card. Only I don’t take the tires. You give me \$100 instead.”⁵⁴⁷ The total cost of the tires would cost \$160 dollars, so Abagnale’s deal insures that the gas station attendant will profit from the deal as well. This deal marks the beginning of Abagnale’s con schemes because he gradually escalates the monetary value and intricacies involved in successfully garnering money from his unsuspecting marks. Of course, Abagnale is not truly successful in his Mobil scheme because the bill for the gas card goes to his father and the Mobil investigator visits their home to ascertain why his father has not paid the outstanding bill. The repercussions for Abagnale include a stay at “a C.C. private school for problem boys in Port Chester, New York.”⁵⁴⁸ Abagnale’s stay at the school resembles a luxury get away opposed to his previous living situation with his Dad.

Abagnale’s voracious need for money only escalates after his father loses his business in 1963. He laments how his father, “was really wiped out. He was forced to sell the house and his two big Cadillacs and everything else he had of material value. In the space of a few months, Dad went from living like a millionaire to living like a postal clerk.”⁵⁴⁹ Abagnale seems particularly distressed over his father’s fall from financial security, but his father tries to instill in him the importance of people over material possessions; a lesson that Abagnale does not take to heart. His father states, ““It’s not what a man has but what a man is that’s important.”⁵⁵⁰

Abagnale’s father’s loss of social status unnerves him and “every time Dad put on his postal

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, 18.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, 19.

clerk's uniform and drove off to work in his old car, I'd feel depressed. I couldn't forget how he used to wear Louis Roth suits and drive big expensive cars."⁵⁵¹ Abagnale is so distressed over his father's deprivation of social status that he runs away to New York in 1964.

Abagnale's journey to New York in 1964⁵⁵² at the age of sixteen highlights other elements of the normative structure that he did not encounter while he was still living with his father. Abagnale quickly realizes that a young man working in the city "wasn't worth a man's wages" so he alters his birth date from 1948 to 1938 age to gain more monetary compensation for his labor.⁵⁵³ Abagnale's mention of age alteration also highlights an aspect of the normative structure previously unmentioned; age.⁵⁵⁴ Abagnale is also told that it is not only his age which discounts him as an ideal job applicant but his lack of a college education and "some prospective employers bluntly told me that it wasn't age that determined a worker's salary, but education. The more education he had, the more he was paid."⁵⁵⁵ This particular statement is indicative of the normative structure in regards to socio-economic status because an individual who acquires a certain level of education, higher education, can attain financial stability. Abagnale recognizes the significance of education and even states, "I ruefully concluded that a high school dropout was like a three-legged wolf in the wilderness. He might survive, but he'd survive on less."⁵⁵⁶ Abagnale is not satisfied with merely surviving and begins to pass phony checks to supplement

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, 21.

⁵⁵² This is last definitive date Abagnale provides in his memoir and the only other dates mentioned are in the afterword indicating that in April 1971, he appeared before a federal judge. Ibid, 280-281.

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁵⁴ Age passing is not a topic I cover in this dissertation, but I did feel the need to mention how important this element is within the passing phenomena.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, 24.

his meager income. Once Abagnale begins to pass phony checks, he quits his job because he realizes he can earn more and his “standard of living improved remarkably.”⁵⁵⁷

Abagnale quickly recognizes his fraudulent skills at forging phony checks, but he also realizes that he needs a more secure cover to continue his lucrative means of financial security and he sees an opportunity when he notices a flight crew exited a prestigious hotel. Abagnale sees the airline pilot and his shiny uniform as a means to fulfill his financial security because with an airline pilot’s uniform “I could walk into any hotel, bank or business in the country and cash a check. Airline pilots are men to be admired and respected. Men to be trusted. Men of means.”⁵⁵⁸ Abagnale’s obvious respect and admiration of these men is illustrative of not only the uniform the pilots wear but also the prestige of the profession. His response to these men is both reflective of a young boy’s fascination with the idea of flight, but also with the obvious skill involved in the profession. Of course, Abagnale views this profession as a means to achieve his financial freedom or more pointedly his means to pass forged checks without repercussion and therein lays the element of the normative structure. An individual who garners respect simply due to his profession, or in this case his uniform, highlights the importance of such physical social identifications. This scenario implies that any man, as long as he acquires the socially acceptable evidence of his socio-economic status, will effortlessly enter any upper class establishment and garner immediate respect and recognition of his abilities.

Another element of the normative structure occurs when Abagnale takes a break from passing phony checks and decides to lay low for awhile in Atlanta. While there, he takes an interest in a singles apartment complex named The River Bend, located on the outskirts of

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, 25.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid, 27.

Atlanta, because of the wide selection of attractive women living there but this particular apartment complex is also “expensive and selective.”⁵⁵⁹ Abagnale is required to fill out a lengthy application for the apartment complex and expounds on the amenities offered including “a sprawling, spa-like cluster of apartment units boasting a golf course, an Olympic-sized pool, saunas, tennis courts, a gymnasium, game rooms and its own club.”⁵⁶⁰ These accommodations are reflective of a particular resident who can easily afford such luxuries but these apartments also illustrate a certain socio-economic expectation in the residents who live there, or more specifically the people who live in this complex adhere to the normative structure; white, upper class, and professional. Abagnale does not identify himself as a pilot on his application but instead submits that he is a pediatrician, which gains him an immediate apartment. He also gives the assistant manager \$2400 in cash when he submits his application which is also indicative of the normative structure as it seems the more money you have the more likely you will receive certain allowances that don’t adhere to policies applicable to the rest of society. Abagnale’s chosen profession also seems to lend him a jump in his social status and he is invited to numerous social engagements while he resides at The River Bend apartment complex. However, Abagnale’s sojourn as a physician lasts longer than he intended and he cuts his losses there after a harrowing experience in the hospital. Once Abagnale decides to leave Atlanta behind he rekindles a relationship with a woman named Diane, who resides in another southern state not mentioned in the memoir, and once again changes his profession from airline pilot to lawyer.

Abagnale takes on the identity of an attorney while visiting Diane, a female acquaintance, but he makes a point of stating that the legal profession is not as lucrative as an airline pilot.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, 77.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, 76.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 99.

Even though his newfound profession is not as financially rewarding as his sojourn as an airline pilot, Abagnale does forge his degree from Harvard University and capitalizes on his elite social status. Many of his fellow attorney's take umbrage over Abagnale's place in the law firm and one attorney in particular, Phillip Rigby, highlights his status as "the haughty scion of an old and established local family."⁵⁶² Abagnale's characterization of Rigby merely reifies the normative structure and highlights the disparity between socio-economic statuses because he believes that his family's old money and long held status within the community gives Rigby superior placement within the legal hierarchy. However, another element of the normative structure is how Abagnale capitalizes on his newfound social status. He states how he fosters "the impression that I was from a wealthy New York family without making any such direct claim. I lived in a swank apartment overlooking a lake, drove a leased Jaguar and accumulated a wardrobe worthy of a British duke."⁵⁶³ Abagnale monopolizes on the socio-economic structure when he alters his physical appearance to mimic what he perceives to embody the upper class.

Abagnale's pursuit of women also reifies the normative structure in regards to both gender and class. More specifically, one particular encounter with a woman named Rosalie highlights preferable feminine qualities adherent to the normative structure. Abagnale comments on Rosalie's preferable qualities when he states,

She seemed the epitome of the kind of woman most young bachelors [sic] dream of finding for a wife: she was loyal, clean-cut, intelligent, even-tempered, considerate, lovely and she didn't smoke or drink. She was all apple pie, American flag, mom and sis and spring all rolled up in a Girl Scout sash.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² Ibid, 105.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 105-106.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid, 134.

Abagnale's description of Rosalie demonstrates how the normative structure dictates socially acceptable feminine qualities but also illustrates how Abagnale believes Rosalie is more attractive because she exhibits these qualities. Rosalie's role in society is configured around those characteristics which conform to the normative structure or more specifically those characteristics which confine her to the role society finds acceptable for her; wife. However, Abagnale's characterization of women throughout his memoir does not merely confine them to the role of wife but also as adornments befitting his social status. He does regale upon the independence of most of the women he meets but he also treats them as commodities to possess. After all, most of Abagnale's memoir discusses his constant pursuit of attractive women hence his need to pass and accumulate as much wealth as necessary to achieve this goal.

Abagnale's accumulation of wealth is also evident in his ability to alter his location and the space he occupies which is another indication of the normative structure. More specifically, Abagnale's ability to simply uproot himself and change his location is the result of his class status. A poor man, or woman, is stagnate because his/her class does not afford him the luxury of simply uprooted his/her life to stake a claim in another location. Abagnale's con is reliant upon his ability to move from location to location and upon his class status, but more importantly, Abagnale chooses locations where the wealthy establish their separation from lower class individuals. More pointedly, these locations cater to wealthy individuals thereby firmly establishing the differentiations between classes. For example, Abagnale travels to Acapulco and states, "it teemed with beautiful people, most of them rich, famous, or on the make for something or other, sometimes all three."⁵⁶⁵ This particular location affords Abagnale certain privileges such as meeting a wealthy woman who agrees to help him in securing a United States passport.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 157.

This particular woman “has clout from the Presidential Palace in Mexico City to Washington D.C., the White House even” and she thereby illustrates the particular privileges one can accrue from simple association with the right people.⁵⁶⁶ Abagnale encounters these people wherever he goes, but his social class enables him to get within reach of these individuals. His ability to move seamlessly from one location to another without any financial restraints illustrates how he reifies the socio-economic structure but also how he highlights the very flaws within that structure as a con man playing the system.

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America

Barbara Ehrenreich’s, a white woman, 2001 memoir *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* begins with a discussion she has with Lewis Lapham, the editor of *Harper’s*, in 1998 Key West, Florida over lunch concerning poverty and the question of whether or not an individual can function on minimum wage. Ehrenreich’s conversation with Lapham reveals her socio-economic status and her less than enthusiastic response to the idea of writing a piece about low wage workers. She states,

Lewis Lapham, the editor of *Harper’s*, had taken me out for a \$30 lunch at some understated French country-style place to discuss future articles I might write for his magazine. I had the salmon and field greens, I think, and was pitching him some ideas having to do with pop culture when the conversation drifted to one of my more familiar themes—poverty. How does anyone live on the wages available to the unskilled? How, in particular, we wondered, were the roughly four million women about to be booted into the labor market by welfare reform going to make it on \$6 or \$7 an hour? Then I said something that I have since had many opportunities to regret: ‘Someone ought to do the old-fashioned kind of journalism—you know, go out there and try it for themselves.’ I meant someone much younger than myself, some hungry neophyte journalist with time on her hands.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, 158.

⁵⁶⁷ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By In America* (New York: Picador, 2001), 1-2.

Ehrenreich's conversation with Lapham, and her location in Key West, Florida establishes her initial placement within the socio-economic structure as an upper middle class woman who can afford a high priced meal at a nice restaurant, but this conversation also highlights her privilege as a white, educated woman of a certain age whose curiosity about income disparity does not necessarily include her as a candidate for an experiment in low-wage employment. Eric Wanner's (2005) chapter "A Self-Perpetuating Trend?" elucidates how Americans are particularly uncomfortable when questions of equality and inequality are raised in public discourse. He states, "We are, after all, a nation founded on the premise that 'all men are created equal,' and most Americans see themselves as part of a vast middle class that encompasses the greater part of society."⁵⁶⁸ Ehrenreich is not inferring that there is no disparity in wealth but she is stating that her educational background, her middle class status and her age 57 in 1998 should exclude her from embarking on public discourse around income inequality. Gregory Mantsios's (2006) chapter "Class in America" discusses how the subject of class, specifically the poor, in America is not discussed when he states, "People in the United States don't like to talk about class. Or so it would seem. We don't speak about class privileges, or class oppression, or the class nature of society," but "it is acceptable in the United States to talk about 'the middle class.' Interestingly enough, such references appear to be acceptable precisely because they mute class differences."⁵⁶⁹ Ehrenreich reticence in embarking on this experiment into low-wage workers, and immersing herself in a class long forgotten in public discourse, is indeed indicative of the apathy towards poor people but also an indication of her class status. Michael Zweig's (2000)

⁵⁶⁸ Eric Wanner, "A Self-Perpetuating Trend?," in *Inequality Matters: The Growing Economic Divide in America and Its Poisonous Consequences 2005*, ed. James Lardner and David A. Smith (New York: New Press, 2005), 203. PDF e-book.

⁵⁶⁹ Gregory Mantsios, "Class in America," in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study 2007*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007), 182-183. PDF e-book.

book *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* further explores the idea of class when he states, "Class is about the power some people have over the lives of others, and the powerlessness most people experience as a result."⁵⁷⁰ Ehrenreich's middle class status, and her education, allows her a certain level of power over low-wage workers because she can literally choose not to mire herself in the issues surrounding low-wage workers.

Ehrenreich further emphasizes her reluctance to engage in an experiment passing as a low-wage worker by stating, "the last time anyone had urged me to forsake my normal life for a run-of-the-mill low-paid job had been in the seventies, when dozens, perhaps hundreds, of sixties radicals started going into the factories to 'proletarianize' themselves and organize the working class in the process. Not this girl."⁵⁷¹ Lane Windham's (2017) book *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* explores the importance of young men, women, and the working class in implementing legislative gains in worker's conditions.⁵⁷² However, Ehrenreich never definitively states that she was approached to join a union but the term 'proletarianize' refers to Karl Marx's theory of social class and does indeed give the impression that she was approached to organize a union. Marx uses the term 'proletariat' to indicate the working classes, who have no power over their production, or labor, but merely work to provide for the bourgeoisie.⁵⁷³ Therefore, Ehrenreich's lack of enthusiasm to assist the working class even when she was a young working class woman herself is rather strange and illustrative of her disconnect from her co-workers. She does qualify her disinterest in

⁵⁷⁰ Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 11. PDF e-book.

⁵⁷¹ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 2.

⁵⁷² Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017). PDF e-book.

⁵⁷³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1904). PDF e-book.

socio-economic reform when she mentions her familial background especially in regards to her father who “had been a copper miner” because to her, her current status “sitting at a desk all day was not only a privilege but a duty: something I owed to all those people in my life, living and dead, who’d had so much more to say than anyone ever got to hear.”⁵⁷⁴ Therefore, Ehrenreich believes that her current socio-economic status is a position that illustrates how far she has risen from her poor, working class background and also how her position is a reflection of all the hard work her family did to get her there and should be honored accordingly.

Ehrenreich hesitates to engage in this proposed experiment because as she points out, “if the question was whether a single mother leaving welfare could survive without government assistance in the form of food stamps, Medicaid, and housing and child care subsidies, the answer was well known before I ever left the comforts of home”; therefore her experiment would simply validate the statistics already available to her in 1998.⁵⁷⁵ The success rate for previous welfare recipients achieving a “living wage” merely from a low wage job “were about 97 to 1” and given these numbers Ehrenreich believes her experiment will merely illustrate the same results and therefore hesitates to engage herself in such a futile endeavor.⁵⁷⁶ Gwendolyn Mink’s (1998) book *Welfare’s End* maps the purpose and demise of welfare. She states how the implementation of welfare “was to relieve poor single mothers of the necessity of wage-earning so that they might engage in the full-time care of their children. Over the years, welfare came to be viewed less as an alternative to wages than as a safety net for mothers when wages were not available to them.”⁵⁷⁷ The purpose of welfare programs was indeed to aid poor mothers and to ensure adequate care for their children; however, with welfare reform those ideals were

⁵⁷⁴ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 2.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

⁵⁷⁷ Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare’s End* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1. PDF e-book.

abandoned in favor of punishing both parties. In fact, “the broad support for disciplinary welfare reform is rooted in the view that mothers’ poverty flows from moral failing.”⁵⁷⁸ The connection between morality and poverty is not only rooted in the ideals that a mothers’ promiscuity is to blame for her failing to find employment but also in the idea that the poor indeed have ample opportunity to seek, and find, adequate employment. Gus Hall’s (1987) book *Working Class USA: The Power and the Movement* describes how employment opportunities for women coming off welfare are simply not economically viable. He argues how

The new policies of forcing the unemployed off the welfare rolls into employment on a starvation level creates critical problems, especially for mothers who, in many families, are the only breadwinners. In the industrial centers, mothers who are on the rolls for Aid to Families with Dependent Children—and especially Black mothers—are forced to take some of the worst, dirtiest and lowest-paid jobs in industry. These are jobs workers accept only in an emergency.⁵⁷⁹

Ehrenreich’s premises that the effects of welfare reform on women is already available in the statistical information she can access at anytime minimizes the overall issue and shows a egregious level of disconnect. Welfare women and their families are more than merely statistically data and their experiences with low-wage employment state a larger issue in America concerning poverty and employment. Zweig comments further on welfare recipients and employment when he states, “people unfamiliar with the daily life imposed by poverty have a hard time understanding the life circumstances that often make ‘the culture of poverty’ a reasonable set of behaviors.”⁵⁸⁰ Therefore, Ehrenreich’s knowledge of the current statistics

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁷⁹ Gus Hall, *Working Class USA: The Power and the Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 284. PDF e-book.

⁵⁸⁰ Zweig, *The Working Class*, 90.

regarding welfare reform and a how these women cannot live on minimum wage does not truly capture the experiences of poverty.

Ehrenreich does eventually decide to begin her experiment mostly because her scientific background, Ph.D. in biology from Rockefeller University, reinforces the idea that data is obtained in the field and she cannot stay isolated at her desk to achieve verifiable results. As a scientist, she establishes rules for herself to ensure her experiment does not deviate from the parameters and corrupt her data. Her first rule implicitly states that she cannot use “any skills derived from my education or usual work”; her second rule insures that she take “the highest-paying job that was offered”; and her third rule states that she “had to take the cheapest accommodations.”⁵⁸¹ All of Ehrenreich’s rules deter from her current socio-economic status and also highlight the disparities between class statuses. More specifically, Ehrenreich simply demotes herself from her current status in order to pass effectively as a low wage worker, but these demotions also highlight certain stereotypes associated with low wage workers. Ehrenreich’s exclusion of her prior education and skill set from her experiment implies that low wage workers do not need any level of education or acquired skill set, but her rule also presupposes that she will easily pass as a low wage worker by simply removing her educational background. Paul C. Gorski’s (2015) chapter “Perceiving the Problem of Poverty and Schooling in the United States: Deconstructing the Class Stereotypes That Mis-Shape Education Practice and Policy” illustrates how perceptions about education and low-wage workers are misguided by the presumption that these individuals do not hold education in high regard. In fact, Gorski states that when people are questioned about their perceptions of poor people and the stereotypes of poor people they “... identify structural barriers as responsible for a portion or even most

⁵⁸¹ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 4.

poverty, they almost always qualify their answers with a litany of stereotypes: Poor people are lazy. They don't care about education. They are addicted to the welfare system."⁵⁸² Ehrenreich merely reifies the stereotypes of low-wage workers by inferring that none of these women have an education and that the passing will be achieved in the low-wage job market by simply removing her educational credentials. Margaret L. Anderson and Howard F. Taylor's (2008) book *Sociology: Understanding a Diverse Society*, Heather E. Bullock's (2004) chapter "Classism" in *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, and Policy*, and Charlotte Ryan's (2006) chapter "It Takes a Movement to Raise an Issue" in Stephen J. Pfohl's *Culture, Power and History: Studies in Critical Sociology* all address the issue of stereotyping the working class in various fields of study and also discuss how the media promotes these stereotypes as well.

Not only does Ehrenreich create rules for her experiment that illustrate the normative structure, but she also give herself "reassuring limits" which include items such as a car, an ATM card, food, and the assurance that she would end the experiment if she found herself homeless.⁵⁸³ Ehrenreich's limits, before she has even entered the experiment, shine light on her socio-economic status and in some ways deters from the overall goal of the experiment. Does a low wage worker always have access to a car? Can a low wage worker always rely on an ATM card with accessible funds? Does a low wage worker always have food? Is a low wage worker worried about the possibility of impending homelessness? Ehrenreich's position within the normative structure is still retained throughout the experiment especially if she has access to

⁵⁸² Paul C. Gorski, "Perceiving the Problem of Poverty and Schooling in the United States: Deconstructing the Class Stereotypes That Mis-Shape Education Practice and Policy," in *Poverty, Class and Schooling: Global Perspectives on Economic Justice and Educational Equity 2015*, ed. Elinor L. Brown, Paul C. Gorski, and Gabriella Lazaridis (North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2015), 71. PDF e-book.

⁵⁸³ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 5.

available funds not associated with her low wage position. She qualifies her need for a car when she states that “a story about waiting for buses would not be very interesting to read,” but waiting for public transportation would certainly not deflect from her overall goal of passing as a low wage worker.⁵⁸⁴ In fact, a low wage worker would rely heavily on public transportation to off-set any cost associated with owning a vehicle. [low wage workers and transportation] As far as her living accommodations and the qualification that if she found herself unable to pay her rent she “would simply declare the project at an end” because of the possibility that she would spend time in a shelter “or sleeping in a car,” Ehrenreich denies the real conditions most low wage workers deal with on a daily basis.⁵⁸⁵ Also, the notion that if her next meal was ever in question she would simply cheat and use her ATM card to buy food limits the reality of her position. All of the limits Ehrenreich gives herself for this experiment void the real experience of living as a low wage worker, but these limits also place her within a set position within the normative structure that denounces any and all hardships associated with the lower class. More specifically, Ehrenreich disassociates herself from truly passing as a low wage worker and steadfastly retains her privilege throughout her experiment.

Ehrenreich does not deny that she has certain advantages in her current socio-economic status and these advantages reinforce the normative structure. For example, Ehrenreich’s position as a white, English speaking woman determines not only her location but also the positions she applies for during her experiment. Ehrenreich states, “I ruled out places like New York and L.A., for example, where the working class consists mainly of people of color and a white woman with unaccented English seeking entry-level jobs might only look desperate or weird.”⁵⁸⁶ Vanessa H.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, 7.

May's (2011) book *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940*, Premilla Nadasen's (2015) book *Household Workers Unite: the Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement*, and Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei's (1996) book *Race, Gender and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* all illustrate the progression of domestic workers starting with African American slaves, to Irish and European immigrants in New York, and then finally to Latinas, and Asian workers all in middle to upper class homes. Ehrenreich's conclusion that women seeking employment in these locations are women of color with little to no English speaking skills denotes a stereotypical narrative about low wage workers. More specifically, Ehrenreich makes it a point to illustrate how a white woman seeking employment in these locations/spaces goes against the normative structure. A white woman, apparently, should not engage in the physical labor of housekeeping because society deems such endeavors for white woman an oddity whereas a woman of color engaging in the same labor is simply the norm in a society demarcated by race and class. However, Ehrenreich's conclusion about women of color and their occupational niches only encompasses certain locations/spaces because while she moves around several times during the course of her experiment, her employment does include a brief sojourn as a maid.

Ehrenreich begins her experiment in 1998 passing as a low wage worker in Key West, Florida "mostly out of laziness" and finds the transition from upper middle-class to working class rather difficult because "it's not easy to go from being a consumer, thoughtlessly throwing money around in exchange for groceries and movies and gas, to being a worker in the very same

place.”⁵⁸⁷ Ehrenreich’s recognition of her socio-economic status only begins when she has to alter her position in society and pass as a low wage worker. She laments the casual way she flaunts her money and her easy access to simple luxuries when she has to become a bit more aware of how she spends her money as a low wage worker. Ehrenreich must abandon the prior deference she is accustomed to and tolerate rhetoric associated with a woman who “never got through college” and who now is addressed as “ ‘baby,’ ‘honey,’ ‘blondie,’ and, most commonly, ‘girl.’”⁵⁸⁸ These terms eliminate any individuality but also illustrate how a lower socio-economic status regales female wage workers to an almost infantile state. However, Ehrenreich’s mention of these terms is a bit out of context since at this point in her memoir she has not acquired a low wage paying position and instead is simply recounting how her position as a professional woman is downgraded to gender specific stereotypes. Ehrenreich must first find suitable living arrangements, but even this endeavor is fraught with issues. First, Ehrenreich budgets at least \$500 for rent and finds this price range rather difficult to achieve in Key West and is rather shocked to find “that ‘trailer trash’ has become, for me, a demographic category to aspire to.”⁵⁸⁹ Yet again, Ehrenreich’s prior socio-economic status rears its ugly head when she realizes that she cannot afford to live in a trailer because with her budget she cannot afford even, according to her, the most stereotypical level of accommodations for the working class. Ehrenreich’s shock at finding that a trailer is a desirable place to reside given her current socio-economic status is rather telling of her preconceived notions concerning people who do live in trailers. Her use of ‘trailer trash’ to describe the types of individuals who live in those areas is reflective of how upper class individuals view these sorts of living arrangements as homesteads

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, 12.

for the dredges of society. The belief that the worst of society accommodate these areas is simply reified by Ehrenreich's use of the terms, but at the same time her current socio-economic status as a low wage worker will not even accommodate her to live in such a place. Ehrenreich's exclusion from the trailer trash illustrates how her socio-economic status does not even afford her the luxury of inclusion within this particularly, according to status, distasteful group. Ehrenreich does eventually find an efficiency to rent within her allotted budget and then begins her search for a low paying position.

Ehrenreich's search for an appropriate low paying position is a rather interesting process because she has the rare opportunity to pick and choose what she wants to do. For example, she rules out "various occupations for one reason or another: hotel front-desk clerk, for example, which to my surprise is regarded as unskilled and pays only \$6 or \$7 an hour, gets eliminated because it involves standing in one spot for eight hours a day."⁵⁹⁰ She finds this particular position rather unsavory because she will have to stand in one place for too long and cites her health issues as reason enough to forgo such positions. Once again, Ehrenreich is afforded the rare privilege of picking and choosing what she wants but as a low wage worker, does one get to discriminate upon what position is most optimal when survival is in question? Ehrenreich's experiment is supposedly grounded on the notion of passing as a low wage worker and many men and women in this position cannot afford to reject the rare opportunity of employment merely because they will need to stand in one spot for eight hours. Not only does Ehrenreich discount certain positions because they do not meet her criteria but she also includes certain positions that seemingly adhere to her strengths. For example, once she dismisses these unsavory positions she remarks upon how "supermarket job, such as deli clerk, or housekeeping in the

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid, 13.

hotels and guest houses, which pays about \$7 and, I imagine, is not too different from what I've been doing part-time, in my own home, all my life" are more favorable simply because she has done them in the past, albeit infrequently.⁵⁹¹ Ehrenreich's inclusion of these types of positions due to familiarity seems realistic; however, her mention of doing housework part-time rejects the notion that such an occupation takes any skill or that this occupation is labor intensive, which she soon realizes is quite unrealistic. Once Ehrenreich has narrowed down her position preferences, she begins to fill out numerous job applications and remarks upon the interview process at each job site. She begins her quest at a local supermarket where the interview is conducted via computer and she is ushered into a room where "posters illustrating how to look 'professional' (it helps to be white and, if female, permed) and warning of the slick promises that union organizers might try to tempt me with" pervade the space.⁵⁹² Ehrenreich's observations of the room reify the normative structure especially in regards to race and gender in the workforce. Once Ehrenreich completes the application and interview process, she is directed to a doctor's office where she will submit to a urine drug test. This apparent requirement to work as a clerk at a supermarket horrifies Ehrenreich because she states, "the wages Winn-Dixie is offering--\$6 and a couple of dimes to start with—are not enough, I decide, to compensate for this indignity."⁵⁹³ Ehrenreich's affront at a mandatory drug tests highlights not only her socio-economic status both present and past, but also illustrates how out of touch the upper middle-class is when it comes to the requirements potential employers place on low-wage workers. Can Ehrenreich afford to place her personal dignity above the prospect of gainful employment? Herein again Ehrenreich fails to understand how a low wage worker cannot afford, both monetarily and personally, to place value

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*, 13.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, 14.

on personal feelings over a paycheck. Ehrenreich's quest for employment is not as easy as she first thought and she remarks upon how "three days go by like this and, to my chagrin, no one from the approximately twenty places at which I've applied calls me for an interview."⁵⁹⁴ Ehrenreich seems shocked that she has not found employment and even goes so far as to state that she was "vain enough to worry about coming across as too educated for the jobs I sought, but no one even seems interested in finding out how overqualified I am."⁵⁹⁵ This particular statement presupposes that Ehrenreich's education will hinder her quest for a low wage position, but even with the exclusion of her education on the various job applications she has completed she is still unable to secure employment. Ehrenreich's preoccupation with how her education will either aid her or deter her from gainful employment is an echo of our society's rhetoric on education and employment. More specifically, the idea that education will guarantee a position in the workforce is a rather unrealistic notion Ehrenreich realizes in her quest for a low wage position.

Ehrenreich does eventually acquire a position as a waitress at Heartside, "a dismal spot looking out on a parking garage" instead of her preference as a housekeeper.⁵⁹⁶ Ehrenreich is less than enthused at the prospect of working as a waitress and even comments about her desire to state to her manager, "Thank you for your time, sir, but this is just an experiment, you know, not my actual life."⁵⁹⁷ Ehrenreich's self-righteous attitude toward working as a low wage worker, and her constant reminders of how these positions are merely an experiment, taint her primary endeavor of passing. Once Ehrenreich begins her position as a waitress, she rants on and on about how "of all the things that I have left behind, such as home and identity, what I miss the

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, 16.

most is competence” in reference to her co-workers and the customers she serves on a daily basis.⁵⁹⁸ The notion that once an individual passes he/she understands and adjusts their view of the normative structure is lacking with Ehrenreich because she constantly reifies her socio-economic status. Ehrenreich holds onto her socio-economic status even though many of her co-workers are in dire economic decline. For example, Ehrenreich comments on her co-worker, Gail, whose boyfriend “was killed a few months ago in a scuffle in an upstate prison” and how “after he was gone she spend several months living in her truck, peeing in a plastic pee bottle and reading by candlelight at night.”⁵⁹⁹ Of course, Gail’s situation is not the only co-worker whom Ehrenreich remarks upon and she finds that many of her co-workers’ living situations mirror that of Gail. However, through Ehrenreich’s observation of her co-workers’ living conditions she realizes that “in my middle class solipsism, that there is a gross improvidence in some of these arrangements” and while she recognizes her socio-economic status at many points in her memoir she still refuses to place herself, realistically, within the parameters of a low wage worker.⁶⁰⁰ A more specific example includes her attitude toward her living arrangements,

I’d been feeling pretty smug about my \$500 efficiency, but of course it was made possible only by the \$1,300 I had allotted myself for start-up costs when I began my low-wage life: \$1,000 for the first month’s rent and deposit, \$100 for initial groceries and cash in my pocket, \$200 stuffed away for emergencies.⁶⁰¹

Ehrenreich’s statement all at once identifies her socio-economic advantages while at the same time responding to her newfound status. She fully understands that her \$500 efficiency is not possible without the required cash flow she has allotted for this experiment, but her smug attitude toward her living conditions illustrates how she places those around her in a category of the

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid, 17.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid, 26.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 27.

“other.” Ehrenreich’s smug attitude does not last long when she begins “to assess it after two weeks of work” and realizes that her wages will not cover her rent “if this were my actual life.”⁶⁰² Her waitressing job will not cover her living costs and thereby prompts her to find a second job but her hopes of finding a housekeeping position are non-existent when she realizes that the pool of working housekeepers are limited to “African-American, Spanish-speaking, or refugees from the Central European post-Communist world,” so Ehrenreich must settle for another waitressing job at a place called Jerry’s.⁶⁰³ Ehrenreich’s observation that most housekeepers in the area consist of women of color illustrates the socio-economic structure she is only now beginning to understand. Many of these women do not speak English; therefore, they are not fit to work as a waitress where the majority of workers dealing with customers face to face “are almost invariably white and monolingually English-speaking.”⁶⁰⁴ These women relegated to housekeeping are never seen nor heard in the rooms they clean and the picture Ehrenreich paints for her reader indicates that these women are only equipped to clean rooms because they lack the communication skills which would make them visible to their customers. Of course, the demarcation between white women and women of color is clearly marked in the socio-economic structure which dictates what the profession they are capable of performing. Ehrenreich is rather eager to procure a position as a housekeeper, but prospective employers dictate where her place within the socio-economic structure is and that does not include housekeeping.

Ehrenreich’s two waitressing jobs begin to strain her body and she becomes more and more reliant upon drugstore pain relievers to help her continue working both jobs. She cannot afford to miss a day from either one of her jobs because of pain and states,

⁶⁰² Ibid, 28.

⁶⁰³ Ibid, 29.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid, 29.

In my ordinary life, this level of disability might justify a day of ice packs and stretching. Here I comfort myself with the Aleve commercial where the cute blue-collar guy asks: If you quit after working four hours, what would your boss say? And the not-so-cute blue-collar guy, who's lugging a metal beam on his back, answers: He'd fire me, that's what. But unfortunately, the commercial tells us, we workers can exert the same kind of authority over our painkillers that our bosses exert over us. If Tylenol doesn't want to work for more than four hours, you just fire its ass and switch to Aleve.⁶⁰⁵

This particular statement highlights Ehrenreich's recognition of how differently she navigates the power over her body in her previous life versus how a low wage worker under a boss' supervision exerts power over her body. More specifically, Ehrenreich does not have the luxury to go home and take a break to heal her aches and pains because the repercussions of that would lead her to lose her position. In her current position, Ehrenreich has no control over her own body, or her own labor, because her boss determines when her pain is worthy of a break, or not, in this case. Dr. Charlene Harrington and Dr. Carroll L. Estes' (2008) book *Health Policy: Crisis and Reform in the U.S. Health Care Delivery System*, Michael Zweig's (2004) *What's Class Got to Do With It?: American Society and the Twenty-first Century* and Karen Seccombe and Kim A. Hoffman's (2007) book *Just Don't Get Sick: Access to Health Care in the Aftermath of Welfare Reform* all illustrate how employers, companies, and the health care system are designed to neglect the working class.

Ehrenreich's insights into her current socio-economic position are at times insightful but then she makes statements where she flip flops to her previous position. For example, she states "I take occasional breaks from this life, going home now and then to catch up on e-mail and for conjugal visits (though I am careful to 'pay' for everything I eat here, at \$5 for a dinner, which I

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid, 33.

put in a jar), seeing *The Truman Show* with friends and letting them buy my ticket.”⁶⁰⁶ Even deep in her experiment, Ehrenreich still takes the time to distinguish between what is her real life and what is merely her scientific discovery. Her use of the terms “conjugal visits” implies that Ehrenreich feels her time as a low wage worker is a jail sentence she must endure merely for the sake of an article. Of course, after she consigns her experiment to a jail sentence, she remarks upon how her “old life is beginning to look exceedingly strange. The e-mails and phone messages addressed to my former self come from a distant race of people with exotic concerns and far too much time on their hands.”⁶⁰⁷ Ehrenreich begins to view her old life as a series of mundane concerns and filled with people who are preoccupied with luxuries that seem foreign to her. However, Ehrenreich also has the luxury to return to her old life, as she puts it, and enjoy activities that are otherwise denied to people who work low wage positions. Ehrenreich’s passing as a low wage worker allows her to view her previous socio-economic status with a new perspective and understanding, but she still has the opportunity to return to her past life; therefore, her passing is superficial. She never truly cuts off her past life and only marginally understands a low wage worker’s socio-economic status.

Primary Relationships:

The next step in the intersectional passing model looks at primary relationships and focuses on how the passer navigates personal interactions before he/she chooses to pass. In most cases, the passer recognizes how he/she is marginalized by these relationships and passes to find a place in society. Abagnale’s personal relationships are not fully developed in his memoir because he is moving from location to location to keep his façade of a wealthy pilot in the

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, 34.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 34.

forefront of people's perceptions; however, he does explore his relationship with his parents early on in the memoir and this does give the reader some insight into his motivation for passing. Abagnale's interaction with his father, and his perception of his father, gives the reader some inkling as to why Abagnale chose to pass for most of his young adulthood.

Abagnale frames his relationship with his father as a close association, but there are still cracks apparent in how he interacts with his father. Abagnale begins his memoir with a description of his parents' relationship and states, "I could say I was the product of a broken home, for Mom and Dad separated when I was twelve. But I'd only be bum-rapping my parents."⁶⁰⁸ The failed relationship between Abagnale's parents might not be the cause of Abagnale's passing; however, his description of his relationship between himself and his father does illustrate an early tendency of manipulation from both son and father. Abagnale describes his relationship with father,

I loved my dad. I was the closest to him, and he commenced to use me in his campaign to win back Mom. 'Talk to her son,' he'd ask of me. 'Tell her I love her. Tell her we'd be happier if we all lived together. Tell her you'd be happier if she came home, that all you kids would be happier.' He'd give me gifts to deliver to Mom, and coach me in speeches designed to break down my mother's resistance.⁶⁰⁹

Abagnale's father used his son to manipulate his wife's affections and persuade her to return to their family home, but this scenario also illustrates how Abagnale received his first lesson in how to con someone. Of course, this particular con was not successful but Abagnale quickly learned from this failure and from his father no less. Once Abagnale's parents divorced, he decides to move in with his father and due to his father's successful life; he acquires a certain taste for the

⁶⁰⁸ Abagnale, *Catch Me If You Can*, 6.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

finer things in life. Abagnale spends a great deal of time “in some of New York’s finest saloons” because his father, a successful businessman, conducts many of his meetings over cocktails and conversation.⁶¹⁰ These particular associations and lax locations give Abagnale a certain “street-wise” education and also allow him to test the boundaries of his father’s authority.⁶¹¹ Abagnale’s father is a bit hands off when it comes to disciplining his son and thereby Abagnale becomes a juvenile delinquent. However, Abagnale believes that his delinquent behavior will somehow garner him the attention he is lacking from his parents. In fact, Abagnale states, “I did want my parents together again, and I had vague notions at the time that if I acted like a juvenile delinquent, it might provide a common ground for a reconciliation.”⁶¹² Abagnale’s actions do not heal the breach between his parents, but he does realize that his delinquent behavior is somehow beneath him and this realization prompts him to discard petty theft in favor of his first con.

Even though Abagnale paints his relationship with his father as a close one, he still executes his first con using his father’s trust against him. Abagnale’s father buys him a car and thereby fosters his obsession with attracting women. Although Abagnale has a job which allows him to effectively maintain his obsession with women, he feels he cannot fully attract a bevy of women without wining and dining them, which his meager salary as a shipping clerk does not allow. Abagnale decides to con his father when he asks him for a gas card and even states, “I’ll try to pay the bill myself, but I promise I won’t abuse your generosity if you’ll let me have a gas card.”⁶¹³ Abagnale’s statement that he will pay the bill is truthful, at the beginning, but he finds out that he cannot effectively pay for his dates and the bill at the same time, so he devises a plan to use the gas card for tires, oil, and batteries that he did not need in order to get cash. He does

⁶¹⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁶¹¹ Ibid, 9.

⁶¹² Ibid, 9.

⁶¹³ Ibid, 12.

not keep up to date paying the bill and instead throws the monthly bill in the garbage until an investigator confronts his father and tells him that he has racked “up a \$3,400 bill for gas, oil, batteries and tires.”⁶¹⁴ His father’s disbelief prompts him to confront Abagnale, who admits that his obsession with girls prompted him to spend so much money but his father forgives him and pays the bill. Abagnale’s con lands him in a reformatory school and when his dad comes to collect him, he is told about his father’s decline in social status. Abagnale is extremely bothered by his father’s misfortune but his father states, ““It’s not what a man has but what a man is that’s important.”⁶¹⁵ This particular lesson does not infiltrate Abagnale and at sixteen he decides to leave his father’s home without saying goodbye. He states how he “had no plans to run away. But every time Dad put on his postal clerk’s uniform and drove off to work in his old car, I’d feel depressed. I couldn’t forget how he used to wear Louis Roth suits and drive big expensive cars.”⁶¹⁶ Abagnale’s obsession with his father’s downgrade in social status prompts him to leave home and seek out his own elevation in social status. He even goes so far to emphatically state, “I did have a definite goal. I was going to be a success in some field. I was going to make it to the top of some mountain. And once there, no one or nothing was going to dislodge me from the peak. I wasn’t going to make the mistakes my dad had made. I was determined on that point.”⁶¹⁷ Abagnale’s departure from home at the young age of sixteen also marks the end of his close relationship with his father as he never contacts him throughout the memoir nor does he see him again.

Abagnale’s close relationship with his father is the only close relationship he explores in his narrative. Of course, Abagnale does have numerous relationships with women throughout his

⁶¹⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid, 21.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 22.

memoir but these encounters are brief and do not explore any true intimacy. He does fall in love with a woman named Rosalie while in San Francisco. Rosalie, a young blonde flight attendant, encompasses all the qualities that Abagnale values, or more pointedly, he is told to value according to societal norms. Rosalie is a virginal young Catholic girl who shares similar interests as Abagnale and after losing her virginity to Abagnale assumes he will marry her. Of course, Abagnale does not dissuade this assumption and even goes so far as to meet her parents, discuss wedding plans and dates but he also begins to feel guilt about lying to Rosalie and her parents. However, Abagnale's love for Rosalie prompts him to disclose information about himself that he never told any of his prior female companions. He takes Rosalie on a picnic away from her parents and anyone else who might over hear his confession. He then begins by stating, "Rosalie, I am not a pilot for Pan American. I'm not twenty-eight, Rosalie. I'm nineteen. My name is not Frank Williams. My name is Frank Abagnale. I'm a crook, Rosalie, an impostor and a check swindler, and I'm wanted by the police all over the country."⁶¹⁸ Abagnale's confession to Rosalie is met with tears and disbelief, but she does not remark further and simply suggests they return to her parents' home. Abagnale; however, prompts her to promise him she won't tell her parents or anyway else and she does promise not to tell anyone. While Rosalie returns to her parents' house alone, Abagnale contemplates what he his confession means to his freedom because after telling Rosalie who he is, he doesn't trust her anymore. He rides his bike back to Rosalie's parents' house and parks it around the corner so he can view her house from a distance and what he sees confirms his suspicions; "my lovely Rosalie had finked on me."⁶¹⁹ Rosalie did not hesitate to contact the police and they were waiting for Abagnale in front of her parents' house. Abagnale quickly escapes from the scene and catches the first flight out of town, but he does not feel any

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, 137.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 139.

sadness over the previous events or losing Rosalie. In fact, he states, “I was happy to have Rosalie out of my life! The knowledge astonished me, for not six hours past I’d been desperately seeking a way to make her my wife. Astonished or not, I was still relieved.”⁶²⁰ The relief Abagnale feels at the loss of Rosalie is quite interesting, but mildly understandable at the same time. Abagnale, at nineteen, seems overwhelmed at the prospect of marrying Rosalie and wishes to retain his exciting lifestyle free from any restrictions a wife might give him. However, Abagnale’s confession to Rosalie also implies that his intimacy with her was not a con and that he felt secure with her enough to disclose his true identity. Abagnale’s relationship with Rosalie is the only close female intimacy he discloses in his memoir because for the remainder of the memoir he simply moves from one woman to another without ever mentioning Rosalie again. It is also important to note that his lack of intimate female relationships after Rosalie correlates with his fear to trust anyone after Rosalie betrayed him. However, Abagnale himself never makes this correlation so his lack of trust in anyone, male or female, can simply equate with the nature of passing. Passing does not necessarily allow for disclosure because the fear of detection is ever present in the passer so trust is always an illusion.

Ehrenreich’s passing is not predicated on her primary relationships nor is her passing reliant upon the navigation of such relationships to find her place within society. Ehrenreich’s decision to pass is not based on a sense of personal marginalization, but is based on her reluctant desire to publish a story about poverty. Ehrenreich’s description of her family and friends before her passing is minimal at best and these relationships do not prompt her to pass. In fact, when she does describe her familial relationships she relates how each family member, in one way or another, navigates and escapes low wage positions. For example, she states “In my own family,

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 139.

the low-wage way of life had never been many degrees of separation away; it was close enough, in any case, to make me treasure the gloriously autonomous, if not always well-paid, writing life.”⁶²¹ She clearly states that her family members did struggle with a low-wage life but that she only experiences this life through her relationships. Ehrenreich’s life as a writer allows her to distance herself from the experiences of low-wage working but her relationships with family members illustrates how the issue was still close enough for her to reflect upon her socio-economic position. Ehrenreich recounts how her “sister has been through one low-paid job after another—phone company business rep, factory worker, receptionist—constantly struggling against what she calls ‘the hopelessness of being a wage slave.’”⁶²² She also mentions how her “husband and companion of seventeen years was a \$4.50-an-hour warehouse worker when I fell in with him, escaping eventually and with huge relief to become an organizer for the Teamsters.”⁶²³ These relationships illustrate Ehrenreich’s ties to low-wage workers but they do not indicate in any way that she feels marginalized due to her socio-economic status. In fact, she argues that her current position is “not only a privilege but a duty: something I owed to all those people in my life, living and dead, who’d had so much more to say than anyone ever got to hear.”⁶²⁴ This particular statement illustrates how Ehrenreich’s socio-economic position allows her to voice the concerns associated with low-wage workers from her own family but also states how her position is a familial duty to all those family members who endured hard labor. Ehrenreich justifies her participation in this experiment as a way to give voice to those who cannot be heard by society but in the same vein bemoans that she is the one who must engage in such an experiment. In fact, she questions the validity of engaging in this experiment because the

⁶²¹ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 2.

⁶²² *Ibid*, 2.

⁶²³ *Ibid*, 2.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

data already obtained on the notion of a “living wage” already illustrated how low wage workers could not successful live off minimum wage.⁶²⁵ Ehrenreich finds the entire experiment futile at best and the only way she can convince herself to give her experiment any validity is to equate herself to a scientist, which is not too farfetched since she has a Ph.D. in biology.⁶²⁶ Ehrenreich’s commitment to her experiment is achieved only because she treats her low-wage life as a scientific data collection. She does not see her experiment as passing for a low-wage worker because she argues, “people knew me as a waitress, a cleaning person, a nursing home aide, or a retail clerk not because I acted like one but because that’s what I *was*, at least for the time I was with them.”⁶²⁷ However, her experiences in these positions rely heavily upon her departure from her prior existence and therefore she is passing as a low-wage worker.

Aesthetic Emulation

The next step in the intersectional passing model looks closely at aesthetic emulation and how the passer undergoes numerous alterations to pass. This stage is sometimes difficult for the passer because prior relationships still inform him/her of their position. However, through changes in location, occupation, dress, and manner this stage is vital to passing. The individual submerges themselves within the group they hope to emulate and therefore this stage, or concept, will be called “aesthetic emulation”. The word aesthetic is used here because the process of passing is not completed with just the decision to pass, but also includes the restructuring of one’s overall physicality, personality, and space/location for success. These modifications include basic aesthetics and more complicated performative alterations.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁶²⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁶²⁷ Ibid, 9.

Abagnale's aesthetic emulation begins when he moves out of his father's house and relocates to New York. As a young sixteen year old boy, Abagnale has difficulty acquiring a well paying job because he is a high school dropout without any useful professional skills. Abagnale comes to the conclusion that his lack of education is not the real factor to him earning enough money to entertain women and survive in New York, but his age. He states, "I wasn't being paid lowly wages because I was a high school dropout but because I was only sixteen. A boy simply wasn't worth a man's wages. So I aged ten years overnight."⁶²⁸ Abagnale's increase in age was not questioned by potential employers and he did receive a minor increase in salary from \$1.50 an hour to \$2.75. Even though Abagnale's salary increased after he falsified his age, he still lacked the amount of money he wanted or needed to foster his insatiable desire for women. As Abagnale is contemplating a solution to his financial problems, he happens to observe an airline pilot exiting an upscale New York hotel and at the spectacle this pilot represents, Abagnale forms a plan to emulate an airline pilot. He states,

What if I were a pilot? Not an actual pilot, of course. I had no heart for the grueling years of study, training, flight schooling, work and other mundane toils that fit a man for a jet liner's cockpit. But what if I had the uniform and the trappings of an airline pilot? Why, I thought, I could walk into any hotel, bank or business in the country and cash a check. Airline pilots are men to be admired and respected. Men to be trusted. Men of means. And you don't expect an airline pilot to be a local resident. Or a check swindler.⁶²⁹

Abagnale's brief visual encounter with an airline pilot fosters a deep desire to emulate this person, and profession. Abagnale wraps so much importance into the physical representation of this pilot and equates this pilot's worth on his mere physicality that Abagnale immediately sets off to acquire a pilot's uniform. More importantly, Abagnale views a pilot's physicality with

⁶²⁸ Abagnale, *Catch Me If You Can*, 23.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*, 27.

financial success, respect, and professionalism which allows him to manipulate these ideals for his own monetary gain. Abagnale chooses to emulate an airline pilot and thereby solidifies his manipulation of the normative structure because he uses the perceptions of others and the value they place on an airline pilot to his advantage.

Abagnale's emulation of an airline pilot imbues him with a newfound importance and alters his self-confidence. He states, "I felt great in my Pan Am pilot's uniform as I walked into La Guardia Airport. I obviously was commanding respect and esteem. Men looked at me admiringly or enviously. Pretty women and girls smiled at me."⁶³⁰ Abagnale's emulation of an airline pilot also defined his self-worth because whenever he wore the uniform it "bought me respect and dignity" and without it he felt "useless and dejected."⁶³¹ While Abagnale's sense of worth is tied to his Pan Am uniform, his physical alteration also enabled him to pass fraudulent checks with little to no questions which reifies the notion that a man in a uniform deserves a certain amount of reverence and respect.

Abagnale not only dons a Pan Am uniform as part of his aesthetic emulation but also, during a rare moment when he decides to take a break from passing as a pilot, allows him to successfully pass as a pediatric doctor. Abagnale's obsession with women leads him to a very selective community housing unit in Atlanta, River Bend, and while he fills out the application for residency he decides, "on impulse, nothing more" to "put down 'medical doctor'" as his occupation.⁶³² Abagnale does not want to state he is an airline pilot for Pan Am just in case someone in the manager's office decides to check up on his employment, so he defers to another

⁶³⁰ Ibid, 45.

⁶³¹ Ibid, 46.

⁶³² Ibid, 77.

profession that is a little less dangerous and therein passes as a doctor.⁶³³ Of course, even Abagnale's passing as a medical doctor invites certain complications such as when he meets another resident who is a doctor. This doctor, Dr. Granger, works in the local hospital and begins to question Abagnale's background to which Abagnale successfully responds, but his complications with this doctor do not end after this conversation. In fact, after having his discussion with Dr. Granger, Abagnale is invited to have lunch with him at the local hospital and is introduced to the medical staff as a doctor which imbues him with a certain amount of authority. Of course, this emulation is further fostered when he experiences "the same vicarious pleasures, the same ego boosts, I'd known as a bogus pilot" from simply walking the halls of the hospital.⁶³⁴ His aesthetic emulation is further explored when he begins "sporting a tiny gold caduceus" on his suit lapel but is solidified when a hospital administrator offers him a temporary position in the hospital.⁶³⁵ His newfound position, and his abhorrent lack of medical knowledge, forces him to create a personage of idiocy. In fact, he states,

If I was going to fake out seven interns, forty nurses and literary dozens of support personnel, I was going to have to give the impression that I was something of a buffoon of the medical profession. I decided I'd have to project the image of a happy-go-lucky, easygoing, always-joking rascal who couldn't care less whether the rules learned in medical school were kept or not. I put my act on the road the minute I arrived for duty the first night and was met by Brenda in the R.S.'s office.⁶³⁶

Abagnale's idiocy, of course, was not an act but he uses his smock and stethoscope to garner a certain amount of acceptability from the staff for his eccentric demeanor. Many of the staff he works with find his manner quite amusing and allow his unconventional behavior simply

⁶³³ Ibid, 77.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, 83.

⁶³⁵ Ibid, 83.

⁶³⁶ Ibid, 87.

because of his status. He charms the nurses using humor and he gets “a lot of laughs during the following shifts with my wisecracking manner, seeming irreverence for serious subjects and zany actions.”⁶³⁷ His penchant for humor, and his hands off teaching style with his interns, endears him to the hospital staff and everyone there thinks he is a wonderful doctor. In fact, the hospital administrator offers to extend his tenure at the hospital and Abagnale readily agrees because he is “in love with my role as doctor. I was enjoying it almost as much as my pretense of airline pilot. And it was much more relaxing. I hadn’t written a bad check since assuming the pose of pediatrician.”⁶³⁸ Abagnale’s tenure as a physician allows him to break from his habit of passing bad checks, but he still feels the longer he carries on his charade the more danger he is in of disclosure. Abagnale’s emulation of a physician plays upon the perception that doctors are immersed in their own world and as a result acquire certain idiosyncrasies that must be overlooked by hospital staff. It is also quite telling that Abagnale fashioned his doctor persona after the popular television series M*A*S*H where many of the doctors used humor to disconnect from the gruesome evidence of war they encountered on a daily basis.⁶³⁹ Abagnale’s emulation of a doctor lasts a year and after a particular harrowing experience with a blue baby, he decides that his passing as a doctor is dangerous to continue. He realizes that he was “playing a role that had reached its limits” and decides to resign.⁶⁴⁰ Abagnale’s yearlong passing as a doctor illustrates the deferment many individuals give to a man of authority, or supposed authority, merely because he has certain credentials. No one ever questions whether or not Abagnale is truly a doctor or why he prefers a more hands off approach towards his patients but they simply trust him because he wears a white coat and carries a stethoscope.

⁶³⁷ Ibid, 89.

⁶³⁸ Ibid, 92.

⁶³⁹ Ibid, 87.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid, 96.

Abagnale leaves Atlanta and his aesthetic emulation continues when he decides to pass as an attorney in another southern state. His association with a young woman, Diane, leads to an introduction with the state's assistant attorney who questions his credentials and invites him to join the attorney general's office. Abagnale fakes his Harvard credentials and proceeds to study for the bar exam and succeeds in passing this exam after the third try which allows him to fully pass as an attorney. Abagnale then begins to perfect his persona of an attorney by giving

the impression that I was from a wealthy New York family without making any such direct claims. I lived in a swank apartment overlooking a lake, drove a leased Jaguar and accumulated a wardrobe worthy of a British duke. I wore a different suit to work each day of the week, partly because it pleased me but mostly because my extensive wardrobe seemed to irritate Rigby.⁶⁴¹

Abagnale solidifies his status as a wealthy lawyer by making sure he acquires all the material trappings associated with that class and he does this to keep up his passing persona, but also annoying the haughty Rigby. Abagnale's appearance was so effective that one day while in court the judge presiding over the case he was observing stated, "Mr. Conrad, you may not contribute much in the way of legal expertise to the proceedings before this court, but you certainly add style, sir. You are the best-dressed gopher in Dixie, Counselor, and the court commends you."⁶⁴²

Abagnale never actually tried a case when he was passing as an attorney but his physical transformation, and everyone's assumed perception of his status based on his manner and dress, fulfilled the stereotype a wealthy, successful attorney. Abagnale's passing as an attorney did not last long, nine months, because once he started discussing his Harvard education with an actual Harvard Law graduate, he knew his time as an attorney was over. Abagnale's successful emulation of an attorney relied solely on how he physically presented himself to his fellow

⁶⁴¹ Ibid, 105-106.

⁶⁴² Ibid, 106.

colleagues with the clothes he wore, where he lived, what car he drove, and how much money he spent. He never actually had to try a case and therefore he does not mention in his memoir whether he altered his rhetoric to suit his position; legal jargon. He presents his passing as an attorney as merely an alteration in physical appearance which reifies the notion that class is indeed a manifestation of material signifiers. As long as Abagnale displayed the items associated with his socio-economic status, no one would question whether or not he belonged within that group. He plays on the notion that physical markers equate monetary wealth throughout the memoir.

When Abagnale moves on from passing as an attorney, he reverts back to his pilot status but occasionally he takes on minimal personas to acquire large sums of cash. For example, he flies to Philadelphia and enacts a scheme that relies solely on how the bank tellers perceive him. He passes as a wealthy businessman and completes this perception when he rolls up to the bank in a chauffeured vehicle,

As the chauffer opened the door for me, I saw one of the bank officers had indeed noticed my arrival. When I entered the bank, I walked directly to him. I had dressed befitting a man with a chauffeured Rolls-Royce—custom-tailored three-piece suit in pearl gray, a \$100 homburg and alligator Ballys—and the look in his eyes told me the young banker recognized my grooming as another indication of wealth and power.⁶⁴³

Abagnale understands the normative structure surrounding class and constantly uses this knowledge to emulate a man of means in order to fleece unsuspecting bank tellers to give him certain allowances. Abagnale is quite adept at altering his persona to fit any given scenario where his audience expects a particular physical representation to fit their own preconceived notions of wealth or influence. In the case of this particular scenario, Abagnale uses the deference accorded

⁶⁴³ Ibid, 148.

to a man of means entering a bank and wanting to withdrawal large sums of cash to his financial advantage. He emulates a man of means one other time in his memoir, but his motivation for doing so is quite different than the before mentioned scenario. Abagnale overhears a conversation between a young man and an elderly gentleman in an airport lounge, and what he hears infuriates him and prompts him to execute a con. Abagnale surmises from the conversation that the elderly gentleman is the young man's employer and the manner in which this man speaks to his employee irks Abagnale which prompts him to dig deeper into who this elderly gentleman is and to con him out of money. The elderly gentleman is Jasper P. Cashman, a wealthy bank president presiding over a bank holding assets worth \$100 million dollars and because Abagnale finds Cashman so disagreeable, he decides to emulate a man Cashman would view as worthy to bank at his bank. However, Abagnale emphatically states that the reason he cons Cashman is not for any monetary gain, but simply because "Cashman's manner irked me, and I simply wanted to sting him."⁶⁴⁴ Abagnale's previous emulations did not involve any personal vendettas against wealthy individuals, but for some reason Cashman highlights the disparity in wealth and caste. Abagnale plays on Cashman's perceptions of wealth and status by presenting "the picture of the affluent businessman when I entered the bank. Gray three-piece suit. Alligators, luster-shined. Countess Mara tie. A leather briefcase, slim and elegant."⁶⁴⁵ He further emulates his wealth status when he approaches the same young associate who had a conversation with Cashman in the airport and informs him that "J.P. Cashman knows me, and he'll verify the check. You can call him. No, I'll do it myself, since I need to talk to him anyway."⁶⁴⁶ Abagnale's supposed association with Cashman allows him to get away with cashing a sizable check, but another

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid, 211.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, 211.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, 212.

important aspect to this particular con is that Abagnale understands, and utilizes, the notion that wealth will give him certain allowances. His desire to humiliate Cashman because he marginalized his employee adds another element to Abagnale's con, one which has not been used in his previous passing; a sense of superiority. Abagnale's uses his knowledge about the normative structure regarding socio-economic status to illustrate how Cashman is not superior simply because he has money and bests him by cashing a fraudulent check.

Abagnale not only uses people's perception of wealth and alters his physical appearance accordingly, but he also uses people's complete objection to interact with certain people as well. Case in point, Abagnale changes his persona according to the scam he is about to initiate so when he observes how people ignore a security guard at a busy airport bank drop off, he is able to steal the contents of the night depository quite easily. He first devises a way to appropriate a uniform and when he goes to pick up his uniform, "no one questioned my status" and he quite easily picks up "a complete guard's outfit; shirt, tie, trousers, and hat, the name of the bank emblazoned over the breast pocket and on the right shoulder of the shirt."⁶⁴⁷ Once he has acquired his uniform, Abagnale returns to the airport bank and stands at attention in front of the night depository box where he has placed a sign that states, "NIGHT DEPOSIT VAULT OUT OF ORDER. PLEASE MAKE DEPOSITS WITH SECURITY OFFICER."⁶⁴⁸ Abagnale simply stands in front of the bank and accepts the patrons' deposit with no questions asked from anyone and he is even able to receive assistance from two on-duty state troopers to load the money into his station wagon. Abagnale's ability to observe a scenario and adapt his persona according to what those around him perceive as the correct representation of either a wealthy man or a man in

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid, 180.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid, 180.

uniform allows him to quite effectively con anyone. His ability to succeed in these endeavors also reflects a deeper flaw in the socio-economic structure where a person's social status is reflective of their physical appearance, manner, and attitude. When Abagnale passes, briefly, as a security guard no one questions his authority simply because he physically appears to conform to what most people expect of a security guard; namely a man in a uniform.

At this point in Abagnale's memoir, he has accumulated vast wealth from his cons and decides to retire to France. He believes that settling down in Montpellier is the best place because "the lack of air service or swank hotels weighed in my favor" and "there was very little chance of my encountering a pilot, a stewardess or a hotel employee who might recognize me."⁶⁴⁹ Abagnale's settlement in this small French village means he effectively retires passing as an airline pilot and instead creates a new persona to deflect any unwanted attention. He decides that while he lives in this quaint village, he will present himself as "Robert Monjo, a successful author and screenwriter from Los Angeles, 'successful' in order to explain the sizable account I opened in one of the local banks."⁶⁵⁰ Abagnale's new persona allows him a certain level of security, as no one in the village questions his wealth or why he decides to locate there and he buys a small cottage. He spends most of his time traveling around the area and visiting his mother's family who live close to him but he never divulges to them that he lives in Montpellier. He mulls over the idea of attending the University, or getting a local job but these he never does because "four months after taking up residence in Montpellier, I learned a bitter truth: when the hounds have help, there is no safe place for a fox to hide."⁶⁵¹ Abagnale is apprehended because a former lover, a stewardess, spotted him in Montpellier and reported his whereabouts to the police

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, 217.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid, 217.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid, 221.

in Paris.⁶⁵² Interestingly, even though Abagnale is arrested and dragged to the local police station for questioning, he tries doggedly to deny that he is Frank Abagnale. He is fully committed to passing as Robert Monjo and states, quite indignantly, ““I am a writer from California, an American. I’m afraid you gentlemen have made a very serious mistake.””⁶⁵³ Abagnale is so deeply invested in passing as Robert Monjo, that even when he is caught and threatened he still maintains his persona. The police investigator, Marcel Gaston, does not acquiesce to Abagnale’s claims of identity, but simply threatens him with beatings, and starvation to finally get the information he wants from Abagnale.⁶⁵⁴ Once Abagnale admits his identity, he is confined in a French prison, Perpignan, for a year and as Gaston indicates, he does starve. Abagnale’s stay in Perpignan only last six months, but during that time he endures light deprivation, meager food, severe illness, and abhorrent living conditions. Once Abagnale is released from Perpignan, he is transported to another prison in Sweden to await trial and sentencing but his experiences here lead him back to the United States where he once again begins to con his way out of jail by passing as a prison inspector. United States marshals transfer him to a prison in Atlanta but they did not have any “commitment papers” for him so “the admissions officer to whom I was offered had a lot of questions” but he was given no information other than to hold him until he went to trial, which gave Abagnale a perfect opening to pose as a prison inspector.⁶⁵⁵ He enlists the aid of a former girlfriend, Jean Sebring, through several phone conversations and she eventually visits him in prison where Abagnale divulges his plan. Jean has no issue helping Abagnale and even states, ““I think it would be funny as hell if you pulled it off.””⁶⁵⁶ Jean’s mission is to pose

⁶⁵² Ibid, 224.

⁶⁵³ Ibid, 222.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid, 223.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid, 268-269.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid, 270.

as a journalist to garner an interview with a real prison inspector, C.W. Dunlap, and acquires one of his business cards for Abagnale.⁶⁵⁷ Once Jean has Dunlap's business card, along with a business card she receives from an FBI agent, Sean O'Riley, she visits a print shop and gets new business cards printed with a phony home telephone and office number. Jean then goes back to visit Abagnale in prison and gives him one of the phony business cards whereby Abagnale puts his plan in motion. He passes as Dunlap and is taken to the warden's office where he proceeds to tell him he needs to make a phone call to Agent O'Riley. Abagnale gives the fake business card to the warden, who makes the phone call, and Jean picks up phone posing as a secretary for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Abagnale launches into a tale about a case they are working on and his urgent need to discuss said case with O'Riley in person as soon as possible and the warden assures him that they will allow him to speak to O'Riley outside the prison. Of course, once the warden and his officers let Abagnale out of prison to meet O'Riley, Jean is waiting in the car for him and they both escape with no one the wiser.⁶⁵⁸ Abagnale's con is successful merely because U.S. marshals neglected to stress the importance of his detainment to prison officials and because he did not fit the profile of a prisoner. Abagnale was allowed to keep his civilian clothes and given an above average cell to pass his time, but the prison's admission's officer assumed Abagnale was a prison inspector simply because several of their previous officer's were fired and he had "learned how to spot you."⁶⁵⁹ The prison officer's assumption about Abagnale's identity directly correlates with how he dressed and acted but also led to Abagnale's successful break from prison. Once again, other's assumptions about Abagnale's

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid, 271.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid, 272-275.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid, 269.

identity allows him to pass successfully because these individuals are mired in the idea that how one looks, dresses, and acts equates to the sum total of their identity.

Ehrenreich's aesthetic emulation begins before she ever pursues a low-wage position because she has to decide how to present herself to prospective employers. She settles on "the truth, or at least a drastically stripped-down version thereof," so she presents herself "as a divorced homemaker reentering the workforce after many years, which is true as far as it goes."⁶⁶⁰ These particular truths omit her career as a writer and also exclude her extensive education because as she states, "I figured the Ph.D. would be no help at all" and thereby limits her education "to three years of college."⁶⁶¹ Ehrenreich limits her educational background to increase her job prospects, but also states how a job offer she receives "could have been performed perfectly well by an illiterate" thereby illustrating, in her estimation, the low marketability of a college education.⁶⁶² However, her statement discerning how a prospective employee in a particular job does not need even basic reading skills in order to perform the position denotes a rather elitist viewpoint concerning education and employment. Her generalized statement that an illiterate could perform the job is indicative of her overall viewpoint when it comes to the skills needed to perform a particular position especially considering that she has never performed this position. Ehrenreich's opinion concerning low-wage positions and the requirements to perform these positions is also evident when she states, "unlike many low-wage workers, I have the further advantages of being white and a native English speaker."⁶⁶³ These advantages aid her in finding employment but also illustrate elements of her aesthetic emulation that she capitalizes upon throughout her experiment. Of course, these

⁶⁶⁰ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 5.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁶² *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid*, 6.

advantages only aid her in certain job positions and exclude her from other positions. As a low-wage worker, Ehrenreich argues that she “made no effort to play a role or fit into some imaginative stereotype of low-wage working women,” but she does also mention how if she was “seeking to replicate the experience of a woman entering the workforce from welfare, I would have had a couple of children in tow.”⁶⁶⁴ On one hand Ehrenreich argues that her experiment as a low-wage worker is authentic because she cannot fake working in these positions and does not want to stereotype low-wage working women, but her statement about welfare women and children reify the very image that society has created about welfare women in the United States. Her assumption about women on welfare does in fact stereotype these women and the notion that these women are all mothers with multiple children feeds into the derogatory construction of the welfare queen.

Ehrenreich continually states that her outward appearance does not alter during her passing as a low-wage worker. In fact, she states that “I wore my usual clothes, whenever ordinary clothes were permitted, and my usual hairstyle and makeup. In conversations with coworkers, I talked about my real children, marital status, and relationships; there was no reason to invent a whole new life.”⁶⁶⁵ Ehrenreich may not alter her physical appearance but she does modify her language in deference to her newfound position as an employee which thereby limits her use of “profanities” or any language that might be deemed “brash or disrespectful” in the workplace.⁶⁶⁶ In her interactions with other employees Ehrenreich maintains she spoke to them as she “would do in any other setting.”⁶⁶⁷ Ehrenreich asserts that her prior physical appearance

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid, 8.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, 8.

remains intact, but aesthetic emulation also includes an alteration of location/space and occupation which Ehrenreich changes quite frequently.

Ehrenreich's location/space undergoes a drastic change when she begins her experiment. Her first location is Key West, Florida because she is familiar with the area and because she lives in a town nearby.⁶⁶⁸ Ehrenreich's first task is to find a place to live and she acquires "a \$500-a-month 'efficiency' thirty miles up a two-lane highway from the opportunities of Key West, meaning forty-five minutes if there's no road construction."⁶⁶⁹ Ehrenreich's efficiency home suits her needs for the duration of her stay in Key West; however, the location also relies heavily upon personal transportation which she is very lucky to have considering most low wage workers cannot afford to own a vehicle and rely heavily upon public transportation. After Ehrenreich secures her living space, she begins her search for a job in what she deems "a respectable-looking outfit of ironed Bermuda shorts and scooped neck T-shirt."⁶⁷⁰ Ehrenreich fills out applications at hotels and supermarkets hoping to secure a position that does not require too much physical activity. However, Ehrenreich does not receive an immediate job offer at any of the places she submitted an application and after three days with no job offers; Ehrenreich becomes desperate to secure employment. She decides to physically visit a local hotel in the hopes of securing a position as a housekeeper, but when she visits the hotel she is directed to visit the attached restaurant and "try out as a waitress."⁶⁷¹ Ehrenreich is not too thrilled with the prospect of working as a waitress, but considering none of the places she previously visited have offered her a job; she takes the position as a waitress at Hearthside. Ehrenreich's tenure as a

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, 12.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid, 15.

waitress lasts two weeks and she works “from 2:00 till 10:00 p.m. for \$2.43 an hour plus tips.”⁶⁷²

Although waitressing is not Ehrenreich’s ideal job, she does perform her duties with vigilance and becomes conscious of her customers’ varying personalities and occupations. For example, she recounts how Benny “a short, tight-muscled sewer repairman who cannot even think of eating until he has absorbed a half hour of air-conditioning and ice water” or “Sam, the kindly retired cop who has to plug up his tracheotomy hole with one finger in order to force the cigarette smoke into his lungs.”⁶⁷³ All of Ehrenreich’s interactions with her customers illustrate her ability to adapt to her environment that differs from her previous experiences. Ehrenreich’s limited recollection of her primary relationships does not give us much evidence of how she interacted with friends, family, or even co-workers; however, her position as a waitress does highlight her affable interactions with customers. After working her shift, Ehrenreich travels to her efficiency and snacks on “Wheat Thins and Monterey Jack, accompanied by cheap white wine on ice and whatever AMC has to offer” before beginning her work cycle.⁶⁷⁴ Ehrenreich soon realizes that she cannot survive; financially, only working one job so she attains another waitressing job at a place called Jerry’s. Her shift at Jerry’s starts at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 2:00 p.m. where she begins her 2-10:00 p.m. shift at Hearthside. Ehrenreich’s second waitressing position at Jerry’s illustrates how she interacts with management when her manager, Joy, intercepts her one morning to critique her job skills,

she pulls me aside abruptly and brings her face so close that it looks like she’s planning to butt me with her forehead. But instead of saying, ‘You’re fired,’ she says, ‘You’re doing fine.’ The only trouble is I’m spending time chatting with customers: ‘That’s how they’re getting you.’ Furthermore I am letting them ‘run me,’ which means harassment by sequential demands; you bring the catsup and

⁶⁷² Ibid, 16.

⁶⁷³ Ibid, 19.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid, 21.

they decide they want extra Thousand Island; you bring that and they announce they now need a side of fries, and so on into distraction.⁶⁷⁵

Ehrenreich's response to her manager's criticism is to meekly thank her and then continue on with her work, but internally Ehrenreich recognizes how the pace of her performance outweighs and familiarity she might forge with her customers. She feels "stripped naked" by her manager's criticism and implies that the standards for working at Jerry's require "no fancy service ethic" and that "chatting with customers is for the good-looking young college-educated servers in the downtown carpaccio and ceviche joints."⁶⁷⁶ Ehrenreich's experiences as a waitress show her the distance placed between the worker and the customer. She learns rather quickly that her place as a low wage working waitress do not include familiarity, at least to management, but her sole job is to move customers in a timely manner so the next customer can assume their place at her table. Ehrenreich must adjust her personality with both her customers to the point where she views the men and women she is serving as a "major obstacle to the smooth transformation of information into food and food into money—they are, in short, the enemy."⁶⁷⁷ Therefore, she does not view her customers as individuals anymore but merely an obstruction to her overall goal; money. Ehrenreich attitude towards her customers, an indoctrinated belief substantiated by her managers' overbearing presence, occurs over a short period of time but also illustrates how she aesthetically emulates her environment.

While Ehrenreich struggles to form a balance between her customer service skills and appeasing managements needs to increase customer volume, she begins to realize that she can no longer afford to commute back and forth from her jobs and her efficiency home because gas is

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid, 35.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid, 35.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, 35.

eating up the money she barely makes at both service jobs. Ehrenreich decides to move closer to her jobs and pays “the \$1,100” for a trailer that is about “a mile” from her jobs.⁶⁷⁸ Her new living quarters are not as spacious as her prior efficiency and “the Overseas park is a nest of crime and crack” while the residents “are not exactly people here but what amounts to canned labor.”⁶⁷⁹ Ehrenreich’s new living arrangements are not ideal and the people who live there are merely striving to afford their meager residences. After Ehrenreich moves to the trailer park, she decides to try once again to find a job as a housekeeper and is successful. She acquires a job at the hotel right next to Jerry’s but she only works one day before walking out on her job at Jerry’s and her time in Key West, Florida.

Ehrenreich moves to Maine after her time in Florida “for its whiteness.”⁶⁸⁰ She chooses Maine because as a “blue-eyed, English- speaking Caucasian” it is easier for her to “infiltrate the low-wage workforce.”⁶⁸¹ Ehrenreich chooses Maine simply because she will have no problem fitting the aesthetic which will allow her to have more employment opportunities. However, her first obstacle is to find a place to live and she finds this endeavor quite difficult because many of the available places to rent are unsavory or cost too much. Meanwhile, she is spending \$59 per night to stay in a local motel but soon finds another local motel that rents apartments for \$120 a week and decides that this is her only option.⁶⁸² Once she has secured her home, she begins her job search and fills out applications for Goodwill, Wal-Mart, and Merry Maids.⁶⁸³ Ehrenreich’s desire to work as a housekeeper in Key West was rather difficult because most employers preferred women of color, but in the “demographic albinism” of Maine, she is quickly offered a

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid, 39-40.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid, 51.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, 51.

⁶⁸² Ibid, 55-56.

⁶⁸³ Ibid, 60.

job as a Merry Maid.⁶⁸⁴ However, Ehrenreich also knows that she cannot survive working one job so she has takes a job working at a nursing home “on the weekends for \$7 an hour.”⁶⁸⁵ She does not plan to keep her job at Merry Maids for longer than a week because of her back problems and determines that she can spend her free time searching for other local jobs.⁶⁸⁶ Ehrenreich’s aesthetic emulation is rather subtle in her low wage positions and the changes always correspond with her clothing. As a waitress in Key West, Ehrenreich wears the required uniform; a polo shirt and khaki pants, but while she works as a Merry Maid in Maine her position highlights her lack of visibility. For example, Ehrenreich states how “maids, as an occupational group, are not visible, and when we are seen we are often sorry for it.”⁶⁸⁷ According to Ehrenreich’s co-workers, the customers they work for do not treat them with respect because they view maids as less intelligent and less worthy than themselves.⁶⁸⁸ Ehrenreich notices the treatment she receives from not only the customers she serves, but also individuals she meets at the grocery store simply because of the Merry Maids uniform she dons. For instance, Ehrenreich recounts how her maid’s uniform deters her from getting any service at a diner and how she “tried to order an ice tea to take out, but the waitress just kept standing there chatting with a coworker, ignoring my ‘Excuse me’s.’”⁶⁸⁹ Ehrenreich finds her treatment at the grocery store is also unsavory because she “couldn’t take the stares, which are easily translatable into: What are *you* doing here? And, No wonder she’s poor, she’s got a beer in her shopping cart!”⁶⁹⁰ Of course, none of the customers or staff in the grocery store ever outright confronted Ehrenreich while she was shopping the grocery store, but she felt that everyone was judging her

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid, 51.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid, 60.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, 61.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, 100.

solely on the basis of the maid's uniform she wore because "the brilliant green-and-yellow uniform that gives me away, like prison clothes on a fugitive" sparks a response from people who do not have to labor as a maid.⁶⁹¹ Ehrenreich's uniform, or aesthetic emulation, as a maid garners her unwanted attention and prompts many people to judge her solely on her profession, but she takes others ostracism of her occupation one step further when she equates her experiences with how Black men and women are treated in society. She feels her treatment at the diner and the ludicrous stares she receives at the grocery store equal how racial differences are treated in society and states, "maybe, it occurs to me, I'm getting a tiny glimpse of what it would be like to be black."⁶⁹² The undue attention Ehrenreich receives due to her occupation, identifiable only by the uniform she wears, and equating these feelings with the experiences Black men and women endure on a daily basis is a false equivalency, at best.

Ehrenreich's next location is Minnesota where she tries to acquire a position at Menards, a department store, and fills out an application for Wal-Mart as well. Her application at Wal-Mart also includes an intensive personality test and surveys designed to determine her compatibility with management. Ehrenreich describes this experience as "draining" but the strain "to look both perky and compliant at the same time" illustrates her aesthetic emulation.⁶⁹³ Ehrenreich's exaggerated and supplicant demeanor highlights the expectations of Wal-Mart's management team for workers who are team players. Her interview at Menards department store garners a position but when the details of her salary are disputed, she was promised \$10 an hour, she settles for working at Wal-Mart. Her living arrangements are limited and she is forced to rent a hotel room while she tries to find adequate living space and the stress of trying to find this

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, 100.

⁶⁹² Ibid, 100.

⁶⁹³ Ibid, 127.

space prompts her to pay special attention to her physical appearance because “the idea is to make myself look like someone who’s spent the night in a regular home with kitchen and washer and dryer, and not like someone who’s borderline homeless.”⁶⁹⁴ Ehrenreich pays special attention to her physical appearance, her clothes and hygiene, in order to pass for an individual with a normative socio-economic status because she does not want her co-workers to perceive her social status as lower class. Even though Ehrenreich does not want her co-workers to recognize any physical signs of her lower class status, she does remark upon how her other co-workers exhibit this social status. In fact, she states:

Now, of course I’ve notices that many of my coworkers are poor in all the hard-to-miss, stereotypical ways. Crooked yellow teeth are one sign, inadequate footwear is another. My feet hurt after four hours of work, and I wear comfortable old Reeboks, but a lot of women run around all day in thin-soled moccasins. Hair provides another class cue. Ponytails are common or, for that characteristic Wal-Martian beat-up hopeless look, straight shoulder-length hair, parted in the middle and kept out of the face by two bobby pins.⁶⁹⁵

Ehrenreich’s observation of the stereotypical physical markers of her lower class co-workers seem to exclude her as part of this social class; however, she does in fact remark upon her own personal physical alterations and how she does her “hair with enough bobby pins to last through the shift.”⁶⁹⁶ Although Ehrenreich consistently tries to distance herself from her fellow low wage workers, her aesthetic observations of her co-workers and her own aesthetic emulation illustrate the changes she has undergone to pass as a low wage worker. Overall, Ehrenreich’s aesthetic emulation does not focus on her physical passing but rather on her location/space because every

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 161-162.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid, 172-173.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid, 161.

time she decides to move to a new location, she sheds her previous passing persona and reinvents herself as a different person in a different location.

Immersion

Once aesthetic emulation is achieved, the next step in the intersectional passing model is immersion. The “immersion” stage allows the passer to form new relationships within his/her newfound group but also allows him/her to observe as well. This stage is tenuous and complicated because the passer is still constantly aware of his/her performance even though he/she has somewhat successfully immersed themselves within the group. In many of the novels, memoirs, and essays, the passer, in this stage, begins to question his/her decision to pass at all, which is grounded in fear of exposure. If the passer successfully avoids exposure, and controls any emotional responses to their prior social group then he/she has completely passed into his/her designated group. Once the passer is “immersed” within a particular social group the advantages of such inclusion are seen in his/her social “upgrade,” or in some cases “downgrade.” The advantages correlate with the group the passer immerses himself/herself in and therefore are not finite across all social groups.

Abagnale’s immersion begins immediately after he leaves home to move to New York and his immersion is further developed when he decides to pass as an airline pilot. Abagnale invests fully in making sure his identity as an airline pilot is completely three dimensional. Abagnale acquires a co-pilot’s uniform but notices he does not have the Pan Am wings and emblem for his uniform and after an embarrassing conversation with the store clerk, realizes that he will have to go to an “employee commissary” to get these necessary items.⁶⁹⁷ When he

⁶⁹⁷ Abagnale, *Catch Me If You Can*, 31.

reaches the hangar, he dons his uniform and completely immerses himself in his newfound identity but he still retains a bit of unease because he still feels “like a sixteen-year-old” and he is “sure that anyone who looked at me would realize I was too young to be a pilot and would summon the nearest cop.”⁶⁹⁸ However, no one takes a second glance at him in the hangar and he successfully acquires his wings and emblem. He also takes this opportunity to “pick up as much information as possible on airline pilots and airline operations” so he simply observes all the men and women in the airport hangar to glean as much of this information as possible.⁶⁹⁹ He is able to observe the pilot’s interactions with the other members of the flight crew in the hangar and realizes that many of the men and women do not illustrate any familiarity with one another, but they all wear id badges displaying their credentials. He knows he needs one of these badges; however, he determines that his knowledge about airplanes is of more importance and thereby he starts “haunting the public library and canvassing bookstores, studying all the material available on pilots, flying and airlines.”⁷⁰⁰ This information is helpful, but he still needs pertinent information so he calls Pan Am and tells them he is a high school student writing a report about airline pilots whereby he is immediately patched through to the “crew lounge.”⁷⁰¹ Abagnale talks to an airline pilot and asks him questions about the feasibility of a young pilot, salary ranges, number of pilots, bases of operation, familiarity between pilots, flight passes for airline personnel, and the aesthetics of a pilot’s license.⁷⁰² Abagnale’s conversation illuminates quite a bit about what it means to be a pilot and he wastes no time getting back on the phone with the intent to obtain a phony pilot’s license. Once Abagnale receives his pilot’s license, he walks into

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, 32.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid, 34.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid, 35.

⁷⁰² Ibid, 37-38.

La Guardia airport dressed in his uniform and attempts to pass as a pilot. However, he does encounter a slight hiccup during his first foray as a pilot because he doesn't quite have the proper rhetoric and a conversation with an actual co-pilot confirms his error. The co-pilot asks him "what kind of equipment"⁷⁰³ he is on and Abagnale, internally, tries to cope with this question:

My brains turned to ice cubes. I nearly freaked out. Equipment? What did he mean, equipment? Engines? Cockpit instruments? What? I couldn't recall having heard the word before in connection with commercial airlines. I frantically searched for an answer for it was obviously a normal question for him to ask. I mentally reread the reminiscences of the veteran Pan Am captain, a little book I'd really liked and which I'd virtually adopted as a manual. I couldn't recall his ever using the word 'equipment.'⁷⁰⁴

Abagnale's response to the TWA pilot confirms that he is woefully unprepared to fully pass as an airline pilot because he simply does not fully grasp the rhetoric and he concludes that he is not "sufficiently prepared to attempt a deadheading venture, despite all my prior work and research."⁷⁰⁵ Although Abagnale may conform to the physical aesthetics of an airline pilot, he is not yet educated on how to verbally interact with a flight crew. After his embarrassing conversation with the TWA pilot, Abagnale makes a point of engaging a TWA stewardess in conversation and asks her what equipment she was on and her response of "seven-o-sevens" confirms that he needs to spend a bit more time familiarizing himself with airplane equipment.⁷⁰⁶ He begins to spend more time at the airlines and starts "pumping their people for information" while posing "as a college student doing a paper on transportation, as an embryo book author or magazine writer, or as a club reporter for one the area's dallies" in order to gain access to a

⁷⁰³ Ibid, 46.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid, 46-47.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid, 47.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, 48.

variety of information otherwise withheld from the general public.⁷⁰⁷ The information Abagnale gains from these interviews bolster his confidence and he begins passing checks at local banks in his pilot's uniform and the reaction of the bank personnel confirms what Abagnale suspected all along; the banks fall over themselves to cash his checks. He states, "cashiers couldn't get the money out the tills fast enough. Most of them didn't even ask for identification. I shoved my phony ID card and my ersatz pilot's license in their faces anyway, I didn't want my handiwork to go unnoticed."⁷⁰⁸ The bank personnel do not care about Abagnale's identification because they see his uniform and automatically assume he is a man who is professional and trustworthy. Abagnale's successful immersion depends highly on the perception of those around him and he spends quite a bit of time merely observing the interaction of pilots and stewardesses in local airports. In fact, Abagnale spends a great deal of time "handing around La Guardia" so he can "meet airline personnel and to eavesdrop on airline talk."⁷⁰⁹ The time he spends in the airport allows him to fully observe and immerse himself in the environment of airport personnel, but he also engages in conversations with these men and women so he can test his rhetoric. His plan is quite successful and he states, "some books *are* judged by their covers, it seems, and in my uniform I was an immediate best seller. I'd walk into a coffee shop, where there would usually be a dozen or more pilots or other crewmen taking a break, and invariably someone would invite me to join him or them. More often it was them, for airline people tend to gaggle like geese."⁷¹⁰ Once Abagnale is invited to join this group, he does not readily engage in conversation but instead pays close attention to how the crew talks to one another and the rhetoric they use with each other. For example, he states that he, "usually let the conversations flow around me,

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid, 48.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid, 50.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid, 50.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid, 50.

monitoring the words, and phrases, and within a short time I was speaking airlinese like a native.”⁷¹¹ Abagnale’s successful immersion passing as an airline pilot also includes close relationships with stewardesses which also feeds his prevalent preoccupation with women.

Abagnale engages in relationships with stewardesses, not only because he loves women, but because he can ask them questions about flight rhetoric. In fact, he states “some of my language books were absolutely gorgeous. I guess stewardesses just weren’t that used to seeing a really young pilot, on that appeared to be an age peer.”⁷¹² Abagnale uses the stewardess’s attraction towards to him to gain information but at the same time makes sure to discount the often held stereotype of the promiscuous stewardess by stating,

the myth that all stewardesses are passionate nymphs is just that, a myth. If anything, ‘stews’ are more circumspect and discriminating in their sexual lives than women in other fields. The ones I knew were all intelligent, sophisticated and responsible young women, good in their jobs, and I didn’t make out en masse.⁷¹³

While Abagnale regales the reader with his initial relationships with stewardesses as strictly professional, he still engages in sexual relationships with many of them throughout his memoir. This entire information gathering leads to Abagnale’s growing confidence in his passing and thereby results in his first deadheading experience, which refers to his ability as a co-pilot to hop on a flight strictly as a passenger. Abagnale’s immersion relies heavily upon whether he can successfully respond to the other pilot’s rhetoric in the manner fitting a fellow pilot. Abagnale boards a flight to Miami and is able to successful interact with the flight crew and even though he felt like he was in the hot seat during his journey he also states that “it was ridiculously easy”

⁷¹¹ Ibid, 51.

⁷¹² Ibid, 51.

⁷¹³ Ibid, 52.

because after a few pointed questions about his education and experience, the flight crew merely resumed their responsibilities as pilots.⁷¹⁴ Abagnale's first experience on an airplane, and his acceptance from the flight crew as one of their own, reified his immersion as a pilot.

There are numerous benefits associated with Abagnale's newfound status as an airline pilot which include his ability to cash checks anywhere, the ready availability of housing accommodations, and free transportation to his hotel. After Abagnale departs from his first deadheading experience, he is at a loss as to where the airline "housed its people in Miami" but soon finds out that there is a motel where the flight crew are accommodated as long as their stay does not extend "less than twenty-four hours."⁷¹⁵ Once Abagnale receives the necessary information as to his accommodations, the clerk at the ticket counter also procures a "claim-check-sized card" to Abagnale and informs him that this card is good for any local cab company and that the card is essentially "a ticket for a free cab ride."⁷¹⁶ As a pilot, Abagnale is given a free cab ride, a hotel room paid for by the airline company as part of his expense account, and ample opportunity to cash fraudulent checks merely because he appears to fit the aesthetic of an airline pilot. These accommodations are not isolated to his experience in Miami, but apply every time he travels as a pilot hence his reasoning behind passing as an airline pilot. To further aid his immersion, Abagnale keeps a journal with all the information he has gathered which will assist him in his passing. For example, in his journal he "jotted down phrases, technical data, miscellaneous information, names, dates, places, telephone numbers, thoughts and a collection of other data" to keep track of all the pertinent information he needs to fully immerse himself as a pilot. He also mentions, repeatedly, how "just by watching and listening" he is able to become

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, 56.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid, 57.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid, 57.

quite “adept” with other aspects of his passing to enhance his “pose.”⁷¹⁷ All of Abagnale’s experiences deadheading and his interactions with other pilots and crewmen culminate into successfully passing as a pilot. In other words, Abagnale must interact with these individuals if he wants to fully immerse himself into their group.

While Abagnale’s passing as an airline pilot, and his experiences therein, fill the bulk of his memoir; he also immerses himself in other minor roles as well with the same attention to detail. For example, when he passes as a medical doctor he does not rely solely on his aesthetic emulation to pass successful but also immerses himself in the role when he educates himself about pediatric medicine. To convince the medical staff at the hospital, he spends hours in the hospital library reading “up-to-the-minute books, journals and medical magazines dealing with every facet of pediatrics” and the medical staff commends him for his devotion to keeping up to date on medical innovations in his field.⁷¹⁸ Again, Abagnale does not merely decide to pass and superficially change his aesthetics, but also endeavors to formulate a working identity through an exploration of the physical and technical skills associated with that identity. This physical and technical development is also illustrated when Abagnale passes as an attorney because he cannot solely rely on simply stating he is an attorney, but must also take the bar exam which will validate his identity. He takes the bar exam three times before he passes the test on the third try, but he studies voraciously each time he is scheduled to take the test. He finds his success at passing the bar exam rather humorous considering he never attended law school but as he puts it, “I cracked up. I hadn’t even finished high school and had yet to step on a college campus, but I was a certified lawyer!”⁷¹⁹ Abagnale’s successful passing for each new persona relies heavily

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, 63-64.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid, 82.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid, 105.

upon his ability to educate himself about the finer details of each profession; thereby effectively adhering to the criteria many expect of these professional positions. Each position, or persona, also relies heavily upon the impression he gives to the people surrounding him who share his profession, so whether he is an airline pilot, doctor, or lawyer; he must mimic the rhetoric associated with each persona. Many of these immersions are short in duration so his capacity to form any lasting relationships does not occur or if he does form relationships they are superficial at best. Abagnale's immersions are also based solely on the con he is initiating; therefore he does not immerse himself unless he can receive some benefit from eliciting a new persona. As he states,

I never immersed myself so deeply in an assumed identity that I forgot I was really Frank Abagnale, Jr. In fact, in casual encounters with people, where I felt no compulsion to play-act and nothing was to be gained by affecting a guise, I invariably presented myself as Frank Abagnale, a foot-loose fellow from the Bronx.⁷²⁰

Abagnale's admission that he did not pass, or immerse, himself in a new identity unless he received some form of benefit varies greatly from those individuals who pass based on their race, gender, or sexuality. Abagnale's class passing, and his motivation for doing so, is solely based on the monetary benefits he will receive when he immerses himself in these various identities.

Ehrenreich's immersion is rather unique in the sense that she is passing for a low wage worker not as a means to elevate her socio-economic status, but instead to illustrate how financially challenged low-wage workers are in various geographical locales. Of course, during Ehrenreich's passing she does immerse fully in her role as a waitress, a maid, and a Wal-Mart worker. As Ehrenreich navigates her passing personas across geographical spaces, her

⁷²⁰ Ibid, 121.

relationships with her co-workers grow from merely superficial conversations to more in-depth activism. Ehrenreich begins her passing in Florida as a waitress where she tends to view her customers as “‘patients’” because “‘of the mysterious vulnerability that seems to have left them temporarily unable to feed themselves.’”⁷²¹ Ehrenreich’s viewpoint of her customers as individuals who cannot effectively gain sustenance on their own is also coupled with her overwhelming desire to make sure that her hard-working customers receive the best meal/service possible. She states, “‘the plurality of my customers are hardworking locals—truck drivers, construction workers, even housekeepers from the attached hotel—and I want them to have the closest to a ‘fine dining’ experience that the grubby circumstances will allow.’”⁷²² Ehrenreich passes as a waitress begrudgingly at the start of her experiment, but she slowly begins to immerse herself in her persona and she alters her interaction with her customers to merely staid service to an assurance of high quality customer interaction. Her interaction with customers tends to draw from her previous life experiences and education especially when she speaks to her German customers with her pidgin phrases much to the delight of her customers.⁷²³ Her service ethic impresses her co-workers and sometimes brings her unwanted criticism from her manager who stresses that Ehrenreich’s position requires her to move food and people out of the restaurant in an expedited manner so more customers will flow through the restaurant. Ehrenreich does slowly begin to interact with her co-workers and forms superficial relationships which are regaled strictly to the workplace. For example, Ehrenreich states,

I like Gail, who is ‘looking at fifty,’ agewise, but moves so fast she can alight in one place and then another without apparently being anywhere between. I clown around with Lionel, the teenage Haitian busboy, though we don’t have much vocabulary in common, and loiter near the main sink to listen to the older Haitian

⁷²¹ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dime*, 18.

⁷²² *Ibid*, 18.

⁷²³ *Ibid*, 19.

dishwashers' musical Creole, which sounds, in their rich bass voices, like French on testosterone.⁷²⁴

Ehrenreich's relationships with her co-workers revolve around their mutual environment and work circumstances, which limit her interaction with these men and women outside this environment. She does quickly relate to her co-workers because their conversations tend to revolve around customers, fellow co-workers or management. These conversations illustrate how quickly Ehrenreich fully immerses herself in her environment, but also highlight the superficial nature of her engagement with these men and women. More specifically, the common theme in most of Ehrenreich's interactions with her fellow co-workers is their work conditions and she does not tend to delve any deeper into her relationships with these individuals outside of this environment. Even though Ehrenreich tends to limit her interactions with her fellow co-workers, she still fully immerses herself in her experiences passing as a waitress. For example, she loathes management because, as she puts it, "managers can sit—for hours at a time if they want—but it's their job to see that no one else ever does, even when there's nothing to do, and this is why, for servers, slow times can be as exhausting as rushes."⁷²⁵ Ehrenreich's criticism of management illustrates a disconnect between the individuals who endeavor to serve their customers and those individuals who monitor whether or not their workers are laboring according to particular standards. Ehrenreich's commentaries on the managers at Hearthside revolve around the very unrealistic standards which all employees must adhere to in addition to their other duties. For example, she states how all employees are required to attend a mandatory meeting where her manager, Phillip, gives the illusion that they are considered a "we" but where in fact Phillip

⁷²⁴ Ibid, 20.

⁷²⁵ Ibid, 22.

monopolizes the tone of the meeting to merely complain about certain issues in the restaurant. More specifically, Ehrenreich remarks upon how Phillip opens the meeting “with a sneer” and begins to list all the infractions committed by the staff.⁷²⁶ Ehrenreich’s umbrage at how Phillip not only expects the staff to clean the break room but curtail any form of gossip illustrates how fully she has immersed herself as a waitress. Even though Ehrenreich effectively immerses herself in her position as a waitress, she still tends to ignore the vast class disparities between herself and the men and women she works with in the restaurant. One such conversation with her co-worker illustrates Ehrenreich’s complete naivety in regards to the dire socio-economic conditions she must endure. Gail, Ehrenreich’s co-worker, remarks upon her desire to escape her roommate and acquire a room at a hotel and Ehrenreich’s reaction is indicative of her class status: “I am astounded: how can she even think of paying \$40 to \$60 a day? But I was afraid of sounding like a social worker, I have come out just sounding like a fool. She squints at me in disbelief: ‘And where am I supposed to get a month’s rent and a month’s deposit for an apartment?’”⁷²⁷ Of course, Ehrenreich does not have these worries when she begins her experiment because she has funds to acquire satisfactory living conditions, but her reaction and response to Gail is still indicative of her socio-economic status. Her reaction also illustrates, to a certain extent, an almost paternalistic response to take care of Gail and counsel her in the best course of action in this situation. Ehrenreich’s reaction to Gail does not illustrate a full immersion into her socio-economic circumstances because Ehrenreich makes a conscious effort to disconnect herself from the dire financial circumstances that her fellow co-workers endure at Hearthside. However, as her experiment progresses, Ehrenreich realizes that she cannot adequately support herself holding one position as a waitress in Florida, so she must acquire a

⁷²⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁷²⁷ Ibid, 27.

second waitressing job at a place called Jerry's. While working at Jerry's, Ehrenreich does forge friendships with the other women working there and they "form a reliable mutual-support group: if one of us is feeling sick or overwhelmed, another one will 'bev' a table or even carry trays for her."⁷²⁸ Ehrenreich's immersion as a waitress, and a low-wage worker, illustrates her slow progression out of her socio-economic status. Her discussions with these women revolve around common experiences with "men, children, and the sinister allure of Jerry's chocolate peanut-butter cream pie—though no one, I notice, ever brings up anything potentially expensive, like shopping or movies."⁷²⁹ Ehrenreich's discussions with the women she works with are limited to activities within their socio-economic means or focus on familiar family issues, but all discussion of any extra-curricular activities that require money are not readily shared with this group. Of course, Ehrenreich's expectation that these women engage in such activities still reflects her socio-economic status so she fails to recognize through her immersion as a waitress that these women cannot afford any activity that would divert funds from the bare essentials. Another example of Ehrenreich's attempt to immerse herself as a waitress occurs when she mentions how attach she becomes to George, a "nineteen-year-old Czech dishwasher who has been in this country exactly one week."⁷³⁰ Ehrenreich and George's relationship is further strengthened when she begins teaching him English through a series of ESL lessons, but it is her reaction to a fellow co-worker that illustrates how far Ehrenreich's immersion as a waitress has evolved. Ehrenreich becomes irate when her manager at Jerry's cannot accurately call George by his name because, as she puts it, "'George, Joseph—there are so many of them!'"⁷³¹ Ehrenreich attempts to shame her manager because she cannot, or will not, take the time to learn her employees' names.

⁷²⁸ Ibid, 37.

⁷²⁹ Ibid, 36.

⁷³⁰ Ibid, 37.

⁷³¹ Ibid, 38.

Ehrenreich's reaction to her manager's slight illustrates her growing sense of solidarity with her fellow co-workers at the diner.

Interpretation

The next stage in the intersectional passing model examines how the passer interprets his/her experience with a greater understanding of their new social group. The passer's new found relationships within the social group allow him/her to alter their understanding of the normative structure and in some cases slowly alter that structure. This interpretation stage relies heavily upon how the passer navigates his/her new social position and how he/she reinterprets the normative structure. As stated previously, once the passer begins the journey of passing he/she repositions themselves within the normative structure and the interpretation stage will look at how the passer effectively processes this new position. How does the passer view his/her new position within the social group? What does the passer learn about his/her new social group? Does this newfound knowledge of the social group alter the passer's attitude? The passer interprets his/her new position through the rhetoric associated with his/her current and previous social group. The rhetoric of the text will show whether or not the passer's knowledge of his/her new social group alters, or shifts, to allow for a greater understanding of race, gender, class, or sexuality.

Abagnale's passing is quite interesting in the sense that his position within the socio-economic structure reifies our understanding of class status, but also illustrates the cracks in that structure as well. More specifically, Abagnale's childhood and the loss of a stable socio-economic status prompt him to crave economic stability, but in doing so he does not necessarily alter the normative structure. Instead, Abagnale's passing illustrates the vulnerability of class

permanence and also highlights the cracks present in the normative structure. Abagnale's passing does not revolve around a need to alter the normative structure and in fact he tends to absorb himself in merely an accumulation of wealth. However, Abagnale's profession as a con man to acquire wealth does illustrate how the socio-economic structure is easily manipulated because he simply uses the normative structure to gain a foothold in an otherwise strict social group. More specifically, Abagnale uses the normative structure against these men and women to illustrate how aesthetics imply wealth.

Abagnale's first con, charging his Mobil card to acquire cash, invokes a belief that he deserves certain monetary advantages because he needs them to maintain his lifestyle. Abagnale tries to justify his needs and desires by categorizing those who do not indulge in their criminal tendencies with those who do:

I think a lot people do fantasize about being a supercriminal, an international diamond thief of something like that, but they confine their larceny to daydreams. But there's also a type of person whose competitive instincts override reason. They are challenged by a given situation in much the same manner a climber is challenged by a tall peak: because it's there. Right or wrong are not factors, nor are consequences. These people look on crime as a game, and the goal is not just the loot; it's the success of the venture that counts. Of course, if the booty is bountiful, that's nice too.⁷³²

Abagnale's description of criminal behavior versus normative behavior highlights juxtaposition between defying the normative structure and conforming to that structure. More specifically, Abagnale's description of criminal behavior maps out a deviance from societal ideology about right and wrong; therein, he knows what he is doing is not within the normative structure of acceptable behavior. However, he engages in this criminal activity not to merely challenge the normative structure but also to conform to socio-economic normative standards. Abagnale wants

⁷³² Abagnale, *Catch Me If You Can*, 13.

to acquire as much wealth as he can to fund his insatiable desire for women but at the same time he wants defy the system that regaled his father to a mere postal worker. Abagnale works the system in various ways to not only successfully pass fraudulent checks but also to pass as his many personas. For example, Abagnale understands how local police deal with fraudulent checks and this knowledge allows him to escape incarceration for quite some time. He states,

Fraudulent check swindles are the most common of crimes, and the professional paperhanger is the wiliest of criminals, the hardest to nab. That's true today and it was true then, and it's no reflection on the abilities or determination of the officers involved. Their success ratio is admirable when you consider the number of complaints they handle daily.⁷³³

Abagnale's in-depth analysis of the criminal justice system and how local police deal with individuals who pass phony checks, allows him to continue his fraudulent activities and pass for an airline pilot for years without suspicion. Abagnale correctly ascertains that local police are inundated with numerous cases of counterfeit checks and thereby must prioritize cases. This system works in Abagnale's favor because he knows that the local police will "put a message to whichever city is appropriate on the police teletype and pigeonhole the complaint for possible future reference, that's what they do. They've done as much as they could."⁷³⁴ Of course, this system is rather antiquated and Abagnale rightly admits that the system the police have in place today, a "computerized police link," would curtail his fraudulent activities "by years."⁷³⁵ Abagnale's understanding of the not only the workings of local law enforcement, but also the banking systems of his day allow him to effectively work the system.

⁷³³ Ibid, 61-62.

⁷³⁴ Ibid, 62.

⁷³⁵ Ibid, 62-63.

After Abagnale successfully passes for an attorney, he decides to travel and ends up in Eureka, California. During his sojourn as an attorney, Abagnale does not pass any fraudulent checks for nine months but the urge returns when he observes that Eureka has an abundance of banks. He devises a plan to use the Pan Am logo on his checks, and mails the check to himself through the local post office in Eureka. After receiving the check, he goes to a local bank attired in his Pan Am pilot's uniform and approaches a young female bank teller. The female bank teller proceeds to ask him questions about his adventures and his responses are delivered "in a manner designed to bolster her apparent romantic image of airline pilots."⁷³⁶ Not only does Abagnale prey upon the young female bank teller's perceived notions of airline pilots, but he also admits that "the transaction also verified a suspicion I had long entertained: it's not how good a check looks but how good the person behind the check looks that influences tellers and cashiers."⁷³⁷ Abagnale's success depends upon how the teller perceives the aesthetics of his persona. Abagnale preys upon his audience's perceptions of socio-economic status and these perceptions allow him to effectively pass as an airline pilot and pass his fraudulent checks.

Abagnale uses people's perceptions of socio-economic success to his advantage on numerous occasions especially when he enters a bank to acquire funds. For example, he scopes out a bank in Philadelphia and notices that the bank has an "all-glass front" which allows the bank tellers to view the street and "the cash inflow."⁷³⁸ Abagnale uses this high visibility to his advantage and dresses up as a wealthy man and arrives in an expensive car. He immediately garners the attention of a male bank teller whom he approaches as he enters the bank. He presents himself as a wealthy businessman who wants to open a checking account with the bank

⁷³⁶ Ibid, 120.

⁷³⁷ Ibid, 120.

⁷³⁸ Ibid, 148.

and transfer his personal funds from his New York bank account.⁷³⁹ Abagnale understands that the teller's deference to him is solely based on how he dresses and his manner toward him, but this aesthetic deference is also displayed when he travels to another Philadelphia bank. At this bank, Abagnale encounters a female teller, who turns out to be the bank manager, and her inquiry as to how she can help him indicates how important aesthetics are when dealing with customers. She states, ““Now, what's your problem? You certainly don't appear to need a loan.””⁷⁴⁰ The bank manager is basing her conclusions about Abagnale's socio-economic status solely on the way he dresses and Abagnale is using her assumptions about his status to acquire funds. Abagnale repeatedly uses the perceptions of others, especially when entering banks, to work the system.

Abagnale's position as a con man is highly successful because he understands how important his skills of observation are to achieve his goals. His skills of observation allow him to notice how many bank patrons making a deposit do not necessarily fill out their deposit slips with their bank account number, so he uses this information to divert deposits to his personal bank account. In fact, he states “I surreptitiously pocketed a sheaf of the deposit slips, returned to my apartment and, using press-on numerals matching the type face on the bank forms, filled in the blank on each slip with my own account number.”⁷⁴¹ Abagnale ends up acquiring over \$40,000 simply because he noticed a discrepancy in how the bank accepted deposits from their clients. Abagnale's cons are limited to those men and women who hold extreme wealth and power. In fact, Abagnale states quite emphatically that his “targets had always been corporate

⁷³⁹ Ibid, 148-149.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid, 150.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid, 147.

targets—banks, airlines, hotels, motels or other establishments protected by insurance.”⁷⁴²

Abagnale’s justification for passing relies heavily upon seeking a perceived injustice and conning targets where the loss does not adversely affect anyone personally. Of course, Abagnale tends to go to great lengths to rationalize his criminal behavior and his motives are rather ambiguous especially considering that Abagnale acquires vast wealth through his cons which places him within an exclusive income bracket.

Abagnale’s successful career as a con man quickly comes to an end when he is arrested in 1971 and sent to a federal prison in Petersburg, Virginia.⁷⁴³ Abagnale tries to retain honest work after he is released from prison and soon realizes how difficult it is to keep an honest job with a criminal record. However, Abagnale does conceive of a plan to assist major banks in reducing the number of fraudulent checks they receive. After years of working the system to acquire funds through forging fraudulent checks, Abagnale became “one of the world’s most respected authorities on counterfeiting and secure documents.”⁷⁴⁴ Even though Abagnale spent the majority of his life using societal perceptions of socio-economic status to work the system in his favor, he ends up working within those same systems to change the way banks do business.

Ehrenreich’s interpretation begins at her first position as a waitress at Hearthside in Florida. As Ehrenreich clearly mentions in her introductory chapter, her experiment as a low-wage worker is merely to validate her conclusions about those men and women on welfare. Therefore, she gives the impression that her foray into low wage positions requires a certain amount of mental and physical detachment from her fellow co-workers simply because, as she qualifies, this is merely a scientific experiment to collect data. However, Ehrenreich begins to

⁷⁴² Ibid, 197.

⁷⁴³ Ibid, 280-281.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid, 284.

rethink her original position when she realizes that as a waitress she needs to alter the nature of her inquiry or as she states, “to my total surprise and despite the scientific detachment I am doing my best to maintain, I *care*.”⁷⁴⁵ In spite of her determination to maintain an objective viewpoint and interpret her data without any emotional inference, Ehrenreich does become personally invested in her performance as a waitress. She states, “the whole thing would be a lot easier if I could just skate through it like Lily Tomlin in one of her waitress skits, but I was raised by the absurd Booker T. Washingtonian precept that says: If you’re going to do something, do it well.”⁷⁴⁶ Ehrenreich’s work ethic and her investment in her position as a waitress are grounded in her familial relationships which she references throughout her experiment. An interesting aspect of her interpretation as a waitress is her utter surprise that she has any emotional attachment to her co-workers, and customers. She states, “I feel the service ethic kick in like a shot of oxytocin, the nurturance hormone. The plurality of my customers are hardworking locals—truck drivers, construction workers, even housekeepers from the attached hotel—and I want them to have the closest to a ‘fine dining’ experience that the grubby circumstances will allow.”⁷⁴⁷ Ehrenreich alters her previous notion of emotional detachment and begins to view each patron as not only a symbol of working class men and women, but as an incentive to display her own working class roots and work ethic.

Ehrenreich’s waitress position at Hearthsides also highlights the rather stifling nature of corporate management and the control these entities exert over managers and their employees. Ehrenreich seems to enjoy her time at Hearthsides and even states that she “could drift along like

⁷⁴⁵ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 18.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 18.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 18.

this, in some dreamy proletarian idyll, except for two things. One is management.”⁷⁴⁸ Her assessment of management is that not all “managers and especially ‘assistant managers’ in low-wage settings like this are exactly the class enemy,” but the notion that “everyone knows they have crossed over to the other side, which is, crudely put, corporate as opposed to human.”⁷⁴⁹ Ehrenreich’s interpretation of managers’ positions revolves around the idea that these men and women serve no purpose other than to create a system of surveillance. Managers do not necessarily serve customers nor do they actually seem to perform any menial labor, but instead these men and women are in place to ultimately ensure that the employees under their purview understand their limited importance. More importantly, although Ehrenreich states that managers in this environment are not necessarily agents to enact a class war, these managers do constantly remind their employees that their continued employment is always precarious and dependent upon how well they perform according to managerial standards. Of course, many managers are beholden to the corporations they represent, and Ehrenreich continually reiterates how the divide between employee and manager is a fostered dichotomy. For example, Ehrenreich recounts how a staff meeting dovetails quickly into the blame game where the manager recounts several infractions made by the staff. Ehrenreich also observes how “there is no ‘we’ at this meeting” because the manager, Phillip, does not view his place as a manager to foster a collective team atmosphere with his staff but instead berates his employees to illustrate how he can give certain amenities to them and just as easily take them away.⁷⁵⁰ Phillip’s position as a manager clearly illustrates a class divide between those individuals who possess a salaried, corporate sanctioned position versus individuals whose sole income is reliant upon serving patrons and constantly

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid, 22.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid, 22.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid, 23.

jumping to the whims of physical bored manager. Ehrenreich's interpretation of her place within a low-wage position and how her managers do not view her as an individual but merely as a work mule is quite indicative of a clear class divide. Even though Ehrenreich comments on the unlikelihood of a class war between these two groups, the evidence she recollects does in fact point to an income based disparity. Managers' salaries are increasingly more than the employees they oversee, but incidentally their salaries do not necessarily reflect the level of labor they perform. Ehrenreich states, "managers can sit—for hours at a time if they want—but it's their job to see that no one else ever does, even when there's nothing to do, and this is why, for servers, slow times can be as exhausting as rushes."⁷⁵¹ The role of a manager is to make sure that their employees are constantly working or at least completing tasks that infer they are working. However, managers do not have to fulfill the same criteria as their employees for their position only requires the performance of labor. Hence, managers can sit down on the job as much as they want because their position entails the illusion of overseeing the conduct of their staff and do not require them to constantly run around fulfilling the needs of their patrons.

Aside from the hostile nature of management, Ehrenreich does enjoy her time at Hearthside, but also concedes that she cannot survive, financially, as a waitress. In fact, one of the problems Ehrenreich recognizes in her position as a waitress is how many of her fellow co-workers are struggling to maintain any stability in their living arrangements. She begins talking to her fellow co-workers and discovers that many of them are barely able to maintain adequate housing. For example, "Gail is sharing a room in a well-known downtown flophouse for \$250 a week" and "Tina, another server, and her husband are paying \$60 a night for a room in the Days Inn. This is because they have no car and the Days Inn is in walking distance of the

⁷⁵¹ Ibid, 22.

Hearthside.”⁷⁵² Ehrenreich recounts how many of her fellow co-workers are sharing their housing costs with other people because they cannot afford accommodations on their own. Of course, Ehrenreich does not have similar worries about her living arrangements because she began her experiment with enough money to secure adequate housing. Moreover, Ehrenreich’s secure housing situation, and her perceived elevated social status, allows her to attempt to impart some semblance of wisdom to her co-worker, Gail, when her housing situation becomes intolerable. Gail wants to abandon her current living situation and move to the Days Inn, and Ehrenreich rebukes her because she does not understand how Gail can afford to pay for the room.⁷⁵³ Ehrenreich immediately regrets her condemnation of Gail’s decision and critiques her attitude about her own living accommodations. She states, “I’d been feeling pretty smug about my \$500 efficiency, but of course it was made possible only by the \$1,300 I had allotted myself for start-up costs when I began my low-wage life.”⁷⁵⁴ Once Ehrenreich recognizes her advantages, she begins to critically interpret the overall effects of poverty. She states, “there are no secret economies that nourish the poor; on the contrary, there are a host of special costs. If you can’t put up the two months’ rent you need to secure an apartment, you end up paying through the nose for a room by the week.”⁷⁵⁵ Of course, these elements of poverty have not necessarily effected Ehrenreich personally as of yet, but she does slowly begin to realize how her position as a waitress cannot sustain financial security. She states,

My own situation, when I sit down to assess it after two weeks of work, would not be much better if this were my actual life. The seductive thing about waitressing is that you don’t have to wait for payday to feel a few bills in your pocket, and my

⁷⁵² Ibid, 25-26.

⁷⁵³ Ibid, 27.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid, 27.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid, 27.

tips usually cover meals and gas, plus something left over to stuff into the kitchen drawer I use as a bank.⁷⁵⁶

Ehrenreich's interpretation of her dire financial situation is qualified by her statement of "if this were my actual life" which somehow demotes her assessment of her current financial situation.⁷⁵⁷ Why does she feel it is necessary to disqualify herself from her current situation and separate herself from her fellow co-workers? Ehrenreich does interpret her situation, always, with a clear demarcation between herself and her co-workers. After all, Ehrenreich is merely exercising in these activities for the sake of scientific data, but her reaction to her financial situation is indicative of an individual who finds themselves on the brink of homelessness. Therefore, Ehrenreich tries to rationalize the difference between herself and her co-workers by stating that this is not her reality which effectively negates, in some respects, her overall experiences. Ehrenreich interprets her current situation as merely a temporary deviation from her actual existence, but at the same time she spends an inordinate amount of time regaling her reader with statistics/facts about poverty, welfare, and employment numbers depending on the areas she migrates to in order to begin her experimentation anew.

Ehrenreich does have to acquire another position in order to keep her current lifestyle and she finds herself with two waitressing jobs; one at Hearthside and one at Jerry's. She physically suffers from working two jobs that require her to constantly stay on her feet and she remarks upon how "in my ordinary life, this level of disability might justify a day of ice packs and stretching" which cannot occur because her dependence upon a constant influx of cash will not

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid, 28.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid, 28.

permit her to take off work.⁷⁵⁸ Ehrenreich's physical ailments are coupled with her interpretation of a working man/woman's dilemma; if you don't work then you cannot live. Her assessment of how precarious her situation is aligns with many working men and women who cannot afford to get sick. Of course, during the course of her lamentation over her physical limits, Ehrenreich goes back to her previous life for a visit. She takes occasional breaks to sort out her bills, her correspondences, and to indulge in extra-curricular activities with her friends that she could not afford as a mere low-wage worker. Her visit home also illustrates the clear divide between her foray as a low-wage worker and her ordinary life. Ehrenreich's visit to her home not only highlights class disparities, but also the ease in which she passes from one class to another. Ehrenreich began this experiment with the knowledge that her financial situation was not permanent, but when she visits her home she does notice how strange she feels revisiting her previous environment. She states,

But as the days go by, my old life is beginning to look exceedingly strange. The e-mails and phone messages addressed to my former self come from a distant race of people with exotic concerns and far too much time on their hands. The neighborly market I used to cruise for produce now looks forbiddingly like a Manhattan yuppie emporium. And when I sit down one morning in my real home to pay bills from my past life, I am dazzled by the two-three figure sums owed to outfits like Club Body Tech and Amazon.com.⁷⁵⁹

Ehrenreich's brief visit to her former home, and her prior life, illustrates not only class disparities but also the ease of life that Ehrenreich once took for granted and now finds strangely alien. Her brief description of her prior activities highlights how time is a luxury her working class self does not have time to indulge in, but also how her prior concerns and activities seem rather frivolous to her current status as a low-wage worker. Ehrenreich's current work situation does

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid, 34.

not allow for weekend jaunts to a farmer's market nor any other leisure activities because she simply cannot afford such a waste of time, gas, or money. While this excursion to her prior life and home temporarily halts her passing as a low-wage worker and in effect negates the concept of passing, her interpretation of the class differences between her low-wage self and her prior self highlight how class is not merely monetary but also psychological. More specifically, Ehrenreich's return to her home is coupled with the seamless ease with which she relaxes herself from the constant state of survival her low-wage deals with on a daily basis.

Ehrenreich's departure from Hearthside and Jerry's is fraught with a sense of failure because she is fed up with management and simply walks out. She recounts how she "had gone into this venture in the spirit of science, to test a mathematical proposition, but somewhere along the line, in the tunnel vision imposed by long shifts and relentless concentration, it became a test of myself, and clearly I failed."⁷⁶⁰ Ehrenreich's sense of failure stems from the realization that her experiment does require her to form real-life associations with the people she works with and these relationships highlight her increasing departure from mere scientific inquiry. She also finds that her adventures into low-wage positions time and time again require her to form a certain disposition. More specifically, she states "educated middle-class professionals never go careening half-cocked into the future, vulnerable to any surprise that might leap out at them. We always have a plan or at least a to-do list; we like to know that everything has been anticipated, that our lives are, in a sense, pre-lived."⁷⁶¹ Ehrenreich's interpretation of how middle-class people arrange their lives to pre-empt any sense of vulnerability directly correlates with socio-economic stability. Her interpretation of middle-class ideology firmly places her within that

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid, 48.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid, 54.

socio-economic group and she does not quite understand the mentality of low-wage workers or their ability to quickly adapt to their environment. Ehrenreich posits that middle-class workers do not take unnecessary risks with their financial security and prefer to establish some semblance of structured order in their lives. Of course, this sense of order and structure is merely an illusion, but Ehrenreich's interpretation of her employment prospects prompts her to correlate stable employment with social class disparities; if one is gainfully employed, and educated, then there is less risk of financial instability. Ehrenreich's interpretation of the differences between middle-class workers and low-wage workers is rather superficial, especially considering her conclusion that low-wage workers do not have plans to ensure stable employment or that their plans were to work for the rest of their lives in low-wage positions. Ehrenreich's conclusion about low-wage workers' vulnerability in the workforce is glaringly evident when she moves to Minnesota to embark on another low-wage position.

Ehrenreich's final position as a low-wage worker occurs in Minnesota where she finds her prospects of employment limited to working at Wal-Mart. As soon as she arrives in Minnesota, Ehrenreich fills out several applications for retail positions but her primary concern is the lack of available housing. Ehrenreich stays a few days at a friend's apartment, but this living arrangement is not permanent. At the same time she is looking for adequate living arrangements, Ehrenreich begins to question whether "the scenario I have created for myself, both here and in Maine, is totally artificial. Who, in real life, plops herself down in a totally strange environment—without housing, family connections, or job—and attempts to become a viable resident?"⁷⁶² Ehrenreich's assumption that what she is doing is unrealistic is put to rest when she meets, and talks to at length, a woman named Caroline. Caroline did pack up her two children

⁷⁶² Ibid, 130-131.

and move across country with no housing and no pre-planned employment prospects. After hearing Caroline's story, Ehrenreich states, "So I have a friend now in Minneapolis, and the odd thing is that she is the original—the woman who uprooted herself and came out somehow on her feet and who did all this in real life and with children—while I am the imitation, the pallid, child-free pretender."⁷⁶³ Ehrenreich's assumptions of whether or not an individual would indeed leave everything behind to begin a new life somewhere new without housing or employment is put firmly to rest from Caroline's story. Ehrenreich's conversation with Caroline illustrates her rather narrow perspective of socio-economic circumstances and her assumption that no one has actualized her experiences. In fact, Caroline represents the fearless nature of low-wage workers simply because her position required her to leap into a new environment without any clear plans for financial success. Ehrenreich's recounting of Caroline's story illustrates, once again, a socio-economic demarcation between middle-class workers and low-wage workers. Specifically, Caroline did not have a choice as to whether or not she wanted to move to a new city with no familial connections nearby because her survival depends upon such a move. Ehrenreich's vulnerability in the face of socio-economic instability seems to stem not only from her lack of a reliable support system, but her prospects of unemployment as well.

Ehrenreich continues her search for employment in Minneapolis, and finds she is performing another drug test during the application process for Wal-Mart and Menards, a hardware store. She remarks upon the routine requirements for employment at every job she applies to and states, "Each potential new job requires (1) the application, (2) the interview, and (3) the drug test."⁷⁶⁴ These requirements are not arbitrary and she interprets these hurdles as a

⁷⁶³ Ibid, 133-134.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid, 135.

clear indication that most companies require drug tests to limit the type of applicants. More specifically, she states, “the whole venture, including drive time and wait, has taken an hour and forty minutes, about what it took for the Wal-Mart test, and it occurs to me that one of the effects of drug testing is to limit worker mobility—maybe even one of the *functions*.”⁷⁶⁵ These drug tests fulfill dual roles; catch potential drug users and eliminate them from a potential employee pool, and insure that only serious potential employees are hired to work. Ehrenreich continues to search for employment, and adequate housing, while awaiting the results from her drug tests. Menard’s calls her for an orientation session and she is assured employment at \$10 an hour which will allow her to reject employment at Wal-Mart. However, Wal-Mart does call her and tells her the “drug screen is fine” and that she will have orientation but only offers her \$7 an hour.⁷⁶⁶ Ehrenreich does not reject employment at Wal-Mart outright, and instead attends the orientation session which includes an extensive indoctrination from “the Cult of Sam.”⁷⁶⁷ Ehrenreich’s orientation session at Wal-Mart is rife with trainers reading for the employee handbook, descriptions of acceptable employee aesthetics and computer testing. Ehrenreich feels rather confident that she will not have to entertain the notion of employment at Wal-Mart; however, her first day at Menard’s is her last.

Ehrenreich goes to her position at Menard’s, working in the plumbing section, with the understanding that she will receive \$10 an hour but when she arrives she is told that she will only receive \$8.50 an hour for an eleven-hour shift.⁷⁶⁸ Ehrenreich declines this position but also questions herself as to why she was not more assertive during the hiring/interview process. She states,

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid, 135.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid, 142-143.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid, 143.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid, 149.

There's no intermediate point in the process in which you confront the potential employer as a free agent, entitled to cut her own deal. The intercalation of the drug test between application and hiring tilts the playing field even further, establishing that you, and not the employer, are the one who has something to prove.⁷⁶⁹

Ehrenreich interpretation of the hiring process for low-wage positions highlights the lack of personal agency for one's labor. Of course, this lack of agency is not isolated to merely low-wage positions, but the entire hiring process for every position. One's labor is always subjected to employer conditions; salaried positions are based on years of experience and budgetary allowances. The low-wage labor market is saturated with potential employees; therefore, a potential employee arguably has less bargaining power simply because there are more than enough people to fulfill the employer's conditions.

Ehrenreich's job prospects are limited to Wal-Mart and while her employment is adequate, her living arrangements are intolerable. Ehrenreich rents a room at a motel but the conditions of her room are problematic. She has a room on the first floor but "the single small window has not screen, and the room has no AC or fan. The current is transparently thin; the door has no bolt."⁷⁷⁰ Ehrenreich's room presents issues of safety that she usually does not concern herself with but now represent her demoted status. The location of her room and her unsecured door lend weight to Ehrenreich's interpretation about poor women's safety. She states,

Poor women—perhaps especially single ones and even those who are just temporarily living among the poor for whatever reason—really do have more to fear than women who have houses with double locks and alarm systems and husbands or dogs. I must have known this theoretically or at least heard it stated, but now for the first time the lessons take hold.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid, 149-150.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid, 151.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, 153.

Ehrenreich's vulnerability has a woman alone in a room with no locks highlights the plight of numerous poor women in similar situations. However, her assertion that women with locks or other safety devices detach them from feeling any fear for their bodily security is seemingly naïve as well. Do these elements of security ensure security or merely the illusion of security? Ehrenreich's description of how poor women really do have to fear for their safety more than other women, and her sudden understanding of these women's situations because she is now in a similar situation, illustrates a remarkable disconnect between socio-economic experiences. Of course, when she also states that, "I am not a congenitally fearful person, for which you can blame or credit my mother, who never got around to alerting me to any special vulnerabilities that went with begin a girl," her notions of privilege are rather glaringly obvious.⁷⁷² Ehrenreich's stance on her experiences as a woman and the notion that she has never felt any sense of vulnerability or fear as a woman is rather indicative of her social class. She has never felt fear as a woman because she was always afforded the securities associated with socio-economic stability; male protectors, upscale neighborhood, and home security measures. Her rather blasé response to theoretically understanding the plight of poor women highlights her overall detachment from fully understanding a poor woman's plight. However, now that she is truly experiencing this plight, everything she previous heard about poor women holds some substantial truth that she must recount and authenticate. Of course, Ehrenreich's interpretation of her living situation does not stop at merely recounting poor women's experiences. Ehrenreich starts to settle into her room and begins to take notice of those around her who live in similar circumstances. She states,

⁷⁷² Ibid, 152.

As far as I can tell, the place isn't a nest of drug dealers and prostitutes; these are just working people who don't have the capital to rent a normal apartment. Even the teenagers who worried me at first seem to have mother figures attached to them, probably single mothers I hadn't seen before because they were at work.⁷⁷³

Ehrenreich's awareness of her surroundings reflects her growing understanding of her socio-economic situation; however, her assumption that the men and women who live in her apartment complex are the drudges of society reflects a preconceived notion about lower class individuals that is rather prevalent in our society. Of course, Ehrenreich further solidifies her preconceived notion of lower class individuals when she refers to how these men and women are unable to adhere to any form of normalcy in regards to their living conditions. What is normal for these men and women? Ehrenreich's living conditions are subpar because she is quite used to her home in an upper-middle class neighborhood with no visible threats to disrupt her perceptions of security; therefore, her understanding of normalcy is insulated by her socio-economic advantages.

Ehrenreich's living conditions are less than ideal but her work environment at Wal-Mart illustrates how her view of others, both co-workers and customers, becomes apathetic. She feels rather proprietary towards her duties as a floor re-stocker for women's apparel even going so far as to feel aggression towards customers who do not return apparel to its rightful place. Her annoyance toward her customers and co-workers is illustrated when she states,

Am I turning mean here, and is that a normal response to the end of a nine-hour shift? There was another outbreak of mental wickedness that night. I'd gone back to the counter by the fitting room to pick up the next cart full of returns and found the guy who answers the phone at the counter at night, a pensive young fellow in

⁷⁷³ Ibid, 160.

a wheelchair, staring into space, looking even sadder than usual. And my uncensored thought was, At least you get to sit down.⁷⁷⁴

Ehrenreich interprets her reaction to her co-workers as not merely a consequence of working in an environment that requires her to work long hours or even the physical nature of her work, but rather a bleak reflection of her life if her father did not strive to elevate his socio-economic status. Ehrenreich's interpretation of her work persona reflects a woman with no education who holds onto grudges with an almost vise-grip to comfort her because she lacks the skills for social and economic mobility. Ehrenreich's position at Wal-Mart, and her subsequent interpretation of her socio-economic status, illustrates a rather startling discovery for her that her other positions did not necessarily reflect; a heightened aggression and a rabid sense of survival. Ehrenreich becomes rather entrenched in her position at Wal-Mart to the point where she does not even bother trying to get a more financially viable position elsewhere because she begins to believe that Wal-Mart is her "connection to the world, my source of identity, my *place*."⁷⁷⁵ Her loyalty to Wal-Mart is not tied to any financial gain because she is barely surviving on the meager salary she receives working there, but her interpretation of her connection to this environment is predicated on an understanding of herself. She finds structure and order in returning clothes to their rightful places on the shelves. Her sense of identity and connection; therefore, illustrates not necessarily a human connection with her co-workers or customers, but rather a mechanical repetition of her duties that allows her some semblance of comfort in an environment mired in chaos.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid, 168.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid, 171.

Even though Ehrenreich feels a sense of identity at Wal-Mart, her financial situation is rather dire in respects to her living conditions because she cannot find any adequate housing based on the salary she earns at Wal-Mart. Her conversation with a representative of the Community Emergency Assistance Program illustrates her dire housing prospects because the representative tells her to “move into a shelter” until she “can save up enough money for a first month’s rent and deposit.”⁷⁷⁶ Ehrenreich’s interaction with this representative reiterates not only the direness of her financial situation, but also the lack of affordable housing for low-wage workers in Minneapolis. Her interpretation of her interaction with this representative also illustrates how this person mistakenly identified her as another worker from Wal-Mart who she previously spoke to about living accommodations. The representative’s mistake leads Ehrenreich to interpret how all low-wage workers are easily identified because “crooked yellow teeth are one sign, inadequate footwear is another.”⁷⁷⁷ These identifiable traits of low-wage workers also indicate how many Wal-Mart employees are “real-life charity cases, maybe even shelter dwellers.”⁷⁷⁸ Ehrenreich identifies traits that are stereotypical of low-wage workers, health and mobility, but also how other aesthetic markers indicate socio-economic status. She also states how “Hair provides another class cue. Ponytails are common or, for that characteristic Wal-Martian beat-up and hopeless look, straight shoulder-length hair, parted in the middle and kept out of the face by two bobby pins.”⁷⁷⁹ Ehrenreich also uses bobby pins to tame her hair, but also to conceal the limitations of her personal hygiene because she does not readily have access or time to shower before going to work at Wal-Mart. Ehrenreich’s interpretation of her conversations with the housing representative and how that representative mistakenly assumed

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 173.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 174.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 175.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 175.

she was some other Wal-Mart worker illustrates an interchangeability among low-wage workers. More specifically, Ehrenreich's observation of indicative traits associated with low-wage workers allows society to view these men and women only through the lens as low-wage workers who no longer retain any sense of individuality but are merely marginalized through stereotypical physical traits.

Ehrenreich's experiences passing as a low-wage worker at Wal-Mart allows her to physically engage with people who are, in most cases, below the poverty line. Her experiences with her co-workers also prompts her to instigate a conversation about unions, but not because she cares about the conditions of her fellow co-workers. Ehrenreich states, "The truth, which I can't avoid acknowledging when I'm in those vast, desertlike stretches between afternoon breaks, is that I'm just amusing myself, and in what seems like a pretty harmless way."⁷⁸⁰ Ehrenreich's belief that her suggestion of union organizing is simply an amusement for her to pass the time while she is bored at work is highly disturbing. However, Ehrenreich justifies this amusing activity as a way to highlight the rather disingenuous mantra of Wal-Mart's "family."⁷⁸¹ Ehrenreich reasons that she does not have any investment in her position at Wal-Mart and therefore finds it her mission to expose the exclusionary practices of corporate Wal-Mart to her fellow co-workers. Of course, Ehrenreich's so-called mission to expose Wal-Mart's dysfunctional family relies rather heavily upon her own personal need to break-up her rather monotonous duties as a re-stocker. In fact, Ehrenreich laments how her job at Wal-Mart offers no excitement at all and she states, "I have been discovering a great truth about low-wage work and probably a lot of medium-wage work, too—that nothing happens, or rather the same thing

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid, 185.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid, 185.

always happens, which amounts, day after day, to nothing.”⁷⁸² Ehrenreich interpretation of her low-wage position’s lack of excitement seems rather petty considering that most jobs are not constructed around an entertainment value for employees. While her need for excitement in her position at Wal-Mart seems rather juvenile, her interpretation for such amusements illustrates a rather startling realization about low-wage positions. She states,

Yes, I know that any day now I’m going to return to the variety and drama of my real, Barbara Ehrenreich life. But this fact sustains me only in the way that, say, the prospect of heaven cheers a terminally ill person: it’s nice to know, but it isn’t much help from moment to moment. What you don’t necessarily realize when you start selling your time by the hour is that what you’re actually selling is your *life*.⁷⁸³

Her realization that her prior life experiences, and memories marked by significant events, are no longer relevant or a useful form of escapism illustrates how a low-wage worker’s life is one constant exercise in repetitious activities. Ehrenreich’s need for outside stimulation to escape the monotony of her position at Wal-Mart stems from the larger realization that her robotic, repetitious activities are indicative of a life of servitude. More specifically, Ehrenreich realizes that her low-wage positions rely heavily upon breaking the spirit of employees while the employers and large corporations gain monetary profits.

Ehrenreich’s growing aggression toward Wal-Mart ideology and her distaste for repetitious activities, embroils her to perform small acts of defiance. For example, she leaves a newspaper in the break room with an article highlighting a local strike by hotel workers in the hopes that a fellow employee will read the article and prompt a discussion about forming a

⁷⁸² Ibid, 186.

⁷⁸³ Ibid, 187.

workers union for Wal-Mart employees; unions are strictly forbidden at Wal-Mart.⁷⁸⁴ Ehrenreich begins to take longer breaks and sneaks behind her manager's back to make unscheduled phone calls because time is something else the manager's at Wal-Mart deny their employees. An unscheduled break at Wal-Mart is constituted as time stealing and warrants swift repercussion from management. However, Ehrenreich does not care whether she is reprimanded or regaled to a detestable department because her phone calls do not produce any secure housing opportunities, so she is going to quit Wal-Mart.⁷⁸⁵ Ehrenreich seems genuinely disappointed to leave Wal-Mart behind her because she still believes that she can prompt her fellow co-workers to unionize. In fact, her last encounter with a fellow employee at Wal-Mart gives her the hope that "if I could have afforded to work at Wal-Mart a little longer" the formation of a union would have been possible.⁷⁸⁶ Ehrenreich's reluctant departure from Wal-Mart does not occur with any of her previous low-wage positions and marks an unprecedented solidarity with low-wage workers.

Recall

The final stage of this model looks at how the passer recalls his/her experience of passing through the narratives they write. The process of recall takes all of the abovementioned steps and allows the passer to not only articulate his/her experience to garner meaning, but also endeavors to relay that information to a wider audience who might similarly undergo such an experience. Basically, this step looks at how the narrator conceptualizes his/her experiences in the form of the narrative. After all, the passing experience takes all the factors to illustrate not only the individuals' personal experience with passing but to also generate an overall understanding for

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, 187.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid, 189.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid, 191.

any individual who will engage in passing. This particular step is vital to not only understand the relevancy of passing but to also articulate the changes in normative structure and within social groups. The passer's ability to recall his/her experience allows the reader to broaden his/her own position within the normative structure and invites change. This stage will incorporate all three methodologies. First, the product of the passer's recall is in fact the narrative, so looking intently at how the passer shows us his/her experience and imparts such knowledge is useful to map the overall influence of such narratives. Second, the product is informed by his/her social experience within their old and new social groups, so looking at how the passer formulates knowledge about the normative structure is important to changing such a structure. Thirdly, these narratives are an addition to historical literature on the same subject and therefore lend a new voice to the subject of passing but also challenge the notion that the normative structure has altered in any significant way from previous narratives.

Abagnale's recall is rather unique because he does not necessarily alter the normative structure nor does he advocate for anyone to follow his actions, but he does highlight the cracks within socio-economic norms. In fact, Abagnale's activities throughout his memoir illustrate the vulnerability of class structure. The remarkable ease with which he infiltrates the upper class highlights the vast knowledge he acquires throughout his passing. However, he staunchly asserts that he "was always aware that I was Frank Abagnale, Jr., that I was a check swindler and a faker, and if and when I were caught I wasn't going to win any Oscars. I was going to jail."⁷⁸⁷ Abagnale's ownership of his pre-passing identity does not necessarily correlate with prior memoirs on passing. Men and women who pass traditionally shed, alter, and reform their identity to fit their newfound situations. Abagnale's pre-passing position as a privilege

⁷⁸⁷ Abagnale, *Catch Me If You Can*, 5.

white male from an upper/middle class socio-economic class contributes significantly to his tightly retained identity. He endeavors to re-create himself through passing as a pilot and a wealthy young man for amusement and sexual attraction, but never does he necessarily alter the fact that he is a white, privileged male. While most passers shed their previous identities for fear of exposure from family or friends, Abagnale clings tightly to his previous identity as a form of respite from his constant cons. In fact, he asserts, “To a degree, my actual identity became a refuge from the pressures and tensions of posing.”⁷⁸⁸ Is it possible to retain one’s original normative position while passing? Was it easier for Abagnale, Jr. to retain his original position because of his gender and race? Many men and women who pass find the act of shedding their previous positions within the normative structure as a vital part of reconstructing themselves, but also as a critical exercise in protecting themselves as well. Any and all connection to who they were within the normative structure prior to passing eliminates their success, and safety. Abagnale is able to retain his persona while passing simply because society does not visualize a man of his status altering his social position.

Abagnale does not alter the normative structure, but he does bring attention to the superficial structure of socio-economic status through the myriad of personas he inhabits while passing as various professional, wealthy men. His passing as a wealthy man highlights the aesthetic nature of public perception. More specifically, when Abagnale enters the bank and assumes the role of a wealthy man with all the physical attributes; a flashy car, finely tailored suit and an air of entitlement, no one questions the validity of his persona. In fact, many of the bank employees bend over backwards to fulfill his every request and it doesn’t hurt that he drops the name of a wealthy colleague to achieve his passing. Abagnale’s extensive experience passing

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid, 121.

fraudulent checks eventually leads to his employment with the FBI's Financial Crimes Unit and an instructor position there as well. Abagnale's reflection of his youthful activities in no way advocates his behavior and he even states, "this is not 1960; we are living in an extremely unethical society. We don't teach ethics at home; we don't teach ethics at school, because the teacher would be accused of teaching morality; and we have to look long and hard to find even a college course on ethics."⁷⁸⁹ Abagnale's summation of society's declining morality implies an escalation of criminal activity which he ties directly to disintegration of the home, and he does apply this introspection to his own activities. He states, "I kept track of my identity by always using my first or middle name as part of my alias. The Frank Abagnale I was was an egotistical, unethical, unscrupulous criminal."⁷⁹⁰ Abagnale's recall of his passing is a cautionary tale about his criminal activities, but also an important insight into how socio-economic passing allows a modicum of identity retention.

Ehrenreich's recall reflects on her experiences passing as a low-wage worker and often contradicts what she explains in her memoir. She often self-congratulates herself over surviving as a low-wage worker and even goes so far as to state, "If I may begin with a brief round of applause: I didn't do half bad at the work itself, and I claim this as a considerable achievement."⁷⁹¹ This particular statement implies that she somehow deserves an award for enduring the life of a low-wage worker because the work she performs her duties without fault. However, she does concede that her work as a low-wage worker does involve certain skills that her previous work experience did not prepare her for and that "in the low-wage work world I was

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid, 291.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid, 193.

⁷⁹¹ Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 193.

a person of average ability—capable of learning the job and also capable of screwing up.”⁷⁹² Her concession that low-wage workers do acquire certain skills to remain successful in their work and that she marginally performed these skills counters her previous assertion that low-wage workers do not necessarily require literacy to complete the tasks the work requires. Ehrenreich’s shift from deriding low-wage workers from an outside perspective to recalling how a low-wage worker’s skills are acquired through necessity from the inside is quite indicative of socio-economic status. Ehrenreich’s starting position as a white woman with a higher education gives her a rather entitled position to make snap judgments about the men and women who work low-wage positions. However, once Ehrenreich enters a world where her education no longer affords her certain advantages, she realizes that her ability to perform certain skills is significantly more important. This particular realization is quite indicative of socio-economic division; the belief that low-wage workers and the work they do is less valuable than the work others perform. The socio-economic divide that Ehrenreich recalls does illustrate how her beliefs have altered about low-wage workers but her desire to somehow receive credit for surviving her experiences as a low-wage worker still devalues these low-wage contributions to society. Ehrenreich’s desire for praise still illustrates her belief that low-wage work is something she needed to survive, as if she could not stand the thought of having to perform low-wage work for the rest of her life.

Ehrenreich also highlights how “each job presents a self-contained social world, with its own personalities, hierarchy, customs, and standards.”⁷⁹³ Ehrenreich’s distinction that low-wage work is not some homogenized group of men and women does allow her to illustrate the diverse group of men and women who perform low-wage work. Of course, her newfound understanding

⁷⁹² Ibid, 193-194.

⁷⁹³ Ibid, 194.

of the micro-society present within each new low-wage position is somewhat overshadowed when she states, “in my normal life I usually enter new situations in some respected, even attention-getting role like ‘guest lecturer’ or ‘workshop leader.’ It’s a lot harder, I found, to sort out a human microsystem when you’re looking up at it from the bottom, and, of course, a lot more necessary to do so.”⁷⁹⁴ Her recall on how she feels in her normal life, the center of attention, as opposed to how she felt during her low-wage positions marks a clear delineation between socio-economic positions. Ehrenreich’s position as a low-wage worker departs from the spotlight of her previous position and allows her to fully analyze, to an extent, the position low-wage workers are in which is the bottom of the socio-economic norm. She understands, through her experiences as a low-wage worker, that over-achievement in her duties only adds to the overall pressure of her co-workers. Meaning, Ehrenreich recognizes that performing her duties did not require her, nor was her effort rewarded by employers or fellow employees, to show up her co-workers. Her fellow low-wage workers did not over-exert themselves in their positions, or do more work than was necessary because they knew that they would not receive any special accolades and would earn the disdain of their fellow co-workers. Ehrenreich’s prior position rewarded her efforts to excel as an employee with financial compensation or notoriety within her academic community, but in low-wage positions such exertion only increases one’s work with no compensation. While she lauds herself on actually retaining a low-wage position and performing admirably, her ability to acquire adequate nutrition and housing was dismal at best. She recalls the disparity between low-wage compensation and her inability to acquire adequate housing because her socio-economic position did not place her within the realm to compete with upper, middle class workers for fair housing. She laments how low-wage workers do not have the drive

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid, 194.

to alter their financial situation but at the same time understands that the lack of mobility prohibits most low-wage workers from attaining better work opportunities and housing. She cites the overreaching arms of management and the repeal of civil liberties that low-wage workers experience to dehumanize these men and women, but she also urges low-wage workers to demand better working conditions and wages to compensate their work.

Ehrenreich's recall does offer considerable detail on the socio-economic conditions of low-wage workers, but in the end she does return to her previous social class. She states, "to go from the bottom 20 percent to the top 20 percent is to enter a magical world where needs are met, problems are solved, almost without intermediate effort."⁷⁹⁵ She relishes the many socio-economic conveniences she left behind as a low-wage worker, but does she alter the normative structure of class? She states, "some odd optical property of our highly polarized and unequal society makes the poor almost invisible to their economic superiors."⁷⁹⁶ Her recall does bring attention to the low-wage worker and her experiences offer insightful data to fulfill the requirements of her original assignment, but does her exercise simply reify socio-economic division? Does her passing as a low-wage worker over-simplify and generalize these men and women's experiences? Her assertion that the poor are "almost invisible" is coupled with her assessment that "the poor are usually able to disguise themselves as members of the more comfortable classes."⁷⁹⁷ However, her entire experience passing as a low-wage worker does not necessarily support this conclusion because many of her fellow low-wage workers could not even afford housing or food let alone adequate clothing to pass as an upper, middle class person. Ehrenreich's overall recall of her experiences passing as a low-wage worker indicts the upper,

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid, 215.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid, 216.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid, 216.

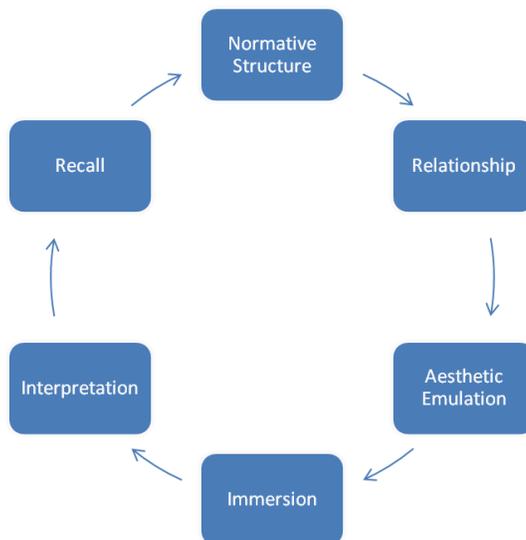
middle class Americans who feed off of the labor of low-wage workers but she does not alter the normative structure.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Reinventing Passing

The intersectional passing model and the definition of each stage is worth another look in light of the extensive analysis presented, so the model is constructed as follows:

The Model:



Normative Structure

The first stage in the intersectional passing model is the normative structure and how the passer is consciously aware of his or her place within said structure. The normative structure represents socially constructed categories such as gender, sexuality and class. The passer's initial position within the normative structure illustrates how he/she does not necessarily adhere to

these socially constructed groups and forces the passer to recognize how his/her exclusion from these social categories allows him/her to begin the process of passing. The normative structure is quite vital to the intersectional passing model because this step not only forces the passer to recognize his/her place, or displacement, within socially constructed categories but also allows for an in-depth analysis of the fragility of socially constructed groups.

Primary Relationships

This second stage begins with the passer's close relationships within his/her group. This stage resembles the previous stage of normative structures, but emphasizes how the passer relates to men/women within that structure and those outside it as well. However, this position, for the passer, informs the passer of his/her difference within these relationships. The passer is shown how these differences separate them from the group either by gender, sexuality or class. This position is directly linked to the normative structure and is reified in the passer's relationships. More specifically, a passer is informed of his/her differences within his/her social group, and these are often times presented in negative ways. For example, a young woman who often feels that she does not "fit" in alters her relationships which push her to decide how she will identify herself within the group. This concept is defined as simply the "primary relationship" stage and will focus on how the passer interacts within his/her group. The close relationship within his /her social group or the role the passer occupies within this group informs his/her placement and status. This stage looks closely at the role the passer occupies within his/her group and in most cases the passer is not necessarily viewed as holding a significant role within the group. The dissatisfaction the passer feels attributes to his/her need to find a role within a social group where he/she is not marginalized based on gender, sexuality, or class. The purpose of this particular stage is to show how the passer's role within his/her group identifies the passer and the best

evidence to support such a position is to show how the character within the novel, essay, fiction, or memoir interacts within his/her social group before committing to passing. To code for relationships, the character's interaction with his/her parents, siblings, and extended family is of paramount importance. These relationships will be coded as primary relationships because these interactions shape how the character will feel about his/her identity. There are, of course, secondary relationships and these encompass relationships with friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances.

Aesthetic Emulation

The next stage involves the passer's decision to pass and his/her preparation in such a task. This stage includes the alienation of previous relationships because the passer cannot fully pass until he/she forms new relationships within the group they hope to assimilate into. This stage is sometimes difficult for the passer because prior relationships still inform him/her of their position. However, through changes in location, occupation, dress, and manner this stage is vital to passing. The individual submerges themselves within the group they hope to emulate and therefore this stage, or concept, will be called "aesthetic emulation". The use of the word aesthetic here refers to the process of passing and how it is not completed with just the decision to pass, but involves the restructuring of one's overall physicality for success. These modifications include basic aesthetics (hair and clothing) and more complicated performative alterations (speech and mannerisms). These aesthetic accouterments also emphasize your social group and categorize gender, sexuality, and class. These aesthetics are more easily visible in relation to gender, class, and sexuality because certain dress is associated with femininity, wealth, and sexuality. The authors of passing literature develop their characters and utilize these aesthetic accouterments to flush out the characters and bring the element of humanity to their

characters. More pointedly, history has illustrated how Black men and women's bodies were viewed differently than white bodies; therefore a passer who passes for white incorporates the history of Black men and women and alters their physicality accordingly. The emphasis with this particular stage is to show how the passer changes, or alters, their physical appearance to conform to the criteria of the group. Of course there are many questions this stage will address as far as what it means to be white, black, a woman, a man, upper or lower class, and gay or straight, but the overall purpose of this particular stage is show the transformation of the passer. The use of all three methodologies with show how the passer transforms him/herself, but also show how important this stage is for the passer to fully integrate him/herself with the group. In order to code for aesthetic emulation, an in-depth look at how the author describes his/her character once that character passes into another social group is reliant upon these aesthetics and will include hair, dress, accessories, and language modification.

Immersion

Once this stage is completed, the passer's immersion within the group he/she is passing into begins. This stage, or concept, is defined as the "immersion" stage. The "immersion" stage allows the passer to form new relationships within his/her newfound group but also allows him/her to observe as well. This stage is tenuous and complicated because the passer is still constantly aware of his/her performance even though he/she has somewhat successfully immersed themselves within the group. In many of the novels, memoirs, and essays, the passer, in this stage, begins to question his/her decision to pass at all, which is grounded in fear of exposure. If the passer successfully avoids exposure, and controls any emotional responses to their prior social group then he/she has completely passed into his/her designated group. Once the passer is "immersed" within a particular social group the advantages of such inclusion are

seen in his/her social “upgrade,” or in some cases “downgrade.” The advantages correlate with the group the passer immerses himself/herself in and therefore are not finite across all social groups. For example, a man who is mixed race and decides to pass for white has immersed himself in a group with distinct social, economic, and racial advantages inherent within that group. However, a man passing as a woman has arguably “downgraded” his social group status and while he might attain certain advantages passing as a female, he has in fact given up more of the advantages he would receive as a man. To illustrate how passing benefits the passer we must look at how the passer’s prior experiences in his/her previous social group lacked certain advantages and also show how the act of passing is preferable to their previous state. Again, the use of historical and sociological methodology will allow me to show how there are certain advantages within an alternate social group. In order to code for immersion, the passer’s newly formed relationships, both primary and secondary, look closely at the passer’s rhetoric in association with his/her previous relationships. More specifically, does the passer reminisce about his/her prior social groups? How does the passer temper his/her language about his/her previous group?

Interpretation

Once the passer is immersed within his/her new social group then the passer interprets his/her experience with a greater understanding of their new social group. The passer’s new found relationships within the social group allow him/her to alter their understanding of the normative structure and in some cases slowly alter that structure. This interpretation stage relies heavily upon how the passer navigates his/her new social position and how he/she reinterprets the normative structure. As stated previously, once the passer begins the journey of passing he/she repositions themselves within the normative structure and the interpretation stage will

look at how the passer effectively processes this new position. How does the passer view his/her new position within the social group? What does the passer learn about his/her new social group? Does this newfound knowledge of the social group alter the passer's attitude? This stage will use both literary and sociological methodologies to show how the passer interprets his/her new position through the rhetoric associated with his/her current and previous social group. The rhetoric of the text will show whether or not the passer's knowledge of his/her new social group alters, or shifts, to allow for a greater understanding of race, gender, class, or sexuality. The rhetoric the passer associates with his/her new position will show the passer's new normative structure, but how he/she alters this normative structure will employ sociological methodology. How does one change the normative structure? Is such a change even possible? In order to code for interpretation, special attention is paid to any changes in the rhetoric from the first step through the process of passing and then at the end of the novels to see if any significant attitude shift has occurred in the passer's overall perspective of gender, sexuality, and class. This evidence illustrates how the language the writer uses to emphasize the overall experience of passing, and the language the narrator's newfound relationships employ throughout their association, alter according to social class categories. These alterations of rhetoric also inform the reader as to whether or not the passer understands his/her new position within the normative structure and if the passer will attempt to alter such a structure.

Recall

The final stage of this model looks at how the passer recalls his/her experience of passing through the narratives they write. The process of recall takes all of the abovementioned steps and allows the passer to not only articulate his/her experience to garner meaning, but also endeavors to relay that information to a wider audience who might similarly undergo such an experience.

Basically, this step looks at how the narrator conceptualizes his/her experiences in the form of the narrative. After all, the passing experience as I have outlined it above takes all the factors to illustrate not only the individuals' personal experience with passing but to also generate an overall understanding for any individual who will engage in passing. This particular step is vital to not only understand the relevancy of passing but to also articulate the changes in normative structure and within social groups. The passer's ability to recall his/her experience allows the reader to broaden his/her own position within the normative structure and invites change. First, the product of the passer's recall is in fact the narrative, so looking intently at how the passer shows us his/her experience and imparts such knowledge is useful to map the overall influence of such narratives. Second, the product is informed by his/her social experience within their old and new social groups, so looking at how the passer formulates knowledge about the normative structure is important to changing such a structure. Thirdly, these narratives are an addition to historical literature on the same subject and therefore lend a new voice to the subject of passing but also challenge the notion that the normative structure has altered in any significant way from previous narratives. The recall stage illustrates how these narratives impart certain knowledge about not only the experience of passing but also on the normative structure. The sheer number of these narratives will emphasize the overall recall method for these passers, but the authors will also illustrate how this experience has added to the knowledge of passing.

The Cassock and the Dress: Gender Passing

Lousie Erdrich's novel and Richard J. Novic's memoir allow for a thorough examination of gender passing from two varied perspectives. Erdrich's novel explores how Agnes DeWitt passes as a man, a priest, and how her struggle to acquire some semblance of space takes her to an Ojibwe reservation. Novic's memoir also illustrates how passing as a woman gives him a

complete sense of himself as both a man and a woman. These two very different experiences with gender passing do share one common thread and that is that both of these individuals are searching for some sense of self and only find this piece through passing. Specifically, DeWitt is floundering as a woman after she loses the one man that she has ever loved but she also realizes that she cannot continue living in her environment as a vulnerable, lonely woman. Her decision to pass as a male priest is predicated by her meeting with Father Damien, the persona she appropriates, after his untimely death in a flood. Novic's passing evolves over the years as he crudely experiments with wearing female clothing to a part-time immersion as a female. Both of these experiences illustrate a deconstruction of socially constructed gender roles and indicate a measurably fluidity in gender roles. More specifically, gender normativity gives the illusion of a fixated point of identity but as these two examples illustrate, gender is both fluid and performative.

In and Out of the Closet: Sexual Passing

Timothy Kurek's and Martin Duberman's memoirs explore heteronormativity from both a heterosexual perspective and a homosexual one. Kurek begins his memoir as a strict heterosexual Christian whose perspective of homosexuality is dictated by his church. However, Kurek begins to question his faith after a close friend comes out of the closet and is promptly disowned by her staunchly religious family. Kurek passes as a gay man to experience the overwhelming disengagement from his friends, family, and his church. While his experiment allows him to delve into a superficial understanding of homosexuality, Duberman's memoir recounts his experiences as a gay man struggling to exorcise his homosexual tendencies but at the same time engaging in relationships with men. Both of these men struggle with societal interpretations of heteronormativity, and while Duberman is indeed homosexual and engages in

sexual relations with men his yearning for heteronormativity almost results in his destruction both physically and mentally. Kurek's experiment passing as a homosexual male forces him to examine his relationships but while Kurek attempts to fully immerse himself as a gay man, his experiment is mired in prescriptive stereotypes of gay men. In fact, Kurek relies heavily upon cultural caricatures of gay men and women to the point where his experiment is flawed. On the other hand, Duberman's fanatical pursuit of conversion therapy as a cure delves deeply into the torturous heteronormative psychotherapies session he endured to reach the promise of heterosexuality. Of course, Duberman never successful converts to heteronormativity, but the overwhelming influx of societal pressures present in his memoir illustrate how the normative structure never relents and how medical professionals reify such a structure.

Class Act: Class Passing

Frank Abagnale Jr.'s and Barbara Ehrenreich's memoirs both explore the concept of class passing. Abagnale Jr.'s memoir focuses on his experiences as a young man whose life pursuit is the accumulation of wealth, but Abagnale is also a con artist. However, do not mistake passing as the equivalent to a con because Abagnale's transformations during his memoir illustrate not those of a con man but of a young man who constantly searches for an understanding of himself. His professions alter constantly according to the space/location he occupies and his passing occurs during these spatial explorations. Abagnale's memoir explores class passing and illustrates the undeniable cracks within the socio-economic normative structure. In fact, many of his experiences in passing rely heavily upon the aesthetics of wealth and make the reader inquire as to how such a structure of wealth exists. While Abagnale's memoir exposes the cracks in class passing, Ehrenreich's memoir experiments in low-wage occupations. Ehrenreich's passing also orbits around her space/location, but she always pivots back to her conscious understanding that

her experiences are only an exploration of wage discrepancies for the sake of a larger understanding of class. However, Ehrenreich's memoir is rife with stereotypical characterizations of low-wage workers and at times her passing is inundated with an overwhelming atmosphere of contempt for those men and women she associates with in the workplace. She is naively unaware of the real-life struggles her co-workers encounter because she enters into her experiment with an overwhelming sense of privilege that she does not deny and at times cannot escape.

Interrogation of the Model

The intersectional passing model is designed to formulate a clearer understanding of passing along social categories and relies heavily upon deconstructing these categories to illustrate how passing extends beyond the parameters of racial passing. Indeed, the purpose of the intersectional passing model is to heavily critique society's preoccupation with social categories to illustrate the fluidity of all social categories. Of course, the design of the intersectional passing model is to create a more fully realized understanding of passing and the data does tend to reaffirm my earlier assertion; passing is indeed intersectional. However, with any data analysis and collection there are gaps in how the steps effectively correlate with the experiences of the passers which the following interrogation will illustrate.

Normative Structure

This step is designed to highlight how the passer negotiates his/her place within society but also hones in on whether the passer feels a conflict surrounding his/her designation. Simply put: the normative structure focuses on the conflicts the passer encounters with how society views them in relation to their social groups. The normative structure is not the same for each

social structure and therein the data is oftentimes varied with each text. Oftentimes, multiple social structures are represented within one section or only a singular social structure is emphasized over others. In this sense, not only does the model highlight the social structure of gender, sexuality and class but it also illustrates how multiple social categories can affect the data collection.

Erdrich's and Novic's texts focus on the construction of gender from a male to female and female to male perspective. The normative structure in Erdrich's text is quite difficult to decipher because the data collected before DeWitt begins passing as a man is limited to her experiences with the nuns in the convent and her relationship to Vogel. Of course, the lack of data in regards to the normative structure does allow DeWitt's experiences to flourish in ways her counterpart, Novic's, do not. While Erdrich's description of DeWitt's childhood socialization to gender roles is non-existent, Novic's boyhood is inundated with gender defined roles from his dual responsibilities in the household and outside work to how he acts and reacts to his peers and the attention of the opposite sex. The normative structure in Novic's memoir is identifiable through the various ways he attributes any trace of femininity within himself as insidious because these notions of clearly demarcated roles are continuously reified from his family, friends, and society at large. However, unlike DeWitt who does not have a history in the text mired overwhelmingly by society's dictates in regards to gender thereby allowing her to pass as a man with ease, Novic struggles to reconcile his desires to pass as a woman while retaining some semblance of his masculinity. The differentiation between these two experiences in gender passing prompts the question as to whether or not the absence of the normative structure socialization at a young age does indeed allow one to fluidly move from one gender to the other thereby disrupting the construction of gender entirely. DeWitt's experiences certainly explore the

possibility that her self construction of gender does not rely heavily upon a societal expectation of the feminine and masculine. This is further reified when she passes as a man, a priest, on an Ojibwe reservation where gender is most certainly fluid and where a Western perspective of gender is both unrecognized and shunned.

The application of the normative structure to Erdrich and Novic's text illustrates the rebellion and adherence to defined gender roles but the data garnered from each text creates a fractured perspective of the gender normative. Firstly, Erdrich's account is deeply ingrained with a non-western perspective of gender roles and thereby it is easy to conclude that the absence of a normative structure concerning gender will give us the same results, but the normative structure stage does not take into account the absence of such an influence on the passer. Indeed, the other texts do encounter similar issues with limited development of any childhood experiences but this is not to say that these texts' characters and subjects do not encounter outside influences, society's expectations to be exact, in the construction of their positionality. However, even though many of the other texts do delve deeply into childhood experiences in relation to an understanding of the normative structure and hence their early association into the varying differences between social groups, Erdrich's text allows us to completely abandon any prior socialization in the construction of the self which helps the character create her own sense of self. Also, DeWitt's space/location also informs the normative structure differently than any of the other texts under analysis because she does not end up in another space/location occupied by a Western understanding of gender. One of the wonderful discoveries about the normative structure in regards to DeWitt's experiences is that the normative structure and gender identity on the Ojibwe reservation do not conform to Western notions of gender which allows DeWitt's passing as a male priest to evolve fluidly.

Primary Relationships

The primary relationship stage looks closely at the relationships the passer engages in within his/her social groups before the passer even begins passing. Many of the memoirs illustrate close primary relationships with family members and a few select friends; however, the lack of these primary relationships offers the most interesting data collection. The purpose of coding the primary relationships is to see how the passer negotiates these relationships because these relationships allow him/her to become aware of their differences which prompt the passer to begin passing. As previously mentioned, DeWitt does not have any close primary relationships with any family members and in fact her parents are barely mentioned in Erdrich's narrative. Of course the lack of any significant primary relationships does create quite an interesting gap in the intersectional passing model because the primary relationship stage does result in the passer passing; therefore, DeWitt's motivation is not predicated on any sense of exclusion from her social group but instead becomes an exercise in gender exploration and religious faith.

Erdrich's narrative is not the only example where the lack of primary relationships does not influence the passers decision to pass. Kurek's decision to pass as a gay man is not the result of his socially unacceptable position within his social group, but merely an experiment he undertakes after a friend is disowned by her family. We could equate his decision to pass because of this incident under the moniker of a primary relationship, but Kurek is not the one socially ostracized by his social group and thereby this exception cannot work under this stage. Kurek does mention the influence of another friend who encourages him to undertake the challenge of passing as a gay man; however, this encounter is so brief that it can hardly equate to a primary relationship. In fact, many of Kurek's engagements with friends and family remain

superficial which makes gathering relevant material for this particular stage quite difficult. Did Kurek make the decision to pass because of his primary relationship to his gay friend? Yes, and therefore his decision to pass deviates from the parameters of the primary relationship stage. Of course, this deviation could result from how this particular stage is structured; the focus is usually on a passer who feels isolated from his/her social group and tries to forge a new place in another social group.

Kurek's primary relationships also closely mirror Ehrenreich's but the mark difference between these two is that Ehrenreich claims she is undergoing this experiment in honor of her family, if you will. Both Kurek and Ehrenreich's passing is an experiment and therefore does not necessarily fall into the same category as the other texts under analysis. Therefore, Ehrenreich's primary relationships are not developed fully in her memoir so it is quite erroneous to place any emphasis on her decision to pass because she is ineptly navigating her social group. In fact, Ehrenreich does not omit her enjoyment of her social group and at one point in the memoir returns to her previous environment while her experiment is underway so she can enjoy some of the advantages of her social class. This return to a previous social group is not a factor taken under consideration with any of the other texts and does not occur often, so these two texts offer a rare insight into the importance of primary relationships as the driving force behind passing.

Aesthetic Emulation

This stage analyzes the physical alterations one must endure in order to successfully pass and those alterations usually take the form of physical transformations. Many of the texts illustrate an effective application of this stage, or more importantly many of the passers undergo extreme physical stages to effectively pass. However, there are several memoirs where the physical changes are minimal at best and these findings are quite interesting in regards to the

application of this particular stage. For example, gender passing often relies heavily upon the perception of femininity and masculinity only because physical markers are often a precursor to a societal gaze seeking such markers. The obvious physical changes occur when DeWitt and Novic both change their clothing, alter their mannerisms and speech patterns to correlate with their perceptions of masculine and feminine. DeWitt shears her hair and dons a cassock to pass as a man as per the expectations of her place as a priest on the reservation. Novic's physical transformations evolve over a longer period of time and begin with wearing woman's clothing; dresses, lingerie, high heels, and stockings. Once Novic begins to venture into public spaces more frequently as a woman, his alterations are extreme; makeup, accessories, wigs, waxing, high quality dresses, and an overall deconstruction of physical characteristics associated with masculinity—plastic surgery. Both DeWitt and Novic also alter their mannerism to adhere to socially acceptable behavior associated with gender. More specifically, DeWitt's speech alters to elicit authority as opposed to her previous, albeit rarely shown, deference to male authority in her relationship with Vogel. DeWitt speaks to others with an air of authority and knowledge, which she does not have in her occupation as a priest, to illustrate how men never really ask but instead tell others what they want emphatically and without doubt. Novic scales back any aggressive behavior in his passing as a woman and demurs more readily to male dominance while passing as a woman. Novic also attributes femininity with softness and flirtatious behavior which he perceives to embody feminine behavior. DeWitt and Novic's aesthetic emulation readily adheres to this particular stage in the passing model.

The less obvious changes in aesthetics occur within sexuality and class for neither social group indicates an overwhelming alteration of themselves to pass effectively. Kurek and Duberman offer subtle changes within certain spaces/locations but overall they do not alter

themselves in physically noticeable ways. Kurek's passing as a gay man does not regale homosexuality to a physical caricature; he does not emulate a stereotypical flamboyant gay man. Kurek's aesthetic emulation is a subtle change in how he interacts with other gay men in social settings. These changes are most evident when he goes to gay clubs and interacts with other gay men as oppose to other social settings. Duberman is a homosexual man passing as a straight man, but the only aesthetic emulation he engages in is an overabundance of male aggression which he attributes to masculinity. This subtle change occurs when he hosts a dinner party at his apartment and the bartender becomes rather aggressive with his guests. Duberman's behavioral alteration occurs within a social setting when others gazes are upon him and where an expectation of masculine behavior is the norm. Both Kurek and Duberman's aesthetic emulations are within certain spaces/locations and also rely heavily upon the view of others, or more pointedly, the societal expectations of others.

Abagnale Jr. and Ehrenreich's aesthetic emulations vary from situational to the point of non-existence throughout their memoirs. Abagnale Jr. relies upon aesthetic emulation when he alters his physical appearance during his passing as a wealthy man, but he oftentimes engages in such activities when he tries to manipulate other wealthy people's treatment of lower class individuals. More specifically, Abagnale Jr. hires a chauffeur and dresses in expensive clothing to enter a bank after he notices how a wealthy banker treats one of his employees. These alterations in dress occur sporadically in Abagnale's memoir but he never changes his overall mannerism in his interactions with men and women when he passes. Specifically, Abagnale Jr.'s interactions with men and women within the same class structure as his passing persona do not alter, so his aesthetic emulation only occurs in a physical manner. On the other hand, Ehrenreich's aesthetic emulation is rather non-existent and she even states that she never alters

her appearance while working her low-wage positions. She does don a uniform in many of the positions she retains but once her work day is complete, she goes back to her living accommodations. Ehrenreich also does not necessarily overly engage in any social activities with her co-workers and this correlates with her lack of aesthetic emulation. Ehrenreich's speech and mannerisms remain the same in every occupation she endeavors to occupy; therefore, Ehrenreich's aesthetic emulation does not alter in the extreme manner as DeWitt and Novic. This variation in the aesthetic emulation stage infers that when social construction relies heavily upon the visible markers of one's social group then the passer must reconstruct their bodies in order to fulfill societal expectations. More specifically, gender is the only socially constructed category identifiable by visible, physically recognizable markers and therefore requires the passer to exhibit these markers.

Immersion

This stage relies heavily upon the passers successful inclusion within his/her new social group and measures the passers success on whether or not he/she maintains relationships within the new social group. More importantly, the passers immersion into his/her new social group is reliant upon the passers complete detachment from his/her prior social group, which includes any, and all, prior relationships. Many of the memoirs under analysis forge new relationships and successful immerse themselves with their new social groups. Alas, there are a few passers who immerse successfully but lapse as far as detaching themselves from prior relationships or even prior identities. For example, DeWitt successfully immerses as Father Damien on the Ojibwe reservation because the idea behind immersion, for DeWitt, is the performative nature of gender and expounds upon the ideas Judith Butler discusses in her book *Gender Trouble*. Gender is an act that "as in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is

repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (178). Father Damien’s refusal to acknowledge her original positionality as a woman and abandon her former self is indicative of how DeWitt has fully immersed herself as Father Damien. While DeWitt fully immerses herself as Father Damien, Novic seems to immerse himself as Alice only part-time and is still able to retain many of his previous relationships. Novic immerses himself as Alice only when he leaves the confines of his home which is not necessarily too far from the objective of the immersion stage; however, Novic benefits from both his relationships as Alice and his femininity while at the same time still retaining his masculinity at home with his wife and kids. Of course, the goal of the immersion stage is to fully disengage oneself from previous relationships and fully embrace one’s new identity, but Novic’s positionality affords him the luxury of moving from one masculine to feminine without truly immersing himself fully as Alice. This particular aberration in the immersion stage is not necessarily indicative of all the memoirs, but many of the passers whose starting points originate from advantage still retain this even after they begin passing. For example, Ehrenreich’s memoir illustrates a woman in an upper-middle class economic starting position who passes for a low-wage worker and a woman who never fully immerses herself during her passing. Ehrenreich’s original position, and her awareness that her passing is merely a sociological experiment, hinders her experiences passing as a low-wage worker because her immersion is non-existent. She forges work based relationships during her low-wage positions but these are relatively superficial and the most obvious example of her failed immersion occurs when she retreats back to her upper/middle home to catch up on her “real-life” responsibilities. Ehrenreich’s failure to fully immerse herself as a low-wage worker interrupts the passing narrative and simply regales her

memoir to that of a cursory glance at the real problems low-wage workers face. Novic and Ehrenreich's memoirs highlight quite a few issues with the immersion stage because the contradictory data begs the question as to whether or not a passer must indeed depart from all previous associations to successfully pass. Of course, these two memoirs also illustrate how the passer is not fully committed to passing in another social category simply because they are marginalized in their prior positionalities. More pointedly, if a passer is indeed passing to find refuge or escape from an oppressive social group then the immersion stage is stringently followed, but if the passer is merely passing as a social experiment then the data for immersion suffers.

Interpretation

This stage of the intersectional passing model focuses on not only the rhetorical tools the passer uses to inform his/her newfound understanding of their social group, but also illustrates how the passer attempts, successfully or not, to alter the normative structure. Many of the memoirs under discussion illustrate a marginal alteration of the normative structure or, at best, enlighten the reader as to where the normative structure cracks, allowing for the passer to alter his/her own interpretation of the normative structure. Many of the passers reconstruct their understanding of gender, sexuality, and class once they have fully immersed within their new social group. However, there are a few of the passers who do not alter the normative structure and whose interpretation of said structure remains stagnant. For example, Novic's exploration with gender passing raises quite a few alarming questions about his understanding of femininity and how he interprets the feminine when he passes as Alice. Novic argues that women should embrace sexual objectification as one of the advantages of femininity and chastises women who do not want to manipulate men to use their bodies as sexual objects. Novic also spends an

inordinate amount of time in his memoir, once he begins passing as Alice, describing female aesthetics; clothing, makeup, and jewelry as the definition of the female body but he never stops to interpret how women actually feel within these patriarchal trappings. In other words, Novic creates a woman who embodies all the qualities that he as a man wants in his significant other. Therefore, Novic does not alter the normative structure; he merely reifies societal expectations of the feminine. Of course, Novic's failure to alter the normative structure in regards to gender is also due to his part-time immersion as a woman and his rather unrealistic viewpoints of femininity.

Another passer whose interpretation does not alter the normative structure and illustrates an overwhelming bias within her new social group is Ehrenreich's experience class passing. Ehrenreich spends quite a bit of time in her memoir bemoaning the nature of her experiment and that she has to engage in the experiment at all makes her rhetoric and interpretation of her class passing disingenuous. Ehrenreich's interpretation of her newfound social group does not necessarily positively alter until her last low-wage position working at Wal-Mart. Her sense of kinship within her social group relies heavily upon her personal quest to form a labor union but not necessarily in regards to her personal relationships with the men and women she works with in these low-wage positions. She argues that her desire to form a labor union for her fellow low-wage workers is so they can earn more money and receive more benefits, but she also seems wrapped up in making her mark before she ends her experiment. The only time that Ehrenreich even remotely displays her concern for the working conditions, and wage disparities of her fellow co-workers is when she is departing the job and moving on to the next one. She spends some time recounting certain struggles that the men and women she works with in each low-wage position struggle with, but she does not seem to alter her class position. Her interactions

with these men and women seem to focus on her expert advice, whether financial or health related, instead of intentionally listening to what these men and women need from a low-wage position. Ehrenreich's intentional separation from the men and women within her new social group completely negates the interpretation stage of the intersectional passing model because she never truly immerses herself within her new social group. Of course, this is not to say that Ehrenreich does not offer valid information during this stage, but her data relies too heavily upon statistical information instead of including the men and women within this group. Her interpretation is impersonal and she relies too heavily upon dehumanizing her low-wage colleagues so she can complete an article, or in this case a book.

Overall, the interpretation stage of the intersectional passing model is fraught with issues as to whether the passer is necessarily responsive to a complete paradigm shift. Novic and Ehrenreich illustrate the difficulty in measuring one's effective reconstruction of the normative structure from personal experience with a new social group for a short period of time. Of course, Erdrich's fictional novel about a woman who passes as a Catholic priest offers an in-depth examination of gender normativity but her novel also explores a non-Western conceptualization of gender. Does a fictional account of passing offer a more objective viewpoint of the normative structure and allow the author/passer to illustrate how the normative structure should evolve? Erdrich's novel does offer longevity when her main character, DeWitt, undertakes passing as Father Damien for over 80 years, which allows her views on gender to shift. Father Damien begins to interpret his experiences in relation to his devotion to Christ and correlates his successful dedication to his station as a priest. Therefore, he asserts that his success depends on his gender passing as a man. This paradigm shift away from a binary gender structure is also attributed to his interaction with the Ojibwe people and their conceptions of gender. There is no

stigma attached to gender fluidity on the Ojibwe reservation which allows Father Damien the freedom to successfully pass as a man.

Recall

The final stage in the intersectional passing model looks closely at the impact each text has on the normative structure but also on passing. Each text allows the reader to understand the experience of passing through the narrative and garner information that will aid him/her in their own endeavors with passing. Of course, the goal of this particular stage is not to determine a blueprint for effective passing through the narrative, but to analyze closely how the passer's viewpoint has altered through the passing experience and how passing is an intersectional phenomena. Many of the memoirs set aside significant portion at the end of the narrative to address the writers' experiences with passing. Indeed, this step in the intersectional passing model is quite effective in illustrating how the passer either successfully, or unsuccessfully, articulates the meaning behind not only their experiences with passing, but also how their experiences alter the normative structure even in slight ways. For example, Duberman's passing as a straight man eventually comes to an end when he realizes that years of psychotherapy have not "cured" him of his sexual preferences so he begins to write openly about his sexuality and also becomes a gay rights activist. His painful experiences passing as a straight man and his involvement with the gay community allows him to urge heterosexual and homosexual men and women to understand the intersectional nature of their community. His acknowledgement of the intersectional nature of the gay community and how he highlights the exclusion of gay women enables him to advocate for changes in heteronormativity to allow the inclusion of homosexual men and women as well as urge young men and women on the same inquisitive sexual path to defy heteronormativity.

Duberman's memoir advocates for an inclusion and an intersectional viewpoint of gender, sexuality and class through the construction of his narrative and his realization that his homosexual experiences do not encompass, or define, the entire homosexual community. Duberman's experiences as a gay man passing as a straight man do not define the experiences of all gay men nor does he argue that all experiences are similar. While Duberman's experiences passing as a straight man before embracing his sexuality illustrate an in-depth deconstruction of heteronormativity, Kurek's memoir and his experiment passing as a gay man does not alter the normative structure. His recall does reflect upon his experiences with the intent to educate a larger audience but his focus does not necessarily alter societal expectations for major social groups because he tends to focus on his the narrow goal of altering Christian perception of homosexuality. The narrow focus on a Christian audience informs his rhetoric and tends to merely cater to an already homophobic belief system. Yes, Kurek does alter his own personal belief about homosexuality but his attempt to educate a larger audience is slightly unsuccessful because he simply reifies heteronormativity when he casually stereotypes homosexual men and women while passing as a gay man. Kurek's failure to alter the normative structure is largely in part because his passing as a homosexual man superficially attempts to re-construct sexuality through marginally passing as a gay man. Specifically, Kurek relies heavily upon societal views of homosexuality even while passing as a gay man, but the troubling aspect of his passing is that he constructs a narrative about homosexual men that is widely based on his perception of homosexual men. Kurek's partial immersion as a gay man tends to take aspects of his experiences in the gay community and constructs a heterosexual perspective of homosexuality. This perspective disengages the experiences of gay men, and women, which also negates the intersectional nature of passing. Kurek does not recognize the differing experiences of gay men

and women but merely collates his experience as one monolithic representation of homosexuality. In this sense, Kurek's recall does not effectively challenge heteronormativity nor does he alter the normative structure.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Passing narratives have always included an intersectional lens and major themes of race, gender, class and sexuality are prevalent within many, if not all, passing experiences. In fact, recent scholarship on passing including Allyson Hobbs' (2014) book *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*, Laura E. Turner's (2009) article "Intimate Geography: The Body, Race and Space in Larsen's *Quicksand*," Rich DeJordy's (2008) article "Just Passing Through: Stigma, Passing, and Identity Decoupling in the Work Place," Nathan D. Shippee's (2011) article "Gay, Straight, and Who I Am: Interpreting Passing Within the Frames For Everyday Life," Rafael Walker's (2016) article "Reconsidered: The Trouble with Desire in *Quicksand* and *Passing*," and Sinead Moynihan's (2010) book *Passing into the Present: Contemporary American Fiction of Racial and Gender Passing* all discuss passing within an intersectional lens. Judith A. Clair, Joy E. Beatty and Tammy L. MacLean's (2005) article "Out of Sight But Not Out of Mind: Managing Invisible Social Identities in the Workplace" offers a sparse model on passing that identifies three stages in the work environment and a conceptual model indicating certain stages in a person's decision to pass in the workplace.⁷⁹⁸ While this model does not apply to literary analysis, it is an example of the application of a passing model to map out how workers in a business environment reveal, or conceal, social factors which might exclude them from acceptance. Therein, this model illustrates the changing significance of

⁷⁹⁸ Judith A. Clair, Joy E. Beatty, and Tammy L. MacLean, "Out of Sight But Not Out of Mind: Managing Invisible Social Identities in The Workplace," *Academy of Management Review* 30, no. 1 (2005): 78-95, accessed July 13, 2017, www.web.mit.edu.

passing and how the term is defined and interpreted to include various disciplines. The mention of this study is to elucidate the applicability of constructing an intersectional passing model and to emphasize the need of such a model in analyzing passing experiences. The passing scholarship mentioned above does look at the trope of passing from the lens of literary theory, and while this scholarship is particularly useful in highlighting contemporary theories and issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality; a practical application of a theoretical model broadens the scope and applicability of the passing trope to include variations not before analyzed in previous scholarship. Indeed, the texts chosen in this dissertation do not necessarily fit the traditional understanding of passing or the passing trope. Many passing narratives focus on women and men of color, religious passing, and mixed race men and women; however, the texts chosen here focus on white men and women to illustrate the applicable progression of the passing trope. Societal issues concentrating of race, gender, sexuality and class have progressed, in some areas more than others, so the claim that white men and white women who are gay and living straight lives out of fear of exposure are not passing is based on the old model of passing in these narratives; these examples are indeed passing. My hope with this dissertation is not only to contribute an intersectional passing model applicable in contemporary passing scholarship but also to illustrate the useful insights into the passing phenomena that other researchers in the fields of literature and sociology can implement when looking at passing.

Of course, the application of the intersectional passing model does allow one to map the passing process. However, to universalize the application of this intersectional passing model for every passing narrative would deny the unique experience each man or woman undergoes when they pass. I concede that there are definite weaknesses in particular stages of the model. These weaknesses correlate with not only the depth of passing in the narrative, but also with the criteria

each step intends to investigate. According to the data, the weakest stages in the intersectional passing model tend to occur when coding for noticeable alterations of the normative structure and the immersion stage of the model. Many of the memoirs under analysis did not necessarily alter the normative structure through the narrative. Of course, the impact of these narratives is another avenue to explore in the future with specific focus groups or ethnographic data collection, but for the purpose of this study the data is rather inconclusive as far as determining the long term results of mapping alterations in the normative structure. These memoirs do; however, alter the perception of the passer and his/her conception of the normative structure, in most cases. Ehrenreich bemoans the very nature of her experiment, so her interpretation of socio-economics is superficial, at best. Her experiment with low-wage employment does not necessarily alter her own perception of class because she revels in returning to her middle-class life.

The purpose of the interpretation stage of the model is to track how the passer utilizes his/her experiences to re-conceptualize the normative structure from their new social group and this stage also infers that the passer's experiences will inform a larger audience to recognize the normative structure's repressive elements and endeavor to alter this structure. Many of the memoirs fail in this endeavor; however, Erdrich's fictional account of a woman passing as a Catholic priest does allow the reader to consider the implications of gender passing in a wider context. Can a fictional account of passing allow for a more in-depth analysis of the phenomena and a more fully developed application of the intersectional passing model? The data collection does illustrate a more developed narrative of passing, but there are elements of the model that are neglected in Erdrich's novel. For example, the primary relationship stage of the model presupposes that these interactions inform the passer of his/her placement, or misplacement,

within the normative structure but an absence of this data complicates the decisive nature of the passers decision to pass. Therefore, if the passer does not feel any displacement within his/her social group, then what can be the motivation for passing? If the passer is merely executing an experiment in passing, can the data offer a genuine view of the intersectional nature of passing? Writers who experiment with passing, John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, and fully explore the concept of passing without regaling their experiences do offer a complex analysis of the intersectional nature of passing without merely regaling their experiences as an experiment under duress.

Another element of passing that the intersectional passing model does not explore a bit more in-depth is the spatial limitations inherent in passing. More specifically, a large part of passing is the notion that once the passer immerses within a new social group that he/she will be able to move fluidly through previously restricted spaces, and locations. We can see evidence of this phenomenon when Novic, Duberman, Kurek and Abagnale Jr. enter spaces previously restricted to them because they did not conform to societal expectations of their social class. More specifically, Novic entering a wig shop to purchase a wig as a man feels an inherent displacement in what he considers a clearly designated female space. Of course, this designation is strictly from his purview and no one is necessarily enforcing the notion that he cannot enter this space. However, a more extreme example of the space/location restriction does apply in regards to DeWitt passing as a Catholic priest; an establishment that clearly marks spaces for men and women of the church. The intersectional passing model does mention spaces/location in regards to aesthetic emulation, but a more in-depth analysis of this restriction to certain spaces/places will fully explore the notion of passing and add an element to the intersectional nature of passing. In order to analyze the element of spaces/places and the restriction therein, one

must explore disability theory. This theory can add an exploratory analysis of not only spaces/locations marked as inaccessible to certain physical bodies, but also can add an in-depth deconstruction of the disabled body as encompassing those bodies that reject societal definitions and social categories. More specifically, disability theory can illustrate how the body of the passer as in some ways viewed as deficient an invisible, hence the need to pass.

This project illustrates numerous issues with the intersectional passing model, but also clarifies how this model reintroduces the applicability, or usefulness, of analyzing literature through a sociological lens. The sociology of literature emphasizes a concerted effort to analyze the text through corresponding themes or data collection. The model clearly outlines an applicable model to code passing narratives. Of course many of the steps need further reconfiguring to allot for data corruption, but the overall goal of the intersectional model was to map out specific stages of passing, code passing narratives, gather qualitative analysis of each stage and conclude this analysis with a more precise instrument to measure and determine factors of passing. Albeit, the field of sociology of literature is not as widespread today as it once was in the early 1970s and 1980s,

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