

Ima Read: Reading the Black Church through the Performative Work of Black Same

Gender Loving Males

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my dissertation project is to understand how Same-Gender Loving (SGL) Black Christian men negotiate their sexuality and spirituality in spaces that are not always accepting of SGL people, by examining on how Black SGL men perform their sexual identities within hegemonic institutions that often deny their existence or outwardly seek to exclude them from their communities. I have identified three scripts that Black SGL men often follow within Black religious settings. The first script that SGL people often follow in the church is that of deliverance-- confessing their same-gender desires and maintaining that they have been delivered from those desires. The second is "don't ask don't tell" performed by men who many believe and suspect of being SGL; so long as they do not publicly affirm these beliefs they are able to hold a variety of positions in their religious communities.. The last script involves accepting one's same-gender desires and also affirming one's Christian beliefs, proclaiming that the two are not at odds with one another. I examine how these scripts and/or others are performed by and on the bodies of Black SGL males in two distinct sites. The first is the career and music of former gospel star Anthony Charles Williams II (Tonex / B. Slade), who has utilized the three scripts at various times in his career. The next site is that of theatre, where I explore how these scripts have been employed in dramatic texts. By reading Christian Black SGL performance through its theological parameters, I aim to discern the avenues in which Black people in the United States are able to perform same-gender sexual identities in spaces that are constructed as "homophobic," and in so doing combat the narrative of hyper-homophobia in Black communities.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to David Joseph Cummings (1986-2008) who believed in me and whose friendship continues to sustain me.

And

To anyone who ever questioned God's love for them

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand how Same-Gender Loving (SGL)¹ Black Christian men negotiate their sexuality and spirituality in spaces that are not always accepting of SGL people. Black leaders often present homosexuality as a byproduct of European influence (Gates xiv), despite the existence of virulent opposition to homosexual activities within Euro-American communities as well. While many people of African descent see homosexuality as something inherently not African, the rationales often used to support the ideology of homosexuality as unnatural are also non-African texts, such as the *Bible* and the *Koran* (Douglas 89). While Blacks are often constructed as hyper-homophobic, SGL people find their way in these contexts. My research focuses on how Black SGL men perform their sexual identities within the hegemonic institution of the church and closely related institutions of marriage and family, institutions that often deny their existence or outwardly seek to exclude them from their communities.

The site of the Black church is a useful vehicle to understand sexuality in regards to Black communities. Black people in the United States are often portrayed by dominant culture as inherently more religious than the dominant population. There are many studies, including those done by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which reinforce this sentiment. According to the Pew Forum, 79% of African-Americans state that religion is very important in their lives compared to 56% of all U.S. adults. 78% of Black Americans follow a Protestant faith (Sahgal). We can take this information as

¹Same-gender loving (SGL) will be used as an alternative to the Eurocentric terms like gay or lesbian. The term SGL was developed by activist Cleo Manago in the early 1990's to affirm Black homosexual and bisexual men and women in a way that gay or lesbian identifiers fail to.

evidence that due to the importance of religion in Black communities in the United States, religion can be a beneficial site to study various aspects of relationships evident in the lives of Blacks.

However, in many cases religion means something different to Black Americans in relation to the dominant population. The Black church has historically been more than just a site to worship on Sunday mornings for its congregants. It has become a place to celebrate life, bridge the community together, a site for organization against oppression, an economic resource, etc. Black SGL men, who choose to leave homophobic worship spaces, like many of their white gay counterparts suggest, are not just leaving a worship site but a community that has supported them against many different obstacles.

Historically, the Black church has served and continues to serve as the political, financial, spiritual and social center for many Black people. Oftentimes Black SGL people are willing to overlook or ignore the homophobic and heterosexist aspects of the church in order to remain a part of the community. As a hegemonic institution the Black church helps form and spreads ideology around sexuality masculinity, gender, race, class, etc. While the benefits of the Black church for many people outweigh the negative aspects of the institution, the often contradictory relationship that the Black church has with the Black body and theology makes it an interesting site to explore Black sexuality.

Background

My desire in this project is to understand how sexuality is regulated and performed by Black bodies in relation to Christian identities: this desire for understanding

has been in formulation since my youth. Whether it was attending “True Love Waits”² events or hearing whispers about member’s suspected homosexuality and out of wed-lock children, it was evident that outside the limited space of heterosexual matrimony discussions of other types of sexuality were not encouraged or in many cases even permitted. The exploration and understanding one’s self as a sexual being has not been compatible with the theology of the Evangelical Black church.

These early experiences within the hegemonic institution of the Black church led to my very complicated relationship with sexuality and theology. Through my high school and early college years I became more aware of my peers who, like me, were raised in the church, and were now experiencing and exploring their sexuality. At that time, I believed without doubt that homosexuality or sexual activity outside of marriage was a sin. Exploring and understanding your sexuality becomes a difficult thing to do when you are taught that sexual exploration should only happen with your opposite-sex spouse. Often my peers became laden with guilt and shame surrounding their desire to explore their identity as sexual beings. I felt that there was something wrong with the public way that young adults and adults who experiences in regard to their sexuality (same-sex and opposite sex relationships) that fell outside of the parameters provided by the church, were being treated (kicked out of church ministries, requirement of public confession, etc.). This feeling was especially true for my peers experiencing same-sex attraction. Instances of ostracism and the imposition of “counseling” all increased their level of shame and feeling that something was wrong with them. Watching their struggle

² Events designed to promote abstinence among Christian youth, design around the idea that if your opposite-sex mate will wait until marriage to engage in sexual relationships with you if they really love you.

showed me the power imposed by the hegemonic institution of the church and the congregation's desire to discipline those who did not follow their model of Christian heterosexuality.

In recent years I have seen my peers who experience same-sex attraction take several paths including: finding places of worship that affirm them, rejecting Christianity and/or continuing to worship in venues that teach that something is wrong with them. This dissertation comes out of my and others' experiences regarding reconciling Black Evangelical theology with sexuality. It comes out of continued experiences with people of various ages, gender and races, who question God's love for their queer bodies. This dissertation is powered by the strength of Audre Lorde, who taught me that silence is not protection. It is also inspired by the wisdom of James Baldwin who has imparted the knowledge that nothing can be changed until it is faced.

These experiences, for me, highlighted the need for conversations and discussion of queer sexualities in my local Black Christian communities. The more I read and traveled, I understood that need for these types of conversations also existed nationally and globally. Here in the United States, the prevalence of angst surrounding homosexuality and religion was explicitly seen in May 2012, when President Obama publically announced he personally supported same-sex marriages. Although his announcement did not indicate the desire to initiate any federal legislation surrounding same-sex marriage, it created an outcry among many leaders in the Black church. The *New York Times* reported that following, the President's interview in which he made his announcement, the President held a phone conference with eight Black ministers to

explain his decision to support gay marriages (Calmes and Baker). Various Black Evangelical leaders used words like “hurt” and “betrayed” to describe how they felt about the President’s statement. Many expressed the sentiment that the President made it hard for them to continue to support his candidacy. Among Black religious leadership there are notable exceptions of pastors supporting President Obama and his statement regarding same-sex marriages. The fact that the President of the United States of America felt that he needed to explain his own personal position on same-sex marriage to such a small segment of society highlights the volatile dynamics of same-gender expression in Black religious communities. More recently the conversations that occurred after NBA player Jason Collins became the first male professional athlete to publically reveal that he is gay man, exemplified how gay and Black is still seen in many circles as antithetical to being a Christian. Although he stated that he was a Christian in a *Sports Illustrated* article, an ESPN commentator felt the need to proclaim that Collins was living in open rebellion to God and proclaimed that he was not a Christian.

Purpose

I am particularly interested in exploring how SGL male populations operate within the Black church. How do they perform their identity, both as SGL and as Christians? How do others accept/not accept their presence in these religious environments? How do they reconcile these seemingly non-compatible identities- Christian, SGL and Black? In my initial research I have identified three scripts that Black SGL men often follow within Black religious settings. I am using the term script for two reasons. First, this dissertation utilizes a performance studies and gender studies

framework. According to scholar Judith Butler there is no innate biological sex/gender; bodies become gendered through their social existence. In other words gender is not something one is, but is rather something one does or a sequence of acts that one performs (Butler 25). In this dissertation I will also apply this ideology to sexual orientation; sexuality will be viewed as a “doing” and not a “being.” Like gender, sexuality becomes a process of “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler). The script(s) that the Black SGL men and those around them perform in this dissertation is determined by this rigid regulatory frame which is also the hegemonic institution of the Black church. I am also using the term script to express the use of dramatic texts and theatricality that is an integral part of this dissertation. Scripts can become the familiar text that the body calls up and performs; they can also be rewritten and merged with others. This is why it is too simplistic to assert that there only three distinct scripts operating within Black religious communities, and I am aware of the possibilities of others as well as merging of scripts with each other. However, for this particular project I will strictly focus on the three following scripts. The first script SGL people often follow in the church is that of deliverance- confessing their same-gender desires and maintaining that they have been delivered from those desires. The second is “don’t ask don’t tell” performed by men who many believe and suspect of being SGL; so long as they do not publically affirm these beliefs they are able to hold a variety of positions in their religious communities. The last script involves affirming one’s same-gender desires and also affirming one’s Christian beliefs, proclaiming that the two are not at odds with one another. While the first two have prominently been performed in Black

religious history, the third has become increasingly popular in recent years, as is shown in both established denominations' increased tolerance and in newly emerging denominations or Christian sects.

My purpose is to look at how these scripts and/or others are performed by and on the bodies of Black SGL males in two distinct sites. The first is the career and music of former gospel star Anthony Charles Williams II (Tonex / B. Slade), who has utilized the three scripts at various times in his career. The next site is that of theatre, where I explore how these scripts have been employed in dramatic texts. Religion is a subject that has is often dealt with in the Black dramatic tradition, particularly in the "Gospel Play" genre. The plays normally include some aspect of gospel singing (live or recorded) and a story line that requires redemption from some sort of sin. Examples of this genre range from Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* to Tyler Perry's *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. Even when Black plays are not explicitly about religion, the ethics evident in the plays are built upon religious principles (Hatch 282). Black plays about religion that fall outside of the "Gospel Play" genre include James Baldwin's *The Amen Corner* (1954) and Owen Dodson's *The Confession Stone* (1960).

Recent years have seen an increase in scholarship on the relationship between religion and sexuality in Black Churches (e.g., Kelly Brown Douglas's *Sexuality and the Black Church* [1999]; and Horace Griffin's *And Their Own Received Them Not* [2006]), but these works tend to approach issues of sexuality and same-gender loving populations from a theological perspective. During this same period there has also been substantial scholarship on the ways gender, race, ethnicity and other key aspects of self-identity are

both performed and performative, like E. Patrick Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (2003). However, no study has yet examined how the complexities of religion and sexuality for Black SGL men can be understood through the optic of performance. By reading Christian Black SGL performance through its theological parameters, and vice-versa, it is my aim to discern the avenues in which Black people in the United States are able to perform same-gender sexual identities in spaces that are constructed as "homophobic," and in so doing combat the narrative of hyper-homophobia in Black communities.

Cultural and hegemonic notions of masculinity also contribute to the various scripts being performed. In order to truly understand this we must explore how society looks at masculinities and homosexuality. A major task in this project is nuancing and understanding how masculinity is performed in the lives of Black men. It is important to understand that standards of masculinity primarily refer to white heterosexual masculinity. Simply being Black automatically makes Black masculinity non-normative; this is further exacerbated by any deviation from heterosexuality in the performance of Black masculinity. Both Black males and Black females in the United States are often portrayed as hypersexual by the dominant culture. To combat these portrayals many Blacks in religious communities perform a hyper-pious depiction of sexuality that leads to silence and repression of all types of sexuality. This dissertation explores how notions of Black masculinity influence gender roles and relationships with Black women and children.

The Texts

I believe it is imperative to use the voices and works of Black SGL men and their allies as the foundation of this dissertation. It is through their lived experiences and creative work that they are able to establish agency and fight the heteronormative narrative. The texts that I analyze are primarily plays, but I also read Anthony Charles Williams' life as a performance text. I chose Williams due to his extensive music career as well as his history of being vocal about his support for and against same sex relationships. Similar to President Obama's "evolution" on same-sex marriage, Williams exemplifies an evolution on issues of theology and sexuality. His transition from a man who espoused anti-homosexual rhetoric to self-affirming SGL man is an inspiring depiction of what is possible for Black religious communities.

Initially finding dramatic texts that dealt with issues of sexuality and religion from a Black Christian perspective was difficult. I was put in contact with Elmo Terry-Morgan, a professor at Brown University. Mr. Terry-Morgan created the "Black Lavender" class, which explores issues of sexuality from a Black perspective. Mr. Terry-Morgan sent me several scripts that he believed fit the parameters of my research interests. Two of these became a part of my dissertation, *Deliverance* and *Crying Holy*. *Deliverance* was written by one of Terry-Morgan's student—Jamila Woods. The unpublished play had its first production as part of the Black Lavender class in the spring of 2012. *Deliverance* is inspired by a young man who experienced an exorcism in the hopes of being rid of his same-sex attraction. This incident received national news after video of the exorcism was uploaded to YouTube. *Crying Holy* was originally produced by Theatre Rhinoceros in 1993. The play is loosely based on the life of the playwright,

Wayne Corbitt. Corbitt was part of the generation of gay men whose lives were cut short by the new disease, AIDS.

At the No Passport Conference (2012), I was introduced to Daniel Banks and Otis Ramsey; both men expressed interest in my work and a desire to help me find plays to utilize in my research. Ramsey put me in contact with the authors of *Muddy the Water* and *The Contract*, both plays are unpublished. *Muddy the Water* was written by Darren Canady and depicts how a married man's dishonesty about his sexuality affects the entire community. *The Contract* written by James Webb is also about a married minister who maintains same-sex relationships. However, his wife knows about his relationship and organizes these interactions. Both Banks and Ramsey introduced me to Robert O'Hara's *Booty Candy*. This satirical work includes a monologue titled "Dreamin' in Church" that offers an alternative and hopeful view for how sexuality is talked about within church.

The last two plays, *Order My Steps* and *The Colored Museum*, are plays that I came across on my own through research and my own knowledge of Black theatre history. *Order My Steps* was written by Tracey Scott Wilson and commissioned by the Cornerstone Theater Company's Black Faith/AIDS project in Los Angeles. The play uses interviews and research to discuss issues of sexuality in a Black faith community. *The Colored Museum* by George C. Wolfe is a classic in theatre history. For my purposes I use the exhibit "The Gospel According to Miss Roj." The protagonist Miss Roj, a female impersonator espouses his own version of theology based on his experiences as a SGL man.

Many of the plays I used are based on real-life events or the biographies of the playwright. The two plays written by women incorporate research in the forms of interviews and/or news stories. It is important to show the impact of religion in the work created by and about SGL people and this factor into the Black experience. However these texts are largely unpublished and/or under produced.

The Black Church & the *Bible*

My purpose in this project is not to argue whether or not homosexuality is wrong from a Christian perspective, but rather to explore how these scripts are performed in the bodies of Black SGL men. However, in order to understand this script, it is important to look the rhetoric of the Black Evangelical community that condemns homosexuality and makes it necessary for (some) Black SGL men to enact this script. The primary tool for the condemnation of homosexual activities is the *Bible*, which leads me to the question-- how is the *Bible* read in these communities? How is it interpreted? It is difficult to challenge how homosexuality is viewed by members of the heteronormative Black church when the *Bible* is perceived to be the inerrant word of God, free of errors and not to be challenged. The *Bible* itself has become an authoritative text to not only establish and justify heteronormativity, but also gender inequality, homophobia and patriarchy. Understanding current interpretations is not fully possible without looking at the legacy of enslavement of African people in the United States of America. The *Bible* is an extremely important aspect of many of the characters in the plays I am analyzing in this dissertation. Many of them view the *Bible* as the authoritative and inspired word of God.

The relationship between Black people and the *Bible* in the United States has a history of being antagonistic. In the antebellum South, the effort to assert mental domination as well as physical domination over enslaved population required maintaining control of ideological sectors of society such as religion (Cannon 38). Initially, moral issues with enslaving African people were soothed by emphasizing that this would make salvation available to Africans who otherwise would die as pagans (Raboteau 96). Many slaveholders used biblical texts to rationalize the inferior treatment of enslaved people. Womanist theologian Katie Cannon states that, “the doctrine of biblical infallibility reinforced and was reinforced by the need for social legitimization of slavery” (33). This is important in the dissertation because it demonstrates why it is problematic for Black people in the U.S. to take the *Bible* as an infallible text when it has been used to dehumanize them in very recent history.

Chapter Plan

Chapter Two explores the script of Deliverance. This script requires the belief that same-sex desires are wrong in the sight of God and is something that can be removed through God’s help. The introduction to the chapter will lay out in detail the specifics of the script, as well as the belief system of the Gay Christian Movement Watch. These beliefs systems will be used in analysis of the plays and performance during the chapter. The first part of the chapter explores why people believe they need to enact the script of Deliverance through the character of Darrel in *Deliverance*. Darrel is a young teenager that is experiencing same-sex desires; the influence of those around him constructs this same-sex desire as something that is wrong and against God’s plan. The next part of the

chapter looks at the script of Deliverance in the gospel music industry primarily through the work and testimony of Donnie McClurkin and Anthony Charles Williams II (Tonex). Both men admit to having same-sex desires and participation in homosexuality, but they each maintain that God has delivered them from these desires and activities. Further exploration of this script is done through Passion for Christ ex-gay ministry and the “I’m Free Project.” Both of these entities use the internet to share testimony of Deliverance. It is important to look at each of these to understand why people enact the script of Deliverance and how Deliverance is enacted.

Chapter Three looks at the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT)” script. This script allows for men in the church to engage in same-sex relationships as long as they are discreet and do not tell about these experiences. This requires the men to embody the ideas of Black Christian masculinities. This script will be explored through three dramatic texts: *The Contract* by James Webb, *Muddy the Water* by Darren Canady and *Order My Steps* by Cheryl West. Each of these plays features a married man who engages in same-sex relationships. Their spouses’ levels of knowledge concerning their relationships vary. The chapter looks not only at those who “do not tell,” but also those who do not ask. How are others complicit and affected by the performance of DADT? Through the script of DADT, I will explore how all oppressions are interlocking. Homophobia within the church is often seen as the reason why men enact DADT, but what other oppressions are present within the church that perpetuates the performance of DADT?

Chapter Four focuses on the Acceptance script. This script examines men who affirm themselves as SGL. They do not feel the need to perform “Deliverance” or “DADT”. While they have come to accept themselves, not everyone around them has accepted them. This chapter focuses on SGL men returning home to the families and institutions that have previously rejected them because of their sexual orientation. The beginning of the chapter focuses on Anthony Charles Williams II (Tonex), whose embodiment of the Deliverance script we previously explored in chapter one. For this chapter we will focus on his journey to accepting and reconciling his theological beliefs with his sexuality. Williams’ signifies his acceptance as a SGL man and a new era in his music through changing his name to B. Slade. I will also explore how 1970’s gay disco icon Sylvester James journey both parallels and inspires Williams. The chapter then looks at three dramatic texts: *Crying Holy* by Wayne Corbitt, *The Colored Museum* by George C. Wolfe and *Booty Candy* by Robert O’Hara. These plays each deal with a character who has come to accept themselves and formulate their own theology while in institutions and families that teaches that there is something wrong with them.

Finally, in Chapter Five, the conclusion, I discuss how the performative work of Black SGL men can be used to fight oppression within Black communities. This dissertation aim is to be a significant contribution to Theatre, Performance Studies, Queer Studies, Gender Studies and African-American Studies.

CHAPTER 2

DELIVERANCE

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Matthew 6:13

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

This chapter focuses on the script of deliverance. Deliverance involves confessing one's same-sex desires and maintaining that you have been delivered from those desires. In order for this script to be enacted, one must first believe that homosexuality is wrong or something that needs to be removed and corrected. It also relies on the idea that homosexuality or same-sex attraction can be changed through a relationship with God. God is seen as the all-powerful creator who does not make mistakes and it is his divine plan that men and women be together. Same-sex pairings go against his plan and are not natural. This belief is often distributed by religious leaders, churches, families, communities and friends. Once a person with same-sex attraction accepts this belief, the next step in the deliverance script is to confess the desire to rid themselves of their same-sex attraction or homosexuality.

The deliverance process in the Black church can involve counseling, prayers, laying on of hands and in some instances exorcism to remove the homosexual spirit. The success of the process requires the removal of the same-sex attraction. Often people with same-sex attraction repeat the process several times before they reach their desired results

or give up. A person's lack of belief is often seen as the cause of their lack of success in the process. A marker of success in this script is the replacement of same-sex attraction with opposite sex attraction, which ideally will lead to marriage. Marriage or the ability to maintain a relationship with someone of the opposite sex is indication that the person has been cured and the performance of the Deliverance script has been completed. This concept can be applied to various "sins" (fornication, alcoholism, lying, stealing, etc.) or diseases (cancer, HIV, arthritis, etc.); each of these things are constructed as something negative that can be overcome through faith in God.

In order to establish further connection between the play *Deliverance* and how the script of Deliverance is performed in gospel music and social media, I will refer to the tenets of the "Gay Christian Movement Watch." Gay Christian Movement Watch (GCMW) is a website that describes itself as "the foremost voice of truth against the unbiblical acceptance of homosexuality in the contemporary Christian church." It is run by Pastor D.L. Foster who claims that he has been delivered from homosexuality. Unlike many other sites with similar goals, GCMW is largely focused on Black and Latino religious institutions and Christians. It also offers a venue where "ex-homosexuals" can share their stories of deliverance via YouTube videos. They hold an eight tenet belief system that reflects the thinking of many who believe in the script of deliverance. These tenets, briefly summarized, are: 1) the Bible, inspired by God, is infallible and rejects contemporary theories and philosophies of genetic homosexuality; 2) "real freedom from homosexual addictions only come through Jesus Christ" and daily accountability to Christ through other Christians and the church; 3) sexual orientation can be changed; 4)

change is only possible if one is “born again,” by acknowledging their sins and asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit (part of the trinity of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit); 5) professional counseling based in Biblical principles only is recommended to complement one’s faith in God and adherence to a Spirit-guided life; 6) the Bible condemns homosexuality but also provides” the remedy by way of repentance and faith in the work of Christ on the cross”; 7) God loves all persons, but “homosexual behavior expression” is not God’s will; 8) the Church must not reject homosexuals who seek its help, but must also remove anyone “steadfastly unrepentant of homosexuality” from positions of leadership. These tenets outline the way many evangelical churches understand homosexuality as something from which same-gender loving individuals in the church must seek deliverance. The idea of being holy, or living in accordance with God’s will as outlined in the tenets, is a primary concern for all members of the Black church.

The performance of Deliverance is at work in various ways throughout this chapter. The first half of this chapter examines the causes and multiple factors that lead people to believe they need to enact the script of deliverance. This is shown through the character of Darrel in Deliverance, where the playwright Jamila Woods demonstrates how the people and institutions around him contribute to his formulation and acceptance (or rejection) of his identity. I will examine his relationship to male religious leaders, his mother, his friend and Prophet Love. While Darrel enacts the deliverance script, the play ends without indication that he successfully completes the script. The performance of Deliverance is further explicated through the gospel music industry and social media. In

the work of Tonex and Donnie McClurkin, we see how the message of deliverance is spread through their music and public appearances. Similar to Woods' depiction of Darrel, we see their struggle with same-sex attraction and their desire to rid themselves of such attraction. The successful enactment of the script is seen in the testimony of Passion for Christ Ministry's Poet JO, Tonex and Donnie McClurkin-- each was able to maintain a relationship with women and /or get married. The "I'm Free Project" is a film distributed through social media and promoted on the GCMW website, which showcases examples of "successful" embodiments of deliverance. The second part of the chapter also deals with how molestation often is blamed for sexual confusion in men with same-sex attraction. The performance of this script also indicates a desire to be sanctified and made holy, and these concepts will be explored further throughout the chapter. The Deliverance script is often the initial script that SGL Black men will perform. It is important to look at this script to understand the reasons why men with same-sex attraction are often hesitant to affirm these attractions. My goal is to examine the multiple institutions and people that encourage this performance and question the true value of "success" in this script.

Delivery and Deliverance

The main performance text I will explore in this chapter is *Deliverance*³ by Jamila Woods. She describes the play as "a spiritually lost adolescent gay male searches for self-acceptance and love in his heavily christian environment, when he experiences a gay exorcism, he loses hold of his identity and must rediscover his soul in the midst of painful

³ Since its initial performance at Brown University in the Spring of 2012, the title has been changed to *All Who Have Sinned*

scrutiny from church and family” [sic] (1). A central aspect of the plot deals with how the protagonist Darrel sees himself and understands his gender and sexual identity. Darrel comes to understand who he is through the institutions, community, family and friends that surround him. The protagonist Darrel is a good student being raised by his single-mother Rachelle. He is beginning to explore his sexuality and gender performance through his friendship with Jordan.

In order to truly understand the character of Darrel and his identity it is important to examine the entities surrounding him. The play chronicles his experiences with both his mother and various church leaders who seek to instill a performance of Black Christian masculinity within him. *Deliverance* relies on some understanding of the types of services⁴ that are typically seen in the Black Christian tradition.

Woods spends a great deal of time in the text demonstrating the role the church and religion has on Darrel’s life. Scene two’s portrayal of a children’s Sunday school class, demonstrates how religion can be indoctrinated in young people lives. The class consists of 5 students and a male teacher. The students’ lesson for the day is “Standin Sanctified,” the lesson attempts to impart the desire to be holy and sanctified onto the students. Throughout the text the desire to be holy and sanctified will continue to be seen. The scene consists of Students 1 through 4 reciting *Bible* verses, posing and answering questions in a very uniform manner. The stage directions suggest that the “dialogue is a score to which the students perform synchronized movements inspired by military

⁴ The three types of services typically seen in various churches are Sunday worship services, Bible Study and Sunday School, the latter two often separated by age and/or gender. While much attention is often paid to Sunday worship services, much of the learning about the tenets and doctrine takes place in the Sunday School and mid-week Bible Studies classes.

routines. At each recitation of a *Bible* verse, all students turn from wherever they are in the room to face MR. WALLACE and salute him” (2). The stage direction and the uniformity in which the students perform and recite their lesson suggest their indoctrination. The salutation to the instructor shows a sense of respect that can be translated to a respect and deference for God. Mr. Wallace is simply acting as a stand-in for the ultimate male leader- God.

While Students 1 through 4 are very serious and uniformed in their routine, Student 5 falls out of step with the other Students shortly after the lesson begins. Woods describes this as initially very subtle and then becoming more and more pronounced. There is no indication that the teacher notices or tries to correct Student 5’s sloppiness and irregularities, but the other students give him disapproving looks. His peers serve the role of authority figures through their policing of the uniformity of others, even when the teacher does not notice any deviation. There comes a point in the scene that Students 1 through 4 begin to form a tableau in the shape of a scale to emphasize the specific point of being balanced. Student 5 realizes that no one is paying his half-hearted attempts of marching any mind. He then goes behind the scale that the other students are creating with their bodies and begin performing an impeccable vogue⁵ routine. The playwright is obviously demonstrating how Student 5 is different from the others. He does not seem interested in the recitation and performance of biblical knowledge. While participating with the group he is constantly tripping over his feet and failing to be in sync with the others. However his performance of a vogue routine demonstrates precision and

⁵ It is a stylized form of dance that evolved out of the ballroom scene in New York by gay Black and Latino males.

dedication that were lacking in his Sunday school performance. It is evident that Student 5 is different; the playwright's choice to have him perform a vogue locates him in the gay culture performance tradition.

The lesson the children are performing/reciting speaks to the biblical belief of God being holy and purified set apart from the rest of the world.⁶ It is a Christian belief that the confession of their sins and belief that Jesus Christ the son of God died for their sins, gives them a responsibility non-believers do not have. This responsibility includes a calling that Christians live a holy and separate life from the sinful world. As the students describe those who do not walk worthy of "our holy calling" as throwing the scale off balance, Student 5 knocks into a desk which calls attention to his voguing activity and also ends the student performance/recitation of the lesson. Student 5 is an example of someone not walking in a holy manner, as his deviation literally throws the scale (class) off balance. At this point the teacher, Mr. Wallace, begins his part of the lesson.

Mr. Wallace as the authority figure further constructs what is normative and righteous behavior for young Christian men and women through his lesson. He begins by asking the class, "Who knows how it feels to walk unholy, to live a unsanctified lifestyle?" (6). His question assumes a certain level of sinfulness amongst his students, through his focus on "unholy" and not the living of a "holy" lifestyle. He expounds on this by talking about how the media encourages promiscuous behavior among "young ladies." Notably, Mr. Wallace never addresses promiscuous behavior among heterosexual males; he instead speaks of the acts of homosexual males. Not addressing sexual behavior amongst heterosexual males implicitly condones heterosexual male sexuality-- the

⁶ Adam and Eve's sin in the Bible, caused a separation God and men.

heterosexual male's exploration of his sexuality is acceptable in a way that it is not for females' and same-gender loving males' sexuality. He states:

Far too many fellas today
get together actin' *funny*
defilin'they minds n bodies
puttin *suga* in they tanks
curruptin' other brothers
actin foul n unnatural
they din forget about God's word! (6)

He frames homosexual behavior not only as something unnatural and foul and thus clearly against God's word. Because God is the creator of all things natural, his creation of Eve as Adam's partner is seen as natural and reflects the divine intention of men being partnered with women. This is similar to the first tenet of the GCMW statement on homosexuality:

We believe the *Bible* to be the final and only authority in matters concerning sexuality and the wholeness of mankind. We believe the scriptures are self-validating. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16), consequently we hold that the totality of Biblical canon reject contemporary theories and philosophies of genetic homosexuality. ("Beliefs")

GCMW rejects any scientific evidence that there is a gene that explains homosexuality, due to their belief in the scripture. This reflects the fundamentalist ideology that the *Bible*-- God's word -- is infallible and rejects any reading of the *Bible* that allows for

modern theory and/or contextualization of scripture. However, Mr. Wallace's condemnation of the media and focus on homosexual immorality reflects a reading of a certain type of morality on the *Bible*. Six or seven verses in the *Bible* discuss homosexuality, but the number of verses that discusses heterosexuality morality is far greater. Yet, Mr. Wallace does not address male's heterosexual morality. While Mr. Wallace condemns the behavior of young females, he does not explicitly frame that behavior as unnatural or against God's word. Their behavior is blamed on "watchin them hoes on music television," he does not give an explanation of the cause of the male's homosexuality (6). The students are then lead to give examples of "walkin worthy of standin' sanctified" (6). The previous four students' answers elicit affirmation from the group, while Student 5's answer -- "Not messin around with no homos" -- receives murmurs and sniggers (6). Considering the obvious separation he has from the group and the "vogue" dance moves he demonstrates this can be seen as Student 5's attempt to connect with the group and dismiss his previous suspect behavior. As the teacher further prompts him about his answer (something he does not do with the other students), Student 5 becomes uncomfortable. His discomfort rises as Mr. Wallace engages in a monologue that further paints homosexual behavior as deviant and begins to imitate "gay" male behavior. Mr. Wallace likens homosexual behavior to boys trying to look like females; strengthening the narrative that homosexuality means effeminate behavior among men. The other students laugh and affirm his monologue with approval. He ends the lesson and his monologue by reminding the young ladies to remain chaste and the young men not to engage in sexual activities with young men. He again overemphasizes

this point and spends more time discussing same-sex male behaviors than female chastity.

There is a clear imbalance in the nature of Mr. Wallace lesson with his focus on male gender performance and homosexual behavior. His preoccupation on homosexual behavior might cause the audience to question what his motives are. Is the teacher trying to hide his own struggles with homosexuality and his masculinity by projecting them out to his class? Have there been incidents at the church involving homosexuality and young men that leads him to believe this is a subject that needs to be talked about? Or does the presence of Student 5 and what he perceives to be Student 5's non-normative behavior simply prompt his diatribe on homosexual behavior? Woods uses this scene to create an environment where queerness, especially male homosexuality, is condemned, and show how church leaders promulgate this perspective. Although Darrel does not appear in the scene, the scene is important because it establishes how homosexuality is viewed and dealt with in his church. The character of Mr. Wallace will return later in the play.

Woods further demonstrates how sexuality is viewed at Plain Valley church, through the counseling session that Darrel's mother, Rachelle arranges for him with the pastor. The GCMW also promotes the importance of Christian counseling as a manner to deal with same-sex desires. Rachelle becomes concerned with Darrel's masculinity and lack of male role models after he is bullied at school. She is also concerned that he might fail to be the good "Christian" (read heterosexual) son she wants. The ideal of "manliness" is explored during the "counseling" session with Rev. Powell. Rev. Powell's counseling session stresses a biblical knowledge as well as the importance of

learning what it means to be a man. Drawing upon stereotypes about masculinity, Rev. Powell holds this session in a garage, where he attempts to teach Darrel about car's oil changes. Working on cars has often been portrayed as a bonding experience between generations of men. Darrel's father is absent, so he lacks a male role model to teach him about cars and, by extension, masculinity. Rev. Powell's car lesson quickly becomes an opportunity for Rev. Powell to speak about his upcoming sermon. He asks Darrel to read the scripture at church Sunday because he believes it is an important scripture⁷ that Darrel take heart, emphasizing a man's duty and responsibility to both God and his wife. Although Darrel is obviously too young to think about a wife, Rev. Powell wants to make very clear the expected behavior of a Christian man.

The staging of this scene emphasizes Rev. Powell's religious authority as well as his attempts to impart the values of masculinity to Darrel. While Darrel is listening to Rev. Powell, he is underneath the car and oil from the filter drips on his head. As Rev. Powell's monologue goes on, the dripping of oil increases. Darrel, however, feels like he must maintain his attention on Rev. Powell and cannot move away. By the time the oil stops leaking, he is covered with oil. The oil dripping on his head represents a sort of anointing⁸ of manhood on Darrel's body by Rev. Powell. By using very masculine identified activities he hopes to imbue Darrel with the masculinity that he believes Darrel

⁷ The scripture that is cited by Rev. Powell is Ephesian 5:25-31: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

⁸ In religious ceremonies the application of oil often referred to as being anointed is a sign of sanctification. Anointed is also synonymous with being chosen by the divine.

is lacking. The stage direction that the playwright provides further strengthens this reading of the oil as masculine. After Darrel exits the stage, Rev. Powell

kneels down in the puddle of oil on the floor where DARREL used to stand. He rubs his hands in the oil and brings them to his nose. He closes his eyes and inhales, smelling his hands. Suddenly, he begins to rub his oiled hands all over his head and face. He pants heavily, looks around to make sure no one is watching, then exits. (19)

His reaction to the oil is very different than Darrel's reaction of disgust and discomfort. Rev. Powell is positioned as a real man; real men revel in activities such as fixing cars, which causes one to get dirty and sweaty. These are not activities that women are believed to enjoy because women are constructed as dainty and clean. The oil serves as a way to anoint or initiate Darrel into manhood; Rev. Powell is shown to revel in this manhood to a point where it can be seen as sexual. He hides the sexual nature of this from others.

The examples within the Sunday school class and the counseling session demonstrates how sexuality and masculinity are constructed, and each occur within Darrel's and his mother's home church, their community. There is a certain level of familiarity within this structure since Rachelle has been bringing Darrel to this church his entire life. After Rachelle discovers her son wearing women's clothing she decides that she must take a more radical step. Here Woods make the decision to take Darrel outside of this familiar community.

Mr. Wallace directs Rachelle and Darrel to “God’s Friendly Church.” This is a church that she has never been to and has no knowledge of the pastor. Their experiences here reflect a more radical and negative view of sexuality. Their home church Plain Valley seems to be a traditional Baptist-style church. God’s Friendly Church, however is a storefront church. Storefront churches are typically seen in the smaller Holiness denominations and non-denominational congregations, and often located in lower social economic areas. Storefronts are normally ideal for smaller congregations due to the lower cost for maintaining a store front church versus a traditional church structure. The insides of the building normally consist of a removable chairs opposed to permanent pews and some sort of make-shift pulpit. Woods spends a great deal of time describing the atmosphere of the church.

A storefront church with velvet lavender guts invades DARREL’s bedroom. The bedroom is transformed into a sanctuary by the CHURCH MEMBERS & ORGAN PLAYER, who act as stage screw, removing or transforming DARREL’s bedroom furniture, carrying in the pews, rolling out the carpet, and untying the curtains as they softly hum a hymn. The pews are lined with purple cushions, the center aisle is lined with a purple carpet, the whole sanctuary is filled with purple light—until it feels like we are sitting inside an amethyst crystal. It smells strongly of wine and perfume. There is a pew either side of the center aisle, facing a large altar in front of an even larger podium. Behind the podium there hangs a thin cloth or

curtain. PROPHET LOVE stands behind the curtain so that her exaggerated silhouette is visible. In this scene, PROPHET LOVE's voice is always amplified by a microphone. Live film shots of parts of her face are projected onto the curtain as she speaks, i.e. close-ups on her lips, jiggling neck, furrowed brow, toothy smile, wide eyes, but never a projection of her face in its entirety. There are two other curtains positioned on either side of the center podium. Parts of her face are also projected onto these curtains. We feel surrounded by PROPHET LOVE even when her body is not yet completely visible. After the stage is set, the CHURCH MEMBERS and ORGAN PLAYER sit down. The air conditioning machine in this lavender God house is broken. The 5 CHURCH MEMBERS fan themselves constantly with paper fans to keep their necks from sweating. The ORGAN PLAYER begins to play heartily. RACHELLE, MR. WALLACE, and DARREL enter. The music played in this scene converses with the PROPHET's dialogue, in the traditional way organ riffs respond to the climax of sermons in black churches. (28)

Darrel's room had initially been his safe place, where he expressed to Jordan how he felt about him. As the play progresses his bedroom becomes a place of humiliation and shame-- it is where his mother saw him wearing female clothing which ultimate led her to bring him to Prophet Love's church. It is very telling that his bedroom, a site of previous trauma, transforms into God's Friendly Church.

Before the audience actually sees Prophet Love we are surrounded by her presence. The music and the lack of air-condition set the mood for an intense experience.

The characterization and physical movements of Prophet Love makes her and the church closer to the devil and to hell than to God, her description paints her as evil almost demonic. There is big dichotomy located between what her name, “Love,” suggests and what we initially feel and see in God’s Friendly Church. God’s Friendly Church, like many churches proves to be a less-than friendly place for SGL people. As Prophet Love welcomes the congregation to the church she informs them that “this is a place of healing.” Again there is a rift between what she says and what is actually occurring.

Now I have been told
that there are some brothers and sisters among us
who are searching for healing today
who have come to be prayed over
who have come to be sanctified
made holy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ
The time for healing is now, my brothers and sisters
Is there one among us today? (29)

Prophet Love does not make it clear whether someone told her that there were people in the church that were in need of healing or if this is something that she routinely says. The term Prophet normally refers to an individual who is in contact with the divine or God. It is quite possible for this to be read as God telling her that there was someone in need that day.

Similar to Scene 1, we see this word “sanctified” again; the word reflects the need to be set apart from things of the world and to be made holy. Christians believe that

everyone is born into this world as sinners that need to be saved and made holy. This invitation is not just for those who want to be “healed” but also an invitation of sorts of salvation and sanctification. Darrel’s mother and Pastor have already put into his head that he needs to be healed, that he is not normal. He accepts the invitation given by Prophet Love and walks to the front of the church. He does not initially ask to be healed but rather be prayed over because of his lack of focus. His prayer request does not express any struggle with behavior that could be considered sinful. However when Prophet Love hears his request she asks him a very direct question, “Are you gay? (28)”

There are many negative connotations to the word “gay” particularly. Gay is slang to describe something as stupid, idiotic or otherwise undesirable. Until this point we have not seen Darrel identify as gay. He told Jordan that he was not gay, but that he just happens to be attracted to Jordan. In a previous scene with Jordan, we see Darrel attempt to maintain notions of heterosexuality by speaking of his attraction to women as well as using gay slurs to distance himself from the term “gay.” His attempt to deflect Prophet Love’s question prompts her to chastise him about lying; she rephrases the question to “are you a homosexual?” Gay normally carries with it an aspect of culture that term homosexual does not. Gay typically refers to the lifestyle and ethos of men who are attracted to other men, while homosexual refers to the individual who has sexual relations with people of the same sex. Darrel’s whispered “yes” is not sufficient for Prophet Love; she demands that he speaks up. She continues to aggressively interrogate Darrel in front of the church about whether or not he is a child of God, his desire to go to heaven, and so forth. She admonishes Darrel like he is a child; this establishes her power over him and

his desire to please her. She becomes “God-like” and all-powerful in her quest to administer God’s will. After Darrel accepts her invitation to “cast out the evil spirit living inside you,” and she tells him that he needs to be delivered from homosexuality, the curtain drops and the audience is finally able see Prophet Love completely (30).

With the focus on Prophet Love, Darrel and the congregation, the Prophet begins the “exorcism.” While commanding the spirit of homosexuality to come out in the name of Jesus, Prophet Love

moves her hands from his shoulder to his neck, to his head. She presses her fingers into his skin first as if she is kneading, bread then as if she is squeezing the last bit of toothpaste from the tube. At the end of each phrase she shakes him violently as if this motion were the punctuation of her sentences. (31)

The physicality that Prophet Love displays heightens during this scene. She is physically trying to push, shake and whip the demonic force that she believes is inside of Darrel.

While performing an exorcism it is important to identify who you represent. Through her repeated use of the name of Jesus, she allows the congregation to know that she is representing Jesus and the spirit is against Jesus. The spirit is the force of the Devil. She presses the heel of her foot inside of his stomach as she slaps him with a towel, while the congregation shouts Hallelujah. Since the spirit is “inside” of Darrel she essentially fighting Darrel on stage. The congregation can be viewed as cheering Prophet Love on.

However, we are reminded that the congregation is not just filled with members of Love’s church but also Mr. Wallace and Rachelle. Despite the nervousness that Rachelle displays she does not step in and stop Prophet Love from performing the exorcism. In any

other scenario Rachelle, being a mother who cares about her son would stop another grown woman, especially one that is a virtual stranger to her, from assaulting her child. The spiritual frenzy located in the church's atmosphere, Prophet Love's title and Rachelle's desire to have her son "fixed," prevents her from stepping in during this process and suspends her normal logic.

As Darrel begins to convulse and hold his stomach it is logical to assume he is doing so due to Prophet Love's foot being thrust repeatedly upon his stomach. However, Prophet Love believes it is because the spirit needs to come out of his belly. At this point she asks for a deacon to come and stand him up. Although we are lead to believe that Mr. Wallace is a deacon at Plain Valley church, he steps forwarded and holds Darrel up. The stage direction describes the image created by Mr. Wallace holding Darrel up as a crucifix. Darrel, followed by Mr. Wallace and the congregation, begins to sway side to side. As they sway, the church members walk down the aisle and whip Darrel with a white towel. As Prophet Love continues to command the spirit to come out, the intensity of both Prophet Love and the church members climax as Darrel begins to vomit profusely. This is the response that Prophet Love wanted and expected.

Yes, yes, yes.

Let that evil spirit out

Let the devil out

Yesssssssss.

Loose your grip Lucifer

Hallelujah. (32)

The church members drop their towels over Darrel's previously shaking, now limp body on the floor. Prophet Love drops the last towel on to his body. This display seems intense and unreal. Yet, as dramatic as a scene as the one written by Jamila Woods is, it pales in comparison to an actual gay exorcism. In 2009, a video was posted on the YouTube account of Manifested Glory Ministries. The 20 minute video showed a 16-year old boy "flopping violently on the floor, even vomiting at one point" (Netter). The boy is surrounded by adults imploring that the homosexual demons be cast out of his body. Like Darrel's case, the information provided by True Colors (a mentoring program for LGBT teens that the boy was involved in) states that he had been struggling to reconcile his sexuality with his religious beliefs. The pastor involved in this maintains that the boy requested the exorcism.

While these church experiences factor heavily in Darrel's formulation and understanding of his identity, his interactions with his mother (Rachelle) and friend (Jordan) also play a major role. I will first discuss the impact his mother's view of sexuality and masculinity has on Darrel. Then I will focus on how Darrel's friend, Jordan, represents a different more positive view on sexuality within the play.

The scene which introduces Darrel's mother, Rachelle occurs after school. His mother appears to be very proud of his scholastic achievements even offering Darrel as tutor to her friend's children. The church's influence is immediately seen in his mother's life. She mentions attending the church bake sale, the impact the church has on her recently widowed friend's life through the church assisting her with the mortgage payments. She also mentions that the pastor asked about Darrel's whereabouts, this is an

indication that Darrel is not as involved in church as she would like him to be. All these things construct her as a very loving and caring mother.

Darrel has been bullied in attack at school and his previous conversation with his friend Jordan indicates that he is nervous about his mother seeing his injury. As the scene begins Darrel attempts to hide his bruised eye from his mother with his hand as they eat dinner. Eventually Rachelle sees her son's bruised eye and knows that her son's initial answer of being hit by a ball in gym class is not the truth. She continued to press until her son confessed he was hit by some guys at lunch that was bothering him. Rachelle does not believe Darrel when he says that he does not know who hit him or why. Her mood changes from concern protective mother about her son's injury to nervous and resigned.

RACHELLE sighs, slides back in her chair and holds her temples between her fingers.

RACHELLE: [softly] I didn't think...we were gonna go through this again...

DARREL: Ma-

RACHELLE: [stronger] I was hoping. We wouldn't have to go through this. I thought things were gonna be different- new high school...it's been three years since the last time, I...

DARREL: Momma, I didn't do anything- they didn't say anything to me, it was probably weird jock hormone rush, something...maybe they thought I was someone else. I don't know. Please, don't...

RACHELLE stares at him, Long beat. (16)

This exchange indicates that Darrel has had issues in the past being harassed by others. The incident that occurred three years ago is never fully explained but it can be deduced that it had something to do with his sexuality or his appearing to be homosexual. She tells Darrel about a counseling program that Rev. Powell runs for young high school boys that she thinks can help him with the bullying. Despite Darrel not being the aggressor and excelling in school, his mother still places the blame for others' behavior onto her son. She tells Darrel, "I just want you to be happy and be able to go about your business like the good Christian son that I know you are is that alright? (17)" Her ideas about Christianity and masculinity reflect a very heteronormative perspective. Similar to Mr. Wallace, she sees femininity as not being a characteristic of a Christian male. Her desires for her son include his happiness, but she has a clear idea about how his happiness should look. Her image of a happy son also includes the adoption of her faith, Christianity. She believes if her son acted manlier then others would not bother him. Again we see that effeminate ways are not compatible with ideas of Christian manhood.

As the play progresses, Rachelle becomes more concerned with her son's performance of (or failure to perform) Black masculinity, even though she initially is in denial about the seriousness this problem poses. Rachelle is a single mother raising her son alone. There is no mention of Darrel's father throughout the play. According to the National Kids Count program 66% of Black households are headed by a single parent. The high number of single mothers in Black churches makes it an ideal place for single Black men to find potential partners. In Scene six Rachelle is seen on a coffee date with the Sunday school teacher, Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Wallace and Rev. Powell are seen as potential male role-models for the young Darrel. They are Black men with religious involvement and are both employed. Rachelle speaks with Mr. Wallace about the role he has in the church, specifically the positive impact his Sunday school class has on the young males in the church. She believes that it would have been good for Darrel to have a “strong Christian male presence” in his life at a younger age. As the conversation develops she admits that she is worried about her son. She mentions she believes he is “confused” and her concern about him being so different from other boys. Her confession opens the door for Mr. Wallace to tell Rachelle what he thinks about her son. He believes that her efforts, even bringing Darrel to Rev. Powell for counseling are not sufficient.

MR. WALLACE: Rachelle, listen to me. I been workin at Plain Valley Church for goin on seven years now. I seen a lotta boys come into this church who are *confused*, but I also seen a lotta boys come into this church who are *cursed*, who got the Devil inside them, and who need to be *delivered* from that curse. Believe me, I know the difference. Now, you know your son much better than I do. But can you honestly tell me that Darrel has never done anything that would lead you to believe he’s fallen under the influence of a homosexual spirit? ++⁹ (22)

This statement makes Rachelle uncomfortable for several reasons; this is her first date and interaction with Mr. Wallace outside of the church. Not only is he a Sunday school teacher but he is also a Deacon at the church and for him to be so frank about his opinion of her son’s behavior is really hard for Rachelle. Because of Darrel’s age Mr. Wallace

⁹ The playwright uses this symbol to refer to a verbal slap, whether malicious or unintentional, denotes a word that has the effect of physically slapping the character who it is being said to.

has only limited contact with him and through that limited contact believes the possibility that her son is cursed and in need of deliverance. The distinction between being cursed and confused is that more hope exists to correct the sexuality of someone who is confused through non-radical steps like counseling. Being cursed requires a more radical approach if the person is going to be changed. If Mr. Wallace believes and sees this from his limited interaction others in the church must see and believe similar things about her son. It is often said that a mother always knows, and Mr. Wallace verbalizing her fears about her son's sexuality is jarring and disconcerting for Rachelle. He suggests a place where Darrel can get the healing he feels he needs. Hearing these fears voiced by a respected man of God makes her fears that much more real. His statements obviously hurt Rachelle, although she tries to play it off and tells him, "Well Mr. Wallace, you are certainly right about one thing. You don't know my son" (22). No parent wants to hear an almost stranger condemn their son in the manner in which Mr. Wallace does. Rachelle abruptly ends the date, thanks him for his time and refuses his offer to walk him to her car. Rachelle is still in denial about the extent of her son's sexuality.

This denial that her son is not interested in performing Black masculinity as proscribed by society and the church ends when she discovers Darrel in a dress. She knocks on Darrel's door to wake him up for church. Darrel half asleep, searches for his church clothes. As he gets out of bed the audience notices that he is wearing a blue dress, which he had on from the previous scene. Rachelle continues to knock and eventually comes in the room to make sure he is out of bed. She finds her son "half-nude in the middle of the room, with her powder blue dress hanging around his hips" (23). She stares

at him in shock before Darrel pushes her out the room. This is the third scene with Darrel in a dress, which reinforces the notion of homosexuality not only equating effeminization but also cross-dressing/ gender identity issues. I will further address why this equation is problematic later in this chapter.

Seeing her son in her dress is obviously jarring to Rachelle especially after Mr. Wallace has suggested that the spirit of homosexuality resides within her son. No longer able to ignore her son's sexuality, she calls Mr. Wallace for the help he offered earlier that she previously refused. For the first time she believes that Darrel's sexuality is something that she cannot handle. The incident causes Rachelle to reach out to Mr. Wallace even as the same incident causes Darrel to push his friend Jordan away. Rachelle grounds Darrel and tells him he must attend the church that Mr. Wallace recommended for healing.

As discussed earlier, Darrel's experience at God's Friendly's Church was extremely intense. After this, Rachelle no longer seems confident that she made the right decision. Scene 14 occurs after the exorcism at Rachelle and Darrel's house. The Darrel we see is a very subdued version of his former self. The guilt that Rachelle feels for taking Darrel to God's Friendly Church is seen through her attempts to make him feel better. She offers him his favorite meal, which he shows little interest in. She apologizes to him for the experience and cites ignorance for not knowing how intense of an experience it would be. She also indirectly blames the experience on Mr. Wallace and informs Darrel that she will not be seeing him ever again.

What that woman did was- it made me so uncomfortable. But I didn't know what to do, Mr. Wallace kept telling me it was normal, that vomiting- expelling the spirit- was the usual end of the process, and that I shouldn't interrupt. But I wanted to make sure you're okay. You're sure you're okay? (35)

Rachelle expresses her own discomfort before speaking about Darrel's experience. The natural reaction of a mother seeing her child vomiting and being hit by others is normally to protect their child. The words and reassurance of a virtual stranger normally does not have an impact on the natural instinct of a mother to protect her child. Her concern about the well-being of Darrel comes a day after the experience. She waits until the next morning to ask him if he is okay. After Darrel assures he is fine, her next question is whether or not he feels it worked.

Her instinct to protect her son was colored by her stronger desire to "fix" him, make him normal. Rachelle was willing to watch her son be physical assaulted and watch him in pain, because of the hope that this temporary pain on the flesh would provide a permanent cure within his spirit. After she asks him if it worked, Darrel discontinues his already short responses. Within Rachelle we see a mother who loves and cares for her son. She wants him to be successful, but those around her have taught that his success can only be accessed on specific terms. These terms mandate a heteronormative understanding of sexuality and belief in certain Christian tenets. Her relationship with her son causes her to become confused in regards to her value system. While she does not want to harm her son, she also wants him to be cured of any sexuality or gender

performance deviation. Her own personal confusion is seen with her promise of not forcing Darrel to return, yet still asking him whether the process worked.

Darrel's friend Jordan represents the only person in his life with whom he can be his full self. When we initially meet Jordan he is hanging in Darrel's room after school the day that Darrel was bullied and assaulted at school. As they talk casually about the upcoming homecoming dance; Darrel holds a pack of frozen peas on his face. It is not until later in the scene the audience becomes aware of why he is holding a pack of frozen peas on his face. The school quarterback became jealous when the girl he liked asked Darrel to homecoming; although Darrel declined her invitation, the young man still decided to attack him. Darrel indicates throughout this scene his admiration for his friend Jordan who is not afraid to be himself no matter what anyone thinks.

JORDAN: Do what? I don't *do* anything D. I just don't do shit. I don't apologize for what I like. It's not my fault that other niggas like to pretend to be something they're not for the sake of some high school bull shit. You know me, I don't do that fake shit. And you know what, most people actually like that, they can't help it, cause they wish they could be like that themselves. And if they don't like it, they at least shut up about it, cause they can't say nothing to me, cause they no I ain't scared. Not like somebody else I know [sic]. (10)

Jordan demonstrates a self-confidence and assurance about his own identity. There is no shame evident in his statements or actions. Darrel admires his friend's unwillingness to be ashamed or afraid of whom he is or what he likes, and Jordan's confidence also motivates him to not be afraid either. After dismissing every girl that Jordan mentions as

a possible date, Darrel tells him “I wanna go with you” (11). For the first time Darrel makes an advance on his friend; he holds his hand and kisses him on the cheek. This is a very forward act on the behalf of Darrel. The text implies that previously he has only flirted with his attraction for Jordan but has not acted. Jordan appears to be in pleasant disbelief with Darrel’s action and asks, “You sure you know what you’re saying D?” as a way to make sure Darrel knows the seriousness and implication of his action (12). Jordan continues to mention obstacles such as his mother and the guys at school that Darrel will have to encounter if he does bring a boy as his date, but Darrel remains committed to the idea.

Jordan represents to Darrel the possibility of loving a man and being comfortable in his identity. In a later scene Darrel dreams about the homecoming dance. In this dream, Jordan wears a silver suit, shiny dressy shoes and a blazer covered in mirrors. Darrel wears a powder blue checkered dress. The two begin to dance. While Darrel is presumably the more submissive of the two since he is wearing a dress, he initiates the passionate kiss, after which they hold each other until the scene ends.

This dream is short lived after the influence of his mother and Rev. Powell, Darrel no longer wants to think about the possibilities of loving a man. In Scene ten Darrel informs Jordan that he is no longer able to go the homecoming dance with him and he needs to get help dealing with his confusion. His use of “confusion” indicates that he believes that the cause of his attraction is something mental that can be fixed, not something innate or irreversible within himself. Knowing his friend, Jordan is immediately concerned about Darrel and suspects that Rev. Powell is leading Darrel to

believe he is confused. Since Darrel's mother discovered him in her dress Darrel has been having nightmares, and he further confesses to Jordan that he is often in his dreams. As Jordan tries to assure Darrel that his feelings are a normal part of coming out, Darrel becomes very defensive and tells Jordan he is not gay.

DARREL: I don't like boys, okay. I just, I like you. That doesn't make me gay. I like girls too.

JORDAN: And trying on girl's clothes...

DARREL: Fuck you. You're the only person I told about that. I didn't tell you so you could go hanging it over my head like it make me some kinda faggot ++

JORDAN: What did you say?

DARREL: I'm, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that, Jori. I'm just, I'm not gay okay. I think my Ma and Rev. Powell are right about me needing some extra guidance. That's how I feel, all the time, like I'm just lost. I can't explain the thoughts I been having lately...I feel like its becoming harder and harder to feel like I have control over my own mind and body... [sic] (26)

The Darrel that appears in this scene is very different from the Darrel we saw in previous scenes. When Jordan was last over at his house Darrel was confident and seemed very comfortable in his decision to accompany Jordan to the prom. He was motivated by Jordan's refusal to care about what others thought of him. Darrel begins to push Jordan away after his mother catches him in a dress. He now distances himself from Jordan by not only stating he is not gay, but also by using a gay slur. He wants it clear that he is not like Jordan and although he does admit to being attracted to Jordan, he refuses to admit

attraction to other men. Darrel is hesitant to put any type of label on his sexuality or classify his same-sex attraction. Yet, others like Mr. Wallace, Prophet Love and Jordan attempt to label Darrel's sexuality. This can add to the confusion that Darrel is feeling about his sexual identity.

Jordan's and Darrel's spiritual and religious upbringings differ greatly. Darrel has grown up in the church and has been taught to pathologize sexuality. After a couple of weeks of counseling by Rev. Powell, the self-confidence that Darrel possessed about himself and desire for Jordan has all disappeared. He legitimately believes that the Rev. Powell wants the best for him and his confused thoughts are not what are best for him. Again, sexuality is seen as being in the thoughts or head, not something innate. Jordan's understanding of spirituality more than a specific religion gives him a different worldview than Darrel's. He believes that Darrel must look at himself to know himself rather than looking towards other people ideas and thoughts of him.

Jordan further represents the ideal of spirituality versus religiosity during the exorcism scene. After Prophet Love is initially revealed, the other side of the stage features a spotlight of Jordan praying. Unlike Darrel, Jordan does not have a strong church background or relationship with God based on a structured religious understanding. However it is obvious from his prayer that he is a spiritual being and deeply cares about Darrel. His relationship with the divine is not based on doctrine but an innate understanding of the presence of divinity in his life without the need for intermediaries (i.e. church or religious leaders). His prayer expresses the sentiment that God made Jordan and knows and accepts Darrel for himself. The juxtaposition of

Prophet Love on the other side shows the competing views of how one relates to God. Jordan acknowledges that Darrel's mother means well and desires to help her son but she, like the others, does not "know how to love without hating" (31). His sense of spirituality, while not as rhetoric-filled as those around Darrel, is extremely strong. His ability to understand that one can both be same-gender loving and a child of God is something that we will develop further in Chapter Four.

The last major influence in Darrel's formulation of his identity is the character, The Spirit. At the end of Scene 11, the lights begin to flicker and a figure that is identified as The Spirit is seen hovering over the body of Darrel smiling. The introduction of The Spirit is quite interesting. After painting this intense visual scene of the exorcism, it would be very easy for Woods to suggest that the Spirit is not real--that the exorcism was an unneeded form of torture. The audience's sympathy lies with Darrel, who appears to be a victim of Prophet Love. However the appearance of The Spirit disrupts this sympathy; perhaps the exorcism was needed.

The following scene takes place in the church without the congregation or the smell of vomit. The pews have been moved to the sides of the room. Darrel continues to lie in the same spot; he appears to be asleep. The Spirit moves and the audience sees that the Spirit is the spitting image of Darrel. However we are never able to see his face completely because it is covered in mime make up and his expressions are always exaggerated. As the Spirit stares at Darrel, Darrel wakes up and notices this figure that resembles him. The Spirit begins to perform a liturgical praise dance. Liturgical dance is a form of dance used within worship services in order to praise God. It is intended to add

depth and dimension to the spoken or sung music. It can be viewed as an externalized prayer that expresses the joy, visions and struggles of a searching heart. Liturgical dance has a long history in Judeo-Christian culture—King David¹⁰ of the scriptures often was depicted as dancing for God. Dance continues to play a significant role in many Black churches in the United States through praise and mime dance ministries. In explaining this scene, Woods refers to the performance video of K&K as inspiration. K & K is a popular mime group composed of two twin brothers who have performed at various churches around the country. In the video “We fall down,” the twins perform a mime dance to “We Fall Down, but We Get Up.” Their connection of being identical twins is similar to the deep connection that Woods wants to create between the Spirit and Darrel.

Woods also uses the song that the K&K dance to “We Fall Down, but We Get Up” by Donnie McClurkin, for the liturgical or praise dance performed in the scene. This song selection is a deliberate and purposeful choice. McClurkin is a popular gospel artist who experienced a long and successful career. He has also been one of the most outspoken gospel artists about the spirit of homosexuality. He speaks of his deliverance from homosexuality in his 2004 DVD, *The Donnie McClurkin Story: From Darkness to Light* and in his 2001 biography. With the knowledge of his testimony, I will venture to read his popular song as evidence of his own struggle with same-sex desires. The song is about how all Christians will sin but what is important is that Christians repent from their sins. He stresses the importance of not condemning others for their sins because everyone

¹⁰ David was the King of Israel. He is known for his skill in battle, as a young man he defeated the giant, Goliath. His story appears in the Old Testament, he credited as the writer of the Book of Psalms. David is portrayed as having a close relationship with God, despite instances of sexual immorality. Jesus, the messiah is often referred to as the Son of David

sins, and God is able to forgive whatever sins they commit. McClurkin believes that when people believe they will be condemned if they speak about their same-sex desires/homosexuality, they are not as open to seek out and receive help. McClurkin's story expresses the sentiment of GCMW's last tenet, which critiques the process of "rejecting homosexuals who come to her [the church] for help."

The Spirit begins to dance with his eyes locked on Darrel during the first hook of the song, after which Darrel joins him in the dance. His confidence dancing with Spirit increases as the song continues. Like the twins in the video Woods' references, they play off each other and dance in sync. This dance celebrates and reflects their spiritual connection and becomes a release or cathartic movement for Darrel after experiencing the exorcism. It also reflects a sense of freedom and the acceptance of the Spirit's role in Darrel's body and spirituality. The scene ends with their bodies falling to the floor.

But Darrel is not the only one who interacts with the Spirit; Woods also has a scene where the Spirit touches Prophet Love as well. Prophet Love is by far the most radical embodiment of anti-homosexual thought in the play. Rather than only portray Prophet Love in the emotional fervor of the exorcism, Woods allows Prophet Love the opportunity to share her thoughts and beliefs outside of the intensity of the church and congregation. Her monologue initially is made up of the typical rhetoric used by Christians to condemn homosexual behavior. As discussed in the Introduction, Prophet Love's interpretation of the scripture demonstrates a literal understanding of the *Bible* as an infallible text. She maintains that she is just a messenger of God and it is he, not her, who condemns homosexuality. This removes her from any criticism associated with

being a homophobe. This is similar to the statement provided by the pastor involved in aforementioned 2009 exorcism depicted on YouTube, “As for me being a pastor, I live by the word of God, I don’t hate them. We love them. We just don’t agree with their lifestyle” (Netter).

As Prophet Love talks, the Spirit touches her throughout her monologue. She maintains that God’s Friendly Church believes in power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives the gifts that allows people to speak in tongues,¹¹ be healed from affliction as well as witness to others. The intense emotions that one can experience through a worship service are attributed to being filled with the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit that touches her is not the Holy Spirit that she references throughout her monologue but the Spirit that we saw dancing with Darrel. The Spirit is a representation of the divinity inside of Darrel, not the Holy Spirit represented in the Christian trinity. In the presence of this Spirit, Prophet Love speaks of her own shortcomings and sin. She admits to having experienced desires for another woman but denies ever acting on these desires. It is often believed that those who are the most homophobic or focused on the homosexuality activities of others are themselves struggling with homosexual desires. Her desire to rid others in general or specifically Darrel of the temptation of homosexuality reflects her own struggle for deliverance.

Prophet Love’s monologue also reflects the dichotomy between flesh and spirit often seen in Evangelical cultures. Kelly Brown Douglas argues that Western forms of

¹¹ Refers to the current Pentecostal belief that one can possess the gift of speaking in real unlearned languages, heavenly language or the language of angels, this can be traced back to the New Testament. Some Christian believers dispute this notion, and believe the current practice is more learned behavior of meaningless syllables.

Christianity separate the body and the spirit, a concept not found in traditional African religions, Eastern religions or Judaism. She cites this “spiritualistic dualism” as the cause for the alienation of persons from their sexuality because their spirituality demands a denial of their bodily-selves (Douglas 29). “Such alienation from an essential part of one’s being often compels one to project onto others what one finds undesirable, but unavoidable, about oneself” (Douglas 29). This projection of the undesirable onto others is seen repeatedly in the script of *Deliverance*. The flesh is seen as the cause of man’s downfall -- as Love states, “your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak.” This phrase comes from Matthew 26:41¹² which reflects the ideology that it is the flesh or one’s natural feelings that are dangerous and cause one to be weak in resisting sinful desires. No matter how strong one’s faith is the natural weakness of human nature causes people to give in to temptation. Prophet Love refers to homosexuality as a parasite “sucking at flesh from the inside” (34). If Prophet Love believes that homosexuality is on the inside, it is possible to read this as her believing that homosexuality is unnatural and innate. It is not something that comes from the outside, i.e. because of molestation or lack of strong male influences. She believes that the bad spirit seeks to vanquish the spirit given by God. In order to defeat the bad spirit one must cure oneself.

The struggle with who one is in private and how one presents oneself publicly is apparent from the very beginning of the play. Our initial introduction to Darrel occurs in the first scene, which takes place in his mother’s room in front of her mirror. During the scene he dresses in his mother clothes, including her bra which he stuffs with tissues. He

¹² ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.’ NIV

puts his hands on his hips as he performs femininity in front of the mirrors. He smiles at his reflection, indicating that he enjoys this gender performance that he delights in how he sees himself. As he hears the door slam, he quickly puts the clothes away and exits his mother's room. This scene establishes that Darrel enjoys wearing woman clothes, but feels the need to hide this enjoyment from others. We see his image of himself change drastically throughout the play.

The ideology of "the body is weak" is further explicated towards the end of the play as we see Darrel becoming more aware of his own identity and how he has been influenced by rhetoric of the church. As with previous scenes, Darrel is in his bedroom and there is no dialogue. In the background Ahmad Jamal's "My Funny Valentine" plays (this is the same song to which Darrel danced with Jordan in his dream). This time the song is played backwards, giving it a jumbled sound not unlike Darrel's feelings. He strips down to his underwear and stares at his reflection. Darrel's reflection causes him an intense amount of self-hatred. While his heart wants to be rid of the homosexual desires, what he sees in the mirror is a homosexual. In order to rid himself of the flesh which makes him weak, he tries to rub and scrape off his skin¹³. He continues to hit himself and inflict pain on his body until he collapses on the floor from exhaustion. Darrel is frustrated that, after the exorcism and all that his mother has done to try and rid him of his feelings and thoughts, nothing has worked-- he still has the same desires and thoughts. Yet, Darrel is profoundly changed by the experience of the exorcism. From the voicemail

¹³ Darrel is committing an act of self-injury. Self-injury usually begins in adolescence is more prevalent in the LGBT community than within the heterosexual community. Youth without a strong support system or who struggle to hid their sexual orientation are more susceptible to self-injury.

recording that is played from Jordan, we learn that Darrel has not attended school. He has also not been responsive to Jordan's calls.

The last scene starts much like Scene two's "Sunday school," with Darrel reciting the same definition of holy that we heard the Sunday school class recite from the *Bible*. He personalizes the recitation by using the words "I" and "my." The Spirit character responds to Darrel's definition with a definition from the dictionary citing the origin of the word "separate" and "spirit." As Darrel speaks he does so slowly in a programmatic way that expresses the indoctrination that he has received. This contrasts with the energetic manner in which The Spirit enunciates his words. While Darrel does not acknowledge the presence of The Spirit, the text indicates that The Spirit's presence is still felt. Darrel is continuing to work through the dichotomy between flesh and spirit, between body and heart.

THE SPIRIT:

Your body

is the trunk in which your spirit takes root

Your skin is the color of autumn leaves

wet from rain

You are an oak tree

You smell like a windy morning

there's no way

to tell when your leaves will change

One day

you could be shed half dead across the sidewalk

Another day

you could be blooming tall like a child of the sun

Your spirit may be willing, yes

but your body is beautiful

too

Chopping down the trunk

will only kill the root

Let yourself grow here

There is no one else like you

You cannot be replaced

Your seeds were planted perfect by God

so please

Let yourself

Grow (37)

With this dialogue The Spirit is refuting the claims made by Prophet Love and others that the problem is found in the body or the flesh. The Spirit instead proclaims the beauty of Darrel's body, of who he is. Darrel has gotten to the point where he hates his reflection and his body and has tried to inflict pain on his body. The Spirit tells Darrel that killing the body will only take away the chance of growth. He reminds Darrel that he was uniquely and perfectly made by God. Anti-homosexual rhetoric often describes the seeds or one's roots being corrupted. The Spirit is telling him that God knew the type of

seeds, the type of tree or person that Darrel was destined to be. He pleads with Darrel to allow himself to grow into the person God had planned him to be. The Spirit stands Darrel up and puts him in a prayer position; he corrects Darrel's bowed head lifting it to face the audience. The Spirit calls for Darrel to pray but instructs the audience to "open our eyes for a word of prayer" (38). Prayer typically is thought of as an act done with one's eyes closed and head bowed. The Spirit is actually telling Darrel to open his eyes and see for himself. He has relied too long on what others thought he should be and what others thought he should believe. With The Spirit's invocation we hear Darrel's prayer.

This is the first time we hear Darrel verbalize his own spirituality. He tells God that he has always loved God, even without knowing why. This reflects that Darrel's belief system has been based on what he has been told to believe. He speaks about hearing God's voice out of everyone's mouth but his own. God has been something external to Darrel, not something that lives and guides him from within. He problematizes his lack of hearing God from his body, the body that God created. For the first time he acknowledges that God made him, all of him- not just the spirit. He states that "the trunk and the roots, the spirit *and* the body is willing" (39). We are seeing Darrel reject the doctrine he has been taught in favor of spirituality that he can feel. He ends his prayer with a request that the Lord teach him how to love himself. The actions of the religious leaders in this play have destroyed any sense of self-love that Darrel possessed; it is his emerging spirituality that rebuilds his confidence and love of self. He ends the prayer invoking the name of Jesus. This allows the audience to believe that he has not rejected the Christian faith but is rather developing a sense of spirituality that

allows him to believe that Jesus and his same-sex desires are not incompatibly. This most importantly means he does not need to be fixed. The character of Darrel within Woods' *Deliverance* demonstrates the many forces that indict young queer males into the performance of *Deliverance*, many of which believe they are doing what is best for you. Darrel shows the courage and strength that it takes to reject the script of *Deliverance* as presented by the church. However, Darrel does receive deliverance—the deliverance is not from his sexual desires but delivered from other people conception of who he should be and from the condemnation from others. Darrel is delivered into both a personal and spiritual relationship with the Divine.

Deliverance in Gospel music

The script of *Deliverance*¹⁴ also can be seen in the early work of gospel recording artist Anthony Charles Williams II. Unlike Woods' play, which reframes deliverance from evil as a personal attempt to reject a part of oneself to instead developing one's own spiritual relationship with God and rejecting the authoritative voices of condemnation of one's community leaders, the script Williams and other gospel singers embody is similar to how Darrel struggles to reconcile his desires to fit the demands of the gospel community. The remainder of this chapter will explore how Williams' as Tonex and Donnie McClurkin used the script of *Deliverance* within their successful gospel careers.

Williams, a child of both musicians and pastors, decided at a very early age that he wanted to pursue a career in music. He recorded his first album at home at ten years

¹⁴Some might disagree with my reading of Tonex's lyrics as evidence of his journey of self-acceptance of his same-gender attraction. I am choosing to use the light and knowledge provide by Williams during interviews about his own public journey to speak about his same-gender attraction to read his lyrics.

old and adopted the stage name “Tonex” at thirteen. The use of a stage name, while typical in other forms of music, is not normally seen in the gospel music industry; this is significant because a stage name indicates an alter-ego or a persona that is not one’s own. As seen throughout this dissertation, the gospel music industry places substantial value on the gospel artist’s personal relationship with God. A stage name frames Tonex in the context of a performer rather than singing about his lived realities.

Tonex released his “debut” album *Pronounced Toe-nay* through an underground record label in 1997. He stayed in his hometown of San Diego and independently distributed his album. This album became a major underground hit and caught the attention of the producers of the 14th annual Stellar Awards in 1999. The Stellar Award Show celebrates the best in gospel music. Because the performers featured are typically well-known gospel artists, it was very unusual that a newcomer without a major record deal would be invited to perform on the show. The artists who are normally included already have a built a relationship with the audience, who are familiar with their songs and lyrics. In Tonex’s case, more scrutiny was placed on his performance not only due to the dancing and stylization of his persona, but also the audience’s desire to know who this new person was. As a result of the performance and subsequent buzz (both negative and positive), he was signed to a three way record deal: Verity (gospel label), Zomba (pop label), and Tommy Boy (hip-hop label) (Vargo). His unusual record deal reflected his eclectic style and mixture of various musical influences. The practice of producing and distributing of his own music, rather than a reliance on a major record label, would be a practice that Tonex would return to throughout his career. *Pronounced Toe-nay* was

re-released through his new record company in 2000 greatly increasing distribution of the album. The sound of his debut album differed from the popular sound of mainstream gospel music by not only reflecting a jazz, hip hop, retro funk aesthetic but also the lack of a background choir. The vocals were primarily done by Tonex without added help. The album songs relied heavily on sampling to achieve its sound, something not typically seen in gospel music.

The album serves as mainstream gospel introduction to Tonex. The title track uses edgy hip hop lyrics to position him as a leader who promises to “never lead you astray.” In a later song he proclaims that he is “saved and sanctified walking in the light.” Gospel music relies very much on a perception of the artist having a real and authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. “Personal Jesus,” where he speaks about the intimacy of his relationship with Jesus, became the biggest hit on the album. These songs helped to establish Tonex’s credibility in gospel music and despite his “edgy” appearance his message was familiar to gospel audiences. His songs in this album reflect a desire to teach and lead, eschewing the traditional praise and worship songs. This can be attributed to his call to preach. In a 2000 interview he stated, “Preaching is my first call, singing is a side order,”¹⁵ this order can be seen in his music. He features his mother’s singing on “Untitled,” a song that focuses on salvation, asking the listener of the song about their own personal relationship with God. He offers a prayer to God for the listener of the album to repent from their sins. He specifically mentions drug dealers, drug addicts

¹⁵ Gospel Flava magazine

and prostitutes, inviting them all into the body of Christ. Tonex never mentions homosexuals in his call for repentance.

The album displays Tonex's relationship to Jesus and his theological understanding at that time. "Real with U" is a heartfelt ballad that expresses his desire for transparency both in his relationship with God but also in his life. His expression of his desire to be real can be read in all his actions. In another he asks the Lord to "make him right," although it is not clear what needs to be righted. He focuses on the dangers of the flesh throughout the album, most strongly in "Restoration." The process of restoration comes when a believer has broken their fellowship with Jesus Christ and needs to be restored back into the body of Christ. Tonex sings about leaving the fellowship of Christ and falling astray. The song is his plea and promise to renew his relationship with the Lord. The song demonstrates his struggles with the flesh and how it quickly takes over his actions. Simply being around unrighteous friends provides the environment that allows sin to creep into his life. He advises that if one repents and gives up the sin that God forgives you.

Tonex explicitly tackles the script of Deliverance in his the soulful ballad "Deliver" (2003), located on the underground album *Oak Park 921 '06*. The song reflects the ideology that if one desires to be changed Jesus is able to set them free. He uses himself as an example proclaiming that Jesus "loosed his shackles, set me free. Who the son sets free is free indeed." He acknowledges the struggle of praying for deliverance multiple times and not receiving any deliverance. Tonex informs his listeners that they

must not give up, but ask Jesus one more time, one must reach up and grab deliverance if that's what they truly want.

Tonex, like Prophet Love in *Deliverance*, claims the power to be delivered is available, however one's failure not to receive it is their own and not Jesus's failure. Tonex sings that Jesus is able to break any bad habits, he lists pornography, adultery, and smoking weed as things from which Jesus is able deliver Christians. This is one of the first times he addresses homosexuality specifically and he does so in a manner that equates it with a bad habit. This differs from the previous views of homosexuality we have seen that portray homosexuality as a spirit that needs to be cast out rather than a habit that needs to be broken. The first describes something innate or in one's thoughts, while the later described more a series of actions. While I prefer not speculate on his thought process during the writing of this song it was released during the time he was married. He has stated that he truly loved his wife. His marriage can be viewed as indication that he does not (or no longer) struggle with his sexuality and reflects his adherence to heteronormative Christian standards.

Perhaps the most powerful song that demonstrates Tonex's struggle with homosexuality is "Make Me Over".¹⁶ This song appeared on his live double CD *Out the Box*, his most popular album. The album debuted at the top of the Billboard Gospel chart and also appeared on the R&B chart. It garnered Tonex a Grammy nomination along with

¹⁶ I was introduced to Tonex through "Make Me Over," as struggled with reconciling my beliefs and sexuality it would be the song I would play repeatedly. Although I did not know anything about Tonex's sexuality at this point the song struck a chord with me.

several Stellar awards. “Make Me Over” won the Stellar¹⁷ award in 2005 for song of the year. The songs on this album featured Tonex’s choir “The Peculiar People.”¹⁸ While this song never addresses homosexuality directly, the inner struggle and turmoil that Tonex later confirmed is clear. In 2004 Tonex performed this song on BET’s annual “Celebration of Gospel.” The performance featured Tonex conservatively dressed in a suit with a low-cut fade. His appearance contrasts with many of his earlier appearance where he donned extensions, boas or ultra-urban apparel. He stands in the middle of the stage singing in a microphone, with the “The Peculiar People” choir in the background. Like many of his songs “Make Me Over” is written as a prayer or personal conversation with God. Tonex acknowledges he desires to do things his own way and not with God. “Time after time I failed you” he sings, reflecting the desire to do what he believes is right yet still falling short of this standard.

The song itself is three verses however the adlibs that Tonex provides when he is performing it live allow us real insight into his thoughts. Through the first half of the performance he sings the ballad in a standard way, slowly building up. As the momentum builds he sings, “I am tired of myself. I am tired of my evil ways. Everyday it’s the same time, it’s the same thing and I am ready for change Lord. Create in me a clean heart; renew in me the right spirit.” Tonex is speaking to his feeling of disappointing not only God but also himself. Tonex quotes Psalms 51:10, when David describes having a corrupt heart that is in need of being made new. He desires a constant spirit that is not bound by sin and will not yield to temptations. David is known as being a man after

¹⁷ The Stellar Awards is the first and oldest annual television event awards show celebrating the best in Gospel music. The first show was produced in 1985.

¹⁸ The choir included his then wife.

God's own heart, yet he falls repeatedly to sexual sin in the *Bible*. Tonex then begins to implore the Lord "Take it out of me Jesus. I am sick of my flesh Lord." Tonex is asking God to remove the desires that he believes to be sinful and not pleasing to God. Similar to *Deliverance* the flesh is portrayed as being in conflict with the one's relationship to God. As Darrel spins into self-hatred after the deliverance attempt fails, he physically tries to remove his flesh and scrape the sin of homosexuality off himself. As the song seemingly ends and the intensity begins to fall, Tonex returns back to the microphone.

I die to myself. I die to myself. I am sick of church the same way. I am sick of church the same way. I am sick of service the same way. I get pray and I go back out. I get delivered and I sin again. I get pray and I sin again. I am ready for change. Take it out. Make me over, Jesus...I am ready, Lord. Forgive me. Forgive me. When I want to do right evil is always present. My spirit don't want to do it but my flesh keep on drawing me to it and I am ready. I submit, I submit, I submit, I submit, I submit. Take my identity away Lord. I just want to be more like you Lord. ("Make Me Over")

In this unscripted display of vulnerability Tonex reveals his dissatisfaction not only with himself but also with the church as a whole. This is a very bold statement to make on national television in front of an audience filled with other gospel artist and celebrities. Tonex admits that the church is not helping him change.

It is very easy for believers and church leaders to fall into the routine of the same type of worship service, songs, and sermons, while failing to address the real needs of the people present. The prayers and laying of hands meant to deliver him from whatever he

fighting against is not sufficient. He has fallen into a routine of sin and repentance. The frequency of succumbing to the flesh would make it hard for one to believe that they could ever truly be free of the temptation. Dealing with the failure to be delivered, as seen with Darrel, is a key aspect of the performance of *Deliverance*. People who experience same-sex desires usually are subject deliverance or gay exorcisms multiple times. In June of 2010, *Details* magazine profiled a 20 year old name “Kevin,” the story of gay exorcism is eerily similar to that of Darrel in *Deliverance*. In the article he recounts that he was subjected to gay exorcism about 10 times between the ages of 16 and 20 years old. Each time he hoped that the person performing the exorcism would be able to do what the previous people had failed to do-- deliver him from homosexuality. Tonex expresses his frustration with multiple attempts to be free from his same-sex desires. He quotes the Apostle Paul¹⁹ to emphasize the temptations around him that encourage him to commit sin or evil acts. Paul states that the struggle between desiring to do right and the presence of evil forces is something that all Christians face.

Tonex also addresses the battle between the flesh and the spirit that we saw in *Deliverance*. He acknowledges that it is his flesh, his body that allows his mind and heart to become weak. His request for Jesus to remove temptation from him is similar to Prophet Love’s commanding the demon out of Darrel’s body. In both cases there is something inside of them that they and others deem evil and not pleasing to God that needs to be expelled. Tonex’s request that the Lord make him over symbolizes that there is something wrong with who is, and how he was created. This contradicts the view that God made us perfect in his image and enforces the view that something went wrong in

¹⁹ Romans 7:21

the creation of Tonex, requiring that he be made over. He claims to now be ready to really make change in his life, and submit. In biblical terms to, submit means to follow God's word. By desiring to lose his identity- who he is—Tonex is forsaking his own wants and desires for God's. He is demonstrating an effort to be more like God and less like who is. In order for this to happen Tonex must die and God must make him new. For God to forgive one's sin, one must confess the sin. Even though he does not specifically name his sin, Tonex confesses that he is struggling with something and desires God's intervention.

The act of confessing personal battles with sexual sin is not an anomaly in the gospel industry. In light of the fact that gospel music places great importance on living a life that reflects a Christian ideology, the extent to which what would be defined as sexual sin is publically addressed within the gospel music industry might be surprising to some. Darwin Hobbs has spoken publically about being molested and struggling with same-sex attraction (Darwin Hobbs pt1). Singer Donnie McClurkin discussed being a victim of molestation which triggered his subsequent experience and release from a homosexual lifestyle in his book *Eternal Victim, External Victor* (2001). Gospel artist Kirk Franklin admitted to struggling with an addiction to pornography during an *Oprah* episode in 2006. Tye Tribbett took a year sabbatical from music after he admitted to committing adultery in 2009 (Landrum). These are just a few of the musicians in the gospel industry who have publically talked about their struggles with sexual sin.

The gospel audience expects its artists to confess publically to any sins they commit that threaten to compromise the artist's personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The biblical verse *I John 1:9* explains this particular aspect of the script. It states that “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” When the artists previously mentioned disclosed their sexual struggles/ immorality, they each went through a period of restoration that included some form of Christian counseling. By admitting their faults, asking for forgiveness and seeking reconciliation with their faith, the artists were welcomed back not only into the gospel industry but also into their respective larger communities of faith. Likewise, in the play *Deliverance*, we are led to believe if Darrel had confessed his struggle with homosexuality and either the counseling or exorcism was successful, he would have been welcomed back to his faith community. However the unsuccessful deliverance attempts requires him to remain an outsider in the faith community in which he grew up.

The similarities between these performances of confession and reconciliation of sexual sin have become so monotonous that they can be viewed as ritualized. A more detailed example of this in continual performance is displayed with Darwin Hobbs. After discussing the impact experiencing molestation as a young child had on the later formation of his same-sex desires, Hobbs publicly acknowledged how his faith had freed him from the bondage of sexual sins, including same-sex attraction and an addiction to pornography (Darwin Hobbs pt1). However, Hobbs deviates slightly from the established script for discussing sexual sin. He criticizes the church for not addressing the ramifications of the shame and guilt resulting from molestation and homosexuality. He refers to the lack of dialogue about sexual sin as a gag order placed upon those in the Black church (Darwin Hobbs pt2). While there are instances of people admitting to

sexual sin or their experiences of being molested, there is rarely any substantial dialogue that occurs regarding the sin beyond the need for repentance. Males are significantly less likely to talk about abuse.

While he encourages victims of abuse to seek help that encompasses more than just prayer, he maintains that prayer and restoration through God is important factor in being healed (Darwin Hobbs pt2). In his song “Free,” his declaration of freedom from sexual bondage on his 2008 album of the same name, Hobbs e sings, “Free from the pain/ Free from the guilt that would cause me to be ashamed/ Once, Once I was blind/ but now I see/ clearly the debt that I owe Jesus paid for me/ No more chains are binding me” (Hobbs). The song emphasizes his gratefulness for the salvation that Jesus gave him despite his sins. It also explores themes of freedom from being ashamed or guilt-ridden by his past experiences and transgressions. While deviating from the normal script slightly, he remains very strong in his faith in his commitment to living a monogamous heterosexual Christian life. In the end his testimony re-inscribes the ideology of the Black church by following the proscribed script of Deliverance.

Tonex also dealt with molestation as a child and sings about the repercussions of this experience. However he deviates more dramatically from the script employed by other artists such as McClurkin and Hobbs. In 2007, he released a mix tape titled *The Naked Truth*, in which he discusses his molestation (Sanneh). At this point Tonex had divorced his wife of four years in 2005 and no longer had a woman in his life to deflect questions of his sexuality or facilitate a construction of himself as heterosexual (Sanneh). During the song when he stops rapping, he states, “Come see me money. I already done

lost everything, I already lost everything, so I'm crazy. That's right, That's right, I got your faggot. I got your bitch. I got your rumors, I got your switch. It's that preacher that touched me when I was fucking six. Did you know that? (The Naked Truth)” While the language used in these lyrics is appropriate for a rap or hip-hop song, it is certainly not appropriate for a gospel artist signed to a major record label. Throughout the song Tonex uses profanity and refers to his genitals. The song expresses his anger about his treatment in both the church and the gospel community. He talks about the rumors around his sexuality as well as the controversy regarding his appearance. While talking about his freedom from his past, Tonex’s choice of language is very different from Hobbs: “And I got out alive nigga, I peeled off layers of bullshit, and falsehood/ I peeled off years of slander and embarrassment” (The Naked Truth). His ability to be released from past is seen through his own personal power rather than the power of God. Despite the anger that is displayed throughout the song he also makes sure that his relationship with God is clear: “I'm Hot, I'm Next, I'm Saved to the bone./ I'm Prophet, I'm singer, I'm Rapper.” and “Give me three years, and I'll spark a revival bigger then William J. Seymour. /Baptizing all the people that your ass can't reach. /Use my hands to grab a basin, and wash my enemies' feet” (The Naked Truth). The tone of these verses is far from humble. They express the feelings of someone who is very confident in their ability, and who lacks the humility usually evident in gospel music.

There is a sense that Tonex is going after a population that is not normally targeted by both the Black church and the gospel industry. By harnessing his anger and his choice of words in the song, he is attempting to reach a marginalized population,

which is not unlike the figure of Jesus Christ who preached to prostitutes and those in poverty. He further likens himself to a central figure within then the Pentecostal faith (in which he was raised) through his evocation of William J. Seymour (Sanneh). Seymour's contribution to the faith includes demolishing barriers to keep women from leadership roles. His Azusa Street Revival held from 1906-1909 led to the movement referred to as "Pentecostalism" (Sanneh). Unlike Church of God in Christ, another major denomination in gospel music, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World,²⁰ is based on *Acts 2*, this scripture is also tattooed on Tonex (Sanneh). This passage describes how, after Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles saw visions of the gifts of "speaking in tongues," and prophecy. *Acts 2* is heavily tied to prophetic visions, and Tonex's lyrics can be seen as a prophecy for his task of expanding the body of Christ to populations (i.e. homosexuals) excluded, overlooked or ignored by church. He is inserting a script that is associated with "redeemers" into the performance of confession and redemption.

The release of the song created uproar in the gospel community and within the denomination. While the reaction of the leaders of the church could be due to the subject matter of molestation or the profanity, it probably has more to do with Tonex's paralleling himself to such highly regarded religious figures. It is significant that he compares himself to "father" of his denomination, and suggests that he is able to start a movement bigger than the church of which he is currently a part. Although it was released independently of his label, this song resulted in Tonex being dropped from his label because it did not reflect the Christian themes that they associated with their artists

²⁰ Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc. (PAW) was founded in 1906 and is the oldest Oneness Pentecostal organization. It has over 1.5 million members in the U.S.

(Sanneh). Subsequent to the release of the song and album, Tonex issued an apology for the song. However, the apology was not addressed to the gospel music industry, but rather to the presiding bishops and other national and local leadership in the denomination. The placement of the apology on the MySpace page of P.A.W. demonstrates the severity of his deviation of the script and his imposition of the script of “redeemer” in his performance.

This was not meant to bring a reproach, but it was meant to bring closure to one of the darkest chapters of my life from whence I came out alive, thank God... The world experienced my purging, my therapy session and the release of puss, vomit, anger, and rage that all humans have the propensity to demonstrate — I do not ask a pardon for the Sin, only for the anger and discouragement and resentment that came from years of misappropriated slander toward myself and my family. In other words, things just honestly came to a head and busted. ...All of these things I submit humbly and respectfully and pray restoration with meekness. If a public rebuke is necessary I’m willing to receive it, but please know in my heart that I know Who Jesus really is. I still teach and preach the apostles’ doctrine according to Acts 2:38 and I’m a TOTALLY on fire for Jesus. My mission is clear; unify the body for the edification of the Kingdom. To reach the masses through mainstream media with creativity and a real flow of the unadulterated anointing. (Williams II)

The apology displayed some of the Christian “humility” that was lacking in “The Naked Truth.” By centering his apology on the passage that his faith (P.A.W.) was founded upon, he draws parallels between himself and biblical apostles in a more positive way,

using different methods to reach non-believers. However, he did not apologize for his use of profane language because it was not intended to be Christian song. This statement shows that Tonex viewed certain actions acceptable when not in a Christian setting, which differs from the ideology of displaying “Christian” behaviors in all aspect of one’s life. Tonex was willing to receive “rebuke” because he understood his deviation from the script was perceived as a challenge to the ideology of the Black church. Ultimately he reenacted the ritual performance of public confession and restoration.

Although Hobbs and Tonex both used their music to express their freedom from their past sexual molestation, Tonex displayed anger that was not typical of the gospel music genre. The swift response to Tonex’s recording by those not only in the gospel community but national leaders of various denominations, showed the how powerful and unified reproach can be when one deviates from the norm. Althusser observed that, “Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc. to “discipline” not only their shepherd, but also their flock” (81). This is seen with Tonex having to deal with the consequences of breaking away from the expected behavior of a gospel artist in such an extreme manner. Throughout Hobbs’ interview pertaining to his molestation, he was very careful in the word choices he used regarding his criticism of the church, and suggested that real action as well as prayer for others to heal was needed. The way that Tonex dealt with his past molestation further indicates how he deviated from the norm of a gospel star; instead of seeking Christian counseling to “heal,” he used his music to express his anger regarding the abuse. However, even when Tonex deviated in favor of

another script, he returned to the original script of confession and restoration, demonstrating the disciplining power of repression maintained by the Black church.

Social Media and the Script of Deliverance

These examples demonstrate a disturbing trend in not only gospel music, but also in Christianity and other aspects of society, to conflate homosexuality with pedophilia. While molestation does not play a part in the performance of deliverance that we see through Darrel, it is evident in several other performances of the script of deliverance. Donnie McClurkin publically speaks of his molestation by his pedophile uncle and cousin at the ages of 8 and 12 to explain his later confusion regarding his sexuality. This helps strengthen the narrative that all homosexuals prey on children or that all homosexuals have been molested (Boyd 85). This narrative has also gained strength by the many accusations against priests in the Catholic Church of child molestation. Organizations like the Family Research Institute believe that the goal of the gay movement is to, “legitimize child-adult homosexual sex.” This idea is often promulgated on many YouTube testimony and films. The “I’m Free Project” is a documentary film, available through YouTube and promoted by the Gay Christian Movement Watch, which profiles four men and women who previously identified as gay, lesbian and homosexual but no longer use those identifiers because they have been delivered. Each of the people profiled in the video experienced some form of molestation during their childhood or the absence of strong male figures. Like Donnie McClurkin, they credit those experiences as the reason they gravitated toward same-sex relationships later in life.

This narrative also is promoted by the Passion for Christ Ministry (P4CM). P4CM is located in Los Angeles, California, but its influence is far reaching through the use of social media and their websites. Their goal is to energize the youth to live a Christian lifestyle, and they claim to have more than 60,000 hits per month. They tackle tough issues that are often ignored by church leaders, like homosexuality, masturbation, adultery, etc. People involved in the ministry often wear bright shirts imprinted with labels such as “ex-gay, ex-masturbator,” “ex-liar,” to proclaim their deliverance from particular sins. They further galvanize the youth through “Rhetoric,” a Christian slam poetry event very similar to the secular DefPoetry events. Jackie Hill’s 2010 poem “My Life As a Stud,” in which she chronicles her experience and deliverance from homosexuality has over a quarter million views on YouTube. On November 25, 2011 the P4CM YouTube channel uploaded Poet J. O. Speaks’ spoken word performance piece entitled, “I Promised I Wouldn’t Tell.” The video shows a tall husky Black male on a stage standing in front of a microphone with scarf draped over it. Behind him on the stage are about eight people on each side sitting on chairs and couches watching the performance. He begins the piece with his head down before slowly raising his head and reciting the first line, “My innocence was stolen at the tender age of six” (P4CM). The poet goes on to speak about his first two sexual experiences all occurring under the age of ten. He recalls promises of not telling others about these sexual encounters that were shrouded in secrecy and silence. Similar to Mr. Wallace in Deliverance and Donnie McClurkin, J. O. equates perceived femininity as signs of homosexuality and opposition to Christian manhood. “Somehow the evidence started leaking and my masculinity and

my wrist started to weaken. My wrist started to swing” (P4CM). He recounts not being able to hide his homosexual feelings, and how evidence of both his thoughts and actions could be seen through his behaviors. As he speaks, imitating the demons and spirits that clung to him, the camera pans to the audience who immediately begin to “snap.” “Demons” and “spirits” seem to be key words to garner the approval and attention of the mainly twenty something and teen-aged crowd. Poet J. O. further follows the script of deliverance by addressing his desire to be delivered. “Because in church I would consistently search to be made free, you see I heard the liberalous testimonies of prostitution and drug abuse even healing from HIV, but I never heard of one testimony of someone delivered from homosexuality” (P4CM). Not all Christian men are as open as McClurkin about their experiences with homosexuality because they fear the stigma and repercussion. J. O. speaks to this silence and the hierarchy that is often created surrounding sin. It is easier to discuss one’s problems with drugs and even other forms of heterosexual immorality then it is to discuss homosexuality. Theologically he understood the need and possibility of deliverance, yet this it was still hard for him to believe that he could personally be delivered. He states that he decided to both live and die in his sin, putting himself in dangerous situations that included having unprotected sex with another man that he knew had AIDS.

Although his actions are different, his desire to self-harm is similar to Darrel. Both of these men hated who they were because of their homosexual desires. By claiming that “Satan wants you to believe you are your desires,” J. O. is proclaiming that just because you desire to have same-sex relations does not mean you are a homosexual,

and that one does not have to give in to their urges (P4CM). This is similar to Darrel's belief he was confused and not homosexual it was a matter of changing his thoughts. Darrel did not want to believe it was something innate that caused his attraction to Jordan. J. O. takes time out to dismantle the belief that people are born gay -- he likens it to the fact that Christians aren't born saved but become saved through their choices. He ends the poem stating, "Please don't take this poem as being conceptual because I wasn't bi I was literally a homosexual. I have never been with a woman in my life and the first woman I slept with was my wife on my wedding night" (P4CM). J. O. emphasizes that he had no attraction to women before his deliverance from homosexuality, and he is not just simply blocking out his desire for men. He reveals how he maintained ideals of sexual morality after leaving the homosexual lifestyle by waiting until after he was married to have sex. Donnie McClurkin, who makes similar claims of deliverance and expresses a desire to be married, recently had a child out of wedlock. While he sought forgiveness for committing fornication, he interestingly did not have to seek the same ritual acts of deliverance such as the laying of hands since this occurred in a heterosexual relationship. Both Donnie McClurkin's child and J. O.'s marriage suggest they have been truly delivered from homosexuality. They show that it is possible for someone once identified as gay to not only stop engaging in those activities but to also desire and maintain a relationship with a woman. The resounding theme throughout J.O.'s nine-minute performance is the need for more people in the church to speak about their secrets, struggles and deliverance so others may also be freed.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen the script of Deliverance in several different performances. Woods' *Deliverance* portrays a very confused and fragile young man who desires to please those around even when their desires are detrimental to his well-being. We see how three male gospel artists, Darwin Hobbs, Donnie McClurkin and Tonex, used their music and public personas to speak about their deliverance and desires for deliverance from homosexual thoughts. The Gay Christian Ministry Watch (GCMW), the "I'm Free Project" and Passion for Christ Ministry (P4CM), broadcast the script of Deliverance through social media to widely share the struggle and the possibility of deliverance from homosexuality. While the avenues in which deliverance occurred differed, they shared in several common major themes. The most significant theme was that of spiritual dualism, the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. The flesh or the body is portrayed as an impediment to living a holy life. In order to truly be free from homosexuality, one must fight the temptations of the flesh. There is also a tendency to conflate homosexuality with pedophilia, furthering the narrative that child molestation causes homosexuality and homosexuals are child molesters. Effeminate behaviors or any deviation from hegemonic masculinities are construed as signs of homosexual desire in male's bodies. Lack of strong father or male figures to teach boys how to be men is also seen as a cause for homosexuality.

CHAPTER 3

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL

This chapter focuses on men in the church who are silent about their engagement in same sex relationships. This practice is commonly referred to as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT). This name plays on the official military policy²¹ that allowed homosexuals to serve in the United States military as long as they do not reveal their sexuality. Similarly homosexuality is unofficially allowed in many Black churches, as long as homosexuals do not reveal their sexuality. The vast majority of descriptions and analyses of these practices focus on men (and women) who are engaged in same-sex relationships. However, it is important to understand that this script requires the involvement of multiple parties in order to be enacted and performed. In other words it requires silence from not only the people who participate in same-sex relationships but also requires the participation of those around them. It has been explicated in a number of venues including by scholar and theologian Michael Eric Dyson in *Race Rules*, is one of several scholars who has discussed the complicity of the church leadership play in the performance or enacting of this script. According to Dyson, pastors are motivated to turn a blind eye to the flamboyance and sexuality of people like the choir director (the example used by Dyson) because the church directly benefits from the choir director’s talents. Examples like these identify same-gender loving people as conspicuously visible through the flamboyant, femininity and other stereotypical characteristics of homosexuality. Dyson in his example suggests that sexuality is easily read on the body, and assumes that the pastor is heterosexual. Due to his rank and the heterosexual and

²¹ The policy was in effect from December 21, 1993 to September 20, 2011.

masculine performance that he embodies, the pastor or church leader is not comprehensible as a homosexual. Such framing does not allow for a performance of sexuality that defies stereotypical representation of homosexuality, and further entrenches, a normative representation of Black masculinity. The script of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” thus reinforces normative masculinity and fails to encompass the multiplicity of the performances of masculinity and sexuality embedded within the Black church. My analysis demonstrates that this script requires the knowing participation of many other parties to neither ask nor tell.

My goal in this chapter is to nuance and expand our understanding of this script by exploring the motivations for all the parties, regardless of sexuality, who are complicit in the performance of DADT. It is also my goal to expand the cast of characters that must be involved for DADT script to be performed. This includes examining how the male leaders in the Black church embody normative standards of Black masculinity. I am particularly interested in understanding what heterosexual Black women who participate in DADT script, both gain as well as lose from their own participation.

In this chapter I focus on three dramatic texts. These texts not only depict church leaders who engage in same-sex relationships, but also display the dynamics of these leaders’ relationships with those who are close to them and how these relationships operate under DADT. Most, importantly this chapter demonstrates how oppressions mutually reinforce each other; where one form of oppression such as homophobia exists (the oppression most easily identified with DADT), one is bound to find others forms as well. The impact and presence of patriarchy, sexism, ageism and capitalism are often

ignored in the analysis of DADT, but, by expanding the analysis beyond the individual with same-sex attraction and/or homophobia, we can understand how a multiplicity of oppression must be enacted by an individual and those around the individual in order for this script to be performed.

The first play I will examine is *The Contract* by James Webb, which depicts the relationship of an opposite-sex married couple who are pastors of a mega-church in the south. The wife in this play contracts male lovers for her husband in order to satisfy his desire for the same sex while also maintaining their marriage. The next play, *Muddy the Water* by Darren Canady, depicts the fall out that occurs when a married minister is arrested for solicitation and lewd conduct. The final play, *Order My Steps* by Tracey Scott Wilson, explores how one couple deals with both the sexuality and adultery of the husband, their diagnosis of HIV, and the reaction from their church community.

While some aspects of these plays depictions of DADT are stereotypical, the playwrights are able to add nuance and depth to these depictions that provides insight about why people perform and maintain these scripts. Unlike the example of a flamboyant (most likely single) choir director given by Dyson, the men who participate in DADT in these texts are married and not as easily read as homosexual. Their performance of their supposed “heterosexuality” is aided by the presence of their wives and/or families. While the wives’ level of knowledge of their husband’s sexual activities varies throughout the plays, their conscious or unconscious complicity is a recurring theme in each of the dramatic texts. These texts demonstrate how multiple oppressions- not just homophobia -operate in the performance of DADT, as well as how these

oppressions create an environment that casts multiple people (wives, sister, brothers, friends, etc.) in the performance of DADT. In order to effectively understand DADT, we must understand how and why the whole church community is affected and involved in its performance.

The Contract

The first play I will examine is *The Contract* by James Webb. Webb used the writing of the play to help facilitate his acceptance of his own sexuality and as a way to share the truth and struggles of his sexuality and spirituality with others. The central theme of the play is how one lives a public authentic life; something that Webb personally dealt with as he wrote the play. We will see this theme in all of the plays in this chapter; while following the script of DADT may provide some security eventually one desires or becomes compelled to live an authentic life. The *Bible* states that “For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”²² Both Darryl and Deborah who are Christian, reinterpret the commandment “thou shall not lie,” and justify their lies of omission to their congregation while exercising a great deal of honesty with towards each other. Webb’s own belief that truthfulness and transparency are highly valued traits is explored through the main characters relationships. The DADT script is a temporary one; eventually the truth comes out.

The Contract depicts the story of Daryl, a pastor of a mega-church in Birmingham, Alabama and his relationships with both his wife (Deborah) and his lover (Paul). Unlike the other plays we will be looking at in this chapter, in *The Contract* the

²² Luke 8:17 New International Version

male protagonist's same-sex desires and his acting on those desires are no secret to his wife. There is a level of truth and transparency in his private life that is not seen in his public life. The prologue is set up like a press conference; through this the audience learns that for several years Deborah and Daryl had an arrangement that involved hiring a male lover for Daryl one weekend a month. Daryl is able to be honest about his same-sex relationships with his wife, but not the outside world.

The play is about how one deals with the complexities and contradictions involved in living a truly authentic life, but it also deals with power. The three characters (Daryl, Deborah and the lover Paul) struggle for control and power throughout the play, although their definition of power and the level of control they seek vary. Webb chooses to empower Deborah, instead of characterizing her as an unsuspecting victim of her husband's deceit. She recognized that Daryl has a need that she is unable to fulfill directly, so she finds an alternate way to fulfill her husband's needs. She is the epitome of control not only through her actions but also her "well-coiffed" appearance. She is the one who comes up with the arrangement to contract a male lover for her husband. She sets the ground rules as well as picks his male lovers. In the first scene she presents Paul with the contract of their arrangement and has seemingly thought of everything. She not only gives him details of the business side of the arrangement "You are paid in cash at the end of each visit, so there's no paper trail"; the requirements of his appearance "I want no major changes to your hair, body, or face. No new tattoos or piercings"; but also of her husband's behavior, "Daryl likes to indulge himself from time to time. Nothing

major. Marijuana, maybe a few pills” (7). This initial monologue by Deborah shows us a woman who plans every detail and is well acquainted with her husband’s likes.

Let me be clear.

So there is no misunderstanding.

This is a sexual arrangement.

However, nowhere in this contract does it explicitly state you are being paid for sex.

You are being paid to stay clean,

To follow my instructions, and to keep your mouth shut.

When you sign this contract, you will *not* be working for Daryl.

You work for me.

You are *paid* by me.

If you have any problems or concerns,

You address them to me. (7)

Deborah assertion of control over the arrangement makes up for any feelings of being inadequate. Since she does not have the physical anatomy to please her husband in the way he desires, she makes the arrangements to fulfill those desires. She takes her responsibility of serving her husband very seriously. Her aggressiveness, high-strung manner, and strength are also what attracted Daryl to her. She maintains control not only in this arrangement with his male lovers but also within the church. She is the brains and the heart behind their multi-million dollar mega church. While Daryl’s charisma and face is more recognizable, the work that Deborah does can easily go unrecognized. As the

action progresses, the audience must ponder how much her desire for the prestige and power that is associated with being a mega-pastor plays into her complicity in the DADT script. As the play progresses it becomes clear that she is not only allowing her husband to have affairs with men to keep him satisfied but also, and perhaps more so, she is doing this to maintain her power and position. Deborah's investment in the ministry and the public appearance of being a part of a happily married couple is significantly more than her husband. Having a husband was an integral part of her success in the ministry.

Deborah comes from a family of preachers; her father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all preachers. The ministry and church leadership was something she grew up around. She states that even as a young child she had an insatiable appetite for knowledge and was naturally curious, this is one of the reasons she stated that she became a preacher. She states that ministry was in her blood, yet laughs at Paul's question about whether or not the women in her family were also preachers. This signals Deborah's acknowledgement of how her role as a pastor defies norm in the tradition of the church. Although there are individual cases where women are in pastor positions in the Baptist church, it is not the usual. Deborah recounts to Paul her journey to the ministry. The reaction her father gave her on her 18th birthday when she told him she wanted to go to seminary to study theology shows us how entrenched patriarchy is in the culture of the Black church.

He asked me why would I want to do that?

I told him, I wanted to join the ministry. I wanted to preach.

To be like him. I felt I had a calling.

He looked at me and he laughed.

He laughed for quite some time.

And then finally, he stopped. He said,

Women don't need seminary to teach Sunday school. (111)

It is interesting to note that her father laughed at her desire to join the ministry, similar to her laughing at Paul's question concerning if other women in her family were pastors.

From the text it is easy to ascertain that Deborah looked up to her father and thought the world of him. This is an acceptable father/ daughter relationship, girls are taught to want to find a man like their fathers. The problem occurs because she does not want to find a man like her father; she wants to be like her father. She desires to be powerful and influential in the ways she has seen her father behaved. Her father's reaction makes it very clear the value --or lack of value-- he places on women in the church.

A calling to ministry is positioned by many in the Black church as something only a man can obtain. This part of the play emphasizes the patriarchy embedded in the Black church. The possibilities for young girl's lives are predetermined for them, including not being able to access pastoral positions in the Black church. Deborah is not the type of woman who allows her father's beliefs on the role of women to stop her from her calling. While "calling" is constructed as only being for men, her faith in her "calling" allows her to reject this idea. Instead of following what her father and church leadership has taught her, she organizes a study group with other young ladies in the church.

Deborah: Every day after school, we spent hours in the library.

Reading and talking about philosophy and spirituality.

Well one day, one of the older women from the church came into the library.

She saw us reading a book on Eastern mysticism.

She told my daddy. She told everyone.

That next Sunday, there was a huge uproar in the church.

Mainly from the men. But some of the women, too.

They had such hatred in their eyes.

Especially for me, because I was the pastor's daughter.

And I should have known better.

They said, Had this been some other time, I would have been stoned.

They wanted my daddy to beat me. Teach me a lesson.

Instead, he made us stand before the church and apologize. (112)

These young women were not only denied the right or opportunity to go to seminary but also to study theology in an informal setting. Their gathering together to explore and understand theology (that they were not allowed access to) was threatening to the men and the women of the church.

The fact that it was a woman who brought the issue to the attention of the congregation and women also condemned her actions demonstrates how entrenched patriarchy is within the structure of the church. These women have bought into the idea that knowledge and study of theology is a practice that should only be undertaken by men. The women see limited possibilities for their lives as well as for other women, and are disturbed by any disruption to gender roles in the ecosystem of the Black church. They suggested that stoning, a form of capital punishment would be a suitable

punishment for this offense in another time. This statement can be justified biblically with Deuteronomy 13:6-11 which advises to stone anyone, be it “your brother, the son of you, mother, or your son, or you daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend” who preaches about other religions and attempts to take you away from the God of Israel. This scripture suggests that Christians male or female should not learn about any other religion besides Christianity, and reinforces the expectation that followers accept and not question what is taught to them. The girls break this expectation by not only questioning what have been taught to them, but learning about other religions including Eastern mysticism. Eastern mysticism is a Western classification that refers to several separate religions and/or philosophy. One of the major differences between these Eastern concepts and Christianity is the divide between the secular and sacred, there tends to be more fluidity within the divide in Eastern religions. They are also not as concerned with the concept of one supreme God as Christian religions. Even when the knowledge pertains to Christianity, it is set up in a hierarchal manner and only certain people (in this case, exclusively male) are thought to be worthy of access to this knowledge.

Deborah’s actions of learning about other religions and studying theology is seen as particularly reprehensible by the church leaders because of her gender, her involvement of other young girls and their lack of knowledge of the situation. Deborah’s father makes her apologize for ‘being a witch’ and likens her search for knowledge to that of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

In the Christian religion Eve is often demonized because she is seen as the cause of the downfall of men. Women are seen as needing male authority or else they will

wreak havoc like Eve did. In the same regard, some of the blame also falls upon Adam for not having control over his woman. Eve's temptation and ultimate downfall occurred due to her curiosity; she wanted to learn both good and bad. Deborah was irrevocably changed after she started her search for knowledge and the church's subsequent reaction to her search. Deborah's actions of wanting to learn more about theology, a role not believed as appropriate for a woman, reflected negatively on her father also. It was his job to make sure she knew the appropriate role of a young Christian woman. His decision to make her apology to congregation was his attempt to regain his authority and demonstrate to his daughter her correct role. While not officially banished from "Eden" or her father's church, Deborah leaves to go to college. That experience makes Deborah promise herself that she "would never allow a man to dictate my soul" (112).

After experiencing patriarchy and sexism within the church that proscribed the roles and the place of women, Deborah is attracted to Daryl's ability to accept and respect her as a full person. Although many other men find her strength intimidating, Daryl describes her strength as one of the things that attracted him to her. Daryl further distances himself from the type of men Deborah associates with Christianity by sending her to seminary, something her father had previously laughed off. While Daryl differs from her father in his respect for an autonomous spirit in a woman, he is similar to the male preachers in her family in other ways. In one scene of the play she addresses the audience and recounts being at her grandfather's funeral when she was a child. As the family prepares for the final casket viewing two women she has never seen begin to cry and make a huge commotion while screaming "Daddy, my daddy" (72). Her grandmother

continues walking to her husband casket despite the sudden hush over the church, and kisses her husband's body in the casket before calmly walking out. Deborah, being a child, is confused about what is going on and who the women are. That night her mother came into her room and told her "Deborah, no matter who you marry, whether he's a man of God or not. You remember this, He's just a man" (72). The words of her mother and actions of her grandmother accept their husband's infidelity as something that men do. It was important for her grandmother to show those present at the funeral that she was in control and to reassert her position as "the" pastor's wife. This establishes a pattern early on that infidelity is an acceptable behavior for men and pastors. The acceptability of adultery relies on it being normal and natural; an adulterous homosexual relationship is not natural or understandable in the ways heterosexual adulterous relationships are. Again, we see Black "church" women complicit in patriarchy by not holding men accountable for breaking the bonds of marriage. Infidelity becomes another activity that men are privy to performing, but not women. These insights into Deborah's past help the audience to understand and in many ways sympathize with her relationship with her husband. While Daryl's finds Deborah's intelligence attractive, she has learned at an early age that it is acceptable to love and maintain a relationship with a man who is not sexually committed to you.

Deborah is seen as being in control of the affair and a willing participant if not architect of the contract; however her control is just an illusion. Her aggression often masks her desire to be wanted, to be truly be chosen by her husband both in private and in public. While this arrangement has been occurring for significant period of time,

Deborah begins to understand that while Daryl loves her as person and friend, he does not desire her as a lover. In scene six when he offers to cancel the date with Paul and take her out, he tells her he would not mind making love to her. As Deborah understands that providing her sexual pleasure has become a chore or duty for Daryl, she seeks to try to emphasize and maintain her control in other ways. One of these ways is the new church project. She is driving force behind their church's initiative to expand their current building and ministries.

Daryl is presented as the cool, calm other half of Deborah. He does not pay attention to details in the same manner as Deborah. In our first real introduction to Daryl he is drinking and engaging in illegal substances. This becomes increasingly shocking behavior as we later learn he is pastor, a fact he does not mention in his initial meeting with Paul. During the first meeting with Paul, he comes across as a man who is used to receiving whatever he wants. Because of his sense of entitlement that stems from the power given to him as a mega-pastor, Paul's disregard of Daryl's sense of entitlement is unnerving for him. Webb examines the private behaviors of religious leaders through Daryl's extramarital sexual affairs and his indulgence in narcotics. While Daryl does have a sense of agency, he is able to relinquish control and is able to smoke marijuana and engage in this sexual relationship without fear because he knows his wife Deborah is in control. However, the control she possesses is only the control he gives her willingly- he is always in a position to regain control. Deborah fails to realize that she does not have the control she believes she has.

Similar to his wife, Daryl is descended from a lineage of preachers. In many ways he has been groomed to become the pastor of his father's church since childhood. His father most certainly taught him how to run a church and maintain a position of authority, but he also taught him how a man must act as a very early age. During an address to the audience much like Deborah's, Daryl recounts his childhood and the feelings of freedom he experienced as a child. Often children are unaware or disregard the gender norms imposed by society. Daryl speaks about playing church with his sister, recreating the scenes they saw at church. In addition to playing church Daryl also played house with his sister. At times he played the role of "mother", which included pretend breastfeeding his sister's doll. "We had such fun. Pure fun. No rules. No limitations. We were free" (62). This era of freedom came to an end when Daryl left the safety of his home to start kindergarten. Before he started school his sister warned him not to tell the other kids or even his parents about the playing with dolls. His sister understood that boys playing with dolls went against society's expectations for boys. Daryl however did not initially understand how seriously the enforcement of gender norms would be. On his first day of school he asked a little girl if he could play with her doll, she laughed at him and informed the teacher, who in turn told his dad.

When he came to pick me up, Daddy looked at me like I was worst than dirt.

Like I was a freak.

And that's when I began to feel shame for the first time.

About what me and my sister had done.

Our tawdry secret.

After that we stopped playing altogether.

And I buried that special part of myself, so that I could become normal.

Ordinary.

To be like the other kids.

I haven't been free since. (62)

This vulnerability, freedom and openness that Daryl previously displayed as a child disappeared. Parental love and validation can be extremely important, and for Daryl's father to display his disappointment so prominently for something that was natural for Daryl appears to be extremely traumatizing. That fact that he believed he had to bury that part of himself to be normal shows that he came to understand his behavior to have been abnormal or wrong. From this point in his life he built a wall up in order to avoid anyone knowing that he wasn't "normal," and this included distancing himself from the close relationship he previously shared with his sister, while also holding on to shame.

Similarly to Deborah's relationship with her father, Daryl's actions reflect on his father. Having a son who desires to engage in "unmanly" activities might highlight the fragility of his own performance of masculinity. Daryl eventually takes over his father's church, something that he was groomed for since childhood. This makes it even more important for his father to correct behaviors that impede the passing of his position as pastor to his son, Daryl.

Daryl understands how central the perpetuation and implementation of heteronormativity is to the Black church. His perceived comfort level with hiring a man to engage in a yearlong sexual relationship might be interpreted as him being very

comfortable with his same-gender desires and his religious beliefs. However, it becomes clear that he is still struggling to reconcile the two. Public perception obviously plays a large part in why Daryl does not publicly affirm his sexuality. His internal struggle to make peace and accept himself is a major reason why he continues this secret double life. Throughout the play Daryl struggles to regain the freedom that he lost as a child. The dichotomy of the expectations of a child versus a man is highlighted in the *Bible* in 1 Corinthians 13:11, the speaker states that when he became a man he “put away childish things.” Daryl had to become a man early and put away the fluidity between gender roles and a level of innocence and ignorance that is acceptable for children. The ending of his play (be it with gender or dolls) needed to be done in order for him to become a man. Daryl is careful not to be seen as a bigot and publicly condemn homosexual activities; he instead chooses not to address it at all from his pulpit. Daryl understands that his position as a Black man, pastoring Black church in the south does not allow him the same amount of freedom that his white religiously liberal counterparts have.

Daryl struggles with reconciling his sexuality and his relationship to Christianity. During his first meeting with Paul he states that “The only definitive thing I know is that God loves me. Alright? Regardless of who I sleep with” (53). This statement speaks to *agape*, the belief in God’s love and that simply being a child of God is enough. He refuses to admit to an actual struggle regarding his sexuality to Paul, although to himself he admits that he sometimes struggles with it. The struggle between his sexuality and his theology as well as his loyalty and commitment to Deborah and the growing love he feels towards Paul are the catalysts that cause him to make a definitive choice towards

freedom. On the surface Daryl is able to live the best of both worlds and have the public and personal life he desires; however, his soul is not free. Darryl's use of illegal drugs is a way for him to regain that sense of freedom that he felt as a child, which he had to bury in order to be like the other kids. The other opportunity for him to be free is his monthly sessions with Paul. Daryl's indulgences in illegal drugs stop as his relationship with Paul progresses. He does not need mind altering substances to help him cope with his reality.

Similarly, Deborah is also not free. She is bound by her desire and need for the prestige that being a co-pastor and the wife of Daryl provides. In order to maintain this she must cater to Darryl's desires no matter how hurtful they are to her. She must also maintain this coldness and never allow her true emotions to show. One common argument against women in leadership roles is their supposed tendency towards emotion rather than logic. Deborah's vehemence in not letting the limitations placed upon women dictate her life also means that she rejected other traits imposed on her gender, like emotions. The only emotion we see in Deborah is anger; she tries to hide any hurt that she might feel. Deborah does not have any outlets to be free from the bondage of the prestige and positions of co-pastor. Deborah and Daryl both step outside the proscribed roles for their positions and gender, this aids to their attraction to each other and why they remain together for so long.

Daryl maintains throughout the play that Deborah only thinks she has the power. However it is the secret of his sexuality that maintains the most power over him and prevents him from truly being free. In order to combat this, he sends an anonymous letter to the head Deacon detailing the contract between himself and his male lovers. Daryl

later admits to Deborah that he wrote the letter. He uses this to coerce Deborah into allowing him to bring Paul to their home for the summer. “And tomorrow I’m going to send another one. But it won’t compare to the last one. Because the next one I send, I’m gonna give full disclosure. And I’m gonna sign it. Unless you do something for me” (128). Daryl knows how much her status as the co-pastor of mega-church means to Deborah, the success of their ministry depends on the appearance of happy marriage. Daryl’s threat to stop the façade is the first time we not only see him truly challenging Deborah but also admitting that the marriage was not based on love “This whole marriage has been nothing but one big business arrangement” (131). Deborah tries to convince Daryl that Paul also sees their relationship as a business arrangement and does not love him. More than just wanting a more convenient arrangement for a sexual relationship Daryl wanted Paul to choose to be with him unpaid, to see if he really loved him.

The complicity that others play into DADT is particularly highlighted in Deborah’s response to Darryl’s demand that Paul visit them for the summer. For this arrangement to be successful, her job (more than Darryl’s) would be to convince others that Paul was just a relative coming into town. Deborah not only has to accept the arrangement but she also has to convince Paul to accept the arrangement as well. Darryl is using her power of convincing others for his benefit, he only relinquishes his power in things he does not want to do himself. Deborah agrees to the summer arrangement because she does not believe Paul would choose to stay with Daryl if he was not being paid. This is similar to Deborah’s desire that Daryl chooses her and not the relationship with Paul or the other. Both Deborah and Daryl are seeking to be desired and wanted in a

way that neither can fulfill for the other. At the end of the scene Deborah verbalizes for the time her knowledge that she is not enough for Daryl. “I have done everything in my power I could to meet you half way. But I see that it could never be nearly enough. I hope Paul can be everything you need because clearly I’m not” (132). She is realizing the limits of her power in this exchange. Even after acknowledging not being enough for Daryl, he still expects her to convince Paul to accept the arrangement. Daryl remains reliant on Deborah to take care of things for him, indicating that he might not be as ready to leave their situation as pretends to be.



Fig 1

With Paul, Daryl is able to dream about what a life without fear would entail. He dreams of divorcing Deborah, moving into a 2-bedroom Upper West side apartment with Paul and their two dogs. However Paul rejects this hypothetical scenario because Daryl would no longer be preaching, which is something he believes is central to who Daryl is a person. Paul desires Daryl whole, using all the gifts God has given him. Daryl gives Paul many reasons why he cannot come out of the closet and live an authentic life including his location in the south, his ministry being discredited and not being able to change the many years of church doctrine. Yet none of these are truly the real reason. Darryl is still carrying with him the trauma of his childhood and the expectations of masculinity

provided by his father. This has led to him developing a deep internal fear of others knowing his sexuality. His belief that God would not accept him as a pastor and would condemn him for his sexuality is the real hindrance in him living an authentic life.

Daryl: HELL!

That's the big deal.

Big fiery burning place of everlasting punishment seething in torment of weeping
And gnashing of teeth. Fire and Brimstone. You ever heard of it?

That's the big deal.

And for the last thirty years of my life,

I have felt the flames of that fire searing against my back,

Reminding me day after day after day of where I might be headed.

Because as much as I want to believe that God is a forgiving God

And that He loves me unconditionally,

There's still a major part of me that thinks I'm going to hell.

It's not easy, Paul. I'm not like you.

I wish I was okay with my sexuality,

But it's been one big constant struggle since the day I was born.

I've done everything I could to change.

I've fasted, I've prayed, I got married. I accepted my calling.

Everything, I could think of to be pleasing to God and to make myself feel
"right."

But no matter what I do, there's still a major part of me that just feels wrong.

(125)

More than public opinion or loss of power and prestige, Daryl is afraid of being condemned to hell. The potential earthly losses do not compare to the fear of eternal damnation. Although Daryl stated that he is not a fire and brimstone type preacher, he deeply fears fire and brimstone. Like the examples in the previous chapter, Daryl undertook the ritual for to change one's sexuality. He prayed, fasted, and ultimately got married. For those in the previous chapter, marriage was the completion of the journey towards deliverance. However as we see with Daryl the struggle still continues within. Becoming public about his same-sex attraction and his relationship with Paul would mean that Daryl believed their relationship was right. Daryl cannot tell the world that his relationship with Paul is right, when he personally struggles with whether or not it is wrong. Daryl's feelings of "rightness" when he is with Paul do not diminish his fears of being wrong in the sight of God.

The aspect of the DADT script that Paul performs is the "don't tell," a critical part in keeping the perpetuation of the script. Deborah is extremely meticulous over who they choose to offer the contract. Her choice is based not only on Daryl's preferences but also on her experiences with the past men to whom she offered contracts. Unlike the stereotype of males who engages in sexual relationships for money or gay hustlers, Paul is educated. Deborah used a private investigator to find out intimate details of his life before choosing him. One such detail of his life that Deborah learned was that Paul previously had a romantic relationship with his professor who ultimately exploited his

power over Paul. Academia is another institution that has traditionally been embedded with patriarchy and where heteronormativity has been rewarded. After the professor ended their relationship he took away Paul's fellowship- his means of affording graduate school.

Deborah uses this information in two ways to gain Paul's acceptance of their offer and assert her power over him. First, she blames Paul for the outcome of the relationship with his professor, according to her Paul's major mistake was giving up power to the professor and not using alternative options to get his fellowship back. Paul is not as manipulative as Deborah; from his vantage point his options were extremely limited "Demetri is the chair of my department. Even if I were to report him, he's tenured And he could still block my thesis" (28). Deborah's knowledge of his relationship with his professor lets her know that Paul is attracted to older powerful men who use their power to take advantage of him. If he agrees to the contract, Paul will have a sense of agency and control in the relationship with Paul that he did not have with his professor, something he has lacked. He also gains the means to pay for his education, which is something that was taken away with the demise of his relationship with the professor. An additional thing that Deborah is able to surmise from Paul's relationship with his professor is that he is able to keep a secret. Even after the professor betrayed Paul's trust he did not seek retribution. Ultimately it is the combination of power, curiosity and financial compensation that influenced Paul's decision to sign and participate in the contract. Paul's decision to enter the contract made him bound, like Darryl and Deborah to the restrictions of the DADT script.

Playwright James Webb's voice and desire to reconcile his sexuality and his religious belief comes through his characterization of both Paul and Daryl. Webb states that he was inspired to write the play for one reason:

I wanted to come out. Many people in my circle know that I am gay. I also have people in my circle who know that I am a Christian, I love God. But rarely do the two meet in any of my circles. And it's one thing to say I am gay separately. Or that I love God separately. But to say that I am gay and that I also love God. And that I feel that God made me gay and I feel that it is a gift and a blessing is a totally different thing. (The Best Gift)

Neither man is portrayed in the stereotypical manner of same-gender loving men being flamboyant or feminine. Webb makes sure to emphasize both men's masculine features in both their physique and in their behaviors. Several times Daryl expresses his desire to live an authentic life. Paul does not identify as a Christian but is fascinated by Daryl's relationship with God. Paul is turned off by the church because he believes that it makes one continually apologize for who they are. Webb's inability to really reconcile his faith with his sexuality caused him to distance himself from his family; it wasn't until he was able to reconcile, his faith and sexuality that he was able to really embrace his family.

In the conversation he (Webb's father) did begin to ask me how do I balance this with my relationship with the church. At that time I didn't have an answer. And I was ashamed. I pretty much told him and I told my aunts that it was just a phase and that phase was over. But it made me very angry and I pushed everybody away. So I pushed my father away, I pushed my aunts away and I definitely

pushed my sister away. And for almost seven- eight years I did not speak to them.

(The Best Gift)

Paul attending graduate school in NYC like Webb, and Daryl's growing up in the South like Webb are both indications of how Webb inserted himself into both of these characters. It was an experience at a church while Webb was in graduate school that highlighted the tension between his sexuality and religious beliefs. He made the decision to stop attending church but develop a more intimate relationship with God outside of institutionalized religious.

This intimate relationship with God motivated Webb to live an authentic life, the type of life that Daryl longs to live. Living an authentic life means not hiding any parts of one's self, being able to present yourself wholly in every environment. It is a life based on truth and not lies. Webb believes that his gayness is his gift, and has drawn him closer to God. This directly contrasts the "Deliverance" script discussed in Chapter Two, where gayness is perceived as a curse: in order to be accepted by the church community one must be delivered from the curse of their sexuality. In *The Contract*, Daryl initially views his sexuality as more of a curse than a gift. It is what has stopped him from truly being able to be free and have real authentic relationships. While he claims to love Paul, this relationship is dependent on payment for service. Webb explains that it was his reconciliation with his spirituality and sexuality that allowed him to repair his relationship with his family members and free him from the shame.

Webb deconstructs the view of the wife as victim by portraying her as willing participant. But what are the costs associated with being a part of public deception what

is the price that one must pay to live an inauthentic life? The ultimate cost as emphasized within the play is the inability to have meaningful relationships with others. Webb believes that “this play helps to show a broader range of complexities surrounding this issue, it helps us to look beyond surface and to go deeper into what it means to have feelings for the same sex but also have an earnest desire to have full right relationship with God” (The Contract).

Muddy the Water

Darren Canady’s *Muddy the Water* offers another perspective of a minister engaging in a same-sex relationship. The play is set in contemporary Kansas City, Missouri. The action centers on the aftermath of Minister Mark Patterson’s arrest for solicitation and lewd and lascivious conduct at a park. Nationally and locally there have been several sexual scandals involving prominent members of society receiving criminal citations for these types of violations. Unlike Webb who tells the story of the three people most intimately tied to the script of DADT and consciously perform it, Canady focused more on the lives of those who are not aware of their active performance of DADT. Patterson’s arrest and suspected homosexuality destroys his family and divides his congregation, yet he is never seen nor heard throughout the entire play. This technique takes the audience’s attention away from why someone would embody the script and focuses on the question how it affects those around them. For this section of the chapter I will focus on how Patterson’s decision to perform DADT casts those around him in the performance as well. I will examine how patriarchy, sexism, ageism and capitalism all

factor into his need to perform DADT, and how these structural oppressions contribute to all the play character's complicity in fulfilling the DADT script.

Muddy the Water explores the relations of power within the church. While the pastor often is perceived as the figurehead of the church, the actual power and decision making authority is normally distributed between the pastor and some sort of governing board. Traditionally the role of the governing board is one that is integral not only to the daily operations of the church but how the church itself is run. The majority of administrative decisions must be approved through the board, including the hiring and pay of the pastor. In Bishop Eddie Long's²³ *Taking Over* he speaks about how he was initially simply a hired preacher called the pastor. His power to make key administrative decisions was greatly limited by the board controlling the money as well as his authority. He remarks that the ruling board not only signed checks but also "expected to tell the man of God when to jump and how high" (47). This is very similar to the system at New Hope Baptist Church, which is highlighted in the first scene of the play which takes place following church on the Sunday after Mark was arrested. Sister Owens²⁴ informs the Pastor on the behalf of the church council that he needs to handle the Minister Patterson situation (in other words fire him immediately). Pastor Jacobs (Terrell) is unwilling to do this before talking to Mark about the situation.

Sis. Owens is a woman in her sixties who has been an active member of New Hope for over thirty years; this and her position on the board give her an air of authority.

²³ Popular mega-church pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, under his leadership the church grew from 300- 25,000 members. In 2010, several civil lawsuits were filed against alleging inappropriate sexual relationship with several young men.

²⁴ The title "Sister" (abbreviated as Sis.) followed by one's last name is used to refer to lay persons in the church or members who are not ordained. It is a generic friendly title and its counterpart is "Brother".

In her suggestion to Pastor Jacobs about how to handle Minister Patterson position at the church, she uses the church history and the limited time Pastor Jacob has been at the church to establish her authority. Pastor Jacob has only been the Pastor for three years, but the system governing the church has been in place for over a hundred years. Since the church is one the largest Black churches in Kansas City, Sis. Owens is committed to upholding its image. She tells Pastor Jacobs “You know it is one thing for Minister Patterson—and one or two other men I could name—to go switchin’ they hips all over this church. But to take that mess out in the streets, what’s that gonna make us look like?!” (5). This remark suggests that Mark’s engagement in same-sex behavior is not a surprise. Despite having a wife and family, his sexuality has always been under suspicion. It also acknowledges that in many ways his questionable sexuality was tolerated if he adhered to certain rules, such as keeping his business private and maintaining the appearance of a happy family. The maintenance of the appearance of heteronormativity is key to the performance of DADT.

In order for DADT to be performed there is a considerable amount of time and energy that must be committed to not only not asking, but also not telling. Mark did not tell anyone about his sexuality and also no one asked. As we will learn throughout this chapter the script of DADT is a draining one for all involved. This initial scene introduces a theme that will be explored for the remainder of the play, the clashing of traditional and older segments of the church with younger more innovative voices in the church. While the situation with Mark brings many issues to the surface, these issues were always present and are much bigger than a minister being arrested for “Lewd and

Lascivious Conduct.” The tensions in the play do not just occur between Pastor Jacobs and Sister Owens; each scene is filled with tension between the various characters. The tensions occur because the characters are either fighting for change (Pastor Jacobs) or against change (Sister Owens).

When Sandra and Monica (the respective wives of Mark and Terrell) meet for the first time after Mark’s arrest, they initially start the dance of not addressing the proverbial elephant in the room. While everyone else seems to have at least questioned Mark’s sexuality, Sandra seems completely caught off guard by the recent events. For the first time, she is verbalizing and thinking about her fears in regards to her husband. Her frustration is evident not only with Monica, but also her mother-in-law Heloice, to whom she believes her husband runs to whenever he has a problem. This situation only brings to the surface longstanding issues of resentment between Mark’s mother and his wife. The women are shocked to discover that Mark has essentially disappeared, leaving his family to deal with the aftermath without him.

Despite Mark’s disappearance, events continue to transpire without him. Sis. Owens and the church council present Pastor Jacobs with a memorandum asking for him to fire Mark. This very tense and hostile conversation between Pastor Jacobs, Sis. Owens and Monica takes place in the pastor’s study. The ladies do not hide their disdain for each other and go back and forth with insults, before Pastor Jacobs tries to calm them down.

TERRELL: I just don’t get it Norma. What’s at stake for you?

SIS. OWENS: Everything.

TERRELL: Forgive me if I find that just a little ridiculous.

SIS. OWENS: I told you this would happen.

TERRELL: You told me you were going to get me fired?

SIS. OWENS: No. I *told* you not to let those kids do that rappin' foolishness in service.

MONICA: What?!

SIS. OWENS: And I *told* you not to lose sight of what's brought New Hope through these past *hundred and twenty-seven years*.

TERRELL: And I am telling you I don't see what ANY of that has to do with Minister Patterson.

SIS. Owens: It just takes one thing, Terrell, *one thing!* One little change here and a blind eye there and you will lose sight of your faith—*our* faith. (32)

This exchange emphasized why Sis. Owens is so critical towards Pastor Jacob's leadership. She views him as a young preacher ignorant about the way and the traditions of the church. What many might call his innovations and desire to make the church service relevant, Sis. Owens interprets as a threat. The infusion of Christian hip hop music in religious setting has caused a backlash. She is fighting the battle against a younger generation that threatens to make her and her style of worship irrelevant. It also demonstrates how fragile she believes faith is- small changes can make their faith irrelevant. This foreshadows the ladies questioning of their faith later in the play. As the play progresses, her deep commitment to New Hope and her resentment towards Pastor Jacobs is increasingly fleshed out. She tells Heloice that "Terrell Jacobs has got to learn folks don't stop matterin' just because they've got some gray hairs—or if they sing an old

song! I matter, Heloice—I matter!” (39). She spent 30 years working at the state hospital, a facility that is normally reserved for the mentally unstable and economically disenfranchised residents of the state. Her job involved menial work with a low wage. She is has never married and claims that this due to men not being able to handle a strong woman. The only place where she felt that she mattered and had authority was the church.

The Black church has a long history of providing purpose and respect that is often denied to Black people by society. When Pastor Jacob assumed leadership of the church he ended many of the mission circles, committees and choirs that Sis. Owens was part of and that provided her with a feeling of importance and belonging. The change in the church service, the new members and the new direction of the church leaves her feeling like an old relic that will soon be discarded. The feeling of lost importance is a feeling that Sandra shares with Sis. Owens. While Sis. Owens devoted her life to church; Sandra devoted her life to her husband. After spending her life creating a life with Mark, she now sees how fast it crumbles. The women in the play have placed a great deal of energy in maintaining specific appearances; change threatens to make this irrelevant. DADT is maintained because people feel as if they are benefiting from DADT. When people start to question these allege benefits that is when the performance of DADT starts to unravel.

While the play is mostly dominated by women, there are two significant male roles. They are Pastor Jacobs (Terrell) and Robbie. Robbie is a Black man in his 20s who, after spending a significant time away from Kansas City, returns home suspiciously close to when Mark disappears. Sandra’s presence at Robbie’s mother home almost

immediately after his arrival into town demonstrates her knowledge about her husband's close relationship with Robbie. She wants to ask if Robbie knows Mark's whereabouts or any of his acquaintances that she may not know. Her decision to ask questions signals the disruption of the DADT script. As Robbie claims ignorance, Sandra refuses to play the game and continues to be direct with her questions. The intensity of the scene rises when Sharon, Robbie's mother, comes into the room. She resents Sandra asking her son about Mark. She denies that Robbie was ever friends with Mark and instead insinuates that Mark abused Robbie. "Listen girl, I know plenty! I know what your sicko husband did to my boy-" (24).

The nature of the relationship between Mark and Robbie is not known to anyone besides them, however the nature of this relationship has been the source of constant speculation. Mark was often praised by the members of the church for his gift of counseling. Even Sharon admitted that his gift was from God, however this does not mean one cannot use a God given gift for evil.

I sent him to Mark because...you're right. Because Mark has a gift from God. He can counsel people, he can disarm 'em, make 'em love him and ev'rything he stands for. And oh did he work his magic on Robbie. He told me, "Mom, Mark's the only person who ever sees behind my eyes." *Behind my eyes*. I never...I never did...that, never saw that. And I was so, so, *so* grateful to God that this Man of God was mentoring my...my wayward son. (72)

At the time of the counseling Robbie was home from college, where he was experiencing a rough time adjusting. While technically Robbie was of legal age, during this time he was emotionally vulnerable and relatively young.

There is a legacy in religious communities of religious leaders using their position of authority to coerce or unduly influence young males into sexual relationships with them. Most recently mega-pastor Eddie Long was accused of grooming young men in their youth for eventual sexual relationships. All of his accusers were of legal age when they engaged in sexual acts but their intimate relationship with him began when they were much younger. The evidence in the text does not suggest that Mark preyed on Robbie in the way Long is accused of doing. However, regardless of reaching the legal age of consent there are moral issues with someone in a position of authority engaging in a sexual relationship with someone younger. In *The Contract*, we see how Paul's professor took advantage of his authority in order to establish a relationship with Paul. He also used his power and authority to insure Paul's silence after he was done with him. In addition to the Robbie's age, Mark had access to a very emotionally vulnerable young man.

The conversation between both the mother of Mark and the mother of Robbie focuses on who seduced who into the relationship. Mark's mother, Heloice believes that it was Robbie who distracted Mark from his calling. Without Robbie's presence she does not believe her son would have ever fallen victim to homosexual temptations.

We all got our temptations, and maybe Mark's is—is- *whatever*, but he was controlling it. He wasn't giving in. He was living a life of purpose 'till your

mantrap of a demon possessed son come along! Talkin' all this mess--this—this craziness about “Be open” “Be free” “Be who you are.” Well look at where “Be free” is now, huh! Is this what “Be free” gets?! Mark was brilliant, he was gonna be somethin', he was gonna make me proud--! (74)

As we saw in the previous chapter, the language around homosexual behavior is often tinged with demonic characterization. Heloice is unable to even speak the words gay or homosexuality, she simply refers to them as temptations that he formerly was able to be controlled. The two mothers play the blame game on whose son initiated the relationship.

Of the two people who know the nature of the relationship between Mark and Robbie, only Robbie is present in the play to give his perspective. Despite the circumstances and ethical issues surrounding their relationship, Robbie fell in love with Mark. As his mother admits to Heloice, Mark gained access to a side of Robbie that no one had before. Robbie displayed all the stereotypical characteristics of needing to be loved by a man; he refers to his father as a sperm donor since his father was not present in his life. He grew up mostly around very strong women. The lack of father figures is one reason that people like GCMW cite as an encouragement same-sex relationship. Mark's interest in him is perhaps the first interest (of any kind) that a man showed him. The man who showed him this attention and later shared his love with him was also a man that he could never have. The bond Robbie felt with Mark is a major part of the reason he never told anyone about having a relationship with Mark. His sense of loyalty encouraged his participation in the “don't tell” part of DADT.

Devastated after the ending of his relationship with Mark, Robbie has since established a new life in New York City and is now more comfortable in his identity as a gay man. The big city allows Robbie to fit in and feel comfortable in a way his hometown cannot. While all of the other characters in the play participate in some way in the church, Robbie does not. Many of the initial exchanges between Robbie and Mark's wife Sandra suggest he does not feel like his relationship with Mark was wrong. He seems to totally disregard how it might make Mark's wife feel that her husband engaged in a relationship outside of their marriage, specifically with a man. He does not recognize the impact his actions had on Mark's family. The question of who was entitled to being "hurt" by Mark looms over the play, and Robbie believes that Mark's "love" was enough for him to discount how others felt. Since he chooses to no longer participate directly in the church community, he is not aware of the dynamics unfolding and how he contributes to dishonesty and lies that are affecting others.

The characters in the play experience a great amount of hurt and they also express a great deal of anger, including the women who are not asked about their discontent and are expected not to tell about their discontent concerning their oppression in the church. Black women in the U.S. historically have been characterized by the angry black woman stereotype as represented through the Sapphire caricature. This caricature portrays Black women as "rude, loud, malicious, stubborn and overbearing" (Pilgrim). However, Christianity's expectations of meekness, gentleness, kindness, self-control reflected in the Black church often seek to challenge negative stereotypes about Black women. Black women in the church are expected to be loving and patient; an example to women who

are not saved. The depictions of God particularly in the Old Testament often portray an angry wrathful God.²⁵ While God's anger is depicted as justified, the anger of others in the *Bible* is not normally presented as sympathetic. God as the righteous creator has the privileged to display his anger. The many Biblical verses that emphasize refraining from anger²⁶ or being slow to anger²⁷ explain why the Christian characters in this play are so hesitant to display their anger. The women have been indoctrinated into an ideology that makes anger unacceptable for Black Christian women. DADT is not only relevant to sexuality; it is also performed in relation to patriarchy, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

The discontent that festers within the culture of DADT is revealed through the women's anger. On the surface Sandra is angry at Mark for leaving their family, and Sis. Owens is angry at the decisions Terrell is making as pastor.

Yet, their anger is really directed towards God. The last scene in Act One is directed at God, but God is merely a placeholder for patriarchy, sexism and homophobia.

SIS. OWENS: And all churches are built on the backs of women

MONICA: This church is breaking my back

SANDRA: You OWE me!

SIS. OWENS: Lord—you owe me!

MONICA/ SANDRA/SHARON: He owes me, Lord!

HELOICE appears in her own light.

HELOICE: *Our Father, if you're in Heaven*

²⁵ 2 Kings 17:18, 1 Kings 17:18 John 2:13-16

²⁶ Psalms 37:8

²⁷ Proverbs 15:18

I take it back

SIS. OWENS: I feel like you've turned your back

SANDRA: I'm angry with you

SANDRA/MONICA: With him

ALL: With ev'rybody (53)

The anger that the women feel and express towards God is a direct result of the role patriarchy plays within their Christian identity. They speak of the sacrifices that they must endure as women in the church, sacrifices they make for the men in their life and the lack of appreciation for those sacrifices. The anger they feel with the patriarchy implanted in the religious institution causes them to lose their faith. As a collected unit they are vowing not to praise God until things change.

The women are the only characters that Canady characterizes as angry. The anger and wrath the women express towards God can be extremely off-putting to many Christians who see anger as a negative thing. However, anger can be viewed positively. Black women writers such as Audre Lorde have theorized about the ways anger can be used for the collective good. Although "Uses of Anger" was a response to the racism of white women, it is applicable to other systematic issues such as patriarchy. Lorde believes the focusing of one's anger can be a power tool in the fight against oppressions. The anger we see in the women in the play is due to issues of sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism and patriarchy.

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being.

Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives. (Lorde 127)

It is clear from the women's reluctance to display this anger that they have been taught to suppress and ignore it. As both women and as Christians, anger is not thought to have any place in their lives; rather, their anxieties and problems should be taken to God in prayer. Sandra expresses frustration with "talking to the air" and not feeling as if her concerns matter to God. The act of prayer has become ritualized for all these women, something they just do regardless of not seeing or feeling any results. Yet, they are powerless or afraid of doing anything different. Prayer becomes a rote performance as opposed to an honest expression. Sharon points out the problem of performing ritualized prayers full of thank-you's and praise if that does not reflect one's true feelings.

But it wasn't the truth! What good is gettin' down on your knees with all those pretty little "God our Father," "We praise you Lord," "We thank you Lord" when what you really want to say is "God I hate you SO MUCH right now?!" He knows your heart. Why would you lie--it's just you and him! He can't fix what you won't speak. (51)

Sandra can no longer ignore the issues of her husband's sexuality and she cannot go on ignoring her own anger. In order to deal with the rage and the anger inside, she must first

acknowledge its existence. This scene emphasizes the cost of DADT—one must be honest not only with others but also with one’s self.

The playwright ends Act 1 with four of the women in the play (Sandra, Monica, Sharon and Sis. Owens), praying separately, yet simultaneously. Speaking in unison, they begin their prayer with the familiar “The Lord’s Prayer,” and between the words from this prayer voice their own concerns. In their own individual ways they tell God that they need answers, and express their frustrations with the men in their lives as well as their positions as women in society. Sis. Owens states that “all churches are built on the back of women” while Monica contends that “this church is breaking my back” (53). The women express that not only do the men in their lives “owe” them, but the Lord also owes them. Questioning even the existence of God at this point in the play, Heloice joins the other women on stage and begins her prayer “Our Father, if you’re in Heaven”. This also is the point at which the women express a more decisive anger. Feeling as if God has turned his back on them, they each vow to take back all the “I love yous,” “Hallelujahs,” and all the praise they have bestowed on God.

HELOICE / SANDRA: So no more “Amen’s”

MONICA: No more praises

HELOICE / SANDRA / MONICA /SHARON: No more fruit from my lips

SIS. OWENS: Not til you make a change

ALL: Something has got to change (54)

Their collective anger makes them realize that they are not satisfied with God or their lives. Their anger allows them to realize that they want more. It is their anger that brings the desire and the demand for change.

The women direct their anger at the institution of the church and also towards men-- their husbands and church leaders in their lives. Lorde suggested that anger can inspire radical change beyond simply making peace with a situation. This change can completely alter the way women understand their own worth, inspiring them to demand a similar change in how they as women are treated within the church and how gender is viewed and tolerated. While Sis. Owens is resistant to change in many ways, she understands that certain changes in how women are treated within would be freeing. Women who are oppressed by the sexism and patriarchy embedded in the church, might not be as quick to oppress others due to sexuality if they themselves acknowledge and examine how oppression hurts them as well as the institutions they are a part of.

After the promise of change at the ending of Act 1, the start of Act 2 is a letdown. Rather than the women using their collective anger to change and challenge the system that oppresses them, the ladies turn their anger onto each other. It begins when Sis. Owens and the church council decide to change the locks and effectively fire Terrell as pastor due to his failure to handle the Mark "situation." This spurs a display of madness during the Sunday morning worship. The scene that takes place is over the top, filled with insults, fighting and the police.

MONICA: You oughtta be on our side Sandra! Terrell's the only person standin' up for your fruitcake husband.

HELOICE: What did you call Mark?

SIS. OWENS: hmph. *The truth!*

SANDRA: Stop this. Just—stop this!

SIS. OWENS: Terrell, come out that pulpit or I will call the police.

MONICA: Call ‘em girl—and I’ll rip that raccoon you turned in to a wig off your head and shove it down your throat! (59)

Robbie brings some sanity and perspective to the situation by telling his sister Keisha that the situation she described to him was nothing more than a coon show and reminiscent of the over-the-top unrealistic action that is indicative of a Tyler Perry play. Robbie’s reaction also helps the audience understand that the playwright is purposely using this scene to comment on the way conflict and anger is expressed within Black culture, it so often portrayed as humorous and outlandish. The humor often masks the ways that Black people allow sexuality, class, gender, and religion to turn them against each other. Traditionally the church is viewed as a place of serenity and refuge. However, we see Canady challenge this depiction of the church within the play. Initially the discord happens in the pastor’s office or in the member’s home as the play climaxes the discord cannot just occur around the church. It eventually happens inside the sanctuary during the actual worship service. The discord that DADT produce eventually infiltrates all aspects of the church, and it cannot be kept hidden. Initially it takes place on a smaller scale, but eventually takes over the entire institutions. This scene highlights the chaos that has taken over the “holy” site of the church; it is filled with cursing, rivalries and infighting.

The two very different ways that characters in the play expresses anger demonstrate the struggles that are occurring within many Black churches. The desire to create meaningful impactful change is often challenged by the tendency to maintain the status quo. The maintenance of the status quo in this play requires the characters to internalize the anger and frustration they experience due to various oppressive forces against themselves. Ultimately, however, they express their anger towards other oppressed and marginalized persons in their community. The women thus disparage homosexuality and attack each other, while men perpetuate and value performances of Christian heteronormativity. This contributes to an environment where men like Mark feel pressure to live a heterosexual life regardless of their same-sex attraction. Mark's inability to be honest with others in turns hurts his mother, wife and children. The truth about Mark's sexuality reveals the truth about other oppression at work within the church.

Oppressed people become oppressors. The few limited options available to Sis. Owens as a woman leads her to become bitter and act in ways that are ageist and homophobic. Sis. Owens uses her privilege as a heterosexual against others in the same way her age and sex is used against her. While radical change that calls into question the systems of privileges and oppressions located within this religious institution might be too much to ask for within this play, we do see the women begin to realize that their pain is connected. Even Robbie understands for the first time that his performance of DADT script has consequences beyond his own broken heart, and that many lives were affected by Mark and his dishonesty.

ROBBIE: Yeah, yeah it does. Look. I can't fix everything, but I can at least try to clean up the mess I made. I closed my eyes to a lot of things cuz I was so busy being scared and angry and...in lust and love and whatever else. I just...just thought of your heart as collateral damage. It's a year and a half late, but I'm sorry for that. Nobody deserves that. Nobody. (88)

Robbie's decision not to meet up with Mark signifies his understanding and unwillingness to continue to participate in this script. In order for the performance of DADT to end, it is important for those involved to take responsibility for their involvement. In *The Contract* Paul, Daryl or Deborah never really take responsibility for their roles in DADT.

In contrast, this play shows how one can use the church itself to facilitate change. Although Sis. Owens succeeds in removing the pastor from his position, the play ends with hopefulness. Terrell challenges Robbie to stay in the church and help make the needed changes. Robbie moves from the peripheral of the church politics to become a more active role to make changes inside of the church. Mark as well as Daryl in *The Contract* needed to leave the church in order for them to have change.

New Hope will change. It will have to. Someday, God will take Norma home. The question is what are you doing to affect the folks who come behind her? Who's gonna pick the church up and march it forward? Brother, you can't win a fight you've already left. (93)

Terrell understands that the church as is currently operating cannot and will not survive.

This play shows how everyone is affected in the enactment of scripts like DADT. Canady uses his play to urge same-gender loving people to be visible in the church, to make their voices heard so that fight to end the oppressions that are operating inside of the church can be won. He also calls upon others in the church to be honest and examine how they are participating in the oppression of others.

Order My Steps

Order My Steps is the final example of the DADT script explored in this chapter. The wife in this case is not actively performing the script with her husband like Deborah in *The Contract*, but she is not completely ignorant to her husband performance like Sandra in *Muddy the Water*. Her participation in the enacting of DADT falls somewhere in between the previous two examples and offers a fruitful site to further explore the complicity required of others in order to successfully enact DADT.

Order My Steps, written by Tracey Scott Wilson, was produced in 2003 by The Cornerstone Theatre Company's "Faith Based Theatre Cycle." The goal of the cycle was to examine issues of faith and organized religion (Foley). This play addresses the Black church's response to HIV/AIDS. The Black church has been heavily criticized for its slow response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Currently, Black women make up 56 percent of AIDS cases among females and the most common route to infection is through heterosexual sex (Douglas 3). Despite this, many Black ministers still characterize HIV/AIDS as a gay disease. In *Sexuality in the Black Church*, Douglas states that, "The inappropriate association between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality has been perhaps the critical factor in causing Black passivity in regard to the AIDS crisis" (Douglas 3). Like

the two previous plays explored in this chapter, this play deals directly with how sexuality is performed and dealt with in Black religious environment. This play shows that the effects of the DADT script are not just mental or psychological in this production, but also very much physical.

The play becomes a metanarrative through the protagonist's writing of a "gospel play,"²⁸ many times it is hard to tell if the action performed onstage are that of the characters in the play, or the characters in the play written by Selena, the protagonist. Despite the obvious use of the gospel play format, the play would be best described as a docudrama. It features documentary interviews from ministers dealing with HIV/AIDS in the Black community (Foley). The playwright also uses flashback scenes to convey how the past has influenced the present.

Order My Steps presents the debates over how the Black church addresses the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Selena, the protagonist, believes that presenting a play about HIV/AIDS in the church would be a good way to deal with the growing epidemic. Reverend Howard (Selena's pastor), on the other hand believes that directly addressing the disease (including openly talking about safe sex and the manner of infection) will alienate a majority of the congregation who feel that is not appropriate conversation for the church. Conversation about HIV/AIDS means that pastors would have to directly address issues like homosexuality and sex outside of marriage that are viewed as sins,

²⁸ The gospel play refers to a genre of plays that cater to a Black working-class audience and not the typical Broadway audience. The plays normally include original music gospel music, simple set design and plot. These productions tour the urban circuit and are thinly veiled moral lessons based on Christian values relying on the use of stock characters.

even though these reflect the activities of many church members. *Order My Steps* reveals the central role of denial in the performance of the DADT script.

The action of *Order My Steps* begins with two simultaneous scenes: a pastor and choir are performing a wedding sermon, while a doctor informs her patient that she has HIV.

REVEREND JOSEPH HOWARD: So faith, hope, love abide; these three but the greatest of these is love. I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

DOC KERRY: I have your test results. (Wilson 2)

This scene helps frame the theme of denial that reoccurs throughout the play and juxtaposes the concept of love with truth. The information that Selena receives from her doctor leads to the destruction of her marriage. The choir sings about love as the characteristic of a powerful and protective God. The play's subsequent portrayal of the lack of truthfulness seen not only in Selena's marriage but also within the church itself, questions not the power of love but the presence of love within the church.

As the opening scene progresses, the patient/ protagonist (Selena) convinces the doctor that the diagnosis it is a mistake and that she is still a virgin. She explains that her husband has a medical condition that prevents him from having sex with her or anyone else. As the play develops we find out that this is all a fabrication and part of her denial of her reality. Her husband does not have such a disease. Rather, unable to face her diagnosis and what it means, she concocts a story based on a medical condition she learned about from an *Oprah* show.

This reference to Oprah is extremely telling about the play's subject matter and the time in which it was produced. In 2004 the author J.L. King appeared on *Oprah* to discuss his book *On the Downlow*. This book was about Black men who appeared to be heterosexual but had secret sexual relationships with other men. The men did not consider themselves to be gay and many still maintained relationships with women. It was perceived that, because of their failure to be honest about their sexual activities, they were placing Black women at a high risk of HIV/AIDS. As this narrative picked up momentum throughout the media many men shared that one of the reasons they felt they could not be honest with their attraction to other men was because of their religious beliefs. This was further compounded by the Black church history of ignoring the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Black community.

Unlike this depiction of men on the "DL" or Daryl and Mark from the previous two plays, Malik informed his wife of his sexuality prior their marriage. Selena was convinced that she would be able to fix Malik's desire for men. Similar to Deborah in *The Contract*, Selena allows her desire for status within the church to influence her choice of mate. Wilson uses a flashback scene to show a young Selena and Malik falling in love and the dreams Selena had of becoming a preacher's wife someday. Selena denial of her husband's sexual attraction became so strong that she forgets he even told her about this. Selena was not able to cure her husband's attraction to men through her love, but she was able to recruit and direct him in the performance of DADT. Initially Selena has trouble accepting her new reality, often confusing her reality with the fictional play she is writing. After originally trying to convince the Doctor she does not have HIV, she

sinks into depression as she begins to accept her fate. Her disappointment and hurt concerning the diagnosis and the infidelity transforms into a raging anger. This anger spreads to other members of the church. After the church is informed that Malik's homosexual activities has led to both his and Selena's HIV diagnosis, the congregation becomes angry with the pastor's failure to kick Malik out the church. The members of the church who leads the revolt against the pastor and are the most vocal about the removal of Malik from the deacon board are Selena and her mother. Like Sister Owens in *Muddy the Water*, they believe the removal of the homosexual member will somehow make the problem disappear. However, Malik's same-sex marital infidelity is just a symptom of a larger problem. Selena feels hurt and deceived, she refuses to see or talk to Malik. When she finally talks to him, he reminds her that she had always known about his sexuality and that he did not deceive her. Her anger slowly begins to dissolve as she realizes her own complicity in Malik's secret lifestyle.

Unlike this depiction of men on the "DL" or Daryl and Mark from the previous two plays, Selena's husband Malik had told her about his sexuality prior their marriage. Selena was convinced that she would be able to fix Malik's desire for men. Selena's denial of her husband's same-sex attraction is so strong that she forgets he even told her about this. The younger version of Malik seems to have accepted his sexuality telling Selena that this was the way God made him, but it was a young Selena who insisted that he could change. Malik tells Reverend Howard "I read about people who change. Get married. A part of me hated being.... I loved her so much. I thought I had changed Reverend. When I married Selena I swear I thought that I had changed" (88). Selena's

faith and insistence that he could change made Malik question his own internal knowledge of his sexuality. While Selena is not able to cure her husband's attraction to men through her love, she –as well as the expectations of the church -- played a major role in recruiting and directing him in the performance of DADT. Their relationship displays the popular sentiment of deliverance within the church that was discussed in the previous chapter: if a man who is attracted to the same gender prays enough he can be cured. She begins to understand that this is who he is, who he always was- it was his love for her that made him try to change. The denial that has clouded her judgment and perception is finally beginning to dissipate.

The performance of DADT within the church community, however, demands that Selena keep silent. When Selena confesses to the Reverend that she did know about Malik's sexuality before they were married, he advises her to keep this information a secret because she would no longer be seen as an innocent party by church members. After she has finally accepted her complicity, he asks her to continue to live in denial. Her denial of her knowledge of Malik's sexuality prior to their marriage is critical in maintaining DADT. Her mother even tells her she deserved everything that has happen to her if she knew about Malik beforehand. Unlike the other males in the previous plays discussed in this chapter (Mark and Daryl), Malik confessed his same-gender attraction before he married his wife. He gave Selena a choice that none of the other wives had; the fact that she had a choice to enter into the performance of DADT disavows her from any sympathy concerning the state of her marriage for many of the members of the church as

well as her mother. This also further emphasizes that performing DADT requires a supporting cast.

It is important to examine how the environment that surrounds men with same-sex attraction contributes to their inability to be truthful about their sexuality. Malik is a seemingly righteous and moral man who understands that he cannot hold position of deacon within the church and be open about his sexuality.

REVEREND JOSEPH HOWARD: When I was growing up we never ever used the word "gay" not even as an adjective. We knew who they were. They knew who we were. And we never crossed paths. They had their places. We had ours.

DEACON FRANKLIN: Hey, what do you call a gay bar with no places to sit.

REVEREND JOSEPH HOWARD: What?

DEACON FRANKLIN: A fruit stand.

(Deacon Franklin and Reverend Howard laugh. Malik does not.) (Wilson 12)

The jokes surrounding sexuality and manhood are something that same-gender loving men must endure in order to continue the façade of heterosexuality. Among the church leadership, discussion about homosexuality is derogatory and lacks empathy. The jokes and comments reinforce notions of masculinity and heteronormativity, by depicting gay men as “other,” and perform violence on Malik and others who may internalize these notions. The othering of gay man locates them outside the Black church “community.” Reverend Joseph Howard’s claims that gay people occupied separate spaces than heterosexual males ignores the long history and presence of same-gender loving people in Black religious spaces. In order for Malik to continue to be successful in the

environment of the Black church he must know his place, including being silent about his same-sex attraction if he wants to fit in. Later in the play, Malik will experience more concretely how the institution of the church ignores and silences those who destroy the appearance of heteronormativity. The congregation that once enthusiastically supported him throws him out of the church. Despite the warning from his male lover, Malik thought that his close relationship with the pastor who served as a father figure would prevent this fate from happening to him. Similar to *Deliverance*, we see a pastor attempting to fill the role of a seemingly absent father figure.

Malik's denial of how the church will respond is mirrored in how the church denies the existence of homosexuality and HIV/AIDS in its own community. Rather than examine how the church itself may contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS with its silence about sexual practices, homosexuality and HIV/AIDS, church leaders and congregations seek to remove anyone who openly has HIV/AIDS or is attracted to the same sex. Malik's struggle is not uncommon among Black churches throughout the United States. Same-gender loving men fear that they would be outcast from the only community they have known should people know about their sexual attraction. As a Black man within the church Malik was expected to uphold a strict moral code and a certain performance of Black masculinity which includes a heterosexual marriage and providing for his family. As seen with Deborah's father and grandfather in *The Contract*, some marital indiscretions are acceptable so long as heteronormativity is maintained. Malik's deviation from this code with his sexual relationship with a man results in his being expelled from his church community.

Denial becomes a characteristic of not just Malik's relationship with his wife, the church leaders, but also his lover Paul. After Malik is informed of his HIV diagnosis he meets up with Paul, his lover for the last four years. At this point Malik is not aware of his pending exile from the church. Malik informs Paul of his status and tells him that he must have it too. They exchange blame for who infected who with the disease. Malik's denial of his emotional attraction for Paul, led Paul to seek sexual relationships with other men. Paul's engagement in risky sexual behavior can be traced back to the hurt he felt by Malik's denying his request for Malik to leave his wife to begin a relationship with him.

DEACON MALIK WATSON: You have to tell whoever...whoever you.....

PAUL: Don't tell me what to do. You tell Selena. Have you told Selena?

DEACON MALIK WATSON: She told me.

PAUL: Damn. (Pause) That's what I get. That's what I get for messing with a Down Low brother.

DEACON MALIK WATSON: You....You gave it to me... You...

PAUL: I wanted to have a relationship remember? Remember all the times... Me begging you....

DEACON MALIK WATSON: Stop..... Just...

PAUL: Begging you. Begging you to be true to yourself...

DEACON MALIK WATSON: You gave it to me.

PAUL:....And be with me.

DEACON MALIK WATSON: You.... (Wilson 58)

Through Paul and Malik's relationship, similar to Daryl and Paul's in *The Contract* and Robbie and Mark's in *Muddy the Water*, we see how DADT affects men who have accepted their same-gender attraction.

In many ways DADT forces the partner who is comfortable with their sexuality back in the closet and to become a secret, something to be hidden. Paul expresses to Malik how much he desired to have a more significant place in his life. Malik's failure to be true to his own desires and resist the role of a "good" Christian husband that Selena and others casted him in created a situation that allowed both Paul and Selena to become infected with HIV. Paul expresses his unhappiness over the inadequacy he felt in his relationship with Malik. This caused Paul to seek attention from multiple sexual partners and which ultimately results in his being infected with HIV. Despite how the relationship with Malik affected Paul's self-esteem, which also played a role in his risky sexual behavior, he is complicit through his decision to maintain a relationship with a married man who cannot fully emotionally commit to him. It is interesting that Wilson chooses not to portray the scene in which Malik informs Paul of his HIV status as an angry one; the scene emphasizes the hurt that both parties feel due to their belief that things could not have been different. The denial evident in their relationship creates a deep feeling of longing for something they cannot have.

Although Paul in *Order My Steps* and Paul in *The Contract* both are depicted as gay men involved in relationships with married men, one of the major differences between the two is that this Paul has experienced life as a SGL man in the Black church. Paul is more knowledgeable than Malik about the church's policy and tolerance for those

who disrupt the norm. Paul even shares with Malik his story of sexuality and the church when he learns that Malik's whole church knows about his sexuality and HIV infection. At this point Malik is still unaware of the impending backlash from his church. Paul's love for Malik is seen in his attempt to warn Malik about how the church will react by sharing what he went through when his church found out he was gay. He was subsequently kicked out of his church and his family's home because of his sexuality. Malik does not believe this will happen to him. Paul tells him "They don't like to see you because it reminds them of their own sins. Their own temptations and shortcomings. You think you're the only DL brother at your church. You ain't" (Wilson 62). The lack of desire to examine one's own shortcomings becomes further motivation for congregations to fear the presence of same-gender loving members. Seeing Malik would only remind the church of their shortcoming in terms of sexual tolerance and AIDS, he would be a constant reminder that they ignore this population and this disease.

Similar to *Muddy the Water* the church pressures the pastor to remove Malik from the deacon's board. Reverend's Howard's sermon after the congregation learns about Malik goes back to the very first line of the play about love and calls into question- how does one's love for God show up in how one practices his or her religion? Love should conquer all things, yet money, prestige, and other things often become more powerful than love in the practice of Christianity. In response to Reverend Howard's sermon focus of the unconditional love of God and not judging others, one of the deacons begins to recite scriptures condemning homosexuality. Even though the pastor seeks to change the narrative around sexuality he is met with resistance. The Reverend's refusal to condemn

Malik causes attendance and offering to go down, demonstrating the power of the congregation to pressure to Reverend Howard to go with status quo. This is an example of how material concerns such as finances contribute to the culture of silence and denial in the Black church. Those leaders who stand against homophobia risk their churches and their family's financial security.

The "gospel play" format that Wilson utilizes emphasizes the theme of Christian redemption as the characters recognize their mistakes and return to Jesus. The five major characters in the play begin to pray to God as the choir begins to sing "Order My Steps," a song describing a desire to do God's will. Malik's prayer emphasizes his continued belief in God and his full acceptance of his sexuality: "Before I was born you knew me, before I was in the womb you set me apart. Father God, I thank you for the strength you will continue to give me in the days to come" (Wilson 92). Selena's prayer, in contrast, reveals her confusion and anger. "My Lord Jesus, I am confused. I am angry. I am afraid. Please, please, show me the way" (Wilson 92). After his prayer Malik decides to find another place to worship due to the hostile reception of him at their church. Selena ultimately refuses to keep quiet about her prior knowledge of Malik's sexuality, and confesses that "The shame is killing me Reverend, it's killing the church" (Wilson 96). She tells Reverend Howard that she is willing to go through all the turmoil associated with telling the whole truth, "Because I am the church, Reverend. I am the church and it's got to change. (Pause) It's got to change" (Wilson 96). When Selena says she is the church, she is stating that her previous attitude of intolerance of homosexuality, her belief and insistence that Malik can change, and her initial anger and disgust directed at Malik

were all reflecting the attitudes of the church. She now understands that silence and denial are not effective tools to fight the issues of sexuality and HIV/AIDS in the church. Her anger and her experience have allowed her to see both her own failures and that of the church. How much of this change is ever fulfilled is not evident in the play, but the desire for change and the refusal to no longer be complicit in the DADT script is extremely powerful. While *The Contract* and *Muddy the Water* end with the men vowing to end their performance of DADT, *Order my Steps*, is the only example where we see a Black woman acknowledging her anger, complicity and her desire to change the environment of the church.

Conclusion

The three plays in this chapter demonstrate that scripts performed by same-gender loving men are not only embodied by same-gender loving men- they must be performed by all who are close to them in order to be effective. Furthermore, DADT as seen in these three plays is a temporary script. Eventually the truth comes out in each example. In some cases, as it is for Daryl, an inauthentic life is not livable; he wants to be free. Despite his own personal issues with the morality of being same-gender loving, Daryl refuses to continue performing the script of a happily married heterosexual man. Mark in contrast cannot sustain his performance and is arrested for lewd and lascivious acts. The public arrest forces those around him to deal with his sexuality and the silence around issues of sexuality in the church. Mark's disappearance can be read as him no longer wanting to maintain the façade of heterosexuality. Removing himself for the situation allows him a certain amount of freedom from his responsibilities as a father, husband, son

and a minister. Yet, in his absence he is still maintaining DADT because he continues to be silent. The diagnosis of being HIV positive forces Malik to deal with his sexuality and understand that he can no longer play the role of husband to Selena, he must be true to himself. This also forces Selena to realize that simply denying Malik's sexuality will not make it go away. These three plays illuminate the emotional, mental and physical complexities and complicities required to perform DADT.

Exploring the performance of the script of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" demonstrates how all people in Black religious settings are affected by this script and the homophobia that motivates it. It also reveals how other systems work to sustain homophobia. Mari J. Matsuda, in her essay "Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory Out of Coalition," defines a method she calls "asking the other question." She states,

When I see something that looks racist, I ask, "Where is the patriarchy in this?"

When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, "Where is the heterosexism in this?" When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, "Where are the class interests in this?" Working in coalition forces us to look for both the obvious and non-obvious relationships of domination, helping us to realize that no form of subordination ever stands alone (Matsuda).

One cannot destroy homophobia in Black religious settings without also addressing the systems of patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism that mutually reinforces each other within these settings. For thus reason it is important to investigate and look at the performance of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" from a womanist theology perspective.

Womanist Theology seeks the liberation from oppression for all in the Black community. This means that in order to end the script of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” we need to dismantle all systems of oppression that bind Black women, men and children.

It is virtually impossible to view one oppression, such as sexism or homophobia, in isolation because they are all connected: sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ableism, anti-Semitism, ageism. They are linked by a common origin -- economic power and control -- and by common methods of limiting, controlling, and destroying lives. There is no hierarchy of oppressions. Each is terrible and destructive. To eliminate one oppression successfully, a movement has to include work to eliminate them all or success will be always be limited and incomplete.

(Pharr 53)

The treatment and role of Black women in the church may seem to be an unrelated issue to that of Black men engaging in same-sex relationships. However, as we see in *Muddy the Water* and *The Contract* they are very much related issues. Deborah’s gender made her father and those around her growing up not see her as being a viable candidate for not only the ministry but also for even attaining theological knowledge. Studying theology and preaching were things she was taught at early age were not for women. While she was able to overcome the restrictions her gender placed on her theological calling and become a co-pastor of a large church, Sis. Owens in *Muddy the Water* did not. Sis. Owens anger at not being able to enter the ministry results in her claiming power in the name of upholding church tradition, thinking only of her oppression as a woman she does not see how she oppresses others (homosexuals). With Deborah we also see how she

accepts adultery as a male behavior. She has watched her father and grandfather live a duplicitous lifestyle, which causes her to accept dishonesty in her own life. This is similar to Selena in *Order My Steps* whose mother also has taught her that all men cheat and that she should expect this of her husband.

Even so, the three plays in this chapter also embody a spirit of change, the hope that one day those in the church will no longer feel the need to perform this script. The plays identify the honest expression of anger towards an important step in moving individuals to demand change in the church. *Muddy the Water* and *Order My Steps* ends with Robbie and Selena vowing to work within the church's structure to create change. While Daryl in *The Contract* becomes ostracized from the church community due to his confession, he personally becomes closer to God. These examples indicate that one can maintain a relationship with the church and God, while remaining SGL and fighting against oppressions. Chapter Four will further explore how one accepts and honors their sexuality while still being a part of the church community

CHAPTER 4

COMING HOME

"When I think of home/ I think of a place where there's love overflowing/ I wish I was home/ I wish I was back there with the things I been knowing." The Wiz

This chapter will focus on the script of acceptance of sexuality and reconciliation with religious beliefs for Black SGL men. The previous chapters featured men who saw their same-sex attraction as something to hide, change, or be ashamed of. Their negative perceptions of same-sex attraction were based upon religious beliefs and social

constructions of heterosexual Black masculinity. Within this chapter I will explore depictions of SGL men who have come to believe that their sexuality, gender and religious identity are not at odds; they do not feel the need to change to fit societal expectations. The men in this chapter challenge the notion that SGL people do not belong in Black institutions, churches and communities by returning “home” and refusing to allow their sexuality to exile them.

I will begin the chapter by revisiting Anthony Charles Williams II (Tonex). In Chapter Two, through his music and sermons we see a man who is struggling with his same-sex attraction. We also see someone who believes that God wants him to be delivered from these attractions and will deliver him. The Anthony Charles Williams II in this chapter, however, has discarded the script of Deliverance in favor of the acceptance. He signifies this new phase of his career by changing his stage name to B. Slade. The process of changing scripts and his acceptance of a SGL identity will be explored in this chapter. Williams’ embodiment of two of the scripts at different points in his life makes him a rich venue to analyze how these divergent scripts are performed through a person’s body. It is key to pay attention to the reactions his transformation elicited from others in the Christian community as well as examine musical artists who preceded him embodying the script of acceptance.

The second half of the chapter will be grounded in the dramatic works of three SGL playwrights that feature SGL Black men who have accepted themselves for who they are. These plays are *The Colored Museum*, *Booty Candy* and *Crying Holy*. *The Colored Museum* by George C. Wolfe and *Booty Candy* by Robert O’Hara are satirical

works written twenty-five years apart that deal with being Black in the U.S. *Booty Candy* specifically deals with life as a Queer person of color in the U.S. These two plays are both written as a series short scenes/ vignettes, for the purposes of this chapter I will explore one vignette respectively from each. *Crying Holy* by Wayne Corbitt explores a queer man's relationship with his mother and her inability to fully acknowledge him. Just like B. Slade the men in these plays may have come to peace with themselves as SGL, but must still confront the various responses of those around them.

Same-sex attraction has been depicted in the last two chapters as something that is antithetical to a relationship with God. However, the four texts in this chapter challenge and disrupt this narrative. The SGL men in these texts all are confronted with the decision of whether or not to return home to those places (church and community) that previously rejected these men due to their sexuality. These texts demonstrate that it is SGL people's responsibility to return home as full authentic people, unashamed of their sexuality. Black communities and churches cannot change without them, just as they (SGL people) cannot be their highest self without their communities. The four men express the idea that being SGL does not mean one must reject Christianity and that rejecting the doctrine of Christianity does not mean you one must also reject the community. The visibility of SGL people who affirm themselves is vital to building communities and churches that also affirm SGL people.

The journey to B. Slade

In Chapter Two, I discussed how Anthony Charles Williams II (Tonex) actively campaigned against homosexuality, proclaiming that God is able to deliver people from

their homosexual attractions. He used his music, public appearances and sermons to spread the message that living a homosexual lifestyle was not compatible with being a child of God. In addition to his condemnation of homosexuality, he spoke out about his own personal struggles with homosexuality and sexual molestation in the church through his mix-tape, *The Naked Truth*. Although he later apologized for the explicit language he used, his actions were of a young man struggling to reconcile his sexuality and religious beliefs.

In the 2009 interview on *The Lexi Show*²⁹ in which he revealed his sexuality, Tonex deviated from previous scripts regarding same-sex desire. As first explored in Chapter Two, same-sex attraction is not a rarity or a novelty within the gospel industry; two scripts dominate in this situation. The first is employed by some mainstream gospel artists (i.e. McClurkin) who admit to same-sex attraction, and often blame their same-sex attraction on childhood molestation. These men believe that they need to be delivered from this same-sex attraction, which tempts them to engage in homosexual relationships. Engaging in homosexual sex or same-sex relationships is viewed as a sin, while being attracted to the same sex is not necessarily viewed as a sin. Another script often employed is that of silence or “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”, which can be seen in the flamboyance of the late Rev. James Cleveland or Dr. Bobby Jones (Saneeh). It is common knowledge that certain individuals have same-sex attraction and maintain same-sex relationships; their silence about these relationships allows others to ignore this aspect of their lives in favor of focusing on their musical contributions. In 2009, Tonex

²⁹ An interview style television show hosted by singer Lexi. It was broadcasted on the Christian cable channel, the WORD network.

departed from both of these scripts by not blaming his same-sex desires on his molestation and refusing to maintain silence.

The interview with Lexi marked Tonex's public deviation from the proscribed script of same-sex attraction and the beginning of his embodiment of the third script, "Acceptance." Lexi sets the tone of the interview immediately by stating to Tonex, "You have to know that you are controversial" (The Lexi Show Part1). She refers to him as controversial due to his eclectic style and she cites specific examples like his spiked dyed hair for an awards show, wearing a boa, make-up and a lollipop ring. In the context of popular culture none of these things seem "extreme," but in the context of the strict religious denomination that Tonex grew up in they are shocking. Tonex's parents were ministers in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (P.A.W.) denomination; within this denomination, as Lexi points out, women are not allowed to wear make-up and must dress in a conservative manner that does not show any of their skin (i.e. cleavage or legs). Tonex responds that his style was not an attempt to shock or make others angry-- he was simply being himself. Lexi maintains that: "What I do believe is that when you grow up in the Black church, you can't do that, you know we frown upon that. Come on you know how we do. You can't do anything outside of wearing a suit; you can dress down these days" (The Lexi Show Part 1). Lexi lays out the expectations for not only gospel musicians but also Christians within Pentecostal denominations.

Throughout the interview Williams constructs himself as someone who is an anointed man of God as well as someone who desires to be free and transparent. As Lexi questions how his persona reflects his conservative upbringing, Tonex responds that

although he may stray far away, he still has his anchor. This anchor is his faith and his relationship with God. Repeatedly in the interview he makes it clear that he is the same person he always was, and that his anointing from God is undeniable whether or not you agree with him. In owning his own sexuality, Tonex presents himself as someone who wants to take responsibility for his sexual choices, but who is also on a path to understanding who he is sexually. Tonex in addition takes care to distance himself from people like Donnie McClurkin who blame their sexuality on molestation:

Yes, I was indeed molested, true. I was exposed to sexual activities and exposed to things that obviously at that age you shouldn't be exposed to, which opens up a box of awareness. However I am not blaming those situations on the choices I made later. It could have been a foundation or a seed planted. But I take ownership for every bit of sexual exploration that I have made. (The Lexi Show Part 2)

He purposely steps away from the narrative that men become homosexual due to sexual abuse at a young age and alludes to the belief that his sexuality was something innate within him. When asked if he “struggled with homosexuality,” he responds “it wasn't a struggle” (The Lexi Show pt 2). This directly challenges the ideology of many in the Black church and in the gospel community (i.e. Darwin Hobbs and Donnie McClurkin) that homosexuality is a spirit that needs to be defeated: “Whether they are churchgoers or not, Black people often argue that the *Bible* makes clear that homosexuality is a sin” (Douglas 90). The dominant literal interpretation of the *Bible* in the Black community supports this ideology. Even Tonex's previous songs such as “Make Me Over” (2004),

“Restoration” (2000) and most directly “Deliver” (2006) in which he states “If its homosexuality, Jesus can deliver you,” all affirm the ideology of homosexuality as a sin that one must overcome. Yet, by stating that homosexuality is not a struggle, Tonex demonstrates the evolution of his own journey to self-acceptance.

While Tonex is open about his experience with “homosexual” sex throughout the interview, Tonex does not refer to himself as a gay man. When asked if he was dating men or women he resists labeling himself. Although he “loves” women he feels like he has more of an affinity to those of the same sex. Rather than focusing on sexual categories, he refers to principles of love. He uses biblical principles in his answer to further construct himself as a man of God.

I believe that God does not honor promiscuity in neither hetero or homosexual lifestyle- same gender loving. I think it’s important for people to not be so caught up with who I like to sleep with as much as I’m practicing safe sex or I am in a monogamous relationship no matter what that would be. Then you will have those that would say that should be under the guise of marriage. I believe covenant period is marriage. Same-sex marriages, I never could really wrap my mind around same-sex marriages but same-sex covenant I can definitely wrap my mind around that. Well, for me the term marriage in my mind at least at this point of my conviction, I believe the term marriage is set aside for a man and a woman. (The Lexi Show pt2)

He also is very clear that his divorce had nothing to do with his sexuality or cheating on his wife- stating that they had a very active and enjoyable sexual relationship (The Lexi

Show Pt 2). This indicates his faithfulness and that he was capable of sustaining a monogamous sexual relationship with a woman. He indicates his adherence to certain values of Christianity including sustaining the bonds of marriage. In Chapter Three, we saw several examples of married men struggling with their sexuality who engaged in sexual relationships with men, both with and without their spouse's knowledge. Tonex makes certain within this interview to display his knowledge of the *Bible*. The construction of same-sex relationships as something that also adheres to Christian ideology gives Tonex an added level of comfort or even a crutch in the process of disclosing his same-sex attraction to a Christian audience. It allows him to try on a new theological understanding, but also allows him to maintain his old understanding. By promoting monogamous relationships and stating that promiscuity is not of God, Tonex demonstrates that he has not completely rejected the ideology of Christianity. Instead he has disregarded the parts of the Black church's formulation of the Christian faith that does not support same-sex relationships. He also refuses to state that he is only attracted to men, and his decision not to label himself can be viewed as an unwillingness to completely associate himself with the gay community. Association with the actual label "gay" would completely disconnect him from many of his connections in the Black church. As discussed in the Introduction, gay and lesbian are Eurocentric identities which are grounded in European culture and do not affirm the Black cultural experience. His rhetoric also distances himself from the narrative that men who engage in same-sex relationships are sexually promiscuous.

The Backlash

Despite his hesitation to “label” himself, Tonex immediately was shunned by the gospel community. Immediately following the airing of the interview, concerts and church appearances were canceled, including an appearance on BET’s Celebration of Gospel³⁰ (Sanneh). The most noteworthy reaction spurred by *The Lexi Show* interview was that of Donnie McClurkin. About two months after Tonex’s appearance on the show McClurkin spoke at the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) 102nd Holy Convocation³¹ International Youth Department Service in Memphis, Tennessee. The importance of the convocation and its international appeal makes it a venue where issues like those raised by Tonex must be addressed; it also shows the stakes of McClurkin’s statements. The emotional intensity that McClurkin employs is in direct contrast to the calm articulate manner in which Tonex spoke about his sexuality to Lexi. Throughout his address to the youth, McClurkin becomes overcome with emotion, speaking in tongues and using repetition. His intensity is matched by the atmosphere within the venue and those in attendance. He blames himself and others for the circumstances that caused the present situation. McClurkin constructs himself as an elder, someone who is responsible for future generations. McClurkin started his career in gospel in the early 90’s, making him Tonex’s musical “forefather.” McClurkin suggests that he should have been more diligent in his responsibilities as a forefather in order to help guide Tonex onto the right path. It is important for McClurkin to proclaim to the youth that not only is Tonex wrong, but that homosexuality is wrong. A tearful McClurkin tells those preparing to come up for an altar call:

³⁰ An annual awards show on Black Entertainment Television celebrating and showcasing gospel music and its artist.

³¹ The COGIC convocation is the largest annual event for members of the denomination.

Hold on one moment, before you come. We are in a very, very dangerous point and our children are being lost, but they are being lost in the house. They are being lost in the house, they are being lost right here in the house. And they are being covered by music, they are covered by gifts, but they are being lost in the house. They have been failed on many points. They have been failed on many many points. They have been raised without fathers. They have been have been left empty and hurt and the very ones of us who have been their forefathers have failed. Hear me please. Hear me please. The very ones of us that were over the generation failed, myself included. Now they are being tainted by people in their generation. They are being tainted and they are being turned by people in their generation. We talk about the Tonex situation and they are slowly turning their hearts away from God and making them believe that such conversation is real. When it is not real. It is not real. It is not real. It is not real. It is not real. God did not call us to such pervasion. God did not call this generation to such perversion. God did not call you young people to such perversion. Your generation has lied to you. Society has failed. The only way you can really find real hope is in Jesus Christ. That's the only way you can find deliverance. (Speaking in tongues). If it hadn't been for this Jesus, I would be homosexual to this day. But he is a deliverer he is a deliverer. (Donnie McClurkin gets real pt1)

Similar to the example of McClurkin sharing of his testimony in Chapter Two, he tells of being delivered from homosexuality while presenting himself as an example of someone freed from the “perversion” of homosexuality. Here, McClurkin is in tears. The image of

a Black man crying so publically in any other space outside of church might be seen as effeminate. Yet, it is McClurkin religious relationship that allows him access to an emotionality that might seem effeminate, without appearing weak and ineffectual.

He also cites the narrative that the lack of father figures may contribute to homosexuality being promulgated. Similar to the church men that Darrel comes into contact with in *Deliverance*, McClurkin does not blame the youth for their confusion with their sexuality but rather blames the fathers for not upholding their responsibility. Robbie in *Muddy the Water* is another example of a SGL man with an absent father figure. He asks “Where are the fathers who will embrace the boys and say no no no, he can’t have, he can’t have you. He won’t have you! Where are the fathers who say I will not condemn you, I will not kill you-- but I will nurture you?” (Donnie McClurkin gets real pt1).

McClurkin further positions freedom from same-sex attraction as a choice that one can make, while also attributing molestation as a cause for homosexuality. McClurkin tells the youth in attendance that they will be free if they want to be free, that this will be the convocation of their deliverance. He uses his testimony to speak to the brokenness inside himself and other young people. He asserts that the silence about these sexual violations creates an environment where young people act out in sexually immoral ways. This claim is interesting in light of Tonex, who had been very vocal about his molestation as a child. In the *Lexi* interview, he refuses to attribute his current sexual attraction to his childhood sexual molestation. However, he does admit it might have been a seed. McClurkin’s assertion, that talking about the brokenness or molestation can uproot the seed of homosexuality uses the same language of “seeds” as Tonex. Tonex

continued use of metaphors common in the church shows not only that his continued connection to church, but also that his interpretation of the same metaphor is changing. McClurkin uses his performance to profess transparency and realness with the youth as he speaks about how people in the church violated him sexually and were not there to correct his behavior. McClurkin shifts the responsibility of his sexual decisions onto others. Again, we see how McClurkin's and Tonex's performance of "realness" differs.

While McClurkin's statements and call for deliverance is very similar to Chapter Two, it is important to understand his speech as an attempt by the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)³² of the gospel music industry and church to self-correct the problem of Tonex and maintain the status quo. After about twenty minutes McClurkin asks the youth to come to the altar:

Right now every one of you young people who say I don't need this. I can't leave out of here acting like this. I gotta be right. I don't want to be a feminine man. I don't want to be a hard woman. I don't want to be in homosexuality, bisexuality, trisexuality. I am not a lesbian I am holy woman of God. I am not gay I'm born again. (Donnie McClurkin gets real pt1).

The distinction between what a Christian and non-Christian is explicit. He makes it clear that one cannot both be a Christian and engage in homosexual acts and thoughts. In order to be viewed as holy of a person of God, the youth must come to the altar and seek deliverance. As seen in *Deliverance*, McClurkin's claims that the children will be delivered can cause more harm mentally and spiritually, if their same-sex attraction does

³² A term developed by Louis Althusser to describe institutions like churches who are technically outside of state control, but transmit and reinforces the values of the state and maintain order in a society.

not leave or when it returns. This public appeal for the youth to “out” themselves is irresponsible on the part of McClurkin. He fails to provide any real resources or avenues for these youth when they go back to their home church. Their parents also in attendance, will have to deal with the sexuality of their child, many for the first time. He further isolates the youth dealing with same-sex attraction by telling them to come by themselves, not with a friend. They must then make their way through Mason Hall and the thousands of people who are there. While McClurkin personally claims not to condemn the youth for homosexuality, it quite possible that the children will go home to unfriendly and aggressive atmospheres towards homosexuality. The belief that it is their lack of faith that causes them to continue to experience this attraction can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts amongst youth.

As an elder in the industry, McClurkin sought to counter what he believed was the misinformation widely spread by Tonex’s decision to speak openly and unapologetic about his sexuality. Other gospel artists felt a similar need to address Tonex’s revelation. Younger gospel artist Deitrick Haddon tweeted, “All Gospel singers are not gay as I don’t have a sissy bone in my body.” After the Tonex interview Haddon felt the need to distance himself from the image of closeted men stereotype within the gospel industry. His use of a gay slur reinforces that homosexuality is abnormal and not in line with masculinity. The fragility of the performance of masculinity is seen within his statement and need to assert his own masculinity.

At this point in his career, Tonex was still somewhat connected to a denomination in the Black church through his relationship with his mother, a minster (Sanneh). Her

death a few months after his disclosure completely pushed him away from the traditional church. When the *Lexi* interview was taped Tonex was performing the duties of pastor after his father's death; with both of his parents-- his strongest link to both the gospel and Christian communities-- no longer living, it was easier for Tonex to walk away (or be pushed) from organized religion and the gospel music industry. The backlash the interview received marked the beginning of the end to the "Tonex" period in Williams' life.

B. Slade and Sylvester

The proscribed scripts of the Black church are just one of the ideologies that Anthony Charles Williams II challenges. He also challenges society's conception of gender roles, through his music and appearance. Although Tonex has challenged gender norms for men throughout his career by frequently wearing boas, tight clothing and long faux dreads, it was not until he changed his name and adopted the persona of B. Slade (Brian Slade) that he really began to transgress gender binaries. The name B. Slade refers to his musical ability to slay every time he performs. After he disclosed his sexuality and effectively left the mainstream gospel industry, the changing of names allowed him to reinvent himself in order to appeal to a different demographic. It also shows a type of rebirth for Williams' that includes a transitioning of beliefs. B. Slade is far from the first Black man with a religious background who transgressed gender norms through his gender presentation and music. In the 1970's, Sylvester James infused many of the same elements as Williams' does in his career as B. Slade. Prior to the public revelation of Slade's sexual attraction, Williams' had very little knowledge of Sylvester James.

Sylvester came to be a model for Williams in this new phase of his career. In 2010, he remade “Mighty Real,” a song originally recorded by Sylvester James. This chapter is focused on the script of acceptance of one’s sexuality and religious beliefs. Sylvester offers an interesting embodiment of this script that I believe is worth exploring due to the similarities between the two artists and B.Slade’s later homage to Sylvester.

Like Williams, Sylvester began singing in the church and used his gospel training in his secular work. As a child, his family attended the Palm Lane Church of God in Christ in Los Angeles, where he sung in the choir. Church of God in Christ is a holiness denomination that is very similar to P.A.W. in which Williams was raised. Gospel music is a very important aspect of the worship experience in these churches; the services can also be very lengthy events. However, it was the feminine aspects of Sylvester’s gender performance, not his vocal talent that set him apart from the other children. He enjoyed dressing up in his mother’s high-heel shoes, wearing his grandmother’s fur coat and playing with dolls-- behaviors not typically associated with little boys. Palm Lane was not only where Sylvester first experienced gospel music and the power of God, but also where he was first introduced to sex. Sylvester’s experience as a child is an example of the rape culture embedded in the Black church. He was “introduced” to homosexual sex by the choir director at the age of eight (Gamson 23). At eleven, his mother brought him to the doctor due to his complaints of pain, and he had to have rectal surgery. He explained to his mother that the injury occurred during the process of having sex, which made evident to his mother that her son was not just feminine but actually homosexual

and sexually active. It is interesting that Sylvester never blamed the man who “introduced him to the life” or viewed himself as a victim of abuse.

“He had sex” Dr. Flunder³³ says, “but he never called it sexual abuse. He never called it that. He was a younger man who slept with some older men. Everybody learns from somebody.” In 1981 Sylvester told the writer Lee Hildebrand,

“Obviously I had to want it to happen or else it wouldn’t have happened.”

Speaking to Barry Walters in 1988, he did describe the experience as “abuse,” yet not as something he regretted. “He did a real number on me “Sylvester said, “But it never made me crazy. I was a queen even back then, so it didn’t bother me. I rather liked it”. (Gramson 23)

This passage from *The Fabulous Sylvester* brings up several interesting dynamics. First, it speaks to the ritual of sexual discovery and sexual exploration of young men in religious settings. Flunder refers to sexual intercourse between the young Sylvester and older men as a sort of rites of passage, an acceptable act, in which young men learn about sex.

Regardless whether Sylvester “liked it” or not, his ability to give consent is restricted by his age. In the eyes of the law, Sylvester was a victim of statutory rape. This is an example of how sexuality is experienced by some SGL Black men. Williams also experienced homosexual sex and molestation at an early age in a church setting. Unlike McClurkin or Hobbs, both Williams and Sylvester do not blame these early experiences

³³ Formally a member of Walter Hawkins Love Fellowship Choir as well as a solo gospel artist. Her career suffered due to her refusal to hide her sexual attraction and relationship with woman. She is currently the pastor of City of Refuge church in San Francisco, California. She served as a spiritual advisor to Sylvester towards the end of his life.

of sex with older men for their subsequent attraction to the same sex. Sylvester understood that he was always same-gender loving even before his first sexual contact.

Sylvester's understanding of church politics and his experience with those in the church led to his decision to leave the church and cease his association with organized religion. The church politics and attitudes towards sex were not limited to just homosexual behavior. Sylvester's mother was a respected member of the church and viewed as an elegant classy lady. However, the number of children she had with several different men displays a dichotomy between her church persona and her personal life.

In many religious environments, specifically the Black church, it is often permissible to engage in certain behaviors as long as your public persona does not reflect this engagement. Sylvester at an early age refused to play this game and was always unapologetic for his effeminate behavior, even when his partners and mother participated in the DADT script. Sylvester was linked to the married organist at the church, who was also a father. Unlike Williams, Sylvester made the decision to stop going to church at thirteen, as his inability or lack of desire to perform heterosexuality or church-defined masculinity alienated him from others in the church. Similar to the experience of Williams, those who had participated in the homosexual activities with him turned their back on him because he refused to maintain the façade. The hypocrisy and judgment that he experienced led him to not trust those in the church.

Despite his distance from organized religion, the influence of the church in Sylvester's life was always evident. He prayed before performances and warmed up with the hymns he learned as a child. His performances would often turn into the frenzied

environment similar to a revival meeting filled with Sylvester's flock (Gamson 225). After a particularly good performance he would often say "We had church today." In 1982, he became a regular attendee at Love Center Church in East Oakland. He stated that the service carried him through the week. Love Center was a place where Sylvester's celebrity status did not matter: he wasn't expected to sing—he was free to just worship without expectation or judgment. Love Center was a place where many people who grew up in the church but felt like outcasts were able to find solace and acceptance in a religious environment. He was able to reconcile some lingering feelings of shame from his experience as a youth in church with his spirituality, by separating God from the church. This is essentially what he had been doing with his music, allowing the transcendent power of the spirit to overcome him in his musical performance and experiencing God in secular environments because he was not able to freely himself in many religious ones. Daryl in *The Contract* believed that his ostracism from church and religion drew him closer to God.

These examples show that God can exist in many places. The performance of spirituality is not held hostage to a church building, the performance takes place within the body and the body is free to perform in any venue: secular or non-secular, gay or straight. In 1983 Sylvester recorded "He'll Understand," a gospel song that reflected his spiritual understanding that God accepts him and is pleased with who he is. The song features vocalists from the Love Center Choir, his new spiritual home. In December of 1988, Sylvester James was able to return home to the Black church wearing a red

kimono, during his home-going service³⁴ at Love Center. This signifies his return to the church as his full-self, his request to be buried in the tradition of the Black church while performing his gender in a non-normative way was honored.

The paths that Williams and Sylvester took shared many similarities at various points of their lives and careers. While Williams was heavily involved in the gospel music industry as well as pastoring, Sylvester's career was always in secular music. However in many ways he also had a flock to whom he ministered through his music and performance. Both performers eventually came to a place where they knew without a doubt that they were children of God and were accepted and loved by God for who they were. Both Sylvester and Williams are a part of a larger tradition in gospel music of balancing careers in secular and spiritual music; bringing the influences of each into the two "different" arenas. This can be seen in the career of Thomas Dorsey, Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke and Sister Rosetta Tharpe among others. While Dorsey and Tharpe are both known to have same-sex relationships, Franklin and Cooke are equally relevant because their use of sexuality within their later work alienated and shocked their Christian fan bases. Williams and Sylvester go a step further by specifically targeting the gay community.

Williams uses Sylvester's status as an icon in the gay community to reach out to others in the gay community. On October 1, 2010, he digitally released his first album under his new brand B. Slade, *A Brilliant Catastrophe (alpha)*. The album included

³⁴ A term that many in the Black community used instead of funeral. These services tend to be more upbeat and positive than a typical funeral.

“Mighty Real 2011” which is B. Slade’s recording of Sylvester’s 1978 hit disco single³⁵ “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).” While there is not a video for that specific song (“Mighty Real”), on the album B. Slade recorded and shot a video for the song “Get Over You (Sylvester Screen test),” that he wrote in the style of Sylvester. The video itself communicates a nostalgic feel with its musical styling and reference to the 1970’s through a montage within scenes from the 1970’s, Studio 54, voguing and his family. By using intertextuality within the video B. Slade ties himself to a specific historical moment. Fredric Jameson notes the use of nostalgia as “the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage” (496). This reminds those who were present in the era of the “good ole days” and creates a fondness for this period to those who never experienced this era by only associating the positive part of this history not the negative parts (i.e. Harvey Milk³⁶’s murder and Sylvester’s battle with AIDS). The 70’s are often portrayed as a very sex-positive era and a crucial period in the gay rights movement. The fact that the perils of AIDS were not yet known coupled with the freedom located in the sexual liberation movement often makes this period romanticized in the gay community.

B. Slade in this video continues to pay homage to Sylvester through his own androgynous look. In the video he wears a shoulder length wig that is made for a woman, while also maintaining his facial hair (Get Over You). The soft fullness of his feminine hairstyle is disrupted by the physical and masculine appearance of facial hair. The cinematography which maintains angles that only show B. Slade above the shoulder

³⁵ The song reached the Top 10 charts in the United Kingdom and the Top 40 charts in the United States.

³⁶ Openly gay San Francisco politician who was murdered in 1978.

joined with the gown he wears, further construct attention away from his muscular and masculine physique allowing for an allusion towards androgyny. The song makes use of his high falsetto voice as he sings in a range that is typically associated with females. The use of androgyny was also a staple of Sylvester's persona throughout his career and personal life. B. Slade's dramatic debut in the video allowed him to pay homage to another Black music artist who managed to reconcile his sexuality and spirituality, while also transgressing gender norms. Sylvester's spirit guided B. Slade towards his self-acceptance both within his life and his music.

BSFF

In October 2010, after several high-profile suicides of gay youth caught the nation's attention, along with the emergence of the anti-gay bullying campaigns such as "It Gets Better," B. Slade further aligned himself with the gay community through the song "BSFF (Rated R)." On his website B. Slade prefaced the lyrics to the song with the following statement: "In response to all the bullying of all people and gay bashing and slander of past and present, this song is an empowerment tool for you" (BSFF). Hesitance to align himself with the gay community during the *Lexi* interview could be contributed to the mainstream gay community failure to affirm Black people and culture.

"BSFF" can be viewed as B. Slade's attempt to affirm young Black women and men who are attracted to the same sex, by using culturally specific references throughout song. One criticism of the "It Gets Better" campaign is that it did not take into account the socio-economic and cultural differences in the lives of queer youth of color, who do not have the options or privilege that white youth have. The song's title "BSFF" stands

for “butch, stems, faggots and fems,” names that have been viewed as derogatory in the gay community. These terms have been re-appropriated by queer people of color to self-identify. Within the song B. Slade mixes his signature high vocals with a rough spoken word/ rap. The merging of these two styles of music represents a mixture of a vulnerable femininity, through the description of himself as a target in his youth, with the rougher rap portion of the song demonstrates a more “manly” aggressive stance of fighting against those who seek to victimize him. Within the song he recounts his experience with homophobia and bullying: “Stand up for yourself / You've got support now / don't let them beat you down/ stand up for yourself / time to fight back now/ if you don't know I'll show you how” (BSFF). By sharing his story and offering support he is allying himself with gay community and the larger discourse of the gay activist tradition, positioning himself as an activist calling for the LGBT community (particularly people of color) and beyond to stand up to bullies.

While this song uses many of the same words that he used within “The Naked Truth,” it does not reflect the same anger that was evident in that song. Rather than dwelling in the emotional trauma of being called a faggot, he embraces the hateful terms that he was called. He specifically calls upon targeted youth to fight back at school, church, work and home. His inclusion of “church” references his own personal experiences and his decision to distance himself from the mainstream Black church. The free download of this song help distribute it to a wider audience. The mention of the song on blogs dedicated to Black gay men lives such as “Living Out Loud with Darian” and “Son of Baldwin” increased his exposure to the Black SGL community. This, combined

with the ease of sharing songs via Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr produces an audience for B. Slade that performs the work of marketers and a label. B. Slade's experiences signed to a major record deal as Tonex fuels his desire to be responsible for his own music and choose to distribute it independently. What is also different about the release of "BSFF" versus "The Naked Truth," is his position as an independent artist. By not being signed to a mainstream gospel label, like he was during the release of *The Naked Truth*, he had the freedom to choose how he wanted the song released.

Williams' move from a "gospel" artist and his brand name change broadened his audience. It also meant he did not have to issue an apology for his use of profanity and blatant criticism of the Black church. He was no longer seen as a representative of both the Gospel industry and Christianity. While bullying is an issue that touched B. Slade personally, it also appealed to a different audience than his "Tonex" audience. Showing the gay community that he is not only an ally but he also is committed to their cause, the political nature of this song allows B. Slade to reach an audience that might not have been enthusiastic about the church and performers associated with the church. With this song he shows that he although he has a religious background, he also looks critically at the church and fights against oppression.

Tonex's transformation to B. Slade was cemented through his first public appearance and performance as B. Slade several months after the release of the initial B. Slade albums. The site of B. Slade's performance in December 2010 was at Joe's Pub, a small intimate performance venue in NYC (Aaron). B. Slade wore skin tight pants, a sleeveless muscle shirt and blonde hair piece with short spikey black hair, and performed

a rendition of Janet Jackson's "I Get Lonely," a song about missing one's lover. During the song Tonex rapped about Jesus, and performed vocal runs in the style of various gospel artists while calling out their names. The song lyrics, "You are the one who lives in me, I want no one but you," can be seen as ode to Jesus (Jackson). He remarked that he is covered by the blood, a reference to saving power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He pointed out that he still has the "same insides" (B. Slade). As the song ends he goes back to using his falsetto range and performs "vogue"³⁷ moves which are popular in the gay community.

The transformation of a secular song into a spiritual song alone is not innovative in the music world, but Slade's direct reference and use of Black gay culture within the performance shows his ability to transcend and bridge separate categories of gospel music, R&B and gay culture. He is creating a space where Black culture, gay culture and spirituality can come together equally. Immediately after the Joe's Pub performance he performed again at Splash, a popular gay male nightclub in NYC (Aaron). The decision to perform at a gay nightclub shows Williams' intention in bringing his music to this population, rather than hope they find him. While using secular venues and secular songs, B. Slade continues to infuse his music with Christian ideology, not just spirituality. While the interconnectedness of the sacred and secular is a feature of African cosmology, the influence of European ideas in the Black church has caused them to be seen as separate and independent of each other (Douglas). The divisions evident in gospel music/ church are no longer evident in Williams' music or life. Again, Williams' is challenging the

³⁷ A dance made popular in the ballroom culture of Black and Latino gay men. It involves striking a pose between fluid movements.

ideologies promulgated not only by the Black church but the Christian faith at large. His specific references to Jesus, “the blood” and other colloquialism popular in the church paired with a gospel aesthetic work to transform the venues themselves into places of worship. He plays with the audience knowledge and experiences inside of churches in order for the transformation to occur. This is similar to the transformation of a gay club into a transcendent worship experience as E. Patrick Johnson describes in “Feeling the Spirit in the Dark: Expanding Notions of the Sacred in the African-American Gay Community.” Johnson states, “as spectators of erotized gay bodies that are Christian bodies, black gay men in the night club space both witness and become witnesses for the union of body and flesh” (Johnson 410). Johnson further goes on to describe how this merging of features of the Christian church in a nightclub venue forges a sense of community that is denied within the performance venue of the Black church. By expressing his sexuality through the suggestive dance moves and his Christian ideology through his lyrics, B. Slade is creating a space where he and others can use a site that is not typical seen as a worship venue to express themselves in a manner denied to them in a traditional Black church worship venue. B. Slade shows that you can not only come as you are to experience spirituality, but also that the church and other religious venues are not the only places where this experience is possible.

The performances at Joe’s Pub and Splash allowed for B. Slade to reach out to an audience that might not have been familiar with his former persona as “Tonex” while also reaching out to SGL gospel fans. However, the performances did not speak to his former mainstream Christian fans. A key part to the acceptance script is returning home, and for

Williams, this is the gospel music industry. In January 2011, during a pre-Stellar³⁸ awards party, B. Slade performed in front of an audience largely comprised of those in the mainstream gospel community (Walker). This was not only the largest audience for whom B. Slade had performed it also was filled with people who had failed to embrace him after he disclosed his sexuality. B. Slade displayed a very punk rock aesthetic which included using hair extensions to create a Mohawk, conspicuous jewelry, combat boots and leather gloves (Walker). According to the parameters described in the *Lexi* interview this look is more appropriate for an alternative club experience, not for a mainstream gospel affair for which the attire is normally traditional suits and dresses or contemporary urban attire. B. Slade's attire expressed a distinctly "gay" aesthetic. B. Slade performed songs from his "Tonex" repertoire while using choreography that is more typically found in secular settings or gay clubs (B. Slade- Believer). The performance was largely well-received even though initially a significant percentage walked out of the performance (Walker).

The merging of Christian songs with the stage persona of B. Slade in a Christian setting showed a conveyance of two "conflicting" ideologies within Tonex. During a post-performance interview with the Christian magazine, *Path MEGA*zine, B. Slade insisted on his love for God (fig 2). His statement, that "There is only one way and that is through Jesus Christ," reflects an inability to construct alternative religious possibilities (Path MEGAzine). Those who do not believe in Christ are not offered the "exclusive gift" of eternal life from a Christian God. While his notions of sexuality and the *Bible* are

³⁸ An annual award show celebrating the best in Gospel music. The 14th annual Stellar Awards in 1999 was Tonex's first national appearance on the Gospel music scene.

liberal in comparison to the dominant ideology in the Black church, his views on salvation express a very conservative theology. At this point he is not willing to see other theological possibilities, but he expects Christians to allow for more sexual possibilities within their theology. This division between liberal and conservative understanding is complex and demonstrates his struggle with absolutes. As with his *Lexi* interview, B. Slade showcased his knowledge of the *Bible* and theology. However, unlike the prior *Lexi* interview, he was clearer about his thoughts on homosexuality. “I feel like it’s a disposition that a lot of people are actually genetically given, I really do. If you are scientifically born that way, the bigger question is have you been born again” (Path MEGazine). His statement regarding the reasons for homosexuality is closely aligned to ideology of the gay community and not the gospel community, the later typically advocates nurture versus a nature view of homosexuality. B. Slade bringing the conversation’s focus back to his religious belief and that of salvation shows again his tendency to revert back to his theological background.



(fig 2)

Those who have followed Anthony Charles William II’s career from “Tonex” to “B. Slade” have seen at times what society views as incompatible identities forged within him. However, Williams has created a way to allow fluidity in his identities. In the

performance of life we have the ability to maintain the given script, make adlibs or we can completely rewrite the performance. It was the adlibs found in Williams' artistry and life, which forged the momentum to not only challenge the proscribed performance but also his attempt to rewrite them completely. His journey reflects the creation of his own script for the performance of sexuality, which excludes "Deliverance" and "DADT." Through Williams and the plays discussed in this chapter we will see the diversity of the performance of the acceptance script.

Crying Holy

The first of the three dramatic texts I use within this chapter deals with HIV/AIDS. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, HIV/AIDS affected a variety of communities during the early 1980's. Originally thought of as a white gay man's disease, this perception has changed as more communities of color became infected with the disease. Even when it became clear that HIV/AIDS was affecting Black communities at devastating rate, many Black communities' reactions to the disease were and continue to be willful ignorance of the epidemic and/or denial of its impact. This is connected to the treatment of sexuality within this same community. If Black churches spoke about HIV/AIDS, then they would also have to address sexuality. The method of denial is seen in Wayne Corbitt's play *Crying Holy*, and was also seen in *Order My Steps*. The play is largely autobiographical and was first produced by Theater Rhinoceros in 1993. HIV/AIDS was still a relatively new epidemic about which many people were ignorant.

In *Crying Holy*, the protagonist Waters Hardy goes back home to visit his family in the Midwest. Described as a 40 year old flamboyant man. Waters is a self-identified

queer man. Corbitt depicts going home as challenging for SGL people, particularly those of color. Places like New York City and San Francisco provide refuge for young LGBT people. They are places where one can form community around their sexual identity and express themselves in ways that were prohibited in their hometowns. Coming home requires a re-adjustment to the attitudes of family, friends and neighbors who did not experience or understand the liberal attitudes of NYC and San Francisco. In San Francisco's *The Chronicle*, Corbitt declared, "I took BART into San Francisco, walked up Polk Street and said, 'I'm home'" (Harmanci). This is a reference to sense of freedom he initially felt when he arrived to San Francisco and started experiencing the gay community there. Yet, while he felt home in the sense of being able to be free about his sexuality, racism embedded in the gay community prevented him from ever being truly at home there. The feeling of home was temporary. Joseph Beam, Marlon Riggs and Essex Hemphill all wrote about the perils of returning home, to the Black communities they were/are members of.

When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community; the Black press, the Black church, the Black literati, and the Black left. Where is my reflection? I am most often rendered invisible, perceived as a threat to the family, or I am tolerated if I am silent and inconspicuous. I cannot go home as who I am and that hurts me deeply (Beam 231).

Crying Holy is a compelling look at how SGL Black men who are out and live their lives as such relive the struggle to be authentic and unashamedly queer when they return home.

This struggle is magnified through the character of Waters who not only brings his sexuality home but also his AIDS diagnosis. AIDS forced many families to discover and deal with the sexuality of a beloved family member, while there were many instances of families standing by their beloved in their final days, there was also many instances of families denying support and love because of their diagnosis and sexuality (Hemphill 297). Despite the open life he has made for himself in California, Waters understands the importance of returning “I needed (hesitantly) to go home/ and- rest in the bosom of my family/ a family of women for 1,000,005 reasons/ I have always identified with women/ and I wanted to rest in their bosom” (Corbitt 457). Despite the communities built with other gay men in San Francisco, in his sickness Waters feels that only his family of women (he is the only male character seen in the play) can provide the comfort he needs. My analysis of this and the following two plays, examine the cost that SGL Black men must pay to maintain relationships with their families and communities. Williams’ (B. Slade) refusal to maintain silence on issues of his sexuality ostracized him from many in the gospel/church community, but he was also embraced by other communities. Hemphill suggests that in Black communities gay men are willing “to create and accept dysfunctional in them, tales of caricature, silence and illusion” (298).

Waters speaks of his AIDS diagnosis, but much like the reality of his sexuality, his family ignores his comments and the reality of his illness in the presence of Waters. However these conversations about him and his sexuality do occur-- just not with him present.

LORETTA: Skinny as he is/ don't look like he's eatin much of anything to me/
But he sho look a lot better than I expected/ You know/ like those/ you know like/
those/ victims/ you see on the news/ I guess all we can do is pray. (Corbitt 458)

Waters' visit home is the first time many of his family members have seen him since they learned of his diagnosis. Considering the location and size of the town Waters' family lives in, it is likely this is the first person they know with this disease. Waters is a living and moving embodiment of this "disease" that they previously only had access to through television. The images of bodies infected with AIDS projected on television are probably very sickly homosexual white men. The images of white men on television collide with the physical appearance of their Black, queer brother. Waters' return home brings with him a national crisis that they were somewhat removed from in their communities. While Loretta's reaction to her brother's disease is that of prayer, their other sibling's (Annette) reaction (who is not seen in the play) is that of fear. Annette makes excuses so she does not have to have Waters in her home. This is indicative of much of the early misinformation surrounding how a person became infected with HIV/AIDS. The discomfort that all of the characters have with the exception of Waters is seen with their inability to say HIV/AIDS or gay. They refer to it as "he got what he got" or in references to Meredith's (Waters' friend) sexuality as "she turned out to be *that way* too" (emphasis mine). There is a desire to "welcome" Waters home as the person he was before he left; but this would mean Waters' sexuality and illness remain undisclosed.

Mother Bell, Waters' mother, has the hardest time accepting the state in which her son returns home. His mother, an active member of her church who has been bestowed

with the title “Mother” by her congregation, obviously loves her son but does not know how to deal with his sexuality or disease. As her oldest child he was the obvious favorite and she often bragged “And you just watch Waters gone be preaching one day” (Corbitt 462). Her pride and adoration continues for him extends to his poetry. One reason why his mother does not address his disease is because she does not believe he has it. She instead offers prayers for her son. When Meredith speaks to Mother Bell about Waters’ frustration with the family’s reaction to his illness, we see how Mother Bell is processing the information about her beloved son.

MOTHER BELL: I don’t believe he got it/ Faith is the evidence of things not seen/ and the substance of things hoped for/ Dogs bark,/ but that don’t mean somethin’s out there/ Dogs bark at nothing but wind blowin leaves in the dark.
(Corbitt 474)

While his family is doing the best they know how, which is to use religion and their faith to combat his condition, it is not enough for Waters. Waters wants his family to see him, to acknowledge him as a Black queer man who is HIV positive: to see and love all that encompasses, to see him fully and not compartmentalize. This is what the larger Black SGL community wants as well- to be recognized, not ignored, denied or feared. Mother Bell’s faith acts a dividing point between her and her son. She believes that if he repents of the sin of homosexuality, then the Lord will heal his body.

However, as much as her faith and religion separates her from her son, it also binds them together. The silence around sexuality is not only seen in relation to homosexual relationships but also through heterosexual relationships as well. This is

particularly seen with Waters' first experience with sexuality and the secrecy of his birth father. Waters uses the convention book³⁹ to show his friend Meredith "the history of my sex life." "I worked those conventions especially that youth convocation from the time I was 13" (Corbitt 478). The youth convocation he is speaking up is probably the same national youth convocation that Donnie McClurkin used as a platform to talk about the perils of homosexuality after Tonex revealed his sexuality publically. As Waters goes through the book he points out various pastors and choir members he had sexual relationships with in his teens.

WATERS: And honey, that was before I was sixteen/ We'd shout and fall out at the Sunday night musical/ Fuck our brains out the rest of the night/ and those same queens said amen the loudest/ when the preacher said the abomination line on/ Sunday morning. (Corbitt 478)

This pattern of living a duplicitous life is nothing new and was discussed in Chapter Three. However, what makes people like Anthony Charles Williams II and Waters different is that they refused to continue this pattern that would require them to pretend to be straight in public. We also see the familiar theme of child molestation within this work-- Williams, Sylvester and Waters' first sexual experiences were at the hands of men from their churches. Again, we see evidence of a rape culture in the Black church, an atmosphere where abuse and molestation of children reoccurs. Waters recounts losing his sense of being a child, "I lost that at seven/ to a straight uptight deacon/ At least Evangelist Bobby Hope gave me a choice" (Corbitt 476). This is important to note

³⁹ Elaborate program given at the convention with the schedule of events, it also includes photos of the elders and delegates in attendance.

because not only did Williams, Waters and even Sylvester have to make a conscious decision not to be ashamed of their sexuality, they also had to deal with the script of shame surrounding sexual abuse at young ages. The “dating scene” around the convention satisfied Waters to a certain extent because he was empowered enough to be able to choose sexual partners, but the satisfaction did not last long because he was not able to be his authentic self publicly in that environment. He also experienced many of the self-harm behaviors that LGBT youth disproportionately have to deal with. His subsequent refusal to hide or pretend to be straight has led him to be called out during church services and condemned for being a homosexual.

While Waters experimented with his sexuality at church conventions, he would later find out that his mother did the same. “I really thought you were praying with those brothers/ I took off the blinders Momma/ and realized that you were prayin/ just like me/ at those conventions/ and believe me I wasn’t praying” (Corbitt 516). Mother Bell has since repented of her sexual sins, including the sin that caused her to become pregnant with Waters. The identity of Waters’ biological father is a secret that she chooses to never reveal. She has found salvation from her “sexual sins” through her faith in God, and she wants her son to repent and find the same salvation. However, Waters is unwilling to believe that he needs salvation from a religion that condemns who he is. An impasse exists, preventing her from seeing her son fully because of her faith. She retreats to the comfort of familiar scriptures and prayers to get her through the uncertainty that accompanies the illness of her eldest child. Corbitt gives the character Mother Bell a six page monologue full of prayers surrendering her son to God.

MOTHER BELL: Call him to repentance/ Bring him to your bosom and make everything alright/ Save him Lord/ Heal and save him Lord Jesus/ you gave him to me/ Now I'm givin' him over to You. (Corbitt 485)

A monologue of this length and the emotion/physicality required of the actress would make an audience uncomfortable. The strength that previously characterized Mother Bell leaves and this vulnerable woman emerges who only has her religion to comfort her. The final scene of the play allows Waters to confront his mother and really talk about his disease. He asks her "Can't I have my own faith?" his desire to find a belief system that affirms rather than condemns him further ostracizes him from his mother. She takes his denial of her faith as him also denying her. Waters' sees Mother Bell's denial of his AIDS status and sexuality as denial of a central aspect of his reality; similarly Mother Bell sees Waters' denial of her faith as him denying a central aspect of who she is. He expresses the sadness of his inability to return and be accepted by his family.

WATERS: I cannot go home as who I am
it seems
unredeemed by what blood
unsaved by what grace
unnatural by whose standard....
I cannot go home as who I am
but want and want and want
some homebody to hold me and...
Rock me with

Heat musk salt and sweet

Sweet home

longing to share

my joy in knowing who and what I am. (Corbitt 518-519)

In this moment his desire transcends being accepted; he wants to be held by his mother, reverting back to his childhood as his mother reverts back to what she knows best. As the play ends Mother Bell is “crying holy” and holding her child. Waters’ story is significant because, even when one is confident and out about their sexuality, there is a certain a realization and knowledge for Black SGL men that often they cannot return home and express the fullness of who they and be accepted by their families. This knowledge does not stop the desire from existing and festering, often fed by anger and silence. This play was Wayne Corbitt’s way of dealing with his own inability to come home as himself. In an interview Corbitt stated, “I do love them and they love me. That’s the lesson that I’ve learned: That everybody is doing the very best they can, even if we may think sometimes they can do better” (Hatmanci). Corbitt did not adopt a stance of hatred towards his relationship with his family, due to his belief that their actions and reliance on their faith is really all they knew to do.

The Colored Museum

George C. Wolfe’s *The Colored Museum* premiered in 1986 at the Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ. The play is comprised of eleven vignettes/exhibits that satirically present aspects of Black life while making profound commentary on the lives of Blacks in the U.S. and how they are represented in popular culture. The impact of both

the career of the playwright and the play continues to be felt today in the Black theatrical world. For my purpose of examining the script of self-acceptance in the bodies of same-gender loving Black males, I will focus on one of the exhibits housed in *The Colored Museum*. In this scene I am particularly interested in how Black SGL males articulate their belief systems and identity in response to unhealthy and negative familial structures. The title character of Miss Roj in the exhibit “The Gospel According to Miss Roj” is performed by a Black male. His fashion choices are more in line with female gender codes. The title of the exhibit indicates how the character has reinterpreted the “gospel,” or the good news. The “gospel” is central aspect in the Christian religion, which charges its believers to share about salvation. A major tenet of Christianity is that its followers must ask to be saved from their sins by Jesus Christ. Miss Roj’s dress immediately reads him as different. This difference cannot be ignored in the way that the adherence to gender norms of the characters (Darrel, Darryl, Mark and Malik) could be ignored in the previous chapter. The character Ms. Roj is reinterpreting principles that are associated with Christianity, a religion that seeks to deny him access due to his sexuality.

The exhibit takes place in a club called the “Bottomless Pit,” where Miss Roj performs on the weekend. It is important to note that Miss Roj is not transgender but rather works as a female impersonator. Female impersonation allows for men to play with gender norms in ways they are not otherwise able to. However as Judith Butler has explicated, all forms of gender presentation have elements of drag or performance embedded within. The language used by Miss Roj reflects his knowledge of the Black church. His very first line, “God created black people and black people created style,”

emphasizes his belief in a higher power. As the monologue progresses, his use of the word “baptize” is further evidence of the character’s religious upbringing. He also speaks of demons, which is particularly common in many of the Holiness denominations that believed a person’s body can be overtaken by spirits or demons.

MISS ROJ: So the demons just took hold of my wedges and forced me to kick the drunk son-of-a-bitch into the closet and lock the door. (Wolfe 16)

Homosexuality is commonly referred to in Holiness religious circles as a demon that must be removed. In queer scholar E. Patrick Johnson’s chapter “Gayness in the Black Church,⁴⁰” one of the interviewees- Gerome- blames his same-gender attraction on the Satan and the devil. Johnson goes on to ask him if he believes he can be cured or free from homosexual attraction. The man strongly believes that one can be cured by God of same-gender attraction, a sentiment shared by Mother Bell in *Crying Holy*. The belief in demonic forces is an aspect of the Holiness denomination belief system we see through Ms. Roj. He blames his negative actions such as locking his father in a closet for three days on his “demons.”

Within the interview the Gerome snaps his fingers at various times to emphasize certain points. The snapping of fingers⁴¹ is often associated with Black same-gender loving males. Miss Roj speaks of the power of the snap and his ability to “snap your ass into oblivion” (Wolfe 16). Marlon Riggs describes the power embedded in the snap in his “Black Macho Revisited” essay, “The snap can be as emotionally and politically charged

⁴⁰ This chapter is located in E. Patrick Johnson’s *Sweet Tea* an ethnographic study of Black gay men in the south, published in 2008.

⁴¹ A effeminate male who uses the snapping of his fingers to accentuate communication is often referred to as a “Snap Queen.”

as a clenched fist, can punctuate debate and dialogue like an exclamation point, a comma, an ellipse, or altogether negate the need for words among those who are adept at decoding its nuanced meanings” (Riggs 294). Both Riggs and Wolfe are reclaiming the image of snap queens from the rank of caricature in popular culture to a powerful figure through their work. Gerome’s use of the “snap” associates him with the behavior of the very population of which he claims to no longer be a part. While Miss Roj’s use of snaps indicates her internal power to fight against oppression (Miss Roj’s father); Gerome’s snaps reveal his suppressed desire.

Similar to the space B. Slade creates within the night club and that E. Patrick Johnson theorizes about, a transcendent space is evident in Miss Roj’s invitation for the audience to dance with him. Miss Roj makes sure to inform the audience that is a not a party but a wake, he wants the audience to understand that he dances in spite of his pain. The club experience is refuge from harsh realities of life. In the Bottomless Pit, Miss Roj represents a same-gender loving character who is not asking for acceptance from the church or from anyone else. He is in touch with his spirituality and understands the power that he has within himself. Despite the church’s denial of a space for him and others like him, he reconceptualizes the gospel and claims his own space. “We don’t ask for acceptance. We don’t ask for approval. We know who we are and we move in it” (Wolfe 17-18). This is a level of self-acceptance that is not seen with the other same-gender loving characters in the plays discussed in earlier chapters. Unlike Waters, Miss Roj does not need acceptance from anyone- not even his family. Wolfe takes a stereotype of Black

male gayness⁴² that is used to characterize SGL men as weak and creates a self-assured man of strength despite his lack of desire to conform to society ideals of Black masculinity.

Booty Candy

In the tradition of George C. Wolfe's *The Colored Museum* 25 years earlier, Robert O'Hara crafted *Booty Candy*. The play consists of 10 scenes that satirically explore what it is like to be Black and Queer in present-day society. Wolfe's skits point out the aspects of culture that sets Blacks apart, while O'Hara's piece explores the incongruities of being gay in a world where "Black" no longer means outsider in the same way; yet Black and gay does (Marks). For the purposes of this chapter I focus on one particular skit in *Booty Candy*, "Dreamin in Church." In this piece, the character Rev. Benson speaks to two specific groups: those in the church who seek to exclude queer members, and queer people in the church. He seeks to empower queer people through the language of both the Black church and Black gay culture.

In a single monologue, O'Hara builds upon the narrative of homophobia in Black Churches that we have seen in many of the plays discussed so far, but he also completely deconstructs that narrative and takes the Black church to task. This is the only example in this chapter of the church being taken to task within the venue of a church; it is even more radical because it is the pastor who criticizes the church. This is done through the character of Rev. Benson during a "typical" Sunday morning sermon. The skit begins

⁴² The use of the caricature of Black gay men as "snap queens" can be seen in *In Living Color's* reoccurring segment "Men on Film." Damon Wayans and David Alan Grier portrayed very effeminate highly sexualized men as well as the only representation of LGBT characters on the show. Marlon Riggs criticized the portray as perpetuating "a notion that black gay men are sissies, ineffectual, ineffective, womanish in a way that signifies inferiority."

with Reverend Benson behind the pulpit wearing an elaborate floor length robe. He uses a vernacular and speech style that is very popular in many Black churches. The cadence required of the actor reflects what is stereotypically thought of as Black preaching. Reverend Benson interpellates the audience of the play as the church congregation, by beginning the sermon facing the audience and addressing them as “church.” The audience thus becomes the collective embodiment of the Black Church. He uses a rhetorical device of describing “I HEARD FOLK⁴³” in a very general way. “I HEARD FOLK” are the people who whisper and talk about things they “heard,” he is talking about gossipers. He then moves from describing “I HEARD FOLK” to locating them specifically inside of the church. The “I HEARD FOLK” have graduated from whispering to writing what they have heard and directing it at Reverend Benson. The collective efforts of the “I HEARD FOLK” becomes “THEY HEARD.” He focuses his sermon’s subject on what “THEY HEARD,” and warns the congregation that he is “liable to say something they don’t wanna heah/ im liable to put my foot down in somethin/ that dont smell too fresh or feel just right/ cos the THEY HEARD FOLK are fit/ (as some might say)/ FIT/ TO BE READ” (O’Hara 8). This is an indication that Rev. Benson is preparing to call the church to task in a manner that is indicative of Black gay culture. Reading comes out of the gay ballroom culture of NYC in the 1970’s. The process of reading involves telling someone about themselves and according to Dorian Corey in *Paris is Burning* (1990), is the real art form of insult. It is a method used by LGBT people of color, to not just insult each other, but also to prepare themselves within their own communities from insults and

⁴³ Reverend Benson is referring to the gossipers within the church.

attacks from non-LGBT people⁴⁴. “Reading” is a colloquialism that has maintained importance in the vocabulary of LGBT, particularly those in NYC since the 1980’s.

The letter sent to Rev. Benson notifies him about the “sexually perverted young men” who sing in the choir and have been seen “kissing inside of certain bars” (7-8). The association between male members of the choir and homosexual relationships is nothing new. Through Tonex, Donnie McClurkin and others, we have seen how prominent same-sex relationships and desires are among the musicians of the Black church. The letter further attributes this sexual “pervasion” on the young men’s lack of a father figure or the shortcomings of their mother. In *Deliverance* and through the testimony of Donnie McClurkin, we have seen this as central narrative for why some males experience same-sex attraction. The letter suggests that these type of people need to be removed from the church “cos gawd dont llow no sin folk/ in the kingdom/ so we shouldn’t llow that kind/ in our church” (9). The letter ends by reminding Rev. Benson that they know he will understand because he is “gawd-fearin.” The letter writers’ self-identifying as “the folks/ who pay yo salary” is meant to remind Rev. Benson of the power that the “THEY HEARD” people possess (10).

The play thus critiques the power that money and economics play in decisions about church policies. In *Muddy the Water*, *Order My Steps* and *The Contract*, we have seen how powerful members of the church can be in influencing how the pastor of the church responds to the concerns of parishioners. Terrell was effectively removed from his position as pastor because he did not follow the Church Council’s request that he fire

⁴⁴ The continued relevance of reading was seen in 2012 through “Ima Read” by queer rapper Zebra Kat. The song quickly became a hit in the underground gay community and mainstream fashion world.

Mark. This type of authority stifles the pastor's ability to make decisions when he must be concerned with his own livelihood and career. The threat of losing financial security and support is a method that the institution of the Black church uses to maintain hegemony. The members who wrote the letter are trying to use the power they possess as the providers of Rev. Benson's salary to persuade him to do something about the choir boy's overt non-normative sexuality. The invocation of "God" and his word often absolves people of their heterosexism, sexism, racism, etc. because they are simply doing what "God says." Anyone who fails to act in accordance to this is seen as being disobedient to God and not righteous. According to the letter writers, because God does not let sinners (homosexuals) in the kingdom, there should be no place for them in the church. The righteousness of the pastor and his relationship with God are often questioned when he fails to properly discipline sexually deviant (gay) members of the congregation.

Rev. Benson addresses these questions when he addresses the rumors surrounding his own sexuality. As a pastor, there are certain expectations for how he must conduct his personal life-- namely he should be married. In *The Contract, Order My Steps, Muddy the Water*, and even in the life of Anthony Charles Williams II, marriage was used as a way to dispel any suspicions of homosexuality or served as a potential cure for same-sex attraction. The Reverend's lack of a wife causes the members to speculate about his sexuality. This shows that the members understand that humans are all sexual people; they do not assume that he is not sexually active. The idea of celibacy is not seen as plausible, therefore they demand to know "what you been doin," how you been doin it"

and “WHERE is yo’ NUTT” (19). Instead of addressing the concerns of the congregants, he lets them know what he does is none of their business “and i just wanna say WHAT i do HOW i do it and the WHO WHERE and WHEN of it thats **MY** bizness” (19). While refusing to disclose details can be seen in some circumstance as evidence of shame regarding one’s sexuality, he is simply affirming control of his body and his attractions. He then urges the church to really examine and see who their pastor is. The visual image that follows of Rev. Benson displaying his high heel shoes, putting on his wig and pulling out a purse is far more powerful than any verbal statement (fig 3). While cross-dressing is not an indication of one’s sexual preference, it is a daring statement to send from the pulpit and would elicit shock from the audience and congregation.



(Fig 3)

Instead of allowing the congregation to leave and not face the sight of him in drag he declares, “im tired/ of creepin round/ im tired of sneakin round/ im TIRED/ watchin every which way I turn/ lookin to see who lookin in my direction/ im tired / of playin that game” (15). The performance of hiding who one is and the shame that comes with living a double life is draining. This same “tiredness” is what motivated Daryl in *The Contract* to reveal his sexual orientation, risking his reputation as a minister, his church and the life he built for himself. This “tiredness” of putting on a facade is what made Mark leave his family and friends rather than continue the charades or deal with the consequences of his choices. Rev. Benson is doing something none of the other characters have done in the other dramatic works previously explored; he forces the audience to witness his defiance of gender norms and expresses his fatigue with embodying the “don’t ask, don’t tell” script. He then proclaims that:

yo words

cant TOUCH me

yo words

cant REACH me

im too HIGH nah

cos i gat the word of GAWD

deep down inside my soul

to protect me

and see me through ALLLL this mess

GAWDS word is FIRE

SHUT UP IN MY BONES (15-16)

He proclaims that he is protected against their homophobia by God. He crushes the script of “deliverance” and “don’t ask, don’t tell.” His sexuality is neither hindrance nor impediment to the anointing of God. He also proclaims that God will see him through whatever backlash this sermon will cause. While, Rev. Benson does not explicitly claim a sexual identity nor disclose his sexuality, it is obvious from the text that he embodies a queer persona. This unapologetic proclamation and affirmation of his divinity is similar to what we see in Williams’s persona of B. Slade. Rev. Benson reinterprets intended insults levied at homosexuals like “flamin” as him being on “FIIYAAAHH.” In the Black church being on fire for the Lord is seen as a being an instrument to do God’s work.

His sermon also does the work of liberation theology by paralleling Jesus with the oppressed. This is in contrast to the recent surge of the prosperity gospel within Black communities, which preaches that God desires his followers to be rich and prosperous. This type of preaching maintains that hardships, particularly economic ones, are signs that people are not following God’s will. Within Jesus’s ministry the bulk of the negative criticism he endured came from religious leaders. By referencing Jesus’s experiences in Galilee he posits Jesus’s experiences with that of the so-called “sexually perverted” choirboys. They too have to endure negative criticisms as the objects of scorn by religious people. He reminds the church of the persecution that their own leader, Jesus Christ, endured and to questions if they want to continue the legacy of persecution. Rev. Benson claims Jesus for himself and invites the church to: “check yo self/ against my

JESUS/ you oughta/ check yo self/ against my GAWD” (16). By inviting the church to “check yo self” he is making reference to rhetorical device used in urban environments. It also makes reference to a popular 90’s song⁴⁵. The definition of ‘check yo self,’ according to urbandictionary.com, is to “To reevaluate your actions after realizing that your current course of action is likely to lead you into a troublesome situation” (urbandictionary.com). He is indicating that the actions that the Black church has taken is causing them to be in a problematic situation and advising them to change their course of action. The homophobia and patriarchy embedded in the church is harming the Black church.

His focus at the end of the sermon is no longer the “They Heard” people or the church, he is now preaching directly to the queer members of the church. The ending of the sermon utilizes the “sing-song” style that is traditionally used towards the end of sermons done in the Black religious vernacular tradition that emphasizes that the pastor is filled with the “spirit.” He speaks to the choirboys, whose behavior motivated the “THEY HEARD” people to contact him and utilizes the climax of the sermon to speak directly to queer people in the church. He tells them that they do not have to be afraid of who they are and what they do. This affirmation is made even powerful coming from a pastor. We have seen though the Deliverance script that McClurkin and Williams as pastors have used the pulpit to condemn and demonize queer people. O’Hara pays homage to Miss Roj through Rev. Benson’s statement “if ya feel lak SNAPPIN sometimes/ up and down and round again/THATS ALLLRIGHT” (19). The reverend explicitly identifies

⁴⁵ “Check Yo Self” appeared on Ice Cube’s third album *The Predator* in 1993. It features rappers DAS EFX.

behaviors that have been demonized and negatively associated with the Black gay community and tells the queer members of the church that they are alright. This is a vastly different message than McClurkin's concerning the need to fix "effeminate" behaviors in young men. Rev. Benson's message that it is ok to "dress up" through his revelation of a "divine dress" under his robe is the message that queer youth like Darryl needed to hear when his mother discovered him wearing a dress. His reference to gay black pop culture icon "Ru Paul" further aligns in the ball tradition of "reading" in the Black gay community. He advises them to:

SASHAY

SANTAY

SASHAY

SANTAY

SANTAY

SANTAY

TURN TO THE LEFT

TURN TO THE RIGHT

WERK

YOOOOOOOUUUUUU BETTA WERK!!! (19).

The message of pride in a queer identity from a religious leader is something not seen in any of the other plays. While Waters in *Crying Holy* was an out queer man, we still see a level of shame around his sexuality and disease through interactions with his mother. In many ways it seems that he is burdened with the task of convincing his mother that his

sexuality is not a sin or something he should be ashamed of. Rev. Benson used his sermon to not only call out those seeking to exclude queer people from the church, but to also refute the notion that one should be ashamed of their sexuality. More so than any other character in the plays I have explored, Rev. Benson is an example of what it means to be unapologetically and unashamedly Christian and SGL. However, the piece is entitled “Dreamin Church” and it is meant to be comedic and satirical, yet there is a deep amount of hurt and pain that is layered within the work. I believe that O’Hara is countering the negative experience of SGL people in religious environments through this skit, which embodies what he dreams church can be for SGL people. His vision of inclusion at times is so radical that it can only be seen as a satire. O’Hara radically reimagines what church can be, using the church’s own religious dogma and texts.

Conclusion:

The script of acceptance is an especially difficult one in institutions and cultures that not only reject you but also teach that you should also reject yourself. The men in this chapter bravely embrace who they are and critique the institutions, communities and family members who fail to affirm them for who they are. B. Slade’s lyrics and the playwrights’ texts allow them to determine the manner in which their sexuality and religion are performed. They accomplish this with the use of their own words and experiences. In his essay “Does Your Mama Know About Me?,” Hemphill highlights the interconnectedness of the Black community.

Our mothers and our fathers are waiting for us. Our sisters are waiting. Our communities are waiting for us to come home. They need our love, our talents and

skills, and we need theirs. They may not understand everything about us, but they will remain ignorant, misinformed and lonely for us, and we for them, for as long as we stay away, hiding in communities that have never really welcomed us or the gifts we bring. (300)

Discarding aspects of Black communities and institutions because they are homophobic is not an adequate solution for SGL men. Often the only alternative is to seek refuge in racist white gay communities. In white gay communities Black people must discard aspects of their culture in order to be tolerated, and Black SGL must deal with the reality they may never truly be accepted by the gay mainstream.

The texts explored here show that the Black community, and specifically the Black church, will never reach its fullness by denying access or demanding silence based on one's sexuality. In Williams' transformation from Tonex to B. Slade, we see his desire to bridge the supposed barriers that exist between his sexuality, gender and religion. Through his music and style he continues to claim a part of the Black church community in which he was raised. His performance at the pre-Stellar Awards emphasizes his desire to come back home and share his gifts as well as his knowledge that one does not need to hide themselves in order to be loved and accepted. Similarly, Sylvester James needed to return home to the "Black church" towards the end of his life, despite his connection and experience in the mainstream white gay culture. There was comfort in the preaching, the music and the culture of the Black church that called him home. He was fortunate enough to find a church that allowed him to bring all himself and not deny his sexuality like the church of his youth. He was able to have the ultimate homecoming by having his final

service at church be a celebration of his life and also be a chance to share his love of church with people who had never been to a Black church prior to his death.

Despite the knowledge of the struggle of coming home, Waters understands the importance of coming home and giving his family the opportunity to view his Black, queer and AIDS-ridden body. As expressed by Hemphill, without access to their queer and SGL brothers and sisters, Black families and communities will remain ignorant about them. When their SGL brothers and sisters are missing from their lives and communities, families also suffer from their absence. Mother Bell speaks of her son and holds on to the words of his poetry to survive his absence from the family. Although she is not able to really deal and comprehend the fullness of who her son is, she needs his presence in her life.

The abuse suffered by Miss Roj at the hands of his father reminds audience of the physical and not just emotional pain that Black SGL men must endure in their efforts to come home as themselves. O'Hara's "Dreamin' Church" serves as fantasy for many SGL Black people. Reverend Benson's monologue serves as an invitation to a homecoming of sorts to a population who have told that they are not welcome as who they are. The acceptance script can be the hardest one to perform, because SGL men risk being denied the safety and love of a home. Yet, it is so important for them to enact this script and return home-- "there is no place else to go that will be worth so much effort and love" (Hemphill 300).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect.” ~ Audre Lorde

During September 2012, B. Slade performed a series of Friday night shows at an intimate venue in Venice Beach. I was able to attend the September 28th performance. I arrived early to assure I would get a good seat although I knew B. Slade was the last act for the night. The other performers that night included rock bands and pop piano music. As I waited I noticed there weren't many Black people in attendance, and I was afraid the turn-out for B. Slade would be disappointing. These fears quickly disappeared around eleven. The previous bands and their fans cleared out, and B. Slade's begin to pour in. His seven member band quickly took over the stage, as a young hip Black audience emerged. From my conversation with various members of the audience I learned their knowledge of Williams differed. Some had never heard of B. Slade, others knew him from his Tonex days, but the majority present was familiar with his new musical persona as B. Slade. There was a great familiarity between the crowd, the band and B. Slade. He shouted out various family and friends in attendance, he even acknowledged me. This created a very personable and loving environment. At one point of the show, B. Slade stopped to acknowledge the birthday of one of his band members and invited the band member's wife onstage to sing him "Happy Birthday." After which B. Slade took over and, infused the birthday song with a gospel style that transformed the venue into a

church. The crowd, familiar with both gospel and the Black church, begin to clap and shout with B. Slade as he sang how grateful he was that God gave him “One more year,” in reference to the additional year of life his band member was given. As he became more emotional, or caught in the spirit, he begin speaking about how he still had the same insides and anointing on his life as he did previously. He referred to himself as a covert operative working for God, “I’m on kingdom assignment, don’t blow my cover.” As the mood died down, he commented that he had not shouted like that in years. During this period of show we saw a glimpse of his former persona, Tonex. The liveliness of the venue, the band and the audience who all shared knowledge of the Black church experience made this different from the Joe’s pub performance. Williams was among family, and his shouting was organic and impromptu. His energy was matched by the audience. B. Slade went on to sing a variety of songs, many sexually suggestive.

I begin the conclusion with this story because Anthony Charles Williams II shows more than any other single person in this dissertation an evolution from self-condemnation to a self-affirming SGL man. His music continues to push boundaries as he has become more comfortable with himself. Most importantly, his music and performance indicate his refusal to be silent about his experiences.

The three scripts discussed in this project are not designed to represent all SGL Black men experiences within the Black church. There is a variety of ways that SGL Black men perform their sexuality in religious contexts as well as a variety of ways that people react to their performances. The exploration of these three scripts provides valuable insight into how SGL people understand and develop their identities in these

environments. The texts explore the ways SGL men identify and negotiate the spaces of community, home, family and self through the church. In many of the plays, the community that surrounded the SGL men was the church. As seen in *Muddy the Water*, Mark's church family was also his community. The influence of his community in his personal life is seen in his choosing of a lover, Robbie, from within his church community. Having a lover from within one's own community is beneficial because the lover is knowledgeable of the culture of that community. Indeed, there were fewer suspicions concerning the time he spent with Robbie because the time spent together was viewed as part of his job. At the same time, his community also made it more difficult for him to accept his sexuality through its depiction of homosexuality and expectations of heteronormativity.

The texts also hint to the existence of communities where SGL loving men are accepted and affirmed. In *Crying Holy*, Waters speaks of the community that he, Meredith and his deceased partner created for themselves. This is also seen in the community Robbie found for himself when he left home for NYC. These texts indicate the importance of SGL men developing their own communities that accept them and their sexuality. It was the strength that both Robbie and Waters developed inside of those communities that sustained them at home where they faced intolerance. Conversely it was the lack of affirmation present in Mark's (church) community that caused him to flee and not return.

The history of queer Black people in various historical movements have often been erased or minimized. The sexuality of Harlem Renaissance's writer Langston

Hughes and the role Bayard Rustin played in the Civil Rights Movement have often been erased or diminished in history. Despite how valuable a contribution Rustin was to organization of the CRM, many of the powerful religious leaders did not want to be associated with an (out) homosexual. Initially, the threat of rumors linking Rustin in a sexual relationship with King, encouraged King to distance himself from Rustin

Family is also a major influence in how Black SGL men perform their sexuality in religious contexts. Darrell's mother dictates to him her expectations of Christian masculinity, a type of masculinity that reflects notions of heteronormativity. Rachelle's influence in her son's life is seen in his desire to please her, and his attempt to rid himself of his same-sex attraction. This desire to perform the expectations laid out by one's parents is also seen within Daryl in *The Contract*. As a child he understood that he was being groomed to take over his father's church, as well as his father's disapproval of certain behaviors associated as more feminine. The expectation of a heterosexual life led to his marriage to Deborah. Once married, he understood how important his marriage was to image of his ministry. His position as a mega-pastor was helped by his father's legacy and the presence of a strong supportive wife. In *Order My Steps*, Selena was able to influence and convince Malik that his sexuality could be changed. Although he understood his sexuality, she was able to make him believe that love and prayer would be enough to make him heterosexual.

Finally, how SGL men look at themselves plays a great role into their performance of their sexuality. In *Deliverance*, the hate and shame that Darrell felt after his failure to be delivered during the exorcism was the catalyst needed for him to

examine how he thought about God and his relationship with the divine. Darryl in *The Contract* after struggling with how both he and God view his sexuality eventually comes to the conclusion that his sexuality is a gift from God. This revelation occurs when he is alone, after he is ostracized from his faith community and his family.

The three scripts discussed in this manuscript all inform each other and are interconnected. For many, the Deliverance script ends one of two ways. A “successful” performance means that one no longer experiences same-sex attraction and maintains a relationship with an opposite-sex mate. The other outcome is the person with same-sex attraction no longer feels that his attraction is incompatible with his relationship to God and questions the need for Deliverance. We see this questioning occur in Darrell at the end of *Deliverance*. “Successful” performances of Deliverance often end with marriage; in the texts analyzed, however, we have seen several occasions where the same-sex attraction remain even after the person has been “delivered” and married. This is evident in *Order my Steps*, where Malik initially believes that his prayers and love for his wife will be enough to end his same-sex attraction. Darryl in *The Contract* speaks about his attempts to be delivered and focus on his relationship with wife. Williams (Tonex), who speaks of wanting to be delivered and God’s power to deliver him, is supposedly shown through his marriage. Yet, as we see in Chapter Four his same–sex attraction never went away. Each of these men emphasize that even when “Deliverance” is successfully enacted, the success is relative. Each of these men displays Christian masculinity through his participation in a heteronormative institution like marriage.

Their enactments of Deliverance lead directly to their subsequent enactment of DADT. After buying into heteronormative ideas of marriage, these men must now maintain these performances by being silent about their continued same-sex attraction even as the presence of their spouses diminishes questions about their sexual attraction. Inversely, it was Rev. Benson's single status that stirred up questions about his sexuality from his congregation. Both not asking and not telling becomes a very draining script for men like Darryl to maintain. In the case of Malik, his AIDS diagnosis makes it impossible to continue not telling the truth. Darryl's public confession about his participation in the contract leads him to a place where he can finally accept himself as a SGL man and also child of God who is loved and affirmed by the creator. Malik's diagnosis and the ending of his marriage also ushers him into the performance of the script of acceptance.

The exploration of these three scripts using texts created by SGL Black men and their allies shows their desire to change the narrative and the conversation about sexuality in religious contexts. Through their work they are fighting the narrative of Blacks as hyper-homophobic while also exposing other equally divisive issues within the church. Homophobia in many instances is just a symptom of a larger problem, particularly the culture of silence and erasure within Black church communities. We see the issue of silence regarding the sexism embedded in the church. The anger that the women in *Muddy the Water* feel is directly tied to the marginalization of women within the church. Deborah, in *The Contract*, had been taught since her youth that her gender made her inadequate. She eventually attends seminary and becomes a minister, despite her father's

beliefs. Yet, she still possesses internalized feelings of inadequacy, which cause her to maintain a marriage with a man who does not desire her. She overcompensates for her feelings of inadequacy through her performance of control.

These texts examine and challenge community silences around sexuality. Silence about sexuality reinforces a rape culture within the church where both boys and girls are victimized. In *Crying Holy* as well as in the lives of McClurkin, Williams and Sylvester we see young men being sexually abused in an institution that refuses to talk about sexuality in any other context outside of heterosexual marriage. The importance placed on upholding heteronormative standards of masculinity places can instill a sense of shame involving sexuality and their abuse among young men and women. It also creates a venue where men can repeatedly abuse and take advantage of men within the church. Recently, the scandal involving inappropriate sexual relationships between Bishop Eddie Long and several young men in his church highlighted on a national level a problem that is present in many local communities. By sharing their stories and creative work, these SGL men and their allies are proclaiming that they will no longer honor the culture of silence embedded in the Black church.

Some SGL men choose to continue their affiliation with the Black church as members or even casual attenders. The number of Black churches that have made the decision to be places of affirmation and not condemnation for same-sex loving individuals is steadily growing. In the aftermath of President Obama's May 2012 announcement of his support of same-sex marriages, many Black pastors condemned his support and a group wrote a letter to announce their disapproval. In response, Otis Moss

III, senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, penned and read an open letter to some of the Black ministers who condemned Obama's position. He cited the hypocrisy as well as the need to address all types of sexuality in the Black church. Similarly, Pastor Fredrick Haynes III of Friendship-West Baptist Church in Houston, Texas addressed his congregation along similar themes. Haynes stated, "Black folk can't even deal with issue of homosexuality because we got issues with sexuality. And because we have issues with sexuality we can't have a healthy discussion about homosexuality." Both of the men redirected the conversation back to those who voiced strong opposition towards same-sex relationships and spoke about how insecurities, hypocrisy and prejudices, not theology, are the cause for their disdain towards SGL people. Like Paul in *Order my Steps*, they suggest that people in the church do not like to deal with SGL people because it reminds them of their own issues and they often project their own negative feelings of self onto SGL people. Haynes states that, "we love to judge other folks' sins because it keeps it off of us as oppose to looking at us" (Never Would've Made It). Both of these pastors have over 5000 members and large national followings. Their statements distance them from other mega-church pastors who either do not publically comment on issues of sexuality or resort to using the *Bible* to justify their condemnation of SGL and gay marriages.

Rev. Delman Coates of Mount Ennon Baptist Church also has become an outspoken voice on gay rights in his Maryland community. He believes it imperative that he help "change the narrative" concerning where Black mega-church pastors stand on gay rights. Since the announcement of his support of same-sex marriage equality in 2012, over 1000 people have joined his church, yet about 10% of his 8000 member

congregation left the church because of his position. Rev. Coates stated that, “I didn’t want my silence to be interpreted as consent. I just thought it was important for me to raise my voice on this issue, to really shift the narrative around where the black church is on gay rights.” However, Coates support for gay rights is political and civil, not religious. He will not allow gay marriages to be performed at his church, but is willing to fight for gays to have the right to the right to marry. In this particular case the support for social justice and civil rights has been economically beneficial for him and his church. The support allows him to be seen as an advocate without having to really make the changes needed for the LGBT members of his church to be included or to have deal from the pulpit with sexuality from a theological perspective. In many ways, he is continuing the legacy of ignoring SGL people and the culture of silence in the church. The texts in this project remind us that the church is not simply a religious institution but it is also an economic entity, which functions in a capitalistic society. While it is important to recognize progress, it also important not to allow queer people presences to be recruited into churches, without having their needs and interest served by these religious institutions.

Covenant Baptist Church in D.C., founded in 1945, is perhaps the greatest example of how economics is often tied to many Black churches’ failure to affirm and accept their queer members. Similar to Daryl in *The Contract*, Dr. Wiley who became pastor of Covenant Baptist in 1985, was preceded by his father. His wife Christine Wiley began serving as his co-pastor in 2004. Around this time they begin to push for greater inclusion of LGBT people in their congregation. It is interesting to note that initially there

was no vocal opposition in the congregation about the pastors' new initiative to include SGL individuals. Instead, the opposition focused on, the gender of the new co-pastor, Rev. Christine Wiley, revealing the continued sexism embedded in the Black church and the uneasiness many people feel towards women leadership and power. As seen throughout Chapter Three, oppression is always linked to other oppressions. In 2007, unlike the other churches mentioned, Covenant did not just preach inclusion and accept "tolerance" of LGBT people from their congregation- they put their messages into action. The pastors performed two same-sex marriages in the church during the summer of 2007, prior to the passage of same-sex marriages in D.C. The ceremony of two same-sex couples within the church pushed the limits of tolerance of many of their members. Their decision to perform their marriage resulted not only in the loss of over half their congregation, but also a lawsuit. They were sued for \$250,000 by member Yvonne Moore. Moore wanted a portion of her tithes returned that she had paid throughout the 30 years she was a member. She felt that the Wileys' did not respect the church members who had funded the church with their tithes because of their decision to perform the same-sex marriages. She eventually dropped the lawsuit and like many others left Covenant. Since then Covenant has gained many new members, who do not just tolerate but also affirm SGL people in the church.

Nonetheless, many ministers are not willing to risk losing members over their stance on same-sex relationship. In *The Contract*, Darryl states that he chooses not to preach about issues of sexuality due to the divisiveness of the topic. In *Order My Steps*, *Muddy the Water* and *Booty Candy*, we see three pastors who are threatened with the loss

of their jobs and/or members for even the perception of tolerating same-sex relationships and people. Williams' decision to publicly affirm his same-sex attraction and SGL identity caused him to lose his record deal and have many of his performances canceled. There are economic rewards for maintaining silence not only about issues of sexuality, but also about sexism within the Black church. The texts in this dissertation demonstrate how intricately related capitalism is to sexism, homophobia, heterosexism and the maintenance of a culture of silence. Terrell in *Muddy the Water* and Rev. Benson in *Booty Candy* are examples of both queer men and their allies who refuse to let capitalism and economics scare them into silence and passivity in regards to sexuality in the Black church. Williams also took on great financial risk with his revelation, losing a large part of his fan base. These examples suggest that economics and money are no longer enough to insure silence regarding SGL issues and individuals in the Black church.

This dissertation reveals a larger need for further and continued exploration about gender and sexuality in the Black church, particularly how both heterosexual and queer woman perform their sexuality within religious contexts, and exploring how sexism, patriarchy and capitalism influence these performances. By revealing the scripts that SGL men in the Black church have performed in response to the constructions of a Black Christian (heterosexual) masculinity, this analysis also illuminates how not keeping silence about homophobia reveal how Black Christian (female) femininity and opposite-sex relations and marriage likewise have been constructed to fulfill certain needs within the Black community and particularly the Black church.

The writers of the texts examined in this dissertation are continuing the legacy of Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs and others, who refused to be silent about the intersectional oppressions that queer Black people experience in their lives. Writing and performing are weapons to both combat and end oppression. The chapters examine not only why these men perform these scripts but also challenge the reasons they are told they have to. This dissertation reminds us what can happen when tongues are untied. Marlon Riggs ends his award winning documentary *Tongues Untied*: “Now, I hear. I was mute, tongue-tied. Burdened by shadows and silence. Now I speak and my burden is lightened, lifted, free.” There is freedom that comes when queer people redefine and tell their own stories. These artists and others like them are answering Audre Lorde’s questions in “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”:

What are the words you do not have yet? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am a woman, because I am black, because I am myself, a black woman warrior poet doing my work, come to ask you, are you doing yours?

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APPENDIX A

GAY CHRISTIAN MINISTRY WATCH “BELIEFS”

1. We believe the Bible to be the final and only authority in matters concerning sexuality and the wholeness of mankind. We believe the scriptures are self-validating. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God”(II Timothy 3:16), consequently we hold that the totality of Biblical canon reject contemporary theories and philosophies of genetic homosexuality.

2. We believe that real freedom from homosexual addictions only come through Jesus Christ. We fervently believe that Jesus was the perfect embodiment of truth and that knowing Him makes one free (John 14:6, 8:32). We hold that freedom comes, and is maintained, not through religious methodology, but through a life of submission to Christ, accountability at a Bible-practicing church, and walking daily according to the precepts found in the Holy Word.

3. We believe that according to II Corinthians 5:17 that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away and behold: all things are become new.” Because the Bible declares newness of life in Christ, we reject the theory that one cannot change ”sexual orientation.” This phrase –humanistic in origin– suggests one’s sinful proclivities are immutable, thereby being in direct conflict with the scriptures (John 3:3, Matthew 16:24).

4. We believe that in order to live a life free from sexual immorality, one must be born again and then ask for the free gift of the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 1:8, He (the Spirit) will empower the receiver to be witnesses unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Freedom is not perfectionism nor is it absolutism in conduct, but an acceptance that disciples of Christ must (1) continually lay aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us, (2) repent and confess their sins to God who is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us all unrighteousness and (3) cast down every thought which seeks to exalt itself above the knowledge of Christ.

5. We encourage persons struggling against sexual and gender identity issues to seek professional counseling for the solutions they desire. Such counseling should not be a replacement for repentance but as a supplement to one’s Christian journey to maturity in Christ. We caution that those providing the counseling, in order to be effective, must base their counseling on Biblical principles. We therefore reject all practices such as yoga, transcendental meditation, spirit-guides and other new-age based techniques that focus on humanistic solutions to the spiritual problem of sin.

6. We believe the Bible speaks clearly to the conditions and consequences of same gender sexual sin without regards to the chronology of society and its ever-changing social mores. The timeless message of the Bible clearly condemns homosexuality in every form, but not without providing the remedy by way of repentance and faith in the

work of Christ on the cross. Our response to that glorious work is to conform our lives to the image of Jesus Christ.

7. We affirm the sanctity and worth of every human life, whether homosexual or heterosexual. We believe the agape love of the Father extends to all persons regardless of response. While all persons are God's creations, all are not God's children. Thus, we hold homosexual behavior and expression as outside of the will of the Father for *His children*.

8. We believe that the church is God's ordained agency in the earth, commissioned to communicate and demonstrate the love and judgment of God. Therefore, we call upon the church, which is the body of our Lord Jesus, to cease its practice of rejecting homosexuals who come to her for help. We hold that the church should openly preach and teach a redemptive message of deliverance and healing for all persons have experienced the ravages of sexual sin. It should also provide applicable ministries to support and nurture these believers into maturity. Likewise, we urge the church to cease its practice of allowing persons, steadfastly unrepentant of homosexuality, to operate in positions of influence and authority. For the scriptures wisely admonish us that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (I Cor 5:6).

APPENDIX B

ANTHONY CHARLES WILLIAM II DISCOGRAPHY

Tonex
 1994: *Silent X: The Self Confrontation*
 1995: *Damage*
 1997: *Pronounced Toe-Nay* (underground release)
 1999: *Personal Jesus (Remixes)*
 2000: *Pronounced Toe-Nay* (international release)
 2000: *Circu\$\$*
 2001: *Tonéx Presents MSS Dynasty: The Hostile Takeover*
 2002: *O2*
 2003: *The O'ryn Project: Figure 'O Speech*
 2003: *Protranslutionary*
 2003: *Oak Park 92105* (underground release)
 2003: *Remyx: Pronounced Ree-Mix*
 2004: *Out The Box*
 2005: *Ain't Remyx*
 2005: *Oak Park 92105* (iTunes release)
 2006: *Oak Park 921'06*
 2006: *Banganyn EP*
 2006: *The London Letters*
 2007: *Oak Park 921'06 Japanese Import*
 2007: *Stereotype: Steel & Velvet* (MySpace release, listen-only)
 2008: *T.Bizzy: The Album*
 2008: *Banganyn Remyxes*
 2008: *Tonéx Presents T.R.O.N. (The Ryderz of Nureaumerica)*
 2008: *The Naked Truth*
 2008: *Bapost.o.g.i.c.*
 2008: *Rainbow EP*
 2009: *TEMET NOSCE Nag Champion Mixtape*
 2009: *Unspoken*
 2009: *Circu\$\$* (Digital Release, Final Configuration)
 2009: *OakPark 921'06* (Digital Release)
 2009: *Baposto.g.i.c. Mixtape* (Digital Tracked Version)
 2009: *Personal Jesus: Remixes* (Digital EP)
 2010: *The Parking Lot* (Digital Release)
 2011: *GospOp* (Digital Release)
 2012: *Playlist: The Very Best of Tonéx* (compilation)

B. Slade

2010: *Dawn O' the Unicorn* (mixtape)

2010: *A Brilliant Catastrophe (Alpha)*

2010: *A Brilliant Catastrophe (Beta)*

2010: *Dance Floor Arsonist: The Jack5on Magic Mixtape*

2011: *Stereotype: Collector's Edition*

2011: *Diesel*

2011: *Songs O' Lament* (compilation)

2011: *Stealth*

2012: *The Children* (compilation)

2012: *Knowing*

2012: *Deep Purple*

2012: *Cigar* (compilation)

2012: *Deep & Slow* (mixtape)

2012: *B.Slade Live at the WitZend*

2013: *Stunt B%\$@H*

