



Mixed Communities Require Mixed Theories: Using Mills to Broaden Goffman's Exploration of Identity Within the GBLT Communities

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Abstract

The central objective of this paper is to attempt to counter an overly-rigid theoretical approach in data analysis. Implicit in the push to identify and follow one proper theoretical stream is the idea that one's particular theoretical approach will always be plausible and contains an inherent 'value' over any other approach. That being said, the purpose of this paper is two-fold. The first is to argue that a rigid theoretical approach to understanding people from non-homogenized communities leaves the analysis wanting. Instead, I refer to a more flexible nature of using a mixed-method approach to analysis, which will generate an appropriately pluralistic representation of someone from a pluralist community. Secondly, this paper suggests that a mixed-method approach should include both a micro and a macro analysis. In this vein, I put forward the benefits of combining the theoretical approaches of both Goffman and Mills. In doing so, I am not suggesting that Goffman and Mills are the only theorists to use. Rather, the combination of these two theories is useful for understanding an intersubjective approach to myself. A flexible epistemological approach would recognize that other situations might call for the use of other theorists.

Keywords: Mills, Goffman, Gay, Queer, Mixed-Methods, Methodology, Reflexivity, Sociological Imagination, Symbolic Interactionism, Class

Introduction

1.1 As a working-class gay male, I have often had to face many contradictions within my identity. I enjoy cooking and musicals, but also revel in my shed full of power tools. I am critical of mass media but, again, I really enjoy the 'fluffiness' of musical theatre. These discrepancies have often caused problems for me as people try to define my actions and interests. And, in the construction of my 'self,' such contradictions have forced me to be hyper-aware of who I am and how I appear to others. Erving Goffman (1959) offers a dramaturgical theory that is particularly useful for understanding my interactions as I move between socializing with political activists, chefs, building contractors, and other gay people. However, an application of Goffman's 'Presentation of Self' (1959) is limiting in that it only explains my particular make-up within an

isolated framework of such social interactions as cook/recipes, carpenter/power tools, and gay/musicals. There is little room for a gay/power tools, or a chef/musicals relationship. To further develop an understanding of my varied positions—especially in regards to the influence of other positions that I encounter—C. Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘sociological imagination’ (1959) helps to expand Goffman’s micro-analysis into a broader understanding of ‘why’ I might present myself in one way and not another. Through a discussion of both Goffman and Mills’ theories, I will argue that a mixed-method approach to social research, one focused on both micro and macro levels of analysis, would enhance Goffman’s theory beyond its focus on individuals in their immediate settings by adding a focus on the larger structural forces that influence the shape of the world people inhabit. Though it is imperative that we understand what someone is doing when they interact directly with other people, it is implicit that there is also a larger ‘why’ behind their actions. As with myself, there is a need for a mixed-methods approach when studying any individual that is part of a community, particularly one as diverse as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, and queer community. My identity is not singular; it is a composite. Similarly, as the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans (GLBT) community is not homogeneous, I would surmise that the use of a singular approach to understanding the GLBT community is too limiting.

1.2 Though this paper makes references to the various GLBT communities, in the absence of a fully organized research project, I will instead focus on my direct experiences as a gay man who has worked with others in these communities. In no way am I implying that my experiences are either universal, or that my analysis holds for all identity constructs. Some inferences may cross genders and sexualities while others do not; that is the role of other research projects to determine. Instead, I propose using myself, and my experiences, as a way of understanding my particular socialization in relation to ‘the big picture.’ My own personal experiences are merely the most direct aspect that I can speak to.

1.3 During the course of my (albeit limited) studies, I have encountered a number of professors that have espoused the benefits of mixing qualitative research methods with quantitative methods. And though this is a laudable point for discussion, there seems to be less dialogue on the benefits of using a variety of theoretical approaches to data analysis. In part, this paper is a response to one professor’s inflexible positioning of a micro-analysis over any macro considerations, and the many debates with fellow students based on a fixed positioning of one theory over another.^[1] I acknowledge that not all researchers rigidly hold to one theory and one theory only, however, there is a consistent theme that has popped-up during my pursuit of sociological research methods: that of using the *right* form of analysis. Implicit in the push to identify and follow the proper theoretical stream is the idea that one theoretical approach will *always* be plausible and contains an inherent ‘value’ over any other approach. That being said, the purpose of this paper is two-fold. The first is to argue that an overly rigid theoretical approach to understanding people from non-homogenized communities leaves the analysis wanting. Instead, I refer to a more flexible nature of using a mixed-method approach to analysis, which will generate an appropriately pluralistic representation of someone from a pluralist community. This may sound trite and obvious, but in light of authors like Sheila Jeffreys’ proposal of radical feminism (and her argument for the complete repudiation of anything masculine or ‘male’) (2003), this is still an argument that needs to be continuously made. Secondly, this paper suggests that a mixed-method approach should include both a micro and a macro analysis. In this vein, I put forward the benefits of combining the theoretical approaches of both Goffman and Mills. In doing so, I am not suggesting that Goffman and Mills are the only theorists to use. Rather, the combination of these two theories is useful for understanding an intersubjective approach to myself. A flexible epistemological approach would recognize that other situations might call for the use of other theorists. I will briefly discuss this point in the next section.

Defining a mixed-methods approach

2.1 To understand why one might combine theories of analysis, I would first like to define my ‘mixed-method approach.’ In its simplest form, I am referring to a mixed-method approach as using more than one *theoretical* approach to developing an analysis of the phenomenon being studied. Though the inclusion of ‘method’ implies forms of data collection, in this case, Esterberg’s definition of methodology explains the

inextricable nature of both theory and method, as one's 'approach' is framed by the 'theory and analysis of how research should proceed' (2002:19).^[2] In discussing a mixed theoretical approach, implicit is the understanding that the act of defining the mixed theories to be used will have some impact on how something will be researched (Ibid:12). I would like to use the analogy that when baking, some deserts use flour as the foundation, some sugar, and others milk or cream. My limited experience as a qualitative data analyst has shown that you do not always reach for the same ingredients, unless you always want to make the same recipe.

2.2 Ritchie and Lewis explain that the benefit of using more than one method of data analysis is that they will expose different ways of understandings the data collected (2003:36). Norman Denzin (1978) more specifically referred to this approach as theory triangulation. Essentially, each of these authors were concerned with developing an analysis that did not relying solely upon one theory or approach. Consequently, Ritchie and Lewis caution that triangulating theories may lead to a 'fuller picture of a phenomena, [but] not necessarily a more certain one' (2003:44). By using a mixed-method approach, the researcher will add depth and breadth to their analysis, as the application of multiple perspectives would provide a more nuanced understanding of a phenomenon.

2.3 It is the suggestion of depth and breadth that is particularly important in ensuring that a theory be both applicable and useful to the larger public. Much like Robert Merton's 'middle-range theory' (Wallace and Wolf 2006), I am also attempting to 'fill in the blanks' (Ibid. 47) between understanding individual actions and their contexts within the larger structures. That being said, one might then simply point to Giddens' (1984) ideas on structuration as a way of achieving depth and breadth. In *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Giddens explains that structuration theory provides an understanding of a balance between individual agency and structural influences. While Giddens was trying to bridge the gap between micro and macro influences, I am apprehensive in merging structure and agency into one analytical theory. Instead, I propose that a mixed-methods approach maintains the distinctions between the two levels of analysis while recognizing their interplay. Doing so helps to ensure that power dynamics are not obfuscated within a singular concept such as 'structuration.' Similarly, Judith Butler's (1990) notion of 'performativity' also implies the juxtaposition of structure over agency. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler theorizes that gender is performative, occurring through a 'repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts' (1990:33). While Butler's theory of performativity adds value to the notion of constructed identities (and challenges previous 'natural' conceptions of gender distinctions), it minimizes agency through an already defined set of normative performances. By claiming that gender attributes are performative, and that there are no 'true' attributes, her theory then positions researching the context of agency as either secondary or even immaterial, 'Genders can be neither true or false, neither real nor apparent, neither original or derived' (1990:141). Though I would whole heartedly agree with Butler's claims to the social construction of gender and the normalization of performativity, such an academically rigid stance is contrary to the many ways in which non-academic individuals see their world being shaped. I see that the major distinction between Butler and Goffman is that while Butler is concerned with deconstructing how the body is acted upon and how gender construction becomes normalized, Goffman's symbolic interactionist approach is more interested in making sense of an individual's actions, of tracking how the actors' themselves create and contribute to the process of construction. This is not necessarily an oppositional stance to Butler's, instead, I am recognizing that we each have a different focus. While Butler's concern is on the repetition of actions and the performative construction of gender, mine might better be positioned as focusing on the *transformative* aspects of gender construction, on the interplay between agency and structure. One crucial aspect in the argument of using a mixed-method approach to research (within the GLBT communities) is that there be an adequate recognition of agency in the creation of a performance.

2.4 In regards to gender, West and Zimmerman (2008) explain that bodies are not simply acted upon, that there is a need to recognize both the institutional factors as well as the forms of individual interactions. Essentially, while the impetus for gender construction may come from a macro/cultural level, the onus to inhabit that gender construction falls to the individual. As they note, 'if we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—may be called to account (for our character, motives,

and predispositions)' (West and Zimmerman 2008:104). For this reason, there has been some academic movement in recognizing the material world of the queer communities, as one's experiences have 'real social and political consequences' (Jackson 1999:182). Furthermore, in the book *Gender* (2002), Connell explains how children negotiate their experienced gender constructions. Essentially, children are not a tabula rasa. Connell notes that even when effort is made to present a non-gendered environment (the example used is the classroom), children are active in both negotiating and assuming new and pre-defined gendered ways of interacting. Gender can be taken up and played with, it can be tested and tried and discarded to some extent, and positive or negative affirmations help to solidify their gendered constructions. Connell states that for children, 'gender is important in their world, but it is important as a human issue that they deal with, not as a fixed framework that reduces them to puppets' (15-16). Similar to gender, this point sets the tone for a critical look at 'gay' by turning the discussion away from the usual 'cultural impact' debate, to one containing a mix of agency, social influences and compromise. In a later section, I will begin to draw correlations between the gay individual and the structural influences on the formation and adoption of a gay identity, but for now, suffice it to say that if gender is widely considered to be a mix of social construction and agency, so too is homosexuality.

2.5 A mixed-methods approach that combines the insights of symbolic interactionism and conflict theory would recognize both the possible transgressions of the gay performer (from the structural norms) as well as the ways that structural factors place limitations on the performance of sexuality. At the same time, by using an iterative approach to analysis, we can try to get at the contradictory relationship between structure and agency. As I will point out later, the adoption of characteristically 'gay' behaviour can be seen as both a regressive and a transgressive application of agency. However, without considering the larger factors that impinge upon an actor's performance, a critique of one's self-presentation would be moot, as actors act within a social context and not simply for themselves.

2.6 Next, I will turn to two theorists, Erving Goffman and C. Wright Mills to demonstrate the benefits of using more than one theory to further my analysis.

The Presentation of Self

3.1 The first theory to discuss is *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman 1959). Goffman's basic premise rests upon the idea that social interactions are constructed events in which individuals attempt to present themselves in the way that they wish to be perceived. Using the metaphor of dramaturgy, he explains that individuals are actors performing a role for an audience (other people), with the intent of influencing 'in any way, any of the other participants' (Goffman 1959:15). As with any actor, there is a front stage for the public performance, and a backstage for private rehearsals. The actor employs props and performs in settings, all with the intention of creating a believable role that signifies the actor's intended meaning (Ibid. 22). This act culminates in a 'dramatic realization' (Ibid 30-34) of a performance in which the staging is favorably received by the audience. Furthermore, the rejection or acceptance of this presentation will determine the future course of the interaction (Ibid. 1)

3.2 The ideal type of performance is one in which there is coherence between the setting, appearance, and manner (Ibid 24-25). The setting is the location that the role is played out in. If we are to use myself as an example, the setting could be a classroom. My role would be that of a student and my appearance would include items that signified my student status, such as a pen, textbooks and notepaper. My manner, as a student, would consist of taking notes, appearing attentive, and not sleeping in class. If there are no conflicts (conflicts between what is presented to, and perceived by, the audience) and the role of an interested student is understood and accepted, then the performance would be considered a successful one. If the performance was not adequately acted out, because either my appearance or manner contradicted my role, then the performance would be challenged by the audience.

3.3 Some contradictory aspects of my student persona included my status as a 'mature' student, my weight, my past experiences, and my gay marital status.^[3] Though there is no one type of student, a host of discrepancies in my role seemed to indicate that whatever the case, I was definitely not part of the 'norm'.

To apply a theoretical explanation of myself as presenting a successful student persona, I found that there were aspects of my performance that I had to downplay, others that I had to highlight, and still others that I had to conceal, as the contradictory evidence would have disrupted my presentation. Goffman refers to the taking up of such a persona as 'the front' (Ibid. 22-30). He describes a front as the performance (appearance and manners) that readily defines an actor to an audience. The value of a front is that it consists of a collection of abstract and generalized aspects, which present a 'collective representation' (Ibid. 27), or stereotyped role. Now some might argue that this sounds similar to Butler's theory of performativity (1990) and that her approach might be more appropriate here as she goes further than Goffman by suggesting that 'fronts' are not merely sometimes unstable, but are fundamentally contradictory. Like Goffman, she might agree that a front is a constructed persona that is presented as normal. But, unlike Goffman, the theory of performativity argues that there is no 'original' persona behind the front. Instead, there are only perceptionally normalized personas; when I am a student, I do this, when I am a cook I do that, etc. Butler is certainly right in suggesting there are no primordial identities, but her approach obscures Connell's claim that people nonetheless do tend to understand themselves and their behaviours in this hierarchical way, that some behaviours are more contrived to fit certain circumstances while others require less diligence and focus to perform. For a person that self-identifies as 'gay' but obscures that identity in certain settings for whatever reason – fear, discomfort, social pressure – they would probably feel they are 'putting up a front', masking an identity they feel is more legitimate with one that they feel is less legitimate. We need a way to talk about this.

3.4 Goffman's theories provide us with a way of capturing these distinctions in a concrete way that Butler does not. As stated earlier, this is a question of understanding the phenomena, rather than focusing on pulling it apart and dissecting it. In my own case, as noted earlier in the gender/agency discussion, I was grasping at a way to fit in. I was actively taking up a stereotype. My front was a typification of what I thought my audience expected, and not necessarily a realistic portrayal of how I understood myself. Goffman explains that this is why the front is as easily taken up as it is shattered; an actor can only sustain a false role for a finite amount of time before personal experience becomes visible.

3.5 Having established my status as a student, I would like to return to the idea of myself as a working-class gay male. Though this paper does not present a specifically theoretical class based analysis, a reflexive approach to understanding my gay identity would need to recognize my class location. This isn't simply a matter of reading identity off income levels and status indicators. As Beverley Skeggs explains in her book, *Class, Self, Culture*, class analysis is more than materialist "economic" categories, it involves efforts to understand the cultural struggles of appropriation and exploitation (2004:186). That is how I imagine exploring my own class identity. I had mentioned earlier that my sense of identity had always been in question. Essentially, I felt some pressing need to solidify 'who I was,' beyond the simple category of gay. Though I did come from a welfare background and was openly gay, I was not able to take up either of the 'ready-made' performances of the tough-talking, trailer-trash *lumpen proletariat* (recognizable from television shows like *The Trailer Park Boys*); nor was I the witty and flamboyant *screaming queen* typified by Jack on *Will and Grace*. Instead, presumably like many young gay men, the sexually confounding category more likely fell somewhere between the two polar extremes. Because I could not meet the criteria of either category, I was not able to rely on a readily available 'front' and instead, had to construct my own.

3.6 Surprisingly, I later found out that others were also in the same boat. Alan Bérubé's (1997) account of growing up gay, working class, and living in a trailer in the United States in the 1950s is an indication that though I felt alone and isolated, others were not only having to define their own fronts, some had already constructed ones very much like my own. For instance, initially, I thought that I could go into university as a first-year student and interact with other first years as if I were new to many of the ideas encountered. But, as Goffman points out, I discovered that my 'appearance and manner may contradict each other.' (Ibid. 25). Similar to Bérubé, in trying to extricate myself from my class background, I also thought that 'to fit into this new world I had to keep my trailer park past a tightly guarded secret' (1997:35). However, by downplaying my experiences and presenting a 'false front,' I produced situations where my role was misrepresented and appeared contradictory, thus causing my audience (professors and other students) to be confused about

and question my performance. It was clear that my 'idealized student' performance was hopelessly inaccurate and incomplete and thus not believable. In one sense, my constant use of profanity and love of a vulgar joke did not fit with the educated and classy person I wished to portray. On the other hand, it was obvious that some of the textbook ideas were not new, and it was also apparent that my vocabulary was more extensive than some of the other (younger) students in my class. The simple fact that I had a mortgage to pay was a huge contradiction to the stereotypical notion of being a first year student living in residence. Goffman notes that when an actor misrepresents himself or herself, they chance 'immediate humiliation and sometimes permanent loss of reputation' (Ibid. 59). In one instance, my reputation was in jeopardy when I talked about quitting school at 16, and relying on a 'sugar-daddy' for rent. This example from my 'rough' background did not fit cleanly into the well-educated persona that I had endeavored to present. In order to minimize the reaction, I realized that I could not merely create a new front (or identity). Instead, I had to accept that there were certain experiences (such as language, age, and my class background) that limited such a performance. I realized that I could not simply perform the role of the *tabula rasa*, freshman; my experiences betrayed that there was little 'fresh' about me.

3.7 Goffman argues that this awkwardness of taking on a new role (as, say, a student) is typical. When an actor takes up such a position, the success lies in identifying intangible cues and stage directions. These preconceived directions are combined with already accumulated 'bits and pieces of [an actor's previous] performances' (Ibid. 72-73). For me, that meant that whether I wanted to or not, I found that many of my discussions were framed around gay and lesbian issues and any political discussions often became defined as gay or class politics. As Goffman notes, actors do not only inhabit one role, nor are they provided with scripts to perform from. Instead, they must cobble together a believable portrayal that usually relies upon preconceived notions, and the generosity of the audience to suspend disbelief until a certain portion of the performance has been completed (Hier 2005:108). To use a theatrical term: one must improvise with what one has. Eventually, I picked up on enough cues to cobble together a believable (though altered) student performance. Once established, Goffman's 'Maintenance of Expressive Control' (1959:51) would help to ensure a continued interaction, hopefully leading to act two, or a return engagement.

3.8 I have highlighted the importance of the reflexive actor and that the strength of Goffman's theory lies in the intersubjectivity of social relations. Furthermore, this intersubjectivity manifests in understanding interactions on a face-to-face level. Though Goffman does not explicitly frame his theory within a micro-analysis, he does state that his book is primarily concerned with understanding performances that are influenced by persons in the direct presence of the performer (1959:15). One cannot help but feel that there is an implicit micro-understanding in such a formulated and tightly concentrated intersubjective focus. It is this level of micro-analysis that provides credence to Goffman's work. Randall Collins notes how Goffman's 'empirical reality' provides a concrete way of understanding structures and organization: 'Organizations and positions are thing-like in their solidity only because they are continuously and repeatedly enacted in a series of micro-situations' (1980:190). To Goffman, the strength of analysis lies in understanding these micro-situations and their direct applications.

3.9 However, though the strength of the theory rests in its direct application, a critique can be made that his discussion of 'actors' and their interactions often disengages them from the social structures of everyday life (Rogers 1980:100). In order to do Goffman proper justice, a thorough approach to understanding student life (and my role as a gay student) would lead to identifying the different genders and sexualities, as well as class positions, personal tastes, size of families, geographical areas of upbringing, height, weight, hair colour and, whether I was considered conventionally 'attractive' or not. This critique is not meant to negate the value of Goffman's theory, but rather to point to the limitations of its application. Because such an exhaustive list would be completely unwieldy in the most basic of studies, there are aspects which must be left out of the analysis, ones that could drastically affect the interpretation of the interactions. A simple example is that I am not always a 'gay' student, sometimes I am an angry student whose anger is not related to being gay, while at other times I am a working class male that can't afford tuition. In trying to interpret my day-to-day interactions as either 'gay' or 'student,' we must ask, which do we focus on and where does one draw the line in considering contextual influences?

3.10 One additional critique of *The Presentation of Self* is that Goffman places too high an emphasis on an actor's intentionality, with little regard for structural power imbalances (1959:103-104). This brings to mind a typically sociological question of whether individuals make up organizations or if organizations make up the individuals. Though Goffman tries to place individual interactions within the structure of 'team members,' and regional influences on impression management (Ibid. 77-140), his theory is really a micro-analysis of interactions. It should be stressed that *The Presentation of Self's* foremost concern is with understanding how people negotiate face-to-face interactions. In other words, Goffman may refer to the perceived norms and characteristics that make up a student (such as the behaviour patterns in a class room or their display of theoretical knowledge), but he does not discuss how systems like capitalism determine who must rely on the library to obtain course textbooks compared to who has the ability to buy them, or structural influences on determining who is precluded from attending university, or what knowledge is considered worthy of study.^[4] Nor does Goffman's level of analysis look at the larger class structures that determine who gets to attend university. Admittedly, locating class in a discussion of agency is difficult to do. Skeggs (2004) notes that the recent focus on individual identity has obfuscated the limits to one's agency, in favour of an analysis of the individual's experience. Succinctly put, "[t]he rhetoric of identity politics is, therefore, dependent upon the individual morally authorizing themselves through their own experience" (Skeggs 2004:58). Furthermore, the 'pathologizing' (Ibid:59) of one's identity, such as gay, further removes the individual from their class location, i.e. from the larger societal structures that impinge upon an actor. Try as I might, I could not join class with gay.

3.11 Others have highlighted this perceived absence in Goffman's work and also proposed ways to address it. For instance, in a paper presented to the American Sociological Association, authors Neil McLaughlin and Robert Alford quote Randall Collins as stating that Goffman 'is the greatest sociologist of the later part of the 20th century' (2002:3). Nonetheless, they then proceed to discuss the limitations of Goffman's theory, specifically highlighting how his theoretical methods did not capture the structural influences that his ethnographic studies pointed to. Though McLaughlin and Alford propose a 'multi-method research' model of Goffman's *Presentation of Self*, linked to a historical/comparative approach, I would suggest that combining Goffman with Mills' (1959) sociological imagination provides a more immediate or 'user-friendly' way of achieving a micro/macro analysis.

The Sociological Imagination

4.1 Around the period that Goffman was developing his dramaturgical theory, C. Wright Mills published an equally influential book *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). Mills put forward the theory that the modern individual was in a state of 'anxiousness'. People had lost the ability to contextualize themselves, a disconnection that is particularly important as Mills tells us that, 'Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both' (Mills 1959:3). Furthermore, with the dramatic changes brought on by industrialization, anxiety and apathy increased and individuals were removed from seeing a correlation between the highs and lows of society, and the highs and lows of their own personal troubles (Brewer 2004:320). To quote Mills, individuals are 'seldom aware of the intricate connections between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history' (1959:3-4).

4.2 In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills outlined how people needed to learn to connect their personal (private) troubles with the larger (and more abstract) societal issues (8).^[5] By doing so, the sociological imagination would help people to 'break away from routine, day-to-day understandings of social situations' (Anderson 1996:24). Mills argued that because individuals are part of society, they must learn to see their own personal troubles as societal issues in order to identify the larger constraints that bound them (1959:7-11). Much of Mills' work is categorized by the argument that though society is made up of individuals, it is often larger societal influences that induce (or limit) the actions of such individuals. Metaphorically, because of an individual's dislocation, they could no longer see the water, as they were too busy swimming in it. For a less abstract example, Mills noted that marital problems may be seen as the troubles of individuals but when divorce rates dramatically increase, this tells us that there are structural problems with the institution of marriage (1959:9). In essence, using one's sociological imagination would

illuminate the water; it would allow people to frame their personal micro-troubles within a larger macro-context.

4.3 It should be stated that though I position Mills as a macro-conflict-theorist, he is not *explicitly* a macro-theorist, nor merely a conflict-theorist. Wallace and Wolf state that it is Mills' sociological imagination that has the ability to bring together both macro and micro levels of analysis (2006:107). There has been much debate over trying to place Mills into one theoretical camp or another, a label that Mills himself avoided (Brewer 2004). Regardless of any one label, Mills was a theorist that insisted on providing a context within which to understand personal troubles. Part of Mills' call for a sociological imagination was rooted in his criticisms of the overly theoretical approaches that then dominated sociology. Mills wanted to challenge the dominant modes of social research and his call for the public use of a sociological imagination was a direct attempt to shift the then existing debate between a Parsonian notion of structural functionalism and Lazarsfeld's highly empirical studies, to one that included conflict theory (Anderson 1996:283-284). Implicit in Mills' criticism was that while one approach removed the individual from the discussion, the other only focused on the microcosm of the individual. In his challenge, Mills refused to reduce an individual's troubles to a single discussion of either not fitting in with society or being a victim of society. Mills more contentiously phrased this as a sociology split between 'statistical stuff and heavy duty theoretical bullshit, turgid polysyllabic slabs of stuff' (Brewer 2004:326).^[6]

4.4 Relevant to such a statement is the understanding (and emphasis) that Mills placed upon the idea of public sociology. In a biographical treatment of Mills, John Brewer explained that Mills was bothered by the staid methods in the discipline that were defined by Parsons' and Lazarfeld's limiting approaches to sociology (2004:320). Mills felt that for sociology to be useful, it must not only have practical applications, but also be understood by a populace beyond the small academic circle that was controlling the debate. In this vein, Mills encouraged social scientists to relinquish their turgid debate over theory and focus on social problems, Mills even went so far as to criticize his own deliberations. In a letter to the British Marxist Ralph Miliband, Mills wrote, 'I'm sick of writing about academic stuff and want badly to get back to writing about realities' (Ibid. 324). To back up Mills' idea of popular sociology, in 1998, members of the International Sociological Association voted *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) as 'the second most influential book among sociologists of the twentieth century' (Phillips, Kincaid and Scheff 2002 : vii).

Why a dialogue between Goffman and Mills specifically?

5.1 Some might wonder why I would choose Goffman and Mills specifically, given the enormous amount of theory produced in sociology since their influential works were published. Here I believe that the old versus new, current versus non-current descriptions of thinkers in sociology is often not very helpful or instructive about the real reasons that different scholars choose different theories. Just because things are new does not necessarily mean they are better. In any case, a cursory citation search on both Goffman and Mills demonstrate that their theories are still very much alive. Recently, there has been a heightened interest in both thinkers and a belated recognition of their ongoing influence in numerous fields of sociology and other disciplines (Mclaughlin and Alford 2002 ; Phillips, Kincaid and Scaff 2002). But let me say that I am not suggesting that these two theorists are the only ones that could or should be used. Such choices should be related to what is being studied and assessed in terms of how well they will fit and further the exploration being taken up. I will go into more detail below about why I think they are particularly useful in taking up the issue I am focusing on for the rest of the paper, namely, gay and lesbian youth identity formation. However, further to this line of questioning, some might wonder why I would apply these two thinkers to questions specifically of gay and lesbian identity rather than drawing on the considerable existing literature that already focuses on 'queer' identity (Jackson 1999; Madon 1997; Sedgwick 1993; Butler 1990). Though this can only really be addressed in a much longer and detailed exploration of the literature, suffice to say at this point that I think the existing work suffers from many of the same problems as Goffman's work does on its own: either an over-reliance on agency or an over-amplification of structure and context. I am also, like Mills, committed to a more public form of scholarship, one that can be translated into a publicly accessible form of knowledge. Here many commentators agree that with Goffman, for instance, 'his work enjoys wide popular

appeal because it is accessible and capable of engaging the non-specialist' (Smith 2006:2). For me, the attraction of Goffman's and Mill's work is their immediacy and clarity in terms of converting theory into method and each theory's ability of a direct application As Goffman was quoted as saying, 'Sociology is something that you do, not something that you read' (Smith 2006:4).

The Imagination of the Self

6.1 Before getting into the following section, I would like to acknowledge the list of well-established scholars who have also endeavored to argue for some form of mixed-methods approach to sociology: Ritchie and Lewis (2003), Norman Denzin (1978) Robert Merton (Wallace and Wolf 2006), Giddens (1984), Connell (2002), McLaughlin and Alford (2002), Mills (1959), Phillips, Kincaid and Scheff (2002). With the exception of a few on this list, the dominant trend of their discussions follow the arguments of mixing quantitative research methods with qualitative research methods. I am neither unique, nor alone in my quest to identify micro aspects of agency and the macro influences of structures. That being said, by using both Goffman and Mills, I hope to demonstrate a way in which both levels of analysis are allowed to display their influences. We cannot separate an analysis of the individual from one of society; this would be like a Hollywood without actors. Without one, the other has no purpose.

6.2 Now, to cut through my own theoretical 'bullshit,' I intend to juxtapose Randall Collins', 'greatest sociologist of the later part of the 20th century' (McLaughlin and Alford 2002:3) next to the theories of 'the second most influential book...of the twentieth century' (Phillips, Kincaid and Scheff 2002 : vii). In doing so, I propose that for Goffman's 'presentation of self' theory to have a more meaningful significance, it would require a mixed-methods approach, i.e. a theoretical approach which included some discourse on structural influences. I can see how the use of Mills' 'sociological imagination' would fill this requirement.^[7] Goffman's work is a *celebration* of the self, 'a defense of its right to resist the social world' (Freidson 1983:359). Similarly, in Mills' critique of Parson's grand theory, he warned against applying a theory of structure that eliminated power (both political and economic) from an understanding of how it influenced the individual (1959:25-49). Essentially, I am suggesting that we not limit a theoretical focus to the role of agency. It follows that the inclusion of structures into an analysis of the individual would only strengthen a sociological analysis of interactions. After all, it is as important to 'grasp the interplay between [the individual] and society' (Ibid. 4), as it would be to grasp the interplay between society and the individual.

6.3 Where I see the value in merging the theories of Goffman and Mills is that both explain how an individual/actor cannot understand another actor/individual unless each has a clear idea of where the other is coming from. In more academic terms, while Goffman's concept focuses on the day-to-day interactions, Mills' theory locates the day-to-day actions within a broader context, providing the functionality of applicable research methods that are grounded in both theory and empirical data. In a sense, there needs to be some intersubjectivity, not only between actors and each other's contexts, but also reflexivity between theories and analysis.

6.4 In the interests of applicable sociology (and the need to write about something 'real'), I would like to demonstrate the benefits of mixing the methods of both Goffman and Mills. Specifically, I will do this by referring to my experiences with a series of events that I was involved in while working at a community centre^[8] in a major metropolitan city in Canada. Between 1998 and 2001, I worked at a downtown-based community centre that primarily (but not exclusively) served the gay, lesbian, bi, and trans (GLBT) public. My main role was as an 'information officer' which was really a glorified title for 'front desk receptionist'. Though my duties were varied, the principal focus of my job was to collect information on the GLBT communities. I would then synthesize and distribute this information over the phone, in person and in the form of brochures, newsletters and a published resource listing about GLBT groups across the province.^[9]

6.5 As I was often a primary resource for community information (and being geographical located at the front entrance to the building), I was lucky enough to meet a wide variety of the people that used the centre. Through my work, it was easy to see the academic contradictions present in trying to locate a 'gay culture,' and being a gay individual.

6.6 To frame my comments within a Goffman/Mills dialogue, I have seen how social interactions mix with structural influences in shaping and defining the creation of an individual's 'front.' While at the community centre, part of my job was to work with facilitators of the GLBT youth group, providing support as a 'first contact' for new members. It was a commonly held belief (at the community centre) that many questioning GLBT youth would walk past the centre a number of times before allowing themselves to enter. Once in the door, I was often the first person that they encountered, their first point of contact, and my role was to ascertain their needs and direct them to the relevant information/groups.

6.7 The focus of this example is to highlight and try to understand the change that would often occur between the individual that I first encountered and the person that developed out of interactions with the GLBT youth group. During this period of interaction, I would often see dramatic changes in the personalities of gay youth group members as they were influenced by their peers and took up, what they considered to be, the subtle cues and props of the gay culture. As far as members of the group-identified culture, it seemed to predominantly consist of gay cultural icons such as clothes, demeanors, and forms of entertainment (i.e. clubbing). As new members began to be inculcated into the gay youth culture, they began to alter their appearances and manners to reflect the new roles. This can be seen in Goffman's dramaturgical theory as the *creation* of a gay male to be just that, a creation, or a new performance. I would observe teens trying on various aspects of the gay role, using props such as hair coloring and make-up, or language, as they attempted to negotiate their way through an improvised performance. However, as a Goffman approach would note, the use of props and 'fronts' is not quite so static. Over time, they might discard certain aspects that did not fit with their performance (that *they* wished to portray), while maintaining aspects that proved to be successful. To me, it seemed that the most successful were also the narrowest personas kept. Rarely would a youth, new to the community centre, enter the reception area yelling 'Beeotch' and then proceed to lie across my desk.^[10] However, after a period of socialization within the youth group, this particular style of 'outrageous' behavior frequently emerged.

6.8 In uniting the theories of Mills and Goffman, an explanation begins to take shape as to why the youth would often forego the creation of a new 'original' role in favour of an 'institutionalized...collective representation' of *gay* (Goffman 1959:27). This seemed to be the transformation of gay as a sexual act into an entire life-style. As for myself, once I began socializing with other gay men, I also dropped behaviours that were considered unconventional for gay people, none of which had anything to do with having sex with men (such as hunting for deer), in favour of more 'urbanely sophisticated' behaviour. In my position at the community centre, I could see similarities between my own emergence as a gay man and how the new members of the centre's youth group really only became *gay* through a process of socialization with others in their group. In a sense, it was as if they were trying to combat a heteronormative world with a fabricated homonormative culture in which all things not gay must be eradicated. For some, their world had suddenly shifted from a closeted life to one in which homosexuality was the dominant stream. As critical as it may sound, I remember when all I did was go to gay clubs six nights a week and hang out with other gay men, shopped at gay stores, and tried desperately to support gay merchants. Structurally, I obviously did not accomplish this but individually I saw my life as being that of the big city queer. That is, until I had to branch out of this self-imposed set of interactions and face the still prevailing heteronormative reality.

6.9 Moving forward a number of years, part of my role at the community centre was to present a certain gay male image to the new Youth Group initiates. Contrary to the gay stereotypes of the club-circuit gay male, my presence indicated that a gay man could also be serious, casual, and not male-model beautiful. Mills might ask why these youth took up one specific *gay* persona when there was an alternate role available. Goffman's idea of the performance would indicate that the current GLBT youth group members' behaviour dictated a pre-set list of acceptable manners. However, though this might be a useful way to understand the specific manners adopted, it is rather limiting in explaining *why* these particular manners became dominant in the first place and how these manners became the proscribed ones for gay teens.

6.10 In taking up the absence of a structural analysis in Goffman, the use of a sociological imagination might explore how, of the various roles on offer, the most widely accepted role was also the one most

heavily promoted on the cover of several magazines aimed at young gay men, the gay identity present in the two main local gay newspapers, as well as the gay images presented in several magazines and countless media portrayals. Yes, there were other representations of 'gay', but, across the varied medium, the creation and promotion of a young gay male role was particularly limited to areas of consumer culture: gay nightclubs, gay restaurants, and gay shops (with more gay advertisements). Clearly, the gay community was meant to be one homogenous middle-class community, bent on consumerism. Valocchi (1999) explains that in the mid-part of the twentieth century, the gay community had been stripped of its plurality by middle-class doctors through labeling homosexuals as one group of people who committed same-sex acts. Valocchi notes that this new definition 'ignored the differences in the subcultures and included everyone in its chilling embrace' (1999:215). We can see this (macro) trend toward homogeneity in the following eras of gay and lesbian identification. More recently, the media's dominant gay role model was of a middle class, consumer-oriented attractive young man, who was typically vacuous, catty, sassy-talking and fashion-conscious. What this means is that the dominant role models available were very partial in class terms. And much like myself and the experiences of the youth group, the middle class message was that 'if you buy the product or consume the service, you are doing it along with many other gay people: indeed, if you are truly 'gay' or 'lesbian,' you will consume these commodities' (Valocchi 1999:220). Participation was structurally defined by a consumer capitalism. To be considered properly gay (and the peer pressure was considerable), gay youth must surrender great swathes of their existing identities to gain admittance into this new role. Part of the driving force to participate was their own desire for acceptance and the actions of the existing group members, just as Goffman would note, but the larger forces shaping this identity construction also included the commodifying tendencies of modern capitalism, which tended to shape and promote identities on the basis of what was profitable rather than what was inclusive. Skeggs notes that an economic analysis of the 'homogenized' gay identity formations would demonstrate how such identities "are not available to all," and "expose how class relations are being refigured' (2004:61).

6.11 In today's mediated world, commodified representations play a key role in how the general public understands minority groups. We need only look to gay portrayals on television to note the pervasiveness of the 'screaming queen' (e.g. Jack on *Will and Grace*) or the overly fashion conscious gay men on *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy*. In the book, *Alternate Channels* (2000), Steven Capsuto explains how the exceedingly flamboyant gay characters Blain and Antoine (on the television show *In Living Colour*) began to influence status quo ideas of gay men (290). In less than one year their 'flamboyant gestures were being imitated everywhere from gay bars to New York Mets games' (Ibid). Furthermore, though the 1990s saw a 'heyday' of gay-positive characters, more recently we are seeing a return to the gay character as a figure of fun (Ibid: 405). Although they may be funny, the danger lies in the ability of a stereotype to bias the viewer's perceptions of minority groups (Madon 1997:9). When we encounter characters like Jack or Blain, we see an amusing individual character, but little effort is required to recognize how a stereotypical perception of the mediated gay male might translate into a skewed 'real life' understanding of gay behaviour. Though camp may be actively taken up as a performance, doing so reduces the complexities of a gay person to a caricature, in a sense, it is the gay man taking up a set of homonormative characteristics in order to present an easily identifiable and understood front.

6.12 When I was coming out, I wanted to feel that I belonged to a group of others like me. I wanted to be initiated and included in the elusive and exclusive gay culture ('elusive' because, growing up in a small town, gay people were hard to find; exclusive because the price of social ostracization was not one people paid willingly). Sapolsky and Share define culture as 'behaviours shared by a population... that are independent of genetics or ecological factors and that persist past their originators' (2004:534). As a young gay man, my culture consisted of stereotyped media representations and products. It seemed imperative that I have a \$200 belt by 'Nanni,' jeans by 'Big Star,' and, of course, a 'Liz Claiborne' shirt. The brand names may change but the pressure to obtain them as both props and a rite of transformation into an accepted gay youth identity seem as strong as ever. It never occurred to me to question why I needed these items in order to be accepted. In trying desperately to fit in, I became conscious of the importance of a constructed appearance. And again, to reference Goffman, even when deliberately manipulating my behaviour and image, my presentation was still not believable. If I had read *The Presentation of Self in*

Everyday Life (1959) as a youth, I might have understood that though I may look the part, my language and demeanor still betrayed my lower class background, rather than the middle class demeanor that was considered the norm. At one point, the simple act of not knowing 'Calvin Klein' instantly shattered my presentation of being part of the 'in-crowd.'^[11] Goffman's account of 'impression management' (1959:208-237) explains why the mere wearing of clothes was not enough to counter the defining fact that I grew up in a family on social assistance and lived most of my life in small towns.

6.13 In his chapter on impression management, Goffman notes that there is a complex negotiation of performances, both between actors and within social settings, in which the individual actor must adapt their own performance to both signify the importance of their role and counter any disruptions to the reception of such a role (1959). In my socialization as *gay*, I have come to appreciate such a multifaceted performance. Though I may think that I am carrying off a believable performance, at any time it may be challenged by either outside or internal actions and I must be ready to incorporate them into my presentation. By acknowledging the possibility of disruptions, an application of Mills then allows us to see that structured behaviour is not nearly as solid and defined as we might think. Even for those that feel themselves successful in performing the modern commodified gay male identity, the context is still crucial for their efforts. If a culture is defined by shared behaviours, then what happens when the individual is removed from that culture: are they still gay?

6.14 In a study that focused on urban gays and lesbians that return to rural settings to attend family weddings, we can see that when gays and lesbians move to larger urban areas, they are given the opportunity to redefine aspects of their person/character/role (Oswald 2002). Oswald's research indicates that though they may be well integrated into a GLBT or Queer community, and have stable gay and lesbian identities, when they return to their rural settings, there is often a discrepancy between their new urban profile and the previously left behind rural persona. Though Oswald notes that there are a number of reasons for this, I would like to focus on one primary aspect that corresponds with Goffman, that of the ritual (Oswald 2002:326-328). To unfairly reduce the research to one point, Oswald found that for gays and lesbians to participate in a family ritual, they constantly had to negotiate between invisibility and an 'in your face gay' approach to family interactions. Oswald's work suggests that the absence of a space for gay identity in rural settings forced gay-identified people into having to redefine their performances.

6.15 I would like to demonstrate this type of ritual impact on my gay identity (and my ability for impression management) by referring to a recent trip home for a funeral, though with results that depart from Oswald's findings in important ways. Growing up, my relationship with my brother had always been awkward and strained, and this only increased when I moved to a big city and announced that I was gay. In fact, much of my family began to react differently towards me and I'd assumed that it was entirely due to my coming out. Major changes were apparent in the way I dressed, talked, and interacted, as well as a whole new set of different points of reference. Though I knew I had changed in many ways, like the gay youth at the Centre, I saw my sexual identity as the primary factor in that change. My perception was that my family couldn't understand me because they weren't gay and, consequently, I had assumed that they were a bit homophobic.

6.16 In hindsight, an understanding of Mills' theory allows me to place my family's discomfort within a broader context; being gay was only a partial factor in their inability to normalize my new behaviour. What was indicative of this realization was the way my brother interacted with me at my grandmother's funeral. Before the service he came up to me, grabbed my stomach, and laughed about how fat I'd gotten, much fatter than him (teasing is one of the primary rituals in my family). Then during the eulogy, my brother talked about his favourite memory with my grandmother, that of flying out to my wedding and 'popping wheelies' on the subway with my grandmother in her wheel chair. The physical contact and reference to my 'gay' wedding were not, to me, the actions of a homophobic person.

6.17 These acts may not seem particularly profound until we take Mills' sociological imagination into account. Using the sociological imagination pushes past the limited scope of day-to-day interactions with my family. Though Goffman's approach may add value to understanding the physical interaction of my brother

grabbing my stomach, it isn't until we apply Mills' level of macro-analysis that I can see the discrepancies between the commodification of a gay identity and my family's rougher appearance. Thus there were important class dimensions to my family's discomfort with me that were arguably as important or even more important in our alienation from one another than my 'gay' identity. I have come to believe that they were much more threatened by the middle class aspects of a conventionally commodified gay identity, than the actual same-sex aspects of my relationship with my male partner. Oddly enough, in a discussion on class and identity, Steve Velocchi uses a quote from Allan Bérubé that parallels my own trailer-park/class-shifting/homosexual situation,

They accepted my being gay. But they heard me describing my homosexuality in the language of those more powerful and more educated than they were and saw my homosexuality as one more indication that I had entered elite worlds that were changing me beyond recognition. Through me they saw "gay" as college-educated—and I couldn't deny it, since, in my middle-class worlds, that's what I had learned too. (1999:208)

6.18 Time has demonstrated that acceptance of my partner has been easier than understanding my shifting class position. To negotiate this at the funeral, I decided to not wear a suit, opting instead for just an ironed shirt, while my partner decided not to wear a tie but kept his suit jacket on. As I carefully negotiated my appearance to fit in, my brother mentioned that he was wearing clothes that I'd given him. Oswald's discussion about negotiating gay identity in rural settings misses this crucial class dimension because, like Goffman, it focuses exclusively on the social interactions, thus omitting the larger contexts that also shape and cross-cut gay and small town identities.

6.19 I had to figure out if I was really not wearing a suit for the sole purpose of fitting in with the crowd. Was it an act of agency, the structural influences of peer pressure, or the material fact that I was simply too fat to fit comfortably into one of my suits? Previous to my *gay* socialization, a suit would have been quite a foreign decision, but it had since become an icon of gay culture and style. Goffman might note the battle over my weight indicated that my not wearing a suit could have been linked to my family's poor eating habits. Whereas Mills' application might point to the pressures of still trying to fit into a gay image that was not realistic for someone with my body shape. The relevance in using both approaches is that neither is wrong and together they provide a broader picture as to my family interactions. Much like the *gay* image, neither my family, nor my identity was created in a bubble as each was a product of individual interactions and structural influences.

6.20 An additional example that highlights the significance of Mills, focuses on the importance of context in understanding identity negotiations for members of one city's trans community. I am hesitant to speak of trans issues concerning identity because of the complex 'community' debates amongst trans people themselves. However, one particular discussion with a trans community activist had such an impact on my understanding of structural influences on identity formation that it has defined the way I approach much of my work in the GLBT community. While employed at the community centre, I had an interesting conversation with a trans outreach worker. In discussing the difficulties of using the terms community or culture to encompass such a wide array of differently identifying groups (female to male, male to female, trans; transitioning, 'successfully' transitioned, pre-transition, in transition, post-transition; straight, gay, lesbian, bi, etc), she noted that one's ability to transition and gauge the success of their transition was usually related to their class location. Up until that point, I had understood the transitioning process as being a constructed shift in identity, with the focus on identity re-formation. What she had raised was the idea that though one might change their identity, financial constraints determined how much and how well those changes would occur. The operations necessary for transitioning are extensive and expensive and not typically covered by the Canadian medical plan. Concurrently, there was a group of transitioned women that came from more affluent backgrounds. This particular trans worker was trying to develop links between the two class-divided groups.^[12] In consideration of this, questions of impression management, props, and disruptions to performances abound, but over-shadowing it all are the structural influences that prevent a performance from being accepted or 'complete.'

6.21 One final aspect of the sociological imagination that directly impinges upon the actor is how authority works. As Mills explained, 'authority is often not explicit; those with the power often feel no need to make it explicit' (1959:169). It is only when one begins to look at agency and structure that they can see how much manipulation and management goes in to 'affecting his chances and capacities to act as a free man' (Ibid. 170). This represents a direct problem with Goffman's idea of the actor 'choosing' their actions. I myself did not know I was gay until I met other gay people who shared my desires and interests (in men). Around the start of grade eight, I would count the amount of guys I thought were attractive, thinking that this number increased each year; and still, I did not know I was gay because I did not know the term 'gay'. A small town conservative society kept those roles hidden from me. Previous to encountering 'gay', I just thought I liked men. Once I began to interact with the institution of *gay*, I began to be defined by it. I also began to consume in a way that I hadn't previously. The forces shaping this institution were not merely based on the interactions between myself and the other actors I encountered. After some time, and through additional interactions with activists and actors, I have come to a more complex definition of what it means to be gay. As I have tried to demonstrate with my examples, introducing youth to other gay youth could dramatically alter their 'front.' But, as my own experience demonstrates, changing a gay youth's culture could also dramatically change that youth, not necessarily in positive and inclusive ways. That youth then replicates the culture and passes it on to new members, thus taking the culture beyond its initial originators, 'The self is a product of [such] arrangements, and in all of its parts, bears this genesis' (Goffman 1959:253). Due to space limitations, this example only represents one of the many structures (i.e. commodification of culture) that might provide a sense of context to understanding the limitations that one faces when choosing a role to perform.

Conclusion

7.1 This paper began by recognizing how Goffman presents us with some very valuable tools with which to dissect a performance. However, by combining an understanding of his creation of a front with the Mills' notion of how social aspects limit or shape that front, we can see how restricted and narrow the proffered fronts really are. In some cases, agency can act to change the front, in others agency can be curtailed by overwhelming structures. Additionally, a mixed-methods approach to analysis indicates how being able to identify the limitations of such presentable fronts would allow individuals to acknowledge that they were in a predicament, and perhaps act to change those circumstances, with an end result of broadening the acceptable role models available to gay youth. In today's society, there is a lot of focus on the individual to be just that, an individual. Yet, the sociological imagination shows us that the roles available for the individual to model themselves on, and participate in constructing, are shaped through collective processes that are themselves affected by stark inequalities in influence, specifically ones where the importance of the commodification process is overlooked or poorly understood.

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Notes

¹ The first incident mentioned is particularly relevant as it occurred in a foundations/survey course; the various assignments and discussions were tailored to favour a micro analysis (of one particular theorist) over others.

² There has been some concern raised over the use of the term "mixed-methods." Typically, the term is used to refer to the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2006). However, a review of the debates demonstrates that the use of the term in this way is not definitive. In reference to mixed-methods, Moran-Ellis et al (2006) have proposed the term "integration of

methods,” while Hammers and Brown (2004) refer to a methodological ‘alliance’ in their discussion of blending two methodological approaches into one ‘queer theory.’ These are only a few of the cases that demonstrate the multitude of approaches that researchers use when referring to ‘mixed-methods.’ By focusing on the theory side of the mixed-methods debate, my insistence on continuing to use the term is meant to further expand this debate and promote a broader sense of what can be ‘mixed,’ and the benefits that ‘mixing’ entails.

³ Canada began to officially, and legally, recognize same-sex marriages in 2005 with the acceptance of Bill C-38.

⁴ Ritzer’s (2000) book *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists* is indicative of ‘who’ is worthy of studying as his choices of sociologists centre on North American and European scholars. Inherent in the promotion of certain scholars, and omission of others, is an implied valuation of their works and their contributions to the field of sociology.

⁵ Mills made a clear distinction between ‘troubles’ being personal and ‘issues’ being societal (1959).

⁶ Brewer notes that Mills took up these two sections in chapters within *The Sociological Imagination*. Specifically, chapter 2 ‘Grand Theory’ (Mills 1959:25) and Chapter 3 ‘Abstract Empiricism’ (Mills 1959:50) (Brewer 2004:325-327).

⁷ In using Mills to critique Goffman, I am not equating Goffman with Paul Lazarfeld’s abstract empiricism; rather, I am using Mill’s criticism of ignoring the macro to focus solely on a micro level of theoretical application.

⁸ In an attempt to ensure anonymity, I have omitted the name of the community centre, as well as those of clients and employees.

⁹ I have also omitted the name of the resource guide to maintain confidentiality.

¹⁰ ‘Bee-otch’ being slang for ‘Bitch.’

¹¹ At the time, I had heard about his clothing and had thought he was part of the in-crowd that hung out at one of the higher-end clubs in our town.

¹² I would again like to stress that this analysis is based upon my conversations with people in one particular city’s trans community, others may be very correct in arguing a different analysis as my experience is limited to certain trans communities.

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