

Masculine Enough to Smooch a Dude on Stage; or, How I Had to Get Over Society's Limiting Scope of Masculinity to Smooch a Dude on Stage

Cry on stage? How about, as a straight man: kiss another guy on stage where the opposing actor playing the character-to-be-kissed was himself a gay classmate.

Yep. Comes with the territory of a BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in Acting. Commit. Commit! One must *commit* to the character's POV (point of view). Or as one of my late, great acting instructors said, "you must be your character's attorney." And for the prestige of the program and amount of dolla bills I was shelling out per year, damn right I committed!

I distinctly remember the moment we first put this particular production on stage for a live audience — opening night in other words. In our microcosm of a theatre conservatory, (approximately 300 students in total, spanning all 7 years and majors of the BFA and MFA tracks) the opening audience was typically a majority of schoolmates. Moreso, gossipy schoolmates who were curious to see what juicy fictitious drama their classmates had been up to for the past two months of rehearsals. Especially in our case, because word on the street was, "OMG apparently Dan and Jack kiss in this show!" When would it happen... and where? Upstage right, far out of view? Centerstage, which is classic blocking? Or how about downstage, up close and personal? Yea. It was the latter. Jack and I were to display our fictitious kiss downstage right. Which in this particular Chicago storefront space was most definitely up close and personal.

So there we were. Just the two of us on stage after the other characters had made their exits and left us there. Clearly, sexual tension ripe in the air. My character (me) approached Jack (totally forgot his character's name). Anticipation looming in the crowd. An energy of deep focus from all eyes zeroing in on us. No one snoozing, no one peeking at a text message. Literal intent focus.

My character was pent up, clearly liking the looks of this guy. Ready to make his move, which he initiated. Moving in slowly. Dragging the fingertips of his right hand along the tabletop in half hesitancy, half ponderence as he circled around. Some dialogue here. Dialogue there. Maybe a pause or two. Some more dialo- and BAM! I (my pent-up character) made his move! A passionate one. You know, hands cupping either side of the face kind. A furrowing of the brows, making a stern, needing expression kind. An "I don't care if this is wrong, I've been needing this for so long, damnnit!" kind. What you might see in a prototypical romance film.

The sound from the audience, and I distinctly remember this even 8 years later, was a singular and collective gasp. I remember the feeling of doing that scene in front of a live audience for the first time. It was electrifying. I loved it. I ate it up. The vain parts of me were hoping some of the hot girls in school were turned on by it. I mean, I was at the beginning of a total body transformation at the time (thank you Tony from P90X) and the attention from that was already

on me. The “have you seen how much weight Dan lost?” post-winter break attention. I was on top of my physical game and feeling like the attractive leading man I’d always wanted to be. (Yes, there is a component of vanity that drives every actor no matter how much of a bohemian artist they try to make themselves out to be.)

Now up until this point, I’ve been talking about a big ol’ smooch with one of my guy classmates (within the context of a dramatic work). What the hell does this have to do with masculinity anyways? Isn’t having to kiss a guy on stage totally unmasculine? Doesn’t it go against the long-standing ideas of being a man. Having kids with a woman, and raising a family in the traditional sense? What about other ‘unmasculine’ things like... crying. Well, I was called to do a lot of that too on stage. Or it just happened when I was “in the moment” of an intense dramatic scene. Likewise with that, the same principle held true – commit. Commit to the action and arc of the character. Be the state-assigned attorney to the character when no one else will. It’s the actors’ job.

But let’s for a moment circle back to what I just said. That having to do something like show affection, or crying on stage is ‘unmasculine’. First off it’s not. It just isn’t. To *societal constructs of masculinity*, yes. It could be. But to divine masculinity itself it is not. On the contrary, in more recent times and in the ‘woke’ age, it’s being argued in the exact opposite by quote ‘progressive’ types that it *is* masculine to cry. To show emotion. To get a sex change, whatever the hell it is. That as a man *one must* show emotion and vulnerability to be considered the “new definition of a man”. The same holds true. No. It doesn’t; for those things, like crying on stage, or displaying affection to whatever sex.

What matters is the often aforementioned word: commit. *To be masculine is to commit*. Moreover it is to protect. To use the God-given qualities men have in our favor. Be that stature, musculature, whatever else of that which is *divinely masculine*. So you could throw ‘*to protect*’ as another transitive verb in there as well. But there is no protection without commitment. One must commit to being the man he was born to be. Everything else...literally doesn’t matter.

To quickly mention, what about *divine femininity*? That means to protect too. But with the God-given qualities of the female. To nurture. To nourish. Things aren’t black and white here, but you get the idea. As in, a mother could physically protect her young as a man could emotionally. I’m speaking of the masculine and feminine qualities at their base, which for a vast majority of people, hold true.

To play the role of a ‘masculine man’ is to utilize the divine, or God-given masculinity we were born with while overlooking any and all societal constructs. Beyond those divine qualities, it is up to each individual man to decide what will make him the man he is to his family, community, and country. We’re all different. And that tapestry of men makes the overall picture of what real societal masculinity is – or ought to be.

So kissing a man on stage makes me less of a man? Well...

Uncomfortable, yes.

Shy, maybe.

Challenging, (for me not really I loved the attention) could be.

But less masculine? Less of a man? No way. I was doing my job. Committing to my job.

I utilized the fact that kissing a guy on stage ***didn't matter***.

How about, getting the job done, and done well as a masculine quality? For your friends, children, whomever; and in my case, the writer, director, producer, and audience.

Masculinity is commitment. Commitment to our families. To our community. To our country. To getting the job done. And through the scope of *divine masculine energy*.

Speaking of all this theatrical stuff, the final play I performed in conservatory (acting school) blended the biblical story of Judas' betrayal of Jesus with a modern twist and all the profanities under the sun; the final ten-minute monologue staged by a character named Butch Honeywell. We could talk for hours about that monologue in Stephen Adly Guirgis's *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, dissecting what it means about commitment, masculinity, and purgatory, but we'll save that discussion for another time.

For now, go out there and commit!