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### Pride

Jason Momoa, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, and John Cena; these are all examples of straight male actors, who combat many stereotypes of actors. When many people think of male actors, they sadly feed into the homophobic stereotype of male actors being accused of being a queer man. It is very sad to see men with a love and passion for the arts, be attacked for it. I am very supportive of those in the gay community, but it is very hard to see this harmful stereotype live on. I am an actor, in both theater and competitive speech, and a musician, and have dealt with the repercussions of this stereotype of actors being thought of as being gay.

I have always been passionate about the performing arts, especially from an early age. The performing arts includes theater, music, and art. Music class was always something I looked forward to in the week during elementary school and is a part of the performing arts that I am good at. Every school year, my high school shows our musical production to the elementary and high school. As an elementary student, I was extremely excited to see the great production my high school was able to put on, especially being able to see the great male actors we had sing and dance, and just enjoy being on stage like I do now. Watching our school's production of *Grease* sent me into a craze and truly inspired me after watching the legendary “bad-boy” T-Birds. I knew from that point that on, I wanted to try acting, especially musical theater. Once I was old enough to be able to act in my school's community education summer theater production, I was ecstatic. After that first year, I could not hold back my excitement for the next summer to roll

around; nervously waiting, ever so patiently waiting to find out what the production was, and what part I would be able to take on for that week. I have also taken a great liking in band and choir; I have been playing percussion in band for my sixth year and been a tenor/bass for my fifth year. I even enjoyed the sports I was able to play with my peers, even though I was not a talented athlete in my younger days.

Being so passionate about acting, singing, and dancing, set me apart from the rest of my peers. Even though I shared many similarities, like enjoying sports and big trucks. Children usually tend to bully to help gain popularity, and it is through this bullying that kids can achieve respect, influence, admiration, and leadership over their peers. Due to the natural desire to be popular, my differences in loving the performing arts landed me as the victim of a lot of bullying as my peers hoped it would bring them popularity. I never received any physical bullying, as most kids did not even want to touch me, but I did receive a lot of verbal bullying. Things like “gay,” “fag,” and “homo,” were said to me quite regularly. I remember many times of my peers being uncomfortable with changing in front of me for gym classes because I was “gay” and sexually attracted to them, or even the countless times I came home from school crying due to the harassment from the day. This amount of ostracism at such a young age really hurt, especially since the accusations were untrue to begin with. Being different is what makes us human and makes life interesting for us and those around us. It is so sad that because of these differences people can be the victims of discrimination, or in my case, bullying from my peers. I always wanted to be “one of the guys,” and “fit in,” but participating in sport teams with my peers could not save me from the harassment of enjoying the arts.

As the stereotype states, I was being bullied because I enjoyed singing, dancing, and acting. Which can do a lot of harm to a child's mental health as their brain is still maturing and may not be able to understand why they are being made the victim of bullying. The bullying

reached the point where I even had thoughts of suicide as a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grader, and even questioned my sexuality as an elementary student because of the constant harassment of being called gay. All of this because some kids fed into a completely incorrect stereotype about male actors and performing artists. The worst part of the bullying was that I was being harassed about something I am truly passionate about and love to do. The constant name calling, and harassment put me into a depressive state. I hated going to school, even though I genuinely loved learning about all the different subjects being taught. I thought I had no friends, even though I did have a few friends that stuck by me. I enjoyed being at school, but sadly it was not a safe space for me to be able to learn like any other child of my age. I had tried to help my situation by trying to report these behaviors to adults in my school and my parents, but kids are relentless. To help my situation, I decided to teach myself to laugh at the jokes too. Hopefully tricking myself into thinking that I was being included and that it was not hurting my feelings.

Now I am a high school student, and thankfully the bullying has stopped. I am now happily able to be involved in many activities with my peers. I am the captain of my basketball and speech team, an officer on our school's Student Council, and involved with our chapter of National Honor Society, yearbook, band, and choir, and regularly the male lead in our musical productions. My peers have been able to mature and realize that being passionate about the performing arts is a completely normal thing. I do still think that they, and many others, still feed into this truly harmful stereotype. One person who has truly helped me throughout my JH and HS life is my speech coach. She works hard to ensure that speech is a safe space for all involved. She also has really helped me come out of my shell and be more confident with myself.

Many people have and will feed into the homophobic stereotype of male performing artists and actors, and I was one of those people who are the victims of said stereotype. The definition of a stereotype is “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a

particular type of person or thing.” The worst thing about stereotypes is that they are usually in a negative light, with male actors being perceived as gay being one. I think that we can start a stereotype of actors and performing artists, celebrating them being able to take that step and being able to have their voice heard, because many people are too scared to take that step. Jonathon Groff, Neil Patrick Harris, and Jim Parsons are three gay actors that I love. Groff’s performance in *Hamilton* is something that I truly admire. Harris in *How I Met Your Mother* cracks me up all the time, and Parsons acting in *The Big Bang Theory* is amazing. These three men have been able to find a lot of success while being openly gay, which I do admire. There are many people proving that the stereotype is both inaccurate and harmful and hopefully we can start celebrating everyone and their differences.