

HARD WIRED

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Abstracted

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My piece is an abstract depiction of two women in the midst of sexual relations. This abstract, line-heavy style was inspired by artist Venetia Berry, who depicts female figures in this style in an attempt to reverse the male gaze, thus questioning the sexualization of female nude bodies. I tried to mimic this aim by conveying two women in a same-sex relationship. This art piece is based off a still I took from a lesbian porno and then abstracted. The women's breasts are freely out, and their feet, which typically symbolize eroticism and sensuality, are flexed and curled. However, the taboo nature of the porno is deflected through abstraction. I also made the figures interconnecting as if they are one—the lines that I used to make one figure continue onwards, making up various body parts of the other figure. For instance, the face of the figure on the right continues into a wavy line, hugging the figure on the left while also forming her hair. Moreover, I chose a colour scheme—pink and blue—that reflects the gender binary, but brought it into a queer context to challenge the validity of monotonous colours representing singular genders. There is a history and culture of fetishizing lesbian relationships, namely within pornography and the media. Through abstracting these figures, I'm able to divert this sexual gaze and challenge it as a whole.

Hardwire is the undergraduate journal of Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. Our journal provides an academic platform for issues of sexuality and gender. It aims to promote Sexual Diversity Studies and showcase scholarly and creative work by students critically analyzing sexuality at the undergraduate level.

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HARDWIRE

*The Undergraduate Journal of Sexual
Diversity Studies*

Issue 2

**Sexual Diversity Studies
University of Toronto
2018-2019**

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Putting the final touches on this year's volume of *Hardwire* feels unreal. It's been a long journey to get here— from our first meeting with Professor Moreau, to desperately advertising our call for submissions, to weekend mornings spent editing in Future bistro.

Watching this journal grow has been such a special thing. The last time *Hardwire* was published was in 2011-2013. This year, Professor Julie Moreau, representing the Bonham Centre of Sexual Diversity Studies, sponsored the journal's revival—the first time in five years. Our editorial team started as a small group of interested students. With plenty of hard work and determination, it grew to an 11-person team which consisted of students from a wide range of disciplines and experience levels.

From the beginning, our editorial team has been ready to work and full of ideas. We'd often remark on the efficiency and effectiveness of our meetings— we always had so much to cover, yet worked quickly and respectfully with each other.

We had no idea whether anyone would be interested in the revived journal; after releasing our call for submissions, no one submitted for the first couple of weeks. As time passed, contingency plans were created to address the situation of receiving no submissions.

But, one of the best moments of the journal's progression occurred at the beginning of January. About a week before our submission deadline, we finally started receiving pieces. By the end of the week, we had received 35 submissions from 33 authors. It was a magical moment where, for the first time, we saw our distant vision and hard work come together to create something excitingly real.

Going forward, we are incredibly proud of the journal we have produced for you. Our journal centers critical analyses of sexuality. As such, we foreground queer, intersectional, anti-racist, decolonial, and feminist perspectives. We believe our journal to be an important injection into academic discourse; we aspire to highlight queer, racialized voices and provide an academic platform for critical work from multiple disciplines.

This work intends to explore, to unsettle, to remake. It is the product of countless hours of thought, creativity, and discipline, from both our authors and editors. We sincerely hope you enjoy Volume 2 of *Hardwire: the Undergraduate Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies*.

With gratitude,

The *Hardwire* Editorial Board

Queer Slang and its Relation to Society

Ze Xi Ye- (*she/her*), History, Anthropology, and Sexual Diversity Studies

How does the use of queer slang reflect upon the society that uses it? Queer slang is used by groups to create speech communities within hostile environments. I will prove this through the examination of three different studies of queer slang. The restricted code of transgender youth in Oakland, the gender inversion of gay men's slang, and the derogatory queer insults used by university students represent unique speech communities while also reflecting society at large. Furthermore, the changing nature of queer slang runs parallel to changes within the linguistic study of queer slang. Studying queer slang is studying the marginalized in the context of the societies they are a part of and are excluded from. Since this field is relatively new, there is also potential for more interest and research.

What is queer slang and how is it used within the LGBTQ community? In this article, I will explore the ways in which queer slang actively challenges the gender binary and disrupts heteronormative social structures. Through the analysis of different speech communities in America, I will demonstrate how queer and trans youths are forging new speech communities. Finally, I will discuss the possible limitations of queer speech studies and reflect upon the possible areas of development.

Firstly, I will prove the existence of queer speech communities using an ethnography of a transgender community in Oakland, California. This study focuses on African American assigned male at birth (AMAB) adolescents and young adults who use queer slang to express their lived experiences (Eyre et al., 2004). For example, trans youths refer to themselves as “TG,” meaning transgender, and use female pronouns (Eyre et al., 2004). They also use specific terms to categorize different gender-presentations such as “femme” (female gender presentation) and “trade” (a masculine man that has relationships with “TG’s”) (Eyre et al., 2004). Such language demonstrates how queer slang is used to subvert gender norms.

Queer slang is a form of restricted code because it requires specific background knowledge and an understanding of implicit social nuances (Dansei, 2018). In this sense, restricted code requires exclusive membership and thus creates a community through its discourse. For example, the act of “reading” another “TG” is both playful and insulting because it “clocks” other people and judges their passability as women in a humorous way (Eyre et al., 2004). This type of discourse requires communicative competence (Dansei, 2018) to strike the right balance between insulting and funny.

Gender inversion is another type of queer slang. Speech communities which utilize gender inversion the most are subcultures like drag queen and leather communities where the performative nature of gender (Butler, 1997) is most exaggerated (Johnsen, 2008). However, this type of queer slang has also been adopted by Western gay men (Johnsen, 2008). For example, gay men often use gender inversion to refer to themselves and each other with phrases like, “he’s a big old girl” (Johnsen, 2008). The use of gender inversion signals the homosexual identity of other gay men (Johnsen, 2008). Therefore, gender inversion indicates group solidarity because it requires the knowledge of one’s sexuality. In this sense, gender inversion is another type of restricted code because it requires background knowledge.

It is interesting to note that queer slang and gender inversion are not exclusively used in North America. In fact, the language of gender inversion transcends location and subcultures. Queer slang is used in a number of other languages, such as Norwegian, and thus is not a uniquely English-speaking phenomenon

(Johnsen, 2008).

Despite the fact that the sex-gender binary is a societal construct (Foucault, 1978), Western society continues to adhere to specific gender roles that are predicated on the basis of biological essentialism (Butler, 1997). One reason that queer people created a vocabulary for themselves was because of the danger and threat of violence that they faced from society at large. Therefore, the creation of queer speech communities challenges the sharp boundaries outlined by society and fuels queer solidarity. A study out of California Polytechnic State University surveyed students to discern their usage of homophobic slurs (Burn, 2000). According to the study, homophobic slurs such as “fag” and “queer” were used by (predominantly) young men in order to gain group approval (Burn, 2000). Interestingly enough, the study indicates that half of the participants did not hold discriminatory attitudes (Burn, 2000), rather that derogatory terms have become colloquialisms and are used as a general insult. Thus, queer slang is not just language used by queer people, but also language used *against* queer people.

Of course, there are limitations to both of these examples in terms of each study’s methodology. For the study on gender inversion, full conversations could not be recorded for ethical and privacy reasons (Johnsen, 2008). Furthermore, taking notes during a conversation may lead to participant bias, causing exaggeration or performance (Johnsen, 2008). Due to these limitations, the study relies on the memory of the researcher and is thus not verbatim or guaranteed accurate (Johnsen, 2008). The study is also limited because its sampling occurs in English and focuses on a Western narrative. In order to understand whether or not the queer slang of gender inversion is a global phenomenon in queer speech communities we would require assistance from multilingual researchers. Moreover, there are languages which do not have gendered pronouns; whether gender inversion occurs in the queer slang of these languages is uncertain.

In the case of transgender queer slang, there is a major sampling issue. To be clear, the speech community of Oakland youths should not reflect transgender people overall. As the researchers admit:

Most of our contacts were made in the parking lot of a single gay bar to which the teens could gain admission and on the ‘ho stroll’ (a place where the ‘whores stroll’), a city block a few blocks away where some of the transgender youth engaged in sex work (Eyre et al., 2004, p. 150).

Therefore, the participants of the study come from specific backgrounds, which are likely socioeconomically disadvantaged; this could affect their vocabulary. Justification for this assumption comes from William Labov’s study of the pronunciation of /r/ in New York department stores which proved there is a social divide in its usage (Dansei, 2018). Using Labov’s study as a framework, it is possible to presume that the speech communities of different socioeconomic transgender communities utilize different vocabularies. Because the study is from the University of California’s Department of Pediatrics, it focuses on vulnerable youth. This sampling limitation means its conclusions about queer slang cannot be broadly applied to other speech communities who are older, more financially stable, or in different locations. However, this preference for studying the oppressed over the privileged seems to be a common sampling bias in queer theory academia. More research on privileged queer speech communities would lead to more balanced insights on queer slang overall.

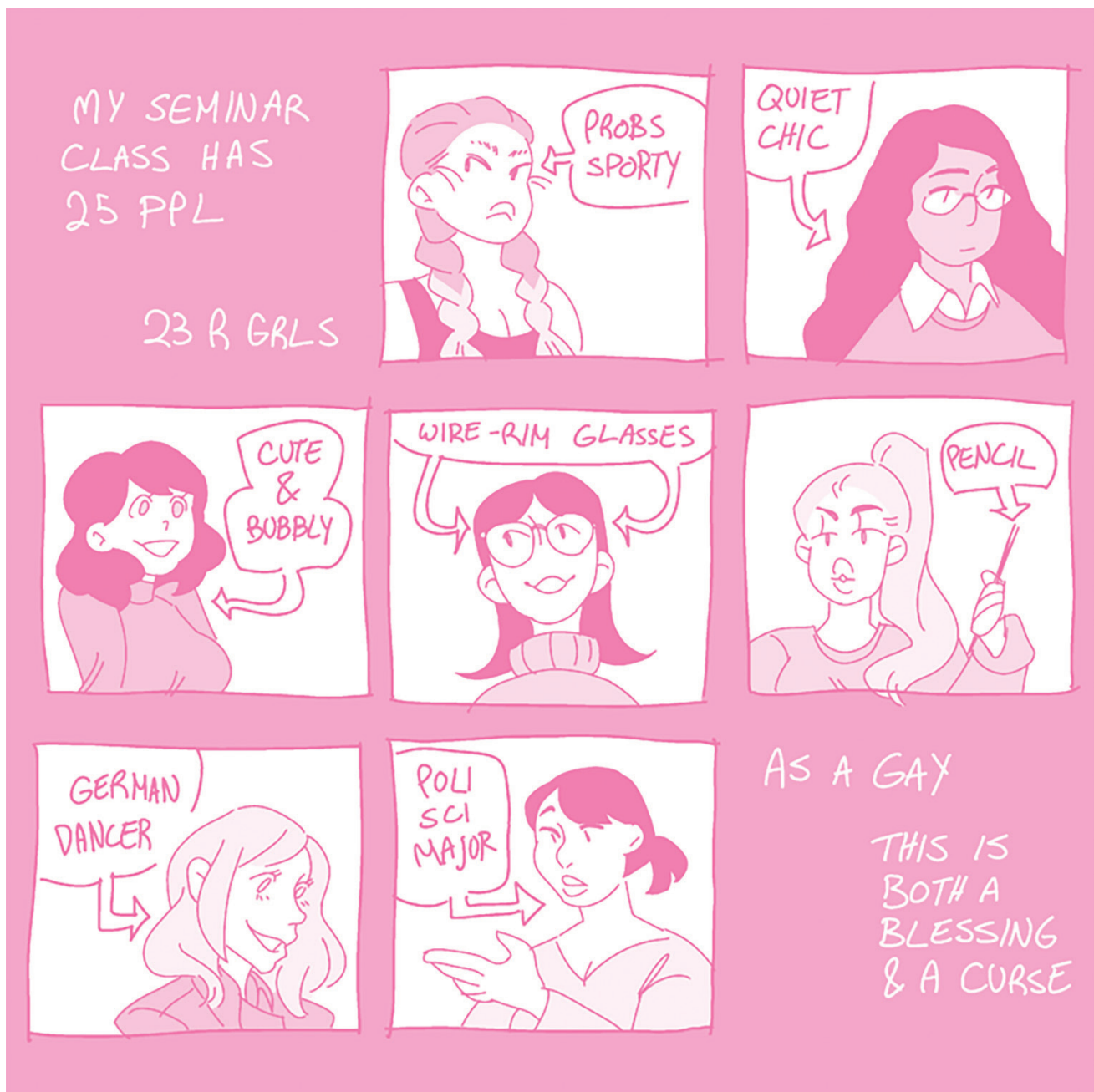
In a broader context, the study of queer slang is actually a relatively new field. Queer theory is much

more contemporary when compared to other fields of academia. Furthermore, the word “queer” did not appear as a colloquialism for homosexual until recently. Homosexual was a term created through the medical jargon of the 18th century (Foucault, 1978). Essentially, queer was slang used as an insult against gay men and women (Sayers, 2005). However, a definition of queer as simply same-sex is quite limited since queer theorists of modernity address more than just “homosexuals” in their writings. Rather, they focus on queerness as societal marginalization, as being on the peripheries of the charmed circle (Rubin, 2011, Chapter 9). Such a paradigm shift in the usage of “queer” and in queer theory is reflected in the study of queer slang.

The linguistic study of queer slang focused originally on homosexual men (Cameron & Kulick, 2006). Women, such as trans women and lesbians, were largely ignored or disregarded and their vocabularies left unstudied (Cameron & Kulick, 2006). Furthermore, the dictionaries of gay men’s slang were not created with the intent to educate, since they were written when homosexuality was considered both a criminal and mental deficiency (Foucault, 1978). However, even though the origins of queer linguistic studies are far from inclusive, the progress towards more intersectional research spells out hope and reflects a society which is becoming more self-aware of the need for intersectional academia (Cameron & Kulick, 2006).

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Ze Xi Ye- (she/her), History, Anthropology, and Sexual Diversity Studies

As a first-year student, university was an anxiety-inducing environment. I no longer had to be closeted but still did not know how to come out. White suburbs were behind me, yet the freedom of the city didn't feel like freedom at all. This stress was not helped by the fact that nearly all of my classmates were smart, intelligent women of diverse backgrounds with unique voices. How do I signal that I'm interested? How do I tell they are interested? Am I actually interested or is the fact that I've never seen so many types of woman and this is overwhelming my sense of rationality? By making this comic, the bone-deep terror of the situation was elevated with humour. Inspired by Hourlies (a day of hourly comic making), I wanted to make something light-hearted but honest. I hope other people can relate to the shock of suddenly gaining autonomy and realizing it didn't solve anything at all.

One Step Out of the Closet: Queer University Students and the Liminal Space of Coming Out

Andrew Situ- (he/him), Public Policy and Sociology

Coming out, while seen as a linear process by some, is instead a multifaceted process that can have vastly different outcomes for queer youth undergoing the process. To better understand the complexity of coming out, I study how queer university students perceive and subsequently navigate through the process. Youth, and more specifically post-secondary students, are of interest as these individuals currently undergo a process of identity formation. As youth discover which (social) identities resonate with them, tensions may potentially arise throughout the process when trying to negotiate between their identities and actors within the social environment. I use data from a content analysis of 10 Reddit discussion posts from the subreddit /r/comingout, observational field research from two dinner events, and semi-structured interviews with four undergraduate students enrolled at a mid-sized Canadian university, exploring queer youth's experiences with coming out. I find that queer youth 1) keep their sexuality a secret due to fear and potential judgement from others, 2) navigate through familial ties and tensions about their sexuality, and 3) maintain a sense of critical hope for future acceptance, both for themselves and the queer community. I consider my findings in relation to literature, discussing the role of social environment and how a multiplicity of coming out narratives are present amongst queer youth. I bring attention to the liminality that is present, wherein social factors impact, shape, and subsequently create the lived experiences each person faces. With conceptualizing "coming out," one must go beyond romanticized visions and consider the spectrum of positive and negative experiences that queer youth can face when disclosing their sexuality to others. In turn, by highlighting such dynamic narratives, one must be cognizant of how queer individuals face different levels of privilege and oppression, all of which continuously (re)shapes and (re)molds the context of reception when trying to disclose one's sexuality.

When one considers the process of coming out, a multiplicity of experiences is present with queer youth trying to disclose their sexuality to their friends and family. Queer youth face different levels of receptiveness from their social contexts, creating cascading consequences that personalize one's lived reality. Coming out, then, is not a single narrative story. Rather, the process can be fraught with compounding obstacles, creating diverging sets of outcomes for queer youth as they navigate through their lives. This pilot study uses three different qualitative modes of inquiry, namely a content analysis, observational field research, and semi-structured interviews to exemplify such sentiments. My research is guided by the following questions: 1) *How do queer youth perceive the process of coming out?* 2) *What challenges do queer youth face when trying to come out?* and 3) *What strategies do queer youth use to help them come out?*

This pilot study begins with a literature review to provide context on what scholars have already found. Second, I explain my pilot study, providing information on what this project entails. I provide an analysis of the methods used, along with details on the results found. I subsequently present data on three salient themes including 1) having to keep one's sexuality a secret due to fear and judgement, 2) familial ties and tensions, and 3) informants' sense of critical hope of future acceptance. Thirdly, I provide a subsequent discussion, giving insight on the significance of my results. In sum, this paper provides readers with a glimpse into the complex lived experiences of queer youth as they navigate through the process of coming out.

Literature Review

Developmental Models: Coming Out as a Staged Process

Early scholarship on coming out focuses on the usage of developmental stages to understand such

processes. Scholars (Cass, 1979; Carrion & Lock, 1997; Troiden, 1989) describe coming out as a linear process, wherein queer folks move from one stage to the next as they come to terms with their sexuality. As queer individuals continue to transition, one can create a more concrete sense of self. While models have epistemic variations, Eliason and Schope's (2007) insightful review of queer identity development finds similarities across many studies. Simplified, queer individuals first become cognizant of their identity and try to make sense of it before moving on to further explore their sexuality. (Re-)negotiation subsequently occurs as queer folks continue to navigate their sexuality, finding which sexual identity, or identities, provide a sense of resonance. Finally, queer individuals achieve a sense of self-acceptance, integrating their sexuality as an active part of their life. In essence, coming out becomes part of a process that ultimately leads to identity formation, wherein queer individuals can wholly conceptualize themselves.

However, such models face criticism due to the rigidity of stage transitioning and perceiving coming out as a linear process. Other scholars (Cox & Gallois, 1996; De Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001) reconceptualize the process of coming out through alternative models. While developmental models provide insight into an individual's internalized negotiations, external factors (e.g., family ties, friendships, economic stability) found within the social environment also require attention. Such scholars also incorporate the complexities of social life within their respective analyses, creating a more fluid description of what coming out entails. As such, the process of sexual identity disclosure goes beyond essentialist purviews that implicitly categorizes queer individuals within the confines of generalization.

Multiplicity: The Process of Coming Out

Other scholars have noted that such developmental models are only able to capture a portion of the overall mosaic of lived experiences that queer youth have when trying to come out. As scholars (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; McLean, 2007; Orne, 2011; Rasmussen, 2004) argue, social context matters as a multitude of lived experiences are generated based on how well received others are towards those that identify as queer. These factors can directly intervene as one attempts to come out, creating differing contexts of reception for queer youth. For example, Klein et al.'s (2015) study utilizes a photovoice technique wherein queer research informants are asked to take photos of their day-to-day lives, catalyzing their perceptions through images that resonate most with their experiences. Collectively, informants' photos depict a vast mosaic of lived experiences, showing how coming out is not a single dimensional narrative that encapsulates the realities of being queer. Instead, a variety of factors impact the process of coming out, intertwining and creating cascading effects for queer individuals.

Scholars also describe how variation manifests itself through an individual's ability to navigate through the social spheres that they inhabit. Prior research describes a multiplicity of factors that affect one's ability to come out, whether it be familial ties (Chester et al., 2016; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Klein et al., 2015; McLean, 2007; Orne, 2011), maintaining friendships (Chester et al., 2016; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Orne, 2011), financial stability (Klein et al., 2015; Rasmussen, 2004), or (internalized) societal perceptions of heteronormativity and homophobia (Chester et al., 2016; Rosenberg, 2017). As such, coming out is not necessarily a linear process where individuals disclose their sexuality once. Instead, as Rust (1993) and McLean (2007) write, coming out is a process of continuous (re)negotiation as queer individuals navigate their social spheres and interact with others. When one considers the process of coming out then, one must be cognizant of how queer individuals face different levels of privilege and oppression, all of which continuously (re)shapes and (re)molds the context of reception when trying to disclose one's sexuality.

Coming Out: Rethinking Romanticized Visions

Notable as well, while individuals can gain a sense of liberation from coming out, such an expression can also have negative implications. As Rasmussen (2004) describes, one should not romanticize the process of coming out, as by doing so, one largely invisibilizes those that are unable to disclose their sexuality. Indeed, Ben-Ari (1995) and Orne (2011) describe how adverse reactions can permeate after a queer individual discloses their sexuality, particularly from personal relationships such as friends and family. In turn, queer individuals must strategically come out to those within their lives, prioritizing those who are deemed to be safe over others that can further complicate and hinder sexual identity disclosure. Alternatively, Rosenberg (2017) offers insight through their concept of “coming in,” which describes how queer individuals are still able to obtain a sense of self-acceptance despite not being out to others. “Coming in” places oneself at the center of discussion, whereby coming out to others is not seen as an end goal for some. Coming out is only able to afford a partial form of freedom, whereby the liberation of self is not wholly achievable if one is not able to come to terms with their respective sexuality.

Methods & Analysis

This pilot study utilizes three different qualitative modes of inquiry. I draw on data from content analysis, field-site observation, and semi-structured interviews. For the content analysis, I analyzed ten discussion posts from the subreddit, www.reddit.com/r/comingout (henceforth known as “/r/comingout”). Subreddits are specific community hubs that provide users with a safe community space to discuss specific topics anonymously unless one reveals their identity. As described on this subreddit, it is a “comforting place to share your story about coming out or discuss ways that you could come out. [W]hether you’re still in the closet or out in the world, this subreddit will make you feel welcome” (/r/comingout 2019). For /r/comingout then, this subreddit provides a space for queer individuals¹ to share their experiences with coming out, whether it focuses on the process or the aftermath of doing so. With many, if not all, of the discussion posts, youth appear to have written each one respectively. Users provided indicators through the ways they described their familial living situations, (post-)secondary school attendance, and general background information (e.g., age).

Regarding the observational studies, two field-sites were used and visited once respectively I observed interactions at two different invited dinner events - first at Congee Queen and then Green Grotto - for approximately an hour each. I chose both sites as it conveniently allowed me to explore the potential role of social norms and heteronormativity, particularly as it relates to discussions around monogamous relationships. Congee Queen involved members that are either from my immediate or extended family, many of whom are vastly older than I am. With Green Grotto, the site was used to meet and interact with friends that are closer in age to me. Using two different sites, I am given observational data to complement and contrast, subsequently seeing any possible patterns and themes that relate to the literature. For field notes, I was able to sit at the table and discreetly write notes as the individuals present were busy speaking with one another or were eating food. However, whenever the conversation required my focus, I was forced to remember as much as I could before 1) excusing myself to the bathroom to quickly jot down notes or 2) writing in the car ride home after each meal.

Lastly, I conducted four interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes each. I recruited my informants through my networks, as each was either a friend or a close acquaintance. Informants were chosen based on their sexuality, as each identified as being someone within the queer community. Of the four individuals, three

¹ As some discussion post authors do not explicitly share their gender nor their preferred pronouns, I will be using “they/ them” throughout the “Results” and “Discussion” section whenever referencing an individual from the content analysis data.

identified as being male and the other as female. With my informants, two identified as being bisexual but questioning, one identified as gay, and the other as queer. For those questioning, one was considering if he was gay, while the other was not sure if she identified as a lesbian. Within this research project's scope, informants were also chosen based on whether they attended university. As such, I specifically choose current students at my university. Such a decision also helped to maintain the feasibility of the project as it gave me an accessible population from which to gather data.

For both the content analysis documents and interview transcripts, I conducted a preliminary reading before the coding process to give me a contextual basis to work with. I utilized both pre-coding and memo making methods to highlight noticeable phrases and potentially significant themes. I then formulated concrete themes based on the information presented and subsequently analyzed all three data sources in tandem with one another.

Results

In this section, I present three themes. I first begin with a discussion of how queer youth perceive potential fear and judgement if they disclose their sexuality to others. Second, I describe the role of familial tensions and the subsequent tensions that can arise if and when one decides to come out to their parents. Finally, I end this section by discussing how queer youth still maintain a critical sense of hope and future acceptance, for themselves and the queer community at large.

Fear & Judgement – Keeping Queerness a Secret

A prominent theme was that of keeping one's sexual identity a secret due to the fear of potential (physical) harm against them or being judged by others. While some were more open with their sexual identity, a sense of tentativeness was still apparent. Queer youth face internalized tensions, not being sure of who or when to come out to others. In large part, social context can play a role in determining how queer youth can come out and publicly disclose their sexuality.

For example, in the observational sites, different levels of reception are available based on the individuals within it. From the Congee Queen field site with family, older members made conversation on the topic of relationships and whether the youth at the table had a partner. Individuals raise heteronormative questions, asking the men if they had a girlfriend or wife, and for the women if they had a boyfriend or husband. No individual explicitly stated the possibility that someone could be queer and that, in turn, can create external barriers to whether one can come out within a given situation. Assumptions become implicated on to people, labelling queer individuals with a sexual identity that is not theirs. Although speculative, how individuals structure conversations with others can lead to different degrees of inclusion for each member in conversation.

In turn, social context can become a complex space in which individuals question whom to come out to or when to come out. Coming out then can become an internal struggle as queer individuals try to navigate their thoughts of possibly disclosing their sexuality to others who may not be receptive. For example, in a Reddit discussion post, N0_ThisIsPATRICK (2015) shares a visual description of what these apprehensive sentiments may entail:

It's like I am standing on the diving board looking into the pool while the sun beats down on me on a hot summer day. I am sweating and uncomfortable on the diving board and know that the water will be refreshing but I am scared of that instant change in temperature, like a shock to my system.

Interestingly, this was not wholly the case for some. Daniel, an interview informant who identifies as gay, does not actively hide his sexuality from others due to fear for himself. Instead, he describes how he does not need to share his sexuality, as it is not an essential part of his identity that others should know:

I'm comfortable, but I won't share everything like my sexual orientation, identity, or whatever. It's not like I don't trust them, it's [that] I don't think it's necessarily important because I don't think it should be... you don't see people say 'oh can I tell you something? I'm straight or whatever'. So, I don't really think it should be like a problem, cause I don't think it's a problem at all whatsoever.

However, when asked about his potential feelings with being openly out to everyone, Daniel comments on the difference between total acceptance versus that of being given a "friend exception." Daniel describes this as a "mental block":

Like I'm perfectly fine, I don't care if you know [about Daniel being gay]. But at the same time, do you approve... are you perfectly fine? If you can accept me, but you can't accept anyone else, like... what's the point? Like, if you could accept me and other people then like yea... I'd love that. But if you could only accept me and not other people cause I'm like a friend or something... then I would feel like nothing has changed.

Daniel does not fear judgement, but he appears dissatisfied if his friends were not fully accepting of others within the queer community. Although in the scenario Daniel is open to his friends, being out to homophobic individuals, who only make exceptions for him, is not enough concerning acceptance. Coming out, in this sense, has no meaning to Daniel as it does not change his current situation with his friends.

Notably, then, each becomes implicated within a system that does not necessarily allow them to come out to those that they want to, whether it be family or friends. While my informants wish that they could come out, fears arise over the potential loss of relationships. For others, however, coming out does not pose a threat to their relationships directly, but can still create feelings that nothing has changed with whether one's friends are accepting or not. Informants cannot easily create a compromise between keeping their relationships intact and being able to express their sexual identity freely. Instead, informants may choose to keep their sexuality a secret as the potential consequences outweigh the benefits gained from coming out.

Familial Ties & Tensions

Coming out can be seen as a significant challenge when considering familial ties, whereby keeping one's sexual identity a secret is a better alternative than being open and facing subsequent consequences. For Carl, an interview informant who identifies as queer, he notes his fear of coming out to his parents and potentially losing their financial support. Carl describes his tentativeness as he does not know how his parents will react after coming out:

You only have one chance to tell your family, and you can't really try once, see how they react, and then you know take it back and try again. You only have one chance to tell them or not tell them at all and... because I'm still economically dependent on them, you know there's a little bit of a fear that my living situation or whatever could be compromised if I tell them and they're not happy.

However, other individuals note that they did not want to come out as it could psychologically or emotionally hurt their family. In N0_ThisIsPATRICK's (2015) discussion post, he describes his reluctance to come out to his mother as it could have severely negative implications. N0_ThisIsPATRICK worries about his mother's wellbeing as she may not necessarily cope well after already feeling betrayed that her gay brother did not disclose his sexuality to her before dying of AIDS:

My uncle (Mom's brother) was gay but died from AIDS in the early 1990s when I was a toddler. He was never officially out to his family, but they knew. I think my mom was hurt that he never confided in her. I am worried that my coming out will stir up all sorts of crazy emotions in her. I think she will be happy that I was able to tell her (I'm pretty sure she knows deep down). But I also think that a part of her will be upset and worried for my safety. She already lost her brother to AIDS and I think she will be worried that the same may happen to me. I dont [sic] want to send her over the edge.

Luke describes similar thoughts within his interview as he shares his attempts to come out to his immigrant parents. He speaks of how he posed a hypothetical situation to his parents, asking about if he were gay, how they would react to that disclosure. He describes how his parents' initial reactions were tolerant but tinged with rejection. Notably, while his parents would not outright ostracize him, they state how they would also not be able to love him fully. Luke then describes how later in the night, his mother walks downstairs to the living room and starts crying. His mother shares her thoughts with him, talking about her struggle with making sure that Luke and his brother have the best possible life, even if that means sacrificing herself in the process. His mother continues, stating how she wants grandchildren and Luke's future wife to chat to as a sign that her hard work had paid off. Luke describes his afterthoughts, stating his burden and sense of guilt with not being able to fulfill his mother's wishes:

Like if I don't keep my end of the bargain by giving back to her and my dad for everything that they've done, then they're going to keep thinking about where they went wrong or like, if everything that they've done, by working so hard and having to give up everything themselves... was it worth it? I just don't know. Like I just want to be happy and to live my life to the fullest, but I just can't let go of knowing and experiencing sort of what my parents went through and continue to go through [with my life] without paying some form of attention to it.

As noted in the previous theme, coming out is not necessarily a possible option in some social contexts that involve family relationships. Rather, as queer youth describe, barriers are in place that subsequently prevent individuals from coming out. While some informants have more acceptance afforded to them, others do not operate within the same realm. Instead, one hides their sexuality due to the fear of not knowing what consequences lie after coming out to their parents.

Maintaining Critical Hope – Future Acceptance of the Queer Community

While informants faced obstacles with trying to come out, many emphasize how they maintain aspirations for the future with being able to come out more easily to others. Informants describe their hopes for their family, friends, and society at large, with being able to come to terms with the queer community. In gatoronastick's (2016) discussion post, they include a coming out Facebook announcement draft for feedback from other subreddit users. They describe their tensions with navigating their Christian affiliation and being gay, with such social identities intersecting to create an internalized hostile mindset. However, similar to Rosenberg's (2017) notion of "coming in," gatoronastick attempts to move forward from their internal struggles by coming

to terms with themselves. In doing so, they hope to gain a sense of self-acceptance by no longer having to hide their sexuality:

I'm tired of being afraid, telling half-truths, and waiting for some magical solution that filters all of the intimidation out of being forthright with the people I love. I might not rest easier tonight for having shared this, but I know that this is a necessary step towards living more honestly and openly.

Luke makes a plea towards others, especially those that identify as heterosexual, to understand that being queer should not mean being deemed lesser than someone who identifies as being straight. Luke describes how coming out and being openly queer should not be seen as something unacceptable. Coming out as queer should not subsequently mean becoming labelled as something less than a human:

I think we all deserve love, especially for those that haven't done anything wrong in their lives. I think we all deserve to live our lives to the fullest without having to fear for our safety and well-being... I don't want to be seen as a freak... I just want to be seen as a human... [as] someone that is so much more than my sexuality.

In a similar vein, the Green Grotto field site can become a case study of the impact of accepting others and their sexuality. Someone initiates a conversation with a friend, asking about how well they are doing with their relationship. The friend responds, describing how she and her lesbian partner are doing "ok" as they have been working through their issues as best as they could. She mentions how she hopes that "everything will work out" and that she is curious to see where their relationship "will go." Others at the table nod their heads in agreement, with some wishing her good luck with everything and saying that they would always be there if she needs support. She thanks everyone for their thoughts and then redirects the conversation. From this case, queer youth appear not to be alienated as they share their struggles within conversations over queer relationships with their friends. Instead, such a topic is normalized, as others at the table listen and respond. Queerness, in general, integrates itself within the conversational flow rather than being perceived as something out of place.

Discussion

Social context plays a significant role in whether queer youth can come out. As Klein et al. (2015) and Rasmussen (2004) describe, divergences are present with queer youth's ability to publicly disclose their sexuality. While some can do so, others do not have the opportunity to negotiate their ability to express their sexuality. Different constellations of lived experiences are present, depicting a spectrum of disclosure and subsequent receptiveness. Similar to Kaufman and Johnson's (2004) results, informants from this pilot study actively strategize who is the best to come out to, basing their decisions on who is the safest to tell. Decisions can be based on fears of potential judgement and reprisal or past experiences with homophobic individuals, as highlighted in the first two themes respectively. In a sense, queer youth strategize about whether or not to come out to specific individuals, working under the restraints set upon them by others.

For example, the observational field sites provide insight into how social contexts can create differing outcomes for queer youth attempting to express their sexuality. In the Congee Queen site, a sense of compulsory heterosexuality manifests itself through the usage of heteronormative language. Individuals are assumed to be heterosexual, thereby ignoring the potentiality that queerness exists. However, in the Green Grotto site, queer youth are invited to speak about their sexuality, subsequently opening up the space to include conversations

that revolve around queerness. Although these observational sites can only provide a point of speculation, it is important to note their potential significance. For (heterosexual) individuals that operate alongside queer folks within a given social space, the former can act as gatekeepers, providing access or restricting the latter from being able to express themselves fully.

As well, queer youth actively decide whom to come out to, hiding their sexuality from those that are a threat to their wellbeing. As Orne (2011) describes, coming out can lead to “collateral damage” (p. 693) whereby sexual identity disclosure can have multifaceted effects, especially on one’s relationships with others. Keeping one’s sexuality a secret, in turn, acts as a defense mechanism that protects oneself from potential danger. While informants wish they could come out to specific individuals or groups, there is also considerable recognition that such actions may not be the best, especially when considering their current situation. For Carl, who is financially dependent on his parents, coming out does not become a priority for him. Coming out consequently means potentially becoming ostracized; compromises between wanting to be open and maintaining some form of economic stability in one’s life is not possible. In turn, decisions are made to come out at another time once a given informant finds themselves in a safer situation.

Critically then, coming out does not necessarily lead to better outcomes for some. McLean (2007) problematizes the concept of the “disclosure imperative” (p. 154) which largely romanticizes coming out as an end goal for queer individuals as they can achieve a fuller sense of self. While for some this may be the case, others are unable to achieve such a goal due to constraints found in the social environment. Whether it be Carl’s financial struggles or Luke’s struggle with achieving his immigrant parents’ American Dream, coming out does not end with an idyllic fairy-tale-like ending. Rather, one’s dissonance becomes exacerbated, adding additional tension to the process of trying to create some semblance of one’s sexuality and achieving (self-)acceptance. Coming out, and more specifically the perceived positive outcomes is not a universal narrative. Instead, queer youth are intertwined with a spectrum of narratives, creating divergences in how one experiences disclosing their sexuality to others. While some are able to gain a positive reception, others may instead receive further backlash as they attempt to disclose their sexuality.

However, while the process of coming out can be fraught with multiple obstacles, queer youth still maintain a strong sense of hope with being able to freely express their sexuality, whether it be for themselves or other queer folks within a similar situation. Indeed, as Klein et al. (2015) highlights, societal norms and dominant perceptions of heteronormativity and homophobia affects one’s ability to come out. Disclosure is intertwined with such sentiments, creating a duality of acceptance that queer individuals must obtain. Coming out, then, becomes a more straightforward process once society becomes more accepting of the diverse array of sexualities that are present. While Rust (1993) poignantly writes of how coming out is a lifelong process, queer individuals should not bear the sole burden of the challenges that emerge from trying to come out. Coming out becomes a collective effort, wherein queer individuals feel safer with expressing their sexuality when their social environments become more receptive.

Conclusion

Queer youth are not within a static process of coming out. Rather, sexual identity disclosure for individuals manifests at different levels, with actors found within the social environment mediating each process. While this pilot study is small in scope, it nevertheless provides insight for readers on the complex, dynamic nature of coming out. Queer individuals face different challenges, wherein they must navigate potential tensions that emerge from their family and friends. Such obstacles become compounded, whereby one can face

constraints, whether it be from perceived fears of judgement, harm, isolation, or overall lack of acceptance. Queer individuals reside in multifaceted realities that subsequently create a mosaic of differing disclosure and receptiveness. However, while queer youth navigate through a challenging social environment, such individuals still maintain a robust sense of hope for the future. Coming out may not be practical for some presently, but such a goal remains as an option that is still achievable.

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Mind the Gap: Investigating the Absence of Community Programming for Young Queer Women

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While many diverse youth community programs exist to serve the needs of young gay, bisexual, and queer men, as well as LGBTQ youth in general, upon closer investigation, it is evident that no such Toronto-based programs currently exist that cater to the specific experiences and needs of young queer women, specifically between the ages of 13-18. Furthermore, while there are multiple studies that analyze and consider the necessity for and impact of services for diverse LGBTQ youth (Choi, et al., 2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Kosciw, Bartkiewicz, & Greytak, 2012), very few of these scholarly works focus on young queer women's communities. Utilizing personal experience working with Planned Parenthood Toronto's peer anti-homophobia education program, Teens Educating And Confronting Homophobia (T.E.A.C.H.), as well as engaging with research on LGBTQ youth programs and services, this paper will provide an overview of existing programs for queer youth, as well as previously-existing programming for young women, and investigate the impact that the absence of support services, resources, and community spaces have on young queer women.

A Google search for “queer men Toronto” reveals a plethora of opportunities available to members of Toronto's gay and queer men's communities. The first page of results shows a variety of community services and programming available for young gay, bisexual, and queer men, generally between the ages of 16-29. The programs listed on the search results provide opportunities to gain knowledge and skills, and to build community, both with peers and intergenerationally through mentorship programs.

Conversely, a Google search for “queer women Toronto” produces a very different list of results, mainly consisting of links to webpages with information about nightlife, including various parties and events, which primarily happen in bar settings. Amongst these search results for the best parties and bars is a video produced by Xtra in late 2018 entitled “Where have all the spaces for queer women in Toronto gone?” While this video pertains primarily to the disappearance of queer women's bars throughout the city, the question presented in the title reflects a wider state of affairs for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. If finding and building community is predicated upon being over the age of 19 and therefore legally able to access bar spaces, how can young queer girls and women locate and access support, resources, and services necessary to develop and maintain communities? While many diverse youth community programs exist to serve the needs of young gay, bisexual, and queer men, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth in general, upon closer investigation, it is evident that no such Toronto-based programs currently exist that cater to the specific experiences and needs of young queer women, specifically between the ages of 13-18. Furthermore, while there are multiple studies that analyze and consider the necessity for and impact of services for diverse LGBTQ youth (Choi, et al., 2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Kosciw, Bartkiewicz, & Greytak, 2012), very few of these scholarly works focus on young queer women's communities. Utilizing personal experience working with Planned Parenthood Toronto's peer anti-homophobia education program, Teens Educating And Confronting Homophobia (T.E.A.C.H.), as well as engaging with research on LGBTQ youth programs and services, this paper will provide an overview of existing programs for queer youth. This paper will also touch on previously-existing programming for young women, and investigate the impact that the absence of support services, resources, and community spaces have on young queer women. Throughout this paper, I will be using the acronym LGBTQ and the word “queer” interchangeably, with queer being both a shorthand umbrella term encompassing identities within the LGBTQ+ community, as well as a reflection of the fact that many women, particularly young women, are using the word “queer” with

increasing frequency as their primary identity marker in addition to, or instead of terms such as lesbian or bisexual.

Historical and Contemporary Contexts

The issue of creating spaces for queer women is not new, nor are the challenges and barriers to building sustainable community spaces, organizations and programs. In 1976, the Lesbian Organization of Toronto, more frequently referred to as “LOOT” was founded in response to the male-dominated nature of gay activism. Running until 1980, LOOT was located in a house at 342 Jarvis St., just outside of Toronto’s Gay Village. During its time as an organization, LOOT provided a space for lesbians to find solace and community, hosting a number of events including coffee houses and dances, as well as providing housing, peer counseling, and support at their weekly drop-in (Rise Up!, 2017). However, internal issues began to arise such as the exclusion of racialized and trans women from this space, as well as affordability; those running the space were mostly poor and working class and did not have the funds to keep up with the increasing rent. It was largely due to these exclusionary policies and financial instability that led to LOOT disbanding in 1980.

As neoliberal economic policies took hold throughout North America in the 1980’s and 1990’s, a decline in state regulation and spending on public infrastructure and services has been most strongly felt by working class marginalized communities (Dodson, 2006), which made owning and maintaining physical spaces increasingly difficult. Almost a decade after LOOT was dissolved, a cooperative space called The Woman’s Common opened in 1988 at 580 Parliament St. in the heart of Cabbagetown. It was thought to be the first and only space for queer women that was fully owned and operated by queer women, with 1600 investing members at the height of its existence (Brown, 2004). However, in 1994, The Woman’s Common closed its doors for two main reasons: the first due to effects of the economic recession of the early 1990’s and the other due to competition from a brief, yet significant boom in lesbian spaces in Toronto around this time (Rise Up!, 2017). As North America was faced with economic hardship in the early 1990’s, a shift in gendered roles and expectations, particularly around employment was also seen during this time. With an increasing amount of women, the majority of whom were white (Barker & Feiner, 2009), working in historically male-dominated fields with higher-paying roles (Huffman, Cohen & Pearlman, 2010), an unprecedented access to financial independence and disposable income made it possible for women to gain access to public spaces, such as bars. This helped keep these spaces in business, despite the economic uncertainty early in the decade.

However, since the early 2000’s, spaces that experienced a brief period of success in the 1990’s quickly began shutting their doors eventually leading to the current absence of spaces for queer women, trans, and non-binary folks. The video produced by Xtra mentioned in this paper’s introduction seeks to bring forth the question many people in queer women, trans, and non-binary communities have been asking for the past two decades – what is happening to the spaces for queer women, trans, and non-binary folks in Toronto? Throughout the video, issues of gentrification and financial precarity were featured front and centre in the interviews with various queer bar managers and event promoters. Bobby Valen, previous manager of the west end queer bar The Henhouse, went into their role already feeling the pressures of rapid, private development on small businesses, stating “I knew [the gas station next door] was going to be a condo. So when I took over the bar, we took a tiny hourglass of invisible time, we flipped it over and said ‘okay, let’s see how long we can ride this for’” (Xtra, 2018). The Henhouse eventually closed its doors in June 2015 when construction on the condo began. Carmen Elle, previous manager of the short-lived Less Bar echoed Bobby’s sentiments regarding the precarious nature of physical spaces in Toronto: “you have something, it’s really, really good for a while and then all of a sudden, someone’s like ‘okay, your rent’s tripled now,’ insert unforeseen financial issue

here” (Xtra, 2018). Cici Czigler, previous DJ and event promoter for Cream, a queer women’s event which used to take place at Club 120 on Church St., put it succinctly when asked what she thought was in store for the future of Church St., “one word: condos” (Xtra, 2018).

Throughout the remainder of this paper, the parallels between the precarity of queer women’s spaces in general and a lack of community programs for young queer women will become evident, with gendered and racialized wage and labour disparities, as well as gentrification playing central roles in the gaps and barriers to accessing and maintaining spaces for young queer women. As William Lavina, a queer event promoter bluntly put it during their interview, “it’s hard to live under late-stage capitalism and be gay” (Xtra, 2018).

Research on Young Queer Women

The lack of community services available to young queer women in Toronto is illuminated not only in the online world, as indicated in this paper’s introduction, but also through the everyday lived experiences of young queer women who struggle to locate programs that reflect their identities. In early 2017, I was facilitating a T.E.A.C.H. workshop at a middle school in Toronto with a class of 12 and 13-year-old grade 7 students. T.E.A.C.H. (Teens Educating And Confronting Homophobia) is a peer-education program offered through Planned Parenthood Toronto, a community health centre serving youth ages 13-29. The T.E.A.C.H. program trains youth between the ages of 16-25 to facilitate anti-homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia workshops in a variety of settings, including middle schools, high schools, community centres, and homeless shelters. T.E.A.C.H. workshops are fairly interactive and consist of discussions and brainstorming activities between the facilitators and participants surrounding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Following the workshop, one of the students who had been particularly vocal and interested in the topics presented throughout the session asked if she could speak to me outside in the hall. In our conversation, she came out to me as queer and asked about resources for LGBTQ youth in the city. After I made multiple suggestions about general LGBTQ youth programs, she then asked if there were any specific programs for young LGBTQ girls in Toronto. I responded that, to my knowledge, there were currently none in existence for people her age. Her disappointment was palpable and indicative of a need and desire for such programming to exist in the city. This was not the first time I had been asked that question, nor the first time I had received a disappointed reaction to my answer. Over the course of the last three and a half years I have spent working with the T.E.A.C.H. program, it has become abundantly clear that there is both a need and a desire for girl-centred queer youth programming and opportunities in the city. Research on school-based programming reflects this need as well; a study from 2013 on the impact of gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in schools included 15,965 students from 45 Wisconsin schools and found that while GSAs have a positive impact on all LGBTQ students, this was particularly the case for LGBTQ girls (Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, & Russell, 2013). The study, conducted by education scholars from Boston College and the University of Arizona reported that sexual minority girls in schools with GSAs were less likely to experience mental health issues, such as suicidal ideation and attempts or engage in substance use and unprotected sex, than those youth in schools without GSAs (Poteat, et al., 2013). Similar results regarding issues of sexual health were found in another survey conducted that same year in British Columbia. The 2013 British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey included 30,000 students ages 12-18 from 56 of 59 school districts. One of the unpublished results of this survey showed that lesbian and bisexual girls were twice as likely to become pregnant during their teenage years than their straight counterparts (Ball, 2014). Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc of the University of British Columbia’s School of Nursing commented on this finding, “there definitely appears to be a link with experiencing discrimination and harassment [...] it may be that

pregnancy involvement is a way to camouflage your sexual orientation to avoid or reduce your experiences of homophobic bullying” (Ball, 2014). Clair O’Gorman, the program director of YouthCo. — A British Columbia-based, youth-driven sexual health agency— echoes these sentiments, adding that queer teens appear to be “tuning out” during sex education classes, as sexual health curriculums tend to be primarily focused on straight sexual relationships and do not reflect the identities and experiences of queer youth, particularly queer girls when it comes to safer sex practices and healthy relationships (Ball, 2014). These examples clearly demonstrate a need for programming, services, and resources focused on the experiences and needs of young queer girls, as well as demonstrate the results of a lack of access to services and spaces that reflect their experiences and identities.

Past Programming

While these programs do not currently exist in Toronto, past programs focused on the lives, experiences, and health of young queer women, revealing how access to these community programs and spaces benefit young LGBTQ women. There have been multiple successful programs available in the past, however these tend to be short-lived due to precarious or short-term funding. Before the program was dissolved in 2015, Women’s Programming at Planned Parenthood Toronto consisted of various services, resources, and programs focused on women’s health. One such program within Women’s Programming was programming for women who have sex with women, (WSW) which is an umbrella term often employed in the health care sector to include a broad range of women’s same-sex identities and experiences. One of WSW programming’s most popular and longest running programs was called “Sex Talk,” a sexual health workshop series for LGBTQ women, which ran from 2010-2013. According to Planned Parenthood Toronto’s 2010-2011 annual report, when the Sex Talk series first began, it was “the only free, ongoing health promotion programming available in the city that targeted LGBTQ women specifically” (Planned Parenthood Toronto, 2011). The uniqueness of this program resulted in “high registration numbers for the workshop and even waiting lists for some sessions” (Planned Parenthood Toronto, 2011). During the 2011-2012 run of this series, Planned Parenthood Toronto reported that “93% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘I feel this workshop presented me with opportunities that I cannot/have not been getting anywhere else’” (2012). These series of workshops were based on a queer women’s sexual health campaign run by Planned Parenthood Toronto in partnership with Sherbourne Health Centre, and Women’s College Hospital in 2009-2010 called “Check It Out!” This incredibly successful campaign aimed at encouraging queer women and trans folks to go for regular pap smears and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) culminated in a one-day conference for LGBTQ women entitled “The Hot Wholistic Health Fest: A Well-erbatation of LGBTQ Women’s Sexual Health.” This conference took place in 2010 and was revived in 2012 and 2013 with the name “Pleasure and Possibilities.” The feedback from these conferences echoed the sentiments from participants of the Sex Talk series, with 86% of conference attendees reporting that they “strongly agreed or agreed that the conference presented them with learning opportunities they could not get anywhere else” (Planned Parenthood Toronto, 2014). The overwhelmingly positive feedback for both the conferences and Sex Talk workshop series is a clear indication that opportunities for young LGBTQ women to build community and learn with and from each other is greatly beneficial and necessary for community members to develop and maintain networks and support. As one Sex Talk participant put it these opportunities and discussions must take place, “loudly and often” (Planned Parenthood Toronto, 2012).

When Women’s Programming ended at Planned Parenthood Toronto in 2015, a new young queer women’s sexual health project was granted one year of funding to run workshops and events for young LGBTQ women between the ages of 16-29. This project, entitled “Bawdy Talk,” was a community

program of Planned Parenthood Toronto, led by a youth advisory committee comprised of young queer women, also ages 16–29. The youth leading this project were given the opportunity to gain leadership and facilitation skills through the creation and implementation of events and workshops throughout the year of the program's existence. Bawdy Talk facilitated a number of workshops on various topics such as consent, racism, and trauma, and held a few events throughout the year, including picnics and open mics. Bawdy Talk gave young queer women in Toronto the chance to meet, work, and build community with each other. As this opportunity was so rare, especially outside of the bar spaces, the events and workshops hosted by Bawdy Talk were very well-attended and received largely positive feedback. These events also brought together queer women with a variety of experiences and identities, creating space for those who due to intersecting experiences of marginalization, do not necessarily feel comfortable or safe in community spaces, such as queer women of colour, trans women, disabled women, and those who fit multiple of these categories. Keeping in mind the histories and current experiences of racist, transphobic, and ableist exclusion from queer women's communities, Bawdy Talk did the important work of recognizing the specific barriers young queer women face in conjunction with race, gender identity and expression, as well as ability and disability and worked to create spaces and conversations which centred young queer women's intersectional realities. It was due to this approach, as well as filling a gap in young queer women's community programming that Bawdy Talk was so successful. However, Bawdy Talk was also one of the many community programs working with only one year of funding and therefore was unable to continue to provide incredible opportunities and experiences beyond the one year time frame. While this program may have momentarily softened the blow caused by the termination of Women's Programming at Planned Parenthood Toronto that same year, Bawdy Talk's temporary status meant young queer women were not given the opportunity to receive ongoing support, resources, and community space.

Funding

The precarious nature of funding for community programs is not uncommon in the realm of social services, as cuts to federal and provincial social welfare budgets have been steadily increasing over the past three decades (Morrow, Hankivsky, & Varcoe, 2004). These financial changes force community services and agencies to compete for funds from non-governmental organizations and private agencies (Baines, 2010). A result of this economic shift has been the replacement of "long-term core funding [with] short-term, project-based funds" (Baines, 2004, p. 280). Women's services are disproportionately at risk of either losing funding (Abramovitz, 1996), or becoming subjected to the aforementioned short-term and project-based funding, akin to what happened with Bawdy Talk. When it comes to queer community programs, there is not only a clear gender discrepancy in the existence of these programs, but in who receives long-term, secure funding and who does not.

While there are currently no community programs that are specifically for young LGBTQ women in Toronto, there are at least three programs for young gay, bisexual, and queer men. Programs of mention are: Totally outRIGHT: a free leadership program run by ACT (AIDS Committee of Toronto), BOYBOY: a twice-monthly program run by Central Toronto Youth Services, and OurSpace: a youth-led program, which organizes events and workshops throughout the city. In addition to community programs, ongoing community-based research projects on the health and wellbeing of young queer men, such as CruiseLab, the Investigaytors, and most recently, Engage, have created frequent opportunities for young queer men to both lead these projects, as well as participate. The gender gap in access to community programs is unsurprising when access to financial opportunities is taken into account. Men, particularly white cisgender men, have more access to money than women, a fact which becomes increasingly true for women of colour, trans

women, and disabled women (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2017). Access to funding for community programming can also be linked to "The Glass Escalator" phenomenon: a term describing the ability of men to move into positions of leadership more quickly within traditionally female dominated fields. An example of this phenomenon is the field of social services, wherein many of these youth community programs exist (Williams, 1992). When young queer men's programs receive longer-term funding, this gives young men the opportunity to not only build community, but to take on leadership roles within these programs, making connections that have the potential to lead to paid work. It is then no surprise that economic realities, such as pay inequity, continues to persist when young queer men are being given opportunities through access to community programs, which simply do not exist for young queer women. In addition to a lack of access to funding for community programs and opportunities for paid work, other barriers to accessing existing community programming must be examined as well.

Barriers to Accessing Community Programs

The closure of lesbian and queer women's spaces such as bars, cafes, and bookstores, is often justified using the argument that queer women are simply not as interested in spending time in bars than that of their male counterparts. Similar arguments have been made regarding community programs for young queer women. When I have spoken to other service providers who work with queer youth communities about the lack of programming for young queer women, a common response cites a lack of interest, which leads to a lack of attendance. However, not only is this assertion of a lack of interest inconsistent with the aforementioned responses to past women's programming, it is also reflective of an overly-simplistic response which works to mask the specific barriers women, particularly young queer women, face in attending community programming and accessing queer youth spaces. For instance, it is more likely that young women will be expected to take on unpaid, domestic labour, such as cooking, cleaning, and care work for children and/or elderly members of their families (Poortman & van der Lippe, 2009). However, while women's participation in the paid workforce has increased significantly (Coltrane, 2000), it is largely white women who have benefitted from access to paid work, while low-paid or unpaid labour continues to be performed by racialized women (Barker & Feiner, 2009). Meanwhile, men continue to be encouraged to seek paid work outside the home, giving them more access to public spaces, such as community services. Due to a lack of research on young queer women's communities, there are no specific statistics on queer women and gendered labour. However, as a result of persistent gendered labour expectations, one can deduce that young queer women, particularly working class and/or racialized young queer women, are less likely to access community programming due to responsibilities that generally centre the care and needs of others, rather than their own.

In addition to the amount of time devoted to unpaid, domestic labour as a barrier to attending community programs, another factor to take into consideration is the location of queer youth services. Throughout North America, services and programs for queer youth tend to be centralized in larger cities; in Toronto, LGBTQ services such as Sherbourne Health Centre, Central Toronto Youth Services, Egale, The 519, and ACT are all approximately within a ten block radius, located in the downtown core. These services tend to be in and around Toronto's "gay village." While seeming to invite all queer and LGBTQ bodies into the neighbourhood, much research has demonstrated that gay villages typically only cater to a privileged few, primarily cisgender white gay men (Rosenberg, 2017). Rae Rosenberg argues that gay villages often act as anchors for homonormativity, which maintain oppressive gendered and racialized power relations. Rosenberg explains "much research has linked the spatialization of homonormativity to both the explicit exclusions and the more subtle undercurrents of sociopolitical rejection that manifest in gay villages, often targeting people of colo[u]r, women, and homeless, transgender (trans), and gender nonconforming people" (2017, p. 137).

Geography plays a significant role in young queer women's access to programs; with the ever-increasing cost of living in large cities like Toronto, due to the effects of gentrification and economic instability, more young people and their families are beginning to live outside of city centres on the outskirts, in the suburbs, or in rural areas. These are not only areas with larger low-income populations, but they are largely underserved by reliable public transportation, a reality that has come to be termed as "transit deserts" (Spurr, 2015). Young queer women living in low-income areas of the cities, as well as outside the city face increased barriers to accessing community programming as a result of poor transit options, and a lack of access to financial means necessary for travel.

Taking these gendered, racialized, and class-based factors into consideration, it becomes apparent that perhaps a "lack of interest" in young queer women's programming may very well be a lack of access due to systemic barriers faced by young women, barriers that are not adequately addressed in the creation of queer youth community programs.

The absence of community services, resources, and programs for young queer women in Toronto, as well as gaps in research on young queer women's communities speak to the inequitable structures present in community programming for queer youth. In analyzing the necessity and impact of queer youth programs, it is essential that we consider whose experiences and needs are prioritized, which queer youth communities are given long-term funding to sustain their programming, and whose identities and experiences are both underfunded and under-researched. With more research and conversation focused on the intersectional experiences and needs of young queer women, a shift toward greater equity and access to services, resources, and community spaces is possible. Centering the voices and experiences of youth in the discussion is essential in order to respond to their particular needs and for the survival, success, and wellbeing of young queer women.

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Record

Julia DaSilva- (*she/her*), Philosophy, Literature & Critical Theory, and Indigenous Studies

It may have been a dream but

it was clear
as a summer dress like a crisp, clean apple,
clear as the fight between
the withered seed and the hardened
ground
no
as the withered seed suspended
without water or sun or earth
as the withered seed
that grew it.

It was a dream but

a tableau
where all that moved was the sea
of her eyes
that ordered me to stop where she sat
on her upturned wooden crate.

It was my dream but

I thought
she was only daring the whole world to remember—
also
she was daring me

and I forgot

how she sat on her crate and gathered
the darkness
that lay at her feet,
propped up the light.

When I remembered,

I was an adult recording a dream like a child's
rambling.
She laughed in the face of fate, I wrote,
but not laughed,
only looked.
And I wrote and I looked
Away.

I asked, did she take my words, as well

as my eyes?
I answered, my words are fine.

And I forgot

that there are rebirths, only not
the kind where you grow
into an adult, only
where a sapling remembers how the seed
was already withered.
I am a child, tossed again in her eyes,
as she blossoms I recoil
into a seed,
as she holds up all the light that could never
hold sway I
am an infant,
grasping at anything that might
fill
these empty hands,
crying for all the unnamed women in all
the dreams
that might have been mine,

I forgot

that I might have recalled if only
I'd known
that there are more things to dare
than the whole world,
that you can call
another person to sit
beside you on an upturned crate,
see if it holds.

“Distant Music,” Second Place

Julia DaSilva- (*she/her*), Philosophy, Literature & Critical Theory, and Indigenous Studies

We ran along the blackened stones
And she giggled, well-rehearsed
—my pen retraces sterile lines—
She gestured, “You go first.”

I did not take
her invitation.
Walked inside and thought
the music rent the dream-walls with
dead hope,
smearing
the bits of lace with bits
of pitying light.
She led me to the underworld
With a smile on her face—

you go first you go first you go
first
a remnant of dead courtesy
(like I could know, like mine
was even born) you go first
In an endless fall from grace.
you
go
First

A poem chaste enough to win
a high school contest
(well place second but no one
remembers that now)—
I re-form the letters and all
they say is her arm
reaching for the door, come in

and I sat in my bright, bleak
shadow to watch her fall
and sat did not hear her call
sat until I fell
past what I thought was true

into her arms.
And I went first and she went first and damn
the blackened stones

Rethinking “Re-Orienting Desire:” Acknowledging Queerness through Androgynous Pop-Stars in China

Xi Xian Huang- (*she/her, they/them*), English and History

The power of media lies in its ability to generate and shape norms. By analyzing how CNN Philippines and The New Yorker report on Chinese popband FCC:Acrush, this essay argues that organic queer potentiality is limited by Western paradigms of queer identifiers.

The danger of a single, paradigmatic example of what LGBTQ existence looks like is that it limits the inherent queer potential of any queer act. Building on the Saidian definitions of Orientalism, Joseph Andoni Massad (2002) argues that the “Gay International” prolongs discourses of colonialism by enforcing a universal experience for LGBTQ existence (p.362). This is an Orientalist and colonizing act, as the Gay International is reproducing Western definitions of gayness instead of welcoming new definitions. To explore the danger of a single definition, this paper focuses on the Chinese pop band FCC:Acrush, a group made up of assigned female at birth (AFAB) singers and dancers who have stirred media discussion because of their masculine mode of dress. To extrapolate on the differences between the Orientalist gaze and an organic queerness, I will be looking at two different news articles, one published by *The New Yorker* and the other published by CNN Philippines. I will also give a brief background on Chinese perceptions of queerness. Because news articles often disseminate mainstream ideas, the purpose of this paper is to compare how media representation encapsulates the differing perceptions of queerness in the West versus Asia. I argue that *The New Yorker* article views FCC:Acrush in a distinctly more Orientalist way than the CNN Philippines version, as the CNN article acknowledges the organic queer potential of East Asian culture.

Queerness, from Ancient China to Modernity

China’s history is one of distinct phases and stages, from the Imperial era to the modern-day republic. Bret Hinsch and Cuncun Wu’s studies have revealed that patriarchal hegemonies within China allowed men to engage in sex with both men and women, free of persecution or social upheaval. Male homosexuality was “an expression of elite male power and contributed, paradoxically, to the domination of women” (Wu, 2012, p.6). Sex between men was acceptable as long as there was a social gap between the dominator and the dominated. Interestingly, sex with male prostitutes (*xianggong* 相公) in the late Qing dynasty became less taboo than sex with female prostitutes (Stevenson & Wu, 2012, p.264). Over the course of the Republican and Maoist eras, however, conceptions of homosexuality originating from Western Europe began to influence Chinese understandings of sexuality. Men like Havelock Ellis (Sang, 2003, p.24) began pathologizing non-normative sexualities; this reified a pre-existing patriarchal structure in China that recognized only penetrative sex as legitimate sex. Sexual science created an oppositional gender binary of male versus female that painted gender non-conformity as a psychological perversion, naturalizing a transnational/transhistorical/biological idea of gender binarism and conformity (Sang, 2003, p.107). Throughout the 20th century, these tropes of perversion persisted. However, 21st century transnational discourses have broadened the visibility of Chinese and Asian queerness to allow subliminally queer acts to have space in the mainstream— such as FCC:Acrush. Although these queer acts are not clearly defined, they are nonetheless legitimate in their queer potential.

The CNN Philippines’ Conception of Queerness

The CNN Philippines article written by Marian Liu and Serenities Wang addresses an extant cultural phenomenon in East Asia: the encouragement of androgyny and non-normative gender appearances.

This article is written in anticipation of the band's first single, and highlights the fact that the band has almost a million followers on Weibo even before the single's release. The title of the article is "China's all-girl boy band." This is rather neutral, and does not sensationalize the group members, simply stating what the band is: an all-girl boy band. One of the first sentences in the article states that the band is only the "latest in the androgyny trend in China," (Liu & Wang, 2017) noting that this band is responding to a trend, instead of an instigator of androgyny and non-normative gender appearances. The authors also credit the band's androgynous appearance with attracting them a large fan base before their release of any music. The article cites Wang Tianhai, head of the band's entertainment company, stating: "We're just tapping into the unique beauty of gender neutral" (Liu & Wang, 2017). According to Wang, there is a universal aesthetic/standard of beauty that disregards a gender binary completely. Wang also stressed that "Acrush's style is not a gimmick, with all the girls dressing like boys before they joined the band." He posits this androgynous trend and non-binarism as something organic to China—the band is simply the commercialization of this trend.

The article also cites further precedence for the androgynous trend. Li Yuchun is the idol who won "Supergirl," a Chinese females-only talent show. Her stardom is due in large part to her androgynous appearance, as she has been dubbed "Bro Chun" by fans (Liu & Wang, 2017). The article also cites specialists such as sexologist Yinhe Li and sociologist Jieyu Liu— this adds a level of legitimacy to the article, and underpins the idea that sex studies are advancing in China. The specialists observe that "gender boundaries are blurring" due to "popular Korean and Japanese dramas presenting more feminine male characters" (Liu & Wang, 2017). Rather than making the androgynous trend an anomaly by arguing for the specialness of this group's dress in an 'oppressive China,' the authors Liu and Wang point out that this group is simply the result of a transnational East Asian phenomenon, acknowledging the inherent queerness organic to Asia.

By highlighting extant cultural trends and shifts towards a blurring of gender binaries, Liu and Wang point out that the attitudes of youth in China (and Asia) are leaning towards openness. However, the article also points out that "gender roles, especially for the older generation in China, remain the same. Males are still expected to be dominant breadwinners and women are still expected to marry"; the article does not negate the idea that there is work to be done in shifting gender roles (Wang & Liu, 2017). However, it does not try to limit China's queer potential.

Let us return to Massad's (2002) main argument, that "the Gay International . . . both produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology" (p.363). To rephrase, Massad essentially argues that Western terminologies and understandings of what it means to be homosexual, gay, or lesbian can create hardship for said individuals in a context where these categories are not organic. For example, in the Arab nations that Massad is drawing on, homoerotic relationships have existed without labels of homosexuality. It was only with the introduction of categorization and labelling as "gay or lesbian" that these groups began to be targeted and ostracized. The CNN Philippines article draws on a history of same-sex desire in China that existed pre-categorization. For example, the Peking Opera was an art form catapulted into significance and popularity because of a love for young boys dressed up as women (*dan* actors) (Wu, 2004, p.8). These male actors were also courtesans (high level prostitutes). Given that China has this history of acceptable male-male sex, we must remember that Western encroachment in the 20th century led to the pathologization of same-sex desire (Sang, 2003, p.107). Although China was never fully colonized by the British empire, channels of Western influence opened up through sea ports (such as Canton and Hong Kong) and extraterritoriality where Westerners governed Chinese soil (Sang, 2003, p. 9).

The New Yorker's Conception of Queerness

Shifting focus to the article titled “The Stifled Desires Behind Acrush, The Chinese Boy Band Made Up of Five Girls” written by Jiaying Fan in *The New Yorker*, I argue that this article has Orientalist undertones and limits the queer potential of Chinese androgyny. In the title alone, readers immediately get the sense that certain desires are stifled. Like the CNN article, Fan (2017) alludes to the “Asian trend . . . almost entirely unknown in the West: yaoi, or Boys’ Love, a genre of Japanese anime . . . that depicts romantic or erotic relationships between male characters,” citing a pan-Asian desire for androgyny. By pointing out that this trend has not yet made its way to North America, Fan is potentially hinting at the idea that certain attitudes towards queerness in China are more transgressive/progressive than attitudes in North America. However, she immediately undercuts herself by saying that:

Despite exposure to the wider world in recent years, China remains a country rooted in conservatism, with a social hierarchy that is rigid and unforgiving. Norms are carefully guarded and labels upheld: man, woman, father, mother, husband, wife. Confucian ideology, which has defined Chinese culture for millennia, places supreme importance on a person’s responsibility to fulfill the role assigned by his gender, class, and age. To dress and act in a manner that does not accord with your position is to violate a fundamental law of existence. To live for oneself is not only selfish; it is depraved. (Fan, 2017)

Fan limits the queer potential and value in androgyny by limiting the scope of her analysis to a small subject (however pervasive) of Chinese history. It is true that Confucianism guides many principles of social existence in China. However, the history she cites is too general and broad; it does not acknowledge that norms have changed drastically over the last 400 years from the fall of the Qing dynasty to Republicanism. The norm for men used to be that they could have sex with whomever they wanted; it was acceptable for men to have sex with young dan actors who were boys (Wu, 2004, p.120). Orientalism is also obvious from the first two words— “despite exposure”— as they convey the sentiment that globalization and exposure to the West is accompanied by liberalism. According to Massad (2002), Fan has “committed errors of ahistoricism” (p.367). Rather than seeing China as a backwards, conservative land, it is important to acknowledge that China does have an organic history of queerness. Here, Fan represents a Modern West that “attacks alleged repressions of sexual freedoms” (Massad, 2002, p.375). However, these oppressions are only *alleged*. Fan assumes the backwardness of China without acknowledging that the group is responding to China’s cultural climate by harnessing a pre-existing fan base with androgynous desire. Fan (2017) also advances the argument that China is far too repressed to allow “Acrush, like *yaoi* [to have an] effect on China’s social reality.” Fan concludes the article with the opinion that there is no way Acrush could change the social climate in China. However, what the article (and Fan) fails to acknowledge is the fact that Acrush is responding to a trend that already exists, rather than starting a new one. Fan (2017) also quotes Wang Tianhai, the founder of Zhejiang Huati Culture Media Company: “We have no intention to push a political message . . . We have no clue even what the term L.G.B.T. means . . . [we are] just tapping into what the fans want.” Fan posits that there is an inherent connection between liberalization and the advancement of the LGBTQ agenda. However, she fails to acknowledge the enabling (and queering) potential of androgyny as an area for people to explore desire detached from stabilized gender binaries.

The biggest criticism against Acrush and its queering potential, according to Fan, is that the group does not openly advance LGBTQ rights and issues. I argue that it is not important to connect Acrush to an agenda of LGBTQ rights because stratification and labelling is not necessary for queerness to become inherent in Chinese culture. The inherent queer potential of Acrush lies in its possibility and its lack of categorization. Rather than forcing the band to take on a specific agenda for advocacy, the band’s representations can influence culture from the bottom up, allowing fans and the band itself to exist without categorization. In the CNN article, the authors say that “Acrush members will not say what their sexual

orientations are” (Wang & Liu, 2017). Fan (2017), however, states that “the five members of Acrush have claimed to be straight.” This is clearly a contradiction between the two articles. Pursuit of truth aside, I ask, *why* is it important for the group to disclose their sexuality and limit sexuality to identifiers and terms coined by American universalism? Within his work, Massad (2002) often wraps quotations around the terms “gays and lesbians” (p.362) — this highlights their artificiality as Orientalist inventions. The queering potential of the group lies not in a political agenda that encourages people to come out in categories of “gay and lesbian,” but to embrace non-heteronormativity through the rejection of concrete identity and gender markers. Instead of attempting to “liberate “gays and lesbians” from the oppression under which they allegedly live, by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay, (Massad, 2002, p.362) it is more important to acknowledge the queering potential of desire.

Rather than stabilizing the desires of Acrush fans into categories of lesbian or gay, it is more important to recognize these desires as fluid. Indeed, they are responding to an aesthetic attraction that is without determined gender categories, making their desires inherently non-normative. Massad (2002) points out that “it is precisely this perceived instability in the desires of Arab and Muslim men that the Gay International seeks to stabilize, as its polymorphousness confounds gay (and straight) sexual epistemology” (p.364). Rather than allowing “the Gay International [to destroy] social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of reproducing a world in its own image” (Massad, 2002, p.385), it is important to recognize unstable desire as legitimate queer desire. There is queering potential in desire detached from limitations of LGBTQ meaning.

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Blackfishing: Beauty Standards and Consuming the Other

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Blackfishing is a practice where white people pretend to be black, generally on the internet. This trend poses interesting questions about racialization and desirability, especially during an era where social media's popularity has risen. Using bell hooks' 'Eating the Other: desire and resistance,' this essay analyzes the changing beauty trends in North America. It argues that while it may appear that beauty standards are changing to include people of colour, this is not the case. By further examining blackfishing, social media beauty icons, and cultural appropriation, this essay articulates how blackness is consumed by white people in order to come across as exotic and interesting.

Introduction

Beauty standards, and by extension what is considered desirable, are socially constructed ideas that are dependent on time and place. The Victorian times had vastly different expectations of women than the 90s—the standard of beauty in these eras was a product of its time, and varied depending on location. In North America, beauty standards have always been related to whiteness. Fashion magazines almost exclusively featured white people, and people of colour were expected to aspire to whiteness (Hunt). Racialized bodies were not viewed as desirable and were (and still are) associated with deviant or excessive sexuality (Miller-Young, 107). This essay will look at the ways in which desirability is viewed in a supposedly post-racial world. It will look at beauty icons Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner and the trends they inspire—colorism, as well as a phenomenon known as ‘blackfishing.’ It will also examine the ways in which beauty standards have not become inclusive, but rather commodify the ‘other,’ as theorized by bell hooks. Using bell hooks’ concept of *Eating the Other*, this essay will examine the ways in which white women in particular are able to benefit from copying black women’s aesthetics and benefiting from them in ways which are not afforded to black women.

Today’s beauty icons and trends highlight some of the ways in which beauty standards have changed. Admittedly, fashion, beauty magazines, etc., are slightly more diverse than before (Fashionista) with an increase in the number of women of colour on magazine covers and within the fashion industry (Hunt). Despite this increase, however, beauty and desirability are still highly racialized. For example, in mainstream pornography, a site in which desirability politics are amplified, racialized folks are often cast in stereotypical roles (Taromino, 261). Also, in Hollywood, racist stereotypes portray black women—particularly dark skinned black women—as undesirable (Kent). The increasing popularity of social media means that popular culture is influenced by an increasingly bottom up narrative. Therefore, people of colour are able to have a bigger presence and voice in respect to popular culture. Social media has become an important player in determining beauty standards as a result, meaning beauty standards are no longer decided exclusively by fashion magazines or runway editors. This has shaped how beauty and desirability politics are understood. But, rather than social media enabling the spread of less racist beauty standards, anti-blackness continues to thrive.

Blackfishing

On November 6, 2018, Twitter user and Toronto-based writer Wanna Thompson created a thread on Twitter that accused a number of white women on Instagram of pretending to be black (McGregor & Virk). In dramatic before and after pictures, the thread showed women who were pale, had straight hair

and could unambiguously be read as white appearing in later pictures where they had fuller lips and hips, darkened skin, and curly hair or black hairstyles. These women had been able to successfully 'pass' as black or 'racially ambiguous' on Instagram, fooling several thousand followers. This thread exploded on Twitter and was retweeted several thousand times, with many people rightfully upset. Folks expressed concern that these women were taking opportunities away from actual black women, and expressed feelings of betrayal. This attempt by white women to 'pass' as black or racially ambiguous was then coined 'blackfishing'.

Blackfishing refers to these women's ability to successfully pass as racially ambiguous or black on the internet. These women were compared to the likes of Rachel Dolezal, who had made headlines in 2015 when her relatives revealed that she was faking her race. Dolezal, a white woman, had claimed to be black and was able to acquire positions meant for black women, such as her job heading a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Washington State (Karimi). When the news of her faking her race broke, Dolezal defended herself by saying she was transracial, claiming that although she was born white she identified as black. It is important to note that the term transracial was misappropriated by Dolezal and has meaning outside of what she associated it with. Transracial actually describes the lives of people of colour who have been adopted into white families and as a result struggle with identifying completely with their cultural identity which they often do not have access to (Murray).

One important difference between these women accused of blackfishing and Dolezal however, is that unlike Dolezal, most of the women accused of blackfishing denied ever claiming to be black. It's unlikely that they never noticed how their race was perceived on the internet, but their darkened skin was explained away with excuses of tanning and their fuller hips explained away by going to the gym or as a natural process of becoming older (McGregor & Virk). One woman, Aga Brzostowska, claimed that her darkened skin was because of her recent trip to Jamaica (McGregor & Virk). Some claimed that their curly hair or braids were simply a hairstyle they sported (Jones). Considering the ways in which whiteness is upheld in society within areas of beauty and desirability, this begs the question of why white women would pretend to be black on the internet. Blackfishing is an interesting look into how racialization and desirability intersect. It demonstrates how white supremacy functions to place black women's aesthetics and desirability for consumption by white bodies.

Blackfishing is essentially a contemporary version of blackface minstrelsy. Blackface minstrelsy refers to white people painting their faces black and their lips an exaggerated red, as a form of entertainment. It gained popularity as a form of entertainment in the late 19th century (Osborne, 14). White actors would put on blackface and attempt to imitate black people in an attempt to mock them. This performance would include white actors using black slang in a derogatory mimicry of black people (Osborne, 15). Blackface was practiced in movies and plays and was a great source of entertainment for white people. This form of blackface occasionally still happens, usually under the guise of cultural appreciation. While the goal of blackface is to mock, blackfishing seems to be about gaining popularity and appearing more desirable. It is a contemporary form of blackface but with different goals.

Blackfishing, as well as cultural appropriation, are ways in which white people try to come across as interesting, exotic or desirable. As Miller Young notes in "Interventions: The Deviant and Defiant Art of Black Women Porn Directors," there is a sexual hierarchy, and black women are considered to be at the bottom of it. (Miller-Young, 107). She also notes in "A Taste for Brown Sugar" that Black women are privately enjoyed and publicly scorned in society (Miller-Young, 4). Since black women are considered to be at the bottom of a racial sexual hierarchy, why would white women then pretend to be black in order to seem more

desirable and gain followers on Instagram? This can be attributed to how whiteness functions as neutral, and is then able to consume the 'other' for its benefit (hooks, 370). As Sara Ahmed notes in "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," white people blend into the background because their whiteness is assumed to be neutral (Ahmed, 151). Whiteness then functions as the background for social action, causing racialized bodies to then become more noticeable (Ahmed, 151). While this neutrality is a source of privilege for white people, it also means it makes them stale and boring culturally. The 'other' then becomes commodified in an attempt to excite white audiences (hooks, 370). As bell hooks notes in "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," "The commodification of otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling" (hooks, 366). Whiteness is able to use the 'noticeable' other to decorate itself and stand out from the background, making itself more interesting. And because of the blankness of whiteness, these people are able to shed the negative baggage, history and trauma that comes with blackness. As bell hooks puts it, "One desires 'a bit of the Other' to enhance the blank landscape of whiteness" (hooks, 372).

These white women use black women's aesthetics to be seen as interesting. Because of their position of privilege, they are able to casually slip in and out of 'cosplaying' blackness, which means that they retain their white privilege while still using black women's aesthetics for profit.

Keeping up with Cultural Appropriation

In America, black people have influenced every part of pop culture. From music to fashion, black people have consistently been instrumental to the development of pop culture favorites (White). Despite this, black people are rarely credited for their pop culture innovations (White). Every part of blackness is commodified and consumed by whiteness with little respect to black cultures or an investment in black people (White). This influence that black people have on culture goes unnoticed because of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation has become more of a hot button topic recently. Several celebrities, such as Miley Cyrus, have been accused of appropriating black culture in their artistry to stay relevant. Miley Cyrus has attempted to twerk, and uses hip hop as a means of 'marketable rebellion' (Arceneaux) in order to create a new image of herself in the media. bell hooks talks about this use of blackness as a way for white people to shed innocence. She says that it is assumed that the other is more experienced in terms of sexuality because of their difference, therefore white people use the other to shed their white 'innocence' and appear more mature (hooks, 368). While Miley's case of cultural appropriation is often relatively easy to understand, the Kardashians have a less noticeable way of commodifying blackness. In particular, Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner are two pop culture figures that commodify blackness as a brand. This is from their appropriation and 'renaming' of black hairstyles to their style and lip injections (Sesali). Since blackness is often associated with modernity, experience, and an all-around coolness factor—particularly in the age of social media when black people are able to create visibility for themselves—associating with blackness is profitable (Sesali).

The Kardashian family is a high-profile example of white women culturally appropriating black culture and using blackness as a prop to profit from (Sesali). They are notorious for appropriating black hairstyles and black culture (Sesali). Speaking on cultural appropriation, bell hooks says, "currently the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization" (372). This explains how context and history is erased when white people culturally appropriate black culture. In the case of the Kardashians, this presents itself when Kim Kardashian is credited for 'boxer braids,' which are actually

cornrows (Danielle). This erases the history and context tied to this particular hairstyle.

As Sesali notes, today's beauty standards in America are not quite simply skinny and white. Racial ambiguity is increasingly viewed as an attractive feature, in addition to being an hourglass 'curvy' body type—not fat, but with big breasts and wide hips (Sesali). Kim Kardashian is often attributed to making this hourglass curvy body type more acceptable for women (Daily Mail). Munoz also notes that America has an obsession with half white women or women who are racially ambiguous and who have access to whiteness. Not to generalize black women's body types, but full hips and a curvy body is usually associated with black women. It is important to note that for this body type to be considered attractive it has to be on a white woman. Her body's racialization allows her to move between her own whiteness and shallowly associate herself with people of color when she needs to be cool, relevant and "ethnic" (Sesali). As bell hooks notes in "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," cultural appropriation relieves feelings of deprivation and lack that white people have as a result of the neutralizing effect of whiteness.

Kylie Jenner is often associated with making lip injections popular (Walker). The popularity of her lip kits graduated into the creation of a cosmetic line which gave her a spot on Forbes' Celebrity 100 list; in 2016 lip injections were the most popular non-surgical cosmetic treatment (Walker). This shows Kylie Jenner's influence on beauty trends. The neutrality of Jenner's whiteness meant that she was able to capitalize in a relatively hassle-free way on features that black women have been ridiculed for. In both of these cases, white women with considerable class capital are able to capitalize on features that black women have been previously shamed for. This shows how black features, when placed on white women, become acceptable and aspirational. Black features are acceptable on white bodies because those bodies are read as exotic but have the safety of whiteness. Black features on a white body thus creates a socially acceptable way of desiring black aesthetics without the implication of scorn that being black creates. Black features that were once used to categorize black people as deviant and not normal, such as full lips, have become trends that women are expected to aspire to. There is a shift in beauty standards that does not displace whiteness as the standard but rather places an exoticized form of whiteness as the standard, which is whiteness that is sprinkled with just a bit of the other.

Colorism

It's important to note that most of the women who were accused of blackfishing did not darken their skin enough to pass as a dark-skinned black woman. Rather, most of them look 'racially ambiguous' or like light skinned black women. This points to the ways in which white supremacy appears within colorism. As Sinnamon Love notes in "A Question of Feminism," light skinned women are often seen as more desirable to a white male gaze than dark skinned women (99). A colorism trend can also be noticed in Hollywood, particularly among younger black women. While there is more representation on screen and more black women are getting recognized in Hollywood, there is a colorism issue that is particularly noticeable among young black women (Kent). Looking at the young A-list black women celebrities in Hollywood, it becomes quickly recognizable that there are very few dark skinned black actresses under the age of 30, with the vast majority of young black women in Hollywood being light skinned (Kent). As Clarkisha Kent points out, there are very few young dark-skinned women of colour in Hollywood. She notes, "there's virtually no incoming "class" of brown-skinned/dark-skinned actresses under 30 like there is with Stenberg, or Yara Shahidi or Laura Harrier and etc" (Kent). This is important because it shows how even though there is rising visibility of black women, this visibility highlights light skinned black women.

The women who were ‘blackfishing’ were not trying to appear dark skinned because even though there is a commodification of blackness, these women must retain their connection or access to whiteness. This is in no way suggesting that light skinned black women have white privilege or are not disadvantaged by their blackness, but rather that their association with whiteness makes them a more acceptable form of blackness. This echoes back to racist tests such as the brown paper bag test, where a brown paper bag was used to determine a black woman’s desirability. The gendered nature of colorism explains why blackfishing happens mostly among women. Colorism is, at the end of the day, a product of white supremacy. Colonialism and slavery has left its impact on beauty standards so much so that the practice of bleaching one’s skin to look lighter is a big problem in countries that have a small population of white people but have a history of colonization (Norwood, 587).

Conclusion

At first glance, it appears that blackfishing suggests that people of colour are the preferred standard of desirability in American society. It can be tempting to think that blackfishing and cultural appropriation are signs of positive change in desirability standards, but the nature of blackfishing and cultural appropriation still centers whiteness as the ideal. Both of these things are successful for white people because of their whiteness. Blackfishing and cultural appropriation demonstrate how white supremacy functions in society as a way of consuming the other. People of colour and their cultures are served up for white people to fetishize and consume. As bell hooks points out, “the over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (380).

When it comes to desirability and standards of beauty it is not quite as simple as being white. While that is a large component of it, the cultural shift which posits racially ambiguous women as desirable signifies how race is commodified and used as an aesthetic. This has resulted in the trend of white women using blackness to make themselves more desirable. Whether this is through cultural appropriation, or physically changing their bodies, these new standards of beauty show how racialization affects Black women and women of color differently than white passing and white women.

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Politics of Sex and Power: Mayan Noble Sexual Desire and Dominance in Colonial Yucatán

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Using primary and secondary sources, this historical analysis of sexual behaviour in colonial Yucatán aims to unravel the relationship between politics, sex, and power during and after the Spanish Conquest of Mexico. Focusing on riddles and passages from the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, I look at the ways in which the practice of “sodomy” was integral to the Mayan tradition of passing down spiritual knowledge and access to the power of the Gods, particularly through the passage of noble lineages. I discuss the difference between the sexually “active” and “passive” participant in these rituals, as well as the nuanced understandings of culture, government, and sexuality that emerged due to the hybridization of Mayan and Spanish colonial belief systems.

To understand the sociopolitical structure of the Mayan dominated colonial Yucatán, one must turn to primary sources that outline the defining foundations of spiritual and political power. The Books of Chilam Balam are historical, prophetic, and philosophical texts Mayan noblemen wrote around the 18th century to “[ensure] that their colonial leaders and governors ... held the proper ... knowledge” to “conserve their cultural and political hegemony throughout the later colonial period” (Chuckiak, 2010, p. 115). Through the study of these texts, we can come closer to understanding the positions of these noblemen in respects to the hierarchy that existed both pre- and post- Spanish conquest.

Although this collection includes books from several Yucatec towns, I will be focusing on passages from the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, particularly looking at those describing the relationship between sex, power, and interpretations of noble lineage (Sigal, 2000, p. 51). Following an in-depth analysis of the symbolic representations of power through ritualistic sodomy, I argue that Mayan nobles in Yucatan preserved traditional spiritual conceptions of sexual desire to maintain their pre-conquest power in their communities after combining their ideas with those of Spanish colonizers. Sexual acts such as sodomy thus continued to play a significant role in the social, economic, and political stratification of Yucatan society well into the colonial period.

Before delving into the primary source, it is important to consider the organization of power within the context of Mayan lordship and colonial rule. Mentioned in several of the Chilam Balam passages, “the ‘batab’ [sometimes also called *cacique*, or lord] maintained his power through personal, and not territorial associations” (Quezada, 2014, p. xiv). It is essential to keep this in mind when studying the power held through ideas of sexuality and conquest, as the responsibility of these lords belonged in the assertion of dominance over the bodies of the Gods and Mayan people. Being highly stratified, “nobility was a central component of Maya life,” with the commoners “[owing] the nobles their bodies and lives... providing them with tribute” and “nobles [owing] the commoners protection... by invoking the sacred world and leading the people into battle” (Sigal, 2002, p.32-33). This relationship between the Mayan lords and the community is central to understanding the dynamic presented in the documents. Political dominance and spiritual power are inseparable, with sodomitic rituals performed to solidify this claim over the Gods that Spanish colonizers could not. Because of this, members of nobility were able to preserve their cultural positions in relation to commoners during most of the early colonial period.

The significance of noble legitimacy and continuing lineages is explained in The Books of Chilam Balam through riddle-like passages describing political rituals in “Zuyua speech” or “unintelligible speech” that ensured only those “who had knowledge of society could rule” (Sigal, 2003, p. 223). Using these documents, the noblemen were able to establish the power relationship between true nobility and young nobles who had to prove themselves true and worthy, as found in this introduction:

The questions and answers come into the *k'atun* as it is ending. Thus, arrives the day of questions and answers of the *batatob* of the communities: Whether they know how people and the lords came; whether they explain the coming of the *batatob* and the *balach uinicob*; whether they can prove that they are of the lineages of the lords and the *batab* lineages (Roys, 1967, p.89).

In this passage, one can see the differentiation of the “balach uinicob,” known as the “true man,” and the young noble boys he calls “batatob” (Sigal, 2000, p.234). These boys had to prove themselves to the true leader using their bodies in exchange for knowledge in the form of tests and sodomitic rituals. The importance of this text can then be evidenced by the very fact that these ideas were preserved and passed down through generations in order to continue the legitimacy of rule and culture.

The rituals referred to in this passage are those that involve the exchange of noble knowledge through semen and blood. Sigal writes that “in order to gain the political power of the *balach uinic*, the youth must gain his semen and blood” thus making the “symbolic relationship ... a homoerotic one,” using penetration or ritualistic “penis piercing” to test their knowledge (Sigal, 1997, p.19). This also relates to later discussions of knowledge gained through sexual relations with Gods, as eroticism stressed the power held by the active, dominant sodomite over submissive figures. These rituals guaranteed the validity of noble lineage and power, thus maintaining the social order within Yucatan. This notion of legitimacy as a result of powerful sexual desire stems directly from Mayan understandings of sexual behaviors associated with the Gods themselves. To Mayans, “sexual acts among gods and between gods and humans were pictured as creating humanity... these gods were seen as the progenitors of the nobles, who thus were provided with legitimacy” (Sigal, 2003, p. 106). Although Spanish colonization influenced traditional notions of Mayan kinship, the continuation of this knowledge in these texts reveal the resilience of Mayan culture, even after forming hybrid ideas in conjunction with Christianity, as discussed later in this paper.

To continue, Mayan notions of sodomy and destruction appear in descriptions of warfare, using sexual insults to create a framework that divides sex into active and passive roles. These concepts are evident by means of an analysis of a prophecy in the Chilam Balam, possibly predicting the Spanish conquest:

The three children of your strength are the bearers of the land of the younger brothers. They have surrendered their spirit, and the hearts of the flowers are dead. Also [dead] are those who are often back turners, those who are spreaders: Nacxit Xochitl, with the flowers of his companions, the two-two-day lordship [i.e., brief, because of their corruption], the crooked in their thrones, the crooked in their flowers. Two-two day people are their words, two-two day are their seats, their gourds, their headdresses, the lust of the day, the lust of the night, the monkey of the world. Their necks are twisted, their faces are wrinkled, their mouths are slobbering in the lordship of the lands, oh, lord (Roys, 1967, p. 168-169).

Using the symbolism presented by Chilam Balam as well as a number of secondary sources discussing this text, I will begin to construct Mayan ideas of power difference in relation to sodomy.

Pete Sigal provides one interpretation, suggesting that the Mayan “younger brothers lost their hearts and their spirits to their older brothers (the Spaniards), who then killed their flowers by symbolically engaging in sodomy” and “effectively [feminizing them] in a discourse that masculinized the winning warriors, the Spaniards” (Sigal, 2002, p. 32). Sodomy then, was characterized less by the sexual act itself, or the labelling of individuals as a result of sexual behaviors, and more through the assertion of dominance. This provides insight to the belief system of the Mayans, as they fit colonialism within their spiritual ideologies and continued to interpret the world and its daily occurrences through the same foundational frameworks.

Although Mayan lands and peoples were conquered by the Spaniards, the maintenance of these

beliefs can be understood as a sign of resilience and resistance and as a way to cope with the trauma of colonization. The end of the Indigenous Mayan mind and way of being was not terminated with the arrival of Spanish conquistadors, but rather it was seen as a continuing shift in power and dominance asserted by warriors who won battles by accessing the sodomitic power of Gods. Through this visualization, one can conclude that “passive [sodomy]” was seen as one of the “important factors in the reasons that rulers were overthrown, people were killed, and communities were conquered” (Sigal, 2003, 104). Therefore, it was believed that the passivity and weakness of men allowed the Spanish to colonize the Maya.

Furthermore, this idea also allows for the interrogation of the role of “active” ritualistic sodomy in the context of Mayan society and colonization. The “active” embodiment of sodomy can be found in the author of the Chilam Balam’s use of the term “flower,” which could be understood as a pollinator or penetrator. Sodomy as a symbolic manifestation of dominance “showed the power and desire of the active partner to control and penetrate the passive...which emphasized both desire and power...as an element of the social structure” (Sigal, 2003, 104). Claim to power was therefore maintained through the belief and perpetuation of ideas that held the noble male at the top and commoners at the bottom of the sociopolitical hierarchy. There is an emphasis on the power of penetration as symbolized by the flower, with the “Maya [desiring] to be the symbolic penetrators in warfare” and to “penetrate the bodies of the gods in order to harness their power” (Sigal, 2000, p. 244). This connection between noble and god enhanced the power of the nobles within Mayan society, upholding the stratification that would later be sustained by Spanish colonization.

During early colonial rule, the Spanish did not heavily influence or change Mayan hierarchies in respects to the role of nobility. Using sexual desire as an anchor to prestigious recognition, Maya elite were able to maintain some of their validity in the eyes of both the Spanish and Mayan commoners. However, as a relatively Hispanicized Maya, Antonio Gaspar Chi speaks to Mayan perspectives on sodomy outside of ritualistic practice saying the Maya “did not eat human flesh, nor did they know of the nefarious sin [sodomy]” and that “in the time of a Xiu lord, they had punished this sin by casting those found guilty in a burning furnace” (Sigal, 2002, p. 27).

In contrast to previous discussions of active and passive sodomy, one can begin to unravel the complexities of the Maya’s relationship with sexual desire. Sodomy outside of active ritual practice could have been seen as punishable because it did not align with the social stratification that reserved anal penetration for the sake of gaining power from the gods to control the destruction of civilizations. This narrative fit comfortably within Spanish colonial systems, “[suggesting] to the Spaniards that the Maya system of morality was not too different from their own; sodomy, connected with cannibalism, was punished by death” (Sigal, 2002, p. 10). It was because of these similarities in their relationships with sex and power that Mayan nobles were able to preserve traditional knowledge and create hybrid rituals to maintain the hierarchy.

Instances of this hybridization can be found in the resilience of a symbolic sexual symbol, the Moon Goddess, later envisioned through the Virgin Mary. The Moon Goddess “symbolically regulated all sexual behavior, ...engaged in “promiscuity,” ... and signified the Maya concept of women’s symbolic power manifested through upheld virginity throughout the colonial period” (Sigal, 2000, p. 100). Again, here one can see the influence of expressed or repressed sexual desire, only placed in the body of a strong deity. Virginity and fertility can then be understood as interconnected, as the Moon Goddess was considered to be the mother of all, offering protection to the Mayan people. However, as Catholicism imposed more patriarchal ideas, the Virgin Mary appeared to replace the Moon Goddess in Catholic rituals.

The Chilam Balam of Chumayel describes this change, evaluating the status of Mayan women in respects to religion:

[The *katun*] established the foundation of the great holy cathedral, the fire house of God, erecting

and decorating the house of God the father. It established the foundations of the seven sacraments and the forgiveness [of sins]. The great work began in the middle of the community...the world's misery. Then there was erected our [mother]... according to God's word, which was delivered by the face of God the father. Then the white stone child arrives from the heavens. The Virgin Lady, as she is called, is the mother of the seven great stars (Roys, 1967, p. 150).

It is possible that this narrative was used to explain the transition between traditional spiritual knowledge and Catholicism post conquest. As this narrative suggests, the Virgin Mary still preserved the Moon Goddess's role as the mother of all, although the main focus seems to have shifted to God, the father.

In terms of maintaining social order, one could suggest that "the outward structures of Maya politics and Catholic religion had fused in such a way as to present the Virgin Mary as the traditional mother," as "Maya minds, fantasies, and ritual performances...developed a more hybrid notion of gender and desire" (Sigal, 2000, p. 110). Hybridization, although forced upon the Mayan people, was also upheld by the elites in order to maintain the social hierarchy that existed previous to Spanish conquest.

To continue, I correlate this idea of syncretic spiritual and religious knowledge to my argument surrounding the stratification of Maya society, as noblemen used the resilience of the Moon Goddess and Virgin Mary to control power. Hybridization, used as an instrument to cope with colonialism, allowed for the protection of traditional values whilst also fitting into imposed colonial standards. Thus, "this re-inscription allowed desire to be repositioned in a way that would allow the people to desire their rulers," with "commoners and nobles [wanting] their traditions to remain the same, and these traditions included powerful goddesses and a symbolism of gender parallelism" (Sigal, 2000, p. 127). Therefore, by using the image of Virgin Mary in traditional rituals and writings, Maya elite were able to maintain the social order while both resisting Spanish influence and maintain their seniority with them. Sigal explains this phenomenon by saying, "the nobles rightfully would have feared that commoners would have started to believe that their nobles had attempted to trick them" and "would have begun to question the social, economic, and political hierarchies" (Sigal, 2000, p. 127). By continuing to write down the significance of rituals and practices in *The Books of Chilam Balam*, Maya elite were able to conserve their power and respect of the commoners, earned through fornications with gods as previously mentioned.

Another form of hybridization can be found in the combining of Christian and Indigenous thought in representations of the political ceremony of penis piercing and blood-letting discussed earlier in this paper. Using images from the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, Damián Morales argues that "the Mayas interpreted 16th and 17th centuries Catholic imagery into a new visual culture" that included "the same initiatory political ceremony" with the Maya "Halach Winick...substituted with... Ecce Homo and Saint Peter" (Morales, 2015, p. 35). Consequently, these images reflect the ways in which traditional ideas were conserved yet also evolved through the colonial period. However, it is important to note the persistence in themes that continue the foundation maintained by the elites creating these documents. As much as Christianity influenced Mayan notions of religion and sexuality, it should not be considered a spiritual conquest. Rather, the creation of Mayan documents such as the *Chilam Balam* should be seen as exercises of power and resistance that persisted in Mayan Yucatan.

In the end, inequities in colonial years were maintained by Mayan ideas of sexual desire that regulated society and explained each individual's place in the social fabric. Used as a tool to create power relations, "colonial Maya discourses on excess, sex, adultery, rape and illegitimacy presented to the people a moral code of regulation and repression" (Sigal, 2000, 92). The perpetuation of these ideas may have been the most solidifying way of constructing and securing the hierarchy by means of which the state existed and thrived.

Mayan elites therefore could not be challenged by commoners because of this imbalance in power,

and inherent lack of questioning as a result of ingrained belief systems of spirituality and lineage. However, as colonization continued, “Maya nobles had to challenge the colonizers as well as their local competitors” thus leading to the appropriation of new Catholic “gods,” by “[attaining] their power through the process of hybridization” (Sigal, 2000, 92). The influence of sexual desire then never disappeared, but rather lived within new paradigms that fit the needs of nobles that wanted to conserve their positions.

By analyzing historical Mayan texts in conjunction with secondary sources that clarify the context of the symbols and language used, one can see how significant notions of sexual desire existed in respect to political, social, and economic order. In writing *The Books of Chilam Balam*, Mayan nobles were able to conserve their traditional knowledge through ways that maintained their pre-conquest power over commoners and younger nobles who aspired to rule. Power then, could not be separated from sexuality or spirituality, as all of these aspects of Mayan belief aided in constructing the hierarchy that dominated Mayan society before and during colonization.

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Animating Decolonizing Desire: Misadventures of Pussy Boy Trilogy (2000-2003)

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In the early formation years of the Trans community in Toronto, Canada, circa the late 1990's and into the early years of the 21 Century, Trans/Two-Spirit emerging filmmaker Alec Butler's animated film trilogy offers a pathway towards decolonizing desire. A visual and oral medium, these short interconnected films tell the story of Two-Spirit high school teens exploring their emerging queer sexualities against the heteronormativity of high school and the rural, winter landscape of Eastern Canada. Butler explores their inspiration for making these award-winning films in the past, while connecting their art praxis to academic writing about the poetry of Chrystos and Gregory Scofield in the field of Queer Indigenous Studies in the present. Misadventures of Pussy Boy Trilogy was screened at Innis College on March 19, 2018 as the third installment of the film series "State Violence and Indigenous Resistance," presented by the Indigenous Education Network and Jackman Humanities Institute Program for the Arts, University of Toronto.

"The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge" (Lorde, 1978).

Reading Audre Lorde's book of essays and speeches *Sister Outsider* (1984) in the mid 1980's was the beginning of reconnecting my mind and body towards decolonizing desire. My desire in writing this article now is to honor Lorde and the emotional labor of an Indigenous Two-Spirit Lesbian poet Chrystos who has articulated erotic sovereignty in their poetry since the late 1980's (*Not Vanishing*, 1988). Both Lorde's and Chrystos' work have inspired my own expression of erotic sovereignty in "Misadventures of Pussy Boy," a trilogy of animated videos created 19 to 16 years ago. The subject of decolonizing Two-Spirit queer sexuality cumulated with the landmark publication of two important collections of essays by Two-Spirit and queer scholars and activists, *The Erotics of Sovereignty* (2012) and *Queer Indigenous Studies* (2011). How does one do "erotic sovereignty"? How can sexuality be decolonized? These interwoven queries have been at the forefront of my own erotic and gender journeys over the last 35 years. In this essay, I will analyse the work of Chrystos and gay Metis poet Gregory Scofield and how they have inspired my own thoughts and art practice about decolonizing sexuality.

In "MisAdventures of Pussy Boy," the three interconnected videos are based on performance pieces from the late 1990's that I transferred to the visual and oral medium of film. Cut outs of drawings of painted racialized queer bodies are manipulated against painted scenic backdrops of natural beauty and the impersonal public change room. The land, as represented by "the birch grove," is not merely background for erotic adventures but is another character with a voice. Created from 2000-2003, a few years after transitioning from a butch dyke to a trans man, the "Pussy Boy" character is a Trans/Intersex/mixed race Two-Spirit "tweensy" on the verge of puberty, their Intersex body flooding with the adolescent hormonal urges of both genders and feelings of first love.

"Pussy Boy" is called "queer" and "sick" by their peers at school. A rural route junior/high school in the bush, the fabled cold white winter landscape of snow banks in rural Canada is the backdrop of hot erotic scenes between two queer characters. As narrator of their own "misadventures" with first love and first sexual intimacy, "Pussy Boy" is also the queer "scapegoat" for their peers' adolescent anxieties about sex, sexuality, race and gender. The poetry of Chrystos and my own performance/film work are also acts of "erotic sovereignty."

In depicting her attraction to and pleasure with other women, Chrystos often draws on

natural imagery, which might be read as reiterating the very discursive strategies through which Native people are displaced from contemporary life. However, desire appears as itself a form of labor, an expression of bodily being in the world through which it is (re)produced but also potentially transformed—a capacity through which settler reifications can be made Native in ways that extend the bounds of indigeneity. Chrystos’ fusing of nature with explicit descriptions of erotic need, connection, and satisfaction makes figures of Indianness mobile, dislodging them from fetishized traditional objects or locations and proliferating spaces for expression and reclamation of Native identity while also investing potentially disembodied images with sensuous experience. In this way, her poetry enacts a sovereignty divorced from the terms of state-sanctioned self-determination, insisting on the apprehension of urban experience as authentically Native and thereby marking and refusing the task of managing the relation between interested settler expectations and the geographies and conditions of contemporary Native life” (Rifkin, 2012, pp. 220-221).

In his brilliant essay “The Space of Desire” that centers Chrystos’ lesbian erotic poems, Rifkin lays out how to do erotic sovereignty: “Chrystos’ erotic poetry... addresses how conventional images of Indianness work as part of Native affective formations, but in doing so, she endows the image with a sensuous physicality that exceeds the terms of settler value while making “nature,” and an attendant sense of an Indigenous connection to the landscape, achingly proximate within urban space, suggesting an extension of the possibilities for envisioning sovereignty as a kind of *lived practice*” (Rifkin, 2012, p. 251, italics added).

When I wrote “Misadventures of Pussy Boy” as performance monologues, I had been living in an urban environment for 25 years, pushed into moving here because my territory was colonized centuries ago, my ancestors “disappeared,” now remembered only by myself. Identifying as a butch lesbian I had both the pleasurable and unsettling experience of hearing Chrystos read her erotic lesbian poetry in the mid 1990’s in downtown Toronto.

Chrystos’ reading was unsettling in that it made me think about my own Indigenous roots, which had been a taboo subject to even bring up throughout my adolescent years. Chrystos was only the latest Indigenous writer that I had met within the last few years. Back then I was writing a full-length play with Two-Spirit artists who also encouraged me to explore my heritage. Writing the play while simultaneously meeting with Indigenous artists triggered many memories, memories of racist incidents that I witnessed happening to members of my own family, what we would now call “historical trauma”; this brought forth realizations about my own background that I had buried to survive. Ultimately it was hearing Chrystos’ poetry that inspired me to write about my own Indigenous heritage and come to a realization of my own gender and erotic sovereignty that became the seed of the performance scripts for “The Misadventures of Pussy Boy.” The seed of creating these videos was my own empowering sense of “living it” as a sexual Indigenous person discovering the knowledges that Lorde refers to in “Uses of the Erotic” (1978); the two queer lovers in the videos are “living it” in the present towards a Two-Spirit queer and indigenous futurity.

Our sexuality is infused with the effects of colonization, we treat each other like property to be exploited. Acts of erotic sovereignty or self-determination of our sexuality, the “biopower” (Foucault, 1978, p.140) of queer Indigenous bodies, can be used in ways that disrupt the plans the settler colonizer has for the power of our very bodies. Two-Spirit people still exist despite all that was done to eliminate us. It is this sense of *lived practice* of sovereignty that is often all we have as Indigenous peoples in a post colonized world. In the first and third “Misadventures of Pussy Boy” videos, the erotic encounter between the two queer characters

happens in an idealized remembered landscape from the past. The stereotypical Canadian winter scene is penetrated with the heat and messiness of sex, loud queer orgasms in the cold crisp “dead of winter” air.

Our instigators are marking their territory in the birch grove, giving it meaning beyond what a heteropatriarchal settler would imagine as a space without life. Pussy Boy, with a lot of help from their love interest K, are creating their own language. Together they reclaim insulting “stereotypes” like “queer” and “sick” that are flung at them by their peers in the hallowed hallways of “learning.” They are learning the ropes of “erotic sovereignty” from each other, safe from the prying eyes of the authorities who would see their attraction as “sick.”

K is very aware of how their attraction would be pathologized; this is why she keeps their relationship a secret and is “cool” towards “Pussy Boy” in front of their peers, their peers who are not like them. Their peers are not Indigenous or queer, they are the children of settlers, offering another reason to keep their relationship secret. Rifkin (2012) points out that these “very dynamics can be made the vehicle for (re)opening possibilities for peoplehood and self-determination” (p. 250).

Rifkin’s thesis is about the power of Chrystos’ poetry to transform settler narratives about Indigeneity for ourselves. He investigates the way she uses and “distends” the stereotype in the act of (re)producing self-determination. I will demonstrate how this (re)production is more explicit in the second video of the “Misadventures of Pussy Boy” trilogy called “Sick.” The background of the erotic encounter between our queer heroes in this video is not the stereotypical winter landscape of the first and third videos. In this middle video of the trilogy another stereotypical background fraught with queer meaning is featured as the backdrop for further “misadventures.” “Misadventures” serves as a double meaning for their confusing gender presentation which causes them to be drawn into “misadventures” with peers, i.e. smoking pot and overhearing conversations about sexually transmitted infections and inappropriate relationships (student/teacher), as well as the sexual connotation and social connotations of “getting in trouble.” Both of the backdrops used in the videos, the “birch grove” and the public washroom/change room are in the public domain, as well as “stereotypical” spaces where queers meet and have sex. These spaces can quickly become unsafe spaces where queers might be surveilled, rounded up and persecuted by the State.

The setting of the change room in the middle part of the story holds a double meaning—it is both a literal change room and a site of personal change in attitude. It is literally where change for Pussy Boy will happen over the course of the short video. First by an initiation through being set up as a “scapegoat,” then “sacrificed” in the form of being ganged up and queer bashed. And then after this “near death” experience, Pussy Boy is further initiated in the “change room” by K into the paradise like land of “erotic sovereignty”—she offers “revenge” for their humiliation in the form of K’s “pussy” to lick, thus adding another layer of meaning to the nickname that reclaims it from their tormentors’ expectation. In this “queered” public/private space where intimacies are exchanged in guarded and sometimes dangerous contexts, caution is thrown to the wind in this “change room”; the bashing, rather than making K and Pussy Boy run away in fear, only emboldens them both. Dangerous body fluids are front and center, scenes of blood swirling down a shower drain from a bashing “Pussy Boy” endures in the secret cubby hole where our queer lovers were supposed to be meeting for another erotic sovereignty lesson. K saves Pussy Boy after they are set up by queer bashers and attacked in the basement at junior high school. K takes Pussy Boy, her “hero,” to the girls’ locker room to clean up and comfort Pussy Boy. Our characters’ queer bodies mess up the public “change room” with abandon, they “queer it up” with discarded clothing, open nakedness, messy body fluids and non-reproductive sexuality.

Naked in the change room shower, where anyone could enter at any moment, holding each other, K makes Pussy Boy tell her what the bashers said as they were attacking them. Pussy Boy resists at first out of shame then breaks down and cries out, “They said I was sick! Sick!” K’s response is “verbal art” and living one’s sovereignty “in practice” and how to do erotic sovereignty that is based on (re)producing and transforming the stereotype for our own self-definition. K takes the insult and turns it into a badge of honor. Like the act of reclaiming the word “queer” from queer bashers reduces its power, K reclaims the label of “sick” from the “authorities.” As a result, the biopower of the State to dehumanize and pathologize their attraction is minimized but not completely overcome. Due to the inability to overcome the dehumanization and pathologization, they still have to move in a colonized, homophobic and transphobic world beyond the borders of the temporary “safe space” of the public washroom/locker room and the birch grove.

Furthermore, and to Pussy Boy’s great relief, K does not only take the sting of the insult and turn it into an act of “erotic sovereignty” against the pathologies of the authorities; authorities who have the power to determine whether people such as our queer heroes live, die or have access to a sustainable life. K herself embraces the insult, when she says, “Sick, oh yes, you and me both baby, you and me both.” Thus, so-called state sanctioned “sex crimes” of “juvenile delinquents” are transformed into acts of “erotic sovereignty” right before our eyes. Back then I did not have the scholarship that exists now to buttress my artistic praxis; my inspiration was from the urban verbal landscape superimposed over memories of growing up queer and racialized in the bush of rural Eastern Canada.

Jumping forwards to the first video in the “Pussy Boy” trilogy, it is clear from the start that K is proud of her Indigenous heritage, as she talks openly about it. This is very different from Pussy Boy, who is uncertain of their own mixed race Indigenous heritage and whose only point of comparison is their mother’s skin tone against K’s. K’s knowledge about her Metis and Indigenous heritage connects her to the pre-contact attitudes about gender fluidity amongst the First Nations before colonization. The double story narrative between K and Pussy Boy is an act of erotic sovereignty in itself. Telling the story from one point of view that imposes the truth is a western pedagogy of storytelling— this is disrupted when the story is told with equal weight on both characters. Additionally, having one of the characters as female and more knowledgeable than the other character tips the scales towards gender parity, an important aspect of decolonizing sexuality. K recognizes the instability of Pussy Boy’s gender presentation according to who is looking and confirms her comfort with this unstable state of affairs. However, K is comfortable with Pussy Boy’s gender ambiguity because of her Indigenous heritage and knowledge of gender fluidity from before colonization, and gifts Pussy Boy this name.

The third video titled “First Period”, is a double meaning for the first period of the school day and Pussy Boy’s first menstrual period. A-lick experiences an “emotional tailspin” in their relationship to K because of this “first period,” as they are worried K will think differently about them if they find out, however they had no reason to worry. Additionally, in the third video “A-lick” gets up the courage to tell the story of how they got the nickname “Pussy Boy.” In the story, it is seen that while they are down on their hands and knees in the school parking lot trying to tempt a stray cat to come out from under the cars, the other kids hanging out around the back door give them the nickname. Kids make fun of them calling out “pussy, pussy, pussy” to the stray cat and the name “Pussy Boy” sticks like “a case of mono.” Here again K reclaims this act of humiliation that marks their queerness. When they are alone, she turns the Pussy Boy insult into a term of endearment. “A-lick” is the nickname that K gives Pussy Boy when they are together in the sacred birch grove at the end of the third video; the stray pussy that A-lick was trying to coax from under the car in the parking lot joins the two lovers and all have come home to themselves.

According to rigid cissexist standards, “pussy” boy is not-quite-a-boy with a pussy. Nor are they up to cisgender standards of maleness because they are penis-less; they may also be called a pussy “boy” because they fail to live up to female gender presentations. It is also not because of their attraction to K that they are being called out as “a-lick-er of pussy.” Pussy Boy occupies a third category, an unstable category through which stories of adolescent desires, messy pleasures, and queer confusions are on parade before us against backgrounds that mark “trans motion” (Rifkin, 2012, p. 217), the ability to move across State sanctioned territories where the pristine Canadiana winterscapes is tainted by the red menstrual blood of a Two-Spirit teen. “Pussy Boy” also describes the movement of an Indigenous person who has no status because of colonization so has the “freedom” of not being recognized in official settler narratives, so is capable of movement within the margins of their “ghost like” existence. “Trans” here has another double meaning, movement across the different landscapes and transgressing gender norms.

This occupation of a third category of gender is the interpretation that K is advocating for with her “living practice” acts of “erotic sovereignty.” This is based on K’s Indigenous knowledge of differently gendered beings from the not so distant past, embodied before her in the present in the form of “A-lick,” a gender and sexual “trickster.” Many Indigenous creation stories have gender fluid tricksters as instigators of life coming into being (see Tomson Highway, plays, essays). Pussy Boy however, is only a trickster character in training, who with the help of K’s Indigenous knowledge will reach the full potential of the term trickster.

The “Misadventures of Pussy Boy” trilogy, like Chrystos’ lesbian erotic poetry, visualizes and gives voices to queer bodies in rebellion against the heteronormative status quo; in the videos, these acts of erotic sovereignty initiated by K, a Metis Two-Spirit Lesbian Femme, is by design. The character of K was inspired by the work of Chrystos and in recognition of her emotional labor and the emotional labor of all femme presenting people in the queer multiverse. K is the true hero of “Misadventures of Pussy Boy.”

Gregory Scofield is a Metis and Cree gay poet who has also wrestled with self-determination and sovereignty in his work: “Turtle Island is a place of sacred and not so sacred people, all of us looking for a sense of belonging, a validation of our existence—maybe even a platform to stage our resistance, for whatever reason. One could conclude, I suppose, that these inherent needs are one and the same, an endless step towards self-definition (Scudeler, 2011, p. 206). These endless steps towards self-definition are the core of Scofield’s resistance to having hard boundaries drawn around his own identity, he does not call himself “Two-Spirit” in reverence for a powerful spiritual role that he has not had extensive training in by another Two-Spirit elder. Scofield wonders himself if this training is hard to access in the present because of the effects of colonization through the Indian Act, a Canadian state policy of assimilation that enforced heteropatriarchal settler colonial sexuality on First Nations officially for the last 150 years or more (Cannon, 1998).

Finally, consent is how we do “erotic sovereignty.” A lack of asking for permission is what Scofield is trying to point out with his uncompromising stance on the non-consensual nature of the labels that are applied to him as an Indigenous gay male writer. The idea of asking for permission to take what is desired is a foreign concept in a capitalist system. The practice of sovereignty, and more specifically an “erotic sovereignty,” is not possible without consent being a core value. Indigenous knowledge starts with asking permission, to tell the story, to harvest the medicines, to kill food for sustenance and to touch each other’s bodies intimately. It was said that before colonization rape did not exist in Indigenous communities. In this way, the “Misadventures of Pussy Boy” trilogy is an attempt to make a contribution to a culture of consent in a Two-Spirit queer context.

I support the goal of decolonizing Two-Spirit Queer minds, bodies, desires and pleasures to create bridges between Indigenous Two-Spirit communities and Indigenous communities currently experiencing resurgence, with an examination of Chrystos work with stereotypes and my own video work. The premise of Laing's award-winning essay is: "I will illuminate the ways in which the concerns of bodies, lands, and relationships that (Indigenous) resurgence politics addresses are the same concerns addressed by two-spirit writing and criticism, and argue that two-spirit people living their teachings is an act of decolonization" (2017, p. 2). In her timely article, Laing gives us an overview of current Two-Spirit writers on the concept of "resurgence" that is described as "a return to ourselves and the way we are meant to be in relationship with our bodies, the land, and one another" (2017, p. 16).

In conclusion, personal learning journeys like the lesbian erotic poetry of Chrystos, Scofield's stories of self-acceptance and my visual and verbal arts that accumulate in the erotic misadventures of a sexual trickster pussy boy contribute to the ongoing steps towards self-definition that are necessary to decolonizing our minds, bodies, gender expressions and sexualities. Our continued existence challenges the hierarchical structures of the nation state that is constantly erasing the circle of love that sustains us. Our stories are healing medicine meant to be shared. Scofield uses the Cree term "ayekkwew," which means "neither man nor woman." Years ago, I was gifted with this word by Billy Merasty, one of the Two-Spirit actors I worked with on one of my plays in the early 1990's through to the late 1990's, who learned it from his mother, who was a grandmother to his many nieces and nephews. The gifting of this word was medicine for me and heralded another chapter in my own gender journey, culminating with my own "resurgence" twenty years ago. Learning the ancestors' words for Two-Spirit identities from our grandmothers is a powerful act of decolonizing our desire.

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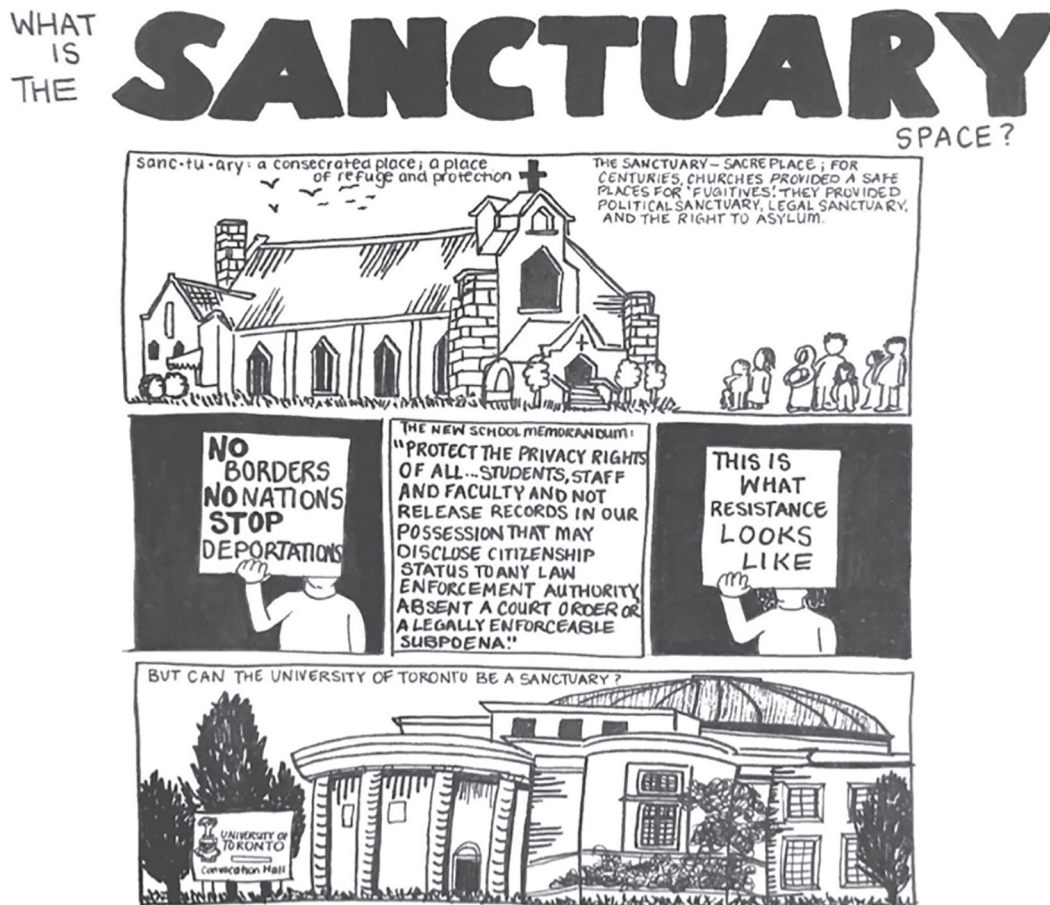
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What is the Sanctuary Space? An Examination of the University of Toronto

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Since the election of Donald J. Trump to the United States presidency, and his administration's subsequent immigration reforms, university campuses across North America have seen the revival of the sanctuary movement. Nevertheless, universities, as institutions, cannot be places of refuge or sanctuary. With its histories of colonialism and legacy of oppression, the Academy is not a safe space for marginalized individuals. For the University of Toronto, the same holds true. The University's long-standing connections to the Israeli Apartheid as well as their commitment to Peter Munk exemplifies the ways in which the institution continues to engage in penal logics by reinforcing the nation building project. This paper examines what it means to be a sanctuary space for the University of Toronto and highlights the reasons for which such an outcome is impossible. With the help of illustrations, this paper explores how the University's affiliation with the Israeli state and Barrick Gold reveal an underlying commitment to hegemonic imperialism. Finally, this paper provides a critical reflection of the author's personal experiences as an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto.



For thousands of years, sacred spaces have been places of sanctuary providing asylum, refuge, and immunity from political persecution. This tradition is deeply rooted in religious practices, with churches often being the physical site of sanctuary. However, conceptualized as an extralegal action, in the last forty years movements have called for sanctuary as a legal concept. Nevertheless, institutions are reluctant to support such movements as this form of civil disobedience functioning outside the legal system is technically illegal;

consequently, legal sanctuary can only be understood as a legal fallacy. In 2016, with the election of Donald J. Trump to the American presidency, the sanctuary movement has been revived on university campuses. Since the election, nearly two hundred institutions, including Columbia University and The New School, have petitioned to become 'sanctuary campuses'. Similar to the sanctuary city, the sanctuary campus is a university or college that vows to protect undocumented immigrants from federal law enforcement. Despite the symbolic and rhetorical value, the sanctuary campus reveals a potent institutional contradiction: universities are, in many ways, carceral spaces that reproduce borders and engage in the nation-building project. As a student at the University of Toronto and an intersectional feminist, I would love to believe that the University of Toronto can be a space for radical change: a place free from the dominant hegemonic imperialism of the state. However, as long as the University of Toronto remains an institution reproducing the nation-building projects of the penal state, it cannot become a sanctuary space.

This paper will examine two specific cases of University of Toronto's institutional history and contemporary practices to provide a socio-legal critique of how the University mimics immigration policies and the policing of borders. First, this paper will examine the University's censorship and renouncing of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) Movement, as well as its substantial investments in the Israeli apartheid. Second, this paper will explore the University's relations with Peter Munk, focusing on Barrick Gold's worker exploitation and human rights abuses. Finally, I will reflect on my personal experiences as an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto and how these experiences have informed my understanding of immigration policies in a broader sociopolitical context.

The University of Toronto's response to the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement and support for the Israeli state highlights the University's dedication to upholding settler colonialism and western hegemonies. The origins of the BDS movement are found in a 1948 Arab League boycott of the Israeli state during the Nakba (Dhamoon & Abu-Laban, 2009). Today, the movement is predominantly a form of economic resistance, inspired by the boycott movements against the South African apartheid. It strives "to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law" (www.bdsmovement.net). At the University of Toronto, there are primarily two student-run anti-Zionist organizations/Palestinian solidarity organizations: Students Against Israeli Apartheid (SAIA) and UofT Divest. The former is a stand-alone political group, whereas the latter was created through the UTSU BDS Ad-Hoc Committee. In 2015, the UTSU Board rejected supporting the BDS movement, thanks to the lobbying and support of Hillel, a Jewish student's organization, which misrepresented the BDS movement stating it was anti-Semitic (i.e. anti-Jewish) and oppressive (Varsity, 2015). Furthermore, UofT's administration has previously denied the SAIA room bookings for their general meetings, as well as for a conference in 2008 (Schofield, 2009). The University's unspoken censorship policy towards the BDS movement is not rooted in a desire to be 'politically indifferent' to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as exemplified by their outright support for organizations such as The Canadian Academic Friends of Israeli (CAFI) and the Canadian Council for Israeli and Jewish Advocacy (Schofield, 2009); both organizations' sole purpose is to support Israeli state rhetoric.

As the university continues supporting the Israeli state and its human rights violations against the Palestinian people, it cements its complicity in upholding migration detention centers and the expansion of the Israeli prison industrial complex in Palestine. Additionally, the University's censorship of anti-Zionist organizations demonstrates how the campus itself become a carceral space, not only for those resisting the Israeli apartheid but for all students calling for radical change against colonialism and neo-imperialism. In other words, the University simultaneously supports the Israeli state in creating physical borders around

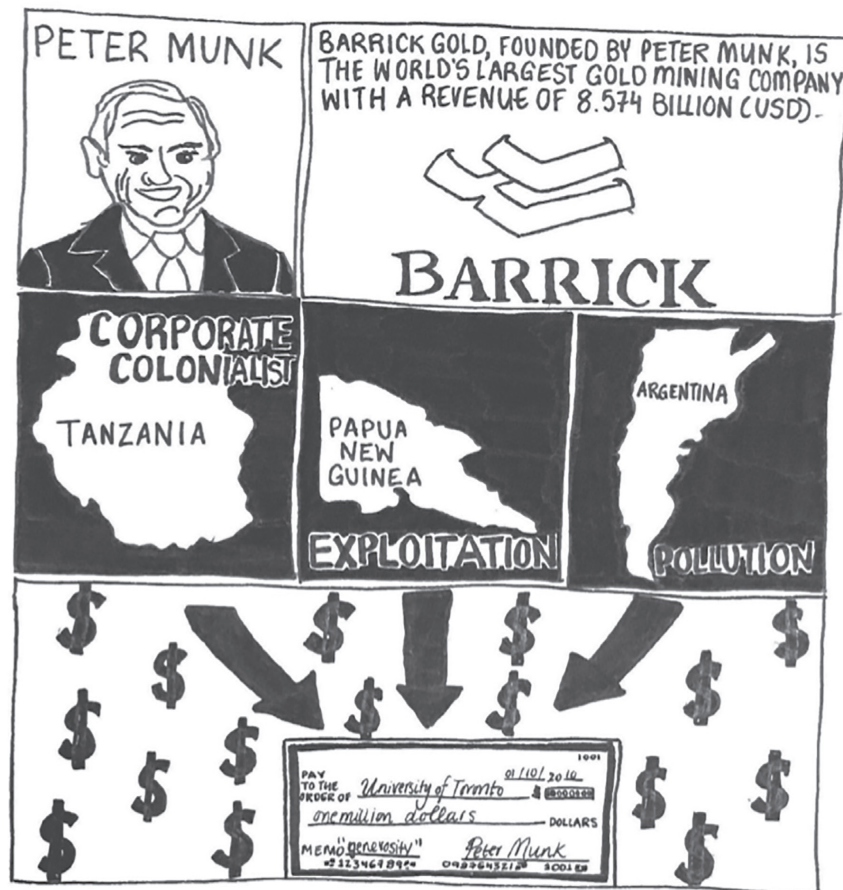
Gaza and Occupied Palestine, and creates ideological borders encircling academia within dominant Western ideologies. UofT's policies mimic the borders created by the Canadian nation-building project which seeks to cleanse its settler colonialist status through the censorship and policing of Indigenous resistance. Bohaker & Iocavette (2009) explore the ways that the state attempts to recast itself as an "Enlightened nation" (p. 431) through the casting of Indigenous Canadians as immigrants. The white settler state does this, according to the authors, by hierarchizing Canadians through citizenship and migration policies. A model of citizenship, rooted in white Christian bourgeoisie morals, is disseminated into society and brands Indigenous peoples as precarious citizens (Bohaker & Iocavette, 2009). Similarly, by censoring pro-Palestinian organizations, UofT antagonizes student resistance as it seeks to solidify its power within the dominant order. The University is generating an image of the ideal student, one that adheres to all University policies and is complacent in the University's imperialist involvement. In doing so, the university brands non-compliant students as "dangerous internal foreigners" (Dhamoon and Abu-Laban, 2009, p. 169), imbricating belongingness, or lack thereof, to threat. Consequently, the idea of citizenship within the University transcends faculty and students, becoming deeply connected to an alliance with the University's ideologies.



After his death in March of 2018, an array of newspaper articles were published eulogizing businessman Peter Munk. In an article on U of T News, the University of Toronto refers to Munk “as a true innovator, and as one of the country’s most generous philanthropists” (UofT News, 2018). This veneration of Peter Munk and indifference to Barrick Gold’s human rights abuses represents the university’s dedication to environmental and capitalist exploitation. Peter Munk founded Barrick Gold in 1985, the world’s largest gold mining company with mines across Canada and the world. Despite contributing to hospitals and universities across Canada, Munk’s legacy is one of capitalist exploitation, environmental disregard, and colonial violence. In May of 2011, workers at African Barrick, a subsidiary of Barrick Gold in Tanzania, clashed with Barrick security forces, resulting in the arrest and beatings of eight people, the injury of twelve people by security forces, as well as the death of 27-year-old Emmanuel Magige; his body was disposed in a coffin by Barrick security on the side of a dirt road (Edwards, 2011). Furthermore, in 2016 a Tanzanian government inquiry revealed 300 unreported violent deaths at Africa Barrick mines (Saunders, 2018). These acts of corporate colonialism in the global South committed by a subsidiary business of Peter Munk’s Barrick Gold are not isolated incidents: in Papua New Guinea, a hospital built by Barrick Gold, which sits adjacent to a Barrick mine, has been the object of criticism due to the widespread rape allegations against Barrick Security forces (Saunders, 2018). In addition to Barrick Gold’s corporate exploitation, in Argentina, Barrick Gold has contaminated five rivers with cyanide (McSheffrey, 2016). The environmental effects of the mining industry and Barrick Gold’s negligence are part and parcel with its corporate colonialist agenda. As the University continues to eulogize Peter Munk, we must ask ourselves who will write the eulogy for the exploited workers in his mines, or the survivors of sexual assault perpetrated by Barrick Security, and who will write the eulogy for the polluted waters and the Indigenous populations poisoned? I do not wish to construct survivors of Peter Munk’s corporate colonialism as victims. Khoday describes the victim as “a person who is identified as suffering harm to the exclusion of other defining characteristics” (Khoday, p. 633); they embody passivity. Based on Khoday’s critique, I would like to characterize these individuals as embodying both the role of victim and agency; most importantly, their multifaceted experiences provide them with the tools to be resilient.

Peter Munk’s philanthropic work in Toronto juxtaposed with his human rights abuses in the global South mirrors what Catherine Dauvergne calls “citizenship with a vengeance” (Dauvergne, 2007, p. 488). Just as migration law does the ‘dirty work’ for citizenship law, the exploitation of workers in Barrick Gold’s mining industry works in tandem with Munk’s generosity in Toronto. This dichotomy constructs borders that exclude individuals from the benefits of the Western “citizenship regime” (p. 495). The coupling of migration-citizenship law allows for the creation of a national rhetoric that reified the notion of an ideal citizen, which subsequently constructs the deviant citizen. Similarly, Peter Munk’s financial donations construct a duality where one group of individuals are characterized as deserving generosity and the other exploitation. The unfreedom of the exploited group is integral to the freedom of the unexploited group. With regards to the University, the veneration of Peter Munk mimics the Canadian nation building fallacy. Canada’s nation-building project posits an ideal wherein all individuals (read: white settler citizens) are free and protected by *the Charter*. Razack highlight how this story is one rooted in racial superiority as well as Western chauvinism (Razack, 2000). This image of Canada “is building of an unequal structure of citizenship” (p. 187) defined by documentation. According to Razack, documentation is a stand in for race, centering the story of Canada as a racial story which draws from colonial rhetoric that racializes the ‘primitive’ and whitens the ‘civilized’. Likewise, the University of Toronto’s adoration for Peter Munk is contingent on its ability to censor his role in Barrick Gold’s human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Embodying the ‘ideal’ University alumnus, Peter Munk to UofT is the ideal citizen to the settler Canadian state. Peter Munk’s legacy is, therefore, a fallacy, one that strives to reify the superiority and prestige of the University of Toronto; the truth

behind his actions are therefore irrelevant as long as his legacy fulfills its role of elevating the University as an institution. Furthermore, just as the fictitious 'ideal citizen' reinforces citizenship and exclusion, the honoring of Peter Munk, defines what it means to be a true member of the Academy. Consequently, the University of Toronto's requirement of membership status creates an environment wherein only a minute subset of the population may feel welcome. Only these individuals can conceptualize the University as a place of sanctuary. Just as our national borders construct the deserving and the undeserving asylum seekers, the University constructs an ideological border with a lock on the inside. With no way in, those seeking refuge may never enter the gates and climb into the ivory towers of the institution. The University cannot be a place of sanctuary free from state violence, as it is the bastion of Western neo-imperialism.



As a fourth-year student dedicated to activism and social justice, I struggle to truly understand the consequences of the University's abhorrent policies. For the past three and a half years, I have had the privilege of feeling consistently welcomed and respected by this institution. But upon completing my research, I realized that in reality it is not that I have had a particularly warm welcome by the University but that I have chosen to internalize university policies and rhetoric. This decision has been subtly rewarded by praise from professors, scholarships, and my implicit role as a "good student." Likewise, in many ways I embody the idea of the "good immigrant" and have often felt that the dark side of Canadian immigration policy never truly applied to me. However, in reality this is due to the fact that I am complicit in the Canadian nation-building project, by striving to be the "good immigrant." The motivations for being an ideal citizen and ideal student are contingent on avoiding some form of punishment. For the former, I fear becoming a target of oppressive

government policies; for the latter, I fear losing my social value by not receiving a degree. Upon realizing the fragility of my privilege, I've been confronted with the reality that the University is not a space for radical change in the face of the state; it is, however, a place where dominant ideologies are reproduced in a variety of fields. This is not meant to dismiss the entire education system for there is undoubtedly merit in gaining knowledge as to how oppressive systems and their underlying ideologies function; however, this realization has been of paramount importance for me as it has allowed me to view the institution as inherently elitist and oppressive. This harkens back to a quote from Audre Lorde: "for the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house." Consequently, the University, despite being a safe space for me, has revealed itself as intrinsically unable to be a sanctuary space. This is not necessarily a negative outlook to me because ultimately change has to happen and we must build these sanctuary spaces, however, we must look to other spaces to form these sanctuaries, as they cannot be found in institutions.

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Performing Murder: *The trans panic defense through a performative and necropolitical lens*

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CW: violence, murder, death, trans misogyny

The trans panic defense has been used countless times in legal courts to defend those who murder trans folks after having been romantically or sexually intimate with them. Defendants in these cases claim that a crisis of identity flung them into such a violent and uncontrollable rage that they killed their victim in a heat of passion. Such defenses have been successfully used in multiple trials to reduce sentences and generate public sympathy. While such arguments are abominable at face value, what remains to be understood is the true rhetorical implications of such actions and their justification using the trans panic defense. In this paper, I argue that trans panic violence and its subsequent defense in court is a performance of masculine heterosexuality that is actively condoned by countless Western legal systems. Trans women, particularly women of colour, are therefore reduced to figural tools for the sake of heterosexual assertion and reification.

Leticia King was shot twice in the back of the head by her eighth-grade classmate. Gwen Araujo was beaten and strangled to death at a house party. Islan Nettles was killed on the street by a man who felt he had been “fooled” by her feminine appearance (McKinley Jr., 2017). These murders, as brutal and unthinkable as they are, are but a tiny sample of the countless acts of violence perpetrated against trans folks every day. Yet something else links these murders as well. In all three, and indeed in many more, the victim had been romantically involved with her attacker. What Lee and Kwan call “trans panic defense” is a tale that has become undeniably familiar: a trans woman becomes intimate with a man, who, upon “discovering” her identity, becomes incensed at her “deception” and kills her in a mad rage (2014). So powerful is this purported reaction that even legal courts have recognized its effect, often granting leniency in sentencing to those convicted. It is through the legitimization of such acts, both culturally and legally, that this form of violence against trans women has become so common. Yet, such violence is far more complex than simply a frenzied rage. Rather, the context of the violence as well as its legal legitimacy point to structural and rhetorical power levied against trans women— especially women of colour such as King, Araujo, and Nettles. This paper will explore this rhetorical power, analyzing trans panic violence in the context of performative heterosexuality. Through primarily the work of Viviane Namaste and Judith Butler, I will link the ways in which trans panic violence is enacted and responded, to conceptions of heterosexual and masculine performance. This will be contextualized both within a cultural epoch that enables the rhetorical use of trans bodies as figural tools as well as a legal framework that legitimizes the performance of normative and masculinist identity, often at the cost of trans women and people of colour.

Rhetorical Reduction

What must first be understood about this phenomenon is the tendency of rhetoric— be it that of literature, discourse, hate speech, or violence— to utilize trans women as rhetorical or figural tools. Whether they are used to prop up campaigns, symbolize ambiguity, or assert cisheteronormative patriarchy, trans women are constantly reduced to rhetorical pawns to be used for some discursive end. Viviane Namaste analyzes such reduction brilliantly in “Gendered Nationalisms and Nationalized Genders.” Working primarily through the Australian drama “The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert,” Namaste identifies a marked cultural penchant for the appropriation of trans lives as figural tools (2000). The trans characters in “Priscilla” are used as literary devices to symbolize metropolis as well as conflict. Their gender is used as the only meaningful part of their character, to symbolise culture and indecision, with little respect

paid to any other aspect of their humanity (Namaste, 2000). As such, they are not realized as fully developed characters, but rather as tools to communicate literary ends irrelevant to their personhood. Trans bodies become metaphors to prove something about that which employs them. Namaste identifies instances, both in literature and trans activism, where trans bodies are reduced “to the purely figural, thereby erasing the literal transsexual body.” (2000) This inherently reductive discursive act posits trans people not as complex and agential human beings, but rather as rhetorical tools for the sake of communicating distinct and sometimes problematic ideas. Namaste highlights the ways in which such utilization is dehumanizing, stripping trans individuals of their “status of personhood.” (2000)

Of course, the deployment of such rhetoric is hardly new in discourses of trans representation. From Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics to bell hooks’ analysis of the politics of consumption, the utilization of marginalized bodies for assertive power is all too familiar. Indeed, it is the multitude of similar rhetorical reductions that indicate a systematic utilization of marginalized bodies. Important within this is the acknowledgement of intersectionality within these phenomena. The disproportionate violence faced by trans women of colour also points to a tendency for the most marginalized of our communities to be those that are often the most victimized by such rhetorics. King, Araujo, and Nettles, whose lives I recall in this paper, are women of colour. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and engage with their race as much as their gender in understanding the violence they faced and the theoretical implications that has for trans women of colour more broadly.

Performing Heterosexuality

With an understanding of the prevalent reduction and management of trans bodies as figural tools, the violence of trans panic killings can be analyzed far deeper. The societal and legal acceptance of such acts is not only therefore read as a violent outburst but rather as a deliberate utilization of trans bodies to assert one’s heterosexuality. Whether it was King asking her killer, Brandon McInerney, to be her valentine, or the flirtatious interaction Nettles had with James Dixon minutes before her murder, or the sex Araujo had with two of the four men that killed her, all three women had been intimate with the men that would later take their lives. Dixon and McInerney were both viciously teased by their cishet peers for being “gay,” and Gwen’s killers were similarly repulsed at the thought of their having had sex with a “man.” It was through this sentiment of a wounded heterosexuality that these men felt it necessary to use their victims as rhetorical tools to assert, or perform, their normative sexuality.

Here, an affinity with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity becomes apparent. Namaste identifies the productive nature of figural representation, where rhetoric not only describes existent ideology, but creates discourse in its own right (2000). Conceptions of transness and identity are formed by the utterance of the rhetoric itself. This productive use of rhetoric is profoundly linked to Butler who similarly identifies performative rhetoric as discourse with the power “to produce that which it names.” (1993) Butler also crucially notes that it is not merely queer identities that must be performed, but cisheterosexual identities as well (1993). This is pivotal because it means that the rhetorical usage of trans bodies is a performative act, which is used to reify structures of power and oppression (1993). As such, trans panic violence can be seen as performative heterosexuality. The perpetrator’s heterosexual identity is ostensibly threatened by their intimacy with a trans woman and therefore must be enforced and legitimized through violent reprisal.

This performance of normativity is then structurally and discursively condoned by the legal system. This is the heart of the trans panic defense. If it were so that the trans panic defense simply cited violent rage, it would have no more salience than any other defense founded on emotional aggravation. Rather, the unique cogence of trans panic to juries and judges is that it was a “necessary” performance of heterosexual identity,

both for the perpetrator and for normative society. The use of violence is deemed as more justifiable because it was done in the spirit of enforcing the “normal.” Rescuing one’s failing heterosexuality, thereby defending against homophobic ridicule, as explicitly cited in the cases of King and Nettles, is deemed as necessary to maintain a sense of self. Of course, analogous privileges to queer and other marginalized communities are never meaningfully actualized; rather legal institutions solely seek to protect one’s ability to perform normative modes of being. One is only justified in proving they are straight.

Crucially, however, it is not only trans and genderqueer identities that mark bodies as more deserving of reduction. Race, particularly through the eyes of the legal system, consistently registers bodies of colour as more appropriate for such usage. From lynching trials in the Jim Crow era to the clemency lent to police brutality against racialized civilians, the legal system regularly devalues the bodies of people of colour. This has meaningful interaction with the trans panic defense, where racialized people are not only more deserving of violence out-right, but also more justifiably used to the benefit of others. Accordingly, racialized trans women are rendered as targets, not only because of their gender, but so too because of the colour of their skin.

Rescuing Masculinity

Yet, it is not only heterosexuality that trans panic killers seek to reclaim. When teased by their peers or upon discovering their intimacy with a “man,” these assailants feel profoundly emasculated as well. Lee and Kwan identify this, arguing that “men are socialized to believe that being a man means not being a woman and not being gay.” (2014) This conditional relationality of manhood relies on the confidence of the other’s identity; therefore, the killer’s sense of manhood, deeply tied to heterosexuality, is threatened. Importantly, it is this threat to masculinity that necessitates violence above all else. While heterosexuality can be reclaimed through a number of public and forceful forms of rejection, violence is unique in that it is inherently masculine. Lee and Kwan analyze the underlying masculinity of the “heat of passion” rhetoric that is used to defend perpetrators of anti-trans violence (2014). Uncontrollable rage, the use of violence, and murder itself are all profoundly associated with manhood.

Such patterns are plainly observable in each case study as well. In each case, killers felt their masculinity threatened through intimacy with their victim. Dixon was ridiculed for not realizing Nettles was trans, McInerney felt “squeezed and disgusted” when near King, fearing he would be seen as homosexual himself (Corbett, 2016), and Araujo’s killers vomited and cried upon discovering Araujo’s trans identity. Suffering this emasculating vulnerability, a restoring act of hyperbolic masculinity was necessary. Indeed, it is specifically this hyperbolic performance of masculinity that so closely associates trans panic violence with Butler’s concept of heterosexual performance. Butler argues that to make cultural imperatives legible and therefore established as normative, “hyperbolic versions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’” are required (1993). To assert masculinity, especially in the face of the supposedly feminine act of “homosexual” sex, one must therefore perform a very extreme version of masculinity, of which violent murder is one.

Again, it is important to recognize the legal system’s active legitimization of such a performance. Juries and judges are sympathetic to men who feel emasculated and feminized by the deceptive trans woman who tricks them into gay sex. Their consequent violence is therefore seen as more justifiable because they were enacting a necessary corrective to their previous blunder. It is uniquely their manhood that excuses such a heinous act. This, again, points to the particular privilege lent to heterosexual men by a legal system that enables them to violently perform their identity at the cost of trans women and other marginalized communities.

Conclusion

Trans panic violence will likely remain prevalent for years to come, as some cisheterosexual men continue to view trans women as deceptive, homosexual men. Yet, while such a cultural phenomenon may take generations to truly unlearn, the discursive implications on how society and the legal system view and understand this violence are much more easily reformed. The validity of the trans panic defense lies in cultural and legal protections for those who seek to perform and enforce normative masculine identities. The bodies of gender and racial minorities become easy prey for reductive rhetorical performance: tactics that actively deny personhood to the dead. We, as agents of change, in recognizing the discursive roots of such violence and its prevalence in our society, can better combat such maneuvers, giving voice and humanity to those who are exploited as performative tools. Leticia, Gwen, Islan, and so many more can thereby be known not as the bodies used by their killers, but rather the strong women of colour they always truly were.

Endnotes

1. In my research, I found that King had asked a number of times to be referred to as Leticia in school but was refused by teachers and staff. She had also signed the assignment she was working on at the time of her murder with the name Leticia. I recognize that this is not conclusive evidence that she wished to be called by Leticia by everyone, much less by a stranger in Toronto whom she never met. However, considering the context of her deeply transphobic and homophobic school and family life, I am more inclined to believe that this was the name she wished to be known as but was unable to fully publicize it. As such, she will be referred to as Leticia, along with she/her pronouns, for this paper.
2. In the spirit of this work, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which my work may also contribute to the problems this paper addresses. This paper undeniably centralizes the violence faced by trans women and in doing so sacrifices meaningful engagement with what the lives of Leticia King, Gwen Araujo, and Islan Nettles truly looked like. However, I felt it disingenuous to biograph the lives of women I did not know. The ideal we ought to strive for is not one where trans women's humanity are merely represented post-mortem, but rather celebrated during their lives when they can speak for themselves. Their stories are not mine to tell, but it is imperative that we remember that all three of the women discussed in this paper, and more broadly all victims of hateful violence, are more than the crimes committed against them.

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The (Un)Dignified

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Gilles Deleuze defines Masochism as a “victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes” (1971, p. 20) and as only practiced when a mutually agreed upon contract is present. Raising questions about the relationship between extreme forms of torture and the inviolable nature of human dignity, this essay explores the dynamics of consent in a masochistic relationship between the subject and torturer. Drawing on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s portrayal of a masochistic relationship between Severin (the subject) and Wanda (the torturer) in Venus in Furs, I argue that consent is insufficient to justify death and extreme forms of violence between torturer and subject. Themes examined in this essay include the connection between THE LAW and one’s own liberty, why our desires should not be the basis of our will, and the transcendent nature of human dignity.

Gilles Deleuze defines masochist as a “victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes” (1971, p. 20) and as only practiced when a mutually agreed upon contract is present. For the purpose of this essay, I will base my definition of masochism around the idea of perverse erotic experiences; meaning the suffering of physical pain as a requisite to sexual fulfillment. Using this definition of masochism and the contractual agreement between the subject and torturer, it is evident that consent must be present. According to L.H. Leigh: “the fundamental idea of not punishing the infliction of minor harms where there is consent is appropriate” (1976, p. 137). However, this raises the question of what can be classified as “minor harm” and how far can the defense of consent go before becoming a defense of indignity and unjustifiable violence.

Further, can death be justified on the basis of consent? In Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* (1971), the male subject Severin consents to his possible death at the hands of Wanda, his torturer, in writing. I, however, argue that consent is insufficient to justify death and extreme forms of violence between torturer and subject in a masochistic relationship. In order to relay my case, I will be making reference to Masoch’s novel. I will examine why consent alone cannot ethically justify death and extreme forms of torture while negotiating the tolerable degree of harm inflicted on the subject. Firstly, I will determine the role of THE LAW and when THE LAW can intervene regardless of one’s liberty to practice one’s chosen lifestyle. Secondly, I will argue that desires cannot form the basis for consent because desire precedes intellect and intellect helps to determine morality. Lastly, I contend that human dignity transcends people and their chosen existence even when the transcendent nature of human dignity works against something that may have been consented to.

Before delving into why consent cannot justify death, I will outline the premise of *Venus in Furs*, as it illustrates the core principles of my argument. The book depicts the provocative tale of Severin and Wanda’s love; telling the story of a relationship between subject and torturer, educator and persuader, and fantasy and suspense. Masoch is known for being the eponym of a form of sexual perversion known as masochism (Deleuze, 1971). Severin, adores Wanda as Venus herself. Severin says: “She has drawn up a contract by which I am to commit myself on my honor to be her slave for as long as she wishes” (Masoch, 1971, p. 196). When Wanda finally succumbs, and takes him up on his offer to be her slave, she excitedly admits,

a man who worships me and whom I love with all my soul should be dependent on my every whim, that he should be my possession, my slave... It will be your fault if I become utterly frivolous. I think you are almost afraid of me now...but I have your oath (Masoch, 1971, p. 195)

Throughout this essay I will the death that Severin has agreed to in this contract and how it runs counter to the inviolable nature of human dignity.

Deleuze argues that THE LAW, which can also be known as moral law, “is the representation of a pure form and is independent of content or object, spheres of activity or circumstances... and as such it cannot be grounded in a higher principle” (p. 83). Contemporary forms of law present the notion that THE LAW is self-regulated and based solely on its own form of what it deems ethical. As such, when referencing the relationship between THE LAW and one’s own free liberty, consent cannot always justify certain forms of torture (Deleuze, 1971, p. 82).

Establishing THE LAW meant that the “object of THE LAW is by definition unknowable and elusive” (Deleuze, 1971, p.83). By comparing THE LAW with masochist behaviors Deleuze states that, “the result in every case is the opposite of what might be expected (thus whipping, far from punishing or preventing an erection, provokes and ensures it). It is a demonstration of [THE LAW]’s absurdity” (p. 88). For example, Severin gives up all of his rights as a free man to Wanda through a mutually agreed contract, which is a necessary precondition in a masochistic relationship. The contract means consent has been given freely by both parties involved and forms a set of principles, rights and duties, they can act out (Deleuze, 1971, p. 77).

Thus, the contract between Severin and Wanda represents an abiding law between the two parties involved. In signing the contract, Severin gives up his own free liberty by his own free liberty. According to John Stuart Mill, liberty is the state of living as one desires (1864, p. 118). Therefore, insofar as people are have personal liberty, they must be allowed to do as they please regards with what concerns themselves, “to act as seems best to themselves at their own peril, they must equally be free to consult with one another about that is fit to be so done...” (Mill, 1864, p. 121).

Severin makes it known that his choices were voluntary, desirable and endurable, but by signing himself away as slave, he surrendered his own liberty to Wanda. Mill (1864) argues:

He therefore defeats, in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself. He is no longer free; but is thenceforth in a position which has no longer the presumption in its favour, that would be afforded by his voluntarily remaining in it. The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free (p. 126).

Although Severin is free to do as he likes, he should not be free to consent to death as it involves another person: an external agent. The State, or rather the rule of law, “is bound to maintain a vigilant control over his exercise of any power which it allows him to possess over others. The law must always protect the best interests of the agents” (Mill, 1864, p. 123). Even though Severin has consented to death at the hands of his torturer as a free agent, THE LAW would interject its condemnation, as all citizens must conform to the law regardless of liberty when it involves the persuasion of another person. Hence, THE LAW becomes the formal principle itself and is non-negotiable (Basile, 2018). In accordance, Severin’s consent does not equate the justification of his death nor it is ethical.

Severin’s role as a subject to torture and harm provides the reader with a clear representation of someone who is living their ultimate desires. I argue that Severin’s mode of expression of his desire for Wanda, even with his consent present, is unethical and unjust. Masoch plays with expectation and suspense in portraying the punishment of Severin, but the reader is also left with feelings of ambivalence regarding their harshness. In one particular scene, Wanda punishes Severin for paying a little too much attention to the female server by immediately tearing the whip from its hook and striking him right across the face. Wanda then ties Severin up and throws him into a tiny dark vault with no light, heat or food (Masoch, 1971, p. 233). He states: “I was buried alive” (p. 233).

David Simard (2105) argues that the meaning of consent rests in the nature of human beings and how we interact with each other. Simard demonstrates how consent is rooted in desire and will. Desire is described as “an urge directed towards something” (p. 66). Similarly, will as a longing or wishing. Simard engages Freud and Spinoza’s argument about how desire precedes intellect: in Freud’s theory, will is a result of a conscious choice and thus oppositional to the repressed desire. Since desire works in non-transparent ways, will is a more appropriate basis for consent.

Furthermore, Spinoza believes that desire is primitive in nature and therefore cannot be changed by will. Simard (2015) states:

Desire as endeavor falling under the heading of human essence precedes any object which may be desired, and the objects which are acquired through desire are more a function of the circumstances than of a reasoned choice which might indicate to us one object of another as being desirable. Desire can therefore no longer be considered the fruit of choice. Hence, if to consent is to choose freely, desire cannot form the basis of consent.” (p. 66)

Severin explicitly gives his complete consent when he says: “you know that nothing gives me greater bliss than to serve you and be your slave; I will give you anything to be entirely at your mercy, to feel that my whole life lies in your hands” (Masoch, 1971, p. 219). Yet, this does not mean the acts of violence and killing are justified. His desire to be subjugated by Wanda cannot be the only foundation of the consented contract precisely because his desired object is the reflection of his environment and his position. In other words, Severin’s desires precede his intellect and cannot be used to inform what he chooses of his own free will to consent to.

Finally, I argue that human dignity should be over and above consent. Even when the activities and practices involving subject and torturer are mutually agreed upon, I believe consent is not sufficient to justify death. Simard draws on Immanuel Kant, to demonstrate “the distinctive idea of referring the concept of dignity simultaneously to the concepts of liberty, autonomy, and respect for the subject, and to the idea of a transcendence which would go beyond any human being” (Simard, 2015, p. 67). The oppositional relation between dignity as metaphysical (attribute of the subject) and legal (attribute of humanity) creates a problem for concept of absolute liberty, the concept on which the value of the subject’s consent is grounded.

Kant argues that human existence itself is a basis of human dignity and this intrinsic value cannot be swayed by individual will (Simard). Not to mention, the relationship between human dignity and masochism went through a process of legal reflection at the end of the twentieth century. The European Court of Human Rights’ ruled that one has the right to pursue morally or physically harmful or dangerous condition(s) of life was met with criticism from Muriel Fabre-Magnan (2006). According to her, this ruling disavows the transcendence of human dignity and consent is invalid when it betrays human dignity (p.68).

Severin describes signing the official contract by saying: “I have willfully ended my useless life” (Masoch, 1971, p. 221). This contract meant that Severin was turning over his entire existence and its purpose to Wanda. Wanda proclaims, “you are no longer my lover, but my slave; your life and death are subject to my whims” (Masoch, 1971, p. 223). In doing so, Severin’s status in this relationship shifts from an equal partner to a slave. Moreover, his willingness to end his “useless” life reveals his circumstance in which determines his desire. Therefore, mere consent cannot ethically justify inflicting death or extreme forms of torture on someone as it would violate human dignity. Consent is not able to shift the absolute nature of human dignity.

To conclude, this essay has examined why consent cannot justify death and extreme forms of violence, by using examples from *Venus in Furs* to demonstrate the relationship between subject and torturer. A person

cannot fully and legitimately consent to levels of harm that contravene the transcendent value of dignity that all human beings possess even if consent has been given freely. Masochism is a practice based on the mutual consent to its own functioning law, the contract, and punishment. However, willingly given consent does not automatically grant the justification of the harm. Even though one may appeal to personal liberty, it is evident that THE LAW can intervene when someone is involving an external party, as the State and ruling law are bound to protect the best interests of the agents which comprise it.

Additionally, consent cannot be based off of desire as desire is an innate feature which functions independently from our intellect. Therefore, such a violation of human dignity is not something one can consent to merely on the basis of desire. Deleuze (1971) states, “the masochist needs to believe that he is dreaming even when he is not” (p.72). Yet, how can someone consent to handing over their entire existence, life and death, into the hands of their torturer when they are entering this relationship in a dream with only the fantasies they wish to act out? Desire precedes intellect and human dignity transcends our existence, thus making it impossible for someone to fully and truly consent to death.

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