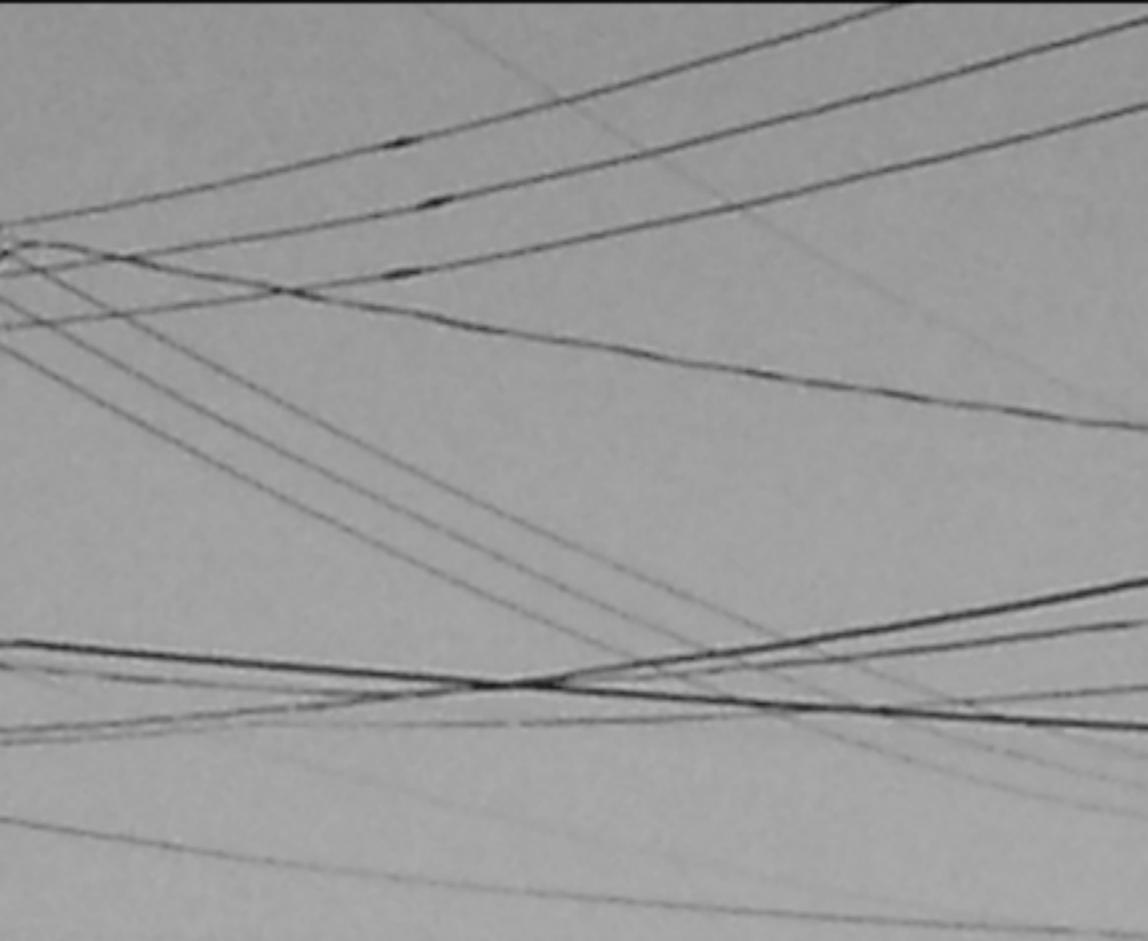




**HARD**

THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF SEXUAL DIVERSITY STUDIES

**WIRE**





# **HARD WIRE**

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**THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF SEXUAL DIVERSITY STUDIES**

# Hard Wire 2011-2013

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## *Editors' Note*

Well, this took far longer than we had hoped...

This project was started in between full-time classes and full-time jobs, with very little knowledge of how, exactly, one puts together a journal. Now on the other side, we (finally) have a journal in hand, and countless new supportive heads and hands to help keep Hard Wire on its feet.

More than anything, our intention was to lay the foundations for this journal to be published annually. I'm happy to say that the newly-reformed Sexual Diversity Studies Student Union will take the reins for this journal to continue in the years to come. Hopefully we have developed some of the knowledge and skills to pass along to the next year's group of editors, who can pass down their skills in turn.

During our time as students in Sexual Diversity Studies we have seen our peers engage in some truly unique and inventive research, and we wanted to create a platform to showcase that talent. The works presented herein address a diverse range of topics, covering issues of law, race, literature, art & photography, trans embodiment, desire, community, and, of course, some sexy sex. This subject matter would be impressive in a professional anthology, but is even more so coming from a group of undergraduates.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to our peer review board for their work in the selection process, our peer editors for all of their work polishing off these papers, and the Sexual Diversity Studies program for their ongoing support of this project. This journal wouldn't exist if it weren't for the fabulous contributions of our authors; we are extremely proud to be presenting your work.

Finally, on behalf of the editorial board, thank you for reading. We hope you enjoy Hard Wire.

Sarah McQuarrie & Paul Weadick  
Editors-in-Chief  
August 2013

# VALERIE SOLANAS WAS NOT A FEMINIST, BUT...

Brock Hessel

*It was a very hot day, as Jed, Valerie, and I waited for the elevator, I noticed she was wearing a fleece-lined winter coat and a high turtle-neck sweater, and I thought how hot she must be—although she wasn't even sweating. She was wearing pants, more like trousers (I never saw her in a dress), and holding a paper bag and twisting it bouncing a little on the balls of her feet.*

(Warhol and Hackett, 1980, p. 342)

When Valerie Solanas is thought of at all, she is usually considered as the “circus-show-lesbian-schizophrenic-feminist” (Fahs, 2008, p. 592) who almost killed Andy Warhol. Many do not stop to think about how her bouncing feet in the elevator may have one day marched “over the president’s stupid, sickening face” (Solanas, 2004, p. 76). Instead of marching, she bounced;

instead of shooting “a more representative male oppressor,” (Girodias, 1968, p. 19) she shot Andy Warhol. The agitated movement of her feet in the elevator may be read as a symptom of the schizophrenia that may have contributed both to the genesis of her plan to exterminate the male sex, and the prevention of its realization. Indeed, her mental illness has made her *SCUM Manifesto* a footnote to the Warhol shooting (Fahs, 2008, p. 592), and a footnote to the women’s movement at large (Rowe and Chavez, 2011, p. 272; Lord, 2007, p. 42; Deem, 1995, p. 523). Avital Ronell’s 2004 introduction to Solanas’ manifesto notes that even though Warhol’s celebrity court consisted of outcasts (such as drug addicts and sexual radicals), Solanas was either too deviant, “or insufficiently deviant, [and so] she had no home among the homos” (p. 23). In “The Radical Possibilities of Valerie Solanas,” Breanne Fahs (2008) further notes that because Solanas shot Warhol along with Mario Amaya, the “shootings become evidence of Solanas’s instability, insanity, and unreliability” (p. 592). Fahs (2008) also suggests that the shootings lead to “the overly reductive formulation of Warhol shooting = *SCUM Manifesto* in practice” (p. 592).

Indeed, reading Solanas as nothing more than a historical footnote perpetuates her marginalization. Although Solanas detached herself from feminism even while focusing on fixing the under-appreciation of the female sex (Fahs, 2008, p. 595), she may present both a problem and solution<sup>1</sup> to those who are marginalized for uttering, “I’m not a feminist, but...”. While Solanas collaborated with both feminist movements and men, many of her collaborations were strategic. These collaborations made compromises to her body, yet they made no compromises to her manifesto. While feminists may be quick to shame those who start sentences with a disavowal of feminism, and while Fahs (2008) argues that Solanas “laughs” in the faces of

1 The potential problem being the extremity of Solanas' politics.

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apologetic women (p. 613), Solanas also laughs at those radicals who see no humour in their own politics. Solanas, on the radical end of the non-feminist spectrum, offers herself as an example of someone who abhorred labels yet did not take her own too seriously. In this way, she opens up possibilities for those who share similar views of a political identity, yet do not want to be labeled. Her politics resist any definition but her own, nevertheless they shake up both the complacency of non-feminists and the stark seriousness of radical feminist politics.

Before reading Solanas in a contemporary context, a look at her manifesto's dismissal of all rights movements, including feminism, is needed. The 1960s was a decade of political activism for those who were typically marginalized and footnoted. However, Simon Hall (2008) argues that most of this activism was not revolutionary: "both the gay rights and anti-busing movements sought to ground their protests in patriotism; and both appealed to the nation's founding ideals when advancing their cause" (p. 665). For Solanas, any supposed anti-oppression activism is nothing more than the male attempting to prove that he is active. Applying a Solanasian lens to these non-revolutionary civil rights responses to oppression indicates various extensions of the male's hatred of his own passivity (Solanas, 2004, p. 37). This hatred prompts him to project his passive state onto females while defining himself as active. Solanas would argue that the only superiority men have over women is in the strength of their projection. Because his activity is unstable, he must prove it again and again by compulsive "screwing" (Solanas, 2004, p. 20). For Solanas, there is no distinction between screwing and activism. For instance, Solanas (2004) explains racism as the male's need for "scapegoats onto whom he can project [...] his frustration at not being female" (p. 53), where the white male projects his passivity onto racialized groups. She goes on to suggest that the straight

men among these racialized groups must prove that they themselves are not passive—by screwing females in their fight for civil rights.

Moreover, for Solanas there is no difference between protesters who appeal to patriotism and those who reject it completely. Indeed, Solanas argued that even those on the political left who, because it gave birth to war, abandoned “an Americanism that they viewed as inherently flawed” (Hall, 2008, p. 665), were doomed to fail. Solanas (2004) maintains that any “male ‘rebel’ is a farce” (p. 55), and that her SCUM anti-movement, often turned from acronym into the “Society for Cutting Up Men”, “is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights within it” (p. 76). For Solanas, the system is inherently male, which means that even if their “rhetorical anti-Americanism” (Hall, 2008, p. 665) were to come to fruition, the problems which they were protesting against are bound to reappear. Their causes do not take into account that the male sex was, and still is, the over-arching problem from which such things as sexism, racism, homophobia, and war spring.

While the female sex is the solution to the problem of the male system, for Solanas, even feminist rebels are a farce. Solanas (2004) labeled feminist tactics, such as picketing, demonstrating, marching, and striking, as completely ineffective because, like other civil rights tactics, “they acknowledge the rightness of the overall system and are used only to modify it slightly” (p. 76). She sees the open “civil disobedience” of “nice, ‘privileged, educated’, middle-class” (Solanas, 2004, p. 76) feminists as nothing more than their “high regard for the touching faith in the essential goodness of Daddy” (p. 76) and his system. SCUM’s mission to strike undetected and “in the dark with a six inch blade” (Solanas, 2004, p. 76), as opposed to using attention-seeking tactics, reflects Solanas’s resistance to be outted or labeled as anything outside of her own politics.

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Solanas was satisfied with her absence from certain women's movements and irritated by her inclusion in others. She believed that definitions were a way of escaping responsibility. For Solanas (2004), labels were a part of the male's system, a means to "define all his troubles away" (p. 51). Even after being incarcerated, she was resistant to feminists, such as Ti-Grace Atkinson and Florynce Kennedy, who attempted "'to recuperate [...her] as a feminist hero' by characterizing her as a figure comparable to Jean Genet" (Frank, as cited in Harding 2009, p. 210). Indeed, Atkinson and Kennedy's use of *SCUM* to define the radical feminist movement contradicts *SCUM*'s anti-movement project: "*SCUM* consists of individuals; *SCUM* is not a mob, [it is] a blob. Only as many *SCUM* will do a job as are needed for the job" (Solanas, 2004, p. 76). Although Solanas made compromises to her vision via prostitution and collaboration with feminists, this does not mean her compromises were unconscious, especially if we consider that she resisted her manifesto's appropriation.

Breanne Fahs (2008) argues that Solanas purposely constructed contradictions between her body of work and her literal body: "She can be *SCUM* while living in scum" (p. 597). Fahs (2008) suggests that Solanas resisted the labels imposed on her. Instead of morphing into the "circus-show-lesbian-schizophrenic-feminist" (Fahs, 2008, p. 592) labels imposed onto her, she used an ironic layering of complex identities that she herself identified with: "prostitute, activist" (Fahs, 2008, p. 596), "actress, really a writer" (Harding, 2009, p. 152), "lesbian" (Fahs, 2008, p. 598), "not a lesbian" (Fahs, 2008, p. 598), and someone who says "crazy" things (Rowe and Chávez, 2011, p. 281). This seems to be a conscious acknowledgement that escaping labels and definitions completely may be impossible. Such irony is seen in Solanas' (2004) replacement of "mob" with "blob" (p. 76) in the description of her anti-movement. Solanas was resistant to mob mentality

and perceived a lack of individuality amongst feminists, yet her preference for the word “blob” is more representative of the movement she critiques. Many of the compromises that Solanas made to her vision, in the divide between theory and practice, were strategic. From survival prostitution, to the shooting of Andy Warhol—an act of revenge for “mistreatment and neglect” of her most sacred belongings (Faehs, 2008, p. 603)—to allowing an interviewer to label her as “crazy” in order that she could remain credible, Solanas made no unnecessary moves to compromise her anti-movement.

While collaborating with any male, even male homosexuals, may be seen as a contradiction and compromise to her vision, she had use for some males even if they had no use for her. Dana Heller argues that misogyny within Andy Warhol's Factory scene, favouring “virtual females” as opposed to real ones (cited in Ronell, 2004, p. 17), made Solanas an outcast even to the outcasts. However, the main argument of her manifesto inverts these virtual females into the real. Solanas, too, favoured “virtual females”—emasculated men who accept their passivity—and thus Solanas promoted male homosexuality, though not in a liberatory sense. The single footnote in her manifesto, devoted to those who are “dropped out on drugs or strutting around in drag or passively watching the high-powered female in action” (Solanas, 2004, p. 79), makes the Warhol crowd representative of the kind of men Solanas idealized. In that footnote, Solanas (2004) puts forward that after SCUM has had its way, the few remaining men will have the privilege of electronically tuning “into any specific female they want to and follow in detail her every moment. The females will kindly, obligingly consent to this, as it won't hurt them in the slightest” (p. 79). This appears to be Solanas' appropriation of a male gaze that would typically objectify a female body.

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In director Mary Harron's *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996), the filmmaker actualizes this footnote by having Lili Taylor (as Solanas) read from her manifesto as she is filmed for a screen test for the Warhol Factory members to watch. The real Solanas may have turned to the Factory scene because she saw a forum in which she could slowly turn her theory into practice. Harron's version of Solanas, filmed in the Warhol screen test style, may have been a taste of the kinds of films that passive men would watch if Solanas had her way. While Solanas had some agency via her brief appropriation of the Factory scene as a forum for her politics, ultimately it was the legacy of the Factory scene that misappropriated and Warhol-washed Solanas and the shooting as an attempt at fifteen minutes of fame.

Even Solanas' publisher Maurice Girodias (1968) misappropriated the *SCUM Manifesto* by using the Warhol shooting as a marketing tool. Despite his misappropriation, this does not necessarily mean his reading of the manifesto as "a verbal provocation à la Swift, a joke meant to emphasize her point" (Girodias, 1968, p. 14) is invalid or dismissible. Indeed, his reading of SCUM as a satire of patriarchy may also be applied to the radical anti-pornography and anti-prostitution feminism of Andrea Dworkin and others.

Returning to how Solanas has been footnoted in the women's movement, a literal footnote may serve as seemingly disposable information in the margin, but it also may serve to satirize, destabilize, and expand upon ideas that the restrictions of a main text may not allow. Reading Solanas as destabilizing changes her manifesto from historical footnote into *verbum sap*<sup>2</sup> and credibility. Fahs (2008) argues that because Solanas did not assert her "own corporeal body as the center piece for purity, morality, and

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2 "A phrase used in place of making a full statement or explanation, implying that an intelligent person may easily infer what is left unsaid[.]" ("*verbum sap*", 2012).

bodily integrity, she puts forth the *SCUM Manifesto* as the embodiment of these ideals... [thus complicating] notions of authorship, ownership, and intent” (596). Fahs’ (2008) questioning of Solanas’ authorial intent through the conscious divide between her text and person allows *SCUM* to be read not only à la Swift, but also à la Roland Barthes.

Instead of simply misappropriating *SCUM* in order to insist upon Solanas’ relevance to events outside of her historical moment, Barthes’ (2010) idea of the death of author<sup>3</sup> may be applied to compare her manifesto as a strange bed-fellowship of the Meese Commission and Women Against Pornography (WAP) without compromising *SCUM*’s manifest meaning. In 1985, Ronald Reagan appointed the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography (referred to as the Meese Commission) in order to investigate pornography regulations in the US, in the hopes of banning it completely. During its investigation, the Commission, consisting of moral conservatives, collaborated with WAP, resulting in what Linda Williams (1999) describes as the “strengthening of the idea of sexual norms” (p. 20). To show the anti-pornography feminist movement’s reinforcement of gender stereotypes, Williams (1999) uses Andrea Dworkin’s testimony for the Commission as an example. Dworkin presented what she believed was evidence of pornography’s adverse effects on society. Her claim was that a causal relation exists between an issue of *Penthouse* magazine, which depicted Asian women bound, gagged, and hanging from trees, and a *New York Times* article about an eight-year-old Chinese girl who was raped, murdered, and found hanging from a tree. In Williams’ (1999) view, Dworkin merged the *Penthouse* photographs with the case of the rape

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3 In his essay, “Death of the Author”, Barthes (2010) argues that once an author finishes his or her text, he or she has little control over how it may be interpreted or appropriated (1322).

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and murder of the Asian girl to create a symbol of the victimized woman, appealing to the Commission's sympathy and demanding rescue by a stereotypical male hero (p. 21). Williams (1999) asserts that the representation of the victimized woman only enables stereotypes and "women's powerlessness" (p. 22). The irony here is that while Dworkin used women's powerlessness to appeal to male power, she seemed, perhaps unconsciously, to have compromised the strength and power she used to make the appeal.

This compromise thus perpetuated the very stereotypes of women's powerlessness that Dworkin attempted to dismantle, highlighting the flaws that Solanas believed were inherent to the feminist movement. Indeed, Dworkin projected onto the men of the Meese Commission the very assertiveness and integrity that Solanas argues men do not have, while concurrently accepting their projection of female passivity. Dworkin's tactics were thus limited because they acknowledged "the rightness of the overall system and [were] used only to modify it slightly" (Solanas, 2004, p. 76). Fahs' (2008) claim that Solanas was conscious of the contradictions between her theory and practice implies that while Solanas may have known that overthrowing the system may be near impossible, reclaiming and redefining its oppressive aspects *is* possible. Indeed, the one footnote in Solanas' (2004) text—men watching the "high-powered female in action" (p. 79)—seems to anticipate the creation of feminist porn, which, I believe, is a better compromise of Dworkin's values than collaboration with moral conservatives.

In terms of anticipation, Ruby Rich (cited by Deem, 1995) argues that there "is something intensely contemporary about Solanas" (p. 521) while comparing Solanas to Lorena Bobbitt and the Lesbian Avengers. Does Rich account for the ways in which Solanas might continue to be relevant even to today? Whether "à la Swift" or not, Solanas uses camp humor,

similar to the Chicago Feel Tank movement<sup>4</sup> in her assessment of and solution to the long history of men oppressing women. Solanas' use of humour as political rage seems to be the other side of the Chicago Feel Tank use of camp humour in response to political burnout and depression. Instead of simply treating men as they have treated women, Solanas (2004) argues that men must be treated as "turds" because that is what they are (p. 73).

While second-wave feminism, gay liberation, the African-American civil-rights movement, and the anti-war movement were prominent, some of those movements were still relatively nascent in 1967. Solanas had predicted and evaluated the effectiveness of these movements in their attempt to completely erase sexism, homophobia, racism, and war. She even questioned the effectiveness of her own movement and the existential political depression that may follow if her manifesto were fully realized:

Why should we produce even females? Why should there be future generations? What is their purpose? When aging and death are eliminated, why continue to reproduce? Why should we care what happens when we're dead? Why should we care that there is no younger generation to succeed us. Eventually the natural course of events, of social evolution, will lead to total female control of the world and, subsequently, to the cessation of the production of males and, ultimately, to the cessation of the production of females. (Solanas, 2004, p. 69)

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4 A group of activists, artists, and academics that gathered together to address their disappointment about the "war in Iraq, a sentimental takeover of 9/11 to underwrite militarism, Bush's reelection [among other things]" (Cvetkovich, 2007, p. 460). Their main argument is that "customary forms" of leftist political response were no longer working to stop the kinds of events, which gave birth to the Feel Tank, or were making them feel any better.

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Solanas' nihilism here makes a gesture to a repudiation of her manifesto completely—ironically, she seems to lack faith in even the females who might co-opt and misinterpret SCUM's agenda. Solanas suggests that the world might be a better place if *both* men and women were wiped off the face of the earth and left her alone to take complete control. This repudiation affirms a satirical reading of her manifesto altogether.

The Chicago Feel Tank's concept of "political depression" may be used as a contemporary corollary of Solanas's manifesto. Rather, Solanas' nihilism anticipates the Chicago Feel Tank. Ann Cvetkovich (2007) explains that the Feel Tank's "concept of political depression is not, however, meant to be wholly depressing" (p. 460) or nihilistic. The Tank has "operated with [a] camp humor, [...] organizing an International Day of the Politically Depressed in which participants were invited to show up in their bathrobes to indicate their fatigue with traditional forms of protest" (Cvetkovich, 2007, p. 460). Cvetkovich (2007) further explains that the "goal is to depathologize negative affects so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis" (p. 460). Cvetkovich's (2007) paraphrase of the Feel Tank's goal to depathologize negative affects may be in turn be used to acknowledge Solanas' legitimate struggles with mental illness, while accepting and reconsidering the labels she didn't identify with along the labels she did.

Solanas' resistance to being labeled a feminist anticipates the modern day dilemma of starting a sentence with "I'm not a feminist, but..." In fact, her resistance allows her manifesto to become a lens to find the humour in political extremity even when it seems like there is no humour to be found. Take, for example, Andrea Dworkin's statement about the mainstream perception of female prostitutes, and the female body in

general: “She is perceived as, treated as [...] vaginal slime. She is dirty; a lot of men have been there [...] Her mouth is a receptacle for semen, that is how she is perceived and treated” (cited by Anderson, 2002, p. 753). Solanas, as a prostitute herself, seems to have reclaimed this perception via dubbing her anti-movement SCUM. She detaches the kind of dirt and slime that Dworkin speaks of from the women’s body, pinning it onto men and what they will do for a chance to attach themselves to a female body. Solanas (2004) argues that a male will “swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, if he thinks there’ll be a friendly pussy awaiting him [...] and furthermore, pay for the opportunity” (p. 37). While Solanas’ manifesto was written before Dworkin made her statement, it seems like an empowering parody of the kind of graphic rhetoric Dworkin used to blanket all prostitution. While Solanas’ own extremity may at first appear as alienating as Dworkin, reading *SCUM* as a satire not only of patriarchy but also the radical feminist sex wars may make her manifesto more inclusive than it is typically interpreted. Reading Solanas in this way allows those “not-feminists” to emerge from the footnotes and the margins and speak without being dismissed.

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# **TRIANGULAR IDENTITIES AND FLOURISHING SEXUALITIES: 1920S-'30S HARLEM AS A POSITIVE QUEER SPACE FOR THE FORMATION OF A BLACK LESBIAN IDENTITY**

**Emily Milton**

The triangular, intersectional nature of race, gender and sexuality is often promoted as a contemporary topic of third wave feminism. However, its origins are easily traceable within pockets of history. The Harlem Renaissance, an African American cultural movement spanning roughly from the early 1920s to the mid-1930s within Harlem, New York City, provided a tangible atmosphere for marginalized racial identities to viably burgeon. However, the intersectional nature of human identities is often not considered when examining the transformative nature of Harlem during this cultural peak.

Harlem, during its Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s, provided an environment for black lesbian identities to flourish by the means of 'otherness'. Moreover, Harlem's existence as 'other' was first marked by its identity as a 'black' community, and secondly as a queer space. As

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Harlem was primarily seen through a lens of racial otherness, it provided a safe space for a black lesbian subculture to materialize. Both Harlem's art scene and buzzing social scene fostered a culture where queer women of colour could actualize their sexual identities. Rent parties, with the underlying goal of sexual "misconduct", allowed lesbian visibility to grow, while musicians and literary figures provided veiled endorsements of lesbian sexuality. Both of these artistic and social phenomena, placed in the context of Harlem's (in)visible identity as an alternative space to the white, heteronormative paradigm, nourished the lesbian community as an entity both partially visible—through the presence of butch or masculine lesbians—invisible—through underground parties held by unidentified or feminine lesbian women—and legitimate—through mainstream artists' affiliation with the queer scene.

The burgeoning art and literary scene with a wide scope of renowned musicians often marks the Harlem Renaissance. The art scene of Harlem also provided a crucial space for a growing lesbian identity within the rising black culture of New York. The reign of such large names as Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, and Billie Holiday legitimated the idea of female sexuality and lesbianism as a strong, feminist, powerful and sexual cultural movement. In "Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday", Angela Davis (1998) examines the ways in which famous blues artists, specifically the aforementioned three, created "traditions of feminist consciousness in working-class black communities" (p. 1). Although these women were not born in Harlem, they are often associated with the movement. As women of colour who openly promoted sex and sexuality in their music, they contributed to the cohesive identity of the Harlem Renaissance. Ma Rainey, often referred to as 'The

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Mother of the Blues', was a renowned blues artist from Georgia, yet still maintained a celebrated presence within Harlem during its cultural peak. Ma Rainey's music, often highly sexualized in nature, boldly speaks of her own involvement with other women. Davis (1998) looks at Rainey's lyrics in "Prove It on Me Blues", a self-composed exploration of lesbianism:

"Prove It on Me Blues," composed by Gertrude Rainey, portrays [...] a "wild woman," who affirms her independence from the orthodox norms of womanhood by boldly flaunting her lesbianism. Rainey's sexual involvement with women was no secret among her colleagues and her audiences. The advertisement for the release of "Prove It on Me Blues" showed the blues woman sporting a man's hat, jacket, and tie and, while a policeman looked on, obviously attempting to seduce two women on a street corner. (p. 40)

Rainey's exploration of lesbianism is coupled with a conscious representation of a masculine aesthetic, where she dons men's attire and arguably takes on a butch persona. "Prove It on Me Blues" works as a bold statement of identity and sexuality with the following lyrics:

They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men / It's true I wear a collar and a tie / Make the wind blow all the while / [...] They sure got to prove it on me / [...] Wear my clothes just like a fan / Talk to the gals just like any old man. (Davis, 1998, p. 40)

The sexual nature of these blues lyrics also work as an example of how some women could claim sexual agency within a black working-class community. The agency exhibited by blues singers such as Ma Rainey was critical when posited against white culture's construction of Harlem

as an exotic community of debauchery and sexual lasciviousness, as explained by A. B. Christa Schwarz (2003) in *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. The sexual agency in blues music is unabashed within the context of Harlem, where white folks flocked to indulge in the racist hypersexualization of black men and women (Schwarz, 2003, p. 8).

As an act of naming and illuminating issues and situations usually left silent, female blues singers called attention to issues such as sex between women, lesbian identity, and abusive relationships (Davis, 1998, p. 42). For these women, naming is a tool of empowerment and legitimacy. Rather than shying away from or fearing notions of female hypersexuality, Ma Rainey exhibited sexual agency by unabashedly crooning about her sexual desire for other women, regardless of the potentially racist implications. 'Naming', specifically in the case of 'lesbian desire' (although not explicitly identified as such), helped to legitimize a black lesbian identity within Harlem, as Rainey, Smith and Holiday were each highly celebrated artists. Their endorsement of agency and female-female sexuality helped to solidify a black lesbian identity during the Harlem Renaissance and paved the way for future generations of queer women of colour.

The existence of lesbian sexuality within Harlem's rising arts movement extends further into the realm of literary work. Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, published in 1929, explores the relationship between two mixed racial women of colour, and sexual tension between the two women permeates the novel. Although *Passing* primarily examines issues of racial passing, and the placement of 'mulatto' women as more privileged within a racist social context, the undertones of lesbian desire work in conjunction with Larsen's exploration of race (Landry, 2006, p. 27).

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In "Seeing Black Women Anew Through Lesbian Desire in Larsen's *Passing*", H. Jordan Landry (2006) critiques previous understandings of the novel that situate lesbianism as entirely independent of black identity, instead arguing that the story's main protagonists utilize lesbianism as a means to assimilate themselves into "white" society, and that "whiteness is the initiator of lesbian desire between the two women" (Landry, 2006, p. 27). Landry (2006) argues that Irene and Clare's desire for one another is propelled by their idealization of the black female body, and that it is both their desire for each other and the desire to claim a black identity that propels the narrative (p. 28).

Landry (2006) looks at the nature of desire and affection in the novel as a way of reclaiming the black female body for mulatto women, often painted as promiscuous, sexual race traitors in Harlem literature. In typical Harlem literature, mulatto women are re-accepted into black society only when they "slough off illusions about whiteness [and] renew their desire for black men" (Landry, 2006, p. 37). However, by shifting the context of desire for blackness from a male-female coupling, into a female-female pairing, Larsen is able to link race and sexuality by their ability to repossess black female bodies—Clare and Irene's 'blackness' is no longer defined by their submission to black men. In the novel, Clare's disillusionment with whiteness grows not from loving a black man, but from her homoerotic relationship with Irene (Landry, 2006, pp. 37-38), a black woman.

Female musicians and authors of the Harlem Renaissance were able to contextualize lesbian sexuality and desire as a legitimate, if not powerful, form of sexual expression. Although lesbian desire was by no means widely accepted in New York City, Harlem's art scene gave way to a growing underground lesbian identity and space to explore sexuality.

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The lesbian identity portrayed by both Ma Rainey and Nella Larsen works defiantly, as a means of exuding sexual agency and remaining unapologetic of one's sexual practices and desire. Both of their representations of lesbianism are inexorably tied to issues of race and class. While the sexual lyrics of female blues artists denounce concerns regarding black female hypersexuality, placing pride and agency within the space of the working class, the characters in *Passing* reclaim the agency of the mulatto woman through the homoeroticization of female relationships.

A method of making the art scene accessible for a wide range of citizens within Harlem was the integration of artists into the party scene, where many musicians would perform at bars or 'rent parties'. Rent parties, born in Harlem as a means of raising money to pay rent during times of economic crises, also worked in conjunction with the queer nature of many musicians, fostering spaces where lesbian and female desire could exist. Although the parties themselves were created for financial purposes, the nature of rent parties became beneficial beyond the financial sense.

In *Bulldaggers, Pansies and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*, James F. Wilson (2010) examines the emergence of queer, gay, lesbian and trans identities during the Harlem Renaissance, predominantly propelled by their increased visibility in the party scene. Wilson (2010) acknowledges that their visibility and presence, on a large scale, was ultimately secretive in nature in order to progress. When visible to the heterosexual community, queers in Harlem provoked a sense of bewilderment rather than outrage, as demonstrated by a character in Claude McKay's novel *Home to Harlem*: "There is two things in Harlem I don't understand / It is a bull-dycking [sic] woman and a faggotty man" (Wilson, 2010, p. 39). Although far from a positive reaction to gay

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visibility, this line demonstrates the growing presence of lesbian identity within Harlem, with the specific naming of the ‘bull-dyke woman’.

Wilson (2010) examines the presence of the ‘bull-dyke’ within the party scene. While Nella Larsen’s characters demonstrated an invisible lesbian identity, in which both women are feminine and in heterosexual relationships, Wilson (2010) locates concrete examples of self-aware masculine women within the party circuit. At a party in 1926, a violent fight broke out, ultimately exposing a butch woman to the heterosexual outer realm:

According to witnesses, Stobtoff had accused Wright of paying too much attention to a woman named Clara, who was known in this “underworld” as “Big Ben” because of her “unusual size and from her inclination to ape the masculine in dress and manner, and particularly in her attention to other women.” The article points out that Big Ben was not present at the affair, but witnesses over-heard Stobtoff warn Wright “to stay away from the ‘man’ woman” (Wilson, 2010, p. 41).

The presence of Big Ben in the article that Wilson (2010) references depicts the emergence of visible lesbian identity into the heterosexual world. Although problematically framing the lesbian underworld as a dangerous or violent realm, it nonetheless presents the existence of a butch identity to mainstream society.

Lesbianism in Harlem can be seen as an ultimately private subculture, while male homosexual and drag culture grew more visible with the existence of Harlem’s drag ball scene as well as in the theatre world (for instance, David Belasco’s play *Lulu Belle*, in which the protagonist is a male in drag). Examples of butch lesbians and lesbians in drag remained invisible except in the private realm of parties.

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However, despite this private nature, lesbian identity was still actualized within these spaces. Many private parties combined a positive queer space with the endorsement of famous blues or jazz musicians. This celebrity presence helped the mainstreaming of lesbian culture. There were also a number of celebrities who engaged in lesbian or queer relations, such as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters, acting as popular figures in a lesbian space (Wilson, 2010, p. 30).

Rent parties were also places of sexual freedom and of relative safety, where women could explore their sexual desires. Mabel Hampton, an American entertainer, recalls her time spent in Harlem and the sexual, lesbian nature of rent parties:

Some man over there was kissing another one. A woman over there was kissing another one. Boy—everybody was kissing... Seen the rest of them do it, what the hell, I'll do it too. It was fascinating... The bulldyers [sic] would come and bring their women with them. And you wasn't supposed to jive with them, you know. They danced up a breeze. They did the Charleston, they did a little bit of everything. They were all colored women. Sometimes we ran into someone who had a white woman with them. But me, I'd venture out with any of them. I just had a ball.  
(Wilson, 2010, p. 14)

Hampton's account exemplifies the welcoming nature of attendants at rent parties who did not identify as lesbian or queer—how the sexual energy was dismissed as harmless and did not incite any panic, discomfort or anger. It is in this setting that a lesbian identity was given space to develop with agency, rather than being policed. Harlem's rent parties provided a space in which lesbian and queer desire could be expressed free from harassment and policing.

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Essential to the Harlem lesbian movement was blues music and parties. While Harlem was marked as a black space in terms of racial marginalization, and therefore an already othered space, it was in part because of this cultural otherness that queer women could explore their desires. Lesbianism as a cultural or political issue was 'on the backburner'. Although partially invisible and underground, the flourishing of black lesbian identity was also able to segue into the mainstream through the participation and silent endorsement of famous female black figures. By creating a strong vision of unapologetic lesbian examples in music and literature, as well as by utilizing the free space of rent parties as a zone of sexual and gendered exploration, Harlem's Renaissance provided a multitude of factors that gave space for, while not without yet being wholly accepted into mainstream society, a black lesbian cultural identity.

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# **LEGISLATING SEXUAL MORALITY: YOUTH SEXUALITY AND CANADA'S RISING AGE OF CONSENT LAWS**

**Tyler Carson**

In 2008 the Conservative Government of Canada passed legislation through the House of Commons that raised the age of consent concerning sexual encounters from 14 to 16 years. This paper will outline these changes to the *Criminal Code of Canada* and will highlight the specific discourses that were employed by the government to garner support for the “urgent need” to protect youth. A thorough investigation of this change will reveal how youth identity is politicized by adults and will critically examine the implications and consequences of these justificatory explanations for raising the age of consent. Indeed, it is my intention to unveil how this law has worked to uphold existing power relations between certain identities and has further entrenched essentialist ideas about childhood, gender, and sexuality into social and legal discourses. From this discus-

sion I seek to substantiate my contention that the Government of Canada utilized a discourse of conservative sexual morality—not based on any comprehensive empirical evidence, but rather on naturalized ideas of adolescence, gender and sexuality—to effectively regulate youth sexuality. Finally, I posit that this imposition of conservative sexual morality seeks to uphold heterosexual hegemony, the nuclear family and monogamous sex between partners of the same generation.

BACKGROUND  
CHANGING THE AGE OF CONSENT

*The Criminal Code of Canada*, prior to 2008, defined the age of consent—the age at which an individual can legally engage in consensual sex—as 14 (Hunt, 2009). The legislature originally proposed to change sections 150-154 in Bill C-22 (Age of Protection), a change whose passing had been postponed in parliament due to prorogation. It was reintroduced, along with four other bills (all seeking to further regulate violent crimes) in October 2007 under the title Bill C-2 and successfully passed through the House of Commons and the Senate. The legislation formally amended the *Criminal Code* under 150.1 to raise the age of consent from 14 to 16. Sexual interference and the invitation to sexual touching were also raised to the age of 16 (Sections 151, 152). A newly added close-in-age exemption allows for consensual sexual activity between 14- and 15-year-olds and a partner less than 5 years older (Section 150.1(2.1)). Finally, the close-in-age exemption for partners of less than 2 years remains for 12- and 13-year-olds (Section 150.1 (2); *Bill C-2*).

A government document explaining Bill C-22 cites in the preamble that Parliament has “grave concerns regarding the vulnerability of

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children to all forms of exploitation, including child pornography, sexual exploitation, abuse and neglect” (*Bill C-22*). Accordingly, the title of Bill C-22 was “The Protection of Children and Other Vulnerable People.” In October 2007, after being reintroduced as Bill C-2, it was debated and reviewed by parliament. During these parliamentary sessions there was an overwhelming presence of Christian and conservative social advocacy groups pushing for the government to raise the age of consent laws well beyond 16. Moreover, of the three groups representing youth who were present at these presentations, only one expressed concern over the plethora of negative repercussions of these amendments. Carol Dauda (2010b) asserts that overall there was clearly “evidence for the government’s strong support of a moral, conservative voice in the proceedings” (p. 1172). Indeed, it is my intention in this paper to unveil how advocates of this proposed legislation constructed the urgency around the vulnerability of youth sexuality, effectively masking their reliance on a conservative morality that seeks to regulate youth sexuality.

### FRAMING CONSENT AND YOUTH SEXUALITY

For decades theorists and scholars have highlighted how sexuality, especially youth sexuality, is regulated and controlled not only through familial and social pressures, but through formal legislation that governs legal and social institutions as well. Scholar Gayle Rubin (1984) highlights how society continually refuses to recognize the sexuality of the young. Rubin (1984) suggests that instead of trying “to provide for [sexuality] in a caring and responsible manner, our culture [...] punishes erotic interest and activity [for] anyone under the local age of consent” (p. 290). This is in large part tied to an extensive history of moral conservatism and the

assertion that appropriate sex occurs only within monogamous heterosexual marriages. Moreover, sexuality has been framed as “adult-only” because youth are assumed to lack the proper level of maturity and agency to fully understand the repercussions and dangers of these sexual activities. Youth sexuality is often recognized as being (biologically) present and (physiologically) absent (Dauda, 2010a). This has produced “a paradoxical logic where sexuality is latent in the child but may materialize, always from an external cause, and once activated is quite dangerous” (Dauda, 2010a, p. 229). Thus, youth sexuality is viewed as dangerous to the broader social order, and therefore must be controlled, regulated and protected from outside harms. Dauda (2010a) further suggests:

The assumption that children and youth are innocent but susceptible to inappropriate sexuality has been taken for granted, ‘naturalized’, creating an ideological impasse where anyone who challenges these notions is seen as an apologist for the sexual exploitation of children. (p.1168)

In other words, these entrenched and naturalized ideas about youth sexuality have prohibited any meaningful discussion from taking place around the sexual agency of youth.

Many scholars have been quick to link the connections between moral panic and the regulation of sexuality through state apparatus. Particular sexual behaviours and identities often come “under the purview of the law when they become objects of social concern and political uproar” (Rubin, 1984, p. 288-89). This occurs when established boundaries of sexual zones are threatened, whereby the heterosexual hegemony seeks to suppress marginalized or alternative sexualities out of fear of moral corruption and degeneration. Alan Hunt (1999), however, cautions against using only a “social anxiety” or “moral panic” thesis

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when trying to understand moral regulation as they prevent us from fully contextualizing complex political and social processes. Thus, it is necessary to examine the symbolic elements along with the political processes and actors that work in conjunction to alter the law.

### UTILIZING PROTECTIONIST DISCOURSE

Many of the presenters who were able to address the House of Commons held fairly conservative beliefs on consent and youth sexuality. Yet, the successful passing of this bill cannot simply be attributed to these conservative mouthpieces. The ease in passing this legislation also suggests that there was a consensus among politicians that regulating youth sexuality in the name of protection was justifiable (Dauda, 2010a). Indeed, political actors and pressure groups successfully portrayed this legislation as an attempt to resolve an urgent crisis of sexual abuse of young people as it was argued that they could effectively save children from sexual predators. Politicians and lobbyists frequently cited the need to control internet predators, arguing that the lower age of consent in Canada attracts sexual predators from the U.S. and U.K. However, a police constable's testimony stated otherwise, observing that international child-luring cases are rare (Dauda, 2010a). When questioned about the lack and the legitimacy of their statistical evidence, these conservative groups sidetracked by saying there was a lack of proper studies, and that these issues are just too new to have adequate information (Dauda, 2010a). Conservatives thereby successfully constructed an atmosphere of urgency without any substantial empirical evidence. So why did every political party quickly endorse this legislation? The simple answer seems to be that

no party wanted to be seen as opposing measures that would “better” protect children from sexual exploitation.

This indicates that the legislation, instead of relying on empirical evidence, relied on normative ideas about youth sexuality to vindicate this proposed legislation. The intervening groups and government effectively mobilized a discourse that appealed to naturalized beliefs about gender, sexuality and childhood. The symbolic imagery invoked by intervening parties powerfully resonated with politicians; one of the most effective arguments centred on notions of generation. Carol Dauda (2010b) comments that the idea of generation was “decisive in the conservative discourse of protection, subordinating any contrary evidence of young people’s agency and sexuality and leaving young people themselves marginalized” (p. 1161). Throughout the debates, intergenerational relationships were a topic of extreme disapproval and moral outrage—it was framed that youth could not consent to sexual activity in these relationships because they were inherently exploitive and always involved abuses of power. (I do not mean to suggest, however, that these relationships are never exploitive or unhealthy—more attention will be given to intergenerational relationships later).

At the same time, the discourse of protection was highly gendered. For instance, a content analysis of words used in the proceedings of Bill C-2, reveals that ‘girl(s)’ was used much more frequently than ‘boy(s)’ (Dauda, 2010a). The discourse therefore had normative ideas about femininity and girlhood embedded within it—that is, the belief that women and girls are inherently weaker, more passive, less competent, and thus require more protection than males. Dauda (2010a) further notes that, “most references to adolescent girls were characterized in stereotypical and moralized terms revealing underlying assumptions that

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autonomy and responsibility for decision-making is either impossible or not advisable” (p. 238). The conservative discourse of protection also involved concern over males, however, was limited to discussing young boys who are pressured by older men into performing sexual acts. This aligns with the politicians' and advocacy groups' refusal to discuss section 159 of the code, which states that the age of consent for anal intercourse is 18. The section was recently amended by the government and made gender neutral, although it limits consensual anal sex to "private" encounters: if more than two people are present, it is considered a public act and remains illegal. This clause thereby imposes a preference for monogamy onto often non-normative bodies and identities, and thus gives force to the assertion that this discourse seeks to uphold heterosexual hegemony (K. Hunt, 2009).

The goal of maintaining heterosexual hegemony is also intertwined with concerns over preserving the idealized nuclear family (Dauda, 2010b). This legislation can be read as an attempt to secure parental control over youth sexuality, effectively ensuring that their child will recognize the "right kind" of sexual behaviour and identity. Thus, one of the underlying goals of regulating youth sexuality is that it is supposed to produce a sexual identity that will not threaten the heterosexual nuclear family. During the debate in parliament parents pleaded with politicians to help protect their children and relied on normative assumptions that parents *naturally* have the responsibility of controlling their child's sexual activities and behaviours (Dauda, 2010a). Ironically, this legislation actually removed the right of the parent to do so, as the ability of parents to make judgments that are based on the maturity of the particular youth was restricted (Dauda, 2010a). Protectionist reasoning was therefore deeply implicated and embedded in a conservative discourse, which relied on

essentialist ideas about youth sexuality and gender. Let us now focus on analyzing some of the implications of this legislation and how it has worked to further entrench traditional conservative moral views about gender, sexuality, and adolescence into social and legal discourses.

#### IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

The phrase *age of consent* in a sense empowers youth—it promotes the idea that at some age youth are able to exert enough agency in their lives that their sexual choices can be granted respect and legal weight. The recent changes in the law have been accompanied by a discourse of protectionism, leading to a suggestion that the phrase *age of protection* now represents a more accurate description of youth sexuality. Kalev Hunt (2009) asserts that this phrase “implicitly denies agency to youth, marking them as vulnerable, and ironically, entrench[es] their status as easy targets for predators” (p. 28). He adds that this protectionist discourse effectively “conflates and collapses several contested categories—adolescent, youth, pubescent, prepubescent, child, minor—into the single, monolithic notion of child” (K. Hunt, 2009, p. 28). Furthermore, the adoption of this protectionist discourse masks the deeply problematic reliance on essentialist ideas about gender and sexuality by only focusing on the harm trying to be prevented, namely the sexual exploitation of children.

Politicians frequently employ contradictory ideas about youth agency. On Bill C-25, reforms to tighten up the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, Conservative MP David Tilson contradicts the conservative argument that youths' agency is weak and incompetent when he says, “youth are in fact aware of their actions and of the consequences [...] and that they do know what they are doing” (cited in Dauda, 2010a, p. 239). This example reveals

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how different characterizations of youth are politicized for particular outcomes, and how “youthness” is defined entirely by adults (Dauda, 2010a). Moreover, it illustrates how unstable, fluid, and capricious ‘naturalized’ ideas about youth sexuality are. After parliamentary hearings around Bill C-2 had adjourned, Nicholas Dodds, from the Age of Consent Committee, concluded that having “virtually no consultation with communities of youth [who] are directly affected [by this legislation], sends a cynical political message about the importance of youth participation under the present government” (cited in Dauda, 2010a, p. 235). This is, arguably, a trend in conservative moral discourse and political processes, where marginalized groups who are directly affected by reforms in the law are given no serious voice in the decisions being made.

The consequences and ramifications of this law have received little to no investigation or debate. However, a few healthcare professionals have pointed out the negative repercussions of raising the age of consent. First, they claim by criminalizing sexual activities of youth, they will be deterred from seeking help from healthcare providers; and second, the amendment provides a justification for refusing to provide sex education to young people (Dauda, 2010a). Moreover, the refusal to lower the age of consent for anal intercourse disproportionately affects queer youth and upholds the idea that “queer sex” requires more agency than “straight sex.” This supports Dodd’s observation that “often when youth are queer, it is assumed their choices are uninformed, just a phase, or that they are being recruited and exploited” (Dauda, 2010b, p. 1174).

Finally, these new reforms reinforce existing assumptions about intergenerational relationships involving youth. Rubin (1984) suggests that relationships and sexual acts should be judged by “the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or

absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of pleasures they provide” (p. 283). When factoring the sexual agency of youth into this inquiry we should be respectful, yet also evaluative of the ability of youth to make informed and rational decisions. By raising the age of consent and by framing intergenerational sex as something inherently unhealthy and exploitative, the law completely strips youth of their potential or already-present agency. Furthermore, it curtails any meaningful discussions that healthcare providers or parents may have with youth where they might be able to judge whether the young person is making informed decisions.

#### REFUTING THE LAW

In a population-based study conducted in British Columbia, social scientists Miller, Cox, and Saewyc (2010) surveyed the sexual activities of youth from ages 12-18 to judge whether the reformed consent laws were justifiable under the “better protecting vulnerable youth” rationale. They did not find evidence that supports the claim that younger adolescents are making unsafe sexual decisions (Miller, Cox, & Saewyc, 2010). Furthermore, they found that for the most part 14- to 17-year-olds engaged in the same behaviours, regardless of age (Miller, Cox, & Saewyc, 2010). The scientists did find that younger youth were at a greater risk of sexual exploitation than older youth, however, this evidence shows that children under the age of 14 years of age are at the greatest risk (Miller, Cox, & Saewyc, 2010). Finally, they suggested the important role sex education plays in informing youth about healthy sexual relationships. From these findings the authors concluded that the change in the age of consent was not necessary.

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Even proponents of harsh criminal sanctions for child exploitation and abuse find the criminal code's sections on the age of consent overly broad and hopelessly vague, and argue that jurisprudence will be even more confusing when interpreting section 153 (Patrick, 2006). Obscenity and decency laws in Canada have a definitive similarity to consent laws as all the harms that proponents cite as trying to prevent—human trafficking, underage prostitution, and internet child-luring—are already criminal under other sections of the code (K. Hunt, 2009). Furthermore, the 2005 legislation around having sex with youth under the age of 18 protects youth from sexual predators. Kalev Hunt (2009) asserts that the effective conclusion to be drawn from the age of consent legislation, “is an attempt to regulate youth’s sexual behaviour and, [...] to protect youth from themselves and their sexual desires” (p. 28). This also reveals government motives in their refusal to lower anal sex consent laws; if the government is concerned about normative sexual behaviour of youth, they most certainly are also concerned with non-normative sexual activity (K. Hunt, 2009). To lower the age of anal sex consent laws would threaten heterosexual hegemony and would work to undermine the conservative moral trajectory that advocacy groups and the government have been seeking to entrench in public discourse.

## CONCLUSION

Canada’s decision to raise the age of consent is therefore supported by a conservative discourse that seeks to impose a specific sexual morality onto youth, which is deeply entangled with ideas of gender, sexuality, and generation. Politicians effectively veil this sexual morality through the constructions of the innocent child and abusive

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sexual predator. In doing so, they successfully mobilize normative understandings of childhood, gender, and sexuality, attaching them to notions of vulnerability and susceptibility. The older sexual partner is rendered as corrupting and exploiting youth, no matter the circumstances. Youth sexuality is recognized as being present yet irrational and lacking agency, and therefore in need of protection from the law. Youth are thereby stripped of their sexual agency. Furthermore, healthcare professionals' and parents' ability to engage in dialogue with youth about intergenerational relationships has been curtailed. Embedded in this conservative moral discourse is the ultimate goal of preserving heterosexual hegemony, the nuclear family, and traditional monogamous sex between partners of the same generation.

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# **MALE EROTIC CAPITAL: A FIELD THEORY APPROACH TO THE IMPERILMENTS OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY**

**Justin Newrick**

**Trigger warning: this paper will discuss sexual violence and sexual assault of women by men.**

This paper addresses some issues experienced by men, which I see as stemming from a culture of hegemonic masculinity and a social construction of the male psyche. I begin with an exploration of online dating trends, which I believe suggest that what makes a man attractive to a heterosexual woman is directly related to his ability to sustain employment. By looking to “social role” theory on the construction of maleness, I will suggest that there is both a gendered labour dichotomy and a male centred sports culture, which I argue is, in part, a catalyst for the (continued) socialization of men in terms of hegemonic male culture. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the relationship between masculinity, as constructed by economics, sport culture, and new modes of dating, is a culpable motivating

factor in spousal abuse and sexual assault (looking exclusively at the assault of women), particularly where recent or prolonged deficiencies in economic capital (and thus in male erotic capital) are present. My analysis seeks to address how Western, gendered notions of work and the workforce have been used to construct “men” as hegemonically masculine while subsequently devaluing women through constructions of femininity. While this ideation has been theorized to the point of saturation, my paper specifically seeks to unpack the effects of masculinity and male erotic capital on the one hand, against capitalistic value and economic capital on the other, connecting these issues to instances of spousal abuse. Furthermore, my analysis seeks to demonstrate that there is a significant correlation between male attractiveness (hegemonic masculinity) and spousal abuse and/or sexual assault of women particularly within domestic spheres. I will suggest that as men’s worth is questioned or there is a lack of capital (economic/erotic), their self-worth is stressed. In instances of dating, particularly online or speed dating, “success”, “ambition”, and wealth are all used to hierarchize men by their erotic worth. When some men lose or cannot achieve societal expectations of wealth they may engage in violent or abusive behavior to reassert their masculinity, to prove they are still “real” men.

Before I begin to theorize masculinity and the effects of male erotic capital, it is important to accurately establish a few intended inadequacies in my analyses. Firstly, I consider gender to be divorced from biological sex, and in some cases I use them interchangeably, asserting a construction of gender by viewing it as a binary between *male* and *female*. My arguments are focused exclusively on the hegemonic culture of North America as gender normative, as I explore both hegemony and normativity. I believe this interpretation is required in

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order to critically examine masculinity as a construction that exists outside of (but still dependent upon) the category of a “man”. Secondly, my analysis relies upon a heterosexist position, focusing on attraction and relationships that occur between cisgendered males and females exclusively. Again, this truncated account of gender and sexuality is necessary for my polemical opinion of hegemonic culture as pervasively and persuasively heteronormative. Thirdly, I do not want to suggest that violence occurs exclusively from and/or between men and women, inarguably there is violence between and across various genders and sexes. Lastly, I acknowledge that masculinity, while shaped by hegemony, is not static, and intersections such as race and class play an important role in the ways different men (and women) experience and live (with) masculinity. My analysis is restricted to North American culture, but I do not intend to imply any biological or cultural universalism(s).

The concept of “erotic capital” in its most reducible form refers to “a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex” (Hakim, 2010, p. 501). However, I would like to expand Hakim’s definition to suggest that there is little distinction between erotic attraction, and attraction for what wealth can yield. Attraction directed toward a wealthy individual will, at the very least, be feigned in order to extract the material goods and/or quality of life. The “field” (Bourdieu, 1984) that I am using to quantify male erotic capital is restricted to mainstream, heterosexual online-dating communities where the “agents” or “players” of that field construct and negotiate the online profiles. Along with Pierre Bourdieu (1984), I hold that reality (which includes the process of valorizing attraction) is relational to the constructed surroundings (in this case, online dating profiles).

MALE EROTIC CAPITAL AND ONLINE DATING

Up until fairly recently, mate selection was primarily occurred within one's one racial, class, and communal ties. However, as urbanized communities increasingly developed, motivations for dating appeared to have less to do with uniform cultural backgrounds, and more to do with an exchange of economic resources from the male, for beauty from the female (Ingoldsby, 2003, p. 11). This abandonment of endogamy suggests that capitalist-styled exchange now structures mate selection—that is, economic capital in exchange for traditional displays of erotic capital after North American industrialization and urbanization.

The idea that modern dating requires market-style analogies in order to quantify exchange in capital was the finding of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) study on speed dating. According to the study, women were found to have a proclivity towards men with greater earning potential by valorizing such encoded attributes as “ambition, intelligence, and social status”, whereas conversely, men were significantly less likely to find ambitious women attractive (Fisman et al., 2006, p. 675). Ariely claims that men were found to respond with less frequency to women who promulgated high-earning salaries (cited in Harford, 2011). More importantly, this suggests that exchanges of erotic capitals have become conflated with a form of commodification that uses wealth for men and beauty norms for women. This gendered exchange has become so culturally embedded as a “natural” dating practice that sites (such as [www.whatsyourprice.com](http://www.whatsyourprice.com)<sup>1</sup>) have been able to explicitly and

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1 What's Your Price now breaks down their membership between “generous” and “attractive” members, rather than on an exclusively male-female divide. This thinly veiled corporate copy language still connotes “generous” with a wealthy man and “attractive” with young, thin women.

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popularly “sell” women at a price (which the women set per date) to each man who can afford her.

The former studies certainly do not stand-alone. Nancy Etcoff (1999) argues that “men with higher-status jobs and higher permanent incomes are more likely to be married than men with lower-income, lower-status jobs”, while for currently-married men, “the possibility of separation and divorce increases if a man’s relative earnings decline” (pp. 75-76). Although these studies are not specific to online dating, another study conducted by psychologist David Buss confirmed that women desired men with strong economic capital, while men preferred physical attractiveness as desirable in women (usually externalized with age) (cited in Battan, 1992, p. 78-79). This was explained by a belief that older men have a greater potential for fiscal earnings, while younger women were considered to hold fecundity.

The gendered division between economic value and beauty value was also the evident in a study of online dating for heterosexual students that was comprised of men and women ranging from 18-28 (however almost half of the participants were 18). The study concluded that men were motivated by women they found sexually “attractive”, whereas women disproportionately abnegated that criteria in an attempt to attract “successful” men (Shaughnessy et al, 2010). Finally, at the risk of sounding tautological, another study on wage inequality by the American Psychological Association found that not only do women receive lower salaries, but through social-role theory have come to understand money as inextricably coupled with masculinity (Williams et al, 2010). This not only functions to affirm patriarchal workforce dominance, but further maintains the perception of female inferiority both within the public and private.

The studies mentioned are brought together by a relationship of wealth conferring attractiveness for men. While male erotic capital is not solely enshrined in economic worth, the studies above suggest that it is the primary signifier of male attractiveness to women. Admittedly this is not the case for all dating fields, however it appears that market-style exchanges (where one currency of capital is weighed against another) have excessively become a representation of modern North American dating practices, particularly within speed dating and online dating.

#### THE DERIVATION OF MASCULINITY WITHIN INDUSTRIALIZATION

North American industrialization transformed the roles of men and women. Many of the roles that emerged as a result of a wage-labour culture remain undercurrents of hegemonic masculinity. Industrialization created a disjuncture between residence and place of work, subsequently forcing men to maintain a significant presence in the public sphere and women in the private sphere. As such men became lionized as the “breadwinners” while women became devalued as unpaid domestic workers (Barker, 1994, p. 133). This notion was further extrapolated by a contemporary scientific discourse which stigmatized women in the workforce, suggesting that the menstrual cycle made them unfit for anything but domesticity for ¼ of every month (Fausto-Sterling, 1992, p. 93). The naturalization of women’s social place within the home and men’s within the public workforce has been so pervasive that women only earn \$0.81 to every dollar earned by a man (Williams et al, 2010).

Two detrimental aspects of masculinity also developed as a result of industrialization and wage labour: namely, absentee fatherism, and physical/psychological endangerment in the workforce. Industrialization

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not only pushed men into the workforce, but actively removed them from the home. Although wage labour promised a better family life by way of a new mode of support, absentee fatherism developed because of industrialization, rather than despite of it. In the new urban space of capitalism, men were forced to sell their labour, as well as work long hours in order to subsist in this newly developing milieu (Razack, 2002, p. 8). Within this environment, the respectable father (and therefore the desirable man) is not one who spends time at home, but one who provides for a home. Given the quantification of male erotic capital put forth earlier, this image of masculinity is still valued today. As such, it is important to acknowledge that if the image of masculinity and male erotic capital is expected to be ameliorated, and if we are working towards espousing equality for women in the workforce, then the antecedent must also be an emphasis on men's involvement in the private sphere (rather than simply arguing for equality for women in the public sphere). For example, one important (yet still insufficient) initiative was allowing for greater paternity leave in Canada by introducing a new ordinance that allows for the (potential) equal division of parental leave between the mother and father.

New codes of masculinity successfully confounded how men are valued that they will assume the risk of physical/psychological harm in exchange for work. It would be perfunctory to ignore (and thus make genderless) that 96% of work-related deaths befall men (Krahn et al, 2007, pp. 114-115). Citing Donaldson (1991), masculinity theorist RW Connell (now Raewyn Connell) (2000) suggests, "working-class men have basically one asset to market—their bodily capacity to labour—and their bodies are, over time, consumed by the labour they do" (p. 187). Further, Connell (2000) also points out that while at work, men are almost exclusively the victims of electric shock, eye injuries, accidents involving hammered

metal or fencing wire, as well as traumatic brain injury due to motor vehicle accidents.

Connell's (2000) account of men in the workforce obviously presents more serious cases which are easily reportable, however Connell fails to also consider how working men are imperiled by environmental dangers, such as pollutants ingested from coal and asbestos mining, certainly leading to early death. When discussing the capacity in which men engage the workforce, we must also consider the capacity of the men themselves. That is, given that their role is heavily influenced by hegemonic gender ideologies (such as patriarchy), their subsequent capacity and agency to consent to the work is severely lessened due to the coercive nature of having to substantiate (i.e. prove) their masculinity. This means that men can ingratiate each other by correctly aligning masculinity with employment, while those unable to "perform" masculinity through employment will be viewed pejoratively. It is at this level that coercion to physical and/or psychological endangerment occurs.

The problem of labour dichotomy clearly affects both men and women, albeit in distinctive forms. However, it seems reasonably ostensible that the majority of, if not all of the jobs concerning heavy manual labour confer masculinity. Incidentally, the majority of jobs which yield high economic return also androcentrically prioritize men in the hierarchy. This leads to the important question(s) of how men have come to accept physical threats as a component of masculinity in their particular workforce. What daily practices of masculinity make employment for men more normative, and how do these forces function to propagate male dominant sectors?

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### EMPLOYMENT THROUGH SPORTS AND RECREATION

The role of sports and recreation in the construction of masculinity has been well theorized, however, the relationship it has as a mechanism to sustain/maintain men in roles of public employment has received less scholarly attention. From an anthropological perspective, the culture of sports such as football might very well resemble the skills necessary in the corporate workforce. For example, football teaches the players that success is contingent upon the degree to which the players self-abnegate in exchange for hard work. The skills for competitive sports and the corporate world are analogous. Robbins (2006), citing Arens, suggests that both sports and corporations require:

...teamwork, specialization, mechanization, and submission to a dominant authority. [...Both fields] are compartmentalized, hierarchical, and highly sophisticated in the coordinated application of a differentiated, specialized technology, and they both try to turn out a winning product in a competitive market.  
(p. 27)

Although sports are becoming less androcentric, Brian Pronger (1990) has argued that men have a vested interest in reserving sports as an exclusively masculine territory. According to Pronger (1990), "the intentionally segregated organization of sport, and the remarkable enthusiasm of men to keep it segregated rather than redesigning it so that integration is possible, proves that women are not seen as the fellows of men" (p. 178). Considering how sports (both professional and amateur) reinforce masculinity, viewing or partaking in them functions as a socializing agent, grooming men for the workforce. The self-policing discourse of "real men play hurt" or "you throw like a girl" provide the necessary schema for

men to view and subject their bodies to physical and/or psychological harm for an intended reward—in this case a wage and subsequent performance of hegemonic masculinity.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) analysis of private school sports and recreation also concluded that "sport is conceived as a training in courage and manliness, 'forming the character' and inculcating the 'will to win' which is the mark of the true leader, but [it is] a will to win within the rules" (p. 360). In considering the relationship that men and masculinity have to sports, it becomes evident that sport culture is an entry point to facilitate upward mobility, intragenerational mobility, and transfer of ownership pertaining to the means of production. The correct performative alignment of masculinity and male erotic capital inextricably concerns the degree to which economic capital can be accumulated through workforce dominance.

From a social role theory analysis, sports functions to include men, while simultaneously excluding women. Bonnie Erickson's (1996) study on class position within specific securities industries in Toronto furthers this claim. Erickson (1996) suggests that knowledge of sports within the workforce "divides men from women but unites men of all classes" (p. 224). It is within this gender dichotomy that upward mobility within a given company occurs for men, while the women are repeatedly denied access to the necessary resources to ensure promotion. Given male privilege, what are the effects of defining masculinity within its relationship to capitalism and employment? How has this conflation contributed to the composition of male erotic capital? And most centrally, how has this conflation affected women in society outside the loss of earning potential? I now shift from from the hegemonic masculinity, to abuse, assault and sexual violence as an extension of hegemonic masculinity.

Many studies have come to establish three identifiable causes or warning signs for spousal abuse: 1) socialized with parental abuse (including spousal abuse) while growing up, 2) current sexual aggressiveness, and 3) condoning violence against children (Koss et al, 1994). If men feel emasculated or effeminized by a perceived deficiency in erotic capital from unemployment, some men may respond aggressively. That is, “violence at an individual level serves as a mechanism for the personal control of men over women and is a response to female autonomy” (Koss et al., 1994, p. 27). Violence and aggression may be used to exude masculinity in absentia of employment. When men assume an identity of “subordinate masculinity”, they may substitute hegemonic masculinity with physical or sexual dominance in order to feign that which they have lost (Groes-Green, 2009). The notion of subordinate masculinity (which I have identified as a possible precursor for abuse) is heavily invested in notions around male erotic worth.

There have been many recent cases that elucidate the idea that immediate losses in male erotic capital could be connected to unemployment. For example, a case involving a *Pfizer* scientist who and stabbed his wife after losing his job, because he could no longer provide for his family (Smith, 2009). Another similar case involved a man distressed over losing his job who shot his wife and five children before killing himself (Vercammen, 2009). These cases serve to illustrate the insistent societal pressures men endure while trying to perform and uphold their virility through employment. Not dissimilarly, a recent study of 35,000 construction workers identified men who had experienced recent layoffs and/or extended periods of unemployment or under-employment, simultaneously

experienced greater levels of cumulative stress and aggression (Cunradi et al, 2009). While these claims are telling and informative in the ways some men experience stress associated with joblessness, I would like to suggest that it neglects to address how men are socialized through mechanisms of masculinity and patriarchy, and that often times male aggression is misappropriated as a component of being a “man”. I would like to suggest that as men continue to be valorized relationally to their employment, detrimental, visceral and in many cases violent reactions may occur as an expressive means to externalize the psychological distress of immediate or extended job loss.

According to Reddington & Wright-Kresiel (2009), husbands often tend to view their wives as their property when they see themselves as economically responsible for them. According to the research and connection between joblessness and abuse, some men enact violence and sexual assault to reassert their masculinity and reaffirmation of “property ownership” over women. In this purview, the commodified relationships in viewing women as property may encourage violence by some men who lack economic status. In this light, the pervasive imaginary of what a “real” man should provide and how he should provide it influences his behavior toward women. Through instances of poverty or joblessness and dominant conceptions of masculinity, men and women often find themselves in a relational struggle of power. Some men only see their self-worth in relation to their net worth; when there is a lack there is a greater likelihood of feeling emasculated and potentially enacting violence toward women as a reassertion of power.

Sexual assault statistics demonstrate that most instances of sexual violence are occurring in neighbourhoods with high unemployment and low family income (Scully, 1990). Scully’s (1990) analysis demonstrates

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that instances of joblessness and abuse can be related to systemic barriers such as class and race that are often misunderstood as inherent characteristics of said race and class groups. It is important to understand that while low economic status can be a contributing factor in instances of abuse that other factors, such as male erotic capital separate from economic capital, can also lead to perceived low self worth and instances of violence towards women.

### CONCLUSION

I would like to suggest that there is an absence of analyses related to hegemonic masculinity and the effects of male erotic capital. I have argued that the requirements for men to be successful capital “winners” in order to be “true men” fosters a culture of gendered division which places enormous pressure on men and how they interpret their self-worth. Using studies which point to market style exchanges in North American dating, I have used a field theory approach to suggest that male erotic capital (that is, what is attractive to women within the field of online dating) is partially comprised of the degree in which men can obtain and maintain a high currency of economic capital. Almost conversely, female erotic capital was comprised of not just their physical features, but also the degree that they denied their fiscal earning potential. Gendered dating practices are arguably an impetus to the instances of physical and sexual assault against women, as men seek to reclaim their masculinity due to low economic status. I further posit that the pressures men face to secure their masculinity also obstinately encourages the marginalization and commodification of women.

Through a social role theory analysis, I ultimately suggest that this practice of rendering the public and private spheres as dimorphically-gendered is part of an epistemology carried over from the labour dichotomy of industrialization. Daily activities available to men (such as sports) function as socializing mechanisms that perpetuate and sustain a capitalistic and competitive ideology. Finally, and most centrally, I suggest that there may be a correlation between physical and sexual assault and joblessness as a result of placing too much emphasis on male employment and capital success. Spousal abuse correlates to unemployment or long-term underemployment, where violence is wielded as a tool to reassert masculinity. However, as I pointed out, this relationship is not a justification for violence, nor is unemployment a direct cause of crime, rather a trend. At the basis of the correlation is a call for more attention toward decoupling economic capital from what signifies male erotic capital in hopes for greater gender equality overall.

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# **DISRUPTIVE CROSSINGS: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN QUEER TEXTS**

**Brad Latendresse**

What makes a text “queer?” Queer theory, which emerged in the early 1990s and continues to be a useful and transforming analytic lens for a broad range of studies, emphasizes the constructed nature of social categories. Arguably, defining a text as queer is not contingent upon how its author identifies; rather, it depends upon how a text addresses non-normative or peripheral categories of sexuality and gender in order to challenge and problematize socially constructed categories. The relationship between sexuality and gender in queer works is usually fraught with complexity, intertwined with and inseparable from identity categories of class, social status, and race. In myriad ways, queer narratives emphasize gender performativity and the separation of acts and identity in order to expose the discursive structures that conflate sexuality with gender and maintain heteronormativity. For example, fictional depictions

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of childhood innocence and gender crossing enable writers to explore the relationship between sexuality and gender in intriguing ways. In some texts, the failure to conform to mainstream gender roles and sexual practices places characters at odds with the larger culture, forcing them into marginalized spaces. The ways that marginalized characters navigate the competing and overlapping discourses of identity attached to different types of spaces, including those of the human body itself, is a frequent concern of queer works. Often it is the very act of narrative creation—giving permanence to one’s experience through the act of writing—that allows characters to give order to their lives and realize their identities in all their complexity. In doing so, queer texts can be seen as counter-narratives, unsettling and destabilizing easy categorizations of sexuality and gender by giving voice to new possibilities and forms of identity.

Childhood innocence is a recurring theme in many queer texts, allowing for an exploration of the relationship between gender and sexuality. A child coming into knowledge of gender roles and “appropriate” gender behaviour emphasizes our understanding of the “natural” as mediated via culture, revealing the fabrication behind essentialized gender. In Ivan E. Coyote’s (2000) short story “No Bikini,” the narrator recounts the summer swimming lessons taken as a six-year old girl. The narrator’s mother buys her a bikini—a piece of clothing that carries with it particularly feminine, sexually-loaded cultural connotations—that slips off easily when the narrator raises her arms over her head too quickly. The narrator’s mother states: “You’ll have to watch out for that” (Coyote, 2000, p. 21), imparting the cultural expectation that a girl should not expose her “you-know-whats” (p. 21). The textual replacement of “nipples” with the phrase “you-know-whats” emphasizes how particular body parts become marked both as sexual and shameful depending on gender: the word

“nipples” is so charged it cannot even be uttered. Because breasts, nipples, and genitalia are almost always hidden, gender must be read off of clothing—or the lack of it—rather than from the body. The narrator, simply by not wearing the top portion of the bikini, is assumed to be a boy by her swimming instructor and peers, resulting in “a sex change” (Coyote, 2000, p. 21).

The learned nature of gender performance is underscored by the narrator’s rejection of the colour pink. Even at six years old, the narrator is aware that the colour is an indelible cultural marker of femininity; for an “accomplished tomboy,” a pink swimsuit is simply “out of the question” (Coyote, 2000, p. 22). The text’s retrospective perspective is fundamental to the way in which it engages in unsettling heteronormative constructions of gender difference. It is only as an adult looking back on childhood that the experience of “six weeks of boyhood” can be fully appreciated as “six weeks of bliss” (Coyote, 2000, p. 23). The text’s insistence on contrasting childhood innocence—“The water ... felt simple, and natural, and good” (Coyote, 2000, p. 23)—with the wry awareness of a mature perspective—“I didn’t have to be ashamed of my naked nipples, because I had not covered them up in the first place” (p. 23)—lends the piece an elegiac tone that privileges gender fluidity, rather than the strict gender binary, as the more natural experience.

Childhood innocence and gender crossing also meet in Shyam Selvadurai’s (1994) *Funny Boy: A Novel in Six Stories*, which depicts the coming-of-age of a gay man against the backdrop of escalating civil war in 1970s and 80s Sri Lanka. In the opening story, “Pigs Can’t Fly,” the narrator Arjie recalls playing the childhood game of “bride-bride” with his female sisters and cousins. The story reveals the way in which children’s innocence of constructed gender categories allows them to

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inhabit spaces in which they feel most natural, regardless of their physical gender. Selvadurai emphasizes the gendering of space in a manner similar to “No Bikini.” Like the swimming pupils who are organized by their instructor based on gender—“boys on the left, girls on the right” (Coyote, 2000, p. 22)—Selvadurai’s (1994) characters play in an area that is “territorially [...] divided into two” (p. 3).

The division of the children’s space into gendered territories emphasizes the constructed nature of gender while also serving as a microcosm of the larger society: the boys play in “the front garden, the road, and the field that lay in front of the house” while “the girl’s” territory is “confined to the back garden and the kitchen porch” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 3). The setting serves to show society’s privileging of men, who are allowed in the public area of “the front,” while the women are “confined” to the private area at the rear of the house. It is through the navigation of these gendered spaces that Arjie senses his difference: the girl’s area is where “I seemed to have gravitated naturally” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 3). Tellingly, Arjie’s “primary attraction” to the girl’s area is its “potential for the free play of fantasy” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 3). The space not only allows Arjie an escape from the “incomprehensible” boy’s world of hours-long cricket games, but enables him to achieve his potential: “Because of the force of my imagination, I was selected as leader” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 3). The depiction of gendered spaces reveals the way in which constructed gender categories are limiting.

Concurrently, it allows Selvadurai to emphasize the potential of gender crossing as a way in which to break free of gender limitations—a potential explored in Arjie’s experience of the game “bride-bride.” The game itself can be viewed as queer in that it is a “queering” of other games, which the text insists is made possible only by Arjie’s imaginative

force: “it was I who discovered some new way to enliven [bride-ride], some new twist to the plot of a familiar tale” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 4). Combining “many elements of the other games [Arjie] love[s]” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 4), bride-ride takes on an aura of ritual, culminating in Arjie’s transformation into the bride—his “ultimate moment of joy” (p. 4). The moment of gender crossing becomes a moment of transcendence, an overcoming of limitations: “I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self [...] I was an icon, a graceful, benevolent, perfect being upon whom the adoring eyes of the world rested” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 5). Arjie’s transformation is allowed through play, revealing fiction itself as a space that allows for the shattering of societal constructions.

Selvadurai (1994) is aware, however, of the dangers of sentimentalizing childhood innocence: “those Sundays, when I was seven, marked the beginning of my exile from the world I loved” (p. 5). Like the narrator in “No Bikini,” who can only appreciate the ease of her childhood gender transgression from the perspective of adulthood, Arjie articulates an awareness of society’s seemingly inevitable power to quash behaviour it deems deviant. The arrival of an outsider to the childhood game reveals the way in which deviant behaviour is both labeled and learned. When Arjie’s cousin, nicknamed “Her Fatness”, arrives in Sri Lanka from the United States, she calls him a faggot, a sissy, and a pansy, but is met with only blank stares. The children, having never learned this terminology of deviance, do not understand that her words are intended as insults. It is telling that “Her Fatness” has learned these words from another country; it not only reveals the way in which oppression is culturally constructed, but speaks to the novel’s larger themes of colonialism and power. Indeed, it is “Her Fatness” who introduces power dynamics to the

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game of bride-ride. Her desire to takeover the role of “bride” results in Arjie’s removal from the girl’s territory, essentially “outing” him, and leads to Arjie’s overheard realization that turning out “funny” is socially unacceptable. By the end of the story, Arjie, after a failed attempt to regain his power and return to the girl’s area, becomes a marginalized figure. His inability to conform to prescribed gender roles leaves him “caught between the boys’ and the girls’ worlds, not belonging or wanted in either” (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 39). Selvadurai shows that although gender crossing can offer profound potential for self-realization, larger schemas of power often force these possibilities into peripheral spaces.

The potential of gender crossing as a means of self-realization is also depicted in Shani Mootoo’s 2001 novel *Cereus Blooms At Night*. Set on a fictional Caribbean island, the novel uses elements of magic realism to explore issues of sexuality and gender. Mootoo’s characters, much like Arjie, frequently fail to conform to prescribed gender roles, resulting in their marginalization. However, Mootoo emphasizes queerness, represented by the gender-crossing characters Tyler and Otoh, as a means of overcoming both limiting gender roles and the legacy of colonialism. The novel tells a multi-generational story on the fictional island of Lantanacamara. Mootoo anchors the story around the traumatic life of Mala Ramchandin, who, after experiencing great loss as well as sexual abuse at the hands of her father, literally walls herself up inside her house and refuses to speak. Mala’s story is told by her rest home nurse Tyler, a self-described “outsider,” “pansy,” and “the only Lantanacamaran man ever to have trained in the profession of nursing” (Mootoo, 2001, p. 6). The narrative is a reparative one and seeks to heal Mala’s traumatic experiences. That Tyler, a queer character, is in control of the narrative and gives voice to Mala, emphasizes queerness as a means of healing and

overcoming: “[It was] the positions I was in that enabled me to gain the full story [...] a shared queerness with Miss Ramchandin” (Mootoo, 2001, p. 48). Marginalized as the town madwoman, Mala can also be viewed as a figure of queerness. In a key scene, Mala slyly encourages Tyler to put on a nurse’s uniform; in it, Tyler feels that his body is “metamorphosing” and is “excited by the possibilities trembling inside” (Mootoo, 2001, p. 76). Mala’s matter-of-fact recognition of Tyler’s queerness allows him, like the titular flower, to bloom within the darkness of his marginalization: “She was not one to manacle nature, and I sensed that she was permitting mine its freedom” (Mootoo, 2001, p. 79). The relationship between the two can be seen as a mutual exchange, two queers allowing each other a voice.

The possibility of queerness to overcome trauma is also emphasized in the relationship that develops between Tyler and Otoh. The relationship between Otoh’s father, Ambrose, and Mala, is cut short due to the violence of Mala’s father, a trauma that also ruins the marriage between Ambrose and Otoh’s mother: in Mootoo’s imagined nation, heterosexual institutions are faulty and crumble inevitably. The romantic, and definitely queer, relationship between Otoh and Tyler, however, is allowed to develop and remains open-ended. Queerness and gender crossing, then, denote possibility and the path to the future.

Through their depictions of different forms of queerness, Coyote, Selvadurai, and Mootoo challenge established heteronormative categories of gender and sexuality. These Canadian works unsettle the limiting constrictions of constructed categories, engaging in a dialogue that point to the possibility of gender and sexuality being conceived as provisional, unmarked, and constantly evolving. A queer future awaits.

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# **“FORCED TO CHOOSE”: THE MAKINGS OF IDENTITY IN A MULTIRACIAL, QUEER/TRANS CONTEXT**

**Arik Day**

In North America today, notions of individual identity are arguably shaped by an array of lived experiences, which reflect unique situations of race, class, gender, sexuality, location, occupation, and more. However, a system of identity politics is deeply entrenched within our society, which is generally based upon single-identity demarcations of (for example) “homosexual”, “heterosexual”, “man”, “woman”, “black”, “white”, or “transgender”. Out of this system arises a plethora of social movements—feminist, queer, and radical racial movements, to name a few. According to Mary Bernstein and Marcie de la Cruz (2009), social movements do not only aim to achieve equal “rights” for their marginalized individuals, but also establish the achievement of “identity” as their main goal. Through these actions, they assert themselves not only as social movements, but as “deconstructive movements” as well, which

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both “challenge stigmatized identities [and] seek recognition for [new ones]” (Bernstein and de la Cruz, 2009, p. 727). However, within a post-modern, post-structuralist context, countless layered and intersecting identities become apparent. How do individuals with complex lived experiences and multiple, intersecting identities negotiate the divides, parallels, and contradictions which may complicate or problematize their interpellation? To what extent are they even more marginalized in society, and to what extent have they worked to build their own “deconstructive movements”?

In this essay, I intend to examine both multiracial and transgender/transsexual/queer movements and discourses in North America and posit them against “LGBT/feminist” and monoracial social movements, institutions and organizations which may render them marginalized and invisible. I argue that while the lived experience of multiracial, trans, and multiracial-trans individuals is distinct, it is also one of similarity, which is marked by oppression, essentialism, and confusion insofar as the extent to which these individuals may have the experience of feeling “forced to choose”. Examining these parallels, I also argue that multiracial and/or trans individuals are subject to the universal system of social construction of gender/race dichotomies, and subject furthermore to what Jane Ward (2004) introduces as the “triple jeopardy” of race, class and gender oppression.

It is important to note that I do not aim to imply that the lived experiences of Trans individuals and multiracial individuals are wholly analogous to each other. Instead, I merely aim to point out similarities in terms of their relationships to constructed binaries, social organizations, institutions, and marginalization. Further, many individuals may identify as trans *and* multiracial demonstrating an individualistic approach to

intersectional identity, implying the eventual shift from current systems of single-identity politics.

For the purposes of this essay, I aim to use “trans”, “transgender”, “transsexual” and in some cases, “queer” to discuss people who are, as Katrina Roen (2006) suggests, “gender liminal”, or “people who live between genders, live as a third gender, or are undergoing a transgenering process” (p. 656). The term ‘multiracial’ is used, in this context, to define individuals who come from ancestry (and usually parentage) of two or more ‘races’; oftentimes these individuals self-identify as such. Notably, all of the trans/transgender/transsexual/queer and “multiracial” individuals I examine identify equally with each specific identity signifier, and despite the general understanding that they live within a socially constructed world, they adopt these terms as part of their own individual processes of identity-making.

#### THE MULTIRACIAL EXPERIENCE VS. THE QUEER/TRANS EXPERIENCE

*I have the right...not to justify my existence in this world, not to keep the races separate within me, not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity, not to justify my ethnic legitimacy...*

“Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People”, Hapa Issues Forum (Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2009, p. 736)

*Given the right to define one's own gender identity and corresponding right to free expression of a self-defined gender identity, no individual shall be denied access to a space or denied participation in an activity by virtue of a self-defined gender identity which is not in accord with chromosomal sex, genitalia, assigned birth sex, or initial gender role.*

The International Bill of Gender Rights, Press for Change (¶4)

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Both multiracial and trans people are situated within a socially constructed world. In regards to multiracialism, stable constructions of race are built upon essentialist notions of racial embodiment and homogeneity, despite flagrant diversity within racial groups in social characteristics and situational experiences (Harris & Sim, 2002). Monoracialism (read: white normativity) and the evolution of a *black vs. white* dichotomy exacerbates the construction of difference by erasing other identities of colour, and posits those identities within biased and racist social hierarchies (Bernstein & Cruz, 2009). For transpeople, they are consistently “caught” between the “gender binary” of man-woman, as well as regimes of sexual division—namely the divide between heteronormativity and homonormativity—which, as I argue later, also intersects with racialized regimes of oppression (Roen, 2004, 2006; Haritaworn, 2007; Manalansan, 2005;). For example, Katrina Roen (2002) suggests: “the expectation is that transsexuals want to pass as women and men. Those who are too obviously ‘both/neither’ do not count as transsexual” (p. 505). For Roen, choosing to “pass” (or not to pass) as a certain gender is indicative of a certain individual’s political stance on transgenderism—where there are some who choose to be “both/neither” and “visibly transsexual” or “posttranssexual” (sometimes in different times and spaces) in order to deconstruct the male-female gender binary (2002, 2006).

The rhetoric of “both/neither” is paralleled by negotiations within the multiracial community. As Mary Bernstein and Marcie de la Cruz argue, mixed-race activism challenges the roots of North American power struggles within a framework of racial classification (2009). Additionally, because the term “mixed-race” is supposedly indicative of only black/white racial ancestry, “multiracial” activists, such as those in the Hapa movement,

create a formerly-unrecognized group of individuals that oppose the imperatives of a taxonomic framework (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009). The emergence of the “biracial” has worked to solidify the “both-ness” of identity within and above the black/white binary, especially among youth (Herman, 2004).

While the similarities are evident, both Bernstein and De la Cruz take caution in analogizing racial politics to other identity politics. Christine Garza (2009) argues that “performative” politics (i.e., transpeople who choose not to “pass”) does not work for individuals whose difference is “marked on the body” (i.e., racial bodies). However, they note that in the case of multiracial bodies, notions of race are incorrectly assumed to be marked “*clearly* (or clearly enough) on the body to require no explanation” (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009, p. 726, emphasis original). Furthermore, they reiterate that while it is performative to take up an “anti-passing” embodiment, both trans and multiracial movements employ an “anti-identity” rhetoric. This can deconstruct the very idea of structurally “written” bodies while also creating new and transgressive identities (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009). For in the case of many multiracial individuals, their “marked race” is rendered unintelligible or superimposed, and therefore “violat[es] the racial truth regime” of black/white racial politics (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009, p. 726). Similarly, with many transpeople, their “marked gender” can be rendered unintelligible and superimposed. As such, the unintelligibility of multiracial and trans bodies can easily come under scrutiny for their visible and invisible (or understated) unpacking of race and gender.

THE QUEERING AND MULTIRACIALIZING OF SINGLE-IDENTITY POLITICS

*I have the right...to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial, to change my identity over my life time—and more than once, to have loyalties and identify with more than one group of people, to freely choose whom I befriend and love.*

“Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People”, Hapa Issues Forum  
(Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2009, p. 736)

*All human beings have the right to control their own bodies...individuals shall not be subject to psychiatric diagnosis or treatment as mentally disordered or diseased...every consenting adult has a corresponding right to free sexual expression...individuals shall not be denied the right to form committed, loving relationships with one another...*

The International Bill of Gender Rights, Press for Change (¶ 5)

All culturally unintelligible individuals are arguably othered in a systemic sense within a framework of white, male, heteronormativity (Haritaworn, 2007). Historically, monoracial movements have aimed to fight against oppressions of race and class, while feminist movements have aimed to actively deconstruct patriarchy (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009; Koyama, 2006). Furthermore, gay/lesbian/queer movements have aimed to achieve visibility and equality based on sexual orientation (Haritaworn 2007; Koyama 2006). However, each movement was built within the faulty system of single-identity politics, and have consequently marginalized a whole other set of individuals. For instance, many lesbians and queers of colour were exempt from early feminist and gay/lesbian uprisings. In the case of radical feminism (or lesbian separatism?), FTMs were often seen as a potential threat to the feminist manifesto, insofar as their transition to

being “biologically” male was read as acting out a desire for male privilege and a reinforcement of patriarchy (Haritaworn, 2007; Koyama, 2006). Additionally, radical feminism tended to supplant all oppression as solely gender-based, subsequently “ranking” oppressions and in turn oppressing people who could claim multiple identities (Koyama, 2006).

According to Jane Ward, (2008) many of these movements grew solely out of assumptions of “white normativity”, or “cultural norms and practices that make whiteness appear as natural, normal, and right... [it] sustains other forms of normativity, such as middle-class or heterosexual norms that emphasize the pursuit of prosperity, safety, reproduction, and respectability” (p. 564). Norms themselves, she argues, are always racialized; in the context of social “deviance”, the “normal” is always “white” (Ward, 2008). As such, many activists and scholars have adopted an intersectional approach to identity theory and movements, where notions of race, class, gender and sexuality become intertwined as “multiple consciousnesses”, and are also explored within the tropes of the “normal” (Ward, 2004).

For instance, the Hapa movement in the United States represents a social movement that operates *within* race as well as across class, gender and sexuality, (demonstrating how people can organize around intersectional identities as a movement away from single-identity politics or “white-normativity”). *Hapa* is a Hawaiian word that means “mix” or “part” in a racially ambiguous way, and generally signifies a person of part-Asian descent (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009). Built during the time of the “first-wave multiracial movement” in the early 1980’s, when most multiracial groups only served those of white/black descent or suburban mothers with biracial children (Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2009). Hapa became an ideology for those who did not fit into the restrictive

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frameworks of the first-wave multiracial movement (Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2009). Eventually, the Hapa movement spawned branches in universities all across the United States, as an anti-identity politic student group which aligned itself with trans, intersexed and “queer” activist groups as well as other movements for people of colour (Bernstein & De la Cruz, 2009).

### PERPETUATED INVISIBILITY OF MULTIRACIAL TRANS BODIES: THE CENTER, ACAS, AND 2-SPIRITS

Despite the politics of multiracialism and the growth of Trans activism, multiracial-trans-bodies are still rendered invisible and marginal within both monoracial and “LGBT/Queer” institutional contexts. Before exploring the three North American outreach organizations known as The Center, ACAS, and 2-Spirits, it should be noted that these organizations, like most identities, are built within frameworks of single-identity politics and divide between race, gender, class and hetero/homonormativity.

In Jane Ward’s (2008) deconstructions of gay/lesbian (and I argue, white) politics, she argues that even in “racially diverse” environments, whiteness remains the discourse for communication and behaviour. The L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center, also known as The Center, is one of America’s oldest “LGBT” outreach centers, and continually prides itself in its own marketed diversity (Ward, 2008). However, as Ward (2008) suggests, The Center’s perpetual “inclusivity” strategies are merely indicative of a corporate-driven hierarchy of management and public relations—mirroring the organization’s devotion to white capitalist normativity. Despite hiring a supposedly “multiracial” staff (implied as individual monoracialism), The Center’s “mainstream and corporate approach to diversity” (Ward,

2008, p. 582) disguises its true level of accessibility and diversity. Additionally, Haritaworn (2007) argues that within mainstream queer discourses, the unspoken homonormativity reflects on “non-trans gay agendas” (¶ 4.1), which ignore the realities and lived experience of most transpeople, some of whom identify as heterosexual. Homonormativity can also be read as “white”, and remains a form of activism that conflates and depoliticizes many othered queer communities, as it “remaps and recodes freedom and liberation in terms of [sexual] privacy, domesticity and consumption” (Manalansan, 2005, p. 142). The inclusion of the “T” in the “LGBT” utilized by The Center, and the “racial diversity” that it manipulates mark a flawed positionality within a white, homonormative, structuralist, single-identity political space.

Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS) is a monoracially defined outreach group for the “East and South Asian” community in Toronto, offering services in English, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Chinese (ACAS, 2007). While its aims are specifically HIV/AIDS driven, it notably aligns itself with racialized queer groups such as “Gay Asian Youth” and offers support programs for Asian Youth, Gay Asian “men who have sex with men”, and “Asian Canadian women and trans-women at risk” (ACAS, 2007). There is no mention of multiracially-defined identities or issues, nor whether or not they are welcome to utilize the support. Additionally, the “trans inclusion” by ACAS is extremely problematic in the “politically-correct” lumping together of trans-women with other women, as well as the complete erasure of Asian trans-men or genderqueer individuals. Evidently, ACAS, as a monoracial and “LGBT-friendly” organization, once conforms to the dictum of a culturally-structured, overarching system.

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The website for the 2-Spirits organization in Toronto exemplifies a more comprehensive approach to outreach, however it is important to note that a paid membership is required to access their services (2-Spirits, 2005). The membership itself consists of “gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex and transgender people in Toronto born of *Aboriginal ancestry*”, and its services include HIV/AIDS education, counselling and ambiguous “prevention” programs (2-Spirits, 2005, emphasis mine). Interestingly, their tag line states that they hope to “bridge the gap between 2-spirited lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities, and our Aboriginal identity” (2-Spirits, 2005)—which represents an understanding of multiple identities, but also an outright rejection of intersectionality. Additionally, the website perpetuates the marketed “diversity” narrative, in its use of the LGBT rainbow flag and of consistent single-identity demarcations of “Aboriginal”, “Gay”, “Lesbian”, et cetera. Furthermore, while the term “2-Spirits” tends to evoke a notion of gender fluidity and transgression, contradictory terms such as “2-Spirit Woman” and “2-Spirit Man” are consistently utilized, not as a part of a person’s own individual identifications, but as a trope for separate sub-committees and sub-organizations. Evidently, 2-Spirits also conforms to typical models of gender, race, and single-identity politics.

## CONCLUSION

How is a multiracial and/or Trans person to negotiate their own identity/identities when social institutions and organizations enact regimes of, as Melissa Herman (2004) suggests, forcing individuals to *choose* where their allegiance lies? How can individuals understand the need for transgression and anti-identity politics in a world that is still

socially constructed for them? As Bernstein and De la Cruz (2009) argue, clear categories are necessary at this place and time in order to *eventually* erase the boundaries between them. These categories, utilized as social movements or “collectives” can give great agency (in an ironically organized fashion) to anyone who is oppressed (Bernstein and De la Cruz 2009). However, can terms such as “multiracial” or “trans” be transgressive when they are deemed too vague or too “umbrella-like”? How might these new “deconstructive” terms be equally binding and equally exclusionary as the system they aim to dismantle? Is the true range of diversity conflated and “lumped together” through these terms? Is universal agency impossible?

Jin Haritaworn, a multiracial (of Thai and German descent), Trans-identified activist presents a possible answer. Haritaworn (2007) studied the way in which single-identity politics tends to struggle for equality only through “positive representations” (i.e., pure, non-sexual, non-“deviant”) of their oppressed group. He claims that his Thai community tend to envision a utopian world—in which transvestites, prostitutes and children of sex-workers (who have sex with white, middle-class foreigners) are included—that bears a strong resemblance to the North American LGBT community. Subsequently, their own questions of “Thainess, mixed race, sex work, and queer sexuality” become intersected, and are “never fully captured through an undifferentiated queer discourse alone” (Haritaworn, 2007, ¶ 3.5). For, he argues, “queers of colour and other multiply minoritised queers have little interest in single-issue equations, which evade real power differences around gender, race and sexuality” (Haritaworn, 2007, ¶ 5.1). Perhaps Haritaworn has forged a unique form of transgression, which represents a postmodern, poststructuralist sense of identity. The necessity to decompose existing

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structures of race and gender is still alive, and allying together within and between activist circles may have to suffice for the present. For, as Katrina Roen (2006) aptly suggests, “transgender and racial politics do not need to be approached in an either/or fashion, but can be worked together” (p. 664).

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# **LESBIANISM IN NATIVE CONTEXTS**

**Andrea Ferguson**

As Judith Butler's (1991) work suggests, the definition of "lesbian" is always up for debate, as there fails to be one characteristic or detail that all lesbians could be said to share. "Lesbian" is a term with tangible implications within the context of Western concepts of gender and sexuality, but it is complicated by competing concepts of gender that do not follow a male/female dichotomy. Homosexual/heterosexual identities cannot exist without the concept of a male/female gender dichotomy, and this system poses a problem for the recognition and legitimization of Native genders and sexualities. Some Native sexual identities are based on gender identity as opposed to the biological sex of a body. This complicates the Western concept of "homosexuality," and thus of "lesbianism," as partners of the same sex but of different genders are not considered "homosexual" in Native cultures.

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The term *two-spirit* or *two-spirited* was coined in the 1990's in an attempt to distance Native sexuality from Western sexual identities. It remains a contested term because it does not accurately encompass the depth of history that founds various Native genders and sexualities. In this essay I intend to explore the depths of the complications posed by Western concepts of gender and sexuality on those of indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality, and specifically of lesbianism. Further, I will examine how the imposition of lesbianism is a contemporary push toward the assimilation of indigenous culture. My desire is not to appropriate indigenous cultures of North America but I will be speaking in general terms in order to illustrate my arguments.

The contemporary, taken-for-granted male/female dichotomy was introduced to North American indigenous communities via the missionaries that colonized the “new world.” Prescribed gender roles became influenced by Christian ideals of female subservience and male superiority. Wesley Thomas (1997) suggests:

Multiple genders were part of the norm in the Navajo culture before the 1890s. From the 1890s until the 1930s dramatic changes took place in the lives of the Navajos because of exposure to, and constant pressures from, Western culture—not the least of which was the imposition of Christianity. (p. 156)

Thus contact with Europeans heavily influenced and altered organic Navajo concepts of gender and sexuality. Ultimately, what the Europeans challenged was how the Navajo identified with themselves, with each other, and to how they related to the planet. Suggesting that contemporary indigenous sexualities are not as they once were, Beth Brant (1994) attests, “Our [indigenous] sexuality has been colonized, sterilized, whitewashed” (p. 60).

In the process of colonization and forced assimilation, gender and sexuality became a method of obtaining control via sexism and manipulating conventions of masculinity. Siobhan B. Somerville (1998) states that “the 'invention' of the homosexual occurred at roughly the same time as racial questions were being reformulated” (p. 61). This striking connection emphasizes a simultaneous structural assimilative push. Furthermore, Western homosexual identities perpetuate the highly problematic male/female dichotomy. “Homosexual” identities may be assimilative rather than transformative, because by identifying as “homosexual” one is accepting the underlying Western prescriptions of gender enveloped in same-sex relationships. Moreover, the term “homosexual,” implies a pathology which goes unchallenged when adopted as an identity category. To some, “homosexuality” suggests an innate perversion or deviance in a person’s sexuality as opposed to a facet of human sexuality that is almost universally experienced. According to Jacobs, “Genders and sexualities are multidimensional and vary within and among cultures, sometimes over time and space and sometimes over the course of life,” (1997). By this, Jacobs suggests that nothing about gender is innate or fixed, and that gender identities are malleable and subject to change. If we acknowledge that genders are socially constructed then it follows that variations of gender identities exist everywhere.

History suggests that Native societies were poly-gendered as opposed to being dichotomized as male or female, as Lang (1997) states: “A majority of Native American cultures define gender in a way that allows for the cultural construction of more than two genders [...] and the opportunity for individuals to change gender roles and identities over the course of their lifetimes” (p. 103). Individuals have the opportunity to change their gender roles over the course of their lives, meaning their

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gender-identities surpass their physical bodies and are malleable forms of expression. “In many Native American cultures,” Lang (1997) continues, “there existed—and in a number of instances still exists—three to four genders: women, men, two-spirit/womanly males, and, less frequently, two-spirit/manly females” (p. 103). In the model that Lang (1997) describes, there exist two opposite extremes, maleness and femaleness, but there is also a grey area in between that encompasses a blurring of the two. In this model, gender looks more like a spectrum than a dualism.

Before the term *two-spirit* was adopted, anthropologists commonly referred to indigenous bodies with mixed or multiple genders as “berdache,” (Jacobs, 1997). Since the rise of gay activism, “berdache” has been regarded as a problematic and derogatory term due to its anthropological origin—a product of non-indigenous minds. The need arose to replace the term with something more aware of contemporary circumstances, as Jacobs (1997) explains: “The use of 'berdache' became anathema to Native American gay activists [...] who wished to distance themselves from white, gay, male culture and begin to use the expression *two-spirit* or *two-spirited* people to identify their special qualities” (p. 21-22). According to a study by Anguksuar (1997), “the term *two-spirit*, which has come into recent popular usage, originated in North Algonquin dialect and gained first currency at the third annual spiritual gathering of gay and lesbian Native people that took place in Winnipeg in 1990,” (p. 221). *Two-spirit* distinguishes native concepts of gender and sexuality from Western concepts of gender and sexuality, as the term ignores the either/or pressures resulting from the Western gender dichotomy. Lang (1997) argues that, “contemporary two-spirit people seem to regard a combination of the masculine and the feminine as a more abstract quality that is inherent in homosexual individuals” (p. 106). Maleness and

femaleness are therefore a figurative part of a person's psyche but they are not bound up in physical bodies, nor are they innate features of a human being. The term *two-spirit* acknowledges the presence of maleness and femaleness in individual bodies, as well as the possibility that *one* gender may reign more heavily than the other. Since the early 1990's, Wesley Thomas (1997) argues, "two-spirit [has been] a rapidly spreading Pan-Indian North American concept intended to distance Native Americans from European-American-dominated lesbian and gay cultural norms" (p. 166).

The term *two-spirit* was introduced as a term that would distinguish queer urban Native bodies from those that identify as LGBTQ, but it is also complicated by its urban, English origin, as it has been unable to adequately translate into indigenous languages. It is a term predominantly used by urban Natives, or by those who live off reservations. The four (sometimes five) Native genders interact differently than LGBTQ relationships in a Western context. According to Lang (1997), "a same-sex relationship in many Native American cultures, at least, traditionally, is not necessarily at the same time a same-gender relationship" (p. 104). Following this logic, two partners of the same physical sex, but of different genders, would not be considered "homosexual," while two people with the same *gender* would be taboo and considered perverse. In his research, Thomas (1997) deduced that, "relationships between two women, two men, two female-bodied *nddleeh*/masculine<sup>1</sup> females, or two male-bodied *nddleeh*/feminine males are, however, considered to be homosexual and even incestual in traditional Navajo culture" (p. 162). Thus, in Navajo traditions, gender is the basis on which societal status is designated, not the physical body or sex of a person. A clear distinction exists between the physical body and gender representation of that body.

1 A Navajo term similar to *two-spirit*.

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Beth Brant (1994), an author and self-identified *two-spirit*, believes that it is important to distinguish a difference between Native and Western genders and sexualities, since racism and homophobia go hand-in-hand: “It may be possible to discard or put away those values that reek of racism, sexism, and homophobia, but we can’t remake ourselves into an image that is just another take on a racist formula” (p. 30). Therefore by adopting this relatively recent term as an expression of her gender, Brant makes a political statement as well as a strong claim to her indigenous heritage.

That indigenous cultures traditionally have more than two genders does not suggest that homophobia does not exist both on and off reservations. According to Brant (1994), “[homophobia is a] result of the self-loathing that imperialism has forced into our minds” (p. 69). The practice of homophobia is therefore a reaction to Western colonial pressures for the assimilation of gender and sexuality. As indigenous communities adopt Western ideals, they also adopt Western habits. Brant (1994) continues:

Yet, I have been hurt and ostracized by some Natives, men and women, who have made it clear that being a lesbian, or *saying* it out loud is not good for our community. I believe what they are really saying is—you embarrass me with your sexuality, therefore you embarrass our people, and *white* people will have even more ammunition to use against us. (p. 76)

In challenging assimilative pressures in regards to gender and sexuality, one becomes a target for both homophobic and racist backlash. Brant (1994) suggests that indigenous communities may engage in a sort of self-policing where assimilative pressures come from within the community as well as from external forces. In her essay, Lang (1997) extrapolates:

“The attitude toward sexuality in general and same-sex relationships in particular has changed dramatically on many reservations due to long-term exposure to Western religion, boarding schools, and, more recently, the media, most notably television” (p. 108). Technology has allowed for new and different manifestations of assimilative, colonialist pressures, a continuation of the systematic erasure of indigenous cultures. The effects of self-policing are evident in the lives of those Natives who experience homophobia in their communities. Jacobs (1997) suggests:

Only on a few reservations has resistance to white values spared homosexual, bisexual and transgender people from ridicule, even though such resistance may have spared customary or traditional kinship structures, child-rearing practices, gender equity, and religions of great antiquity (p. 22).

The imposition of Western concepts of gender and sexuality affect more than just the way an individual relates to themselves and their communities, it also affects the community structure by enforcing gender inequality, challenging communal parenting, as well as undermining traditions and cultural practices that existed for centuries prior to contact. Colonialism and assimilation have challenged Native communities and identities across North America. Homophobia is rampant because the imposed Western conventions of gender and sexuality are accepted as valid and transhistorical. However, two-spirit identities are beyond acceptability as well, as Lang (1997) suggests, “it seems that both on and off the reservations, the only way a two-spirit male or female can identify is as a gay person” (p. 109). This is most-likely because the pathological language of “homosexual” versus “heterosexual” cannot convey the complexities of Native gender and sexuality. In order to be

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understood, one needs to adopt Western labels and identify with Western concepts with all of their implications and connotations. Gender transgression is subject to prejudice anywhere, but it is especially complicated in an indigenous context. Thomas (1997) argues that “the majority of those who identify as gay or lesbian (i.e. homosexuals) have moved to urban settings” (p. 163). Indigenous people must assert themselves in a Western context in order to adequately identify with Western concepts of “gay” or “lesbian,” as these concepts do not align with various indigenous cultural identities.

A legal system that is framed by the heteronormative gender dichotomy will not recognize indigenous genders, just as Canada and the United States’ legal systems do not recognize indigenous genders. Where does this person fit into the legal system, and do they have any rights? Countless Native people are forced to assimilate their gender in order to be legally recognized. Western sexual identities are gendered, and are thus complicated by indigenous concepts of two-spirit. If one is neither male nor female, what constitutes “homosexual” behavior? What, then, constitutes as “heterosexual” behavior? The pathologization of same-sex relations focuses on the physical sex of a body and not the gender. This system of categorizing same-sex relations is insufficient in a Native context because it looks exclusively at relationships based on physical sex, rather than at gender variations. The breakthroughs that the LGBTQ communities across North America have made in regards to civil rights and freedoms in recent decades are certainly not to be belittled or dismissed, but LGBTQ activism has failed to overcome the widespread heteronormative male/female gender system, which in effect devalues and extinguishes alternative indigenous identities. According to Brant (1994), “a hegemonic gay and lesbian movement cannot encompass our complicated

history. [...] Nor can a hegemonic gay and lesbian movement give us tools to heal our broken Nations” (p. 45). In a way, gay activism becomes irrelevant for the issue of contemporary colonialism. The blatant disregard for Native cultures that have pre-dated the current system of societal organization by centuries, and the assimilative pressures placed on indigenous people in regards to their gender and sexual identities, are manifestations of neocolonialism.

Thus “lesbian” identities are complicated by an indigenous context, as the term exists in a Western context of gender, and defines the physical body accordingly. As Butler (1991) argues, there is no one way to be “lesbian,” and likewise there is no one way to identify as queer or native. It is hard to accurately say how “lesbian” identities, with all of their connotations and implications, affect queer Natives on an individual level. No doubt there are Native people who identify with the signifier of “lesbian,” but as previously mentioned, they often live in urban settings or are more attuned to Western conceptions of gender and sexuality. If “lesbian” is a time-specific, geographically-specific term, it will become obsolete once Western concepts of gender have evolved passed a dichotomy. In order to make sense of the term “lesbian,” we must never abandon its context: a constructed term, specific to the Western world, and founded on the homosexual/heterosexual pathological dichotomy that assumes a male/female gender dichotomy that thus perpetuates homophobia, racism and sexism.

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# **QUEERING THE ENVIRONMENT: ANNIE SPRINKLE LOVING THE EARTH (...IN *THAT* WAY)**

**Paul Weadick**

Annie Sprinkle loves love. If she could make love to every beautiful thing, every beautiful person on the planet, I think she would. She can, and does make love to the planet itself. To me, Sprinkle recalls the worst of flower child, new-age philosophy, the most over-the-top sex-positive feminism, and the campiest of performance art, but I cannot help but love her—not in spite of these qualities but because of them. No one person fits the notion of being ‘greater-than the sum of their parts’ more than Sprinkle, and what a list of parts it is: sex worker, porn actress and director, artist, sexologist, journalist, educator, writer, herstorian, and more. An endless list of accolades and occupations follow her name; Sprinkle has done virtually everything you can do, everything you have ever wanted to. Most recently Sprinkle has added “ecosexual” to her list of modifiers.

Sprinkle's "ECOSEXY! Exploring the Landscape of a New Sexual Identity" lecture came to the University of Toronto on January 12, 2011. In many ways the bridging of sexual and environmental politics was a logical next step for Sprinkle, whose work has been focused on tantra, yoga, and "sacred sex" for a number of years, with environmental concerns skirting the periphery. On the other hand, it seems to have come out of left field: Sprinkle's work has always been concerned with sexuality, but until 2008 there was no inkling of environmental concerns. That was the year that the Love Art Lab (Sprinkle's on-going collaboration with partner Elizabeth Stephens) took vows to "love and cherish the Earth," and with her EcoSexy lecture, Sprinkle makes it clear she means to love the Earth in *that* way: that is, sexually. But how have we come to this point? When did it become fair game to out ourselves as planet-fuckers? With "EcoSexy," Annie Sprinkle has synthesized a number of strands of feminism, activism, and theory, and fused them together. She merges the seemingly disparate strains of ecological, cyborg and sex-positive feminism, with her own activism addressing sex work, queer sexuality/theory and imbues it all with a post-modern sense of play, paradox and irony. Here her work culminates in a step which logically flows from earlier feminisms (particularly Donna Haraway and others' pursued politics of "affinity, not identity") but which radically shifts the emphasis of sexuality, directs it away from the body, away from identity, and towards a love and respect of the Earth. And while its articulation is somewhat fraught (especially its indebtedness to sexology and the taxonomic categorization of sexual identities), this radical re-articulation of desire's directionality opens up a breadth of future possibilities.

The biography of Annie Sprinkle veers so close to mythmaking that I have difficulty fathoming the truth of it. Maria Elena Buszek's (2007)

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article “Mothers and Daughters, Sluts and Goddesses,” paints a beautiful portrait of Sprinkle’s life from porn to performance art and beyond. Sprinkle’s art work began when the roots of Third-wave feminism were growing—mid/late 80s, give or take—which means she tends to get planted within that particular movement. Buszek (2007) looks back further, however, complicating the temporal and generational conceptions of Second- and Third-wave feminism, and connects Sprinkle to the work of Mary Beth Edelson, oft-considered an artist of the Second-Wave. By connecting the two, Buszek (2007) “forces us to confront [the] problem of defining a hard line between feminist generations, as well as a single way of ‘doing’ feminist art” (p. 240). Moreover, Buszek (2007) articulates Sprinkle’s paradoxical embodiment of porn, sex, art, and feminism simultaneously, categories that were often formulated as diametrically opposed during the sex wars. Sprinkle inhabited a sex-positive feminist position, indebted as she was to sex work and pornography, at a time when “good” feminism meant anti-porn and anti-penetration. At the same time she suggested that porn could be art and art could be porn, when they too were considered incongruous, with blurry lines distinguishing between the high art of ‘erotica’ and the low art of porn. Buszek (2007) notes that “Sprinkle embodies the third-wave embrace of both/and rather than either/or in regards to feminist identity,” (p. 258) but also stumbles somewhat by insisting on these identity constructions as transformations. From porn star and sex worker to feminist and artist, which Buszek (2007) articulates, and then on to metamorphosexual and ecosexual, which Sprinkle inhabits later—these positions are never abandoned in Sprinkle’s life and work, but are held together at once, part of the “both/and” of feminist identity. Transformation implies a total change, that the past form has been left behind like a shed cocoon, but for Sprinkle the

multitude of forms become the heart of her work; *combining* sex and feminism, porn and art, play and seriousness, everything at once and all the time.

EcoSexy's most clear progenitor would be the bounty of work on ecofeminism, which emerged around the same time that Sprinkle started making performance art. Itself stemming from the fusion of environmental and feminist activism, ecofeminism attempted to "distinguish between privileged and oppressed groups, where the privileged are upper- or middle-class, human, technologically and industrially 'developed,' male, and the oppressed are poor or working-class, nonhuman animal, 'undeveloped' nature, and female, respectively" (Gaard, 2003 p.1-2). Unlike what would emerge in Third-wave feminism, early ecofeminism was more clearly rooted in a feminist essentialism. While perhaps merely identifying the terms by which patriarchal-capitalism constructs difference and enacts oppression, early ecofeminism often unwittingly upheld this binary opposition through its articulation (Azzarello, 2008). Greta Gaard (1993) has argued that "one task of ecofeminists has been to expose these dualisms and the ways in which feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth," (p. 3) which certainly points toward discursive construction of bodies and nature. However in "Unnatural Predators," Richard Azzarello (2008) argues that the notion that nature has itself been socially constructed is not well-received in environmental activist communities.

Ecofeminism, though, was a clear fusion of theory and activism, moreover one which began to articulate the intersections of oppression across nations, groups of people, and most obviously extending to the environment as well: "[ecofeminism] requires us to create a theory that

will provide, as full as possible, an inclusive and global analysis of oppression. To do this, theorists must meet with activists to exchange information and to create political strategy; ideally, theorists must also be activists, thereby enacting the goal of ecofeminist praxis” (Gaard, 1993 p. 3). Ecofeminism's exposure of dualisms, intersectionality and its fusion of theory and practice present startling similarities to queer theory and activism, yet the two fields have, until fairly recently, remained staunchly disparate. Azzarello (2008) made this the focus of his article "Unnatural Predators", asking:

[If] sexuality is indeed everywhere [...] why has queer theory been so disconnected from environmental studies? The disengagement of queer theory from, say, critical race studies or globalisation studies would be inconceivable in contemporary criticism, so why does that extrication work so well with environmental studies? To put the question in an [sic] more appropriate manner, why do queer theory and environmental studies figure as so *naturally* disconnected? (p. 138, emphasis in original)

I believe there are a variety of rhetorical reasons for these separations, but that largely they function as red herrings; to use another metaphor, the concerns of queer theory and ecofeminism are quite on the same page, but require markedly different reading practices. I would first suggest that the disjuncture is over a fairly simple distinction between the body and the environment. Theories of sexuality figure sex as inextricably connected to the body, and while “sexuality is indeed everywhere,” it flows far more readily amongst and between bodies desiring each other. Environmental concerns are certainly intertwined with human interactions and migration, as ecofeminism makes plain, but the environment does not function like a “human” body; the Earth is sexless, genderless, and without

sexuality. Of course, ecofeminism has drawn parallels between environmental destruction and gendered oppressions, and has articulated the way in which patriarchal-capitalism scripts the planet as a feminized body, one therefore fit for use and abuse. To make a distinction between a human body and say, an earthly body is to ignore the way that both bodies and environment *are* socially constructed by hegemonic discourse. As Greta Gaard (1993) suggests: “ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (p. 1). Gaard’s statement clearly points toward sexuality as a domain in which ideological oppression is enacted, yet many ecofeminisms pay only lip service to sexuality. My own (limited) experience of environmental activism points to a particularly virulent strain of heterosexism both unchallenged and unacknowledged. Concern for the environment is often directly connected to a concern for heterofamilial reproduction and survival—a concern for the world of the next generation (of happy heterosexuals). Moreover, the construction of the two movements (environmental versus sexual) from the outside (read: mainstream) suggests a key difference in the nature of their politics. Within the capitalist mainstream, ecological movements and sexual movements are also oppositional to each other because of the way in which they are abjected, their discursive place as *anti*—anti-hegemonic, anti-heterosexism, anti-patriarchy, et cetera. With the exception of inclusionary or normativizing politics, queer sexuality (especially but not exclusively gay sexuality) has been libellously characterized by the mainstream as promiscuous and excessive. With Pride parades as the ultimate emblem of that excess, LGBTQ communities are depicted as lewd, indulgent, and anything but charmed, sexually. On the other hand,

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environmentalism, particularly sustainability movements, are characterized by a relative restraint, which in the eyes of a patriarchal-capitalism dependant upon an unmitigated (re)production, stands in the way of the bottom line of profit and progress.

Greta Gaard, Catriona Sandilands and Richard Azzarello have all done pioneering work fusing queer politics and ecological feminisms, in particular by drawing out the “sexuality” within the long list of intertwined oppressions. Azzarello (2008) expertly brings the conversation back in time, via Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, to articulate the connections between environmental and queer discourse. He focuses on the discursive construction of ‘the natural,’ which “both queer theorists and environmentalists articulate a profound interest in” (Azzarello, 2008, p.138). In particular, Azzarello (2008) focuses on the construction of the natural along lines of heteronormativity, survival and a reproductive imperative. In Stoker’s character Renfield, Azzarello (2008) sees an alternative form of life production, one connected to the consumption of life (“disgusting blow flies”) rather than through the propagation of a heterosexual family form. By distinguishing himself from heterofamilial bonds, Azzarello (2008) argues, Renfield marks himself as queer, and is therefore subject to a medical-scientific gaze. This gaze, of course, is that which has historically constructed both non-normative sexuality (through sexology and medical discourse more broadly) and the environment (through species classification and taxonomies), and their relationship to hegemony; to the very gaze which is constructing them. Contrary to the rhetorical separation of the environmental and queer theories, the two fields, rather than being opposed to one another, actually oppose the same monolithic force of capitalist patriarchy. Gaard (1993) articulates this force as “The Western intellectual tradition [which] has resulted in devaluing whatever is

associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans culture, and the mind” (p. 5). Queer theory and ecofeminism, as we can see, have clear parallels, and their synthesis is where Sprinkle’s EcoSexy emerges.

To suggest that the environment and sexuality do not cohere would be to ignore the intense language of animalism which surrounds sexuality. It is also present in the domestication of what Donna Haraway calls “companion species.” Bob Barker spent decades telling us to spay and neuter our pets. Humane Societies sterilize animals before they are made available for adoption. In a factory somewhere, a bull is being jerked off; elsewhere a farmer is “artificially” inseminating a springer. The sex lives of companion species have been considered the biblically-imparted dominion of mankind for some time. But we also write animalism into our own sex lives—animal sex is the go-to metaphor for articulating “wild” sexuality, whether queer or straight. We invite the cock(s), the pussy, bears and otters, beavers, chicks and all other manners of beastly humans into our homes, our beds, our dungeons before the heels fly up and we fuck, like rabbits, like dogs, like animals. The linguistic foreplay of sexual transaction is littered with animal imagery. We eroticize humans as animals, and in so doing, we eroticize the animal kingdom as well.

EcoSexy inhabits a position of paradox and contradiction which, as discussed above, has been central to Sprinkle’s career, but which is also firmly rooted in post-modernism. Without a heavy debt, Sprinkle takes up the ironic, playful stance of manifestos like Duggan and McHugh’s (1996) “A Fem(me)nist Manifesto.” Not explicitly femme-identified, Sprinkle does seem to embody the mandate of “the performer who demands performance in return, the player who brings pleasure into play” (Duggan and McHugh,

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1996, p.154). Moreover, Sprinkle engages with what Duggan and McHugh (1996) describe as “the thorniest issues—desire and humor” (p.156). Sprinkle clearly counters what Duggan and McHugh (1996) cite as the humourless feminist, boring leftists; those products of a mainstream trying to deflate the efficacy of anti-hegemonic discourse. Sprinkle (2009) lovingly embraces the terms of derision which are flung at her from outsiders: “I’m a lot of things a lot of people love to hate. I’m a woman, I’m a whore, I’m an artist, I’m Jewish, I’m a very round woman [*laughs*].” But like many performance artists, Sprinkle’s humour is a tool to invite the audience into discussions of “thorny” issues like desire, like feminism, and like the environment. Unlike the call to arms of “A Fem(me)nist Manifesto”—which in true post-modern fashion is all style with no philosophy—Sprinkle uses humour, and flourish of style, as a window into her philosophy.

How to define the philosophy of EcoSexy, however, is not particularly simple. From ecofeminism it takes a concern for the environment, but it morphs it into concern for a lover or a partner. EcoSexy is, after all, concerned with loving the earth and all that that may entail. In articulating ecosexuality as a “new sexual identity,” Sprinkle attempts to cast a broad net, referring to various ways that we may have had ecosexual experiences, the ways we might all be somewhat ecosexual. Largely the focus is on a sexual relationship to nature itself—less to do with the language, the articulation, the construction and sexualisation of nature, and more to do with a personal, physical and emotional connection to nature’s aspects directly. Relatively commonplace activities like skinny dipping or bathing are imbued with an eroticism that is redirected towards the Earth itself. Implied within this spectrum is the possibility of erotic attachment not to any particular body, but to an Earthly body, a Mother Nature. Beneath Sprinkle and Stephens’ Love Art Lab wedding to

the Earth is the implication that we could have a relationship with the Earth alone (rather than to each other). In so doing, they articulate a sexuality which is wholly deferred from the body, procreation, and survivalism. Loving the Earth has been taken in a particularly literal way to mean: “treat the Earth as your lover.” This invocation has particularly fascinating implications, but also indicates a connection to a strand of feminism which I have yet to discuss, one which would also seem incongruous with ecological activism: cyborg feminism.

Like “A Fem(me)nist Manifesto,” discussed above, Donna Haraway’s 1991 “Cyborg Manifesto” is invested in irony and contradiction. In a manner that seems fully contradictory to ecofeminism, we are called to identify with machines, embrace our already-cyborg-like qualities. But Haraway (1991) actually metaphorizes the similarities between the machine (unnatural) and nature (surprisingly, natural), stating that “Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum and these machines are eminently portable, mobile—a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore” (p. 153). The machine becomes bound to the natural, forced as it is to submit to the laws of physics (electromagnetic waves), causing not only human pain in Detroit, but vast earthly pain from manipulated energy, refracted from its ‘nature,’ or intended directionality. Machines are both natural and unnatural at once, calling into question the oppositional construction of what is natural and what is not. But this “human pain” is not only that of the Rust Belt’s outsourced employment crisis, but the legacy of production methods: the chemical foundations of mechanized productions which both pack up and move with the factory yet lurk in the soil, water and air, with an endless half-life terrorizing the yet-unmade organisms-to-be. In short,

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pollution, which travels, voraciously contagious, over the planet. Haraway (1991) writes extensively on pollution, suggesting that “cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine” (p. 176). Yet the concept of pollution is being transfigured through identity politics—pollution holds multiple identities together, pollution is resistance against an essential or “pure” identity politics. This concept is fraught in *EcoSexy*, which attempts to define how an ecosexual may identify using a scale modelled after Kinsey’s 0-6 scale for homosexuality. Yet at the same time Sprinkle herself presents a conflicted identity, inhabiting many disparate identities at once.

Pollution, of course, indicates something entirely different in environmentalism—a fully destructive force. And here, perhaps, is the stark difference between the politics of cyborg and ecofeminism and Sprinkle's synthesis of them both. Pollution, for Haraway (1991), becomes a means of survival and revolution; discussing the cyborg in science-fiction, she posits: “cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (p. 175). Pollution steers us away from original innocence, from purity, from identity politics, towards a hybrid being (animal-machine-human) which is capable of surviving. Ecofeminism too, with its latent emphasis on the heterofamilial, the future generation, and reproduction, is about survival—survival of the race, which depends upon a curtailing of the excess of capitalism. *EcoSexy* does not have a built-in survival instinct, at least, not one for the human race. In fact, in a certain light, Sprinkle suggests that the human, the ecosexual, is less important than the lover: Earth. *EcoSexy* not only defers desire away from the body, but it suggests a sexuality in which the human is not the ultimate (penultimate, perhaps). Here too are the

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resonances of queer sexuality; a sexuality which takes on a history of exclusion from the hegemonic construction of coupledness and procreation. EcoSexy posits that there are alternative formations of desire, ones outside of heterosexist family forms, and it also reconstructs a hierarchy in which Man, the emblem of patriarchy, cannot be at the top, because “*Mankind*” is not the highest form of being. This suggestion also opens the door to a set of theories in which the self-indulgent survival of our own species is not ideal—a new theory in which the planet and its physiology is more important than human replication.

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# **REPRESENTATION AND AESTHETIC: (DIS)IDENTIFICATION AND SELF REPRESENTATION IN THE WORK OF DEL LAGRACE VOLCANO**

Amy Silverberg

Jay Prosser (1998) has argued that theorists such as Judith Butler have great difficulty in discussing the physical body. I contend that theories of discourse tend to reduce the body to an idea and a symbol of the workings of power in society. Both feminist and queer theory have drawn upon trans bodies and identities to elaborate their theories on the fluidity and performativity of gender. Other theories have also subsumed the transgender body as a figure for the instability of gender. Sara Davidmann (2009), a cis-gendered photographer and essayist, argues that “photographs of private atypical visualizations of gender taken into the public realm constitute an intervention that facilitates a questioning of pre-conceptions of gender and the body, contest[ing] the boundaries of the binaries, and present[ing] a challenge to the gender system” (¶ 54).

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There is a tendency to view transgender artwork as a commentary on the transgressive or subversive nature of trans identity; this has the effect of diminishing not merely the subject's identity but also the aesthetic of the work and the transformative value of the work in and of itself. Members of a community deemed unintelligible through dominant assumptions and discourse can use photography as a technology to transgress and thus deconstruct those assumptions, creating new meanings through acts of self-representation. I further contend that we cannot use the transgender "subject" as a tool to deconstruct our assumptions of a gender/sex binary. Once a subject is *used* as proof of a theory that "subject" ceases to embody their own subjectivity.

These points will be elaborated with an in depth discussion on the self-identified "gender variant" visual artist and photographer Del LaGrace Volcano and his retrospective publication "Sublime Mutations" (2000). Volcano's 'corpus' consists of astonishingly tender and beautiful images created in collaboration with queer-identified people who both question and shed light on new possibilities for understanding gender variant identity and artistic representation.

### THE PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIUM

Volcano (1993) discusses the history of "the camera as being thought of as an invasive and patriarchal (phallic) tool, the contemporary equivalent to the evil eye" (Grace<sup>1</sup>, p. 92). He describes his camera as being an extension of himself, which he calls his "lesbian cock," and uses it as a tool of desire, pleasure and cultural production. Used as a tool for pleasure

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1 For clarity in citations: some past publications by Del LaGrace Volcano have appeared under the surname Grace.

and expression, the camera becomes a futuristic technology for Volcano. While formerly understanding his camera as obtrusive and male, he now sees it as a part of himself. The “image” for Volcano is the product connected to the human. Visual consumption of the image allows connection with others, as the image makes its way into the psyche of the consumer. This visual product questions identity, gender, pleasure and sexuality. It moves beyond the physical picture itself and becomes part of a cultural learning process.

Historically, photographic technology has been used as a means of communication, knowledge production, and as a tool of representation. Photography was capable not only of transmitting, but also creating facts. In the first half of the twentieth century, modernist photography offered a particular way of seeing. Wells (2000) argues, “Modernism aimed to produce a new kind of world and new kind of human beings to people it” (p. 19). At this time, photography was seen as the most important form of representation for documenting the world, as well as creating cultural meanings from the images themselves. However, the meaning of an image does not exist in and of itself. Rather, people create the meaning, and this meaning is based on the individual, social, and cultural experiences of each person. Textual representations therefore become sites of struggle over conflicting meanings and experiences. If we gain meaning from our culture and these meanings are then reproduced through the image, the image then takes on the task of representing the truth.

John Tagg (1988), in his work “The Burden of Representation,” uses the theories of Michel Foucault to explore the way in which photography was used as a mechanism for maintaining social hierarchies. He insists on “the need to trace the complex relations between representation, knowledge and ideology in terms which take account of fundamental class

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interests at stake” (Tagg, 1988, p. 56). He terms this “the prerequisites of realism” to explore the ways in which the photograph is a symbolic exchange, while simultaneously referring to the values implicated in such an exchange. He is concerned with how the photograph represents truth and meaning while simultaneously being the creator and representation of that meaning. This is an analysis of how the social utility of photography functions and the institutional frameworks within which they are produced and consumed.

Critics have drawn attention to the ways in which photography has been used as a political and ideological tool in defining social types viewed as different or other. The photograph’s obsessive concern to record, catalogue, explore, reveal, compare and measure, with particular affinity to the human body, can be seen as a part of the disciplinary process, as well as the representational one. Victorian men of science delineated inner and moral character by scrutinizing photographic subjects. Employing the use of the seemingly “impartial eye” of the camera, they recorded varieties of difference traced on patients’ bodies. Culture shapes societal viewpoints, and the impartial eye of photography was wielded as proof that those viewpoints were objective truth.

Therefore, when we interrogate how photographs speak/think politically, it is necessary to think of them as discursive practices situated within the general economy of societal creation. Volcano (1993) recognizes the utility in which the camera has been used and asks:

What might an image look like if both the photographer and the photographed inhabited the subject position, or even if the subject-object dynamics oscillated between them in a way that caused the spectator to question his or her own positioning? (Grace, p. 90).

Prosser (2000) probes along the same lines, stating, “Instead of the anxiety and fear one might expect from those whose identities have a history of shaming and abjection, these subjects bring to the camera an evident pride and pleasure bearing all” (p. 10). Volcano's imperative is to represent those who, like him, fall just outside what culture deems normal or intelligible. There is collaboration between subject and photographer, allowing both creation and trust.

In recent years, those who want to construct their own history have used photography as a means for self-representation. Their photographs can be personal and autobiographical tactics that marginalized communities utilize to oppose past historical representations. These communities deconstruct dominant assumptions within and about earlier artistic representations, and create works embodying resistance. Volcano's aesthetic seeks to disrupt the modality in which photography has been used. Central to the politics of representation is the question of whose experience is being validated. Volcano is not only invested in the exhibition of his work, but also in the process by which photographic seeing can foster alternative social and political perceptions. Volcano refutes the “concept of the body beautiful, that there is only one acceptable body type. Mutations come in many forms...” (Prosser, 2000, p. 5). Mutation, as Prosser (2000) discusses in the introduction to Volcano's photographic retrospective “Sublime Mutations”, “conjures up a change that is neither clear cut nor complete” (p. 2). Prosser (2000) continues, “If the point of transition is to get over the change, mutation implies ongoing and unimaginable change...” (p. 6). Transgendered embodiment and experience can be said to be unique for each individual who is transitioning. Prosser (1998) describes transition as:

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intermediate nonzone, transition represents the movement in between that threatens to dislocate our ties to identity places we conceive of essentially (in every sense) secure. Transition provokes discomfort, anxiety—both for the subject in transition and for the other in the encounter; it pushes up against the very feasibility of identity. (p. 3)

Volcano manipulates and plays with these feelings of discomfort and anxiety through his photographs. He exposes the moments of the in-between; the body not fully “secure” in its sexed position. Prosser, in his 1998 book *Second Skins: The Body Narrative of Transsexuality*, questions how we can “represent the transitions of transsexuality, and how to put into narratives its remarkable bodily trajectories”(p. 4). He continues to discuss how the narrative of transsexuality has been taken up, where “the overwhelming tendency in work that does address transsexual bodies is to isolate medical discourse to the exclusion of subjective accounts and to emphasize the transsexual's construction by the medical establishment” (Prosser, 1998, p. 8). These constructionist theories, Prosser (1998) argues, fail to account for the ways in which the transsexual subject creates their own subjectivity. It does not take into account the way in which this subject has the capacity “not only to initiate and effect his/her own semantic transition but to inform and redefine the medical narrative of transsexuality” (Prosser, 1998, p. 8).

## ART AESTHETIC AND LANGUAGE

The images that Volcano produces play with the narrative of transsexuality and gender variant identity. Through his artistry, Volcano mocks, bends, and subverts norms, on a difficult and transformative field

through the articulation of new selves. Volcano is a part of the complex work of examining, articulating, and (re)constructing identities. He does this through his involvement in “disidentification”. Muñoz (1999) writes, “Disidentification resists the interpolating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus. It is a reformatting of self within the social” (p. 97). He further argues that disidentification “is a performative mode of tactical recognition that minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 97). Volcano seeks to make bodies, all bodies, and break away from the representations and restraints on the “social body”. Citing Mary Douglas, Meg Lovejoy (2001) discusses the social body as “a form or surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and commitments of a culture are inscribed. The central insight [Douglas] offers is the idea of the body as a symbolic medium of culture” (p. 239). At the core of Volcano’s artistic representations is the drive for radical cultural production, with the impulse towards cultural critique.

There is immediacy in Volcano’s work which allows for an understanding of how it functions not as symbol but as aesthetic. This is contingent upon artistic immediacy as defined by Henri Bergson (2008). Art, according to Bergson (2008), “has no other function but to brush aside the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself” (p. 75). Art, in this sense, is essentially concrete, individual, non-conventional, and thus uniquely real. The constructed and accepted meanings of language fall short of the artistic and aesthetic representation that Volcano is invested in. Languages, used in theoretical interpretations of transgender identity, are often abstract and frequently generalize experience; in this sense language fails to faithfully represent

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the gender variance within Volcano's work. Art may produce feelings which are inexpressible in words; the feelings gained by the aesthetic are individual and real for the viewer. There is, then, a relationship between the image and the viewer. Each individual will not see the same thing as someone else, thus creating their own meaning. Theorists who have relied upon the trans body articulate their systems of gender detract from individual ways of both presenting and viewing the aesthetic of art.

It would be a disservice to reduce Volcano's work solely to transgression of heteronormativity. His images incite a narrative of autobiography and biography, loss and gain, love and intimacy, sex and expression. We cannot simplify these representations to only the subversion of cultural norms based on gender and sexuality; disruption does not describe the totality of his art. "Tranz Portraits" (2000) captures transsexual men as they appear, without visible difference from any cismale. "Trans Genital Landscapes" (2000) provides photographs of genitals and "Tranz Romance" reveals an "aesthetic of intimacy" (Volcano, 2000, p. 10). Volcano is not so much concerned with the subject position of the viewer but what he is representing of his subjects. If "Tranz Portraits" establishes the *real*, then "Trans Genital Landscapes" deals with the real of transsexuality, while "Tranz Romance" represents the sexuality and intimacy between a couple.

Volcano's use of photographing the genitals of transsexual individuals destabilizes the construction of "the medicalized trans body" and its representation through both medical and artistic portraiture. Volcano's (2000) portrait "Trans Cock 1" (p. 151) examines the medical fascination with both trans and racialized genitalia, where the size and shape of the penis of the Other, whether a black man's or a trans man's, has remained one of medical and social inquiry. There is an obsession with

the exotic “other” and penis size, stemming from anxieties during slavery that black men would rape the wives of white men, because black men were considered sexually deviant and insatiable. Here, Volcano uses the tape measure, signifying scientific technology, to uncover the black penis as the object of fetishization and otherness. By displaying close ups of genitals, we have no other choice but to *look*. The individual in the portrait itself is making the choice to show the difference of their body. Volcano does not create one type of transgendered subject; he allows and accounts for different types of presentation and self-expression, thus recognizing trans identity as an individual experience. It disallows the viewer to create an all-encompassing identity of any of the subjects presented. Volcano’s work denies any simple conclusion.

The way in which Volcano has photographed his models allows for each individual to construct their own identity. Volcano’s “gender optional” portraits show his imperative to “disidentify” and “mutate” into different selves. “Andro Del” (Volcano, 2000, p. 176), “daddy Del” (p. 174) and “mad Debby” (p. 179) exhibit his interest in exposing the different subject positions he embodies. Volcano represents the many “reals” identity has to offer, not for us, but for him. He is creating a narrative specific to his subjective identification.

Within language and representation the meanings and truths of specific individuals have been left out. Volcano creates photographs for the creation of new truths, new meanings and new histories. The future that Volcano is accessing has the ability to create a new relationship between what we see and what we know. If his photographs signify his truths and his experiences, how can we view them from our already preconceived notions or language? He is involved in a complete dismantling and transgression of the truth we have known. The image of

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the transsexual is set up in opposition to both the normative male or female (cisgendered normativity) and transgender gender ambiguity (the genderqueer). Yet, there is a theoretical problem with drawing oppositional conclusions from work that is so clearly performing a resistance to cohere.

Volcano's *Sublime Mutations* (2000) allows people to be voyeurs into the possibilities of sublimity and mutation. We cannot fix stable meanings to his work as it only offers the possibility to "disidentify". There are *only* possibilities in his work. Prosser (1998) discusses this as being equal to a threesome, "it is not a matter of two, for two can only meet only in a third, which could be the eye, the eye as a third sex, which is not tied to the definitions of male and female" (p. 188). As Volcano's images are read, they do not exist within the binary of man and woman, but offer us sublime limitless possibilities. The camera is the eye in which Volcano wants us to see; *his* eye, not the lens of culture, gender, or constructed form. He is offering us new ways of seeing, not in relation to our own gender, but to see his many realities; the many opportunities of what could be if we allow ourselves to disconnect from our assumptions. Volcano, through the use of photographic technology, disrupts identifiable language and creates new meanings through the act of self-representation. It is in his work that we see the limitlessness and overlapping of bodies, the desire, the feeling and the intimacy. To see his work only in relation to two, does a disservice to the multiplicity he is creating. Man, woman, android, Volcano, Del... Gender optional.

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# **QUEER(S) BEHIND BARS: THE MATERIAL HISTORY OF SAME-SEX SEX IN AMERICAN PRISONS, 1890-1945**

Natasha Novac

In her book *Criminal Intimacy*, historian Regina Kunzel (2008) writes: “[w]hile historians of sexuality have paid little attention to prisons and prisoners, historians of the prison have paid scant attention to sex and sexuality” (p. 5). Despite this history of scholastic neglect, the following paper will argue that same-sex sex among prisoners has been a critical site of knowledge production about human sexuality throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ultimately, this paper aims to reframe the subject of same-sex sex in prison as a fruitful, if neglected, chapter of queer history. Indeed, the modern North American prison system and the sexual behaviour of those incarcerated have left an indelible mark on how we understand sexual orientation, where it comes from, and how it works.

Homosexuality has always interacted with the criminal justice system, predominantly through the persecution of same-sex sexuality, yet

little work has yet been done on the unique social history of prisoners engaging in same-sex sex acts while living within the system. Potential reasons for this silence are, among others: the criminalization of homosexuality throughout the nineteenth century and the subsequent absence of primary source material, limited access to material resources for prisoners, and a prison culture which functioned largely under a cloak of secrecy. This paper, however, focuses on a more epistemological explanation for this subject's neglect: the historical development of the homosexual as a category of personhood, and the ways in which the figure of the homosexual does—or does not—figure into the material history of the prison.

The critical importance of same-sex sex in prison is borne of a unique epistemological conundrum. Primary source material on the prison, including sociological studies and prisoner autobiographies, reports that same-sex activity occurred by and large between so-called “straight” prisoners. These men and women self-identified as heterosexual prior to (and often during) incarceration, and upon release often returned to heterosexual relationships with opposite-sex partners (Halleck and Hersko, 1962; Giallombardo, 1966, p. 98). The homosexual behaviour of these prisoners was problematic because it threw an epistemological wrench into the idea of a fixed and immutable sexual preference. A new trend of understanding sexual preference as a facet of identity, what Foucault (1978) calls “the truth of the self” (p. 69-70) had been developing. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this new explanation for human sexuality failed to account for the proliferation of same-sex sexual activity among people who were incarcerated. Were these prisoners “gay” if they only had same-sex sex while behind bars? Reports reveal a confused and anxious inability to understand this type of behaviour using the newly

available analytical toolbox of essentialist sexuality. Moreover, this inability to conceptualize and compartmentalize same-sex sex among prisoners affects almost all sociological literature on the subject from the late nineteenth to late twentieth centuries. The disconnect between the lived sexual experiences of many prisoners and the analytical tools used to understand them marked the prison as a site of rupture between the sexual realities of early twentieth century inmates and the reigning sexual schema.

So are prisoners who have same-sex sex while in prison a part of queer history or not? Seeking answers to this question requires a comprehensive analysis of how homosexuality has been understood throughout the early twentieth century. This paper interrogates the discursive history of consensual same-sex sex in prison in order to discover how same-sex sex in prison has interacted with understandings of homosexuality, and what the epistemological rupture between acts and identities has contributed—if anything—to the history of modern sexuality<sup>1</sup>. By its conclusion I hope to demonstrate how the subject has contributed to the rise and fall of sexual essentialism as the dominant mode of understanding human sexuality in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries.

#### THE DISCURSIVE HISTORY OF SAME-SEX SEX IN PRISON

Historically, little attention has been paid to the subject of sex in sociological literature on the prison (Kunzel, 2008, p. 4; Eigenberg, 2000).

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1 It should be noted that this paper deals only with the issue of consensual same-sex sex, and does not participate or draw conclusions from the wide body of research on coercive sex or sexual violence in prison. For more information on prison rape and its attendant issues see Anthony M. Scacco Jr., *Rape in Prison* (Springfield: C.C. Thomas, 1975) and David James Friar and Carl Weiss, *Terror in the Prison: Homosexual Rape and Why Society Condone It* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974).

Given the stringent attention paid to almost all other aspects of prison life in research from this era, the subject of sex among prisoners went remarkably under-acknowledged and under-theorized until well into 1950s. It was only in the 1940s that prison officials began to directly refer to and discuss how to deal with the “problem” of homosexuality in institutions, and several decades later before the first thorough analyses of prison sexual culture began to emerge (Freedman, 1996, p. 404; see also Giallombardo 1966; Ward and Kassenbaum 1965; and Sykes 1958). In 1913, Margaret Otis published the first analysis of same-sex sexual relations among female inmates in a New Jersey girl’s reformatory. It was not until 1931, sixteen years later, that sociologist L. Selling revisited the subject in his study on “pseudo-families” in women’s institutions, touching briefly on the occurrence of “girl-girl” sexual relationships in family groups. In 1934, former US federal prison inspector Joseph Fishman published the first book-length commentary on the subject, *Sex in Prison: Revealing Sex Conditions in American Prisons*, which remained the only comprehensive analysis for the next thirty-odd years.

These three examples notwithstanding, the startling lack of scholastic interest in the sexual comportment of prisoners fails to recognize the importance of sex in prison culture. In fact, some contemporary sociologists argue that sex is one of the central organizing features of prison life; in 1965 sociologists David A. Ward and Gene Kassenbaum claimed that “the phenomenon of homosexuality [...] is the single most pervasive influence in the prison” (p. 219). Sex between inmates and the administrative responses to it have influenced everything from the spatial organization of the prison to the make-up of prisoner society (including “pseudo-families”) to the presence of sex-related health risks like HIV. I aim to prove that sociological neglect of same-sex sex among prisoners is

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a critical site of entry into the making of what we know of today as ‘modern’ sexuality, broadly defined as a general acceptance of and an adherence to the idea of sexual essentialism. In particular, the silence around the subject of same-sex sex in prison has aided the construction and naturalization of essentialist sexual identity norms.

Our contemporary sexual regime is founded on what Sedgwick (1990) calls the “world-mapping” (p. 2) strategy of sexuality-as-identity. It is a regime in which “every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or a female gender, [is now] considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or a hetero-sexual sexuality” (Sedgwick, 1990 p. 2). One’s designation as either homo- or hetero-sexual is based on one’s sexual object-choice, which was expected to be consistent and innate to one’s character. Observing that the vast majority of seemingly heterosexual inmates were having homo-sexual sex behind bars, early twentieth century prison observers found themselves experiencing a sort of observational obstacle. If these prisoners were only having same-sex sex while incarcerated, what was their sexual identity? Their analytical toolbox was not equipped to process a type of sexual object-choice driven not by innate preference but rather by space, place and circumstance (i.e. the circumstance of incarceration). The possibility of a malleable sexual preference, which might explain these prisoners’ sexual behaviour, was as yet far outside the scope of sociological and (what would eventually become known as) sexological comprehension.

In response to this categorical problem, prison observers developed theories for the sexual behaviour they witnessed which placed the prison population outside the sexual norms of free society. Same-sex sex in prison was considered a reaction to the unique pains and challenges of incarceration: it was ‘circumstantial’ or ‘situational’, driven not by desire

but by the unique physical and psychological strains of prison life. For example, many commentators hypothesized that the majority of same-sex sex occurred as a necessary response to the pains of heterosexual deprivation; appropriately, this explanation was called the 'deprivation theory' (Sykes, 1958). In an era where the notion of sexual fluidity had yet to gain traction, sociologists used situational analyses of prison sexual culture to avoid having to explain how same-sex sex occurred among straight-identified inmates. This explanation allowed them to maintain the coherence of the sexual essentialist framework. If circumstance was the driving force behind same-sex sex between inmates, it was redundant to try and reconcile prisoners' sexual behaviour with the sexual expectations of the world beyond bars. The prison was seen as a world unto itself, with its own sexual norms and protocol, and the people within it could not be held to increasingly naturalized expectations of essentialist-driven sexual behaviour. Moreover, an abundance of other reasons were available outside the realm of sexual knowledge to explain the seemingly unexplainable sexual behaviour of people in prison. As will be discussed, homosexual activity among inmates was often problematically attributed to assumptions of criminal degeneracy, racial inclination and mental illness. These explanations were rhetorical strategies which diverted attention away from sexuality and the limitations of sexual analytic tools, including the disconnection between situational sex acts in prison and essentialist explanatory models.

The subject of prison sex has ironically made its mark on the history of modern sexuality by being excluded from sociological research on sex in the early to mid-twentieth century. Broadly speaking, sociological silence borne of epistemological uncertainty about the causes and conditions of homosexuality behind bars confined the possibility of situational sexual

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activity to the site of the prison. In other words, the subject of prison sex has been framed in period sociological literature in a way that emphasizes the connection between sexual fluidity or 'situational' sexuality with criminality and other forms of social marginalization. In this way the discursive history of prison sex bolstered the perception of sexual essentialism as the only legitimate and viable sexual subject position to occupy, while effectively containing "queerness", defined literally as non-conformity to sexual norms, behind bars. But just as prison studies helped structure and reinforce the era of essentialist sexuality, they also eventually helped reveal flaws in this taxonomy. By remaining stubbornly resistant to the explanatory logic of the essentialist framework, same-sex sex in prison eventually became a major conceptual problem in the field of prison studies. Demand arose for new perspectives which might better explain and predict the workings of prison sexual culture. The silence around same-sex sex in prison thus helped expose the glaring inconsistencies in the essentialist framework, namely its inability to contain the possibility of fluid sexual object-choice. By remaining resistant to the taxonomic pressures of the early twentieth century sexuality, prison sexual culture contributed to the demand for new types of sexual knowledge.

### UNDERSTANDING PRISON SEX: SITUATIONAL ANALYSES

Essentialist sexual norms were just beginning to appear when the first prison observers, including L Selling (1931) and Margaret Otis (1913), began taking notice of same-sex sex among prisoners. At this time the social and sexual relations of prisoners were believed to function on a sociological plane completely separate from free society: prisons were

unique spaces which developed their own unique inner rules and regulations. Because prison society was considered unique, prison observers believed that studying prisons required the development of prison-specific sociological lenses. For example, in 1931 L. Selling developed the notion of “pseudo-families” to explain the proliferation of tight-knit groups of women that he observed in female correctional institutions. He proposed that the idea “that institutional life is abnormal is universally conceded” (Selling, 1931, p. 247), and argued that in an attempt to ease the difficulty of incarceration, female inmates tended to organize themselves into familial groups which mimicked their pre-carceral lives. In other words, “pseudo-families” arose as compensatory responses to inmates’ loss of contact with their biological families. Institutions were for the most part tolerant of these cliques, as “primary groups” were considered a stabilizing influence on delinquent teenage girls (Selling, 1931). In his study Selling (1931) located the root motivation of pseudo-family participation in the experience of incarceration, and particularly in the loss of contact with one’s biological family.

At the turn of the twentieth century, ‘situational’ analyses of prisoner behaviour like Selling’s (1931) gained remarkable popularity among criminologists, prison administrators and even prisoners themselves as a means to understand the development of prisoner culture. In hindsight, Sykes labeled this interpretive lens the ‘deprivation model’, in which prisoner behaviour could be traced back to “the unique pains of imprisonment”, including “the forfeiture of liberty, withholding of goods and services, denial of heterosexual relationships, loss of autonomy, the sacrifice of security, boredom, lack of privacy, and forced association” (cited in Hensley, Tewkesbury, & Koscheski, 2002 p. 126). Situational analyses explained prison sexual relations as well as the result of “spatial rather than

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temporal circumstances” (Kunzel, 2008, p. 4), meaning circumstances unique and confined to the site of the prison and separated from the temporal changes of society at large. The sexual fluidity of incarcerated men and women also came to be understood as intimately connected with the prison and the unique circumstances of imprisonment. The assumption was that the strangeness and difficulty of the prison experience encouraged sexual behaviour in individuals who otherwise may never have displayed homosexual tendencies. Furthermore, by locating homosexual inclination in the prison experience itself, the subtext of these documents suggests that upon release from prison, the majority of prisoners would return to heterosexual relations.

Evidently, situational analyses of prisoners’ sexuality did not employ our contemporary identity-based notions of homosexuality. In the late nineteenth century ‘the homosexual’ was just beginning to emerge in free society as a distinct social type, most often characterized by gender inversion (effeminacy in men and masculinity in women). Prisoners engaging in same-sex sex were rarely seen as ‘homosexuals’ per se, that is, members of a particular sexual minority category defined by their innate attraction to people of the same sex. Prisoners were not expressing queer desire in their trysts; instead, they were merely responding to institutional stimuli. In fact, at times prisoner sexual relations seemed to be about everything *but* desire: sex was alternatingly about family, kinship, protection, coercion, gender inversion, racial inclination, mental incapacitation, and poverty. Sociologists traced same-sex sex between prisoners back to interracial attraction, deprivation of heterosexual contact (Otis, 1913), the female need for emotional intimacy and familial bonds (Selling, 1931), and pathological criminal degeneracy which encouraged individuals to engage in sins both social and sexual (Reynolds, 1890). We see here how the

sexuality of prisoners was seen to function on a different level from that of free society, where sexual attraction was considered an intimate facet of one's identity.

The idea of 'circumstantial' or 'situational' homosexuality echoed the broader notion of prisons as enclosed societies with their own norms and protocol. Supported by space-based interpretations like the deprivation theory, prison sexual culture was considered to be largely unaffected by the sexual norms operating in free society, including changes in the body of knowledge about sexuality (*like essentialism*). Kunzel (2008) points out that, as a result, the sexual behaviour of prisoners was understood as "peculiarly, even obstinately, ahistorical [...] apparently unmoored from sexual identity and resistant to the taxonomic pressures of the twentieth century" (p. 4). Moreover, the explanation of what came to be known as 'situational homosexuality' in homosocial spaces rendered any further discussion of the topic virtually unnecessary. Besides mere curiosity, the sexual comportment of incarcerated people was framed as inconsequential to the outside world because it operated differently. As we will see, this finalizing assessment of same-sex sex in prison served a critical rhetorical and social function in the 70-odd years from the late 1890s to the 1960s. People may have spontaneously 'turned' gay if they were sent to jail; however for 'normal' people in free society, sexual preference was largely considered immutable and fixed. Thus framing same-sex sex in prison as a non-issue for the general public effectively and strategically halted any discussion on the possibility of sexual malleability outside of the prison context. Consequently, this rhetorical strategy allowed norms of sexual essentialism to proliferate unchallenged.

'THE REAL THING':  
SEXOLOGY AND AMERICAN PRISONS IN  
THE EARLY TO MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

In her article “The Prison Lesbian: Race, Class and the Construction of Aggressive Female Homosexuality 1915-1965”, feminist historian Estelle B. Freedman (1996) profiles the case of Jane MacGregor, whose same-sex sexual activities were initially assessed by a prison psychiatrist as the result of an unfulfilled need for affection and “mother love” (p. 410). To discourage Jane’s homosexual proclivities, prison officials altered the institutional circumstances around Jane’s sentence, recommending increased recreation time and a new daily duty caring for animals. Yet despite attempts to reroute MacGregor’s attention her homosexual activities continued, and the psychiatrist was forced to conclude at her parole hearing two years later that MacGregor was indeed “strongly homosexual” (Freedman, 1996, p. 410). As a result the parole board revoked her release, citing her homosexuality as a symptom of a pathological illness which deemed her unfit for employment (Freedman, 1996).

Jane’s case illustrates an interesting transition point in the history of homosexuality. The mid- to late nineteenth century saw an upsurge of theories on the causes of sexual orientation, and these theories began to bleed into sociological examinations of prison life. Jane’s same-sex desire was eventually recognized by her psychiatrist as an innate and hence uncontrollable attraction, an assessment which reflected emerging notions of stable sexual identity categories of “gay” and “straight”. At the same time, Jane’s homosexuality was understood as a disease, reflecting the widespread understanding of gayness as a mental illness. Inmates like Jane, whose homosexuality seemed to be innate, were rare exceptions to

understandings of homosexual activity behind bars as merely stimulated by circumstance. Jane's case became one of the first studies on 'true' homosexuals in American prisons, a sexual category which was just beginning to develop. Prominent sexologists in North America and Europe were beginning to assemble typological profiles of 'the homosexual' as an individual whose same-sex desire was dictated by internal constitution. According to early sexological reports, 'true' homosexuality was "a congenital trait with somatic causes" (Kunzel, 2008, p. 59). In other words, attraction to the same sex was a biological and/or psychological predisposition. It was a "constitutional abnormality", considered on par with other supposedly immutable traits like criminality, colour-blindness, and genius (Ellis, 1928, p. 310).

The small percentage of inmates who fit this description of the 'true' homosexual were thus fundamentally different from their 'situational' or 'pseudo-homosexual' counterparts because their homosexuality was physically and psychologically based, and hence impossible to cure. The 'homosexual-by-constitution' perspective had the effect of alleviating blame from the individual, but increasing their social marginalization. For example, mid-nineteenth century sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing assigned weighty legal significance to the distinction between the constitutional and the circumstantial homosexual. As an acquired behaviour, situational homosexuality was considered to be an avoidable "perversity" like vice and sin, a sort of deplorably bad habit that was punishable by law. Homosexuality rooted in an individual's constitution, on the other hand, was a "congenital" pathology, and therefore not the fault of the individual (Kunzel, 2008, p. 53). However, this logic did not always apply in prison societies. 'True' homosexuality was thought to be made visible by some manner of gender inversion, whether masculinity in women or

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effeminacy in men. Non-normative gender presentation often made homosexual inmates the targets of sexual violence behind bars, and they were frequently segregated for their own safety. Some inmates, like Jane MacGregor, were also punished or institutionalized in hopes of containing their psychological abnormality.

### SEPARATING THE 'TRUE HOMOSEXUALS' FROM THE 'PRISON TURNOUT'

In the early 1900s a small number of sociologists began focusing on the experiences of 'true' homosexuals (like Jane MacGregor) in prisons, including Selling (1931), and Otis (1913). By the 1930s, prison observers began regularly referencing the typology of true or pathological versus situational homosexuals and organizing prison life around this separation (Kunzel, 2008, p. 58). Increased attention to 'true' homosexual inmates arose because situational analyses were no longer covering all the bases in terms of predicting and controlling same-sex sex in the jailhouse. The homosexual behaviour of some inmates began eluding situational analyses, betraying "troubling inconsistencies" in the model's explanatory accuracy (Kunzel, 2008, p. 58). Some prisoners, like Jane MacGregor, had multiple same-sex partners despite having changes made to their institutional surroundings. Other inmates presented prominent and consistent behavioural traits which fit various emerging typological models of the 'true' homosexual too neatly to be ignored, for example the "queens", "fairies" and "pansies" (i.e. effeminate men) of major urban institutions like Auburn, Pennsylvania State, and Sing Sing. Faced with a new type of prisoner who seemed to be *more* than 'circumstantially homosexual', prison observers made a demand for new explanations of same-sex sex in prison which went beyond the deprivation model. In particular they reached out to the

faddish new sexological reports floating into America from Europe on the constitution of 'the homosexual'. In line with concurrent sexological opinions of the congenital roots of homosexuality, sociologists writing about 'true' homosexuals in prison emphasized the pathological roots of homosexual behaviour. Importantly, they also stressed the linkages between homosexuality and other pathologies like psychological abnormality (including gender inversion) and criminal degeneracy.

On an administrative level, making conceptual distinctions between true and pseudo-homosexuals had a major impact on the everyday governance of prison life. For prisoners like MacGregor, for whom same-sex sexual activity seemed to be a consistent trait, aversion rarely proved to be a sufficient remedy. Most often these prisoners were cordoned off into their own separate quarters, along with other vulnerable or problem cases like the infirm. While classification and segregation were arguably done in the name of prisoner safety, prison officials also isolated inverts in an attempt to lessen the risk of 'homosexual contagion' (Kunzel, 2008, p. 87), fear that the combined stressors of institutional pressure, heterosexual deprivation and criminal intermingling would infect otherwise resistant prisoners with homosexual inclinations. The segregation policy thus reveals an interesting fracture in the general consensus about the constitutional nature of homosexuality. If same-sex desire was an immutable trait, why were prison administrators concerned around it 'spreading' to the general prison population?

'FAGGOT FACTORIES':  
PRISONS AND THE FEAR OF HOMOSEXUAL CONTAGION

Assumptions about the pathological connections between homosexual activity and criminality are woven tight into the body of literature

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about same-sex sex in prison, and contribute much to explaining why administrators so feared the 'infection' of homosexuality. In contrast to predominant notions about the constitutional source of homosexuality, same-sex desire was still considered by a small percentage of early-twentieth century sexologists to be an acquired and immoral habit, like vice and sin, something one *did* as opposed to something one *was*. As mentioned, the emerging typological profiles of 'true' homosexuals identified gayness primarily by gender presentation: the 'true queers' were men and women whose gender contradicted traditional expectations, the stereotypical 'mannish' women and effeminate men of pop culture. These individuals often became subject to the 'third sex' theory: effeminate men were considered to have female constitutions but male anatomy, and vice versa for masculine women. In prison, however, same-sex sex partners were rarely both gender non-normative. Instead prison couples often had one gender-normative partner and one gender non-normative: female-bodied couples were most often 'femme' and 'butch', while male couples were 'fag' and 'daddy'. The gender-normative partners did not fit the emerging typological profiles of 'the homosexual', and thus posed a problem of classification for administrators. What was the root of their sexual degeneracy if not a sexually abnormal disposition, of which gender inversion was a symptom? Sociologists eventually came to believe that gender-normative prisoners, the femmes and daddies, were not predisposed to homosexual activity *per se*; instead, they were of weak moral character, predisposed to moral corruption and crime. In the same way that one's homosexuality was essentially pathological, so too was one's criminality. Gender-normative prisoners were still considered abnormal; however it was their *criminal* abnormality, as opposed to their sexual, which was the root cause of their same-sex activities. Somewhat spectacularly,

this explanation managed to assimilate gender-normative people under the reigning rubric of homosexuality-as-gender-inversion.

Beyond homosexuality, prison administrators were equally concerned about the spread of criminal knowledge in the prison. The intermingling of hardened criminal degenerates like murderers, rapists and burglars with “softer” deviants like prostitutes, drug users and forgers was considered ideal breeding conditions for criminal conspiracies. Prison became a training ground where young criminals-to-be learned the lessons of illegality from their more experienced elders. Although originally intended to rehabilitate and redeem (see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*), prisons acquired a reputation in the late nineteenth century as “schools of the damned”, inducting young and vulnerable inmates into a criminal underworld. At the same time prisons also became known as uniquely queering sites, breeding homosexuality where previously no inclination had existed (Kunzel, 2008, p. 54). In particular, early prison observers worried that the psychic risks posed by incarceration, like intermingling with hardened criminals coupled with heterosexual deprivation, might trigger a ‘latent homosexual tendency’ in more vulnerable prisoners (Ellis, 1928, p. 322). The twin contagions of crime and homosexuality thus became a doubled risk for vulnerable inmates, two psychic threats to further corrupt the already-corrupted. Young male prisoners were considered to be especially vulnerable to the degrading influence of homosexuality and crime, and pains were taken in American prisons to segregate “kids” from older male prisoners who might further threaten their social and sexual standing (Kunzel, 2008, p.31). Fears about the infectious nature of crime and immorality, including anxiety around homosexual contagion, bred speculation among prison observers that the prison was, ironically, a site of proliferating vice (Ellis, 2008, p. 26). Many popular representations of

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prison at the turn of the twentieth century, including pulp novels, newspaper exposes and popular sociology reports, sensationalized this anxiety, labelling prisons “faggot factories” (Kunzel, 2008, p.33).

The sense of the prison as a uniquely queering site, part of a queer cartography at turn of the century America, suggests a qualified recognition of sexual malleability on the part of prison observers. Early prison studies remind us that despite the rapid development of essentialist norms, a diversity of opinions on the causes and characteristics of homosexuality did circulate among interested parties. Overall, however, the studies still work in the service of the essentialist framework. By uniting the society of criminals and homosexual activity, sociologists painted circumstantial same-sex sex as a type of debauched behaviour intimately connected with criminal deviance. This sociological trend reinforced the immoral and pathological opinions on both criminal activity and homosexuality. Moreover, this link relegated situational sexual activity to the site of the prison. By tying situational homosexuality (i.e. sexual fluidity) to the prison, sociologists effectively criminalized it. By criminalizing sexual fluidity, sociologists placed it firmly outside the sphere of influence for most mainstream observers. What was out of sight was out of mind; the problems posed by the supposed sexual malleability of prisoners were effectively locked behind bars.

MARKED:  
THE INFLUENCES OF GENDER, RACE AND CLASS

Markers signaling ‘true’ homosexuality in the early twentieth century often bore concurrent assumptions about gender, race and class. In this way an examination of how prison observers wrote about

homosexuality behind bars can also reveal broader historical narratives about the construction and conventions of other categories. In her book-length study *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*, historian Regina Kunzel (2008) interrogates the “intertwined histories of criminalized race and class and criminalized sexuality” (p. 6). First she points out that American prisons have always been disproportionately occupied by poor and working-class people and by people of colour, marking the prison as an important site in critical social histories of America (Kunzel, 2008). As a site of layered oppressions (see Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*), the American prison system and its historical evolution is uniquely revealing of how and why social constructions of race, gender and class have shifted in the past century. For example, Estelle Freedman (1996) argues that the aforementioned study by Margaret Otis (1913) on women in a New Jersey girls’ reformatory indicates how Black female sexuality was constructed as aggressive and masculine at the turn of the twentieth century (Freedman, p.400-01). In her study Otis (1913) made much of the fact that most female-female dyads formed between black and white students. Having observed that a great many white girls were engaged in the practice of “nigger-loving”, Otis (1913) concluded that “the difference in colour... takes the place of difference in sex, and ardent love affairs arise between white and coloured girls in schools where both are housed together” (p. 113). In other words, Otis (1913) understood interracial same-sex attraction as a type of racialized gender inversion, in which Black women became temporary substitutes for white men (Kunzel, 2008, p. 29). Otis’s (1913) study speaks to popular perceptions of Black female sexuality as stereotypically masculine: domineering, powerful and “denied [the] femininity” typically assigned to white women (Kunzel, 2008, p. 29). Moreover, in reading interracial lesbian

attraction through the lens of gender inversion, Otis succeeded in assuring onlookers of the fundamental heterosexuality of white partners (Freedman, 1996, p. 400). Kunzel (2008) also points out that the status of the white students in Otis' study as both criminal and largely working-class "would (also) have exempted them from assumptions of sexual propriety otherwise accorded to white women" (p. 30). Otis' (1913) study is a prime example of how same-sex relationships at the turn of the twentieth century were often understood not as a unique type of (gay) desire, but as a complex web of *opposite*-sex relations triangulated through racial and gender difference.

Period assumptions about gender and sexuality also came into play in analyses of prison sexual culture. As mentioned, gender inversion among prisoners, or presenting gendered characteristics typically assigned to the opposite of one's biological sex, was the most widely recognized sign of homosexuality. This interpretation of gender complemented concurrent sexological accounts of homosexuality as a form of sexual inversion, by which a homosexual man experienced an essentially female desire for other men, and vice versa for women. In other words gay men were thought to have a female disposition, although their male biology marked them as sexual 'inverts'. Very few studies exist which comment on the presence of masculine women in women's prisons; at the turn of the century women made up a scant percentage of the overall prison population, and scholarship around their carceral experiences is limited (Kunzel, 2008, p. 24). In men's prisons, male inverts drew a fair amount of sociological attention, presumably for the shock value of their gender presentation. "Queen culture" was on the rise inside the prison and out, and pulp novels and prisoner autobiographies often make mention of "pansies", "sissies", "fags", "boys" and "fairies". Thought to have adopted

the social and cultural roles of the female sex, these prisoners were noted for their feminine appearance and playing a receptive role in sex. Effeminate prisoners fell neatly into the typologies proposed by European sexologists Heinrich Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfield, who understood homosexuality to be “a migration of the soul” (from the male to female end of the gender spectrum) and indicative of “a third sex” (Kunzel, 2008, p. 50). The visibility of queens as a sexual minority spoke to the rumblings of a prison sexual culture in an era in which sexuality was rarely spoken of explicitly, and almost never in scholastic material. Queens and fairies were a unique and indelible part of the prison population, but their visibility made them the frequent targets of sexual violence at the hands of prison guards and their fellow inmates. Their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation lent justification to the segregation policy implemented throughout the 1900s.

WHY PRISON SEX MATTERS:  
LINKED PATHOLOGIES

The imperative among prison observers to chart and separate the ‘true’ from the ‘situational’ homosexuals reflected the increasing importance of essentialist sexual norms in the field of prison studies. The prevalence of essentialist sexual norms in prison literature also reveals two major points about the development of modern sexuality. First, as mentioned, ‘true’ sexuality was tracked among inmates as a combination of race, class and gender-based markers. Studies referencing ‘true’ homosexuals in prison revealed how evolving notions of homosexuality interacted with social constructions of other typological categories. Conversations about same-sex sex in prison were sometimes less about sexuality and the sexual subculture of the prison and more about projecting

and refining social norms about gender, race and class using the arena of sexuality. Freedman's 1996 work on the figure of the prison lesbian and the construction of Black female sexuality illustrates this trend well. Secondly, the racializing and pathologizing interpretations of same-sex sex in prison served the critical role of shooing the subject away from the sexual discourse of mainstream America. Same-sex sex was the business of criminals and people who were socially marginalized and not the American status quo, who were largely white, straight and middle-class.

In this way, the history of same-sex sex in prison served a critical function in the system of modern sexual knowledge. Identifying the phenomenon of situational homosexuality with the prison experience relegated the possibility of sexual fluidity to the unique, marginal and sparsely populated site of the prison. The situational explanations for same-sex sex in prison, so popular in the first fifty years of the twentieth century, were a way of accounting for a pattern of sexual behaviour which eluded, evaded and challenged the newly hegemonic norm of sexual essentialism. On a psychological level, attributing a tendency toward sexual fluidity to criminals suggested a pathological, and at the very least immoral, link between sexual malleability and another form of social deviance: crime. On a sociological level, containing the possibility of sexual fluidity among persons already marked by crime, poverty and non-normative gender presentation bolstered the mainstream acceptability of essentialist sexual norms. Pairing sexual fluidity with the prison normalized stable sexual identity categories by dismissing instances of its explanatory failure as the result of, among other things, criminal degeneracy. Described as it was as the concern of criminals and some members of socially marginalized categories, situational homosexuality was framed as a non-issue for

mainstream observers. In this climate, essentialist sexual norms were given room to proliferate beyond bars unchallenged.

SILENT HISTORY:  
CONTAINING QUEERNESS BEHIND BARS

Thus despite the lack of scholastic attention paid to the subject, same-sex sex in prison in the early years of the twentieth century still exerted a considerable force over the development of contemporary sexual norms. Homosexual prisoner relations have contributed to the history of modern sexuality, and particularly to the construction of what we now know as “gay” identity, by being framed by prison observers as what “gay” was *not*: circumstantial. In her article "Imitation and Gender Insubordination", Judith Butler (1991) argues that the silencing of homosexuality has historically been a means of establishing and naturalizing heterosexuality as the only viable sexual identity. Therefore, the vocalization of homosexual subjectivity is a “necessary error” in the advancement of anti-homophobic critique (Butler, 1991, p. 16). Butler (1991) takes issue with any political project mobilized behind a static identity category; the true nature of identity is malleable in her eyes, and she resists supporting the stable, essentialist notions of identity which frequently serve as “the normalizing categories of oppressive structures” (p. 16). Nevertheless, Butler (1991) concludes that it is necessary to speak of ‘the homosexual experience’, to “march under the banner of lesbian”, so to speak, despite its conceptual flaws, lest heterosexuality become the only sexual identity with a voice (p. 14). Butler’s argument is much needed in the field of sexuality studies: throughout history, the homosexual experience has served as the silent or deviant counterpart to strident

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vocalizations of heterosexual dominance. Accordingly, the discursive history of homosexuality deals primarily in the realm of silence, foreclosure and dismissal, and it is now the work of queer scholars and theorists to uncover the buried history of homosexual relations in historical texts (see Vicinus, 2004, Craft, 1994, and Sedgwick, 1985). Butler (1991) concludes that the silenced epistemological and representational history of homosexuality has thus paradoxically helped to construct the norm of compulsory heterosexuality by *not* participating in the same sexual history, at least not overtly. Via the exclusion of homosexuality from sexual discourse, both mainstream and scholastic, heterosexuality has become *the de facto* sexual orientation, and deviations therefrom become aberrations.

With this dynamic in mind, I argue that the discursive history of same-sex sex in prison shares a parallel epistemological history with the subject of homosexuality itself. The strategic silences and representations of prison sex served a critical conceptual function of communicating same-sex sex among prisoners as the perverse and degenerate alternative to the increasingly confident proclamations of essentialism as the truth of human sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholarship around same-sex sex in prison thus helped to establish and legitimize norms of essentialism by positioning itself outside that frame of reference. Sex in prison operated on a different plane, conducted and controlled in a world unto itself, and as such it was not necessary to include it in mainstream discussions of sexuality. Silence, after all, does not accumulate on accident; instead it responds or becomes the unvoiced alternative to a particular declaration, in this case the “truth” of sexual essentialism. “Ignorance,” Sedgwick (1990) writes, “is ignorance of a knowledge [... T]hese ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and

circulate as part of particular regimes of truth” (p. 8, emphasis in original). If essentialism was positioned as the true mode of human sexuality in the early years of the twentieth century, the complex epistemological contortions of same-sex sex in prison were one of its silent counterparts. And perhaps most importantly of all, the discursive silence around prison sex contained “queerness”, defined as non-conformity to sexual norms, behind both rhetorical and actual bars, effectively cordoning it off from the world of mainstream sexuality.

#### CONCLUSION

By the 1960s, difficult subjects like same-sex sex in prison had poked enough holes in the notion of sexual essentialism to warrant considerable support for other theories of human sexuality. Essentialist ideas were on the wane, slowly being replaced by more liberal notions about the malleability of sexual preference and the impact of culture and society on sexual orientation. Throughout the period when essentialist sexual norms dominated, the subject of same-sex sex in prison challenged hegemonic discourse while remaining unaccounted for. Same-sex in prison simultaneously refuted, evaded and counteracted the accepted epistemology and language of sexuality. Solving this conundrum either required rhetorical contortions which occasionally strained the limits of credibility (see Eigenberg, 1992), or a re-jigging of dominant sexual narratives to better explain the unexplainable, a route which began to take shape in the 1960s. By eluding the current regime of sexual language and ideas, same-sex sex in prison ironically exposed that system’s flaws. This subject demanded recognition from the reigning ideas about sexuality, and contributed to an ongoing sea change in sexological accounts of sexual identity. In particular,

the discursive history of same-sex sex in prison charts the paradigm shift in understanding the root causes of homosexuality. Buried in sociological accounts of prisoners' homosexual behaviour is a map of the shift from essentialist notions founded on a medical history of biological and psychological pathology to a more social constructionist perspective, which granted recognition to the influences of time and place, culture and society on human sexual behavior (Eigenberg, 1992, p.220).

Contrary to popular representations of same-sex sex in prison as “peculiarly ahistorical”, the historical research around same-sex sex in prison recognizes that the prison and the people contained therein are not islands unto themselves. Instead, the prison is intimately bound up with the sexual and social norms operating beyond bars. In 1962, Irwin and Cressey argued that previous prison observers had “overlooked the dramatic effect that external behaviour patterns have on the conduct of inmates” (p. 145). They introduced what became known as the ‘importation’ or ‘diffusionist’ model of prisoner behaviour, which stated that inmates carry into the prison with them certain pre-prison patterns of behaviour (including homosexuality) which in turn affect their comportment while incarcerated (Leger, 1987, p. 449). In other words, the deprivation model inaccurately contained prisoner behaviour patterns inside the prison. The importation model, by contrast, recognized the permeability of prison walls, acknowledging that prisoners carry contemporary cultural and social norms with them when they move in and out of the institution. Today the importation model is by far the more accepted approach to studies of prisoner relations. Just as contemporary cultural norms have come to bear on prison culture, so too have contemporary sexual regimes come to bear on the organization of prison sexual life. Drawing on linked theories of crime, class, gender, race and psychology, the

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discursive history of same-sex sex in prison is a critical chapter in the history of modern sexuality, shining new light on the construction of queerness both inside and outside prison walls.

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