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Letter from the Editors

To our readers,

As we conclude the editing process of the eighth issue of Hardwire, we struggle to find an appropriate and fitting way to introduce this year's iteration to you. Against the backdrop of the past year, there is a palpable frustration, tension, and resolve felt across our team and cohort of writers as we reflect on the recent events that have conspired. We grapple with their weight on us as academics, community members, survivors, and the many others in our communities and families.

In 2025, the world has ignited and extinguished in contradictory ways for different people. Various movements in Turkey, Mali, Myanmar, among many more, continue to fight for democratic accountability amid rising authoritarianism and sociopolitical oppression. The Gaza-Israel Military Campaign continues, with ongoing Israeli operations in Gaza further spurring civilian casualties, international protests, and displacing Palestinian people from their families and homes, with the conflict escalating as Iran-American tensions continue to grow. Among all of this, the developing (or deteriorating) situation regarding the Trump administration's recent initiatives and their impact on access to healthcare, affordable housing, policies regarding sexual and gender minorities, accountability from corporations and the ultra-wealthy, etc. has become a pertinent point of insecurity and danger for us all, and especially our community's most vulnerable.

Across the world, people feel their tenacity being tested as their requests for a moment of respite are met with an escalation of the conflicts that destabilise their everyday lives. None of these issues, discussions, and ongoing processes are abstracted into the background noise; our ability as critical studies scholars to identify, intimately engage with, and act upon multitudinous forms of pain and struggle is crucial to our collective mechanisms of survival, resistance, and joy.

In a time where it is difficult to point towards one particular issue, ongoing crisis, or active political tension as the most pressing, we want to remind our readers of the motivating purpose of Hardwire as an academic journal - spotlighting brilliant undergraduate work that critically engages anticolonial, BIPOC, queer, trans, activist, and feminist epistemologies to analyse, complicate, and deconstruct the matrices of power organising our lives and dwells upon the idea of a "normal reality". This is the animating heartbeat of Hardwire.

We are excited and honoured to host a breadth of work that showcases the richness of queer futurities and collective imagination presented by an incredible network of activists, scholars, creatives, and more. The contributors of this issue of Hardwire build upon the portfolio of critiques of the conditions of colonialism, war, and inequality collected through previous editions of Hardwire while also daring to expand our understandings of solidarity, connection, and the endurance of our communities, families, and kinship. In the face of the cacophony of our everyday lives, Hardwire offers a unique opportunity to observe the various ways in which we confront and negotiate the conditions of contemporary life. Some authors identify inventive and novel ways to mobilise and engage our communities against greater systems of domination. Others explore how queer communities negotiate politics of invisibility and intimacy to survive in environments of persecution and surveillance.

Navshimmer Kalra and Jas Chhetri design an accessibility map of the 2SLGBTQIA+ space at the University of Toronto, SC:OUT. Through the presentation of the map, they critique Universal Design and compliance-based approaches to accessibility and explore a more expansive approach to accessibility that centres the voices and needs of marginalized students. Olivia Rego reflects on

and challenges normative views of pollutants and waste in order to foster a deeper, more appreciative and more reciprocal relationship to nature and the world around us. She engages with the relationship between colonisation and pollution, and questions mainstream notions of natural vs unnatural.

Amareena Saleh-Singh utilises the erotic, as conceptualised by Audre Lorde, to examine how Muslim women negotiate and navigate their sexuality. She challenges dominant Western frameworks of Islamic religion, giving a spotlight to how Muslim women thrive, cultivate joy, and utilise the erotic as a source of power within religious and cultural traditions. Ruby Mason presents an argument for how the rule of non-simultaneity, a rule which states that it is morally impermissible to romantically or sexually engage with more than one partner, can be imagined as an intentional, flexible practices rather than an imposed rule, thereby complicating dominant moral prescriptions of monogamy.

Sabrina McLennon engages with the 1980s University of Toronto feminist newspaper, OtherWise, and offers an analysis that highlights the absence of marginalized, particularly Indigenous women's, voices in the discussions about abortion in pro-choice spaces. McLennon extends this analysis to show Indigenous women's exclusion from mainstream reproductive justice efforts in Canada at large. Taryn Parker critically analyses FaT GiRL, a 1990s zine created as a response to the exclusion of self-identified fat dykes in various spaces. Their meditation traces the circulation of the zine through fat and queer communities and offers a multi-faceted perspective on its forward-thinking critique of classism, fatphobia, and racism while also drawing attention to and complicating the ableism laced in the zine.

Valando Skandalakis offers a poetic exploration of their realisation and conflicts with their sapphic identity in the context of an unaccepting religious community, transforming and complicating their experience of shame, trauma, religious involvement, and more through an intimate gesture at a promise of love and tenderness. Sofia Moniz's I Ate a Girl and I Liked it is an introspective and deeply explorative exercise where she imagines what a fictional fangirl to a character in the film Jennifer's Body would say, inspired by the cultural fascination women had with serial killers such as Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer in the 80s/90s. Moniz also contributes a meditation on kinship, rage, and expelling emotions of shame and paranoia by drawing on various readings of The Exorcist.

Parker Bloom's essay celebrates the campiness, irony, and sheer nerve of John Waters' 1972 film Pink Flamingos, arguing that the film's embracing of bad taste constructs a subversive queer structure of feeling. Erika (Ozols)'s podcast episode "Off Script" Finding Joy in Reclamation Black Female Pleasure, Power and Sexuality explores Black women's reclaiming of their sexualities as a tool for resistance and liberation against oppressive systems and structures. She utilises the work of Black feminist scholars, as well as Black female music artists to talk about Black joy, empowerment, pleasure, and autonomy.

Saige Severin deliberates, negotiates, and ultimately celebrates the survival of queer joy through non-secular spaces. In the face of dominant discourses positioning religion and queer experiences in opposition to one another, Commandments refracts this line of thinking by narratively exploring a setting where queer love thrives in a religious environment.Madelyn Stanley provides a detailed analysis of the impact of Bill-137 on the agency of trans and gender non-conforming youth in Saskatchewan, underlining how the bill creates unnecessarily harmful circumstances that leaves many gender non-confirming children vulnerable and at the mercy of conservative, patriarchal, and heteronormative systems that do not have their best interests in mind. Franca Ciannavei uses Dobbs v. Jackson, the 2024 United States Supreme Court decision that ended the constitutional right to abortion to discuss the need for a queer reproduction justice that includes gender non-conforming people, who face intersecting barriers to abortion access and reproductive care. Shebonti Khandake's gorgeous photography is featured throughout this issue of Hardwire.

To conclude, we would like to extend our gratitude to the incredible team at Hardwire for their invaluable time and work. It is impossible to describe in words how grateful we are for the countless contributions from our editors in curating and refining the submissions for this year's edition. The same can be said for the rest of the executive team, consisting of administrative staff, social media managers, and designers who supported the completion of the eighth issue in countless ways.

And lastly, thank you to our readers for picking up the eighth issue of Hardwire. We hope this collection of work provides space to ponder the question: how, in spite of the pervasive fear and deeply tangible pain of our quotidian lives, do we continue to believe in the prospect of our liberation, joy, and persistence?

“Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread.”

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From Compliance to Community: Centering Disability Expertise in Access Mapping through a Case Study

Navshimmer Kalra *(any pronouns)* and Jas Chhetri *(any pronouns)*

Bio: Navshimmer Kalra and Jas Chhetri are undergraduate students at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), currently in their fourth and third years, respectively. Navshimmer is studying Neuroscience, Health Studies, and Music & Culture, while Jas is pursuing Molecular Biology and Biotechnology.

"With this article, we put our faith in our chosen family and our collective commitment to the deinstitutionalization and decolonization of the spaces that are dear to us."
~Navshimmer and Jas

ABSTRACT

This article presents an accessibility map of SC:OUT, a 2SLGBTQIA+ space at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), created as part of a student-led mapping access project. It examines the limitations of institutional accessibility practices, critiquing Universal Design and compliance-based approaches for prioritizing bureaucratic checklists over meaningful inclusion. Drawing on participatory methods and the lived experiences of queer, disabled members of SC:OUT, the project highlights community-driven accessibility practices that counteract institutional performativity. The findings underscore how adaptive, peer-led solutions can address gaps in sensory-friendly design, navigation tools, and gender-inclusive spaces often overlooked by institutional standards. By showcasing the room's disability expertise and emphasizing collective efforts in fostering access, the article advocates for shifting from top-down frameworks to participatory approaches that center marginalized voices. The discussion concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of community-driven practices, urging institutions to move beyond performative accessibility measures to ensure genuine equity and inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a modification of our Mapping Access assignment for HLTB60: Introduction to Disability Studies under the guidance of Professor Cassandra Hartblay. The space we chose to map is a 2SLGBTQIA+ club and lounge at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) campus: Scarborough Campus OUT (SC:OUT). Located in BV 334/336, it acts as a meeting point for queer students and community members at UTSC, acting as a hub for peer support, disability justice, activism, advocacy, mobilization, and wellness for its members. We are both involved in the club through volunteering (Jas) and co-presidency (Navshimmer), and have utilized the lounge as a third space to find friends, allies, fellow organizers, and chosen family members. SC:OUT is positioned uniquely in terms of accessibility practices as it supports various informal policies which are embedded in principles of Disability Justice (Berne, 2016) and collective justice. We believe

that accessibility is not a destination but a process that demands continuous reflection and problem-solving. Therefore, during this Mapping Access project, we aimed to create an access resource in the form of a working draft of an Accessibility Map for all present and future SC:OUT members.

This project is inspired by Aimi Hamraie's *Mapping Access Toolkit* (2020), emphasizing a multifaceted approach to addressing accessibility challenges by combining critical inquiry, data collection, and community-driven advocacy. This method is not about immediate solutions but about fostering long-term practices through collective action and reflection. With this project, we aim to move beyond bureaucratic checklists for accessibility and adopt a holistic approach that prioritizes the needs of SC:OUT members. Rather than treating accessibility as a static requirement to be checked off, we believe that it should be approached as an ongoing, iterative process. This article aims to transcend the checklist approach to accessibility by going beyond prescriptive compliance models such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), also referred to as the ADA. Assuming that justice is achieved through compliance alone overlooks the nuances of diverse needs and the dynamic nature of access, especially in intimate spaces such as SC:OUT. By taking a participatory approach, accessibility practices at SC:OUT incorporate socio-spatial practices via community conversations, participatory mapping, and advocacy work. Hamraie's *Mapping Access Toolkit* promotes collective justice by facilitating public participation and ethical data collection to document accessibility over time (Hamraei, 2016). This approach enables designers and communities to collaboratively create spaces that are inclusive and adaptable to changing needs. Through the given case study, the paper also attempts to respond to the question of Universal Design as it aims for solutions that work for everyone, all the time. This case study attempts to tackle this question within the context of a small-scale student-run organization while accounting for perspectives and insights gained by the writers during their past four years of engagement with the space and its members, noting and accounting for diverse and ever-evolving access needs of a given community.

We acknowledge that mapping access is a significant challenge and difficult to do justice to. Again, access is not static; it evolves with changing needs, environments, and technologies. The process of collecting data on access, ensuring ethical considerations, and continuously updating designs is complex and resource-intensive. This underscores the need for participatory approaches that engage diverse communities in identifying and addressing barriers. Hamraie (2020) emphasizes the importance of data collection and mapping of patterns, thus advocating for critical access mapping as a socio-spatial practice. They suggest that this can include practices such as: collecting data about restrooms (accessibility, gender inclusivity, environmental safety etc.), searching for information through unconventional sources like informal conversations, notes and maps, analyzing patterns to identify gaps in accessibility, creating tools like maps, or lists that document where accessible restrooms are present or absent. This mapped data being accessible and open to all ensures that communities remain well-informed of their surroundings.

METHODOLOGY

We began with an investigation to confirm if any accessibility maps were already created and easily resourced. We physically walked around campus and called the official contact numbers of various places, including: AccessAbility Services, Health and Wellness, Welcome help desk, Campus Safety office, facilities department, and the library front desk. All places referred us elsewhere or reported that they used the campus map, while facilities reported they only had non-public facing architectural plans; however, AccessAbility Services, directed us to the interactive map. We additionally looked through the library website to the U of T map and data library (University of Toronto Scarborough, n.d.-b). However, there were no appropriate maps, atlases, or geospatial data in the database.

As there was no pre-existing accessibility

map of SC:OUT, Bladen Wing (BV), or inside the campus building, we used non-accessibility-specific maps that were available to conduct preliminary research and support our mapping project. Three general maps were collected via search engine results and on-campus inquiry. All these maps lacked sufficient detail and elements of missing entrances, buttons, or ramps. Furthermore, oversized scale, missing links, outdated details such as construction zones, and poor dissemination of updated maps from official sources were observed, resulting in inconsistent reliability and inadequate accessibility. The most widely used map was found on the campus website (University of Toronto Scarborough, n.d.-a), Google Maps uniquely provided partial room numbers and floor interior layouts (Google, n.d.), and the interactive map was referred to by the AccessAbility Services (University of Toronto, n.d.).

MAP-MAKING

During map-making, multiple visits to the space and photos of the room were used to draft a representational map of the room's features — the resulting illustrations are not to scale and not intended as exact and measured maps but as symbolic and simplified representations of the room. We conducted interviews with SC:OUT members and, along with our personal reflections, incorporated these as sources of disability expertise during the drafting of the maps, influencing design choices such as map scope, elements, formatting, and presentation. Two maps were drawn to convey access information through both directional and geographical viewpoints. The directional accessibility map of SC:OUT as published in this article is inspired by a directional map that was first drafted by co-president and finance coordinator, Gillian Xiao Win Nightingale, and then edited and reformatted by Jas Chhetri.

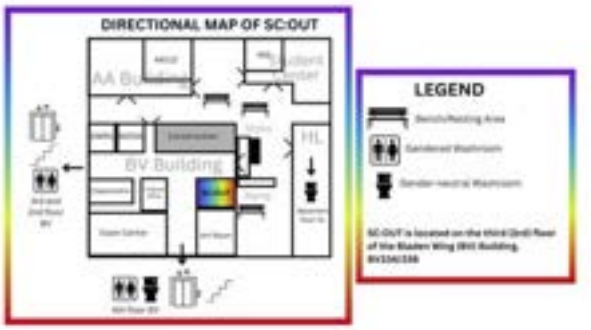

Figure 1:
Directional Map of SC:OUT

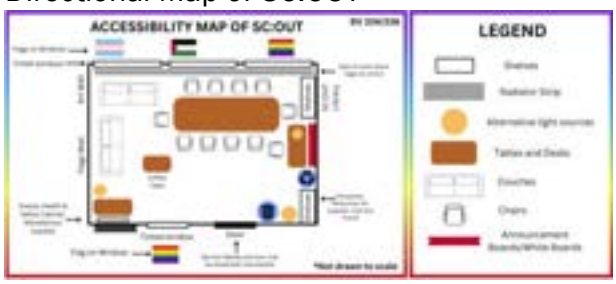

Figure 2:
Accessibility Map of SC:OUT
Figures constructed using Canva Pro

DISCUSSION

While the approach of asking questions and reaching out to campus departments seemed frustrating and redundant at first, it was ultimately helpful in searching for answers online. Reflecting and focusing mostly on the widely used campus map (although this generally also rings true for the Google map and interactive map, too), there seems to be a clear use of a compliance-based approach to these maps in terms of accessibility. The accessibility symbol's limited application to parking spaces and doors reflects a narrow interpretation of disability, primarily focused on mobility impairments, such as the use of a wheelchair. However, even individuals with mobility challenges may find these maps inadequate, as they lack detailed information such as the width of doors, ramp access, or the availability of functional door-opening buttons. Critical features like Wheel-Trans stops, rest areas, or the chair charger at the start of the valley trail are also absent. Furthermore, the map overlooks accommodations for other disabilities, such as decompression spaces for individuals with

attention or mood impairments, alternative lighting for sensory sensitivities, accessible formats like alternative text or screen-reader-friendly files for those with visual impairments, and clear, well-lit spaces for hand signing to support the auditory-impaired. This oversight perpetuates the misconception of mobility as a monolithic representation of disability. By merely adding accessibility symbols to fulfill a basic requirement, the map fails to address the deeper and more diverse needs of disabled users. Additionally, critical spatial details such as the locations of floors, room numbers, elevators, and key offices or clubs like AccessAbility Services, the Registrar, SC:OUT, EMRG, or BIOSA are missing. Essential features for queer, disabled, and especially queer-disabled students, such as accessible gender-neutral bathrooms, are also absent. Even practical details, like the side door connecting BV to AA, have been omitted, further limiting the map's utility.

A closer analysis of the UTSC institutional maps reveals a clear prioritization of institutional growth and infrastructure over the lived experiences of disabled or marginalized communities. The maps favour individuals with higher socioeconomic status, evident in the detailed labeling of roads and parking lots, while relegating alternative transportation, like the bus loop, to small, uninformative symbols. Features essential for accessibility, such as Wheel-Trans stops, wheelchair charging stations, gender-neutral or accessible bathrooms, and detailed indoor navigation like elevators or accessible entrances, are notably absent. This exclusion leaves queer and disabled individuals unsure if campus spaces are inclusive or accommodating. The focus on institutional aesthetics is further highlighted by the omission of food locations or dietary accommodations and the emphasis on showcasing new construction projects and renamed buildings. For instance, while Indigenous names like the *Kina Wiiya Enadong* Building are used, actions such as undermining the campus farm and its Indigenous Garden, which are barely represented on the map, expose a performative commitment to inclusivity. Meanwhile, construction sites and new building names are prominently featured, reflecting priorities aligned with institutional optics rather than accessibility or intersectional community needs. Lastly, smaller-scale community-oriented spaces like SC:OUT are not significant in the map's scope and have minimal visibility. In fact, many newcomers at SC:OUT reported not knowing about the space early enough due to this lack of visibility and representation. This frames the campus as a conglomerate institutional space rather than a diverse community space. The scale and detail consider access *to* the campus but not access *within* the campus, ignoring peer-based mutual aid and community-focused initiatives that are crucial to fostering genuine inclusion and dismantling ableism.

Standardized access checklists, such as those enforced by institutions, often lack the nuance required for genuine inclusivity. While these checklists provide a starting point, they can become bureaucratic exercises that overlook practical challenges or fail to incorporate insights from those they aim to serve. Universal Design is often criticized for being overly idealistic or difficult to achieve in practice. As Tom Shakespeare, an English sociologist and bioethicist (2006) points out, the concept of creating spaces that meet the needs of everyone, everywhere, is ambitious but not always feasible. Accommodating conflicting needs, such as bright lighting for some and dim lighting for others, highlights the limitations of universal solutions. Additionally, the natural environment itself presents barriers, such as uneven terrain or changing weather conditions, which may be impossible to fully address through built designs. It is our takeaway that true inclusion requires acknowledging that "universal" solutions may fail to cater to specific or conflicting needs, such as smooth surfaces for mobility aids versus tactile indicators for vision impairments. While Universal Design and access standards aim for inclusivity, they are not without limitations. Addressing these challenges requires a shift from rigid, one-size-fits-all approaches to more flexible, adaptive, and participatory strategies. By incorporating diverse voices and prioritizing practical, multipurpose solutions, we can move closer to designs that genuinely serve everyone while acknowledging the inherent complexities of accessibility.

Engaging communities through conversations is vital to our approach. These dialogues can uncover lived experiences and generate new ideas. This participatory method not only informs better design but also strengthens communal bonds while attempting to deinstitutionalize cultural practices of access and inclusion. Hamraie (2020) encourages researchers and advocates to dwell in the ambiguity of incomplete or conflicting solutions, using this uncertainty as a starting point for continuous improvement. Hamraie's approach highlights the need for a holistic, community-driven process to tackle accessibility challenges. By questioning norms, collecting data, engaging in critical mapping, and fostering solidarity, we can create inclusive environments that reflect the diverse needs of all individuals. This method underscores that accessibility is not a destination but an evolving process that requires sustained effort, collaboration, and innovation.

Many access elements were present within the space, both physically and in social practice. There are many fidget toys donated or brought in by members. Having a community understanding of stimming as a regulatory behaviour makes it much easier for neurodivergent students to focus and express themselves. SC:OUT has quiet hours every Tuesday and Thursday, keeping a lower sensory profile and providing a silent space to work or decompress, especially for those who self-report any auditory-processing challenges or PTSD. The bright and loud overhead LED lights are typically turned off. Two lamps, along with fairy lights situated on the large windows, provide both natural and softer yellow light as a sensory alternative. There is a general rule for members to put their bags and coats on the back side of the room or coat rack to prevent clutter in the room, which is especially important for our members with low vision and mobility to safely traverse the room. The rolling chairs and couches also help provide clear spaces for mobility, along with being a place to sit and rest or even nap if needed. There are billboards, a calendar, and a whiteboard present in the room that are used to advertise events or make announcements, which are also sent through digital platforms such as Discord and Messenger. These options provide room for flexibility while providing consistent reminders regarding upcoming events and programming. The space also has a 'Lost and Found' box in case a member forgets their belongings. This also happens to be good accommodation for those facing challenges with executive function. It is also worth noting that having a room-specific 'Lost and Found' might be more efficient than always having to go to the Campus Safety office to turn things over. The side shelf is stocked with free supplies such as chargers and Health & Safety supplies such as condoms, lubricant, pads, tampons, self-harm reduction kits, first aid kits, and naloxone kits. There are also many pamphlets for student resources, such as sexual health (resources) or services on campus. Another shelf houses the SC:OUT library that consists of both fiction and non-fiction queer literature for those who want to learn more. One of the most impactful elements are the community events and support from queer disabled peers which facilitates SC:OUT as a place of advocacy and belonging while valuing knowledge from firsthand experiences of the members.

As members of SC:OUT, we often explore the intersection of neurodivergence and queerness in direct lived experience. Disabled queer individuals bring unique perspectives that underscore the need for accessibility measures that account for sensory sensitivities and physical design of environments. For instance, queer students should not be forced to walk to a separate building to access a gender-neutral washroom, as this reinforces both physical and systemic exclusion, however this is the reality of many students at UTSC. An accessibility feature that is often overlooked is the 'sensory-friendliness' of a given space on campus — for example, dim lighting and noise-control, which create low-stimulus environments beneficial to both disabled and non-disabled students. SC:OUT's quiet hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays provide members with a dedicated time for relaxation and focused work, garnering positive feedback. SC:OUT members exemplify how advocacy can drive accessibility improvements. For instance, a visually disabled member encountered significant barriers at the 2023

'Pride Pub' event, organized by the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Office (EDIO) and the Sexual and Gender Diversity Office (SGDO) at the St. George campus. Despite the event's accessibility claims, the SC:OUT member reported facing difficulties in navigating the space and approaching organizers for accommodations. This issue was later raised with the organizers, highlighting the importance of advocacy in addressing systemic gaps. Some inaccessible aspects of campus life may include: overcrowding in spaces like the library, where even the dedicated mindfulness space becomes inaccessible when it is overcrowded, and communication barriers that lead to accessibility challenges during events such as 'Pride Pub', pointing to the lack of real-time support for those with disabilities.

SC:OUT's physical space is well-maintained in several aspects, including a collection of diverse queer literature, accessible free supplies, and clear communication between executives and members through various formats. However, certain areas require improvement, such as enforcing quiet hours, reducing clutter, and promptly removing food from the space. Delays in replacing supplies or furniture, such as the couch, and slow reimbursements for students covering costs out of pocket are persistent issues. Additionally, event planning, including timely elections, could be better organized. The space lacks certain accessibility features and faces several limitations. Historically, the room was converted from two closets, and its constraints remain evident. It is located in a low-visibility area that is difficult to find, with a standard-sized door lacking an accessibility button, making entry challenging for power chair users due to the cramped hallway. Access to the space is further restricted by limited hours, dependent on volunteer availability. Some practices, such as avoiding strong scents, are informally observed but lack explicit understanding among members. Previously provided snacks and drinks, like oatmeal and juice, are inconsistently restocked, reflecting operational challenges. The absence of monetary compensation for SC:OUT executive members and volunteers, who are full-time students, often results in stress and burnout, impacting the sustainability of daily tasks such as restocking supplies, maintaining the space, and running regular programming. Moreover, the room itself is hard to locate both geographically and as a resource. The space is adorned with various flags symbolizing diverse queer and marginalized identities, which could be critiqued for being mere "symbolic support". Such representations risk being seen as performative unless paired with concrete efforts, including mobilization, advocacy for social justice, mutual aid, and peer support, to ensure alignment with the values these symbols represent.

Discussions with peers revealed the importance of ground-level solutions and community-led advocacy powered by peer perspectives on disability, queerness, and class-based disparities. For instance, members at SC:OUT frequently advocate for their peers through their involvement in disability justice, housing justice, and mutual aid efforts, demonstrating how collective efforts can create meaningful change. SC:OUT also organizes an annual gender-affirming gear giveaway that aims to provide trans-affirming products such as binders, packers, tucking tape, and more to members for free. This underlines the importance of being proactive in recognizing and addressing access issues, even when they might not affect everyone in the same exact ways. We have observed overwhelmingly that anytime someone has shown signs of discomfort or exclusion in the space, members present in the room have responded proactively with sensitivity, vigilance and responsibility, thus highlighting the role of non-medical support personnel in all our lives- this might include acquaintances, friends, family, allies, or concerned and well-wishing peers. The presence of accessibility practices was also noted in instances of virtual engagements (presentations, Zoom meetings, and more), such as implementing closed captions and responsiveness through online chat.

Another noteworthy takeaway is that accessibility improvements are ongoing and incremental as they work in tandem with knowledge collection. By combining vigilance, practical measures, and community engagement, individuals can learn to

identify and address inaccessibility in ways that are meaningful and impactful. Close attention should be paid to understanding and supporting “unapparent” disabilities. An exclusionary approach that labels certain accommodations a “convenience” rather than a necessity may make it harder for those who are undiagnosed or marginalized to voice their needs in the face of such invalidation. Through our methodology, we attempt to frame accessibility as a transformative practice, rather than an ameliorative one, by moving beyond “damage control” or “band-aid” solutions and by focusing on addressing root issues surrounding ableism, productivity culture, hyper-individualism, and a culture ultimately dictated by capitalism.

Our accessibility recommendations for SC:OUT focus on both resource and procedural improvements. We propose fostering explicit practices (e.g., storing bags at the back, observing quiet hours) and encouraging implicit dialogues (e.g., minimizing overhead light and strong scents). Open discussions and active listening to those in the space respect lived experiences while promoting community collaboration in developing meaningful solutions. This approach helps avoid superficial band-aid fixes that may unintentionally sustain ableist systems not designed with queer and disabled students in mind. Additionally, making the accessibility map from this article physically available and widely distributed would address barriers to accessing SC:OUT. Many students lack the peer networks or administrative support needed to locate or learn about the space. Our findings highlight the university's failure to prioritize such resources, creating obstacles for queer and disabled students whose access to peer support and solidarity can be transformative. A tangible, student-created representation of this information is a vital step in bridging these institutional gaps. Primarily used by queer disabled students, the space thrives on collaboration and solidarity. Continued outreach and stronger partnerships can amplify these voices, ensuring meaningful advocacy. Leadership transitions through regular elections also sustain SC:OUT's operations and mission.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this exploration emphasize the urgent need for transformative, community-driven approaches to accessibility on campus. By moving beyond compliance-based practices and token gestures, a de-institutional approach prioritizes the lived experiences of marginalized groups, particularly queer and disabled students. Spaces like SC:OUT exemplify how participatory strategies and peer-led initiatives can address accessibility gaps, providing vital support systems that challenge ableist norms. This article underscores that accessibility is not merely about fulfilling institutional checklists but about fostering adaptive, iterative processes that center collaboration, mutual aid, and advocacy. Bridging institutional shortcomings through tangible, student-led efforts such as comprehensive accessibility maps and resource distribution can empower conditions for more equitable class and disability conscious solutions.

Scan to View UofT's Maps and Atlases

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Rooted in Reciprocity: Engaging in Environmental Justice Through Action and Art

Olivia Rego
(she/they)

Plastic has become an intimate part of the lives of human beings and more-than-human beings. This is not only through its everyday use, but also through the microplastics that are present in our bodies and the plastic that is discarded into forests, rivers, fields and other ecosystems. Plastic pollution is ingrained into our environments, and I have noticed the pervasiveness of plastic in my community. I have carried out trash clean-ups over the past few years at a park near my house, where I enjoy taking walks. Originally, I began conducting these trash clean-ups as a way to spend time in nature and engage in movement while recovering from a concussion. This paper will reflect on my experience and engagement with my most recent trash clean-up and an art piece assemblage I created out of the trash I collected, scrap craft materials I already possessed and natural materials such as fallen leaves and acorn caps (2023). Initially, I did not know the shape that my art assemblage would take as it depended on the materials I gathered during the clean-up. I named my art piece *Transforming Trash into Trees* to bring attention to the ways in which fossil fuels, which comprises plastics, are actually composed of fossilized plant and animal beings. By combining both 'natural' and human-made materials, I challenge the normative assumptions surrounding pollution and discard, such as the binary constructions of what is and who are perceived as natural/unnatural and living/nonliving.

I invited my girlfriend at the time, Kyela, to help me with this clean-up as I wanted to do this activity with my community. Partaking in this clean-up together brought us even closer as we performed an action centred around our shared values and morals. The clean-up provided us with an opportunity to engage in a reciprocal relationship with our environments and the gifts that they provide. During the clean up, we reflected upon the many gifts we are offered by the Earth such as oxygen, moments of happiness and beauty, and an ability to connect with more-than-human beings. In acknowledging and appreciating these gifts, we were able to generate a relationship of reciprocity with our environment by picking up plastics and other pollutants (Kimmerer, 2018, p. 29). While trash clean-ups do not address the root causes of pollution, namely the extractivist logics of capitalism and colonialism, our action was grounded in intentions of care, responsibility and gratitude to our more-than-human world. In "Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic and Eco-Normativity" (2010, p. 200), Giovanna Di Chiro refers to queer ecologies as a lens for seeing the beauty in the pain and damage in the world and accepting a responsibility to care for the world. This definition of queer ecologies seems fitting for the way Kyela and I engaged in the trash clean-up as we recognize that there is no neat delineation between nature and pollution, and we must work to queer these binaries. As Kyela and I are both queer, we have broadened understandings of the meaning of 'home' and this allows us to not restrict our homes (home meaning both body and environment) to limiting constructs. We are therefore able to appreciate the importance of queering and decolonizing normative notions of pollution to instead

embrace the diversity, interbeing and an ethical relationality to the world around us.

Zoe Todd (2017) reflects on her relationship with oil and fossil fuels in "Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in *amiskwaciwâskahikan* and Treaty Six Territory". Todd (2017) states that crude oil and natural gas, components that are used to create plastic, are not threats or violent in and of themselves (p. 107). It is in the ways humans weaponize these fossil-kin that they become contaminants and pollutants (Todd, 2017, p. 107). In viewing oil and fossil fuels as kin, they are no longer perceived as mere resources that are extractable and commodified for human gain. As an abstract representation of a tree, my art piece symbolizes that there is no definite separation between plastic and what we consider to be living beings. This is true in that plastic is embedded into our world, but also in the ways that plastic is made up of our fossil-kin. As humans, one way in which we can cultivate reverence for our fossil-kin is by removing their weaponized bodies from environments. This removal can be seen as a responsibility where we prevent further harm to beings in the park ecosystem while trying to provide our fossil-kin a final resting place.

Discard studies emphasizes the 'what' or 'whom' that must be discarded in order for a system to persist. This is explored in "An Introduction to Discard Studies" (2022) by Max Liboiron and Josh Lepawsky. The politics of discard studies seek to disrupt naturalized, preconceived notions about waste, purity and disposability, such as individual moral responsibility for pollution, in order to address the systems of power that perpetuate such violence and harms (Liboiron & Lepawsky, 2022, p. 6). Pollution heightens and alerts us to the presence of pre-existing power structures in our global society. "Time-space compression" describes movement and communication across space, the broadening of social relations and our experience of this shift (Massey, 1994, p. 2). Experiences of the time-space compression are not distributed equally as different social groups experience differentiated levels of spatial mobility and access, which hinge upon the degree of control and power they possess (Massey, 1994, p. 2). As a result of the increased ease in travel, movement of goods, and capitalist processes of globalization, the world is seemingly becoming 'smaller' and more convenient for those of us in the Global North in different ways. Plastics exist everywhere; however, the majority of product packaging I found was not manufactured in Canada. This is an example of the time-space compression in which labour is extracted from the Global South in order to fulfil the 'needs' of the neoliberal capitalist societies of the Global North (Massey, 1994, p. 1). Racialized communities have been constructed as disposable and discardable through the overexploitation of their labour, resources and land, in which the unequal burdens of climate change are placed on these communities (Sultana, 2022, p. 4). This is exemplified in the way that although the park faces a form of plastic pollution, due to its physical and political location in the settler-colonial nation-state of Canada, this specific area is not disproportionately impacted by results of the systems of racial capitalism. Rather, it is Indigenous Lands and communities who are facing the brunt of this climate coloniality (Sultana, 2022, p. 3).

In "Introduction" to *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021), Max Liboiron states that due to colonial relations of power and land relations that shape plastic's global distribution, pollution is colonialism (Liboiron, 2021, p. 5). Liboiron defines colonialism as a set of evolving land relations, primarily based on the assumed access to Indigenous lands for the goals of settler colonial projects (Liboiron, 2021, p. 6). "Land" can be capitalized to differentiate its existence beyond a material space, as it exists as a spiritually infused physical space grounded and steeped in interconnected and interdependent relationships (Liboiron, 2021, p. 6). In comparison, "land" refers to a geographical and physical space (Liboiron, 2021, p. 6). In this way, pollution is one of the ways in which ongoing colonial relations to Land

manifest (Liboiron, 2021, p. 6). Under colonialism, Land is seen as an empty vessel to hold single-use wastes such as plastics, which can only be secured through unconditional access to land and resources (Liboiron, 2021, pp. 8-9). We can see this colonial entitlement to land play out in the original colonial concept of Terra Nullius and its modern-day imperial interpretation of land as a commodity for capitalist resource extraction (Murphy, 2023). Trash cleanups are one way in which I care for the Land and work against colonial tendencies. This undertaking is an attempt rooted in my aspirations to fulfil my responsibilities and show gratitude to the Land.

Plastic permeates our environment, and this is an unavoidable fact. However, the ways in which we view our relationships to pollutants, such as plastics/fossil-kin, will impact the land-based practices we enact. In recognizing the relations and systems of power that are at work when we encounter discard in the environment, we must continue to analyze our positionality in these exchanges of power and work to create more equitable and reciprocal relationships with the world.

Art assemblage in the form of a tree made of materials picked up during Rego's trash clean-up.

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The Power of the Erotic: Exploring Muslim Women's Pursuit of Agency and Joy

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In her work *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power (1984)*, Audre Lorde reconceptualizes the erotic as a deeply emotional, spiritual, and creative force—a source of inner knowledge that empowers women to live authentically and pursue fulfillment beyond the confines of societal repression (p. 569). Rather than being limited to sexual desire, the erotic is, for Lorde (1984), a site of profound self-connection and resistance. This framework offers a compelling lens through which to view the lives of Muslim women, who often negotiate joy, self-expression, and agency within religious and cultural structures that are frequently mischaracterized in Western discourse as inherently oppressive. Lorde's framing of the erotic opens space to understand how Muslim women reclaim power and authenticity from within, rather than in opposition to, these traditions. This paper argues that Lorde's concept of the erotic provides a valuable framework for understanding how Muslim women navigate fulfillment and self-expression within modest, faith-based practices. In doing so, this paper contributes to a more inclusive utopian vision where empowerment does not require the rejection of cultural or religious commitments, but can instead be rooted in them.

Nadia Al-Bagdadi's (2020) analysis in *Eros and Etiquette: Reflections on the Ban of a Central Theme in Nineteenth-Century Arab Writing*s provides a critical lens for understanding the transformation of erotic discourse over time in Islamic societies. Historically, Islamic thought featured rich, spiritually infused conversations around eroticism, such as in Sufi poetry and classical Arabic literature, which celebrated the interconnectedness of body and soul (Al-Bagdadi, 2020, p. 114). However, during the 19th century, these discourses began to disappear in response to colonial moral codes and rising internal conservatism (Al-Bagdadi, 2020, p. 115). This shift aligned with the imposition of new moral standards influenced by colonial and patriarchal values, leading to the disappearance of Arabic ars erotica and the sidelining of discussions on *eros* (Al-Bagdadi, 2020, p. 116). The erasure of these earlier traditions has shaped contemporary cultural and religious narratives, often reinforcing rigid gender roles and suppressing expressions of desire and fulfillment. However, as Al-Bagdadi (2020) highlights, the historical richness of Islamic discourse on eroticism offers a foundation for reclamation and reinterpretation (p. 119). By reconnecting with these earlier traditions, there is potential to foster fulfillment and agency through the rekindling of this suppressed aspect of cultural and spiritual life. Embracing the erotic, as Lorde (1984) describes, would mean actively challenging this historical suppression and opening possibilities for re-engagement and empowerment.

Shirin Saeidi's (2021) study on women in post-2009 Iran's Hezbollah cultural institutes offers a real-world example of how women can find joy within conservative religious spaces. Through interviews and observations, Saeidi (2021) found that women in these settings navigate their lives in ways that challenge conventional assumptions about their passivity or oppression (p. 723). These women developed subtle forms of resistance against gender norms while maintaining their religious identities (Saeidi, 2021, p. 724). These women reinterpreted religious stories to highlight female strength and reaffirm the hijab as a personal, spiritual choice rather than a symbol of submission—granting them both internal agency and collective belonging. Rather than rejecting the religious

frameworks they inhabit, they reinterpret and adapt them to create spaces for agency and self-expression (Saeidi, 2021, p. 725). Saeidi's findings demonstrate that, even within conservative spaces, Muslim women actively shape their emotional and physical experiences, finding ways to navigate and express their desires, agency, and identities.

Reinterpretation as an act of resistance has not been limited to individual expression—it has also become a collective strategy taken up by organized feminist movements across the Islamic world. Building on the individual acts of resistance, Saeidi (2021) describes Justin Jones's (2024) work, *Muslim Feminism as Islamic Modernism: Women's Activism in India Between the Quran and the Constitution*, which explores collective movements within Islamic culture that aim to reinterpret religious frameworks and empower Muslim women on a broader scale. Organizations such as the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan work to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts by advocating for egalitarian readings of the Quran (Jones, 2024, p. 423). These movements argue that religious teachings can coexist with principles of gender equality, offering a model where faith serves as a foundation for empowerment (Jones, 2024, p. 426). Talha Rehman's (2020) analysis in I*slamic Feminism: The Challenges and Choices of Reinterpreting Sexual Ethics in Islamic Tradition* complements this perspective by examining how feminist movements engage with Islamic teachings to construct alternative visions of gender equality that remain rooted in religious authenticity. Rehman (2020) emphasizes that patriarchal constraints in Islamic law are not inherent to Islamic religious texts but rather are the result of historical and cultural interpretations (pp. 218-219). By revisiting these texts through a feminist lens, these movements challenge traditions and create pathways for women to embrace agency while remaining connected to their religious identities.

Beyond resisting patriarchal interpretations of Islam, these reinterpretations counter Western stereotypes that portray Muslim women as incapable of holding agency or empowerment within their religion (Rehman, 2020, p. 215). Rather than rejecting their religious identities, these women draw on spiritual and cultural resources to foster empowerment, self-expression, and authenticity. In Lorde's terms, this is an erotic act: an intentional movement toward truth, fullness, and connection with the self that arises from authentic insight rather than imposed obedience.

Lorde's framework helped me articulate a belief I've long held through personal experience: Muslim women are fully capable of pursuing fulfillment, joy, and authenticity within Islamic frameworks. What surprised me, however, was the lack of academic work reflecting these realities. I was repeatedly directed to sources that framed Muslim women's pursuit of the erotic solely as resistance to religious oppression. While important in some contexts, this narrative felt disconnected from the lived experiences I've encountered. The dominance of Western-centric perspectives in scholarship often reduces Muslim women's choices to a binary of submission or resistance. Lorde's vision of the erotic—rooted in inner agency and emotional integrity—offers a more expansive, inclusive framework that affirms how power can be expressed in spiritually grounded, culturally embedded ways.

Envisioning a utopian future, I imagine a world where Muslim women's joy, fulfillment, and agency are fully recognized as thriving within the cultural and religious frameworks they inhabit. This vision challenges the idea that empowerment and authenticity require a departure from tradition or the sacrifice of cultural values. In this utopia, modesty and self-discipline are not seen as barriers to the authentic self but as mediums through which women can engage with their identities and desires. Faith is not mischaracterized as inherently oppressive; instead, it is understood as a source of strength, hope, and joy. By rejecting reductive narratives that frame non-Western religions as solely oppressive, this vision makes space for the diversity of women's experiences globally. Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic underscores this vision, reminding us that the pursuit of the erotic is deeply personal and can thrive in various contexts.

Through my research, I have come to understand how Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic as a source of power highlights that empowerment often lies in quiet, subtle acts of self-determination that exist within various contexts. This understanding has strengthened my advocacy for honouring lived experiences, particularly in academic discourse. These personal stories of Muslim women remind us that fulfillment is not confined to a singular framework but arise from the ways individuals navigate and reinterpret the structures around them. Future research should delve deeper into this topic by applying an intersectional framework to examine how class, race, and sexual orientation further shape these experiences.

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

A model is posed in front of green foliage with their left hand on their hip and their right hand holding a pink chinese fan. They look dramatically into the camera with their mouth closed. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, orange lipstick and pink blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a blue, floral silk skirt; white turtleneck tank top and black sheer gloves. The photo is taken in natural lighting.

Fluidity and Intentionality in Monogamous and Nonmonogamous Relationships: A Move from *Promise to Practice*

Ruby Mason
(any/all)

Compulsory monogamy and the socially enforced possessive structure of romantic and/or sexual relationships (RSRs) negatively impact individuals' sense of self and capacity for love and pleasure. However, this does not rule out monogamy as a fruitful option for some, but instead suggests that monogamy would be most fruitful if stripped of the imposed *rule of non-simultaneity* (RNS), which states that "it is morally impermissible to romantically [or sexually] interact with anyone other than one's partner" (Grahle, 2022, p. 179). I argue that non-simultaneity, *if desired*, and other relationship parameters are most rewarding when treated as intentional, flexible practices rather than imposed, rigid rules. I will begin by briefly introducing the foundational texts from which I construct my argument. Tracing the themes of promise, practice, and possession throughout, I will then reflect on monogamy in our current social order before imagining its potential in the absence of the RNS. This is not to say that monogamy can exist without non-simultaneity, but rather that non-simultaneity can be freely practiced rather than strictly enforced. Next, I will examine the benefits and challenges of nonmonogamy, identify its central tenets, and recommend integrating these into all RSRs. Finally, I will conclude by advocating for fluidity in personal relationship styles, suggesting that this promotes a way of being and relating grounded in *intention*.

The arguments presented in this essay are built from a combination of personal experience, which I touch on later, and four key texts. The first text is André Grahle's "Love without Possession," which links the RNS to an urge to possess one's partner and attributes such to concern for "social status" and "self-worth" (2022, p. 181). Grahle (2022) concludes that it would be in the best interest of all love, even monogamous love, to abolish the RNS (p. 194). The second text is John McMurtry's "Monogamy: A Critique." In arguing that the RNS incites its own violation, McMurtry explains how monogamous marriage works against the same ideals commonly used in its defence (1972, p. 592). McMurtry (1972) also addresses the compulsive force of monogamy by mapping its utility in maintaining the capitalist order (pp. 597-599). The third text, Christine Overall's "Monogamy, Nonmonogamy, and Identity," considers four potential explanations for the feelings of jealousy, stress, and grief that accompany a partner's actual or anticipated violation of the RNS and which may inform one's proclivity for monogamy. The final text is Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy's *The Ethical Slut*, which, as a sort of instruction manual for the unlearning of compulsory monogamy and ethical practice of nonmonogamy, has been fundamental to my understanding and practice of such. These texts together provide a well-rounded critique of compulsory monogamy and offer a starting point for my radical reimagining of monogamous practice.

Monogamy as *Promise*

I begin by complicating our prevailing understanding of monogamy, i.e. adherence to the RNS. Specifically, I will challenge the *R* in RNS and consider what it means to engage with monogamy as *promise vs. practice*. The *R* in RNS is a kind of promise. Like a rule, a promise

is something that can be broken and to which nonadherence is immoral. Once monogamy is promised (or more often *assumed*), the partners owe one another adherence as though they are repaying the debt of the other's adherence. As Overall (1998) astutely observes, the idea of "cheating" in RSRs "suggests depriving someone of something through fraud or deceit" (p. 5). By breaking the promise of monogamy, the cheating partner "takes [what is owed to their partner] and gives it to someone else" (Overall, 1998, p. 5). This feeling of exclusive entitlement turns lovers into exchangeable commodities (Grahle, 2022, p. 181) and reflects the tendency "[i]n our socioeconomic system [to] relate to virtually everything of value by individual ownership," meaning "the effective right to exclude others from the thing concerned" (McMurtry, 1972, p. 596). The RNS is the manifestation of this right to exclude, which cyclically is both a justification for and a response to the "fear of losing a competition that we accept just by endorsing [the RNS]" (Grahle, 2022, p. 188).

While a broken promise of monogamy is a breach of trust and painful in its own right, it is made all the more so by feeling robbed of one's possession and the resulting fear of not being able to recover or replace it. Although in a milder form, this fear is always already present in an anticipatory capacity and "is a defining feature of the experience of romantic love as currently organized" (Grahle, 2022, p. 189). It is the result of the RNS (Grahle, 2022, p. 188) and the assumed "starvation economy" (Easton & Hardy, 2017, p. 28) of love and sex, otherwise known as a scarcity mindset. This attitude is "consistent with capitalist culture" as it treats love and sexuality as finite currencies of which "spending in one location means less for another" (Overall, 1998, p. 5). As Grahle (2022) notes, "most areas of life today are organized competitively in quite the same manner" (p. 197). The resulting fear that "if another person gets love and intimacy from one's loved one, there won't be enough — or any — left for oneself" is one reason why monogamy might seem compelling (Overall, 1998, p. 5).

One may also be drawn to monogamy because they feel defined through/by their sexual partners (Overall, 1998, p. 8). As Overall explains, not wanting to share a partner is not necessarily about not wanting to share a possession, but rather, about not wanting to share oneself, i.e. open oneself to encompass a metamour (partner's partner) "who is not a chosen part of [one's] self-assumed identity" (1998, p. 10). This form of self-identifying affects women more than men, who, according to Overall (1998), are more likely to locate identity and self-worth in their sexual abilities (p. 8).

Monogamy as *Practice*

When treated as practice, meaning something one does actively, intentionally, and repeatedly, monogamy begins to serve lovers in a whole new way. To practice monogamy means to continuously make the conscious choice to be monogamous. Monogamy as practice, unlike promise, does not predispose foreverness, and in this way, partnered individuals choose their partner every day (Easton and Hardy, 2017, p. 98). By continuously making this active choice, partners are unlikely to grow resentful of their relationship because their freedom to renegotiate or end its terms remains apparent. Such freedom is always already present in promised monogamy but is rarely ever acknowledged.

Take, for example, my own transition into nonmonogamy. After ending a four-year monogamous relationship, I began dating nonmonogamously and was very upfront about this — I did not want to end up where I was before, stuck in begrudgingly monogamous love. I started dating someone, and despite being decidedly nonmonogamous, I did not get involved with anyone else for many months. My needs were being met, and I did not want to spend my time/energy elsewhere. All I needed was to know that I could if I wanted to, and this freedom made it clear that I was exactly where I wanted to be. Though we later began seeing other people, the time we spent with each other and with our

other partners continued to feel precious due to it being spent with intent. Like Easton and Hardy (2017), "I never fear[ed] that the grass might be greener on the other side of the fence — I've been there" (p. 84).

The loosening of monogamy as promise to monogamy as *practice* encourages fluidity and opens space for relationships to evolve into participants' ideal form, monogamous or otherwise. And if the partners' ideals become incompatible, they can feel grateful to not be bound by pretend foreverness and the impulse to cling. "Clinging," Grahle (2022) explains, "is a strategy of defending what is 'mine' to protect myself against the loss of my status as its owner. To this end, it aims at keeping one's partner 'at bay', while falsely appearing as intense romantic longing" (p. 190). In addition to facilitating the removal of associated resentments, the unlearning of this tendency and boundness may also quell certain anxieties.

Because monogamy as practice does not assure either partner of the other's continued monogamy, it can alleviate the fear of broken promise. One may still break a promise by cheating on their partner; however, the problem is less with the external relationship and more with the cheating partner's failure to communicate their desire/intention to no longer practice monogamy. And because such conversations are, in theory, welcome in practiced monogamy, I would argue that such transgressions are far less common than in promised monogamy. This is because the "totalitarian expectation of sexual confinement," as McMurtry (1972) explains, is "inevitably more subject to anxiety and disappointment than one less extreme in its demand" (p. 593). In other words, increased dominance of a rule creates increased pressure to adhere to that rule, thereby generating increased anxiety at the thought of nonadherence and increased likelihood of actual violation. Here, McMurtry is following much the same line of reasoning as Georges Bataille (1991), who holds that "prohibition and transgression" are often a package deal, and that transgression is the heart of eroticism (, p. 94).

Nonmonogamy as *Fluidity*

As evidenced by my own experience, nonmonogamy can encapsulate monogamy as practice, and, therefore, distorts the monogamy-nonmonogamy binary, which is extremely useful in alleviating anxiety and increasing fulfillment in RSRs. Abandoning promised monogamy may help relieve certain anxieties resulting from the pressures of its enforced adherence but will not relieve those associated with the scarcity mindset nor the threat of identity violation. However, I suggest that such may be soothed by invoking two central tenets of nonmonogamy, which I term (1) the *awareness of awareness* and (2) the *deexceptionalization of sex*. As I will now expound, the *awareness of awareness* helps lessen the scarcity mindset, and the *deexceptionalization of sex* helps alleviate the threat of identity violation.

The *awareness of awareness* refers to the awareness of the fact that the only concrete difference in monogamous and nonmonogamous relationships is whether or not one is consciously and admittedly *aware* of their partner's ability to leave, cheat, fall in love, fall out of love, etc. Despite monogamy being an agreed-upon boundary in a given relationship, either partner can cross that boundary at any time, meaning the threat of starvation/deprivation persists; one's awareness of the threat is the only thing that changes. As Easton and Hardy (2017) explain, veto power gives you nothing that you do not already have (p. 182) — not the ability to stop your partner from cheating or leaving (which you can *never* have) nor the ability to leave yourself (which you have *always* had). Put another way, person X can set a boundary with person Y, person Y can decide whether or not they will respect that boundary, and person X can decide whether or not they want to continue their relationship with person Y.

To consider how the threat of identity violation can be mitigated by deexceptionalizing sex, recall Overall's

(1998) postulation that people, especially women, find identity in RSRs and are thus resistant to nonmonogamy for its inherent opening up of their identity to the influence of potential metamours whom they have no part in choosing (p. 9). Because monogamy raises the status of "one kind of relationship above all others," thereby "narrow[ing] the scope of other kinds of friendships" (Cartledge cited in Overall, 1998, p. 5), it is no wonder we attach so much of our identities to RSRs; we simply do not afford our other relationships the same value or consideration. But importantly, it seems that sex is the principal feature of RSRs as it is subject to the harshest monogamous restrictions, while other forms of intimacy, such as cohabitation and emotional closeness, tend to be met with a more laissez-faire attitude. I, therefore, suggest deexceptionalizing sex, i.e. eliminating its assumed cultural sanctity, as a possible means of combatting the tendency to locate identity in RSRs and the resulting anxiety that monogamy unsuccessfully tries to mollify.

Overall (1998) concludes that "[t] he conventional production of female identity primarily in and through sexual relationships means that both monogamy and nonmonogamy will continue to be problematic for women under patriarchal conditions and assumptions" (, p. 14). While I agree that this production of identity is problematic in all RSRs, I believe it is inherently challenged by nonmonogamy's refusal to exceptionalize and sanctify sex. If sex is no different than other forms of relating, it is no more worthy of informing our identities. This is not to say that everyone should be nonmonogamous, but rather, that everyone can benefit from the principles of nonmonogamy, i.e. the deexceptionalization of sex, the awareness of awareness, and more generally, the embracing of fluidity.

Conclusion

Nonmonogamy is an extremely capacious term as it is defined not by restrictions, but by a lack thereof. Nowhere is this clearer than in its ability to encapsulate monogamy as practice and its resulting rejection of the monogamy-nonmonogamy binary. The beauty of nonmonogamy lies in its fluidity and customizability, for these qualities promote *intentional* living and connecting. When lovers are free to mould their relationship structure however they choose, they must confront and make intentional choices about how they want to connect with one another and with those outside the relationship. By moving with intention and thoughtfulness, individuals are more likely to pursue the paths best suited to them and less likely to hurt others in the process. Intentionality, as I understand it, is the putting into practice of the semi-well-known saying, *do no harm, take no shit*. Ultimately, all relationships, whatever their parameters, are most fruitful when *practiced* with intention rather than *promised* with pressure.

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

1: A model lies on their back in tall, green grass propped up on their right arm. They look dramatically into the camera with their mouth closed, right leg straight, left leg bent and are holding a pink chinese fan in their left hand. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, orange lipstick and pink blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a blue, floral, knee length, silk skirt; white turtleneck tank top; sheer, black gloves; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun

2: A model's feet, ankles and calves take up the left half of the photo, and a pink chinese fan takes up the left, both on green grass. The photo appears to taken while the model is laying down with their right leg straight and left leg bent. The model is wearing tall, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The fan sits about six inches from the model's left foot. The photo is illuminated from above by the sun.

Abortion, Activism, and Absences: *OtherWise* and the Limits of Feminist Discourse at the University of Toronto

Sabrina McLennon
(she/her)

In the late twentieth century, limited access to abortion services persisted as an ongoing issue for women enrolled at the University of Toronto (UofT), despite the gradual decriminalization of abortion. *OtherWise*, a feminist newspaper founded and run by UofT students, sought to bring questions of reproductive rights, gender equality, and sexual autonomy to the forefront of campus life. From abortion and contraception rights to sexual harassment and equal pay, *OtherWise*'s (1985) recurring feature column "From The Collective" showcases the views of the 'collective' of feminists on a myriad of campus-specific and global issues. Albeit primarily limited to a white, middle-class women's positionality, as a product of the dominant feminist discourse of its time the collective's discourse around reproductive justice remains relevant to Canadian abortion activism as it reveals how and why abortions laws directly implicated students. The examination of missing marginalized voices from *OtherWise* is further important to understanding Canadian pro-choice advocacy, as it may elucidate how feminism, and its constituents, evolved over time. To ensure consistency with the historical record, the terms "pro-life", "anti-abortion", and "pro-choice" will be used as they appeared in *OtherWise*, and by activists in the 1980s. The purpose of this paper is to give nuance to the divergence of the pro-choice, sex-positive attitudes of the 'collective' from the pro-life views of women at the University of Toronto, as well as to bring into focus the exclusion of Indigenous women voices from *OtherWise*.

Throughout their publications, the feature column "From The Collective" articulates the modern feminist views of women at *OtherWise* on abortion rights, in the context of the rupture of the 'nuclear' mold. In the October 1985 issue, the collective states that "the nuclear family of dad at work and mom at home with the kids is dying. Women have been simultaneously liberated from a pre-programmed life 'Kinder, Kuchen, and Kirche' and left 'unprotected'" (OtherWise, 1985, 7). Veronica Strong-Boag (1994), in her article Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60, explains this phenomenon of the rupture of the 'nuclear mold' by the emergence of the new modern family dynamic. After the integration of women in the workforce during World War Two, married women continued to work in the labour force (Strong-Boag, 1994). As a result, women often carried out domestic and labour force duties, rejecting the ideal of female domesticity and traditional gender roles (Strong-Boag, 1994). The 1985 October issue further elaborates on the implications of women's nonconformity by stating that "men are no longer as socially obliged to care for their children; most divorced fathers provide no financial support at all."(8). The Divorce Law of 1985, enacted the same year, explains the increase of absentee fathers. This contributed to the rupture of the nuclear family model, as the requirement to marry declined, and divorce became less socially stigmatized (Snell, 1991). The 1985 Divorce Act enacted the same year further introduced no-fault divorce and streamlined the legal end of marriage; by reducing procedural hurdles and weakening enforcement of child-support obligations, it made it far easier for fathers to walk away without financial or emotional ties. This erosion of paternal responsibility

undercut the nuclear-family model, once grounded in a father as both provider and patriarch, and hastened its collapse (Snell, 1991).

Despite *Otherwise*'s stated aim to oppose the categorization of women as "other", the publication reproduced its own exclusions – most notably through the exclusion of Indigenous women (OtherWise, 1984). Initially, in the 1985 October issue, *Otherwise* fails to nuance how the issue of reproductive rights is complicated by involving race, gender, and class as only general terms such as "we as feminists", and "women" are used. However, by the 1990 February issue, the collective demonstrates a better awareness of class and capitalism with the issue feature "Breaking Barriers: Women confronting Sexism and Racism". The piece shares a conference that was held at UofT that provided an open forum to confront "the experiences of women of colour who are forced to to deal with racist and sexist attitudes in education, employment and, community." (Sudds, 1987). While the recognition of feminism beyond the white middle class expanded in *OtherWise* publications from the earlier 80s to the late 80s, an absence of Indigenous women struggles remained. This could be explained by the fact that Indigenous women's issues, such as sovereignty and treaty rights, were not on the radar of Second Wave feminists, and white feminists often had conflicting views with Indigenous women. For context, white feminists, similar to the women of the collective, often viewed the ideal of female domesticity as inherently oppressive, while many Indigenous women viewed motherhood and homemaking as politically empowering (Nickel, 2017). As a result, the ignorance of mainstream feminism to Indigenous feminism and the disparity between Western and Indigenous values can explain *OtherWise*'s failure to incorporate Indigenous issues in their publications.

Furthermore, restricted access to post-secondary education due to socio-economic marginalization, as well as the colonial nature of the education system, limited Indigenous women's engagement at the University of Toronto. Contextually, if we seek to understand the exclusion of Indigeneity at *OtherWise*, it is crucial to grasp the Canadian government policies passed on Native education at the time. By the 1960s, extensive evidence demonstrated the profound social and economic effects of the 1876 *Indian Act* on Indigenous well-being. In addition to cultural genocide, the government policy of assimilation via education further isolated Indigenous people from the dominant middle-class culture (Agbo, 2005). A history of colonial abuse, lower socio-economic opportunities, and a Western-centeric curriculum are some factors that may explain the low representation of Indigenous people in post-secondary institutions, such as UofT (Agbo, 2005). Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson explain that Indigenous women, faced with both settler colonialism and sexism, endure a specific violence derived from their identities as Indigenous people (Mayer, 2007). Lorraine Mayer addresses the gendered nature of access to education and humanizes the Indigenous experience in a personal analysis. She questions how Native women can be expected to attend university and integrate as fully functioning members of society after enduring both colonial and patriarchal violence. While some women succeeded, the deep conditioning into 'otherness' creates an additional barrier to education for many others (Ralstin-Lewis, 2005).

Moreover, this marginalization also shaped Indigenous women's distinct engagement with reproductive rights. Whereas the *OtherWise* collective framed productive rights largely through the pro-choice vs. pro-life debate, Indigenous women were engaged in a fight for the right to natality and the right to choose when to procreate in response to forced sterilization and involuntary birth control experiments by physicians (Ralstin-Lewis, 2005). Rooted in eugenic ideology, provincial Sexual Sterilization Acts in Alberta (1928–1972) and British Columbia (1933–1973) disproportionately targeted Indigenous peoples, with approximately 74 percent

of all Indigenous people presented to Alberta's Board of Eugenics being sterilized (Leason, 2021). Across Canada, federal records document 580 sterilizations in 'Indian Hospitals' between 1970 and 1975; between 1966 and 1976, more than 1,200 sterilizations occurred nationwide – 1150 involving Indigenous women, and around 50 involving Indigenous men or persons of undocumented sex (Webb, 2024). On December 7, 2018, the United Nations Committee Against Torture officially recognized forced or coerced sterilization of Indigenous women as a form of torture and of principle concern for Canada to conduct a national investigation; the Canadian federal government accepted these recommendations in 2019. Thus while the mainstream dialogue of reproductive rights centered on abortion, as reflected in *OtherWise* publications, Indigenous reproductive rights – notably the right to bear children without state interference – were equally prominent and are essential to the historical record of Canadian Women's history.

In the 1980s, *OtherWise* writers boldly championed women's right to self-governance amid persistent barriers to local abortion services, widening campus debate and laying the groundwork for feminist activism at the University of Toronto. Yet by framing reproductive justice through a predominantly Western lens, *OtherWise* overlooked Indigenous women's experiences of criminalization and coerced sterilization, despite their gradual integration of othered and marginalized voices. An omission reflecting a broader tendency in Canadian reproductive-justice histories, the missing narrative of Indigenous women's reproductive rights is not unique to *OtherWise*. Arundhati Roy asserts, "the 'voiceless' are women we have chosen not to hear". The historiography of reproductive justice in Canada continues to center white middle-class women's right to limit their fertility whilst ignoring the criminalization of motherhood for Indigenous women and the legacies of coerced sterilization (Stettner, et al., 2019). As such, while the feminists at *OtherWise* failed to nuance and understand the polarization of abortion attitudes or include Indigenous women in their discussion, the historical record on reproductive justice calls us to consider all these attitudes in reviewing feminism in the 1980s.

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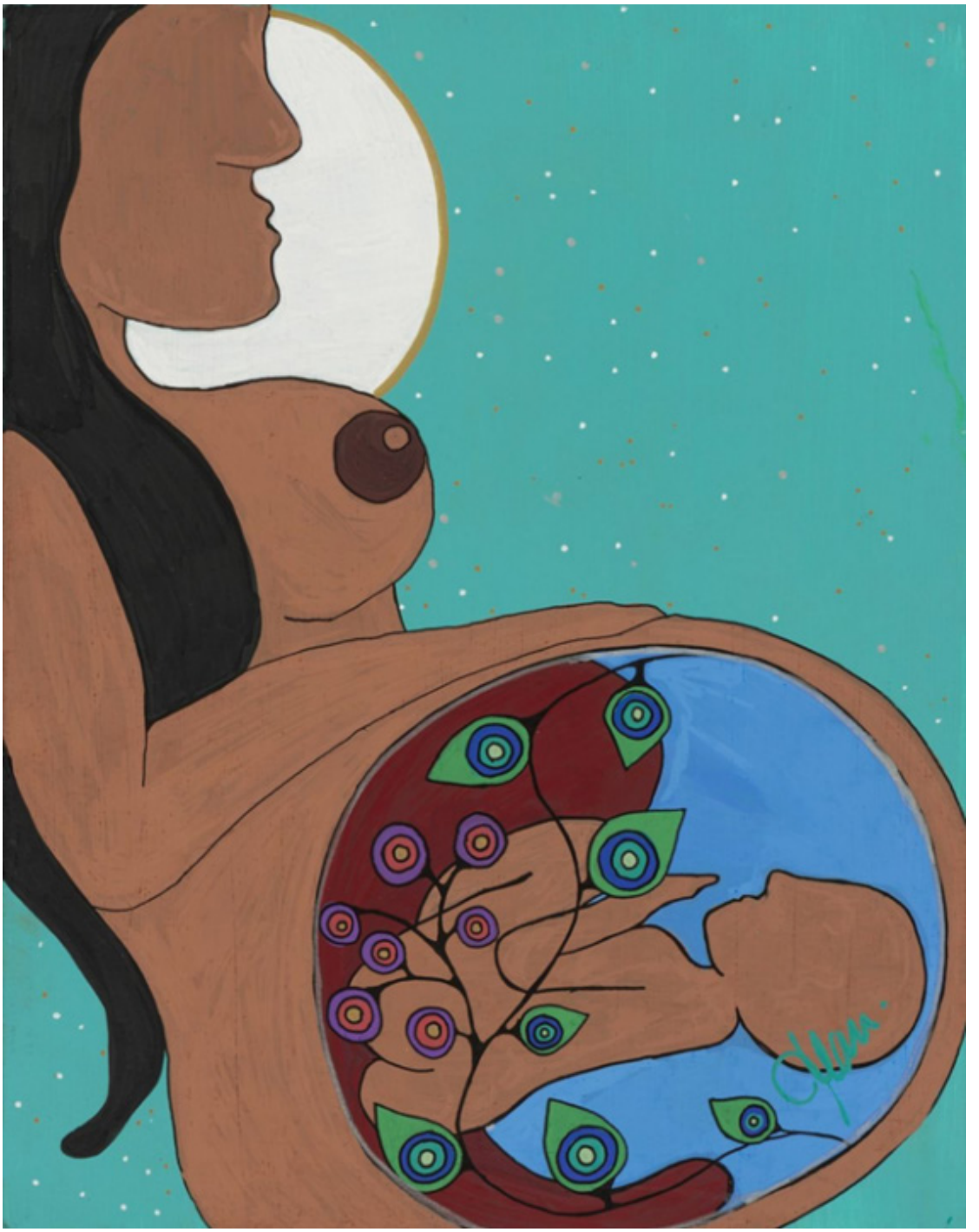

Figure 1. Jennifer Leason, Matriarchial Wisdom.

According to Leason, the piece depicts a woman with a womb, representing all mothers who carry the seed of creation. The child symbolizes the past, present, and future of humanity. The seven leaves correspond to the Seven Sacred Teachings: courage, wisdom, respect, love, honesty, humility, and truth. The berries represent the seeds of creation and collective responsibility to the seven generations before and after. As the backdrop, Grandmother Moon signifies matriarchal wisdom and the power of women's moon time (menstruation).

By Fat Dykes, for Fat Dykes: Fat Visibility, Intersectionality, and Ableism in FaT GiRL Zine

Taryn Parker
(she/her)

In mid-1990s San Francisco, a group of fat lesbians came together to create *FaT GiRL*, a zine "for and about Fat Dykes" (Airborne, 2022). Frustrated from their exclusion from queer kink community for being "too fat," feminist community for being "too kinky," and fat-activist community for being "too queer and too kinky," the collective worked from an intersectional mandate to "challenge and inform our notions of Fat-Dyke identity" (FaT GiRL, 1995a, p. 3). In FaT GiRL, fat lesbians and their bodies, knowledge, and experiences are seen, appreciated, and desired. FaT GiRL faced dismissal from both fat and queer communities during and after its three-year run; the zine disappearing from the feminist historical record for nearly twenty-five years until it was revived through a community archival project (Airborne, 2022). By bridging the erotic and political, FaT GiRL resisted the overlapping forms of fatphobic and queerphobic stigma that many fat dykes faced, creating a space where they and their lived experiences could be seen (and desired) in their wholeness. Analyzing FaT GiRL Issue 3, I argue that the zine's success was the result of its intersectional approach, where issues of racism, classism, sexuality, and gender presentation were interrogated alongside fatphobia. I also trouble the zine's ableism, noting the absence of disability from the zine's intersectional lens, and highlighting moments where it perpetuates an ableist respectability politic. Drawing on the work of Eli Clare, I ultimately find that reflecting on both FaT GiRL's successes and shortcomings allows us to push back against the presence of ableism in current mainstream fat activism.

FaT GiRL contributor Barbarism explains how "FaT GiRL was explicitly created out of frustration with existing queer, dyke & kink publications, which outright rejected fat people because they believed "nobody wanted to see" fat bodies (Gelfand, 2022). These fatphobic sentiments, which designate fat bodies as shameful and undesirable, are explicitly resisted in the visual design of the zine, which features numerous large-scale photos of fat lesbians, both sexual and non-sexual. Erotic photos of fat lesbians across gender presentation, race, and size spectrums punctuate the zine. These images are not relegated to the back pages or shoved into the margins. Rather, they fill entire pages, as seen in the centrefold section on pages 18 to 21, the inner cover on page 2, or even accompanying the table of contents as a design feature as seen on page 3 (FaT GiRL, 1995). This is not limited to sexual images, as clothed non-sexual portraits of authors or interviewees also take up entire half pages, as seen on page 13. In the *Racism and Fat Hatred* roundtable, a photo of each speaker is centred on each page (FaT GiRL, 1995b). The formatting of these images communicates that fat lesbians deserve to be seen and to take up space. By providing the same visual space to both sexual and non-sexual photos, as well as pairing sexual images with political and personal writing, the zine also resists the fetishization of fat bodies. Instead, it communicates that fat people deserve to be seen in their wholeness.

Alongside providing visual representation for a diverse range of fat lesbians, FaT GiRL also foregrounds the lived experiences of multiply marginalized contributors. In her essay "Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines," Elke Zobl (2009) states that "often, [1990s feminist] zines lacked a reflection on white privilege and continued

the hegemonic narrative" (p. 3). FaT GiRL rejected this norm and instead amplified discussions of fatphobia's intersections with other forms of oppression. In *Roundtable 3: Racism and Fat Hatred*, a group of four lesbians of colour and one Jewish lesbian discuss their lived experiences of fatphobia (FaT GiRL, 1995b). They speak to the ways in which racism and fatphobia have shown up in their romantic relationships, families of origin, and engagement in the lesbian community. Roundtable contributor Marian introduces notions of intersectionality to the discussion, speaking about how her experiences of racism and fatphobia have all been a matter of the "amount of difference" she occupies from the societal norm (FaT GiRL, 1995b, p. 45). While *Roundtable 3* is the piece that dives the deepest into intersecting experiences of oppression, conversations about the relationship between fatphobia and experiences of class, gender presentation, and gender expression appear throughout the issue.

While this roundtable addresses intersectionality and fatness, a glaring omission in the discussion of oppression is disability. Disability is only briefly touched on once, when a contributor suggests a future roundtable on disability, which does not materialize in the rest of the run of FaT GiRL (FaT GiRL, 1995b, p. 42). This lack of engagement with disability marks a major gap in issue three of FaT GiRL, ranging from erasing disabled fat lesbians to reproducing ableist attitudes. In several articles, authors define their fatness against disability as a bid for respect from non-fat people. In *Fat and Healthy*, Selke (1995) argues that "self-accepting fat girls who take care of themselves in a positive fashion can be just as healthy as everyone else," and describes conditions that thin women are more at risk of than fat women, such as osteoporosis (p. 8). While this piece is targeted against health myths often used to perpetuate fatphobia, it perpetuates ableist tropes that associate health with moral goodness and disease as punishment, seen in its descriptions of osteoporosis that liken it to punishment for being thin. In *A Word to Our Concerned Sisters*, to exemplify the intensity of fatphobia, Arellano (1995) quotes a study where young girls state that they would prefer to be "in a wheelchair" over being fat (p. 56). While the author clarifies that this quote is not meant to disrespect wheelchair users, the inclusion of it perpetuates the distancing of fatness from disability by implying a hierarchy, where it is shocking that children would choose to be disabled over being fat and non-disabled. In these articles, disability is distanced from fatness by being contextualized as undesirable or less desirable than fatness. In these moments of ableism, FaT GiRL replicates the respectability politics they rejected from the mainstream queer and fat communities.

This shortcoming invokes disability activist and writer Eli Clare's piece *Resisting Shame: Making Our Bodies Home*. Reflecting on how notions of respectability sow division in the trans community, Clare (2010) writes, "shame festers in this kind of flawed community. And the answer here is easy: we simply cannot afford it" (p. 463). While Clare may not have been addressing the fat lesbian community, the sentiment holds. In a zine that defines itself against shame and in a community which is so often on the receiving end of violent shaming, othering disabled people perpetuates this very shame. Acknowledging this shortcoming is crucial, not in an attempt to dismiss the important work done by FaT GiRL, but to magnify the ways in which the fat community still defines itself against disability (a quick scroll through body-positive instagram will quickly bring up a "fat and healthy" slogan) and in turn perpetuates the very ableism that is yielded against fat and disabled folks alike. This bid for respect only serves to perpetuate the ableist shame that fuels fatphobia and erases the worth of fat disabled people.

Zobl (2009) argues that "one of the most important characteristics of zines is their potential for critical reflection" (p. 9). This characteristic is seen in the article *No Apologies*, the only piece in issue three that grapples with disability, where the ableism that exists on other pages is critiqued and challenged. Reviewing a performance by disabled women's theatre group Wry Crips, Barbarism identifies the intersection of fatness and disability, and the ways in which ableism harms both fat and disabled people.

Barbarism (1995) calls for solidarity, stating "fat women are a part of the disabled women's community as disabled women are an important part of the fat women's community," and describes the ways in which fat women and disabled women are pitted against each other by ableism (p. 23). Though this may have been a brief moment in the issue, *No Apologies* exemplifies FaT GiRL's mandate of including "challenges" to fat lesbian identity, fostering a more inclusive view of fat lesbianism by challenging notions of ableism alive within the community.

Working through this project I was moved by how ahead of its time FaT GiRL felt, in the sense that it created intersectional (and queer) fat visibility that is lacking today. Twenty-six years after their last issue, fatphobia still goes unchallenged in queer and straight spaces. As a fat disabled lesbian, I grew emotional as I realized I had never witnessed something fully made for and by fat queers or that was so unapologetic in its fatness. At times, FaT GiRL sharply challenged my own internalized fatphobia, and reminded me of the queerphobia I've witnessed linger in fat spaces, the fatphobia I've seen fester within queer spaces, and the respectability politics that haunt both. At others, I prickled against passing ableism. But most palpably, I would often flip a page and feel as though I was reading my own internal monologue. [line break and new paragraph]

One of these moments moved me so deeply that I wrote to the author to thank them for how seen their piece made me feel. They replied "that [the article] has time-traveled and touched someone else means a lot to me. It is weird and lovely to feel so seen all these years later." Despite its shortcomings in terms of ability, I believe moments like these are what made and continue to make FaT GiRL an invaluable source of feminist knowledge. FaT GiRL created space for a group so often rendered invisible to see and be seen by one another. In Eli Clare's (2009) words, "shame feeds upon isolation… In community at its best and most functional, we find reflections of ourselves, reflections that will not be found in *GQ* or *Cosmo*" (p. 462).

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

1: A model lies on their side in tall, green grass propped up on the left arm, their head resting on their wrist. The model gazes to the right of the photo with their mouth closed. An octagonal mirror is on the grass below the model's face. The model has their left leg straight and right leg bent with their right elbow resting on their hip and right hand holding a white chinese fan with blue and pink flowers near their face. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, red lipstick and pink blush. They wear a light pink, long sleeve dress with lace around the cuffs and collar; a bright pink tool skirt; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun. 2: A model lies on their stomach in tall, green grass propped up on their forearms, and their knees bent to the right. The model gazes at the camera, through an octagonal mirror they are holding with both hands with their mouth closed. An octagonal mirror is on the grass below the model's face. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, red lipstick and pink blush. They wear a light pink, long sleeve dress with sheer sleeves and lace around the cuffs and collar; a bright pink tool skirt; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

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A model poses standing in front of green foliage. They have their right foot turned out, and are holding their skirt in each hand with the right side higher than the left. They look into the camera with their mouth closed. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, red lipstick and pink blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a light pink, long sleeve dress with sheer sleeves and lace around the cuffs and collar; a bright pink tool skirt; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun. lace around the cuffs and collar; a bright pink tool skirt; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

I know what it is to be black and blue (with shame) along my thighs

Valando Skandalakis
(she/they)

I know what it is to be black and blue along my thighs as if I had smothered berries all across.
I might tell my mother these are punch stains and not much more,
That I don't know how there is none on my dress—but what a blessing is that!
And I will tell her not much more and she will tell my father even less if he happens to wonder...
I know that such behaviours on my part and theirs are in relation to my fruitiness of character.
Whether they say so or not, I will never forget how dynamics in a family are shaped by resentment more often than the rest.
As a child, I was fawned over and marked as sweet, candied, agreeable.
I have not been remarked as pleasant by them in a decade and likely more...

I pray for progress of compassion towards my extraordinary character,
For all my fellows with seeds in different places and
Those which bloom later and smaller than the rest.
I pray against a chorus that, unlike with Medea, would not share sympathy with me.
I wonder if their tongues could only settle for a sour sensation,
One which revitalizes their withering energy,
And that this is why they call me a tart instead;
That it is to help them, rather than inform me, of what I know and have known.

That I was suffocating under the bestowed title of saccharine angel.
That I was made to wander helplessly into the arms of pomegranates and tangerines,
A binding of flesh in the shape of what they deemed most inferior.
And what's worse, I was made to stray from seeking
An acceptable love to purify my incomplete anatomy.
I have always preferred sugary nourishment, not that they ever asked.
They feed me unfulfilling stews saturated with salt instead.
If I asked for something sugary and sweet, they would give me fluff and filler,
Seasoned with resentment for my inability to be pleased.
My whole body tensing and quivering as I work my way through the loveless gift;
Angel food never did sit well in my stomach.

I attend an opera inside myself every night.
A personal performance to soothe my welling emotions in the way I know how.
A tragedy sung high and wide in words I wish I could not understand. The stage tells of the shame that drips down my fingers,
My downfall into the green seas of misery they tell me I created myself.
The orchestra crescendos before fading into a comfortable white noise.
I return to outside of myself with you meeting my gaze:
My face, my heart, my essence.
All held by you with citrus scented hands.
You feed me blueberries, with a tenderness I learned was real only the other day.
You see that I am hungry for berries over smoked meats.
You see me, you water me, and I blossom with fruits of black and blue;
Afflicted to wander helplessly forevermore into the arms of pomegranates and tangerines, for a taste of comfort I otherwise might never know.

I'm So Vain, I Probably Think This Movie is About Me: A Paranoid Reading of The Exorcist

Sofia Moniz
(she/her)

I'm sitting at the back of the 506 on my way home from church. A man in front of me turns around, stares at my tits, then tells me I'm beautiful. I say "Okay…" – overriding my inexplicable instinct to thank him. He leans towards me and mutters a string of compliments, invitations, and threats I half-hear through my headphones. His breath smells sweet, like the blood of Christ. I look out the window, my face burning. He asks to sit next to me. I respond "Please don't." Now, he's pissed, because he knows I was ignoring him. The streetcar is almost empty. He has me cornered. I tell him I'm getting off soon, and move to the front of the car. His gaze follows me. When I get off at my stop, I feel like he's still watching me. I wait inside a cafe on College until I'm sure he's gone.

When I moved to Toronto two years ago, I started watching horror movies. In my mind, I had finally given up on Catholicism for good, and I wanted to catch up on what my religious childhood had sheltered me from. Though the horror genre was new to me, it felt familiar. Part of this familiarity could be attributed to residual fears from my catholic upbringing. But, more than that, I felt the familiar fear that something was out to get me. When I take the TTC alone, I am vigilant. I know I am at the mercy of whatever man wants my attention. In these situations, I am quiet and nice, my responses are polite and measured. I try not to give anyone a reason to hurt me. In horror, I look for answers or alliances. I am a little white girl trying to survive in a world I am too small and innocent for. But it is more complicated than that. I am also a monster. In aligning myself with the monstrous, I draw from S. Trimble's account of their shifting alliances with characters in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). Trimble (2022) refers to herself as a demon-girl, linking her queerness to the way Regan's girlhood has "gone awry" (p. 14). In this paper, I will discuss Trimble's reparative reading of *The Exorcist*, paralleling their reading of Father Karras as Regan's queer kin, to my experience as a demon-girl working in a catholic church. Interacting with Susan Stryker and Eli Clare, I will attempt to embrace my rage, while also exorcizing the shame and paranoia I feel as both a monster and a little white girl.

In *The Exorcist*, Regan is introduced as a sweet, innocent, loveable 12-year-old girl. Whitney Monaghan (2016) defines girlhood in popular culture as, "white, middle-class, slender and able-bodied, feminine in appearance and dress." (p. 32). As such, Regan is the perfect little white girl, which makes her demonic possession even more horrifying. Trimble (2022) first offers a reading of *The Exorcist* that sees Regan as "a revolting girl revolting against the little-girl box in which she was stuck" and positioning the doctors and priests as "an army of men working to put her back in" (p. 12). When Regan is possessed, she no longer meets the prescribed definition of girlhood, and fights the priests' attempts to 'fix' her. However, Regan's queering of girlhood is temporally limited. Monaghan explains that queerness on-screen is often portrayed as an interruption on the prescribed path towards heterosexual maturity, and therefore must be resolved (2016). When Karras draws the demon out of Regan's body, her identity as a God-fearing little white girl is restored, with no memory of her possession – ensuring she is no longer dangerous. Audiences are assured that Regan's demonic possession is a short detour in her coming of age from cute little white girl to pretty little housewife, which is, as far as she knows, all she can aspire to be.

This reading was one I could get behind. As I watched the movie, I identified with Regan, revelled in her rebellion, and felt satisfaction when she killed the priests. This queer identification with the monstrous I felt is what Susan Stryker takes up in her "Words to Victor Frankenstein". Speaking back to transphobes who argue she is at "war with nature" she says: "I do not fall from the grace of their company – I roar gleefully away from it like a Harley-straddling, dildopacking leatherdyke from hell" (1994, p. 239). As a monster, Stryker– through her presence alone– can wreak havoc on a cisnormative worldview, before speeding away on her motorcycle to the depths from whence she came. Similarly, rather than respecting priests and seeing them as more than human, Regan– also more than human– offers another, freer, way of being, by defeating the army of men and breaking free from the strictures placed on her. Regan - and Stryker, through Frankenstein's monster - find power in their monstrosity, a freedom and untouchable-ness that I do not quite know how to access.

Having grown up queer in the Catholic Church, a story of catholic priests forcing a queer girl to be quiet and nice felt familiar. To my horror, however, Trimble goes on to offer a reparative reading that rescues Father Karras. She sees Karras as Regan's "queer kin, the one giving up his future to ensure the other has one." (Trimble, 2022, p. 16). This reading is where she lost me. Per Eve Sedgwick (2003), I was paranoid– I could not allow for possibility (p. 146). I refused to allow that a priest could have humanity, I could not trust that his sacrifice was in Regan's best interest. I was also angry: I could not understand why Trimble, a self-proclaimed 'demon-girl', would side with the enemy. As I watched *The Exorcist* again, I noticed the queer subtext to Karras' character. Further, I began to realize that Karras had more in common with demon-girls than I had initially allowed myself to see. The priesthood is a survival strategy for Karras, it gives him an excuse to never marry and have close relationships with other men– like Father Dyer. Despite my animosity towards priests, I sometimes feel the pull to follow in Karras' footsteps. Rather than staying a demon-girl, I could end my "interruption" and become a nun or a housewife.

A year ago, I took a job singing in a church choir. Before beginning this job, I had not been to church in several years, after having attended catholic mass on a weekly basis my whole childhood. On my first day, I felt hypervisible. I worried I might burst into flames when I set foot in the church and reveal that I was not a true believer. As the year went on, I found myself blending in. Every week after mass, the priest stands by the door and greets the congregation. Though I remain wary of him, I smile, shake his hand, make small talk, and act as though I believe in God. None of this is in the job description; I could sneak out the back exit at 12:15 and return to my regularly scheduled sinning, but I feel compelled to act like a devoted churchgoer, despite my complete lack of faith.

When I began this job, I felt tempted to hide my demon-girl-ness so I would fit in. I did not want to be picked apart by the congregation. I knew that realistically, no one would ask me anything beyond regular small talk, but sometimes a look is enough to know what someone thinks of you. Eli Clare describes this experience in "Gawking, Gaping, Staring". He writes, "a pair of eyes caught me, held me in their vise grip, tore skin from muscle, muscle from bone." (Clare, 2003, p. 257). This "what's-wrong-with-it?" stare is the same one the party-goers give Regan as she makes her transformation apparent by pissing on the carpet, and is one I rarely experience. Normally, the stares I get say 'I-want-to-fuck-it'. Though these experiences are upsetting, they are also validating – my encounters with horny men on the streetcar tell me I successfully perform little-white-girl-ness, they confirm that I am not a freak.

On my first day of church, to avoid complete self-betrayal, I set some rules for myself: I would not hide my body, I would not give spoken responses during mass, I would not bow or genuflect. Every Sunday, I walk up to the altar to receive communion and feel shame in my small acts of defiance. I avoid eye contact with the congregation, I imagine what they are thinking, what answers their gaze demands: 'why is she dressed like that?', 'why isn't she kneeling?', 'who raised her?', 'what's wrong with it?'. I hate being visible in this way. The prospect of being

perceived negatively by churchgoers is almost enough to make me hide away in a convent or disappear into a marriage. Although I would rather not give my life and body up to God, it still seems like a safe and familiar option. Purity is a Catholic ideal I claim to reject, yet it remains part of my little-white-girl identity. It makes me ashamed of the demonic, impure parts of myself.

Though I am, at times, tempted to lead a double life, I can see, through Karras, that it comes with a cost. By becoming a priest, Karras avoids explaining his monstrosity. As a result, he is ashamed, directionless, and paranoid: he cannot be a "bad surprise" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 130). Karras does not believe in the life he has chosen, but is too afraid to take a different path, so he is trapped between two worlds. As a demon-girl, I feel trapped in my hybrid identity. I dodge questions from my church boss, the way Karras evades the detective's questioning. I am paranoid that my demonic nature may be found out by the Catholic Church and I fear the social rejection that may result. I do not want to let go of my little-white-girl-ness because everyone likes them and if everyone likes me, maybe no one will want to hurt me. Similarly, everyone respects priests. No one likes a monster.

For a different approach, I return to Stryker's "Words to Victor Frankenstein", where she embraces her monstrosity. Stryker (1994) says by reclaiming words like 'monster' and 'creature', she takes away the ability of these words to harm her (p. 240). As much as I aspire to take up Stryker's approach, I cannot bring myself to embrace these terms. The etymology of the word 'monster' does not particularly make me feel better about being one. What if I don't want to be a monster? Why should I have to explain myself? Why can't I just be normal? Do I even have a choice in the matter? Karras may ignore his monstrosity, but his anger and paranoia builds up inside him until he reaches a breaking point – when Regan kills Merrin–the older priest who Karras assists with the exorcism. In drawing the demon out of Regan and into himself, Karras sets himself free from a world in which he does not belong.

The church I work at is in Regent Park, so after evening rehearsals, I have to be escorted home by one of the men in the choir. One night, as we were waiting for the subway, an older woman I recognized from the congregation saw us and asked if he and I were together. I stared at her in disgust and disbelief. I had not considered, until that moment, that we might somehow look like a couple. Almost as horrified at the notion as I was, he set the record straight, and we laughed about it after she left. At our next rehearsal, he told the choir what had happened as a funny little anecdote. I forced a smile but I felt sick. Though I certainly did not want what happened to be our little secret, I would have preferred for it to remain my own private shame.

As a little white girl, I feel, on one hand, ashamed that this woman saw me as a sexual object. On the other hand, what is a white girl if not a pretty little doll for some guy to have a midlife crisis with? Returning to Monaghan's (2016) definition of girlhood in the cultural imagination, she writes, "[girls] typically aspire to beauty, popularity and successful heterosexual romance." (p. 32). A little white girl on her own is begging for men to tell her she is beautiful, so to avoid male attention, I need to act like I already have it. The guy who walks me home protects me the same way the doctors and priests protect Regan – he makes me appear 'normal'.

As a demon-girl, I am enraged that I have to roleplay as a housewife just to survive my trip home. Sometimes I feel the guy gets a kick out of being my knight in shining armour. I half-heartedly participate in his banter until he calls me 'young lady' or something and then I kind of want to shove a crucifix up his ass, if only to momentarily feel like I have some kind of control. Stryker (1994) speaks of this rage, saying, "the longer I live in these conditions, the more rage I harbor. … It is a rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival." (p. 244). Though I am full of rage, I remember that Regan's trouble began when she expressed her anger. To project a little-white-girl exterior, I must keep my rage inside. I need him to protect me from the other men who are out to get me, so I play the part of

a pretty little princess, silently seething on the subway. I play up my little-white-girl-ness because it is protective. It does not prevent me from getting assaulted on the TTC – but it is palatable: everyone wants to fuck me, and no one wants to send me to hell. Like Stryker, like Regan, like Karras, I can feel my rage building up inside me. I worry that this performance can only take me so far.

Trimble sees the ending of *The Exorcist* as a jumping-off point to queer futures. In one of the final scenes, after Regan is seemingly back to normal, she sees Father Dyer. Even though she does not remember the exorcism, she sees his priest collar and is compelled to hug him. Though the exorcism seemingly restores Regan's innocence, Regan's inexplicable recognition of Father Dyer indicates that her body holds memories of her possession. As such, we can ask, "What happens when what her body knows becomes too much for her mind to repress?" (Trimble, 2022, p. 15). Although Regan's "white-girl" exterior is restored, she still wars with her demonic nature, so the possibility of a queer future always remains. It feels like a natural progression: sweet little white girl becomes dutiful wife and mother, and cute little Sunday school girl becomes pretty little choir loft soprano. Who would I be if I did not spend my Sunday mornings at Catholic mass? Though some of my hatred towards Karras remains, I now read him differently, as a forefather or a cautionary tale. Even if I do not end up a sacrificial hero like Karras, I do not want to be the final girl either, sticking around for the long haul as a reward for my purity and pretty face, so the audience has something to look at. I can either follow Karras' lead and let my shame and paranoia control me, or, like Regan, I can listen to my rage.

I'm walking down Queen Street and pass a guy handing out flyers. He leaves his stand and follows me. I tell him I have to go and start walking faster. A woman smoking by an empty storefront yells at the guy to fuck off. I thank her and we smile as we watch him shrink away.

Sedgwick (2003) explains that the reparative reading Trimble engages in requires readers to "surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to [them] *as new*." (p. 146). The problem with paranoid readings and survival strategies is that they leave no room for possibility. My little-white-girl performance is a survival strategy; it makes me powerless and scared. Despite what I may miss out on, I do not feel ready to exorcize my paranoia.

Stryker challenges her readers to embrace their monstrosity, to "risk abjection and flourish as well as have I." (Stryker, 1994, p. 241). As much as the prospect of 'abjection' scares me, I feel compelled to meet Stryker's challenge. What would it look like if a demon-girl did not grow up to be a housewife, but a demon-woman? My answers are in the stories of monsters and undercover monsters – Regan, Trimble, Stryker, Clare, and Karras. My answers are in the loud, angry, emotional, crass, queer, beautiful, demon-women I encounter. I take them as my teachers, they embody what I want to become.

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

A black and white photo of a model. They sit in the grass with their knees up, their right hand around their knees and their head resting in their left hand. They gaze dramatically into the camera with their mouth closed. They have spiky hair, are wearing eyeshadow, lipstick and blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear an white, turtleneck tank top and sheer, black gloves. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

The Divine Comedy: a Flamboyance of *(Pink) Flamingos*

Parker Bloom
(he/him)

Dripping with obscenity, exaggerated caricature, and depictions of transgressive sex, John Waters' 1972 film, *Pink Flamingos*, is equal parts low-budget trashy charm and a bold declaration of presence from the edges of society. John Waters' film mobilizes parody and strategies of camp—an aesthetic sensibility that embraces an ironic appreciation of bad taste—to insert queer presence into existing normative discourses around gender roles, class, and sexuality. The cast of *Pink Flamingos* play characters who parody a cross-section of twentieth-century American identities in order to "camp" depictions of normative class and gender roles. Drag queen Divine stars as a counter-culture anti-hero on the run from the law and in a feud with a couple of depraved suburbanites: Connie and Raymond Marble, "two jealous perverts," who conspire to upstage the infamous Divine while making her life as miserable as possible. *Pink Flamingos* transgresses the norms of a heterosexist society through its parodic depiction of both marginalized and normative sexualities, and functions as a "queer structure of feeling" (Bordowitz, 1993, p. 211), effectively acting as a tool of agency and survival for the queer community. "Camp is a solvent of morality," Susan Sontag (1964) writes, "It neutralizes moral indignation, [and] sponsors playfulness" (p. 12). *Pink Flamingos*, in its copious camp, offers playfulness in droves, and affirms the presence of queer identities in opposition to the moral outrages of the mainstream.

A "queer structure of feeling," defined by Gregg Bordowitz (1993) as "an articulation of presence forged through resistance to heterosexist society," operates as "cultural strategies of [the] survival for queers" (p. 211). Bordowitz writes that cultural productions might be "considered within a queer structure of feeling if self-identified queers produce the work … [or] it is viewed as queer, either by queers or bigots" (p. 211). *Pink Flamingos* embodies a queer structure of feeling through its representation of queer identities, as well as its production by a queer filmmaker and queer cast. With her striking makeup and sky-high hair, the drag queen Divine acts as a beacon for her community. Similarly, Waters' ensemble cast of outsiders and self-identified queers (Holmlund, 2017, p. 31-43; Norby, 2022) stand in stark contrast to normative discourse. *Pink Flamingos*' articulation of queer presence acts as a deliberate transgression against the repression of queer sexuality and asserts the presence of queer identities by claiming existence and rejecting silence.

The parody employed by *Pink Flamingos* subverts the cultural and political suppression of queer sexualities by representing queerness (and thus creating a queer structure of feeling) amid the identities and space typically occupied by heteronormativity. "Power and domination," Meyer (1994) writes, relies upon "the ability to produce codes of signification," a process over which the dominant order maintains control by valuing certain social codes as the privileged "original" (p. 4). In *Pink Flamingos*, the "original" representations of North American identity are cast in heterosexist terms: heterosexual marriage and relationship coupling, an aspirational bourgeoisie, and domesticity are all privileged above other non-normative social codes. This privileging is apparent in the film's satirical valuing of its mainstream characters against Divine's eccentric and outsider milieu.

To Meyer (1994), the original is "the signifier of dominant presence," and "it is only through the 'original' that we can know and touch that power" (p. 4). Queer identities are excluded from the dominant order's signification, distancing queer communities' access to political power and marginalizing their presence in society. "Camp refers to

strategies and tactics of queer parody," (Meyer, 1994, p. 3) a parody that destabilizes, subverts and ultimately transforms existing notions of sexual identity (Ross, 1988, p. 18). By parodying the establishment's sense of the original, queer structures of feeling achieve access to signification and value production previously only the purview of heteronormativity—it is through camp that *Pink Flamingos* subverts the dominant order and asserts queer agency.

In camping the image of a glamorous housewife or aspirational bourgeoisie, Waters' cast presents exaggerated depictions of normative identities and inserts queer cultural cues into dominant discourses. Here we may see *Pink Flamingos*' cast employing tactics of "queer parody" (Meyer, 1994, p. 3) by creating campy renditions of identity to create a queer structure of feeling, and thus offer "resistance to heterosexist society" (Bordowitz, 1993, p. 211). The character of Divine epitomizes this subversive camping of identity. Dressed to the nines in high-heels, fur stole and a glamorous mini-dress, the persona of drag queen Divine is described by the narrator in *Pink Flamingos* as "the notorious beauty Divine, the filthiest person alive." Hiding out from a public disgusted by her unrivaled licentiousness, Divine has assumed the identity of Babs Johnson and is inhabiting a trailer on an unaddressed plot of land outside of Baltimore. Ornamental pink flamingos decorate the scrubby space in front of her home, and inside a china plate hanging on the trailer wall declares "God bless our mobile home." Divine subverts heteronormativity through her parodic embrace of female beauty and domesticity, evident in her theatrical drag queen makeup and sexually suggestive attire which references an idealized mid-century glamorous housewife. The domestic scene to which we are introduced at the start of the film foregrounds this parody of normalcy: her mobile home—denigrated in normative discourse as inferior to the single-family detached house—is Divine's suburban bliss, evidenced by her decorative china and lawn ornaments. Co-inhabiting her trashy idyll is Divine's chosen-family: her "trusted travelling companion Cotton, her delinquent son Crackers, and her mentally-ill mother, Miss Edie." The film uses Divine's coterie of social outsiders to camp middle-American suburbanism and "the ideology of capitalist society [that] has enshrined the family as the source of love, affection, and emotional security, … where our need for stable, intimate human relationships is satisfied" (D'emilio, 2013, p. 189). In Divine's world, love, affection and emotional security is in abundance, though it emerges not from a heterosexual family but rather from an assemblage of queer identities living in a utopic parody of suburban satisfaction.

Pink Flamingos' queer parody of heterosexist hegemony—manifest by the characters of Connie and Raymond Marble—can be seen as produced by a population typically "excluded by conventional representations of male-as-hero or narrative agent, and female-as-image or object of the spectacle" (Ross, 1988, p. 17). Instead, queer cultures often "express their lived spectatorship largely through imaginary or displaced relations to the images and discourses of a straight, 'parent' culture" (Ross, 1988, p. 17). Connie and Raymond Marble are rivals to Divine's crown of filth, enviously competing with Divine for tabloid recognition of their depraved ways. Criminals and sexual deviants, the Marbles take pride in both their depravity and their enmeshed businesses; a basement baby ring funds their multiple pornography shops and elementary-school heroin trade. Embodying the aspirational bourgeoisie, Connie and Raymond Marble parody the heterosexual couple ubiquitous in modern America. Early in the film, we are introduced to the couple as living "across town, located in the teeming metropolis known as downtown Baltimore," where Connie Marble is conducting a job interview in their suburban home. The irony implied in locating the Marbles in the ignominious city of Baltimore is mirrored by Divine's unaddressed trailer hideout; despite their aspirations to wealth and fame, the Marbles live in an unglamorous and working-class city while the nationally-notorious Divine resides on a dirt-road outside the reaches of normativity. In heterosexual culture "the love plot of intimacy and familialism … signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way. Community is imagined through scenes

of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction" (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p. 554). The Marbles' parody of bourgeois business practice extends to control of reproduction and generational narrative through their nefarious baby ring. Connie Marble explains that they "keep two girls at all times, who are impregnated by Channing, our rather fertile servant. We sell the babies to lesbian couples, and then we invest the money in various businesses around town." In *Pink Flamingos*' outrageous version of the American dream, the bourgeoisie control both the means of production and the means of sexual reproduction. Waters' film illustrates the thin facade that separates the mainstream from its outcasts. While the Marbles may be deviant criminals, their illegal activity in fact mirrors the entrepreneurial values of a capitalist mainstream; *Pink Flamingos* seems to suggest that the difference between an outsider and insider is often no more substantial than an aesthetic layer of concealer and rouge.

"If she walks by, the men-folks get engrossed, (She can't help it! The girl can't help it!)" (Waters, 1972). High-heeled footfalls keep time with a snare drum as Divine ascends an exterior stairway: "if she winks an eye, the bread slice turns to toast (She can't help it! The girl can't help it!)" (Waters, 1972). Little Richard's wailing rock-and-roll vocals soundtrack a series of shots of Divine, clad in a tight mini-dress with clutch and fur stole in hand, strutting through the streets of Baltimore on a shopping trip in the big city. One of *Pink Flamingos*' most iconic scenes occurs midway through the film, depicting Divine in the midst of staid Baltimore as she sashays, hips swinging, down a sidewalk populated by a gawking public. Waters' insertion of a queer icon—the real-life drag queen Divine playing *Pink Flamingos*' Queen-of-Filth—within the public environs of a heterosexist society demonstrates the tactic of using sexual public practice to contest the hegemonic structure of hetero-centric intimacy by instead sharing knowledge about queer sexuality (Berlant and Warner, 1998). Similar sexual public practices often deployed in this act of "queer world making" include cruising, parades, dance, and the camp-laden parody of drag performances (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p. 561). As Divine swaggers down the sidewalk in front of a glitzy theatre marquee, the camera mirrors the onlookers' gaze and remains locked on Divine. "If she smile the beefsteak become well done, (She can't help it! The girl can't help it!)" (Waters, 1972). A sideways glance seems to meet the camera, and Divine bares her teeth in a flirtatious growl before pursing her lips and, moments before a hard cut ends the scene, blows a kiss at the real-world audience. "She make grandpa feel like twenty-one, (She can't help it! The girl can't help it!)." Divine's moment of self-aware queer camp deploys a public display of queer sexual practice—drag—within the heteronormativity of urban Baltimore. By flaunting her queer sexuality, Divine's downtown prowl epitomizes Bordowitz's "articulation of presence" (1993, p. 211), illustrating how queer structures of feeling contest hegemonic values and affirm queer presence.

Relying on the trashy tactics of camp, John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* articulates the presence of queer identity within the very framework of signification employed by dominant heterosexist society. By camping mainstream notions of class, gender and sexuality, *Pink Flamingos*' depictions of outsider sex and marginalized sexualities parody the notion of the normative original. It is through parody that the disenfranchised and marginalized may "advance their own interests" by inserting alternative, self-made signifying codes into [the] discourse" (Meyer, 1994, p. 4) of dominant culture. *Pink Flamingos*' wholehearted embrace of the transgressive can be read as a moment of praxis where normative aesthetics, identities and socially-constructed roles are supplanted by a queer structure of feeling. In all of its revulsive glory, *Pink Flamingos* epitomizes Sontag's description of "the ultimate Camp statement: it's good because it's awful" (1964, p. 13).

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

A model sits in green grass. They have their knees up and open, with their left arm resting on their left knee and their right hand holding a pink chinese fan between their legs. They look intensely up at the camera with their mouth closed and slightly pouted. They have spiky hair, are wearing eyeshadow, lipstick and blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a floral, knee length, silk skirt; white turtleneck tank top with a hood; sheer, black gloves; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

“Off Script” Podcast Episode 1: Finding Joy in Reclamation: Black Female Pleasure, Power and Sexuality

Erika Ozols *(she/her)*

Podcast opens with “Mad” by Solange, a song about themes of anger, frustration, and resilience, particularly in the context of Black identity and experience.

Erika:
What does it mean to find pleasure in a body that the world has so often defined only by the suffering it’s endured? For Black women, pleasure and joy is something so much more than just a personal feeling. It’s political, it's historical, and it’s deeply intertwined with power and autonomy – or the lack thereof. The sexuality of Black women has been a weapon of control, exploitation, and misinterpretation, from the remnants of slavery to the prejudices that persist today. But there has also been joy, autonomy, reclamation, and resilience that have risen above.

In today’s episode, which is truly special to me, we will be unpacking the complexities behind Black women’s reclaiming of our sexuality, not only as a means of pleasure, but as a radical act of resistance against systemic and historical structures of oppression and pain towards our people. Through black joy, empowerment and resilience, we are unlimited in redefining what it means to live authentically and fully in our own bodies. Together, we’ll dissect these legacies of pain, and the transformative powers of the erotic, as well as exploring how contemporary Black women are defining these structures to empower, and dismantle pre-written narratives.

So get comfortable, because we’re going to talk all about how pleasure, yes pleasure, can be the most powerful tool for resistance and liberation. I’m your host, Eri, and this is ‘Off Script’.

Podcast transitions. *"We Deal With the Freak’n’ by Solange begins to play, a song about Black female empowerment and manifestation. Music fades.*

Erika:
To understand pleasure as a tool for Black liberation, we need first to dissect the historical forces that shape, and still continue to shape the ways Black female bodies are viewed, and handled. This goes so much further than history, it embodies a long legacy of pain, misuse of power, and commodification. In her groundbreaking book, Scenes of Subjection, Saidiya Hartman details how Black women's bodies were both commodified and beyond mistreated during the transatlantic slave trade (Hartman, 1997). She describes how women in slavery were

viewed as objects of desire and manual labour, bodies to be used, abused, and dehumanized.

Hartman adds, "The terror of captivity secured by the use of the female body was the origin of racialized gender," (Hartman, 1997, p.86). Black women were simply reduced down to stereotypes; the hypersexual jezebel, the mammy type, both types created with the intent of catering to others, and erasing their own autonomy. These types were born out of fear. During this time, Black women were the subject of extreme sexual violence, harrassment and exploitation, which contributed to the notion that Black women are hypersexual and "impure." In her work, 'Mapping the Margins', Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) states, "The well-developed fear of Black sexuality served primarily to increase white tolerance for racial terrorism as a prophylactic measure to keep Blacks under control" (p. 1272). Both Hartman and Crenshaw's work contends that the female Black body was used as property, not to be seen as human. These stereotypes are still prevalent in pop culture, the media, and social perceptions even in the postcolonial era. In her work, *Beyond Black and Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography, and Black Female Sexuality*, Ariane Cruz investigates the way in which contemporary pornography mimics the treatment of Black women. According to her, Black women are frequently the targets of acts of subordination that mimic past oppressions, and these portrayals continually represent a cycle of racial violence (Cruz, 2015). Despite this, Cruz also acknowledges that there are many Black women who engage in BDSM and other erotic practices, not as victims of historical violence, but as women redefining their sexual narratives. In this context, BDSM then becomes a space of exploration with the goal of liberation, where Black women have the ability to control their own limits, boundaries, and desires.

This dichotomy, between oppressive structures and empowerment, sets the foundations of today's discussion. It's within this tension that we start to see the transformative power of pleasure and autonomy. Let's take a quick break.

Ad break plays. *'Doo-Wop (That Thing)' by Lauryn Hill, a song advocating for self respect, autonomy and the rejection of societal expectations held against Black women. Music fades out*

Erika:

Welcome back, take a chance to recentre, and let's continue our discussion. We discussed the historical contexts, but in order to fully dissect the relation between pleasure and power, we need to also discuss some key theoretical frameworks that are going to help us unpack the intersections of gender, race, and power. I want to talk a bit about Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic, examined in her work *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. Lorde (1984) situates the erotic

as more than sexual– it is a deep-rooted sense of joy that stems from being able to live freely, and authentically in our own bodies . Lorde (1984) writes, "The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (p. 53). For Black women, whose bodies, desires, and needs have often been rejected and ignored, the erotic then becomes a tool for reclamation—a way to become connected with themselves, and find empowerment in pleasure. Now, I want to touch a bit on Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Crenshaw calls us to think about race and gender as inseparable when it comes to moulding the lived experiences of Black women. In the context of pleasure and sexuality, this can look like the handling of different layers of oppression – in this case, being both hypersexualized and desexualized, marginalized for being Black and for being a woman. Crenshaw critiques contemporary mainstream anti-racism and feminist movements for not accurately addressing the unique

needs of Black women. In feminist spaces, discussions around sexuality often cater to the cisgender white woman's experience, and dismiss the way racial dynamics affects a Black woman's relationship to sex, to their body, to their pleasures and desires (Crenshaw, 1991). This exclusion only further reinforces oppressive attitudes in conversations about pleasure and joy, leaving them to have to navigate these politics of identity on their own. Together, these frameworks offer us a clearer lens to examine relationships between power, pleasure and resistance.

"Woman" by Little Simz begins to play as transition music,
a song about female empowerment and connection.

Let's face it, we as Black women have always been storytellers – whether it be through our activism, music, art, media, and the creative ways we move through the world. Today, we've witnessed a powerful transformation in the ways we have reclaimed our narratives, especially surrounding pleasure and sexuality. These contemporary art forms created by Black women don't just act as creative mediums, but mediums through which we're able to harness so much history, emotion, pain and power. These modern stories challenge those painful histories and create spaces which celebrate Black female joy, autonomy, and self expression. Let's begin with media and entertainment. Shows like *Insecure* (Rae, 2016), created by Issa Rae, and *Chewing Gum* (Coel, 2016) created by Michaela Coel, portray multidimensional Black women who navigate love, intimacy, pleasure, sexuality and desire. These narratives were created to disrupt these predetermined stereotypes, by portraying their Black female leads as complex characters who experience the full range of human emotions and tackle hardships of simply being alive, and Black. In these narratives, sexuality is not written as a spectacle, or a stereotype, it's written as an essential part of life to explore, and is portrayed with so much authenticity. In *Chewing Gum* (2016), the show's protagonist, Tracey, is an awkward, and deeply curious young woman exploring her sexual awakening. What makes *Chewing Gum* (2016) stand out for me is the way it portrays Tracey's exploration of pleasure in ways that are messy, hilarious, and unapologetically human. Coel,who also stars as Tracey, offers a character who is both relatable and vulnerable. It is a crucial reminder of what bell hooks describes as the power of representation. It carries the ability to dismantle the dominant white gaze, and open up new doors for understanding the lived experiences of Black women. Hooks states in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, that Black women are too often rendered as either invisible through erasure or hypervisible through fetishization (hooks, 1992). In response, Coel fully presents Tracey as a nuanced woman rather than merely a stereotype. This works to support hooks' critique, that Black women's representation must be questioned, and spaces must be created where Black women can feel heard, and seen.

"Self" by NoName begins to play,
a song critiquing societal expectations, systemic oppression, and the music industry.

I've been playing music through every transition, and trust, it is very intentional. Music is the voice of the community, and everything I've played today shares a message, and holds a story. Let's talk about one of my favourite albums of all time, Solange Knowles' "A Seat at the Table". This album offers a more subtle, introspective approach to reclaiming pleasure, joy and autonomy. Songs like 'Cranes in the Sky', 'Mad' and 'We Deal With the Freakn' examine

how Black women resist and navigate systemic oppression. Same thing goes for Lauryn Hill's record breaking album, 'The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill'. Hill criticizes the social constraints placed on Black men and women to present themselves in ways which cater to white audiences, especially with regard to sexuality. She reinforces a message of self-respect and independence in the opening verse by cautioning women against becoming objects of male desire. These artists embody what bell hooks (1992) describes as the significance of radical self discovery . It isn't simply about surviving pain, but about creating opportunities for self care, identity and pleasure. In activism, we've seen hooks' ideas radicalized through movements like #MeToo and the Black Women's Blueprint. Hooks reminds us all that liberation does not stop at just dismantling systems of oppression, but is about shaping spaces where Black pleasure, joy, and satisfaction is possible.

Erika:

Throughout today's episode, we've dissected how Black women navigate the intersections of pain and pleasure, reclaiming the narratives we have historically been rejected from. From Saidiya Hartman's reflections on the histories of slavery, to Audre Lorde's declaration of the erotic as a tool for liberation, we've been through some pretty heavy frameworks, and seen the ways they challenge oppressive structures and stereotypes. So as we close out today's episode, let's remember that the journey from pain to pleasure is continuous, and is a process that demands reimagination, dismantling, and a lot of unlearning. I am still unlearning things about myself everyday. Healing is not linear. It's about appreciating the freedom that comes with creating our own narratives, and accepting the complexity of my messy, unapologetic Black female sexuality.

Thank you so much for joining me in today's episode. I urge you all to honour and amplify the voices of Black women everywhere. To every awkward Black girl listening to this who thinks it's weird to still be figuring out your sexuality, know you're not alone. You are strong, resilient, and beautiful. Until next time, stay curious, stay critical and always seek out the beautiful Black joy you rightfully deserve.

"Tina Taught Me: Interlude" by Solange begins to play as the podcast closes out.

Scan to Listen

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A model poses in front of green foliage. They are crouched with their knees bent and their hands clasped between their knees. They gaze dramatically into the camera with their mouth closed. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, red lipstick and pink blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a light pink, long sleeve dress with sheer sleeves and lace around the cuffs and collar and a bright pink tool skirt. Their feet are covered by their skirt. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

I Ate a Girl and I Liked it: Queer Hunger in *Jennifer's Body*

Sofia Moniz
(she/her)

Introduction

One Friday night, my friend suggested we watch *Jennifer's Body*. I googled the title and saw Jennifer on the movie poster sitting on a desk, clutching her books to her chest and staring seductively out at me, her uniform skirt draped perfectly over her stiffly posed legs. I took a sip of something lukewarm, unnaturally pink, and hand-sanitizer flavoured, and prepared to watch sexy schoolgirl Megan Fox get murdered – she didn't stand a chance running away from a killer in her strappy summer heels. For better or worse, this was what I had come to expect from horror movies. I took one look at Jennifer's body and saw its vulnerability, I knew something bad was going to happen to it. DongWon Song, in their essay titled "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Eat the Damn Eyeball," speaks on their fraught relationship with mainstream media, discussing the negative effects of mainstream portrayal of East Asian culture on their identity, and ends with a call for good representation. For Song, "eating the eyeball" is empowering; it is a rejection of the shame and alienation they internalize from media that positions East Asian culture and cuisine as abject. Similarly, mainstream horror often overlooks, casts aside, and victimizes its feminine, white teenage girls, shrinking their chance of survival unless they adhere to the masculinized, virginal conventions of the Final Girl (Clover, 2015). In this sense, the genre reduces the possibilities for women's representation – either killing off the ditzy blonde teen or masculinizing her to survive so she can become the last one standing. But there is a tension here. Who decides if representation is good or bad, accurate or not? Even if it is *bad*, Song still loves Star Trek, and I still love a classic slasher. What do you do with a story that doesn't love you back?

This is the space *Jennifer's Body* plays in. When up-and-coming indie-rock band Low Shoulder books a show in the small town of Devil's Kettle, best friends Jennifer Check and Anita "Needy" Lesnicki sneak into Melody Lane, the local bar, to hear them play. As expected, something bad does happen to Jennifer's body: the band burns the venue to the ground, which serves as enough distraction to allow them to kidnap Jennifer – who they assume is a virgin – and sacrifice her to the devil in exchange for fame. As it turns out, Jennifer was not a virgin, so the sacrifice is unsuccessful, but this almost doesn't matter – the public narrative that arises around the fire depicts Low Shoulder as heroes, launching them to national acclaim. Jennifer and Needy, the only people who know the truth about Low Shoulder's true character, eventually take matters into their own hands, fulfilling the *revenge* aspect of Barbara Creed's theorization of the rape-revenge plot. Jennifer climbs into Low Shoulder's van, a scared little girl, and returns with a deep, insatiable hunger that can only be satisfied by cannibalizing her classmates. To me, though, the most interesting dimension to consider is a different kind of hunger – the movie's undeniable but ill-defined queerness. Jennifer and Needy have been best friends since early childhood, and their relationship has always been uneven – Jennifer is popular and controlling, and Needy is a nerdy pushover. The homoeroticism between the two is present throughout the movie, but the closest we come to any version of "coming out" is when Needy says, "I thought you only murdered boys," and Jennifer replies, "I go both ways" (Kusama, 2013). This queerness remains unspoken: it does not make its way into either the story the film tells, or the story the people of Devil's Kettle tell.

In the film, Needy begins her narration saying, "Every day I get letters. I think I get more

letters than Santa Claus, Zac Efron and Dr. Phil combined... I'm kinda the shit!" (Kusama, 2013). In response, I begin this paper with a fictionalized fangirl love letter to Needy, inspired (if you could call it that) by the Ted Bundy/Jeffrey Dahmer craze in the 80s/90s where women would send them letters in prison. These letters were parasocial to the extreme: horny, desperate, and overly familiar. I use this letter as a way to think about the narratives that surround tragedy in the movie (and how they might continue to play out after the movie ends), and to consider the potential for empowering pleasures in reading Jennifer and Needy as heroes.

Letter

Dearest Needy,

I watched your trial on TV, and you were absolutely glowing - like Jennifer after she ate that emo kid. Your hair looked so long and luscious and your tits looked great too. Losing the glasses was a good idea. Did killing Jennifer give you life? Do you feel empty without her?

I don't know what they tell you about what's going on out here, but everyone's brain-dead as usual. When Low Shoulder got slaughtered in their hotel room, the whole world basically stopped. Their groupies all lost their minds, and everyone kept posting their 'thoughts and prayers.' Anyway, they're, like, world famous now. They're constantly on the radio, which sucks because their songs aren't even good. At least they're not around to enjoy it.

Your school has a shrine to Chip and Jennifer now, by the way. I saw it on the news. They'd probably hate that they're up there together, but I guess two dead teenagers are better than one. It's kind of crazy, I mean, what did Chip ever do to deserve this much attention? Jennifer wouldn't like the picture they used. She looks perfect, of course, but way too cutesy, not like the real Jennifer. She's the type to want her tits on display in her obituary. Do you miss her? You've probably forgotten Chip existed by now, but you and Jennifer were practically soul-tied.

You're still on the news sometimes, too. The picture they use is so dorky, not like the ones from your trial, and they always call you "Needy," not Anita. I guess that nickname probably came from Jennifer, but the way I see it, Jennifer was the needy one. She couldn't bring herself to eat you because you were too important to her, isn't that so romantic? When Jennifer controlled how you dressed, who you hung out with, it was because she wanted you to herself, and you let her because you wanted her too. Now that she's gone, what do you hunger for? Do you still want revenge? Do you still want to eat boys? Or maybe girls?

Now that you've read this far, I guess I should tell you my real reason for writing. I know you have powers, I know you killed Low Shoulder. You were always hot, but you have this unnatural glow that wasn't there before. Needy, I want you to bite me. You understand me like no one else, and I need to know what it's like to be you. I want to be able to command a room, to rip a boy to shreds. Please respond this time so we can make it happen. I'll write again soon.

Love,
Your Biggest Fan xoxo

Reflection

This letter, which idolizes Jennifer and Needy as (anti)heroes, is a position I have taken in other papers, centering other horror protagonists. The fangirl's tone fits with stereotypes of teenage girls – angsty and sarcastic – and speaks to my experience as a teenage girl – full of desire she does not understand and dubious of the mainstream feel-good narratives that often surround tragedy. In *Jennifer's Body*, the local story that arises in the wake of the fire at Melody Lane deifies Low Shoulder, who Needy and Jennifer know was responsible for the tragedy. These narratives within Devil's Kettle allow the town to gloss over the horrors they experience, fulfilling Song's notion that "fiction helps us order our lives" (Song, 2017, .para. 5). While thinking against mainstream narratives may be uncomfortable, subversive readings can afford unique pleasure. The more I think in this binary way, however, the less these readings satisfy me. Each provides a shallow catharsis – there may be more pleasure to be found revelling in chaos. Below, I will position memorialization of heroes and anti-heroes as coming from the town's and viewers'

anxious desires to make sense of a messy reality that cannot be controlled. Further, in conversation with Barbara Creed and Carmen Maria Machado, I will consider the pleasures *Jennifer's Body* affords in its contradictions and confusions, in its mostly unexplained queerness.

The day after the Melody Lane fire, a teacher at the local high school tells his class to "put aside your teenage concerns" given the tragedy they experienced. This struck me as a ridiculous ask; how can a teenager put aside teenage concerns? As a teenager, I was deeply concerned with my teenage concerns. My world was small and my default emotions were hatred and disgust – I had yet to master empathy. I was sickened by my world, and sought out representations of the evil I felt. No scale of tragedy could have made me hold hands with my peers and sing a Green Day song; I hungered for the eyeball.

In some sense, depicting teenage girls as vulnerable victims-to-be limits their narrative potential and tells audiences that these girls are uninteresting and insignificant. Likewise, this trivialization alienates audiences that identify with these figures, which Song (2017) says sends a message that "There was no room for people like me in the future or the past." (para. 14). In *Jennifer's Body*, Needy is constantly brushed aside and prevented from acting in the narrative. First, when she tries to tell Chip, her loser boyfriend, what happened to Jennifer–that she is "really evil," not just "high school evil"–and then by her classmates and teachers when she tries to explain that Low Shoulder are not the heroes they need (Kusama, 2013). These dismissals, though, allow Jennifer and Needy to get away with a certain amount of evil; because they are overlooked, they have more freedom to act outside of social expectations. For them, this includes telling sarcastic jokes, making out with each other, and killing boys. In this way, Jennifer and Needy make room for themselves. Likewise, the fangirl makes room for herself when she asks to share in Needy's demonic power.

In the fangirl's world, the media dismisses Jennifer after she dies. They take away her agency and, through tragedy narratives that depict her as a helpless victim, erase the evil, cannibalizing bitch she actually was. As a result, no one knows the real Jennifer except Needy. The intense, homoerotic friendship at the centre of *Jennifer's Body* is one of its main sources of pleasure. Needy's connection to Jennifer borders on the supernatural; she has visions of Jennifer and can sense when she is nearby. Needy and Jennifer each have a queer hunger within them: a hunger for girls and boys, for attention, power, and revenge. Song (2017) says, "to break bread … with someone different from us is to build a bridge of understanding" (para. 22). My fangirl yearns for the understanding Needy experienced when she indulged her hunger and killed the band.

Identifying *Jennifer's Body* as a rape-revenge plot, the story contains the potential to "give power back to the marginalized" (Song, 2017, para. 21). Barbara Creed (2023) argues rape-revenge narratives encourage audiences to root for the woman by centering her point of view and including horrifying rape scenes In *Jennifer's Body*, the sacrifice scene is horrifying: the band members make needlessly cruel comments amid Jennifer's desperate sobs. The scenes where Jennifer eats boys also encourage the audience to root for her, as Jennifer makes jokes while seducing the unfortunate but ultimately insignificant side characters. As such, it is easy to idolize Jennifer and Needy. I greedily watched Jennifer tear those boys up, a welcome change of pace after being force-fed the over-sweet post-tragedy rhetoric prevalent throughout the rest of Devil's Kettle.

Lately, however, I have found that in my rejection of these saccharine narratives, I sometimes swing too far in the other direction. I see this tendency as coming from a protective impulse toward the self, a desire for catharsis, or a saviour complex (the third often being the case for actual serial killer fangirls). I often feel this way toward horror movie monsters; I feel a kinship with them. I want to do right by them. I want to save them. My impulse to memorialize Jennifer and Needy comes from a hunger for solidarity, for an expression of the rage I felt as a teenage girl. In this way, horror in general, and *Jennifer's Body* in particular, provides catharsis for my rage. Returning to

the framework of rape-revenge, Jennifer is the "all-powerful, all-destructive" castrating woman who unleashes her "terrible but justifiable wrath" on the men who wronged her (Creed, 2023). The pleasure of rape-revenge is in victims taking back control of their narrative. Even though this pleasure is interrupted by Jennifer's death, her power survives through Needy's revenge.

Though this straightforward reading provides some pleasure, it ultimately falls flat; even though Needy kills the members of Low Shoulder, the broader structural issues remain. There will always be a new scummy guy with a van, a new horny teenage boy, a new indie band colluding with Satan. And so, I am left unsure of what would satisfy my hunger. Jennifer and Needy's relationship is a mess of desire, earning the label of queerbaiting through its unwillingness to define the relationship. Machado (2022) problematizes this accusation, and the simplicity of the "Born This Way" narrative that tends to come in its place, saying, "there is such little grace given to the perfect messiness of desire. Even queers feel pressure to homogenize the experience into catchy slogans" (p. 19). My first encounter with the concept of queerbaiting was a 2008 interview clip of Lady Gaga, who, when asked for her opinion on Katy Perry's song "I Kissed a Girl", says "I don't think she's kissed a girl." Personally, I have no stake in whether Katy Perry kissed a girl. If I wanted to be pedantic, I would point out that she probably did not write the song either. The lyrics to "I Kissed A Girl," whether fact or fiction, are messy – the relationship she describes cannot be concretely defined – which means it is offensive for audiences who are inclined to get offended, and so much fun for audiences who are inclined to have fun.

Mainstream narratives of queerness often simplify it in an attempt to make something inherently evasive and messy more concrete. The "Born This Way" slogan, however politically expedient as a narrative, has not been my experience of queerness. Like Machado, at various times in my life I have called myself straight or gay when questioned– either out of self-preservation, to get a boy to leave me alone, or because I really believed it– before settling comfortably into a middle ground I do not particularly care to name. The controversy surrounding "I Kissed A Girl" is what makes the song so fun and so queer. Whether Katy Perry really has tasted cherry chapstick, or whether the song is a tasteless attempt to capitalize on a cultural fascination with queerness, there is pleasure in revelling in the specific brand of early-2000s bad taste and homophobia found in both "I Kissed A Girl" and *Jennifer's Body*. Needy pines after her best friend and blows off her boyfriend to see her, fielding accusations of being "lesbi-gay." When Needy straddles Jennifer in her bed, about to kill her with an Exacto knife, Jennifer says, "Do you get all your murder weapons from Home Depot? God, you're butch" (Kusama, 2013). These messy, campy, evil, queer, stereotypically teenage-girl comments are what makes the movie so fun. *Jennifer's Body* is a mess of hunger and desire and power and revenge. I feel an impulse to try and understand it, to impose a narrative onto it that would make me feel safe. Lately, though, I just want to revel in the mess. I do not need to eat the eyeball, but I do not want to discard it either – I am content to stare at it, and allow it to stare back.

A few weeks ago, as I was walking home, a man waiting at a red light called me a dyke. This kind of came out of nowhere because I am not visibly queer, and certainly not butch. At first, I was afraid. I wanted to understand what had made me stand out to him in this way. I could have given in to fear and refused to engage with this labelling, either by hiding – never leaving the house again – or by retaliating – hunting him down in a black hoodie and ripping his organs out. Instead, I choose to find pleasure in the messiness of that encounter. Sure, he clocked me somehow, in my pink platform shoes and sparkly hair clips: I like kissing girls. But he was the one with the ponytail and the pickup truck, so who's the dyke, really?

My first experience watching *Jennifer's Body*, sitting on my bed with a childhood friend who I've been known to make out with when drunk (and she and I were a little drunk that night), was a mix of queer kinship and queer desire. Machado (2022), quoting José Esteban Muñoz, argues, "a girl kissing her best friend … is the acceptance of loss [to "a

world of heterosexual imperatives, codes, and laws]... no matter where she goes afterward" (p.19). Jennifer and Needy do not need to play a part in a larger narrative for their story to be enjoyable, it is enough for them to just be. I no longer hunger for heroes or anti-heroes: instead, I find satisfaction in messy queer icons. Jennifer and Needy, of course, but also (especially?) the guy who called me a dyke from his pickup truck, before the stoplight changed and he drove away, continuing down what I'm sure was a strictly heterosexual path, ponytail swaying in the breeze.

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A black and white photo of a model. They sit in tall grass with their right leg straight, left leg bent, their right hand placed on their right knee, their left elbow resting on their left knee and their left hand holding a chinese fan near their face. They gaze dramatically into the camera with their mouth closed. They have spiky hair, are wearing eye shadow, lipstick and blush. They have a small tattoo on their left calf. They wear a light, long sleeve dress with sheer sleeves and lace around the cuffs and collar; a darker tool skirt; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

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A black and white photo of a model, except their skirt which is dark blue with a floral pattern. They pose in front of foliage, looking sideways at the camera over their shoulder with their mouth closed. Their back is arched with their hands placed on their lower back. hey have spiky hair, are wearing eyeshadow, lipstick and blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a blue, floral, knee length, silk skirt; white turtleneck tank top with a hood; sheer, black gloves; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

Commandments

Saige Severin *(any/all)*

Bethany Stevenson doesn't dance on Sundays. Papi said no and Father said *respect your elders* and Mother said *listen to your father*, so Bethany kept her feet together and her knees tucked in tight and her little black shoes polished to a shine and she stayed still on the Lord's day. Still and silent like a little doll, perfect in the church pew.

Thing is, Bethany ain't no little doll. Not these days, at least, not with her man's pants and her baseball cap and her breasts hung loose inside her shirt. Shirt, not blouse. No frills, no lace, no pretty satin bow. Bethany's shirt is ratty old cotton and she's damn proud of it.

Her ratty cotton shirt leans against the old, weather-beaten stone of the chapel as her watch hand clicks one notch over and marks Peter officially late. He rounds the corner scant seconds later, sleek banker's tie tugged loose around his throat.

"Late," she announces. He's already smiling.

"Ah, Beth," he says. He slides the tie all the way off and chucks it into her outstretched palm. They're tucked into the alleyway between the chapel and the post office, encased neither in the church's silence nor the street's chaos. In this muted third space, Peter pulls at the buttons of his proper white button down and says, "You know what the Good Book tells us. 'Be patient toward all people.'"

She throws a pile of fabric at him, a monstrosity of pink and satin that her mother would've drooled over. "It also tells us 'Be not ignorant of time with God,' and you seem plenty happy to shirk *that*."

Peter ignores the edge in her tone and gives a happy little shimmy as he tucks himself into the soft folds of his blouse. She hands him the skirt next and tucks away his plain black slacks into the rucksack at her feet.

"'Course," he says. "Of course you're right, I been remiss." He toes off his loafers right there in the alley, pulls off his socks, and slides one foot at a time into the navy-blue kitten heels she holds out for him. They took a good long while and a lot of elbow grease to widen up, but Peter is more than pleased with how they came out. They make his feet look small, his ankles strong. Dancin' shoes.

Bethany snorts at him as he does a little twirl, skirt kicking up in the late autumn wind.

"But you know what the Lord says most of all?" he asks.

"What's that, Pete?"

He heads off down the alley, heels clicking against cold asphalt. She follows right behind with the soft tread of well-worn boots, close enough to catch the soft puff of air as he winks at her and says, "'Forgive.'"

Around the corner of the squat, square church and out onto the street. Just for a moment. Peter keeps his head low and Bethany tucks her arm around him, hopeful that, from a distance, they'll look like a good, God fearing young couple headed to the evening service. Never mind

they ain't a couple, never mind that the men with the gavels and the guns would never call them "good." Folks will see what they want to believe, and they don't want to believe in women who hate skirts or men who wear them.

Bethany holds the church door open a crack and Peter slips inside. She follows him, sliding quiet as she can into the protective shadows at the back of the room. Even in the back, even in the dark, she doesn't like thinking that folks could be looking at her. She keeps her shoulders slouched and her head tucked low. Don't need to see the preacher to hear his words, and she's listening well enough. Peter doesn't think that way though. He's sitting up proud as anything, letting the moonlight shine off the beadwork on his blouse.

Up at the altar, Father Amand speaks of love. He has a voice that fills the hall with striking confidence. He's a young lad, come to the parish barely a year before, but he's already better loved than the old bag that came before him. His Amen echoes up to the vaulted ceiling, past the Savior enshrined in stained glass, and straight up to the heavens. Like a curl of smoke, it settles into Bethany's lungs. She breathes with him, through him, one breath and one heart beneath the eyes of God.

They pray. They sing. They pray more, sing more, shout loud in faith like the church bells ringing, and eventually the services end. Peter slides into the shadows, pressed against Bethany's side. They wait.

Questions must be answered. Some religious, some pure gossip. The ladies at late services love to talk. Bethany is careful to keep her name out of their mouths. Eyes down, do your work, do as your mother tells you. She's gotten good at faking it when she needs to.

Father Amand bears the questioning with his usual energetic grace, giving guidance to those who ask, and a subtle reminder of 'love thy neighbor' to those who run their mouths just a little too far. Then, when all the askers have left, there are rituals that must be observed. The Bible put away, the podium dusted, the candles snuffed. The doors must be locked.

When all that must be done has been done, Father Amand faces them with a smile. Bethany. Peter. And the seven other people who sit patiently on their pews, bodies full of worship but minds turning slowly from God to other joys. Other sources of community. Other forms, perhaps, of prayer.

"Lovely evenin' for it," says the Father.

"Lovely, indeed," says Marie Wilkinson from their place towards the front of the room. Long dress, pretty shoes, and a lipsticked smile better suited to cursing than verse. "I brought coffee."

Peter rises from his seat and swishes towards the front of the church. He drops an arm on Marie's shoulder and leans in as if whispering a secret, though his words come loud enough for all to hear.

"And we'll damn well need it, darlin'. I'm not going home until my shoes give out."

As if given permission, the group rises. There's Greg Davidson, the surly old carpenter, and Katherine Jones whose husband, Derrick Jones, stands across from her next to his lover, Jamie Malor. There's Susan Sanderson, Katherine's lover, and little Tommy Marshall—called "little" though he's a man grown, 'cause he's the youngest of them all and they can't let him forget it. And then there's Peter, in his pretty little skirt, and Bethany makes nine. Nine souls and Father Amand the tenth. Father Amand, who goes into a side room for a moment and

comes out in nothing but a plain tee and a pair of old jeans.

"Well c'mon folks," he says, that holy echo gone now from his voice. "Hop to it."

And they do. In pairs they lift each pew and move it to the outer edge of the church, creating a ring of wood and a wide open space in the center. Bethany and Katherine drop one right in front of the door—protection, in case they're heard. They haven't been, yet, but all of them know just how quick it could all go south. Better to hold the door with something more than its own lock.

When the floor is clear, Jamie walks up to a table near the pulpit and pulls a pile of sandwiches out of his beat-up backpack. Greg adds a handful of sweets, Susan produces a container of chips, and little Tommy tops it all off with two six-packs of beer and a wicked old grin.

And then, the crowning jewel. A clear space is left in the middle of the table for the king of their joyous gathering—Father Amand's record player.

The streets are empty, quiet. The world outside is dim but darkening quickly, and when the twilight sun finally gives up the ghost, Father Amand lets the music play.

He starts with Dylan, as he always does, and as the record kicks up the group comes alive. Limbs everywhere, laughter sailing up to the vaulted ceiling. Peter in Marie's arms, them in his. Little Tommy moves his body like a startled deer and Susan moves hers like she's always been doin' this, like she ain't stopping now and never has, like she's been here forever. Whistles, as Katherine pulls her in for a kiss. More whistles when the Dylan album ends and Greg puts on The Kinks.

The Kinks, the Stones, the Velvet Underground. Quick-step songs and slow-hip songs and head-on-shoulders songs that might be sad but can't be here. Bethany leans against the table and watches it all. When the others need a break, she talks with them, and when they go to dance again she sits back with an easy grin. Franklin and Coltrane and Walker and Ellington. Songs to make your blood sing and your head bop and your whole body sway like a great tree bent to the wind.

Record after record she watches, and drinks, until the sky outside is pitch and her body is mellow and warm. Then the last strains of Ellington fade out and there, in the silence, comes the ringing of the church bells. Heavy, low chimes. Calling out to the town, calling out to God. Calling out to Bethany and this room full of the people she loves, all the people in the world who know her as she is and don't care one wit about it.

Father Amand turns to her, his forehead misted with sweat, his breath coming happy and short. "What'll it be, Beth?"

"Cash," she tells him. "You know the one."

He puts the record on and she steps away from the table.

Bethany Stevenson doesn't dance on Sundays, because Papi said no and Father said *respect your elders* and Mother said *listen to your father*, so Bethany listened, and she obeyed, and she has followed their rules for all twenty-seven years of her life.

But it isn't Sunday. It's a minute past midnight on Monday morning, and all God's children can dance.

The Agency of Trans and Gender Non-Conforming Youth vs. Parental Rights: Contradictions of "Protection"

Madelyn Stanley
(she/her)

Increasing attention is given to the safety, self-determination and well-being of trans and gender non-conforming peoples in Canada. This attention often translates to a concern for children and as a result, youth agencies are often subject to the surveillance and authority of their parents and the government. In the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, the 2023 amendment to The Education Act, Bill-137, requires parental consent before school teachers can use a student's preferred name, pronouns, and/or gender identity if the student is under the age of 16 (*The Education Act 1995*. Amendment Act, 2023). The Bill is premised on the notion that parents have rights over their children under Section 2(a) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: parents can raise their children according to their own beliefs as long as the child's best interests are not violated (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, s.2.). Under these laws, a child's social identity, the identity they are socially perceived as, is contingent on the parental approval of their gender expression. This mandate, I will argue, threatens trans and gender non-conforming youth's safety and well-being against Section 7 of the Canadian Charter or the right to life, liberty, and security (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, s.2.).

By interfering with a child's self-determination, specifically, their ability to make autonomous decisions about their gender identity, this Bill exacerbates the harmful circumstances that this marginalized group faces and renders them unprotected. In this essay, I will discuss how the consequences of Bill-137 subjects trans youth to more harm than safety. I argue that parental rights are conflated with parental responsibilities, and only serve to legitimize parental control over children and propagate conservative, patriarchal, and heteronormative ideals of family. I suggest that parental rights operate as a legal tool to oppress children's self-expression, and I explain how the rights of trans and gender non-conforming individuals are inherently challenged by a legal system that is binary and highly specified.

Bill-137 and Parental Rights Context

The 2023 "1 Million March for Children" protest opposed the inclusion of gender identity and sexual orientation education into Canadian school curricula. This protest closely aligned with the provisions of Bill-137 by operating under a similar guise of parental rights concerns (Moman & Burns, 2024). The "1 Million March for Children" movement suggests that children belong to their parents and must be protected from sexualization and the indoctrination of non-normative notions and the diversity of gender identity and sexuality (Masonne, 2023). In this movement, children are characterized as parents' property and as innocent asexual beings (Carter, 2023). The relationship between children and sexuality is characterized as a moral panic of sexualization or perversion, and strives to prevent children from receiving any education about gender diversity and sexuality. However, people develop a relationship with gender and sexuality at different stages of their lives, most often starting in their youth. Therefore, painting children as asexual and innocent is inaccurate (Flanagan, 2016). If children are not educated about sexuality and gender diversity, heteronormativity – the norm of opposite-sex attraction – and the gender binary – which suggests that there are only two gender categories of man and woman that an individual can be – are perpetuated. The domination and normalisation of heteronormativity and gender binary yields harmful consequences to several members

of society, as I will explain below. As such, it is important to challenge these norms through education because they are founded on right-wing conservative mythology and white patriarchal ideals that marginalize and discriminate against several groups, such as sexual and gender minorities.

Heteronormativity assumes the naturalisation and the idealisation of heterosexuality. This assumption propagates gender norms and gender inequality; it favours people whose gender presentation aligns with their assigned gender at birth and it encourages and privileges people in heterosexual romantic relationships to take on traditional gender roles that tend to subordinate women and reinforce the patriarchal power allowing men to hold the majority of authority in relationships (Robinson, 2020). In Western societies, these concepts are grounded in conservative ideals derived from white colonial understandings of gender and sexuality, and they disregard other forms of identity expression in other cultures, particularly Indigenous identities like two-spirited people (Betasamosake Simpson, 2017). As such, heteronormativity and patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality are tools used to reinforce colonization and imperialism. When challenging white conservative beliefs about patriarchy and heteronormativity, it is revealed that these are merely social constructs. Gender expression is not a binary. Both sexuality and gender exist on a spectrum (Lorber, 1996). These gender and sexuality norms suppress trans and gender non-conforming individuals, contributing to the serious effects of gender dysphoria (MacMillan, 2019). In contrast, education about gender and sexual diversity, I argue, promotes more accurate, non-discriminatory, and open-minded notions about the range and multiplicity of social identity. Teaching these ideas to youth is important because it affirms and includes them within the realities of various social identities.

As such, the "1 Million March for Children" ideologies are grounded in the white conservative, patriarchal, and heteronormative belief that exposure to education about gender identity and sexual orientation may cause children to identify with these non-normative social identities, thus 'spreading' and growing this so-called 'deviant' ideology (Masonne, 2023). Fearmongering and moral panics skew and overestimate the prevalence of trans and gender non-conforming identities. Trans and non-binary individuals represent only a small portion of the population in Canada: 0.69% of Canadians ages 15 to 34 reported identifying as trans or non-binary in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Gender identity and sexual orientation education only make up a small portion of the Canadian grade school curriculum, which is designed to foster understanding and inclusivity, not indoctrinate students. As such, the protest group and Bill-137 exclude a socially marginalized group, putting their safety at risk, and perpetuating far-right conservative ideologies of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, all the while masking it as parental rights and children's protection.

Harmful Outcomes of this Bill

The outcomes of Bill-137, which mandates that teachers obtain parental consent before using a student's preferred name, pronouns, or gender identity for students under the age of 16, directly oppose its protective incentives because its consequences exacerbate the harmful realities faced by trans and gender non-conforming youth, violating Section 7 of the Charter (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, s.2.). I argue that Bill-137 undermines its purported protective intent by violating the right to life, liberty, and security, and perpetuating anti-2SLGBTQ+ sentiments in three key ways: 1) undermining students dignity through a restrictive disclosure process, 2) risking their safety if parents are transphobic, and 3) compromising the safety of school environments for these youth (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, s.2.).

Trans and gender non-conforming youth are a vulnerable group with unique minority stressors: social stigmatization and discrimination against their identities correlate with higher rates of anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and homelessness (Fish et al., 2002). Over one-third of gender non-conforming youth in Canada have attempted

suicide, and nearly half have experienced extreme episodic stress (Veale et al., 2017). A national survey of trans people in the United States recorded that 40% of the 27,715 respondents had attempted suicide at some point in their lives (Daum, 2020). They are also highly likely to experience gender-related violence and harassment through physical and/or verbal forms of harm (Ashley, 2024). These concerning statistics demonstrate that this community is acutely unprotected. Their social lives are put at risk because their identities are scrutinized, marginalized and inadequately recognized. Bill-137 exacerbates minority stressors, further entrenching and creating more oppressive and dangerous circumstances by disallowing children to express themselves and robbing them of their integrity.

Bill-137 interferes with trans and gender non-conforming youth's agency to affirm their identity with dignity and safety. When a child is forced to come out to their parents before their peers or teachers, part of their choice of how or to whom they want to disclose this information is undermined. Coming out is a milestone that affirms, authenticates and changes a gender or sexual minority person's positionality in society. Time, deliberation, safety, and support are large components of this process and vary from person to person based on their social contexts. For example, one may feel comfortable coming out to their friend but need more time before coming out to a relative. Some may not even feel the need to come out at all. Under this Bill, the unique coming out process becomes legally defined and operates under specific guidelines—this integral, careful, and complex process, then, is rendered coercive. This form of coercion, by obliging a child to come out to their parents before they come out at school, affects a child's social recognition during this time of their life: until a parent consents to change their child's name or pronouns, the child must conform to normative gender scripts and assume an identity that is inauthentic to them. This Bill challenges a child's freedom to engage in this process at the speed, in the environment, and with the people they want, posing a threat to their social identity and dignity.

This Bill can also have dangerous implications because trans and gender non-conforming youth might not feel safe at home; they may have transphobic parents who disregard their non-normative gender expression. For example, children may experience abuse or have their identities denied by their parents due to differing beliefs (Barret & McIntosh, 2015). The law makes the problematic assumption that parents create households as places of comfort, love, and safety; yet this is not always the case for some households. By granting this assumption, the law has the power to establish universal truths about the concept of the "family," which purports one "good model" of the family. This traditionally "good model" requires "appropriate parental and gender roles [to] produce adequate personalities" (Barret & McIntosh, 2015). Since trans and gender non-conforming youth do not fit into and pose a threat to these familial ideals that are suggested by the law, their identities are not always welcomed in the household, putting their safety at home under threat (Barret & McIntosh, 2015).

Family violence and homelessness are large risks for the trans youth population: they are eight times more likely to be homeless than other youth because of familial rejection (Ashley, 2024). Moreover, the risk factor is larger for children who are racialized, whose families have strong religious beliefs, and/or who experience economic instability (Robinson, 2020). When trans and gender non-conforming youth are left homeless, they struggle to find shelters that will take them because the binary structure and administration of most facilities do not accommodate gender non-conformity (Spade, 2015). Since the safety risks of disclosing one's identity are great for some youth, mandating that students disclose their identity firstly to their parents increases the likelihood of youth becoming alienated in their households. Fearing rejection or violence, trans and gender non-conforming youth, especially racialized children and children from lower socioeconomic households who experience other forms of social stressors and marginalization, may leave home, and be left homeless because administrative systems cannot support their needs and identities,

exacerbating their suffering (Robinson, 2020).

For some trans and gender non-conforming youth, schools can be a refuge from oppressive households if it is an accepting environment of friends' and teachers' support. However, Bill-137 disallows gender non-conforming students to take refuge at school, making this group further isolated and neglected. LJ Slovin's book, *Fierce, Fabulous, and Fluid: How Trans High School Students Work at Gender Nonconformity*, explores the importance of students "building worlds outside of adult surveillance" in school settings that accommodate gender diversity and create social identity suited with the students' desires for gender (Slovin, 2024). When schools become "safer and more affirming places for transgender youth," the common mental health challenges these youth face are diminished (Slovin, 2024). A study conducted in Canadian schools found that schools with gender-affirming policies saw a decrease in discriminatory acts in classrooms by nearly 50% (Veale et al., 2017). A study exploring the research into queer youth's mental health and key resources for promoting their health highlights the importance of providing students with the ability to choose their name or pronouns, and teaching 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive curricula, protects 2SLGBTQ+ students against victimization and bullying, to create better mental-health conditions for trans and gender non-conforming youth (Fish et al., 2020). These studies show that schools' solidarity initiatives, through events, clubs, and support groups, correlate with lower rates of minority stressors. In contrast, Bill-137 undermines the school community's support, more specifically a student's relationships with their teachers and their peers, because the school now relies on parents to speak on behalf of a student, blatantly disregarding that child's right to self-determination. Bill-137 does not seek to improve the conditions of trans and gender non-conforming youth because a lack of gender-affirming policies and support from schools implies significant danger to trans and gender non-conforming youth by further isolating them from a potentially positive environment. Schools become a site of increased scrutiny and security over gender identity.

Overall, this Bill threatens the safety of trans and gender non-conforming youth in several ways: by removing children's freedom to inform people of their gender identity at school of their own accord, their dignity and sense of self are put at stake. By imposing that youth must disclose their identity at home, the risk factors of homelessness and familial abuse are enlarged and put children's physical safety and well-being at risk. When the school's role in welcoming gender diversity for their students is subverted by prioritising and accommodating conservative parents, the safety of the school environment for trans and gender non-conforming youth is greatly diminished. Though the proponents of Bill-137 and transphobic parents may believe that they are protecting children, the multitude of damaging outcomes of this Bill demonstrates that it functions to diminish protections instead.

Parental Rights and Their Consequences

Parental rights inform Bill-137 under Section 2(a), which states that parents may raise their children according to their beliefs on the condition that this is done in the child's best interest (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, s 2.). This is contrasted with parental responsibilities or the set of responsibilities parents should assume when they have a child. The distinction between parental rights and parental responsibilities is conflated in the conversation about control over children's ability to express themselves. Parental rights are grounded in theories of biology, labour, and property (Hall, 1999). The law becomes a tool that transforms parental responsibilities into parental control by imposing parental beliefs and weaponizing children's dependency on their parents to suppress their autonomy (Ashley, 2024). Whereas parental responsibilities are grounded in a relationship where parents provide for their children and make decisions in their children's best interests, parental rights use the law to privilege parental priorities that overrule or disregard a child's welfare. Children must conform and adjust to parental preferences to benefit parents based on genetic, property, or labour entitlements (Dwyer, 2006). Children's best interests are

a mask for parents' preferences which can be motivated by selfish or inconsiderate reasons.

Parental rights emerge from biological or genetic connectivity within the parent-child relationship. Commonly, blood relations are perceived as a 'natural' indicator which binds family members together. For example, the biological confirmation of a paternity test symbolizes a form of binding that pushes a father to care for their child, or in the case of adoption, the initial genetic ties to the biological mother are resigned *before* the new guardian absorbs the right to raise the child (Hill, 1991). Another prominent theorization of parental rights emerges from property-like rhetoric where parents are entitled to make decisions for their child and control them for the same reason they are entitled to anything that is a part of themselves or belongs to them (Hall, 1999). Just as children reflect their parents' genetics, children also reflect their parents' values, goals, and/or wants. On this basis, children are seen as biological and ideological extensions of their parents and their interests (Barrett & McIntosh, 2015). Parental entitlement in this sense echoes previous conceptions of children as the legal property of their parents (Ashley, 2024). The notion of possessive rights over children informs the belief that parents' labour entitles them to exercise control over their children. Parental rights under the property and labour logic posit that if parents dedicate emotional, financial, and physical labour to raise their children, they can reap the rewards of this labour cost by imposing their choices on their offspring, producing the child they envision after all that work (Hall, 1999). For example, if a parent works to save money for their child to attend a post-secondary education, that labour translates into a parent's ability to choose what school and program of study their child will pursue. Children become the products of their parents, and this relationship becomes closely resemblant to dehumanizing capitalist practices. Under labour assumptions, children are a means for parents to realize their wishes and aspirations.

By granting and condoning parental rights, the law negates children's rights by allowing parents to have disproportionate control over a child's life and legitimizes oppressive familial forces. If children understand that their lives' decisions are based mainly on adults' expectations and wishes, they learn "that they are unimportant, which can cause them suffering and thwart their development toward autonomy," creating oppressive domestic circumstances (Dwyer, 2006). Parental rights assume children are passive and/or unreliable agents with no sense of self, and they emphasize a child's vulnerabilities, lack of autonomy, and incapacity for rational and complex thinking to diminish their rights to agency. Yet children are full human beings – they develop moral intuitions and mental capacities, discover what is good for themselves, and are widely known to have personalities, preferences, and opinions from a young age. These human features complexify as children grow up, but they remain widely present throughout a person's life, including childhood. Parental rights use the legal system to legitimize unnecessary and excessive forms of control over children.

Parental responsibilities, on the other hand, are characterized differently. Parents are responsible for ensuring their children's safety, making decisions when their child lacks adequate cognitive and rational capacities to make their own decisions, equipping their offspring for eventual independence, and ensuring their physical and mental well-being. Parents have a unique set of responsibilities to support their children as they grow up, often characterized by positive parent-child relationships with the pillars of love, support, and understanding. In this model, parents aim to care for and respond to a child's well-being by rearing them in a manner they believe is appropriate for their child's needs. These responsibilities are not upheld by legal text but function out of social and moral practices that families absorb. Bill-137 paints a child's education and gender identity as a right owed to parents; they take it upon themselves to be 'responsible' for the knowledge their child acquires in school and 'responsible' for their child's identity, when in reality these are forms of excessive control that have been legitimized within the law.

The Incompatibility of the Law's Structure with Gender and Sexually Diverse Identities

Bill-137 highlights a unique challenge of

categorization that trans and gender non-conforming people experience with the law. The nature of legal operationalization poses an inherent friction between the definitional requirements of the law and the complexities of gender identities and narratives. I argue that using the law to control trans and gender non-conforming youth is not a productive mechanism to protect children. The legal system's binary structure and detailed-specific processes of law-making are fundamentally incompatible and ill-equipped to address gender-diverse people, let alone accommodate gender-diverse youth. Bringing children into the complex realm of legal trans and gender non-conforming politics unnecessarily politicizes, complexifies, and challenges children's identities. Trans and gender non-conforming identities generally are difficult to categorize in the legal context because their identities challenge the law and its heteronormative binary construction. Their identities do not operate in traditional understandings of gender and sex while the legal system leans heavily on these traditions and operates under universal assumptions that assert rules over a group with little consideration of their diverse backgrounds and unique identities (Daum, 2020). Since the trans and gender nonconforming communities are not monolithic, this legal structure and writing practices are incompatible with appropriately addressing and accommodating the intersecting identities. The interjection of legislation in these communities may lead to detrimental results.

Legal documents demand clear definitions, and legal procedures follow strict practices of population categorization. They often use binaries to distinguish an 'us vs. them' dynamic between groups. Categorizations like male/female or cisgender/transgender or parent/child are not negligible because creating categories is inevitable to human psychology. However, it is crucial to remember that categories are never neutral and tend to favour one side of a particular binary. The rights of the parents over children, in the parent/child binary, perpetuate certain parental ideologies, such as far-right conservative norms of gender and sexual identities (Daum, 2020). The nature of legal categories is helpful in making distinctions between contrasting groups, but these distinctions have oppressive stakes, as the evidence presented in this essay has shown. In the parent/child binary, children are usually overruled by their counterparts, their parents. Since children are not considered full legal subjects until they reach an arbitrarily selected age, parents, as full legal subjects, exercise power over their sub-legal subjects, creating an unnecessary power dynamic between groups. Though children are not full legal subjects, they are still human beings who require the preservation of their rights. Therefore, the law's tools inherently pose a struggle to advocate for children's rights as binary categorizations tend to favour parental rights. These biases in the law render children, particularly trans and gender non-conforming youth, structurally vulnerable in the legal context.

Trans and gender non-conforming identities are fluid, and these individuals' place in the law is complex because the law reduces gender identity. The law's simplification of trans and gender non-conforming realities robs these individuals of their autonomy and interferes with their protection. Trans and gender non-conforming individuals stand in complex relation to the law because their lives are not compatible with legal systems (Daum, 2020). This relationship renders it difficult for the law to address issues of trans and gender non-conforming children, putting these children, again, in more vulnerable positions.

Conclusion

Bill-137 is unjustifiable under the notion of parental rights because the outcomes of the law directly contradict the justification of the law to protect children. As research demonstrates, requiring parental consent for children to change their name or pronouns has the potential to create more harm for trans and gender non-conforming children in several realms of their lives, and as a currently vulnerable demographic, these changes heighten their marginalization and threaten their safety. I argue that the notion of parental rights used in Bill-137 is a legal tool that extends unnecessary parental control over youth using genetic, possession, and labour entitlements to justify the belittlement of a

child's autonomy and well-being. The law's structure favours parental rights in the parent/child binary, and it cannot accommodate the complexity and fluidity of non-normative gender identities. This inadequacy of the law should not have an impact on children's ability to express themselves. Due to the law's inherent structural limitation and tension in portraying trans and gender non-conforming people, I believe it is crucial not to extend these legal inadequacies to the lives of trans and gender non-conforming youth. Law-making has tangible consequences for people, and targeting vulnerable youth in our law procedure is not productive nor beneficial for the young population. Bill-137 in Saskatchewan and similar adjustments to education acts in other provinces in Canada, like New Brunswick and Alberta, are putting children's lives at risk and have harmful consequences for youth. The implementation of these bills must be reconsidered.

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

A model sits in green grass. They have their knees bent with their arms wrapped around their news and a pink chinese fan in their right hand. They are winking with their right eye and have their lip curled, showing their teeth. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, red lipstick and pink blush. They have an angel tattoo on their left arm above their elbow. They wear a floral, knee length, silk skirt; white turtleneck tank top with a hood; sheer, black gloves; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.

Bodies in Discourse: Exploring Barriers to Abortion for Trans and Gender Expansive People in a Post-Roe World

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of the United States Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson decision on abortion access, particularly its implications for trans and gender-expansive (TGE) individuals. While abortion has traditionally been framed as a women's rights issue, this lens often excludes marginalized groups who face compounded barriers to reproductive care due to intersecting axes of oppression, including racism, and transphobia. Grounded in historical analysis and a 2019 study by Dr. Heidi Moseson on non-clinical abortions among TGE individuals, this paper explores the evolution of abortion rights in the U.S., healthcare system inequities, and the rise of self-managed abortions in response to systemic exclusion. The findings highlight how gendered language and cisnormative healthcare practices alienate TGE individuals, forcing many to resort to unsafe abortion methods. Advocating for a gender-inclusive approach to reproductive health, the paper argues for a shift from binary frameworks to intersectional advocacy that unites diverse voices to address inequities in abortion access and envision a more inclusive movement with queer reproductive justice.

On June 24 2022, the United States Supreme Court issued its ruling on the Dobbs v. Jackson case — a historic decision that ended the constitutional right to abortion for people across the United States fifty years post-Roe. Many cite this decision as a horrifying back slide after decades of advocacy for bodily autonomy within the United States with deadly consequences. Healthcare rights pioneer and second wave feminist Merle Hoffman defines the ruling as indicative of a "human rights crisis… as Dobbs denies individual women the ability to use their reason that it is nothing less than our human rights being violated" (Hoffman, 2023, p. 209). Historically, the movement for abortion access in North America has centralized the voices of advocates like Merle, white, upper class, self-defined "pro-choice" women's rights activists who have championed the codification of rights within the law for women to be able to terminate a pregnancy without the interference of state. Despite the groundbreaking work they have done for the abortion rights movement, the question remains: "*Who does their activism leave out of the fight for access to safe abortion?*" As mainstream discourses take up the mantle of choice as a women's right issue, they are ignorant of the fallacy of choice without access, and how the effects of enshrining rights into law differently impacts certain people due to intersecting axes of power that continue to limit the ability of people to receive abortions despite their legal right to do so. Furthermore, the depth of the state's presence in medical intervention, both as a restrictive force barring populations from receiving life giving/saving care, or through coercive medicalization, have never been accurately depicted in mainstream women's rights issues. This is due to "white feminism's" purposeful benightedness about aspects of personal identity that differently influence the way individuals are able to interact with the systems that control their

lives; as racism, ableism, xenophobia, economic elitism, and cisgenderism are all essential to understanding societal inhibitors to accessing care (Kozhimannil, Hassan, and Hardeman 2022,1538). In the year following the fall of federal protections for abortion, the rate of self reported abortions performed without clinical supervision rose from 2.4% to 3.3% of all female-identified respondents, which suggests a significant correlation between the two (Ralph et al. 2024). However, this is not a new phenomena, as longstanding accounts of trans and gender expansive (TGE) communities resorting to self induced abortion due to lack of access to care predate the Dobbs decision and reinforce the point that legality cannot be the zenith at which advocacy ends (Moseson et al, 2021). This paper will argue that abortion care must adopt a new strategy to better serve the needs of all people with uteruses, though this paper's focus will center trans and gender expansive (or TGE) people as a starting point for change. Grounded within a 2019 study conducted by Dr. Heidi Moseson about abortion attempts outside of clinical settings by TGE people in the United States, this paper will trace the historical basis of the movement for choice in the USA, healthcare and trans exclusion, self-managed abortions, and the positive implications for a move towards inclusive abortion access through the proposed framework of queer reproductive justice.

A History of Choice (and Lack Thereof)

Historically, the movement for the choice to have a medical abortion within the United States has always centered the voices of women who have sat at the intersection of multiple axes of privilege, temporally placing abortion and contraception as an issue of modern femininity. However, the historical precedent for autonomous fertility management has been documented across all parts of the world, with the earliest surviving written evidence documented on the Ebers Papyrus – a medical text from Egypt in 1550 BCE which details how to induce an abortion with insertive plant medicine (Dickinson 2015). In the territories that are colonially known as the United States, sacred rites and religious ceremonies centering all aspects of reproductive health care have been held by many different Indigenous communities since before colonizers laid claim to the land (Beck & Lapier, 2022). For example, Blackfeet women pass down traditional knowledge about the use of sacred plant medicines to new generations along with years of training surrounding cultural protocol, this knowledge includes the dozens of plants used for both menstruation and abortion (Beck & Lapier, 2022). Following European settlement and colonization of the United States, abortions completed during the early stages of pregnancy were protected under common law during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Reagan, 2022). However, the same legal freedom to abortion during that time was not afforded to enslaved Black birthgivers as their bodies were considered "property" of the white men who "owned" them legally, disallowing them from making any choices about their own reproductive system (Acevedo, 1979). In 1857 a campaign to put a nationwide ban upon abortion began under the newly formed American Medical Association, in-part due to the desire to regulate medicine and restrict midwives and homeopathic doctors as they were viewed as competition to physicians (Reagan, 2022). It wasn't until 1910 that abortion was banned nationwide at every stage of pregnancy, mainly at the hands of male doctors, but led in-part by Horatio Robinson Storer. The crux of his antiabortion campaign relied upon the socially constructed malevolence towards immigrants who white Americans feared would pose a threat to their political power, using the control of pregnancy as a method of securing power through population regulation (Reagan, 2022). Furthermore, this antiabortion campaign changed discourse surrounding abortion from a medical procedure, to a morally reprehensible act that violated the Hippocratic oath, with the assumption that life began at conception[1], thus making abortion murder (Johnson,

[1] This is a view that exists within Catholicism and other subsets of Christianity. The presence of religion within debates around abortion due to the moral aspect is an indisputable factor within Horatio Robinson Storer's motivations and the ongoing debates surrounding abortion currently. As America is a country founded through colonialism the separation of Church and State is largely fictive in practice when one considers the practices and legacy of religion within US politics.

2017). Storer's views and subsequent crusade to outlaw all abortion effectively reframed abortion as an issue of morality as opposed to a medical procedure done to protect the lives of those who are able to get pregnant (Johnson, 2017). This moral view of abortion continues to underscore the basis of the modern anti-abortion movement, who claim to be "protectors of the unborn," and disputes scientific evidence that supports abortion as life-saving healthcare that protects individuals from the complications of self-inflicted abortions and pregnancy complications, compounded by the social and economic impacts of forced parenthood (Williams, 2022, p. 6).

Following the total outlawing of abortion at any stage, what is now known as the "pro-choice" movement began gaining traction in opposition to the conservative values around the moral question of abortion in the 1960s (Hoffman, 2023). Feminists and family planning activists worked tirelessly during the pre-Roe period to create a coalition of the women's rights movements, abortion movement, and population rights movement in the fight for fair access to abortion services, after witnessing the devastating impacts of "back alley" and self-induced abortions (Staggenborg, 1991, p. 3). The movement foregrounded women's "right to bodily self-determination" and emphasized the lived experiences of women, as opposed to the moral perception within male-dominated governments, reinforcing gendered binaries which TGE people with uteruses do not fit within (Petchesky, 1980, p. 663). The use of language here is important, as many contemporary activists maintain gendered language of "women"/"girls" to acknowledge the histories of gender discrimination, but in doing so, they alienate other populations who experience gender discrimination on the basis of their trans and gender expansive identities (Hoffman, 2023). This often conflates the ability to become pregnant with womanhood, which doesn't accurately reflect the realities of people who can become pregnant (Hoffkling et al, 2017).

The movement for choice materialized in federal policy through the historic ruling in favour of Roe in 1973, which protected the choice for individuals to receive abortions across the USA on the basis that individuals had the right to privacy through the Fourteenth Amendment (Hoffman, 2023). As important as choice is for many, the flattening of reproductive care into a binary of "pro-life versus pro-choice" does not consider how, without access, there can be no real choice. As it stands, the ability to choose is a luxury few can afford, as racialized groups, those of lower socioeconomic status, queer and TGE people, immigrants, and disabled people encounter barriers to reproductive care at a higher rate than their privileged counterparts, something that Roe did not effectively acknowledge (Young et al, 2021). Though the introduction of choice is liberating for many, the fact remains that even during the Roe era, 36% of pregnant TGE people surveyed in a study about abortions in 2019 stated they considered terminating their pregnancy on their own due to barriers to healthcare (Moseson et al, 2021).

Trans Barriers to Healthcare

The systems of healthcare within the United States, and much of the world, maintain transphobic roots that impact access to both gender affirming care and also access to basic healthcare that cisgender people are granted access to (Safer et al, 2016). Though a myriad of factors impact TGE people's access to healthcare, such as real and perceived transphobia, a main factor is the lack of physicians who are competent with regard to the diverse and specific needs of trans and gender expansive individuals (Safer et al, 2016). Healthcare within western contexts are pervasive sources for harmful reinforcement of gender binaries that historically have medicalized queer and trans identities and reduce identity and lived experiences down to biological essentialism (Berro & Zayhowski, 2023). The construction of the normative body within healthcare defines the biological realities of intersex individuals, racialized bodies, disabled bodies, and trans bodies as abnormalities that have to be "corrected" through treatment that "returns" the body to a state of normativity deemed acceptable by mainstream medical systems. This fundamental idea is the root of many contemporary ideologies about the goals of healthcare access as a trans and

gender expansive person through the myth of the "wrong body" and a focus on binary constructions of what a medical transition entails, and thus what one's gender identity must be (Miquel & Riddle, 2022). This view of healthcare is deeply ingrained in the way that doctors are trained within the United States, with the few culturally competent options for TGE individuals being inaccessible to many based on the spatial distribution of care. Therefore, providing few spaces where trans individuals are able to access care that honours their unique needs and frames healthcare as a service aiming to affirm their gender, not correct it.

Trans healthcare provides unique challenges to individuals, not just because of the difficulty in acquiring specific gender affirming healthcare, but also due to economic and class disparities that disproportionately impact trans and gender expansive individuals within the

LGBTQ+ community that bars them from receiving any medical care at all (Moseson et al, 2021). Moreover, trans and gender expansive people sitting at multiple axes of marginalization, and most significantly racialized trans feminine people, are most significantly impacted by systemic violence and microaggressions that produce the conditions in which these disparities present themselves (Stryker, 2014). However, research about practical solutions to correct these disparities for TGE people has yet to be deeply explored beyond the academy due to deeply enshrined cissexism in medicine. Practitioner education continues to be an issue as there is a great lack of standardized gender inclusive (and expansive) education within medical schools in the United States (Safer et al, 2016). This issue extends into sexual healthcare, as many clinics that do not specialize in gender affirming care maintain cultures that frequently make assumptions about the gender of patients based on their sex, creating dysphoria-inducing environments that deter trans and gender expansive individuals from receiving sexual healthcare (Porsch, et al.,2016). Many clinics that provide abortions are aggressively gendered in name, such as "EMW Women's Surgical Centre" in Louisville, or "The Georgia Advanced Surgery Center for Women" in Georgia. Language is important, as the marketing of a clinic is a symbol of the demographic it looks to serve; in this case, abortion clinics that centre women make TGE individuals feel ostracized.

In an interview series about abortion access and transgender/gender diverse individuals, Oliver Hall perfectly sums up the systemic issues faced by TGE individuals seeking reproductive care:

> Doctors don't have a lot of knowledge about trans bodies, and that's where we might get people being misinformed about the risk of pregnancy on [hormone replacement therapy], or even people who are on estrogen or on hormone blockers are sometimes misinformed about their ability to impregnate… That's the result of institutional transphobia not prioritizing knowledge about trans bodies (Germain, 2022, 7)

This quote demonstrates the lived experiences of many TGE individuals that deter them from seeking healthcare, as they recognize the great disparity in mainstream medical knowledge surrounding their reproductive health. It highlights how seeking assistance can often give people incorrect information that can lead to unwanted pregnancies, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of ill-equipped medical providers leading to situations where TGE people will seek abortion care that is also not affirming. A large number of TGE individuals who seek abortions describe experiences in which they were misgendered, or verbally harassed by staff working at clinics that proved that abortion clinics were not safe or accessible to them, forcing them to consider or perform alternative abortions outside of healthcare contexts (Moseson et al, 2021;Germain, 2022).

Non-Clinical Abortion and a need for Queer Reproductive Justice

Non-clinical, "back-alley", or "DIY" abortions have been methods employed by individuals who have been unable to access legal or clinical abortion for a large variety of reasons – from geographic inaccessibility to economic factors. Merle Hoffman (2023)

describes the deadly reality she has faced in her time at CHOICES Women's Medical Centre, and within abortion advocacy, stating:

> Over the centuries [pregnant people] have tried a number of home remedies to induce a miscarriage. They will go into freezing and then hot water. They will throw themselves down stairs. They will use lye. They will use a hanger. Historically, many of these [people] ended up becoming septic and dying… Bill Baird (known as the "father of the abortion movement") decided to spend his life and career in birth control and abortion advocacy after witnessing the death of a woman from a failed coat-hanger abortion…Baird's epiphany, like mine, was forged in blood. (pp. 14-15).

This quote illuminates how historically, abortion has always occurred even when it is illegal, and it has deadly consequences when people cannot access the services that would assure a safe termination of their pregnancy. This has serious impacts across the United States following the Dobbs decision, as mortality rates of maternal individuals following state restrictive abortion laws have spiked by approximately 21% (Kheyfets et al, 2023). This spike in mortality rates is in addition to the 22 million unsafe abortions that are performed across the globe every year, which results in approximately 70,000 documented maternal deaths and leaves 5 million people with disabilities (Shah & Åhman, 2009). These statistics have a disproportionate representation of trans and gender expansive people amongst them, as the lack of healthcare access for these communities leads to a higher rate of non-clinical abortion. The decision for TGE individuals to have a non-clinically managed abortion often comes with either previous negative experiences acquiring some form of healthcare, or denials due to term length and lack of culturally competent care, such as medical professionals refusing to provide individuals with care due to religious factors (Moseson et al, 2021). Most commonly, TGE people will pursue means of DIY abortion through herbs, self-induced physical trauma, overconsumption of vitamin C, fasting, and substance abuse, which have a variety of unwanted and often life-threatening side effects (Moseson et al, 2021). Many self-induced abortions can result in unsuccessful attempts that put the life of the pregnant person at risk – either through the remainder of fetal matter in the uterus that result in life threatening infections such as sepsis, organ failure, or irreparable harms to the individual that can lead to other health complications or even death (Saultes et al., 2009). The 2019 study by Dr. Moseson concluded that even during the period of federally legal abortion in the US, 36% of TGE people within the study had considered pursuing non-clinical abortions when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. This shows the need for gender neutral reproductive care as a method of reducing just one of the barriers to accessing abortion as life-saving care. Simultaneously, the weight of this recognition must travel beyond frameworks of legality, as it is clear that the passing of a law that allows for abortion to be performed still does not adequately address barriers that force people to pursue non-clinical abortions that threaten their lives.

Therefore, if working within a rights-based framework is not adequate and the movement for choice is largely focused on women's rights and the ability to choose to have an abortion as a singular issue that leaves out multiplicity of factors that impact "choice" – then to stop the necessity of self-performed abortion, a new framework needs to be adopted in the fight for access to reproductive healthcare that can remove barriers for all. Historical and mainstream abortion rights advocacy continues to prove that they are ill equipped to do more than address law as a barrier; thus a more "radical" politic that also works to dismantle the systems that put them into place is "queer reproductive justice". Reproductive justice is a critical feminist framework created in 1994 by twelve Black women: Toni. M Bond Leonard, Reverend Alma Crawford, Evelyn S. Field, Terri James, Bisola Marignay, Cassandra McConnell, Cynthia Newbille, Loretta Ross, Elizabeth Terry, Able Mable Thomas, Winnette P. Willis and Kim Youndblood after their frustrations with reproductive rights being treated as separate from other social justice issues like race, poverty, and food insecurity (TransCare+,

n.d). The three core values of reproductive justice are: 1. The right to have children, 2. The right to not have children, and 3. The right to raise children in healthy and safe environments (TransCare+, n.d). However, in the many years since the inception of reproductive justice, it has expanded to cover other aspects outside of a birthing context with the right of self-determined gender, and experiences of sexuality on one's terms (TransCare+, n.d). What has been referred to as queer reproductive justice takes the third pillar of reproductive justice one step further, arguing that the core of parenting is being in relation with each other and acting with integrity and responsibility within the world for the sake of collective existence, and therefore every element and action of an individual's life (even without the direct relation of being a biological parent) is concerned with reproductive care and rights (Baglatas, 2025). Therefore queer reproductive justice takes the stance that parenting in safe and supportive communities should be reframed to be the right to live in safe and supported communities (Baglatas, 2025). This reframing is more all-encompassing, providing a better framework with which advocates and activists can argue that all action to improve the lives of people is tied to the fight for reproductive rights. Utilizing a holistic approach can encourage movements to act in ways that value every aspect of personhood, thinking beyond medical services and instead focusing on the multitude of factors that affect access to that care, such as inclusive language, histories of medicalized racism, and deconstructing binaries inherent to traditional approaches to abortion advocacy. Creating conditions where living is more possible by providing for all people's needs should not be a radical concept. However, because our communities are ravaged by structural disadvantages at the hands of the state, which creates conditions that force people into situations where their lives are threatened, the only way to have choice is if we can all live well.

Conclusions

Trans and gender expansive people report not feeling safe or being unable to access abortion at higher rates than their cis counterparts, which forces them to consider non-clinical and often unsafe alternative methods on their own. This is not an issue unique to only the post-Roe era, as evidenced by Moseson's 2019 study detailing a variety of issues surrounding gender-inclusive abortion services that have driven trans and gender expansive people away from seeking healthcare services that are significantly safer and have higher rates of efficacy compared to at-home remedies[2] to induce miscarriage. Following the Dobbs decision in 2022, state bans will only further marginalize trans and gender expansive individuals, as activists' focus will turn back to allowing the basic federal right to choice, as opposed to expanding the breadth of inclusivity to include trans and gender expansive individuals. Due to histories of cisnormative medical care in the United States, which remain pervasive in modern offerings for sexual health and reproductive access, the basis of the fight for bodily autonomy remains rooted in women's rights movement which is fundamentally exclusionary in both language and action for trans and gender expansive individuals who can also get pregnant. Unwanted pregnancy and forced parenthood is not a struggle condemned to only cisgendered women, as trans masculine people with uteruses also experience gender discrimination, and through their early life socialization as female, maintain inequitable labours within societies – especially those who are not "passing" or are perceived as cisgender males in the eyes of society and the systems which shape it. These individuals who are subjected to unwanted pregnancies will often opt for "DIY" abortions to avoid the stigma and grief that comes with engaging with healthcare systems as a trans and gender expansive individual. Choice, as it is conceptualized within mainstream movements for women's rights, is reductionary of the barriers to choice marginalized individuals face. By advocating for the reform of the healthcare system to be more inclusive for all people, reproductive health can become more inclusionary to reduce barriers to access not only for trans and gender expansive people, but also other

[2] Not to be confused with self-medicated abortion, which is a safe alternative to surgical abortion.

intersectional identities that experience oppression. The current discourse that centers certain groups over others (women vs trans people) around human rights issues effectively weakens their impacts by not seeing the potential for coalition-based forms of advocacy that view people and systemic injustices with the nuances they contain. This continued siloed approach to social action feeds into the intentional separation and pitting of groups against each other by the systems of oppression that seek to maintain social control that ultimately results in extreme and unnecessary harm for select groups while preserving the culture of domination that only benefits a powerful minority. Finally, the introduction of queer reproductive justice allows for a framework through which people of all identities and lived experiences should be able to pursue a good life. This can reduce barriers to access and is a more holistic approach in both who it includes in its mission, along with what issues to fight for beyond the legal right to abortion. If more advocacy rallied around improving living conditions as a method of creating "choice" not as a fallacy but rather through liberating those who are barred from self-determination by the state, then the pursuit of justice for *life* would be for all people, not just the unborn.

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Shebonti Khandaker (she/her) is a Bangladeshi writer and photographer whose work explores topics of embodiment, cultural inheritance, and the uncanny. More of her photographs can be found at @nootcam on Instagram. Model: Carlo Enciso; Stylist: Roya Adel; Hair Stylist: Jess Gagliano; Makeup Artist: Amani Hassan.

A model sits in green grass. They are sitting with their knees bent and to the left side, with their right hand on their hip and their left hand holding an octagonal mirror behind their head. In the mirror we see the back of their head. They look at the camera with their mouth closed. They have spiky hair, are wearing blue eye shadow, red lipstick and pink blush. They wear a light pink, long sleeve dress with sheer sleeves and lace around the cuffs and collar; a bright pink tool skirt; long, white socks and black high heels with pointy toes. The photo is brightly lit by the sun.