2025

YEAR-IN-REVIEW

MARK S. BONHAM CENTRE FOR SEXUAL DIVERSITY STUDIES

QTRL

Queer and Trans Research Lab

Queer and Trans Research Lab (QTRL)

The QTRL is a collaborative research project based at the Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, University of Toronto, focusing on methods in queer and trans studies across the disciplines as well as across creative, activist, and scholarly research practices. Our aim is to bring innovative approaches and solutions to entrenched and emerging social and political problems affecting 2SLGBTQA+ and BIPOC lives and communities.

The Queer and Trans Research Lab (QTRL) is committed to:

1. Providing an interactive, creative space for scholars, students, artists, and community leaders to work collectively on their projects with the vital support needed to undertake them.
2. Welcoming scholars, artists, and 2SLGBTQA+ community leaders from across the country and around the world to conduct their work both at the university and in the community through talks, workshops, symposia, performances, and exhibitions.
3. Creating new research and study networks by providing its members with the opportunity to collaborate on complex issues in queer and trans studies and to imagine new approaches to research partnerships that will improve the lives of people in their and our communities.
4. Creating public-facing, accessible materials and knowledge delivery methods that stage and reflect the ongoing research collaborations as they take place at the lab.

Director's Message

Dana Seitler

As we close out another exciting year at the Queer and Trans Research Lab, I would like to extend my thanks to the amazing folks that make the QTRL such a pleasure: my incredible staff, our wonderful students, and the entire 2024-25 cohort that make this experiment in collaborative research what it is. This year has brought its own unique, and often alarming, challenges, but our cohort—the undergraduate and graduate research assistants, our community organizers in residence, our artist in residence, our postdoctoral fellows, and our faculty fellows—all worked in solidarity, with great strength and resilience, to navigate them. The community that forms so genuinely at the lab each year serves as a continual reminder that we are always stronger than we think, and we are always stronger together. And so, as 2SLGBTQA+ livelihood continues to be under threat around the globe, we came together, once again, to engage these issues with collective care and intellectual rigor. We continued to pursue our vision for the world that we want, one in which education matters, art matters, knowledge matters, queer and trans and black and Palestinian, and indigenous lives matter—not just because these things are inherently valuable but also because without them, our worlds are impoverished.

And so, while it is important that we respond to and organize against the ongoing harms and material violences of our everyday lives—institutional, legislative, and/or genocidal—we also need to simultaneously "make life" by building collectives and educational programs that imagine and enact new and different worlds, and that value, respect, and hold up the ones that we have. The Queer and Trans Research Lab, this year and every year, makes use of all the world building tools we have in our tool kit to build a world we want to live in, to have the thoughts and feelings we want to have, and to learn and teach the knowledges that we believe are worth learning and teaching. As many of us have learned from Sylvia Wynter: "Human beings are magical. Bios and Logos. Words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities [. . .] And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms" (Wynter 1995: 35). I think Wynter means that we have the creative capacity to actively re-define our world, to bring ideas into existence, to "make flesh" out of our desires for an elsewhere and an otherwise, forging new paths and possibilities for a more just existence.

Do we dare? We dare.

Program Co-ordinator Review

Christopher Smith

As the 2024-25 academic year comes to a close, I am always, still, in awe. As Research Associate and Program Coordinator for the Queer and Trans Research Lab (QTRL) I am so proud of the coalitional work that we have and will continue to do. Each year, with every cohort, a new set of critical questions and debates are on the table.

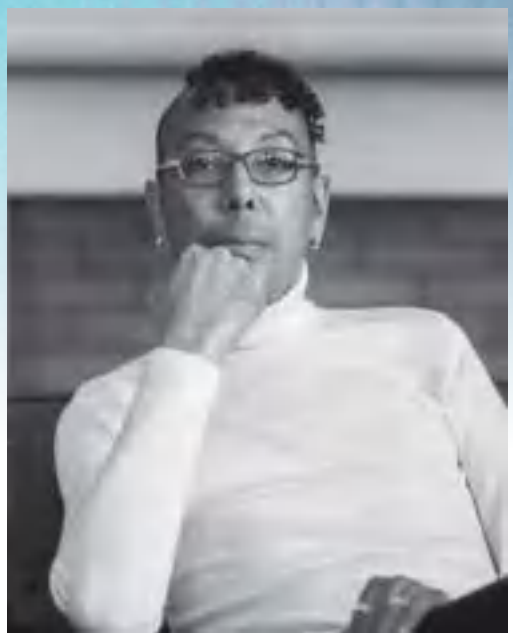
This year we have seen the work of our Community Organizer-In-Residence – Shaun Brodie, founder of the Queer Songbook Orchestra, who brought immense joy to the community with an annual fundraiser "*Roasted Chestnuts*" at Hart House Theatre before the holiday season. The concert was sold out!!! We needed that joy and the opportunity to commune in what we would later discover would be precarious if not dangerous times for non-binary and trans* youth.

Community Organizer-In-Residence – Yasmeen Persad is another source of queer joy. During her residency at the QTRL, she created a series of brief, strengths-based videos that aim to empower and encourage trans women of color to discuss their sexual health and speak about HIV in a positive light. The videos discuss pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP), which, while widely available to some, are not accessible and inclusive of trans women's experiences. The premiere of "*Trans Women Leading with Love: Their HIV Story*" occurred at the annual QTRL Fest, and the video will be in circulation on YouTube in the near future. I am grateful for what is a necessary intervention in public conversions on these matters.

Working with Artist In-Residence, Vivek Shraya has been such a pleasure. A live musical performance of "*New Models – Album Preview Show*" at Hart House in the East Common Room occurred on Friday June 6th. Another infusion of joy and defiance. Stay tuned for details about the album release in October!

The work of our faculty fellows, and the primary investigators for the emerging projects funded by the QTRL always offer new pathways, and methods to do queer and trans research differently. Whether it's learning about Asexuality studies, Queer and Trans technologies in Brazil and Argentina, the nascent histories of Queer Scarborough, the Queer Italian Experience in Canada or Queer Parenting – everyone leaves the room with new insights about the importance of Queer study, curiosity, and critique.

Faculty Fellows Liza Blake and Rafael Grohmann facilitated reading groups related to their research that were engaged by scholars from University of Toronto



and abroad. The "*Queerborough Speakers Series*" featured a series of public engagements (artist talks, workshops) that occurred in May. As someone who is Scarborough adjacent, it is so invigorating to see a project that is excavating a rich history of queer life in the region.

Last summer I was invited by Paolo Frasca to attend a preliminary photo exhibition entitled "Unveiling The Queer Italian-Canadian Experience" featuring works from a collective of artists at the Columbus Centre in Toronto. I literally busted out with joy and giggles and shouted out "bellissismo!" when I received the news that the travelling exhibition will begin in Winnipeg – July 4 – 25 at The Edge Gallery and Urban Art Centre.

The opportunity to work with each and every one affiliated with the QTRL each year has made my role as Program Coordinator so fulfilling. The opportunity to mentor undergraduate and graduate research assistants as they engage in their own research trajectories emphasizes the importance of the QTRL as an innovative research hub.

Each year, I am moved most by the fact that the connections we have built, as researchers, colleagues and friends carry forward with each cohort. These traditions will carry on as we welcome the 2025-26 cohort at the QTRL.

community organizer-in-residence

Yasmeen Persaud

"What attracted me to the QTRL was the chance to be with all these folks working in different areas, and to get to know what they're doing, and be part of this broader community."

Yasmeen Persad

Through music and video, Yasmeen Persad and Shaun Brodie are working to help trans and queer people tell their stories.

Persad and Brodie are this year's Community Organizers-in-Residence at QTRL. For both activists—one from a musical background, the other from the world of community health and research—the year at the lab has come as a welcome source of support in their hard-fought struggles.

"The QTRL has proven to be a wonderful experience," says Persad. "It's like a family. There's a lot of support—not just from the administrative staff, but from the students, and everyone who's part of it. Everyone comes in with their own level of education and experience and everyone can educate folks about the work they're doing."

For Brodie, who runs the Queer Songbook Orchestra (QSO) and the Queer Songbook Youth Orchestra (QSYO), the QTRL has allowed him to see beyond his own projects.

"My project is very collaborative, but in day-to-day work, I can often feel a bit siloed. What attracted me to the QTRL was the chance to be with all these folks working in different areas, and to get to know what they're doing, and be part of this broader community."

The QTRL is also providing avenues for the activists' work to be seen. Persad's videos will be launched on the QTRL website, and the lab partnered with the QSO for their 2024 December holiday fundraiser concert at Hart House.

A longtime health activist, researcher, and educator, Yasmeen Persad is devoting her residency at the QTRL to creating a series of videos made with and for trans women of colour living with HIV. Trans women are twice as likely as cis women to be HIV positive and face numerous barriers to accessing care. "There's stigma, isolation, systemic barriers," says Persad. "There's a lack of knowledge."

In the videos trans women of colour share stories about their experiences with gender-affirming care and living with HIV and discuss their experience with pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis treatments which are less accessible to trans women. There are very few studies in terms of their interactions with gender-affirming hormones. But the videos offer far more than just facts. "These will be the first videos of trans women of colour living with HIV talking about their experiences as it relates to empowerment and engagement," Persad says. "It'll be more inspirational than educational." Focused on challenging myths, stigmas, and preconceptions around HIV, the videos are designed to reduce internalized shame and stigma, and decrease social isolation among trans women of colour, including those who are sex workers.

Persad has been focused on trans women's health issues for decades. In 2007 she co-founded the Trans Women HIV Research Initiative at Women's College Hospital, and for 15 years she has worked with the 519 Church St. Community Centre as Coordinator of Trans Programs and the Trans People of Colour Project. She also provides training to front-line shelter workers around trans community inclusion and support, has led several federally funded trans health research projects, and co-authored several academic studies on trans people's health. But producing the videos presented a new set of dilemmas.

"We had to work out how to put these people out there without reproducing or increasing any harm or stigmatization that can affect their lives," she says. "It takes a lot of caution, when you're asking people to give up such a personal piece of their lives." Persad hopes the videos will not only serve as inspirational and educational tools on their own but will also serve as templates for future videos.

"We're going to create a short script of questions based on the stories that are being told that can be presented at HIV conferences internationally," she says. "Our videos are not going to cover everything, but researchers and community workers can use the script to adapt and create versions of their own." Persad hopes to release the videos in June, at an online launch on YouTube and on the QTRL website. And she is considering future projects on topics such as trans women with HIV and aging. "The women would be interviewed, but not on video," she says. "There would be a questionnaire, but it could take an artistic form, exploring art as a form of intervention. It's not written in stone. The way it is led will have to be from the community, it will be in whatever medium they choose."

community organizer-in-residence

Shaun Brodie

A classically trained trumpet player with a performance degree from the University of Victoria, Shaun Brodie has performed live and in-studio with many of Canada's top indie acts, toured internationally, and appeared everywhere from David Letterman to the Glastonbury Festival. He is also Artistic Director of Queer Songbook Orchestra (QSO), a 14-piece professional chamber pop ensemble dedicated to using "story and song to express, honour and elevate 2SLGBTQ+ experience". The QSO performs the work of queer and trans writers and composers, including songs by queer writers who often were unable to be open about their sexuality. "We honour these experiences in a way those composers couldn't," says Brodie. They also perform work that reflects queer lives generally. "Music is the soundtrack to a lot of experiences in the queer community: songs about coming out, your first queer love, first queer heartbreak. Everybody has these stories."

Brodie also leads the Queer Songbook Youth Orchestra (QSYO), comprised of some 50 children and young adults who are mentored by and play alongside professional musicians. Working in partnership with the Toronto District School Board, the QSYO plays shows at schools across the city. Because neither orchestra charges admission to its shows, adequate funding is always a concern, and Brodie is using his residency at the QTRL to create a plan that includes a path to securing charitable status for the QSYO. The residency is also giving him time to experience the sense of community he cultivates in his orchestras. "My project is very collaborative, but in day-to-day work, I can often feel a bit siloed. What attracted me to the QTRL was the chance to be with all these folks working in different areas, to get to know what they're doing, and be part of this broader community."

Growing up in Regina, Brodie initially wanted to be a drummer. But one afternoon when he was seven, an instructor at a community band program handed him a trumpet, telling him he was "a little small to be playing the drums." Though Brodie notes in hindsight he was "maybe a little too small to be playing a trumpet as well," the instrument served as his gateway; he got involved in school marching bands, jazz bands, and concert bands, and wound up touring the US twice, at age 12 and 13.

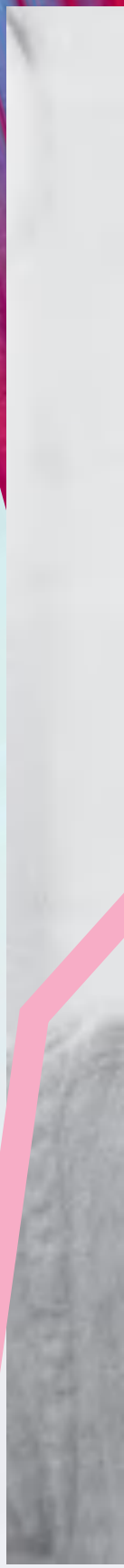
But once at UVic, he realized he didn't want to be a classical musician. "A classmate started a Cuban song band, and I started saying yes to everything I could," he says. "I wanted to play different styles and see what resonated." Brodie became a successful freelance musician. "I was able to cobble together enough work to pay the bills, but when I got to my mid-30s, I didn't necessarily see a life-long career."

He had always had an interest in journalism, so he pitched a documentary to CBC Radio featuring musicians he knew and also applied to the journalism school at Toronto Metropolitan University; both applications were rejected.

"I didn't really have a plan B," he says. "I remember sitting on the front steps in 2013, thinking, 'What do I do now?' Over the next month, this idea started to form. I had never been a bandleader, but I decided to start my own ensemble, not just three or four people, but 12, a chamber pop orchestra." And, always, he says, "queer was the intention from the start."

Brodie reached out to several musician friends, all of whom were interested, commissioned new arrangements of songs that he felt told queer stories, and in March 2014 at Videofag, the QSO premiered. "The band took up half the room," he says. "We played "Easy To Be Hard" from Hair, and I was in the middle of the band thinking, 'This sounds amazing!'"

But not every day is such a peak experience. "There are days when you're motivated and inspired, and days when it's like, 'What am I doing? Wouldn't it be easier to get a job?'" But Brodie says despite the ups and downs, he's determined to keep the QSO and the QSYO going because he thinks the need for such organizations is greater now than ever. "A friend said to me that the project had a shelf life. That society felt like it was becoming more progressive," he says. "It was always in the back of my mind that maybe this isn't my forever career. But as we're seeing this swing back to the right, it feels now like it might be more important and relevant than when we started."



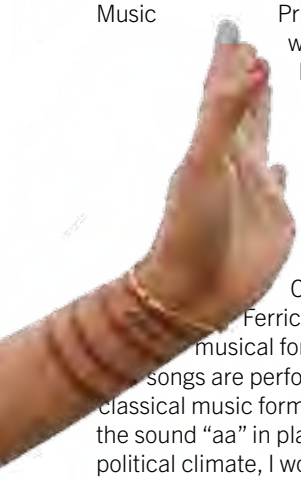
"It was always in the back of my mind that maybe this (music) isn't my forever career. But as we're seeing this swing back to the right, it feels now like it might be more important and relevant than when we started."

Shaun Brodie

artist-in-residence

Vivek Shraya

Award-winning novelist, screenwriter, poet, playwright, musician, actor, visual artist, teacher, and publisher Vivek Shraya is this year's artist-in-residence at the Queer and Trans Research Lab. Shraya has released more than a dozen albums, including "Part-time Woman," a collaboration with the Queer Songbook Orchestra, which was named one of the 17 best Canadian albums of 2017 by CBC Arts and longlisted for the 2018 Polaris Music Prize. She will spend her residency working on her latest album, "New Models," due to be released in October of this year.



Shraya, who has toured and collaborated with a wide range of artists, including Peaches, Jully Black, Jann Arden, Tegan and Sara, Dragonette, Melanie C, Team Dresch, and Melissa Ferrick, is turning to an ancient musical form for "New Models." The songs are performed in Aakaar, a Hindustani classical music form in which notes are sung using the sound "aa" in place of words. "In this particular political climate, I wondered what it would be like not to center English," Shraya says. "I had never really brought classical forms into my music practice, as I've always been worried about it being categorized as world music. But when I was nervous about songs, I was turning to Aakaar, and I decided it was more effective to not use language."

The QTRL is far from Shraya's first exposure to academia. For six years she was a tenured professor of creative writing at the University of Calgary. "There are things about academia that I love," she says. "The classroom is one of the few places that you can affect change and see change happen. I used to tell students, 'A lot of you are here to get an A but let me tell you that the classes you remember are the ones that made you think.'"

"But academia is really bogged down by arbitrary rules. Things tend to move quite slowly. One of the things I really found odd is that it's often viewed as a beacon of progressiveness, but self-preservative thinking and behaviour seem to thrive in academia. There's a lack of thinking about the real world. You really can exist in an ivory tower and not have to really engage."

The QTRL, though, offers an antidote to all of that. The small size and the focus on the larger community are refreshing to her.

"The QTRL is not a graded environment," says Shraya. "As an artist, you understand that things shift. The QTRL's understanding is that it is a gift. It's an environment where people are grappling with contemporary issues, not with grades. What's been lovely is how pro-active they've been. Everyone is open to conversations. That is very generative."

Shraya says she is enjoying the ways the QTRL exists in contrast to traditional forms of knowledge

"I love hearing about other people's work. At the QTRL, we meet once a month to talkabout what we're all working on and how it's shaped by what's going on in the world. It's a haven, and I've learned so much from interacting with everybody. It's a wonderful initiative."

Vivek Shraya

production, and how the residency gives students and professors a window into the reality of life as a working artist. "There's always a mystery about artists," she says, but in the QTRL "students and scholars have the time to gain perspective from somebody who's doing it in the field, often navigating several projects in real time. They can ask for opinions or advice. Faculty have also brought me into classrooms for artist talks."

The QTRL, though, offers an antidote to all of that. The small size and the focus on the larger community are refreshing to her. The collaborative nature of the QTRL, and the experience of learning from other people doing creative work, has also been very positive for Shraya. "My number one passion is making art, but number two is consuming art," she says. "I love hearing about other people's work. At the QTRL, we meet once a month to talk about what we're all working on and how it's shaped by what's going on in the world. It's a haven, and I've learned so much from interacting with everybody. It's a wonderful initiative."

Shraya, who has written novels, poetry collections, children's books, and the bestselling 2018 non-fiction book, *I'm Afraid of Men*, was recently appointed a senior editor at Random House Canada. In addition to this new role, she will continue working at her own imprint, VS Books, which she founded in 2017 to provide opportunities for Black and Indigenous writers and writers of colour. VS Books's publications include Téa Mutonji's award-winning collection of short stories *Shut Up You're Pretty*, which was the 2024 Canada Reads runner-up. "I want to continue creating more pathways for young authors," says Shraya. "I'm curious about what it'll be like to work within a mainstream framework. But it's more important than ever, now that a lot of institutions are pulling back on what has been framed as diversity."

Shraya is currently writing a how-to book for middle-grade children on songwriting and her new novel for adults, set in a dystopian future, will be released in 2026. "I'm heartened that despite what some institutes are doing, U of T hired and provided me with this residency and Random House hired me," she says. "Those are things that I don't take for granted. So much of my experience has been the opposite, but I think that's the model. How do we use the power that we have to do good in the world? How do we move the needle forward?"

Martha LA McCain Faculty Fellows

The purpose of the Martha LA McCain Faculty Research Fellowship at the QTRL is to support University of Toronto faculty members working on aspects of queer and trans studies at any rank, teaching status, discipline, or campus. The fellows participate in QTRL activities, have the much-needed opportunity to carry on their own research or creative agenda, and collaborate with others in the QTRL cohorts on creative, curricular, and pedagogical practices.

This year, the roles belong to Liza Blake and Rafael Grohmann. Both are taking the opportunity to focus on their writing and research but are also invigorated by being part of the mix of academics, students, artists, and activists at the research lab.

Working to expand the idea of queer identity and to create cracks in the capitalist system, Blake and Grohmann are making space for those who are often overlooked and marginalized.

Liza Blake

Blake, an Associate Professor in the Department of English, UTM is co-founder of the online Asexuality and Aromanticism Bibliography, an online resource with tagged entries meant to help scholars find relevant writing on the topics of asexuality and aromanticism studies.

She finds that those who are asexual (ace) or aromantic (aro) often find themselves overlooked at U of T, even in queer studies.

"Queer studies, as a field, has not always been welcoming to ace and aro studies" she says. "Queer and feminist studies frequently center themselves around radical sex positivity, which is good, but can sometimes tip over into sex normativity. There's the expectation that having sex is the only means to achieve liberation, and that a disinterest in sex is automatically retrograde or conservative.

"It did seem to me that attention to asexuality and aromanticism was missing from the conversation about queer studies happening at U of T. I didn't really see events coming up that spoke to me. Ace and aro students find me, and they say they also have trouble finding and researching asexuality at the university. It's not a standard topic that gets taught in queer studies."

But Blake's work shows that ideas of aromanticism and asexuality have been around for a long time, including as a major theme of Renaissance love poetry. While at the QTRL, Blake is completing an edited collection—with Catherine Clifford and Aley O'Mara—called *Early Modern Asexualities* as well as updating the online Bibliography. She is also working on a new monograph entitled, *"I want not love": The Asexuality and Aromanticism of Early Modern Love Poetry.* The book argues that though the modern trend is to read Renaissance love poetry as erotic and saturated with desire, it is in this body of work that we can also find some of the clearest first-person assertions of never having experienced attraction or desire.

Blake refers to the poet Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) as a leading example of how asexuality is featured in Renaissance poetry, although it is not identified as such. In Cowley's poem, "The Request," for example, he explicitly says he has never experienced sexual desire, has "never been shot by Cupid's arrow."

"I read this as very ace-coded," says Blake. "It echoes a lot of the things that ace people experience. Deep in my heart, Cowley is my little ace icon. He, along with John Donne, is considered one of the fathers of metaphysical poetry. For the first two centuries, what metaphysical meant was perversely asexual love poetry. As you get past the Renaissance, it becomes possible to become a poet without writing about love, but the way you look for asexuality in literature changes slightly depending on what century you're in.

"I'm thinking about representation, but also about ace history. Looking for representation is important because it demonstrates that asexuality is not an invention of the internet in the 2000s."

Blake also stresses that a singular problem is that much of the poetry of the time that references asexuality might also be deeply misogynistic.

"A lot of poets say they have never experienced attraction to women, but sometimes it's because they think women are disgusting," she says. "Discourses of racism and sexism are shaping much of what seems like potential asexual representation in the 17th century."

Blake herself grew up in Louisiana— "the Toronto of the south, as no-one calls it"—in a suburb of New Orleans. She did her undergrad work at George Washington University in Washington, DC, got her master's at Cambridge and her PhD at New York University. But she says it is only in recent years that she has made ace and aro studies the focus of her work in literature.

"My first publication was on dildos in the Renaissance," she says. "It was only when I was 29, in 2013, right around when I got offered the job in Toronto, that I became aware that asexuality was an identity.

"When I was growing up, I stopped dating because I didn't like people touching me. A lot of people who identify asexual grow up thinking they're broken. At 29, one of my cousins forwarded me an article about asexuality, and it was a lightbulb moment. This transformative experience changed the trajectory of Blake's work in literature and brought her to her current focus: researching how ideas of aromanticism and asexuality have shaped literature for centuries and emerged as a major theme in Renaissance love poetry.

Blake's efforts to make asexuality more visible are not solely scholarly. She is currently fighting to make I and A—intersex, asexual, aromantic, agender—an official part of U of T's 2SLGBTQ+ acronym and to make the university a more welcoming place for those interested in ace and aro studies. "I've been working for the past few years in ace and aro spaces," she says. "I was interested in bringing those perspectives to the QTRL and using those perspectives to speak to queer studies more broadly. It seemed like a good opportunity to think about the implications and to broaden some of the approaches privileged at U of T. I want to help make a space for ace and aro students to see themselves."

"When you discover this identity, you're able to figure out there are other people like you," says Blake. "A lot of activism in the ace community has been done to not have ace classified as a disorder. It needs to be understood as an orientation, and to fall under the same protections other orientations receive under law.

Blake sees the QTRL fellowship as offering an opportunity to challenge these assumptions and make queer studies more inclusive and welcoming. After spending the past few years in "ace and aro spaces," Blake is determined to bring the perspectives found there to the QTRL. "I want to help make a space for ace and aro students to see themselves. Visibility could have made a huge difference to my life, and it could make a huge difference to students today."

Rafael Grohmann

Rafael Grohmann is an Assistant Professor of Media Studies with a focus on Critical Platform and Data Studies with a graduate cross-appointment to the Faculty of Information. His research examines how workers are taking charge of digital technologies, and focuses on Latin America, including his home country of Brazil.

His work already encompassed queer and trans cooperatives, but when Grohmann was invited to join the SDS steering committee in 2023, his work wasn't yet fully shaped by queer studies. "I was starting collaborations with tech worker cooperatives from Argentina consisting of only trans people, and I had a long-term collaboration with a delivery worker co-op in Brazil formed by women and queer people." While working with SDS, Grohmann realized that the book project he wanted to write was about the notion of "queer failure" inspired by queer theorist like Jack Halberstam.

The idea of queer failure, he explains, is one of resistance. "It's when queer and trans people refuse the capitalist, heteropatriarchal, heteronormative notion of success," he says. "It's how they deal with success and failure in different ways." As one example, he points to the cooperatives formed by queer and trans people in Latin America, cooperatives outsiders say are destined to fail because they are too small—an expectation of failure that is shaped, Grohmann says, by "racialized and homophobic assumptions."

But queer failure pushes back against these expectations, according to Grohmann, "It is the way they survive and resist the system. It goes against the traditional notions of what success is. Sometimes queer and trans people, especially from minoritized or racialized groups, are facing failure in their everyday lives. The idea of queer failure is an experiment in everyday life and work."

The book that grew out of the project, *Prototypes of Struggles: Workers Failing and Learning How to Govern Digital Technologies*, scheduled to be published in 2027, is Grohmann's first book in English.

Grohmann grew up in a small town in Brazil, got his master's and PhD from the University of São Paulo, and in 2019 landed his first tenure track position at a private Catholic university in Porto Allegre, in the south of Brazil. While there, he founded the Digilabour Research Lab, now based at U of T, which investigates how workers have built collectivities and technologies through associations and cooperatives.

Grohmann says that his academic career has paralleled his identity as a gay man.

"When I started my masters, my identity as a queer person was not fully understandable to me," he says. "At the time, I was clearly a gay man, but not from the outside, not out of the closet."

Living in São Paulo for 10 years allowed him to explore his identity as a queer man more fully.

"The queer and trans community there, the queer and trans nightlife is one of the strongest around the world," he says. "This impacted my life."

Grohmann also says that his own academic career is built, in some ways, on failure. He stayed in Brazil to complete his academic degrees, obtaining his master's and PhD from the University

Rafael Grohmann

of São Paulo. He feels this makes him something of an anomaly at U of T.

“There are a lot of nationalities here, but most people earned their PhD in North America or Europe. I’m one of the few professors who earned their PhD outside of the global north.”

During the pandemic, universities around the world were taking an interest in digital labour studies and Grohman’s Digilabour Research Lab became one of the main references in labour technology studies, not just in Latin America, says Grohmann. “I realized how people in North America and Europe were learning from it, and I started to publish more in English.” He also decided to apply to teaching positions outside of Brazil—a process that brought him face to face with his own experience of failure and the inevitability of failure. “I had to fail and learn how to apply for an assistant professorship,” he says. “I didn’t have the language. I was writing in a more freestyle way. I was probably not the candidate who exactly fits the norm.”

When U of T offered him the job, he jumped at the chance, only later discovering QTRL, which he says offers a rich combination of personal and intellectual community and inspiration. “I really like this mix between more established researchers, junior researchers, community members, and artists,” says Grohmann. “This kind of artistic perspective is innovative for my own career. I find the community vibrant and supportive, open to listening to new things, and sensitive to the balance between personal and professional lives. It’s kind of a community of care. I’m also learning a lot, especially because 90 percent of the research conducted by the QTRL is outside of my field.”

While this is the first time in Grohmann’s career that his work has involved queer theory (which he terms “a weird discovery in my research path”), it has long been about resistance and liberatory possibility. Some people, he says, advised him to include the word “hope” in his book title, but he declined. “I decided to put in ‘struggles’, and not only in relation to class struggles, but how they’re struggling to survive, how this is an everyday struggle.” We can learn from these workers, he says. “They can inspire us to imagine new worlds. Even in the crisis of political imagination worldwide, their experience can inform us that alternatives are possible.”

Martha LA McCain Postdoctoral Fellow

Ruth Ramsden-Karelse

Exploring how sexually and gender diverse communities fought for safe spaces in apartheid-era South Africa, Ruth Ramsden-Karelse, this year's Martha LA McCain Postdoctoral Fellow at the Queer and Trans Research Lab is examining how queer and trans people try to build lives free of constraint.

Ramsden-Karelse is writing about District Six, a multi-ethnic area in Cape Town that was home to many gay and queer people of colour before the apartheid state destroyed the community in the 1960s.

"I write about people who might now be understood as queer, who described themselves as 'gays and girls,'" says Ramsden-Karelse. "It's about how they worked together to bring new possible worlds into existence."

Ramsden-Karelse is using the opportunity at the lab to work on their book project and to interact with the unique mix of scholars, students, activists and artists found at the QTRL.

"It's really generative to have scholars across different disciplines. We have a lot we can learn from each other. When we work only within our own discipline, it's limited. It's really fruitful to have people who are approaching the same sort of work differently."

Ramsden-Karelse says the QTRL should be a model for how academia can connect to the wider community.

"I've been involved in efforts to try to set up spaces like this, but it's the first time I've been employed in a space that's explicitly queer and trans," she says. "It means that you get to speak about your work with people who share a particular kind of investment in it. The QTRL is set up as a community thatconnects academia with cultural work and community work. I think the most dynamic academic spaces always center these kinds of investments."

Ramsden-Karelse says she had been aware of the QTRL well before she joined.

Ruth Ramsden-Karelse

"I was living in Berlin but had signed up for the newsletters, had attended some online events, and had been admiring the QTRL from afar," she says. "When the post-doc was advertised, I was keen to apply.

"It's a huge privilege to have this fellowship that allows me to really immerse myself in my work. I was assigned a wonderful course to design and teach, and I've been able to get on with my book project."

Ramsden-Karelse is focusing on two main academic writing projects. Her book, Gays and Girls Make Worlds, will show "how gender and sexually diverse communities of colour living under apartheid in South Africa undertook the politically and culturally significant work of creating more just and expansive realities, with a particular focus on the GALA Queer Archive's Kewpie Photographic Collection and associated depictions of Cape Town's lost District Six."

The Kewpie Collection is an archive of 600 photos originally collected by Kewpie, a gay hairdresser who lived in District Six until it was demolished by the government in the 1960s. Over 16 years, 60,000 inhabitants were forcibly removed, and the District was turned into a whites-only area. The Collection is an unprecedented look at the lives of queer people of colour from the 1950s to the 1990s.

District Six is important symbolically, but it is not a case of paradise lost, says Ramsden-Karelse, who was born in South Africa before moving to Britain at the age of 8.

"Part of what I'm doing with my work is arguing that remembered conditions of acceptance were actually worked for by gays and girls themselves, often at great cost," she says. "I'm also highlighting how they experienced forms of violence and discrimination that were so quotidian as to be unremarkable. This kind of everyday violence is not usually given prominence in stories about the past, but it tells us a lot about what comes to count as acceptance and why. District Six was not a magical place that existed for queer, gay and trans people. But it is also a very important symbol of what could have been, were it not for apartheid.

"I had written my master's thesis on drag performance in South Africa, and then when I started my PhD, I wanted to look specifically at queer femininity in the community I come from, classified as "coloured" by the apartheid state. One chapter was on the Kewpie Collection, but it's a really remarkable archival resource that had barely been written about and so that chapter ended up becoming the whole dissertation."

The Collection is an unprecedented portrayal of gay, queer and trans life for ordinary people of colour in South Africa from the 1950s to the 1980s, says Ramsden-Karelse.

"The majority of photographs were taken at a time when there was this boom in amateur photography," she says. "The people it depicts were experiencing multiple oppressions. They lived their genders and sexualities in diverse ways, they were classified as 'coloured,' and they were also poor and working-class. That's an unusual combination, especially given the challenges that a history of displacement poses to the survival of an initially personal archive like this. Compiling and conserving these photographs was something in which its creators chose to invest their limited financial resources."

"The QTRL is set up as a community that connects academia with cultural work and community work. I think the most dynamic academic spaces always center these kinds of investments."

Ruth Ramsden-Karelse

Ramsden-Karelse is also working on the first critical genealogy of the South African word "moffie," customarily used as a pejorative term for effeminate men.

"Moffie has been sporadically reclaimed, but is still used as a slur," she says. "The gays and girls I write about are described as moffies, but there is no record of them describing themselves in this way.

"The history of the word reveals a specific story about how understandings of sexuality are always and already racialized. The word has a colonial history, and the earliest use I've been able to find is as a reference to livestock. Then it was used as a racial term, then to refer to sexual degeneracy."

Ramsden-Karelse is also an Associate of the Stuart Hall Foundation, set up by the family and colleagues of the ground-breaking Jamaican-British sociologist and cultural theorist. She was the inaugural Stuart Hall Doctoral Scholar at Merton College, Oxford, and was then invited to become an Associate of the Foundation.

"One of the Foundation's core goals is to diversify higher education, for example by increasing access for people from backgrounds that have traditionally been underrepresented. My main role as an Academic Committee member is to support the Foundation's network of scholars, fellows, and artists. I host monthly forums for network members to come together and make connections with each other, speak about issues relating to our work, and expand our thinking."

While in Canada, Ramsden-Karelse says she is grappling with the country's own colonial history. "

Ramsden-Karelse says she is delighted that she will be back at the QTRL for a second year.

"I'm looking forward to continuing to write my book and taking full advantage of the wonderful and rare opportunities offered by the QTRL."

Graduate Students

For urban geographer Wiley Sharp, being part of the Queer and Trans Research Lab allows them to broaden their intellectual and professional horizons.

"It sometimes can be a little stifling to be housed in a policy-heavy department," they say. "Sexual Diversity Studies is centred around queer and trans studies. It lets me interact in ways that are really enlivening my own work. The QTRL brings in artists and activists, it's a special community in the university that is grappling with the issues that matter the most right now.

"My interdisciplinary work with the QTRL is allowing me to dig into questions about theory I wouldn't have space for in my own field. This work has come to influence my own studies."

Sharp, Petra Totten, and Upasana Bhattacharjee are the Graduate Research Assistants at the QTRL this year. Samuel Yoon and Maya El Helou are this year's Graduate Dissertation Completion Award Recipients.

Yoon, too, is finding that his time at the QTRL has allowed him to gain fresh perspectives.

"I find it really inspiring and grounding," he says. "It really embodies the hopes and ideals of queer and trans politics, and the ongoing expansiveness and complexities of queer and trans life."

Wiley Sharp

Sharp is working on their PhD dissertation, which "explores the racialized and gendered production of space in early twentieth century Toronto through the queered histories of Toronto's Bloor Viaduct, a critical piece of infrastructure that enabled the city's eastward expansion that became one of the most frequented sites for suicide in the world."

They became interested in the Viaduct while working on their MA at York University, which looked at how queer and trans youth in suburban Toronto build connections and community.

The work included conducting interviews and photographing locations where youth made space for themselves.

"I conducted research mostly in Scarborough," they say. "Taking the subway, that moment of crossing the Viaduct always stuck in my mind. I was somewhat haunted by it. Participants described finding community in the queer rave scene, and going to parties held under the Viaduct. This piece of urban infrastructure had multiple uses."

But while the Viaduct was repurposed as a site for queer community space, it was also a site commonly used to commit suicide, from its completion in 1918 until barriers were installed in 2003. After the Golden Gate Bridge, the Viaduct was the bridge most commonly used for suicide attempts in North America. Sharp says that grim history connected to their work with queer and trans youth.

"The omnipresent spectre of suicide shapes queer and trans lives," they say. "That is being worsened by the anti-trans movement in the last decade."

Sharp says the stories they heard remind them of growing up in western rural Wisconsin.

"The town I grew up in had a population of 5,000," they say. "The only time in recent memory when the town was in the national news was when students at the high school I went to started flying Confederate flags.

"A lot of experiences resonated with my own life. When queer and trans youth aren't being recognized in their communities, or aren't being given opportunities to have queer relationships, there's a similar context in rural and suburban areas.

"The commonalities allowed me to ask deeper questions, but the differences are also important to asking questions. I'm partly being an insider and partly being an outsider."

The history of the Viaduct, most famously told in Michael Ondaatje's 1987 novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, is also one of outsiders, being built mainly by immigrants new to Canada, who used the work to construct new lives for themselves.

"There's very little research on the history of the bridge and that space," says Sharp. "Toronto is not a city known for monumental architecture. *In the Skin of a Lion* has come to stand in for that history. One of the things I'm hoping to do with the dissertation is fill in some of those gaps. What kept drawing me back to the site is that it is loaded with very different histories that exist in tension with each other."

"Ondaatje's papers have been acquired by the University of Texas at Austin. In a postdoc, I would really love to explore those archives."

Researching the roots of Toronto communities has also enabled Sharp to appreciate the role that the QTRL can play currently.

"It's really enriching, for those of us who are fortunate enough to have access to the resources of the academy, to open up space to artists and activists," they say. "We are part of those communities too, and our work is meant to speak to those communities."

Graduate Students

Maya El Helou

MEL Helou, a PhD candidate in Sociocultural Anthropology and Sexual Diversity Studies, calls her work "graphic ethnography," combining academic research with illustration. Her dissertation looks at her hometown of Beirut at three different points in its history: 2019, when a series of protests became known as the October 17 Revolution; 2020, when a massive explosion at a port devastated the city, killing hundreds; and 2021-22, looking at the aftermath of preceding events.

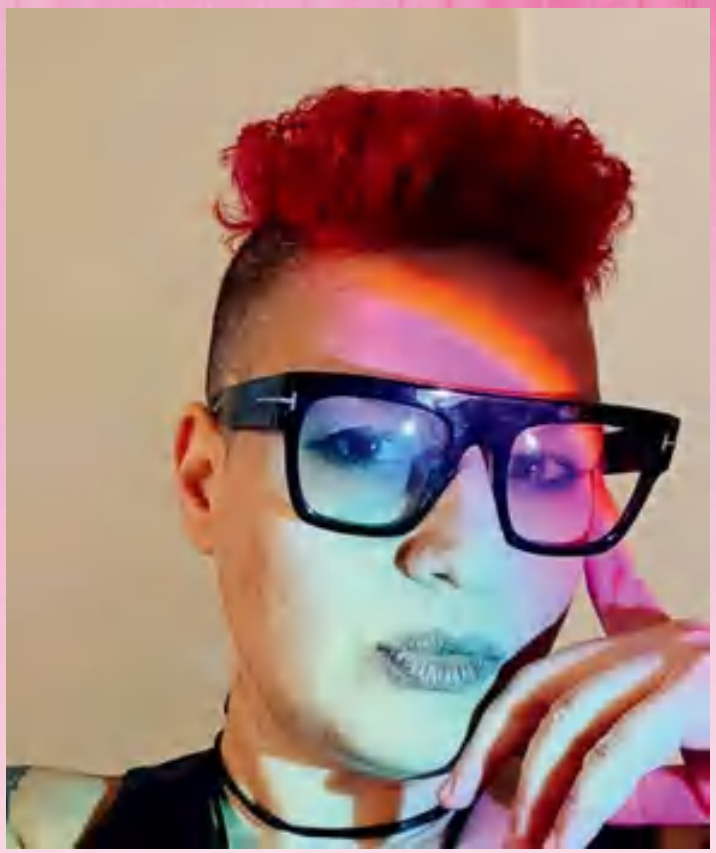
"It's a mix of my own illustrations, archival material, and my imagination of how I saw things," she says. "I am born and raised in Beirut; I just came to Canada to complete my PhD. My project is about queerness and resistance against oppressive states, it was a logical step to join the QTRL."

El Helou has a long history of activism in Beirut, founding and supporting a number of queer and feminist organizations there.

"I'm a queer person who was involved in activism and feminism," she says. "I am a street protest person. It all started with Meem, a support group for woman and trans people. Being queer is illegal in Lebanon, so we decided to go public with a feminist organization, with feminists who aligned with our politics. Our protests were queer from the inside, feminist from the outside."

The protests supported a proposed bill against domestic violence, calling for the bill to outlaw marital rape. The bill eventually passed in 2014.

"The numbers of our group grew so big, you could feel it, it was beautiful, honestly," says El Helou. "The law was an acknowledgment of violence against women and made it illegal for police to ask what you did to make your husband



do this. But as a queer political person, I also recognize that laws are created to protect those in power. Still, it's a stepping stone, and over the years it became more socially acceptable for people to say violence against women is not acceptable."

The protests also showed the intersectionality of fights for social justice in Lebanon.

"For queer feminists in Beirut, specifically, our fight was about mobilizing with trans people. JK Rowling was very weird to me. The way I grew up, the only difference between queer and trans politics and feminism was a different form of struggling with society, but that's it. Queer and trans people are the community, you cannot separate them from it."

After the 2020 explosion, El Helou was involved in a queer mutual aid group offering support to the dispossessed.

"It was just an impromptu gathering of people who had a few resources, and we got a few donations here and there," she says. "We would cook, distribute food, offer safe space. One of those spaces was an activist's one-bedroom house, where almost every day there were 20-50 people who had lost their homes. That's how I first experienced mutual aid. The state did not do anything for people until later."

Beirut has often been comparatively accepting to queer people, although the community is frequently vulnerable.

"There's a tension around what taboos you are able to stretch, but Beirut is a city where sometimes drag queens go out in drag," says El Helou. "But every now and then when the state wants to assert itself, it cracks down on a gay bar or trans space or stokes a moral panic."

"And during Covid, even non-marginalized people were struggling, so imagine the marginalized. People had to live with their parents, had to come out

and many were kicked out. There have been a lot of homophobic attacks on queer bars in Beirut in the last couple of years, and suddenly everyone is feeling scared when walking in the streets."

El Helou has also been instrumental in supporting queer and feminist artists, a process she has continued at U of T through the working group Scribbling Academia. The group explores the collaborative potential between scholars and comic artists. El Helou has brought that same approach to teaching at U of T, opening up her class to different learning approaches.

"I'm not a traditional anthropologist, and this is not a traditional dissertation. It made me realize how much art can inform research and how much art can open perspectives to us we cannot access by only writing and reading."

El Helou hopes to continue teaching in the humanities but is not sure where she might end up.

"At this stage of being a PhD student, you go wherever you find a job. I'm not sure Beirut is a place where I can have a safe job, given everything that is happening. But I'm always going to be returning to Beirut. Beirut is the mothership."

Upasana Bhattacharjee

Upasana Bhattacharjee, a PhD student at the Faculty of Information and Sexual Diversity Studies, was thrilled when the opportunity arose to join the QTRL.

"SDS has always been exciting to me for the research it allows people to do," they say. "There's a real sense of community. When I found out about the position, I had to apply. The QTRL offers meaning and solidarity for the work we do."

Bhattacharjee came to U of T to complete their PhD after obtaining

their masters from the Indian Institute of Technology in Madras in India. Their masters thesis was an ethnographic research project on labour and community building in open technology communities in India.

Their PhD dissertation "Men, Media, *Mohalla*: The Spatial Politics of Racialised Platform workers in Toronto," follows on from that, exploring how mobility and urban infrastructures become sites and sources for the production of masculinities. Their work focuses specifically on food delivery platforms and the largely South Asian bike couriers in Toronto.

"I am basically interested in the gendered ways in which people cultivate a sense of intimacy and mobility around bikes and e-bikes," says Bhattacharjee. "The platform workers are largely South Asian, they're students or migrant workers. I'm looking at how they congregate around their bikes, how they learn to perform masculinity."

Their thesis analyzes how "food delivery platforms create spatial patterns and temporal rhythms of congregation (for instance, on sidewalks and intersections, or close to laundromats) for their South Asian workforce. By examining the racial and gendered histories of labour in settler colonial spaces, Upasana explores "how cities are (re)imagined and (re) organized through technology."

Bhattacharjee says the Covid pandemic marked a major shift to consumers using food delivery platforms, providing opportunities for migrant workers who often already used bikes as a primary mode of transportation.

"For migrant workers, bikes have become a network of infrastructure," they say. "E-bikes are available to rent out to migrant workers, but so much of bike politics is owning your own bike. Learning how to get it to work, even building your own bike and being able to repair things by yourself, means this relationship of authenticity does not extend to those who do not own their own e-bikes."

That individual relationship to one's bike is what produces the community formed by platform workers, says Bhattacharjee.

"You have to be vigilant," they say. "The whole process of socialization revolves around vigilance over your bike, just hanging out around your bikes and just waiting between times of productivity."

Those working for food delivery platforms, as well being largely South Asian, are also largely male, says Bhattacharjee.

"It's very clear it's a gendered workforce, but it's not really clear why," they say. "These are precarious workers, but thinking about them as a gendered workforce is not really something that's been explored outside of the economic subjectivity of it."

Bhattacharjee says there are also similarities to the ways in which bikes became a focal point for many queer and trans people in Toronto.

"A lot of do-it-yourself bike repair places have special hours for women and non-binary people, but don't have designated spaces for migrant workers. There's something going on with race and labour and gender and bikes that I want to explore. Some of it may be unique to Toronto, but there is a lot that is similar in other urban envirnments as well."

Samuel Yoon

When Samuel Yoon arrived at U of T in 2018 to do his masters, he was pleasantly surprised to discover the Bonham Centre.

"It's such a unique space, not just at U of T, but also in Canada," he says. "It wasn't something I was familiar with. Discovering and getting to know a space like that has been really amazing."

Now, as part of the QTRL, Yoon, a PhD candidate at the Women and Gender Studies Institute and in Sexual Diversity Studies, is taking full advantage of the chance to be more fully involved.

"It's been really exciting in terms of actually getting to attend monthly meetings and see everyone's project come to life." he says. "The dissertation grant was perfect; it's given me the time and financial support to finish my project."

That dissertation, entitled "Cruelty Counts: Anti-Asian Violence and its Queer Afterlives," began during the Covid pandemic, when there was a dramatic increase in attacks on Asian people in North America.

"I was observing this increased conversation and organizing around anti-Asian violence," says Yoon. "As someone who was working within queer studies and grounded in queer communities, I didn't really know if there was a project that would bridge those two aspects."

But in 2021, there was a mass shooting at several Atlanta spas, resulting in the deaths of eight workers, six of them Asian women. Yoon attended a performance by Vancouver drag queen Kendell Yan—who performs under the name Maiden China—memorializing the lives of those women.

"I saw queerness as an interesting way into the dominant narrative," he says. "Drag performance does away with hate crimes and policing, it honours the loss of these women's lives and imagines a present and future that would allow these women's lives to flourish."

"In the dissertation, I think about the economy of sexual labour from a queer/feminist focus, and about anti-Asian violence from a queer perspective. Scenes of harm, and how artists present or reinterpret them from a queer perspective, allow us a more expansive vocabulary, a grammar of loss and memorialization."

The spa shooting victims, along with queer Asians, don't fit neatly into the normal narrative about Asians in North America, says Yoon. Attempts to combat anti-Asian violence through education, policing or legislation often leave out the minorities with the Asian community.

"The queer afterlife has multiple valences, ways that in the wake of violence there's something queer, as in something non-dominant," he says. "These women who were associated with economies of sexual labour, their mere association messes with the discourse of the model minority and messes with our notions of who is worthy of protection."

"There are various voices and narratives that are not accounted for. We can't be content with what are often dominant voices that are taken up by politicians. We have to account for voices that are marginalized, that are looking to be protected from the state, not looking for protection offered by the state."

Yoon's future work will continue to take up those marginalized voices. He is working on creating a visual record of HIV among Asian-Canadians and Asian-Americans, to be called "When Not Counted: Queer Visions from the Asian North American AIDS Archive."

Yoon himself grew up in Waterloo, an uncertain member of several minority communities.

"My main experience with the Asian community there was through my parent's church, which was complicated for someone who grew up queer," he says. "My narrative reflects what a lot of queer Asian kids felt: non-belonging within multiple communities."

"But my epilogue to growing up in the church is how we managed to not only survive, but flourish, because of the indifference to us. People often ignored queerness, so my best friend and I found mutual space to explore our desires. We relished being really feminine and flamboyant with each other. Unexpectedly, within the Korean church, we were able to craft a space of belonging."

But Yoon says that for many Asian-Canadians, finding a similar space of belonging within a larger queer community that often fetishizes them can be extremely difficult.

"We've seen so many narrative shifts of Asian men being desirable," he says. "We've seen how queerness continues to be dominated by whiteness, and how it can value Asianness but only in certain ways and on certain terms. It takes a lot of labour to create spaces that are for Asians, where we are desired on our own terms, beyond fetishization."

That, says Yoon, is why he is so happy to be part of the QTRL.

"I find it really inspiring and grounding to be in this place. It really embodies the hopes and ideals of queer and trans politics, and the ongoing expansiveness of queerness and transness to reflect the complexity of queer and trans life."

Petra Totten

As a queer and trans Mormon woman, filmmaker Petra Totten is used to dealing with contradictions.

"I thrive in subversive spaces," she says. "I've felt more empowered to stand up for myself, threatening to contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission if my rights weren't respected in the church community. But it's such a homophobic space that the idea of transness isn't even really a thought. Me showing up there as a femme person with my wife and kids, we're just seen as cis lesbians. On the one hand, great, you do respect me as a woman. But on the other hand, my transness, that thing I care so much about, is not respected."

Nonetheless, Totten says being a part of the Mormon community—the faith she grew up in in Minnesota—remains important to her, and there is support to be found.

"It's still something I find encouraging and positive in my life, if just for the sake that here I am, a trans woman in a Mormon congregation," she says. "There aren't a lot of Mormon people in Toronto, but there are online communities of Mormon feminists who are intersectional and down for a trans woman to participate."

Totten, who is working towards her PhD in Cinema Studies and Sexual Diversity Studies, is finding the QTRL to be a space where she is accepted and valued without question.

"It's really encouraging, and very refreshing, to have this very egalitarian space," she says. "When we do get together, it feels like we're all on the same plane, more so than in other spaces. Everyone's contributions and thoughts are valued. It's really nice to show up and have my perspective valued, not because I am a PhD candidate, but because I am part of this community."

Totten is an award-winning non-fiction film and video artist whose work has won awards at the Emmys and InsideOut, and has been screened across Europe, Asia, and North America.

She says she stumbled into filmmaking while attending a private Mormon university in Utah.

"I took an intro to film course. I thought, 'I like movies, why not?'" she says. "It was transformative. The documentary and non-fiction films in that class were really engaging to me. I applied to the media arts program and was lucky enough to be accepted."

At the time, Totten was not making films about trans issues.

"I was still very deeply repressing my transness and queerness," she says. "I met my wife pretty early on when we were both 18, but I didn't come out to myself until I was 27, after I moved to Toronto."

Totten completed her MFA at TMU and began focusing on capturing trans experience on film and in the filmmaking process.

"The last few years, it's been about moving away from a representational model to what it looks like to create trans non-fiction film made for trans people, but which translates these real experiences and tactile feelings of transness onto film," she says. "It's not only seeing trans bodies on screen but thinking about how production practices tap into this idea of a trans community. It's about changing the output but also the process.

"There's been this renaissance of transness in fiction film, but it hasn't really caught on in non-fiction, especially in documentary spaces. My dissertation is about how we can use different methods and subgenres of documentary film to tap into these ideas that a lot of fiction films are using."

A version of a new video, Visitations, about how shifting identities and memories in transition may not align with current understandings of self can be found at www.petratotten.com.

Totten says that one reason she is pursuing her PhD is to be able to teach in a post-secondary setting, hopefully in Toronto.

"The US, absolutely not. We are not messing with that. In the back of my mind, I'm looking at potential places in Europe like Germany or Ireland. But it would feel really good to stay in Canada."

Undergrads

Comprising writers, musicians, actors, archeologists, scientists and more, the 2024-25 undergraduate Research Assistants of the Queer and Trans Research Lab (QTRL) have diverse interests and diverse backgrounds. But whether it be through exploring the past, through drama or through the law, these students are determined to use their talents and their passions to make the future a better place.

And each of them has found that their time at the QTRL—part of the Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies (SDS)—has not only enabled them to learn and gain invaluable experience but has also provided fresh perspectives on the world.

It's a chance to talk to so many people about how queerness can become so many things I would have never thought of. It's such a beautiful community."

Ghost Mitchell

"The QTRL makes me very grateful to be in an academic institution, and to be able to work with people who have dedicated their lives to helping marginalized peoples," says Lami Islam. "It also makes me feel very hopeful that there are people like this around. It's a humble, not pretentious environment. I can't help but feel safe and comfortable."

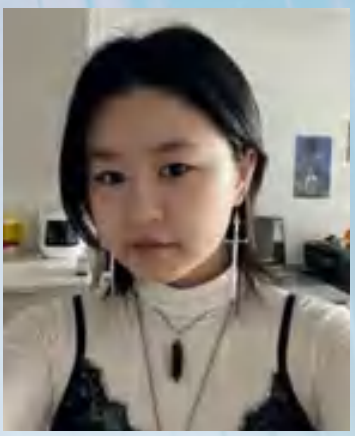
For Linda Li, who is working with the group Queer Scarborough while at the QTRL (one of the funded emerging projects consisting of a collective of university researchers, community organizers, peer collaborators, and arts workers aiming to document the missing 2SLGBTQ+ histories of the east end), the lab has offered an immediate opportunity to improve the world on a local level.

"It's such an amazing opportunity," she says. "At every Share and Tell, I almost feel like I have impostor syndrome. I get to sit in a room with such amazing researchers and scholars and learn how they got to their respective niches. It's such a safe space. And the work has been so interesting, working on a project that is so, so important, it doesn't even feel like work. I'm doing something good for the local communities."

The QTRL's mix of students, scholars, activists and artists has also helped students see a future ahead of them.

"It's inspiring being in the same room as Vivek Shraya [this year's artist-in-residence at the QTRL]," says Ghost Mitchell. "She's kind of a celebrity in my mind, and I'm able to be in the same room as her and have conversations about pursuing creative careers as trans people."

Islam, Li, and Mitchell are joined this year by Sadie Morris, Marissa Reece-Charles, Japneet Kaur, Cameron Miranda-Radbord, Jamie Singh, Erin Huang, and Avery Clague.



Erin Huang

Erin Huang is pursuing a degree in Sexual Diversity Studies, Ecology, and Evolutionary Biology. She feels these fields of study complement one another perfectly. The QTRL's "hands-on" approach makes it "easier to grasp the more immediate impact. In science, it might be a long time until I see the impact," she says. In the QTRL, "we're learning a lot about human interaction" where "the drive within the science community is to be able to communicate findings to a larger audience."

But Huang also says the QTRL lab offers a level of community the science lab does not. "I feel like I'm getting more support and guidance in the QTRL," she says. "We have a shared common goal. Within my science lab, we may be doing similar work but perhaps for different purposes; the work is a little more individualistic, a little more self-driven. Science students also often find it difficult to approach faculty. In the QTRL, the elders have shown us a lot of friendliness."

Huang moved to Toronto from Taiwan for university and originally planned to study creative writing but discovered a passion for evolutionary biology and ecology. "The reason I ended up doing STEM is that I've always loved animals and I wanted to have a career that involved animals. I planned on applying to vet school, but I realized that medicine wasn't really my passion. Ecology was more related to conservation and research and can include wildlife rescue and rehabilitation." Huang is particularly interested in reptiles and exploring the relationship between temperature-dependent mortality and sex ratio in hatching snakes.

At UofT Huang also discovered the opportunity to more fully explore her own identity. "In my high school, there really wasn't a queer community," she says. "There were a couple of people I knew, but I wasn't close to them. I never really felt prejudice for my sexual identity in high school, but I didn't consider it an integral part of my identity until I came here, where it was easier to find a community."

At the QTRL, Huang is working with Paolo Frascà, a professor in the Italian Studies department, on a project exploring the lived experiences and creative work of queer Italian-Canadians. "I'm not very familiar with the Italian-Canadian community, so it's been really cool to find out a lot about it," she says. "I'm mainly doing administrative work, finding potential participants, and finding venues where we're hoping to have an exhibition. I'm learning a lot about general research skills." In addition to her reptilian and queer studies, Huang continues to engage in creative writing, most recently favoring poetry. "It's a great outlet for creativity and imagination," she says. "I'm definitely a fantasy person. My stories tend to include mythological creatures."

Japneet Kaur

Japneet Kaur, a third-year student in SDS and Drama, has always been interested in acting and performing, but did not always see a future for themself in their home country of India.

"I did not see how I could make a space for myself in the acting community as a queer person," they say. "There is a lot of colourism in India, and I was not in a metropolitan part of the country, so I was not able to access resources or teachers."

When Kaur arrived at U of T in 2022, she/they originally planned to study English as well as drama, but an introductory SDS course in their first year changed their thinking about how performance extends beyond the stage. "Everything we do in our lives is drama," they say. "I love talking about how gender and sexuality are constructed and performed. It's fascinating!"

At the QTRL, Kaur is working with writer, actor, and singer Vivek Shraya, this year's artist-in-residence, and finds the experience inspiring. "As a brown queer kid in a new country, working with someone like Vivek is a great opportunity. I was worried about there not being any space for me in the industry. But the way she speaks about her experiences, building so much more out of it, she is so, so amazing at what she does." Kaur says that working with Shraya on a proposed musical has also taught her that stories about queer people do not have to follow a script. "It has challenged my understanding about queer media representation," they say. "Queer people can exist outside of their own queer bubbles. Our stories don't always have to be

coming of age or coming out. We need to let queer people breathe!"

In terms of their own life and work, Kaur says they are interested in "deconstructing what I know about the world around me, and in building queer relationships that are not heteronormative," as well as examining how "colonialism and capitalism have shaped our relationship with performance."

Kaur says they are also more ready to talk about life as a queer femme in India, and the negative stereotypes that often abound around those subjects. "I think I'm coming around to that conversation," she/they say. But while Toronto is easier in many ways, Kaur says that it's important to remember the oppressions that exist here. "I find it much easier to access resources, but not everybody does," they say. "There is so much oppression of people of colour. So much access is based on denying other people access. It's important to center this in my work."

While at the QTRL, Kaur says they have also become much more interested in "how drama can serve as propaganda but can also be a form of resistance and organizing." Indeed, Kuar emphasizes that all of her/their interests have been welcomed at the QTRL. "The QTRL is a great space to explore what I don't know. It's more than living up to my expectations."

Jamie Singh

Jamie Singh did when they matriculated at U of T was to join a sorority. "What is the most cisgender thing I could do?" they ask rhetorically. "I figured out fairly quickly that was not for me." When Singh decided to return to U of T for another degree, they were in a different place in their lives. They chose to study Sexual Diversity and Women and Gender Studies on top of their initial degree in health and disease. "The second time around, I had settled into who I was."

While they're no longer in the Life Sciences, they still love research, and for a while they participated in the Innovation Hub—a student-led collective researching ways to improve campus life. While there, Singh got involved in research on trans and non-binary students, including conducting focus groups in these areas. "We were asking trans and non-binary students about their experiences at U of T," they say. "Students brought up things like the change of name form at U of T, and what needed to be improved about it. They said they wanted more gender training for professors. For example, one student had a physics professor who told them she didn't believe in pronouns. We really wanted to present our findings to the administration, but they kept stonewalling us. U of T loves to put up these little stickers saying it's a safe space, but it really doesn't mean anything."

Now a third-year student, Singh finds SDS refreshingly supportive, and was very excited to have been offered a role at its Queer and Trans Research Lab. "At the QTRL, as well as SDS generally, it's super accepting." They also appreciate QTRL's approach to research. "In SDS, we learn nothing occurs in a vacuum. I come with my own biases, and I must interrogate them. Your goal, when you work with and for the community, is to help the community."

Singh says Sexual Diversity Studies, as well as their work as a Research Assistant at the Lab, are also giving them a fresh perspective on some of what they have learned in science. "You start to realize there's a lot of history they don't tell you about," they say. "Body Mass Index is a good example. BMI emerged out of a racist ideology to say that Black women do not have an ideal body shape."

Singh has found acceptance as part of the QTRL. "Both SDS and my year at the QTRL have been fantastic experiences," they say. "In Life Sciences, you focus on just you. Even if the topic is cancer research, everyone wants to be the one with the big breakthrough. It's every man for himself. In SDS, it's about how can we work together."

Lami Islam

Lami Islam was looking for a place to belong when she found SDS. Now a fourth-year student majoring in SDS and Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity, she was previously a double major in Critical Equity and Sociology. "But I felt sociology lacked community," Islam says. She found some of the community she craved in a queer Muslim group on campus and discovered that many of its members were also part of SDS. Eventually, she followed in their footsteps. She switched her focus to SDS and hasn't looked back. "After a year and a half, I'm very happy with my decision. A lot of people have a sense of pessimism about what's beyond undergraduate, but at SDS I've been exposed to

multiple possibilities that I could be involved with in the future."

Islam is also excited to be part of the QTRL, where she is working with the community organizer in residence, Yasmeen Persad, who is creating a series of videos to empower trans women of color to discuss their sexual health and speak openly about HIV and reduce the internalized shame and stigma of a positive diagnosis.

"I'm learning about communities that are slightly different from mine," says Islam. "I didn't know much about PrEP and PEP [pre-exposure and postexposure prophylaxis]. "I'm learning about dealing with the healthcare system as a trans person of colour. And I'm seeing how class plays a big role in it."

Islam's own family history offers direct experience of the ways in which class and colonialism affect those without power. "My mother's side of the family was in India and had to move to Bangladesh. My father was from Bangladesh," she says. "My parents faced famine and genocide, it permeated everything in our lives. Growing up, everyone looked like us, but the people who mattered didn't look like us. The way teachers would speak to me, I realize now they were microaggressions."

Islam's parents were insistent on the power of education.

"There was always the idea that education would free you from poverty," she says. "Sometimes I feel like I couldn't be a kid. I had a heightened sense of fear and worry that I had to achieve a sense of stability."

Growing up, Islam also started coming to terms with her queer identity.

"I didn't really grow up being attracted to men," she says. "When I did consciously have feelings for a girl, it wasn't a huge deal, it just kind of was. I never felt conflicted or confused. But I grew up in a pretty religious family. My family was never outwardly against it, but when I started expressing my gender, cutting my hair short, that's when it was a big conflict. Now I haven't spoken to my parents in five years."

Islam plans to continue her education, possibly pursuing a master's, maybe becoming a teacher, a psychiatrist, or even teaching dance in high school. "I've danced since I was about 12. At first, I was self-taught, but now I'm part of a competitive hip-hop dance troupe. My dancing has always been very political. Hip hop is a very black art form, so it's important that we are aware of where we're coming from and how we're presenting it."

Islam says the QTRL has expanded her sense of what the academy, and academics, can do. "The QTRL makes me very grateful to be in an academic institution, and to be able to work with people who have dedicated their lives to helping marginalized peoples."

"It also makes me feel very hopeful that there are people like this around."

Linda Li

In my first year, I decided on a whim to take an SDS class," Linda Li says. "Being a queer person, I had to see what this filed was all about." It turned out to be an extraordinary experience. "I've never been lost in lectures the way I was in that class," Li says. "I never knew that queer studies could be so interesting and interdisciplinary, and connect to every other area I was interested in."

The class offered a chance to explore research methods and Li took the opportunity to look at Danmei literature, an underground genre in China about queer men aimed primarily at straight women. "It's eluded state censorship, and it's contributed to the rise of queer rights in China," she says. "But it's usually written by heterosexual women, and it contributes to a very narrow understanding of queer people. Is that truly a good thing for gay men?"

Now a third-year student with a joint major in SDS and Ethics, Society and Law, and a minor in Political Science, Li was eager to apply to the QTRL when the opportunity arose. "I was still so interested in what I had learned, but I hadn't been able to apply those skills to the real world," she says.

In her current work as the Research Assistant for the Queer Scarborough emerging project at the QTRL, Li is getting that real-world experience. In addition to helping with social media and graphic design, Li is part of the effort to host workshops focused on queer and trans youth and to create an archive documenting the queer history of Scarborough. Li sees this archival work as corrective. "Most queer knowledge and research are focused on downtown urban cores. A lot of queer people in Scarborough feel neglected and forgotten, almost invisibilized."

"We're working to build an archive, documenting the queer history of Scarborough. We're also working on recruitment to our collective, and we plan to host six workshops especially for queer youth."

Li herself was born in China, before emigrating to Nanaimo when she had just turned nine. "I definitely feel a strong connection to China," she says. "I miss it." "I spent my most formative years in China," she says. "I haven't been back in six or seven years, but my extended family still lives there, and my dad still lives there."

Nanaimo was not the greatest place for a queer Chinese kid to grow up.

"High school was not the easiest time of my life," she says. "I was given a massive scholarship to a private boarding school which did not attract a diverse demographic.

There were very few other queer students. People were not the nicest to me. I struggled with my mental health, but I come from a family that did not believe in mental health. I was drawn to Toronto, a city where I could feel the world was my oyster."

Now Li would like to bring her academic interests to bear on her heritage.

"I'm more and more attracted to research and academia, especially within the small but growing field of Sexual Diversity Studies," she says. "I don't think there's a huge amount of research on queer people in China, who must hide behind all the strict laws and censorship. I do think that's kind of calling my name."

Sadie Morris

Sadie Morris had one goal in mind for university. "The only way I was going to do post-secondary was if I could study sexuality," they say. "I was only looking at places that had sexuality studies or queer studies." This passion has long roots. When Morris was a child, family studies were their favourite class. "I loved talking about taboo topics. I'm also super personally connected to these topics because I'm gender diverse and sexually diverse. I don't really fit into molds, but exploring the creation of molds has always been a passion of mine."

Joining the QTRL was a bonus for Morris, a third-year student specializing in SDS, with minors in Critical Studies in Equity and Solidarity and in Women and Gender Studies. At the QTRL, Morris has been working with Dr. Laine Halpern Zisman on a project supporting queer families accessing fertility care and related resources. "We're trying to focus on grassroots efforts to support fertility care for LGBTQI+ people who want to build a family within a system that is not built for them," says Morris, who was first tasked with building a media platform for the team. "Laine wants to open the discussion on a very non-medical level and give people a way to connect resources and community. It's a really important project. Not only for the community, but for people who are trying to build or extend a family of their own, but for healthcare providers. How can we rethink the way that we're caring for people?"

Morris' own family has had some challenges. They were born in London, Ontario, and then, in high school, moved to Vancouver with their mother, and then lived alone at 16. In the middle of grade 12, they moved to Port Stanley with their father.

"I just became close with him a few years ago, but my dad is my biggest supporter," they say. "He's the first person that saw that passion in me. He always told me I was someone who could light up a room. I remember when I told him I was pansexual, I baked a cake and put Lucky Charms rainbows on it. Ever since then, he's been my biggest ally. I don't think I could do this emotionally without him."

That passion for sexuality and gender issues took root in high school.

"My high school offered a social justice class and a gender studies class. Those were kind of pivotal for me," they say. "My teacher in gender studies wasn't super informed. But everything kind of clicked.

"I feel very deeply, but all the words in the English language can't always describe those feelings adequately. Pleasure isn't just a word, it's empowerment and activism and resistance; it's love, it's a bodily experience, it's something you can give and receive.

Morris also learned to build their own family in Toronto. They have a cat named Zabie, and work in a toy store with other women and non-binary employees. Their own familial struggles have taught them the importance of these connections.

"Having gone through that, it's made me realize the importance of family. But often family is built, family isn't always blood."

Morris finds that learning at SDS offers a similarly holistic experience that combines academic work with collaboration and community. "I always use my head and my heart together," Morris explains, and SDS has allowed them to do that. In SDS, they explore topics such as "pleasure, connection, sexuality, community, resistance, introspection, and madness. I just really resonate with these taboo topics!"

Ghost Mitchell

For Ghost Mitchell, poetry, fiction, and theatre have been ways to explore their own feelings and to connect with others since their childhood in British Columbia. "I really enjoy using my poetry to tell my story as a queer, disabled person," Mitchell says. "My public school had a slam poetry group, and we got to go to a slam in Victoria. I

got up there and performed a very vulnerable poem, and another poem about being sexually abused. Winning the slam was one of the best feelings I've ever had in my life. People were crying. It felt so good to finally be deeply heard, and to be so welcomed by that slam community."

Mitchell—now a third-year student majoring in Drama and SDS—has found another welcoming community in the QTRL. "It's a chance to talk to so many people about how queerness can become so many things I would have never thought of. It's such a beautiful community,"

As a Research Assistant, Mitchell is working with End of the Line Press, founded by graduate student Hugh O'Neill to support emerging and established trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit artists through an Emerging Project Grant at the QTRL, an experience that is deepening Mitchell's love of literature. "I'm helping organize events and apply for grants," they say. "I was also able to attend an independent publishing book fair. I actually sold some books! Shocking for a first timer."

Mitchell comes by their love of literature honestly, with their mother being a published author of young adult romances.

"She really encouraged my writing when I was growing up. I wrote a recurring book series about pink dinosaurs. I also wrote three plays throughout high school and got to perform two of them in class."

Mitchell's family were also supportive of their coming to terms with their gender identity.

"When I first came out to them, I was afraid," they say. "They had gay friends, but we really didn't talk about trans issues. We were watching Dirty Dancing, and I just stood up and said, 'I can't take this anymore. This is my name,' and ran away.

Recently Mithcell has turned to playwriting as their creative outlet.

"I love seeing what works when actors perform your lines. Sometimes they come up with things I never would have come up with. I love seeing the final performance of something I wrote."

Looking forward, Mitchell is pondering returning to the theatre scene in Victoria—which they found to be a very supportive space—possibly to do theatre with incarcerated people. "Theatre can teach you so much," they say. "I want to use art to help make a better world, especially for marginalized people. I think we can use theatre to help people with their trauma."

Mitchell also works at the ArQuives in Toronto, one of the world's largest collections of historical LGBTQ material. "I really, really love studying queer history. There is so much of life contained in letters, in old images of queer performance and in queer photography. There is so much beautiful history."

Cameron Miranda-Radboard

Cameron Miranda-Radbord was born to be a legal activist. His mothers, both lawyers, were the first lesbian couple to get legally married in Ontario. His mother Joanna Radbord, has been instrumental in winning several crucial decisions on queer rights, including equal marriage, trans parenting, birth registration, and three-parent recognition.

"I've been part of the queer community since I was in the womb," says Miranda-Radbord, now a fourth-year student majoring in SDS and Canadian studies. "My entire existence is thanks to legal change and politics. I was born because my parents were fortunate enough to have access to sperm donations and healthcare. They challenged the fact that only a mother and father could be listed on a birth certificate. I'm here because my parents and others were able to challenge the system."

"When I think of the person I want to be, I think of mothers. I was always encouraged to be critical, to not accept the way things are if they're unjust. I owe a lot of who I am to those values of trying to advocate for communities that, even if you're not a part of the community, deserve equity."

While at the QTRL, Miranda-Radbord is working with community organizer Shaun Brodie, trying to find a way to ensure the continued survival of the Queer Songbook Orchestra, a 14-piece professional chamber ensemble dedicated to using story and song to express, honour and elevate 2SLGBTQ+ experience, while providing opportunities for mentorship and other supports to queer, trans, questioning and allied youth. Miranda-Radbord is researching government grants and philanthropic funding opportunities, and helped organize the 2024 performance of the Queer Songbook Orchestra's annual holiday concert, this year debuting at Hart House Theatre. "The concert was completely sold out," Miranda-Radbord says, "and that's important for people who often find the holidays very difficult."

Miranda-Radbord intends to carry on the family tradition by going to law school and fighting for equity. "It's critical to have people in the legal field who are passionate and pushing things in the right direction," he says. "I'm a bit of a nerd who likes taking on that advocacy. One of the things I'm proud of having done as a member of U of T's Governing Council is pushing to rescind the AIDS policy U of T passed during the pandemic."

He also sees an urgent need to reform criminal law and the way the carceral system treats queer, and especially trans people. "One of the ways to solve transphobia is giving people security, economic or otherwise, and through that, the trust they need to accept other people. When people feel safe and their needs are being met, then they are much more willing to extend that care back. I must believe the kind of society where people can live good, fulfilling lives and be who they are is possible, with a real commitment from government."

Administrative law, Miranda-Radbord explains, is another area that needs reform.

"I'm working with the Landlord-Tenant board at city hall. The tribunal system is broken, and the people who suffer most are often queer."

Miranda-Radbord recognizes that he might find himself drawn into politics to address issues such as growing attacks on trans people.

"I want to go into law, but I don't want to go into politics. But I've realized that it's not realistic," he says.

Avery Clague

For Avery Clague, it was the physicality of archeology that drew them into the major. "Going into the first year, I had no idea of what I wanted to do," they say. "But I took an archeology course and the thing that I really enjoyed about it is that it's so tactile. There is stuff you can look at, pick up, and move around. That's the whole point, figuring out what it is and why it is and where it is. It's not just looking at a computer, it's going and doing and interacting."

Clague was part of a dig in 2024 at a small shell heap site on Passamaquoddy territory in Maine which uncovered a number of artifacts, including a clay pipe stem circa 1790-1890 and a pottery shard some 1,300 years old. "The excitement of finding something, meeting with and listening to Indigenous folks on their land about their heritage—I don't have words to describe it."

When Clague—now a third-year student specializing in archeology, with minors in SDS and Geographic Information Systems—took an SDS seminar course in their first year, they experienced a similar rush of excitement. "I loved every second of it," they say. "The breadth of the things we were talking about, the connectedness of it all, it was something I expected. It wasn't just about sex and sexuality, but about race and class and gender. It was a perspective I didn't know I needed."

Clague also found the critical approaches they learned at SDS to be very valuable in archeology, particularly when it came to thinking about the ancient past and imagining systems that were developed and existed in contexts entirely different from the ones we encounter today. "A huge part of SDS has been thinking about what those systems are, how do you identify them and what could be different," Clague says. "That pattern of thinking has been really helpful."

Clague, who grew up on the upper west side of Manhattan, says they first figured out in middle school that they were queer. But it took a new school to really find their identity.

"I knew I was queer, but I didn't quite know what flavour of queer I was," they say. "I switched schools for high school, and it was such a different experience. I discovered a GSA and I showed up to a meeting. The two co-leaders both introduced themselves with pronouns. One introduced themself with they/them. I had to pick my jaw up from the floor. Wait, this is a thing that real people do. This is something that I can do. That's when I realized that I was probably non-binary."

They then began researching the history of sexuality.

"In a much more limited scope, I spent a lot of time digging through various corners of the internet to find historical examples of queerness, especially gender queerness to be able to point at and say, 'Hey, people like me existed then too."

When it came to choosing a university. Toronto's queer culture was appealing, as was the chance to keep playing hockey, which they've done since they were nine. In fact, Clague arrived with their goalie equipment strapped to the roof of their parents' car.

"My dad discovered the Toronto Gay Hockey Association. It's primarily gay men, and I'm one of the youngest players in the league by an average of 10 years. But I've been playing for two years now, and it is just so fantastic, this huge community of queer adults coming together to play hockey. It's one of the highlights of my week."

As a Research Assistant at the QTRL, Clague has been working with Dr. Tori Smith on an oral history project on the origins of SDS at the university.

Marissa Reece-Charles

Marissa Reece-Charles was a bit intimidated at the start of her year at the QTRL. "I hadn't really worked on any external projects, and not in a collaborative way," she says. "I was like, 'Oh, my God. I'm so inexperienced.' But there's been a lot of guidance, a step-by-step

process of making our way through research."

Reece-Charles, a fourth-year student majoring in SDS and Human Geography, with a minor in Caribbean Studies, is working with the QTRL Program Coordinator and Research Associate Christopher Smith looking at queer tourism in the Caribbean, with a specific focus on Trinidad and Tobago. The project involves examining human rights agreements such as the Samoa Agreement between the European Union and countries in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Africa. One of the questions Dr. Smith is pursuing is how the evolution of gay tourist-friendly policies may be an imposition of Western values.

"One of the conversations circling around this issue is that more queer-friendly countries have more tourism," says Reece-Charles. "But tourism is not the primary economic focus in Trinidad and Tobago and some people think there is an opportunity to expand the tourism industry. But what effect would this have on the island?"

Reece-Charles points out that the research has a racial element to it. Martinique, for example, is often described as one of the more gay-friendly islands. "A lot of white gay and lesbian people say that because the island is still a part of France, they're very queer-friendly," she says. "There's an implication that because they're attached to this particular country that has these largely white liberal ideals, that they are more empathetic and tolerant of gay people—which is very much a racist thing to say—and it also refuses to acknowledge the history of a lot of these islands where it was the colonial laws that were homophobic and transphobic, and created a lot of violence."

Tourism may also lead to mass privatization of public grounds or environmental and social problems, says Reece-Charles, and does not factor in queer residents' lives. "Is queer and gay tourism helping people in any substantial way? What do actual queer people in the region have to say? People forget that there's queer people in the Caribbean, maybe in the diaspora, who move through the Caribbean all the time, through the same spaces that non-Black gay and lesbian people say are too dangerous."

Reece-Charles's personal history has influenced her connection to human geography. She has lived near Toronto's Little Jamaica neighbourhood for most of her life and has seen the real-world impact of urban planning decisions and widespread gentrification. "I'm interested in how transit and housing development is shaping not only the city, but also my own neighbourhood, and how it has the potential to result in the displacement of a lot of communities." This firsthand experience became more salient when she entered university and is helping to shape her sense of where she might want to turn her attention going forward.

"I'm one of maybe two Black people in my human geography classes. It opened my eyes when people talked about representation in certain roles and within certain spaces. That really shook me. I don't always feel that people who have those lived experiences, who have lived in those areas, are in the rooms making those urban planning decisions. I feel like there's something I can learn that can be translated into how we develop these spaces in the city."

QTRL FEST 2025

Each year the QTRL begins with a formal orientation in September. At the end of the academic year, we reflect upon and celebrate our accomplishments at QTRL Fest which brings together past, current and future cohorts together. Throughout the academic year, the QTRL has monthly gatherings where every affiliate has the opportunity to share and discuss their current research projects.

A "Share and Tell". Following this format, this year's QTRL Fest was an intimate gathering in the Paul Cadario Conference Centre. This is how you build the knowledge sharing communities we need in these uncertain times. We even had a furry guest.

As a half day event the current cohort reflected on our experiences while welcoming the incoming residents and research fellows. We closed the first portion of the day with a premiere screening of Community Organizer-In-Residence, Yasmeen Persad's video "Trans Women Leading with Love: Their HIV Story". Stay tuned for information about the public release!

Despite the rain, we communed together for a reception. These are momentous occasions.

1 Wiley Sharp, Upasana Bhattacharjee **2** "Trans Women Leading with Love: Their HIV Story" **3** Yasmeen Persad **4** Vivek Shraya, Shaun Brodie **5** Christopher Smith **6** Franca Ciannavei, Yasmeen Persad, Dana Seitler, Paolo Frasca **7** Sadie Morris, Linda Li and guest **8** Lorraine Pan, Avery Clague and Furry guest

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emerging projects

Every year the Queer and Trans Research Lab sponsors an "Emerging Projects Fund" that provides grants to UofT affiliated scholars and external partners to engage in collaborative and community projects. We were able to support many exciting collaborations in 2024-25 and they are highlighted here. This work, like much of queer and trans research, is an ongoing project and we are excited to see how these interventions blossom and create the possibility of better futures.!

End of the Line Press: a publisher of poetry, prose, and visual art monographs by trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit artists

Primary Investigator, Hugh O'Neil

end of the line press

The first of its kind, End of the Line Press is growing as an independent publisher of prose, poetry, and visual arts monographs with a focus on support for emerging trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit creators. As the organization grows in the coming years, the press will form a worker cooperative constituted by its authors, editors, designers, and artists. The primary goal is to enable and to uplift emerging authors and artists by offering editorial assistance tailored to their projects and promotional backing to advance their work and build their audiences. Established artists will provide guidance for each author to be published, thereby ensuring that they have a network of encouraging readers and designers with which to work in collaboration. Trans literature, as a nascent tradition, is making space for itself in universities and on library shelves. End of the Line Press aims to be a part of this growth and to shift the power of representation, especially in gender expression and identity, from media industries writ large to the very artists who do the creative labour yet lack institutional access and support. End of the Line Press welcomes prose of all genres, such as Young Adult novels, essay collections, memoirs, cookbooks, and short story collections.

Queer Scarborough "On Paper": Toward a Queer of Colour Archival Practice

Primary Investigator, Dr. Andrea Charise

Scarborough is an eastern district of Toronto with a rich, distinct history and culture shaped by its large racialized and immigrant populations. While narratives around queerness in Toronto are often situated within the downtown core, Scarborough has long been a space where queer people – and, particularly, queer people of colour – have existed and resisted. It was, as Richard Fung states in Marvellous Grounds (2018), where some of the first conversations around queerness within a

Tamil context were held and it is where the queer narratives of literary works like David Chariandy's Brother (2017) and Catherine Hernandez' Scarborough (2017) are set. Despite this recent attention placed on highlighting the unique experiences of queers in Scarborough, there remains a lack of formally documented history of queerness in the east end. Our collective of university researchers, community organizers, lived experience (peer) collaborators, and arts workers, aims to document these missing histories, by exploring how digital spaces and artistic practice can expand notions of community and build new ones.

Spazi sicuri / SafeSpaces – Unveiling the Queer Italian-Canadian Experience

Primary Investigator, Dr. Paolo Frascà

The subscription to heteronormative and traditional values has played an important role in the preservation of Italian cultures in Canada and in the integration of Italian communities into the Canadian mainstream, within the colonial operations of white settler-dominated "multiculturalism". These phenomena have caused the marginalization of members of Italian-Canadian communities who belong to gender and sexual minorities; these dynamics have also led to the erasure of histories of sexual and gender diversity in Italian-Canadian communities. Our research-creation, community-oriented literary-photographic exhibit documents queer Italian-Canadians and their "safe spaces" through a combination of photographs by Vincenzo Pietropaolo and poetry/poetic prose Liana Cusmano, both award-winning creators. Thanks to the Emerging Projects Grant, the exhibit will be expanded, and it will travel to three locations: Vancouver, Winnipeg, and the University of Toronto. This project is connected to and inspired by community and academic efforts related to queer Italian-Canadian life and cultural production: these include the two anthologies of queer Italian-Canadian writing (2021; 2024; ed. Licia Canton), the documentary "Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian-Canadian" (ed. Licia Canton) and the SSHRC/Jackman-funded research project "Queer Italian-Canadian Artists: A Study on Ethnic Belonging and Cultural Production" (co-directed by Paolo Frascà and Licia Canton; website: www.qic-artists.com). This is a community building project, pan-Canadian, bridging multiple generations, locations, genders, and sexualities, connecting the academic and artistic communities as well as visual and literary fields. The publication of a volume based on the expanded exhibit is planned for 2026.

2SLGBTQ+ FAMILY BUILDING CANADA

Primary Investigators, Dr. Laine Halpern Zisman

2SLGBTQ+ Family Building Canada (FBC) is a national resource for reproductive justice, community fertility support, and healthcare provider training. Our research, online platform, and activities respond to diverse community needs for education, services, and advocacy during the reproductive journey. With inadequate information available for 2SLGBTQ+ people trying to navigate family building in Canada and limited 2SLGBTQ+ training available in standard healthcare curriculum, many individuals face barriers in creating or expanding their families in Canada. Our online platform helps individuals and families navigate their next steps, understand their options, and address barriers. FBC provides support and strategies for all families. Bridging theoretical analysis and meaningful community engagement, our project activities aim to improve both community access to services and training for care providers. Created in partnership with Birth Mark's Seed and Sprout program, FBC is working to assess community needs and develop an expansive network of programming that supports 2SLGBTQ+ families. Developed and facilitated by community members, researchers, and care providers, our community-based research and activities respond to gaps in knowledge and services.

events

The QTRL had a wide range of events throughout the 2024-25 academic year. Our monthly "Share and Tell" meetings bring together all members of the cohort – students, faculty fellows, artists and community organizers to share and collaborate on their respective projects. The QTRL is collaborative in nature with the goal of imagining new ways to conduct research, make art, and build community beyond the usual silos in place at the university. This is evinced in the robust calendar of events and activation that follows.

SEPTEMBER 6 2024
QTRL Orientation and Reception

SEPTEMBER 17 2024
Queer and Trans Worker-Owned Technologies (Virtual Roundtable) – Convened by Dr. Rafael Grohmann

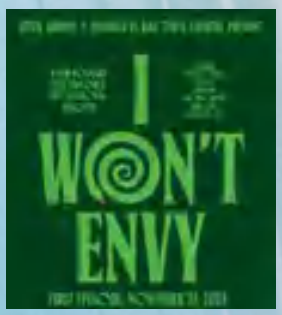
SEPTEMBER 17 2024
Book Launch for 'Fierce, Fabulous & Fluid" by Dr. LJ Slovin

A book launch and conversation with 2023-24 postdoctoral fellow Dr. LJ Slovin and Professor Jen Gilbert (OISE|UofT) hosted by Glad Day Bookshop

NOVEMBER 22 2024
Artist-In-Residence Public Talk – Vivek Shraya

Vivek Shraya offered an Artist Talk at University College that was attended by students, faculty and members of the public, discussing her current and future projects.

NOVEMBER 27 2024
"I Won't Envy" podcast created by Artist In-Residence Vivek Shraya goes LIVE



This project was supported by the Queer and Trans Research Lab and Buddies in Bad Times Theater

DECEMBER 20 2024
"Roasted Chestnuts IX" **– Annual Holiday Concert & Fundraiser for non-profit organization Queer Songbook Orchestra (QSO)**

Hosted by QTRL Community Organizer-In-Residence, Shaun Brodie, and supported by the Queer and Trans Research Lab.

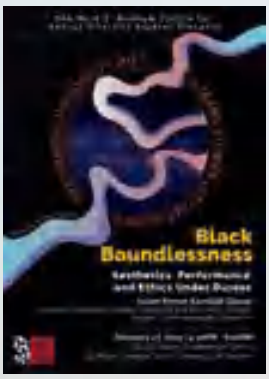
JANUARY 19 2025
2SLGBTQ+ Family Building Symposium

The first ever symposium on queer and transgender family building. This free in-person event featured panels, breakout groups, and discussions, highlighting the voices of queer and trans community members, care providers, and experts in the field of reproductive justice and fertility care.

JANUARY 22 2025
End of The Line Press –

Book Launch
End of The Line Press celebrates its third publication "Picturing" by author Jori Mickelson with a public reading and Q&A at Glad Day Bookshop.

FEBRUARY 27 2025
Transgressing Disciplines: a trans studies lecture series (Convened by Dr. Qui Alexander)



"Black Boundlessness: Aesthetics, Performance and Ethics Under Duress"

Public Lecture by Dr. Julian Kevon Kamilah Glover

MARCH 10 2025
Book Talk: "Trans Technologies" w/ Dr. Oliver L. Haimson

Hosted by QTRL Faculty Fellow – Dr. Rafael Grohmann

MARCH 13 2025
***"For the Gays… We had Jazz"* – Making New Worlds with the Kewpie Photographic Collection**

Annual Postdoctoral Fellow – Public Lecture
Dr. Ruth Ramsden-Karelse

APRIL 8 2025
Disputing Futures: Queer and Trans Anti-Neoliberal Utopias from Argentina and Colombia

Guest talk with Alexandre Nogueira Martins (Freie Universität Berlin)Hosted by QTRL Faculty Fellow – Dr. Rafael Grohmann

MAY 3 2025
Queerborough Speaker Series: Artist Talk with Curtia Wright

MAY 9 2025
Queerborough Workshop: "Changing Portraits" with Curtia Wright

In this hands-on session, participants created symbolic self-portraits using painting, collage, and personal reflection.

MAY 21 2025
Queerborough Speaker Series: Artist Talk with King Diwa

May 21 2025
QTRL FEST
An annual celebration of the achievements of the Queer and Trans Research Lab that honored the current cohort of fellows, while welcoming the 2025-26 cohort into

the QTRL community.
(See more on page X)

JUNE 6 2025

Annual Artist Showcase w/ Artist-In-Residence – Vivek Shraya *"New Models"* Album Review Show
A preview of Artist-In-Residence Vivek Shraya's upcoming album "New Models"

JULY 4-24 2025
Unveiling the Queer Italian-Canadian Experience –

Photography Exhibition Vincenzo Pietropaolo and Lianna Cusmano
The Edge Gallery and Urban Arts Centre – Winnepeg, Manitoba

"Civil War Archives", Digital Illustration, as part of the dissertation "Queer & Trans Antagonism Against the Consortium of Let Die in Beirut" (2025) - Maya El Helou

QTRL

Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies
University College, 15 King's College Circle
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5S 3H7
T: 416.978.6276
F: 416.971.2027
E: sexual.diversity@utoronto.ca

Queer and Trans Research Lab (QTRL)
E: qtrl.sds@utoronto.ca

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE