

Sprinkle: A Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies

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Editorial

“Why this isn’t a baking guide and other truisms”

SEX! Now that we have your attention...welcome to the pages of *Sprinkle*, a peer-reviewed, undergraduate journal of Sexual Diversity Studies. Our aim in producing this edition of *Sprinkle* was to open a space for academic dialogue regarding non-normative experiences and ideas which are often silenced within our regulatory, heteronormative society. In this vein, we hope to draw attention to queer history and experience as well as other issues of gender and sexuality, subjects not often addressed within mainstream classroom curricula.

The manuscripts presented herein, are by no means exhaustive of Queer Theory or Sexual Diversity Studies. They are representative of the emerging, queer academic climate being produced by undergraduate students. The outpouring of submissions that we received from these same undergraduate students far exceeded our expectations, indicating that this journal is filling a niche that has otherwise been vacant. *Sprinkle* seeks to lend legitimacy to the ideas and experiences of innovative thinkers who refuse to be hindered by normative academic discourse.

We decided to begin the journal with experiential narratives in order to problematize the dichotomy of personal experience and theory, as one that ultimately elevates theory at the expense of lived

storytelling. The submissions included in this section queer both hetero and homonormativity through the amalgamation of accessed experiential knowledge and theory. Theoretical abstractions often create a disconnect between the individual and their subjectivity within theory. These pieces attempt to reconcile that disconnect.

Our second section focuses on queer theory and its current formations in the academic world. This section speaks to the relevance of sexual diversity studies in current and contested scholarship. The approaches to engagement are diverse, but all pieces in this section attempt to reformulate and renegotiate the limitations of narrowly defined theory.

It is important to acknowledge the political atmosphere in which our scholarship is produced. We live in a society that is constantly medicalizing and legalizing sexuality. Our third section attempts to destabilize these institutionalized frameworks.

The last section of the journal is perhaps where we see the greatest momentum. The overwhelming amount of submissions that we received relating to communication and cultural studies reveals the extent to which these disciplines are integrating queer theory and sexual diversity studies into mainstream analysis. This is also indicative of the particular relevance that media and literature have to undergraduate students.

While we have presented to you what we hope is an engaging and critical journal, it is not without its flaws. In future editions of *Sprinkle* we hope to publish works that give voice to greater sexual diversity, include critical race analysis, and critique the framework on which queer theory relies. The inclusion of a large array of topics in this edition is not meant to signal a tokenization of these viewpoints and

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experiences. Rather, it is to display to the best of our ability, the multifaceted way in which undergraduates are approaching issues of sexual diversity.

We hope that this issue of *Sprinkle* facilitates and encourages dialogue, for without discussion; new ideas have no hope of developing. Distribute, discuss, and dismantle.

Emma Gray, Shaamini Yogaretnam, and Zoe Engberg
Associate Editors

Developing Sprinkle: Notes on creating an undergraduate journal

We had the pleasure and challenge of teaching Introduction to Sexual Diversity Studies at McGill University in the fall of 2008. Thanks to the initiative of the previous instructor, Ger Zielinski, and the energy and dedication that the students brought to the course, we decided to continue the project that he started after teaching this course in the fall of 2007. We saw this as an opportunity to build upon and extend the dialogues and understandings that had begun during the course. We also wanted to give undergraduate students an opportunity to learn more about academic publishing and the process of creating a peer-edited journal. We pitched it to the class (135 students) to see if there would be sufficient interest to create an editorial team and have students act as reviewers. Much to our surprise, over 20 students signed up to participate in this project. The project began after grades had been submitted, so all participation was completely voluntary. These students created *Sprinkle* because they loved the topics, the theories, and the challenge of putting together an exciting publication that will give voice to the broad array of ideas you will read about in this issue.

Many of the students brought a deep level of commitment and intellectual curiosity to the class. They engaged with the many difficult readings on sex, gender, and sexuality as we explored texts by Butler, Sedgwick, Foucault, Fausto-Sterling, Jagose, Sullivan, Anzaldúa, Halperin, Rich, and Weeks. Through lectures and seminar discussions these students asked great questions, listened carefully, and connected

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intellectually and emotionally to the material. We were thrilled to have the opportunity to continue working with these students through developing this journal. They have taken initiative and spent long hours coordinating, communicating, reviewing, and editing the many submissions for this issue. Although many of the essays emerged from assignments students completed in our course, we also sent out an open call and are pleased to include contributions from students outside of McGill and hope that these submissions will increase in future issues.

We are incredibly proud of this issue of *Sprinkle* and hope you will enjoy reading the ideas, perspectives, and experiences presented here. We also would like to acknowledge the incredible communications and organizational skills of Tess and Val, our Managing Editors. They did an excellent job communicating with authors, managing the files, and providing the Associate Editors everything they needed to make their decisions. We also want to recognize the impressive critical and theoretical lenses brought to this issue by Managing Editors Shaamini, Emma, and Zoe. They sifted through manuscripts and review forms to provide constructive feedback to authors to help them strengthen and deepen their essays. We think the work the students present in this journal is exciting and rigorous and indicates how much undergraduates have to contribute to the field of sexual diversity studies. We hope you enjoy *Sprinkle*!

Elizabeth J. Meyer & Paul Sutton
Co-Editors

**“This one time, at band camp...”:
Experiential Narratives**

Casual Makeouts in Heteronormative High School

By Katie Peacock

Abstract. In dominant discourse, heterosexuality raises few eyebrows. So, when I began to think about the history of my own choice in partners, I was surprised to realize how much I felt compelled to raise an eyebrow at my own engagement in sexual activities with members of the opposite sex. Looking back at my playful sexual exploration with boys in high school elucidated the degree to which my actions and choices were informed by agents of compulsory heterosexuality. Casual make-outs were about gaining social currency—predicated on asserting my feminine desirability that was based on the idealization of love and marriage as the ultimate goal for women. While my high school experience affirms Rich’s assertions about how compulsory heterosexuality functions, her conclusions are inadequate. Ultimately, a complete rejection of heterosexuality is both unsatisfying and unrealistic. Rather, the potential frameworks for heterosexuality need to be expanded. By “queering heterosexuality”, a more nuanced understanding of power can work to create a heterosexual paradigm that evades and combats heteronormativity.

I kissed a lot of boys in high school. When I started the tenth grade, at fifteen years old, I started it with a pack of Mike’s Hard Lemonade and by kissing a boy I had met earlier that night in the park by my house. My three closest girl friends at that time also spent the night behind their respective trees. At 11:30 pm – half an hour past my curfew – we ran down the street to my house and snuck into the basement to compare kisses and kissing partners. The matters to

discuss included who had kissed the most attractive boy, who had been chosen first, and who had gone the farthest. That night marked the first in a long series of similar weekends, and a long series of boys. A hierarchy emerged early on in our group of friends of who consistently kissed the “hottest guy” in the group of boys, or who was the most often pursued. This ritual of casual kisses was not merely an outlet for my newfound teenage urges. It quickly became a ranking system: a way to measure one’s desirability against one’s friends.

A few months ago, I was relating some of these incidents to my boyfriend of almost one year. He asked me if I had actually had feelings for most of the boys that I kissed. When I responded that no, that had nothing to do with it, he asked why, then, had I done it? Why did I do it? Thinking about it from a much different perspective, I can see now that whether I had romantic feelings for them or not, by kissing those boys, I was proving to myself – and to everyone who heard about it – that boys *wanted* to kiss me. I was affirming my own desirability and underscoring my own heterosexuality. I gained status among both boys and girls by having corroboration that I was desired by boys. In their book *Language and Sexuality*, Cameron and Kulick describe this same social phenomenon in terms of pre-adolescents: “Status is gained by pairing up with someone deemed desirable by the group at large...” (70). Since very few of my encounters with teenage boys ever led to relationships of any kind, most of the social interaction that took place because of them was within my group of friends. Cameron and Kulick note this as well, stating that, “The emotional investment here seems to be in the intimate conversation heterosexual relationships enable you to have with your same-sex friends rather than in any kind of

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intimacy with the ostensible object of your desire” (71). If I pursued one boy in particular, it was, at least unconsciously, with the assurance that my friends would approve, and ideally even be jealous. In any case, at that point in my life, I would never have pursued a boy that my friends, male or female, found unappealing, because that would have defeated the point.

I consider my weekend activities during that time to be an example of the enforcement of heterosexuality. The act of casually kissing a teenage boy voluntarily may not in itself demonstrate compulsory heterosexuality, but when the motivation behind that act is to achieve status and desirability, I would argue that the definition is apt. The makeouts were not the result of some driving, innate heterosexual impulse; on the contrary, each one was used to carefully construct and solidify my own heterosexuality. Similar to how C.J. Pascoe presents the way that adolescent boys use the word ‘fag’ to construct what exactly a ‘fag’ is (340), we were acting out heterosexuality in a way that we thought heterosexual women should act. (We had, after all, grown up with *Sex and the City*.) There was never any doubt expressed among my friends and I that we all wanted to be kissed, and that we all wanted to be kissed by *boys*. These encounters, then, are evidence of compulsory heterosexuality because they involved an action with the specific task of underlining our “normative” sexuality.

I believe that one of the most significant social institutions responsible for the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, in my case, would be the institution of marriage, and, even more fundamentally, the concept of marriage as the ultimate objective of a woman’s life. Because of the hegemonic perception of

marriage as every woman's ambition, specific strategies are employed to prepare young girls for their eventual role of 'wife'. These strategies include the socialization from a young age to believe that girls and boys grow up and get married and have babies and live happily ever after, which is in itself the naturalization of heterosexuality. In her definitive article on compulsory heterosexuality, Adrienne Rich describes "the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility" (191) through which women are not aware of any alternative to heterosexuality available to them. As a girl I played with dolls and pushed strollers, not only as play, but also as practice for a role that was assumed to be my inevitable (and natural) fate. When imagining being grown up, there was never any mention of a possible "lesbian existence" (Rich 178). While boys that I knew played with Tonka trucks and Legos, I learned that my role would be complementary to theirs, and therefore my responsibilities included preparing a plastic casserole in my plastic oven using my Fisher Price kitchen. My exposure to compulsory heterosexuality is evident in the fact that I was socialized in a way to inevitably cause me to "shift towards the particular form[f femininity...that conform[s] to the heterosexual principle, 'opposites attract'" (Cameron and Kulick 71), without ever being made aware of any alternatives to heterosexuality. Though I was never told explicitly that heterosexual marriage was the only foreseeable role for which I was being prepared, a more critical appraisal of the socialization of young girls – myself among them – reveals the societal conventions that make this assumption clear.

Another specific strategy used to enforce heterosexuality, related to the institution of marriage, is the idealization of Love: the "happily ever after" part of

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the story. Rich describes the phenomenon of the glorification of heterosexual Love in the following terms: “The ideology of heterosexual romance, beamed at her from childhood out of fairy tales, television, films, advertising, popular songs, wedding pageantry...” (189). Considering that the first movie that I, like many other young women of my generation, remember seeing is *The Little Mermaid*, a Disney cartoon in which a teenage girl gives up her friends, family, and *speech* for the Prince she loves, it is unsurprising that heterosexual Love has been elevated to such great heights.

Up to now, I have written of myself as the agent in the makeouts, but this was not always the case. On various occasions, the boy kissed me, whether I was interested in him or not. When this was the case, refusal was difficult. In acquiescing, I was sacrificing what I wanted, but in refusing, I would have been calling into question both my heterosexuality and my femininity. Not kissing a boy would never have been interpreted as an active choice on my part. It would have been understood as not having been kissed by a boy. This would have led not only to being perceived as less desirable and less feminine in boys’ eyes, but also as less desirable to and in contrast with my female friends. This experience puts Rich’s theory into practice when she writes about “the socialization of women to feel that male sexual ‘drive’ amounts to a right” (183). In this situation, I considered the boy’s desire to kiss me more important than my desire not to kiss him, because going against his wishes would have had farther-reaching consequences. Once again, this illustrates Rich’s explanation of how “women learn to accept the inevitability of this ‘drive’ because we receive it as dogma” (190). Heterosexuality is constantly enforced by women’s dependence on men to define their

position in a world of gender inequality. We accept unwelcome advances because to get ahead in the world, we must play by their rules.

While Rich presents compulsory heterosexuality as a compelling reality that pervades our world, my experience, up to this point, leads me to disagree with Rich's assumption that a woman cannot be in a heterosexual relationship without being oppressed. Rich introduces the question, "Are we then to condemn all heterosexual relationships, including those that are least oppressive?" (201), and then closes her article, leaving the question unanswered, and the words "*least oppressive*" ringing in our ears. This phrase, which contains the obvious implication that all heterosexual relationships are at least a little bit oppressive, is based on the idea that women are heterosexual because they have been socialized to be, but seems to ignore the possibility of women who *are* aware of the alternatives and still pursue emotional and sexual relationships with men. While Rich's article is obviously an essential work on the subject of heteronormativity, her theory of "lesbian/feminism" (201) as the only effective means of resistance to the institution of heterosexuality excludes a variety of other forms of opposition. In their discussion of heteronormativity, Cameron and Kulick indirectly address Rich's assumptions about all heterosexual relationships:

Whereas radical feminism continues to maintain that certain kinds of sexualities and identities – such as butch-femme lesbians, transsexuals, drag queens, and sex workers who claim to enjoy what they do - conserve and perpetuate some of the most pernicious dimensions of heterosexuality, queer theory, in stark contrast, foregrounds those same sexualities and identities as threats to heterosexual

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hegemony, and as potential agents of subversion and change.

I believe that engaging in a relationship with a man does not necessarily preclude compliance to heterosexism. A relationship between a man and a woman need not be characterized by his dominance and her submission. Rather, if both parties are conscious of that possibility, the relationship may provide a setting for their specific strategies to avoid a heterosexist state.

In her article “Fuck You & Your Untouchable Face”, Merri Lisa Johnson responds to the work of feminists like Rich with her comment that “...they don’t say much about what to do in the face of their crippling critiques [of heterosexuality], what to do besides turning off heterosexuality completely or turning away from feminism into quiet complicity. These are not adequate choices” (46). As an alternative to these two options, Johnson offers the notion of “queering heterosexuality” (48). While I wholeheartedly agree with Rich’s critique of compulsory heterosexuality, and while I agree that we must strive to present alternatives and de-naturalize the nuclear family, I do not think that the only way to do this is to turn away from heterosexuality completely. Not only is this a very limited solution, it is also ultimately impractical, given that while the choice may not be innate, a visible majority of women do seek out men as partners. Johnson’s proposal to find new and wholly un-oppressive (rather than less oppressive) ways for women to enter into relationships with men provides a more accessible and more emotionally attainable means of escaping from enforced heterosexuality. In “queering my heterosexuality”, I not only

relationship was one that I was in because of my love for him, as an individual, rather than as a specimen of his gender, but also communicated that if I were not with him, I would not necessarily be with another man. I have also consciously striven to think about our sex as the playful sex of individuals rather than the intercourse of masculine and feminine roles, with all of its connotations of invasion, penetration, and acquiescence.

My experience of compulsory heterosexuality was illuminated post high school, once I recognized the motivations behind and the desired outcome of these encounters; once I realized that I had stopped acting in a certain way in order to construct myself as more feminine, more desirable, and more heterosexual. By realizing that my heterosexuality had to be constantly affirmed, I became aware of the fact that it was not naturally occurring, as I had been led to believe. Marriage as the ultimate goal for women, the idealization of love, and the “dogma” of men’s sexual drive all served as mechanisms to socialize me to believe that heterosexuality is the only natural, innate choice. Adrienne Rich’s article presenting the theory of heterosexuality as a political institution is consistent with what I have experienced, up to a point, but some of the assumptions that she makes about heterosexual relationships fail to account for any form of rejection of heterosexuality other than “lesbian/feminism”. I would put forth, in contrast, that the possibility exists for relationships between men and women that do not, at their core, incorporate gender inequality.

Four years later, I now kiss only one boy, and he kisses me. Having made efforts to establish equal agency between us, I no longer feel as though I must act in any specific way for the purpose of affirming or

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underscoring my sexuality. I am acutely aware of attempts to enforce or naturalize heterosexuality, but I am confident that my decision to be in a heterosexual relationship is a personal choice, and not one that I have been socialized into believing is my only option.

Two years after writing this paper, **Katie Peacock** is a fourth year English Major currently hoping to graduate and move to Europe with that same lover. She enjoys theorizing about gender/sexuality in general, but especially when it means giving some meaning (finally!) to all those high school make outs.

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Debunking the Myth of Gay Promiscuity

By Theo Lyons

ABSTRACT. The stereotype of gay men as a promiscuous, immoral group has its origins in the way in which the concept of homosexuality has been (and continues to be) discursively constructed in Western society. Contemporary understandings of male homosexuality have been shaped by discourses which focus on the act and gendered roles of sodomy, and as a result of this our society continues to associate gay men not with their interest in loving and living with other men, but simply with their engagement in the act of gay sex. Discussions of male homosexuality have examined the behavior of small groups of men who have been made visible by their promiscuity, and this has bolstered the harmful perception of gay men as naturally promiscuous. This myth of gay promiscuity clearly limits the lives of gay men, and continues to be perpetrated in complex and detrimental ways.

When I came out to my dad, one of the first things he told me was that he was “upset that I had chosen a lifestyle characterized by short and unstable relationships.” While I was troubled by numerous aspects of this remark, and found it to be generally reflective of a total lack of understanding of homosexuality, I was particularly confused by the suggestion that my sexual orientation would somehow prevent me from forming viable and committed long-term relationships. I have since come to understand my father’s comment as an expression of what I will refer to as the myth of gay promiscuity. This paper will argue that the common perception that gay men are an

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unusually promiscuous group has its origins in the way in which the concept of homosexuality has been discursively constructed in western society. Beyond that, it will examine why some gay men actually do play out this stereotype of promiscuity, why those men are more visible than the rest of the community, and finally, how this assumption of promiscuity has affected and continues to affect the lives of all homosexual men.

Nikki Sullivan has written that “sexuality is not natural, but rather, is discursively constructed” and that it is “experienced, and understood in culturally and historically specific ways.”¹ Further, she claims that “an analysis of the discourses surrounding and informing sexuality can provide clues as to why particular knowledges, practices, and subjectivities emerge.”² So in considering the discourses that have created our society’s understanding of male homosexuality, perhaps it is possible to find clues as to why and how homosexuality has come to be so closely associated with promiscuous sexual practices.

When discussing the invention of homosexuality, Annamarie Jagose describes Michel Foucault’s claim that whereas homosexual acts had previously been seen as sins to which anyone might be susceptible, “around 1870, and in various medical discourses, the notion of the homosexual as an identifiable type of person begins to emerge. No longer simply someone who participates in certain sexual acts, the homosexual begins to be defined fundamentally in terms of those very acts.”³ This quotation reveals the degree to which early studies of homosexuality (which are almost exclusively concerned with male

1 Sullivan, 1

2 Ibid.

3 Jagose, 11

homosexuality) tend to focus upon the act of gay sex itself.

Because our understanding of male homosexuality, as formed by disparate legal, psychological, and medical discourses, has come out of the study of the act of sodomy itself, our society has come to associate gay men not with their interest in loving and living with other men, but simply with their engagement in the act of gay sex.⁴ What happens in the bedroom is what sets homosexual relationships apart from heterosexual ones, and has traditionally been what justifies the legal, social, and religious ostracism of gay men. Sex has come to define and legitimate gay men, and as a result of this, it is easy to portray and understand the gay community as overly sexual.

While this analysis partially explains the early association of homosexuality with “moral deviation and sexual excess”⁵ in order to fully understand the development of the psychological link between male homosexuality and promiscuity one must delve deeper. One factor that influenced the emergence of the perception of gay men as promiscuous is the fact that during the period in which the modern concept of homosexuality was first developing, the only visible members of the gay community were those who actually were promiscuous.

Rupert Trumbach discusses this idea in the context of English society. At various times men who had sex with men were understood through the

4 This paper focuses its discussion on the act of sodomy because this act has been historically and discursively linked to “gay” sex. It is important to note, though, that sodomy is neither an exclusively homosexual practice, nor a definitive or essential aspect of “gay” sexuality. To suggest this would be to obscure the diversity of sexual practices and preferences that exist within the gay community.

5 Kleese, 58

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different personas of rakes, fops, and mollies. Although rakes and fops were both understood to occasionally engage in sex with younger boys, this did not necessarily compromise their masculinity, as their promiscuity was in of itself a testimony to their masculine virility. These men always took the dominant, masculine role of penetrator, and they were presumed to be primarily interested in women. With the emergence of the molly, “the exclusive adult sodomite”⁶ who took both active and passive roles in gay sex, men who had sex with men could no longer be seen as masculine. As a result of this, men who had sex with men (now labeled ‘mollies’) found that they could only pursue the relations they desired “in a subculture of the like-minded.”⁷ This resulted in the emergence of molly houses and taverns, in which sexual encounters could safely take place. These new forums came to be populated by what was in all likelihood a small and sexually active minority of the total population of men whose primary sexual attraction was to other men. Despite this, because the frequenters of molly houses and taverns were the subjects of virtually all early discussion and prosecution of homosexuality, they contributed disproportionately to the development of Western society’s understanding of gay male sexuality. Equivalent forums for women who had sex with women did not exist during this period.

An example of the way in which this kind of misrepresentation has shaped contemporary public perceptions of homosexuality can be found in early responses to the AIDS crisis. In *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*, Martin Levine discusses how essentialist constructions of homosexuality

6 Trumbach, 134

7 Trumbach, 136

appeared in the designation of gay men as a high-risk population. Epidemiologists studying AIDS based this classification on the fact that the vast majority of early AIDS cases were promiscuous gay men who consumed recreational drugs. The decision to categorize all gay men as part of a high-risk population reflects the doctor's "essentialist perceptions about the behavioral patterns of gay men. [They] assumed that most gay men were at risk for the disease because they were commonly hyperpromiscuous drug users."⁸ Levine goes on to observe that "essentialism blinded these researchers to the diversity of behavioral patterns within the gay community. Gay men vary widely in their sexual and drug habits, and [research has shown that] only a small minority of gay men were promiscuous and took drugs."⁹ Levine's discussion demonstrates the extent to which discourses on male homosexuality have been continually informed through an analysis of groups of gay men who have been made visible by their promiscuity, and have consistently used these observations to retroactively form conclusions about the essential nature of gay sexuality.

Beyond the question of visibility and the overrepresentation of particular groups, one might gain insight into why some gay men actually are promiscuous by returning to the way in which homosexual identity has been constructed. Looking once more at Jagose, Sullivan, and Trumbach's varying accounts of the construction of a uniquely homosexual identity, one clear commonality between their narratives is the crucial role that masculine / feminine gender roles played in the construction process. Men were deemed perverse and oppressed in so much as

8 Levine, 240

9 Ibid., 240

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they engaged in sexual behavior that did not conform to what society saw to be a masculine gender role.

West and Zimmerman argue that “‘the doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production [and that] doing gender involves a complex of ... activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures.’”¹⁰ In this sense, in order to maintain, and “bolster [their] claims to membership in a sex category”¹¹ men were expected to take a dominant, penetrative role in sexual relations. The mollies discussed by Trumbach were unable to pass this test of masculinity and were accordingly deemed ‘effeminate,’ and ostracized from mainstream society. Likewise, when Sullivan describes how buggery laws criminalized sodomy, how Ulrichs saw gay men as being victims of a hermaphroditism of the soul, and how Kraft-Ebbing understood male ‘inverts’ as being degenerate, she is similarly telling the story of how men who are attracted to men have been ostracized for their failure to successfully perform masculine gender through sex. From all this it would seem that if only gay men could find a means of reclaiming the masculinity of their sexuality, they could free themselves from the hatred of heterosexual society.

Perhaps for some gay men promiscuity can, at least on an unconscious level, function as means of salvaging their masculinity. Levine argues that “masculinity is enacted in sexual scripts by the emphasis on scoring, by...the ability to have sex without love..., and by the pursuit of sexual gratification for its own sake” and that “the male sexual script makes it

10 West and Zimmerman, 126

11 *Ibid.*, 126

normative to take risks, to engage in anonymous sex, and to have difficulty sustaining emotional intimacy, and it validates promiscuous sexual behavior.”¹² These behavioral patterns need not be essential characteristics of the male sex for them to be accepted as part of what helps men to perform masculine gender. If this is so, then promiscuity would be a means by which groups of gay men might seek to reaffirm the masculinity of their sexuality. Despite that, it would seem ironic that behavioral patterns adopted as a means of reaffirming the masculinity of gay men, have been so persistently used as a means of justifying and furthering society’s vilification of homosexuality.

There are other factors that help to explain the emergence of promiscuity in some gay communities. Until relatively recently, men who were sexually attracted to other men were unable to act upon any aspect of their sexuality beyond having the occasional sexual encounter. Because participation in stable homosexual relationships would have been highly dangerous, and would have almost certainly resulted in exclusion from jobs, housing, and social networks, gay men were sometimes left with a choice between celibacy and anonymous, non-committal sex. Furthermore, sexually active gay men were categorically denied access to the social institutions that at least supposedly limit promiscuity and promote monogamy among heterosexual men—namely marriage, child-raising, and religion. Despite that, it is important to note that these behavioral patterns were by no means ever characteristic of all gay men, and that they were in fact only ever specific to certain, highly visible groups within the gay male population.

Having thus discussed several different factors that may have contributed to the origins and spread of the myth of gay promiscuity, I will now examine a few of the ways in which this myth has affected gay men. Gay men's supposed promiscuity has long been used to enforce claims that gay men are by nature immoral, and plays a key role in justifying heterosexual privilege. It has been used to defend accusations that gay men brought the AIDS crisis upon themselves and is regularly perpetuated through the mass-media's depictions of homosexuality. Furthermore, the myth of gay promiscuity has had a clear impact upon the legal marginalization of gay men. One example of this can be found in UK immigration law, which sets much higher standards for the naturalization of gay men's overseas partners than for heterosexual couples. In *Immigration Controls, The Family, and The Welfare State*, Steve Cohen describes how gay couples are required to demonstrate at least two years of uninterrupted cohabitation (whereas there are no such requirements for married heterosexual couples) and how "the requirement [for gay men seeking the naturalization of an overseas partner] to show the breakdown of all previous relationships is judgmental, [and] seems aimed against a caricatured image of gay men as promiscuous."¹³

Beyond its use as a means of stigmatizing gay men and justifying their inequality under the law, the myth of gay male promiscuity has also emerged in the politics of the Queer movement where it has been cited by notable lesbian feminists as an example of the immorality of gay men. While arguing against the utility of a united queer movement, Lynne Harne depicts gay

men as sex-crazed hedonists, who seek to use to queer politics to broaden their sexual prospects by lowering “the age of consent law for gay men to that of heterosexuals.”¹⁴ She also makes much of “gay men's resistance to feminist challenges to change their sexual behavior,”¹⁵ and describes how “gay men in local groups... would use 'befriending' (a process where a new member was introduced into a gay group) as a means to sexually exploit the new member into having sex with him.”¹⁶ In *Compulsory Heterosexuality*, while discussing the undesirability of an alliance between gay men and lesbian women, Adrienne Rich also points to the “qualitative differences in female and male relationships, [such as] the prevalence of anonymous sex and the justification of pederasty among male homosexuals [and] the pronounced ageism in male homosexual standards of sexual attractiveness.”¹⁷ Here Rich depicts gay men as not merely promiscuous, but also shallow and inclined to pedophilia.

The myth of gay male promiscuity, which was reflected in my dad's disappointment about my sexual orientation, thus manifests itself in a variety of ways, and continues to subtly, yet surely, work against the interests of gay men. It has become a part of how society understands gay men both because of the way in which the modern concept of homosexuality was constructed around the act of sex, and because of the overrepresentation of certain groups of gay men, who for a variety of reasons, choose to engage in promiscuous behavior. We can only truly begin to debunk this myth once we have sought to examine

14 Harne, 17

15 *Ibid.*, 15-16

16 *Ibid.*, 16

17 Rich, 649-650

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where it comes from, who espouses it, and how it limits the lives of the men it seeks to describe.

Theo Lyons is a second year student, pursuing a degree in political science and European history. He is particularly interested in political philosophy, as well as emerging fields such as international humanitarian law. Theo chose to write on the myth of gay promiscuity because it's an issue that is personally relevant to all gay men, and one, which deserves more scholarly attention.

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**“Foucault is my homeboy”: Queer
Theory**

“Not My Scene”: Queer Auto-Ethnography as Alternative Research Method

By Lorin Schwarz

Abstract This paper is an experiment in how alternative research methods—specifically, creative, arts-based writing—might speak to ethnographic and auto-ethnographic data. In what ways can we “speak back” to traditional, dominant ways of doing research while at the same time attempting to problematize and honour the complex, “queer” ways of being human? How does this form of representation engender different notions of trust, and how might it speak to the silences so integral to the truths of living, silences so often left out of the dominant discourse? What is to be gained from this enmeshing of the heart and mind? In the first half of the piece, I talk about some of the reasons why arts-informed research is an appropriate voice in a dialogue about gender and sexuality. The second half is a small monologue put together from a study on life writing.

The following piece was part of an assignment for a class on “Life History Writing” in which we were asked to use some form of “alternative research method” in which to present the data we’d collected and had been working with. The assignment itself was somewhat “alternative” as much of the data came from auto-ethnographic and autobiographical inquiry; we had the option to use other research subjects but due to the constraints of ethics procedures, most students chose to work with their own life histories. I made the choice

for this reason along with two others: it seemed fantastic to me that my own life might be interesting enough to be researchable, and I was curious to see where that might lead.

It led to interesting places. I chose to present the data in the form of a play, using arts-informed methodology as a starting-point. This type of research presentation made sense, as it seemed to hold a space for the ambiguity necessary to “tell” life history while honouring the method as a way to “create, use, and explore readings and writings of autobiography that recognize their own social construction and cultural conditioning” simultaneously calling “attention to interpretations as always incomplete, always caught up in repression, always interminable” (Miller 151). At the same time, probably because a lot of the piece is my own story and mixed in with that is a large personal investment of affect, feeling and my own identity, I wanted there to be room for empathy and understanding. The story, like any autobiographical piece, was somehow asking for a justification. With the acknowledgement that the researcher is subjective and human, comes the need for a possibility of heartfelt engagement – indeed, for heart itself.

Arts-informed research offers this space by its very definition; Tracy C. Luciani describes this directive as work that is willing “to stand still and listen to ways I can speak back to my heart in the telling that are imaginative and playful and mystical and whimsical” (Luciani 41). More and more in the social sciences, this methodology is seen as both valuable and rigorous, as noted by Liz De Freitas in an essay asking us to redefine our notions of what we “trust” in research. Indeed, she tells us that “meanings are potentially communicated through emotional, embodied encounters that aim to be

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wholly exhaustive, while tracing their own partial or tentative perspective” (De Freitas 269).

There is much to trust in this research alchemy, it seems to me, for those of us interested in “queer” studies and other lives that have been examined from spaces of alterity – the condition of “otherness” assigned by discourses seen as normative and dominant. The tenure of this sort of research work holds within it an imperative not only to question its own completeness and objectivity, but also to “speak back” to forms of authority that have traditionally silenced and left out voices that either don’t fit, refuse to offer a definitive answer or that demand emotional knowing in order to understand what they feel compelled to say. Going beyond dialectic argument, the ambiguity offered by arts-based presentation of research data gives us the tools to respond to the complexity of the social world in a way that is at once compassionate and capable of questioning power dynamics in terms of how research is done. It provides a critical foundation to question the structures we take for granted in often unexamined dualisms of “black and white” thinking. To borrow a phrase from Tzvetan Todorov, I found using the arts allowed my data to live in the human *shade of grey*.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, outside of the constraints of normal research presentation—which is intrinsically valuable and will always occupy an important place—I think this kind of research offers us the opportunity for a richer type of engagement which we, as queer readers, greatly need. Our search for literary models with which to think about our lives is, as any group outside of the dominant paradigm might claim, complicated and requires effort. In other words, an economy of affect and intellect is necessary. As Eve

Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, we read for important news about ourselves often “without knowing what form that news will take” (Sedgwick 3). In the shock of surprise we find in that necessary and life-changing—sometimes life-saving—experience of finding our story in the life of another comes a way of knowing that is redemptive. It might be seen as a call to continue the necessary circle of research that has too often been abject, by creating ourselves both on paper and with an eye to life lived more compassionately as we look for the recognition of something in others that we thought was perhaps unique to ourselves.

SCENE

A hallway at a university. It is dimly lit, with pools of light on the ground from spot-lighting. The ground is bare (there is no carpeting) and the walls are warm, possibly red brick or stucco. There may be a door or two on the wall. Several posters announcing “UNIVERSITY” events are plastered around the walls and doors, and one of them has in clearly visible, brightly-coloured letters: GAY NIGHT.

As the lights go up, two young men go from one end of the hall to the other. They are flamboyant and at least one of them is extraverted and effeminate. They are exuberant as they laugh and walk through the hallway. They are dressed in typical gay “ghetto” fashion—perhaps baggy jeans with boots or running shoes, tight-fitting muscle shirts or tank tops. They wear necklaces. One may have pink hair. They touch each other playfully as they go, clearly on their way to the event.

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After they leave, another figure appears from the darkness. He has seen them go by. He is wearing trendy, casual clothes and has a backpack. After watching after the other young men, he approaches the audience.

Guy:

Did you see them?

(He looks in the direction the others went.)

I see them every day. *(Pause.)* If not them, others like them. *(Pause.)*

When I see them, I usually feel jealous right away. *(Pause)* Well, maybe not RIGHT away. I guess the first thing that happens is I get turned on. Then I get a bit jealous.

(He looks after them again, but they are clearly gone.)

They don't notice me. They never notice me, not really. They probably see me, that's true. I mean, I'm not invisible or anything. *(He thinks about this.)* Although in a way I guess maybe I kind of am. When they see me, they see me as "some guy" standing in the hall, or the dude in front of them in line, or some loser waiting for the bus in the rain. It's hard to imagine THEM ever waiting for the bus in the rain. *(Pause)*

I sometimes wonder if they know how lucky I think they are. Both of them. Or either of them. To have each other. And not just for sex, although I guess that's true too. Yeah. *(Smiling, a bit embarrassed)* They're definitely lucky to have each other for sex: to be able to

feel someone next to you, their warm skin, touching you in that private way --that quiet way that tickles and sends shocks through your whole body because it's so private and intimate and comfortable. They're lucky for that. I wish I had that with someone.

But it's more than that. When I see them, maybe I think of sex first, but then I see them and I think what it would be like to have someone like that -- someone you can laugh with and joke with and be yourself with all the time. Someone who you could come home to and tell all your problems to, and bitch at and still know they're going to have dinner with you and maybe wake up with you. (*Pause*)

I wonder about those two guys. I wonder if one ever wakes up in the middle of the night to find the other guy has rolled over in his sleep, and put his arm around him. Without thinking about it, not consciously. Just did it. Like a natural reflex. (*Pause. Reflectively.*) Because it's comfortable. Because they are so used to each other and they belong to each other and with each other. I wonder how that feels for the one who wakes up to find the arm around him and to know that he has someone that way --that there's a closeness with someone and it's all his. That no matter what else happens and what the world thinks, and even if their parents get mad and never talk to them again, or they fail a course at school or get fired from their job or get sick or have a really bad day, there's someone there that will roll over in the night and put his arm around you without even thinking about it, just because you're his and he's yours and you're there, together in the dark, and the whole rest of the world is lost in the dark

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except for the two of you, and you don't know if the world will ever come back or was ever real at all and you don't even care because you have someone and he's there, with you, right then.

That's why I'm jealous of them.

I wonder how they found each other. *(Pause for three beats)*

It's not that I haven't tried. I've gone to the events and the dances. *(He goes over to the "GAY NIGHT" poster and takes it down.)* These things. I've gone. I have. And you go there, and it's usually the same. I'm there and I'm visible but nobody really sees. There's the really cute boys, and the really buff ones, and they don't even look at anyone or if they do they look really bored. I don't know what to do when they do that. I feel like I want to tell them to come for a walk with me and we can talk, and they don't have to be bored. They'd probably look at me even worse then. They wouldn't waste time with me. I know it.

(He looks at the sign he's holding.)

And then there's the others, who are with their friends and talking about how this one guy they know is a total queen, or this other one wore a Speedo and it looked terrible, and I look at them and I think about what I'd like to say to them but I can't think of anything except that I wish someone would come over and talk to me about queens and Speedos. Sometimes I see another person alone against a wall. *(Pause)* They remind me of me. *(Pause)* I fall in love with them a little bit because they remind me so much of me, and I know

what they're feeling and how alone they must feel and I want to talk to them. But then I think it's stupid -- they're not me. They're probably waiting for their boyfriend but in case they're not I look at them and really see them --not just as someone standing alone by the wall, but as someone who is all by themselves and feeling things and watching the other people and maybe wishing he knew what he could say to them to make them want to talk to him, or come over to him or be his friend or...

(Pause)

(Softly, quietly, looking slightly down)

...put their arm around him.

(Long pause)

I guess it's just not my thing. *(He hangs the poster back up on the wall.)*

I gotta go. I have to get the bus before it starts to rain. *(He looks at the poster one more time, for a long moment, before turning and walking the opposite direction to where the others went. The lights fade.)*

Lorin Schwarz is currently a student at the York University Faculty of Education. Her interests include narrative, psychoanalysis and new ways of (attempts at) representing the truths of being human. This paper was part of a larger project done in a class on life history writing.

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L'Art, aux limites de la Théorie Queer: L'expérience sensible de l'idée

Écrit par Marie-Sophie Banville

RÉSUMÉ : En remettant en question la façon dont les figures d'autorité sont constituées dans le monde académique, la théorie queer ouvre la porte à de nouvelles épistémologies. En s'éloignant de paradigmes positivistes où règnent les statistiques, la logique et la rationalité, la théorie queer a le potentiel de réhabiliter d'autres moyens d'atteindre la connaissance. Je propose ici d'explorer comment l'art pourrait jouer un rôle privilégié dans la diffusion et même la constitution de la théorie queer.

La théorie queer pulvérise le convenu. Elle explore les limites du raisonnement pour mieux les faire sauter par la suite. Qui aurait cru que de remettre la pensée humaniste cartésienne en question nous aurait autant largués? En questionnant l'universel, le cohérent, le fixe, l'immuable, l'authentique, le vrai, l'essentiel, le soi, la Théorie Queer refuse de s'engluer dans de nouvelles définitions, de nouveaux systèmes, de nouvelles normes. Vilaine, elle nous amène aux abords d'un précipice. D'une part, elle ébauche les contours d'un monde plus libre, débordant de possibilités. D'autre part, elle ne précise pas les contours, les nuances et les couleurs de ce monde. La question s'impose : nous voici, queer et déconstruits, que fait-on maintenant? Dans la réalité, où sont nos modèles, nos inspirations? Doit-on entreprendre une révolution, au risque que cette dernière ne revête des allures de croisade autoritaire? À l'inverse, je propose ici de s'abandonner à l'art. En privilégiant la suggestion plutôt que l'ordre, l'art contribuerait en quelque sort à radicaliser la théorie queer en la rendant accessible et

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sensible sans pour autant la rendre autoritaire ou prescriptive. En un premier temps, j'exposerai la façon dont la théorie *queer* résiste aux systèmes et leur est fondamentalement inhospitalière. Ensuite, je démontrerai comment la nature de cette pensée aboutit mieux dans l'art que dans, par exemple, un système politique. Les écrits d'Elizabeth Grosz et de Wendy Gay Pearson seront ici particulièrement éclairants. Pour illustrer cet argument, j'utiliserai en guise d'exemple le film *Zero Patience* de John Greyson et expliciterai ses liens avec la théorie *queer*. Pour conclure, j'adresserai les implications et les limites liées à une représentation artistique de la théorie *queer*, particulièrement comment celle-ci s'articule nécessairement dans un contexte capitaliste.

L'approche poststructuraliste dans laquelle se situent la plupart des penseurs *queer* met la table pour une suspicion systématique de tout ce qui se veut universel. La pensée occidentale est caractérisée par sa tendance à vouloir généraliser certains faits ou certaines connaissances et à, par la suite, les ériger en normes naturelles et intemporelles.¹ Dans *Sexing the Body*, Anne Fausto-Sterling expose bien cette collusion entre faits et vérités universelles en s'attaquant à un grand producteur de vérités modernes : la science. Fausto-Sterling avance que la science crée une véritable « *mythology of the normal [...] by helping the normal to take precedence over the natural.* »² Gloria Anzaldúa décrit ce paradigme intellectuel comme un « *convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western*

¹ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, p. 39.

² Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books, 2000, p. 8.

mode).»³ Ainsi, toute connaissance qui prétend englober l'ensemble de l'expérience humaine est forcément au service d'une norme qui exclut systématiquement certains individus, certains groupes. La science, par exemple, rend invisible l'existence des individus hermaphrodites en s'évertuant à défendre l'existence de deux seuls et uniques sexes (male et femelle). La Théorie Queer, au contraire, cherche à inclure, à reconnaître les multiples identités et/ou positionalités ainsi que leur caractère changeant. Manifestement, un système rigide et totalisant n'est d'aucune aide et est même nuisible à un pareil projet.

La Théorie Queer n'est pas seulement critique d'un système totalisant, elle est aussi critique de toute approche cherchant à immobiliser l'individu dans une identité fixe et intemporelle. Judith Butler résume bien cette position en affirmant que les « *identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes.* »⁴ Selon Butler, le fait d'adhérer à un modèle ethnique de l'identité est une façon de naturaliser et d'idéaliser quelque chose qui, loin d'être naturel, est construit et issu d'une relation de pouvoir. Butler s'intéresse plus spécifiquement à la construction du genre lorsqu'elle avance que « *compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of "man" and "woman," are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real.* »⁵ Ce faisant, Butler remet en question la centralité et l'autonomie du sujet dans la performance du genre: «

³ Gloria Anzaldù, *Borderlands/La Frontera The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books. 1987/2007, p. 101.

⁴ Judith Butler, « Imitation and Gender Insubordination ». *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theorie*. Ed D. Fuss. New York & London: Routledge, 1991, p. 13.

⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

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gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subjects it appears to express. »⁶ En dénaturalisant à la fois le genre du sujet et son autonomie, Butler met en double-échec la pensée dualiste occidentale. Ceci implique qu'un discours qui cherche à consolider des droits légaux sur la base d'une identité cohérente et innée (j'ai « découvert » que j'étais lesbienne, je suis née ainsi, etc.) est problématique d'un point de vue queer. Ainsi, la Théorie Queer refuse tout discours essentialiste qui cherche à confiner l'individu dans une catégorie stable et non-historique.

La précédente discussion a tenté de démontrer, très brièvement, comment les articulations théoriques du mouvement queer résistent aux systèmes et aux catégories d'identités. Force est de constater, cependant, que le monde politique et légal, lui, fonctionne à grand renfort de systèmes et de modèles ethniques. Dans un pareil contexte, il est légitime de se demander si la Théorie Queer peut être autre chose qu'un *trip* intellectuel. Est-ce seulement l'apanage d'une poignée d'intellectuels qui se plaisent à déconstruire tout ce qui leur tombe sous la main : sexe, genre, race y compris. Il devient alors pertinent d'explorer comment la Théorie Queer peut s'incarner concrètement dans la réalité. Pour être à l'image de ses bases théoriques, un projet queer devrait rendre sensible toute sa fluidité et son côté insaisissable. L'art, de par sa nature non-autoritaire et sa capacité à inspirer, s'impose alors comme un projet des plus sérieux. Bref, l'idée est que la théorie queer se jette dans l'art lorsque vient le temps pour cette dernière de prendre forme. La position d'Elizabeth Grosz sur la

6 Ibid., p. 24.

nature et la fonction de l'art sera ici des plus éclairantes.

Dans son superbe *Chaos, territory, art*, Grosz s'appuie sur Deleuze et Guattari pour affirmer que l'art « *is what intensifies, produces sensations, and uses them to intensify bodies.* »⁷ Cette vision de l'art fait donc parfaitement écho au projet élaboré ici : rendre la théorie queer sensible, lui donner une voix dans le réel. Pour Grosz comme pour Deleuze, l'art ne sert pas à communiquer. Il ne sert pas non plus à expliquer ou à représenter, il sert à faire sentir. L'art est un « *becoming-sensation* » et un « *becoming-more.* »⁸ L'art n'est pas un produit de la théorie ou encore un générateur de théories. Il est, au contraire, intimement liée à celle-ci. Sans cesse, ils se relaient l'un l'autre.⁹ Cependant, alors que la théorie peut être hautement prescriptive, surtout si elle revêt la forme d'un système cohérent, l'art, lui, reste une suggestion, une proposition de sensation. Une personne mise en contact avec une œuvre d'art peut autant « s'engager » dans cette dernière qu'il peut y rester totalement indifférent. L'œuvre queer ne force pas le spectateur à être queer lui-même, mais elle génère néanmoins cette sensation de *queerness*. Ainsi, « *art is intensely political not in the sense that it is a collective or community activity (which it may be but usually not) but in the sense that it elaborates the possibilities of new, more, different sensations that those we know.* »¹⁰ L'élaboration de nouvelles possibilités fait partie intégrante du projet de la théorie queer. Le but de la Théorie Queer n'est pas de

⁷ Elizabeth A. Grosz, *chaos, territory, art : Deleuze and the framing of the earth*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2008. p. 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

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déconstruire et de dénaturer les catégories homme/femme et les notions d'orientation sexuelle qui en découlent pour pouvoir mieux les remplacer par autre chose ensuite. Le but est simplement de laisser une porte ouverte, de laisser la possibilité d'interrompre momentanément le flot du discours dominant et d'y faire des brèches pour que d'autres discours puissent surgir. En ce sens, l'art radicalise considérablement la théorie queer puisqu'il lui donne un corps, un univers. Je n'aurai certainement pas été aussi réceptive aux idées de Judith Butler si je n'avais pas vu *Un peu de tendresse bordel de merde!*, une percutante chorégraphie de Dave St-Pierre qui joue dangereusement avec les notions de masculinité, de féminité et de la sexualisation des corps.¹¹ Je n'aurai peut-être pas remis mes valeurs hétéronormatives en question si je n'avais vu cette (incroyable) scène entre les personnages de Frida Khalo et Joséphine Baker dans *Frida*.¹² En somme, je n'aurais pas laissé de telles brèches surgir dans mon raisonnement, si je n'avais pas été mise en contact avec l'art. Comme l'affirme Wendy Gay Pearson en regard à la littérature de science-fiction, « *reading sf queerly, we queer it as much as we are queer by it. As readers, we become different through the act of reading, of opening ourselves to the flow of possibilities, of new ideas, of new bodies.* »¹³ À mon sens, la Théorie

11 *Un peu de tendresse bordel de merde!* Chor. par Dave St-Pierre. Collaboration. Usine C. Montréal Janvier 2008.

Zero patience [videorecording]. writ. & dir. by John Greyson; prod by Anna Stratton & Louise Garfield. New York, NY: Strand Releasing Home Video, 2006.

12 *Frida* [videorecording] dir. by Julie Taymor; writ. By Clancy Sigal [et al.]; prod. by Sarah Green, Salma Hayek, Jay Polstein [et al.]. Montréal: Alliance Atlantis, 2002.

13 Wendy Gay Person, « Toward a Queer Genealogy of SF ». *Queer universes : sexualities in science fiction*. Eds W. G. Pearson, V.

Queer devient assurément radicale lorsqu'elle devient une possibilité dans l'esprit du spectateur chez qui l'œuvre queer est venue éveiller une nouvelle sensation.

Le film *Zero Patience* de John Greyson¹⁴ symbolise bien la façon dont la théorie *queer* peut être radicalisée lorsque rendue par un médium artistique. Ce film s'intéresse au mythe du « patient zéro » voulant qu'un individu bien précis soit responsable de la propagation de VIH/SIDA en Amérique du Nord. *Zero Patience* fait un traitement résolument queer du sujet. Sir Richard Francis Burton (John Robinson) est un taxidermiste vieux de 170 ans mais d'une étonnante jeunesse suite à une rencontre fortuite avec la fontaine de jouvence. Ce dernier veut mettre sur pied une exposition retraçant l'histoire de l'épidémie VIH/SIDA en se basant sur la théorie du patient zéro. Il rencontre alors le fantôme de Zéro (Normand Fauteux) de qui il tombera éventuellement amoureux. Ce qui fait sans aucun doute la plus grande *queerness* de ce film, outre la très grande représentation de l'homosexualité, est son ambiguïté. Roger Hallas offre un bon aperçu du contenu lorsqu'il affirme que *Zero Patience*

historicizes the spectacle of AIDS through a defamiliarization of its contemporary self-evidence, situating it in relation to the historical context of nineteenth century scientific positivism, the colonialist

Hollinger & J. Gordon. Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2008. p. 103.

¹⁴ *Zero patience* [videorecording]. writ. & dir. by John Greyson; prod by Anna Stratton & Louise Garfield. New York, NY: Strand Releasing Home Video, 2006.

En fait, l'ambiguïté du film réside surtout dans le fait que toutes ces thématiques centrales ne sont pas abordées de façon univoque. L'hégémonie de la science, par exemple, est dépeinte de façon très nuancée. D'une part, il y a les activistes de ACT UP qui condamnent de façon unilatérale l'avarice de l'industrie pharmaceutique. De l'autre part, il y a Georges, un membre de ACT UP atteint du SIDA, qui exprime son malaise à manifester contre la compagnie qui produit les médicaments qui le garde en vie. Un autre exemple, est la façon dont Richard Francis Burton, ayant été transformé par sa rencontre avec Zéro, clame que le mythe du patient est dû au sensationnalisme. Il affirme que Zéro devrait être considéré comme un héros, sa collaboration avec le milieu médical ayant aidé à élucider le lien entre les relations sexuelles non-protégées et les infections au VIH/SIDA. À ce moment, il se fait répondre par Zéro lui-même qu'aucune des deux options, sa culpabilité ou son innocence, n'a d'intérêt. Ce film interroge donc l'obsession de la pensée occidentale pour la vérité, la découverte des origines ou ce que Wendy Gay Pearson appelle : « *the politics of origin.* »¹⁶ Le film évolue décidément dans les zones d'ombre, les incertitudes, les nuances et « *such indeterminacy is horrific precisely because it contravenes the Western need for a narrative and, specifically, for a story of origins, a story that identifies where the virus*

15 Roger Hallas, « The Genealogical Pedagogy of John Greyson's Zero Patience ». *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol 12, No 1 (Spring 2003). p. 18-19.

16 Wendy G. Pearson, Op. cit., p. 75.

comes from and whom to blame for it. »¹⁷ C'est là où le film rejoint mon argument. C'est-à-dire dans la façon dont il laisse au spectateur la sensation d'être finalement, lui aussi, incapable de déterminer l'origine du virus, d'être à la hauteur de la « culture of certainty », comme le chante Sir Richard Francis Burton. Cette sensation est celle que désire produire la théorie queer et c'est d'une sensation pareille qu'émerge les possibilités pour la création de nouveaux discours.

En somme, cet essai a développé l'argument voulant que l'art serve de relai à la Théorie Queer. En étant par sa définition même hostile aux définitions et aux systèmes rigides, la théorie queer ne peut manifestement pas se concrétiser dans une révolution organisée ou au sein de l'État libéral. L'art, lorsqu'envisagé comme un générateur de sensations, est une forme sous laquelle la Théorie Queer peut s'incarner avec le plus de sensibilité. De cette façon, elle décuple son potentiel radical et transformateur. L'analyse du film *Zero Patience* de John Greyson aura ici servi à exemplifier comment la mise en contact avec l'œuvre queer suggère au spectateur de dénaturer ses valeurs, son environnement, ses croyances, son corps, son genre, etc. Il serait toutefois fautif et résolument anti-queer de croire que ce lien entre la théorie et l'art est applicable en tout temps et en tout lieux. Rosemary Hennessy observe, à juste titre, que nous évoluons dans une ère marquée par l'« *aestheticization of everyday life* » qui « *encourages the pursuit of new tastes and sensations as pleasures in themselves while concealing or backgrounding the labor*

17 Ibid., p. 82.

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that has gone into making them possible. »¹⁸ Dans cette perspective, ce plaidoyer en faveur de l'art s'inscrit nécessairement dans le cadre plus large qu'est celui de la société capitaliste. Les prémisses de cet essai peuvent donc être problématiques, surtout si elles pointent vers une reconfiguration des identités « *in terms of [consumerist] lifestyle.* »¹⁹ Autrement dit, dans un contexte où l'art est intrinsèquement lié à sa marchandisation, comment la Théorie Queer doit-elle se positionner par rapport à l'art? Décidément, il s'agit d'une question à envisager avec sérieux lorsque l'on rapproche la Théorie Queer et l'art dans un contexte nord-américain.

Marie-Sophie Banville fait présentement un Joint Honours en Science Politique et en Women's Studies à l'Université McGill. Convaincue que la séparation artificielle entre les mondes artistique, intellectuel et politique est une sombre erreur, Marie-Sophie mène une foudroyante révolution pour faire tomber ces murs de division. À grands coups d'essais de cinq à dix pages, elle aspire à changer le monde, rien de moins.

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¹⁸ Rosemary Hennessy, « Queer visibility in commodity culture. » *Social postmodernism : beyond identity politics*. Eds. by Linda Nicholson & Steven Seidman. Cambridge/New York : Cambridge University Press, 1995. pp. 165.-166.

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MULTIMÉDIA ET PERFORMANCE

- Zero patience* [videorecording]. writ. & dir. by John Greyson; prod by Anna Stratton & Louise Garfield. New York, NY: Strand Releasing Home Video, 2006.
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- Un peu de tendresse bordel de merde!* Chor. par Dave St-Pierre. Collaboration. Usine C. Montréal Janvier 2008.

FTM Embodiment of Masculinity: Towards a New Feminist Politics of Incoherence

By Kai Peetoom

ABSTRACT. This paper demonstrates how FTM embodiment of masculinity is a form of incoherence that carries feminist agency through strategically resisting and deconstructing the normative sex/gender system that regulates gender in Western society. The social incoherence embedded in transgender and transsexual embodiments emerges when examining the presumption in Western societies that there are only two innate sexes and corresponding gendered embodiments. This perspective challenges essentialist feminist discourses of transgendered embodiment. FTMs occupy the borderland identities of ambiguity, hybridity and incoherence in terms of their physical bodies, outward gender performance, and inward self-identification. Through a politic of incoherence, we could come to align ourselves less through depoliticized, privatized and individualized identities and more through our similar moral and political self-identifications. Trans embodiment as incoherence presents a new intersectional feminist politic that embraces borderland identities, which functions through resistance to fixed categories of gendered embodiment made intelligible through the normative sex/gender system.

Introduction

Contemporary feminist debates over the meaning of gender have led to some troubling predictions that the indeterminacy of gender may culminate in the failure of feminism (Butler, 2004). As such, "...transgendered people seem paradigmatic of many of the most pressing feminist anxieties about

identity, gender, and personal transformation” (Heyes, 2003, p. 1098). Feminist fears may lie in transgendered and transsexual peoples’ abilities to dismantle essentialist understandings of gender identity and embodiment that arrive at singular, determinate, stable and categorical definitions. This paper will argue that FTM (female-to-male transsexual) embodiment of non-hegemonic masculinity should be included in feminist discourses in order to strengthen the overall movement to end gender-based oppression. I aim to demonstrate how an FTM embodiment of masculinity is a form of incoherence that carries feminist agency through strategically resisting and deconstructing the normative sex/gender system that regulates gender in Western society.

In this essay, I attempt to speak from my subject position as an FTM who locates himself more as a genderqueer transman than as a male defined by the normative sex/gender system. To me this means I experience gender through “overlapping borderzones constituted by the margins of many gender categories” (Hale, 1998, p. 115). It is important to recognize however that there are a diverse range of FTM experiences and embodiments of masculinity regarding gender identity and performance, and that some FTMs do identify strongly with the binary gender system and may construct themselves as self-identified non-trans males.

The [In]coherence of Gender Regulation

Butler (2004) has discussed how gender regulation “operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person” (p. 52). Since individuals in Western society interact through the dominant sex/gender system, embodiment by transmen is

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unintelligible to societal norms (both on the institutional and interactional levels) regulating gender and sex category. Transgendered embodiment falls outside of essentialist definitions that align one's biologically-assigned physical sex with gender identity and performance (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Sullivan, 2006). Fausto-Sterling (2000) discusses how a body's 'assigned' sex is not, as societal norms presume, an either/or phenomenon, but rather that there is complexity even at the level of biological sex difference. Additionally, Fausto-Sterling (2000) clearly locates socially-constructed decisions regarding gender assignment as primary to our labelling of sex category. For example, decisions made by the medical establishment pathologize non-normative sex characteristics such as 'inadequate' penis size, thus maintaining institutional power over sex category criteria that uphold the binary sex/gender system in society (ibid). This argument is crucial to the transgender and intersex movements, because it provides both biological and social evidence against the essentialist argument that there are 'naturally' two sexes. The social incoherence embedded in transgender and transsexual embodiments is evident when viewing sex and gender by questioning the presumption in Western societies that there are only two innate sexes and corresponding genders. Evidence demonstrates that in reality the biological and social realms of sex and gender overlap and provide sexual complexity and ambiguity (ibid).

West and Zimmermann (1987) have discussed how masculinity and femininity are socially constructed through a variety of interactional activities used to create "prototypes of essential expression," reinforcing the socially dominant gender order (p. 6).

Gender, as such, is an ideological tool that “produces, reproduces and legitimates the choices and limits that are predicated on sex category” (ibid, p. 24). Thus, if FTMs subscribe to the modes of essential expression of masculinity, then hierarchical power arrangements legitimated through these “essential” gender differences become reinforced (ibid). Though gender tends to exist primarily on the interactional level and sex category on the institutional and cultural levels, gender and sex category are mutually reinforcing. Thus, social change needs to be directed both at the micro and macro levels of social interaction, gender perception and institutional maintenance of power (ibid).

FTM Embodiment of Masculinity

Given the socially constructed understandings and mechanisms underlying gender and sex category which make these constructions intelligible, it is of concern to ask how FTMs display and perform gender, namely, masculinity. This question is necessary for queer and feminist theorists because of the conflicting stereotypes that transsexuals either subvert or support the heteronormative gender order (Rubin, 2003; Sullivan, 2003). It is important, in this sense, to recognize that FTMs are a heterogeneous group. As such, any analysis of how transmen represent masculinity should not be focused on the either/or of unequivocal hegemony vs. subversion (Rubin, 2003). Instead, Rubin (2003) suggests that we ought to focus on how transmen remake what it means to be a man, reject patriarchal forms of masculinity and maleness, and/or create new forms of masculinity and maleness.

The standard dictionary definition of masculinity refers to the characteristics or traditional

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qualities of being a man. But how is a man defined: by maleness or masculinity or both? The qualities of being masculine are always placed in contrast to femininity, and in effect would not exist without this polarization (Connell, 2005). This relates to the construction of the binary sex/gender normative system in Western culture (ibid). Traditional masculine characteristics have tended to place men in a position of power and women in a position of subordination. In addition, 'true' masculinity has conventionally been conceived of as directly related to the male body, whether inherent of that body or to express something about that body (ibid). This argument has been used to justify a variety of negative 'masculine' attributes; for example, men naturally have an uncontrollable sex drive and an innate urge to violence, which leads them to rape and dominate women (ibid). These are central features of masculinity that feminism has argued so vehemently against while remaining fixed within the sex/gender system.

Rubin (2003) has shown that FTM embodiment of masculinity is more secure when FTMs are recognized publicly as being male-bodied, that is to say when they succeed in 'passing' as male. This security allows FTMs to be consumed less with fitting into normative versions of masculinity. Green (2005) supports this concept of the importance of physical embodiment. He has argued that FTMs possess a sense of compatibility between male/female because transmen and other transgendered and intersexed people have brought the two gendered extremes together; thus for FTMs, it is "the bodily confirmation of the male identity that matters" (p. 499). This becomes complicated since while some authors focus on FTMs passing outwardly as male, Noble (2006) reminds us

that “FTM trans-sexual surgeries are not producing passable bodies, they are producing intersexual, hybrid bodies that are outside of our gender taxonomies and queer lexicons” (p. 27). A paradoxical interplay exists between the contradicting public and private spheres of FTM embodiment of the conventional male body, since with testosterone treatment and binding a transman can pass as male, thus achieving the desired gender performance on the level of everyday social interaction. However, with their bodies stripped of outer male signifiers such as clothing, many transmen display ambiguous bodies lying somewhere between male and female. Thus, FTM embodiment of gender may hold a tenuous agency that reads incoherent to society at large through the sex/gender system that links masculinity to maleness. In contrast, transmen may understand gender through their own dislocated position in society, in which they locate themselves within a diverse range of overlapping margins of multiple identity categories, living in different genderqueer borderzones (Hale, 1998).

Feminism and Trans Masculinity

Sullivan (2003) discusses how feminism can be seen as an ‘ascriptive model’ of community, in that it views gender identity as biologically determined, so that woman would ‘naturally’ precede the feminist community that forms around the bond of women. A ‘full community’ of feminism would form so long as women recognize their common identity towards a collective consciousness based on the agenda of fighting against patriarchal oppression. This position is problematic because it excludes the multiplicity of identities that actually exist among women based on

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different lived experiences of race, class, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, sexuality, and so on, creating many breaks within so-called feminist communities (Sullivan, 2003). Radical feminism¹, following second-wave feminism, carries forward this vision of ascriptive community. Rich (1980) promotes a greater focus on 'lesbian existence' through the woman-identified woman paradigm, a means through which women could form an ascriptive feminist community by recognizing and forming a political ethnic model of community against the institutional power of men and the institution of compulsory heterosexuality (Sullivan, 2003).

Janice Raymond carries Rich's concept further into essentialist views of gender in her critique of transsexual women in her book *The Transsexual Empire*, arguing that MTF transsexuals penetrate women's spaces through appropriating women's minds and bodies, convictions of feminism, and sexuality, while in effect still embodying elements of patriarchal

¹ In order to clarify for the reader my critique of radical feminism, it is important to explain that I carry an understanding and awareness of feminism in its varied waves and theoretical stances. I chose not to focus on second or third wave feminism but rather the theoretical views put out by radical feminism. To me, radical feminist theory (e.g. Rich and Raymond) presented the most obvious view of patriarchal oppression that I aim to argue trans embodiment of masculinity should not be viewed as a part of. I am aware that feminism as it is currently being conceived as part of the third wave and post-feminism/queer conceptions is not limited to this essentialist view of gender--however, I am not trying to argue that feminism as a whole and especially as it is currently theorized and practice is exclusive of an understanding and acceptance of transgender embodiment, but rather I am highlighting key concerns that have arisen within feminist theoretical history through radical feminism and other feminist foundations presented by Jagose and Sullivan. Also, this is not at all the key point of my paper to critique feminist waves. Rather, it is to demonstrate how trans masculinity can in fact represent a feminist formation (and this very much is part of the third wave, though honestly I think we are beyond the third wave currently). I have considered these issues within the huge and contested body of theory known as feminism in writing this paper.

power (Sullivan, 2003). This argument could conversely be applied to FTM's, who have been criticized of embodying male privilege and hegemonic masculinity by choosing to transition into men (Noble, 2006). Radical feminism therefore necessitates a conception of the separation of women from men, defined through essentialist definitions of gender embodiment "in which dissociation from men and masculinity, combined with self-definition and control of women's identity, are prime political values" (Heyes, 2003, p. 1099). Due to the "bipolar assumption that one who is not a woman must, therefore, be a man," transmen and non-transmen are categorized similarly within the dominant feminist discourse upon which men and masculinity are often the battlefield (Hale, 1998, p. 110).

For example, Jagose (1996) analyzes feminism's contestations of queer, stating that "just as feminists refused to accept the masculine pronoun as an ungendered universal term---so there is now some reluctance to allow the gender non-specificity of queer" (p. 106). Clearly, many feminists contest the embrace of an ungendered self due to its historical roots in masculine domination. Additionally, they may fear that this concept would erase all the work feminism has done to promote gender equality through specifying female identity and increasing the collective political consciousness of women. There is still an investment in gender specificity within feminist discourse, and the FTM embodiment of gender incoherence demonstrates that a new wave of thinking about gender and other intersecting systems of oppression is needed, potentially through queer or post-queer theory (Noble, 2006). Hooks (1984) argues that feminist struggle must be based on recognizing the need to eradicate the

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underlying cultural basis and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression. This requires feminism to move towards more overlapping ways of thinking about gender and other mechanisms of systematic oppression.

Towards a Feminist Inclusion of Non-Hegemonic Trans Masculinity

Using an intersectional analysis of oppression, it becomes easier to focus on differences between FTMs and non-trans men that are not always readily apparent to feminists critical of including masculinity and maleness in feminist practice (Hale, 1998). For feminism to embrace trans masculinity would require a recognition of non-essentialist ways of thinking about gender. For example, FTMs have experienced lives as girls and as women with female embodiments that are culturally and historically specific (Hale, 1998). FTMs have therefore been exposed personally to the oppressions which women and girls are subjected, albeit to varying extents depending on their racial, ethnic, class, geographical, and other positionality (Hale, 1998). In addition, some FTMs have many years of experience living as lesbians, heterosexual and/or bisexual women, as well as gender ambiguous persons prior to transition (Hale, 1998). The importance of these experiences to the identities and gender performances of transmen cannot be understated—it clearly separates transmen from cisgendered men in their potential to understand the oppression of women. Additionally, transmen remain marginalized and thus oppressed in a society that engenders them unintelligible (Noble, 2006).

Furthermore, Heyes (2003) suggests that, “despite the fact that many transgendered people are

daily the victims of the most intense and public attempts to discipline gender in ways feminists have long criticized, “trans liberation” and “feminism” have often been cast as opposing movements” (p. 1094). The transsexual in society continues to be pathologized by medical, psychological and legal institutions, which function to produce and reproduce power in maintaining the dominant gender binary system (Spade, 2006). This system tends to individualize, privatize and depoliticize the meaning of those who transgress the gender binary through the maintenance of rigid criteria regulating ‘sex reassignment’ (Spade, 2006). As Hale (1998) argues, depoliticizing, privatizing and individualizing trans embodiment is precisely what leads to problematic formulations of self-identification influenced through social norms.

Conclusions: Towards a Politics of Incoherence as Strategic Resistance

FTMs occupy the borderland identities of ambiguity, hybridity and incoherence in terms of their physical bodies, outward gender performance, and inward self-identification (Noble, 2006). These borderland identities of FTM (and genderqueer) embodiment dislocate us from a gendered society if we do not wish to conform to the normative sex/gender system (Hale, 1998; Anzaldúa, 2003). FTM embodiment of masculinity hence becomes a new subject upon which gender can be unmade and remade.

Due to the complex incoherencies in FTM embodiments of masculinity, Hale (1998) proposes that “we must care more about our moral and political values than we do about our gendered self-identifications” (p.120). This suggests self-identification “primarily as particular kinds of moral and political

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beings, and that our primary positive identificatory referents would be other people with similar moral and political self-identifications” (ibid, p. 120). This approach focuses on forming stronger alliances based on shared feminist, gay, lesbian, queer, intersex, transgender, transsexual, and genderqueer moral and political values. These alliances may work towards ending oppression based on sexist and heteronormative gender constructions as well as gender’s related systems of oppression, including race, class, ethnicity and ability, which are produced and reproduced by social institutions of power (ibid). This is the axis through which transmen may become feminist agents, recognizing that “insofar as anyone continues to occupy the category man it must be remade lest it continue to be oppressive to all of us who are not within that category, or who are not centrally or solidly within that category, whether we be women, men at the margins, or something other than women or men” (ibid, p.121).

Sullivan (2003) suggests that “if we fail to deal with unfamiliar modes of embodiment by rendering them intelligible in terms of existing gender categories...then we reinforce the idea that subjectivity is singular, unified, unambiguous, and knowable” (p. 115). As such, the understanding of an FTM embodiment of masculinity (both by FTMs and by non-FTMs) constructed through the normative sex/gender system “appropriates the transgendered body by explaining away or veiling over any ambiguous or incongruous elements that might disturb the coherent image” that society desires (ibid, p. 115). It is therefore recommended that both FTMs and ‘woman-identified’ feminists align through embracing FTM embodiments of non-hegemonic masculinity, since FTM embodiment

challenges masculinity as it is conventionally understood in society. Incoherence may come to be seen as a new politic that functions through strategic resistance to fixed categories of embodiment. A diversity and multiplicity of groups and individuals within trans, feminist, queer, anti-racist and other movements can align similar moral and political identifications and constructions through this strategic resistance towards eradicating inflexible and essentialist institutional systems of power.

Kai Peetoom is a genderqueer feminist self-identified transman and FTM who lives daily within the conscious borderlands of gender identity and performance. He was inspired to write this paper to attempt to piece together aspects of his own self-identifications, as well as to demonstrate a strategy towards conceptualizing and resisting gender-based and intersecting systems of oppression.

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**“The Trial of *Sex v. Gender*”: Queering
Medico-Legal Frameworks**

The Search for the “Gay Gene” and the Medicalization of Same-Sex Desire

By Amanda Oliver

Abstract Recent efforts aimed at uncovering the biological basis of same-sex desire are the modern manifestations of a discourse originating in the nineteenth century that essentialized and medicalized homosexuality. Research on a “gay gene” has received a great deal of attention and has been supported by some members of the gay and lesbian community who feel that the results might facilitate their pursuit for civil rights. However, investigation into the biology of same-sex attraction is problematic in several ways. In searching for a genetic basis to homosexuality, scientists normalize heterosexuality and ignore the realities of sexual diversity. There is great danger in positing gay and lesbian individuals as physiologically different from the rest of the population. Scientific research is not value-free, and the biases that it generates are conveyed to the public through the media. It is therefore important to question why research aimed at uncovering the biological basis of homosexuality is being conducted, to challenge and scrutinize its results, and to examine how its implications affect the ways in which we understand ourselves and our desires.

In 1991, Simon LeVay studied the brains of gay and straight men and subsequently published a report in which he claimed that an area of the hypothalamus is twice as large in men who identify as heterosexual.¹ In 1993, Dean Hamer published the results of a study in which he claimed that male homosexual desire is linked

¹ Simon LeVay, “A Difference in Hypothalamic Structure between Heterosexual and Homosexual Men,” *Science* 253 (1991).

to a certain region on the X chromosome.² This research demonstrates the ways that nineteenth-century discourses, which essentialized and medicalized homosexuality, have influenced modern science. Although the results of both studies have been contested, they have received a great deal of media attention, and many members of the gay and lesbian community have embraced the research as a validation of their identities.³ However, there are problems underlying the view that homosexuality is biologically determined. Constructing homosexuality as a genetic aberration in turn constructs heterosexuality as a normal, privileged state that does not need to be explained. Scientists who operate under the assumption that homosexuality and heterosexuality are two distinct identities fail to account for the potential fluidity of sexuality, and the fact that more than two sexual orientations exist. Conclusions drawn from these studies are dangerous because they are perceived to be unbiased, and are easily ingrained in the public's understanding of sexuality.

Michel Foucault claimed that the notion of the "homosexual" as an identifiable type of person emerged around 1870, when homosexual acts began to be seen as a reflection of an inborn identity rather than crimes that could be committed by anyone.⁴ Essentialist theories began to develop, which viewed sexuality as a natural and innate phenomenon that exists across time and culture. Thus began the scientific study of

² Hamer, DH, et al., "A Linkage Between DNA Markers on the X Chromosome and Male Sexual Orientation," *Science* 261 (1993).

³ Nancy Ordover, "Eugenics, the Gay Gene, and the Science of Backlash," *Socialist Review* 26 (1996): 127.

⁴ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 11.

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homosexuality. As Foucault writes, “The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history... with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology.”⁵ Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs, who published between 1864 and 1879, asserted that homosexuality was innate and that desire for a member of one’s own sex resulted from “a kind of interior androgyny.”⁶ Ulrichs’s idea that homosexuality was a congenital aberration allowed it to be studied as a pathology. He promoted the idea that homosexuality was natural and therefore should not be punished as a crime, but nevertheless deserved medical treatment.⁷ This view influenced many nineteenth-century sexologists, including Karl Westphal. Many believe that Westphal’s work, first published in 1869, marks the birth of the medicalization of homosexuality. Westphal, a German psychiatrist, believed that homosexuality was the result of a deviation from the normal course of sexual development, and that treatment would thus be beneficial.⁸ Havelock Ellis also agreed that homosexuality was natural, but believed in the power of environmental factors as well. Ellis considered homosexuality to be a natural but harmless aberration.⁹

Modern science’s treatment of homosexuality reflects the numerous discourses that have marginalized and pathologized it throughout history. Investigations into the biology of same-sex attraction operate on the fundamental premise that

⁵ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 4.

⁶ Sullivan, 4.

⁷ Sullivan, 7.

⁸ Sullivan, 10.

⁹ Sullivan, 8.

homosexuality is not normative.¹⁰ In searching for a “gay gene,” scientists have constructed homosexuality as a deviation, the cause of which must be determined. The absence of research aimed at uncovering a “straight gene” suggests that heterosexuality is perceived as natural and unproblematic, therefore requiring no explanation.¹¹ Few scientists have attempted to explain the failure to investigate opposite sex desire, but it is probably due to the fact that heterosexuality is considered to be the “default” sexual orientation by the majority of society.

In addition to constructing homosexuality as abnormal, scientists who perform research on the “gay gene” ignore the diversity of sexual experience. Sexual orientation has been largely defined as a binary system in which homosexuality and heterosexuality are in opposition to, and distinct from, one another.¹² This could not be farther from the truth, as a study conducted by Alfred Kinsey demonstrated in the mid-1900s. Kinsey found that many individuals fall somewhere in the continuum between “heterosexual” and “homosexual.” However, studies that seek to discover a genetic basis to homosexuality avoid investigating the middle of the Kinsey scale and focus only on the extremes.¹³ This overlooks the fact that multiple sexual orientations and identities exist, and that sexual orientation is not static.

Many argue that if homosexuality were found to be biologically determined, gay and lesbian individuals would be granted a protected minority status that

¹⁰ Ordovery, 130.

¹¹ Jagose, 17.

¹² Jagose, 18.

¹³ Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 10.

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would facilitate the pursuit of civil rights. Historically, however, the declaration a group of individuals as biologically unique has proven to impede, rather than facilitate, that group's quest for equality. Searches for biological difference have been carried out against women, immigrants, people of colour, and people with disabilities, often resulting in the marginalization of these groups rather than enabling them to secure rights and protection.¹⁴ Gay men and lesbians were often involuntary subjects of unethical research studies, and endured harsh "treatment" at the hands of scientists who sought to understand and "cure" homosexual desire. Given the way in which science has approached same-sex attraction in the past, the queer community should be reluctant to adopt any scientific argument that attempts to biologically explain sexuality.¹⁵ The discovery of a "gay gene" would only serve to increase the vulnerability of lesbians and gay men to personal, social, political and medical abuse.¹⁶

Upon publishing the results of his study, Dean Hamer urged that his findings not be used towards unethical means, including any attempt to uncover or alter an individual's sexual orientation. He argued that scientists must take precautions to ensure that the findings of their research are not abused. However, scientists are often powerless to control how the results of their discoveries are put to use. The scientists who harnessed and split the atom could not have anticipated or approved of the destruction that resulted from their breakthrough.¹⁷ Several concerns have been raised in response to research seeking to uncover a

¹⁴ Ordovery, 137.

¹⁵ Ordovery, 137.

¹⁶ Ordovery, 137.

¹⁷ Ordovery, 139.

genetic basis of sexuality. Those who oppose the hunt for a “gay gene” are often afraid that genetic testing would be used to determine sexual orientation *in utero* if such a thing were made possible. This could result in the abortion of foetuses deemed be homosexual, or attempts to use genetic therapy to “cure” homosexuality or eliminate it from the gene pool entirely. It is also possible that parents who carry such genes would be stigmatized or deterred from reproducing.¹⁸

In addition to being unable to control the use of his findings, Hamer cannot control the intellectual and cultural effects that they produce.¹⁹ The media operate at the interface of scientists and the public and have therefore greatly influenced public awareness of genetic differences.²⁰ The media’s coverage of genetic research on sexuality has carried biases that shape the ways in which members of the public understand sexual orientation. Newspaper articles and television programs present the most shocking and exciting stories in order to attract an audience. It is therefore not surprising that Hamer’s study became a media sensation, and that other studies that contested, contradicted, or failed to replicate Hamer’s results have gone largely unreported.²¹ Hamer’s research supported the long-standing bias that queer people are “freaks.” When theories that support a current bias enter public discourse, they become entrenched within society’s

¹⁸ Alan Petersen, "The Portrayal of Research into Genetic-Based Differences of Sex and Sexual Orientation: A Study of "Popular" Science Journals to 1997," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23 (1999): 165.

¹⁹ Ordovery, 139.

²⁰ Petersen, 163.

²¹ Ordovery, 128.

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views and are difficult to disavow, even when the theories themselves are disproven or flawed.²²

Modern genetic studies appeal to the general public because they carry with them a promise to uncover the mysteries of human behaviour and difference, creating order in a complex, chaotic world.²³ The media have portrayed genetic research as a puzzle-solving endeavour, one that is bound to reveal the mysteries of human difference. The media have conveyed the message that differences between gay and straight individuals exist, and that these differences are biological in nature and will soon be fully uncovered by scientists. Doubt is rarely expressed about whether the “gay gene” exists at all, or whether scientists will succeed in pinpointing it.²⁴ Scientists who study the biological factors underlying homosexuality do not give nearly enough consideration to environmental factors that might play a role in the formation of an individual’s sexual identity, an oversight perpetuated by the media.

Future discoveries that support the innateness of homosexuality will not function to alleviate homophobia. Hate is not driven by logic, and genetic arguments will therefore be used by homophobic groups in the same way that social and political ones are.²⁵ For that reason, it is crucial to question and challenge studies on the biological basis of sexual orientation. We must remember that science is never value-free, and that the way science approaches sexual orientation drastically influences the way that we

²² Ordover, 12.

²³ Petersen, 179.

²⁴ Petersen, 169.

²⁵ Ordover, 140.

understand it.²⁶ Scientific “facts” about the body are not immutable but are, rather, products of time and culture. Science will therefore always contain some bias.²⁷ Rather than asking how homosexuality and heterosexuality differ, we should be asking the following questions: “Why is it so important to find out, who is it important to, and why is money being wasted on efforts like LeVay’s?”²⁸ Genetic investigations must be scrutinized for their underlying assumptions and biases. Those of us who are concerned about the implications of research on the “gay gene” should work to gain an understanding of how information about biological difference shapes the ways in which we understand our bodies and desires.

Nineteenth century discourse that essentialized and pathologized homosexuality still influences scientific research. Scientists continue to assume that homosexuality is innate and deviant, and have undertaken efforts to ascertain the roots of same-sex desire through biological investigation. This research serves to normalize heterosexuality, and turns a blind eye towards sexual diversity. The scientists seeking to unearth a physiological basis for homosexuality are ill-equipped to manage the consequences that will ultimately result from labelling gay and lesbian individuals as different from the rest of humankind. . It is therefore necessary to remain critical of research on biological difference and to scrutinize its implications.

Amanda Oliver is completing her undergraduate degree in neuroscience at McGill University and plans to pursue a career in

²⁶ Fausto-Sterling, 5.

²⁷ Fausto-Sterling, 28.

²⁸ Ordovery, 130.

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medicine. She is interested in issues of sexuality and gender and the ways in which they intersect with health care and research.

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“No Promo Homo” Takes a Hit: Examining *Lawrence v. Texas* and the Evolution of Anti-Gay Discourse as Palimpsest

By Dawn Cunningham

ABSTRACT. The contemporary exploration of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) studies requires the scrutiny of all disciplines, and is remiss without a thorough examination of the history, discrimination within, and power of the legal system. The plight of modern GLBT communities has been shaped both by the significant victories and losses that have taken place in courtrooms in the United States. Specifically, I intend to briefly study the history of sodomy laws in the American legal system and how William Eskridge’s sedimentation thesis identifies the seemingly inscrutable power of “no promo homo” arguments. However, the 2003 case *Lawrence v. Texas* exemplifies how the GLBT communities and educators, in particular, can utilize the legal system to establish important protections from prejudicial acts. Ultimately, I argue that Eskridge’s study of the evolution of the national anti-gay discourse affects the evolution of sexuality education in American classrooms, as a result of “no promo homo” legislation.

The reception of homosexuality within American culture varies across several planes, from a broad array of moral or religious beliefs to various local or regional attitudinal standpoints. Thus, it would stand to reason that the evolution of anti-gay discourse would likewise represent a changing pattern of attitudes and conceptions of morality and acceptance or tolerance. According to William N. Eskridge, Jr. in his comprehensive landmark review, “No Promo Homo:

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The Sedimentation of Antigay Discourse and the Channeling Effect of Judicial Review¹,” the variegation of anti-gay discourse has taken the form of a complicated palimpsest, the layers of which have steadily built upon one another without eroding any preceding layer in the process.² Eskridge notes the evolution of American social attitudes toward homosexuality, initially citing natural law to pronounce it as a sinful disposition, then citing medical research to pronounce it as a sick or demented disposition, and finally citing a trend of social republicanism to pronounce it as a criminal disposition.³ This bare bones synthesis of Eskridge’s thesis demonstrates the power of anti-gay discourse and its ability to adapt and survive throughout history, remaining powerful and persistent despite pro-GLBT movements and legal initiatives. Channeling his argument toward GLBT issues in education, it is clear that such evolution of the national anti-gay discourse undoubtedly affects the evolution of sexuality instruction in the school systems, especially when considering the propagation of the “no promo homo” arguments.

Eskridge defines the longstanding success and appeal of what he refers to as the “no promo homo” arguments, which work to bat down any initiatives or attitudes that would include instructional materials or content about homosexuality as an orientation or as a

¹ William N. Eskridge, Jr., “No Promo Homo: The Sedimentation of Antigay Discourse and the Channeling Effect of Judicial Review.” *New York University Law Review* 75 (November 2000): 1327-1411.

² *Ibid.* Palimpsest is a term that refers to ancient parchment scrolls that were often reused after earlier writings had faded or been scraped off. Sometimes the older writing would reappear to show the content of earlier documents.

³ *Ibid.*

set of behaviors—which is to say, any initiative or attitude that would provide accurate information about homosexuality to combat myths and social stereotypes, in the case of schools. Eskridge initially outlines what he refers to as “The Standard Argument” which rests wholly upon social assumptions of sexual and gender hierarchies in order to persuade the maintenance of Traditional Family Values (TFV). This reinforces the heteronormative dominance and the rigid binary system of accepted gendered identification/performance.⁴ According to Eskridge, this argument has become the mainstay of parties who wish to enforce TFV and strike down any “gay demands for repeal of consensual sodomy prohibitions and bars to same-sex marriage and for enactment of laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.”⁵ From a legal standpoint, Eskridge argues that such an argument is not only largely effective but also largely accepted as one that is not particularly discriminatory, but one that simply strives to retain TFV and a certain way of life with which the majority has become comfortable.⁶

The assertion that no promo homo arguments are nondiscriminatory and even tolerant is both frightening and unacceptable. In order to illustrate the secondary effects that such litigation can have on the American education system, it is essential to first examine the legal enactment of no promo homo, and its potential trickle-down within schools. Utilizing the court case that ruled sodomy laws in the United States unconstitutional—and key victory for dismantling anti-gay legislation—of *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, the

4 *Ibid.*, 1329.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*, 1344.

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presence of no promo homo arguments within the law become apparent as well as the nature of anti-gay discourse emerging from the previous layers of the palimpsest. And yet, the ruling results in a victory for GLBT legislation, the effect of which is not only historically paramount but also continues to be seen in a social and educational sense.

The Standard Argument became the primary tactical argument of the TFV people in opposition to GLBT movements to appeal state sodomy laws, which recognizes heterosexuality as the metric and seeks to dismantle the promotion of homosexuality in any avenue.⁷ In the case of schools—or the “anxious parent” as Eskridge notes—this argument stems from a concern to keep children safe from the perils of homosexuality which is construed as both criminal, sick and/or sinful depending on the parents, demonstrating the veracity of the triple sedimentation thesis.⁸ Therefore, in order to ensure the safety of children not only within schools but also within society as a whole, it would appear for TFV people that the state sodomy laws must remain intact and enforced. According to Eskridge, the sodomy laws themselves have undergone an “evolution of legal focus—from unnatural sodomy to gender inversion to sexual psychopathy—[which] restructured the nature of perceived social problems, and of deviant identity, within relatively short periods of time.”⁹ Eskridge is placing this within an historical context post-WWII, touching upon the crippling effect of McCarthyism and the witch hunt culture that developed against GLBT educators, but this evolution also buttresses his argument for triple sedimentation of

7 *Ibid.*, 1331.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, 1335.

anti-gay discourse.¹⁰ As a result, the contemporary gay man and/or lesbian is likely characterized as one version of this ideology or perhaps more likely an amalgam of all three—in effect, a walking, talking unnatural, gender-inverted, psychopathic sodomite. In order to eradicate such a person, the TFV people portend to prop up sodomy laws as a defense against the promotion of homosexuality, resting on claims that Eskridge outlines as: causality, state responsibility, and normativity. TFV people argue that the horrific consequences that would result in the promotion (and therefore proliferation) of homosexuality.¹¹ This is particularly poignant when considering the status of GLBT educators, who are primarily and aggressively targeted in such arguments whose aims are to strip individuals of their identities and potentially volatile to personal safety.¹²

Thus, when considering the contemporary case and victory of *Lawrence v. Texas*, it is essential first to examine the legal reason for which such a publicized and influential battle began. Both Lawrence and Garner were arrested because of an antiquated sodomy statute that still reigned in Texas at the time “forbidding two persons of the same sex to engage in certain intimate sexual conduct.”¹³ The apprehension of Lawrence and Garner on the night of September 17, 1998 for engaging in *consensual* sexual acts effectively deemed them criminals in society, placing them on the foremost tier of the palimpsest; however, this statute was long-held in Texas law due to the forces of the other two tiers of

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 1365.

12 Ibid.

13 *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003). <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/02-102.ZS.html>,

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thought still at work, proclaiming homosexuality as sick and sinful.¹⁴ Eskridge's triple sedimentation thesis is perhaps best supported in conjunction with "The Historians' Case against Gay Discrimination" by George Chauncey, et al. which functions as a response to the *Bowers v. Hardwick* ruling in 1986, highlighting the gaps in the philosophies of the decision and its inherent historical flaws.¹⁵ The *Bowers* decision stood that, "by a 5-4 vote, [claimed] that the Constitution does not confer a fundamental right to engage in 'homosexual sodomy.' The majority's conclusion was based, in large measure, on the 'ancient roots' of laws prohibiting homosexuals from engaging in acts of consensual sodomy."¹⁶ Though this contends that homosexuality is a longstanding vestige of American society, Chauncey et al. argue that this is both historically inaccurate and inappropriate when considering the evolution of the discourse of sexuality; in fact, one of their primary claims states that, "the governmental policy of classifying and discriminating against certain citizens on the basis of their homosexual status is an unprecedented project of the Twentieth century, which is already being dismantled."¹⁷ Within an historiographical context, they also note that the specific labeling of homosexuality as an identity or orientation is a relatively new concept and it is decidedly inadmissible within a legal setting to frame homosexuality as an ancient target for discrimination and victimization.¹⁸ Stemming from Eskridge's thesis,

14 Overruled! DVD. Directed by Johnny Bergmann (2008; New York, NY: Lambda Legal, 2008).

15 George Chauncey, et al., "The Historians' Case Against Gay Discrimination." George Mason University's History News Network. <http://hnn.us/articles/1539.html>, 1-2.

16 Ibid., 2.

17 Ibid., 1.

18 Ibid.

Chauncey et al. also claim that social tolerance toward homosexuality has increased considerably since the *Bowers* decision and must be taken into account when regarding cases like *Lawrence* in 2003, acknowledging the newfound social appropriateness of the 14th Amendment and the Equal Protection and Due Process clauses.¹⁹

Working from a social constructionist framework, Chauncey et al.'s strategy to incorporate social science and historical evidence in the legal battleground of *Bowers* and *Lawrence* is an effective and responsible one. If it is accepted that homosexuality is not only fluid but also altered by and adaptive to society and the surrounding environments, this type of sociological and historical argument exercises quite a position in legal argumentation. Despite this, it was held that the arrest of Lawrence and Garner was not unconstitutional because it rested upon an archaic Texas statute, which forbade such activity and effectively promoted the concerns of TFV parties.²⁰ This particular statute, 21.06, greatly resembled the no promo homo arguments identified by Eskridge in that it not only rested upon social assumptions and proscriptive gender and sexual hierarchies, but it also produced problematic secondary effects for GLBT educators and families.²¹ If *Lawrence* had not been overruled, it would follow that the population of GLBT educators in Texas and potentially, nationwide, would have experienced a resurgence of public scrutiny concerning the expression of their sexuality and the integration of curricula that addressed homosexuality. However, this was likely the climate that existed before

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ *Lawrence v. Texas*, 1.

²¹ *Overruled!*.

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the overruling of *Lawrence*, and, likely, a climate that still exists on a wide scale. The significant power of no promo homo arguments that made up this Texas statute, and the considerable power of the evolution of sedimented anti-gay discourse was evinced in the *Bowers* decision. But in the case of *Lawrence*, Chauncey et al.'s speculation that tolerance for homosexuality had increased was in fact correct, and the all-consuming supremacy of no promo homo took a hit.

The ruling in *Lawrence* initially touches upon what Eskridge refers to as a “ ‘*politics of protection*,’ whereby members of a minority group struggle to protect themselves against law’s intrusion into their lives and communities.”²² The GLBT community, as a minority group, fought for their privacy and their right to engage in consensual sexual activity, and the decision acknowledges that the decision reached in *Bowers* “purport to do no more than prohibit a particular sexual act, [but] their penalties and purposes have more far-reaching consequences, touching upon the most private human conduct, sexual behavior, and in the most private of places, the home.”²³ Like GLBT educators, individual homosexuals are subjected to personal censorship of their own identities and private practices under the ruling of *Bowers*. However, *Lawrence* upheld the notion of protecting personal freedoms in the consideration of consensual sex. In this case, the court was careful to point out that the historical evidence of sodomy laws and the discrimination against homosexuality in America was not germane in the present case, because these particular laws originated within entirely different, older historical and legal frameworks, punishing those

²² Eskridge, “No Promo Homo”, 1336.

²³ *Lawrence v. Texas*, 2.

who engaged in sodomy with nonconsenting adults, children, &c.²⁴ Further, the court contends that these laws prescribing nonprocreative sex as sinful and irresponsible are not only inadmissible within a contemporary context, but they are also inadmissible as deliberations on the morality of conduct, which is not a concern of the legal system.²⁵ Thus, the rulings in *Bowers* were overturned and the TFV people's concerns with morality were irrelevant, as were the resentments against nonprocreative sexuality; for, the court was merely concerned with the range of liberties implicated under the Due Process Clause.²⁶

While Eskridge grudgingly touts the effectiveness of no promo homo arguments to “exploit uncertainty”, to appear “more tolerant than the natural law argument”, and to “appeal to Christian theology, a significant consideration for its main audience, which emphasizes love and rejects prejudice and hate”, it would appear that the reign of no promo homo is, at least, being challenged.²⁷ However, he also acknowledges that the no promo homo argument is waning in its application toward sodomy law legislation, especially after the public witnessed the lack of enforcement and attention these seemingly archaic laws received; instead, the TFV parties seem to accept defeat by turning to what they consider to be “the *real* objects of the argument: same-sex marriage, antidiscrimination laws, and other public stamps of approval for homosexuality.”²⁸ Thus, while Eskridge's testament to the persistent evolution of a sedimented

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁷ Eskridge, “No Promo Homo”, 1344.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1346.

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anti-gay discourse is profoundly apt—and apparent in the prolonged appearance of state sodomy laws and apparent in the fierce opposition to their removal—it is evident that no promo homo arguments are flawed within contemporary American society, as witnessed in triumphant cases like *Lawrence v. Texas*.

The implications of this decision for the arena of public education in America remains to be seen, though it would not be entirely unfounded to predict that GLBT educators would be given more freedom from the harsh scrutiny on the performance of their identities, orientations and behaviors. I would also argue that the backlash of decisions like *Lawrence* might promote the opposite, and that TFV people would readjust their focus upon the supposed safety of their children's education. However, such forecasts all regard the kind of trickle-down process that results from all queer legal battles made in the United States. The pronouncement of a seminal decision, such as *Lawrence*, holds widespread social implications and overturns, if only slightly, the heteronormative patriarchy as the American metric. Eskridge's study is effective in pointing out that the legal system is a bastion upon which both gay and anti-gay discourse can develop more fully, and through which both gay and anti-gay groups and legislation can engender productive results.²⁹ While Eskridge promotes the utilization of the legal system by GLBT groups, he likewise acknowledges the power and productivity of no promo homo arguments within queer legal history. The nation is still reacting to the implications that arose from the decision made in *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, just as the anti-gay discourse is continuously shifting and adapting to

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1336.

enforce TFV. But what must be made paramount, to GLBT educators and to the GLBT population of America in general, is the power and opportunity within the legal framework and its ability to promote social justice and with time, erode discriminatory attitudes.

Dawn Cunningham is currently a senior undergraduate student and member of the Honors Program at Denison University in Granville, Ohio studying English and Creative Writing. She is in the process of editing a novel-length creative capstone project, which investigates the space of the bedroom as a contemporary Gothic setting, contending that sexual and psychological history are inextricably linked. This paper was born from the daily engaging discussions of an education course, which identified the connections between educational institutions and GLBT issues in a contemporary setting—considering the problem from all institutional standpoints, including the American legal system.

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**“Xena's Totally into BDSM”: Queer
Readings of Media and Literature**

New Ways Of Representing Desire in *Boys Don't Cry*

By Kate Bass

Abstract: The film *Boys Don't Cry* puts a significant amount of stress on conventional spectatorial positions in narrative Hollywood cinema. Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze considers viewer identification to fall with the main male character. As a result the females in film become nothing more than objects to look at. The trans elements of *Boys Don't Cry* challenge this active male, passive female structure. This paper examines how these challenges are presented, what kind of work they do, and whether they pose a viable feminist alternative to conventional patriarchal structures of film.

A woman walks down the stairs. We see, in slow motion, legs, hips, waists, breasts, face, in a soft focus. What narrative Hollywood film are we watching? Ask Laura Mulvey and she'll say "potentially any of them". The cinema of the pleasurable gaze—in which the female body is an object to look at and derive pleasure from—is what Mulvey describes in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In the essay, Mulvey expresses the idea that normative Hollywood films, in which the male characters do the looking and the females are to be looked at, have the potential to be usurped by what she calls "an alternative cinema...which is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film" (Mulvey 200). The film *Boys Don't Cry* can be seen as an attempt to do just that.

The film endeavors to remap certain features of desire onto a new structure—one not bound by the

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confines of phallogentrism—and create the alternative cinema that Mulvey discusses. This remapping is carried out semi-successfully for most of the film, up until the last quarter when patriarchal structures intrude in the form of the rape and murder of Brandon Teena. This failure is partially a failure of the film in the way it portrays Teena after the incident, but also the failure of real life social structures from which the film cannot escape. To support this claim, I will use a re-worked version of Laura Mulvey's theory on visual pleasure and narrative cinema that is in part determined by but also scrutinizes the spectatorial position created by *Boys Don't Cry*. I will then examine problems that arise from this gaze, and for the film.

Boys Don't Cry, a 1999 film directed by Kimberly Peirce, is the story of Brandon Teena, a female-to-male pre-operative transgender individual living in Lincoln, Nebraska. Based on a true story, the film chronicles Brandon's travels to a smaller town in Nebraska where he starts a relationship with a girl names Lana. When John and Tom, two of Brandon's supposed friends, discover that he has female genitalia, they rape and then murder him.

Although Laura Mulvey formulated her theory on visual pleasure in cinema in 1975 and it therefore predates a number of today's working theories on spectatorship, it is still very useful in reading *Boys Don't Cry*. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" begins by arguing that Hollywood relies on a structure of desire that is "caught within the language of the patriarchy" (Mulvey 199). In other words, desire is only expressed by representations that have been institutionally imposed by the hegemonic culture. For Mulvey this means that only forms of representation and gazing that are found within patriarchy will be found within

film. So, the predominant (and according to Mulvey, mandatory) cinematic spectatorial position is one corresponding to a male's gaze upon the female figure. Mulvey calls this a "split between active/male and passive/female" where the male engages in scopophilia (viewing other people as objects and holding them under "a controlling and curious gaze" [Mulvey 200].) The female then becomes the object to be looked at.

Further, audiences look for a perspective to connect with in the film. Mulvey calls this narcissistic ego identification and the main male character usually assumes this role. That character becomes a Lacanian mirror image that "demands identification of the ego...through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like" (Mulvey 202). Members of the audience see the male character as a better version of themselves and align their identification with him.

Mulvey's final point is that female characters metaphorically represent an unconscious fear of castration because of they lack a penis. This, says Mulvey, is dealt with by film in one of two ways. In the first scenario the main male character, who receives the narcissistic identification from the audience, investigates and then either punishes or forgives the female, exerting his power and overcoming the castration anxiety. In the second case, the female is made into an object of fetishistic scopophilia and consequently ceases to be a threat; instead, she becomes a perfected, idealized, and therefore unreal representation.

According to Mulvey, in every Hollywood film we should find an active male unconsciously acting out his castration complex through either investigation of or fetishistic scopophilia on a passive female. But how,

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then, do we apply Mulvey's theories of visual pleasure to *Boys Don't Cry* -- a film in which the main character is a trans man? The film rejects most straightforward attempts to do so. The opening scene is of Brandon getting ready to go out on a date. For at least the first minute, the audience is unaware that they are looking at anything other than a biological male. Here, we might guess, is where our narcissistic identification lies. But this assumption is quickly challenged when Brandon stuffs a pair of rolled up socks down his pants. The film is filled with similar interruptions that challenge easy narcissistic identifications with any one character. Later on, for example, Brandon gets into a bar fight and afterwards his 'friend' John remarks, "you have got the tiniest hands," again reminding us that identification is not as easy as finding the active male. Brandon is not a straightforward point of narcissistic identification, but neither is he an object of scopophilia. The camera does none of the usual lingering on body parts, soft focus, etc. Instead, the camera treats Brandon as it would any biological male—as an active agent of narrative.

In *Boys Don't Cry*, the difficulty in applying Mulvey's theory is exactly what makes it a better feminist alternative to the pleasures offered by standard narrative cinema. By complicating the relationship between the audience and the main character, the film breaks down many patriarchal structures that otherwise dominate narrative film. That relationship is further complicated by the fact that the audience most likely went into the theater knowing that Hillary Swank, a popular actress, would be playing the role of Brandon Teena. There are traces of this left in the mind of the audience. They are then watching an actress (whom they may consider beautiful and worthy

of their scopophilia) play a man who is actually biologically a woman. The spectatorial hoops that the audience must jump through are numerous and varied, and might also be a first step toward creating a new language of desire within the film.

A further step is taken when male spectators are confronted with the threat of castration. If, as Mulvey says, “in psychoanalytic terms the female poses a deeper problem... the absence of a penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex,” then Brandon Teena embodies the deepest problem of all. He is quite literally a man without a penis. At least in the case of a woman who performs her feminine gender outwardly there is the option of denying the complex. In the case of Brandon, however, the audience is confronted with a performance of male gender *sans* penis—the ultimate horror of the male spectator. The anxiety no longer metaphorical, but literal. For almost the entire film the resolution of this anxiety is denied. Since the camera does not fetishize Brandon there can be no resolution through fetishistic scopophilia. However, a resolution does eventually come in an extreme form of investigation and punishment. When Brandon’s friends discover that he is in fact biologically female, two of them brutally rape him. Brandon eventually reports the rape to the police but they do nothing, allowing his rapists to return and murder him. The threat of castration is ended in the most violent way possible.

It seems that the film, while initially attempting to craft a new way of seeing the world, is eventually frustrated and has to terminate the project. This is evident in the way Teena is filmed after the rape scene. For example, he takes a shower when he returns from the hospital and in the shower the camera fragments

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and lingers on various body parts, as it might in films typified by Mulvey. Yet, the termination of the film's initial work cannot be blamed solely on the filmmakers. Much of the blame falls on society, as the film is based on a true story and therefore cannot fully escape from the oppressive confines of reality. This reality is one in which the police fixated on the real Brandon's gender identification instead of on charging his attackers with rape and putting them in jail. Such bigotry is what makes it impossible for *Boys Don't Cry* to fully re-work the language of desire and break free from patriarchal structures.

Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is an excellent critical tool through which to evaluate mainstream films; despite its age, Mulvey's theory can be extended and reworked to cover a variety of unanticipated spectatorial positions. *Boys Don't Cry* takes Mulvey's work, tips it over, and reassembles the pieces to form a new way of seeing the world and a new representational language with which to examine desire—a language that, while not necessarily outside the patriarchal phallogocentric structure, fights very hard against it. I believe the ultimate failure of the film to stick to its alternative project speaks more to intolerance that exists in society than intolerance in the actual film. *Boys Don't Cry* is proof that cultural products can give us insight into where we want society to be in the future, but that they can't ever fully escape the social conditions in which they are created.

Kathryn Bass is a U1 Cultural Studies student with a minor in Communications at McGill University. Kathryn's particular interest lies in the political possibilities offered by queer readings of popular culture texts, especially in film and television.

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Taboo: *Dracula* and Stoker's Forbidden Sexual Metaphors

By Jenna Whitnall

Abstract: When discussing sexually taboo literature, perhaps Bram Stoker's *Dracula* would not normally come to mind. It is nonetheless one of the most erotic, and sexually saturated novels of the Victorian Era. This essay will examine how Stoker's work directly relates to many aspects of queer theory, and sexual diversity studies. Through discussion of concepts including gender identity, hegemonic masculinity, gender inversion, homoeroticism, male-to-male penetration, and sadism/masochism, this essay ties Stoker's most famous work with elements of the sexually taboo in today's society. Citing prominent queer theory authors such as Judith Butler, Anne Fausto-Sterling, David Halperin, Gayle Rubin, and Nikki Sullivan, this essay provides a general analysis of Stoker's novel and allows the reader to see just how much more than a monster *Dracula* really is.

Legends and myths of vampires have existed since the beginning of story-telling culture. The vampire has been recorded in the histories of countries worldwide and was, for centuries, one of the most dreadful and widely feared beasts thought to exist (Melton pg xxxi). However, it wasn't until the vampire's entrance into modern fiction that the vampire became something to not only fear but desire. Bram Stoker's, *Dracula*, published for the first time in 1897, has since become one of the most popular novels of the Victorian era. In a time when individuals in Victorian society lived in constant fear of being sexually persecuted, *Dracula* led readers into an imaginary world where his human monsters experienced an attractive sexual freedom that was unparalleled in society around them.

Stoker's characters engage in many of the forbidden sexual activities that Victorian society was convinced it was wrong to desire. Count Dracula, in Stoker's novel, challenges Victorian gender roles, explores the hidden homosexual desires of men, and exposes readers to forbidden sadomasochist sexual practices. Thus, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* deals with many aspects of queer theory in its constant and unapologetic inclusion of sexual taboo.

Stoker's first anathema is his highly controversial and repeated challenge of Victorian definitions of male and female gender roles. As Anne Fausto-Sterling discusses the Victorian era definitions of gender were based on a dichotomous model of the sexes- that males were marked by sexual aggression and dominance, and that females were marked by indifference and subordination (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 14). *Dracula* expresses the acute Victorian anxiety about the potential fluidity of gender roles. In the novel, these gender role dualisms that Fausto-Sterling attempts to dismantle are most emphatically perpetuated by one of the main protagonists, Van Helsing. Fittingly, it is he - doctor, lawyer, and priest - who makes frequent mention of the female characters Lucy and Mina as "God's women fashioned by His own hand," and of the rest of the male protagonists (hereafter referred to as the Crew of Light) as "brave men" (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 226).

While addressing gender in *Dracula*, it is impossible to ignore Dracula's victimization of women throughout the text. The parallels of the relationship between the virile Count Dracula and female victims with society's hegemonic male and heteronormative female are easily drawn. As David Halperin discusses, socio-historical views of the act of penetration came to

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be associated solely with domination. He says “the relation between the insertive and the receptive sexual partner was taken to be the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior” (Halperin, 1993, p. 418). Thus, the hegemonic male - through his heteronormative role as the sexual penetrator - and Count Dracula - through his siring of women - both possess power and dominance over females. Every vampire attack that Dracula makes on women can be seen as a man’s attempt to lay claim over not only females, but all of humanity. Stoker takes the metaphor further by showing how, after being sired, the women are used as vessels or tools to perpetuate his will and power over others. The women thereafter are slaves to Dracula’s dominant sexual power having few thoughts of their own - an obvious metaphor for the oppression of women in Victorian society by the hegemonic male.

Through Dracula’s hegemonic and parasitic takeover of the female form, we watch throughout the course of the novel as Lucy and Mina are transformed from society’s sweet, mild, heteronormative females to aggressive, demonic sexual, and lustful beings. It is stated that, post-siring, Lucy metamorphoses her feminine “sweetness” to “adamantine, heartless cruelty, and [her] purity to voluptuous wantonness” (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 252). Mina’s change is realized by the character Van Helsing when, after Mina has been bitten for the first time, he nervously admits, “Madam Mina, our poor, dear Madam Mina is changing” (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 384). One could argue that the girls remain anatomically female, but with an emerging internal sexuality indicative of the hegemonic male Victorian gender role.

If this is true, then the swap of traditional female for male sexual preferences, behaviours, and appetites is arguably a form of Havelock Ellis's gender inversion. Sullivan recounts that Ellis's theory was based in Karl Heinrich Ulrich's understanding of the invert (or Urning and Uringin) who argued that "some males are born with a strong feminine element or psyche...[and] some females are born with a strong masculine drive" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 4). Following the gender inversion argumentation, after Dracula's vampiric children have died, they are reborn with the internal drives of a hegemonic male while retaining their female anatomy.

In contrast, many critics have also spoken to the falsity of this commonly deduced gender inversion. For example, Dungan suggests that "to argue that women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are inverted and take on decidedly male roles of the Victorian Era is to assume that they remain female while utilizing the male given traits" (Dungan, 2007). One could conclude that Dracula is a pseudo-parasite - once bitten, females are not only infected by him, they also *become* him. The fangs of the female vampire, thus, are the male phallus, and their penetration of a male's neck is sexual intercourse. It is through this phallocentric argument that the homoerotic undertones of the novel begin to reveal themselves.

Assuming that all female vampires in the novel are male - internally through their sexuality and externally through their fangs - one must agree that whether the vampire is anatomically female or male, the siring of a male human can always be paralleled to homosexual intercourse. The siring process spreads the female vampire's saliva and blood (actually Dracula's blood as the female vampires are an extension of him). Craft argues that Dracula's blood is a symbol for

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another life-giving liquid - his semen (1984, p. 111). The act of siring serves to disperse Dracula spores that infect the victim.

The female vampiric attack on a male victim, most memorably seen in the novel in the seduction of Jonathon Harker at Castle Dracula, can then be easily tied to the forbidden and abhorrent idea of homosexuality in the Victorian context. Though Jonathan is preyed upon by vampire brides to the point of near penetration in the scene he nonetheless describes the experience as “both thrilling and repulsive” (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 32). According to Halperin’s recount of Caelius Aurelianus’s work on molles (Greek men who desired to be in a sexually submissive role) “the male desire to be penetrated by males...represents a voluntary abandonment of the culturally constructed masculine identity in favour of the culturally constructed female one” (Halperin, 1993, p. 422). Jonathon occupies the traditionally receptive role of the female, or the submissive male homosexual, who, as the vampire’s teeth are at his throat, closes his eyes “in a languorous ecstasy and [waits] with a beating heart,” - submitting to the penetration of the vampire bride’s dominant male sexuality (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 59).

It is important to note also that in the vampire brides’ scene, Jonathon is not successfully penetrated by the brides due to Dracula’s interruption of the seduction at the moment before penetration. Dracula commands control over the situation and his brides, demanding that they stop, yelling “How dare you touch him any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me!” (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 43). This not only again emphasizes Dracula’s hegemonic control of females,

but, more importantly, represents Dracula's desire for Jonathon in the same way that he desires females. Later in the text, Dracula again invokes homoerotic themes when he warns the Crew of Light that "your girls that you all love are mine already; and *through them you and others shall yet be mine[...]*" (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 365, *emphasis added*). He tells the Crew of Light that they too will one day give into his penetration, just as the women already had. Thus one can see that with Dracula's potent sexual power he desires to dominate not only females, but males as well.

Furthermore, Dracula's aggressive sexuality attracts the Crew of Light to him. The men are all overwhelmingly and unavoidably attracted to the female vampires (and thus indirectly to Dracula as their point of extension). Addressing again Halperin's notion of male desire to be penetrated, one could argue that the men refuse to admit their attraction to the female vampires because of the potential implications of an attraction to an undeniably dominant sexual being and what that means for their performance of the Victorian male gender role (Roth, 1977/1999, p. 38). For the Crew of Light, Butler's idea of gender performativity is in place, as the men defend the concept that as men, it is not normal or possible for them to be attracted to these dominant female vampires. Due to Victorian concepts of men always taking on the sexually dominant role, the Crew of Light believes that in order to be accepted as heterosexual men, they must project their attraction onto the female vampires - individually justifying to themselves and each other that it is the vampire that seeks to be dominated by them, and not they who seek to be dominated by the vampire.

Interestingly, although queer themes have made their way into some areas of mainstream society, there

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are certain aspects of the sexually taboo that remain addressed in silence, or altogether ignored. In her article *Thinking Sex*, Gayle Rubin discusses the condemnation of these outer limits of sexuality and urges readers to embrace her epistemological questioning of why they are taboo. Rubin includes a historical analysis of the condemnation of sexual freedom, starting with the Victorian era educational and political campaigns to discourage “bad sex”, arguing that “the consequences of these great nineteenth-century moral paroxysms are still with us” (Rubin, 1984/1993, p. 4). It is interesting then, considering Stoker’s historical context, that various sexual elements are included in *Dracula* from outside of what Rubin calls “the charmed circle” (1984/1993, p. 13). Stoker incorporates four of the twelve components of Rubin’s Outer Limits- homosexuality, extra-marital sex, group sex, and, most particularly, sadomasochism.

Following our earlier discussion of the Vampire brides’ scene, it is plain to see that vampirism is the complex fusion of unwilling rape and sexual desire. As was said earlier, Dracula interrupts the vampire brides’ seduction of Jonathon, and establishes his power through his proclamation that “this man belongs to me.” One could argue that Dracula’s speech here also speaks to sadomasochism. Here, Dracula’s ownership of another man for sexual pleasure, with the shared sexual arousal of the submissive (Jonathan’s lust for the brides) has obvious parallels to sexual fetishism (Craft, 1984, p. 112). Following this, the vampire’s penetrative kiss can also be seen as a rape-fantasy: dispersing his seed into victims, who are both repulsed and unwilling, yet aroused by his sexuality. Furthermore, Dracula’s lust for blood (or lust to penetrate victims) can be tied

to modern sex addiction, sexual predators, and serial rapists.

Yet another critique of Victorian values lies in the fact that not only men, but women too, engage in what Victorians would argue is “the work of the devil, dangerous, psychopathological, infantile, or politically reprehensible” (Rubin, 1984/1993, p. 14). As was said earlier, the vampire women in the novel are infused by Dracula with an aggressive and dominant sexuality. The vampire Lucy seduces Arthur with a “languorous, voluptuous grace” and sexually advances upon him— Lucy the Dominatrix then demands of her husband, “Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my Husband, come!” (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 181). She goes on to make demands of Arthur, asking for kisses to demonstrate his love for her. Here, Arthur is Lucy’s prey, who, like the submissive in sadomasochism, is both afraid and aroused by his being dominated.

The scene of Dracula’s seduction of Mina is the climax of the novel and it is this scene that exemplifies the dark sexuality of vampirism. Involving Dracula forcing a restrained Mina to drink his blood from a wound on his chest, the scene is saturated with “bad sex” as Rubin would say. Following Craft’s arguments of Dracula’s blood being his semen, it is not hard to see how this is a scene of forced fellatio. This becomes clear in Mina’s description of the scene, who graphically describes the “spurt”:

With that he pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I

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must either suffocate or swallow some of the- Oh my God, my God! (Stoker, 1897/2000, p. 343).

Here, Mina makes it clear that she is being forced, and yet, the reader sees that she enters this submission willingly, seduced by Dracula, and powerfully attracted to his sexuality. This scene is by far the most graphic and detailed description of sexuality in the novel - powerful enough to make contemporary audiences squirm. Better than any other scene, it displays that in fact, vampires not only subscribe to the bad sex side of sexuality, but that they are the very embodiment of the nymphomaniacal creatures that Rubin says society suspects will sneak past the “erotic DMZ, the barrier against scary sex” (Rubin, 1984/1993, p. 14) if society’s sexual boundaries were to be lifted.

So how then was *Dracula* able to be published in its socio-historical context? Why, if so many sexually taboo subjects and undertones appear in the novel, was it accepted into Victorian society and not condemned as a deviation from the holy? The simple answer to this question lies in the fact that in the end of the novel good triumphs over evil, or, more specifically, the Church (represented by the crucifix) triumphs over Dracula. Just as today’s non-heteronormative sex is oppressed by social institutions, Count Dracula and his vampirism is triumphed over by Van Helsing’s Crew of Light.

Despite his defeat in a somewhat short and anti-climatic battle scene at Castle Dracula towards the end of the novel, Count Dracula and Stoker’s novel have left an indelible mark on literature, film, and popular culture since its publication. Through its metaphorical discussion of gender roles, its homoerotic undertones, and its sadomasochistic seduction scenes, *Dracula* is undeniably a beacon for the sexually taboo within the strictly moral Victorian era, while relating to many

aspects of modern queer theory. Thus, with *Dracula*, the transformation of the vampire from a scary monster to a sexy being was completed, leaving us to wonder what other creatures can make such a transition in the future. After all, who wouldn't secretly rather have a monster in bed, than a monster under their bed?

Jenna Whitnall is a first-year student in the Arts Program at McGill University. Inspired by her older sister, a life-long fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Jenna was introduced to vampire legend at a very young age and seized this opportunity to explore the academic side of the spooky stories she was told as a child. She plans to major in Art History and hopes to continue writing throughout her career.

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Contemporary Cable Television and Hegemonic Masculinity: Pricks, Pussies and Publicity in HBO's *Entourage*

By Shaamini Yogaretnam

ABSTRACT: This paper offers a critical analysis of the HBO show *Entourage* – a display of popular cultural notions informing and shaping masculinity, while also existing in reaction to already embedded detrimental concepts of Western ideas of manhood. *Entourage* depicts normative male gender roles embedded in a hierarchy of masculinities. Though subordinate, complicit and marginalized masculinities are all represented, they are all done so in an attempt to reinforce hegemonic masculinity as the cultural norm. The only homosexual and non-Caucasian character is tokenized and ridiculed, while women exist in a male world in place only to create difficulty or distraction. I suggest the phallic emphasis on fame, fortune and fucking to be ironic in a media-savvy world. Yet this is ultimately troubled by the ways media is consumed by an uncritical audience.

The culturally acclaimed HBO phenomenon, *Entourage*, offers a packaged embodiment of popular cultural notions that inform and shape masculinity. The television series, which follows the exploits of four childhood friends who make it big in Hollywood through the success of baby-faced actor Vincent Chase, is a narrative about the rise to fame, the success that accompanies it, and the patriarchal power it yields. My analysis in this paper will centre on *Entourage's* portrayal of a normative male gender role, a hierarchy of masculinities, marginalization of queer identity, and

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the dynamics of the gender-based relationships on the show.

Entourage is a prime example of how the successful deployment of normative gender roles benefits the acting subject. As West and Zimmerman have so rightly problematized, the “doing of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production” (West and Zimmerman 126). In this conception, femininity and masculinity are viewed as “prototypes of essential expression – something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes at the most basic characterization of the individual” (Erving Goffman qtd. in West and Zimmerman 129). This outlook erroneously neglects to identify the performative aspects of gender, and the ways these aspects are both socially constructed and enforced (West and Zimmerman). The main characters on the show display masculine deportment, styling and dress. They personally identify as men and socially pass as such in their gender display.

The show depicts a “compulsory order of sex/gender/desire” (Butler 8) where the medico-legal category of sex of the main male characters aligns with their masculine gender and is opposite of the objects of their sexual desire, feminine women. The show is laden with heteronormative sexual assumptions resulting from the “bias of compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich 632). *Entourage*’s representation of sex and sexuality are informed by hegemonic cultural norms that elevate heterosexuality as the ideal and chastise any other variant of sexuality as a deviance to be undermined. In this particular framework, the main characters on the show are heterosexual and hypermasculine, endowed with the privilege that transcends that of mere white

males and reaches the status of celebrity. A common illustration of this is the degree to which Vince, the main character, is bombarded with pussy¹. His entourage often marvels at the ease in which he can access intercourse. The underlying premise here is that his elevated status is what grants this masculine privilege. Regular men must be monogamous and faithful since this privilege is inaccessible to them. The show is quite apt at illustrating the Western “cultural priapism” (Nelson 93) afflicting notions of success, action, and direction. Patriarchal society has a permanent erection:

We have been taught and have learned to value phallic meanings in patriarchy: bigger is better (in bodily height, in paychecks, in the size of one’s corporation or farm); hardness is superior to softness (in one’s muscles, in one’s facts, in one’s foreign policy positions); upness is better than downness (in one’s career path, in one’s computer, in one’s approach to life problems). In a ‘man’s world,’ small, soft, and down pale beside big, hard, and up (Nelson 95).

Recent developments on the show, mainly Vince’s inability to get a paying acting job, have spun this hypermasculine world on its axis. Vince’s masculinity, previously established without reflection, is now threatened. After returning to their boyhood home of Queens, New York, cultural markers of success are visibly absent from their lives. After a night of heavy

¹ This is the first of several questionable word choices in this essay, which I feel require some clarification. In engaging with *Entourage* as a piece of popular culture, my ultimate contention is to reveal its satirical commentary on masculinity. In attempting to censor the language widely used by popular culture and the show, I would be doing a disservice to my task at hand by presenting an ideal of correctness that the show does not employ. Minimizing this language and other problematic conceptions removes the dilemma of the show – parody of the way western society presents men with unrealistic and detrimental models of masculinity, or, simply reinscribing normative notions of how men ought to be. It is my belief that the language is necessary.

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drinking and partying with beautiful girls (Vince does, after all, have some residual celebrity status that will get him laid for quite some time), the boys take a cab home and opt to eat breakfast there as well (S5E12) – gone are the luxury cars and trendy restaurants of Los Angeles. Though Vince denies that his lack of work and slowly encroaching status of a has-been are affecting him, he finally succumbs to admitting his fears after yet another disappointment: “Now I have a house full of people who can see what a failure I am” (S5E12). This revelation is indicative of the hierarchy of masculinities portrayed on the show.

Beyond the depiction of a normative male gender role and its necessary heterosexuality, *Entourage* exhibits varying masculinities. “In addition to hierarchy over women, men create hierarchies and rankings among themselves according to criteria of ‘masculinity’ (Pleck 23). R.W. Connell theorizes the existence of four representations of masculinity: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalized (Connell). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant expression of masculinity that is most valued and given most power by socio-cultural patriarchy. This masculinity would apply to Vince and his misogynistic, gay-bashing talent agent, Ari Gold. Vince’s portrayal of hegemonic masculinity has more to do with the privilege given to him, and thus the opportunities available as a result, whereas Ari’s hegemonic masculinity is earned in the sense that it is an active battle waged daily to ensure his continued access to power. Insulting an artistic German director, Ari cites Vince’s role in many movies “including a blockbuster for an Oscar-winning American director!” (S5E11). ‘Blockbuster,’ ‘Oscar-winning,’ and ‘American’ are deployed as markers of success, indicative of

hegemony. Both Vince and Ari are involved in numerous scenes that occur in private jets occupied by models with an abundance of flowing champagne.

Subordinate masculinities describe men given less power for some visibly identifiable reason, such as men of colour or men of lower socio-economic standing. A masculinity that is subordinate necessarily implies difference along one axis of oppression – race, class, sexuality, or ability. Any oppression based on intersectional identities would display a marginalized masculinity. The show depicts one non-Caucasian man who is also gay, and who therefore occupies the marginal position, rather than the subordinate position, in this hierarchy.

Complicit masculinity refers to the gender deportment of those men who take the privileges of masculinity without asserting the same domineering power. I would argue that the remaining characters, by virtue of their close relationship with Vince, all occupy this position in the hierarchy. Eric Murphy (E), Vince's best friend and manager; Johnny Drama (Drama), Vince's older brother; and Turtle, childhood friend, have access to the same privileges as Vince but are dependent on him for this access. It is imperative to understanding their masculinity that they cannot assert the same power as Vince.

Connell's final description is of marginalized masculinities. This group includes queer masculinities, and those others that are excluded and isolated in society on the basis of occupying multiple contested sites of power. This description aptly describes *Entourage's* portrayal of Lloyd, Ari's assistant. I will take up a discussion of Lloyd's characterization later in the paper.

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The show illustrates these various masculinities but in very biased and purposeful ways. Their engagement is shown in an attempt to reinforce hegemonic masculinity as the cultural norm. The remaining three conceptions of masculinity are all framed through juxtaposition with hegemony. The audience is not confused as to why Turtle has to convince hangers-on of Vince to sleep with him, or why Drama is cast as a TV star and not as a Hollywood heartthrob like his brother. The pervasive qualities of hegemonic masculinity are identifiable in the combination of what the others all lack.

The marginalization and demeaning of the character Lloyd is one such way that hegemony is reinforced. As J.H. Pleck argues, “one of the most critical rankings among men deriving from patriarchal sexual politics is the division between gay and straight men” (23). For Pleck, this division has a larger and symbolic meaning:

The male heterosexual-homosexual dichotomy [is] a central symbol for all the rankings of masculinity, for the division on any grounds between men who are ‘real men’ and have power and males who are not. Any kind of powerlessness or refusal to compete becomes imbued with the imagery of homosexuality (23).

The camaraderie between the men on the show is one in which homosexual insults are frequently thrown at each other: E greets Drama and Turtle with, “Hey what’s up, you guys get sick of jerking each other off?” (S5E10). When Vince and E reconcile after an argument, an onlooking Ari says, “Thank God, this scene was getting way too gay for my taste” (S5E12).

Furthermore, the show’s treatment of Lloyd exemplifies tokenization of the homosexual and the

non-Caucasian. In an analysis of gays and lesbians in American media, Brenda J. Wrigley theorizes that:

Mass media outlets ... are businesses, in business to make a profit. Therefore, economic considerations are paramount in their decision-making process. Anything that threatens that (e.g. deviance) is seen as a threat to the economic viability of mass media. Such deviance must be controlled and framed in such a way so that the audience clearly understands that this particular phenomenon is outside of the norm (242).

In this way, a heteronormative model of sexuality is upheld insofar as the masculinity of Lloyd is marginalized. A common theme in media portrayals of homosexuals is the imposition of the identity of the victim. "Portraying homosexuals as victims places them in an automatic one-down position relative to the mainstream" (Wrigley 250). Lloyd is the only visible minority character on the show and the only one who deviates from the heterosexual model. Though all the other characters work for Vince, they all display aspects of autonomy even though members of the entourage are entirely dependent on Vince for income and ass. Lloyd, as Ari's assistant, is the only character who is always working. Scenes of him engaged in any social activity are wrought with demands from Ari to do some work-related task. Furthermore, Lloyd is subject to homophobic verbal abuse in every episode. Upon entering a world of male prestige, Andrew Klein, a former loser agent who Ari charitably hires at the agency, immediately says to Lloyd, "Why are you standing there like you just swallowed a dildo anally, Lloyd?" (S5E11). This widely identified loser of subordinate status, once regaining access to the privileges of hegemonic masculinity, insults the marginalized man in order to assert his dominance.

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Thus, the portrayal of masculinities on the show are hierarchical and uphold a hegemonic reading of the text.

Related to *Entourage's* depiction of masculinities is the show's portrayal of male relationships as the primary relationships on the show. The show displays primarily same-sex friendships without an emphasis on opposite-sex relationships informing male-male relationships' content and form. However, I must clarify that there is some emphasis on who fucked whom, for how long, and of what quality, yet I take this not to be the primary male-male discussions on the show. Undeniably, in a heteronormative context, the "relations between men and women are governed by a sexual politics that exists outside individual men's and women's needs and choices" (Pleck 23). However, "there is a systematic sexual politics of male-male friendships as well [that is]... shaped and powered by patriarchal norms" (Pleck 23). When E's girlfriend cancels a much anticipated date, the entourage goes to a party and all end up outside commiserating with E. However, this is followed by Drama yelling at E: "Don't be such a fucking pussy" (S2E2). The exchanges between Drama and Turtle are especially telling of friendship since both are complicit in their masculinities and relatively unsuccessful, leaving them to predominantly interact with each other rather than with women.

The problem with this male-male dynamic of relationships, however, is that women are presented as either sexually available, and thereby disposable, or as problematic entities to be avoided or dealt with. Pleck argues that the "form of power that men attribute to women is masculinity-validating power" (21). "In traditional masculinity, to experience oneself as

masculine requires that women play their prescribed role of doing the things that make men feel masculine” (Pleck 21). Ari exemplifies the need for this masculinity-validating power in an exchange with his daughter: “I can’t run my business the way I want, not with that woman as my partner. Your mother controls me at home, she controls me at work. Where can a man be a man?” (S5E10). The woman at work to whom Ari refers is not some insignificant person, but rather his business partner, Barbara Miller, who, through her partnership, saved his company. In trying to get Klein, aforementioned loser, hired, Ari bombards Barbara Miller with compliments trying to get his way. Words like “please” are indicative of his attempt to be polite, though not sincere since he calls her a “nasty twat” (S5E10) out of earshot as she leaves. Miller agrees to a meeting with Klein to assess his potential for employment, as is entirely consistent with the conventions of business partnerships, yet upon hearing this, Klein asks Ari, “Am I working for her or am I working for you?” (S5E10). Ari, in typical fashion, responds: “You’re working for me, her name just happens to appear on your cheque also” (S5E10). Pleck continues his argument with the assertion that “when women refuse to exercise their masculinity-validating power for men, many men feel lost and bereft and frantically attempt to force women back into their accustomed role” (22). When Miller refuses to hire Klein, Ari attends a luncheon thrown for powerful women in Hollywood and interrupts to make comments about Miller’s “advanced age” (S5E10): “She found herself a man to partner up with and look what she was able to accomplish” (S5E10). He leaves the room of women with a toast: “To all of you who have saddled up to powerful men just so you can stand in our way”

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(S5E10). Thus, while male-male relationships are valued on the show, the male-female dynamic is problematized with rampant sexism.

In this paper, I analyzed *Entourage's* depiction of normative male gender roles, hierarchical masculinities, marginalized queer identity, and the dynamics of the gender-driven relationships on the show. A growing concern with attempts at queering popular media is how to decipher when something presents satire or a model to be duplicated. It is my contention that *Entourage*, with its unrealistic celebrity hunk main character, and portrayals of women and gay men who tolerate epic proportions of verbal abuse, cannot be taken seriously. Unfortunately, the show's phallic emphasis on fame, fortune and fucking is not ironic to the greater population. Instead, watched with the uncritical eye, the show solidifies misogynistic, homophobic and hypermasculine behaviours and attitudes. There are competing paradigms that view media influence differently. Wrigley emphasizes "media impact in terms of maintenance of the status quo, of keeping in place the existing power structure, and of inculcating beliefs that would free consumers from having to think for themselves" (244). This assessment is imbued with aspects of social control and undermines the audience's agency, since for Wrigley content closely follows form in television. "Television has to be formulaic. The serial nature of programs, the compressed time schedule, the concern with presenting familiar themes and formats, creates an expectation within the audience that the content will be predictably packaged" (Wrigley 245). However, Nikki Sullivan offers a more nuanced assessment of popular media: "we are always implicated in the production of meaning and identity, and hence are both agents and effects of

systems of power/knowledge” (189). In this view, the relationship between the audience and text moves beyond the binarial confines of being either consumers or producers. Thus, if *Entourage* is maintaining detrimental conceptions of western masculinity, then it is only to the extent that we, the audience, allow this to occur.

Shaamini Yogaretnam is a U3 student in Political Science and Women’s Studies. She hates Political Science and enjoys writing that allows her to swear. Reading cultural media texts for their implications in a heteronormative and gender-policing world is important, thus the inspiration for this paper - along with already having watched countless hours of Vinnie Chase ‘livin’ the life”.

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Paradoxical Scripts: A Critical Reading of Contradictions in *The L Word*

By Emma Gray

ABSTRACT: The L Word is a popular cable television show that first aired in 2004 on the Showtime network. It follows the trials and tribulations of a group of lesbian women in the posh West Hollywood, CA. Oft-cited as groundbreaking, this paper explores the conflicting scripts that exist within the show's storylines and representations. The article begins by looking at the revolutionary potential that the show holds as a queer cultural product. Afterwards, it examines the ways in which The L Word is shaped by its existence within a capitalist society. The piece contends that The L Word is a paradoxical text that simultaneously promotes queered and normative scripts.

"It's rare in this business that you get to do something that's socially important," says Erin Daniels, star of Showtime's lesbian-centered drama, *The L Word*.¹ Since entering the small screen in 2004, *The L Word* has been subject to much critique and discussion, stemming from its controversial content as well as the high expectations that many had for it. Erin Daniels' comment captures the often-contradictory forces that construct the serial drama, which depicts a predominantly lesbian group of women and their lives in Los Angeles; it is both a business venture and a social project. *The L Word* presents seemingly paradoxical scripts: it both queers heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality as a product of and reaction to the New

¹ Sarah Warn, "Interview with Erin Daniels (January 2004)," in *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 213.

Queer Cultural era, and conforms to normative scripts as a product of capitalism. This essay seeks to draw out both the revolutionary and the problematic aspects of the show and explore how these paradoxical scripts came to coexist. The first two seasons of *The L Word*, which originally aired between 2004 and 2005, will be used to frame this analysis.

The 1990s saw the emergence of Queer Theory and a queer cultural movement, which aimed to deconstruct binaries and create an inclusive community stressing self-identification and fluidity. In many ways, *The L Word* has grown out of this tradition. The revolutionary potential of *The L Word* can be framed as a product of this queer cultural movement, as well as a reaction to it.

Queer cultural products have traditionally “embraced the complexity of the community,...sought out the alienated, the discordant.”² *The L Word* gives representation to individuals and communities that have been traditionally marginalized and made invisible on popular television. Although these representations are not always the most progressive, they give visibility to these marginalized groups. The fact that this television show centers around the lesbian experience is something that has rarely been done on prime-time television. The show creates a world where lesbians are not token characters or sultry side plots - they are the epicenter.

Gayle S. Rubin contends that sexuality exists within a hierarchy in the contemporary Western world and that, “popular culture is permeated with ideas that

² Michele Aaron, “New Queer Cable? The L Word, the Small Screen and the Bigger Picture,” in *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 34.

erotic variety is dangerous.”³ She discusses “blessed” (acceptable) sexualities and sexual behaviors as falling within “The Charmed Circle,” and those that oppose this narrow definition of normality, “The Outer Limits.”⁴ *The L Word* gives representation to, and in effect normalizes, many sexual activities that are far outside of this ‘Charmed Circle.’ It goes without saying that the show portrays non-heterosexual sex, as these sexual relationships form the basis of its plot. But beyond the obvious, a variety of sexualities are explored quite visibly throughout the first two seasons. For example, sadomasochism (S/M) is a sexual practice that is rarely portrayed in mainstream cultural texts, but is given some visibility in *The L Word*. In season two, an S/M dungeon is portrayed at the Los Angeles Pride parade, and although none of the main characters are consistently involved in the S/M community, the viewer sees women going in and out of the dungeon and engaging in consensual S/M behavior.⁵ Secondly, role-playing is widely explored in one of the show’s most central relationships between radio host Alice and pro-tennis star Dana. As their relationship flourishes throughout the second season, the audience sees them playfully experimenting with dress-up, even creating a storyline in which Dana dresses in uniform complete with a strap-on to emulate *The Love Boat*’s Captain Stubing, while Alice becomes Cruise Director Julie⁶. They perform their parts perfectly, transforming their

³ Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. H. Abelove, M. A. Barale & D. M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1984), 12.

⁴ Rubin, 13.

⁵ “Loud and Proud” 2:11.

⁶ 2:10 “Land Ahoy” in Wheeler.

generally femme-lesbian selves into a heterosexual man of power and a heterosexual woman. They are both “fully aware of the performance,” reflecting the constructed nature of gender roles in the first place.⁷ In addition, a variety of sex toys are depicted in the show—from nipple clamps to dildos, from whips and handcuffs to chocolate penis pops. The visibility given to these sexual practices challenges the idea that “all sex acts on the bad side of the line are...utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance.”⁸ By giving representation to marginalized sexualities, especially in the context of well-developed and sympathetic characters, it becomes much harder for the audience to pass blanket judgments upon them.

Not only does *The L Word* give representation to non-normative sexualities, but its storylines attempt to queer normative relationships and essentialist ideas of identity. The show, “in its expansion of understandings of desire...makes its queerest connections.”⁹ One example of this is *The L Word's* exploration of heterosexuality. A queering of heterosexuality is found in the relationship between Kit, the only straight woman of the main characters, and Ivan, a drag king. When Kit becomes nervous about their burgeoning relationship, Ivan even states, “How do you know I can't give you what you want?”¹⁰ Ivan courts Kit, both in and out of drag, and Kit finds herself desiring Ivan and his brand of masculinity. At times their courtship seems

⁷ Lara Raven Wheeler and Lorna Wheeler, “Straight-up Sex in The L Word,” in *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 107.

⁸ Rubin, 14-15.

⁹ Aaron, 36-37.

¹⁰ “Limb from Limb,” 1:13

quite traditional, and at others quite radical. This desire experienced by a straight woman “problematizes the whole notion of heterosexual female desire.”¹¹ Another example of queered heterosexuality is Alice's relationship with Lisa, a Lesbian-identified man. Lisa, although he presents as a man, chooses to use a femme name and resists engaging in heterosexual, penetrative sex.¹² When some of the other characters express confusion and skepticism about Lisa's identity, Kit responds by saying, “If the dude wanna give up his white-man rights and be a second-class citizen, then welcome to our world.”¹³

The L Word also allows its characters to have identities that are fluid and constructed - constantly in flux. The show tends to embrace identity as a social construction - a “description of the location of the self in relation to other individuals, groups and institutions.”¹⁴ Paula C. Rust's idea of revolutionary bisexuality is embodied in the character of Alice who engages in relationships with both men and women, and allows her identity to fluctuate depending on whom she is with and how she feels at any given moment. She refers to herself as bisexual at certain times and lesbian at others, floating through a variety of communities with relative ease. Her identity seems to engage with the queer term “pansexual,” although she

¹¹ Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, “What is a Straight Girl to Do? Ivan's Serenade, Kit's Dilemma,” in *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 149.

¹² “L'Ennui,” 1:7

¹³ “Losing It,” 1:6

¹⁴ P.C. Rust, “Sexual Identity and Bisexual Identities: The Struggle for Self-Description,” in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, ed. B. Beemyn and M. Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 66.

is never explicitly labeled in this way. Jenny is another character who goes through a myriad of identity changes, positioning and re-positioning herself on the “sexual landscape,” in relation to her actions, desires, and political context.¹⁵ She is originally constructed as a timid, straight woman. Although she has a torrid affair with another woman, this does not automatically make her identify as a lesbian. Her experience echoes that of many people for whom “a single relationship with an individual...[does] not...motivate a complete identity change.”¹⁶ Her strong identification as a lesbian coincides with her political awakening. As she becomes more radically feminist throughout the second season, her identity as a lesbian seems to solidify as well.

Lastly, *The L Word* represents a queering of popular culture as it is firmly situated as an “AIDS-era cultural product,” responding to and evolving from AIDS-era activism.¹⁷ This is made clear in the importance that the show places on political activism and artistic expression. Bette works at the California Art Center and is involved in a direct-action battle over free expression during her curation of a collection entitled “Provocations.” Bette's partner Tina is also very heavily involved in community work and education. In addition, the show depicts scenes of civil disobedience, debates over the definition of obscenity, and discussions of public policy. *The L Word's* political agenda is very clear, as the characters frequently make digs at the Bush Administration, such as Tina's remark that “it makes [her] sick what this administration is

15 Rust, 67.

16 Rust, 68.

17 Aaron, 37

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doing to our environment.”¹⁸ *The L Word* is not afraid to speak out and take a firmly activist stance.

As with most products of popular culture, *The L Word's* progressive representations are not without major setbacks. Even as the show breaks taboos and norms, it also reinforces some distinctly normative scripts regarding love, beauty and power as a capitalist product aiming to appeal to a mass audience and turn a profit. Media in a capitalist system is only awarded visibility if it is deemed profitable by a corporate elite. Therefore, television shows that want exposure to a mainstream audience cannot escape being shaped by mainstream normative visions, nor can they ignore their own marketability. This linkage of profit with exposure effectively dilutes the ability of mainstream media to directly challenge normative behaviors and limits the range of identities and experiences that are represented. Producers of media sources must exercise caution in order to get past the industry's gatekeepers and gain access to a wide audience. *The L Word* is no exception to these rules.

This necessity to cater to a certain degree of normativity is most starkly clear in that the show's protagonists are predominantly white and almost exclusively upper-class. By positioning the characters as “privileged...in their beauty, booty, and access to the best...the women are neither representative nor realistic.”¹⁹ Although these characters are transgressive in their sexual behaviors and identities at times, they are 'excused' by their place of privilege and access to resources. The women of *The L Word* are in positions of traditional material power in careers such as hairstylist to the stars, pro tennis player, museum director and

¹⁸ “Lies, Lies, Lies” 1:4

¹⁹ Aaron, 35.

heiress. Even Jenny, a writer who does not make a lot of money and works at a grocery store at one point, is able to live a fairly lavish lifestyle in West Hollywood. As the show is aired on the premium cable network Showtime, it is clear that the creators are aiming to appeal to an upper-class audience, who too experiences material privilege. By framing these characters in places of great privilege, their transgressive nature is limited.

Another way in which the portrayal of characters on *The L Word* is problematic is that heteronormative scripts of what constitutes a 'good' relationship are often promoted. For example, although the show lends visibility to promiscuous sexual behaviors, it is still made clear that monogamous relationships are the most fulfilling and moral. Non-monogamy is always met with punishment. When Jenny cheats on her fiancée Tim with another woman, she has an emotional breakdown soon after. When Bette cheats on her long-time partner Tina, she subsequently spends the majority of the next season ostracized from her friends and 'repenting' for her 'sins'. Even Shane, the character that is always with a different woman, is supposed to be most fulfilled when she finally finds someone with whom to be exclusive. It is clear that "cheating on the one you love...is wrong. Sleeping around is fine as long as it is temporary."²⁰ This is a very normative view of what fulfillment is, and how one should achieve it. *The L Word* tells its audience that being in a couple is right and desirable.

In addition, the show attempts to appease its perceived straight audience by assuring viewers that lesbians are 'just like them.' As with any television show, "audiences must be rendered more than merely

entertained, they must be made addicts: they must keep tuning in, in large numbers, for a series to endure.”²¹

This means selling a controversial show to a heterosexual, mainstream audience. Making heterosexuals think that lesbians are 'just like them' can be an effective marketing tool. For example, not only is the first sex scene in the first episode between a heterosexual couple, but when uninterrupted lesbian sex is depicted, it is between Tina and Bette as they are trying to make a baby—the ultimate heterosexual aim.²² Blatantly heteronormative storylines such as Dana and Tonya's engagement are strikingly present, especially in the first season. Although the second season becomes more daring, the original scripts presented cannot be erased. The depiction of lesbian couples engaging in heteronormative practices is not in itself wrong, but the show's privileging of these practices is problematic.²³

The L Word also subjects its characters to the 'Male Gaze' at times, reminding the audience that “lesbians are sexy, attractive objects of desire, even for straight men.”²⁴ Lacy lingerie is never absent in a sex scene, and when Tim walks in on Jenny cheating on him, she and Marina are positioned in a way that is visually reminiscent of pornography.²⁵ This selling of lesbians to straight men also occurs in the form of straight male voyeurism of lesbian sex scenes, or more directly when Bette and Tina attempt to include a man

²¹ Aaron, 36

²² “Let's Do It” 1:2

²³ Samuel A. Chambers, “Heteronormativity and The L Word: From a Politics of Representation to a Politics of Norms,” in *Reading The L Word: Outing Contemporary Television*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 95.

²⁴ Chambers, 91

²⁵ Chambers, 91.

in their lovemaking in order to create a baby.²⁶ Again, the challenging of norms is foregone in order to ensure a straight male audience and therefore financial viability.

The changes that occur between the first and second seasons indicate that cultural products dependent on funding within a capitalist society are limited by the market. Once *The L Word* had established itself as a profitable enterprise for the network it was allowed to become more radical and more political. It seems as if the show needed the go ahead from the mainstream community in order to push the boundaries a little further, “reap[ing] the benefits of its earlier conformity, its lip service to the stock stuff of soap-cum-soft-core serial drama.”²⁷ The second season moves the show slightly closer to the queer approach for which its radical audience yearns.

In conclusion, *The L Word* paradoxically promotes both the queering and breaking of norms, and the reifying and constructing of them. The positioning of the television show as a product of the Queer movement of the 1980s and '90s, as well as a cultural production intended to appeal to a mass audience for profit, serves to explain the opposing forces that simultaneously act upon *The L Word's* material. As Jimmy Kalamaras aptly argues, often within today's North American media, “what [people] misinterpret as acceptance is really just visibility.”²⁸ It is important to recognize that as a show with a distinctly political agenda behind it, *The L Word* has a

²⁶ Chambers, 91.

²⁷ Aaron, 36.

²⁸ Jimmy Kalamaras, “We're Here, We're Queer...But Have You Death with It?,” in *Media Literacy: A Reader*, ed. D. Macedo and S. Steinberg (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 472.

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duty to practice responsible representation. The women of *The L Word* have the potential to challenge norms and create change in the minds of those who engage with their representations - they just need permission to do so.

Emma Gray is a Sociology Major at McGill University in her third year. Her motivation for writing a piece exploring *The L Word* came from a desire to deconstruct the underlying messages that are promoted in popular media—a major influence on the way that individuals construct their ideas of what 'normal' sexuality constitutes.

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