Sprinkle: A Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies

Special Débutant(e) Issue: A Selection of Student Essays

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Introduction

Welcome readers to the début or debutant issue of Sprinkle: A Journal of Sexual Diversity Studies! The idea for the journal was inspired by the excellent work of the undergraduate students in SDST 250: Introduction to Sexual Diversity Studies this past semester (fall 2007) at McGill University. While the title of the journal suggests some polysemic edge, it was primarily chosen to serve as an homage to Dr. Annie Sprinkle and her frank, witty, pro-sex interventionist pedagogical spirit. After all who else would be as appropriate to acknowledge in this very interdisciplinary field of sexual diversity? Maybe Kinsey?

The essays in this issue stand for the remarkable diversity of interests and research done within the confines of the course. Willing students, whose essays received high grades, submitted them for publication here as a collection. The essays were not re-edited, but simply reformatted for increased stylistic consistency. To be sure, there are several other well-conceived and –written papers that could have been included, but were not submitted in time. Perhaps they will form another issue?

Happy reading!

Ger Zielinski

P.S. For more information on the course and the associated minor in sexual diversity studies, see http://www.mcgill.ca/sdst/course
The Little Sperm that Couldn’t: Effective Irony in Gay Advertising

Kendra Sinclair

A consistency evident in advertising marketed towards gay consumers and concerning queer lifestyle is an emphasis on a discreet, easily digestible portrayal of queerness. Katherine Sender discusses the predominance of the “vanilla homosexual” and the de-eroticization of gay imagery in mainstream media. Blatant exhibitions of homosexual eroticism are not commercially viable, as expressed by Sender, Sullivan, Berlant and Warner and demonstrated by advertising companies such as Out Now Consulting. Pat Califia regrets this digression away from what gay advertising once was – feisty and celebratory. While advertising companies geared towards advertising to gay consumers recycle the rhetoric of the vanilla homosexual, gay events that celebrate the fundamental aspects of gay life and queer love instead recapture this feisty and daring advertising. An advertisement for EuroPride 2005, by agency Leo Burnett, successfully revitalizes a feisty gay message while ironically subverting the hierarchy of taste and measure of acceptability. Its initial ambiguity and shock value is effective in facilitating a rise of the repressed in heterosexual viewers. The hyperbole and irony of this advertising message not only invalidates the “tasteful” techniques of mass media advertising by making queer sex publicly applicable under the guise of heternormativity, it ultimately offers a joyous acclamation of homosexuality.

The television segment and widely distributed internet ad for EuroPride 2005 begins with a scene that is sexual in nature but permissible for all ages and sexual orientations – millions of sperm are rushing through a dark, pinky tunnel, encouraged by a rich orchestral score towards achieving the consummate in copulation – reproduction. As it becomes clear that one particular sperm is heading for success, the music slows down and the sperm seems dubious of its mission – the tunnel seems to extend forever and there is not an egg in sight. The sperm is visibly confused, turning back and forth, and its confusion probably reflects the confusion of the viewer. Once the sperm gives up, a male singer’s pop song comes on: “Come on boys and dance with me, come and dance with me” and the bolded words “Oslo Gay Festival” bounce to the music. Suddenly the viewer, who thought he or she was viewing the biological innerworkings of reproduction, realizes that they had unquestioningly exposed themselves to the imagery of queer sex.

The hierarchy of legitimacies, as outlined by Laura Kipnis, posits the most acceptable sexual imagery above that which is deviant and must be censured. The homosexuality that is permissible in mainstream media features aspects of the “vanilla” – the gay couple must be represented as white, affluent, monogamous, and tastefully fashionable. This construction of the ideal gay male excludes the majority of gay consumers, who do not identify with this model of homosexuality. The advertising company must mediate the manifestations of sexuality and ensure that it adheres to the model of vanilla sexuality. The company Out Now Consulting, relied upon by large corporations such as Citibank, Hilton Hotels and IBM, perpetuates this homosexual exemplary. Out Now’s website features the banner “Significant Others,” and with the word “others” italicized the slogan comes across as flagrantly marginalizing the homosexual population. The examples of work done for companies attempting to appeal to gay consumers reflect the vanilla gay archetype: for the hair-loss prevention company Merck Sharp and Dohme, a well-dressed, white, seemingly affluent couple is portrayed on a couch. The image is discreetly sexualized as one man is lying on the couch with his feet propped up on the other man’s knees. This type of advert suggests that “gay lives worth
emulating are sexually discreet” (Sender 352). They are comfortable but not affectionate, happy but not flamboyant, gay but not obvious about it.

The couple’s setting, on a couch that belongs in a home, works for the privatization of sex, situating their intimacy indoors instead of in a public setting. For Berlant and Warner, this “privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy” (554). Berlant and Warner discuss the ways in which the State has actively constituted what is and is not appropriate in terms of intimacy and affection between couples in public. The authors discuss the concept of heteronormativity – a sense of rightness that is produced and reiterated in almost every aspect of our social lives. Heteronormativity “disperses heterosexual privilege as a tacit but central organizing index of social membership” (Berlant & Warner 555). Berlant and Warner argue that “the space of sexual culture has become obnoxiously cramped from doing the work of maintaining a normal metaculture” (556). Social membership involves subscribing to the heterosexual life narrative. Berlant and Warner espouse the making of a queer world, which has required “the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space…, to the couple form…, or to the nation” (556).

The EuroPride ad achieves a message that Berlant and Warner hope for – the heterosexual couple no longer portrayed as “the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture” (548). Berlant and Warner point out the family form “has functioned as a mediator and metaphor of national existence in the United States since the eighteenth century” and the fetus and child “have been spectacularly elevated to the place of sanctified nationality” (550). This elevation of the fetus is mocked outright because the egg has been completely eliminated from the process of penetration and sexual satisfaction.

When viewing or reading an advertising text, the message is not passively received and digested by the reader. In the process of reading an advertisement, we also undergo the experience of actively recreating them. Michel Foucault claims that we are “implicated in the production of meaning and identity” (189). According to Nikki Sullivan, queering popular culture “involves critically engaging with cultural artifacts in order to explore the ways in which meaning and identity is (iner)textually (re)produced” (190). The reader of the EuroPride advertisement is very active in producing the meaning of its message and is forced to engage with the text – the majority of the ad is unambiguous in its appropriation of the expected and accepted sperm and egg scenario. The last few seconds of the advertisement, however, appeal to the reader’s discernment of homosexual sex – the reader must either conclude that the woman is infertile or the tunnel is actually an anus. The sudden shift to pop music and bright text ultimately leave no doubt at the conclusion of the advertisement, clarifying that there was no vagina involved.

According to Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, “prohibited words, images and actions have the power to entice and excite” (117). Freudian logic of repression stipulates that hidden and denied thoughts and feelings can be desired as a source of pleasure because of their sequestering. The ad can also be considered covertly pornographic and thus essentially erotic. Cameron and Kulick write that “a crucial characteristic of the pornographic as a genre is that it turns space inside out, by making the most intimate actions public” (117). Alexander Doty brings up the notion of “queer moments,” in which straight-identifying people engage with queer elements of assumedly heteronormative texts. Because the realization of gay sex is so suddenly sprung upon the viewer in the EuroPride ad, the thought of gay sex has the potential to incite feelings of the repressed in heterosexual viewers, or at least an unguarded reflection upon gay intercourse. The advert can also be discussed in terms of the uncanny – the viewer thinks that they are witnessing something familiar
in the sperm in tunnel scenario, but the realization that the sperm is in an anus instead of a vagina renders it suddenly and potentially disturbingly unfamiliar.

Though the content of the Europride advertisement does indeed situate queer sex in a commercial and public sphere through its wide dissemination, its elimination of eroticized male body parts and animated, scientific rendering allow it to be received as something tasteful and not at the bottom of the hierarchy of taste, even though it deals with anal penetration and orgasm. Pat Califia asserts that sexuality is only legitimately discussed “under the rubric of death and disease” and that “this hypocrisy and prissiness robs the gay press of much of its old feistiness, earthiness, and power to rock the world” (Sender 357). The Europride advertisement exemplifies this feistiness and sense of playfulness. The Europride advertisement eloquently undermines marketers’ “constant invocation of the risk of sexual contagion” (Sender 358) and instead celebrates anal penetration in a pseudo-scientific fashion.

Sender asks what the consequences of being interpellated “by media vehicles in which sexuality is emptied of the open, lusty, joyous acknowledgement of queer desire” (360) would be. The answer lies in advertisements like the hair loss company’s – the essence of homosexuality is robbed of eroticism and replaced with a dull and predictable hetero-friendly message. The EuroPride ad speaks out about that which has been silenced in so many mediated images of homosexual life. Cameron and Kulick point out that “erotic experience always exceeds the capacity of language to represent it” (132) and in this case the erotic experience of traveling down the anus succinctly, viably and jubilantly captures queer desire.
Reclaiming the (S)Word:  
‘Queer’ as a Personal and Political Weapon against Repression

Charles David Mathieu-Poulin

Queer Eye for the Straight World

Knowing queer media has emerged into mainstream culture in the past years (with television shows such as Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Queer As Folk and Will and Grace as obvious examples), one could argue that the overall acceptance and tolerance levels towards queer persons increased. On the other hand, according to a 2003 report from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (4), 2002 actually saw a surprising - as well as threatening - increase in physical and psychological violence against queer youth, with a 51% increase in victims under 22 and 164% in victims under 18. Over the years, it has been stated that the action of reclaiming – or taking back – a word can lead to empowerment of the oppressed minority. While Kirchick argues against this theory, in this essay, I intend to prove, similarly to Cameron and Kulick, that the reclaiming of the word ‘queer’ by the LGBT community is an effective liberating tool against personal and political repression.

Language and Discourse: the Basis of Reclaiming

In writing this essay, I first accept a constructionist vision of language. Just like Cameron and Kulick in Language and Sexuality, I argue that as language evolves, over the course of history, the meaning of words can be altered with changes in use. Words therefore always hold a cultural and social history and importance and, as Cameron and Kulick state: “Whenever people argue about words, they are also arguing about the assumptions and values that have clustered around those words in the course of their history of being used” (29). This assumption opens up the possibility of the concept of reclaiming words, which Roberts defines, through a quote from Jeremy Hayes, as “turning negative words around and assigning new positive definitions to the word as a source of power.” Michel Foucault, in his groundbreaking History of Sexuality, sets the table to the action of taking words back by putting forth the use of discourse as a power flow. As a medium for power, he implies, discourse can thus lead to a power shift without changing the fundamental assumptions in which this discourse is set. This demonstrates how reclaiming a word does not significantly change the fundamental meaning of the said word, but rather borrows its power from the force of the term without declaiming its original properties. This led to Foucault coining the term reverse discourse for the use of language as a liberatory power shift, and, as he states about homosexuality: “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (101). This was strongly marked, close to twenty years after Foucault’s original statements, by the reclaiming of the word ‘queer’ by the LGBT community. Over the course of history, queer has been used in a pejorative manner to describe someone with a same-sex object choice. Originally, in a British context, meant to describe someone odd, curious, peculiar or different, queer transformed throughout the 20th century into a vicious attack from people who viewed homosexuality as a perversion. As Barrios states to explain the emergence of gay activism: “As the homosexual became regulated by discourse, individuals subject to this transformation began to embrace the terms used to create them in ways that seemed almost affirming if not liberating. The movement for LGBT rights was formed within these discourses of control and identity” (346-347). It was in this liberation context that the word queer started being used as a weapon to gain political, social and cultural grounds for the LGBT community.
**Queer: Strategic Robbery**

The word queer, a formerly derogatory term, was decided to be used as a political weapon in the early 90s, following the radicalism rebellion against labelling and normativity through the gay community. This implementation of intentions inside the political discourse shows the voluntarist aspect of language. Indeed, language is now seen as a way to break barriers, change power patterns and obtain rights, which is following Foucault’s theories stated earlier. Jagose mentions that “Foucault’s analysis focuses on discourse as a mode of resistance, not to contest its content but in order to particularize its strategic operations” (82). Schneider agrees with the strategic use of language. In her text Reclaiming the Word Nigger, she compares the struggles of the Black and Queer minorities and summarizes the strategy of reclaiming: “The way to defeat the enemy is simple: steal their ammunition...When political became personal, the gay community responded by disempowering hate speech.” The voluntarist use of language can also be used as an educational tool. Grace explains that: “It is important to understand that LGBTQ persons who reclaim queer and use it as a descriptor are doing so to remind other people that some words have histories connected to stereotypes that defile and dismiss those named.” Grace thus argues that the word queer, when used as a self-descriptor, plays an educational role: it serves as a way to bring back history, and therefore cultural and social importance, to the constant build-ups and changes of the fundamental meaning of a word. He goes further in saying that an understanding of the backgrounds of words is key to increasing tolerance and acceptance for the LGBTQ minority: “Building this knowledge and understanding will help overcome the popular ignorance and fear that can lead to symbolic (verbal slurs and anti-LGBTQ graffiti) and physical (assault and battery) violence against LGBTQ persons”.

**Queer: Politically Incorrect?**

The political efficacy of the reclaiming of queer has been strongly critiqued. Parnaby argues against the constructionist model of language and therefore feels like the act of reclaiming is powerless: “Reclaiming ‘Queer’ as a name is based on the assumption that to do so strips it of its homophobic power, that it turns the world against the queer basher, rather than the bashed. It is a direct consequence of post-structuralist arguments around language which claim that the meanings of words are constantly redefined each time they are used by the individuals who use them, and that we can therefore make words mean what we want them to mean” (14). This joins up with the simplest and thus most common critique of queer theory: queer, a pejorative term, will never lose its connotation, and its reclaiming is a political counter-productive gesture. Watney presents that theory in saying that “its use only serves to fuel existing prejudice and may even lead to an increase in discrimination and violence” (18). Kirchick, in his editorial in the Yale Daily News, follows the same thought pattern by stating that using queer favours binarism instead of getting rid of it: “They (heterosexuals) see little difference between them and their gay peers and it is harmful to the gay cause when activists insist on using a word that symbolizes their outright rejection of mainstream culture and its institutions.” While Kirchick’s view follows the dated liberationist model, the actual ethnic model used in gay and lesbian politics differs from this view by creating a community based on the minority as a tool to equality in rights. Cameron and Kulick summarize the position by saying that gay activists “see renaming as a challenge to the ideological structures which make the subordinate status of the group appear natural, acceptable and inevitable” (25).

**Language and Identity**

As stated earlier, the use of words always implies an acceptance of the assumptions and concepts inherent to those words. In a similar manner, language also is presented as an act of
identity: the choice of words or expressions says a lot about one’s desires, background and vision of self. This follows the view of Cameron and Kulick that: “It is a longstanding observation in sociolinguistics that language-using, whatever else it accomplishes, is an ‘act of identity’, a means whereby people convey to one another what kinds of people they are”(11). Following this mindset, it is possible to see how the use of queer by a person – as opposed to a group – can express resistance to oppression and demonstrate a desire to get out of the repression rendered by heteronormativity.

Erasing the Past

My own personal experience follows this theory. When I was going through elementary school and high school, I was constantly teased about my apparent homosexuality. Psychological abuse took the form of insults: the word ‘tappette’, which translates to fag or faggot in English, usually was the weapon of predilection. Throughout the years, when insults got less common, this word was stamped in my mind as the symbol of the hatred I received and the oppression I was a victim of. This lasted up to a few years ago, when my confidence rose up, following my acceptation as a gay man. I started getting surrounded by a larger group of gay and lesbian people, and realized, to my own surprise, how I would myself introduce the word ‘tappette’ in conversations, first as jokes, then as self-identification. Noticing a similar pattern in my entourage, I realized how it was an outlet for us to empower ourselves against what had been a rough period of our lives. When I started researching for this essay, a friend of mine summarized the situation perfectly: ‘It seems like every time I use the word ‘tappette’ myself, it’s a way for me to erase one situation when that same word was used against me.’ By taking back a word that was a source of pain, we accepted the pain it led to and acknowledged its influence on our lives, but confront it by showing that we won’t let this pain run our life anymore. And to me, that is the important basis of the existence of the reclamation concept.

Conserving Individuality: To Label or Not To Label?

On the other hand, Kirchick states the opposite. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, he critiques the reclaiming of the word queer by stating that it only ostracizes the gay community even more and favours the binary vision of sexuality of the heteronormative model. On a personal level, he argues that: “Simply by being gay, you are a ‘queer’ whether you like it not, as its practical use implicates all gay people. When a gay activist or academic speaks of the ‘queer community’ or ‘queer rights’, he, ipso facto, has labelled me a ‘queer’ regardless of whether or not I accept this label.” This brings up an important issue with the use of queer. While I consider reclaiming of queer a personal tool to self-acceptation and deliverance from traumatic experiences, it is also important to note that queer should not be generalized as a synonym for gay. As Segwick states: “there are some lesbians and gays who could never count as queer, and other people who vibrate to the chord of queer without having much same-sex eroticism”(13). Consequently, it is important to remember individuality through the idea of community and realize that the radicalism promoted through queer activism might not be suitable for all. Finally, while Kirchick’s point is initially valid in saying that a term which originated from the rebellion against labels is a label in itself, he fails to observe the constructionist vision of language. When he states that “there is certainly nothing ‘strange, odd or peculiar’ about homosexuality”, he falls short in considering the idea that words acquire different meanings through history and have a acquired elasticity.

We’re Queer, We’re Here

Despite the increased social visibility of the queer movement, the heteronormative society still oppresses the queer minority. This is the main reason behind the initial act of reclaiming the
word queer, which I argued was a valid political strategy for recognition of the gay minority, as well as a personal outlet against repression. As Sluzki comment about the repression of a word: “It excludes from the domain of public discourse – and by extension, from the domain of personal perception – the concepts or events named by those words” (6). Consequently, the use of queer terminology is essential to mark the presence of the gay movement as a recognizable force and to ensure that its concerns are heard.

**Bibliography**


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Out of the development of gay and lesbian studies came queer theory, a school of thought that fundamentally denaturalizes identity, whether in reference to sex, sexuality or gender. Queer Nation, a group that supposedly acts based on the coalition-based politics of queer theory, has been attributed with having brought “national publicity” to the term “queer” (Jagose 107). However, the publicity Queer Nation has afforded its brand of “queer” is problematic, because it only succeeds in espousing the rights of European whites and lacks meaningful inclusion of queer communities of colour and queer diasporas. This exclusion is enforced in myriad ways. Firstly, Queer Nation opposes the notion of intersectionality found in queer theory, and thereby negates the opportunity for (dis)identification in queer subjects of colour. Secondly, the tactics that Queer Nation takes are racializing in and of themselves, segregating people of colour from the dominant white culture. Lastly, the organization’s actions are exclusive in that they do not encompass racial history or cultural specificity, and instead only discuss (and therefore legitimize) hegemonic American nationhood.

Berlant and Freeman themselves concede that Queer Nation (QN) “remains bound to the genericizing logic of American citizenship…that equates sexual object choice with individual self-identity”, and only a full transformation of these concepts will lead to more than a token “‘inclusion’ of women, lesbians, racial minorities” (171). However, they continue to valorize the work of QN when its work fundamentally imposes on the intersectional identities of queers of colour. Berlant and Freeman clearly state QN’s tactics as exploiting

“the symbolic designs of mass and national culture in order to dismantle the standardizing apparatus that organizes all manner of sexual practice into ‘facts’ about sexual identity” (152).

Indeed, QN proudly proclaims that “every one of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored”, a process that focuses on reclaiming sexual acts and sexuality from heteronormativity (Berlant & Freeman 159). However, the notion of intersectionality is clearly trespassed with this vision, as intersectionality understands that “sexuality, race, class, gender and other identity differentials” necessarily coexist fluidly (Munoz 99).

A lack of intersectionality, as described by Eng and Hom, would be similar to defining a woman only in relation to one variable (11). One becomes a woman

“not only in opposition to men—not only through the axis of gender—but also along multiple lines of social and cultural differences: race, ethnicity class, caste, national origin, citizenship and age. To suggest otherwise would not only flatten out the notion of “woman” but also, in that very same process, center the white European middle-class woman as the unacknowledged and universal subject of feminism” (Eng & Hom 11)

From the same logic, because Queen Nation defines queerness only in terms of sexuality, namely excluding racial and cultural difference in its discourse, white European middle-class gay males are positioned at the top of the hierarchy (Eng et al. 12).
The lack of inclusion is evident not only in this overt philosophy, but in how a focus on sexuality manifests itself in the various tactics QN undertakes. The appropriation of Matt Groening’s character, Bart Simpson, is an example. Bart represents mass American culture as the “white suburban ‘anykid’”, and the queering of his characters means the donning of a Queer Nation T-shirt, an earring and a “queer” slogan (Berlant et al. 165). However, Queer Bart exists only to queer the white modality: there are separate Barts with “‘exceptional’ identities” (Berlant et al. 165), including a Black Bart and a Latino Bart. These models are Othered, because a difference now exists between them and the prototype “anykid” that Groening created. In addition, Queer Bart further emphasizes the segregation of race and sexuality, in literally manifesting different forms for different identities. Therefore, when Queer Bart declares that one should “get used to it, dude”, he really only demands acceptance of the white gay identity.

In another tactical manoeuvre, Queer Nation uses the obtuseness of the idea of xenophobia to support its beliefs. QN creates a parallel by saying that the phobia “would be precisely an inappropriate response for a straight community to have towards gay Americans” (Berlant et al. 169). Xenophobia is used to demonstrate the backwardness of both anti-gay and anti-immigrant rhetoric; however, this parallel seems to ignore the fact that xenophobia still very much exists, by not addressing the issue at all. Neither is this issue addressed in Queer Nation’s interventions of public sexuality. Indeed, Gap ads, appropriated to advertise “Gay”, and the anti-consumerist invasion of the shopping mall are both tactics that happen in a highly racist and white supremacist environment, that of middle-class consumerism.

Out of the workings of Queer Nation, then, it is obvious that cultural history and non-American racial identity would be invisible. The importance of cultural history, to begin, lies in the many ways in which communities of colour represent themselves through it. For people of colour, cultural history is important because it exists as an opportunity to reclaim power. Richard Fung recalls a scene from his childhood in one of his movies, My Mother’s Place (Munoz 77). Fung and his sister view the British queen in Trinidad and Tobago, the home of their youth, and subsequently practice her royal wave at home, with socks on their hands (Munoz 77). This act is culturally significant because it traces back the history of colonialism in the West Indies, and the act itself is about agency and gaining power from an oppressor. However, it is also significant on a performative level, because it is an act of “protodrag”, in which the action is fundamentally queer but at the same time, because of youth, exists outside the understandings of gender prescription and heteronormativity (Munoz 78).

There is also a lack of racial specificity in QN approaches forming the queer counterpublic, and this is apparent in QN’s counteridentification of America. Central to QN’s aims is “coordinating a new nationality” (Berlant et al. 151); citizenship in this new nationality is found in the queer counterpublic, a queer “nation” where oppressed peoples (specifically queers) are safe, and have room to manoeuvre resistance. It is through the queering of icons, such as the flag, and the queering of publicity and quotidian activity, in advertising and shopping, that this alternative nation is created (Berlant et al. 163-170). QN counters the oppressive discourse of American nationalism by appropriating icons that are iterably American. For example, the pledge of allegiance becomes a pledge to “praise life with [one’s] vulva” or to “praise God with [one’s] erection” (Berlant et al. 159). QN, in another situation, fashions a T-shirt that has on it a queered, lavender representation of America (Berlant et al. 161).
This focus on America, however, is only marginally relevant to communities of colour: the American discourse is something that they either lack full access to or lack full interest in. On the one hand, only those who are American enough can subvert the hegemony, because otherwise they have no channels with which to express themselves. Marion Riggs discusses the notion of being silenced: in his time at Harvard, in graduate school and then into his attempt at a career in journalism, he had difficulty placing his own identity among that of the dominant one (61-63). It was only upon finding “the estimable virtue of [his] own voice” that he uncovered the “radiant nobility of [his own] life”—a life that does not lie in the “construct of America, of American power and authority, that is rigidly, monolithically, unquestioningly, white, male and heterosexual” (Riggs 63). In fact, not only are there groups who have cannot find their voice in Queer Nation because they are not reflected in the dominant discourse, there are groups, such as permanent residents, “illegal migrants” and people without status, that actually cannot afford to speak up for risk of exposure (Manalansan IV 105). These people already have a difficult time accessing rights with fear of deportation, and as QN ignores the cultural differences and therefore the various needs necessary because of them, to speak without protective channels could mean harm to their ability to work or live in America (Manalansan IV 105).

On the other hand, while for some people American identity is important, subjects of the queer diaspora may not identify their “home” (as an ideological entity) as fully American, and, in an effort to maintain their historical roots, are actually fighting American cultural hegemony. This position underlines the importance of intersectionality: these communities of colour may fight for and from their queerness, but only from an intersectional standpoint that allows them to disidentify from queerness should they need to, and ally with a different component of their identity (Munoz 156).

Therefore, cultural production from queers of colour essentially employs an intersectional strategy that does not fit in the Queer Nation model. This queering of culture happens significantly in North American and British contexts in Indian diasporic culture. For example, Gopinath details the performance of Madonna’s Hinduism-inspired CD *Ray of Light* by several South Asian drag queens in New York City (29). The song “Shanti/Ashtangi”, with its a pseudo-Sanskritic overtone, in performance acts as a commentary on Western cultural appropriation (Gopinath 30). However, at the same time it is fundamentally queer because the drag performers, though replete with henna tattoos, gold bangles and upper-caste facial markings (Gopinath 30), are not trying to “pass”, but are performing a “parodic repetition of gender norms” (Jagose 85). Therefore, not only does the performance reference and denaturalize gender norms, but it necessarily incorporates notions of culture as well.

Vaginal Davis’ tactics are also very much opposed to non-intersectional tactics of QN. She also performs not solely against an identity, in counteridentification, but intentionally misrecognizes the identity in an act of disidentification (Munoz 106). Her performance of Clarence disidentifies with “white militaman masculinity”, and in that way performs homophobia (Munoz 106). Again, this performance is only possible because of the various shifting identities that Davis chooses to draw upon.

Therefore, Queer Nation poses problems of inclusion for people of colour in several respects: firstly, intersectionality is completely disregarded in the functioning of the organization; secondly, the various tactics with which Queer Nation operates segregate and ignore non-white
communities; and lastly, by disregarding the importance of culture and race in its operations, Queer Nation excludes the queer activity produced and disseminated within communities of colour.

Works Cited


Identity plays an important part in every person’s lifestyle. Sexual identity in this day in age has come to be a main identity that a person will identify with, even over race and religion. However, especially in lesbian culture, there are still social limitations concerning marginalized sexual practices. I will argue that lesbian sexuality needs to be more accepting of other women’s preferences on the basis that if one identifies as lesbian, it is a mental recognition of belonging to the community, regardless of what their specific fetishes may be. When the term lesbian is limited to a specific set of rules, it becomes discriminatory and does not include the majority of the lesbian community. Finally, these ‘deviant’ sexual practices are only ways of expressing sexuality, not deluded women trying to implement heterosexual power into a lesbian relationship.

Throughout this paper I am going to take a constructionist view on sexuality. I believe that lesbianism is socially constructed, only a word that came about when the term homosexual was coined in 1869. Before then, the gender of the person you had sex with was not reflected as the type of person you were categorized.

They were simply engaging in some of the many forms of sexual behavior that are possible for humans, just as people today might have sex with brown-eyed or blue-eyed people, and might have one preference for one eye color or the other, without being placed in categories and assumed to be particular types of people based on the eye colors of their sexual partners. Humans have created the categories of homo and heterosexual and we place each other in them on a basis of our actions and our feelings. They are socially created. This does not mean that these feelings are made up or artificial, but that the desire is interpreted through the outlets made by our culture. This does not mean that lesbians do not exist, but they exist because we have come to understand ourselves in this way.

This has been challenged by the essentialist argument that our sexual orientation is biological, that we are genetically programmed at birth hetero or homosexual. Essentialists believe that homosexuality is universal throughout history, but I take the constructionist point of view in stating that each same-sex act has different cultural meanings in different historical contexts. What about women who will exhibit lesbian behavior, namely having sex with other women, but they do not identify themselves as lesbians? Or Pat Califia, a lesbian sadomasochist who is involved in a sexual relationship with a gay man? Or an even more puzzling identity, Lisa, the lesbian-identified male from The L Word? Let’s examine Lisa’s identity in greater detail.

Lisa is not a woman, or transgendered. Lisa is a man who identifies himself as a lesbian. If lesbian means a woman who is sexually and romantically involved with another woman, Lisa would be considered a straight male because he is sexually and romantically involved with women. However,

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1 Rust, Paula C., Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics (New York University Press, 1995) 27.


Unlike other straight males, Lisa has identified himself as lesbian and becomes upset when forced to use his penis in sex within the episode *L’Ennui*, 1:7. He stops Alice from putting her hand in his shorts and would rather use a dildo, because that is what a ‘real’ lesbian would use during sex. I feel that these women (and man) showcase the complex diversity that is identity. Since identity limitations are so debatable, people should refrain from creating exclusive definitions to describe human sexuality. I believe that the definition of lesbian sexuality of the 70s and 80s feminist movement is sorely outdated. Not only does it not pertain to the culture that we live in now, it includes a small group of women out of a whole that identify as lesbian. The feminist definition of lesbian sexuality emerged as the inverse of male sexuality, and is as follows:

A relationship in which two women’s strongest emotions and affections are directed towards each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship ... or it may be entirely absent ...

Lesbian sex was couple-based, monogamous, woman-identified and political.⁴

This was the most acceptable form of lesbian sexuality when these women were becoming more outspoken and dealing with prejudice from women within the feminist movement. By distancing themselves from the flamboyance of male sexuality, which was considered to be “overwhelmingly oppressive and objectifying”⁵, lesbian feminists were making a political statement as opposed to liberating their own sexualities.

Those women who identified with sexual categories that were considered unacceptable soon began to speak out and tried to claim recognition within defined lesbian sexuality. In doing so they undermined the dominance of the standard definition which they began to perceive as “asexual, dishonest, and regulatory”.⁶ Within Penelope Stanley’s study of lesbian and gay language, he enforced this asexual stereotype by stating that “lesbian attachments are sufficiently feminine to be more often emotional than simple sexual ... lesbians were at once too (gentle)manly and too womanly to want to talk about sex”.⁷

In the 21st century I believe that there is a significantly higher acceptance of sexuality and sexual practices than there was in the 70s and 80s. Women who follow the lesbian feminist definition of sexuality are within their right to do so, but they must realize that it is only one facet of many that a lesbian can exert her sexuality. For example, we see a challenge to the stereotype of the asexual, monogamous lesbian couple within the television show *The L Word’s Chart*. The Chart was made by Alice Pieszecki to showcase the sexual ties of her and her friends to other lesbians within the community. It displayed the “indigenous habits of lesbians and the human highways and byways they and their mutual friends have navigated for sex ... Lesbian viewers understood. We’ve all taken similar paths, after all”.⁸

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I myself have experienced this first hand. Aside from my girlfriend and I, monogamy does not play a big role in the highly sexualized lives of our circle of friends. Therefore, if the feminist definition of lesbian sexuality no longer applies to the vast public, this paves the way for marginalized sexual categories to achieve identification within the lesbian community.

For lesbian women who participate in sadomasochism, butch/femme, and fetish practices, sexual identity has been a silent burden to carry within feminist identity politics. With the explosion of the Sex Wars in the late 1970s and early 1980s, arguments about the proper delimitations of lesbian sexuality brought these preferences to the forefront of lesbian circles because they questioned the binarism of homosexuality and heterosexuality.9 These women identify themselves as lesbians, but because of the narrow beliefs of the feminist structure, they are discriminated against within lesbian society. I firmly believe that these sexual practices are just that: different ways that women can experience sexual pleasure regardless of their identities. These practices are only for pleasure purposes, not to impose heterosexual structures into queer relationships.

Sadomasochism is controversial within all sexualities, not just lesbianism. When talking about sexuality, many people are not able to understand the concept of pain being pleasurable. But to those who participate in sadomasochism, it is more than the experience of pain or domination through sex. Some lesbians may argue that sadomasochism should not exist as an acceptable identity within the lesbian community, for it is enforcing and reenacting a heterosexual relationship in which one woman acts as a the man and treats the other as subservient, a woman. Shelia Jeffreys claims that “sadomasochism is both an immature form of sexuality and a consequence of the way in which sexuality under male supremacy is structured in individuals”.10 She believes that this form of sexuality is merely acting out male dominance within a sexual relationship and cannot be tolerated within lesbianism. In contrast to Jeffrey’s opinion of the heterosexual power relationship, I wish to argue that sadomasochism is not a consequence, but a choice taken by educated women. I demonstrate this particularly in observing the experience of Stacey May Fowles: “People often use the word power when they talk about sexuality ... but ultimately the power we all want is the power to decide what we want. Despite my women’s studies degree ... I want to decide to be demeaned by the person I love”.11 Power is in every aspect of our lives. It is a human condition. This means that you are never going to be able to completely eliminate power within a sexual context, and it does not always represent male stereotypes.

Many feminists criticize the use of sex toys by lesbian sex. By using a dildo, there is the claim that the dildo is used to substitute the penis, therefore making a man’s penis the sole source of pleasure during sex. This would give the dildo no place within lesbian sex acts. The important thing to recognize about the use of this instrument in lesbian sexuality is that it is a pleasure giver, not a pleasure seeker. Lesbians who wear a dildo are not trying to pass as men, hence the wearing of “bright pink or sparkly gold or vibrating, bunny-shaped dildos. Dildos are accessories to the lesbian sex act; they are in no way requisite”.12

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Which brings me to the analysis of those lesbians who identify within the butch/femme paradigm. Lesbians who partake in this sexual identity are considered to be pre-feminism lesbians and are often considered heterosexual or tragic, because the butch/femme relationship is merely lesbians who have adapted to the heterosexual necessity of needing gender differentiation within a relationship.13 This point quickly loses validity because although butches may identify as lesbian, they do not consider themselves women. Butch is “a way of gender that is separate from both man, and woman, and every other gender” 14. The butch/femme relationship, therefore, is not two women acting out the roles of a man and woman. They are genetically both female, and may both identify as lesbian, but this sexual trait should not be condemned by the greater lesbian community because a butch and her femme are not masquerading as a heterosexual couple. They are a truly queer relationship.

When it is taken into account that the feminist definition of lesbianism is out of date, and believing that lesbian is a socially constructed identity, I believe that thinking these marginalized practices are heterosexually imposed is the true ‘immature’ viewpoint on sexuality. The lesbian community should embrace those who identify within their community, for all lesbians know what discrimination against sexual orientation feels like. Sexual identity is too open to interpretation to be limited to a discriminating definition. Some lesbians may even find that they enjoy these practices. Sexuality should be an enjoyable experience, so let’s explore it to its fullest potential!

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13 Jagose, Annamarie, Queer Theory (Melbourne University Press, 1996) 56.
14 Bergman, S. Bear, Butch is a Noun (Suspect Thoughts Press, 2006) 52.
Appendix

The Chart from *The L Word*

Butch and Femme, *Cultura Lesbiana*

Bondage, chantasbitches.com

Strap-on dildo, beautifulanddamned.co
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No Means Yes?

The Complications of Sexual Consent

Claire MacInnes

“A little still she strove, and much repented
And whispering 'I will ne'er consent – consented”
-Lord Byron (Wertheimer, 43).

Many people, whether they know it or not, are familiar with sexual consent. We see it in the movies, we hear about it in music and sexual education classes address it (Appendix A). However, sexual consent is also a double edged sword; as much as we are aware of sexual consent, we are also socialized to regard it as unspoken. It’s not in the movies. Actors in prime-time dramas rarely address whether they desire sex, to what degree they’d like to have sexual encounters, and certainly never in the moment before they act out their desires. Harlequin romance novels, among other genres, omit the consent that should prelude sex.

Culturally, sex is depicted as a natural urge. Therefore, sexual consent is seen as an awkward formality. For this reason, sexual consent is a complex and often overlooked topic. Sexual consent relates to power, legality, rape, gender and coercion. This paper will focus on the relationship between language and sexual consent. I will argue that the popularized tautology, ‘no means no’ is not an appropriate model for consent. As a survey on “token resistance” (Wertheimer, 158) and the practice of sadomasochism demonstrate, the utterance ‘no’ does not indicate a lack of desire for sexual encounters, rather, ‘no’ is a stimulant in relation to sex. Furthermore, I will argue that sexual consent should be sought through affirmative consent: a combination of verbal and non-verbal actions, much like the policy established at Antioch College. (Note: throughout this paper, references will be made to heterosexual relationships since problems with sexual consent predominantly reported by women with male sexual partners (Archard, 87).)

Greg Easterbrook, a columnist writing during the 2003 Kobe Bryant sex scandal, asserted: “the reality of human interaction is that ‘no’ does not always mean no. Maybe half of the sex in world history has followed an initial ‘no’” (Little, 1). The meanings of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are not hard to understand: ‘yes’ is an utterance used in agreement. ‘No’ is vocalized for disagreement. However, in relation to sexual intercourse and sexual consent, ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are the most problematic words. The common phrase associated with sexual consent is ‘no means no’. It is advertised nationally and globally as the rule of thumb when approaching sexual consent (Appendix B).

Yet, according to Pamela Haag, “the tautology ‘yes means yes’ and ‘no means no’ does not in fact tell us what yes and no mean” (Haag, 14). And “despite its popularity, [‘no means no’] is...unhelpful... we should reject ‘no means no’ if we consider... that ‘when a woman says the word ‘no’ she intends to express her lack of consent” (Wertheimer, 158). This statement is based on a famous study conducted by Muelenhard and Hollabough at Texas A&M University: 39.3% of undergraduate females surveyed responded that they “sometimes said no” even though they “had every intention to and were willing to engage in sexual intercourse” (Little, 1). Furthermore, “many women believed such ‘token resistance’ was quite common among other women” (Wertheimer, 44).
Nicholas Little argues “the most common explanation for the results is that saying ‘yes’ too early or too easily results in a woman being labelled promiscuous” (Little, 20). These survey results prove that

“nice girls should demur coyly in order to demonstrate that they are not sluts or nymphomaniacs, but this is a ritual, formulaic gesture and men should not be deterred – resistance is only to be expected from women, and women for their part are held to expect men to grind down their resistance” (Cameron, 36).

This sociolinguistic trend explains for the confusion associated with sexual consent. Merril D Smith notes after a series of interviews with college-aged men regarding consent, “they do not believe that they really forced their partners into having sex... they truly believe the women they raped wanted sex and just needed persuasion” (7). Rape is inexcusable. But it is evident that discourse involved with sexual consent is all too often misunderstood and misconstrued. Alan Wertheimer elaborates, “there are many reasons why women might say no when they actually desire sex” (158). This frame of mind “reflects societal assumptions about what is ‘normal’ in this particular situation” (Cameron, 36).

The acquiescence model of seduction explains that throughout history, women and men have learned how they are supposed to adhere to gender norms. Men intend to pursue women and to be dominant. Women are to be courted and won over. Overcoming resistance is part of the seduction for men, and resistance is power for women (Little, 25). The acquiescence model of seduction is still visible today. As Nicholas Little observes,

“the media and modern entertainment are replete with images of women surrendering to male sexual aggression after a token (or more enduring) demonstration of resistance) and later emerging happy and satisfied with the experience” (24). (Appendix C)

How do we solve the problem of gaining sexual consent? Camille Paglia states in her work Sex, Art and American Culture, “It’s ridiculous to think that saying no always means no. We all know how it goes in the heat of the moment: it's ‘no’ now, it’s ‘maybe’ later, and it changes again” (Wertheimer, 158). Yet, “when [people] do want ‘no’ to mean ‘no’ they cannot be sure it will be taken as they intended” (Cameron, 36). This is why consent must be “defined not as the absence of ‘no’ but as the presence of ‘yes’” (Cameron, 36).

Further evidence for ‘no’ used as a term for sexual gratification is the practise of consensual sadomasochism. Sadomasochism, more commonly known as S/M, is the process of gaining sexual pleasure through enduring pain or causing pain to others (Sullivan). S/M is a sexual activity in which sexual gratification is achieved predominantly through power exploitation. In S/M there are two roles: a top, the ‘master’ – dominant and aggressive, and a bottom, the ‘slave’- submissive and passive. Because S/M involves dangerous aspects such as bondage, whipping, and chains, many precautions are taken to ensure a pleasant experience for both (or all) participants. Andrea Beckmann claims, “in contrast to ‘normalised’ and usually unregulated relationships, there is a requirement for more explicit communication and negotiations... [such as] the setting of safe-words or gestures.” (198) Safe words or gestures are words or actions “that the submissive partner may use to end the activity at any time” (Little, 28). The point of interest here is that ‘no’ absolutely cannot be used as a stop word.
In S/M scenes... the formulaic resistance function of ‘no’ is particularly important. If the submissive partner offers no token of resistance, the dominant partner cannot experience the pleasure of imposing his or her will on a powerless other, while conversely the submissive partner cannot experience the pleasure of being overcome by a more powerful other (Cameron, 40).

S/M relies on smashing the power schisms of real life, and thus bottoms use the utterance to enhance their desired feeling of powerlessness. ‘Tops are equally stimulated by the usage of ‘no’. “To eroticize power differences... initial resistance followed by eventual submission may be expressed as enhancing sexual pleasure” (Cameron, 40). It gives them power, control and a feeling of authority. And yet, “a good top will... rely on the safe word or gesture” (Beckmann, 198). S/M further acknowledges sexual consent can change after sexual experiences have already begun, “most crucial of all, is the requirement to continuously reflect upon one’s own individual limits, which may change” (Beckmann, 199). Since “the sadomasochism community has... a strong emphasis on consent as a prerequisite for sexual activity” (Little, 28) we can base the improved model of sexual consent on sadomasochism.

We have seen through sadomasochism and female usage of the 'no', that ‘no means no’ is an ineffective guide for sexual consent. Sexual relations must be consented to and thus the suggested process of achieving consent is through the process of affirmative consent. Attempted first at Antioch College in Ohio, the Antioch College code was written by the students for the students in 1990 (Cowling). The policy mandates that at each escalating level of sexual intimacy - kissing, petting, undressing, oral stimulation, penetration - verbal consent must be given. The declaration of consent removes the uncertainty that acts are coerced as opposed to free choice (Haag, 14). The code “does the work of constituting and authenticating a sexual exchange as ‘free’ and the result of ‘choice’” (Haag, 14). The code was established as an attempt to curb acquaintance rape – yet it has been empowering in other areas.

“One becomes a ‘sexual object’ rather than a ‘sexual agent’ unless both parties desire sexual contact at the very moment of sexual contact. It does not matter whether the parties are married or in love or having a one-night stand – the recognition of the other’s desire... [is] the sole way in which we can engage in sex without reducing the other to an object and one who insists on the sexual act makes of the partner [only] a means... to one’s own pleasure” (Wertheimer, 135).

The criticism of affirmative consent is two-fold: firstly, critics feel affirmative consent upholds a common stereotype: women do not initiate sexual contact. Secondly, critics “argue that [to] obtain an affirmative indication of consent [or] a verbal permission rule would impose an excessive degree of formality and artificiality” (Wertheimer, 153).

In terms of the first criticism, a goal of affirmative consent is to change how women are sexually portrayed. Affirmative consent demands that women be actively involved during sexual intercourse and not simply ‘willing’ partners (as stereotypes would have us believe). Furthermore, and perhaps more monumentally, affirmative consent changes the politics of rape trials. Instead of the pressure being on a woman to prove that she actively attempted to thwart sexual advances during rape, the offender would have to prove how he had obtained consent (Little, 29). Lastly, affirmative consent could be responsible for a sexual revolution in women. Instead of saying ‘no’ when women really want to say ‘yes’, the stigma of seeming promiscuous would disappear. To quote Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in the 60’s, “where I live, there is something else a girl can say when a man ‘insists’. And that is yes” (Haag, 16).
The second criticism of affirmative consent – that it strips sex of spontaneity and romance – is false. The students at Antioch reacted well to the policy, some even being the most supportive. In an article to the *New Yorker*, Julia Reidheid “describes the code as an ‘erotic windfall’: ‘what man or woman on Antioch’s campus, or elsewhere, wouldn’t welcome the direct question, ‘may I kiss the hollow of your neck?’ the possibilities are wonderful’” (Cowling, 15). A follow up study on Antioch’s policy found an increase in satisfaction of students sex lives. “A number spoke of having better – more exciting, more varied and more pleasurable sex... they found themselves talking much more explicitly...about specific sexual acts, and they claimed this enhanced the experience of sex” (Cameron, 37). Furthermore, “it is not, as some have suggested, a requirement that men carry permission slips that must be signed by the woman before sex” (Little, 25). As noted “affirmative consent is the norm already in at least one area of human sexuality... sadomasochism. [It does] not destroy intimacy and romance as many fear. [Affirmative consent] may be defended as a path to greater closeness between partners in all forms of sexual relationships” (Kobe, 28). Thus, “the important question is not whether ‘no means no’, but whether ‘yes means yes’” (Wertheimer, 2).

As we have seen, the utterance ‘no’ does not always indicate a lack of consent for sexual encounters. On the contrary, a survey based on female college students and sadomasochism have both exhibited that the word ‘no’ is frequently used to enhance sexual pleasure and sexual gratification. It is for this reason that sexual consent should be based not on ‘no means no’ but instead on affirmative consent where the importance is instead ‘yes, yes, yes, yes’.
Appendixes

Appendix A - educational

Appendix B – commonly used phrase

Appendix C – advertising
Works Cited

Appendix A, B & C all retrieved from google.com/images search engine.


Murakami’s Decadence
Sarah Hartney

Man has never known a time when there were clear-cut boundaries between pain and pleasure in erotic relationships (“Mistress Anna”). The playful uses of power, submission and sensation have long been a part of many relationships. Yet the logical extension of these elements of erotic relationships, sadomasochism, has been rigorously tabooed and debased by the vanilla, heteronormative, hierarchy we call modern society. Few publicly held sentiments have changed since the French count Marquis de Sade and the novelist Leopold van Sacher-Masoch were condemned in the late 18th and 19th centuries; sadomasochism is still very much a damned desire (Edwards 77). Today sadomasochism, or as it is more commonly called BDSM, has become an umbrella term for many sexual practices that are thought to be unseemly and dangerous. BDSM has been labeled other, weird and abnormal and placed outside of popular culture as a result of countless events and images within society (Edwards 76). One such example of this can be found in the dangerous fantasy world created by director Ryu Murakami in his film entitled Tokyo Decadence. Murakami’s film propagates many of the commonly held misconceptions about BDSM practices; even the film’s title seems to hiss disapproval. I wish to argue that the film Tokyo Decadence is a skewed, heteronormative, dangerous and an offensive display of sadomasochists and sadomasochistic practices. It is an evident misrepresentation of the BDSM counter public and its participants as it associates BDSM with a singular type of individual; one who engages in drug abuse, violence and non-consensual, even criminal intimacies.

BDSM practices occur between a variety of individuals of different backgrounds, ages, classes, occupations, races and sexes/genders (Sullivan 153). There is no one type of individual who engages in sadomasochism; it is an indiscriminate sexual practice. This however is not the reality portrayed in Murakami’s Tokyo Decadence. Throughout the film, the viewer is introduced to a number of individuals who enter in and out of the life of the film’s protagonist, a female escort named Ai, who is said to specialize in BDSM. Ai’s numerous clients throughout the movie possess a commonality: they are all middle-aged, upper middle-class businessmen. Every one of the participants in the BDSM scenes during the film fit into these two categories of individuals: middle-aged businessmen and female sexual escorts. The viewer is never introduced to a participant who does not fit into this preconceived range of BDSM participants. In this way Tokyo Decadence misrepresents BDSM culture by portraying the predetermined notion that BDSM is only practiced willingly by sinister, older, upper-class men who seek to abuse their wealth and power, and naïve or deviant female escorts looking to make a little easy money. BDSM is not reserved for a certain type of individual and assuming otherwise further degrades the sexual practice and adds to the image of the BDSM participant as cohesive.

It is through the use of these two categories of sadomasochists that the film also creates a male, heterosexual, fantasy world, where women are accessories and men are in control. Murakami seems to take a heterosexual spin on all of the BDSM scenes presented in Tokyo Decadence, as each and every one of the practices are shown between males and females. During the one scene in which the viewer is privy to two women engaging in BDSM, the purpose of the scene is for none other than the enjoyment of a man…a middle-aged, upper middle-class businessman in fact. The two women are hired by the man to act as his mistresses and send him on a whirlwind ride of sexual pleasure through submission. The use of merely heterosexual individuals does injustice to the BDSM
culture and its participants as it excludes all other types of sexualities and sexual object choices that vary from that of the opposite sex. Murakami never deviates from this heteronormative view of BDSM. Through *Tokyo Decadence* he demonstrates that, just as Cameron and Kulick states, “heterosexuality is compulsory” and “the other is forbidden” (44).

Additionally, Murakami seems to evoke the idea of a racial, sexual hierarchy discussed predominantly by early European missionaries, as well as by author and cultural critic Fung (3). *Tokyo Decadence* propagates the “depiction of all Asians as having an undisciplined and dangerous libido” and also furthers the notion of the Asian woman who exists merely to serve the needs of men (Fung 3). This supposed link of race and sexual practices is immensely threatening to Asian BDSM participants and a dangerous representation of sadomasochists in general. Throughout the film, the female BDSM participants are portrayed as expendable, devious and illicit in their sexual behavior. Moreover, the female BDSM participants that are introduced to the viewer are prostitutes and strange mistresses, what Fung calls the “Dragon Ladies” of Asian culture (3). In this way *Tokyo Decadence* threatens the autonomy of female BDSM participants and furthers the assumption of BDSM participants as deviants, abnormal or even somewhat illegal in nature. *Tokyo Decadence* in turn becomes a harmful interpretation of intersectionality (SDST 250 Lecture Oct. 30, 2007, Ger Zielinski).

The film continued along its destructive path as it further stereotyped the participants in BDSM as drug and alcohol abusers. In numerous scenes during the film, BDSM participants are shown using intravenous, inhalant, and tablet drugs, as well as large amounts of alcohol. Murakami continued to debase sadomasochists and sadomasochistic practices by associating BDSM with reckless drug abuse, to the point of making the sexual practice itself seem illegal or criminal in nature. The viewer is shown images of BDSM participants getting high and drunk both during and after the BDSM scenes, creating the notion of BDSM as a criminal intimacy (SDST 250 Lecture Nov. 1, 2007, Ger Zielinski). This is used as an additional way to demonstrate the “inferiority of ‘the other’”(Califia 202). The film distorts BDSM practices in the same way that “every minority sexual behavior has been mythologized and distorted” (Califia 171). In this way Murakami has added to the evocations of hostility and fear conventionally associated with BDSM (Califia 168).

Murakami’s film makes those who practice BDSM seem outside of the law and on the outer boundaries of society in general (Hart 38). This is evident in his choice of settings for the BDSM scenes throughout the film. The viewer is shown scene after scene of BDSM practices being performed in rented rooms and seedy hotels, consequently linking BDSM again with illegality and also portraying it as something so unworthy that it must be hidden. *Tokyo Decadence* feeds into the frequent discourse and images of shame that are commonly held against minority sexual practices (SDST 250 Lecture Sept. 11, 2007, Ger Zielinski). The film seems to state that BDSM is, as Califia puts it, “so far beyond the pale of social acceptability that it can only emerge in a brothel or an alley”, or in this case in shady hotels (238). The practices are always shown as being disconnected from the lives of the participants. Thus, the setting during the BDSM scenes is never in a home, as if the participants have something dark and secretive to hide away from the outside world. BDSM practices have been shamed by societal images such as *Tokyo Decadence*, to the point that there now exists a pairing of secrecy for fear of disclosure and privacy for fear of the public (Kosofsky Sedgwick 72). Authors Berlant and Warner have agreed that this pairing is due to the fact that modern society has founded itself on this privatization of sexual practices (SDST 250 Lecture, Nov. 1, 2007, Ger Zielinski).
Lastly, Murakami’s distortion of BDSM throughout his film *Tokyo Decadence* leads his viewers to believe that BDSM practices are nothing more than the “‘actual inequalities of real-life...extended into the sexual field’” (Sullivan 159). *Tokyo Decadence* portrays BDSM participants as perpetrators of patriarchal violence, as the acts of BDSM are consistently non-consensual in the film. This is apparent throughout the film as the BDSM practices are not expressed as a free exchange of power and responsibility (Thompson 16), but rather as an endorsement for the degradation of the individuals involved (Sullivan 164). This is particularly evident in the scene in which a dominating mistress is disciplining her submissive male partner, and the dominatrix demands that her partner drink a bowl of urine. The scene begins playfully as the two exchange their scripted dictate and obey roles however, when the submissive man has had enough of their game and yells “mercy”, the scene’s safe-word which signals to the other participant to stop, the dominating woman persists in her demands. In this moment both the consensual aspect and the autonomy of the submissive partner is instantly removed. The safe-word has no value if it is not respected by the participants. In this event it no longer ensures the safety, nor the trust between the participants. The consensual nature of BDSM is the pivotal element in sadomasochistic practices, without this element BDSM becomes nothing more than a replication of real-world inequalities and violence. In portraying BDSM as a non-consensual act, *Tokyo Decadence* does injustice to the BDSM counterpublic and its participants. Without the consensual exchange of the participants’ autonomies and a shared responsibility of the actions, the satisfaction of both partners is not possible (Thompson 18). BDSM practices simulate the power asymmetries seen in real-world social relations, yet they do not replicate them (Sullivan 160). Philosopher and sociologist, Foucault, has confirmed this notion, as he believed that BDSM was not merely a reproduction of heteronormative or patriarchal power structures, but was instead a re-inscribed, parody and a challenge to these structures (Sullivan 160-161). Murakami’s film violates the BDSM principle of consent and turns the sexual practice into a dangerous display of abuse.

Thus it is clear that Ryu Murakami’s representation of BDSM in *Tokyo Decadence* is a skewed, heteronormative, dangerous and an offensive display of sadomasochists and sadomasochistic practices. BDSM practices are repeatedly associated with violence, shame, illegality and non-autonomy during the film, ultimately leading the viewer to believe that such aspects are typical of a BDSM participant. BDSM is reduced to a marginalized, deviant sexual practice, performed solely by a range of distinctly odd and sordid individuals who appear to relish in real-world inequalities and human degradation. *Tokyo Decadence* is only one of millions of misrepresentations of sadomasochism in contemporary societies, which have caused BDSM to be ostracized from acceptable public discourse and acceptable sexual practices. This is not hard to believe as our “training in conventional sexuality begins the minute we are born, and because the penalties for rebellion are so high, no individual or group is completely free from erotic tyranny” (Calfia 170). Unfortunately, the debasement of BDSM is only one of many forms of sexual prejudices that exist today, as many sexual practices do not “mirror conventional heteronormative expectations” (Cameron & Kulick 73). Consequently, unacceptable sexual practices, such as BDSM, become little more than maps between the links of rebellion and reaction and, additionally, the very definition of what is excluded from discourse and even from public consciousness (Calfia 208).
The Transgender Phenomenon: From a Mental Health Perspective to a Sociological Outlook

Vanessa Boyce

We, as human beings, go about our daily lives in a very structured and specific manner; we decide what clothing to wear and how to present ourselves, we interact with friends and strangers, and we perform routine tasks, all the while behaving in ways that may or may not deviate from others’ expectations. Gender roles are the basis of these expectations, and society has developed a framework of each gender’s criteria. Following this criteria is considered normative, however variations of a person’s gender roles often bring about problems for the individual. Transgender is an example of such a variation. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines transgender as “…having personal characteristics that transcend traditional gender boundaries and corresponding sexual norms” (2007). Transgender people often describe themselves as being in the ‘wrong body’, and they have consequently been mistakenly interpreted as having a mental or psychological disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders developed the category Gender Identity Disorder, and after several alterations, transgender now lies within the category of sexual disorders. The DSM IV defines this disorder as “…the desire to be, or the insistence that one is, of the other sex…and persistent discomfort about one’s assigned sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex” (American Psychological Association 2000).

I intend to argue that an individual who leads a transgender lifestyle does not fit the criteria of having a mental health disorder as was once claimed, and his or her problems are instead the result of a misunderstanding from our society’s maladaptive tendencies. I will be using selected works by Stryker, Stone, Butler, Livingston and Namaste to support my claim, while explaining the transgender phenomenon and simultaneously contrasting it with the criteria exhibited in the DSM IV.

Due to the past identification of transgender as a psychological disorder, eliminating this schema from society today has become an impossible task. It seems that the medical opinion holds the final authority for what is considered a culturally intelligible body (Vitale 2007), and that our culture does not hesitate to accept the medical world’s declarations. To illustrate this, we need simply review the DSM IV’s section on sexual disorders, specifically Gender Identity Disorder (GID). Although the subject has been debated and modified numerous times, it still contains very broad, ambiguous components. For example, the DSM IV claims that in order to diagnose an individual with GID, “…there must be evidence of clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (American Psychological Association, 2000). Problems arise with this suggestion. Firstly, what is accounted as clinically significant? What if an individual has distress or impairment in functioning, but does not fit the profile of a transgender? Similarly, individuals who do identify themselves as transgender will inevitably feel high levels of distress and impairment in their areas of functioning, simply because they are regarded as outcasts of their social sphere. The DSM is attempting to point fingers at a mental health disorder, when in reality; society’s narrow-mindedness is to blame for this enormous misunderstanding.

Much of the criteria for GID are unsupported and unreliable. Another illustration of its bigotry is the DSM’s claim that treatment for symptoms of GID as a child can help prevent its long-term prevalence (American Psychological Association, 2000). Individuals are born with an innate sense of their sexual identity and sexual being, and this is not something that can be modified or
altered, no matter how early the onset of treatment is. It is also questionable as to why certain transgender adults do not demonstrate any “…pre-occupation with traditional cross-gender identification in childhood…” (American Psychological Association, 2000), as this is a set criterion for the disorder. This illustrates the importance of gender roles in determining what kind of behaviour is considered normative, and the consequences of acting contrary to this norm.

Our behaviours, opinions and mental schemas are all based along the lines of socially constructed gender roles. We are born into a society that tells us what is expected of us, and we follow-suit. Stereotypes of both gender’s performance are laid-out, and the instant a person falls off-track with their stereotype, they are considered to be defying the norm. This is the essence of heteronormativity, and Sandy Stone (2006) illustrates it by claiming that our heteronormative society is at fault for developing transgender into a disorder. Non-stereotypical gender roles are the essence of GID, as it claims that for young boys, “…towels, aprons and scarves are often used to represent long hair or skirts…there is a strong attraction for the stereotypical games and pastimes of girls… playing house…female-type dolls, such as Barbie, are often their favourite toys…” (American Psychological Association, 2000). Society has conveniently developed a set of clearly defined gender roles, and those who cannot follow the roles are rejected from the social group. Vivian Namaste (2000) recognizes this issue with regards to drag, a subgroup of trans. She insists, “…drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (Namaste 10). In other words, individuals who choose to dress as a member of the opposite sex can do so with ease, because they have been given all the ingredients of what gender roles require. The irony is that society has laid every ingredient out on the counter, yet continues to hold up a barrier for those who do not fit the single requirement, which is of course, the proper biological sex.

Some believe that a person’s gender ultimately reflects every social interaction they will ever experience. Namaste (2000) writes of others’ views of the issue, and claims that, for some, “gender is thus a vehicle that functions to displace the material and symbolic conditions of race and class” (Namaste 13). In this view, gender dictates all other aspects of life, and if one behaves as the opposite gender, this creates a strong dissonance that cannot be ignored. The only means of reducing this dissonance would be by eliminating the societal expectations of gender roles, however much time and effort would be needed to succeed in such an undertaking.

Taking a closer look at the existing foundation of transgender and its placement into the category of a disorder aids in demonstrating the key role that society does play in its stigmatization. The development of ‘normative’ versus ‘non-normative’ behaviour is at fault for considering transgender a disorder, yet at the same time it is what transgender individuals are composed of. Sandy Stone (2006) claims that the ultimate goal of any trans is to fade into the normative population, to maintain ‘realness’ by behaving in ways that will allow them to fit-in and avoid counter-discourse. The film Paris is Burning by Jennie Livingston (1990) could not illustrate this concept more clearly. Male-to-female trans in the film perform dance competitions entitled ‘balls’, where they act-out a particular type of individual, and are judged based on their ability to blend-in and produce a convincing character. Categories such as schoolboy-girl, town and country, high fashion eveningwear, and luscious body are a few of the many characters that are imitated by these trans (Livingston, 1990). Every category is in itself a social norm, but is expected to be played-out by a woman, not a man. Judith Butler (1991) states, “…drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes” (Butler 125). Biological males who consider themselves trans are expected to behave as regular men
and keep in line with society’s heteronormative continuum, yet they are stuck in the middle of two contrasting issues. They wish to associate and identify with the stereotypical female lifestyle, yet at the same time they resent the mere existence of those stereotypes, as they become a barrier. Butler also claims, “…drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms” (Butler 125). By associating with the opposite gender’s norms, trans are using these norms in an unnatural way, yet at the same time are utilizing them in a way that suits their needs. Transgender individuals strive to become ‘real’, which consists of passing as a member who fits the social norms. Society designates what is a ‘norm’ and transgender people follow these norms, yet society still excludes them. The problem, therefore, does not lie in the individuals who do not follow normative behaviour; the problem lies in society’s creation of these norms. It can be argued, then, that we are dealing neither with a mental disorder nor a sexual disorder, but what we are ultimately dealing with is a societal disorder.

It is still unclear how to determine the underlying factors of why the transgender phenomenon has developed. Regardless of the mechanisms at work, trans are constantly seeking acceptance and recognition as the other sex, and without this identification, they are left with an ambiguous sense of self. Some blame psychological predispositions, and the American Psychological Association has attempted numerous times to categorize transgender individuals and set up criteria for a proper diagnosis. This attempt has proven to be a consistent failure, and although the category transgender has shifted from a mental disorder to a sexual disorder, its present position is still being debated, and a complete removal from the DSM is being suggested. A correction of the problem may lie in the reformation of our structured society. Categorizing transgender as merely a different genre instead of a problematic ‘third gender’ may allocate the potential for a productive disruption of structured sexualities (Stone 231). Breaking down the stereotypical gender roles built through society may provide a greater understanding of the individual differences each person occupies. This would leave the category ‘gender’ open to more than just male and female, and hold the category ‘sexual identity’ beyond our heteronormative society’s control. We have entered a generation of new and unpredictable dissonances, and in order to broaden our knowledge and understanding of our world’s sexual diversity, we must rearticulate the foundational language that both sexuality and trans are described (Stone, 2006). Doing so will aid in understanding, or at least simplifying, the all-too complicated life of transgender individuals.

Works Cited


“Paris is Burning.” (1990, Jennie Livingston, USA, 71 min.)


"Two Spirited" People: Gender from an Aboriginal Perspective and the Influences from the Outside world

Gina Metallic

The term "two-spirited" comes to us with a rich background of history and importance. In the twentieth century, with the advent of lesbian and gay liberation, "two-spirited" means Aboriginal people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian or transgender, yet according to many electronically sources and scholarly journals this states otherwise. Throughout the essay I intend to argue that term “Two Spirit”, a term coined in only 1990 in Winnipeg at the Native American Gay and Lesbian Conference, has at least three (3) different views which differ from traditional aspects, historical influences and contemporary views of the term which in turn influences how the term is flexibly used today amongst Aboriginals. The sources used throughout the following essay are those of Canadian Aboriginal organizations and sources found on the world wide web.

First and foremost, definitions of various terms must be discussed in order to fully understand the concepts and views that will be discussed throughout the paper. Homosexual, defined by Jagos, is “commonly and widely understood to describe sexual attraction for those of one's own sex”. Gender on the other hand is what is socially constructed from society, meaning “boy” or “girl”, and sex is what is known to us as biological, which refers to genitals. Furthermore, Stryker states transgender “[i]somebody who permanently changes social gender through the public presentation of self, without the recourse to genital transformation". Finally, men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) essentially states a sexual behaviour rather than a specific group of people therefore, it can include anyone from gay, bisexual, transgendered or even heterosexual men.

Before colonization in the 1800's, there was no such term used such “homosexuality” in society. Within the aboriginal communities, some people often considered themselves equally male as they were equally female; that is to say they were not categorized as homosexual or transgender. These special people were essentially considered a third gender amongst their own people, and treated with great respect because of what they had to offer. Their offerings included being medicine healers, participating in traditional ceremonies, providing counseling to both sexes, creating a balanced atmosphere throughout the community by being priests, amongst many other things. It has been said that these individuals made the best marriage counselors because they were able to see both perspectives of the couple. In addition, “Two Spirited” people were seen as messengers from the creator, and according to Mig’maq nation legends, the creator had no distinctive sex and/or gender.

It has to be noted however, that the term “Two Spirited” was only used since the 1990’s. Before this time, Europeans labeled these people “berdache” which has various meanings such as someone who had anal intercourse, male prostitute, and etcetera. Upon the arrival of the Europeans, it was then that aboriginal communities were introduced to homophobia which in turn created homophobic views towards specific genders and sexuality. Due to the flood of Christian missionaries and settlers on aboriginal territory, the different worldviews that were being presented to First Nations severely influenced their views forever, which in turn had a drastic effect on the status of “Two Spirit” individuals. It also has to be noted that First Nations have up to six (6) different types of gender; therefore colonization also implanted the binary gender system. With this being said, people whom were once embraced by their own people, were seen as an embarrassment and shunned for being “perverse”. The concept of binary views in generally was
quite new to aboriginal people because they never saw anything as black or white; Native American concepts often formed circles rather than lines.\(^{13}\)

Due to the negative attitude towards “Two Spirited” people, many were forced to go underground in order to survive.\(^{14}\) Those who were not able to escape the Europeans were forced in pits and eaten alive by dogs.\(^{15}\) Moreover, as the years went on, the homosexual views had gotten worse, especially during the time of residential schools. Their motto “taking an Indian out of the Indian” often included Two Spirited individuals having to hide their true self.\(^{16}\) There was a constant fear that was promoted within these schools, and this fear created a huge burden on all aboriginal people’s traditional belief system.\(^{17}\)

As for today’s views on Two Spirit, society basically views it such as Europeans did hundreds of years ago. As mentioned there is a huge stigma towards “Two Spirited” people yet there is a re-emergence of the identity within community just as there is a re-emergence of other traditional practices and beliefs that were taken away by attending Indian Residential Schools. There is a small amount however that is accepting of the “Two Spirited”, yet the majority clearly seems to have a problem with this. “Two Spirited” people are not as practicing as they were hundreds of years ago, in a traditional sense, therefore people see them as simply sleeping with someone of the same sex. With that being said, most people who do not fully understand term “Two Spirited” label these individuals to be gay.

Moreover, most “Two Spirit” people have left the reservations to urban cities where they possibly feel less judged.\(^{18}\) Yet being in the city, there are major consequences like anything else; Not only do these youth or adults have to deal with being a ‘third gender’, but they are also a minority within society.\(^{19}\) As stated by Gomez and Smith whom spoke about homophobia in the black community “(…) we’re embattled psychologically and economically as an ethnic group”.\(^{20}\) That being said, these people have two factors working against them which in turn undoubtedly can cause severe mental issues. Due to loneliness and fear, people have taken their stress to another level and dealing with it in negative ways. These ways include substance abuse, and increased sexual activity without the use of condoms.\(^{21}\) With that being said, there has been a major increase in the risk of HIV/AIDS within the gay/bi/transgender aboriginal community whom are living within the cities.

Seeing most “Two Spirited” people are men, the Canadian Aboriginal Aids Network consider them to be more or less “men who have sex with men”, also known as MSM, which as Jagose states “[are men] who are unattached to the gay communities”.\(^{22}\)

It has been noted that before colonization that “Two Spirit” was more of a spiritual and social identity rather than a psychosexual identity that it is now used as.\(^{23}\) Being in the twentieth century though, modern gay, lesbian, transgender aboriginal youth and adults are using the term “Two Spirited” The question still remains however if “two spirit” is the politically correct term, or if it’s simply a third gender on its own. In our present day however, it seems it is up to the individual to figure out where they stand with the term “Two Spirited”. Seeing that homophobia is at its highest in aboriginal communities, I tend to believe that sometimes gay or bi aboriginal individuals use this term because it has less of a stigma towards it. In other words, using the term “Two Spirited” means less extreme than using “gay”. On the other hand, it can be highly argued that “Two Spirited” tend more to be transgender because they do have some feelings of being a woman and gay people do not feel like they are the opposing sex, but rather are attracted to their own sex.
As stated, some men dressed up as women for certain ceremonial practices such as the Sun Dance in Ojibwe culture. Therefore, I tend to believe that sources that state that “Two Spirit” people are not gay are only correct in this statement when talking about in an historical context. Today however, the term is so leniently used that even professional seem to be ambiguous about the concept. All in all, as mentioned, I strongly believe that in modern society, the term “Two Spirit” has a huge continuum as it includes all gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. Using the term “Two Spirit” puts a positive attitude towards being gay, bi, or trans because of what they were known to be in the past. That is to say, on a historical account, these people were praised and seen as a huge asset to a community; therefore these individuals only want the equal amount of respect that a heterosexual being would receive in an aboriginal community, and in society as a whole. “Two Spirit” therefore relates to every sexual being within aboriginal communities when comparing historical evidence and linking it with modern times.

ENDNOTES

1 Annamarie Jagos. Queer Theory. 7.
2 Deborah Campbell and Don Kullich. Language and Sexuality, 1.
3 Susan Stryker. (De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies.
4 David Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality.
6 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
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Hijras and Transgender Studies

Tara Narula

In this essay, I argue that transgender studies in the west is strife with binaries of gender, in that it is attempting to break it, and of identification and counter-identification; they are therefore unable to adequately examine hijras in their social role as the hermaphroditic third sex. I use Serena Nanda’s article, “The Hijras of India: Cultural and Individual Dimensions of an Institutionalized Third Gender Role”, to describe Hijra communes, the importance of religion and ritual and their role in society. Using Susan Stryker’s article, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies” for definitions and explanations of transgender studies, I show that “Transgender” is…a category of First World origin that is currently being exported for Third World Consumption” (Stryker 14) while examining ways to conceptualize binary bending while taking into account history and culture. I also examine the already present hierarchies and structural peculiarities similar to normative families in the Hijra communities, given in part by their work, which prevent them from forming “Queer Counterpublics” as described by Berlant and Warner in their article “Sex in Public”. I use Denis Altman’s “Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities” to elucidate some of the problems or shortcomings of western terminology and Trans Studies when applied to the Indian hijra context as there is an odd mix of acceptance and revulsion associated with hijras; they cannot be classified within common terms for gender fucking. Finally I analyze hijras as performing what Jose Muñoz calls disidentification or tactical misrecognition that serves to subvert the identification-counter-identification binary.

According to Stryker, Transgender studies came into it’s own with its progress from being treated as a subject of abnormal psychology to that of legitimate expressions in the material world. As late as the 1980’s, “Transgender” moved from the clinics to the streets over the course of that decade, and from representation to reality” (Stryker 2). The terminology for transgender studies is fairly recent and of western origin; it is thus unable to account for a community who have had a long-standing social role that is loaded with cultural, religious and historical meaning. Hijras pose an interesting problem to transgender studies, as “neither man nor woman” (Nanda 37), they fall outside the binary and thus within the umbrella of transgender studies. As an institutionalized third sex however, they still conform to what transgender studies, according to Stryker, is attempting to subvert:

“the field of transgender studies…makes visible the normative linkages we generally assume to exist between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy, the subjectively experienced relationship between a gendered sense of self and social expectations of gender-role performance, and the cultural mechanisms that work to sustain or thwart specific configurations of gendered personhood” (Stryker 3).

Sexual oppression in the west arguably originates from differentiated gender roles in society, whereas the social role and special powers attributed to hijras are strongly attached to their third sex, their infertility and impotence and status of ambiguous sexuality. Their social role, were it not coexisting with strong stigmas that place them in their oppression, is in fact empowering (Nanda 40). While hijras don’t fit in the binary, they don’t reject differentiated gender either and the transgender studies in the west “called into question that entire system. As eunuch-transvestites, hijras don’t fit into any particular definitions; the primary meaning of the term is hermaphrodite, never homosexual. It
therefore becomes extremely difficult to treat them under the banner of queer culture and westernized transgender studies.

Transgender studies is “akin to other efforts to insist upon the salience of cross-cutting issues such as race, class, age and nationality within identity-based movements and communities” (Stryker 7) and it is this aspect that we must exploit to look at hijras. Hierarchies within hijra communities are born from distinctions of age, class and work and such inter-sectional understanding is therefore important. According to Altman, “Modern forms of homosexuality often exist side by side with older traditional ones” (Altman, 82) and the more traditional, non-western sexualities are difficult to grasp within western discourses on gender and sex. Altman says, “attempts to use Western terminology – gay people; men who have sex with men, bisexuals – often block us from understanding the different ways in which people understand their own sexual experiences and feelings” (Altman 81) and therein lies the failure of western discourse to include the ‘other’. This does not mean that western scholarship should steer clear from analyzing sexualities that originated elsewhere in time and space but merely that it should maintain dialectic contradictions of modernity and tradition and class, caste, cultural specificities when talking about it. The age old role of hijras in Indian society problematizes the identification of Transgender critical theory as post-modern and situating it within a contemporary context alone.

While there has been theological scholarship involving the ‘queering’ of Christianity and introduction of gender ambiguity is canonical texts in the interest of women’s emancipation, western transgender studies as spoken of by Stryker does not address ritual and religion; integral to hijra’s construction of identities. According to Gayatri Reddy, hijras’ “construction of individuality is fundamentally moral, intricately bound up with a local economy of respect” (Reddy 18); the respect is determined both by their socio-religious status as able to curse or bless a new born male child or marriage and by their work. The hijras pay allegiance to Bahuchara Mata, a Mother Goddess of Hinduism and this association “is the source both of the Hijra’s claim for their special place in Indian Society and the traditional belief in their power to curse or confer blessings on male infants” (Nanda 35). The respect accorded to them is due to their supposed renunciation of sexual desire and the dharma of hijras is thought to be ritualistic emasculation as “Born intersexed and impotent, unable themselves to reproduce, hijras can, through the emasculation operation, transform their liability into a source of creative power which enables them to confer blessings of fertility on others” (Nanda, 39), which will take them to sanyasa. In the hierarchy within the hijra community, “the sex workers (kendra hijras) have lower respect than the non-sex workers (badhai hijras)” (Reddy 79).

Hijra lives can be structurally similar to normative relationships with some hijra’s living with or having ‘a husband’ (those who aren’t abstinent that is) (Nanda 44) and aspiring to houses, that are modeled after the gharanas of musicians and artists in classical times, to perform their traditional roles. They also have hierarchical guru-chela or teacher-disciple relationships under which novices are initiated. These factors, along with “fictive kinship by which hijras relate to each other” (Nanda 36) prevent them from being included in what Berlant and Warner call “Queer counterpublics” (558). They identify queer culture as “a world-making project” and the making of a queer world “has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation.” (Berlant and Warner 558). It can be argued that hijras are engaged in building the counter-public to this counterpublic, where ritual tie people together in normative structures, and “such relationships connect hijras all over India, and there is a constant movement of individuals who visit their gurus and fictive kin in different cities” (Nanda 36). The question posed then to the scholars who propose “The queer world [as] a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance” is on how to understand hijras when the
opposite is both sought and woven into the fabric of their position. There may not be an answer to this except to perhaps recognize that this world-making still presents a binary in which hijras do not find a place.

Hijras perhaps then embody what Muñoz calls disidentification or a tactical misrecognition in which hijras consciously view themselves as women in an example of what he calls interiorized passing (Muñoz 106). Disidentification is a “reformatting of self within the social. It is a third term that resists the binary of identification and counter identification” (Muñoz 97) and may well apply to hijras as it seems to arise from a situation similar to them, albeit many centuries after. While hijra's role requires them to dress as women and they use public systems and conveniences in place for women, they don’t identify as women and claim hermaphroditic status (Nanda 38). Nanda calls hijra behaviour “burlesques of female behaviour” that involves exaggerated and dress and mannerisms and “coarse and abusive speech and gestures in opposition to the Hindu ideal of demure and restrained femininity” (Nanda 38). According to Muñoz, drag performance performs femininity, which is not the exclusive domain of a socially normative female, and “the “woman” produced in drag is not a woman, but instead a public disidentification with woman” (Muñoz 108). Without falling into the trap of identifying hijra lives as or with drag, it is argued that disidentification is a useful way to think about hijras in terms of gender performance. Hijras are notorious for exposing or threatening to expose their mutilated genitals to take money from an unresponsive public and thus “have both auspicious functions and inauspicious potential” (Nanda 40). Muñoz claims of Vaginal Davis that “Her uses of humor and parody function as disidentificatory strategies whose effect on the dominant public sphere is that of a counterpublic terrorism” (100) and similar claims can be made about the ‘shameless’ and thoroughly ‘unfeminine’ behaviour of hijras.

The opportunity to engage in sexual intercourse with men alongside security through organization and acceptance may be what attracts many hijras to the community in the first place (Nanda 48). Hijra elders keep a tight control over sexual activity as this is seen to compromise their socio-religious functions. Many hijras who engage in sex work claim that it has become an economic necessity due in the absence of patrons of their traditional role, that “declining family size and the spread of Western values, which undermine belief in their powers, also contributes to their lowered economic position, making prostitution necessary” (Nanda 49). Addressing Hijras requires stepping outside the prevalent binarism (including lack thereof) in western transgender studies into an acceptance of something that is liminal to the gender binary but doesn’t challenge gender differentiation per se. Hijras do not present a solution to oppressive gender structures but do not comfortably reside within them either, “Where western culture feels uncomfortable with contradictions and makes strenuous attempts to resolve them, Hinduism allows opposites to confront each other without a resolution…it is this…that provides a context for hijras” (Nanda 53). Much needs to be done to remedy the health, social and economic situation of the hijra community but this requires a change in societal thinking. With increasing modernization, the religious importance of hijras is not enough to maintain respect for them but religion provides a cultural context with which to recognize histories and build acceptance into the fabric of modern culture and society.
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The Limitations and Problems of the Feminist Antipornography Movement

Kathleen Burdo

Pornography is most often examined through a feminist framework as a site of gender oppression. While women’s oppression is an important issue to tackle, this is a very limited approach. There are three main problems with the feminist antipornography movement: one, the antipornography movement is inherently classist and therefore politically problematic; two, in focusing so narrowly on gender oppression, it ignores other potential issues; and three, it fails to look at the differences between heterosexual pornography and gay and lesbian pornography, and in doing so does a great injustice to the potential positive aspects of gay and lesbian pornography.

Classism in Feminist Antipornography Movement

Laura Kipnis, in her essay “Disgust and Desire: Hustler Magazine,” discusses the issue of Western feminism as a white and upper-class women’s movement, and claims that “another reason the feminist antipornography movement is so politically problematic” is that it expresses disgust at pornography and attempts to regulate sexual imagery (Kipnis 140). The disgust and distaste that many feminists have expressed in regards to pornography, and particularly Andrea Dworkin in her extensive writings about the disgust she feels at semen (Kipnis 140), is an example of how, historically, social classes have remained distinct from one another. The middle and upper classes find these bodily fluids and these acts to be too animalistic, not civilized enough; they find them to be obscene and so try to regulate them by imposing a universal set of sexual norms (the idea that pornography and BDSM are always oppressive to women, for example). As long as the discourse of the feminist antipornography movement includes discourse on obscenity and a language of disgust, the issue of class will remain a formative blinder for Western Feminism (Kipnis 140).

What’s Missing in This Picture?

In focusing on pornography as a site of gender oppression and in only analyzing heterosexual pornography, antipornography feminists quickly remind us that they are white, heterosexual, middle-class, and in their twenties or early thirties. A great many areas of analysis are ignored, including race, ethnicity, class, age, (dis)ability, and trans issues. I will examine some of these issues, with a focus on race and ethnicity and the conflation of race/ethnicity with class, as well as a brief discussion of the issue of ageism, in order to better illustrate the point that there is more to worry about in pornography than simply gender oppression.

A Few of the Missing Pieces of the Puzzle

Problems with race/ethnicity, class, and age occur in both heterosexual and gay and lesbian pornography. Given the status quo in the United States, it is logical that pornography, including gay and lesbian pornography, accommodate the racist, classist, and ageist norms and attitudes that are so deeply imbedded in the American psyche. Both gay pornography and heterosexual pornography do to some extent “valorize these regressive conditions of racism and ageism” (Burger 53).

Race and Ethnicity: Most pornography is marketed toward white male viewers, whether heterosexual or gay (Burger 54, Fung 210), which becomes immediately problematic when race or ethnicity becomes a theme of the film, as it often does in gay pornography, or when a multi-racial pornography is produced.

Black men and women both are endowed by society with a “threatening hypersexuality” (Fung 208). The portrayal of Black sexuality is as such: “the Black male as brute and potential rapist;
the Black woman, as Jezebel whore” (Pilgrim). Pornography, Pilgrim argues, only serves to validate the idea of the Black woman as a Jezebel whore: sexually insatiable, animalistic, and always available (Pilgrim). Both Black men and Latinos are stereotyped as being super-endowed (Burger 56), and Black men are often dehumanized and reduced to a penis (Fung 209).

While the Black man is conflated with the penis, the Asian man has no sexuality and so there is a striking lack down there (Fung 209). The Asian man is constructed as “harmless and sexless” (Burger 56). Instead, Asian and anus are conflated in gay pornography—Asians are always depicted as bottoms being fucked by a white man, and almost never the other way around (Fung 211). Asian women are also stereotyped as being passive and sexually compliant (Fung 209). Renee Tajima discusses the Lotus Blossom/Dragon Lady dichotomy of Asian women, saying “Asian women in film are, for the most part, passive figures who exist to serve men, especially as love interests for white men (Lotus Blossoms) or as partners in crime with men of their own kind (Dragon Ladies)” (Tajima). Because of Asians being represented as passive and sexless, there is a noticeable lack of sexual relationships between Asian women and Asian men in film broadly and pornography specifically (Tajima).

Class: Race and ethnicity are often conflated with class, and pornography is no exception to this. Thus, those of a non-white race are clearly also of a lower class than the whites in the films. For example, the Asian is often younger (thus implying less economic power) and his occupation remains unspecified, which the occupation of white actors usually is specified (Fung 216). In some gay pornography, this lack of specification implies that the Asian acts as the “house-boy” to his white lover (Fung 213, 216), which also indicates that the white actor is of substantial enough means to keep a house-boy. The house-boy is a male version of the mail-order Asian bride, which falls under the same principles: Asians come from such economically deprived situations that white men can buy them and keep them as they like. Also, Latino men as often depicted as either farmers or criminals in gay pornography.

Age: The ageism in pornography is worth mentioning despite the lack of available research on it. A common theme in pornography is the apparent youth of the actors, particularly the female actors in heterosexual porn and the male actors in gay porn. Both are always attractive and young, and in most cases porn actors retire in their mid-twenties (Burger 57). The lack of porn actors past their late twenties or early thirties is problematic and clearly reinforces our society’s ideals of youth and beauty.

These racist, ethnocentric, classist, and ageist themes in pornography must be regarded as “current examples of the inequities of the dominant social order trickling down into the minorities it oppresses” (Burger 59). Even gay and lesbian communities are not immune to these prejudices that are so deeply imbedded in our culture. Clearly, gender is not the only issue we find in pornography.

Heterosexual vs. Gay and Lesbian Porn

The two most well-known antipornography feminists, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, only discuss heterosexual pornography, nearly always involving penetrative sex. They both make gross generalizations about “pornography,” implicitly indicating that all pornography is heterosexual, and thus perpetuating heterosexism and heteronormativity. MacKinnon, in “Not a Moral Issue,” states that “pornography, in the feminist view, is a form of forced sex...an institution of gender inequality...pornography institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, which fuses the eroticization of dominance and submission with the social construction of male and female” (MacKinnon, 148). Clearly, MacKinnon is discussing pornography that involves a man and a woman. Similarly, Dworkin, in “Men Possessing Women,” states that “Male power is the raison d’être of pornography; the degradation of the female is the means of achieving this power (“Dworkin, 423). Both discuss only heterosexual porn yet make gross generalizations about pornography as a site of
gender oppression, leading to rape and other such ills. If there’s no degradation of the female because there is no female in the pornography, or there are only females and no males to enforce the degradation, what becomes of these feminist arguments against pornography, other than to reduce them to the language of disgust obscenity, which, as previously noted, is classist and politically problematic? This narrow focus on heterosexual pornography doesn’t acknowledge the distinct relations and realities of gay and lesbian pornography.

The Importance of Pornography for Gays and Lesbians

The representation of gays and lesbians in explicitly gay and lesbian pornography has been more positive than negative on the whole. Not only do gay men and lesbians benefit personally from seeing their sexuality represented, but both gay and lesbian pornography are subversive to gender oppression by exaggerating or ignoring gender roles. A large part of being a “real” man or a “real” woman is having sex with someone of the opposite gender than oneself, so if the actors/actresses on the screen are of the same gender, this is an immediate blow against compulsory heterosexuality and the conflation of gender and sexuality.

Particularly, contrary to popular belief that the butch/femme dyad is only enforcing gender roles on non-heterosexual relations, it is an important way of subverting these gender roles. In exaggerating the traditional feminine and traditional masculine gender roles, the unnaturalness of these cultural constructions is highlighted (Dolan 165). On a more personal level, Butler claims that “the figure, or idea, of the butch is and has always been the visible marker of lesbianism” [her emphasis] (Butler 169). The butch serves to authenticate the pornography as lesbian, rather than a heterosexual pornography where sex between two women is used as an appetizer to the main course of penetrative sex between a man and a woman (Butler 168), and helps for lesbians watching the pornography to identify with it.

Jeffrey G. Sherman even goes so far as to argue that “pornography—at least gay male pornography—is to be valued as serving a social good: It enables its consumers to realize satisfying, nurturing sexual lives” (Sherman 662). He argues that gay male pornography helps gay men to accept and embrace their desire to have sex with other men in a positive manner and to develop a positive gay identity, very important things in a heterosexist and homophobic society (Sherman 682). It also serves as an important source of information about sex for gay men (Sherman 682).

The feminist antipornography movement is limited and politically problematic, and should be reexamined to include the many other factors that intersect to make up identities. Pornography is often problematic in many ways, but it is also important to acknowledge the positive aspects of pornography. Despite many issues in both gay and lesbian pornography, gay men and lesbians can see positive representations of themselves as opposed to the negative representations they must face in their everyday life. This is very important to their acceptance of themselves and their sexual desires. Not only does the feminist antipornography movement ignore important issues such as racism and ageism, it also reinforces classism and provides a barrier to self-acceptance for gay men and lesbians. Somehow, I don’t find that to be tactically useful or socially progressive.
Bibliography


Queer World-making: One Facebook Profile at a Time

Yun Gao

Facebook.com is a “social utility” site that has skyrocketed in popularity. Perhaps the reader of this paper has heard of it, or even uses it already. On Facebook, users create profiles, where they can specify their “gender” as either “male” or “female”, and also select whether they are sexually interested in men, women, or both. However, this default system of self-identification relies on pre-existing binary notions of sex, gender, and orientation, which has resulted in the exclusion and lack of representation of users identifying outside of these binaries.

After Facebook allowed individual users to create their own programs for others to use, one user, Rebecca Bettencourt, created an application titled the “SGO”, short for “Sex-Gender-Orientation”. Since June 2007, over 8000 Facebookers have installed the SGO in order to properly represent themselves by distinguishing and specifying their own sex, gender identity, orientation, and more. This paper intends to argue that the SGO application is a successful attempt at queering Facebook, due to its ability to remain true to queer theory’s principles while still addressing many of its limitations, all the while remaining a promising example of international queer world-making.

Firstly, before the heady issue of queer world-making is tackled, the SGO’s queerness must be described. One area of significance is its separation of gender identity from sex as a possible category of identification. This distinction contradicts the default system imposed by Facebook, which follows the popular conception that sex (which is a biological property) is synonymous with gender (which is socially constructed). The anti-normative position adopted by the SGO could also be described as being distinctly queer, in that queerness is often described as a denaturalization of dominant and normative beliefs.

Another cornerstone of queer theory is its denaturalization of identity, which usually is seen as natural, real, and fixed. For example, Michel Foucault has theorized sexuality as not a “natural given”, but as a “historical construct” that is culturally produced. Following this line of reasoning, queer theorists ultimately question the merit of identity categories and identity politics, since all they resemble are, according to Judith Butler, “instruments of regulatory regimes”.

The SGO has adopted this line of thinking in queering Facebook, by giving users a literally unlimited amount of freedom to represent themselves with self-fashioned identities, in the form of blank customizable spaces. Admittedly, the SGO does not question the so-called “realness” of identity and point out its constructedness. However, it still adheres to queer theory in its opposition to imposed identification schemes and identity politics. With SGO, users can eschew the rigid binary options imposed on them by Facebook and instead fashion their own original identities. For example, Facebook might limit a person to describing herself only as a “female interested in women”, known in dominant discourse as a lesbian. In contrast, with the SGO, this same user can craft her own identity however and whenever she wishes, describing herself as a “fagatronic lipstick butch” one day and perhaps a “hyper-masculine femme” the next. Alternatively, a user can opt to select from a drop-down menu the gender identity of “fluid”. Thus, although no one’s subjectivity

7 Ibid., 91.
can truly go uninfluenced by one’s surrounding ideologies and power, this ability to establish an original identity for oneself, or to change it as one desires, or to specify a refusal to identify as anything at all, still demonstrates a very queer freedom from identity politics and Facebook’s imposed regulatory schemes of identification.

Despite the SGO’s adherence to major tenets in queer theory, it still manages to avoid some of its shortcomings. For example, queer theory has been accused of excluding transgender issues and the everyday problems of transpeople. The problem arises from its tendency to emphasize desire over an innate sense of identity, which is not only contrary to transgender theory, but can also be seen as an attempt to completely deny transgender existence. For example, Viviane Namaste criticizes Judith Butler’s treatment of transpeople as mere “allegory”, and by extension, her inability to acknowledge the very real violence that transpeople face due to their lack of gender normativity. In contrast, the SGO contains numerous fields designed with trans-inclusivity in mind, such as options to fill in one’s sex, gender identity, transition status, and desired titles and pronouns, all the while still allowing queer cispeople to express themselves. Thus, at least in this aspect, the SGO’s queerness is one that balances queer identity fluidity with trans ideas of innateness, one that responds to Susan Stryker’s challenge to consider transgender theory as non-normative as queer theory is.

It has not been solely transgender theorists who have criticized queer theory’s lack of practicality: Numerous people have criticized queer theory for its academic elitism and disregard for the everyday problems that some queers face. Despite its adherence to queer theory, the SGO has managed to make itself far more accessible. It and Facebook itself are open to people from all backgrounds, not simply those in academia. Furthermore, one does not need to be well-versed in queer theory to use it. For example, rather than simply assuming that people would already have the academic background to understand certain words and concepts tossed around in the SGO (take the word “genderqueer” or “genderfuck”, for example), its FAQ actually defines all terms in an effort to be as accessible as possible. The SGO also aims to be practical. It acknowledges the homophobia that numerous queers face every day by giving users the option of specifying the people they are out and not out to, while also offering strict privacy settings and blacklists to control just who can access a user’s SGO information. For a semi-closeted queer, these practical considerations could be essential for their comfort and safety. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the SGO allows users to fill in fields describing their desired pronouns and titles, which certainly could be practical for some transpeople.

Individually, Facebook users have installed the SGO to represent themselves in a manner not granted to them by Facebook. However, in the process, not only have they successfully queered their own Facebook profiles, but they have also demonstrated the potential queer world-making power of the SGO. Queer world or culture-building can be described as the creation of public spaces in which heterosexuality and normative ideas of binary systems are destabilized and denaturalized, thus permitting safe and open expression and exploration of other sexualities. But
what makes the SGO a potential queer world-making tool, opposed to simply a more localized example of the queering of individual Facebook profile pages?

One major asset is the medium: Through the internet and Facebook, the SGO provides an opportunity for queers to socialize and congregate publicly. For example, when a user enters a term into a field, the term becomes hyperlinked, so that users can look for other people who have entered the same identifiers. This method for queers to find each other follows Foucault’s theorizations on discourse: Because every term gets hyperlinked, some of them will become more popularized and re-circulated, creating a reality with which SGO users can find each other. Ultimately, these internet associations lead to the formation of a queer counterpublic that is “infinitely accessible” yet still capable of existing independently from the dominant identificatory structure of Facebook.

Additionally, according to Facebook’s pressroom, 54 million people world-wide use Facebook. The queer discourse created by the SGO has the potential to spread further to these people inhabiting different regions of the world, who may not yet have been exposed to such discourse before. Certain aspects of the SGO seem to keep this internationalization in mind. For example, in the field of gender identity, users can select “bigender”, “third”, or “fourth”, or they can of course create their own identities. The inclusion of these “alternate genders” represents the SGO’s efforts at considering non-Westerners as potential SGO users as well. It moves beyond what Shivananda Khan calls a West-centric view of “gender diomorphic structures”. One cannot help but compare the international flavor of the SGO’s queer world-making attempts with those already made by the American Queer Nation. Not only is Queer Nation fairly militant and focused on identity politics to the exclusion of many in the population, but its attempts to queer and reclaim heteronormative public spaces are limited to localized American metropolitans where Queer Nation branches already exist.

Already, there is an indicator of the potential success of the SGO’s queer world-building effects. 10.6% and 3.6% of SGO users describe their orientation as “straight” and “heteroflexible”, respectively. What is significant is not that these hetero-leaning users can still represent themselves accurately with an application as queer as the SGO, but that they are choosing to do so in the first place. They are acknowledging the limitations and presumptions inherent in Facebook’s identification system and are thus deliberately eschewing it, despite their heterosexuality and heterosexual privilege. How can the SGO not be described as beginning to queer the world at large when one already observes how it is beginning to queer self-identified heterosexuals?

However, as promising as this information sounds, one must remember that the SGO can be co-opted and lose its queer guiding principles. The queer counterpublic that the SGO is creating must exist within the dominant structure of Facebook. And though Facebook markets itself as a “social utility”, its guiding principle is still to generate a profit. The same hyperlinking that allows the creation of a counterpublic in the first place can also be used to target queers as consumers, leading to a commercialization of queer theory, much in the same way the commercialization of gay culture has led to the creation of exclusive, homonormative gay villages. One hopes that the

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16 Cameron, Deborah, and Kulick, Don, Language and Sexuality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.
identity fluidity and diversity and the freedom of self-representation that the SGO offers will be
enough to overcome this.

This possible commercialization still is not enough to discount the SGO’s queer world-
making potential. The SGO has already queered individual Facebook profiles in its refusal to adhere
to identity politics or follow normative understandings of sex, gender, and orientation, all the while
still managing to address certain criticisms of queer theory. If one contemplates the complete
absence of boundaries on the internet, it becomes fairly easy to see how the SGO’s queering of
Facebook can be extended towards queer world-building as well. It is impressive that what could
potentially be an influential queer world-making movement originally arose as an individual
grassroots project, as a single computer program known as the SGO.

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On the Contemporary Representation of Gay and Lesbians in Popular Media

Sam Mickelson

During the past decade there has been an enormous increase of gay representation in the media and more specifically in television programming. Surely, the increased visibility has produced a greater acceptance of the queer community. However, what must be taken into account in the observation of this trend are the social and moral guidelines which influence it. That is to say that this representation is only successful insofar as it recognizes certain aspects of the queer community. Therefore, my intent in this paper is to argue that although increased homosexual visibility in the mainstream has certainly led to greater acceptance, it has in turn created a new homonormativity that has obscured less recognized queer identities. Katherine Sender’s documentary, *Further Off the Straight and Narrow* provides examples of this trend in television and the extent to which it has increased acceptance of homosexuality in the mainstream. It is also necessary to cite Annamarie Jagose’s explanation of performativity in her book, *Queer Theory* as this concept relates to some of the motives behind homosexual representation in media. As stated above, this shift in increased gay visibility has in turn generated a ‘new homonormativity’ which deals with the suppression of less-conforming queer individuals. In her article, “Sex Sells: Sex, Class, and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media” Katherine Sender gives a concise explanation of this phenomenon. Jon Binnie and David Bell elaborate on it further and its relevance to urban-economic interests in their article “Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance.” Furthermore, in her article, “Queer Publicity” Patricia White uses the example of queer film festivals to show that the current image of homosexuality has been shaped by the media.

Let us first identify the trend of gay representation in the media through its manifestations. In *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*, Sender notes that it really gained influence when Ellen DeGeneres came out on her sitcom, *Ellen* in 1997.\(^1\) Although the program was cancelled in 1998, *Will and Grace* began short after. From that point queer visibility began to increase at a rapid rate as other programs began to incorporate gay characters. In the same documentary, Howard Buford makes a few important points with regards to the positive aspects of the trend. He says:

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\text{We’re dealing in a country [the United States] where our popular culture really rules and…it’s a country where you don’t exist unless you are on TV…and the very fact that we’re present on TV, in advertising or in the content in the programming makes us real. The imagery has not always been the best; it has not always been the deepest. But the very fact that we were talked about openly…was very…important.}^2
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Buford certainly raises a few important points here. Even though the publicity that is given on television does not usually portray homosexuals most accurately, it still remains that they have gained visibility in the general public. In consequence, this lets people know that queer culture is certainly a reality and it also sheds light on the strengths of the homosexual characters that are portrayed. A good example of this effect can be taken from the reality program, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Sender notes that it gives credit to gay men for their skills such as, fashion and aesthetic savvy. She says:

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\(^1\) *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*

\(^2\) *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*
A great deal was made about *Queer Eye* and whether it was just perpetuating gay stereotypes and I think a couple of things get lost in this argument. Here it’s the straight men that have the problem who need to be fixed, it’s not the gay guys.3

Moreover, *Queer Eye* shows an acceptance of certain aspects of queer culture as it recognizes that although homosexuals do not conform to society’s heteronormative structure, they have gained an accepted place in society.

It is not merely enough to cite examples of this trend, but it is equally important to understand why it has been possible. An explanation to this can be found in Judith Butler’s theory of performativity which Annamarie Jagose expands on in her book, *Queer Theory*. She writes “…one of its [*Gender Trouble*] most influential achievements is to specify how gender operates as a regulatory construct that privileges heterosexuality…”4 That is, in this quote Jagose makes note that the idea of gender itself is performative and it only seems natural as a result of its perennial occurrence in societal conventions. With regards to the recent phenomenon of gay visibility in the media, television programs with gay plots perform acceptance by portraying lifestyles that are not reflective of heteronormative conventions. In *Further Off the Straight and Narrow* Larry Gross makes note of this idea with the example of *Will and Grace*. He says, “They’re not very gay… there is certainly no gay community, there’s no visible sex, at least not any visible gay sex. So it really is in a sense performing acceptance rather than breaking any taboos.”5 Therefore, it does not completely adhere to Butler’s theory since the intention is not to subvert the heteronormative structure of society, but rather to legitimate the gay lifestyle as a particular aspect of it. Nevertheless, there is certainly an element of performativity in the trend. It is also important to note that the characters represented in such television programs conform to moral and social guidelines. That is, as stated above a show such as, *Will and Grace* makes no attempt to denaturalize societal institutions, but to rather gain an acceptance on grounds of respectability.

This idea of the respectable gay individual can be seen as a manifestation of homonormativity. In Katherine Sender’s article “Sex Sells: Sex, Class, and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media” she notes Gayle Rubin’s theory of the ‘charmed circle’ of sex to help put forth the concept of homonormativity. She writes:

> In her seminal essay “Thinking Sex,” Gayle S. Rubin offers us a model with which to analyze the intersections between social and sexual stratification. She addresses the processes whereby some sexual practices are legitimized inside the ‘charmed circle’ of sex: According to this system, sexuality that is ‘good,’ ‘normal,’ and ‘natural’ should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial.6

Sender adds that the ‘charmed circle’ provides no room for any ‘non-normative’ models. Moreover, she notes that Rubin’s theory has translated over into queer discourse. That is, homosexuality has certainly gained respectability through increased public representation and thus adopted its own ‘charmed circle’ which purports the ideal homosexual as “vanilla, coupled, and monogamous.”7 The charmed gay circle then leaves no room for less accepted queer variants such as, transgender people and the BDSM scene which are rarely represented in the mainstream media.

David Bell and Jon Binnie provide elaboration on homonormativity as it relates to the entrepreneurial agendas of urban cities in their article, “Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship,

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3 *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*
4 Jagose, Annamarie, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, 83
5 *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*
6 Sender, Katherine, “Sex Sells: Sex, Class, and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media,” 332
7 Sender, Katherine, “Sex Sells: Sex, Class, and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media,” 332
Urbanism and Governance,” They argue that metropolitan cities have marketed homosexuality because it is profitable for economic interests. Further, they contend that this process has suppressed the representation of less recognized queer identities. In this quote they clarify the idea of homonormativity as a marketing tool for the urban city’s entrepreneurial agenda:

The future of most cities depends on their being desirable places for consumers to live…Sexual others are also clearly constructed as agents of consumer citizenship—not least given the pink economy discourse, plus the discussions of global gay tourism, the globalization of Pride/Mardi Gras mega-events and so on.

In other words, in a world that is controlled by globalization, urban governments need to market certain trends such as, “the hipness” of homosexuality in order to attract consumers to their cities. They also show that this process has as a result suppressed other parts of queer culture. They write, “The new publicity of more mainstream manifestations of gay consumer cultures—thoroughfares, street cafés, trendy bars, themed gay villages—has driven the less assimilated queers underground…” That is to say that in this attempt to capitalize on the increased acceptance of gays, the less recognized homosexual identities have been left out of the agenda.

Another good manifestation of homonormativity in the media can be taken from Patricia White’s article about gay film festivals, “Queer Publicity”. In it she considers the limits that these festivals put on queer identity. That is, once again here is an instance where certain parts of queer culture are excluded from visibility in the media. This point is best exemplified when she notes Eric O. Clarke’s essay “Queer Publicity and the Limits of Inclusion,” which addresses the effect that the media has in shaping queer culture. She writes, “…lesbian and gay film festivals present an opportunity to think about the concept of publicity because the term’s commercial, media-oriented sense clearly overlaps with the sense of having a voice in the rational-political public sphere.” By building on Clarke’s assertions, White shows that queer politics has essentially become influenced by the wants of the media and in this process, it has lost some of its initial aims such as, representing the culture as a whole. She adds, “If the media seem to be ‘all about’ homosexuality at the moment, homosexuality seems increasingly to be all about media.”

To conclude, the recent trend of gay and lesbian representation in the mainstream media has produced a greater visibility of the queer community. Television programs such as, Will and Grace are prime examples of this trend as they perform gay lifestyles which in effect perform their own acceptance. At the same time however, the homosexual figures that are represented in these programs are subject to social and moral conventions and as a result, the visibility of less “respectable” queer variations has been suppressed. This practice which involves marketing only certain aspects of the queer community has led to a new phenomenon called homonormativity. It is certainly evident in every media example that has been cited as well as part of the entrepreneurial agendas which urban governments have in order to make their cities more desirable for consumers. In spite of this, the increased visibility of gays and lesbians in the media must not be viewed negatively. Instead, we must recognize an obligation to re-approach homosexual representation in the media with a more holistic perspective that incorporates the fringe aspects of queer society.

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8 Binnie, Jon, Bell, David, “‘Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance,’” 1807
9 Binnie, Jon, Bell, David, “‘Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance,’” 1809
10 Binnie, Jon, Bell, David, “‘Authenticating Queer Space: Citizenship, Urbanism and Governance,’” 1810
11 White, Patricia, “Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,” 75
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The Representation of Drag-Queen in Queer as Folk (U.S version)

Aurélien Mazuy

Queer as Folk is originally a TV-show from the United-Kingdom but it has been adapted into a new American version. It is a story about a group of gay friends and a lesbian couple living in Pittsburgh. Through the five seasons, the show deals with issues that can be found in the gay community: the “coming out”, children with gay parents, AIDS, homophobia, politics, etc. I would like to analyse the way they present those issues and specifically the Drag-Queen representation. For this purpose, I have chosen a specific episode- #204 – in which Michael, the main character, accepts to march in the Pride Parade with his mother but he changes his mind because his colleagues from work, including his boss, would be there. At the end of the episode, he finally goes to the parade and talks to his colleagues but as a Drag-Queen and not as Michael. During this episode, Godiva, a popular Drag Queen of Pittsburgh’ gay community comes to die from AIDS.

I intend to argue, through an analysis of this specific episode, that Queer as Folk (QAF) affirms a partial view of the Drag and is clearly opposite to the type of Drag Muñoz is. Therefore, I will begin by discussing the fact that the Drag appears to be an outdated phenomena and showing that the Drag reflects the stereotyped woman. Then I will look at Drag as an entertainer.

The paper is to show the different visions of the Drag Queen. For this, the script is important but also the images.

To begin, the episode presents Drag as an outdated phenomenon. It refers to the beginnings of the Gay movement and the characters of the show do not seem to want to perpetuate it. It is possible to demonstrate it by two major points: the analysis of the vocabulary and the reference to a Black Drag Queen – Godiva.

First, it is the first parade for Jason, the younger character, who is really new into the Gay scene. For this reason, he does not know yet the icon of Pittsburgh whom is Godiva. Emmett, another gay character, is giving him an explanation of “Gay History 101.” He explains his first meeting with Godiva, when he was young, and the fact that she is the one who introduces him “to everyone and everything including [my] first pride.” If I draw a parallel between Emmett and Jason for their first Pride, there is a difference: the one who introduces Jason to the Pride are his group of gay friends, not a Drag Queen. The introduction into one ritual of the mainstream Gay life is not done by the same person, time has changed. Moreover, the presentation of Godiva as a main character of “Gay History 101” implies the point that even if she is important into the Community History, she belongs to the past. As an extension, it is possible to say that the death of Godiva at the end of the episode marks a new era in which Drag is not so important. The place of Drag Queen in the Gay Community is a debate that took place several times, as during the 1950’s when the Mattachine Society wanted to promote the image of a homosexual that can fit into the heteronormative model and does not have to differentiate himself from the mainstream society. Some Gay Pride Organizers also intended not to permit Drag to march due to a possible “negative image” on the gay community.

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1 This is the version chosen for the paper.
2 Debbie. Episode 204. 1min32s.
3 Emmett. Episode 204. 2min20s.
5 Namaste, Viviane. “Tragic Misreadings”: Queer Theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity in
Second, Godiva is a black Drag Queen (cf photo 1) and it makes me think to Tongues Untied by Riggs in which the idea that a lot of Black Gays used to turn into Drag Queen when they discovered their homosexuality. It was a way to turn their back to their “homophobic community.” According to Riggs, it happened very often. This idea is reinforced by the movie Paris is Burning in which we can see Black Drags and Transsexuals competing in the balls. Nevertheless, at the end of Tongues United the message is that things have changed and the “snow period” during which the Blacks wanted to look like Whites and love Whites is no longer accurate: “Black men love Black men: that is the revolution” (message at the end of the movie). The Drag of Muñoz, for me, is the evidence that the Black Drag Queen is not the same anymore and what QAF presents is an old model.

The Drag presented in QAF contrasts with the Muñoz model because he demonstrates that Drag Queen are still important and active in the gay community today and the will to look like a White person is something from the past. The episode also tends to give a very specific idea of what is a Drag Queen.

To continue, the Drag in the show reflects a stereotyped woman. This statement is based on the analysis of the appearance but also of the speech pattern. It is important to note that a Drag chose to represent a model but there is not only one.

First, the Drag in QAF is dressed in “bra […] dress […] and […] high heel shoes” (cf photos 1;3;5;6) and cares about her make-up: “Don’t smudge my make-up” declares Michael to his mother. They try to do their best to look like as a specific woman: the White sophisticated one (cf photo 6). It is exactly the same in Paris is Burning, where the Drag identifies with the models of the Fashion Industry Hollywood actresses. But this type of women is a specific one: it is the woman-object, White, but above all, she represents an ideal of femininity and female beauty. It is not only Michael who looks like this but also the other Drags we can see in the gay bar (cf photo 5). This representation is in total opposition with Vagina, the terrorist Drag of Muñoz who can wear some feminine clothes, as the bra, but she does not want to look like this hypersophisticated woman. She mixes the genre and could wear military uniform or a leather jacket with a fake beard.

Second, the QAF Drag does not only look like an ideal woman but also speaks what Lakoff calls “The Women Language.” According to this author, it is possible to identify a woman through fourteen specific characteristics. I will demonstrate how the QAF Drag fits into this model, and including quotations of Godiva from Emmett, with three characteristics:
“woman are more indirect and polite as men”; “Honey if I have to wheel myself out there on a board like “Porgy and Bess’ I am goin’”\textsuperscript{15} / “It takes more courage to wear a dress for an hour than it takes to wear a suit for a lifetime.”\textsuperscript{16} Godiva uses metaphor.

“Women make more use of expressive forms”; “Now, you’ve got Godiva like the chocolate: Dark & Sweet”.

“More of women’s communication is expressed nonverbally (by gesture and intonation)”: Here it is interesting to analyse the comportment of Michael. He is THE character who tries to avoid all signs of potential visible homosexuality in his way of being, speaking, dressing, drinking beer (cf photo 4)... He is under this “compulsory heteronormativity”\textsuperscript{17} which makes acting in a specific way. Nevertheless, it is impossible to reach the perfection of the masculinity.\textsuperscript{18} When he is in a Drag Queen, he is really someone else, and moves, expresses himself with his hands and a new specific voice tone. He really looks like one of his employees imitating a Drag Queen (cf photo 2).

Vagina in her different shows does not try to change her voice at all. Moreover, the Lakoff model has been criticized a lot because gender is not directly linked with one specific pattern of language. We can refer to Cameron and Kulick who give three counter-examples in which the language associated with a specific gender could be use by the other one.\textsuperscript{19} Many feminists argue that Drag is negative for the image of women as ridiculization and degradation of them.\textsuperscript{20}

Those elements tend to demonstrate the image of the Drag Queen in QAF, which is one who wants to look like the White Upper-class women as Adrienne Rich wrote.\textsuperscript{21} It is still a major difference with Muñoz but there is an ultimate one.

To finish, Drag is presented in QAF as an entertainer. Drag Queens in this episode are at specific places and their role is to be “glamour” and “clown” which is in opposition with the Muñoz’ Drag.\textsuperscript{22}

First, the episode takes place during the Pittsburgh Parade which is a specific event in the year. It is like a Gay Carnival (as some Gay Prides are called. E.g.: Sydney Mardi-Gras) and Drags are here to “add some colour” in the parade. The fact is that representation does not allow someone to be Drag but only to be disguised as a Drag. It is only for the show, not for your life. This is again a misrepresentation of the entire Drag community: most of them do not dress like Drag only for few hours, once a year, as Michael does at the end of the episode. Drag has much more to do with a lifestyle; it is a way of being.

Second, the Drag in QAF is seen as an entertainer and specifically for the heterosexual audience. The exchange between Michael and one employee directly reflects this:

“Why don’t you come with us to the pansy parade? (cf photo 2 for his move) / It is not my scene (Michael)/Think it’s ours?/You mean check out the freaks (the boss)/Gotta admit it is the party in town (the employee)\textsuperscript{23}. They only see Drag as a performer and enjoy it. Do you think they will

\textsuperscript{15} Emmett. Episode 204. 21min10s.
\textsuperscript{16} Emmett. Episode 294. 31min24s.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid 14. 59-72.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid 4.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid 9.
\textsuperscript{23} Episode 204. 9min18s.
accept the Drag coming to them in a mall, for instance as Queer Nation does to deneutralised and resexualised this place? 24 Namaste Viviane explains how Drag Queens are accepted only as performers. 25 In the episode, the only places where you can see Drags is the parade and gay bars.

Nevertheless, it is possible to draw a parallel between the action of Michael at the end of the episode and what Vag’ does on stage: “a queer act.” 26 In the episode, Michael kisses his boss (cf photo 7) which is a queer act for many reasons: it breaks the rules of the workplace and its hierarchy – Michael kisses his superior and the employees make fun of him, but also his boss is surely kissed for the first time by a man (cf photo 8 for his reaction). Being Drag permits him to do things he would not do in everyday life and goes against the mainstream social rules. That is exactly what Vagina claims to do by juxtaposing her diverse identities and makes her audience think to different current issues. 27

To put it in a nutshell, the Drag Queen presented in *Queer as Folk* has to be seen as a very partial representation. In fact, it is very far from the “terrorist” drag of Muñoz and present Drag Queens as an old phenomena that only appear once a year for the Parade in order to please audiences – straight and gay by reproducing an ideal image of the woman. Nevertheless, Vagina offers a reactualisation of the concept of Drag as a juxtaposition of identities with queer acts. Nevertheless, there is a real lack of social explanation on what could lead someone to BE Drag and not only a performer. Being a Drag Queen is for me, first, an artistic thing – and here I agree with the vision of Drags as an artist – but it also has to do with a reinterpretation of the society in which we are living and this is not to be forgotten. Can Drags be the satiric artists of the Gay Community?

Cited references:


Videos:

Paris is Burning. Jennie Livingston, USA, 71 min. 1990.


Tongues Untied. Marlon Riggs, USA, 55 min. 1996.