

Sprinkle:
**An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist
and Queer Studies**

Vol. 6 – October 2013

The Freire Project:

Critical Cultural Community, Youth, and Media Activism

<http://www.freireproject.org/sprinkle>

Editor-in-Chief

Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D.,
*California Polytechnic State University
School of Education, College of Science and Math*

Guest Editor

Stephanie Troutman, Ph.D.
Berea College, Berea, Kentucky

Editing and Reviewing Team

Naomi Alix Burke
David Cornette
Daniel Service
David Cornette III
Berea College, Berea, Kentucky
www.Berea.edu

Table of Contents

- 3 Editorial
Stephanie Troutman
- 6 Dissecting a Line Deemed Definite: Gender and
Biology in *Oryx and Crake* and *Cannery Row*
Daniel A. Service
- 15 Love is Liable to be Pliable: In(queer)ies on the
Fluidity of Sexuality in William Shakespeare's *The
Merchant of Venice*
Lucas Wilson
- 23 Blondes and Their Hideous Viciousness
Jessica Brown
- 28 Automatic Autonomy or Inherent Injustice?
Jacob Burdette
- 34 Compulsory Monosexuality and the Problematic
Nature of Identity
Joshua Falek
- 43 Out of the Closet, Onto the Pages
Naomi Alix Burke
- 49 Feminism, Celibacy and the Sexual Revolution? An
Autobiography
Katie Fawley
- 57 A Culture of Silence and Exclusion: An Examination
of Heteronormativity and Homophobia in Schools
Ace Eckstein
- 68 A Black Man's Sexual Manifesto
Waylon McDonald

Editorial: *Sprinkle* Guest Edited volume

This issue of *Sprinkle* seeks to engage, resist, reverse and challenge the plethora of binaries (Cartesian Split) that often characterize scholarship. Different from other issues of *Sprinkle*, in this special issue we, the guest editorial board, chose to prioritize 'hybrid' works whose styles reflect personal narrative, creative writing, autobiographical perspectives, and literature combined with a wide-range of academic theories.

I approached Dr. Elizabeth Meyer at the 2012 American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Annual Meeting in Vancouver, Canada to ask about guest editing a special issue of *Sprinkle* with my students at Berea College. Berea College boasts a mission and history of admitting economically disadvantaged Appalachian youth. Fostering the educational growth of Berea College students from 2011-2013 was my privilege. This issue of *Sprinkle* grew out of my personal commitment to the field of Sexuality Studies combined with courses in African American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies that I was teaching at Berea. In those courses I was privy to the students' innovative thinking, writing, and meaning-making practices and I am excited to showcase many Berea College students' scholarship here. We also feature several external submissions that apply conceptual/theoretical lenses from gender and sexuality studies to discuss literary works.

As a student-centered, feminist pedagogue, I believe that when we ask young people- students who are budding intellectuals and emerging scholars, to undertake the work of deep analysis and new knowledge production, we must allow non-conformity in their writing practices. While particular forms of writing have been traditionally valued

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies and legitimized within the academy, part of revolutionizing academic spaces by making classrooms critical and liberating environments means allowing students to find their voice(s) by embracing writing practices that reflect not only a certain level of academic training but that also affirm their creativity and imagination.

While you may find the essays in this issue 'outside the norm' of what is typically published in an academic journal, you may also find them refreshing, bold, and interesting. The essays that appear here are reflect a range of creative scholarly thought developed through multiple, interdisciplinary encounters that highlight literature -- classic and contemporary, Women's and Gender Studies, and Race/Ethnic and Cultural Studies.

Gratitude:

Of course, the task of producing a journal requires patience, organization, teamwork and support. I would like to acknowledge and express a debt of gratitude to the following people, without whom the publication of this special issue would not have been possible:

Dr. Elizabeth Meyer- you gave us the opportunity to shine in to do it in our own, unique way; Dr. Bettina Love for encouraging me to pursue my idea for this special issue; Drs. Beth Crachiolo and Kate Egerton in the English Dept. at Berea College for recommending and encouraging students to participate in this endeavor. Last but not least, I'd like to thank my outstanding editorial board: Naomi 'Alix' Burke, David Cornette, and Daniel Service.

Final Note to Readers & Dedication:

This issue of *Sprinkle* debuts on National Coming Out Day 2013, and we- David, Alix, Daniel and myself, would like to dedicate it to our friends, peers and colleagues who are brave enough to be 'out' and proud in Berea, Kentucky! Furthermore, we dedicate this special issue to several key

Sprinkle, vol. 6

individuals who not only live 'out' and proud in rural Kentucky, but who work *tirelessly* as campus and community activists politically committed to advancing the cause of sexual social justice through the creation of a Fairness Ordinance in Berea, Kentucky: Silas House, Meta Mendel-Reyes, Judith Faulkner, Thom Price, Paolo Capretti, Ethan Hamblin and Sam Gleaves- aka "the downhome divas" and Jonita (Horn) Bolton.

To our readers: ultimately, we hope that the work published here resonates with you and inspires you; we also hope that our work deeply honors the aforementioned members of the Berea and Berea College communities.

In Solidarity,

Dr. Stephanie Troutman

October 4, 2013

Dissecting a Line Deemed Definite: Gender and Biology in *Oryx and Crake* and *Cannery Row*

By: Daniel A. Service

ABSTRACT: This article examines the ongoing conflict between gender and biology through the scientifically centered worlds of *Cannery Row* and *Oryx and Crake*. Despite the attempts of the novels respective characters Crake and Doc to eliminate human nature and social constructs, they are unconsciously influenced by gender norms. Through their interactions with society their limited scientific objectivity in relation to women and gender is exposed. Their narrow understanding of human nature and relationships hinders and isolates them from social interaction. This tension of scientific study versus social construct offers insights into the issues of gender norms and roles, patriarchy, and the conflicting viewpoints of biology and gender in regards to identity.

‘...we’re hormone robots anyway, only we’re faulty ones’
— Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*

The two worlds of *Cannery Row* and *Oryx and Crake* center and engage the reader to the realm of biology, analysis, and picking apart the human animal. Doc, a marine biologist, approaches the various beings of *Cannery Row* through the lens of the marine life he studies. Attuned to a biological eye, everything to him is capable of being broken down and picked apart until all possible pieces are visible. Science offers all answers, and anything it can’t explain doesn’t matter. Crake, a child prodigy, follows this pattern, though goes to a further extreme by finding human nature itself a complete handicap to the survival of the human species. To Crake, the creation of art, individuality, and

Sprinkle, vol. 6

expression are merely attempts to make up for imperfect genetics in hopes of attracting a mate, or in more crude terms “a stab at getting laid” (Atwood 168). The answer to eliminating human nature and everything else that plagues the survival of the human species lies in the science around him. Human nature is a crutch, and must be excised through genetic modification--those unmodified to be eradicated through the Blyssplus pill. These characters view biology as destiny, as an answer to all problems. However, dependence on science only brings them so far. Through interaction with various characters, they expose their limited scientific objectivity in relation to women, gender, and other social constructs they cannot control. This limited scope is immensely hindering to their interactions and experiences, but offer insights into the issues of gender norms and roles, patriarchy, and the conflicting viewpoints of biology and gender in regards to identity.

In *Cannery Row*, minor characters are important in creating the understanding of gender in the world that Doc lives in. Mrs. Malloy --one of few female characters actually explored by Steinbeck--finds herself worrying about how her house appears through her want of curtains (Steinbeck 43). She appeals to the gender binary by focusing on establishing a good appearance of their home for her husband. Mrs. Malloy’s cry of “men just don’t understand how a woman feels.... Men just never try to put themselves in a woman’s place” (Steinbeck 44) enforces there is a divide keeping men from understanding women, and women from understanding men. There is no successful or acceptable way for men to breach that divide without being ostracized. Showing any form of effeminacy, whether through clothing or mannerisms immediately makes a man no longer a man, as he has broken the line created by gender.

The same pressures apply to Gay, who is constantly being hit and terrorized by his wife when he goes to sleep. His only reaction is to beat her, thus putting him in the dominant role where males are supposed to be. However, Gay is intriguing in that he doesn’t like to beat his wife. “Gay

never did take any pleasure beating her up. He only done it to keep his self-respect" (Steinbeck 31). This passage emphasizes the social standards placed on both men and women in the world of *Cannery Row*. Men are always to be dominant, and women are to be submissive. So odd is the relationship between Gay and his wife that Doc remarks "that's a new one" (Steinbeck 31). Gay is eventually forced to move out of his house to live at the Palace Flophouse because of both the social implications of and the anxiety produced from his wife beating and dominating him. The fact that he ends up in the Flophouse, an environment made up entirely of men strengthens Gay's desire to live in a situation that's devoid of femininity, where he is not asked to show his dominance of females through violence.

The Palace Flophouse is a mirror image of Dora's whorehouse. They are both environments created specifically for a single gender, which in the novel—as well as the time of its writing—is interchangeable with sex. As Stephen Asma indicates through the quote of Michael Foucault, "The notion of sex made it possible to group in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and enable one to make use of this fictitious unity as a casual principle" (3). The very environment in which Doc lives offers linear and divided social systems instilled by social interaction. Unsurprisingly, the purposes behind both the Palace Flophouse and Dora's whorehouse are controlled by patriarchal standards: Dora's "sturdy, virtuous club," is the epitome of misogyny (Steinbeck 15). Being a "madam and girl for fifty years," has given Dora many years' worth of being dominant over women, while at the same time appealing to the notion of women being merely objects. Viewing this through Riki Wilchin's *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, gender defined as a "language, a system of meanings and symbols, along with the rules, privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use---for power and sexuality (35) become apparent. Selling girls, despite her noble motivations, still creates a sense of power with Dora, putting her in a role above those she is selling.

Sprinkle, vol. 6

This mentality would appeal to Crake, who has no respect for women, shown through his interactions with Oryx during her time as a school's prostitute (Atwood 309). Crake, "the student, she the service" (310) is parallel to the notion of females as merely property.

One of the reasons behind this mentality is that gender is a binary; meaning to be on one side makes it impossible to be on the other. If gender is solely separated into male/female, as evinced in both Crake and Doc's need to separate and divide, one must inherently be better. For both the answer is male, and thus sets the two worlds as patriarchal. This is understandable considering Atwood based most of the world of *Oryx and Crake* on mainstream media and a western perspective, as explained in Anthony Griffith's article "Genetics According to *Oryx and Crake*" which values men more than women (1). Gay struggling to assert his dominance forces him to move out, whereas Dora gives power to the system of exploitation by being the madam of a whorehouse. Despite that these individuals were created before the rise of feminism and queer theory, they are still under gender's influence.

Oryx and Crake on the other hand, set in a world of speculative fiction--a distant future that is nostalgic, unsettling, and uncannily alarming--is influenced by all of these theories of gender, but still rejects them throws them out the window. Despite the futuristic setting, Crake finds himself influenced by gender norms, even if the Crakers he created are not made aware of them. The sexual practice the Crakers initiate still has the male performing his dominant gender role by insertion, and the female is stuck with her submissive gender role by being receptive of the male (Atwood 165-164). Typical mating practices have not changed. The male is still responsible for insemination and still has all anatomical structures of man. There is a small deviation because females have been given power by being the one to choose whether or not mating occurs. The woman is still responsible for child birth even though the possibility exists within the world of *Oryx and Crake* to deviate from

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
that norm. Females and males are only identified by their anatomical differences. The concept of gender defined by Jan Stets and Peter Burke “as whether or not an individual perceives themselves as more masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society,” (2) no longer applies to the Crakers, as they have no concept of society.

The fact that the Crakers are supposed to be evolutionary perfection easily brings Crake’s opinion of sex and gender to light. In his attempt to destroy the perception of sex “as a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, (Atwood 165) he cut out all social factors, boiling it down to a mere act of biology, though still being unconsciously influenced by gender. Crake’s statement of “Think of an adaptation, any adaptation, and some animal somewhere will have thought of it first” (Atwood 164) indicates gender’s influence. He did not invent new genders or uses of the human body, but stuck with what worked best in terms of biology as well as society. His insistence on making sexual behavior (influenced by gender) “inevitable,” (Atwood 166) confers that there is no deviation from these norms. In theory, the Craker females will always be feminine and rear children and the Craker males will always be dominant, though they will not retain or notice any importance behind this divide.

To Crake, “Symbolic thinking, of any kind would signal downfall” (Atwood 361). Given that gender is defined as a “language, a system of meanings and symbols, along with the rules, privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use---for power and sexuality...” (Wilchins 35) the Crakers have been handicapped. They are limited to basing norms off of biology solely because communication and understanding of these symbols has been snuffed out by Crake’s genetic work. Because of their naivety to how affection, attraction, and sexuality work within a society outside their own, it is understandable why they could not comprehend that a non-Craker woman who “smelled blue,” was not interested – and was actually afraid of--their mating

Sprinkle, vol. 6

ritual (Atwood 364). Their biological perfection presents a flaw in dealing with anyone outside of their own society: a factor Crake did not assume would be important. Their naivety would be eternal without the interaction of Jimmy, an outside source influenced by social and gender norms. His attendance amongst the Crakers proves that the pure biology behind their creation is not truly pure. There is no way to completely cut out social influences, despite Crake's attempts. Much like the eventual failing of the canneries from *Cannery Row*, Crake wants to fish out all the sardines, leaving nothing left but his Crakers.

The Craker men's territorial marking urine is Crake's attempt to solidify gender and sex roles. To Crake "they'd need something important to do, something that didn't involve child-bearing, so they wouldn't feel left out" (Atwood 155). Such an act would mean that each sex is now fulfilling biologically influenced gender roles, or "shared expectations of each gender" (Stets, Jan, and Burke, Peter 1). Men and women now have their places, and biological differences are designed to keep a solid line between those sexes. Each act is specifically designed for a body part that the other does not have- the female, with ovaries and a uterus, is able to bear a child, whereas men use their penises to protect the people, solidifying them in their normative western gender roles.

The biological lens through which Crake views the creation of his Crakers is reminiscent of the starfish that Doc is collecting and documenting. The starfish are in essence their experiment and study, finding comfort in the company of these beings that are not truly human. Much like a child with a magnifying glass they are attempting to dissect and break apart these creatures down to a core and find solace in the bare answers within them. For Crake, the goal is to create a human being that is devoid of human nature, whereas to Doc the answer to find comfort away from human nature, finding more company with the hermit crabs, octopi, and starfish of the Great Tide Pool. Doc finds himself defending the lives of starfish, calling them "complicated and

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
interesting animals” when Hazel claims they’re “just starfish” (Steinbeck 30). In these creatures, Doc is able to perceive “the smells of life and richness, of death and digestion, of decay and birth” (Steinbeck 28). It is the biology that fascinates him, the clock work cycle and concreteness to the world around him. It is during this same conversation with Hazel that Doc’s analytical nature (similar to Crake’s) becomes apparent. “That was the way with Doc. *He* never asked unless he wanted to know and he could not conceive of the brain that would ask without wanting to know” (Steinbeck 30). Attempting to find a concrete answer to gender (if even defining gender at all) would be almost inconceivable to Doc, who views sexual interaction through the lens of the “Starfish [that] emit semen and eggs” (Steinbeck 28). These tide pools offer questions which Doc can answer through science. Interestingly enough, these creatures are viewed without the context of gender, centering on their biological structure and more scientifically simplistic sex and anatomy.

Despite Crake’s scientific struggles to cut out the inherent disability of gender and human nature, and Doc’s attempts to pull away from human nature itself, gender still etches its way into their life. Stephen Asma’s work recognizes that people are inherently geared towards a female gender because all human beings are born from a female template (5). This completely shatters the patriarchy that most characters of *Cannery Row*, as well as those of *Oryx and Crake* follow. Crake’s proposed superiority over women contradicts the scientific field that he studies in. If he were to fall back completely on biology and genetics, then females would be the more revered, as all human beings deviate from that template. Gender introduces ways to help answer questions biology cannot, especially for those born with biologically ambiguous genitalia. Laura Spinney writes of a “gene called r-spondin1 that promotes the development of the ovaries, and that without it individuals who are genetically female grow up physically and psychologically male, although they have ambiguous external genitalia and

Sprinkle, vol. 6

are sterile" (1). For individuals such as this, where parents are asked to decide a child's sex, biology cannot play a part, as the child has been socially determined as either a boy or a girl, even if their anatomy does not necessarily correlate. If a Craker, through some mutation, is born with ambiguous genitalia, the Crakers will have no way to interact with them, because that social aspect has been severed. Spinney concludes her work by conceding that "evolution may explain different aptitudes and behaviors of men and women, but it does not determine them" (5). Biology cannot be manipulated in such a way to create an end all-solution for gender or sex.

Human beings are not the starfish Doc documents and picks apart. There is an inherent necessity for social interactions that biology is unable to provide. . This does not mean that social interactions are the sole answer. There must be a medium, a symbiotic relationship between the two coexisting to promote survival. Conforming to a single way of thinking, as Doc and Crake have done in their dependence on science, halts all chances of progression. The very notion of human nature becomes stagnant and potentially extinct. Humanity will fade away unless more inclusive ways of knowing and perceiving the world are made available and embraced, thus promoting the growth and evolution of human nature.

Daniel Service is a Kentucky native and senior English Literature and Secondary Education double major at Berea College. He is an avid writer of poetry, short stories, and flash fiction. When not teaching, in class, or working for his resident hall, he can be found at the local skate park. A firm advocate for human rights and identity, he plans to continue his education in the form of a Master's in Gender Studies, and then a Ph.D. in Education and Culture. Other works he's written in support of gender and identity include *Noticeably Unnoticeable*, *Cell Walls and Other Barriers*, and *Sheltered and Shattered: A Hijra Story*.

Works Cited

- Asma, Stephen T. "Gauging Gender." *Chronicle Of Higher Education* 58.11 (2011): B6-B9. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 14 Mar. 2012.
- Griffiths, Anthony. "Genetics According To Oryx And Crake." *Canadian Literature* 181 (2004): 192-195. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 15 Mar. 2012.
- Spinney, Laura. "Venus And Mars Collide." *New Scientist* 209.2802 (2011): 42-45. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 14 Mar. 2012.
- Stets, Jan and Burke, Peter. "Feminity/Masculinity." Borgatta, Edgar and Rhonda Montgomery. *Encyclopedia of Sociology, Revised Edition*. New York: Macmillian, 2000. 997-1005.
- Wilchins, Riki. *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*. Los Angeles: Alyson books, 2004.

**Love is Liable to be Pliable:
In(queer)ies on the Fluidity of
Sexuality in William Shakespeare's
*The Merchant of Venice***

By Lucas Wilson

ABSTRACT: Homoeroticism, sodomy and sexual deviancy were taboo practices in Renaissance Europe that led to societal ostracism. Venetian men were exorbitantly protective and controlling of their wives and in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* Venice's patriarchal culture is sharply contrasted. Through homoerotic euphemisms, Shakespeare satirizes Venetian society by ironically illustrating Antonio and Bassanio as homosexuals. Such an interpretation of Antonio and Bassanio may not have been the sixteenth century understanding of the play. However, due to a societal shift in morality and a more acute recognition of homosexual themes, a contemporary reading of *The Merchant of Venice* leads to a more accurate understanding of Shakespeare's intentions. As Bassanio emancipates himself from a firm homosexual relationship with Antonio into a heterosexual relationship with Portia, Shakespeare enforces the notion that sexuality is malleable.

Homoeroticism, sodomy and sexual deviancy were taboo practices in Renaissance Europe that led to societal ostracism. Venetian men were exorbitantly protective and controlling of their wives whereas William Shakespeare, in his *The Merchant of Venice* sharply contrasts Venice's patriarchal culture. Through homoerotic allusions and innuendos, Shakespeare satirizes Venetian society by ironically illustrating the men of Venice, specifically Antonio and Bassanio, as homosexuals. Such an interpretation of Antonio and Bassanio may not have been the sixteenth century understanding of the play; however, due to a societal shift in morality and a more acute recognition of

homosexual themes, a contemporary reading of *The Merchant of Venice* leads to a more accurate understanding of Shakespeare's intentions. As Bassanio leaves a firm homosexual relationship with Antonio into a heterosexual relationship with Portia, Shakespeare enforces the notion that sexuality is malleable.

In the first scene of the first act, Antonio does not explicitly articulate his passionate feelings for Bassanio; rather, he infers his attraction via a vague denial of love sickness and his jealousy over Bassanio's new love interest. Antonio communicates his melancholy, but he is not sure of its source: "In sooth, I know not why I am sad" (Shakespeare 1.1.1). Antonio does not outright reject the claim that he is in love; instead, he responds, "Fie, fie!" (1.1.47)—an expression of distaste and disapproval, but not an overt dismissal of his feelings. He is ambiguous to avoid being exposed as a homosexual, while remaining loyal to his true feelings toward Bassanio. Furthermore, when Antonio and Bassanio are left alone upon Gratiano and Lorenzo's exeunt, Antonio immediately inquires about the lady "to whom [Bassanio] swore a secret pilgrimage" (1.1.120). Antonio shows a sly curiosity in Bassanio's new romantic interest, demanding that Bassanio inform him about the woman; Portia poses a potential breach in Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. Antonio's forlornness is in reaction to the possibility of being replaced; the reality that a woman could supersede his amorous relationship with Bassanio causes sorrowfulness.

Antonio's willingness to risk his money for Bassanio further lends to the notion of his devotion--they are more than just friends. Just as a husband provides for his wife, Antonio financially supports Bassanio. Upon Bassanio's attempted explanation as to why Antonio should lend him money, Antonio stops him and states,

You know me well, and herein spend but time / To wind
bout my love with circumstance. / And out of doubt you
do me now more wrong / In making question of my
uttermost / Than if you had made waste of all I have. /
Then do but say to me what I should do / That in your

Sprinkle, vol. 6

knowledge may by me be done, / And I am pressed unto
it. Therefore speak. (1.1.153-160)

Bassanio offends Antonio when he tries to explain why he should offer him the money; Antonio sees their established relationship and love as a license for them to openly ask each other for anything. Since Bassanio already owes Antonio money, Bassanio remarks, "To you, Antonio, / I owe the most in money and in love, / And from your love I have a warranty / To unburden all my plots and purposes / How to get clear of all the debts I owe" (1.1.130-134). Antonio replies, "My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1.138-39). Antonio is willing to give of himself financially. Stuart Kellogg, author of *Literary Visions of Homosexuality*, states,

In the sonnets, such a line with so much innuendo would be the moment of complicated ironies, and of much scholarly comment: for example, of Shakespeare's fondness for using debt and usury as metaphors for sexual longing. Here in the play, the line elicits no comment; its boldness is so literal it may need none. Plainly, everything is available: Antonio's purse and his person are interchangeable. (117)

Bassanio and Antonio's love now becomes increasingly explicit. Furthermore, when Bassanio asks for more money, Antonio agrees, despite the fact that he has no money and needs to borrow. Antonio's obligingness demonstrates his devotion to Bassanio and Bassanio's words of bosom affection indicate their sexual relationship.

Antonio additionally demonstrates his love for Bassanio through his amenability to sacrifice his own flesh. Shylock makes a stipulation "in a merry sport," that if the money cannot be paid back, the penalty will be "an equal pound / Of [Antonio's] fair flesh, to be cut off and taken / In what part of [Antonio's] body pleaseth" (1.3.146-52). Antonio's sacrificial act substantiates the authenticity of his love for Bassanio--despite the fact that he could lose

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies

Bassanio (seeing as the money is to find a wife); he could not only lose a part of his skin, but also his lover.

Moreover, Lorenzo explicates Antonio's love for Bassanio when in conversation with Portia. In Belmont, Lorenzo engages in a dialogue with Portia and comments that Bassanio is a "dear lover of my lord" (3.4.7). Portia recognizes this reality and references Antonio as being "the bosom lover of [her] lord [Bassanio]" (3.4.17). Upon this acknowledgement of Antonio and Bassanio's mutual love for each other, Portia quickly asks to change the subject; she asks for no more conversation pertaining to Antonio (3.4.23). She then renders her household into Lorenzo's hands while she takes leave from Belmont to save her husband and Antonio from legal trouble. There is a sense of duality in Portia's motivation to part from Belmont; instead of waiting for Bassanio to return, *she* makes the executive decision to leave in hopes of mitigating any potential relations between Antonio and Bassanio. An understanding of the love between Antonio and Bassanio is incentive enough for her exodus from her home.

The court scene further illustrates Antonio and Bassanio's intimate love for one another. When Shylock remains steadfast in his decision to collect Antonio's flesh, Bassanio offers to be cut open instead. He exclaims, "I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er, / On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart" (4.1.210-12). The lovers reciprocate the act of self-sacrifice. As Antonio waits for his own punishment, he bids Bassanio a passionate farewell. He takes Bassanio's hand within his--an intimate interaction--and gives him instructions on how to deal with Portia. He asks of Bassanio to

[t]ell [Portia] the process of Antonio's end. / Say how I loved you. Speak me fair in death. / And when the tale is told, bid her be judge / Whether Bassanio had not once a love. / Repent but you that you shall lose your friend, / And he repents not that he pays your debt. / For if the Jew do cut but deep enough, / I'll pay it presently with all my heart. (4.1.274-81)

Sprinkle, vol. 6

Antonio's requests to Bassanio are those of one lover to another. Antonio's appeal for Bassanio to tell Portia of his and Bassanio's love seems to be a call to tell the full truth about their relationship; Antonio seems concerned with Portia having an unobstructed perception of his and Bassanio's intimacy--he wants Portia to know that they were lovers. He even asks him to tell her to make an assessment of his and Bassanio's relationship for herself. Additionally, Antonio ends his speech with the comment that he is going to follow through with his promise to die in place of Bassanio "with all [his] heart" (4.1.281). Such a statement is indicative of his true love for Bassanio--his love that oversteps the boundaries of mere friendship.

When Portia dresses like a man, she tests Bassanio's love for her by seeking to gain possession of the ring she gave to him. When he declines to give the ring to her, she further attempts to coax him into rendering to her the symbol of their marriage. She explains, "And if your wife be not a madwoman, / And know how well I have deserved the ring, / She would not hold out enemy forever / For giving it to me" (4.1.445-48). Her ardent attempt to coerce Bassanio into giving her the ring is a first-hand investigation to see if he is faithful to their relationship. She also wants to see to whom Bassanio is more devoted: herself or Antonio. Bassanio fails the test and demonstrates that he is indeed more considerate of his love for Antonio than his own wife.

Antonio demonstrates his jealous passion for Bassanio when he persuades him to relinquish the ring his wife Portia gave to him. Bassanio denies Portia the ring that she gave him. Antonio admonishes his friend by saying, "My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring. / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued against your wife's commandment" (4.1.449-51). Antonio attempts to place himself between Portia and Bassanio by showing Bassanio that the ring would be more appropriately placed on the man that Portia played than on his own finger--which is a sign of their matrimony. Antonio is not only trying to get rid of Bassanio's ring on the premise of who deserves it more,

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies

but he is also attempting to compare his love for Bassanio to Portia's love for Bassanio; Antonio is telling Bassanio to trust *their* love over the love and commitment Bassanio has with Portia. Bassanio then accepts to give his ring to the man whom is actually Portia. Antonio's act of persuasion is

the play's most overt moment of sexual competition. . . Bassanio yields the ring to one 'man' at the behest of another, the ring that linked him to the world of women and marriage. His loyalty to Portia is remiss compared to what he feels for Antonio. (Kleinberg 123)

Bassanio's riddance of his ring is essentially a voiding of his relationship with Portia; he is denouncing his relationship with his wife. The yielding of his ring is an external manifestation of his inward devotion to Antonio.

Portia's possession of the ring is indicative of her possession of the power within Bassanio and her relationship--an ironic reality in comparison to the Venetian marital arrangement in the sixteenth century. Portia's male attire reflects her dominant position in their marriage. She assumes the position of superiority in their relationship; for her,

Bassanio's failure is her victory; the terms of the marriage are void. . . She is free to negotiate for her freedom. . . The ring is now more than a symbol; it is a key. Who has the ring is the master of the bedroom. Portia makes that plain; she will yield herself only to the man who has the ring. Since she herself has it, she means to yield to no man ever again. Instead, she will show that she is free to bestow herself as she wishes. (Kellogg 123)

This notion of feminine dominance in a relationship would be nonsensical to Venetian men; women were always inferior to their husbands--especially those in Venice who were overwhelmingly controlling of their wives. Portia's superior position satirizes Venetian men's overbearing tendencies.

The fifth act illustrates the final severing of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship and the mending of Portia and

Sprinkle, vol. 6

Bassanio's marriage. Upon Bassanio introducing Portia and Antonio to one another in Belmont, Bassanio establishes his indebtedness to Antonio. He states, "This is the man, this is Antonio, / To whom I am so infinitely bound" (5.1.134-35). Portia responds, "You should in all sense be much bound to him. / For as I hear he was much bound for you" (5.1.136-137). Such a reply of being bound to one another has sexual connotation; "[b]onding, senses, money are punned upon as issues of loyalty and honor, erotic preference, and emotional commitment rise to the surface of the scene" (Kellogg 123). Portia delivers an innuendo because of her frustration with her husband; she is tired of his split love between her and Antonio. She even exclaims that she is able to see his double life. As he swears by the reflections of himself in her eyes, she responds, "In both my eyes he doubly sees himself-- / In each eye, one. Swear by your double self, / And there's an oath of credit!" (5.1.244-46). With such a comment, Portia is passively able to convince Bassanio and Antonio to end their relationship. As Antonio agrees to be Bassanio's "surety" to never break their covenant again, Portia secures Bassanio's marital faithfulness (5.1.244). Such a guarantee assures Portia and Bassanio of a marriage free of infidelity.

Shakespeare uses the relationship of Antonio and Bassanio to illustrate the pliability of love. As Antonio and Bassanio's relationship comes to a close, Bassanio's sexual desires do not dissipate, but instead he re-appropriates his love towards Portia. However, Antonio is left without an intimate partner--he has only his ships. As Antonio states that his "ships / Are safely come to road" in Venice, he obviously understands that he must return to Venice--whereas Bassanio does not have to leave Belmont (5.1.294-95). Their geography is in correlation with their sexual orientation at the end of the play. Since Shakespeare is satirizing Venetian men and their strong overpowering affection for women, Bassanio becomes a heterosexual because of his new residence in Belmont, whereas Antonio's homoerotic passions endure as he remains a citizen of Venice. This satire is not Shakespeare's ultimate goal in *The*

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
Merchant of Venice; however, such an irony aids in explicating theme of the malleability of love. In the eyes of Shakespeare, love is pliable and it does not consider sexual orientation.

Lucas Wilson is a Toronto native with a passion for literature. He did his B.A. in English at Liberty University, minoring in French and History, and is currently working on his M.A. in English at McMaster University. His main research interest in English is Holocaust literature. He is writing his thesis on Elie Wiesel's *Night* and A. M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*. In August, he is matriculating to Vanderbilt University to do his Master of Theological Studies degree and will be researching the homosexual community within the evangelical church.

Works Cited

- Kellogg, Stuart. *Literary Visions of Homosexuality*. New York: Haworth Press, 1983. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.

Blondes and Their Hideous Viciousness

By Jessica Brown

ABSTRACT. The following paper is a memoir of a teenager. In this piece, said teenage girl has a recognition of sexuality in a social setting through human experience.

Sarah was the first to know.

No, I wouldn't say that she knew so much as she suspected halfway and treated me thus. She didn't hate me. She didn't taunt me any more than initially, or even any more than Erica did. She didn't threaten or blackmail me. She didn't make it okay, either. Maybe she knew it was something I had to come to terms with on my own. Maybe she just didn't care.

It was just one of those days, those blurry days that mix with other days we had every weekend, every break, every bit of free-time when it was Erica and me—and occasionally her delinquent cousin Sarah. It was a Ouija day and Erica had decided that we would dress up like Voodoo priestesses and summon the “dark other-side” to do our bidding. (She seems to have forgotten this when I mention it nowadays. It's to be expected. I hear having a baby makes you forget all kinds of things.)

I was on our couch—the almost-blue, charred, desecrated, enormous, floppy, grungy, harrowing couch we loved so dearly. (Erica told me that Sarah set it on fire the first spring I wasn't around. Maybe she was celebrating my absence.) I was fiddling with anything I could touch (the Ouija board, the oversized crystals, the closest candle of our circle of “protection”) while I waited for Erica to finish her Voodoo costume makeup and rejoin me. I was so focused on

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
studying the sparkling rose quartz crystal that I didn't look up at the sound of footsteps followed by the scampering footsteps of one of the household's little, curly, doltish dogs. Once Cocoa determined my lap was his cushion and my knee his headrest, I set the crystal down to pet his black head.

I found my hand touching a hand that was definitely not Erica's. Sure, there was a similar peachy-rose color, but where Erica had (and still has, actually) chubby child hands, this hand was slender with ridiculous fake press-on nails painted black and rings—yes, plural—on every finger. Knowing it was Sarah, who didn't like to be touched, I immediately jerked my hand back as if she had let her evil canary peck at me with its newly-bought-scissors-sharp beak. (Even writing this, I remember that evil thing pecking at my fingers until they bled the one time Sarah had held my hand in its cage. I made sure to be as obsequious towards her as possible after that point.)

I hated it when she sat on the couch with me. She always sat too close, as if trying to shove me off and down to my "proper" place, on the floor. I glanced up at her face once before keeping my eyes laser pointed at the floorboards. (I particularly remember staring at the one, singular spot of white paint someone had yet to try to clean up from the mess of painting the ugly, charred walls a boring white.)

She gave a suspiciously satisfied-sounding snicker. I felt her breath on my ear as she squished me into the revealed stuffing of our couch under the pretense of picking up Cocoa from my lap. The (suddenly smart) dog scampered away quicker than I had ever seen him run the moment she almost had her grip on him. I wished I could run off with him without having her think she'd claimed some sort of victory to this showdown, this show of willpower. Her scoff sent the smell of cinnamon into my nose (It's funny how I don't remember the date but still vividly remember the smell of her cinnamon toothpaste) as she stood from the couch to sit directly in front of me on Erica's barstool. When I say sit, I use the term sparingly because she really coiled up on top of it like a snake ready to spring and poison me.

Sprinkle, vol. 6

I could feel her eyes on me as we both sat there in silence. When I finally looked up at her, she curled her blonde hair around her middle finger, something I recognized as her thinking best on how to threaten and/or insult me. Her teeth grasped her lip ring as she watched me. Even though she didn't say a thing, I felt increasingly like a snared rabbit. Her slow blinks hid her icy gray eyes for a longer time with each closing. The moment she began banging her tongue ring against her lip ring, I had to look away from her lips. It felt so wrong, almost obscene the way she sharply flipped her tongue against her lip. Staring at her eyes made me fidget nervously, so I decided to stare at her nose ring, safely between the two points of torture. (Torture? That's how I thought of it, and even then I didn't recognize that as being such a queer word choice for her actions. She wasn't bothering me. She was just blinking and playing with her own tongue ring. What torture did that create for me? Even though I recognize now what I didn't then, I still wonder why her simple actions were such torture for me.)

The gleaming yellow bulb was a strange contrast to her perfectly rosy hue. My eyes wandered from her nose to her skin. While it wasn't flawless, it was amazing (or so my adolescent mind told me) how her beauty wasn't diminished in the least by her few zits. My eyes wandered to her bare shoulders before I realized the clicking had stopped.

I looked back to her face. Sarah's eyebrow was raised and a knowing smirk was placed on her face. Suddenly she changed from snake to cat, uncurling from her seat and giving a long, languorous stretch before taking on a strut that she had to have taken years of watching and studying the original, 1960's, Julie Newmar, Catwoman to get right.

I swallowed a thick lump of acidic fear in my suddenly dry throat as I leaned back in the couch, as if it would make her stop coming to me. She locked me in place simply with her eyes. They were lit up with a revelation, it seemed, or amusement, and while that made me wary, it also

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
cut off my fight or flight instinct so I just sat there, staring up at her.

She towered over me for a moment before leaning in so that her face was directly before mine. Her smirk widened into an almost-smile. Her hands braced her on the couch, keeping her from touching me (not that there was all that much room between us either way). She blinked twice, and just when it looked like she might kiss me, she said, “You’re a lesbian, aren’t you?”

I stared at her as my brain tried to catch up with the words. I stared at her as she didn’t move. I stared at her as my mind tried to order me to say something, anything. To deny her, to affirm her, to question her, to confuse her, to do something. I simply stared at her, my mouth opened just enough for my breath to come in with a slight whistle when I finally remembered to breathe. I simply stared at her as she quirked her eyebrow again. I simply stared at her when Erica entered and punted Sarah out. The sway of her I-watched-too-much-Catwoman-as-a-child walk kept my eye, until she glanced back and winked at me with pursed lips.

Thinking on it now, there’s no question. She didn’t care. Sarah never told anyone what she suspected. Sarah never brought it up again, at least not in words. Sarah never kissed me. Sarah never went out of her way not to touch me. Sarah was never impressed with the guys I dated. Sarah was never surprised when I hugged a girl for a little too long or touched a girl a little too much. That is what is so amazing about her, about my first contact with someone realizing I am not heterosexual.

Admittedly, to this day I cringe whenever someone calls me a lesbian. I’m not. I’m pansexual, I’m bisexual, I’m non-heterosexual, but I am not a lesbian. Maybe it’s her fault that I hate it when people determine I must be. I know it’s her fault that I fall for faux redheads that were once blonde—but never blondes. I know it’s her fault that I can’t listen to anyone click their tongue ring against their teeth or anything without feeling extremely uncomfortable.

Sprinkle, vol. 6

In a way, I think she may have been the best, the absolute best person to realize my sexuality before even I did. Her lack of judgment went a long way to my recognition of self and comfort with it. Her teasing smirks and knowing winks helped me to realize it didn't really matter. Her silence, most importantly, made me realize that in the closet or out, I am the same person and my sexuality doesn't have to be anyone's business. Even with all her cruelty and dangerous ways, she is the one person I truly trusted in those two years that I was discovering myself before Erica left my life and through Erica, Sarah. She helped form me.

Jessica Brown is a sophomore music major and English minor. She is a teaching assistant for the Berea College Women's Chorus. In her "spare time" she takes vocal, guitar, and piano lessons. She is interested in alternative sexuality studies and psychology, namely mental disorders in youth, and plans to work with that in the field of music therapy in the future.

Automatic Autonomy or Inherent Injustice?

By Jacob Burdette

ABSTRACT: This article critically examines Gerda Lerner's book *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Within the work, I attempt to dissect various issues that are, at first, strikingly atrocious, and endeavor to supplement Lerner's suppositions regarding the position of women throughout History/history or debase them depending on their merit. Moreover, this essay addresses Lerner's personal biases regarding Judaism and the effect they have on the validity of some of the arguments throughout the novel. By examining everything from "temple prostitution" to the transition from the voluntary wearing of veils by women to the mandated institution of them as a system of segregation, I hope to contribute to the academic discourse surrounding Lerner's work, and to provide a fundament for future critical analyses of this incredibly influential book.

There are a plethora of notions that seem to be inherently wrong within the novel *The Creation of Patriarchy* however there are three apparent recurring themes; Subordination, humility, and perversion of female sexuality. Women are forced time and time again to cower beneath the proverbial veil of man's protection and the literal veil of their humility or even humiliation. Throughout History—I would like to make the same History/history distinction as Lerner—women are portrayed as evil with the only evidence of such malevolence being menstruation and child birth. The Torah and later, Bible, propagated the belief that women are intrinsically evil and men automatically autonomous. The dethroning of the Fertility Goddess shattered all hopes of feminist consciousness prevailing during such oppressive times. The placement of a male God thrust women further down the rungs of the social hierarchy. I was furious when

Sprinkle, vol. 6

reading these accounts and I made logical leaps to determine if it was because of ethnocentrism and my predisposition towards feminism or if there were necessary reasons for these 'travesties' that I misunderstood. A few things came to mind specifically which will be addressed later.

Even when women still have a facet of dignity and social standing because the goddesses are in power in the religious hierarchy, they are often used as sexual mediums to appease the Gods. This form of divine sex that Lerner refers to as "temple prostitution" seems absolutely unjust. Perhaps this act of sex with the gods, or an earthly deity seemed necessary because of superstitions held during the time period. However, it is much more plausible that it was another act set forth by man to subdue women. Even if the former holds its ground in my speculations, superstitions were controlled by dominant forces or by outliers. It is possible that these practices of appeasement were instituted via the 'superstitions' of the men who ruled at the time. "What seems to have happened was that sexual activity for and in behalf of the gods or goddesses was considered beneficial to the people and sacred" (Lerner 125). This is what Lerner supposes, however I tend to disagree. They were viewed as sacred but to me it seems sardonic. The men, in order to 'get their rocks off' for lack of better terminology, abuse an act that one normally deems sacred, sex. By making women perform the coitus act with priests and other holy entities the men could subdue them as well as seek sexual pleasure all in the name of the gods. One thing that makes me incredibly angry is that not only could men control who women had sex with, but if they had sex at all. It is such a feral and instinctual act that removing the right to have sex, as in the case of the Naditum, seems egregious.

As if control of a natural act was not enough for men of the time period, they continued to brand women as respectable or not respectable through the institution of veils. "The veil, which was the symbol and emblem of the married woman, is here elevated to a distinguishing mark and its wearing is made a privilege" (Lerner, pg 135).

Wearing a veil was, presumably, up to the individual woman prior to the institution of this law. Here we see that it has become a problem in the society because invariably, if something becomes a problem a law is created to inhibit it. It is my supposition that unmarried women were disguising themselves as married women to gain respect and married women were wandering without veils in order to receive sexual pleasure from suitors. Women as well as men have base needs and wants to fulfill. Although there was merit for creating the law, there is never merit to identify someone's race, class, religion, or creed via markings or 'brands'. The institution of the veil was a proverbial scarlet letter for women of this time period, marking them in the same way Hester Prynne was in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel.

Lerner begins to talk about patriarchy in the biblical sense. Although she makes good points I was livid at the biases she applied. Although she quotes the Bible frequently, she refuses to mention verses from the Pentateuch which contradict the ones she chooses to cite. Perhaps it is another case of my predispositions overriding logic, and I shouldn't expect her to look to current culture (current in reference to when the book was written) however some of the things she said struck me as curious. All too often she doesn't write longitudinally and discredits my entire religion with her suppositions. For example, in the chapter entitled "The Patriarchs", Lerner asserts that the family structure of the Jewish people is patriarchal. She bases this assumption on the story of Rachel's theft of her family's 'house gods', which Lerner says represent the title of the estate. She claims that Rachel's actions are a metaphorical account of the transition from matrilocality to patrilocality (Lerner 168). Although I am inclined to agree with Lerner's analysis of the household structure of Jews, she omits an important fact of Jewish culture. While it is true that the early practitioners of Judaism subscribed to a patrilocal system of household arrangement—that is to say that, in affinal kinship relationships, women were expected

Sprinkle, vol. 6

to move into the household of her husband's parents— Lerner neglects the fact that Judaism is matrilineal.

While Lerner feigns an attempt to address this notion in "The Covenant" by mentioning Jewish women's exclusion from covenant making, she does not address the necessity of matrilineal reckoning for claiming Jewish descent. She makes it a point to overemphasize the exclusivity of the making of the covenant, in that Avraham is the only one involved in hearing the pact, but downplays the significance of the blessing Sarai receives from God: "Yea, I will bless her and she will be a mother of nations" (*New International Version Bible*, Gen. 17.16). Moreover, Lerner addresses the practice of circumcision and the notion that only men needed to have a painful symbol to prove their devotion to God by positing that the blessing of Avraham's "seed" and God's promise of fertility symbolized the usurpation of women's role in reproduction (Lerner 193). However, in making this assumption, Lerner avoids discussion of the dictation of God to Eve in the Genesis story in which he says "with painful labor you will give birth to children" (Gen. 3.16) Then, Genesis states that "Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living" (3.20). I believe that the pain women feel during childbirth is a parallel to the pain of circumcision, and is indicative of a belief in equal participation in procreation by both men and women. From just these few examples, it should be apparent that Judaism was matrilineal in regards to inheritance of the religion and patrilocal, which implies an ambilineal, or ambiguous household structure, rather than, as Lerner states, a patriarchal system of kinship.

In Reformed Judaism women are held as equal to men, similar to Rachel Speght's supposition that Lerner mentions: "Shee was not produced from Adam's foote, to be his low inferior nor from his head to be his superior, but from his side, near his heart to be his equall" (Lerner pg. 183-4). Reading this upset me although Lerner is correct in her assumptions of early Judaism. Just to provide an anecdote, my Rabbi is female and we hold her in the utmost

regard. I even prefer her to the male rabbis that were her predecessors. The God portrayed in Genesis is another fabrication of man if I may be so frank. The original Hebrew reads much differently than the modern translations of the Pentateuch, and because of this, many people suppose that the Jewish God is male. However, in Genesis, God only refers to "himself" in the first person, and in the Hebrew language, first person pronouns are gender-neutral. Furthermore, the word Elohim can be the plural of the masculine word for God, El, or the feminine word for God, Eloah, or even a coalescence of the two. The Jewish God, the God I grew up with is egalitarian and believes in equality among genders and for Lerner to generalize so greatly is a travesty in that it makes me discredit a part of her work. Another thing to keep in mind is that Lerner refused her Bat'Mitzvah and may be biased in her assumptions and interpretation of Jewish texts.

Aside from her presumptuous state in small sections of her work, I agree wholeheartedly with Lerner's suppositions. Lerner's pre-existing biases towards Judaism highly contrast with her meticulous effort throughout the novel to remain objective and present counterarguments for her points. Still yet, it is very intriguing that she looks to pinpoint a time when Patriarchy was installed rather than how to rectify it or look for reparations for the past. Moreover, Lerner does a fantastic job of delineating the transition to Patriarchy which was unprecedented at the time. Many historians looked to pinpoint a precise point as the origin of Patriarchy, while Lerner notes and explains the variation of its installment geographically, and the slow formation of the subordinative system. Most of her book was research rather than her own work but I appreciated the novel as it made me rethink the foundations of society in general, specifically America. As a student of Sociology and Women and Gender Studies, I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in speculation about the origin of patriarchal dominance; however, I strongly suggest that the

Sprinkle, vol. 6

reader take the time to research ambiguous points in Lerner's arguments before accepting them as fact.

Jacob Burdette is a sophomore at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, studying Sociology with a double minor in Latin and Women & Gender Studies. His research interests include sexual subordination via religious rites and institutions, food security and food availability, the parallels between classical literature and modernity, and Simmelian social theory and symbolic interactionism. Through his former capacity at HEAL, a student-led sustainability initiative, he has had the privilege of working with a professor of Sociology from a neighboring institution, as well as community partners, to implement a city-wide survey of food security/food availability in Berea. They are currently in the process of cataloguing the data, and intend to present their findings to local officials to help inform future decisions regarding food in the city. In working with the community food assessment, he also realized his desire to employ activism, regardless of the field in which he is researching. Due to this realization, he will be taking a feminist methodology course and a social policy and evaluative research course in the Fall of 2013 in hopes that he will be able to expand his repertoire of qualitative and quantitative skills, and further contribute to research regarding stratification, marginalization, and subordination in all his fields of study.

Works Cited

Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.

Compulsory Monosexuality and the Problematic Nature of Identity

By Joshua Falek

ABSTRACT. In the late 19th century, the term “homosexual” was coined, and ever since, language has been used to catalog sexuality. However, this system of classification and organization has become detrimental to society as it enforces strict guidelines that are essentialist in nature and rely on a notion that sexuality is stable and unchanging, when it is in fact static, negotiated constantly, and socially constructed. Thus, there must be a movement away from these categories, as they are exclusionary, monosexist, and do not take into account sexual pluralism. Compulsory monosexuality forces bisexual, queer, and pansexual people to constantly have to renegotiate their identity and fear that they will be ousted from their community if they do not follow the strict guidelines present.

In the late 19th century, the term “homosexual” was coined, exemplifying language’s trend of defining and cataloging sexuality. This system of classification has become detrimental to society as it enforces strict guidelines that are essentialist in nature and rely on a notion that sexuality is stable and unchanging. It is in fact fluid, negotiated constantly, and socially constructed. There must be a movement away from these categories, as they are exclusionary, monosexist, and do not take into account sexual pluralism. The problematic nature of sexual classification was inherent from its conception. Sexuality was first organized in the late 1800s and began through the medical industry’s rapid securing of power. Foucault’s thesis regarding the Perverse Implantation and the shift from priest to doctor connects the new power of the hospital to the pathologization of the pervert (Bailey 112). It was

Sprinkle, vol. 6

through this trade of power and movement away from the church that sexual identities and disorders were created (Foucault 40 – 45). Before this change took place, these ‘perverted’ actions were simply sins to confess to a priest. With this came the change from religious moral law to medical and legal law. As Foucault notes in his essay, “*Scientia Sexualis*”, “We have at least invented a different kind of pleasure: pleasure in truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing the truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open” (71). The pursuit of knowledge became pleasure. This pursuit of knowledge led to the insistence of classifying every intimate detail. Due to the personal nature, lack of vocabulary to express, and immoral feelings about sexuality, it became the focus of discourse. Beginning discourse perceived the deviance as disease and mental illness. Fueled by ignorance, pathologies were created to segregate and oppress the individuals at hand. Classification became a tool to subjugate deviance. The threat of sexuality induced fear into society, scapegoating and then torturing those who strayed from the norm. These identities were the framework for such inequality to exist.

While these identities were termed for the purpose of curing wrongly perceived ill individuals, one cannot deny the positive influence they have had upon queer life.¹ Jeffery Weeks argues in his work, “Sexuality and History Revisited,” that these sexual identities have created communities that “have become bases for political mobilization” (189). This is true when one notes the growing support for LGBTQ rights in most developed countries, some even legalizing same-sex marriage. Identity has constructed communities that have helped foster understanding of sexuality and heteronormativity. However, the political communities and representation these identities create come with consequences. Often times, at the cost of stability is the

destruction of fluidity. This impairment of fluctuation creates a monosexist environment, where those who identify as having more than a singular object-choice, also termed polysexual, are at times made to feel imprisoned instead of empowered by their identity. Monosexism can be defined as the oppression, discrimination and prejudice found throughout Western culture towards polysexual individuals, including those who identify as bisexual, pansexual and often, queer. Even Weeks, who believes that these identities are essential for the queer movement, explains that “we are increasingly aware that sexuality is about flux and change....but we earnestly strive to fix it, stabilize it” (186). This stabilization is present in the queer community as well as the mainstream community. It is a factor used so that people can be easily grouped and categorized without problem and exception. This model of classification does not realistically work, as sexuality is more complex than acknowledged. People are constantly renegotiating their own identities.

Those who identify as polysexual struggle with this classification system, as it forces them to redefine who they are whenever the sexual landscape changes. Some identities may be lifelong, but for most, this is not the case. Paula Rust, through the analysis of statistical data concerning coming out, found that “bisexual women had changed sexual identities more frequently in the past than lesbian women” (66). These identities are often modified to present a better sense of self. However, this constant mediation can be emotionally and physically taxing, as individuals may feel trapped in an identity or isolated from a community. This is often how bisexual people are treated, perceived as not belonging to either the queer or heterosexual community, both afraid of the individual leaving one population for the other. Rust reports that many of her respondents were “familiar with the term for some time but had understood ‘bisexuality’ as a temporary phrase that one passed through when coming out....or as an identity used by those who wished to deny their homosexuality” (71). This,

Sprinkle, vol. 6

unfortunately, seems to be the way that both the mainstream queer and heterosexual community view bisexuality.

The perceived transitional nature of the bisexual individual isolates them from both queer and straight communities; both parties placing their sexuality under heavy scrutiny. This leads to further oppression of the polysexual, many times, as Gayle Rubin notes, done without conscious realization (155 -157). A new identity may often face suspicion. As Christopher James summarizes, it “is perhaps equally the fear of the hetero- or bisexual other in exclusive ‘gay and lesbian’ contexts that keep many gay or lesbian-identified people from coming out as bisexual” (224). This sprouts from a fear of pluralism, which is defined by Singer, as the “refusal to assume in advance that nature prescribes a unitary model for male and female response” or “that there is a universal condition which constitutes or structures sexual response in all people on all occasions” (Plummer 51). Sexual pluralism is further explained as sexuality being distinctive and unique to every person. Due to the social nature of sexuality, many who deviate may feel locked into an unwanted identity, forced to suppress their desires for fear of castigation or scrutiny of their own perception of their identity. The complexity and fluidity of sexual identity is not simply ignored, but denied and reshaped into a binary model of homosexuality and heterosexuality as opposites.

This contrasting view of sexuality, based on the existence of two divergent, incompatible choices, rejects bisexuality’s existence. Due to society’s insistence on retaining one side of the sexual binary, bisexuality is seen as blurry and confusing. This retention of a sexual binary is coupled with the erasure of the bisexual from history through what Christopher James calls “appropriation without representation.” This “exclude[s] bisexuality as a relevant category” and instead identifies historical figures as queer, gay, or lesbian (228). When queer scholars may find evidence that a character is gay or lesbian, their heterosexual life is ignored. In some cases an opposite-gendered spouse may be simply attributed to the time

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies period. Through such processes bisexuality is erased from history.

Another way in which this happens is through the term “gay” or “lesbian” being applied to sexual or intimate actions, alienating the polysexual by inscribing sexuality on them through a single action. When two men kiss, it is said to be a “gay kiss”. When two women decide to get married, it is said to be a “lesbian marriage”. There is no male-male kiss and no female-female wedding; the label isn’t based upon who acts, but society’s assumption that desire can only be directed towards one of two sexualities. This not only instills the dichotomy of sexuality, but as well, the gender binary of identifying as either male or female. This ignores the possibility of those who do not identify as such, including those who identify as agender, genderqueer, or gender fluid. There is no room for the polysexual as it would shatter the rigidity of both binaries. The concept of monosexuality subjugates those who deviate from it. To avoid such isolation, the categories in homosexuality and heterosexuality must be reexamined and reshaped.

This binary system cannot be solved by simply replacing it. The current continuum still does not adequately represent the polysexual community. Polysexuality has the force to deconstruct identity and the minority status of the queer community. It is not simply enough that it is considered, as it must be realized and distinguished from the modern categories, which do not allow for exception or complexity. Christopher James clearly explains why bisexuality cannot simply operate as a third category, as it undermines the current system and “redefines categories, creates new understandings, and challenges the rigidity of all sexual subject positions” (224). A more fluid understanding of sexuality should be pursued, one less rigid and with a greater emphasis on the awareness of one’s identity. Weeks, in “Movements of Affirmation,” discusses the roles that minorities play in politics, emphasizing that “sexual minorities can never become majorities. The acceptance of homosexuality as a minority experience

Sprinkle, vol. 6

deliberately emphasizes the ghettoization of homosexual experience" (199). To Weeks, the only way to stabilize a community and make political progress is through celebration of various minority identities and deviations from social norms. It should be accepted that sexuality is fluid and that there is more than just two dichotomous ends to the spectrum. Once the ideas of sexuality change through the celebration of oppressed groups, then there will no longer be segregation between the queer and mainstream communities. Acceptance of polysexuality and pluralism will be created through political movements and celebration of minority identities. Through these movements, sexual taboos and norms will shrink away. This is the only way in which a pluralistic society can fully be realized.

Recognition of the social construction of sexuality as the "result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities" and as "a product of negotiation, struggle, and human agency" (Weeks 30 - 31) allows for the cultivation of the culture of pluralism. Rubin agrees with this notion, stating "Sexuality is impervious to political analysis as long as it is primarily conceived as a biological phenomenon" (10). Sexuality must first and foremost be seen as a social construct in order to progress. There must be an effort to unite society in eliminating the segregated nature of sexuality. If society were to embrace such an effort it would promote variation and pluralism inside the culture, prompting the destruction of the labeling of sexual identity.

It may take years for this mentality to develop, but until then emphasis must be placed against the denial and misappropriation of polysexuality. There must be a movement away from the use of sexual labeling and a movement towards a greater understanding of self in order to enact change. Compulsory monosexuality is harmful to all in the queer community. Only through a conscious shift in understanding and embracing polysexualism allows society to break away from "othering" the bisexual. Foucault's theory of power states that power is constantly negotiated and can be restructured through this mediation (Bailey 109).

Understanding social power as a malleable force allows this shift to correct the issues of monosexuality. For Foucault, the shift in society will be continuous, an ongoing revolution, one that is all encompassing and overflows (Bailey 117). Parts of this can already be seen through the liberalization of the sex laws in most Western countries over the last decade. Revision is possible and should be made increasingly executed.

It is fair to say that all will not welcome this theory. Plummer and Weeks both believe the destruction of labels and identity to be too costly. However, they both advocate for emphasis to be placed on social construction and the new discourses to be formed on the basis of identity. Their arguments are clearly problematic as they are monosexist in nature and marginalize the polysexual. Weeks praises the queer community in his paper because it “affirms diverse sexual identities” (Weeks 189). However, while it may affirm those identities of the mainstream gay movement, it does not affirm those who deviate from monosexuality. Weeks may take issue with this theory, but it is only because of his prioritizing of a hierarchy over equality. Despite the claims of both Weeks and Plummer, the movement towards polysexuality will allow for identities to flourish instead of being inhibited.

There currently exists a system in Western society that regards the polysexual as a confused individual. One who cannot decide which object choice to make and of which community to be a part. Those who regard themselves as bisexual are trapped in a binary structure of sexuality, where homosexual and heterosexual are the only valid options and are constructed as opposites and incompatible to each other. This enforces a dangerous sexual hierarchy. There is a need to escape this order for the purpose of creating pluralism and allowing for the deconstruction of sexuality. Through this method, mainstream society can shift away from the labels and identities which plague it and acknowledge the fluidity of sexuality and begin to find fault in the current dichotomy. Without this movement, there will never be

Sprinkle, vol. 6

sexual pluralism in its truest form, as these identities capture us and can restrict our very essence as they inscribe one's actions as one's title. If there is any hope for a culture that not only tolerates, but acknowledges the polysexual, it will be through this revolution away from compulsory monosexuality.

Joshua Falek is a sophomore at McGill University in Montreal. He is currently studying psychology and sociology with hopes to pursue research in behavioral neuroscience.

Works Cited

- Foucault, Michel, and Robert Hurley. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage, 1990. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Scientia Sexualis." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. *Introduction to Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack*. N.p.: McGill University, n.d.
- James, Christopher. "Denying Complexity: The Dismissal and Appropriation of Bisexuality in Queer, Lesbian, and Gay Theory." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. *Introduction to Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack*. N.p.: McGill University, n.d.
- Plummer, Ken. "Sexual Diversity: A Sociological Perspective." (n.d.): n. pag. Rpt. in *Introduction to Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack*. N.p.: McGill University, n.d. Print.
- Ramazanoglu, Caroline. "Foucauldian Feminism: Contesting Bodies, Sexuality and Identity." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. *Introduction to Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack*. N.p.: McGill University, n.d.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. *Introduction to Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack*. N.p.: McGill University, n.d.
- Rust, Paula C. "Sexual Identity and Bisexual Identities: The Struggle for Self- Description in a Changing Sexual

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
Landscape." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. *Introduction*
to Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack. N.p.: McGill
University, n.d.

Weeks, Jeffrey. "'Movements of Affirmation': Identity
Politics." N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print. *Introduction to*
Sexuality Diversity Studies Course Pack. N.p.: McGill
University, n.d.

Weeks, Jeffrey. "Sexuality and History Revisited." (n.d.): n.
pag. Rpt. in *Introduction to Sexuality Diversity Studies*
Course Pack. N.p.: McGill University, n.d. Print.

Out of the Closet, Onto the Pages

By Naomi Alix Burke

ABSTRACT. A feminist literary analysis of the tragicomic *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel in which the author discusses the necessity of the blatantly stereotypical performances of homosexuality in the father and daughter characters. The butch-lesbian and closeted-feminine-gay sexual stereotypes are juxtaposed and analyzed accordingly alongside perceived generational differences and sexual orientation visibility.

In the graphic novel, *Fun Home*, author Alison Bechdel portrays herself and her father with stereotypical representations of homosexuality—herself as a feminist butch/masculine lesbian and her father as a homosexual feminine, fashionable, pedophilic interior decorator/home renovator. These stereotypical representations may be perceived as harmful to the image of the gay community by suggesting that all homosexuals are flamboyant or butch respectively. When reading *Fun Home*, one might wonder why Alison Bechdel chose to blatantly represent herself and her father in this manner and by doing so, perpetuating the stereotypes. This question could be merely written off as pointless. It is a memoir, after all, and maybe this is just an accurate representation of the two people. However, Alison Bechdel crafts numerous images, phrases and dialogues between the two characters centered solely on their obvious homosexuality. In her own way, Bechdel transforms real people, herself and her father, into stereotypical caricatures of themselves used to tell a story that just so happens to be true. Because *Fun Home* is a memoir and is therefore subject to the author's own desires and memories, it is more realistic to suggest that it was *necessary* for Bechdel to employ these stereotypes to provide a coming-out for her

father, a closure for his life and death and to demonstrate the importance of the relationship she held with her father.

Bechdel emphasizes non-heteronormative gender identities in order to illustrate the similarities between her and her father. Alison and her father Bruce share many things in common besides their homosexuality. These common traits represent the complex relationship between the two. Julia Watson describes extensively the relationship between Bechdel and her father and the idea of erotic truth in her article "Autographic Disclosures and Genealogies of Desire in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*." Watson describes Bechdel as having "rakish tomboy looks" and her father as being "fastidiously dressed and combed" (42). Watson states that "Her desire to recast her gender assignment is balanced by his discomfiture with the public exhibit of what he perceives as transgressive sexuality" (42). The descriptions of Alison and her father serve to show their gender-bending behaviors. This is significant because it shows how both of these traits were manifest in the two despite never having discussed their sexualities with one another. There is an instance in the memoir where Bechdel contrasts two photographs; one of her father dressed as a female and one of her, dressed as a male. This represents another stereotype in the gay community—that all gays are gender confused and want to be the opposite gender. This is simply not true. By showing that they both enjoyed cross dressing and are portrayed as happy and comfortable while doing so, Bechdel is validating their unique identities and confirming the magnitude of their relationship. The deliberate representation of their cross dressing and the ways in which it is portrayed serves to highlight the perceived differences in Alison and Bruce's generations within the narrative. Her father was 22 at the time his picture was taken and Alison was 21 at the time hers was taken. This age similarity in two completely different time periods serves to bridge the generation gap between Bechdel and her father. It shows homosexuality is not a new occurrence and validates her father's own sexuality through validating hers. Watson notes

Sprinkle, vol. 6

in her essay about this particular instance in the memoir, “The father-daughter affinity is reflected not only in their shared features, but in their parallel acts of cross-dressing against conventional norms of sexuality” (46). Not only does this comparison strengthen the connection between Bechdel and her father’s sexualities, but it shows both of their desires to defy sexual norms.

Not only does the cross dressing represent the generation difference between Alison and Bruce, but the visual sexual representations of the two does as well. The comparison of Bechdel’s and her father’s bodies are noted in Robyn Warhol’s article “The Space Between: A Narrative Approach To Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*.” Warhol discusses the ‘erotic and necrotic’ bodies represented in *Fun Home*. She states that they add a ‘material dimension’ to Bechdel’s work—they make it easier for the reader to connect to the content being presented (Warhol). It is important to note that throughout *Fun Home*, Alison is seen in various sexual poses, nude and with partners while her father is never shown with partners--just images of his partners and the suggestion of sexual encounters. This is representative of the ability of Alison’s sexuality to be seen and accepted by society while demonstrating that Bruce’s sexuality was one that could only be suggested at or discovered when provided hard evidence, such as the centerfold of Roy.

The conflict that her father had to face was that during his lifetime and early adulthood, homosexuality was not an option for a young man. This is different for Alison because by the time she made it to college, there was more cultural awareness of homosexuality and much literature written on lesbianism. Alison was able to openly be a lesbian, go to LGBT support groups and find partners her own age. Her father, however, was not able to be open, which lead to his need to be as flamboyant as possible in his double life while still maintaining a heterosexual image. This oppression of his personality and general self could be what lead to his unfavorable endeavors, such as having sexual relations with underage males. He was unable to be who he

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies really was. In this way, his flamboyance and Alison's portrayal of it serves to highlight his inability in life to be as open as he could have been.

This oppression of one's true gay self is not uncommon in many rural areas such as where Bruce lived for most of his life. Author Mary Gray, in her monograph *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*, reveals the difficulty of grasping, struggling with, accepting and visibly representing one's homosexuality in rural areas of America, even today. She tells of teenagers being kicked out of their homes and churches for coming out as gay to their parents, people having to remove evidence of gay pride from their cars when driving through certain towns to avoid being attacked and stories of kids who dream of being married to their lovers but fear never being accepted and understood by their families. These are the difficulties gay rural Americans face *now*. Bechdel describes her hometown as being rural and provides a map that details the close-knit community in which her father lived. It would have been nearly impossible for Bruce to have been truly open about himself and his sexuality. He would have never been accepted or taken seriously community. Bechdel's telling of his story in her memoir provides a kind of coming out that he was never able to do in his lifetime and pays homage to his repressed self.

Though Bruce's coming out is not a choice he is able to make in life, the fact that Bechdel makes this choice for him and does so by blatant visual representation of his homosexuality is relevant to the memoir. As Jeffrey Bennet describes in his article "In Defense of Gaydar: Reality Television and the Politics of the Glance," homosexuality is not always easily perceived. One cannot judge simply judge whether someone is gay or straight from a glance. . Rob Cover suggests that people would assume that visual proof is necessary in the performance of non-heterosexuality (Cover). Were this true, Bechdel would be completely justified in her portrayal of stereotypical homosexuality in her and her father. Cover claims that gay-affirmative films

Sprinkle, vol. 6

rely on visually recognizable stereotypes to communicate a great deal of information in short to provide character detail in an image. (Cover) Bechdel could have chosen to portray her father as a stereotypical gay male in order to communicate a set of ideas associated with homosexuality in few images. As a graphic artist, Bechdel is charged with the task of employing both text and image to tell her story. Rather than just stating her father was a repressed homosexual, she showed it in images and sections of text for the reader to connect on their own.

Though her tactics may be ambivalent or the motives obscure, what cannot be questioned is that Alison Bechdel chose to represent her father (and herself) as “stereotypical homosexuals.” Her representation of them in stereotypical homosexual fashion indicates her intentions. The fact that she portrays their similarities in defying gender norms and affinities for cross-dressing shows that through those stereotypes she was able to personally connect with her father. Through the representation of the different societies in which the two lived she is able to show how each of their sexualities were treated. Bechdel turns herself and her father into characters when she incorporates them into her memoir. She chooses how they are represented, exactly what dialogue they will speak and how they will be visually depicted. She is authoring her own version of her own life story. This is not surprising, given that within her memoir, she claims that “her parents are most real to her in fictional terms.” Alison Bechdel makes real her father’s oppressed sexuality by putting him into a work of literature. By portraying her father in a stereotypical manner, she fictionalizes him—ultimately legitimizing and providing closure for his life and experiences.

Naomi Alix Burke is a Junior double major in English Literature and Writing and Women’s and Gender Studies at Berea College. She works as a Teaching Assistant for Dr. Stephanie Troutman and for the Berea College Women’s and Gender Studies office. She also works at the circulation desk

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
at Berea College's Hutchins Library and volunteers at the
New Opportunity School for Women in Berea in her spare
time. She is a member of the Berea College Alpha Nu chapter
of the Women's Studies honor society Iota Iota Iota. In the
future she hopes to continue research and studies at the
graduate levels in literature, writing, sexual diversity, gender
and sexuality. She hopes to work for the stronger
implementation of women's and gender studies and accurate
sex education classes in public elementary and middle
schools.

Works Cited

- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Boston:
Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Print.
- Bennett, Jeffrey A. "In Defense Of Gaydar: Reality Television
And The Politics Of The Glance" *Critical Studies In
Media Communication* 23.5 (2006): 408-425.
Academic Search Premier. Web. 13 Apr. 2012.
- Cover, Rob. "Bodies, Movements And Desires: Lesbian/Gay
Subjectivity And The Stereotype." *Continuum: Journal
Of Media & Cultural Studies* 18.1 (2004): 81-97.
Academic Search Premier. Web. 13 Apr. 2012.
- Gray, Mary L. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer
Visibility in Rural America*. New York: New York UP,
2009. Print.
- Warhol, Robyn. "The Space Between: A Narrative Approach
To Alison Bechdel's Fun Home." *College Literature*
38.3 (2011): 1-20. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 13
Apr. 2012.
- Watson, Julia. "Autographic Disclosures And Genealogies Of
Desire In Alison Bechdel's Fun Home." *Biography: An
Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 31.1 (2008): 27-58.
Academic Search Premier. Web. 12 Apr. 2012.

Feminism, Celibacy and the Sexual Revolution? An Autobiography

By Katie Fawley

ABSTRACT. This paper consists of my journey with discovering the social and biological difference between males and females. I reflect on how society has put restraints on my sexuality and has influenced my sexual behavior. Throughout the paper I point and explain how the personal is political especially a woman's body. I explain how the personal is political by referring to writers such as Jeffery Weeks, Audre Lorde, Patricia McFadden, and other prominent authors. In the end I realize what sexuality means to me and embrace my sexuality and how only I can truly define my sexuality by being a strong woman and realizing that I have to fight for my rights regarding my sexuality every day because the personal is political and what can be more personal than one's own body.

When I was a little girl I wore shorts and a T-shirt all the time. I loved to wear baseball caps and play in the dirt. I hated to wear dresses; they restricted my movements. I couldn't play kick ball in a dress, I could not climb a tree, and running was a big no while wearing a dress because you might show your undergarments. One day I was playing with my siblings and some cousins at my grandpa's house when I overheard the adults talking about all of the kids. I heard someone say "Katie is pretty but she is such a tomboy" and by the tone of their voice I knew being labeled a tomboy was not a good thing. They continued to talk about how it was not right for a girl to always be playing with the boys, how it was not proper. This was the day that I realized that boys and girls were different.

The next big event in my life occurred when I was thirteen; my sister and I were at our piano lessons when I started getting pains in my lower abdomen. So I rushed into the bathroom. When I looked down at my underwear there was blood. Before this no one ever taught me about a girl's body and what happens at puberty. My mom never talked about it to me before and we never discussed it in school. So in my fright I called for my mom and she came into the restroom. All she did after that was give me a pad and show me how to put it on. We exited the bathroom and she told my piano teacher that I was sick and that she was going to take me home. We went to the store instead and she showed me the items that I would need from now on whenever I had a period. She also told me that the reason I have a period is because it lets me know that I can have children now. We did not have the sex talk but she did tell me that I have to wait to get married before having sex with someone because that's what God wanted. I learned more about my body and sex in 8th grade when I had health class for the first time. My experience with learning about sex relates very well to what Rubin says in his chapter "Thinking Sex". Rubin says that "The notion that sex per se is harmful to the young has been chiseled into extensive social and legal structures designed to insulate minors from sexual knowledge and experience" (Rubin 144). I find this very true because when I first learned about sex it was in school and all we were told was how harmful sex could be to us physically and emotionally. This was a political attempt to keep the young from being sexually active as long as possible. The teacher also said that "people who have sex get diseases, called STDs, and that it can lead to our deaths. The only good thing that comes out of sex is children." We were shown pictures of people with STDs and the girls were told that if you had sex you will get pregnant and that sex was very painful for girls. This was when I started to become afraid of sex.

Not once was I told by adults or leading figures that sex could be pleasurable and that I had a choice about my sexuality. This leads me to Patricia McFadden's' essay

Sprinkle, vol. 6

"Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice". In this article she says "Across almost all societies, the notions of "pleasure" and "choice" are rarely mentioned or acknowledged as being among the most contentious aspects of human sexuality, particularly female sexuality" (McFadden). The reason for this is that when women find pleasure and choice in their sexuality they inherit a sense of power like I did. I found power in choosing to be a virgin while most women found power in being sexually active but in the end the result is the same. Women start wanting their sexuality heard at the political level. "In often obscure or hidden ways, it lies at the heart of female freedom and power; and when it is harnessed and "deployed", it has the capacity to infuse every woman's personal experience of living and being with a liberating political force" (McFadden). This is what men are afraid of -that women will become a political force to be reckoned with once women have that sense of sexual power only then can women come together and make a change in politics related to a woman body over a variety of issues such as birth control, abortion, and health care.

For the longest time I never even considered being sexually active until high school. That's when all of my peers were experimenting with their sexuality. It wasn't until my junior year of high school that I really started thinking about it. I never did succumb to the peer pressure to have sex, but that does not mean that my peers did not try to change my mind about it. I felt that waiting for the right person was the best thing for me to do because making love to someone to me is very personal and you can't take it back once you do. I know a lot of people who regret having sex so soon in their lives and I don't want to regret my first time. My first sexual encounter was when I had my first kiss when I was seventeen. It felt good and that's when it became harder to control my sexual urges or desires. I have dated two guys seriously since my first kiss and I am a virgin to this day because they always made me feel bad for being a virgin. I have discovered, at least in my experience that guys tell you that they like the fact that you are a virgin but when they try

to put the moves on you and you refuse them they get angry and call you a tease. This is another double standard I don't think people realize exists. This double standard is that society wants women to be virgins until they are married but if you are a virgin you will be judged negatively for it. Other girls have disliked me for it because they are no longer virgins and they think I'm better than they are in some way. Guys have disliked me for it because I refused to meet their sexual desires or needs.

However, society's belief about how girls should stay virgins until marriage has helped me the most in understanding myself as a woman. At first I did not realize that society only expected purity from girls and not boys, but by remaining what society would call "pure" I discovered how powerful women can be. By remaining true to myself and my sexual beliefs I learned that women can be more than sexual objects, mothers, and wives. I also learned that women are strong enough and powerful enough to step out of society's norms and values. I took my sexuality further than anyone else in my family when I dated someone who was black. This was a big deal because where I'm from there are no mixed raced couples. My father was so angry about this that he disowned me and he was even further angered when he realized that I did not care if he was angry. This relationship showed me that it's okay to find love outside your race and love can be anywhere. Even though my dad and his family disowned me for a long time I remained true to myself and I became even more powerful in my eyes. Rubin mentions that "Sexual essentialism is embedded in the folk wisdoms of Western societies, which consider sex to be eternally unchanging, asocial and transhistorical" (Rubin 149). I find his statement reflects my hometown very well. Sexuality at home was governed by religion and social norms and when I dated an African American boy I was breaking some of these norms and my choice was not very well received. Society's negative beliefs concerning virginity caused me to be outcasted by my peers because I refused to be like them and people started to think that I was snooty. I

Sprinkle, vol. 6

felt alone for many years in high school and even to this day I feel alone sometimes because of my sexuality. I am a virgin stuck in what is now a very sexual world.

I made many choices in my life concerning my sexuality. However, according to Jeffery Weeks “Choices may appear to be individual, but individuals are influenced by social context, and choices have social consequences” (Weeks 25). Looking back on my past and the reason why I stayed a virgin for so long had everything to do with my fear of sex and my experience of sexuality was shaped by society and much of it was political, at first it had to do with the educational system telling me sex was bad and then it had to do with my religious beliefs. Also, the choices I made with my sexuality had major social consequences when I went against the norm of my society and dated someone of another race. I was going against the regulation of my culture. Regulation is when a society defines what is sexually normal and according to my culture dating out of your race was frowned upon and practically unheard of.

In this moment I was having a fateful moment which are “times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands at a crossroads in his (sic) existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences” (Weeks 49). At this time I had to choose between what I thought was right and wrong and what my family and society thought was right and wrong. All of this proves that the personal is political because I was being faced with political agendas and issues while learning about my sexuality. My family and home town were so rooted in their beliefs that no other way was acceptable in their eyes and anyone who went against their values and norms was risking isolation and ridicule. I was taking a major risk when I followed my sexuality and my personal beliefs and values. Risk related to sexuality is “risk associated with conception and birth; with growing up, first sexual awakenings and finding an erotic identity; risks of pregnancy, of sexually transmitted diseases, of HIV and AIDS; risks of violence and abuse, and of discrimination and persecution for your sexual

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
nature and choices; risk of love, relationships and loss”
(Weeks 161-162). I risked violence by my family because I
knew from the beginning that they would not approve of my
dating out of our race. I risked a loss of relationships and I
did receive persecution for my sexual nature and beliefs.

The relationship between sexuality and spirituality
in my opinion differs from person to person. But I have come
to realize that if I am true to my feelings and what I want in
life I will be happy. I have no idea when I am going to have
sex for the first time. It could be on my honeymoon or it
could be before that. What I do know is that when I do have
sex for the first time it will be because I want to emotionally
and spiritually. It’s hard for me to relate sexuality with
spirituality because I have never had sex, but spirituality has
to do with one’s soul and if having sex makes you happy then
I say that is fine. If being sexually active hurts your soul then
something is not right and you need to look out for yourself
above all else.

My sexuality was erotic because I related it to many different
things like Audre Lorde does in her article “Uses of the
erotic: the erotic as power” Lorde says that “The erotic
functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing
the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit
with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical,
emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between
the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much
of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat
of their difference” (Lorde). By remaining a virgin I feel that
to be erotic does not always mean being sexually active.
Being erotic is sharing ones emotions and I do that in many
ways. Lorde also says that “For once we begin to feel deeply
all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from
ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in
accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be
capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a
lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence,
forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of
their relative meaning within our lives” (Lorde). Once I

Sprinkle, vol. 6

grasped the erotic I questioned everything around me. By doing this I gained power and I realized that everything sexual is political and that as a woman I was letting others control my sexuality.

In the end, all of my sexual experiences made me realize that the personal is political. I was forced by the political system in schools to believe that sex was a terrible thing and I learned that this was a ploy to control young teens' sexual behavior. In religious politics my sexuality was being controlled as well and I challenged my society's values and norms. As a woman I will have to fight the political for the rights over my body. So I am forced to realize that the personal is political because nothing is more personal than someone's body and sexuality.

Katie Fawley attends Berea College in Kentucky. She is in her junior year and is dual majoring in Asian Studies and Women's and Gender Studies. Being born and raised in Ohio her whole life, she craved knowledge of other countries and when she went to Berea College that is when she took her first Women's and Gender Studies course. That is when she realized there is a part of history that was never taught in high school and that history consists of half the world's population. Women's history is what she realized she was missing in her life while she was taking this introduction course to Women's and Gender studies. Her interests surround women and gender issues in Asia, mainly in Japan. She will be studying abroad in Japan in Fall 2013 and there she will study issues around women and gender in Japanese society. She wishes to apply what she learns in Japan to help the Asian culture that is increasing here in the United States. Her other main interest is learning Japanese; she hopes to one day become fluent and continue her study of the Japanese language while she is in Japan as well. She hopes that one day she can use her skills in the language to interview women all over Japan and get information about what life is like for Japanese women in their home country compared to what it is like for Asian women in America.

Works Cited

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The erotic as Power." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.

Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984. 53-59.

Rubin, Gayle. *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. 143-178.

Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice, by Patricia McFadden, *Feminist Africa*, Issue 2, 2002,

<http://www.feministafrica.org/index.php/sexual-pleasure-as-femmnist-choice>

Sprinkle, vol. 6

A Culture of Silence and Exclusion: An Examination of Heteronormativity and Homophobia in Schools

By Ace Eckstein

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I discuss the prevalence of heteronormativity in education on the elementary, secondary, and college levels. This paper draws on my personal experiences and observations as a queer student as well as relevant literature including best practices for including queer representation in the classroom and in schools. Pervasive heteronormativity, including a lack of queer representation in the curriculum and everyday dialogue, leads to more recognizable forms of homophobia. Heteronormative ideals and values—“rules”--, along with related homophobia, have lasting consequences for students of all identities. Particularly, heteronormativity in schools leads to vast misunderstandings of queer people. I argue that in order to change cycles of heteronormativity in schools, teachers and school leaders must start with early interventions that include representations of queer people in the classroom and wider school community.

Introduction

The issue of safe spaces for queer² students in schools has come to the forefront of recent dialogue concerning queer youth. This conversation is imperative, though much of the discourse has become problematic due to an overemphasis on homophobia rather than the heteronormativity at play. Additional problems arise in the emphasis on “coming out”-- which places the burden of

² “Queer” is used here and throughout this paper to encompass gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities as well as similar identities and questioning.

creating safe spaces on openly queer individuals. Rather than using coming out as a means to combat homophobia, we must collectively question and address the underlying heteronormative systems that are ever present in schools. The absence of queer history and narratives in the curriculum and every day dialogue of schools feeds into the heteronormative system. Richard Friend (1933) defines this as “systematic exclusion” which is “the process whereby positive role models, messages, and images about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are publicly silenced in schools” (p. 212). Oftentimes queer issues only arise in response to the most extreme displays of homophobia. The absence of an everyday queer dialogue is damaging to both students who identify as queer and also administrators and teachers who are consequently ill-prepared to address homophobia. Through a critical examination of my experiences as a queer person and observations of my environment, coupled with the support of literature that examines queer experiences, I will address the ways in which schools perpetuate cycles of heteronormativity and homophobia in this paper. Further, I will provide evidence of best practices for how to interrupt these cycles.

Coming Out

Redefining the coming out narrative is central in understanding and problematizing the current dialogue of safe spaces. The traditional narrative is the, Cass model, which defines a linear nature of coming out. According to Cass (1984), an individual moves through six stages of identity development in a particular order, from identity confusion to identity synthesis (p. 152). This narrative fails to acknowledge the fluid nature of identities as well as the need to contextualize coming out experiences. For example, I came out to my family first as bisexual, then lesbian, and

Sprinkle, vol. 6

finally genderqueer³, demonstrating fluidity that the traditional model ignores. A model should therefore be created using a more malleable model.

Kenji Yoshino, in *Covering*, defines three concepts: conversion, passing, and covering which are useful in building a more accurate coming out narrative. *Conversion* is defined as “the underlying identity is altered,” *passing* as “the underlying identity is not altered, but hidden,” and *covering* as “the underlying identity is neither altered nor hidden, but is downplayed” (Yoshino, 2007, p. 4). Through examining these concepts a more accurate definition of coming out is revealed: the process of continually covering and revealing parts of one’s identity based on context. The contextualizing piece of this definition is key. It acknowledges the ways in which homophobia and heteronormativity play critical roles in determining how someone covers or reveals their identity. The cycles of homophobia and heteronormativity that schools create actively force covering, passing, and conversion among queer students.

Elementary School

Starting in elementary school, heteronormativity is engrained into the schooling experience. I can recall from kindergarten when a girl in the class had two moms and was instructed not to talk about her family. When other students asked why she had two moms, the teacher would immediately intervene, redirecting the conversation to avoid the topic of queerness altogether. These types of negative interventions enforce institutionalized heteronormativity. This can lead to bullying between students based on stereotypes of queerness, usually in the form of teasing based on gender expressions that are not congruent with societal expectations. Articulated by Friend (1993), “the

³ I define genderqueer for myself as an identity occupying a space outside of the male/ female binary.

most likely targets of homophobic violence and public humiliation...are adolescent males who are effeminate and sometimes females who are 'overly' masculine" (p. 221). The stereotypes of queerness are intimately tied to the culturally assigned gender expectations of our society. Elementary school is a perfect opportunity to intervene and redefine these stereotypes through exposure to various representations of genders and queer individuals. Kathy Bickmore (1999) points to the rationale behind silencing queer topics in elementary schools. Bickmore (1999) highlights that the majority of people, including educators, think sexuality is too mature for elementary school students (p.15). Queerness and sexuality are often coupled as mature topics due to the misguided notion that queerness is synonymous with sex. Elementary school students can be exposed to queerness in a variety of forms that are not tied to sexuality. For example, students who have queer family members. By ignoring queer topics, queer people are rendered nonexistent. This negatively affects all students. Those with queer relatives are immediately affected and those without are left to ignorantly enforce heteronormativity in the future.

There are several practices best suited for incorporating queer topics into Elementary schools. Several elementary school teachers who I know personally have begun to incorporate queer topics in the discussion of family by incorporating children's books with queer themes such as Todd Parr's *The Family Book* which depicts a wide variety of families, including but not limited to queer families. Through discussion, students are exposed to the diverse array of families, all of which are represented as legitimate forms of family. This kind of exposure through books intended for the elementary age group is a critical intervention. For example, I know a boy, perhaps eleven years old who has two mothers. His mothers shared with me that their son keeps asking when they are going to get married to other people. He has not seen affirmation of a family that looks like his and is struggling to see the

Sprinkle, vol. 6

legitimacy of his own family. Incorporating age-appropriate books with queer themes into the classroom has the potential to change this dynamic. Melissa Bollow Tempel, an elementary school teacher, worked to alter her classroom practices to make her first grade classroom inclusive for a gender non-conforming student (2011). One standout practice was having students divide by categories such as “popsicles and ice cream cones” rather than boys and girls. This practice came out of noticing how dividing into boys and girls made a student very uncomfortable, something that is often true for gender non-conforming students. By removing some of the gendered aspects of an elementary school classroom, teachers are able to ease some of the difficulties for gender non-conforming children.

Additionally, Tempel notes that she asked the student about her preferences when difficult situations arose surrounding the student’s gender. This empowers students from a young age to express what they need and to become self-advocates. Through this, teachers are able to affirm students’ identities. These practices illustrate the capability of having inclusive classrooms, even at the elementary level.

Secondary School

For secondary schools, there is a transition from primarily institutionalized heteronormativity, which creates difficulties for queer students, to a combination of pervasive institutionalized heteronormativity and widespread peer-based homophobia. While there is a general recognition of the more profound instances of homophobia (GLSEN, 2012), rarely is the full spectrum recognized. Even less frequently is the connection between the heteronormative institutions and homophobic attitudes of those students acknowledged. Articulated by Richard Friend (1993), “the systematic exclusion and silencing of accurate and affirmative messages regarding homosexuality, coupled with the systematic inclusion of negative and oppressive ideologies, reflects and reinforces heterosexist beliefs and attitudes in schools” (p.

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies 218). Interventions towards inclusion must include both preventative dialogue establishing queer inclusion as well as curricular inclusion of queer topics.

Too often the interventions toward inclusivity come in response to the most drastic acts of homophobia such as physical intimidation or assault. These acts need to be addressed immediately and prevented by looking at the root causes of systematic exclusion that allow for homophobia to escalate to such a degree. Most homophobic attitudes and behaviors are only addressed when an openly queer student who has endured them brings it to the attention of the administration. This was the case at my high school where the administration only began to crack down on policing anti-GLBTQ language after several months of my continued complaints. When the anti-GLBTQ sentiment seemed to escalate, a teacher volunteered me to the administration to give a presentation on GLBTQ issues. Being placed in this situation caused me to feel very alone in my quest for an inclusive school, as if the administration felt that they only had a responsibility to address anti-GLBTQ attitudes and behaviors in the presence of a queer person. Essentially, in an attempt to create a safe space for me, the administration wanted to “out” me in a way that was not congruent with my own perception of safety, which caused a need to cover parts of my identity.

My narrative is echoed by Robert McGarry (2011) when he describes the efforts of an openly gay student using the pseudonym “Fabulous” who wrote and distributed a letter detailing the severe anti-gay taunting he had experienced and witnessed at school. His school’s administration reacted by destroying the letters; however, his effort eventually caught the attention of some district administrators. In either case, administrators would not have addressed the severe problems taking place without an openly queer student calling attention to the issue first. This tokenizing methodology of creating safe spaces is an artificial and superficial attempt to address issues that should be addressed on an institutional level with

Sprinkle, vol. 6

administrative, teacher, and student support. Most importantly, this intervention must occur before homophobia and heteronormativity is established. Our school system is failing to fully educate its students by excluding queer topics. In high school, I was convinced that queer people were not accomplished because they were never mentioned. For instance, I never knew that Walt Whitman was gay until I read about him on a gay pride website even though I had read numerous Walt Whitman poems in school. We talked about the personal life of every other poet we read, but not Whitman. I did not know who Harvey Milk was until the movie *Milk* came out. Learning about key queer figures in our country's history would have been empowering to me as a queer student. The lack of discussion of queer figures led me to believe that queer people were not a part of our nation's history. Similarly, I learned about the Stonewall Riots at a queer history talk at a local queer youth support group. They were not mentioned in a single textbook. When I did learn about the Stonewall Riots, it was empowering to place my experience in the context of a larger movement. Moreover, these events and figures are not only a part of queer history, but also a part of our United States history, and therefore, should be included in the curricula. GLSEN has authored numerous guides for including queer history, yet they are not being used. From my experiences, queer students are being deprived of a sense of community and role models by not learning about the key queer figures or social movements started by the queer community. This enforces the marginalization of queer youth. Additionally, for non-queer students, a lack of exposure to positive queer figures perpetuates misconceptions and stereotypes about the queer community.

There have been efforts to address issues of homophobia in some Colorado schools by updating their nondiscrimination policies due to new statewide anti-bullying legislation. However, only 37% of schools are in full compliance with the law (One Colorado, 2012). With

continued ignorance towards the ways in which heteronormativity creates a culture that instills homophobia, schools will continue to be unsafe for queer people. Safe spaces must include representation in curricular and everyday discourse, prevention of homophobia through exposure to positive messages about queer people, and intervention at all levels of homophobic attitudes and actions.

College

The lack of queer inclusion in K-12 education has severe consequences for queer college students. By the time queer students reach college, many have already internalized homophobic and heteronormative attitudes, only to be met with more institutionalized heteronormativity and peer-based homophobia that has even greater implications. For example, when fraternities and sororities use homophobia as means of building a brotherhood or sisterhood, this peer-based homophobia can have a larger effect because of the Greek status. Leigh Fine (2011), in a study regarding homophobia on college campuses, noted that 70% of the participants, all of whom self-identified as GLBTQ⁴, downplayed the severity of homophobia (p. 530). By the time queer students reach college, they have become tragically accustomed to discrimination.

Equally troubling is the effect that a lifetime of heteronormativity and homophobia has on people who are not queer. By the time these students reach college, heteronormativity is engrained in them and therefore harder to correct. I have witnessed this numerous times at the University of Colorado-Boulder. A noticeable example comes from a class I was enrolled in through the School of

⁴ Students in the study identified as one or more of the following identities: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer

Sprinkle, vol. 6

Education. In Education 3013: School and Society, we focused on the ways in which identity plays into the school system. During the semester, we had a week devoted to sexuality and a week devoted to gender, each approached from a decidedly queer perspective. It became abundantly clear that early intervention must occur as I witnessed my classmate's conception of gender and sexuality turned on its head. Heteronormativity in our society, but particularly our school system, enables misunderstandings of the queer community, which eventually leads to homophobia.

Conclusion

The implications of the heteronormativity and homophobia being perpetuated in schools are vast. The common exclusion of queer topics from school curricula and general discourse leads to a misguided conception of queer people. The problem of homophobia in schools must be tracked back to its roots: heteronormative structures. Best practices of interventions and the breaking of heteronormative cycles exist, yet only a few teachers and administrators are using them. It is essential to recognize the components of spaces that make them truly safe for queer youth rather than superficial rhetoric. In order to be truly inclusive of queer students, schools must begin authentic interventions as early as elementary school. They may do this by including queer voices in everyday discourse and therefore interrupting heteronormative structures as a means to preventatively combat homophobia.

Ace Eckstein is a sophomore studying Communication at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Additionally, he is pursuing a teaching license at CU's School of Education. Ace hopes to teach secondary English upon graduation. Ace is a queer rights activist and is particularly passionate about transgender inclusion. Ace is involved in campus activism through his participation as an organizer for CU's TRANSforming Gender Symposium for the past two years, involvement in peer education where he facilitates

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
workshops on gender and sexuality, and facilitation of a transgender and allied student group. Ace has also been active in the greater Boulder queer community and has worked with numerous community organizations. In addition to focusing on queer inclusion, Ace is a proponent of educational youth empowerment and is involved in CU's Public Achievement program where he works with local high school students to implement social justice projects. Ace is also interested in advocating for immigration reform and believes strongly in an intersectional approach to social justice. Ace enjoys trying to bridge the gap between his activism and education interests in his research work. His primary research interest is inclusive education for marginalized students. Within that, he is particularly interested in queer inclusivity.

Works Cited

- Bickmore, Kathy. (1999). Why Discuss Sexuality in Elementary School? In Letts, William. & Sears, James.(Eds.), *Queering Elementary Education: Advancing the Dialogue About Sexualities and Schooling*. (pp. 15-26). Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing. INC.
- Cass, Vivienne. (1984). Homosexual Identity Formation: Testing a Theoretical Model. *Journal of Sex Research*. 20 (2), 143-167.
- Fine, Leigh. (2011). Minimizing Heterosexism and Homophobia: Constructing Meaning of Out Campus LGB Life. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 58 (4), 521-546.
- Friend, Richard. (1993). Choices Not Closets: Heterosexism and Homophobia in Schools. In Lois Weis.(Ed.), *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools*. (pp. 209-236). New York: State University Of New York Press.
- GLSEN. (2003). Educators. *Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network*. Retrieved 01/03/2013 from <http://www.glsen.org>

Sprinkle, vol. 6

Tempel, Melissa. It's OK to Be Neither: Teaching That Supports Gender Variant Children. *Huffington Post*. [Huffpost Gay Voices].

McGarry, Robert. (2011). Breaking Silences. *Educational Leadership*. 69 (1), 56-59.

One Colorado Education Fund. (2012). One Colorado Education Fund Releases Scan of School District Policies. *One Colorado*. Retrieved 01/5/2013 from <http://www.one-colorado.org>

Yoshino, Kenji. (2007). *Covering*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

The Black Man's Sexual Manifesto

By Waylon McDonald

ABSTRACT. In this article I discuss how the gender and sexual values of my friends, peers, race, family and religion impacted my ideas about masculinity. I use Patricia Hill Collins' "Prisons for our bodies, Closets of our mind: Racism, Heterosexism, and Black Sexuality," "Black Male Privilege," and Gayle S. Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" to contextualize my own sexuality and experiences.

It is a common stereotype to assume that a boy raised by a single mother would be gay, and I wish I could say that I escaped that stereotype. I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio to a single parent household. The majority of my friends were female. I was not athletic or interested in sports, and I had an animated personality. People considered me either "gay" or "feminine". In fact, I remember many of my black male classmates remarking of me, "That nigga soft." The disappointing part of this was not that my peers were using stereotypes of masculinity to measure me, but that my family was buying into it as well. I remember my aunts and uncle telling my mother, "You need to get him into a sport." Not completely trusting my mother to teach me how to be a man, they would go out of their way to arrange opportunities to hang out with my male cousins. I was literally surrounded by people who perpetuated and functioned around an idea of hyper-masculinity where black men were supposed to be highly sexual and tough. This narrow viewpoint of manhood left little room for alternative ideas on masculinity. However, even before I could articulate my longing for a different kind of manliness—one that valued justice, compassion and equality more than brute strength and sexual prowess—I was determined to just be me. This sometimes meant pushing against the gender and sexual values of my friends, peers, race, family and religion

Sprinkle, vol. 6

and having my own sexuality and experiences impacted by these ideas as well.

Gayle S. Rubin's essay "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" gives an outline of the history of sexuality and how it is often suppressed and oppressed. Rubin asserts that in times when society is dealing with poverty, war, and racism there is always a backlash against minority sexualities (Rubin 143). In my household the politics and theories of race, class and gender, suppression and oppression was a lived reality. My mother and her siblings were raised in poverty in Cincinnati and unfortunately were not able to generate intergenerational mobility to advance their social status. Many of the families in my neighborhood were raised in similar conditions of poverty and racism. Under these conditions, fitting in and assimilating were vital to achieving the success denied to previous generations. It also meant I was not allowed to express my sexuality and masculinity the way I wanted. My family's conversations about my mother's inability to raise a man without a male figure in the household, is a vivid example of engendered and destructive ideas about sexuality that can take deep root in communities experiencing crisis. Family members assumed that by not having a man around, I would become gay. This not only diminishes a woman's role but also implies a choice in sexuality. If I was gay then that "broken" sexuality could be fixed by putting me into more "manly" things. Interestingly enough my mother and her siblings were raised in a single parent household. My grandmother was the sole source of support, nurturing and strength. This tension between lived reality and stereotypes also played out in my sexuality and view of women.

I was three when I realized the difference between boys and girls. Living with my mom and only having close relationships with my aunts, I began to notice differences between boys and girls. I noticed that women had breasts, hips, and soft facial features while men have flat chests and harder facial features. I had always seen the difference, but it

An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies
was not until much later that I begin to attach sexual pressure to these perceptions of body.

As a young man mass media provided me a playground to explore my sexuality free of censorship. When I turned on the TV the message was clear: you need to buy this product to get sex or change yourself to get sex. My mother worked full time and didn't discuss sex so my friend became the authority on sexuality. This was dangerous and problematic. Social media, films, TV advertisement, and pornography desensitized and enforced negative and often misogynist perceptions on sex, sexuality, and masculinity. The film *Wild Things* and the late night BET program *BET UNCUT* were the two cultural phenomenons I used to explore my sexuality. I watched the film *Wild Things* on TV and I loved it. I didn't realize how many sex scenes and how much nudity the film contained until I bought it on DVD. I watched that movie every day after school for two weeks straight. One time, my mom came home early and caught me watching it. I felt guilty but I also didn't care because my emerging sexuality was a more powerful force. Around this time a popular TV station was showing the late night program *BET Uncut*, which featured rap artists' music videos with half-naked black women booty shaking. Some of these video's were semi pornographic and displayed women performing sexual acts on each other as background to nice beats and for the entertainment of black men. Watching *BET Uncut* was intoxicating for a young boy like me just realizing his sexuality. This program allowed men to escape from reality and retreat to a place where black women were only sexual objects for men. It was a program that re-enforced the hyper-masculinity of those around me and also sexualized this masculinity to the detriment of others. It demanded a man assert himself physically, sexually, or mentally upon women and other men. More importantly, it suggested the only way to be a man is to be materialistic, violent, and misogynistic. *BET Uncut* lost its appeal when I read an article that helped me contextualize the damaging and pervasive messages

Sprinkle, vol. 6

contained in those video's I loved. The essay "Black Male Privilege" acknowledges that black men have privilege and asks us to critically think about the ways we have assisted in the subjection of black women. When I first read this I was skeptic and did not want to read it. Understanding your own privilege is a hard pill to swallow. Living in America as a black men fighting against mass incarceration and prevalent stereotypes such as being "sambo," violent, or sexually insatiable makes it difficult to understand that you have some power. The author offers a black male privilege checklist to get black man to reflect about the things we take for granted. The author states, "Most of lyrics I listen to in hip-hop perpetuate the ideas of males dominating women, sexually and socially." This privilege allows black men to reduce black women to sexual objects. This was evident when I was watching BET Uncut and then trying to mimic these rappers' behaviors even subtly in my relationships with women. While coming to terms with my own male privilege, I also realized that this "power" was used to oppress blacks in the past and continue to hold us back today.

Patricia Hill Collins "Prisons for our bodies, Closets of our mind: Racism, Heterosexism, and Black Sexuality" gives interesting insight into the construction of black masculinity. Collins discusses how sexuality has been a vehicle for racism and oppression for the African American community. Collins states, "Viewing Africans...as embodied creatures ruled by 'instinct or bodily impulses' worked to...dehumanize blacks (Collins 100). For example, slave owners used slavery as a way to control the sexuality of black women and men. She believes that black promiscuity has produced and sustained a market for cultural phenomenon such as rappers that have sexualized black women. She also states that this type of ideology has manifested itself in a variety of ways. Black men's sexuality was depicted as savage and predatory and has become linked with black masculinity. In my life, many of my peers do not know their history and how the type of masculinity they are pushed to portray was used as a form of

oppression. More importantly, the hyper masculinity they portray has been created as a result of racism. For me the church provide an alternative to this view.

Although many black churches are extremely patriarchal, the church was a place that offered a counter narrative of masculinity. I had developed a relationship with a mentor who was very religious and fostered my relationship with Christianity. We would go to church and do after school bible study. It was interesting to watch how men and women functioned in that setting because religion and an older man was a foreign concept to me. In the church the black women were not exposed as they were on BET Uncut; they were dressed and modest. They showed me that a woman can be attractive without being half naked. The older black men were dressed, intelligent, and were leaders of the church with power and confidence. The older black men validated my masculinity that was in question by my peers. I admired these qualities and church members became men who I wanted to imitate and the model for the kind of woman who I wanted to marry. The church also showed me that I do not have to participate in the broader culture that was sexuality-charged. All through high school I was able to withstand the pressure of my peers who were talking about sex and about the different sexual acts they had performed. I became more comfortable about being a virgin, but when I entered college the pressure from women and men intensified.

My male peers believed to be a man and a virgin in college was abnormal because culture often measures manhood by the number of sexual conquests. However, it wasn't just males who questioned my choice about not having sex. My virginity made me androgynous to my female peers or left them to speculate about my sexuality. These perceptions played largely in my life and were the faction in a major decision. I wanted to lose my virginity.

Many people like to romanticize their first time, but I don't. I do not regret it, but after experiencing it I know that I could have waited longer. I came away from the experience more

Sprinkle, vol. 6

committed to redefining my masculinity and on my terms. To me masculinity is not defined by your number of sex encounters. While not every African American male's sexual journey to discover their sexual identity is the same, it cannot be disputed that many men formulate their identity from the media, religious affiliations, parents, and peers, resulting in many interpretations of masculinity and what it means to be a man. As a black man, I cannot separate out these messages from our racial history nor can I ignore that I am steeped in a world of racism, misogyny and oppression. I can however reshape and reclaim my masculinity to be reflective of the world I want to live in—one that measures masculinity by intelligence, compassion, a commitment to equality and justice, where truly being a man is always having respect for myself and others.

Waylon McDonald is a Junior at Berea College, where he is pursuing a double major in African/African American Studies and Women's & Gender Studies with a Political Science Minor. Currently, he is the President of the Black Student Union and Co-Coordinator of the Diversity Peer Education Team. He is interested in studying the intersections of race and gender in the context of community building for social justice.

Works Cited

- Collins, Patricia Hill. (2004) *Prisons for our bodies, Closets of our mind: Racism, Heterosexism, and Black Sexuality*. In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. Routledge: New York.
- Rubin, Gayle. (1993) *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. 143-178.

Acknowledgements

This project came together based on the energy and enthusiasm of a committed group of undergraduate students at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. I want to thank everyone who provided support for this guest edited issue as we expanded *Sprinkle* to include autobiography along with literary analysis and scholarly research. I also want to thank Stephanie Troutman for her vision and her energy in bringing these new ideas, voices, and perspectives to this journal.

I am continually grateful to Shirley Steinberg at the *The Freire Project: Critical Cultural Community, Youth, and Media Activism* for providing space to publish this journal online in a forum that will appreciate and nurture the voices and perspectives of these developing scholars. We also want to thank Giuliana Cuccinelli and her team for helping us update the site and for making sure this journal continues to reach a broad audience.

Sprinkle Editor-in-Chief

October 2013