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“Building Pillars of Peace”

“In the universe, there are things that are known, and things that are unknown, and in between, there are doors.” –William Blake

William Blake’s words continue to inspire Sprinkle’s involvement in academic justice; with Blake’s ability to find solace in the chaotic, agency in varying worlds of construction, and value in the everyday experience, Sprinkle forges forward with the reminder that life is riddled with contraries—the known and the unknown—but also of doors, constantly opening and closing as we negotiate with the paradoxes of reality. We begin with this imagery from Blake to remind ourselves, and our readers, of the agency we have within the world and the ways in which we experience or perceive it. Sprinkle is intended to serve as a space for exploration, for collaboration, and perhaps most importantly, a space where voices can be heard and acknowledged.

Therefore, this year’s edition includes words and worlds from institutions across North America, a collection of pieces that speak to the vigor and tenacity of scholars and their projects towards liberation. Each piece brings a unique perspective to understanding of -- and negotiating with-- culture, whether drawing from contemporary sources of mass media, or nineteenth century literature, each author illustrates the revolutionary power of the imagination. Indeed, we mustn’t forget that Sprinkle is a journal of power, resistance and, revolutionary politics -- meaning is made and spread across these pages with the hopes of a better now, and a better future. There is an urgency embedded in each piece, summoning the reader to participate, to be a part of the world, not just within it.

Without further ado, we invite you to be a part of this exciting and powerful voyage through feminist and queer voices. But first,
Sprinkle would like to thank the many generous supporters who make Sprinkle a space, a place and, a part of the community. A special thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Meyer for your inspiration and support in the process of building the Sprinkle journal. To California Polytechnic State University and the many departments who offered donations and notes of encouragement, we are truly indebted to your support. And to our fellow staff and student writers, this journal would be nothing without you; thank you for sharing your stories, your ideas, your love for humanity and your courage to make this world a better place.

Saving the world one word at a time,

Jerusha Beebe
Anthony Breakspear
Jessica Ziganti
Associate Editors
Editorial: Sprinkle settling in

I could not be more proud of this current volume of Sprinkle. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with yet another amazing group of dedicated, thoughtful, and hard-working students. We built on the foundation established by my Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies (WGS301) students who made up last year's editors, and grew the editorial board to include more students from across the university and even recruited additional reviewers from my winter 2014 WGS 201 class since we were overwhelmed with the number of submissions and needed more readers. We have so many amazing students here at Cal Poly engaging in important work, that it hasn't been difficult to expand the circle of folks engaged in the work of this journal. The editorial board worked all fall to recruit new members and during the winter term to fundraise and get the word out about the call for papers and train our new editors for the process of reviewing manuscripts and putting the final publication together. The experience and energy of the returning editors were invaluable in keeping the production moving forward and they provided excellent leadership and guidance to the new editors who joined our team this year. We look forward to continuing to settle in to our new home at Cal Poly and are excited about the long-term health of this journal since we have secured more stable funding from the university for this project.

As you read the pieces in this publication, I hope you will continue to stretch the ways you think, understand, and examine contemporary issues through a feminist and queer lens. The articles included here show the high caliber of scholarship in this field and showcases the quality of writing and analysis that undergraduate students demonstrate. As the Associate Editors remind us, words can be powerful and an important doorway to deepening understanding of the world and lead us to more empowering and enlightened lives. We hope these articles will inspire and provide support for more scholarly work and community action in this field. We hope you will find some way to take action in your world in small or larger ways after reading this issue.

Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D.
Editor-in-Chief
Mass Media & Literary Criticism
Female-to-Male Transgender Youth on YouTube: The Community Built from an Individualist Platform

By: Zoe Jimenez

ABSTRACT. The paper elucidates the way in which the global FTM transgender community utilizes YouTube to document their transitions and support one another through personal videos. The paper demonstrates that the “transguys” use YouTube to track their physical and social transitions as they learn what it means to be a man in society. The transguys also use YouTube as a way to reach out to one another by sharing different tips and tricks in order to make transitioning easier for the entire FTM transgender community on YouTube. The evidence discussed in this paper is limited in its scope with only 18 hours of video observed of 5 transguys. It should also be noted this paper is limited in its understanding as the author is a cisgender queer woman. Nevertheless, the findings of this paper show that while the FTM transgender community is oftentimes invisible, the YouTube community is flourishing and deserves to be recognized as a safe space for transgender youth. This paper aims to be a starting point on which further respectful ethnographic research is done on social media transgender communities.

The channel page for a YouTube user is open. The feature video is titled “FTM 1 Year on Testosterone” dated February 5, 2013. As pictures of a person with long hair, a thin frame, and sad eyes slide across the screen, the voice of the person speaks. “I feel like I just want something for myself to call it, just be like ‘this is what I am.’ ... I don’t— I don’t know. I am genderqueer\(^1\). Just call me M.” As home videos come on the screen, you see that M has cut hir hair. Hir eyes have gained more light in them with slight smile on hir face. You see hir adjust the binder—a compression shirt to flatten the chest—underneath hir shirt and say, “I just came out as trans like 2 weeks ago. Not sure yet if I am going to document my transition. I want to, like... I want to be supportive, and I want to be there for other guys, but you know.”

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\(^1\) Genderqueer is nondescript identity for those people who neither identify as male nor female and fall outside the gender binary and cisnormativity. To refer to M, I will use the gender-neutral pronouns: ze, hir, hir.
There are 78 videos on the channel, and all of them discuss identifying as a female-to-male (FTM) transgender person\(^2\) in the world. Glancing at the videos, you realize that M eventually changed his name to Matt, and he is identifying himself with male pronouns. As the videos become more recent, Matt’s facial structure changes, facial hair begins to grow, and his shoulders become broader. In the end, Matt decided to document his transition on YouTube and be a resource to other FTM trans youth on the interactive platform. He opens up this life-changing transition into his true self to the world, and he is not the only one.

There is a whole community of FTM transgender individuals on YouTube who document their own personal transitions, offering their experiences as resources to other transgender youth. These “transguys” frequently discuss the contradictory nature of trying to pass as biological men without any detection of their transgender status while simultaneously posting personal videos of their transition on a public social media site. Many trust that they can hide behind the thin veil of their peers’ ignorance on the subject of transgender identities, but a simple Google search of “FTM” and any of their names will yield video results from these channels.

This small YouTube community brings new light to the discussion of how male-identified youth learn how to be masculine. Most of the ethnographic research on masculinity studies focuses on the ways in which cisgender\(^3\) boys and young men learn to present their masculinity in ways that are acceptable to the wider society. Few academics realize the great theoretical and practical importance of studying the experiences of transgender males as they navigate the murky waters of masculinity as people who were socialized to be women. In this ethnography, I will be analyzing the personal responses and self-analysis of the transguys to the physical changes that occur during their personal transition and the function of the videos as resources to other transguys on YouTube.

**Methods and Limitations**

I observed the videos of five transgender youth ranging in ages from 17 to 24. Four of the boys are of white European descent, while

\(^2\) As Matt now identifies as FTM, I will use the pronouns: he, him, his to refer to Matt.
\(^3\) Cisgender refers to the state in which a person’s biological sex matches their gender identity. An example of this is a person born with normative male genitalia who identifies as a man.
one is Latino. Four of the white youth are from different cities across the United States. The Latino youth, David, is from Canada, and the last youth, Zach, is from England.

The medium through which I observed my subjects forced me to take the role of a passive observer. I was forced to view the content that the subjects deemed appropriate to publicly upload to YouTube. It must be noted that I am not a member of the transgender community, and as such, I cannot attest, or personally relate, to any of the feelings or observations the subjects discuss in their videos. I am but an ally to the community, and I take care to refrain from extrapolating the amount or personal significance of any discrimination the youths discussed in the videos. As an ally, I cannot and do not intend to speak for the transgender community, but I hope my research can enlighten the wider public about the unique struggles of transgender male youth in developing their masculinity throughout their lives.

Validation: Becoming Masculine Before His Eyes

All of the transguys I observed began their YouTube channels at the same time as they began their hormone replacement therapy of testosterone. The commencement of testosterone treatments is an exciting time in which only patience stands in the way of their bodies changing to look more masculine. All of the transguys structured their channels around the month markers of the date they started their hormone replacement therapy to talk about the changes their bodies experienced in that month.

Four out of the five transguys relished in the changes that happened every month, eager to show the changes to the audience on YouTube. They often admitted that the small changes of the first couple months on testosterone may be in their heads, but promised they did feel like changes were occurring. As the months went by, the same four guys grew more confident with their bodies. In later videos, the four guys smiled more and stood up straighter. In his 2 months on testosterone video, Adam comments, “I feel awesome... I got facial hair, indeed, I do. If I let it grow for two weeks, you can kind of see something.” After years of having a post-pubertal female body, any changes were welcome changes.

These trans youth are excited to watch the masculinizing effects of testosterone happen, a puberty confirming their gender identity. While they cannot ever reach the hegemonic masculine ideal of “normative” heterosexuality, power, and dominance introduced by
R.W. Connell, they reach for that ideal in the ways available to them (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). With the introduction of hormones, they are able to see themselves as men with deeper voices and broad shoulders. Growing up in a gendered society, they recognize that they are slowly fitting the look of cisgender men and look forward to being gendered as men. They recognize the importance of looking like normative cisgender men so that their masculinity can be seen as legitimate. The audience to which these guys must perform is society, which defines masculinity, and as they transition, they are excited by the prospect of being gendered correctly (Butler, 1990). After months on testosterone, they now have the personal confidence, informed by what they have learned about acceptable masculinity from society. In fact, several guys mused that they think they are physically attractive, a step closer to hegemonic masculinity. The transguys rejoice when they realize that the body they now have will be sufficiently masculine to the audience that polices their gender performances.

There is one thing hormone replacement therapy cannot give these men: a male socialization from birth. Jan Nespor (1997) argues every child goes through types of suppression during childhood socialization to moderate their behavior and rationalize socially desired behavior. These transguys were socialized as women, and in being taught what is attractive to men, they could extrapolate how to perform masculinity to a limited degree. In the beginning of their social transition, they were forced to make a conscious decision about how they were going to act in light of what they learned about masculinity from society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). All of the transguys discussed that there was a level of exaggerated performativity based on information about masculinity gathered from their limited knowledge. Similarly, C.J. Pascoe (2007) argues that many men perform their masculinity in exaggerated ways to be deemed sufficiently masculine by their peers. Interestingly, I observed when the transguys on YouTube stopped consciously performing their masculinity and began to act in the masculine manner that came most naturally to them, they began to become more comfortable with themselves and their gender identities.

The transguys discussed this problem, many times wishing they could have had a male childhood, but ultimately coming to terms with the reality of their situation and their own ways of being. In a memorable video about this subject, Adam poetically reflects “I’m probably 79% male and 5% female...Maybe I am just another star in the sky of gender”. He later states that he embraces the way he acts as who he is, “thriving in ambiguity”, a form of resistance to hegemonic
masculinity (Way, 2013). Four of the five transguys eventually come to this same conclusion. They are ambivalent to being read as gay men because the goal of their transitions is to be comfortable in their own bodies as men and, over the course of their transitions, be read as such in the eyes of society, as well.

There was one stark exception to this trend: David. From the beginning of his hormone therapy, David seemed unsure of his decision to start testosterone and his decision to masculinize himself to an extensive degree. He talks about feeling like he rushed into hormone replacement therapy, saying, "I don't feel like I regret taking T or anything like that. I mean, I love the person that I am now... [but] I do feel like I did rush into it and stuff like that," and informs the audience that he will be stopping testosterone therapy. As Pascoe (2007) asserts, there are some boys for which heavy emphasis engaging in dominant masculine behavior can cause psychological trauma by internalizing the constant need for approval by society. David shows his YouTube audience very personal footage of sobbing while injecting testosterone, asking himself why he was continuing his hormone therapy. While continuing to identify as a transgender man, he discusses his decision to embrace his feminine socialization and subordinate masculinity in his hormone therapy anniversary video.

There is a small portion of the transgender community that stops hormone replacement therapy at least for a small period of time. As is the case with cisgender males, the feelings surrounding the masculine nature of male bodies are different with each transgender male. The general male transgender community assumes that looking as masculine as one can and constantly attempting to reach hegemonic masculinity are the goals of hormonally transitioning. However, the goal of reaching hegemonic masculinity is impossible and discouraging, considering the fact that masculinity must be won while at risk of being lost in every interaction (Connell, 1995), and all of the youth realize this over the course of their transitions.

Despite being unable to reach hegemonic masculinity, in a very literal way, the transguys I observed are self-made men, the American ideal of masculinity that Michael Kimmel describes in his book, *Manhood in America*. While they are not within classical definition, just as the Self-Made Man proves his own masculinity through hard work and individualism, the transguys create their identities in spite of the obstacles they faced in their youth (Kimmel, 1996). These transguys were socialized as women and were forced to deliberately mold their bodies into more masculine shapes and learn how to be men consciously. They acquire the plight of constantly needing to
prove their masculinity to those around them, and this is especially salient in interactions with people who knew them before they publicly identified as transgender (Kimmel, 1996). All of the transguys expressed in their videos self-consciousness about the ways they acted in light of them being socialized to be women even after passing as biological men.

Advice and Support for Other Guys

The personal information the transguys share on their videos is not only meant to document their personal transition but also to help other transguys, especially in terms of beginning testosterone hormone replacement therapy. Zach, the transguy from England, focuses his YouTube channel on documenting visible changes and complications of hormone therapy and his surgeries. His videos about his physical transition were very formal without emotional reactions; in videos, he listed off physical changes on testosterone or gave updates about his top surgery (mastectomy) results. What his channel lacked in personal reflection and emotionality in the rest of his videos was compensated by the factual information he provides to his viewers who have yet to begin any aspect of transitioning. He even provided a “how-to” on how to pass as a man pre-testosterone.

Zach’s channel parallels Niobe Way’s analysis of academic literature discussing how many guys incorporate the societal expectation of emotional stoicism into their relationships with other guys. From what was observed, Zach is very private with his emotions in his interactions with other transguys through videos, giving only information necessary to pre-transitioning guys. While this may be practiced to promote his own personal safety in “real life,” I would argue that it is also reflective of how he relates to other people in light of societal expectations of men, as he states that he has become more stoic over time since the beginning of his transition. To quote Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner,

Our sex may be male, but our identity as a man is developed through a complex process of interactions with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable (Kimmel & Messner as cited in Way, 2013).

While boys may be emotionally stoic with some peers, they exhibit emotionality with others. In Zach’s case, we see that he does allow
himself to show emotion in videos with his girlfriend, Shiva. Because the cultural perspective on romantic relationships allows for more intimate sharing of personal feelings, Zach is more emotionally available to Shiva, and he allows more emotion to come through in the videos in which she co-stars.

The other transguys are not expected to desire intimate friendships with other men, yet they share things with their transgender audiences that they would not share to many people offline. They upload very personal, emotional videos about their transitions, discussing the implications of their transition. They speak directly to the trans viewers on YouTube, paralleling Way’s (2013) findings that adolescent and young adult boys resist the cultural stereotypes pushed upon them, desiring to share intimate details about their lives to people to whom they relate on a deep level. It is not surprising that four out of the five transguys choose to share intimate details about their lives despite how public the YouTube platform is. The transgender community is small, and the opportunity to come in contact with many transguys is low. The transguys in my observations recognize that there are few resources for young transguys outside the Internet, offering the resources they can to young men that may not have what they need offline. While the band of guys is unconventional, the FTM trans community is essentially a group of friends communicating via YouTube comments and private messages about a development process that affects all of them. Such as the culture-resisting men in Way’s (2013) research, they engage in deep conversation for advice and support about the life-changing process they are undertaking as they transition.

**Gender: Social Construction and Then Some**

The guys discussed in this ethnography are just that: guys. It is true that they were assigned a female sex and gender at the time of their birth based on physical characteristics, but, because they identify as men, they are men. Their determination to transition and force society to view them as men is the convincing evidence to their personal concrete identification as men. Comparing their behavior to studies and ethnographies done by gender and masculinity studies academics demonstrates the similarities between cisgender males and transgender males far outweigh the differences. All are men grappling with the expectations placed on them by society and their own personal wishes and desires.
After 18 hours of watching the YouTube videos of Adam, Matt, Zach, David, and John, I, as an ethnographer, have to question the validity of the argument that gender is purely a social construction. While I wholeheartedly reject the idea that gender and actions, likes, and emotions associated with different genders are innate in each individual, it would be careless to ignore the fact that there is something yet to discover about gender when looking at transgender individuals. Their legitimate feelings show us that the essentialist view of gender in our society is damaging to individuals, but if gender identity were not in some way essential to some, transgender individuals would not exist. What, then, must people do to change the culture to allow the people to express their gender in ways necessary to their psychological wellbeing? Claiming that gender is neither essential nor socially constructed would be doing a disservice to all of society: those who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, those who identify with another gender, and those who identify as bigender or agender.

While the social climate surrounding gender politics is evolving, it is important to take steps to be respectful of the gender of every person. For example, I attempt to refrain from gendering any person based on anything other than their personal identification, but even that can be a dubious decision based on the delicate safety issues surrounding people who are transgender in highly gender-traditional spaces, such as the Catholic university in which I live and study. Being a person who is transgender in these kinds of spaces is, at best, emotionally difficult and, at worst, physically dangerous. While it may be unwise to ask the pronouns of every person in spaces that are dangerous to transgender individuals, being an advocate in these spaces is paramount. Whenever possible, the concerns of this community should be at least mentioned in discussions about changing these spaces. Transitioning is a difficult process, and speaking up for transgender individuals will show that there are people offline that these individuals can look to for support and comfort outside of YouTube.

Author Note

Names and other identifiers have been changed or removed in the interest of preserving the anonymity of the individuals discussed in this ethnography.
Zoe Jimenez is a fourth year student at the University of Notre Dame, studying psychology and gender studies. Her interests within gender studies lie in queer theory, specifically transgender and genderqueer theory. Born and raised in Southern California, she hopes to continue her studies in queer theory and sexual health to help educate the public on healthy and sex-positive ways of expressing themselves in interpersonal relationships.

References


Transgender Misrepresentations in the Paratexts of Motion Pictures: Masking the Authenticity of the Transgender Experience in *TransAmerica* and *Boys Don’t Cry*

By Debra Beight

**ABSTRACT.** Media representations of transgender individuals cross the spectrum from rendering invisibility, to fearful othering, to reductionist comical relief and little effort is given to accurate and realistic media portrayals. Specifically looking at motion pictures, the limited representation of a genuine transgender experience is typically relegated to documentaries while standard narrative expressions are filled with exhausted tropes of transmen and transwomen who are designed to induce fear or laughter at their own expense. To work against the stereotypes, filmmakers need to not only present accurate storylines but to also find ways to engage the audience to view these portrayals. This can be accomplished through the use of a film’s paratexts, the external materials that are not created by the author of the story, as a means to frame the storyline that will be presented. Media researcher Andre Cavalcante established the idea of paratextual influence as a means to represent authenticity in the transgender experience while still making it accessible for mainstream audiences. Building off his work this paper deconstructs the paratextual materials for two films, *TransAmerica* and *Boys Don’t Cry*, to identify the ways in which presentations in movie posters and DVD cover art attempt to normalize the transgender experience but at the compromise of an authentic transgender narrative. Filmmakers and movie studios strive to ensure profits and wide distribution of diverse storytelling, however the implications of these manipulated representations obscure the realness of transgender experiences and erase the rich and intricate layers of the transperson’s sexuality, humanity and identity.

While examining the influences of ethical and accurate representations of sexuality on citizenship, it is impossible to ignore the contributions of popular, mass media constructs. Extensive work has focused on cisgender representations in advertisements, television and movies while ignoring or minimizing the depictions of transgender individuals within these mediums. In marginalizing the transgender experience in the context of visual media portrayals, both cisgender and transgender peoples are denied opportunity to partake
in and contribute to a meaningful dialogue that scrutinizes our politically, legally, and socially produced gender norms. To delineate this idea further, we will delve into the role of paratexts as a means to center transgender identity representations, specifically in two motion pictures, *TransAmerica* and *Boys Don’t Cry*. Each film portrays intuitive elements of the transgender existence while the paratexts for each film attempt to convey assumed, hegemonic gender norms. In dissecting the paratextual influence of these films, we can see where the actions of media presentations continue to constrain the gender ideals into simplistic and sanitized narratives rather than allowing their true complexities to be explored.

French literary theorist Gerard Genette coined the term *paratext* as a component of literary interpretation. The main text created by the author is augmented with extra materials provided by the editor, printer and/or publisher (Genette, 1997). These added elements develop the frame for the main text and can influence the reception and interpretation of the work. Aspects that are not created directly by the author such as the cover art, typeface, arrangement of the dedication, and any promotional materials, are all considered the paratexts for the main text (Genette, 1997). All of these things that accompany the work are part of the “threshold between text and off-text” (Genette, 1997) that implements a transaction of influence that is both subtle and overt. This elicits a measure of control over the material that does not belong to the author, nor does it belong to the audience. A limbo state of manipulation is created to an unknown end where paratexts can be the benefit or detriment to the true story.

For motion pictures, movie posters, trailers, promotional interviews, and DVD cover art act as the paratextual influence for the story being told. This concept was first explored by media researcher Andre Cavalcante. The manipulation of these paratexts can alter the perceptions of the narrative and present a different story from what was originally intended. For films such as *TransAmerica* and *Boys Don’t Cry*, according to Cavalcante (2012), these paratexts perform a type of “double work” in that they attempt to neutralize threats to social norms through subordinating the text and diminishing the complexity of the transgender experience while also presenting the everydаяness of transgender identity through the texts. This idea works in establishing a wider discourse that aims to provide broader representation to transgender individuals. It is a perilous line to maintain.

This level of influence exerted onto the audience will serve to support or diminish the ways in which a viewer would identify with
the story and the characters. We will first look at the film *TransAmerica* to see how the paratexts create a tension for the viewers in how they might relate to the transwoman Bree, played by Felicity Huffman. *TransAmerica* centers around a pre-op transwoman who learns that she had unknowingly fathered a son named Toby. Before she completes her sex reassignment surgery she has to resolve her relationship with her estranged son. They travel across the country together from New York to Los Angeles attempting to reconcile their relationship (Macy & Tucker, 2005).

There is a marked difference in the promotional materials distributed between the foreign and domestic markets. The European release movie poster highlights the transgender issue with the “bathroom conundrum” (Cavalcante, 2012). This poster features a pink background with two baby blue colored doors where Bree stands with her back to the audience. She is frozen in front of the two bathroom doors, one marked female and the other marked male, in a state of indecisiveness, paralyzed at making a choice. This puts the focus of transgender issues in a biological framework by emphasizing concerns of genitalia. “Life is more than the sum of its parts” is the tagline for this poster, which underlines the idea of “parts” being the most relevant aspect. With biology being the central theme in this paratext, it is the gender binary, either penis or vagina, that defines and categorizes the character of Bree. This is an important portrayal for the audience, with a majority who probably identifies as cisgender, however this assumption of a “normal” gender binary posits cis as natural and thereby desired and trans as unnatural and thereby undesirable (Asher, n.d.). This specific paratext presents Bree’s bathroom “confusion” as comical, and an unnatural side effect of not being able to decide which is the “correct” way to proceed. In this way the story is diminished and the complexity of Bree and her experience is reduced to, literally, toilet humor.

The American release poster instead looks at the social rather than biological implications of gender and sex by presenting the trans issue in a subtle manner while overtly presenting a female gender representation with Bree as an idealized mother figure. This poster features the idea of an All-American road film, the “trans” in *TransAmerica* alluding to the cross-country journey. The social focus emphasizes issues around family and shared experiences. “Life is a journey, bring an open mind” is this poster’s tagline, underlining the expedition and inviting the viewer to come along. This paratext is the exact idea of “double work” (Cavalcante, 2012) in that it is masking the threat to social norms by subverting the trans elements of Bree while
simultaneously unmasking the everydayness and normality of the transgender identity. The story from this poster is about a wholesome family road-trip adventure; Bree is the motherly archetype, family-centric with clear female gender markers. She is posed in front of her son, facing forward, looking calm and serene while smiling slightly, and wearing a pink dress-suit with her hands folded demurely in front of her. The backdrop is a beautiful landscape with blue skies, a lush forest and the open road ahead of them. They are driving an All-American car, a station wagon complete with an American flag sticker. Bree’s image recreates the idea of Adrienne Rich’s (1980) compulsory heterosexuality in that she is the embodiment of the “source of emotional caring and physical nurturing” that women are assumed to inhabit as mothers or wives. The only hints at the transgender issue come from Bree’s slightly “mannish” facial features and from a signpost in front of the car that shows the road diverging into opposing paths. This poster still holds to a binary but it isn’t as concerned about the sex organs as it is about the presentation of femaleness through social norms. Rather than being about bodies, the ideas and images of familial structures, the way females are identified socially, becomes the focus for this paratext. This conveys a level of hegemonic control over Bree, with her feminine dress code and confinement to a mothering role (Rich, 1980) which could be read with a sense of irony, a female actress playing a male that is transitioning to become female by adopting overtly feminine traits, however the layered intricacies of Bree’s life are filtered down to just another mom wearing a pink mom-suit.

One final note on the paratextual effects on TransAmerica concerns the DVD cover art. Neither the bathroom issue nor the road-trip allegory is of consequence for the marketing of the DVD release. Instead the cover art presents Felicity Huffman as alluring and seductive, looking highly feminized with none of the “mannish” facial features of Bree. She is set against the blue sky, forest, and open road backdrop but the car and Toby are gone. Her hair and make-up are glamorous with heavy airbrushing to mimic perfection and she is engaging in an over-the-shoulder gaze out towards the viewer. It is solitary, no indication of a journey or of indecisiveness about her body; it’s an invitation to watch, but to watch what exactly? The trans identity is missing and whatever narrative this DVD paratext is trying to convey, it has nothing to do with the original text. The audience is manipulated to a degree where they don’t have the opportunity to relate to the story or character in its true form based on this presentation.
Similarly, the paratexts for the film *Boys Don’t Cry* alter what the viewer can expect from the story to be told. The film is a “based on real events”, dramatization of the life and subsequent beating, rape, and murder of a transgender man named Brandon Teena. The text of this film revolves around the ill-fated love between Brandon and a woman named Lana. After moving to Lincoln, Nebraska for a fresh start, away from some legal troubles as well as some incidents of bullying, Brandon falls in with a rough crowd of friends. His legal problems catch up with him and he is arrested and placed in the women’s section of the local jail (Kolodner, Vachon, & Peirce, 1999). There is a level of invisibility for trans people within the protection of the legal system while still having a high level of visibility in terms of transgressing accepted norms, creating a targeted focus on them in all the wrong ways (Spade, 2010). This is further example of the gender binary system that excludes those outside of the defined and accepted categories which creates disparities in legal and societal protections. From a legal construct Brandon is seen only through an anatomical lens, which marks him as female, locking him, literally, in gender segregated detention that ultimately places him in harm’s way (Spade, 2010). The harm comes from Brandon’s friends who end up beating, raping and murdering him for his transgression of expressing himself as male while being biologically female (Kolodner, Vachon, & Peirce, 1999).

The lush details of Brandon’s struggle are reduced in two ways through the paratextual interpretations presented by both the theatrical release poster and again by the altered DVD cover art. First, the movie title in itself is a reference to a social gender norm that boys don’t cry, exemplifying a form of heteronormative masculinity that abhors weakness. The poster showcases a solitary figure from the neck down. It reads as clearly masculine in body mechanics and theme. This paratext, which highlights the social perceptions of masculinity, primes the audience for a story of successful independence and drive of a loner individual, as this figure seems to be walking towards the audience we infer this man to be walking dynamically towards his destiny. The clothing is distinctively male, dark colors, flannel shirt, oversized belt buckle and cowboy boots. The mannerism is assertive, bold with hands fisted while holding onto a belt loop and a leather jacket. The background colors are burnt oranges and reds with a desolate landscape implying a rugged, Old West thematic; centered down the road he is traveling is a double-solid, straight line. It underlines the eradication of the queer element as though nothing is to fall out of the normal, straight, idealized hegemonic sexual and gender
expressions. The poignancy of Brandon’s love affair with Lana is lost, his representations of chivalrous masculinity and sensitivity is erased for this severe, western masculinity (Hird, 2001). Again, the message for the viewer is manipulated in a way that further dilutes the authenticity of the real Brandon and his legacy.

The second way that the paratext influences the narrative is in the disingenuous semblance of Brandon and Lana on the cover of the DVD release. Comparable to the transformation of the TransAmerica DVD, both Hilary Swank and Chloe Sevigny, Brandon and Lana, respectively, are featured on the cover, gazing out at the viewer. The masculine figure from the movie poster appears at the bottom, this time walking away from the viewer along the straight highway and instead of being a headless body as was in the theatrical poster, Hillary Swank is now a disembodied head, along with Chloe Sevigny, appearing to float above the bleak landscape. Hillary and Chloe both look decidedly female and their intimate, face-to-face posing conveys only the romantic relationship. These images code the film as a lesbian story rather than the dramatic telling of the tragic end of a transgender man. Like the TransAmerica DVD cover, they are inviting the audience to watch them and again it must be asked, watch what exactly and how does this impact the viewer?

Through the exploitation of paratexts, the perception of transgender lives is altered, sometimes beyond authenticity. Often the images used to prime viewer expectations erase the trans issue in order to appeal to a broader audience. This minimizes the complexity of the transgender experience and implies that the audience needs to be shielded from the threat of transgender identity. The options presented are a stunted mix of assimilation and begrudging tolerance with a definite lack of acceptance. By reinforcing narrow gender expectations and silencing the voice of the marginalized “other”, media representations become homogenized and ill reflect the actualities of a diverse and intricate society. When visual consumers are fed a stream of domesticated narratives there is a lost prospect to decenter standard gender exchanges and engage in meaningful discourse that challenges the presumptions and involves the audience to question our social, legal and political constructs of gender that help define citizenship. Paratexts need to serve as a vehicle to further queer the conversation and support and expand boundaries of communication so that characters like Bree and Brandon exist genuinely on their own, without reduction or the media’s tendency at oversimplification. Broad audiences can be reached with the truth about these very human
conditions and the fullness of a transgender life can be celebrated rather than obscured.

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**Who Killed Hannah Montana: The Plight of the Disney Female**

By Oona E. Goodin-Smith

**ABSTRACT.** The author chose not to include an abstract.

Time and again, we see Disney television and movie child stars appear to have it all: semi-decent acting, choreographed dance moves, heavily-produced singing careers, and the inevitable sequel or spin-off show. However, once these child stars grow up and out of their cutesy roles, it appears as if Disney simply drops the star, forcing them to fend in the world of celebrity on their own. Oftentimes, it seems as if these actors and actresses are worse-off than those child stars not associated with Disney, frequenting the tabloids and scandal headlines more than the box office top hits. Additionally, an overwhelming amount of these “train wreck” stars, or the ones who seem to propel themselves off the deep end, “ruined by fame” as society shakes a scolding finger, appear to be female. For example, male Mouseketeers Ryan Gosling and Justin Timberlake and former *High School Musical* star-turned-Hollywood-hunk Zac Efron have all transitioned successfully into mature individual careers. However, ex-Disney sweethearts such as Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, and, most recently, Miley Cyrus have hit a few more bumps on their attempts to escape from their past images, often harkening cries of “train wreck” and “hot mess.” Is it simply that these female ex-Disney stars are just destined for failure, the volatile combination of their femininity and fame exploding over the tabloid scene while many of their male counterparts successfully ease into solo careers and adulthood? Or is there perhaps a greater force at play in the trend of these “good girls gone bad?” The often exalted “perfection” of the Disney woman, that is, remaining meek and unthreatening, combats today’s image of empowered success, constraining the modern teen star as she attempts to create a solo career, forcing her to hypersexualize and exploit herself in the name of liberation, while in fact only diminishing her power.

Marking these women as “train wrecks,” we engage in gossip, a central part of celebrity—and perhaps societal—culture. According to Karen Sternheimer (2011) in *Celebrity Culture and American Dream*,...
“we see celebrities as role models— often we love judging and condemning them, as much as, if not more than, aspiring to be like them...Rather than just having personal influence over individual behavior, talk about celebrities reveals central sociological issues within American society.” Seeing our “role models” stumble and fall through the lens of gossip gives us, as the general public, a chance to validate our non-celebrity. As we point to the failures of those so often put on pedestals, we have the chance to justify our own ordinariness, claiming that perhaps while one does not have the glamour or talent of a certain star, at least the world is not watching each time they misstep, misspeak, or otherwise prove their breakable humanity.

Since “[the construction of Disney] serves as a metonym for ‘America’—clean, decent industrious, ‘the happiest place on earth’” (Bell, 1995), and “talk about celebrities reveals central sociological issues within American society” (Sternheimer, 2011), gossiping about Disney stars is especially appealing as it serves as a vehicle to discuss the chinks in Hollywood’s armor and thus the machine of celebrity in the United States. As a “metonym for ‘America’” (Bell, 1995), Disney films and shows portray, almost exclusively, traditional “values” and gender roles, leaving the male figure to serve as a strong, self-prioritizing hero-- one who could perhaps break the Disney mold and successfully seek an independent career-- while the female characters are generally written to maintain their “good girl” status by doing as they are told without pushback, assuming more docile roles by playing nice and executing domestic tasks--characteristics that do not readily lend themselves to establishing a robust, solo adult career. As Brian Atebery states, “the heroes are male because that has been the considered choice, the norm, for American self-hood. Woman is the exception; man is the default setting” (as cited in Bell, 1995). In other words, as Miley Cyrus and the fallen ex-Disney female child stars behind her have tried to break from the Disney mold and into successful adult solo careers, they have broken societal norms for women and thus been monitored and labeled as “train wrecks.”

“The Good Girl”

Sadly, in many ways, the media dictates our understanding of the functionality of society, and thus, Disney’s constant objectification and portrayal of “good” women as meek, innocent creatures reinforces normative societal views of female gender and sexuality. Therefore, when an adolescent girl goes for five years portraying a singing, dancing, spunky yet “All-American good girl” on television as the
beloved Hannah Montana and seemingly suddenly shaves her head and is seen swinging naked from construction equipment (looking at you, Miley Cyrus), an uproar is bound to (and did) occur, as the foundation of femininity that we are spoon-fed is rocked into oblivion.

From the media standpoint, Miley Cyrus’ recent and drastic image change from “All-American” Disney girl to a peyote-smoking, clothes-shirking, Robin Thicke twerking rebel has summoned cries of “train wreck”, an expression Kirsty Fairclough (2008) states “has become a catch-all term for young female celebrities deemed to be ‘out of control’.” By deeming a celebrity “out of control”, or anything else for that matter, the media cautions society as to when a role model has “gone too far” and is not living up to “acceptable” standards. Some consider this rebellion against their former “good girl” image a means of liberation. However, as Fairclough writes,

To some degree, this exposure could be read as an espousal of a feminist ideal of freedom of choice: these women opt to be in the public eye and choose to display their bodies in particular ways to the waiting paparazzi, fully aware that these images will appear on such sites, commodified for our consumption. Yet these episodes and images do not suggest freedom. Rather, they evoke a postfeminist trickery that encourages hypersexualization and exploitation in the name of empowerment.

She then quotes Ariel Levy, discussing how women today are brainwashed to believe that “all empowered women must be overtly and publicly sexual”, and that the only type of sexuality society recognizes is one which resembles “red-light entertainment”. According to Levy’s argument, women can only be deemed powerful and thus in possession of successful adult careers if they hypersexualize themselves, exposing their bodies, singing sultry lyrics, and perhaps even seductively twerking on a national stage, actions only serving to objectify and diminish from the star’s human worth.

Likewise, after her controversial performance at the 2013 MTV Video Music Awards, Cyrus claimed that her nearly-nude, foam finger antics were all done in the name of empowerment, that she was just trying “to make history” (Eells, 2013) and “represent women in a cool way because people aren’t used to girls that are just like ‘I genuinely don’t care what people think’” (George, 2013), encouraging “hypersexualization and exploitation in the name of empowerment” (Fairclough, 2008). However, by making this history in a “red-light” (Levy as cited in Fairclough, 2008) fashion by exploiting her own body and sexuality through donning flesh-colored underwear and erotically
dancing with a fully-clothed man sixteen years her senior, Cyrus instead only exemplified the underlying Disney message that women are merely physical objects and prized only for their looks and relation to men, failing to successfully escape the “Disney mold.” In other words, Cyrus, the female singer, had to strip down and please a man to gain notoriety while her male counterpart was fully-clothed, hardly dancing, and commended almost solely based on his vocal display, a performance created by media tycoons, furthering the notion that women are only as valuable as they are hypersexualized.

**The Glass Ceiling**

But how else was Miley Cyrus supposed to garner the attention she did in our postfeminist society? As Fairclough (2008) quotes Camille Paglia from *Us Magazine*,

...these women have grown up in a culture where second wave feminism is seemingly of little relevance to their lives: they exist within a postfeminist culture in which the relentless focus on individual choice and pleasure has been the pervading societal mood.

The fading of the feminist movement has caused society to stop thinking about the rights of the woman over her image and body and instead adopt a looser thinking in “liberation,” a term founded in, as Paglia states, “individual choice and pleasure” (as cited in Fairclough, 2008). However, this more laissez faire mode of thinking is often wrought with older, more patriarchal societal messages, such as Disney’s, presenting the almost impossible task to women to be oneself and independent, just not too successful and not too powerful. The result of such a contradictory precedent is seen in Miley and other female stars’ seemingly outlandish acts such as turning to drugs, sex, and profanity in attempts to escape the limiting box they have been forced into by the postfeminist apathy.

In fact, it appears almost as if the “glass ceiling,” so frequently referenced in feminist literature when discussing the barrier to corporate success women seem to face in the business world, applies directly to these female Disney stars trying to escape their previous innocent, adolescent images and launch a successful adult career. The “glass ceiling” exists in the form of societal expectations and the media’s criticism, knocking down these young women’s attempts to succeed and “put them in their place,” leaving it almost impossible to
progress to a healthy, self-respecting adult career after being branded as a Disney female.

For example, in reaction to the Video Music Awards, the media exploded, talking non-stop about the teddy bear and marijuana-infused performance, and thus generating much discussion throughout the country on Cyrus, her antics, and what she was portraying as means as a role model for her younger audience. Naturally, this fueled the blog world's fire and ignited what Fairclough refers to as “Bitch culture,” a “detailed dissection of the celebrity image” and enforcing the aforementioned contradiction that “female celebrities are considered strong and independent women and yet they also regularly inscribed as infinitely inadequate” (Fairclough, 2008). For example, Mashable.com described the performance as “child-ruining,” heavy.com deemed it “shocking and raunchy”, and Perez Hilton poked fun at Cyrus, sarcastically commenting on the star’s attempt at being explicit by writing “Mileybird showed what a good girl she was as she rubbed all up on the Thickness—and herself—at the 2013 VMAs”, again reinforcing the fact that Miley Cyrus’ profane attempts to escape her image of Disney stardom were inexcusable and for naught.

Fame Damage

However, this is not to say that Miley Cyrus has not experienced her fair share of fame post-VMA’s, showing the true power of her sudden hypersexualization. In fact, she is perhaps now more in the spotlight than ever, her most recent album, Bangerz, debuting at number one on the Billboard 200 Chart, her face and now signature tongue-hanging-out-of-mouth pose splashed across countless magazines and tabloids, and her celebrity reaching extraordinary heights as the public waits for her next crazy stunt. This notoriety was not reached by displaying amazing vocals or great talent, though. Instead, it was achieved through making her “bad girl” private exploits—such as getting illegal tattoos, showing a disdain for clothing, and gaining a new passion for drugs and related paraphernalia—public. Such attention to the private life and adventures of Cyrus take away from and diminish any talent-based accomplishments she makes, belittling her achievements and subsequently forcing her back into her Disney girl box and under the glass ceiling of limited success, inevitably causing her to never truly break away and succeed.

As Petersen (2009) says in “Smut Goes Corporate”, this type of private gossip is extremely valuable, and “has functioned as a
commodity like any other, routinely manufactured, bought, sold, and traded”, making a star who airs her “dirty laundry” gossip as public wildly valuable. In Celebrity, however, Chris Rojek (2001) discusses the implications of making one’s “private self” a public entity, saying that while the “split between a private self and a public self” exists for some extent for all humans and inevitably celebrities, for a celebrity:

    The public presentation of self is always a staged activity, in which a human actor presents ‘front’ or ‘face’ to others while keeping a significant portion in reserve. For the celebrity, the split between the I and the Me is often disturbing. So much so, that celebrities frequently complain of identity confusion and the colonization of the veridical self by the public face.

Since Rojek asserts that everyone creates a divide between their private and public beings, yet Miley Cyrus continues to bombard audiences with what she is adamant is her “private self,” it could be quite possible that her newest profession of making her “private life” public is causing her, as Rojek puts it, “identity confusion” and that she has experienced “a loss of self” as a result:

    …the veridical self may make increasingly desperate attempts to overcome the tyranny of the public face. This may result in a pathological slippage between the I and the Me, as the public face resorts to more dramatic attempts in order to alert the public to the horror, shame, and encroaching helplessness of the veridical self.

Perhaps, in all of her “cray cray,” “just Miley being Miley” exploits, Cyrus’ public and veridical selves are in constant battle, and thus, in desperate attempts to escape the “Disney box,” she is willing to sacrifice losing her personal identity. Therefore, even if she manages to seemingly escape her ex-Disney image, Miley Cyrus will have compromised herself in the process, not truly escaping the all-encompassing possession of Disney and the patriarchal values that accompany it.

    This sort of psychological damage to stars is discussed in Su Holmes and Sean Redmond’s (2006) Framing Celebrity: New directions in celebrity culture and is labeled as “fame damage,” or, as the name suggests, how the damage that the constant media scrutiny accompanying the famous can harm the celebrity as a person. Holmes and Redmond harken the numerous accounts of celebrity mental illness as proof of the damage and that society is fixated on the “‘failures’ of celebrities—the failure to sustain a career, to remain
monogamous, the failure to stay ‘naturally’ slim or to ‘cope’ without addictive stimulation”, or in Cyrus’ case, the failure to comply with the societal standards that accompany being a young female ex-Disney star.

**United States of Miley**

If Disney as whole serves as a “metonym for ‘America’” (Bell, 1995), perhaps Miley Cyrus serves as a metonym for American girls. With the media and society so focused on Cyrus’ every exploit or “failure,” as Holmes and Redmond (2006) put it, it is apparent that with the loss of Miley Cyrus’ media-deemed “innocence” comes more than simply one girl twerking in a bear costume, seductively licking home improvement tools, or publicly smoking a joint onstage in Amsterdam. Like it or not, Miley Cyrus, Disney star, stands in for much more. As Richard Dyer (1986) points out, “stars articulate what it is to be human in a contemporary society; that is, they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the ‘individual.’” Thus, Miley Cyrus represents the girls and women of the United States of America “in contemporary society” (Dyer, 1986), and with every try, every attempt to branch out and away from her Disney image by pulling some crazy stunt or over-sexualizing herself, Cyrus symbolizes the constant battle that females throughout our nation face today, embodying the anxieties of femininity faced by trying to meet seemingly unattainable and contradictory standards manufactured by the media and our patriarchal society. As Rebecca Traister explains,

Celebrities are caught between this double helix of meaning which is symptomatic of a contemporary postfeminist popular culture: female celebrities are encouraged to hyper-sexualize themselves in order to generate revenue for the organizations surrounding them, yet they are routinely condemned for growing older (and by implication losing their sexual value)...a key factor in the dismantling of feminism is the "normalization of pornography" (as cited in Fairclough, 2008).

Miley Cyrus is being “encouraged to hyper-sexualize” herself and yet condemned because of it, and, serving as a metonym for the American female, demonstrates through her struggle that girls and women across the country are bombarded with the same double standard. Perhaps because of this, watching Cyrus parade around in a fur and fishnet ensemble or embrace nudity serves a purpose by signifying what is deemed acceptable and what is “slutty” or “trashy”
by our society's standards, helping to reinforce the patriarchal structure by illustrating “what not to do”. She has proven that female culture is stepping outside the gendered norms of innocence and purity, destroying them like a wrecking ball and that drug use and the partying lifestyle can’t stop and won’t stop.

It is for this very same purpose of serving as a symbol for American girls and women, however, that Miley Cyrus’ career accomplishments will perhaps never have the same success and acclaim as a star that did not rise from the Disney machinery, “the metonym for ‘America’” (Bell, 1995). As a martyr of the business and an icon of the oppressed female, Miley Cyrus’ forcefully restrained career serves as a reminder to women across the United States that the fight for equal rights is far from over.

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Feminist Remix of Buffy the Vampire Slayer

By Debra Beight

ABSTRACT. Buffy Summers, the teenage heroine of the television show Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS), presented the horror genre with a third wave feminist icon. Over seven seasons, BtVS contradicted the standard horror model and shattered the damsel in distress trope repeatedly. This program was revolutionary in its female representations and paved the way for shows like Veronica Mars, Alias, and Covert Affairs. However, creators and fans ignore significant anti-feminist themes and plot lines within the show. This paper critically examines the negative elements within the BtVS world that include homogenized character developments, sustained violence against women, sexual assault as entertainment, and generalized policing of sexuality. With a focus on the relationship between Buffy and the vampire Spike, this paper contextualizes the violence inflicted against Buffy, the sexualized danger she is entrenched in and the patriarchal messages that are still filtered through Buffy to the viewers. Exchanges are reconstructed and reimagined to present intersectional alternatives to the established cannon that push the boundaries of feminist representation and embolden viewers to expect more than empowered lip service. Calling for a Buffy reboot that creates a truly diverse archetype that encompasses the ideals of feminist, gender and queer scholarship and creates a heroine we can all identify with.

Looking at the character of Buffy Summers one sees a third wave feminist icon and fans of the television show Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS) can extoll the many instances of Buffy’s feminist representation; the messages that a girl or woman can do or be anything she desires, the apparent role reversals where the girls are in charge, there are no damsels in distress to be saved and the word “empowerment” is normal not novelty. Writer and show creator Joss Whedon is quoted saying, “I have a feminist agenda”, and it is noticeable in the positive female elements seen in the character of Buffy and in the show (Appelo, 1998). However, most critics and fans generally overlook a number of anti-feminist themes in the character developments and plot lines, particularly the intense levels of violence against Buffy herself. Although the creators of BtVS want to preserve
and iconize a strong, progressive female figure, anti-feminist contradictions are still present and often times ignored.

Joss Whedon expands on his vision for the alternative horror movie heroine in his 1998 interview in *TV Guide* with Tim Appelo:

> It was the blond girl in the alley who keeps getting killed...I felt bad for her, she was always so interesting compared to the other women. She was fun, she had sex, she was vivacious, but then she would get punished for it. In my mind I saw the girl go into the alley, the monster follows her, but she ends up destroying him.

Specifically on his ideal for Buffy, “I wanted her [Buffy] to be a cultural phenomenon. I wanted there to be dolls, Barbie with a kung-fu grip”, (Appelo, 1998). Whedon’s intentions are revolutionary, however his heroine is still just a doll, a different version of Barbie. All that’s been added is a “kung-fu grip”, the integration of violence, seemingly the needed component to give Buffy her rightful place in a male dominated genre and to create a third wave feminist icon. Violence against women, or against this particular woman, has been institutionalized in the sense that Buffy has become socialized to entwine with violence. The idea of creating a Buffy doll, and there are a variety from which to choose, introduces a level of desensitization to the reality of combining femininity, play and violence in the guise of an empowering female action figure. The violence becomes, “part of the social environment” and we all learn to “grin and bear it” (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993).

From the first episode of the series, *Welcome to the Hellmouth*, Buffy arrives to Sunnydale in hopes that her slayer past is behind her. She wants a normal, teenage existence, which we can infer, means one free of violence. Her respite is short lived and soon she is back in the fray, caught in a brutal exchange with the hulkish vampire Luke. Buffy emerges victorious from her beating, and accepts her destiny as the girl who fights the monsters (Whedon & Smith, 1997). Violence is the norm. In Buffy’s town of Sunnydale, violence is an accepted reality. The town sits on a Hellmouth, a place where the barrier between the “real” world and the hell dimensions can be easily transversed. This is a space where violence against women has been legitimized. The “big bads”, demons, vampires and all the other little nasties that make Sunnydale their hunting ground still find their victims as predominately female. Even with the feminine savior of Buffy, women are easily sacrificed in these story lines. This solidifies the position that women are still just props ready to be discarded when they are no longer useful. In this realm, author Peggy McIntosh would denote that
Buffy has no distinction between earned strength and unearned power (McIntosh, 1988). Buffy is bestowed with immense physical power, conferred on her from an ancient group of mystical men. In reality these men condemned these girls, all future slayers, to a life of pain, sacrifice and service to the greater good without choice. Her strength is physical, mystical and beyond human realism, and yet she cannot escape being at the mercy of violent interactions. Even if she emerges victorious, she emerges bloodied and bruised.

Critic Gwyneth Bodger in her blog, *Buffy the Feminist Slayer?*, illustrates that Whedon has taken the traditional fetishized female victim and substituted her with an equally fetishized female hero; white, skinny, beautiful blond girl, fun, sexual and immersed in a context of violence (Bodger, 2003). Violence inflicted by and against women, an old standard within a glittery new package. Heroine or not, Buffy is the recipient of most of the show’s violence. She is repeatedly punched, kicked, beaten and thrown about in her nightly battles against the forces of evil. This is her sacred duty, her “place” in the world; even with the super strength, her job is to endure each new physical assault. Other characters in the show reflect the similar mythical norm that author Audre Lorde writes about in *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*. They are all white, young, thin, and financially secure (Lorde, 1984). One character, the sidekick Willow, is presented as heterosexual through the first three seasons but she discovers her same-sex desires early on in the fourth season. There are several male characters throughout the series, of varying power dynamics; however the most prominent males in Buffy’s life are her Watcher, Giles and her lovers, Angel, Riley, and Spike. Although individual essays could be created for Buffy and each of the men in her life, this focus will be on the vampire Spike and the violent relationship he has with Buffy.

Similar to the disposable female victims of Sunnydale, Buffy herself becomes a prop within her unhealthy sexual relationship with the vampire character of Spike. Spike’s infatuation with Buffy begins in season two as he sees her as his ideal victim. Spike has killed two slayers during his vampiric existence and Buffy, being a powerful adversary, would be a worthy kill for him because he’s attracted to her strength and her lust for the good fight. Over the next three seasons Spike is a continued annoyance to Buffy with the majority of their interactions revolving around fighting, either with each other or other threats against them. Spike’s relationship with Buffy begins to intensify in season five as he convinces himself that he is now in love with her. He is manipulative in that he is not her romantic ideal
because he doesn't court her, he stalks her. This soulless vampire, who is a paradigm of pure id, convinces himself that his sexual obsession with the slayer is true love. When Spike confesses his feelings in the episode *Crush*, he does so by knocking Buffy unconscious, kidnapping her, chaining her to a wall and then proceeds to threaten others with a violent death unless she returns his affections (Fury & Attias, 2001). Writer Latoya Peterson would classify his aggressive actions of falling into the “not rape” category where the subtle and overt build-up of his stalking, lewd glances, unwanted suggestive comments and all the instances where he situated himself to be close to Buffy, are elements of his controlling nature that come one step shy of the strict definition of rape (Peterson, n.d.). Later in the episode Buffy discusses Spike's interest with her mother and best friend Willow:

Joyce (Buffy's mom): “Honey, did you send him any signals or lead him on in some way?”
Buffy: “Well I do beat him up a lot, which I guess is like third base for Spike” (Fury & Attias, 2001).

Willow and Joyce then pressure Buffy into confronting Spike and get him to change his behavior. In a classic “blame the victim” moment, Buffy is being held accountable for Spike’s obsession. It’s not up to Spike to control himself, but Buffy's duty to make sure her actions don’t entice her stalker. Their relationship evolves in season six, based completely on sexual encounters and control, filled with sadism, violence and brutality, physical and emotional. Buffy submits to Spike’s demands; he insists to full access to her body on his terms and to suit his whims. He justifies his claim to her body under the declaration of “love”. Buffy, our strong heroine, the one with the power and the sacred duty, yields to his coercions. The ultimate insult to a feminist icon culminates in the episode, *Seeing Red*. Spike is frustrated with Buffy, she is finally rebuking his advances and physical demands and he responds by attempting to rape her (DeKnight & Gershman, 2002). Even with Buffy's super strength and slayer skills, she still falls victim to the horror movie cliche, sexual assault as eye candy for the viewer. Buffy does thwart Spike’s attempt and he is left stammering excuses that he would never hurt her like that and then he later shifts the blame on to Buffy for her own cruel treatments (DeKnight & Gershman, 2002). It seems unfathomable, however, our strong feminist icon not only forgives Spike in the following and final season, she excuses and defends him, ultimately embracing a new relationship with him. Her excuse stems from the revelation that Spike has now
acquired a soul, as if being soulless before gave him a pass for all previous transgressions. This new partnership is no longer sexual, now it’s based in fondness, caring and respect. It’s as if the horrors of the previous seasons had never occurred.

Whedon goes out of his way to tell us that Buffy isn't a victim, she is the girl who kicks ass and embodies “girl power”. There is this emphasis of intentionally slaying gender stereotypes for men and women on the show but there are ways it could have gone further. While there are many positive elements in BtVS, the level of physical and sexual violence against women and against Buffy can’t be ignored. In the episode *Something Blue*, Buffy reflects on her attitude concerning love and relationships:

Buffy: “I know it's nuts, but part of me believes that real love and passion have to go hand in hand with pain and fighting – I wonder where I get that from?” (Forbes & Marck, 1999).

It’s a mixed message, something many women are used to getting, but still it seems counter-productive to Whedon’s intentions of creating a feminist icon.

Specific character developments may or may not be tainted with malicious intent, but it demonstrates the veil that male creators see through that inhibits their realization of the impact of their story choices. The Redstockings Manifesto cites all men as being the agents of oppression due to their unearned supremacy over women (Redstockings, n.d.). The creator of these characters has wielded a level of supremacy over these characters that while his intention may not have been sinister, still resulted in women placed in the subordinate, passive and sometimes disposable role of being less than. Rather than eliminating the “male supremacist culture” from the show, Whedon and his writers have taken to working within the same construct with minor alterations that don’t actually create a revolutionary good for all women (Redstockings, n.d.). We can reimagine a program that removes Frye's birdcage and allows the characters and by extension the viewers to see a world without the traditional barriers that structure limitations and oppressions (Frye, 1983). A new vision of BtVS would remove the double-bind on Buffy that sets her up as the attractive, cheerful, and vulnerable girl that fights unspeakable horrors, not in the town of Sunnydale, but those in her personal life (Frye, 1983).

The exchange with Joyce and Willow from the episode *Crush* could be reconstructed to involve Spike rather than Buffy. After
learning of Spike’s stalking history, rather than questioning Buffy about her participation, Joyce and Willow could confront Spike and pressure him to leave Buffy alone. Buffy is not being framed as a victim but Spike is rightfully being framed as the transgressor; it’s his actions that need to be adjusted, his behavior that must be modified and he must be the one to control his own conduct instead of attributing his obsession to his demonic tendencies or to Buffy’s enticement. If Buffy’s entire group of friends, referred to as the Scooby Gang, confronted Spike and sent a clear message that his behavior will not be tolerated, it wouldn’t be seen as Buffy needing protection but as her community standing up and defending the rights of one of their own to exist free of Spike’s obsession. By approaching this as a group collective, showing support as a unifying force, there would be a shift from violence being familiar and commonplace. Authors Lisa Aronson Fontes and Kathy A. McCloskey (2011) cite that allowing perpetrators to continue their patterns will just lead to sustained and increased violence. By raising the cost to the violator and lowering the cost to the victim, or potential victim, the thought of transgressing could be deterred as being not worth the repercussions (Fontes & McCloskey, 2011). It’s one thing for Spike to go against an individual; it’s another to go against a group of ten.

Spike’s stalking could have been discouraged, his relationship with Buffy could have ended there and the sexual abuse and attempted rape of Buffy could have been a storyline that never happened. Why the writers even decided to create that dynamic is of interest. There was a conscious decision to take this strong character that had survived beatings, heartbreak, and loss and even returned from the dead, twice, and subject her to sexual degradation and harm for our entertainment. Season six never had to introduce the component of dark, sexual fixation to add complexity to these characters. The writers could have presented a season of sexual exploration for Buffy that was based on mutual desire, not control and debasement. Buffy could have engaged in casual sexual relationships of her choosing that could have been with mortal or supernatural beings, male or female, older than her, of a different race than her or she could have declined to enter any type of relationship at all. Christine Seifert writes about the genre of abstinence porn in the Twilight series but there is nothing to say that choosing to be asexual is not a valid option for a character. Rather than framing Buffy’s power in relation to with whom or how she is having sex, her power can be outside of a defining relationship. Buffy has been similar to the Twilight character of Bella in the way of her identity is almost always tied to with whom she is in a relationship (Seifert, n.d.).
It’s been Buffy and Angel, then Buffy and Riley, then Buffy and Spike but it’s never been just Buffy. The success of the show doesn’t have to hinge on her romantic attachment; if it really is a program about female empowerment then it must include an option of remaining unattached. There is an undervalued tactic in allowing a character, a female character, to develop on her own without the constant questioning of will she or won’t she finally hook-up with someone. There is nothing wrong with Buffy being sexual, and there would be nothing wrong with her being asexual. The idea is to remove the dialog from our own obsession over Buffy’s sexual exploits. The writers could have focused on Buffy’s relationships with her friends, her mother or on her own personal growth as a teenager entrusted with the duty of protecting the world from evil to a young woman who becomes mentor to the next generation of slayers.

The aspect of violence cannot be removed from the storylines, the series revolves around a girl who fights monsters, and however, the types of violence and the repeated instances of violence could be restructured from being predominantly placed onto women to being place on creatures that don’t easily identify as any gender. This is Hollywood. They can create any mystical being imaginable, so why not create gender-neutral nasties to fight against. The writers need to move beyond the limitations set by other genres, other programs, other movies and look at a story that is definitively outside the box. Joss Whedon gave the world a character that did push the envelope on what a female protagonist could accomplish but he didn’t push it, or himself, far enough. Over the seven season, BtVS has only had three African-American women featured as major characters and two of those women were killed off very soon after they were introduced. There were no other women of color introduced for the entire series. The secondary character of Willow and her subsequent two girlfriends were the only representations of homosexuality in the series. There were hints of a homoerotic relationship between two male villains during season six, but it was presented as a comical relief rather than a real attraction and genuine pairing. These were all instances where Whedon could have taken the show in a diverse direction and presented a well-rounded vision of his world of empowerment. Marilyn Frye speaks of the example of men opening a door for women and the emptiness of this gesture. It’s a small service that is of no genuine help to women (Frye, 1983). The writers for BtVS opened the door for a feminist icon and highlight all they did to pave the way for portrayals of strong women in action television. BtVS has been off the air for ten years and there is no other program that has taken its place.
in presenting a female lead in an action adventure. Their door opening for the genre was symbolic; it was an acknowledgment that women are still incapable of opening the door themselves (Frye, 1983).

Buffy is just a silly character on a silly show about vampires. But we can't escape the reality that those silly characters on that fantasy show were the only beacons of hope for a feminist representation in a male dominated genre. The potential was there; it just needed to be fleshed out to its fullest extent. Let’s see a Buffy who is a woman of color, who doesn’t wear size two designer clothes and who fights monsters and mentors slayers in training with her female watcher. Give Buffy the support of her best friend Willow and Willow’s girlfriend Kennedy and of Buffy’s other best friend Xander and his boyfriend Andrew. Let none of the slayers in training succumb to domestic abuse, sexual assault or street harassment and if they do encounter any of that, let them stand together as a community to call it out and demand its cessation. Allow Buffy to be alone and independent for a season or two and then let her take a male or female lover that will never cause her physical harm. We need a Buffy reboot.

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**References**


Subversive Family Acts: 
Queering the Body and the Family in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"

By Katherine Beglin

ABSTRACT. This paper applies Judith Butler's Gender Trouble, specifically the chapter "Subversive Bodily Acts", to Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin Market." Butler's critique of gender expression and its limits on the body creates an opportunity to view "Goblin Market" as a possible representation of queer works of literature that have not been analyzed through queer theory. This paper evaluates moments in "Goblin Market" where the text seems to break down the limits of the body between the sisters, Laura and Lizzie, as well as moments where the issue of an inherent gender or sexuality seems to be complicated through Rossetti's imagery. This paper expands upon other critics' theories of "Goblin Market" as a critique of a capitalist society as well as various feminist theories that have analyzed the relationship between the sisters as a dismissal of the heteronormative nuclear family model. This paper demonstrates how past literary works may be examined by applying different gender theories that may create a space for more subversive or alternative readings.

Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" focuses on the boundary between two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, and the horde of goblins they interact with throughout the poem. It is especially fruitful to focus on the idea of the limits of the body and the queering of both the body and the nuclear family by critiquing "Goblin Market" through the ideas set forth in Judith Butler's Gender Trouble, specifically the chapter "Subversive Bodily Acts", which was influenced by Michel Foucault's History of Sexuality. Butler's analysis of the limits of the body and its influence on the family structure and capitalist exchanges can be used to challenge the power of these institutions over the individual. With this lens in mind, Rossetti's work becomes a potentially utopian ideal of identity and community in which limits are not specified between/within/without different bodies. Using Butler's rejection of the limits of the physical body in respect to gender and sexuality, I will analyze specific scenes of "Goblin Market" to breakdown the limits of...
the girls' physical appearances, their relationship with the goblins, and the sisters' subverting the expectations of a patriarchal, nuclear family unit.

The physical identities of the girls are frequently described similarly, almost to the point of being interchangeable. Both share a "golden head" of hair and similar complexion, not to mention the small similarity between the names of Lizzie and Laura (Rossetti, 18). Mary Wilson Carpenter in her essay "'Eat me, drink me, love me': The Consumable Female Body in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'" observes that "the text excludes any suggestion of sexual, racial, class, or any other kind of hierarchical difference between the two women" (Carpenter, 426). These similarities turn to a blending of identity between the sisters. Rossetti describes the girls sleeping "Like two pigeons in one nest/ Folded in each other's wings" (Rossetti, 18). Instead of merely commenting on the sharing of a bed, Rossetti draws attention to the exact limits of the bodies together. Those limits are broken down as she states that the two are "Like two blossoms on one stem/ Like two flakes of new fall'n snow", implying that the supposed individual identities of the sisters share the same origin, in the case of the blossoms, or are indeterminate from each other and also from a larger sense of identity, in the case of the snow. Rossetti's blending of the two in sleeping plays upon Butler's concept of permeability. In analyzing Mary Douglas' Purity and Danger, Butler notes "what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material...the boundaries of the body become, within [Douglas'] analysis, the limits of the social per se" (Butler, 2544). In this analysis, we see the possibility of the sisters' relationship being able to transcend social expectations, not least of all the limits and possibilities of their bodies. Dorothy Mermin in her essay "Heroic Sisterhood in Goblin Market" critiques the previous psychoanalytic readings of the two girls representing the internal conflict of temptation and resistance in saying that "by turning the two sisters into parts of one person, [critics] minimize or distort the central action in which one sister saves the other" (Mermin, 107). However, these readings, along with Mermin's, do not imagine the possibility of the two girls being wholly themselves and also a part of the other.

Laura and Lizzie do not realize their limitless possibilities, and therefore begin the poem preoccupied with the goblins of the market. These goblins contrast not just with the two sisters but are also differentiated from each other. Where the sisters blend and intermingle with "clasping arms", the goblins become separated as "the cat-faced...the rat-paced...and the parrot-voiced" (Rossetti, 13).
These animalistic bodies are separated from each other in the appearance and behavior that suggests an inherent identity in that they perform the sound or action associated with whatever animal they most resemble in that the "cat-faced purr'd" or one scurries at "a rat’s pace" (Rossetti, 13,8). Terrence Holt, in his essay "Men Sell Not Such In Any Town": Exchange in "Goblin Market", suggests that the differing animalistic qualities mean the goblins "seem to possess no integrity of body or of character" (Holt, 56). However the goblins could also represent the effect of power on gender and sexuality throughout history. If we view the goblins through the lens of sexuality and gender being policed and defined through certain supposedly innate meanings, we can ask the same question Foucault does: "When this whole thicket of disparate sexualities was labeled, as if to disentangle them from one another, was the object to exclude them from reality?" (Foucault, 1516). In Rossetti’s text the answer is yes. These "disparate sexualities" are labeled as magical creatures that differ from the two maidens. Holt implies that the separation between the goblins and sisters is necessary because "one may become like them" (Holt, 52). The sisters would lose their sameness and potentially become as different as the goblins in appearance and action.

In the context of gender these "acts and gestures... create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality"; in other words the goblins themselves regulate the illusion of sexuality and gender within the context of the market (Butler, 2549). The product of this "obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" appears as the fruit within the market. The goblins represent those systems controlling and forcing any ideals of sexuality and gender on other bodies. Within their clear differences, the goblins attempt to "punish those who fail to do their gender right", in this case, Laura and Lizzie (Butler, 2551). Laura and Lizzie must confront these expectations and repudiate those threatening systems of power.

Laura is the first to fall for this construct of a clear origin of gender and sex. As she "bowed her head to hear", Laura finds herself drawn to the call of the goblins (Rossetti, 4). Lizzie "thrust a dimpled finger/ In each ear, shut eyes and ran" while Laura remains transfixed by the empty promises of the goblins' cries (Rossetti, 8). Lizzie warns Laura of the inherent dilemma with the source of the fruit: "Who knows upon what soil they fed/ Their hungry thirsty roots?" (Rossetti, 5). Lizzie hints at the flaw in this fruit, or the idea of a fixed origin of sexuality and gender performance.
Laura watches the goblins and desires the fruit. Foucault argues that the fixing of pleasures in this way was the first attempt at creating these power relations of society in that "Power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch" (Foucault, 1518). Laura gives power to the goblins by fixing her gaze on their wares, a specifically "female gaze" (Maxwell, 94). Mermin notes that the fruits "represent desire for a paradise of the imagination that does not exist and therefore can be only desired, never obtained" (Mermin, 108). Through a queer theory lens, the fruit represents Butler's idea of "coherence" between a sex and a gender. But, she notes, "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative" (Butler, 2548). None of the acts, or even limits of the body, inherently define what sex is, let alone gender. Laura yearns for coherence between her body and perhaps her performance of gender, or maybe to differentiate herself from Lizzie. However, because there is no inherent reason behind the limits of her body and her expression of gender, Laura is doomed to search for an origin that does not exist.

Laura attempts to trade with the goblins on their terms even though she does not have any money. Laura insists that she does not have any gold, but the goblins convince Laura to part with a piece of her body: her hair. Holt points out, that in "troping the gold she lacks with the gold on her head, the goblins lead her to accept their construction of her within their gendered system of exchange" (Holt, 62). Laura has now created the first limit of her body and has defined her hair as removed from the rest of her body—something public to not only be judged but also used in exchange. Laura has cooperated with the goblins in "the prohibitive law that generates the corporeal stylization of gender, the fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body" (Butler, 2548). The golden hair of maidens is now a demarcation of Laura's specific sex and/or gender, and she trades it for the goblins' fruits.

Laura begins to suck the juice out of the fruits and continues, "until her lips were sore" (Rossetti, 15). Laura, though, does not cut into the flesh of the fruit or bite into it, but instead ingests the fruit through a state of fluidity by sucking. Laura's sucking of the fruits could be understood through Butler's terms as "the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices [that] presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities" (2545). The erotic image of Laura sucking the goblins' fruits could only be erotic within that presumption of an exchange defined by a heterosexual, gendered exchange of the goblins' realm. Laura now
internalizes the idea of an origin of both gender and sex by ingesting the fruit.

Though Lizzie can still hear the goblin men, Laura's desire renders her useless within the home as she "kept watch in vain" (Rossetti, 25). Even her hair that she had used to trade grows "thin and grey" (Rossetti, 27). This limit of her body that has been used within the gendered market of the goblins loses its luster as Laura attempts to find the origin of those genders. Carpenter comments on how "both a woman and the product of her womb may be called a 'fruit,' but with what different valances" (Carpenter, 427). This touches upon the presumption that the body must conform to society's definitions of sex, gender, and the linking of both with productivity. As the one sister who has not yet submitted to these systems of classification, Lizzie sets forth, with a silver coin, in an effort to save her sister.

Lizzie enters the market armed with the goblins' tool for trade, the coin, and protects her body from being defined as a commodity like her sister's. Holt argues that this act opens up the traditional gendering of the market as male by suggesting, "women might be involved in exchange" (54). However, Lizzie will soon open up the market to the complete un-gendering of this space. When she refuses to eat with them, there is a great clamor as the goblins attempt to make Lizzie consume the fruit (Rossetti, 38). This time the goblins cannot internalize or take anything from Lizzie because she has not defined the limits of her body by the goblins' definitions. In Lizzie's resistance to the goblins' attempts to penetrate and persuade her to eat the fruit, we see the possibility of an inner and outer sexuality or gender as a "border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control" (Butler, 2546). Therefore, for a person to use or refuse to use their body in the prescribed manner creates chaos for the system that has established these boundaries. The goblins, as these forces of regulation and control, cannot handle Lizzie's queering of these boundaries and refusal of their fruit as signifying the origin of these boundaries.

As Lizzie refuses the fruit, her actions begin to break down any idea of an inner and outer difference, or any delineations that the goblins may force upon her: "Lizzie uttered not a word;/ Would not open lip from lip/ Lest they should cram a mouthful in:/ But laughed in heart to feel the drip/ Of juice that syrupped all her face,/ And lodged in dimples of her chin,/ And streaked her neck" (Rossetti, 40). In refusing to speak, Lizzie does not demarcate herself by words or labels. She also reinterprets the meaning of an opening of the body and, in fact, refuses it to be an opening or place of access (Rossetti, 40).
In Lizzie’s signs of resistance Mermin notes that Lizzie is "mixing male and female qualities" until she "is the antidote" (112). Lizzie embodies Butler's "fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability" and the fight against the danger of "unregulated permeability" (2545). She must maintain her control over her mouth in this instance as now a site of impermeability and queer the act of consumption on her own terms.

She feels the syrup entering her and covering her in very different ways than may usually be portrayed for consumption. Though Laura internalized the juice through sucking, and first hints at a queer consumption by consuming through the continuous and fluid action of sucking, Lizzie "does not set up a barrier" but now allows the "maximum saturation" of the fruit or the idea of gender (Foucault, 1520). The different areas of contact with the fruit and the difference in interaction—"drip", "lodged in", "streaked"—now suggest an almost endless possibility of consumption. The goblins do not expect, in Butler's words, "the unanticipated agency, of a female 'object' who inexplicably . . . contests the place and authority of the masculine position" (2540). Lizzie takes control of the situation, much to the goblins' annoyance since "gender requires a performance that is repeated" (Butler, 2552). If Lizzie does not repeat the same interaction and acceptance of an origin of gender and sex, like Laura has, Lizzie frees herself from the damaging "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure" that confine individuals within a gender or sexual binary (Foucault, 1519).

As Lizzie feels the juice of the fruit cover her, she "laughed in heart to feel the drip", internalizing the very external, potentially explosive act of a laugh and confining it to the heart (which will later prove to be a queered site of permeability in the context of family). But it is in the realization that an ideal gender or sexuality is "an ideal that no one can embody" that we see "laughter emerges as the realization that all along the original was derived" (Butler, 2551). Not only does Lizzie provide "laughter in the face of serious categories" (Butler, 2540) but she also covers herself with the fruit, effectively wearing it. Thus, we finally see gender as the performance that Butler calls it. With this new knowledge of gender being a performance, Lizzie brings back this information to Laura.

Lizzie runs home and encourages Laura to consume the fruit through/off her body to share in this performance and further blur the limits of the body, consumption, and agency. The limits of Laura’s body transform after this act. After Laura had "kissed and kissed [Lizzie] with a hungry mouth", she begins "writhing as one possessed"
Rossetti, 46, 47). As Laura queers the act of consumption by eating the fruit off of Lizzie (which Lizzie herself has queered in her act of consumption), the boundaries of what is inside or outside of her, such as her sister, the fruit, and its promise of an origin, become blurred.

Within the final scene there are children that are the sisters' "own"; yet, there is no indication of if the sisters bore them, how they were conceived, or what their relationships to each other or the sisters will be (Rossetti, 50). Though the poem says, "when both were wives", the word "wives" cannot be assumed as an indication of a male presence (Rossetti, 50). Holt contends that the term "wife", "defined as woman married to a man" means the sisters have been put in the context of a male presence (63). According to these critics, the heterosexual family identity becomes another "foundational categories of identity...[that] can be shown as productions that create the effect of the natural, the original, and the inevitable" (Butler, 2541). The sisters define this family without any inherent need for sexuality in order to create. Though the "mother-hearts" the sisters have may allude to the sisters' bearing the children, the queering of the family unit and roles suggests that it may only be an attempt to portray the amount of care and nurturing that a patriarchal audience may relate to. Yet, Lizzie herself queered the heart in confining the very explosive act of laughter within it, so we know that the heart is a unique place of definition for this new queer family.

The sisters encourage the children to hold hands—once again blurring the limits of the body from each other—and support each other. They say "there is no friend like a sister...to cheer one...to lift one...to strengthen whilst one stands" (Rossetti, 50). The sisters' actions create a sense of wholeness to support this new family. The sisters pass on "the performative possibilities of proliferating gender configurations" in new ways to the children (Butler, 2553). The sisters and these children appear to create a queer reality for the next generation.

This short queer reading of Rossetti's "Goblin Market" opens up the possibility of a queer utopia at least within the poem. Once these limits of the body and the societal constructions reflected within texts have been analyzed and critiqued through this lens, there is the possibility of queering the same limits within society as a whole.

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References

What Are You Most Afraid Of?

By Laura Henley

Well I saw my ovaries once on a screen there was a procedure & I saw them first right then left they were as separate from me as jellyfish a crowd of reporters & medical students came into the room

Young rowdy interns put tubes in my veins while eating their lunch over my head some ketchup fell on my sternum some breadcrumbs fell on my neck a pickle slid into my armpit then screams down the hall & everyone left

There I was naked on a metal plank & here’s the thing I walk around now fully clothed still feeling naked on a metal plank

In the market at the bank family reunions waiting tables changing diapers always naked on a metal plank

Now listen I am not a child You can tell me straight— will I come out of this?
Lauren Henley's work has appeared in such journals as Rhino Magazine, Hayden's Ferry Review, and River Styx. Her chapbook, "Desert with a Cabin View," can be found at www.orankmonkeypublishing.com.
Ecology, Environmentalism, and Technology
Laying down a new foundation: An introductory proposal for a feminist and queer ecological engineering

By Cameron Butler

ABSTRACT. Engineering is often conceptualized as a purely technical process, removed from, and free of, politics and justice issues. This paper deconstructs this flawed view, then proposes and explores a newly politicized engineering. It focuses on how social and environmental justice frameworks can be integrated into engineering practice, through the lens of queer ecology and feminist pedagogy. This paper serves as an introductory test to what these social theories might bring to engineering methodology. Most importantly, the feminist technology concept of the ‘sociotechnical’ and the queer ecology concept of ‘natureculture’ are brought together and combined to contemplate the implications of their deployment within engineering. The concluding discussion revolves around question of how these new paradigms can be acted upon in actual engineering practice and how these ideas must be reconciled with the realities of risk reduction and project constraints and financing. In particular, questions are raised around the meaning of ascribing agency to nature and technology, and whether the destabilization of queer theory is compatible with engineering’s goal of diminishing uncertainty.

Introduction

Engineers overwhelmingly see themselves as both removed from, and unqualified to deal with, issues of social and environmental justice (Eschenbach, Cashman, Waller, & Lord, 2005). At the same time, the scope of engineering projects is expanding in an effort to design for larger, multiagent systems, which requires new ways of thinking (Wood and DeLoach, 2001). This paper aims to challenge the false separation by repositioning engineering as an inherently political endeavor. It will provide a conceptual foundation for navigating these increasingly complex, heterogeneous systems.

Queer ecology and feminist pedagogies will be applied to engineering to re-situate its foundational paradigm such that
technology, society, and environment are seen as interconnected and inseparable. Queer ecology melds queer theory and ecocriticism in order to create “a sexual politics that more clearly includes considerations of the natural world and its biosocial constitution, and an environmental politics that demonstrates an understanding of the ways in which sexual relations organize and influence both the material world of nature and our perceptions, experiences, and constitutions of that world” (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, p. 5).

The paper is based on a literature review of feminist engineering frameworks, which are then expanded upon and linked to queer ecology. Some of the implications and characteristics of this framework will be discussed, though this is a preliminary exploration. Given the relative novelty this design approach, many questions will be raised in the paper that cannot be answered yet, but are instead raised as sites of further inquiry. The goal is to piece together the key aspects of an engineering methodology that incorporates and celebrates diversity, in both the profession and the served public; understands the ties between the technological, social, and environmental; and has an ethical framework which explicitly integrates intersectional justice throughout each phase of the design process.

**Engineering as Political**

Engineering is typically seen an apolitical technical domain, not related to oppression or justice (Pantazidou and Nair, 1999). In reality, engineering is built upon a gendered, classed, and racialized history, and is deeply embedded within military and corporate institutions (Riley, 2008). These historical frameworks shape the development of what is considered engineering and technology, as well as determine who can access the profession (Eschenbach et al., 2005). There has long been a significant underrepresentation of women within engineering, unchanged by many efforts from professional engineering organizations to make the field more “women-friendly.” These efforts fail because they do not challenge the systemic embedded masculinity of engineering (Faulkner, 2001).

Engineering’s hegemonic masculinity comes through its historical association with industrial capitalism, as a tool to further the control, domination, and “mastery of nature” (Faulkner, 2001). As the “purposeful utilization of materials is central for engineering,” (Udén, 2009) the control over, and use of, the environment is critically
important to engineering practice. Deeply engrained politics of access have ensured that not all benefit equally, or even at all in some cases, from this increasing resource consumption. One example comes in the form of park designs, which are designed for use by suburban heteronormative families (Ingram, 2010). Unanticipated by designers, queer men have used, and continue to use, parks as a space for sex, oftentimes as a result of a need for discretion with their sexuality. In response, engineers, policymakers, and urban planners have worked to remove the underbrush and trees, as a way of discouraging uses deemed undesirable (gay sex), so that ‘proper’ uses are not hampered, despite that having harmful impacts on both the queer men and the park ecosystems (Gosine, 2010).

Technology is deeply embedded with many unevenly valued dualisms, including “people-focused vs. technology-focused, social vs. technical, detached objectivity vs. emotional connectedness, hard vs. soft technology, concrete vs. abstract, reductionist vs. holistic, specialist vs. heterogeneous” (Faulkner, 2000, emphasis in original). The mapping of the gendered binary upon the above-mentioned dualities shows the side more associated with the feminine (social, holistic, heterogeneous, concrete, emotional connectedness) becomes devalued, while the other, associated with masculinity, is overvalued (Faulkner, 2001). The result is that engineering strives to be a purely rational, objective process that highlights the abstract of mathematical work over the hands-on experimentation of concrete work (Faulkner, 2001). Problems become reductionist, whereby context is erased and only a set of equations matter. When all but equations and parameters are deemed irrelevant, no room exists in design for challenging social injustice.

Engineering must instead be recognized as socially constructed, with emotional connection and social factors influencing all stages (Faulkner, 2000). This is essential for any further discourse on engineering’s history and role in society and the environment, or how those can be (re)shaped towards a feminist or queer end. This brings several questions to the front. Who decides what engineering is or what problems engineers address (Riley, Pawley, Tucker, & Catalano, 2009)? Who is the client, what goals are set, and whose needs or contributions are dismissed (Riley et al., 2009)?

We must explore how the historical frameworks, predominated by white, heterosexual, middle- to upper-class, cis men, has influenced the development of engineering processes (Eschenbach et al., 2005). Feminist technology studies highlights the focus of engineering on high-tech and Western solutions, as well as militarism,
while generally disregarding the problems of, and solutions developed by, marginalized people (Riley, 2008). Will this dynamic change as more people from marginalized communities, especially those who have been directly affected by militarism and war, enter engineering and challenge the current scope? Aarne Vesilind proposes the idea of *peace engineering* as “the proactive use of engineering skills to promote a peaceful and just existence for all” (Vesilind, 2006). This appears to be a positive step forward and creates space for a shift towards social justice as an engineering value. However there are many difficult issues that must be addressed before such a goal can be achieved.

One of the most crucial and complex questions to ask is, “how does the profession of engineering recognize the extent to which global capitalism drives and is driven by our profession, and respond according? (Riley et al., 2009). Given that engineers are hired by clients to solve a specific problem within generally tight and profit-driven constraints, it is difficult to see how engineers can reduce societal inequities, when they are so often paid to maintain them. On the grandest scheme, should engineers collectively stop their work so that the global capitalist system will falter and collapse? Or should professional engineering orders develop more extensive ethical foundations that go beyond the current focus of ethical responsibility located in individual practices? Would ethical frameworks focused on social justice be a sufficient step?

**Reshaping Engineering Education**

Engineering’s underrepresentation of marginalized people is concerning when one “recognizes that all participants bring important insights and experiences into the learning experience and that all participants can learn something new, including faculty” (Eschenbach et al., 2005). Achieving a diverse professional body requires making engineering education, and by extension the field itself, more welcoming and accepting (Lord, Cashman, Eschenbach, & Waller, 2005).

At present, the engineering environment is, amongst other things, heteronormative and heterosexist (Cech & Waidzunas, 2011). It is common for engine technologies to be explained as “the man is the plug and the woman is the outlet and if there are two plugs, how is [anything] going to charge?” (Cech & Waidzunas, 2011). This language, which denies the existence of queer and non-gender-binary-conforming people, is indistinguishable to the homophobic rhetoric
deployed by anti-gay-rights activists, often leaving queer students uncomfortable and isolated (Cech & Waidzunas, 2011).

Pedagogical changes are necessary to create safer spaces. Maria Udén proposes using common things as sites for sharing people’s experiences. For example, while the properties and characteristics of soil may be difficult to grasp at first, all people have experiences with soil (Udén, 2009). People know this experience regardless of and beyond professions and education, ...we live on and by it; we know soil as that which we walk upon, as dirt and dust, transported with the wind from continent to continent, soil to cultivate, soil as slopes that change each year with the flow of rivers and waves, as land suddenly flushed away with storms and rain; the good of soil that gives us crops and the threat of soil as the foundation of houses and villages that vanish; soil sinking down and collapsing when permafrost melts and the sea level rises (Udén, 2009).

These discussions can be used to validate students’ unique experiences and further the collective understanding of the topic at hand.

Anti-racist and liberatory feminist approaches, grounded in Marxist and critical theories, also provide insights on possible pedagogical changes (Riley et al., 2009). bell hooks outlines several key principles, including “a focus on power relations, seeking to upend traditional power structures in the classroom, placing increased authority in the knowledge and experience students bring on the realities of their lives in their entirety” (Riley et al., 2009). Before inequities in engineering can be addressed, their root causes in power imbalances must be identified.

Working to upend traditional classroom power structures requires actively deconstructing these dynamics on several levels. First, it must be understood how broader, societal power relations play out in the classroom (Riley et al., 2009). The classroom can then become a space for critiquing those imbalances. Second, learning, as a one-directional transfer of knowledge from teacher to students, must be destabilized to instead become a continually evolving process whereby teacher and students alike are engaged to learn, share, and teach (Riley et al., 2009).

Students must be empowered as active agents within the educational process. Validating students’ (and teachers’) lived experiences recognizes how people’s identities and lived experiences
shape their perspective. All people’s lives are comprised of unique combinations of experiences that alter how they think and approach problems. Intersectionality is thus crucially important to fully appreciate students’ lived experiences. The experiences of a queer woman of color, for example, is not simple the composition of typical experiences for women, queer people, and people of color (Cech & Waidzunas, 2011). Instead, they are complex navigations of multiple identities that coalesce into different, contextually-driven realities.

Ignoring the embedded politics of engineering does not make engineering apolitical, nor does it prevent the oppression and marginalization that engineering supports. Instead, by declaring sexuality, gender, race, and class irrelevant within engineering, it renders discussions of power, privilege, and oppression irrelevant as well (Cech & Waidzunas, 2011).

**Natureculture and the Sociotechnical**

As mentioned above, engineering problems are typical reduced to mathematical abstractions (Faulkner, 2000). An imbalanced dichotomy develops between the engineering (read: technical) and the non-engineering (read: social). Software design is a clear example of this. Coding directly related to functionality is considered the “meat” of the design, while portions related to the user interface are considered “fluffy” and superfluous (Faulkner, 2000). This diminishes the importance of the user interface, the point where the technology interacts with humans (Faulkner, 2000). It ignores the reality that the functional technology will still fail if it is not accessible or usable by its users. By setting flawed boundaries around what is worth the consideration of engineers, flawed technologies that fail to improve society are produced.

Problematic assumptions about the users of their technologies are often made in design (Faulkner, 2001). For example, microwave ovens were originally designed to appeal to single men, assumed bachelors who couldn’t cook but loved electronics (Faulkner, 2001). To meet their supposed needs, a simple timer function was developed; however, the microwave was then redesigned to be marketed to women, who were assumed to be homemakers, and numerous features and functions were added to fit their presumed knowledge of cooking (Faulkner, 2001). By denying that engineering is influenced by social factors, engineers often fail to see their own assumptions and the resulting impacts on their final designs.
Thomas Hughes developed the notion of the *sociotechnical* in 1986, to reflect the idea that “technology is never ‘just’ technical or ‘just’ social,” but rather is “a densely interactive *seamless web*” (Faulkner, 2001, emphasis in original). Hughes’ work rejects technological determinism, the notion that technologies have singular possible paths of development and that they determine social change (Faulkner, 2001). The idea that technology develops along a singular, set progression, depends on the assumption that engineering is devoid of the social, but merely a composite of mathematical principles and models. Examples like the microwave oven demonstrate the flaw in this conception. While it is certainly true that technology shapes society, it does not reflect the full picture; these processes are complex and subject to varying interpretations and contexts (Faulkner, 2001). Society and technology mutually influence each other in complicated and inseparable ways. And the concept of the sociotechnical reflects that messy interplay between technical and social dimensions.

Queer ecology also deconstructs artificial dichotomies. Donna Haraway proposed the concept of *natureculture* to stress the idea that “the very idea of nature itself is not natural; *nature is cultural*” though that is not to say that nature is subsumed within culture (Bell, 2010, p. 143, emphasis in original). Natureculture allows the nature/ culture binary to be destabilized so that the web of interconnections can be explored. Catriona Sandilands further explains this through the queering of environments, a process “by which all relations to nature become de-naturalized, by which we question the uses to which ‘nature’ has been put” in order to create queer environments where “the boundaries between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ are shown to be arbitrary, dialectical, mutually constitutive” (Sandilands, 1994, quoted in Stein, 2010, p. 288).

Natureculture allows many links between environmental destruction and social injustices to be linked together in deeper ways. Ecofeminism is based on an understanding that the same systems that support gender oppression are also responsible for the domination and exploitation of nonhuman nature (Riley et al., 2009). By seeing nature and culture as deeply connected and tied together, it becomes clear how social systems of oppression and marginalization can have implications for the environment. There is a growing collection of works that connects the exploitation of poor communities, locally and globally, with ecological devastation (Riley et al., 2009).

With the nature/culture duality, “culture” incorporates all within the human domain, including technology. Here it is proposed that further insights can be gleaned from bring in the sociotechnical,
such that the nature/society/technology plurality can be recognized. It is useful to conceptualize them as separate, only insofar as it allows the flawed view of them as mutually exclusive to be deconstructed. It also provides a useful language for discussing how these three interconnected agents can engage with each other.

The garden metaphor, often used in eco-queer writings, illuminates blurring between humans and nature and the queering of natural spaces. In Native American cultures, as noted by Joni Adamson, gardens are seen as “the middle space,” where humans and nature engage in a relationship of reciprocity and co-construction (Stein, 2010, p. 295). The garden metaphor can be expanded beyond natureculture, to encompass the sociotechnical as well, creating the potential to become a space for the technical, social, and environmental to converge as co-creators. All three become active agents, participating within the process of creation and collaboration. Haraway suggests that nonhuman animals and machines should be understood to not only have agency, but also be co-constructing the agency humans possess (Udén, 2009).

The deployment of this metaphor has numerous implications for engineering. First, shifting nonhuman nature from passive source of resources to active participant in creation places greater weight behind the call to ascribe rights to nature. Additionally, this leads to the question about rights and technology. If technology is seen as an active agent, does that mean that it, too, should have rights? If technologies are understood to be tools created for the purpose of use and exploitation, how must that conception change in the face of this ascribed agency?

Engineering is understood to be progressive attempts to remove uncertainties, and increasing accuracy and reduced risk are key goals (Faulkner, 2000). If these are the goals of engineering, how can co-creation with nature and technology be feasible? Do they become clients or co-engineers? What does their input look like and how can it be included in the design process? Does this kind of conceptualization inherently increase the uncertainty and risk associated with engineering projects? Queer theory emphasizes the “fluidity, über-inclusivity, indeterminacy, indefinability, unknowability, the preposterous impossibility, unthinkable, unintelligibility, meaninglessness and that which is unrepresentable” as “an attempt to undo normative entanglements,” (Giffney & Hird, 2008). On its face it appears to work against the very goals of engineering, which may be exactly what engineering needs.
By striving for these understandings of engineering, deeper understanding of engineering problems can be developed. Biomimicry and ecological restoration are areas that may serve as valuable examples of relationships whereby nature acts as teacher and co-creator. Despite the many conceptual and methodological challenges that arise in this kinds of explorations, following through what a queered engineering might look like creates an exciting opportunity to reshape the discipline itself.

**Conclusion**

On first impression, it is difficult to see how engineering, feminism, and queer ecology can find common space for integration. This paper seeks to demonstrate what such a space might look like in order to propose a queer ecological engineering. It must involve an anti-oppression framework, as the recognition and deconstruction of power imbalances is crucial, and it must reposition society as part of nature. The garden metaphor, with the combination of the sociotechnical and natureculture, provides an interesting site to explore the relationships between technology, society, and nature. The implications of these interwoven dynamics can prove a fertile source of inspiration for new understandings of what engineering is, and what it strives to create.

However, there are many questions that have been raised and must be answered in further inquiries. At this point, it is difficult to take the conclusions drawn from this thought experiment and see how they can be applied in practice. With the repositioning technology and nature as active agents within the design process, many fundamental aspects of how engineers conduct their work must undergo significant shifts. It is with cautious optimism that this area of research is presented as a viable direction to reshape engineering as driven towards a broader social and environmental justice focus.

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well as the development of anti-oppressive water resource management processes to empower marginalized communities and voices.

References


By Natalie Tran

ABSTRACT. This paper works to examine the intersection of the 1960s environmental movement and second wave feminism through an ecofeminist framework to expose an epistemological and physical violence against women of color during that time period. First, I define ecofeminism as a framework to historicize violence against women of color throughout United States history. I then link histories of colonization of both lands and bodies of the New World to modern day movements in order to dispel liberal notions of progressive politics of the 1960s. I will detail policies and dominant racist ideologies perpetuated with the purpose of limiting the reproductive rights of women of color in the United States. Ecofeminism may be used a framework for future feminist collaborations with environmental studies to bring about the narratives of women of color and how they can be traced back to racist and classist constructions to reinforce structures of domination. Understanding these histories could push for more just practices when addressing environmental issues that take into account important practices of historicization, intersectional pedagogy, feminist theory, and decolonization practices.

Introduction

During the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, women reacted against renewed domesticity caused by the 1950s “White flight” to suburbia and fought against issues of sexuality, family, the workplace, and reproductive rights. In history books, all women gained legal rights to abortions and contraception options; however, these popular narratives were not consistent across all women in the United States. Narratives for women of color during the 1960s were made largely invisible in the liberal feminist movement of white women fighting for the choice to reproduce: to have the options of contraception, family planning, and abortions, while women of color
were simply fighting for the “right” to reproduce against political and social discourse seeking to discriminate against minorities, such as anti-immigration laws (Sillman, 2004).

The sixties were also a time of heightened environmental consciousness in response to the Green Revolution and postwar mechanization of agriculture. Theories that emerged from this time period, such as the “Population Bomb” instilled a dire and cataclysmic fear of overpopulation and depletion of resources with a large portion of the blame placed on women of color in the United States.

The historical accounts of both movements largely hide aspects of the movement that were deeply flawed and epistemologically and physically violent against communities of color, and though these movements that occurred simultaneously in the 1960s seem unrelated, they helped mutually construct and reify one another as movements against women of color and their environments. I will argue this by first explaining the theory of “ecofeminism” to introduce the framework used to critique the 1960s “radical” feminist and environmental movements. I will explore the dualisms and intersections between issues of race, class, gender, and environmental lands by then linking the history of domination of bodies and lands during the era of exploration to modern day manifestations of epistemic and physical violence against women of color perpetuated by environmental and feminist discourses of the 1960s. These manifestations include anti-immigration laws, the demonization of poor women of color, and scientific testing sites on lands and bodies.

To move into the epistemic violence caused by these movements, I will introduce the environmental theory of the “Population Bomb” and Malthusian catastrophe, which laid the groundwork and justification for control over the domesticity and reproductive rights of women of color. I then explore the environmental theories on population control and its impacts on women of color communities, specifically the reproductive violence against women of color in Native women. Conclusively, I examine how an ecofeminist framework can be used to address issues of inequality by piecing together the lost, invisible histories of women of color and push for the decolonization from histories of domination and control that looms over the United States and their lands.

**Ecofeminism as an epistemological framework to understand the relationship between women of color and nature**
Ecofeminism is a feminist framework that examines issues affecting women’s subordination and the destruction of their environments through an intersectional lens of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Through an ecofeminist framework, I will explain how the environmental movement and second wave of feminism worked to mutually reinforce one another to create an anti-immigrant, racist, and classist movement against people of color. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on theorist Val Plumwood’s theory of ecofeminism and her critique of Western dualistic thought as the grounds for colonization and domination over women and nature.

Val Plumwood (1993) in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* states that dualistic hegemony is the logic behind European colonization and equating women to nature. She states that dualisms both exclude as well as construct difference to ensure that dominant structures of power are reified. These dualities are stable and not fluid, and the categorization and compartmentalization of subjects into these dualisms enact a form of epistemic violence through the silencing of differences and complexities of individuals/life. Some of the key elements in dualistic structure in western thought are (Plumwood, 1993):

- culture/nature
- reason/nature
- male/female
- mind/body
- master/slave
- reason/matter
- rationality/animality
- reason/emotion
- civilized/primitive
- production/reproduction
- human/nature
- public/private
- subject/object
- self/other

Though just tenets of western ideology, these dualisms have unleashed incredible violence upon the way individuals understand their material reality; they underlie dominant forms of knowledge production and reflect the gendering of dualistic thought that fuel patriarchal domination—males are associated with culture, reason, master, civility, human, and self. Women are associated with nature, emotion, slave, primitivism, nature, and other. These binaries are
hierarchal, and women in this system will always be subordinate to men.

Colonization of the Americas Cultivated Gendered and Hypersexualized Notions of Land and Womanhood

The domination over lands and women of color can be traced back to the first European accounts of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492. By examining the historicization of domination through an ecofeminist framework in United States history, it is evident that the destruction of both lands and women’s bodies was essential for perpetuating masculinist and colonist violence over all human and non-human life.

Anne McClintock (1995) in *Imperial Leather Race, Gender and Sexuality* recounts the first descriptions of the Americas by early colonizers and exposes the hegemonic discourses against native people. By feminizing and “scientifically” proving the “primitive” nature of black and brown bodies, European settlers justified the complete destruction of preexisting communities of color and their environment. The European obsession of the colored women's genitalia (ie. “Hottentot” and diagrams and displays of her body) further dehumanizing and terrorizing women—the notions of colored women's heightened sexuality remained a racist pigeonhole that still exists today.

The language used to describe native lands was also hypersexualized. McClintock states:

> Columbus’ breast fantasy, like Haggard’s map of Sheba’s Breasts, draws on a long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment. For centuries, the uncertain continents-Africa, the Americas, Asia—were figured in European lore as libidinously eroticized. Travelers' tales abounded with visions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminized men's breasts flowed with milk and militarized women lopped theirs off. Renaissance travelers found an eager and lascivious audience for their spicy tales, so that, long before the era of high Victorian imperialism, Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination—a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears. (p.22)

This persistent gendering of women and the lands is essential for examining the histories of domination of the 1960s through an ecofeminist framework. Women equated to nature, and the binaries in
which Plumwood discussed illustrates the incessant need by male conquerors to enslave, control, and dominate. Lands in which native peoples once lived were taken and destroyed, and women of color were displaced, enslaved, and raped. These tactics of “Othering” and gendering were reifications of White power, and the epistemological violence perpetuated in this era of exploration was foundational for the continued violence against women of color and their lands into the 20th century.

**Limiting Women of Color’s Reproductive Rights in the 1960s through Population/Environmental Discourses**

The violence against women of color through policy, scientific research, and national discourse during the 1960s arose from ideologies of the environmental movement. Anti-immigration tactics implemented by the United States had the purpose of oppressing and limiting the reproductive capacities of immigrant women of color. In Priscilla Huang’s *Anchor babies, over-breeder, and the Population Bomb: The reemergence of nativism and population control in anti-immigration policies*, Huang (2008) states that the U.S. environmental conservation movement also brought new theories that “perpetuated the undesirability of [women of color] and immigrants,” such as the “Population Bomb” by Paul Ehrlich (p. 385). Ehrlich states that unregulated population growth would eventually exceed resource growth, and without population control, the growth would lead to overpopulation, war, and famine— an “apocalyptic impact that the poor could have on the natural environment” (Abrams, 1997, p. 1111). By 1978, a coalition between environmental conservation organizations and immigration control created the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), founded by numerous Sierra Club members who worked to pass anti-immigration laws that, according to the Building Democracy Initiative that documented these racist movements (2007), imposed “harsh and punitive measures against undocumented immigrants, including barring undocumented children from attending public schools.”

FAIR also accepted millions of dollars from the Pioneer Fund, a foundation that supported eugenics and “race science” research (Reich, 1995). The eugenics movement starting in the late 1800s was the science of improving the human population through controlled breeding to increase desirable, heritable characteristics. Huang states that eugenics sought to “curb pregnancies by women deemed ‘unfit’ for motherhood,” such as being immigrant, poor, non-white, or socially
deviant women; women who fit one of the categories often spanned all four. The eugenics movement provided empirical, “hard science” to justify the racist stratification amongst women. “Racially superior” Anglo-Saxon middle/upper class women benefitted from the eugenics programs, like tax incentives and awareness campaigns for having children, while “unfit” women were coerced into violent policies, like mass sterilizations, out of “necessity” to “prevent the American people from being replaced by alien stock” (Ross, 1993, p. 141).

Discursive violence against women through environmental theory and the silencing of women of color experiences in second wave feminism

Violence against women of color was also perpetuated by the negative and racist social discourses of the environmental movement. During the 1960s, anti-immigrant “activists” asserted that immigrant population growth was the major cause of environmental degradation in the United States says Slifer (2000) in Growing environmental concerns: Is population control the answer? The Malthusian and Ehrlich theories on overpopulation suggested that the world was running out of resources and was nearing “carrying capacity.” Immigrants and their burgeoning offspring were therefore seen as throwing off the equilibrium between humans and the environment. With the carrying capacity of the environment exceeded beyond its limits, nature would be unable to accommodate immigrants’ needs. This sentiment about the environment assumed that the earth and its relationships with animals and humans were stagnant and unchanging, and the blame for environmental degradation and resource depletion was left on individuals of color and their assimilation into American culture. Anti-immigration activists established the dichotomy of “self/other” through the idea that immigrants quickly adapted the Western lifestyle, which would deplete resources used by “real and authentic” Americans (Huang, 2008, p. 403). The image of a “real and authentic” American and the idea that aspects of nature could be owned was dependent on the oppression of immigrants. To understand the freedoms of domesticity and the right to life given to “real” White Americans, it was essential for the liberty of people of color to be taken away; these ideas were reified and perpetuated by environmental activists.

Feminist theorists, such as Andrea Smith (2005), have detailed the way in which women of color, much similarly to those of their ancestors during the era of exploration, were and continue to be
exploited by the United States—a form of domination and control of their lands as well as individual bodies. In *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide*, Andrea Smith shares how during this period of second wave feminism—of white women’s renewed autonomy through obtaining the rights to contraceptives, birth control, and abortions—Native women on reservations became “natural laboratories” in which American scientists tested vaccinations and immunizations on bodies before allowing the “true” citizens have access to that medicalization (p. 115). Scientists performed mass sterilizations without consent on these women, and later in her novel, Smith shares the way in which Native lands were used as nuclear testing sites for NATO and other governmental bomb test sites that destroyed indigenous lands (p. 180). These stories reflect not only the complete disregard of Native peoples as humans, but also the power US ideologies that can be traced back to colonization still exist. One cannot help but question why women during second wave feminism were not known for supporting the fights of women of color, as well as the epistemic violence that was perpetuated by this silencing during the in 1960s.

**Conclusion**

The histories of women of color during the 1960s have largely been kept invisible, and it is difficult to imagine where and how to begin reconciling with an environmental history muddled with racism and epistemological violence. Their stories are still invisible and many environmentalists continue to use theories of “carrying capacity” and Malthusian catastrophe to advocate for extreme policy change. Anti-immigration and nativist sentiments remain contemporary issues in the 21st century. Though a complicated issue with many different apparatuses involved, ecofeminism can be used as a framework to bring justice to women of color who fought for their reproductive rights. This intersectional framework is essential when exploring issues across difference to break imagine a world where coexistence (rather than dualistic notions of thought) between man/nature, woman/man, and slave/master is possible.

Another ecofeminist perspective that is essential for rectifying the pasts of women of color emphasizes the fluidity and complexity of relationships between the environment and humanity throughout space and time. Racist and stereotypical narratives in the 1960s stated that women of color were contributors to the “population bomb” by having children born in the United States to benefit from American
social programs. Those discourses that keep that subject individualized and stagnant lack the ability to transcend both borders and time in order to see the relationships between the displaced and the United States from a local to global scale.

When immigrants flee to the Western world, they must forget and lose the memory of the countries they left behind in order to assimilate into “White America.” Forgetting these histories often removes the larger narratives of why those people of color were displaced in the first place.

The dissociation of people from their homelands, through slavery, colonization, and exploitation of their lands, transcend time, as their effects are still evident in the racialization and demonization of women of color today. Black women throughout American history have been terrorized and oppressed by white, patriarchal society, and they are often blamed for their own inability to escape poverty. The mass migration of Mexican farm workers during the 1990s was due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that displaced and destroyed the farmlands and livelihoods of the farm workers who were then abused and treated like animals in the United States. International conflicts, like during World War II and the Cold War, displaced thousands of people from all around the world, fled to the United States only to be greeted with racism and nativism. Most importantly, and rarely discussed, the anti-immigrant and nativist movements that continue to today have roots in conservation and environmentalism of the 1960s era. Becoming versed in these invisible histories of women of color is to have a strong understanding of ecofeminism and support movements for decolonization and peaceful coexistence.

Colonization, slavery, and warfare are the result and incessant desire for control over not only one another but also over nature. To understand an ecofeminist framework is to transcend dualisms of local/global, past/present, and metaphysical/matter and immerse in the epistemological violence and oppression against people of color. Larger narratives of technological warfare and irreversible destruction of the environment for resources have direct correlations to women’s bodies and their freedom to domesticity. Raising this consciousness and understanding the interconnections between man’s domination over both women and nature, is essential for bringing justice for these immigrant, women of color.

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References


Pervasive Unreality: Reining in Photoshop

By Andrew Bianco

ABSTRACT. The advertising industry utilizes tools such as Photoshop to alter the physical appearance of people and products before advertisements are released to the public. Due to the pervasive nature of advertisements, the public is bombarded with images of bodily expectations, and numerous youth who are exposed to magazines are influenced by the portrayal of beauty standards from the images in magazine photos. European legislatures are taking steps to ensure that advertisements do not promote extreme thinness or that disclaimers are used on modified images. United States legislatures have little legal requirements to limit the usage of Photoshop, despite public opinion on the subject. Some companies are voluntarily refraining from digitally altering their advertisements, but restrict their actions to single product campaigns. The problems surrounding Photoshop in advertising are examined through an episode of South Park, in which the series’ feminist character enters a campaign against Photoshop due to the impact on her classmates. The effort ends in failure and tears, and demonstrates the uphill struggle feminists face when challenging standard practice in pervasive industries. It is clear that the United States needs to take steps to reduce the impact that the advertising industry has on impressionable minds before it becomes too damaging.

Introduction

Advertising works. For a global capitalist economy to spend billions of dollars yearly on the industry (Austin, 2012), it must be profitable and successful, giving immense power to advertisers in choosing what is advertised and how it is advertised. This establishes a status quo in what is available and desirable to purchase and in what physical image people are expected to portray in their dress and appearance. In the past, advertisements had to rely on real images, trick photography, or cartoon illustrations in order to market their product. Now with creation tools like Photoshop, unrealistic portrayals of real situations, products, and bodies can be created and distributed that portray a false reality. This false reality is used to influence people not only into purchasing products they may or may not need, but also influencing people into believing this is the true or expected reality.
The perpetuation of this false reality is run by the status quo, a patriarchal society damaging to the minds and bodies of the population. The United States needs to join Europe in adopting policies limiting the use of photoshopped images in advertising, which will allow more realistic beauty standards for society to look up to.

In a society plagued with ideals and standards of how women should act, look, or dress, it becomes increasingly difficult for women to develop and maintain a sense of self-worth and self-identity. As discussed in *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions*, our culture encourages girls to be competitive with each other about their looks, comparing their bodies against notions of youthful ‘beauty’ (Shaw & Lee, 2012). Our culture promotes unrealistic standards of what feminine beauty is supposed to look like through mass production of advertisements that objectify women or alter the photos in a manner in which advertisers try to make the model look ‘perfect.’ “These images of perfect bodies are fabricated by a male-dominated culture... [to appear] flawless and give the illusion of absolute perfection. In reality, these images tend to be airbrushed and computer enhanced...” (Shaw & Lee, 2012).

Due to these enhancements, eating disorders have been increasingly prevalent in our society. The National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA) published an article called "Get the Facts on Eating Disorders (n.d.)," which shows the following startling impacts that false image portrayals in the media have on an individual's self-worth:

- 42% of 1st through 3rd grade girls want to be thinner.
- 81% of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat.
- Of American elementary school girls who read magazines, 69% say that the pictures influence their concept of the ideal body image shape; 47% say the pictures make them want to lose weight.

The idea that being healthy is less important that being thin is a harsh cry for help from the youth of our society that needs to be answered. It is necessary to start making changes as to how advertisers reach customers, even if it is a small change at a time

**Foreign Policies**

In recent years, foreign governments have begun regulating the practices of advertisers, particularly where it can affect to the self-image of women. In 2008, the lower house of French Parliament voted in favor of a bill that outlaws ‘publicly inciting extreme thinness,’ which is specifically targeted at magazines, advertisers, and the fashion industry (Carvajal, 2008). This decision came after the 2006 death of an extremely thin model from Brazil, which prompted many
changes in the modeling industry to promote healthier models. In 2009, French politicians developed a law to put a “health warning” on photographs of models that are altered. Under the proposed law, all enhanced photos would be accompanied by a line saying: “Photograph retouched to modify the physical appearance of a person” (Hardach, 2009). While the law wouldn’t ban altered images entirely, it would clearly inform the observer that the subject being viewed does not exist in his or her natural form.

British lawmakers have also started to take a stand against Photoshop, as Britain’s Liberal Democrats are trying to ban photoshopping entirely in ads aimed at anyone under the age of 16, and requiring all other ads to carry a disclaimer describing the extent of their alterations (North, 2008). As a strong supporter of banning Photoshop, Member of Parliament Jo Swinson stated:

Today’s unrealistic idea of what is beautiful means that young girls are under more pressure now than they were even five years ago. Airbrushing means that adverts contain completely unattainable perfect images no one can live up to in real life. We need to help protect children from these pressures and we need to make a start by banning airbrushing in adverts aimed at them.

MP Swinson expresses fears that young girls will internalize the way women are objectified in western culture through constant and pervasive advertising.

Domestic Policies

Actions against digitally altered images in advertising are not exclusively a foreign issue. Recently, the National Advertising Division (NAD) for the United States has begun to ensure that “claims made in national advertising are truthful, accurate and not misleading” as they specifically relate to the use of Photoshop in advertising (“Cosmetics advertising digest,” 2012). In 2013, the NAD investigated claims against Covergirl for advertisements on mascara. The NAD determined that when Covergirl “made a qualified performance claim [for mascara], but then artificially enhanced the picture of the model’s lashes... the picture served as a false product demonstration” (“Nad finds p&g,” 2013).

Although the United States hasn’t been as progressive as our European cousins with taking a legal stand on the representation of women in the media, it hasn’t stopped the rise in public outcry against the use of Photoshop in advertising. Some companies are voluntarily
omitting altered images in their advertisements. For example, American Eagle has chosen not to use any photo editing of their models for their Aerie line of lingerie (Dockterman, 2014). “They are still models, they’re still gorgeous, they just look a little more like the rest of us... We’re hoping to break the mold ... we hope by embracing this that real girls everywhere will start to embrace their own beauty.” Said Jenny Altman, a brand representative. The models shown with “tattoos, beauty marks, lines, dimples, fat, puckering and slight stretch marks... clearly on display” (Dockterman, 2014). Interestingly this comes nearly ten years after Dove’s *Real Beauty* campaign, which launched in 2004, using women of several shapes, sizes, and colors, and insists that the women used in the advertisements are devoid of digital retouching (Bahadur, 2014). This is in contrast to the Aerie lingerie campaign that still chooses to use “gorgeous” models for their line.

**Photoshop on South Park**

Public awareness of the impact of Photoshop is not limited to American clothing and hygiene companies. The usage of Photoshop in advertising and popular culture was addressed in the tenth and last episode of *South Park*’s seventeenth season, titled “The Hobbit” (Parker, 2013). *South Park* is the second longest running animated television show on prime-time television, and for at least the past decade has been a point of political and social commentary in the form of parody and satire. Interspersed with jokes of flatulence and feces are those golden turds that make *South Park* a Peabody and Emmy award winning series. In “The Hobbit” (Parker, 2013), Wendy Testaburger, attempts to dispel the notion that Kim Kardashian is naturally beautiful by photoshopping the class’s ugly girl, Lisa Berger, into the beauty standard the United States culture is accustomed to seeing in media and advertising (i.e. skinny, large breasted, long haired, fair, light-skinned, and wearing makeup). The plan backfires when all of the boys in school believe that the photoshopped image is representative of the girl’s worth instead of her true physical appearance. Disregarding for the moment that her entire worth is judged by her beauty over any other factor, it is her digital beauty that appeals to everyone regardless of her true physical appearance, indicating the impact that Photoshop has on the youth. A series of events unfolds resulting in the rest of the girls in school photoshopping their own digital images, Wendy becoming the ugly outcast, labeled a hater, and going on a political crusade against
Photoshop, only being talked into standing down and photoshopping her own digital image and uploading it to the internet in tears. Roll credits. No jolly ending music. No funny, embarrassing joke.

Instead of using the episode for its typical brand of humor, Trey Parker used it to blatantly call attention to the impact that society's portrayal of women plays to the American youth. *South Park* accurately depicted the damage that false expectations of beauty can have on the self-esteem of young women and how it promotes the sexist viewpoints of society at large. In this depiction, even the staunchest supporters of feminism can bend under the enormity of patriarchal pressures at large. The character Wendy knows that giving in and giving up is the wrong thing to do, but eventually gives in to peer pressure. Unfortunately, the real world isn't as simple as photoshopping your Facebook profile photo. The real world involves young girls and adult women trying to mold their bodies into the shapes and styles seen on magazine covers and advertisements, often to the detriment of their health. When the character Wendy experiences horizontal hostility from her classmates, that experience is episodic and singular. It will be gone in the next episode, whereas women and girls in the real world are pressured and bullied by their peers to conform to a societal standard that is constantly barraging them with falsified images and impossible expectations.

**Conclusion**

Advertising is effective. Advertising is smart. In many ways nothing can be done about that. Advertising brings in profits, so somebody is buying into what the advertisers are selling, and that somebody is us. The free market has its dangers. But as with regulations for safety in the workplace and for hazardous waste disposal, regulation on mental safety from advertising practices must overcome its obstacles. History has shown that it is the responsibility of lawmakers to protect the people, through at least marginal regulation, when profits encourage unsafe business practices. Photoshop is a particular target of recent attempts at advertising regulations due to prevalence in the fashion, makeup and beauty product spheres. It is the target of foreign and domestic policy change and scrutiny. It is the purpose for whole new advertising campaigns strictly devoid of its use. It is powerful enough to affect the self-esteem of millions of women and girls the world over. Its effects on the perceptions of both girls and boys are pervasive enough to be satirized in a popular comedy television series known for toilet humor. If
changes aren’t made regarding how advertisers reach out to the children of society, the damage to youth expectations of beauty will only increase. It doesn’t take someone bullying a child to give them low self-esteem; all it takes is a society that continues to do nothing about a false reality.

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Tiana I are sprawled out on my bedroom floor, vigorously coloring in the giant HIV virus I drew on our trifold poster. It is freshmen biology and we feel so lucky to get AIDS assigned to us for the big end-of-the-year disease project; the movie-musical Rent is in its prime and our latest obsession, which glamorizes the disease in our eyes. I feel even luckier, however, that we have been randomly paired to be partners.

I try not to look at her sleek black hair or delicately arched eyebrows or thin lips smiling to the Green Day album I have blasting because, simply, it turns me on and I know I shouldn’t feel that way. Maureen is my favorite character in Rent: she was the one who showed me that being attracted to boys and girls was okay. Unfortunately, my parents detest that idea and condemn her character, so I am trying to shove that part of my sexuality away. It doesn’t always work.

I think I am in love with Tiana. That I’ve been in love with her ever since we had gym together in junior high. Or, at least, what I think is love, which means a quickened pounding of my heart, even sweeter palms, warmth crawling up my neck, and that wonderful sensation between my legs.

Her being right-handed and me being left, our two unused hands are within inches of each other. I giggle at the nub my crayon has become. She lets out a breathy laugh and a jolt of electricity passes between us as she smoothly glides her hand over mine. For what must be the first time that night, we look each other square in the face. We know what is going to happen.

Like a slow pull of a magnet, our lips meet each other, then clumsily, our tongues. We both push the trifold away as I lie down, guiding Tiana on top of me. It wouldn’t have worked any other way. Our mouths hardly separate as our bodies slide against each other, with her hands doing most of the exploring. Time is of the essence here and we both know it: my parents could walk in at any moment. I think Tiana has that in mind as her hand quickly finds the place that is reserved just for myself up to this moment, though I am very ready and happily willing to finally share it with her. A rhythm is quickly established and a few minutes and a muffled
moan later, I want to be hers forever. But as quickly as we both lie down, we are up again, back to coloring.

I love taking a shower in the bathroom of my San Francisco home because the shower has a little window that looks down on the street and sidewalk below. For years, as I’ve waited the five minutes for the conditioner to moisturize my hair, I’ve gazed out that window and watched the people walking by below. Occasionally I would see someone I knew, causing me to giggle beyond control at the thought of my being naked in the shower happening to glimpse them while they have no idea about it. But for the most part, hordes of people I don’t know would walk by as I would imagine their entire life story. As if I could know their story in those split seconds, any more than I could have known Tiana’s and my story. That it would progress or gain grace. That we wouldn’t really know what drew us together, but we would go with its flow.

I hate to admit that I sometimes wonder if Tiana and I were too young to have started what we started. When I see fifteen-year-old girls today, they look and act so juvenile that I cannot believe Tiana and I consummated our attraction at that age. At fifteen, we must have been beyond our years.

As prom season rolled around, I would chuckle to myself as I overheard girls expressing their nervousness at the apparently inevitable fact that they would lose their “virginity” to their boyfriend on that special night. What was the big deal? Was it because it would be with a boy? With a subtle smile, I’d walk by them, still glowing from the previous night spent with Tiana and already challenging the socially constructed concept of virginity.

Oddly enough, as we made our way through high school, nobody knew about Tiana and me. She had her own group of friends: that group everyone is afraid of crossing paths with for fear of a fight, shove, or just a threatening look. That group that could be found smoking pot by the football stadium bleachers after school, blasting screamo music. At least one of them was always in detention for something or another. And then there was my group: close-knit friends since elementary school who had sleepovers on the weekends, discussed literature during lunch, and excitedly still go trick-or-treating every Halloween. Tiana and I were never associated together in the eyes of our peers.

During school, we were careful with each other. Not even a
hello or a nod of the head. Nobody knew. Nobody could know. If someone saw us show any sort of acknowledgement, they would tell their parents and their parents would tell my parents and my life would be over. Everyone would connect the dots and figure out something was going on between us. So went my mental process at sixteen years old. One day during our junior year, we happened to be in the restroom at the same time during lunch. We washed our hands side-by-side, looking down into the sink the entire time. Not even in the pseudo-sanctuary of the girls bathroom could we make any sort of acknowledgement towards each other; there were other people around. That hand washing was longer than usual, however. Longer than anybody would want to spend washing their hands in a high school bathroom, especially during the precious thirty minutes of lunch. This elongated hand washing moment was our only sign that we were both enjoying this brief moment. I tried to catch her eye in the mirror, but she turned off the faucet, slapped her hands dry on her jeans, and got out of there.

It was days like that when I knew she would want to come over that night. No one in my family ever knew she was over. That is something I had to make sure of. It didn’t matter if it was a weekend or a weeknight with school early the next day, but around two in the morning, I would get a text message from her asking if she could come over. These text messages excited me beyond belief. They reminded me that we somehow mattered to each other. Even if I was just roused from the deepest sleep, I’d respond with an enthusiastic “Of course!” and wait the five minutes or so until I’d hear the rapping of knuckles on my window. That was my cue to pull up the blinds, pop out the screen, slide open the window, and help my sweet Tiana crawl in. Weeks of unacknowledgement would be made up for with the biggest embrace and the most passionate kiss, hips and breasts pressing together, fingers getting tangled in each other’s hair. “I missed you,” Tiana would always whisper, lips softly brushing against mine.

I don’t need to tell you the rest because you can likely imagine how we would crawl into my bed, talk and be silly, make love, and maybe even try to sleep. In these moments, we never talked about why we ignored each other at school. We never talked about how hard we judged each other’s group of friends. We never talked about the hand washing moment in the bathroom. Rather, we explored the deep facets of our minds, what we thought we were in past lives, what bizarre experiences we’d had in our travels. I would listen to her wish for the hundredth time that her brother did not die in that car crash. I was probably the only one she’d cried to about this incident, allowing her
tears to moisten the crook of my neck. It was times like this in my bed where we were the purest of individuals, the purest versions of ourselves, when everything else regarding ourselves was beyond extraneous.

My family and I went to Iran in the summer of 2009. It was my brother’s and my first time going to Iran, and the first time for my parents since they’d fled the country thirty years earlier during the Iranian Revolution. This trip was one of the most influential trips of my life, though it took me a few years to realize that. In the ninety-degree humidity of their summer, I was hot the whole time, sweating and uncomfortable under my hijab and conservative clothing. But I am so glad I had this opportunity to see the roots of my family’s heritage, especially one instance with a taxi driver that to this day brightens my mood.

It was the day we spend at Mellat, essentially Tehran’s Central Park, and hailed a taxi to get back to our apartment. Just our luck that we happened to get what struck me as Iran’s sassiest taxi driver that day. As he was chatting to us about what he knows about America and if we knew his relatives in New York, he made an illegal U-turn right in front of a policeman and was surprised when he got pulled over. When the policeman asked him if he knew he made an illegal U-turn, the taxi driver, with his most innocent expression, told him he had no idea. The policeman, after giving me a glance through the window, told him he still had to write him a ticket, at which point the taxi driver instantly dropped that innocent façade, told the policeman the Farsi language version of “Screw off!” and gassed it out of there.

I thought mom was completely overreacting to this situation, begging the taxi driver to let us out right now. I, on the other hand, was laughing so hard there were tears streaming down my face. “This girl knows how to live,” the taxi driver chuckled. To this day, it is one of the best compliments I have ever received. But this is also the moment I started noticing my mother’s tendency to irrationally overreact.

The nights Tiana and I spent together always went by in a confiding, deeply emotionally-connected nature until six in the morning rolled around, which is when I had to reluctantly usher her out. My parents would soon be awake and would try and wake me up for the day (a service they thought they were providing since my alarm frequently failed me). The thought of them finding me with Tiana…I would have rather died. I’d help her out the window, she’d lean in for a last kiss, and I’d watch her meander around the block to her own
nearby home through the crisp Bay Area mist. I knew that when I would see her at school in just a couple hours, we would be like total strangers again. But...I would be okay with that, I’d tell myself, knowing I did not emotionally require anything more from her than what we had and still have. I am content, she is content. Did I know then that this is how it would be to this day?

At the start of our senior year of high school, I finally told all my closest friends about what I had with Tiana. My parents and I had come back from Iran earlier that summer; it dawns on me only now that this was also the summer the Iranian government hung two boys when one of their dads caught them together. Is this what compelled me to tell my closest friends at school? The first things they asked me was if I was a lesbian and if Tiana was my girlfriend. Those two questions shook me to my core. First of all, I thought they would be more shocked that she and I had anything to do with each other at all. But they were not amazed—at least, initially—at how inconspicuous we were. Second, I never considered a label for any of this, yet both these questions had to do with labels. Lesbian. That word still feels disgusting in my mouth when referring to myself. As I stood telling all this to them, I remember trying to say that just because I am a girl and Tiana is a girl, I never associated the two of us with that word. We were just two people—gender being completely irrelevant—who happened to find this odd connection with each other that is hard to put in terms that our society is used to. So, we were also not girlfriends. Plus I still liked guys, so “lesbian” definitely was not it.!

I tried at length to explain explaining this somewhat of a paradox to them: that Tiana and I were sleeping together and had some sort of emotional connection, but were not girlfriends. The not-girlfriends part was harder to grasp because of the intimacy our relationship was built off of, but the lesbian part was slightly easier. They took the “lesbian” label away and slapped “bisexual” on me instead. That still wasn’t right, but I went with it just to bypass this obsession with sexuality labeling they all seemed to have now. As frustrating as this bypass initially was, I was happy. I went into that conversation just wanting them to know about Tiana, not making the seemingly obvious connection that in doing so, I was also coming out them. By their reaction, regardless of the lack of flexibility when it came to labels, I knew that they would be a good sounding board for me to figure out how exactly I felt regarding my sexuality. I am not going into the details of that process, for it is ongoing. If someone asks
me today how I identify, I still do not have a clear-cut answer. I don’t need one. “I like who I like,” I say to them, “and through the experiences I have had so far, I realized that person could be virtually anyone.”

Once I got my license and started driving my mom’s minivan, Tiana and I had the freedom to go on what some people might call dates. They were not a frequent occurrence by any means, but they were memorable. We would drive up to Mission Peak at night for a breathtaking view of the bay, with San Francisco shining bright in the near distance. Or we would get the best Indian food in Berkeley. One time we went to the beach. These “dates” were the closest we ever got to what people would label “a relationship.” As fun as these excursions were in theory, they also felt a little awkward. I didn’t want these interactions that made us more like stereotypical “friends,” or even “girlfriends.” I liked us best in bed, spilling our hearts and our minds out to each other. It was on one of these trips that we held hands for the first – and only – time.

After my friends had some time to ponder what I told them, Lori asked the most relevant question: “Do your parents know?” My heart would always drop to my gut when I thought of what my parents would do when they found out. Relatively speaking, my parents are modern and liberal, but being Muslim and Persian, they also enforce a few core values: one of them being no sex before marriage. No same-sexed or queer-identified relationships would be one of their values, too, if that was even a possibility for my parents to imagine when it came to their children. Of course, I – and you – know why they would be shocked.

How could my parents, who emigrated from Iran when they were teenagers in the early 1980s, from a country where people are still put to death for homosexuality, not have instilled in them a deep-rooted disgust for homosexuality, along with the heteronormativity that goes hand-in-hand with Islam, and, of course, society in general? The thought of a not-straight child was understandably, I suppose, impossible for them to fathom. I eventually tried to tell them. Actually, it was more like my mother forcing it out of me. Proposition 8 had just made it on the ballot and, being in the Bay Area when many gay-themed issues were rising in politics and the media, protestors on both sides were all over the place, including in our neighborhood and most certainly in the Castro. My mom would always honk for the “Yes on 8” ones, feeding their spirit though diminishing mine. Mostly
in response to her doing that, I got a “No on Prop 8” bumper sticker, which my mother forbade me to put on the car.

I put it on the car anyway. Her rage is not even worth talking about, but it left me barricading myself in the bathroom with her slamming her fists on the door, screaming words no parent should ever say to their child. Tears were streaming down my face, but I wasn’t necessarily crying. I felt myself becoming stronger. If I could handle this, I told myself, I could handle anything. Including my mother’s blatant questions, now asking me in the cruelest, bitterest way every time I showed some support for equal rights if I was gay. In her mind, she was sure the answer was no, but she thought she was shaming me in the worst possible way by associating me with the gay community. She thought you had to be gay to be in support of gay rights, and nobody wanted to be gay. Over the last five years, I am so proud of how much she has changed. Not something I could have foreseen at this time.

The breaking point between my mom and myself was Dustin Lance Black’s speech for winning “Best Original Screenplay” for Milk at the 2009 Academy Awards. I was trying incredibly hard to keep my composure while watching it with my family—he was giving so much hope for people struggling with being open about who they are, those who are bullied for being gay, those who are struggling with their families—but I couldn’t help but start openly sobbing. “Why in the world are you crying?! This is nothing to cry about! You’re not gay, are you?” my mom snapped at me. Through my tears, I burst back, “But what if I am?” I was trying to be hypothetical. I obviously didn’t identify as gay. My mom knew I liked boys, which is the crazy thing. But responding with that hypothetical question was just as good as her catching me in bed with Tiana. Instead of responding with anger, she herself burst out in tears. “It can’t be…it can’t be...” she kept repeating. She asked my dad if he heard what I said. He silently nodded. I could almost see new wrinkles forming on his forehead as his eyes brimmed with tears. This is not the right moment, I thought to myself. I had to take it back. “I didn’t say that I was, I was just stating it hypothetically! Stop being so dramatic about everything!” The crying instantly stopped. After a few breaths, my mom squeaked out, “You mean it?” “YES!” And so, at least in their eyes, I was straight again.

This scene is a moment of great disappointment I have in my parents: a sad moment of juvenile behavior and lack of maturity. As I alluded to before, they have gotten better. They realize that the cultural mindset they are used to is changing, and they are willing to change with it. Four years have gone by. I have sometimes considered
telling them about my not-straightness again, but concluded that it is not worth it. Only when I am with someone serious, and if that person happens to be a girl...that is when I will tell them. Recently, my mother stated, “Who cares if someone is gay? We are all children of God.” When she said that, I swear I could hear angels sing.

I thought what Tiana and I had would stop once we went to college. Believe me, if I knew what “what” is I would try to say it, but I don’t have a label. She stayed in the Bay Area to attend San Francisco State while I went to San Luis Obispo. There was no true goodbye between us, only a text from her that read, “I’ll see you when you’re back for Thanksgiving.” “You bet!” was my response, which was my attempt at alluding to Brokeback Mountain: a tragically funny joke she probably didn’t understand. That doesn’t matter, though.

While I’m away, there’s no contact between us, but once I’m back, it’s as if nothing has changed. Late night rendezvous in my room. Sometimes a drive in the minivan, which is now mine. Hours when we catch each other up with our college lives: new causes we believe in, new things we have learned about ourselves, new places we’ve explored. I feel the same profound joy as we share our newfound selves with each other.

The only part where I morally falter with Tiana is that we still see each other at the same time we are dating and “being in a relationship” with another person from college. I dated a boy for a while during my second year at Cal Poly, but when I went home over Spring Break, not seeing Tiana was out of the question. When Tiana had a girlfriend for two years while at San Francisco State, she and I never stopped. Is this cheating? When I embrace Tiana under the sheets after months of being away and with a “boyfriend” back in San Luis Obispo, I can’t help but think that cheating itself is such a juvenile concept. Another that ignores the truth that as human beings, we are not always meant to naturally be monogamous. Tiana and I have had what we have together for more than six years. Cutting it off is what would feel the most wrong.

Maybe one day when we’re living in the same city again, we will gain the courage and maturity that comes along with wanting to be wholly committed to each other. But as of today, we are each other’s unspoken foundation. It is scary, yet thrilling at the same time not knowing when what we have is going to stop. I don’t know if I want it to stop.

The other day as I was explaining to my good friend Keanna about Tiana and me, I found myself stumbling over my words. “We’re
not *girlfriends*, we’re...we’re...I don’t know...”

“You’re lovers,” Keanna completed for me, with her sly, knowing smile. In that second, for the first time, a word for us sounded right.

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Queering National Identities
The War on Women: Serving in Military Combat Positions

By Natalie Darr

ABSTRACT. Women have been restricted from certain types of military duty throughout United States history. In January 2013, Army General Dempsey stated that combat positions would be open to women in the armed forces, considering they meet prerequisite requirements. This has augmented an already active debate of whether women should be allowed to serve in combat military positions. Arguments against women in combat positions include the lack of physical strength of women compared to their male counterparts, however the reality is that women already do experience combat even if they are not in combat-specific positions. This paper challenges the views that women should be restricted from combat positions, arguing that there is a pattern of disempowering women in military service based on the notion that men are the citizens and therefore defenders of the nation, and women are bystanders.

Overview

Throughout United States history, men have filled the combat positions in our military. Women officially served in the U.S. military in the early 1900’s, when the Army Nurse Corps were reorganized under the military ("The army nurse"). On the public and political radar for the past several years has been the debate of whether women should be allowed to serve in combat positions. In January 2013, Army General Martin E. Dempsey released a statement of a new policy that would open combat positions to women in the armed forces. It was said that the policy would be in place by January 2016 (Pellerin 2013). Surrounding this statement there has been backlash from other military sources and the general public about the safety and effectiveness of allowing women to serve in combat positions. One of the main backlashes from the public on women serving in military positions is the lack of physical capabilities of women compared to their male counterparts. From a historical lens, there is a pattern of disempowering women in military service based on the notion that men are the citizens and therefore defenders of a nation and women
are bystanders. However, the reality of the current situation is that women serving in non-combat positions in the military do experience combat, and should not be barred from combat positions in the military. As General Dempsey says, “[Men and women] all wear the same uniform and we all fire the same weapons, […] most importantly, we all take the same oath (Pellerin 2013). From a feminist perspective, if a woman is capable of filling the criteria for a combat position, she is entitled to the opportunity to serve in a combat position, and should not be withheld from this opportunity solely based on sex.

**The Physical Fitness Debate**

A general argument against women in combat positions has been their lack of physical capabilities compared to their male counterparts. In our androcentric society, men are seen as the norm; physically strong, mentally tough, able bodied. Women, however, are perceived as weak and breakable. The stereotypes have outweighed the realities of men and women, especially in the military where physical fitness is such an integral part of the job. In “The Right to Fight: Women at War”, Grossman touches on some of the statistical differences of men and women, “One of the main arguments against opening up combat roles to women has been the physiological: that they can’t hack it, physically. Even among soldiers, women on average have about thirty per cent less muscle strength and fifteen to thirty per cent less aerobic capacity than men” (Grossman 2013). This does not mean that women are not physically fit for combat. It means that on average, many women are not as strong as many men. Some women will be able to pass the standardized physical fitness tests designed for a gender inclusive military, and some will not. Some men will also be able to pass these same tests, and some will not. The tests are not determining who is the strongest, but whether the individual can physically handle combat or not. Which, it turns out, is not even considered one of the top characteristics necessary to be a successful combat military personnel, according to women who have experienced combat. At the Women in Combat Symposium held in Washington, D.C. in February 2013, women from all military branches (all of whom had held “noncombat” positions while serving) who had experienced combat gathered to talk about their experiences. At one point these women were asked what they thought were the top characteristics needed for combat duty. The top two critical characteristics given by the women were teamwork and the ability to stay calm and focused in...
tense situations. The third critical characteristic was good leadership and technical competence (Haring 2013). None of these traits have anything to do with physical capabilities. While physical fitness is of course an important attribute of a successful soldier or marine, it is not the definitive judgment of combat readiness. The Pentagon’s intention is to offer “gender-neutral occupational standards” for anyone who desires a particular MOS (military occupational specialty) (Pellerin 2013). These new standards will reinforce the Pentagon’s claim that “not everyone can meet the qualifications to be a combat soldier but that everyone is entitled the opportunity” (Fishel 2013).

**Historical Habits of a Men-Only Military**

The exclusion of women from the military – and the relationship between citizen and military service – goes back to ancient Greece and its mythology. In the book, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, Kerber references Cassandra and Antigone, two daughters of nobility in times of mythological war. Both women witness the ruling men of their cities take up arms to fight for a cause, and are situated as outsiders, unable to take any action other than lamentation. As women in a patriarchal society, they are not expected to have a voice or opinion; rather they are safeguarded with the rest of the valuables of the city. As Kerber states, “Both roles maintain the classic dichotomy in which men are the defenders of the state and women are the protected” (Kerber 1998). The role placed upon Cassandra and Antigone is that of an object to be protected, not a subject involved in the protection of oneself or of others. This notion continued through history to the American Revolution, and exists today. At a celebration ball in Paris following the end of the American Revolution, a woman (ironically) stood up to say the following toast, “May all our Citizens be Soldiers, and all our Soldiers, Citizens” (Kerber 1998). Holding women as the protected pseudo-citizen and therefore excluding them from military service perpetuates the notion that women are not “citizen enough.” With this mindset, only the “real” citizens must sacrifice their life for their country.

The present day exclusionary policy impedes on women’s ability to “increase in rank” and hold military leadership positions (Burrelli 2013). Similarly, in the revolutionary war, “women of the army” – women who aided their husbands by traveling with them – had no official position. They never received compensation for serving in “de facto” military duty by taking care of the camps and maintaining
cleanliness (which was one of the most important preventions against disease and death during the war) (Kerber 1998). Today women are in de facto combat positions; the unofficial nature of their combat experience limits them from the legitimate promotions that men who share their experiences can receive.

The Reality of What Is

Many women want the opportunity to serve their country in the same way that men are able to, and they want the same achievements as well. Women account for 14.5 per cent of the U.S. military, and since the U.S. involvement with Iraq and Afghanistan, 130 women in the U.S. military have been killed and over 800 have been wounded (Burrelli 2013). Women may not be in combat positions, but they are certainly in combat. They join the military for the same reasons men do, yet are barred from key MOS’s that would be more likely to enhance their career path. “[Women] join the military for the same reasons men do – to escape dead-end towns or dysfunctional families, to pay for college or seek adventure, to follow their ideals or find a career – only to find themselves denigrated and sexually hounded by many of the ‘brothers’ on whom they are supposed to rely” (Benedict 2009). Career stagnation is an issue for women who experience combat in the military. Sexual harassment and rape are also well known issues for some women who serve as military personnel, fueled by the notion that women aren’t real soldiers, and there is little protection for women in these situations. While the military takes educational action against rape and sexual violence, they do not take enough action after such events occur to prosecute the men responsible for the violent acts (Benedict 2009). An increase of women in the military as a whole would increase the power and voice that women have in the military to take action against such issues.

Reflection

Allowing more women in the military and more women in combat positions would decrease the degree to which women are anomalies in military service, increase the number of female mentors for women in lower ranks, and increase the voice of military women as a whole. All of these factors would promote a safer and more successful workplace for women, both stateside and deployed.
Limiting the opportunity for women to serve in military combat positions based on their perceived lack of physical capability or their perceived need of objectified protection is to perpetuate the patriarchal, age-old idea of *couverture*, that a women must be covered, kept from her full potential and place in society. It is not a radical, feminist view that women should be allowed the opportunity for a combat military position, it is a view of equality, a view of letting go of the stereotypes of the past that inhibit new growth.

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References


Smoke & Mirrors: Gender, Sexuality, & National Identity in Miss Gay America

By Nicholas Guarriello

ABSTRACT. Beauty pageants are typically viewed as frivolous or trivial, but as an element of popular culture and with its ability to reach global audiences through social media, it is easy to miss how beauty pageants subtly reinforce traditional gender tropes, sexual norms, and ideal notions of beauty. This article examines how the Miss Gay America male beauty pageant reinforces ideal masculinity and femininity for gay men who perform drag. Although drag is usually perceived as a form of gender-bending, the Miss Gay America pageant ultimately co-opts this in order to re-affirm a gender binary in which one must still do or perform masculinity or femininity in order to be visually perceived as male or female, respectively. Furthermore, despite the attempt to provide a nationally televised space for gay men to freely express their identity, Miss Gay America ultimately provides a one-size-fits-all approach to gender and sexuality. This narrow approach to gender and sexuality ultimately gives unwarranted attention to the gay community by constructing a multicultural spectacle that represents gay men as deviant from traditional masculinity.

There (S)he Is: An Introduction to the Politics of Miss Gay America

Since the premiere of the Miss America Beauty Pageant in 1921, the popularity of beauty pageants has grown rapidly and resulted in the creation of numerous local, national, and international beauty pageants. Pageants are a unique event because they are “the only kind of cultural performance wherein one woman [or man] is awarded, for a year, the power to represent an entire community” (Mensa, 2010). Time and time again, the winner of Miss America serves as a literal model of beauty standards, an actor of ideal U.S. femininity, and as a representative of national identity for an entire group, for a year. When new regional or national beauty pageants are
created, like the Cherry Blossom Festival Queen\(^1\), these female beauty pageants recreate similar themes of representation that are found in the national Miss Gay America Beauty Pageant for men. Therefore, I wish to argue that Miss Gay America is similar to most female beauty pageants in reaffirming the sex and gender dichotomy, and portraying “ideal identities” within the gay community itself. Furthermore, the Miss Gay America pageant exudes notions of equality by asserting that gay men (of color) can overcome systematic and social inequalities by partaking in beauty pageants in order to freely express their identity. However, the identity that is reinforced in Miss Gay America is ideal masculinity and femininity.

Cultural studies scholar Afia Ofori-Mensa and media studies scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser discuss and analyze female beauty pageants through an intersectional view of race, gender, and nation but do mention or analyze male beauty pageants using the same method. Thus, this paper seeks to critically analyze the similarities and differences of the cultural representations of male beauty pageants, by looking at Miss Gay America pageant contestants and the documentary Pageant as a case study. Beauty pageants are particularly interesting to critically analyze because they take place on a national and international level and have the ability to reach global audiences, especially with the global popularity of social media websites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Although beauty pageants are typically viewed as frivolous or trivial, as an element of popular culture and with its ability to reach global audiences, it is easy to miss how beauty pageants subtly reinforce traditional gender tropes, ideal notions of beauty, and the place where cultural meanings are produced, consumed, and rejected (Cohen, 1996).

The contestants in Miss Gay America are men who impersonate women by dressing in drag or dresses and gowns traditionally designed for women. The winner gets the national title of Miss Gay America, $7000 in cash, $2500 worth of jewelry, a crown and scepter, and, most importantly, the mandate of making guest appearances at all Miss Gay America related events; the latter of which garners the winning contestant making an average of 50,000 to 60,000 dollars (Davis & Halpern, 2008).

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\(^1\) The Cherry Blossom Festival Queen is a regional pageant that occurs every April during the blooming of the cherry blossom trees in Northern California. Every April, “a new group of young women are selected to become cultural ambassadors who will represent the Northern California Japanese-American community by volunteering with various local community events and organizations.”
Drag culture is usually seen as a form of gender-bending and not conforming to gender norms. As a result, Miss Gay America might seem to be “queering” heteronormative structures and conventional gendered roles; however, as sociologist Betsy Lucal (1999) asserts throughout her essay, “What it Means to be Gendered Me,” dressing in drag or outside traditional gender clothing is also reaffirming the gender binary in which one must still “do” or perform masculinity or femininity in order to be visually perceived as male or female, respectively, by others.

A National Gay Identity: Converging Masculinity & Femininity

The Stonewall Riots of 1969—generally referenced as the beginning of the gay liberation movement—also coincides with the emergence of Miss Gay America. The Miss Gay America pageant started in 1973 and was originally established by and for the gay community. The current owners of the pageant said that Miss Gay America is currently for everyone and no bylaws prohibit heterosexuals from participating, but one of the owners says that gay people “do it [the performance]” better (Davis & Halpern, 2008). Miss Gay America might be seen as a welcoming medium through which the gay community expresses an array of gender identities and queers conventional gender roles, but it in fact co-opts and undermines the gay liberation movement’s efforts to combat homophobic media and cultural representations of gay men in mass media because the pageant engages in the cultural work of inscribing an identity of traditional femininity on gay men. Thus, the owners, organizers, and sponsors of the Miss Gay America pageant effectively undermine the gay liberation movement by constructing a multicultural spectacle[^2], which culturally represents gay men as deviant from traditional masculinity in front of a national audience. Ultimately, this gives unwarranted attention to the gay community without addressing the historical and political exclusions and the social discrimination and stigma that the gay community experienced.

Although the Miss Gay America pageant exhibits a benevolent guise of tolerance towards drag culture, the pageant becomes a site where dimorphic notions of sex and gender are reinforced and

[^2]: The use and definition of multicultural spectacle here is the same and refers to a blog post from iHeartthreadbare.com from Minh-Ha T. Pham entitled, "Why Fashion Should Stop Trying to Be Diverse."
naturalized through bio-medical discourses\(^3\) around the genitalia. Furthermore, the cultural performance of masculinity and femininity occur at separate incidents throughout the pageant. For instance, in order to qualify as a contestant or participate in any part of the Miss Gay America local or national competitions, one must be considered biologically male as well as an American citizen. According to regulation 14 of the Miss Gay America bylaws,

\begin{quote}
The use of any type of hormone is not allowed. Absolutely no breast implants, cosmetic or body enhancing implants below the neck or silicone (or any other similar type product/chemical) injections, excluding the face, will be allowed before or during the contestant’s reign. This includes any city, state, regional or national reign. L & T Entertainment reserves the right to require a medical examination or physical examination in the event that a contestant is suspected of violation of this regulation. Likewise, L & T Entertainment, or an official representative (to be approved by L & T Entertainment) may require an examination based on “visual observation” at which case the contestant must consent, or face disciplinary actions, including suspension or disqualification.\(^4\)
\end{quote}

Even though the contestants exhibit a type of agency by partaking in gender-bending practices where they engage in disrupting normative notions of femininity and masculinity by dressing in drag and performing acts that are traditionally and culturally viewed as feminine, the contestants are unable to abolish the socially constructed sex or gender dichotomy as a whole, as evident in bylaw number 14. This bylaw not only reaffirms dimorphic notions of male and female at the biological level, but also polices and regulates sex and gender by compelling a “visual observation” of the contestant in question. Drawing from feminist and cultural studies scholar Susan Bordo (1989), a visual observation is a distinct moment where maleness and femaleness and masculinity and femininity are viewed as mutually exclusive from each other. In other words, masculinity and femininity are relational, since one needs the other to have meaning, yet distinctive from one another since they exist as polar opposites of each

\(^{3}\) For further information on how sex is socially constructed into a binary based on the genitalia and other bio-medical discourses, please refer to Anne Fausto-Sterling’s book, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality.*

\(^{4}\) All the bylaws can be found the Miss Gay America’s website at the following website: http://www.missgayamerica.com/About/Rules.htm. Please note that this essay reflects the bylaws as they were in 2014 and any changes since then are possibly not reflected in this paper.
other. Thus, there is a convergence of masculinity and femininity throughout the pageant since the contestant must be biologically male, but must also be able to pass behaviorally as feminine through on-stage performances and adhere to cultural notions and looks of femininity.

Flexibility—meaning the ability to assimilate into a larger culture while keeping non-desirable mainstream behaviors or attributes—between masculinity and femininity allows for a contestant to overcome his non-normative sexuality by adhering to visual and behavioral notions of femininity and biological notions of maleness. However, this flexibility inscribes a gay identity on a nationally televised stage where drag performance is viewed as occurring outside of the everyday workings of family life and only as a temporary makeover for entertainment and competitive purposes only. Although masculinity and femininity are perpetuated by popular culture as mutually exclusive, recently, the two have been shown to co-exist on a global stage and exude traits of flexibility in order to maintain heteronormative structures. According to critical disability studies scholar Robert McRuer (2003), flexibility is a “double-edged trope.” In other words, the flexible body allows one to overcome his difference by performing in drag, but ironically, that difference is also showcased in order to comply with an environment that tolerates diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sexualities, but co-opts it to maintain power structures of heteronormativity.

Matches & Hairspray: Competitive Individualism & Transformative Makeovers

In her book Where The Girls Are, Susan Douglas uses the term “competitive individualism” to analyze cosmetic advertisements’ power to compel women to purchase products in order to compete with one another in looking their best (Douglas, 1994). The term “competitive individualism” can be expanded to incorporate the amount of beauty work that male participants do in order to impersonate women but also the intense competition that is produced among them in order to be crowned the winner. For instance, one of the owners remembers when competitors would use hairspray and lighters to torch gowns and wigs of fellow contestants. The owner states that things are less competitive now, but asserts that professional drag pageantry is still about competition, professionalism, and good entertainment (Davis & Halpern, 2008).
The most important aspect of the pageant is to find the contestant who performs femininity the best and, in order to be the best the contestants must resort to the cosmetic market to conceal visual notions of maleness. After I critically viewed and analyzed the documentary *Pageant*, three pivotal female characteristics that stand out to me were the need to create a hairless face and body, the right hair texture and length or volume, and the illusion of large breasts. Ultimately, make-up, wigs, and padding achieve the aforesaid characteristics. Thus, drag pageantry demonstrate parallels from the individualistic or liberal rhetoric behind makeovers such as the idea of resorting to the market to look like a celebrity and thus visually belonging to a higher class strata (Sternheimer, 2011). Therefore, makeovers and pageants are similar because women or female impersonators are able to write “upward mobility on the body [which] allows them to claim a position that is classier, more feminine, and thus happier” (Weber, 2009). Happiness and confidence plays a major role in determining the female-self or newly-transformed male-to-female-self. For instance, notions of what constitutes as confidence and looking good intersect on the stage during certain categories. This was the case for many of the contestants in the documentary *Pageant* who claimed that confidence was the most important trait to have and exhibit when performing on stage and answering questions in the interview portion of the pageantry. When one of the judges in *Pageant* referred to the evening gown category, she said, “if they [the contestants] look like a man in a dress it is a no” (Davis & Halpern, 2008). Thus, there is a need to transform and leave all visual aspects of maleness and masculinity behind, albeit temporary, in order to pass as an upper-class or celebrity-like woman and impress the judges who determine what qualifies as authentic femininity. However, this transformation in drag pageantry is only temporary because the contestants revert back to their “natural” male bodies.

Most of the Miss Gay America Pageant emulates similar categories, like evening gown and solo-talent performance, that the famous Miss America Pageant has, except for one moment of stark contrast that reifies masculinity or maleness—the professional interview. During the interview, judges use the contestant’s birth name instead of their stage name, which creates a schism between male and female identities and limits the possibility of other gender and sexual identities and expressions. In her book *Excluded*, transgender advocate Julia Serano (2013) argues that:
One-size-fits-all approaches to gender and sexuality—whether they occur in the straight male-centric mainstream or within feminist and queer subcultures—inevitably result in double standards, where bodies and behaviors can only ever be viewed as either right or wrong, natural or unnatural, normal or abnormal, righteous or immoral.

In relation to Serano’s argument, this eight-minute barrage of questions involves the dissecting and investigating of one’s personal and professional life and ultimately asserts that being feminine is only a temporary transformation. Although this interview is never seen on television, the contestants must dress the part in formal business attire and be called by their legal name, which prescribes a fixed and biological notion of maleness. This business uniform is a type of hegemonic masculinity in which men conform to U.S. notions of professionalism. A contestant in the documentary *Pageant* said that the professional interview is the moment in the competition where the judges see the “real” working-man (Davis & Halpern, 2008).

Ultimately, the pageant judges do not objectively choose one contestant based on natural notions of masculinity or who can impersonate a woman the best. As feminist scholar Judith Butler (1988) says,

> [gender performativity is] a stylized repetition of acts... [in which] gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

For instance, the evening-gown part of the pageant focuses on a contestant passing visually as female, whereas the professional interview is dependent on the contestant’s “natural” male looks without any make-up, wigs, and padding. As a result, both femaleness and maleness throughout the pageant are dependent on performing and adhering to certain acts and behaviors that are recognized by the judges and audience as traditionally feminine or masculine. Therefore, judges, along with the owners, organizers, and sponsors, “reward certain ‘acts, gestures, and desires’” that emulate, perpetuate, and inscribe ideal, white, middle to upper class femininity and hegemonic or professional masculinity (Mensa, 2010). This is evident with the various levels of invisibility and exclusion that occurs towards gay men of color and transgender persons in Miss Gay America.
Closing Night: Tokenism, Parallels, & Invisibility

Throughout Miss Gay America, there is noticeable tokenism regarding Black Americans, and the exclusion of Asian-Americans in the Top 10 is relatively noticeable. Sociologist Ashley Mears (2011) writes in her first book about this phenomenon in the modeling industry, *Pricing Beauty*.

The token minority offers the false resolution of racial tension. If and when the token ethnic model hits the jackpot [wins the pageant] her [or his] presence becomes a miracle on two counts: first to have triumphed in a seemingly magical contest, and second to have won as a minority.

Therefore, instead of dismantling normative ideas of gender, sexuality, and race, the Miss Gay America pageant seems more of an attempt at assimilating the gay community, particularly white gay men, into mainstream American society. The problem with diversity in Miss Gay America is that it leads to an attitude of tolerance, which does nothing to address larger social structures that shape and regulate everyday life such as gendered bathrooms based on genitalia and the lack of laws that prevent discrimination towards gay men of color. Thus, the use of diversity in beauty pageants, including Miss Gay America, is actually a “possessive investment in whiteness,” which is similar to the famous Miss America pageant’s attempt at assimilating Jewish-Americans in 1945, white women with disabilities in 1995, and black women, like Vanessa Williams in 1983, who attempt to perform white femininity into the United States (Banet-Weiser, 1999).

An analysis of Miss Gay America would not be complete without briefly synthesizing its parallels to the fashion and modeling industry. Most recently, the magazine *Elle Canada* decided to cast Jenna Talackova for a photo-shoot for a section of their magazine. Jenna Talackova gained international attention when she was disqualified from The Miss Universe Beauty Pageant after it was discovered that she was born a male (Krupnick, 2013). Although Miss Universe now allows for transgender competitors, fashion, modeling, and pageants are still intertwined and heavily invested in reaffirming dimorphic notions of being biologically male and female with no room for other options. However, these industries are allegedly flexible and affirm tolerant notions of diversity. Instead of an attitude of tolerance, a displacement of power among the judges, who ultimately control ideal notions of femininity and masculinity, must occur in which the
participants control how they identify and express their gender and sexuality. Finally, as the only nationally televised beauty pageant that includes openly gay men, Miss Gay America consistently collapses and flattens out gendered and racial differences in order to make a uniform representation and national identity that inscribes femininity and whiteness onto gay men in the United States.

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References


Push & Pull for Rights: The Importance of Culture and Transnationalism in LGBT Activism in Russia

By Karine Picard

ABSTRACT: The Internet and transnational networking have allowed social movements the world over to interconnect and share strategies. Such is not the case with regards to LGBTQ activism in Russia, where recent legislation and state-sanctioned violence has drawn international attention to the state of homophobia in Russia. This paper examines the origins of homophobia and intolerance in Russia, as well as comparing the two prominent activist movements. By comparing the more radical and visible GayRussia.ru movement to the subtler Russian LGBT Network, this paper argues that the latter has been and will continue to be more efficient in changing public opinion of homosexuality in Russia. The first section examines the importance of cultural context, particularly Soviet legacies with regards to opinion on sex and gender, comparing how these two contrasting movements work with or against Russian cultural norms. The second section explores each movement’s respective use of transnational ties to further their agenda, showing how it can do more harm than help with regards to public opinion of sexuality. By comparing the extent to which the multi-institutional approach is employed, this paper argues that the Russian LGBT Network’s tactics of targeting cultural and educational institutions is more efficient than GayRussia.ru’s ostentatious Pride tactics and transnational pressures.

The 2014 Sochi Olympics put the world’s eyes on a growing international power, Russia. It is only in recent years that the international community has been following the evolution of the gay rights movement in Russia, particularly concerning the regressive legislation that has arisen in the past years. Why is homophobia so prevalent in Russia, and how have gay rights advocates approached this obstacle? Two main streams of activism are present. The first is the loud and showy Pride movement, based in visibility, both in public space and in the media. The other prevalent social movement present in Russia is the Russian LGBT Network, which acts as an umbrella organization of smaller groups in multiple regions across the country.
By examining origins of Russian homophobia and Russian LGBT activism, this paper argues that the multi-institutional approach taken by the mainstream gay rights movement has been and will continue to be more efficient than the transnational tactics used by Nicolai Alexeyev's GayRussia.ru movement. The first section will provide a brief history of homosexuality in Russia, with a particular focus on public opinions and cultural perceptions of the homosexuality, and how the various social movements are reacting. This section demonstrates the importance of cultural perceptions in the acceptance of same-sex relations and identities. The second section examines the issue of transnationalism, particularly how transnational ties are used or not by social movements to achieve their goals.

**Addressing Culture**

In order to properly address homophobia in Russia, it is crucial to understand the origin of the hate and oppression. This section examines the evolving understanding of homosexuality in Russian society, as well as how it is excluded from the national identity. It will then examine how both mainstream Russian LGBT Network and the GayRussia activist movements have used culture and cultural change in order to raise awareness and acceptance of homosexuality.

Russian homophobia evolved out of Soviet control over the body and gender (Baer, 2002; Underwood, 2011). State-imposed gendered norms concerning roles, relations, and duty were all closely tied to being the ideal proletarian. Homosexuality was outlawed through anti-sodomy laws, and speaking about homosexuality was socially taboo. In fact, talking about sexuality, as a whole, was not considered socially acceptable, which discouraged public discussion of same-sex relations. This reluctance to bring up sexuality, sexual attitudes, and preferences, in public is maintained to this day (Underwood, 2011). As sexuality was never talked about, concepts other than heterosexuality were never discussed, therefore never considered valid. Furthermore, it was perceived as a “Western perversion” long before being illegal under the Communist regime, with the Soviet state condemning it as an illness and a “product of the bourgeois lifestyle” (Kon, 2009). Healey argues that “post-Communist Russia confronts the collapse of utopia on several fronts,” with its politicians contending with the “challenge of commercialized sexual exploitation in a global contexts” (Healey, 2003), therefore Russians are turning to both maintaining Communist silence, but when
speaking, referring to old pre-Communist concepts of sexual perversion (Healey, 2003). Homosexuals are also viewed on equal setting with rapists and pedophiles (Underwood, 2011).

Article 121, making sodomy punishable by imprisonment, was repealed in 1993, and homosexuality was unlisted as a mental disorder in 1999 (Kon, 2009). Here we see the distinction in treatment between gay men and lesbians, whereby men engaging in homosexual relations were put before the law, while women tended to be institutionalized if they showed same-sex attraction. These legal measures maintained a legacy whereby homosexuality was not only immoral, but also unlawful and unhealthy (Essig, 1999). There had been a few social movements throughout this period, and an elaborate underground gay scene did develop (R. Johnson, 2014), but as will be explained later, progress had little to do with activism. At this point in time, however, political instability and reassertion of “traditional” Russian values fragmented the LGBT movement, and public opinion on gay rights has not improved. Despite this loosening of legislation, gay rights activism in the mid-2000s resulted in state-sanctioned homophobia, through legislation limiting rights to assemble, protest, and even rights to discuss. Initially citywide bans, the new national law on the sharing of gay “propaganda” is attempting to stifle public discussion of same-sex relations within Russian society, therefore limiting familiarity and reinforcing cultural aversion to homosexuality.

Looking back to past discourse in order to understand the present situation is an important aspect to consider for ensuring the success of a social movement. In the case of the mainstream Russian LGBT movement, the approach is to address the inequalities, oppression and violence throughout society as a whole. By addressing the importance of cultural perceptions of same-sex relations and homosexuality, it will more successfully gain public support. As defined by Armstrong and Bernstein, a multi-institutional social movement challenges established authority through the transformation of dominant discourse (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). These movements will look to opportunities other than solely within the state. The mainstream movement considers the importance of the Russian distaste for public assembly around personal (i.e. sexual) identity claims.

By taking into consideration the significance of this distaste, the mainstream movement has found it more interesting in considering subtle and non-ostentatious ways to bring same-sex relations into public discussion and discourse. However, this has been
challenged by recent legislation put in place in 2012 banning homosexual “propaganda.” This made it a criminal offense to discuss, share, write or hold meetings about gay rights, particularly banning information regarding “non-traditional sexual relations among minors” (Federman, 2014). It began in 2011 as an outright ban on LGBT propaganda, was loosely defined, and often resulted in unfair and violent arrests (R. Johnson, 2014). Putin framed the ban as important to addressing the demographic crisis in Russia, as non-traditional relations don’t bear good Russian children (R. Johnson, 2014). This ban has received criticism and been challenged both from within Russia and from the international community. For example, US President Obama did not attend the Sochi Olympics personally, and the delegation sent in his place was comprised entirely of out gay and lesbian athletes, such as Billy Jean King (Liptak, 2014). In addition, he criticized homophobia and intolerance during his European tour in late March 2014. He argued, “Western ideals and values of openness and tolerance would endure long past repression” (CNN Team, 2014). However, the emphasis on Western ideals is not the best way to encourage social change, as it is considered to be both in opposition and a threat to traditional Russian values (Wilkinson, 2013).

The mainstream movement also stresses the importance of addressing the issue of Russian homophobia through several institutions, including government, religion, media and culture. In the future however, the growing authority of the state and Duma, particularly over conceptions and propagation of national identity (Wilkinson, 2013), control of the media, and maintenance of the traditional/non-traditional binary (R. Johnson, 2014), will make the multi-institutional approach a challenge in the future, but less so than simply the approach taken by GayRussia.ru.

Addressing the ways in which politics and legislation affect a minority are tactics often used by social movements to try and incite discussion. According to Tarrow, social movements are groups that interact with the state and political institutions to get access to state resources, creating an opposition between insiders (who actively participate in institutional politics) and challengers (those who want to gain access to them). By targeting potential opportunities, this approach uses the existing state structure to create change (Tarrow, 1996). GayRussia, who have used both visibility tactics and legal tactics as an attempt to gain traction and public support, uses this approach. However, as seen recently, it has backfired, with the Putin government turning to more conservative and traditional rhetoric as
means of maintaining public support.

Gayrussia.ru was founded in 2005 by the activist Nicolai Alexeyev, which then went on to organize Moscow Pride initiative on a yearly basis. The event has been banned on a regular basis by the municipal government, with recurring justification as being the violation of the rights and interests of the Russian population (Tatchell, 2006). Although there have been several attempts to have gay pride demonstrations in Russia throughout the last 10 years, they have mostly been unsuccessful, either being banned by city governments or simply resulting in violent riots. The first gay pride event was held in 2006, where the unexpected number of demonstrators resulted in violent suppression by the police and anti-gay protestors (Underwood, 2011). Similar situations occurred in 2007, met with violent resistance from both radical protesters and police. Moscow Pride and other similar events brought international attention to the issue the state of LGBT rights in Russia, but has simultaneously been criticized from within Russia as being too ostentatious (Underwood, 2011). Peaceful marches are constantly being overwrought by anti-gay protestors, making international headlines, bringing negative attention to Russia from abroad, and reinforcing negative attitudes towards the LGBT community (Schaaf, 2014). The violence and media hype is counterproductive to the advancing of rights, resulting in wider public support of the homophobic legislation put in place by both municipal and national government (Federman, 2014). While in other parts of the world, Pride parades have helped mainstream homosexuality and been a useful tool for the legitimization and affirmation of homosexual identity; such is not the case in Russia. The loud and visible approach taken by the GayRussia.ru and Moscow Pride movement is therefore not adequate to changing the cultural acceptance of homosexuality in Russian society. In fact this movement is exacerbating tensions between the groups, as criticism from abroad increases hostility from the anti-gay camp.

**Transnationalism and Russian Nationalism**

In 2013, Putin’s government put in place legislation concerning homosexuality that renders unlawful public discussion of homosexuality and sharing information about homosexuality with minors illegal. State-sanctioned homophobia in Russia has been making news and has been heavily criticized from abroad, including
the changes in legislation concerning LGBT demonstrations, mobilization, and now even communication on the subject. Following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, LGBT mobilization in Russia was mostly confined to urban centers, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. During this period, Russia was economically, politically and culturally unstable (Engelstein, 1995). This allowed the LGBT movement to exist, but with limited visibility. Russia’s anti-sodomy law was repealed in 1993, following international pressure, with homosexuality still considered a psychiatric disease until 1999 (Baer, 2008). Both of these occurred due to international pressure, having little to do with the influence of Russian LGBT organizing (Kon, 2009). The decriminalization of homosexuality was a politically motivated action, as a condition to joining the Council of Europe. The de-pathologization in 1999 occurred when Russia adopted the World Health Organization’s classification of diseases, which did not list homosexuality as a mental disorder (Kon, 2009). The first concise action towards same-sex rights and acceptance in Russia was conceived abroad and legally became the norm overnight. However, due to lack of understanding and lack of public discussion, homophobia remained.

Although there were a few movements for LGBT visibility and rights under the Perestroika (Essig, 1999), it seemed that democratization and liberalization in the 1990s would help push the movement forward. However, this was not the case. It was recognized from within the importance of addressing cultural change from within Russia, by Russians in order to be taken seriously. One of the most prominent activists in the LGBT movement is Evgeniia Debrianskaia, who had been working since the 1980s for acceptance and visibility of the LGBT community (Essig, 1999). She headed the Triangle (Treugol’nik) organization, which acted to replace the Moscow Association of Gays and Lesbians. As an umbrella organization for lesbian, gay and bisexual groups all throughout Russia, its strength lies in that it had been formed by Russians for Russians with very little foreign input (Essig, 1999). However, lack of funds and disparate organization from within led to its dissolution a few years after. In fact, its initial strength of Russian representation only a year later made so that it had become a very transnational operation, dependent on American investment.

Some issues within the movement were lack of time and resources from Russian participants. The difficult economic conditions left very little time for activism as people spent their time working to
buy food. Western activists then became very prominent within Triangle, particularly bringing in Western concepts and tactics that were not entirely understood or embraced, such as the idea of “fundraising” (Essig, 1999). Although they attempted to provide resources for multiple organizations and institutions, Triangle ultimately folded due to lack of resources and lack of a common goal. The prevalence of Westerners within the organization was detrimental to the success of the movement from the start. The mainstream movement therefore recognized the danger of a Western-dominated LGBT movement discourse, as they knew it would not be coherent with Russian values, making it more complicated to deconstruct the stigma around homosexuality.

From the GayRussia activist camp, Alexeyev has been one of the most prominent activists in Russia since the early 2000s, organizing the first gay pride parade in 2006, as well as the Moscow Pride organization. As a student of gay rights in the West, Alexeyev sought to bring these tactics to the Russian LGBT movement (P. Johnson, 2011). Educated in public administration and law, he has applied his knowledge by challenging the Russian state and publicly advocating for gay rights. As mentioned, his inspiration in social movement tactics from abroad have been questioned and critiqued as to whether or not they are the best suited for Russia. It has been argued that the concept of gay pride is not one that is compatible with the current Russian national identity, particularly with Putin’s more socially conservative government in power. However, considering the homophobic and xenophobic national identity being used by Putin and other legal bodies to justify the legislation, it’s unlikely that these tactics will successfully sway public opinion or dominant political discourse on the issue of LGBT rights. The various pride parades in both Moscow and St. Petersburg were either denied approval by the municipal government, or sparked violent reactions. Activists who chose to march regardless of permits were often met with violence by anti-gay protesters, reinforced by police passivity. The violence at these parades drew international attention through social media and transnational LGBT networks (Schaaf, 2014). An example of this was the international reaction to a demonstration in St. Petersburg, in opposition to the unfair legislation. Anti-gay Nationalists responded to this demonstration with violence and hostility (Robertson, 2014). Participants were rallied up by riot police and then arrested (Robertson, 2014). Despite the violence and the suffering of LGBT activists, activists like Dubrovskaya have continuously criticized
Alexeyev for his dependence not only on foreign support, but also on the tactics employed, believing pride parades and demonstrations provoke and reinforce heteronormative nationalist sentiment, rather than bring awareness to the plight of the Russian LGBT community. Considering the extent to which heteronormativity and homophobia is ingrained in Russian national identity and culture, addressing cultural, political and legal institutions is the most effective means of changing public opinion on homosexuality.

**Conclusion**

Activism for LGBT rights in Russia is a very complicated issue, which must be approached from a critical and well-understood position. As addressed here, the current LGBT movement in Russia, particularly the very visible GayRussia movement, is not making any considerable bounds by relying on foreign investment and transnational networks from the West. Cultural norms such as the current understanding of Russianess and Russian national identity contribute greatly to the past failures of LGBT activism in the past. In order for the movement to succeed, it would need to take into consideration the norms within the country itself. National identity, gender norms and politics will have to change dramatically in order for same-sex relations to be accepted, and to be incorporated into Russian national identity. It is arguable to say that progress has been made with regards to homophobia, as national acceptance levels are still rather high, but a movement with a strategic multi-institutional approach would be best suited to continue addressing the problem. Therefore, although the GayRussia movement provides excellent resources for same-sex-identified Russians, its tactics are not the most appropriate for generating change at a political or social level. The mainstream movement, although also reliant on transnational (albeit much more subtle) connections is better considering the cultural reality of Russia, recognizing the need for movement to not only address politics and legislation, but rather address public understanding and approval. The recent ban on homosexual propaganda is an obstacle but could potentially be overcome if progress starts from the people. Gradual acceptance and incorporation of homosexuality into the national Russian identity will leave political leaders no choice but to accept this. However, it will most definitely be a long and difficult climb.
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References


PINK: WASHING OR BASHING? Sexual dissidents hostage of nationalist discourse in contemporary Russia and Cuba

By Marie Lecuyer

ABSTRACT. In an international context where sexual minorities’ rights are much advocated for by the West, this article compares the stance Russia and Cuba have respectively taken on this issue and raises the question: why has the LGBT rights issue become a tool of foreign policy for the two countries? and why does Russia resort to pinkbashing when Cuba uses a strategy of pinkwashing? I argue that both countries seek to achieve the same goal, which is to redeem their national sovereignty formerly emasculated by the West. To do so, they frame a LGBT discourse so as to challenge the international order that posits liberal democracy as the only viable political model. The response to the western discourse Russia and Cuba adopt is examined in terms of their respective political as well as economic opportunities. While Russia must please a conservative constituency and has the upper hand on its economic relations, Cuba’s political landscape is more fractured and the country holds a subordinate position in its economic relations. Those conditions have led the two countries to take opposite stances on their LGBT community.

In a speech addressing LGBT rights in June 2011, Hillary Clinton urged people and leaders around the globe to choose the “right side of history”, that is, to protect the rights of those she deems sexually weak on the basis that they “deserve all the help we can give them” (my own emphasis) (The Huffington Post, 2011). The LGBT rights discourse as proposed by Clinton offers a Manichaean worldview where sexual minorities’ rights has become a new norm attached to the ideal model of liberal democracy and is hence used as a symbol of political legitimacy on the international arena (Puar, 2005). In order to understand why Russia and Cuba recently took opposite paths regarding LGBT minorities’ rights, this paper will borrow Puar’s theory (2005) of gendered nationalism where norms of sex and gender are built in interaction with the construction of the nation-state. I will argue that despite the seemingly contradictory positions of the two countries, both in fact seek to achieve the same goal, which is to redeem their national sovereignty formerly emasculated by the West. To do so, they challenge the international order that posits liberal
democracy as the only viable political model. In her book, Puar (2005) applies the notion of “sexual exceptionalism” to the United-States, flagship of the liberal democratic model, where it extends the project of U.S. nationalism and imperial expansion endemic to the war on terror.” The narrative of sexual exceptionalism thus serves nationalist strategies and becomes a tool for foreign policy. While Russia is taking sexual minorities as means to challenge the established norms of liberal democracy from outside through pinkbashing, Cuba takes sexual minorities as a promotional tool to advance its own country on the international scene within the current international system. I will finally see that what accounts for the divergence of narrative is a matter of political constituency and economic leverage.

The two countries are relevant for comparison as they were both members of the Communist bloc during the Cold war and they share a history of institutionalized oppression against sexual dissidents (by which I mean not conform to heteronormativity). Under the Cuban revolutionary regime that overthrew the Batista dictatorship, official harassments, public arrests and reeducation camps were part of the legal apparatus. While camps were phased out in 1969 and homosexuality was decriminalized in 1979, discrimination remained widespread (Leiner, 1993). Similarly in Russia, although gender laws have fluctuated over time, the country has a long history of repression under the Soviet Union (Schaaf, 2013; Wolf, 2004). Yet, this common past produced different outcomes. In Cuba, the daughter of Raul Castro, Mariela Castro, leads the LGBT movement and pushed for free access to sex reassignment in 2008. In 2011, Cuba signed the UN declaration on sexual orientation and gender identity (Olstad, 2013) and a bill giving homosexuals right to civil union is still being debated (Darlington, 2012). The Kremlin, on the other hand, is drafting a new bill denying adults parenthood and passed the anti-gay propaganda law in 2013, sanctioning activists, as well as government officials, for promoting non-normative narratives about sex and gender (CBE, 2014; Sharlet, 2014).

A History of National Emasculation

With regard to Russia, the conflicts of the cold war, the economic sanctions toward the Communist bloc and finally the collapse of the Soviet Union, have been a blow to the country’s national identity. Building on Hoganson’s (1998) argument, the defeat in war is a radical change in the character of the nation and thus translates in a
sense of national emasculation. As if the honor of the Soviet empire had been wiped out as the Berlin wall was torn down, communism, as an economic and political model had not just failed, it had failed against the United States.

The collapse of the Soviet Union against the West has translated in the revival of Russian nationalism drawing from an Eurasianist doctrine (Kachaturian, 2009). Aleksandr Dugin, a leading intellectual who has much influenced the Kremlin in the post-soviet era pushes Putin for taking a harder stance against the West and especially the United-States while advocating for an undemocratic order as well as for a “campaign of coercion (although not necessarily military force) to extend Russia’s influence across the two continents while simultaneously blocking Western encroachment” (Khachaturian, 2009). Regaining full national sovereignty has meant for Russia getting out of the grip of the West by challenging the international norms they set. The Russian anti-gay law may thus be understood as a statement of non-compliance to western international norms and a way to reassert the Russian national identity by tapping into patriotic feelings. Although Putin may not have pushed for this oppressive legislation on the basis of his people’s will, he has free ridden on homophobic popular sentiments rooted in nostalgic feelings of the former Soviet Union. As Underwood (2011) describes, Russia’s communist legacy is such that public discussion of sexual identity is taboo and homophobia is rampant. Thus, even though official legislation has decriminalized homosexuality and has allowed for collective association after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has by no means led to the acceptance of non-normative expressions of sex and gender. Underwood (2011) goes on to explain that “identities, like sexual behaviors, were meant to revolve around the Soviet state and alternatives were considered illegitimate or even dangerous.” According to him, “vestiges of such Soviet norms are responsible for a still-limited Russian discourse around sexuality” (Underwood, 2011). Homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic are thus perceived as Western imports, which are corrupting Russian mores and destroying its people. The backlash against homosexuality in Russia is deemed legitimate --if not necessary-- and serves as a way of rejecting Russian subjugation to Western intrusion (Underwood, 2011).

Cuba, in turn, has also been through a number of wars and conflicts that emasculated the country’s sovereignty (De La Torre, 2003). From the 1898 victory of independence robbed by the United States who intervened and occupied Cuba in the subsequent years
Like the 'search for justice for all', the search for sovereignty involves apologizing for past repressive policies enacted against sexual dissidents, which in fact constitute quite a dark stain on the Communist Party Manifesto. In 2010, Fidel Castro acknowledged in an interview the injustice committed under his regime and took full responsibility for it. Yet, he finds justification for the time where he "was not able to deal with that matter" (Acosta, 2010) because "he was busy in those days fending off threats from the United States" (Acosta, 2010). While Castro is not afraid of taking responsibilities, he clearly blames the US for creating troubles that dragged him away from his true revolutionary preoccupations. Not only this testimony is contradictory in itself, it also contradicts the rhetoric of the early years of the Revolution when sexual deprivation was said to be a capitalist social ill to be cured (Leiner, 1993). However, despite the shift in justificatory arguments, the leading thread remains the same: Capitalism, the West and particularly the United States remain the main culprit behind the neglect of Cuba's minorities.

As sexual minorities are increasingly on the agenda of liberal democracies, Cuba is politically required not to neglect the issue of sexual minorities, at least for a matter of consistency with its egalitarian mission. Mariela Castro in fact clearly states that the movement for LGBT right she leads "is a pretext to fight other forms of discrimination" (Darlington, 2012) and fulfill the socialist promise, at least on paper. As such, the new discourse frames the Cuban exceptionalism in contrast to the rest of the world. Indeed, the Cuban LGBT project is "a far cry from the former Soviet project (...) and in the opposite direction to what is taking place in a number of industrialized countries in the West" (Mohideen, 2009). Through the LGBT discourse, Cuba portrays itself as a viable political system deserving legitimacy at home and abroad.
In both cases, the West remains a point of reference from which to depart from or to surpass. While Russia's LGBT discourse can be characterized as heteronationalist for promoting essentialist definitions of sex and gender, Cuba's discourse is homonationalist in promoting equality among sexes and genders. What accounts for such variation between the two foreign policy strategies may well be related to the kind of political pressures at play on the domestic arena as well as the economic clout they hold on the international scene.

Accountability Matters Even for ‘Rogue’ Countries

Russia and Cuba are differently restrained on their way to achieve their goal. They both have different constituencies to please. In Russia, Putin's first office was marked by a steady growth over a period of 10 years and made the man represent “a stabilizing force, ready and able to advance national interests after the country was eclipsed by the West for too long” (Khachaturian, 2009). Overt nationalism fuels radicalism in Russia and has led to a rise of violence against minorities left unpunished as neo-Nazi organizations have infiltrated the government (Khachaturian, 2009). For example, the government youth group Nashi, often described as a Putin personality cult organization by Western observers, “taps into the hostility that many young Russians already feel towards America and Europe” (Khachaturian, 2009). The rise of populist nationalism has gone hand in hand with an increase of hardline foreign policies such as the recent stance Russia took towards LGBT rights. Moreover, as Underwood (2011) argues, Russia has seen a revival of the Orthodox Church since the fall of Communism. As conservative voters have backed Putin's election, the Kremlin has a great incentive to enact conservative policies that will guarantee its survival. As Professor John Besemer of the Centre for European Studies puts it, Putin’s "constituency is not the Moscow and Petersburg intelligentsia, it is very much the average 'Joe six-pack' living out in the sticks, and also what you might call the former Soviet population – people who remember the Soviet Union and remember it nostalgically, the social conservatives who don't like people who are different, and the Orthodox Church and its followers" (Leslie & Tilley, 2014). As a result, by tapping into this homophobia dating from the Soviet era through anti-gay policies, Putin can foster support among conservative constituencies.

While Putin is securing his support among conservative constituencies, Cuba, where the culture of machismo is ingrained in
popular beliefs (Leiner, 1994), could bypass homophobic feelings by justifying its stance through its socialist mission. As the political power is centralized among the Cuban Communist Party (CCP), the main challenge is to secure consensus within a Party that has become fractured between progressives and conservatives (Cameron, 2013). In fact, as journalist Kirchick (2012) explains, "the Castro brothers are wise enough to read international political currents; revolutionary machismo isn't in vogue like it was in the 1960s. They know that a sure way to warm the hearts of progressives is to pledge support for some nebulous concept of 'gay right'". An incident that occurred a couple of years ago highlights the contradiction at play within the CCP. While Mariela Castro pushes for sex and gender policy reforms, the CCP ousted a man from its rank for being gay in 2010 (Castro, 2010). The double standard of the CCP reveals that the reforms are pragmatic rather than ideological and aim at responding to the external and internal pressures the country is facing.

In fact, Cuba, which has long been an outcast on the international scene, and which still struggles to gain foreign legitimacy as a socialist authoritarian state, may exploit this new opportunity to shine at home and abroad. The recent loosening up of U.S. diplomatic sanctions over Cuba as well as the divided opinions among European countries is evidence that Cuba is succeeding in gaining somewhat legitimacy abroad. The National Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX), rebranded as a LGBT rights advocacy group by Mariela Castro, combined with the recent policies enacted with regard to sex reassignment surgery for example, have posed a challenge to the U.S. foreign policy towards Cuba. With tensions over human rights, civil liberties and democracy characterizing the US-Cuba relation over the past decades, the United-States has been compelled to recognize Cuba's improvement on civil liberties and thus to loosen up sanctions. As a matter of fact, Mariela Castro was eventually allowed to attend the Equality Forum in Philadelphia, which is a LGBT summit (Comiskey, 2013). Moreover, although sexual discrimination has not disappeared from the island, the room given to LGBT reforms in Cuba, like new freedoms granted to Cuban citizens, are part of a response to the CCP's fear of new generations increasingly at odd with the revolutionary regime (LeoGrande, 2013). Alfredo Guevara, a long-time behind-the-scene ally to the Castro brothers, in fact declared in an interview that the revolution's future may be jeopardized if more liberties are not granted to Cubans (Anderson, 2013). Ongoing external pressures from the international arena, as well as internal pressures from the Cuban
public and divisions within the communist party, have thus contributed to push the CCP on opening up the LGBT discourse.

The different constituencies of Russia and Cuba helps explain the stances the two countries have taken, but the reason why Cuba decided to loosen up its grip on the population through reforms in line with the West is also because Cuba could not economically risk going against internal and external pressures, whereas Russia could.

Money to Buy Immunity

Cuba does not have the economic leverage that could enable the government not to fear much backlash from the international community while asserting its national identity. Hence, it had no other alternative than to redeem its sovereignty within the current international framework. In fact, Cuba's economic position in the international system is subjugated to other's nations with which it deals economically. This has caused Cuba much trouble on several occasions. In 1959, the US embargo on Cuba put an end to what represented 68% of Cuba’s trade, again in 1990, the fall of the Soviet Union made 3 billion dollars of aid disappear overnight and plunged the country into a recession. Today, a second ‘special period’ is looming with the death of Chavez, leader of Cuba's main partner Venezuela. In order to put an end to such dangerous economic dependence on a single dominant, the CCP - now under the lead of Raul Castro who is more pragmatic than his brother - seeks to get Cuba more integrated in the international system. Economic foreign policies thus aim at diversifying economic relations, participating more actively in international organizations and reducing the threat that Washington poses. Although the reforms undertaken do not follow specific demands from the U.S., they are nonetheless in line with Western standards necessary to improve relations with Washington (LeoGrande, 2013).

In contrast, Russia was able to take a confrontational stance by asserting its identity outside the current international order because it is an economic power and does not depend on other countries as much as other countries depend on Russia. Hence, Putin does not fear legal or economic sanctions from the European Court of Human Rights nor from the wider international community (Holzhacker, 2013). Even before the 2013 anti-gay law, Russia had been fined in 2010 in the Alekseyev v. Russia case for not having respected individuals’ right of assembly on several occasions. However, as Holzhacker (2013)
suggested at the time he wrote, it is unlikely that Russia changes its
stance in the future. The author further argues that the Russian
government does not feel the urge to fulfill its international legal
obligations because, unlike Cuba, it has no political stake towards
other countries. As opposed to some eastern European countries,
Russia is “beyond the new iron curtain - the one separating states with
a hope of EU admission from those, like Russia with none”
(Holzhacker, 2013). It has no interest in the EU and on the contrary,
the rise of radical and neo-Nazi groups in Russia has gone hand in
hand with the rise of anti-EU and pro-Slav rhetoric in Eastern
European countries. Russia can afford not to comply with European
standards even though it is a member of the Council of Europe because
the Russian government supplies a quarter of European countries’
imports in natural gas (Khachaturian 2009). This makes the
government relatively immune from the pressure of external
institutional and civil society actors. As the second most important
exporter of natural resources in the world, the Kremlin assumes that
"because of the energy relationship, Europe was not going to risk a
major confrontation" (Surowiecki, 2014). Whether this strategy is
viable remains to be seen, but in the meantime, Putin has it his own
way only because Russia has the economic clout to do so.

Sexual minorities are being held hostage of nationalist
discourses aiming at redeeming the countries’ fragmented national
identity. However, those discourses are being shaped by political and
economic power relationships. As a result, Russia challenges the
international order by reasserting its national identity through a
heteronationalist stance while Cuba does the same through a
homonationalist discourse. Although prospects look now less gloom
for sexual dissidents in Cuba than in Russia, the extent to which the
state’s new reforms will de facto deconstruct heteronormative
premises of a society built in machismo remains a topic for future
research.

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is interested in closer ties with Cuba


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