

**Sprinkle:**  
**An undergraduate journal of feminist  
and queer studies**

Vol. 9 – Spring 2016

**The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical  
Pedagogy**

<http://freireproject.org/sprinkle>

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## Editorial: Changing Directions

We are very excited to introduce this year's volume of *Sprinkle*, a compilation of critical articles and essays by undergraduate students in the fields of Women's and Gender Studies, Feminist Studies, and Queer Studies both in North America and internationally. This journal always includes a diverse collection of voices from varying backgrounds, cultures, and lived experiences, in addition to the goal for greater and more expansive changes in the future. The authors published this year have demonstrated exemplary work in their various fields of study and we are grateful for their contributions to this year's volume as *Sprinkle* continues to function as a platform to exhibit an increasingly expansive body of work.

This year has posed some particular obstacles for the editorial board to overcome as our founding Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Elizabeth Meyer, moved on to be Associate Dean of Teacher Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder. As Dr. Meyer's leadership has been central to *Sprinkle's* continued existence, this presented unique challenges in the formation of the journal. Nonetheless, through the work of both our new Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Jane Lehr, as well as our new editorial board, we have created a volume of *Sprinkle* that we believe is not only comparable in quality to our previous volumes, but has also begun to move forward in a very positive direction not only for our cause, but for the future of the fields for which we publish.

Our publication this year includes work from new and expanding areas of research as well as examinations of previously explored areas of study now presented in new and exciting ways. Topics in this volume include changing perspectives on sports and athletics as well as in science, technology, and medicine, education, literature, media, and history. In addition to these topics, this volume includes broadened feminist perspectives as well as works that challenge commonly-held beliefs regarding feminism. We

hope that this volume is not only radical in its content, but in its use as well. By publishing these particular works, we hope that we are fostering a community that is constantly challenging itself to be the most aware, most inclusive, and most forward-thinking that it can be.

We would like to thank Dr. Lehr, who has done an incredible job as our new Editor-in-Chief this year and our new Managing Editor Emma Sturm, who had some very large shoes to fill after the departure of our former Managing Editor, Nicole Glass, but was able to fill them with grace. We would also like to thank all of this year's editorial board members, who demonstrated a sincere commitment to the work involved with our journal and to the causes that we stand for. This journal would not have been possible without all of their diligence and dedication. We would also like to thank Cal Poly's Women's and Gender Studies Department for their continued support and to Cal Poly in general for the contributions that many of its students and faculty provided to our journal this year.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who submitted their contributions this year. The submissions we reviewed this year were incredible in regards to both scope and content and each was impressive in its own right whether or not it ended up being included in this volume. These students have shared not only their research, but have shared their voices, their experiences, and pieces of themselves through the work that they contribute to *Sprinkle* year after year. We remain ever-grateful to them as well as everyone who contributed to make this year's volume possible.

Thank You,

Samuel Shrader and Alex Castro  
*Associate Editors*

## Editorial: On Collaboration and Community

We are very proud to continue supporting the work that is presented here in this year's volume of *Sprinkle*. As Sam and Alex noted above, this year's editorial board had to adjust to a change in leadership as Liz left to work in another state, and Jane moved in to take on the role of on-site mentor to this dedicated and inspiring group of students. It was a difficult decision for Liz to change institutions for many reasons, including a question about whether *Sprinkle* had enough of a foundation established at Cal Poly to continue under a new form of leadership. We believe, however, that due to the amazing energy and commitment to the feminist community at Cal Poly and beyond that is shared by Jane and the editorial team – as well as the ongoing support of Liz – this transition has not only been possible, but a strengthening experience for all involved.

The editorial board took great initiative in ensuring key deadlines were met and the returning members worked hard to train and share their experience with the new members of the team. Emma did enter into a challenging role as Managing Editor and kept the communications flowing and deadlines met. She also took on the additional responsibility of compiling and formatting of all the articles into the final complete document – a task that had previously not been led by a student. Alex and Sam carried the knowledge and experiences from the previous years to lead this team and the result is impressive.

It is exciting to see *Sprinkle* continue to grow and evolve and be a space where undergraduate scholars can share their ideas with a broader audience. It is an honor for Cal Poly to manage this journal and create this space for feminist and queer scholarship to flourish. If you enjoy reading this volume, please share it with a friend, a professor, and/or a family member so this content gets the



large readership it deserves. If this journal has been passed along to you, please consider submitting something next year, or sharing it with your professors and peers interested in feminism, queer theory, and related issues of gender justice.

Thank you for being a part of the *Sprinkle* community and helping make space for the contributions of emerging scholars in this field.

Elizabeth J. Meyer, Ph.D. and Jane Lehr, Ph.D.  
*Editors-in-Chief*

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## **Queering Sports: Transnational Perspectives on Athletics**

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# The Development of Women's Professional Soccer Globally

By Allison Aggarwal

**ABSTRACT.** This paper discusses the history of women's professional soccer around the world and the obstacles, political and cultural, women have had to face in their countries in order to participate in the sport. Despite its prosperous growth in recent years, women's professional soccer still struggles to be recognized as a legitimate sport deserving of support and respect. In order to avoid naively overlooking women's fight for representation in soccer, this paper will briefly summarize the history of New Zealand, India, and the Middle East, as well as each country's activist movements that have created a larger platform for women's professional soccer to grow. Lastly, it will conclude by calling us as a Western society to consider what we can learn from these histories in order to create a more equitable environment for female athletes around the world and engage in more transnational activist movements for greater gender equality.

Google "world's greatest soccer players." Immediately you will be bombarded with articles and images of the world's most exceptional athletes. As you begin sifting through all the information, you will realize that almost all of the highly acclaimed players are men. Players such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Landon Donovan, David Beckham, Lionel Messi, and Pelé commonly appear, and there is a good chance that you recognize some of these names. But if I list names such as Abby Wambach, Christine Sinclair, Homare Sawa, Marta, and Mia Hamm, how many of these names do you recognize? Was it more or less than the men? If you noticed a difference, have you ever stepped back to wonder why this global gender imbalance exists in the soccer world?

International women's soccer has been making progress in terms of their visibility and participation around the world. As of 2015, there are 25 professional women's soccer leagues and 138 countries with national teams spanning across the globe—a record high at any point in history (Worldwide Women's Football Leagues Map, 2015; Women's Ratings, 2015, p. 1). Despite this seemingly widespread acceptance, soccer has not always been so popular among many countries and some still struggle to attain the respect it deserves as a professional sport for women. Therefore, it is imperative that the progress made thus far does not diminish the journey many countries have made to overcome the cultural and political barriers that have moderated the status of women in regards to their right to express athleticism and interest in playing professional soccer. Furthermore, acknowledging the activist efforts of female athletes toward achieving greater gender equity within their sport exemplifies the framework of transnational solidarity that we need moving forward to generate more widespread movements for increased female representation in other aspects of life—thus making the issue of visibility of women's sports greater than just that.

## **History of International Play**

### **New Zealand**

Although New Zealand currently has a strong women's international soccer team and professional women's soccer league, this development happened over an extended period of time. In Cox and Thompson's (2003) article "From Heydays to Struggles: Women's Soccer in New Zealand," they discuss how the popularity of soccer among women dates back as early as the 1920s, but it surprisingly was not until the 1970s that it was even considered an organized sport for women. Starting in the 1980s to the present, a demand for organized women's soccer has reached an all-

time high and has become the fastest growing sport for girls and women in the nation despite the overwhelming prominence of other sports such as rugby, golf, cricket, polo, and horseracing. Due to this increase in popularity, the New Zealand Women's Football Association (NZWFA) was created as the nation's first all women's professional soccer league. Associations continued to emerge throughout the country and escalated to being invited to participate in international tournaments (p. 205-206).

The creation of these leagues was not always so easy; New Zealand women faced many obstacles when trying to create platforms for professional women's soccer to thrive. Of these obstacles, a number of them came from political issues. For example, in 1999, the NZWFA that was previously a self-run organization was taken over by the men's national association (New Zealand Soccer). Some of the problems that surfaced from this change in management, as discussed through the personal statement of Barbara Cox (2003) in the article "From Heydays to Struggles: Women's Soccer in New Zealand," were the games being scheduled only on Sundays as to not conflict with the men's games on Saturdays. What made this especially problematic was that Regional Council by-laws closed many fields in honor of Sunday being a day for worship, leaving the women's professional teams with limited access to facilities. To compound the problem, the Auckland Referee's Association would not officially provide referees for the women's games due to the NZWFA's lack of association with the men's Auckland Football Association. With management officials being focused on the men's side of the sport, New Zealand women professional soccer players usually had to take on the responsibility of fundraising for their teams in order to get better equipment and have the financial means to go to international tournaments (p. 210-212). It is typically the responsibility of the league administrators to acquire the necessary funding from sponsors and clubs, but lack of initiative and passion left these female soccer players to fend for

themselves—something that is not an issue for their male counterparts.

Although political barriers are prominent in the development of women's professional soccer, some of the obstacles women had to face came in the form of negative cultural ideologies about gender and sports. For example, Sandra Coney commented that "New Zealand has been called a man's country and nowhere has this been more true than in sport. Sporting contest has been a male proving ground, sport a source of national identity and pride." The beliefs about masculinity and sports confined women's athletic exposure to only non-contact, controlled, clean, low-energy, feminine outfit sports like netball. In addition, New Zealand sports such as rugby and polo are more associated with prestige and athleticism while soccer was seen as "the whimp's" sport (p. 208). In order for women's professional soccer to be recognized and respected by the greater New Zealand community, women had to, and still continue to, battle the belief that sports were exclusively made for men and that soccer is the inferior sport. Although not an easy task, women have been slowly chipping away at the stubborn male-centered ideology that has maintained their stories as the inferior narratives in New Zealand. As bell hooks discusses in her theory of Sociological Feminist Thought, those in positions of privilege should use their advantage as insiders in the system to create collaborations with marginalized groups in order to challenge Eurocentric Androcentric situated knowledge (2015). Therefore, men must also be involved in the deconstruction of patriarchal thinking that upholds beliefs about female inferiority by challenging norms and creating new sources of knowledge that will effectively break down the unquestioned systems of privilege and oppression that are embedded at all levels of society in New Zealand.

## **India**

New Zealand is not the only country that has struggled with trying to overcome the sexist mindsets of their people. In a similar light, the (2003) article “Forwards and Backwards: Women's Soccer in Twentieth-Century India” discusses how soccer in India is considered a men’s sport, and those women who do play it are usually of the lower class because they see no other viable career options available. Therefore, women who play soccer in India are not only scrutinized and disgraced by men but also by other women who belong to the middle and upper classes (Majumdar, p. 81). This relates to the Janet Conway’s article “Activist knowledge on the anti-globalization terrain: transnational feminisms at the World Social Forum.” In the article, Conway shows that despite the commonalities between feminist knowledges, their conflicts between economic justice can cause them to clash and lose sight of their shared overarching goal (2011). In a similar way, women in India function under shared gender oppression, but their class differences and strict adherence to the caste system can blind them from uniting to fight for their rights as women. Failure to acknowledge their positionality and intersectionality as women within the greater class hierarchy becomes a rather significant internal obstacle to being able to create a united platform advocating for women’s representation. Consequently, this creates a very difficult situation for female soccer players in India because they lack allies in their fight for greater visibility and respect in their sport.

## **Middle East**

Montague (2008) stresses in his article, “Kicking Tradition,” that women’s soccer is starting to become more popular in Jordan, where the women have worked to create their own domestic professional league that features eight teams. Previously, countries in the Middle East and central Asia

generally did not support women's soccer. In fact, some of these countries' conservative religious lawmakers banned the formation of a women's national soccer teams altogether (p. 20). With political power in the hands of men, countries like Jordan faced major cultural, religious, and political barriers that intersect with each other to create a strong system of oppression that prevents women's soccer from achieving prosperity.

Despite large political barriers, Middle Eastern women have made progress in creating national soccer teams in spite of restrictions on their existence in the Middle East. One country that experienced success in developing a new women's national team is Afghanistan. Walizada, a former Afghan men's international player, launched a competition to find the country's best female soccer players. Despite having to train at Kabul's Olympic stadium where the Taliban executed hundreds of women, the unguaranteed safety of players, and the criticism Afghan women face when publicly partaking in sports, women and girls were more than eager for a chance to play on the team and change the belief system of their culture about female soccer players. The creator of the Afghanistan women's national team, Walizada, said, "For women in Afghanistan, this shows there is freedom and there is a chance for peace" (Montague, 2008, p. 20). With a similar message, the 2009 article "National Palestinian Women's Soccer Team Takes Field" quoted the captain of the Palestinian national team, Honey Thaljih, when she expressed her opinion on the intersection of women's soccer in Palestine, war, and women's emancipation. She said,

The Palestinian society is still struggling with women's liberation, so for me, soccer challenges that. We live in a difficult reality and as a Palestinian woman living under occupation I want to use this to communicate the message that we all just want to live. For me, soccer is a message of life, love and peace (Shaked, p. 1).



The mere courage it took for women in their region to publically support and participate in soccer was an activist act in itself to change the perceptions of their nation, and the same can be said about the actions of their global sisters despite the more political approach.

## **Activism**

Women have clearly overcome some of the obstacles set before them in order to create and improve the professional leagues and national teams that are available around the world today. For example, in order to counteract the unwillingness of the Auckland Referee's Association to provide referee's for women's games in New Zealand, Cox and Thompson discussed how FIFA's insistence that the Women's World Cup be officiated by females has created a push by New Zealand's professional soccer players to train more women for the job. This is creating a more female-run soccer organization in which management and voice is being directed back to the women who are directly affected by the decisions made. The New Zealand women's professional soccer players also host marathons, car washes, and bake sales in order to get enough money to market themselves as serious athletes that should be considered international competitors (2003, p. 212).

In colonial India, the development of women's soccer was closely related to the women's suffrage movements and emancipation. As stated in Majumdar's (2003) article, when India created their All Women's Congress in 1918, a power shift occurred in favor of the nation's female population. Women were, for the first time, in a formal position of power to demand that female-focused issues be addressed. With this new power, they insisted on better facilities for professional women's soccer players as well as more respect for the women's soccer program because of its potential to simulate more movements for women's rights (p. 84). Political

representation for women was key to improving the environment of women's soccer in India and provided the opening for more discussion on women's representation in office.

## **Conclusion**

Although great advances have been made in women's professional soccer across the globe, there is a lot more to be done. By bringing to light the problems women have had to face in terms of their ability to participate in soccer and their solutions to these obstacles, we can begin to develop a powerful plan of solidarity for creating a movement that counteracts gender discrimination in sports. If you think the United States has been more progressive in their cultural acceptance of women's soccer, think again. Despite the overwhelming amount of sports coverage available in the United States via television, the 1991 Women's World Cup final was blacked out by ESPN in order to show fishing and hunting competitions—and the United States Women's National Team was even in the final (Barnes, 1991, p. 1). Therefore, it is imperative that as people of privilege in the United States, we make a conscious effort to support women's sports globally as it will create a higher demand for more athletic opportunities for women in other countries and in our own. This could mean putting more women in positions of political power, supporting more women-run organizations, creating more literature on the subject, or simply choosing to watch or participate in women's sports to mend the gap between national efforts for an overall global goal of gender equality. All of these actions are, in their own way, forms of activism that can change the status quo of gender roles in sports.

The strides made toward leveling the playing field for women pursuing professional athletic careers is about more than just greater sports visibility. It is a call for the greater empowerment of women across the globe to breakdown the barriers that can dismantle their solidarity.

Acknowledging their intersections while simultaneously uniting as an oppressed group of individuals deserving of equal representation creates greater potential for strong transnational and cross-cultural bonds to be formed, effectively strengthening our ability to initiate change. This includes breaking down gendered assumptions that feminism is only for women so that men start getting involved in the push for widespread women's equality. Although soccer is just one example, it represents the desire for change and the lengths to which passionate individuals are willing to go to ensure their fair treatment. Now we just need to emphasize the intersectional, transnational call to action and we will see more effective feminist activism.

**Allison Aggarwal** is a student at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California.

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# The Gay-Friendly Games: Homonationalism and the Olympics

By Julianna Duholke

**ABSTRACT.** The Olympics, being an international event, have often sparked a number of political and human rights debates. Frequently, countries use the international competition to take a stand on a variety of global issues, at times going as far as to boycott the Olympics. The most recent human rights debate that has entered the Olympic sphere has been centered on LGBTQ rights. An initial look at the media coverage of both the 2012 London and 2014 Sochi Games would suggest that London took the opportunity of being the host city to promote LGBTQ rights, whereas Sochi further oppressed and marginalized the queer community. However, this paper finds that both Olympics were equally problematic for queer folk, as the Western media promoted homonationalist and normalizing discourses throughout both Games. This narrative made space for the white, gender-conforming male at the expense of the queer and trans community, as well as people of color.

## Introduction

The Olympics have been lauded as rallying points for human rights and have frequently been a venue for activists. Citizens, politicians, and lawyers alike see no better time than at a mega-international sporting event to apply pressure on countries that fail to recognize human rights. In recent years, the Olympics' mobilizing nature has appeared to facilitate more space, both figuratively and literally, for LGBT athletes and their rights. However, the international nature of the Games has also led to normalizing discourses and problematic discussions in the media. This can be seen in dialogue at both the Summer

2012 Olympics in London, England, and the Winter 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia. These cases, which are the two most recent Olympic Games, were selected for analysis given the dichotomy of the media's coverage between a liberal, democratic country versus a non-democratic/non-Western country. London was praised for its "gay-friendly" marketing campaign, which revolved around the idealization of the white consumerist gay male. By contrast, the media's critique of Sochi's anti-gay laws relied on the promotion of certain sexual behaviors and the exclusion of non-normative ones. Rather than act as an avenue for oppressed voices and for the promotion of LGBTQ rights, media coverage of the Olympic Games has further marginalized queer people through the prioritization of privileged gay voices.

### **Theoretical Framework: Homonationalism**

The exclusion of queer peoples at the Olympics is best understood through Jasbir Puar's theory of homonationalism. Homonationalism is the "national recognition and inclusion [of gays] contingent on the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary" (Puar, 2005, p. 2). This paper extends the theory to include *international* recognition and inclusion, seeing it as relevant not only within the United States but within the entire 'Western World'. Puar highlights three aspects of homonationalism: sexual exceptionalism, queer as regulatory, and the ascendancy of whiteness. For our two case studies, the former and the latter are of particular relevance.

Puar posits exceptionalism to be "a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority," which has resulted in America seeing itself as "the arbiter of appropriate ethics [...] while exempting itself without hesitation from such universalizing mandates" (Puar, 2005, p. 4; 8). The sexual exceptionalism of the West is evidenced by America's critique of Sochi despite failing to

safeguard the rights of LGBTQ people at home, as well as in London's declaration of being "gay friendly" despite having a history and current reality of marginalization of queers and people of color. Puar continues to explain that homosexual sexual exceptionalism occurs through "stagings of US nationalism via a sexual othering" (p. 4). At both the 2012 and 2014 Olympics, Sochi's laws and norms were contrasted with those of the Western World in order to situate Russia as the "intolerant, uncivilized, [and] sexually repressed" Other (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, Puar reasons that homonationalism is used to "continue or extend the project of US expansion and imperialism that is endemic to the war on terror" (Puar, 2005, p. 2). Imperialist discourses were prominent in Sochi discussions, with Western norms being promoted in a clear attempt to efface non-Western notions of sexuality and normality.

The ascendancy of whiteness, Puar's third prong of homonationalism, is a concept that "links the violence of liberal deployments of diversity and multiculturalism to the 'valorization of life' alibi that then allows for rampant exploitation of the very subjects included in discourses of diversity in the first instance" (Puar, 2005, p. 3). In essence, the ascendancy of whiteness evaluates how any inclusion offered by liberal diversity is mediated by exclusion, particularly through gender, sexuality, race, and class (p. 25). For example, the "exceptional citizen" does not have to be white per se; however, to be included in the national imaginary as an ethnic body one must be straight and wealthy (p. 25). Puar explains how the market is particularly conducive to producing more patriotic and idealized subjects. Market privileges are able to "reorient [people's] loyalty to the nation" by providing them a taste of the American Dream and a (small) sense of belonging; marginalized groups are able to access a sense of nationality through commodification (p. 26). This concept is important for understanding the way London used gay rights as a marketing strategy by specifically targeting gay

white males who conformed to the Western ideal, while excluding queer people of colour who deviated from the norms. Puar continues to develop this idea to look at how “the homonormative” furthers heteronormativity “through the fractioning away of queer alliances in favour of adherence to the reproduction of class, gender and racial norms” (p. 31-32). This fractioning of alliances is evidenced in the dialogue, cited later on, of certain white gay athletes and the commentary that is made on the Olympics.

Puar’s theory of homonationalism lends itself well to understanding the simultaneous acceptance of certain gay bodies and increased marginalization of others at the Olympics. The Western (not just American) media has accepted and given a voice to the white gay male at the expense of queer people of colour, which plays out on a global scale during the Olympics.

Homonationalism has been constructed around the white cisgender male body as this identity allows for homosexual people to be incorporated into the patriarchy without breaking it down in any significant way. It wards off any threat to the status quo of privilege presented by the homosexual identity (an identity historically excluded from the national imaginary), allowing for the same systems of power and oppression to be perpetuated. Being a gay white cisgender male permits the gay man to be, as Puar would say, an “exceptional citizen”.

## **London**

London was celebrated in the media for its inclusion of LGBT people, a marketing strategy that largely relied on targeting white, upper-class consumers and excluding non-Western/non-conforming sexual identities. London’s bid for the Olympic Games revolved around its pledge to make the Olympics more inclusive, which included marketing itself—from day one—as the “gay-friendly” Olympics (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 4). Notably, London was awarded its bid for the Summer Olympics approximately



six months before the Civil Partnership Act came into effect. Furthermore, it had been working on the bid long-before the Act had been passed, with the process beginning in 1997 (Civil Partnership Info). However, the lack of legislation did not appear to stand in the way of London promoting itself as being a safe and welcoming space for LGBT people before and during the Olympics. Its aim for 'unity in diversity,' and its emphasis on the inclusion of different sexual identities was well received by the media (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 2). For instance, the London Pride House was celebrated as a marker of the 2012 Games' welcoming atmosphere. Louise Englefied, the co-President of the European Gay and Lesbian Sports foundation who volunteered to run the London Pride House, described it as allowing "LGBT people to have a place in the Olympic movement" (Arthur). Within print media, both America's *The Huffington Post* and Canada's *National Post* highlighted the incredibly important and beneficial presence of the London Pride House. The *National Post* went as far as citing Australian diver Matthew Mitcham, who pointed to Vancouver's Pride House as one of the reasons he finally felt comfortable enough to 'come out' (Lawless, 2012; Arthur, 2012). The Pride Houses, it would appear, were life changing. Both newspapers went on to express concerns for gay athletes at Sochi (Lawless, 2012; Arthur, 2012). This praise ignored the fact that the initial location proposed for the London Pride House was rejected, as it was too close to a gay cruising site. This form of sexual expression was considered inappropriate and not a part of the idealized responsible white gay consumer, which London had targeted in its "gay friendly" marketing strategy (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 5). John Amaechi, a former basketball player who identifies as gay, stated that there should not be concern about the presence of a gay cruising strip as "today's LGBT community and their straight friends are as much about family and children, book clubs and Bikram yoga...as any other part of the community" (Hubbard and Wilkinson 6). Here it becomes

evident that there were limitations on who and what actions could be included in the gay-friendly image of London. The city was only promoting certain sexual lifestyles, with sites of “perverse sex” being repressed, as manifested in their denial of gay cruising sites (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p 11).

Human rights lawyer Mark Stephens was often quoted by media sources for his statement calling for countries where homosexuality is illegal to be banned from participating in the 2012 Olympics. Furthermore, he urged gay athletes from those countries to ‘come out’ in London and seek asylum (Dunkin, 2012). Highlighting London as the leader in gay rights—through emphasizing the progressivity of the Pride House and quoting advocates such as Mark Stephens—problematically positions the city as superior to the rest of the world. This furthers imperialist discourses, which is problematic as it normalizes Western notions and overlooks “the various ways same-sex desire is experienced and understood” (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 8). For example, discussions regarding the Pride House were more concerned with the future oppression in Sochi than with the present situation in London. During the London Games, the *National Post* quoted Canadian Chef de Mission, Mark Tewksbury, who stated: “the big challenge is Sochi. That’s where it’s [a Pride House] really needed” (Arthur, 2012).

Presenting Sochi in complete contrast to London failed to acknowledge the ways in which London was also marginalizing people. London’s gay villages were a key aspect of their gay-friendly marketing, but these villages were, and continue to be, frequently reported as unwelcoming to women, people of color, and working-class people. Their marketing relied upon, and sought to attract, the gender-conforming white gay man. London was concerned with a “privatized and depoliticized gay culture based on consumption and domesticity” (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 10). Obviously, this marketing came at the expense of queer folk, but this exclusion was ignored

through the imperialist discourse engendered by comparing London to Sochi and the rest of the Western world.

Journalists had seemingly endless praise for the inclusive atmosphere at the London Olympics, with *London Evening Standard* writer, Ivan Massow, stating “London was THE place for gay athletes to be out” (Massow, 2012). Jonathan Harbourne, of the London-based international newspaper *Gay Star News*, reported on his personal experience—as a gay man—volunteering at the London Olympics. He stated that he had never felt more included than he did during rehearsals for the Opening Ceremonies. Harbourne reported that the group of volunteers was so diverse that no one assumed you were straight. He continued to remark on the legacy the London Olympics had set up for LGBT people and how “the 2012 Olympics made good on its promise to ‘inspire a generation’” (Harbourne). In fact, Harbourne himself was inspired to work on the bid for the 2018 ‘Gay Games’ and expressed excitement about the future of LGBT people and sports in the UK. Despite this report of inclusion, the London Games actually failed to reach their target of 7-10% LGB volunteers, reaching only 5%, with no mention of the inclusion of trans folk (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 9). Harbourne is notably a white male, and was clearly able to develop a sense of belonging and feelings of national pride through his inclusion in, and involvement with, the Olympics.

With no recorded trans volunteers and no trans athletes, the voices and experiences of trans people at the London Olympics were effectively suppressed. Sports have long facilitated transphobia and the Olympics have proven no different, with athletes being required to strictly subscribe to the gender binary. The Olympics have even practiced controversial gender verification testing (Goddard, 2013). Practices like these and the absence of trans folk at the Olympics make the lack of critical dialogue surrounding London strikingly alarming.

From the Pride House, to the diverse volunteers, to the discourse of London as an extremely gay-friendly city, the media reported on how the 2012 Summer Olympics had more space for LGBT people than ever before. However, it is crucial to question who this space was really being made available to and on what terms. The media's discussion of LGBT people and the Olympics perpetuated normalizing discourses that ignored the marginalization and exclusion of queer bodies.

## **Sochi**

The media heavily criticized Sochi's anti-gay laws, but with a problematic discourse that idealized Western norms. This was evidenced in the bias towards identity politics, and the focus on 'coming out' and public visibility (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 10). While these identity politics have been discussed as universal, it is important to recognize visibility as a Western ideal not historically important or prioritized in Russia. Lesbian and gay people in Russia have developed through secret communities as this politicking is situated within their local context, yet the West continues to demand and attempt to impose a more mainstream lesbian and gay rights movement (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 11). The insistence on visibility manifested in a critique of well-known American gay figure skater Johnny Weir. Weir stated that he would still be going to Russia but would not be looking to cause a fuss or make any public scenes. In not adopting or prioritizing the visibility of gayness as is done in America, Johnny Weir was criticized heavily (Terlep, 2014). On the other hand, New Zealand athlete Blake Skjellerup was praised for his pledge to "keep it real." He was celebrated in the press as a white gay man subscribing to Western-style activism rather than adjusting to the local context of Sochi (LeBlanc, 2013, p. 9). There were clearly criteria by which gay people were supposed to abide by in commenting on Russia, which suggested that certain ways of being gay were considered more appropriate than

others. Gay athletes were expected to promote Western norms, and in failing to do so, Weir was ostracized by American citizens, including the gay community itself.

Russia's anti-gay laws were a trending topic in the weeks and months leading up to the 2014 Winter Games. Many called for a boycott of the Olympics in protest, and others demanded Russia be stripped of the Games and they be moved to a previous host city. Among these voices was English comedian, actor, writer, and activist Stephen Fry, who wrote an open letter to Prime Minister David Cameron in which he compared Russia's anti-gay laws to the laws of Nazi Germany and asked Cameron to boycott the games. Fry also proposed the Games be moved to Utah, a previous host city. However, there was no mention of the gay sitcom that had recently been denied airtime on Utah's NBC channel (Leblanc, 2013, p. 1-2). Despite the fact that the majority of these critiques were coming from America, a country that has failed to protect LGBTQ people and guarantee them most rights, comparing itself to Sochi allowed for a nationalist discourse that painted and promoted America as the ideal.

Brian Boitano, former Olympic figure skater and gold medalist, was one of the three U.S. delegates to Sochi. He discussed with *The Huffington Post* his "big decision" to come out prior to the games. Boitano was already out to his friends and family, stating he had always kept his personal life private, but wanted to be publicly out in order to "support the country and the President's message" of tolerance and diversity at Sochi (Boitano, emphasis added). *The Huffington Post* interviewer went on to ask him if he "felt safe" in Sochi, again painting Russia as a dangerous, intolerant place in contrast to a safe and accepting America (Boitano, 2014). The two other U.S. delegates, Caitlin Cahow and Billie Jean King, were also openly gay – and notably all three were white. Again this points to the imperialist discourse, wherein Boitano discussed the need to subscribe to the mainstream identity politics of the West and how in doing so he was fulfilling a patriotic duty. The

homonationalist discourse has perhaps never been so blatant, and on such a grand scale, than in Boitano's quote above. Obama's decision to send three gay delegates was lauded as "a clear message" to Russia about "its treatment of gays and lesbians," with the *National Post* claiming Obama had "serve[d] an ace past Putin," once again one can observe how the media celebrated American homonationalism (Pells, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

Media coverage of the Olympics has perpetuated homonationalist discourses that have resulted in the further marginalization of queer people. While London and Sochi were presented very differently in the media on the surface level, being celebrated and critiqued respectively, the same homonationalist framework dominated media coverage in both cities. The idealization and perpetuation of Western imperialist norms has meant that the space and voice created for gay athletes at the Olympics has been made for white, gender-conforming, upper-class gay males and has come at the expense of other segments of the LGBTQ community, such as queer individuals and people of colour. Media coverage at the Olympics has demonstrated how homonationalism can be extended to a global scale with the West as an entity—not just America—seeking to promote certain norms and include specific forms of homosexuality. It is evident through the marketing of London and 'othering' of Sochi that the media has made space for a patriotic, Western white gay male but that this has come at the expense of queer and racialized bodies.

Looking forward, a similar phenomenon is starting to take shape with trans athletes. As briefly mentioned, trans athletes have been overwhelmingly excluded from the Olympics and the media coverage surrounding them. Now, as the visibility of trans issues increases, gender conformity and the gender binary have taken center stage. Hormonal requirements are being proposed so that trans people will

be able to compete (Zeigler). Requiring a certain level of hormones dismisses the identity of trans folks who do not meet the set requirements as illegitimate. And, of course, trans folks who identify as non-binary or genderqueer are completely left out of the picture. The story of trans athletes in the Olympics is just beginning, but it appears to be taking an unfortunately familiar path of adopting certain bodies at the expense of other, less normative ones.

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**Hidden Discourses: Gender and  
Sexuality in Medicine, Science, and  
Technology**

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# The Silent Victims: HIV in the Deaf Community

By Hali Kohls

**ABSTRACT.** Significant health disparities exist between the Hearing and Deaf Communities due to the fact that mainstream society is organized by the physically abled for the physically abled. This systematic oppression, coupled with the prevailing, gendered stigma against HIV/AIDS, led to devastating consequences in the Deaf community. Existing prejudices negatively affect interactions between health care professionals and Deaf individuals. This paper employs a Feminist theoretical perspective while analyzing past research and deconstructing the experiences of a middle-aged, dyslexic, gay, Deaf male living with HIV. It also highlights the need for more sociological and gender studies research on Deaf individuals as well as the creation of a formal Deaf Theory.

Over the last few decades the HIV and AIDS epidemic has created a national panic and has fed on the misunderstanding and silence surrounding the illness. Pervasive myths about HIV/AIDS significantly affect how one experiences being diagnosed and living with HIV/AIDS. Their experience is further influenced by their position in society. Health disparities illustrate how minority groups are disproportionately affected by this illness (Sheetz, 2004, p. 118).

Contributing to these inequities are barriers certain groups face when trying to access health care information and services. Studies show Deaf individuals frequent a general practitioner much less often than their hearing peers (Meador et al., 2005, p. 219). This handicaps them because they are less likely to learn about preventative

health care and are less likely to receive early diagnoses, resulting in overall poorer health.

This paper explores the unique social position of Deaf, gay men that puts them at an increased risk of contracting HIV and how their social standing influences their experiences their diagnosis. It deconstructs situations in which Deaf persons and the health care system interact and how that is affected by the social understandings of HIV/AIDS, deafness, and the intersections of homosexuality and gender. By employing the Feminist theoretical framework, it looks at how our society is organized to privilege the physically “abled”, subsequently killing members of the Deaf community.

## **Literature Review**

The Deaf community was disadvantaged from the very beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is hard to get an accurate number of Deaf persons affected by HIV or AIDS because the Center for Disease Control does not include deafness on their forms. It is estimated that anywhere between 7,000 and 25,000 Deaf are living with HIV or AIDS, but from the limited information that has been gathered, coupled with anecdotal reports, it seems the actual number is closer to 25,000. Although the epidemic struck the Deaf community at the same time as the hearing, it was not until late 1980's that services geared specifically towards Deaf patients were initiated (Sheetz, 2004, p. 119).

Even today HIV/AIDS educational material and information is largely inaccessible by members of the Deaf community. Infographics are designed predominantly for hearing people and often include very few visual aids. Although they are only written at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, on average Deaf individuals read at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level and are highly visual learners (Peinkofer, 1994, p. 391). This is a significant reason for the limited HIV/AIDS knowledge still prevalent among American Deaf today. This lack of knowledge leads to fear and misunderstandings

about the risks of contracting HIV and what the diagnosis means, which often translates into stigmatization and discrimination (Peinkofer, 1994, p. 391).

The Deaf community was hit so hard by HIV/AIDS and taken so unaware that much frustration, confusion, and hopelessness still surrounds the diagnosis. Interviews with Deaf gay men show the high rates of infection and low levels of comprehension within the Deaf population (Mallinson, 2004, p. 30). Even those that demonstrated knowledge of safe sexual behavior seemed convinced that they would eventually contract, and likely die from, HIV/AIDS. It is obvious they felt little support from both the health care system and the Deaf community.

Communication barriers and considerable mistrust often complicate interactions between Deaf patients and health care professionals. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act requires physician's offices to provide and pay for interpreters when seeing Deaf patients (Iezzoni et al., 2004, p. 361). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Some patients may choose to forego the translator, but others do not receive them because they do not recognize their full legal right to demand one.

Furthermore, Deaf patients find that the health care system does not offer them adequate support and compassion. HIV/AIDS is a scary diagnosis. Fear of the disease is augmented by the dissemination of inaccurate information about the disease. Many Deaf individuals, especially at the beginning of the outbreak, learned they had HIV or AIDS without knowing what that diagnosis meant. When they visited a doctor to learn more they were met with frustration and impatience at their lack of knowledge and difficulties communicating.

Up until recently the lay public misunderstood deafness. They were ostracized and perceived as the inherently different, unintelligent "other". Medical professionals took these biases into the lab with them and used their social authority to declare deafness a mental retardation. Deaf persons still encounter this stigma,

particularly when dealing with health care professionals.

According to Lisa Iezzoni and her co-authors, Deaf patients feel that most health care professionals hold prior assumptions about deafness (2004, p. 357). This prejudice that Deaf patients perceived prevented them from asking more in-depth questions and from sharing some of their concerns. This is immensely harmful because it affects the amount of information Deaf patients receive about their health status, preventative health behaviors and treatments. Interviews with hard-of-hearing individuals illuminate the different treatment patients receive based on their hearing abilities. Many respondents who had loss their hearing later in life noticed that doctors also began treating them as less intelligent (Meador et al., 2005, p. 221).

Similarly, many health care professionals feel they possess inadequate knowledge about Deaf culture. It is necessary for medical professionals to undergo Deaf cultural competency training so they can better serve the needs of Deaf patients (Hoang et al., 2011, p. 175). Their inability to do so contributes to the health disparities rampant among the Deaf population.

One contributing factor to the wide-spread misconception of Deafness, according to Kendra Smith and MJ Bienvenu, is the lack of a formal theory, developed by Deaf people, to systematically document and analyze their experiences, in an effort to change their political, social, and economic position in society (2007, p. 43). Other “emancipatory knowledges”, such as feminist theory, have been developed to explain the unsatisfied needs of subordinated groups and introduce effective solutions (Smith et al., 2007, p. 43).

Since the outbreak of the U.S. HIV/AIDS epidemic in the early 1980’s there has been a stigma attached to the diagnosis. At the beginning it predominately affected middle and upper class, white, homosexual males. It was quickly deemed a “gay” disease and even adopted the medical name of “GRID” (gay-related immune disease)

(Lorber et al., 2002, p. 109). Due to its association with homosexuality, and eventually IV-drug use, diagnosis of this illness became a marker for immoral behavior (Bird et al., 2013, p. 2194). In their time of great need, HIV-positive individuals are often marked as outcasts and denied support by their community

The Deaf Community is supposed to be where Deaf individuals can develop self-esteem, communicate easily, and share their Deaf culture (Mallinson, 2004, p. 32). Unfortunately, due to prevalent assumptions of gender and sexuality coupled with gross misunderstandings of the disease, HIV/AIDS is highly stigmatized within Deaf social circles. The Deaf community is relatively small and close knit, multiplying one's fears of their HIV-positive status getting out and spreading through the community quickly (Peinkofer, 1994, p. 391). This leads to less frequent utilization of interpreters in doctors' offices. Some fear that using an interpreter will compromise their confidentiality. This can result in patients purposely withholding medical information, which undermines how effectively a doctor can diagnose and treat the patient (Meador et al., 2005, p. 220).

Concepts of homosexuality and gender are inextricably intertwined in American culture. Masculinity is constructed as distinctly opposite from femininity. Therefore men who have sex with other men are often ridiculed as being unmasculine, weak, and overall inferior (Levine, 1998, p. 20; Mallinson, 2004, p. 32). Internalized homophobia is a common consequence of our heteronormative society telling individuals who are capable of same-sex love that they are "sick" or a deviation from "normal" (Levine, 1998, p. 22). The construction of "gay macho" celebrates frequent, anonymous, casual sex and an enthusiasm for partying and drug use (Levine et al., 1989, p. 146). Masculinity, both heterosexual and homosexual, often encourages risky behavior (including not wearing condoms), which significantly increases chances of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Gay men in the Deaf community often feel they are a “minority within a minority”. Many fear coming out of the closet would result in them being rejected by the Deaf community, the only social circle many can communicate easily and feel genuinely comfortable in.

## **Methodology**

My research study was supplemented by an interview with a Deaf, gay, urban, HIV-positive, Black man that I will refer to by the pseudonym “Darius”. It is also important to mention that Darius is dyslexic and may have other learning disabilities. This has further disadvantaged Darius when trying to access educational sources and when trying to communicate with doctors by writing notes. He has been living with his HIV-positive status since his diagnosis in August of 1990. I compiled a series of open-ended questions to ask him and video-recorded the face-to-face interview. In the room with us were two women he works with at Pennsylvania School for the Deaf to help us record and interpret. An interpreter he knew well was vital because American Sign Language (ASL) is quite different from verbal English; it has its own vocabulary and syntax (Mallinson, 2004, p. 28). Therefore, translating ASL can be difficult and, by definition, very much up to interpretation. Having a friend there ensured more accurate interpretation of his experiences and feelings.

## **Findings**

My interview with Darius offered new insights into how Deaf, gay men experience being diagnosed with and living with HIV. Throughout the interview three themes stood out: communication barriers when interacting with the health care system, existing stigma against homosexuality and associated gender assumptions, and the Deaf community’s significant need for attention.

Darius first decided to get tested for HIV in 1990 when many of his acquaintances were being diagnosed although he was exhibiting no symptoms. Before he was diagnosed he knew very little about HIV/AIDS, just like the majority of the Deaf population. The lack of knowledge led to fear and depression for Darius. “The first doctor I had to ask what [his diagnosis] meant and that I didn’t know. And he was kind of short with me and kind of mean with me and had an attitude with me.” This first interaction Darius had with his doctor about HIV reflects how many Deaf individuals feel doctors lack compassion and patience when dealing with a Deaf patient, particularly during such emotionally sensitive times (Mallinson, 2004, p. 33).

The second time he went to the doctor he brought a hearing friend with him to help interpret. This is a common strategy among Deaf individuals who would rather avoid using an interpreter (Mallinson, 2004, p. 33). At this point in his diagnosis Darius was protecting the privacy of his HIV-positive status. He sometimes still does this by attempting to communicate with his doctor by lip-reading or writing notes rather than asking for an interpreter.

There are times when Darius was being treated by a doctor and desperately needed an interpreter, but one was not available. Darius remembers,

One day I found blood in my pee and it scared me to death. I went to the doctor and wrote down everything that was wrong with me. I was dizzy. They were telling me to hurry up and I was writing notes. The doctor told me there was no interpreter there at the time. The male doctor told me he had to stick something up my penis. I was like, “what! What! What! You have to stick something up my penis?!” And then he stuck something up my penis. Then I could pee. Everything was fine after that, but let me tell you, that was an experience.

This is a good example of how Deaf individuals become very scared when they are interacting with health care professionals and either do not understand what is happening or cannot see what the doctor is doing (Iezonni



et al., 2004, p. 359). When a doctor is out of eyesight the Deaf patient is unable to read his or her lips. This failure to communicate is immensely important to understanding the Deaf community's general mistrust and fear of the health care system.

Darius' gay identity has a profound impact on how he experiences living with HIV. When I asked him when he knew he was gay, he spoke about playing dolls when he was little and how his parents already knew he was gay before he came out to them. I found this explanation fascinating because it reflected the beliefs he held about gender and sexuality. To Darius, his love for playing with dolls and fixing their hair illustrated his sexuality more than his first homosexual experiences at school.

Near the end of the interview I asked Darius what masculinity meant to him (a question that had not originally been on my script). His response: "I think of a strong, normal person. Not weak or flirtatious, But just really a firm, normal, strong person. Not gay and flirty and feminine with floaty wrists and all that. Just respectful, polite, and strong." He draws distinct lines between masculinity, strength, and the rejection of weakness. He also directly connected femininity with being gay and flamboyant. And, of course, to be masculine is "normal".

Darius explained that he had no way of knowing who had given him HIV because he was having a significant amount of unprotected sex with a variety of men. He says that he now uses condoms for protection, but when he was younger he was "wild" and only interested in having a good time. This is similar to research I came across that associated gay masculinity with risky behavior, multiple sex partners, and a concern for their sexual pleasure over safety (Lorber et al., 2002, p. 114; Levine et al., 1989, p. 144).

Social stigma against homosexuality was still highly pervasive when Darius was first diagnosed with HIV in 1990. He spoke more about his interactions with his doctors and how he feared being rejected. He did not like

the attitude of the first doctor he saw about his diagnosis and consequently did feel comfortable speaking frankly with the doctor about medical concerns.

His hearing friends helped him find a gay doctor, with whom Darius thought he would be more comfortable. The improvement was instantaneous. Darius feels comfortable asking all of his medical questions without fear of being rejected or mistreated for his gay identity. In this way, societal stigma against homosexuality and HIV/AIDS significantly influences the effectiveness of medical treatment one receives.

Although Darius' diagnosis was twenty-four years ago, a general lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS is still prevalent in the Deaf community today. Darius was caught unaware by his illness, a terrifying experience he does not want others to have to go through. For five years he ran HIV/AIDS workshops out of his home. Like other HIV-positive individuals, Darius recognized a cultural lag in the Deaf population's understanding of HIV/AIDS and felt resolved to help his community (Mallinson, 2004, p. 33).

He remembers encountering stigma within the Deaf community: "Sometimes my other Deaf friends can be rude. Some of the deaf people that I know say, 'Don't kiss him. You might get sick.'" This experience of Darius reflects the misunderstanding that HIV/AIDS is highly contagious and that an HIV-positive individual is a danger to society (Bird et al., 2013, p. 2196). This is again untrue. HIV/AIDS is spread through the exchange of bodily fluids (i.e. blood, semen, etc.) or by the shared use of needles. These findings illustrate that more work needs to be done within the Deaf community to correct these rampant misconceptions of HIV/AIDS.

## **Conclusion**

The Deaf community is significantly disadvantaged when it comes to receiving preventative health information, understanding treatments, and being at risk for a variety of

illness including HIV/AIDS. The primary reason for these disadvantages is how difficult it is for a Deaf individual to communicate with a hearing doctor. Interpreters are not always available or desired, even though physicians' offices are legally required to provide and pay for the services. Doctors should ask their Deaf patients what their preferred communication style is since preferences vary from person to person. When discussing medical issues, physicians should speak simply and routinely verify with the patient that he or she thoroughly understands what the doctor is saying. Overall, physicians need to undergo Deaf cultural competency training to be able to fully meet the needs of their Deaf patients (Hoang et al., 2011, p. 181). The need for a greater understanding of Deaf people and their culture extends beyond the medical field, however.

Within Deaf Studies, a formal Deaf Theory needs to be developed so scholars can systematically analyze the unique experiences of Deaf people and how they are disadvantaged in society. Similar to more recent forms of Feminist theory, Deaf theory would have to be interdisciplinary in nature because all people, including the Deaf, experience the same situations differently due to intersecting systems of oppression and privilege. Deaf individuals would need to be given a platform through which to take charge, so they can outline their *own* experiences, needs, obstacles, and possible solutions (Smith et al., 2007, p. 44).

Further activism needs to be completed in the Deaf community to correct the pervasive myths about HIV/AIDS circulating the social network. In one study I found many Deaf gay male subjects felt HIV/AIDS educational presentations in ASL would be more helpful and effective than brochures written in English (Mallinson, 2004, p. 31). People need to know the reality of an HIV-positive status and the preventative measures they can take to avoid contraction. The silence and stigma that surrounds HIV/AIDS contributes to less trust, less disclosure, less

communication overall, and inevitably more danger (Bird et al., 2013, p. 2197).

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# Medicating Gender

By Emma Hahn

**ABSTRACT.** This essay is a feminist critique of the modern psychiatric diagnostic method. While attempting to be holistic, the medical model and use of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) are grounded in biological origins. Additionally, the psychiatrists that use them to make decisions for patients are often susceptible to societal assumptions about experiences of individuals of different genders as well as the power dynamics inherent in a field such as psychiatry. Therefore, mental health methodology today is unable to provide the information necessary to incorporate feminist principles to protect patients from these assumptions and hierarchies. Psychiatrists can apply feminism to their work by intentionally focusing on gender and its impacts on mental health during the diagnostic process, hopefully leading to more appropriate treatments for patients.

## Introduction

How can psychiatry more actively and effectively embrace feminism? One way to answer this question is to look at how psychiatry exists as a medical practice. Currently, the modern psychiatric assessment process is often known as the “medical model.” The medical model was a term first used by Scottish psychologist R.D. Laing in 1971 in *The Politics of the Family, and Other Essays*. Laing describes the medical model as a sequence of, “complaint; history; examination; diagnosis; treatment” (Laing, 1971, p. 40). The medical model relies heavily on the idea that concrete physical problems are the cause of abnormal behavior in humans. However, many mental illnesses have been discovered that have not been linked to an organic cause.

Therefore, a discrepancy sometimes exists in clinical psychiatry in which a doctor must treat an illness without knowing its origin. The American Psychological Association's response to this discrepancy is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which lists mental illnesses and symptoms of those illnesses, and provides a standardized guide for psychiatrists to diagnose their patients.

Unfortunately, the current DSM and diagnostic process inadvertently reflect the oppressive nature of present power structures, making healing difficult for marginalized individuals with mental illness. In order for psychiatrists to truly support their patients in recovery, treatment must be comprehensive enough to take into account how past experiences regarding identity have impacted a patient's mental health. Many feminist theories provide a foundation for understanding these impacts, so it is useful to look at the medical model through a feminist lens. Psychiatrists will be able to provide the best support to their patients if they better understand the impact of gender on mental health from a feminist standpoint.

### **Assumptions of Experience**

Assumptions made by a psychiatrist in regards to a patient's prior experiences are often detrimental in engaging with gender during psychiatric examination. Psychiatrists unknowingly develop expectations regarding their patients as a result of social constructions of gender present in society. These gendered expectations then surface during clinical consultation, leading to inadequate interpretation of the information a patient provides, and potential improper diagnosis and treatment. Androcentrism, gender socialization, and gender essentialism are prevalent examples of biases that are present in Western consciousness and seep into psychiatric conversation.

Androcentrism refers to male-centered attitudes and the assumption that the male experience is equivalent to the human experience, with femaleness being an outlier. Peter Hegarty and Carmen Buechel, two psychologists of the University of Surrey, presented a study in 2006 that provided analysis of androcentrism in research published in psychological journals in the past 40 years. The study shows that the ratio between female and male participants in studies has balanced over time, meaning the experience of the female portion of the population has become a more prevalent part of psychological research, as a result of the setting of standards of practice in research, regarding women (Hegarty and Buechel, 2006, p. 381). However, in the studies in which gender differences were a main focus of the research at hand (“medium gender salient” and “high gender salient” studies), researchers were 24% more likely to attribute the differences to be “about women” than “about men” (p. 382). This means that the authors’ considered the natural state of the female participants in the study to be the cause of the gender differences found. This reflects a conflation of femaleness and difference, and a conflation of maleness and normality in the minds of psychologists. This characterization of women and androcentrism present in psychology today is particularly damaging in the context of gender socialization.

The concept of gender socialization can be portrayed by Colette Guillaumin’s feminist theory of “natural” characteristics. Guillaumin, a French sociologist and feminist, explains that natural characteristics are assumptions made about the identity of a person based on the social group they are perceived to belong to. In reality, Guillaumin states that it is actually the perception of being part of said social group that generates these “natural” characteristics. Others treat individuals as though they intrinsically have identity-specific attributes, and so individuals respond by internalizing these characteristics (Guillaumin, 1977, p. 42). This means that people who are perceived to be women are treated as though they possess



those attributes commonly associated with women. Then, they develop a set of distinct “feminine” characteristics, while those who are seen as – and are treated like – men develop a set of distinct, “masculine” characteristics in response to social pressures.

Therefore, women and men tend to diverge into two categories of personality, based on societal assumptions of gender and sex. Hegarty and Buechel’s descriptions of androcentrism tie into this theory of “natural” characteristics because gender socialization is often overlooked as a cause of behavior. Women’s experiences, which are products of both societal pressures *and* individual experience, are lumped together with outliers, rather than as a specific social group in and of themselves. Through this characterization, the stereotyped and anomalous woman becomes less important in research and, as a result, misunderstood in diagnosis.

One example of this process is that women are under diagnosed and diagnosed much later than men with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This is because women express ADHD differently than men resulting from their socialization. Women are more likely to display internalizing symptoms of ADHD, such as inattentiveness, rather than the externalizing ones that are more common for men, such as hyperactivity or impulsivity (Quinn, 2014, Table 1). This can be explained by Guillaumin’s framework in that women are assumed to have the *natural* characteristics of timidity, rather than assertiveness, which is assumed to inherently belong to men. When women are treated as intrinsically reserved, as they often are in Western society, they learn to internalize their ADHD in order to fit in socially.

Furthermore, male-centered psychological attitudes can result in research that indirectly labels this internalization as “uncommon for the standard ADHD patient,” rather than a more gender-specific option, such as “normal for the standard woman with ADHD.” Women with ADHD are then misdiagnosed because psychiatrists rely on

information from male-centered research to create the DSM. When psychiatrists look to the DSM, women are more likely to display the “uncommon” symptoms noted and therefore do not necessarily fit the “standard” criteria for ADHD, resulting in lack of diagnosis or misdiagnosis. This is just one example of the many ways that androcentrism and gender socialization can cause women to be improperly treated solely because of their gender.

A second group of assumptions that frequently affect psychiatric diagnoses are related to the doctor’s perception of the sex and gender of the patient. This concept is illustrated by Gayle Rubin’s theory of “sex essentialism,” which is the assumption that sex is something innate. Sex essentialism arises based on the societal assumption that there is an inherent link between gender and sex (Rubin, 1984, p. 146). In reality, some people discover that they identify with a sex and/or gender that are not cohesive with the sex and/or gender they were assigned at birth, proving that gender and sex are not inherently linked. However, because the idea that that gender is linked to sex is a widespread, socially constructed assumption in Western society, and sex is considered biological, men and women are treated differently because they are perceived to be inherently biologically different. Paired with the assumption that men and women hold certain innate characteristics, this has huge implications for the way psychiatrists interact with the individuals they are treating.

For instance, trans women’s experiences with psychiatrists are liable to be influenced based on the category of sex they are perceived to belong to. Trans women have higher rates of depression and thoughts of suicide than the general population, and this rate does not decrease after sex-reassignment surgery (Dhejne, 2011, p. 7). The way trans women are treated in society is thought to be at least partially if not fully responsible for this rise (Hoffman, 2014, p. 6). These individuals, however, may be treated differently before and after sex-reassignment in

part because of the biases psychiatrists hold about women. Due to essentialist assumptions, women are more readily given psychotropic medication and more readily assumed than men to need ongoing, in-patient treatment, among other differences (Poland, 2004, p. 11). Trans women who undergo sex reassignment surgery are classified biologically under a medical model. They would therefore be treated differently before and after transitioning based on their perceived gender and sex, even though their mental health issues due to societal oppression remain unchanged. Essentialist understandings therefore have an impact on medical treatment for many individuals.

These three examples show how assumptions regarding the gender of women and trans patients can be the cause of poor diagnoses and treatment in modern psychiatry. Additionally, research, training, and education of future psychiatrists focuses on the assumed state of male and female experience, but often prioritizes the male experience because of its presumed applicability to all human experience. This means anyone who is not a man or, does not fit the societal expectation of what a man is like, has increased risk of receiving diagnoses that are inaccurate or inappropriate. In a society such as the United States, where mental health disorders are some of the most common medical issues, it is important for psychiatrists to fully develop their perceptions of sex and gender to increase accuracy and efficiency of diagnosis.

## **Power Dynamics**

There are also many issues with treatment related to the power dynamics involved in modern psychiatry. Many mental health professionals indirectly encourage systems that keep patients in marginalized positions. For instance, the relationship between therapist and patient is often inherently skewed to provide the therapist with more say in what happens between the two participants. Additionally, pharmaceutical companies have a strong

influence on treatment options for people (more often women) with mental health disorders. The following two factors in gendered power relationships generate a situation in which a patient can receive inappropriate or ultimately subversive treatment in response to the symptoms they provide to the psychiatrist.

First, the use of the medical model encourages the idea that the psychiatrist is the ultimate authority (from the DSM) on what is objectively wrong with the patient and what form of treatment the patient should receive. This generates a power dynamic that leaves the patient in a position of limited control. This power dynamic is not based in biology, rather societally inherent biases. For individuals whose personal, identity related experiences have affected their state of mind, this situation reaffirms personal marginalization, and could mitigate any chance of effective treatment.

This dynamic is akin to Ann Oakley's description of interviewing as a "masculine paradigm" (Oakley, 1981, p. 31). Oakley, a sociologist, feminist, and writer, argues that interviewing situations often reflect the power dynamics of Western culture by depicting an effective or normal interview as one in which the interviewer relegates the interviewee to a subordinate position. Therefore, interviewing follows the idea that masculinity and subordination is an acceptable standard for information exchange. Oakley describes how the assumed "male" traits of "objectivity, detachment, hierarchy, and 'science'" from the interviewer are considered necessary components of a proper interview (p. 38). While these elements may be helpful for an interviewer, expecting someone to use them treats the interviewee's comfort and knowledge as less important than the interviewer's quest for information. For psychiatrists acting as agents of diagnosis under the medical model, that means setting aside their patients' identification with a variety of experiences in favor of analyzing immediate behaviors which reflect symptoms that can assist them in reaching a simple diagnosis. This is

detrimental to a patient because it means losing the chance to understand how the individual grew to develop those symptoms, and why they may persist despite treatment. Therefore, a consultation by a psychiatrist is less effective when the psychiatrist assumes a hierarchical position that puts their goals over the patient's needs.

Secondly, pharmaceutical companies hold influence over psychiatrists' decisions, which can largely affect the frequency and conditions under which individuals with certain gender identities are prescribed medication. For example, many women may seek medication without ongoing therapy. However, that desire may be driven by societal or environmental depictions of the medication, rather than the patient's personal needs. Jonathan Metzl describes this phenomenon in his book, *Prozac on the Couch*. Metzl relays how women historically were often manipulated by advertisements into seeking out antidepressants to improve their sex drive, even though their mental state was healthy. Furthermore, as Metzl explains, "psychotropic medications are imbued with expectation, desire, gender, race, sexuality, power, time, reputation, countertransference, metaphor, and a host of important factors" (Metzl, 2003, p. 5). This quote nicely sums up the idea that biomedical treatment in the profit-driven health system of the United States runs the risk of encouraging certain "life-changing" medications for individuals who do not need them. For women, that may mean trying to increase their sex drive through antidepressants or antipsychotics in order to escape the male-driven influences that exist for them in society.

A psychiatrist therefore must understand that diagnosing and treating patients is not necessarily a goal-oriented process, but a means-oriented process. In order to avoid both the drive to diagnose too fast and the drive to treat patients with medication based on outside influence, psychiatrists have to approach their patients with an intentional attitude. When the goal of diagnosis is the focus of the conversation between a therapist and a patient, and

not the actual health of the patient, then a therapist's office becomes an apathetic track towards diagnosis and treatment. Therapists must account for internal and external power influences in order to gauge how to reduce their effects and provide patients with support first, and the right treatment if it seems to fit the situation.

## **Conclusion**

Psychiatry today is an effort to find a quick fix for a complex medical problem. However, when the "medical problem" is interconnected with individual personality, identity, and experience, the situation becomes too nuanced for a single easy solution. Human experience is a compilation of a network of identities moving through a vast number of environments. The collection of all of these interactions culminates in the state of mind of a patient, but under the modern diagnostic method, only some of these interactions are considered valuable to diagnosis. While every experience of a patient cannot be communicated and considered, there remains a need to actively collect information in an intentional way so that gender identity is not forgotten, avoided, or misunderstood in clinical settings.

My solution to this problem is threefold. First, from an administrative and educational point of view, the training of clinical psychiatrists should include comprehensive study of the impacts of gender in society and in clinical settings. Psychiatrists should learn the nuances of gendered assumptions and how those assumptions relate to patient diagnosis and treatment. Additionally, they should be taught about the power relationships that inherently exist in both the psychiatric and pharmaceutical industries. This education is key for psychiatrists' ability to set standards during clinical discussion that indicate an active effort to effectively approach and treat patients.

Psychiatrists must be self-reflexive about which biases are salient for them, and actively focus on subduing the impulse to diagnose and treat based on those assumptions. Specifically, this may mean questioning the usefulness of a diagnosis, and working with or without the DSM on a case-by-case basis (Swartz, 2013, p. 46). This would mean the psychiatrist is focusing on the individual and their specific experiences, rather than what they assume the patient has experienced as a person of their gender, thus avoiding the kind of biases that are present in the DSM based on gender socialization and androcentrism. This allows the psychiatrist to take a step back from the goal of diagnosis, to actually listen to their patients and therefore provide them with self-controlled, unbiased support when it comes to their gendered experiences.

The psychiatrist must also strive to balance the power dynamics in the relationship between psychiatrist and patient. In reality, this may mean actively providing patients with treatment options outside of the realm of biomedical treatment, and stress that whichever form of treatment the patient chooses is acceptable. This approach is described as “narrative” because it focuses on the story of the patient, rather than what the psychiatrists views as the “right” solution (Lewis, 2014, p. 2). More than just changing the standard of medicine, this adjustment represents an active effort by the psychiatrist to empathetically treat their patient and regard them as a mutual actor in the diagnosis and treatment process.

Like any individual going into a clinical setting and expecting to receive effective and wholesome treatment, women and trans individuals need to be specifically supported in their efforts without assumptions or power relationships burdening that process. It is only through education, self-reflection, and active self-inhibition that psychiatrists can truly consider their work to be unbiased both between patients and between themselves and their patients. The balance created through these actions can aid

in genuinely assisting patients who are in a national environment in which they are systematically unsupported.

A psychiatrist may see the merit in passively finding a biomedical treatment, but this cannot be the sole focus of psychiatric conversation. A therapist has to primarily support and validate their patient emotionally in their identity-specific experiences, and only then should the therapist move on to diagnoses and treatment. The therapist should also actively incorporate their patient's attitudes in determining which type of treatment is right for them. Setting this standard of empathetic psychiatry is an essential step in fully appreciating gender, sex, and their impacts on the brain and mind so that individuals can be appropriately supported in their search for a healthy mental attitude.

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# Where Does Sexual Orientation Come From? Essentialism, Social Constructivism, and the Limits of Existing Epigenetic Research

By Matt Klepfer

**ABSTRACT.** Research and theory into the origins of sexuality has been dominated by essentialists and social constructivists. Essentialists argue that sexually is a culturally independent biological force, whereas social constructivists argue that sexuality is the product of a particular culture at a particular time. Epigenetics, which studies the effects of one's environment on their body, has the potential to provide new research into the origins of sexual orientation. By following essentialist assumptions on gender and sex, I argue that existing epigenetic research fails to produce convincing conclusions on the origins of sexual orientation.

The long standing debate on the origins of sexual orientation continues to be fought between essentialists and social constructivists. Epstein (1987) contends that the root of this debate is “the all-too-familiar terrain of nature vs. nurture.” Essentialists view sexual orientation as a culturally independent biological force and treat sexual orientation as “cognitive realizations of genuine, underlying differences.” Social constructivists believe that sexual orientation is the production of a particular culture at a particular moment in time and that sexual orientation belongs “to the world of culture and meaning, not biology.” Social constructivism is appealing largely because it shows that society is changeable based on its environment, whereas those with essentialist and biological deterministic views conceptualize differences as unchangeable givens; as

described by Sofoulis (2009), essentialism and social constructivism is a genes vs. environment dualism. New scientific research into epigenetics shows that environmental factors can influence genetic activity. This epigenetic research not only removes the genes vs. environment dualism, but has the potential to show how one's environment can shape one's body. Epigenetics has the potential to provide answers that are satisfactory to both essentialists and social constructivists, however, existing epigenetic research on homosexuality merely reinforces essentialist assumptions about gender and sex, as well as established notions of masculinization and feminization.

### **Essentialism**

Much of essentialist theory has been supported by scientific research into homosexuality. Many twin studies have been conducted that observe homosexuality among monozygotic and dizygotic twins. In the first, Kallmann (1952) observed that homosexuality rates were higher among monozygotic twins than dizygotic twins. Eckert (1986) studied twins who were raised separately and had similar findings. Further, Hamer (1993) studied families with two gay brothers, observing that gay men tended to have more homosexual males on the maternal side of their family tree. He concluded that homosexuality is probably carried by the mother.

LeVay (1991) studied the brains of dead AIDS victims, who he assumed to all be homosexuals, finding that a part of the hypothalamus in heterosexual brains was on average twice as large as the dead homosexuals. Sanders (2014) and his team conducted genome-wide linkage scans on homosexual brothers, finding that gay men share similarities in two areas of genome. They concluded that chromosome 8 and chromosome Xq23 influence the development of male sexual orientation.

For many essentialists, these studies and many more provide evidence that sexual orientation is a biological force engrained within our very being.

## **Social Constructivism**

Foucault (1978) pioneered the social constructivist theory of sexual orientation, theorizing that there is no inherent human sexuality, but rather changing levels of human ability to experience consciousness and physical behavior relative to societal forces of categorization and regulation. Sexuality changes through time and across societies that are shaped and reshaped by configurations of power. Perhaps similar to sexuality, Hacking (1986) points out that classifications of race change at least every ten years in the US as the census redefines racial categories. Foucault and Hacking argue that our identities change over time, sexual and otherwise, because of our methods of categorization.

Stein (1992) argues that social constructivist theory, if true, would have “deep ramifications” on many previous studies of sexuality because most have assumed the objects of their studies are “natural rather than cultural entities” (p. 5). Most research on sexuality has been “scientific,” or rather, looking for some sort of biological rationale for sexual orientation. Tiefer (1987) theorizes that “the domination of theory and research by the biomedical model” has created a monopoly on knowledge production related to sexuality. The domination of medicalized theory, combined with the public’s desire for medicalized discourse it commonly perceives to be value-free, produces knowledge that inevitably emphasizes the body as the source of difference. Social constructivist scholarship has a hard time receiving legitimacy and funding due to the medicalization of sexuality. McIntosh (1968) points out that lay people will “discuss whether a certain person is ‘queer’ in the same way as they might question whether a certain pain indicated cancer,” as if we inherently discuss sexuality in medical terms.

Vance (1989) points out that the mainstream gay rights movement adheres to essentialism as “an effective weapon against persecution.” This is not in a commitment to essentialist theory per se, but rather a realization of the political usefulness of the “born this way” ideology. She highlights politically appealing arguments made by essentialists; for example, if homosexuality is inborn, then homosexual school teachers cannot influence their identity on school children. For these reasons, Vance states that arguments against essentialism are perceived by some gay communities “as damaging to gay interests.” As Epstein (1987) observes, this is because gay communities view themselves as “legitimate minority group[s],” which solidifies the idea that their identity is a real difference. Social constructivist theories, Epstein hypothesizes, are “out of sync” with the self-understandings of gay communities; the communities are unaware of the constructedness of their identities, see difficulties in getting their communities to a consciousness, and fear the social constructivist threat to group identity and public legitimization.

### **The Black Box**

The process of scientific “fact” making can be helpful to analyze how scientific evidence supporting essentialist viewpoints has supported and developed mainstream views on the origins of sexual orientation. Epstein (1996) explains that many sociologists use the phrase “black box” to describe the construction of scientific facts. The black box has an input, in this case “What are the origins of sexual orientation?,” and an output, which from an essentialist viewpoint would be that “sexual orientation is a culturally independent biological force.” The black box itself is the “contingency, controversy, and uncertainty” it takes to go from input to output. Fact making is the closing of a black box, when “contingency is forgotten, controversy is smoothed over, and uncertainty is bracketed” (p. 28).

Epstein explains the process to close black boxes; “[scientists] take observations, present them as discoveries, and turn them into claims, which are accepted by others, and may eventually become facts, and finally, common knowledge” (p. 28). As scientific discoveries find “causes” for sexual orientation, black boxes are closed, and the mainstream United States gay community adopts scientific findings as facts. As Epstein states, “laypeople are almost always in the position of having to trust what experts tell them is true” (p. 15).

Conrad (2016) describes how gay rights activists from the 1980s on have supported essentialist theory because of its persuasiveness when demanding “equal rights.” As quoted by Vance (1989) earlier, essentialism is “an effective weapon against persecution” because a biological innocence would mean that gays are deserving of rights. Gay rights activists hoped to use science for social justice in order to gain greater liberties. In contrast, Conrad quotes bioethicist Edward Stein who is critical of a science for social justice approach, arguing that “lesbian and gay rights, respect for queer relationships, and so on, should be cast in terms of justice, rights, privacy, equality, liberty and the like,’ and not whether homosexuality is a choice or biologically innate” (as cited in Conrad, 2016). Science can be used as a tool to promote social justice, but what are the (un)intended consequences of doing so?

## **Science and Social Justice**

Lehr (2007) describes how science is often used as a tool for social justice because it “[establishes] credibility for social justice efforts by bypassing the need to establish the authority of certain moral or political claims over others. Instead, these moral or political claims become ‘objectified’ and thus less ‘objectionable’ within public and private spheres” (p. 1). In wake of attacks against the rights of LGBTQ people in the United States, Lehr points out that using science as a tool for social justice may seem as our

only tool to fight against oppression. She warns, however, that as those involved with social justice “it is never enough to ask what we gain through science, but we must also ask what we risk and what we lose” (p. 2). She warns that using science as a tool for social justice create “a situation in which the authority of science goes unchallenged, thereby limiting what counts as appropriate behavior... in relation to science and to the state” (p. 23).

## **Epigenetics**

Epigenetics studies the interaction between the social and the biological and could provide a more appropriate form of science as social justice, since it is capable of change overtime. It also may provide new answers on the origins of sexual orientation, since it combines both biological and environmental factors. Moore (2015) defines epigenetics as the “interactions between DNA and other molecules in [their] local environment, interactions that influence gene expression.” As described by Balter (2015), factors such as nutrition, stress, and exposure to environmental toxins leave “epi-marks,” which can remain in the body for life and be passed to offspring. Epigenetics shows environmental factors can influence genetic activity, and perhaps more importantly, that they can continue to be changed.

In one of the only epigenetic studies focusing on sexual orientation, Rice (2012) found that some “epi-marks” influence a fetus’s sensitivity to testosterone, which may “masculinize the brains of girls and feminize those of boys, leading to same-sex attraction.” The research is based off “a long succession of studies” which have concluded that “XY fetuses experimentally exposed to androgen antagonists during gestation develop feminized genitalia, brains, and behavior, whereas XX fetuses exposed to elevated androgens develop masculinized phenotypes for these same traits.”

A basic social constructivist argument is that gender, along with assigned roles of masculinity and

femininity, are social constructed. The “long succession of studies” that Rice is basing his research on are flawed when viewed upon from a social constructivist perspective. Kessler (1990) and Faust-Sterling (1993) use intersex patients as a case study to show how gender, and our gender binary, is primarily determined by social factors. Kessler emphasizes how sex assigned at birth is created to produce individuals capable of heterosexual sexual intercourse. Lorber (1994) describes how gender is a process, stratification, and structure, and how its process, complete with its existing hierarchies and composition, has been assigned to us socially. Lehr (2015) emphasizes how gender is sociohistorical and changes across time and location. As Lehr (2007) points out quoting Kessler (1990), “if sex as male and female is not natural, how can categories of sexuality be?” Vast literature supporting a social constructivist perspective on sex, gender, and masculine/feminine gender roles would disprove the notion that fetuses exposed to androgen would develop feminized genitalia, brains, and behavior since what we would consider to be feminized is a socially constructed product of one’s environment and changes over time by location and culture. Rice’s findings can be similarly challenged since he used flawed definitions of feminization and masculinization.

Epigenetics has the possibility to challenge the social constructivist and essentialist dualism of environment vs. genes. Since many epigenetic studies continue to rely on essentialist views on gender and sex, however, it does not appear that epigenetic research is yet ready to provide findings that are in line with strongly held social constructivist understandings.

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**Unexplored Radical Potentials in  
Literature, History, and Society**

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# Let My People Go: A Reconceptualization of Black Exodus Discourses Using *The Color Purple*

By Isaac Seessel

**ABSTRACT.** This article makes a comparative literary analysis between the book of Exodus and *The Color Purple*. In this analysis, I conceptualize Celie's story as an Exodus: metaphorically she begins a slave, is then spoken to by the burning bush about masturbation, and finally flees her home. Indebted to womanist thinkers, this article attempts to construct an Exodus narrative that one, focuses not on the straight Black man, but on the lesbian Black women and two, focuses on sexual and bodily bondage rather than racial bondage. Using the master's tool, that is Christianity, I attempt to dismantle the patriarchal heterosexist master's house, the Black church. In constructing this narrative, one can begin to create a Black church that is a place of healing and not of harm for queer people and women.

The master's tools, like any other tool, can be used for a variety of purposes.<sup>1</sup> Tools that were once used to oppress can be used to emancipate. To state otherwise suggests an essentialist stance: tools that were used to oppress will always be by nature oppressive. I suggest otherwise. Instead, tools are context-specific instruments that do not contain an essence; therefore, they can be used in a variety of different ways. Oppressive tools can become tools of liberation and vice versa.<sup>2</sup> The African-American slaves' use of the Christian Exodus narrative proves this: African-

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<sup>1</sup> In this I depart from Lorde's famous article: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." She argues that the oppressive tools can never truly be used to emancipate.

<sup>2</sup> For critiques of Audre Lorde's essay look to Grillo's "Anti-essentialism and intersectionality: Tools to dismantle the master's house."

American slaves used Christianity, originally a tool that was used to oppress, as a spiritual, emancipatory tool. Womanist thought, however has shown how this narrative, as well as many aspects of the Black church, has inadvertently become a tool that silences women and LGBTQ people.<sup>3</sup> Irene Monroe, contemporary Black feminist scholar and blogger's 2004 article "When and Where I Enter, Then the Whole Race Enters with Me: Que(e)rying Exodus," argues that traditional Black Exodus narratives privilege the "endangered Black male," disenfranchising "feminists, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people" (p. 123).<sup>4</sup> However, unlike Audre Lorde, many Womanists, such as Monroe, do not wish to discard the master's tools. Instead, they seek to use their Christian faith and the Exodus narrative in order to emancipate women and LGBTQ people within the Black church just as the Exodus narrative was used to emancipate the African-American slaves.

Despite the fact that white slave owners introduced Christianity to their chattel in order to make slaves more obedient, African-American slaves used the Bible, and more specifically the book of Exodus, as a tool for liberation.<sup>5</sup> Monroe (2000) writes: "My ancestors, enslaved Africans, turned this authoritative text, which was meant to aid them

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<sup>3</sup> Womanism is a movement created by and for Black women in the 1970s and 1980s. The term Womanist, coined by Alice Walker in her 1983 essay "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose," emphasized the racial and gender-based oppressions faced by Black women. Opposing the de-emphasis of race within white feminism, it often rejects traditional white feminist movements. Womanist thought finds itself in a mix of literary, poetic, and scholarly work.

<sup>4</sup> This article is largely indebted to Monroe's 2004 article.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on Christianity and African-American Slavery, turn to Pierce Yolanda's 2005 book *Through the storm, through the night: A history of African American Christianity or Hell without fires: slavery, Christianity, and the antebellum spiritual narrative*. For a specific history of the Exodus narrative with regards to African-American liberation, I suggest Eddie Glaude's 2000 book: *Exodus! religion, race, and nation in early nineteenth-century Black America*.

in acclimating to their life of servitude, by their reading of Exodus into an incendiary text that fomented not only slave revolts and abolitionist movements but also this nation's civil rights movements" (p. 123). The Christian tradition as well as the Exodus narrative extended from sociologist W.E.B Du Bois to civil-rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. and Black theologian James Cone.<sup>6</sup> This narrative pervades the Black church today, most notably with the spiritual "Go Down Moses," a musical arrangement of Exodus 8:1. Through this process of *appropriation*, the original biblical Exodus has created an entire Black Exodus discourse, calling for the liberation of Black slaves, as well as the liberation of contemporary Black people from the systematic oppressions they face today.

According to many womanist thinkers, however, Black Christianity, and more specifically the Black Exodus narrative, focuses on the Black heterosexual male. The reasons for this are many. First, Black Exodus discourses have focused exclusively on racial captivity, ignoring sexual and gender captivity.<sup>7</sup> One major reason for this omission is the history of physical and sexual abuse of African-American slaves.<sup>8</sup> African-American people suffer from the damaging cultural and psychological effects of past physical bondage, resulting in a denial of black bodies and sexualities. The original Exodus narrative as found in the Bible, however, did not only focus on the racial captivity of the Jews, but also depicted the coming out of bodily and sexual captivity as well. In this way, to draw a queer analogy, the Exodus story has always been a "coming out

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<sup>6</sup> For foundational texts that use or refer to the Exodus narrative look to W.E.B. Du Bois' 1903 *The Soul of Black Folk*, Martin Luther King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and James Cone's 1970 *Black Liberation Theology*.

<sup>7</sup> For a complete history and analysis of sexuality in the Black church I suggest: Douglas' *Sexuality and the Black church: A womanist perspective*. For a look at Black sexuality in the Bible turn to Smith's "The Bible, the Body and a Black Sexual Discourse of Resistance."

story” (Monroe, 2004).<sup>9</sup> Second is the issue of compulsory heterosexuality.<sup>10</sup> For reproductive reasons, slaves were held to compulsory heterosexuality—the more slaves had heterosexual sex, the more slaves would be born for exploitation. Third, the Exodus narrative, as is found in the Bible, emphasizes the presumably heterosexual men in the story, leaving out the women (Monroe, 2004). This has been used to rationalize the presence of Black male leaders in the church: Martin Luther King can be Moses, but Harriet Tubman or Aretha Franklin cannot.

Instead of doing away with the Black Christian church and the Black Exodus narrative as Audre Lorde’s logic would suggest, Irene Monroe and I argue for a reinterpretation of the Exodus discourse that includes not only racial captivity but also physical and sexual captivity. In the following section, I make analogies between Walker’s seminal 1985 novel *The Color Purple* and the original biblical story of the Exodus. I do this by focusing not on the racial captivity of the main character Celie, but instead on her sexual and bodily captivity. This literary analysis aims at offering a Black, queer alternative to the traditional Black heterosexist Exodus narrative.

Literature and poetry of a distinctly religious nature has been vital within the Womanist movement. This began when Barbara Smith, a Black feminist author and scholar, called for a proliferation of Black lesbian literary criticism in her 1979 essay “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism.” Following this piece there was a veritable explosion of Black lesbian scholarship, literature, and literary criticism. Walker’s 1985 *The Color Purple* remains a foundational work in the canon of Black lesbian emancipatory literature. In this article, I connect Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and the Exodus narrative; this connection can be used as a Womanist tool for the emancipation of women and LGBTQ

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<sup>9</sup>For a theology of coming out, look to Gorell’s *Erotic Conversion*.

<sup>10</sup> The idea of compulsory heterosexuality refers back to Adrienne Rich’s 1980 essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.”

people. *The Color Purple* can be used as a foundational text for the inclusionary transformation of the Black Exodus narrative: In the same way that Black slaves used the Exodus narrative against white supremacy, Black queers can use the Black Exodus narrative against patriarchal heteronormativity. First, I give a brief summary of *The Color Purple*. Then, I will show how Celie functions as a virtual slave. Finally, I make a comparative analysis between the Exodus as chronicled in the Bible and Celie's personal Exodus.<sup>11</sup>

*The Color Purple*, an epistolary novel written in vernacular language, chronicles Celie, an African-American woman in the South, and her journey from her trouble-ridden childhood to her abusive marriage and finally to her lesbian awakening. Through this journey she undergoes severe racial as well as bodily and sexual trauma. Her father, referred to as Pa, repeatedly rapes her and takes away her children. Her abuse continues when her husband, named in the novel as Mr. \_\_\_\_, emotionally and physically abuses her. After all of this, however, she meets Shug, a fashionable, enigmatic singer and her husband's beautiful mistress, and engages in a sexual relationship with her. To conclude the novel, she leaves her small hometown for a better life in Tennessee.

Many literary analyses have examined *The Color Purple's* liberatory potentials (Lewis, 2012; Abbandonato, 1991; Berlant, 1988; Kamitsuka, 2003). Margaret Kamitsuka (2003) uses *The Color Purple* to "contest hegemonic, idealized abstractions about women and to promote models of liberation and well-being for oppressed communities" (p. 49). With a slightly different focus, Christopher Lewis (2012) examines how *The Color Purple* can teach us to conduct a politics based on shamelessness rather than respectability. These analyses offer us useful lessons on the ways in which literature can be used to

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<sup>11</sup> Just as I intentionally capitalize Black, I intentionally capitalize Celie's Exodus, in order to maintain its religious potentials.



inform our politics. In my article, I have a similar aim; my focus, however, shifts to the distinctly *religious* nature of *The Color Purple*. Comparing the Exodus with *The Color Purple* reveals the ways in which sexuality and the body can be reconciled with religion, reconstructing a Black church that serves to liberate, instead of disenfranchise, women and queer people.

Celie begins the story functionally as a slave, much like the Israelites in Exodus and the African-American slaves in the United States<sup>12</sup>. Her servitude, however, is not *legally* sanctioned by the white heterosexist patriarchy but is instead *culturally* sanctioned by the “Black heterosexist patriarchy” (Monroe, 2000, p. 129). Celie begins the novel in fact as property of Pa, a Black man, her mother’s husband, and thought by Celie to be her father. Pa reifies this ownership by repeatedly raping her: “Then he push his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it” (Walker, 1982, 1). Like a slave owner, Pa then takes ownership of her children: “He took my other little baby, a boy this time” (Walker, 1982, p. 3). Like the African-American slaves, Celie lives with no physical or sexual rights.

This servitude is further reified when Pa chooses to offer Celie as a wife to Mr \_\_\_\_\_. Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is in love with Celie’s sister Nettie; however, Pa does not wish to give Nettie away, as she was younger and prettier and thus more valuable than Celie. In this way, Pa is literally treating his daughters as property to be exchanged. Pa’s proposition to Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ goes as follows:

But she ain’t no stranger to hard work. And she clean.  
And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like

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<sup>12</sup> In order to avoid confusion, I am not stating that Celie was actually a slave. She is legally a free woman. I liken her condition to slavery in order to give thrust to my comparison between her story and the Exodus narrative.

you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed or clothe it (Walker, 1982, p. 8).

Pa describes Celie in purely utilitarian, physical and sexual terms—her value as a wife is not as a romantic partner, but is instead as a laborer whose only use is to please her master. After Mr. \_\_\_ acquires Celie, he begins to send her to the fields, much like the Israelites in Exodus. Exodus reads,

The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them (1 Exodus 13:14, New Standard Revised Edition).

Celie suffers remarkably similar servitude: Mr. \_\_\_ refuses to work, forcing Celie to work the fields: “Every day [Mr. \_\_\_]... mostly never move” (Walker, 1982, p. 27). When *Celie* refuses to work, he says: “You better git on back to the field. Don’t wait for me” (Walker, 1982, p. 26). All of this points to Celie’s physical and sexual enslavement.

Celie’s *Exodus* from Mr. \_\_\_ is marked by three major events: her discovery of masturbation, her reconceptualization of God, and finally her leaving of Mr. \_\_\_, sometimes paralleling and sometimes breaking from the original Exodus narrative. Christopher Lewis (2012) analyzes Celie’s discovery of masturbation as “the means through which her burgeoning self-awareness and self-love are experienced” (p. 163). I view it similarly, emphasizing the emancipatory and even religious potential of her discovery of masturbation. The first event, her discovery of masturbation, parallels the story of the burning bush. In Exodus 3, Moses unexpectedly finds solace in Horeb, the mountain of God, where God talks to him: “I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up” (3 Exodus 7:8). God gives Moses the knowledge and strength to change. In *Color Purple*, Celie finds solace in her bathroom (paralleling

Horeb) with Shug (paralleling God) teaching her how to masturbate. In the bathroom, Shug reveals to Celie that sexual pleasure is possible: "Listen, she say, right down there in your pussy is a little button that gits real hot when you do you know what with somebody" (Walker, 1982, p. 77). Just as God's revelation allowed Moses to begin the journey to freeing his people from the Egyptians' chains, Celie's revelation of sexual pleasure and ultimately masturbation allows her to begin to discover her sexuality, freeing herself from the heterosexist patriarchal chains of Mr. \_\_\_\_.

Celie's reconceptualization of God is Celie's second major Exodus event and the only one to break clearly from the Exodus narrative. In order for Moses and the Israelites to be liberated, God did not need to be reconceptualized. Moses' God speaks directly to Moses, allowing for a direct, unfettered connection with God. Unlike Moses, Celie never speaks directly to God, but instead to Shug. Because of this, Celie's God is not as immediate as Moses' God. Whereas Moses' God speaks directly to him, Celie's God does not. Her concept of God is not direct and is shrouded by the Black male heterosexist church. Her God takes the form of a monolithic male being. For Celie, this conception thwarts her path towards Exodus: Since the institutionalized conception of God is male, and since one is taught to worship God, the worshipping of the institutionalized God is ultimately just an extension of the worshipping of man, and ultimately enslaving (Daly, 1972). Celie writes, "Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown" (Walker, 1982, p. 192).

Celie's concept of God can be seen as directly constructed by the Black heterosexist church. As Shug says: "If you wait to find God in church, Celie... that's who is bound to show up, cause that's where he live...Man corrupted everything, say Shug" (Walker, 1982, p. 194). Shug then begins to change Celie's conceptualization of God from a monolithic male being to a pervasive presence. Shug

argues: “The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God” (Walker, 1982, p. 195). Shug’s God and eventually Celie’s God does not condemn but loves the bodily, the sensual, and the sexual.<sup>13</sup> Instead of masturbation as a shameful act, this reframing of God encourages masturbation and sexual expression. Shug says,

It sort of like you know what, she say, grinning and rubbing high up on my thigh... God love all them feelings. That’s some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God love’s ‘em...You can just relax, go with everything that’s going and praise God (Walker, 1982, 196).

This reconceptualization allows for Celie to accept and ultimately embrace her attraction towards Shug, allowing for her final Exodus event.

Celie’s final Exodus event, her leaving of Mr. \_\_\_\_, directly parallels Exodus 13, where the Jews are freed from Egypt. In this section of the story, Celie, paralleling Moses, orders Mr. \_\_\_\_, paralleling the Pharaoh, to let her and Shug go. Celie says: “You a lowdown dog is what’s wrong, I say. It’s time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need” (Walker, 1982, p. 199). She proceeds to struggle with Mr. \_\_\_\_: He threatens to beat her and lock her up. Celie, however, holds strong and proceeds to leave Mr. \_\_\_\_ for Shug. At the end of her literal Exodus, she cries: “I’m pore, I’m Black, I may be ugly and can’t cook’ a voice say to everything listening. But I’m here” (Walker, 1982, 207). This display of power and emotion stands in stark contrast to her submissiveness and servitude at the beginning of the novel; it is clear that Celie has broken free.

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<sup>13</sup> For more academic literature on how God can be viewed as loving the bodily and the sexual, turn to Gudorf’s *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian sexual ethics* and Gorell’s *Erotic Conversion*.

Reading Celie's story as an Exodus narrative has great implications for the redefinition and the reconceptualization of Black Exodus discourses. By focusing on a women's liberation, we begin to dismantle the false notion that the Black man is at the center of racial oppression. By focusing on sexual and bodily liberation, we allow for an Exodus that is not only seen as liberation from white patriarchy, but also liberation from compulsory heterosexuality, rape, and gender norms. It is through these redefinition and reconceptualization of the master's tools that we can slowly work to dismantle the master's house.

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# The Corset: Constriction or Liberation?

By Amanda Leib

**ABSTRACT.** This paper posits that the corset itself is not an inherently evil or archaic garment, but one that is enjoyed by many women today, and one that is important to examine for its cultural relevance and implications. Contrary to popular belief, the corset can be a garment of liberation and pleasure for women, if they are educated on its history and given the choice whether to wear one or not. In this study, I analyze feminist critiques of body modifications along with the history of the corset, drawing attention to the juxtaposition between claims that the corset is an instrument of torture invented by the patriarchy versus its merits and historical importance. In finding a middle ground between these points, I acknowledge the health risks of tightlacing, while emphasizing the freedom of choice that is necessary to women's embodiment, liberation, and self-expression.

No article of clothing throughout history better represents the dichotomy of pleasure and danger than the corset. This one item of clothing, which has existed in myriad forms for hundreds of years, has reached a mythological status (Steele, 2011). Urban legends abound concerning the corset, and perhaps the most morbid, dangerous, and fallacious claim is that women of the past resorted to having ribs surgically removed in order to slim their waists even more and better fit their corsets to their bodies (Steele, p. 58, 1996). Emphatically untrue, this falsehood has contributed to the misconception that corsets are torturous vestiges of a bygone era.

At its core, the corset is a structural undergarment. Its primary purpose has always been to shape the body to a desirable form, and used as a base on which to layer



clothing. Its descendants are the bras, girdles, and shapewear of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. Examining the corset in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century requires a multidimensional lens, varying from the historical to the social to the feminist. Most relevant today is the feminist critique of female body modification, which ranges from condemnation to a full embrace (Pitts, 2014).

The corset has been used as a shaping garment in the Western world for more than 400 years. From the Renaissance to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it has been a wardrobe staple spanning socio-economic classes, countries, and cultures (Steele, 2011). In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we tend to view it as an outdated instrument of torture, thankfully tucked away in museums alongside iron maidens and chastity belts. But the history of corsets and their place in our culture today are as relevant and fascinating as ever. More than just a garment of constriction, today's corset can represent liberation for its wearer (Von Teese, 2006). Simultaneously an expression of sexuality, beauty, independence, and control, the corset is more complicated than at first glance, and its pleasure and dangers are intertwined.

There is a direct link between corsets and embodiment. The act of wearing a corset has a different impact depending on the wearer's bodily experience. Being pressured to wear one to be socially acceptable in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is different from choosing to wear one in 2016. The corset constrains the body, but is also liberating to those who choose to wear it as a fetish garment. The wearing of a corset objectifies the body, which can be positive or negative depending on the situation. The corseted body is a socially constructed ideal, while still giving the wearer active agency. Through the wearing of a corset, a body can be simultaneously controlled and liberated. In her book *The Corset: A Cultural History*, Valerie Steele (2001) writes:

Far from being just a bourgeois Victorian fashion, the corset originated centuries earlier within aristocratic

court culture and gradually spread throughout society – to working-class women, as well as women of the ruling class. Moreover, women wore different kinds of corsets; they laced their corsets more or less tightly and to different ends. In short, their embodied experience of corsetry varied considerably. (p.1)

Steele also debunks the myth about tightlacing that is so prevalent today: the belief that all women of the Victorian era strove to reduce their waists to 18 inches or less. In reality, the corseted waists of women at the time varied from 18 to 36 inches. Steele also argues that the corset does not represent women's subjugation by the patriarchy, as some men wore corsets as well.

The corset has also been used as a therapeutic tool for back injuries. The artist Frida Kahlo famously wore corsets for most of her life following a streetcar accident, as "her spine was too weak to support itself" (Jamison, p. 1, 2011). For Kahlo, the wearing of a corset meant the difference between life and death. She reclaimed her body and resisted the restriction caused by the corsets by painting her art onto them. Kahlo's corsets represented both pleasure and pain; confined by her condition and battling physical pain, she transcended her bodily agony through her art. Full of images of violence and turbulent emotion, Kahlo's art and her body were forever intertwined, forever interweaving pleasure and pain.

The corset is a piece of clothing that also represents both pleasure and pain. In examining this paradox further, we must recognize that pleasure and pain are linked, and that sometimes pain itself can result in pleasure. To some, the corset lives and breathes eroticism and sensuality. It can represent many things: the ideal female form, control, discipline, sexuality, femininity. A corset can be made out of the most luxurious materials in the world, such as the finest satin, silk, velvet, and lace, fabrics associated with great pleasure. Or it can be constructed from leather, metal, mesh, or latex, materials associated with pain and BDSM. There is a corset for every taste and every desire.

The world-famous burlesque artist, pinup, and fetish model Dita Von Teese addresses the issue of pain versus pleasure in corsetry in her book on the related histories of burlesque and fetishism. She writes:

Though it's never been my goal to have the smallest waist, I love the challenge of tightlacing. I love the extreme feminine curves that result, the sense of discipline I have in wearing it. Best of all, I like taking it off. Sometimes I'll get bruising from my corsets...but it's worth it. Like any good bondage, a tightlaced corset is *not* comfortable in the average person's sense of the word, but it is exhilarating. (Von Teese, 2006, p. 59)

Von Teese finds both the physical bodily constriction and the history of the corset to be erotic. Though she romanticizes the corset, she emphasizes the fetish element. To many corset wearers, the discipline is not a downside but rather what makes the corset so attractive. The feeling of being held, of being restricted, of being forced to sit up straight can be very appealing.

In contrast to the view of corsets as liberation, Leigh Summers (2001) argues in *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset* that the wearing of corsets by middle class Victorian women “operated as a multi-functional discursive device, simultaneously offering masculine critics a safe platform to discuss dangerous sexual issues, while ingeniously providing a vehicle to shape and control female sexuality” (p. 3). She focuses on the repression of the Victorian age and the fear of female sexuality that ran rampant. In this way, the control of women's bodies through corsetry was linked to the diagnoses of many women as hysteric if they demonstrated any semblance of sexuality. Today the corset is often viewed as a fetishistic garment, and is used as a vestment representing sexuality. Originally a garment of control and repression, used to minimize and idealize the female form, it now represents the very eroticism of which the Victorians were so terrified.

Though the discourse around the corset has changed, its use as a way to idealize and objectify the female body has not. The ideal body type has changed radically since the 1900s, but a small waist hasn't fallen out of favor. Corsets help achieve a Barbie doll aesthetic that is naturally impossible for the majority of women. The large bust, tiny waist, and full hip look is back in vogue today. The obsession with women's proportions is as alive and well today as it was a hundred years ago.

More extreme in her corsetry than Dita Von Teese is Cathie Jung, the self-described "Corset Queen." Over many years, Jung has reduced her naturally 26" waist to 15" when corseted. Von Teese's waist measures 22" when uncorseted, 16" when corseted (Von Teese, 2006). Jung wears her corset 24 hours a day (unlike Von Teese), and attributes her modification to the urgings of her husband. Though she has made a living out of her extreme tightlacing, the downsides are severe. When asked about the negatives, Jung says:

Of course it's hard to get around and do a lot of normal things...I can't see well or react well. Or you can only sit comfortably in certain chairs. And then there's the social problem. Not everyone understands what we're doing and thinks a small waist is beautiful. And it takes a lot of time. You know, dressing and undressing and taking care of my body. I have skin problems. ("Queen of Hearts")

Jung has taken her tightlacing so far that she has done irreparable damage to her body. Jung's choices lead to the question of how much control women really do have over their bodies in our modern culture.

Understanding the societal control that influences our fashion decisions is vital. We must think critically about our fashion and self-adornment decisions. Do women long for tiny waists because they actually find them attractive, or because they have been so conditioned by our culture that they cannot think otherwise? This is still an important

debate in feminist circles, spanning topics such as breast augmentation, body piercing, and tattoos.

Patricia Gagné and Deanna McGaughey (2014) explore this issue in their essay “Designing Women.” Though their focus is women who go through elective mammoplasty, the same principle can be applied to tightlacing and corsetry. Gagné and McGaughey write that “on one hand, women choose what procedures to have done. On the other, the choices women make are determined by hegemonic cultural norms” (p. 202). Without context, the wearing of a corset is not a feminist reclamation of the body. It is through education that women should choose how to adorn their bodies; with knowledge they are free to make the personal decision of how to present themselves to the world, and the consequences of that decision.

Victoria Pitts (2014) writes in her essay “Reclaiming the Female Body” that radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin (1994) and Catherine MacKinnon (1997) have argued that “women’s willingness to happily endure pain to shape the body...reflects women’s self-abnegation in patriarchal cultures” (Pitts, p. 278). This quote can certainly be applied to the pain that corsets cause by shaping the body. There are long-term health risks to tightlacing. Bruising and scarring of the skin is common. But Dworkin and Mackinnon miss the choice factor. Their argument implies that women have no free will, no agency to choose to wear a corset still knowing its history and the patriarchal control of beauty. If a woman chooses to wear a corset because it makes her feel powerful, it negates the belief that all beauty practices harm women. In this case, the reclamation of the corset is a positive form of self-objectification. The corset can be embraced as a garment of eroticism, power, and confidence.

To find pleasure in pain is not antifeminist. To enjoy fashion and adornment is not antifeminist. To wear a corset and enjoy the constriction and control it produces is not antifeminist. What is antifeminist is to tell someone that his

or her experience of eroticism and sexuality is wrong. Through self-examination and knowledge we can reach a healthier state of embodiment. In analyzing the corset, we see that although pleasure and pain can be contrasting experiences, they can also be one and the same and irrevocably linked. The corset itself is not liberating; it is in the wearing and the choice that liberation can occur. Some women find power by rejecting cultural beauty norms. Others find beauty in the smallest of places, such as in the perfect, cinched-in waist.

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# A Woman Born Twice: Esther Greenwood's Reconstruction of the Female Identity in a Pervasively Patriarchal 1950's America

By Taylor Steinbeck

**ABSTRACT.** Esther Greenwood of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is an educated, creative, young woman uninterested in marriage or motherhood, despite living in 1950's America—a time in which the patriarchal values dictated that womanhood was tied to the roles of wife and mother. Forger of second-wave feminism through her text, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan urged the despondent housewives of the '50s to become a woman similar to Esther: to pursue academia, take on creative hobbies, and clinch a career. Though the lifestyles of the suburban housewives and Esther appear radically different, Esther suffers from a depression that mirrors the symptoms of the illness Friedan diagnoses as “the problem that has no name.” This paper examines these particular depressions Esther and the housewives experience as a derivation from their entrapment in a patriarchally-dominated space where their agencies are revoked.

It is no coincidence that two novels such as Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* were each published only a month apart from one other in the year of 1963; both texts were a product of their tempestuous age. As Friedan outlines in her bestseller—which spearheaded the second wave of feminism—the 1950's proved to be a confusing, distressing decade for woman, housewives in particular. She began *Mystique* by referring to this sweeping unhappiness felt by women of her and Plath's time,



The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States” (Friedan, 1997, p. 15).

Friedan attributed this dissatisfaction among women, or what she called “the problem that has no name,” to housewives wanting something more in their lives than just “[her] husband and [her] children and [her] home” (Friedan, 1997, p. 32). Esther Greenwood of *The Bell Jar*, however, is no housewife of the ‘50s. She is a Smith College-educated, internship-earning, poetry-writing go-getter interested in neither marriage nor motherhood, and yet she still experiences an emptiness uncannily similar to that of Friedan’s housewives. This being said, I contend that Esther’s depression stems not only from the anxiety of having to choose who she wants to be—as she expands upon through the metaphor of the fig tree—but mostly from having to construct her *own* concept of womanhood when the forces of patriarchy are so palpably working to convince her that a woman’s identity is tied to being man’s other, namely, “the feminine mystique.”

Esther *appears* to be living an empowered life antithetical to the dreary existence Friedan ascribes to the housewives in her text; in fact, Esther could be a prime example of who Friedan wants the housewives to become, and yet she suffers symptoms almost identical to those afflicted by “the feminine mystique.” To break away from the trap of “the feminine mystique,” Friedan encouraged women to piece together a life plan that included education and art-related hobbies. Esther is both highly educated and interested in the arts, and if it were not the case that she predated Friedan’s work, it would seem as though Esther followed her advice. On paper, Esther comes across as the “New Woman” Friedan advocated for: a woman who has successfully silenced “the voices of the feminine mystique” (Friedan, 1997, p. 378), but in reality, Esther is just as lost as the suburban housewives.

The symptoms of falling prey to the “feminine mystique” are alarmingly similar to the ways in which Esther’s depression manifests itself. Friedan diagnosed the “feminine mystique” as a disease that deludes women into believing that their only commitment is the “fulfillment of their own femininity,” and this femininity is achieved in “sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love” (Friedan, 1997, p. 43). After conducting interviews with many different women, including those who were colleagues of hers at Smith College (another eerie parallel), Friedan detected several similarities in the troubled feelings of these women. She observed, “Just what was this problem that has no name? What were the words women used when they tried to express it? Sometimes a woman would say ‘I feel empty somehow . . . incomplete’” (Friedan, 1997, p. 20). Despite her supposedly non-feminine ambitions and implied rejection of the “feminine mystique,” Esther’s emotions echo the unhappiness of the interviewees. Esther feels a sense of guilt for not enjoying her internship in New York, even though such a position at an esteemed magazine would make her “the envy of thousands of other college girls just like [her] all over America” (Plath, 2013, p. 2). She says of her lack of enthusiasm for the opportunity, “I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn’t get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty” (p. 3). How could the archetypal housewife of Friedan’s *Mystique*, whose selfhood is defined by her roles as wife and mother, and Plath’s Esther Greenwood, who is ambitious and ahead of her time, *both* feel an identical sort of emptiness when they each lead such polar lifestyles? The answer is that these women are not so different. Esther, the prospective career woman, and Friedan’s housewife both exist in realms dominated by the male influence: the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the workplace. Thus their identities are muddled by what the patriarchy wants them to be.

Esther undeniably associates the need to make choices for her future with anxiety. As evidenced by the fig tree metaphor, she realizes that there are several different paths she could take. She sees one fig as having a husband and children; she sees another as her being a professor and another of her traveling the world and another of her being an editor like her boss, Jay Cee. Despite all these choices, she feels as though she has been rendered immobile. This sentiment is mimicked almost identically by psychologist Rollo May's description of anxiety. May (1958) commented that anxiety "occurs at the point where some emerging potentiality or possibility faces the individual, some possibility of fulfilling his existence; but this very possibility involved destroying of present security, which thereupon gives rise to the tendency to deny the new potentiality" (p. 53). It is not merely the fact that Esther has to decide between her potentialities as a person, but the reality that she is an emerging woman of the early 1950's adds an entirely new layer to her existential issues. Scholar Nóra Séllei (2003) claimed that "it is the pressure of choice—and most particularly, as clear from the enumeration, the choice between being a wife and mother and being a female creator—that leads to the protagonist Esther Greenwood's schizophrenia and psychic collapse" (p. 128). I am convinced that there is something deeper at work than just the pressure to become a mother for Esther. It is the pressure to be solely responsible for developing an entirely *new* womanhood which exists outside of the patriarchy's authority, when she has virtually no role models to turn to, that actually causes her mental anguish.

Though it is never explicitly stated, Esther seems to have an awareness of and a very real disdain for the patriarchy. She acknowledges the ways in which the patriarchy works to subjugate women in marriage and motherhood when she mentions that the drug given during birth to make the mother forget the pain so she will have more babies is "just like the sort of drug a man would invent" (Plath, 2013, p. 66). Later, after her boyfriend

Buddy Willard claims she will no longer be interested in poetry after she gives birth, she imagines that being married and having children must be like “being brainwashed and . . . numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state” (p. 85). Esther does not realize, however, that the patriarchy’s power extends beyond the domestic sphere. When describing what sort of job she would want, Esther unashamedly says, “The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way” (p. 76), and what a trouble this is indeed; what Esther fails to see is that in working for a woman’s magazine like *Mademoiselle*, she is, in a way, serving man. Though *Mademoiselle* is run by Jay Cee, a woman, the images put forth by the magazine, are most certainly images of “the feminine mystique,” manufactured by the patriarchy to show women what they should strive to be. Said Friedan of the world of women’s magazines, “In the magazine image, women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep the man” (Friedan, 1997, p. 36). It is no wonder that Esther struggles to create the ideal picture of the woman she wants to be when she is being bombarded by images contesting that very image, while also being under the guise that she is in an empowering career. Nicholas Donofrio (2015) concurred in his academic work, “Esther Greenwood’s Internship: White Collar Work and Literary Careerism in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*,” that “indeed, *The Bell Jar* seems to suggest that for young women with career ambitions, working on these magazines might be just as harmful—which is to say, just as counterproductive—as reading them” (p. 220-221). The isolation Esther feels while at her internship could be attributed to the fact that the women she is surrounded by are convinced by the world of women’s magazines, and though she knows that “something was wrong with [her] that summer” (Plath, 2013, p. 2), her inability to figure out exactly what that “something” is could be because that “something” is an aversion to the mysterious, dangerous ways the patriarchy controls even seemingly woman-lead establishments.

The journal article “Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*: a Mirror of American Fifties,” recognizes that although it was the logic of the time to equate womanhood with motherhood, Esther rejects this thinking and “frowns at this biological essentialism which construes woman as an object of desire and a vehicle for procreation” (Ghandeharion, Bozorgian, & Sabbagh, 2016). Despite the fact that Esther *says* she is against adhering to the traditional female roles required of her, she still feels susceptible to succumbing to the patriarchy's molding of her into a wife and mother. The societal expectation to give birth looms over her constantly. Interestingly enough, Esther describes the pressure of motherhood similarly to how she describes the effect of the bell jar. When Esther's depression manifests itself, it feels as though a bell jar is descending down upon her. After leaving Belsize she still has the lingering fear that her depression will return, which she reveals when she wonders, “How did I know that someday—at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere—the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?” (Plath, 2013, p. 241). This looming feeling is also present when it comes to the mental and emotional strain of conforming to societal standards. Esther stresses, “A man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head . . . to keep me in line” (p. 222). The bell jar Esther's mind has conjured up is not a mere metaphor for her depression; it is a symbol of the patriarchy trying to pollute her brain with its time-honored values. Whether or not Esther actually gives into the voices of the “feminine mystique” in the form of the bell jar is debatable, but I hold that she does not. She overcomes them.

It is unclear whether, in Esther's future, she ever does marry; it is only at the novel's end that, at the time of her recovery, she had maintained that she “wasn't getting married” (Plath, 2013, p. 244). Yet when she is reminiscing about her internship experience at the novel's beginning she implies that she has since become a mother. How could

Esther transform so drastically from once asserting that, “children made me sick” (p. 117) to later embracing the idea of motherhood? I am convinced it is because she learns that although being a mother is a necessity for a woman wanting to “fulfill her femininity,” Esther herself, does not have to subscribe to the patriarchal notion of the “feminine mystique” to be a mother. Just as Esther is seeking to build her own identity as a woman, she also has the ability to become her own kind of mother. The reason why it takes her so long to realize this is because until Doctor Nolan, Esther’s psychiatrist and “feminist hero,” Esther had not become acquainted with an embodiment of womanhood she could relate to.

It is Doctor Nolan who finally shows Esther that she can be her own kind of woman. There is a tangible shift in Esther’s mentality when Doctor Nolan informs her that having sex does not have to lead to motherhood, and she prescribes her birth control. Before that moment, Esther had very much subscribed to the myth of female purity that her mother and the patriarchy instilled in her. Her mother misleads her by claiming that there is, “no one hundred percent sure way not to have a baby” (Plath, 2013, p. 81) when a woman has sex and she indoctrinates her daughter with an article entitled, “In Defense of Chastity.” Esther acknowledges the double-standard of men being able to have sex without consequence, but women having to sacrifice their bodies to motherhood when she says, “I couldn’t stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not” (p. 81). Despite registering this inequity, she still strives to preserve her purity because she mistakenly believes it determines her value. It is Doctor Nolan that provides Esther the tools to liberate herself from the patriarchy’s harmful influence, while also helping her to manage her depression. Christopher Simons (2011) argues that,

[The] key is sexual freedom through contraception, and an overthrow of the sexual double standard in 1950s America. Sexual inequality and a lack of appropriate channels for female sexuality play a role in Esther's mental breakdown" (p. 32).

When Doctor Nolan supplies Esther with the revelation that the "Defense of Chastity" is mere "propaganda" (Plath, 2013, p. 222), a propaganda of the patriarchy used to suppress women, she is disillusioned of society's spell on her. As she is having her diaphragm fitted, she thinks, "I am climbing to freedom" (p. 223) to indicate that with the administering of birth control, the bell jar has temporarily lifted, allowing her to clearly see who she wants to be. Through birth control, Esther gains control of her own agency; she does not have to submit to men or the patriarchy's ideas about the sexual realm, or any other realm in her reality for that matter. In claiming her sexual freedom, Esther learns how to operate outside of the bounds of the patriarchy; in her freedom she is able to proudly declare, "I [am] my own woman" (p. 223).

It is important to note that depression is a complex illness and what Esther and the housewives experience is not simply a product of the patriarchy; to claim that depression is manifested merely by outside factors neglects the fact that depression is also a very real biological disorder. However, depression takes on multiple forms and it *can* be triggered by life events (such as the trauma of the death of a loved one). This is the case for Esther and the housewives, and the fact that the housewives and Esther only began to feel the symptoms of depression after being entrapped in patriarchally-dominated spaces certainly seems to suggest that their oppression played a role in their mental illnesses. It cannot emphasize enough that the sex itself is not what "cures" Esther of her depression, and to say she was so easily "cured" would be minimizing depression's complicated and elusive effect. Doctor Nolan essentially introduces feminism to Esther, and it is feminism that grants her the tools to think beyond the

patriarchal ideals that she was being fed before and thus can manage a particular type of depression that was aggravated by the gender inequities of her time. Understanding and recognizing the roots of one's mental anguish is just one way important way of practicing self-care. Having sex did not lift the bell jar for Esther; it was her realizing her agency and her ability to define her own womanhood.

In the novel's final page, Esther admits to feeling as though she has been "born twice" (Plath, 2013, p. 244), which could be attributed to the fact that dispelling the patriarchy's influence has now opened her eyes to an entirely new world. She learns through Doctor Nolan that she actually *can* choose multiple figs. She can be a wife without having to be subservient to her husband. She can be a mother without having to slave after her child. She can be a career woman and have a life outside of her job. She can be whatever kind of woman she wants to be because her identity is hers to choose. Friedan concludes *The Feminine Mystique* with a battle cry for her fellow females: "The time is at hand when the voice of the feminine mystique can no longer drown out the inner voice that is driving women on to become complete" (Friedan, 1997, p. 378). At the beginning of Esther's journey to selfhood she defeatedly professes, "I wasn't steering anything, not even myself" (Plath, 2013, p. 2). After conquering the "feminine mystique" she has undoubtedly driven herself to a sense of fulfillment and she is "perfectly free" (p. 242).

**Taylor Steinbeck** is a senior English major, theatre minor, who has been trying to make the most of her final year at Cal Poly. In 2016, she directed the first production of Cal Poly's OWN (Original Women's Narratives) and wrote a full-length play entitled *Sex/Life* under the guidance of her senior project advisor and mentor, Dr. Ryan Hatch. As a postgraduate, she hopes to pursue an MFA in playwriting. She is ever-thankful for the collection of professors she



encountered during her undergraduate years who showed her the power of the narrative and its potential to enact very real change.

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## **Planting the Seed: Gendered Experiences in Early Education**

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# Binary Ever After: Gender Representation of Non-Human & Non-Animal Characters in Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out*

By Sarah Hethershaw

**ABSTRACT.** In 2015, Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios released *Inside Out*, a popular children's animated film that depicts emotions as humanoid characters with male and female gender identities. In representing non-human/non-animal beings as adhering to the human gender binary, the film contributes to the naturalization and embedding of the binary in popular rhetoric and cultural values. Binary conceptions of gender are tied to patriarchal heterosexism that reinforces structures of inequality, and the images represented in this film do not go without consequence for the young audiences viewing them.

Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios have arguably become the creators of quintessential American childhood. From the 1995 success of *Toy Story* to the anticipated release of *Finding Dory*, Disney/Pixar films hold an influential and special place in the hearts of many. In the past decade, Disney/Pixar has released ten full-length feature films (*Cars*, 2006; *Ratatouille*, 2007; *WALL-E*, 2008; *Up*, 2009; *Toy Story 3*, 2010; *Cars 2*, 2011; *Brave*, 2012; *Monsters University*, 2013; *Inside Out*, 2015; *The Good Dinosaur*, 2016), each grossing over \$100 million in box office sales. Of these ten films, five of them (*Cars*, *WALL-E*, *Cars 2*, *Monsters University*, *Inside Out*) featured non-human/non-animal beings as the main characters of the

film. *Inside Out* was the highest grossing among these five, earning \$356,461,711 in the U.S. in 25 weeks.<sup>14</sup> The popularity of this film reveals the pervasiveness and influence of Disney/Pixar films in contributing to the construction of not only a national identity, but children's everyday realities (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). Therefore, the implications of how gender is represented in the film cannot be overlooked or taken for granted as inconsequential. Because Disney/Pixar is such a large contributor to the media children have access to, I wish to examine how non-human/non-animal characters in animated films are used in naturalizing and reinforcing gender boundaries that support and recreate binary modes of thought and options for gender representation and performance through analyzing *Inside Out*.

There has been much research done on the representations of gender and sexuality in children's animated films (Gillam & Wooden, 2008; Martin & Kazyak, 2009; Thompson, & Zerbinos, 1995; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, Tanner, 2004). Previous studies have examined the ways gender and sexuality are constructed and represented through films in which humans or animals are the main characters and object of study. This body of research sheds light on the ways in which media constructs popular narratives of gender and sexuality, particularly aimed at young audiences. My work extends the existing scholarship by analyzing non-human and non-animal characters who adopt the biological sex binary that humans and animals adhere to by being categorized as

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1. Copyright IMDB (2016).  
<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/chart/?id=pixar.htm>

either male or female (based on physical sex characteristics at birth).

Past research on non-human characters in animated films most commonly refers to animals that are personified and given humanistic traits. However, I intentionally employ both the terms “non-human” and “non-animal” for a narrower specificity. Non-human and non-animal include beings such as motor vehicles, robots, and abstract ideas that are characters in children’s movies. I argue that through gendering objects or things that do not have biological sex characteristics, the rigid “two and only two” male/female gender binary is naturalized and institutionalized.

Thompson & Zerbinos (1995) and Towbin et al. (2004) analyze the representation of gender and gender roles in Disney films, noting the differences and inequalities in the ways male and female characters appear in children’s movies. Gillam & Wooden (2008) have even analyzed non-human/non-animal characters and the ways in which recent Disney/Pixar films have changed representations of masculinity through these characters. However, much of this previous literature reinforces binary assumptions of male/female and masculinity/femininity. Disney/Pixar’s *Inside Out* offers space to consider how deeply embedded the male/female gender binary is in society by observing the ways non-human and non-animal characters are presented as gendered beings. I explore these representations and their potential implications on young audiences.

Children are immersed in media-rich worlds (Martin & Kazyak, 2009, Towbin et al., 2000). The messages presented through images in film are not simply absorbed into children’s subconsciouses; children actively construct the reality they live in and engage with through play and interpreting, tweaking, and reproducing familiar images

(Gillam & Wooden, 2008; Martin & Kazyak, 2009). Although this lends room for agency in rejecting images that are presented, certain concepts are repeated to the point of normalization—becoming mundane, expected, and unremarkable (Martin & Kazyak, 2009). Additionally, although there is some “choice” in how audience members interpret these images, cultural and societal values shape, guide, and inform these interpretations (Braun, 2009). Individual choice is never free from cultural constraints and societal norms, and always consists of “choosing” between options perceived as available (Braun, 2009). *Inside Out* reflects the messages appearing in the majority of other media consumed by young children by presenting the “options” available for gender as either male or female. The culturally constructed meanings attributed to gender through this binary has serious implications for individuals who fall outside of these categories. Although I will not explicitly research the interpretations and meanings children create and attach to the images and representations of gender in *Inside Out*, analyzing these images provides evidence of what narratives and discourse are available to children viewing this images.

### **A Look Inside the Mind**

*Inside Out* follows the story of eleven-year-old Riley Anderson as she and her family move across the country to unfamiliar new circumstances. The plot aligns with events in Riley’s life, but the central focus of the film centers around the emotions Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust that reside in and control Riley’s thoughts, decisions, and memories in her brain. Each of the emotions are represented as humanoid creatures with varying body shapes, sizes, and colors. Although they have physical human characteristics (e.g., vertical posture, two arms and

two legs, eyes, hair, etc.), each emotion possesses traits that not only mark them as distinctly *not* human, but also as other-worldly, magical forces. All five emotions have a colorful glow around their bodies, which are composed as pixelated in constant motion that make them seem fairy-like. Joy and Fear move with inhumanly quick speed, while Sadness moves and speaks incredibly slowly and Anger's rage literally explodes through flames from his head. Disgust is not presented as having any distinguishable super-"human" abilities. Aggarwa and McGill (2007) describe this as "partial anthropomorphizing" (p. 469). Although viewers can see that the emotions physically resemble humans, it is also clear that the emotions are not human—audiences understand that they are, in fact, emotions, and thus not fully anthropomorphized to be considered humans themselves.

The complex ideas of joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust, could have been represented in a variety of forms, and yet Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios chose to design these concepts as humanoid. Aggarwa and McGill (2007) offer three reasons for the tendency to anthropomorphize: (1) to create companionship or relationships with non-human things, (2) to make better sense of the world through connections to what is known or familiar, and (3) as a strategy to construct the world as an inherently human place—a human world that exists within human cultural frameworks and understandings. Showing human emotions as beings with human qualities allows for young audiences to conceptualize abstract ideas, but also limits and constrains understanding by enforcing adherence to rigid social boundaries pertaining to gender.

Joy is the first emotion that inhabits Riley's brain when she is born. Riley's parents call her their "little bundle of joy," and continue to refer to her as their "happy girl" throughout the film. Riley feels heavy pressure from her

parents to remain happy despite all the changes that occur in her life with the move, causing her to become emotionally distraught when she struggles feeling happy. Consequently, Joy and Riley are closely connected. Joy is presented as a cis-gender feminine female character; she has a high-pitched voice and is a thin, bright yellow figure who wears a green floral dress.

Each of the emotion's respective genders are immediately established in the beginning of the film. As Riley grows, Joy narrates the introductions of the additional emotions that become a part of Riley's personality; Anger and Fear are referred to as "he," and we see them dressed in pants, button down shirts, and having little to no hair. Although fear is not considered a traditionally masculine trait (Towbin et al., 2004), Fear's character's purpose is described as being protective and "keeping Riley safe," adhering to traditional masculine values of being a protector. Anger, an emotion traditionally associated with masculinity and men through physical or verbal aggression, is described as caring "very deeply about things being fair," and often problem solves using logic or exploding in a fiery rage (verbally and/or physically).

Sadness and Disgust are both referred to as "she." Sadness wears glasses, has hair that covers her face, and is dressed in a turtleneck sweater and pants. Joy's description of Sadness states that Sadness' purpose for helping Riley is not known, and suggests that she simply does not have purpose or worth at all. Consequently, Sadness is ignored, ridiculed, and excluded by the other emotions throughout the film. Disgust has long hair, exaggerated long eyelashes, wears a dress, and is described as useful for keeping Riley physically and socially untainted, or "poisoned." Disgust not only shields Riley from things she personally finds poisonous (e.g., broccoli), but also by maintaining a pure



image of Riley for other people (e.g., what Riley wears and how she presents herself).

By immediately establishing gender pronouns and expressions for the emotions, the film leaves no ambiguity to how these characters are to be interpreted. Sadness has a low voice and wears pants like the other two male characters and therefore has the greatest chance of being read as a gender ambiguous character—but by immediately establishing that Sadness is a *she*, viewers see that Sadness is an inherently feminine characteristic. Establishing gender pronouns encourages audiences to view the emotions in human terms (Aggarwa & McGill, 2007). Additionally, because Joy is the leader of Riley's emotions, the message reads that girls *should* (and after seeing the film, *want to*) be happy, pleasing, people—to be Joy. Because children tend to imitate same-gender characters more than opposite-gender characters (Thompson & Zerbino, 1995), young boys watching *Inside Out* have Anger and Fear to identify with—the two opposing sides on the “fight or flight” spectrum that suggest primal, instinctive reactions to stress, and that even Fear can be protective, useful, and masculine. This reflects Gillam and Wooden's (2008) findings that Pixar has begun promoting a new model of masculinity that accepts more traditionally “feminine” aspects in male characters (p. 4). However, this new model of masculinity is still constructed in opposition to femininity and reinforces gender hierarchies that value masculine characteristics (Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust are shown in three other characters' brains in addition to Riley. In all other representations apart from Riley's, the emotions are not referred to by name, but can be identified because they follow the same color scheme and share similar physical shape with Riley's emotions. However, Riley is the only character who has both male and female emotions. Riley's

mother's emotions are all women, characterized through female voice actors and evident because each of the mother's emotions physically resemble the mother with long brown hair and glasses. The apparent leader of the mom's emotions is Sadness, who sits at the middle of the control panel in the mother's brain. The mother's Anger emotion has a gravelly, deep voice, displaying a masculine manifestation of a feminine character that aligns with the representation of gender in Riley's emotions. It is not explained why Riley's emotions are both male and female, nor is it clear why they do not physically resemble her in the way her mother's emotions do. Viewers must assume that Riley's emotions will continue to grow and develop with her. Because Sadness becomes an important, accepted, and praised hero at the end of the film by helping Riley cope with missing her life before the move, viewers can assume Riley will become like her mother, replacing Joy for Sadness as she grows up.

Riley's father's emotions also physically resemble the father's character; they wear ties, have moustaches, and are voiced by male actors. Anger sits at the center of the father's control panel, and other emotions refer to him as "Sir." By making Anger the leader of the father's emotions, it further communicates to young boys viewing the film that this is a character they should be identifying with—that Anger is a, (if not *the*), male emotion. The other example of emotions we see in the film are in the brain of a boy approximately Riley's age. All of his emotions are presented as male, and are unable to function (shown chaotically running around with panic alarms blaring) when he interacts with Riley, reflecting the idea that men are not in control of their sexuality (Towbin et al., 2004). Thus, we see gender and sexuality as inextricably linked, with inevitable results of heterosexuality and either male or female gender identity.

In Riley's case, female gender identity is inevitable, expected, and unremarkable. Although she possesses both male and female emotions, Joy and Sadness (presented as female) are the emotions tied most closely to Riley's personality. Additionally, the three representations of emotions we see outside of Riley in *Inside Out* all physically reflect the appearance of the gender of the human whose brain they control. Thus, it is read that humans are the same inside (biologically) *and* out (gender presentation), and that Riley will grow up to be female, like her mother.

### **Implications**

Human emotions are not gendered, yet Disney/Pixar's emotions portrayed in *Inside Out* are. In representing non-human/non-animal characters as gendered beings through using gendered pronouns and maintaining hegemonic ideals of masculinity (as protective, fair, and rational) and femininity (as nurturing, happy, pure, and empathetic), *Inside Out* contributes to the media's hegemonic portrayal of male/female gender identities as the only options available for gender. Future studies should examine how children interpret these messages, to determine how gender is constructed through meanings attached to images in the media. However, the discourse available to children through films such as *Inside Out* suggest to children that binary outcomes of gender are inevitable and natural.

Feminist theory has recognized and highlighted gender identity as something that is fluid and socially constructed rather than a biological fact (Lenning 2009). Even if gender were determined by biological sex, there have been many more than two biological outcomes for sex identified (Lenning, 2009). Additionally, biological sex characteristics (such as genitalia) are not always, or even often, on display for others to see; gender is attributed and

enacted by individuals based on behavioral cues attributed to a label (Lenning, 2009). Maintaining the male/female binary by arguing gender is a function or outcome of biological sex is not only inadequate, but harmful for those who fall outside of “natural” gender categories.

No matter how one identifies, other people will continually gender an individual based off of perceived gender identity (Lenning, 2009). These assumptions operate as part of binary conceptualizations of gender, creating a harmful, exclusionary culture of either/or with significant negative consequences. Gender non-conforming (including intersex, transgender, and transsexual) individuals face social, political, and economic discrimination and violence on personal and systemic levels (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006; Lombardi et al., 2002). Verbal harassment and threats, economic discrimination, invasive surgeries, sexual harassment, physical assault, stalking, suicide, and homicide are the daily fears and realities of gender non-conforming individuals as the result of intolerant binary culture that is reproduced through exclusionary language and limited representations of gender in mainstream media. (Clements-Nolle et al., 2006; Lombardi et al., 2002).

The language debate between the understandings of gender and sex as separate categories displays the struggle in deconstructing binary thinking as a whole (Lenning, 2009). The male/female binary is built upon power relations and hierarchies that cannot be ignored or underestimated. Operating under the constraints of masculinity/femininity reproduces harmful systems of power and actively works to construct gender fluid, transgender, and non-binary individuals as the “other” (Christmas, 2010). Rather than seeing all gender as performative, male and female gender identities are deemed natural, unquestioned identities connected to

biology rather than as influenced and constructed by social structures, expectations, and norms. Maintaining this ideology permits punishment for those who transgress or do not adhere to gender boundaries; the psychological toll of abuse endured by individuals who do not align with the male/female binary is perpetuated by society's refusal to deconstruct power structures built into the gender binary through changing the way we represent, talk, and think about gender (Christmas, 2010; Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Lenning, 2009; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2002).

Gendered language works with dichotomous gender representations in the media to shape popular values, discourse, and understandings of gender identity and performance in broader cultural settings. Representation is never harmless, nor is it non-political. The consequences of unnecessarily embedding gender in children's media prove to be catastrophic in the formation of young audience's gendered everyday lives. Not only for gender non-conforming individuals who face social stigma, discrimination, and violence, but for everyone. Maintaining the rigid gender binary forces an adherence to (white) patriarchal, heterosexist ideals and values; in order for any group (women, LGBTQ+, people of color) to achieve liberation, gender must be reconstructed and understood to be seen as an orientation or performance on a spectrum much larger than only male or female.

Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out* helps children conceptualize and connect to different parts of their personality and recognize the role of emotions in their everyday lives. Representing the emotions as humanoid characters aids in this process, and is not inherently wrong or harmful. However, by attributing male or female genders to the characters, gender presentation is limited to only two options. Within *Inside Out*, there are multiple secondary

characters who appear in various scenes throughout the film that have ambiguous body shapes and appearances that do not suggest either male or female gender presentation. This implies that the creators of *Inside Out* purposefully chose to gender the main characters, and did so in a way that reproduces hegemonic conceptions of gender. Teaching children to value emotional and psychological health could have taken the opportunity to show that emotions, like gender, should not be attributed to someone's outside appearance; boys do not have to be tough, girls do not have to be smiling, and not everyone has to be a boy or girl to live happily ever after.

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# Gender Discrimination in the Classroom: How Teaching Policies Can Help Close the Gap

By Olivia Wycoff

**ABSTRACT.** This paper analyzes gender inequality in elementary school classrooms and proposes large-scale policy changes and small-scale teaching practices to combat the issue. To assess this problem, research is presented examining the existence of performance and confidence gaps between male and female students, most significantly in STEM subjects. Significant connections between these inequalities and discriminatory teaching practices can be traced by through contemporary research, a problem which is presented as grounds for mandatory reform of the teacher credentialing process. The goal of this reform would be to create classrooms that are more gender equitable and empower academic achievement separate of gendered expectations. If properly implemented, such policies could both promote equality in the sphere of education and create positive repercussions in the equality movement beyond schools.

As the institution that shapes and teaches the next generation, the education system is incredibly important in building a society free from gender inequalities. Rather than seeing classrooms that nurture confident and well-educated children, we see a number of disturbing trends in American classrooms where children are receiving inferior educations on the basis of their gender. In order to achieve true societal gender equity, we need to address the educational gap in the treatment of boys and girls in schools. With many specific teaching strategies to combat this inequality already being discussed, I encourage the implementation of mandated gender-bias education in the

teacher credentialing process. This paper will explore the need to reduce gender discrimination in the classroom, the implementation of such a policy, and the outlook for positive effects that this program could create.

## **Current Research on Educational Inequalities**

An overwhelming number of studies show that teachers favor boys over girls in the classroom setting. Though they do not usually intend to, teachers unfairly distribute educational time, attention, and resources among students based on implicit biases that they may not even realize they have. Research in Illinois funded by the National Science Foundation found that teachers spent 39 percent more class time giving direct attention to boys than girls (Shumow & Schmidt, 2013). This trend could lead girls to believe their engagement is not appreciated, thus making them less motivated to participate in the future. In an interview, the same researchers also said girls were more likely to receive help from teachers at times when they didn't actually need it (Heitin, 2014). This could cause the girls to feel like the teachers weren't listening to them or appreciating their achievements, thus undermining the importance of their success and making them less motivated to set themselves up for success in the future.

Some argue that the inequitable distribution of class time and resources is irrelevant, given that boys and girls are now performing at about the same level in math and science (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). Where the real deficit lies, however, is not in performance, but in interest and confidence. Studies show that girls struggle significantly more than boys do with math anxiety, or "feelings of tension and anxiety that interfere with ... the solving of mathematical problems in a wide variety of ordinary life and academic situations" (Tobias, 1993). Additionally, research has found that this discrepancy increases more in classrooms that promote the traditional gender stereotypes that STEM skills are "for

boys” (Bieg, Goetz, Wolter, & Hall, 2015). This shows the pervasiveness of sexist stereotypes in classroom practices is preventing young girls from feeling confident and competent in traditionally male academic fields, despite their innate ability to perform just as well as their male counterparts.

The repercussions of this failure to nourish the minds of young girls are clear when examining their response to being given a more difficult problem in class. For boys in science classes, “engagement levels rose when they felt challenged, as did their concentration and effort”; having had their intellectual abilities in these subjects constantly reinforced by teachers, they gladly rose to the challenge of more difficult problems. For girls, however, more challenging material brought a drop in efforts and focus; feeling that they simply were not skilled enough to complete the tasks, they shied away from more difficult subjects that they could have excelled in given the right encouragement (Heitin, 2014). Simply put, young girls are not being given the academic resources to feel engaged and excited by math, science, and other academic fields, and are coming out of class feeling less competent and less inspired to succeed. Because early education quality serves as the building blocks for later success, discriminating against young students on the basis of gender disadvantages them for life.

### **Teaching Credential Programs**

To combat the unfair gender-based discrimination that is handicapping young girls in their educations, it is vitally important to begin educating current and future teachers on the existence of their implicit gender biases and how to specifically combat them in order to empower young students. As said by American Association of University Women sponsored teacher Colleen Briner-Schmidt, “No one gets up and says, 'I'm going to be unequal today. No one says, 'I'm only going to teach to white male boys today.' . . .

It's just the way it's done" (Hong, 1998). In this way, a large-scale reform of the programs that educate the teachers themselves would give them the real knowledge and tools to combat gender discrimination in their own classrooms without calling out any one teacher or school as maliciously sexist. Specific and comprehensive courses need to be mandated in the teacher credentialing process that educates prospective teachers on how to reduce their gender biases, create more equitable classrooms, and empower students to excel in subjects where those of their gender are typically discouraged, discriminated against, or oppressed.

Such suggestions are not without precedent; previously, policies focusing on gender equity training for future teachers have been introduced into legislation but outcomes have been limited. In California, for example, one state bill proposed "[revising] standards relating to the inclusion of gender equity training for teacher credentials" (Official California Legislative Information, 1999). However, this 'reformation' was completed in 2001, with no substantial revisions or additions having been made to these policies since, despite copious amounts of new and relevant research done by both educational psychologists and feminists. Additionally, such efforts have not spread to other states in order to create a nationwide effort for change, with many other states leaving gender equity out of their credentialing process entirely. Without a targeted focus on gender-based discrimination in these programs, gender equity is likely to fall by the wayside as just another buzzword lost in teachers' education.

The insufficiency of current policies is especially clear when examining one study on teacher's expectations, exemplifying how educator's attitudes even as early as during the credentialing process detrimentally affect their students. This study examines the expectations of pre-service elementary school teachers for their future classrooms, and found that these educators in training already had lower confidence in the mathematic ability of

girls than boys (Mizala, Martínez, & Martínez, 2015). Given that additional research has shown teacher expectations to have a strong effect on the resulting performance of their students, these results are a concerning indicator of the toxic classroom climate credential programs are failing to eradicate (Jimenez-Morales, Lopez-Zafra, 2013). The persistence of such problematic attitudes is a clear indicator of the need to reexamine the credentialing process for elementary school teachers and introduce new legislation that will mandate additional, modernized classes that will more comprehensively educate teachers through an intersectional feminist lens. By simply mandating the completion of such a course and regulating its contents, teachers will receive the same level of education regarding gender equity regardless of what teaching credential program they have chosen.

The suggested course content would ideally synthesize current research and suggestions for creating a gender equitable classroom to create a comprehensive course. Specific instructions in the course could begin with individual suggestions for the teacher. For example, prospective teachers could be educated about the concept of implicit biases in regards to gender and be encouraged to explore and reflect on their own biases. This ongoing discussion could segue into further education on personal policies, such as the use of inclusive language in the classroom (such as saying “you all” instead of the exclusionary “you guys” or the polarizing and binary “boys and girls”), making a point of giving equal focus to both boys and girls when calling on raised hands, focusing on personal attitudes when grading, and other strategies to help teachers continuously check whether their biases are infiltrating the classroom setting (Hong, 1998). Educating teachers on how to identify and address these biases would ideally give them the skills and experience to identify and address new gender biases as they come up as well as other existing biases they may have based on race, class, nationality, etc.

Additionally, the course should focus on educating teachers in how to ensure that the educational content of their own future classrooms reduces discrimination. This can be achieved in a number of ways. For one, teachers can be encouraged to avoid gender stereotyping in their lessons or creating gendered content that perpetuates the binary myth that ranks boys over girls. This could include avoiding lessons, posters, textbooks, or class content that portray women and men in exclusively feminine or masculine roles and jobs, and providing ample examples of role models that break gender norms and stereotypes (Plous, 2016). This could also extend to giving teachers resources to bring the concept of gender equity into their own curriculum.

### **Short and Long Term Benefits**

Creating classroom policies that emphasize gender equity will do more than to just empower girls: it will foster a classroom environment where students of all genders internalize important feminist ideals. To teach young girls that there is no subject or field that they cannot excel in just as well as anyone else is to send the same message to all students that gender should never be grounds for determining someone's abilities, potential, or worth. Additionally, having more gender equitable classrooms will open the door for important teacher-student conversations about the role of gender in other aspects of their lives beyond school. Demystifying feminism, discussing societal inequalities, and promoting strategies for change are all more possible in classrooms where students are equal partners in the educational process, something which is only possible if teachers are shown how to make genuine and specific efforts to put their students on a more equal playing field.

Because early education can be considered the core foundation of a child's development that they will take into adulthood, reformations of this system would have momentous implications for the bigger picture of gender

inequality in the United States and beyond. A significant potential effect of these efforts is the issue of workplace inequality. While the problem of the pay gap for women is a very complex issue with a number of interdependent causes, it is possible that improving the quality of the education we give to young girls could have a positive effect in promoting equality in their later spheres of life. By making strides to empower young girls in the classroom and give them the equal academic opportunities that discriminatory teaching policies are robbing from them, we not only be sending women out into the workforce with better prospects, higher confidence, and more well-rounded schooling, but sending the message that discriminatory policies on any scale will no longer be tolerated.

Achieving such equity would not only positively affect young girls and women, but also the country as a whole. A cross-country analysis found that “gender gaps in education and employment considerably reduce economic growth” (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009). Improving education for women and empowering their free choice of careers beyond stereotypical constraints will bring new talent and ideas into fields typically dominated by men. By investing in their education, we are investing in a more equitable work force and more prosperous country. While economic growth is not the main goal of a policy on classroom inequities or of feminism in general, analysis of the additional benefits stemming from efforts to eradicate gender equality is always important in garnering additional support for such causes.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of this policy would be an important step in eliminating classroom and even societal gender inequality, but it is only the first step. In order to see truly significant results, this policy and others like it need to see a cultural change surrounding sexism, discrimination, and

implicit biases. Hopefully the creation of a mandate for gender-based education classes for in order to become a credentialed teacher will spark reform in the education system and spread the agenda of gender equity across the country. Ideally, schools will also incorporate the message of this policy into the professional development courses each individual school requires its employees to attend in order to include current teachers rather than just new ones. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that while this policy has had an initial focus on problems facing young girls in education, success would allow it to broaden its reach to gender-specific issues of disparity faced by both young boys, gender-nonconforming students, and others. Though such classes won't entirely solve the problem of gender inequity, hopefully this policy will spark the series of changes that we need to combat and eliminate institutional sexism and empower students to realize their potential regardless of their gender.

**Olivia Wycoff** is a second year student at California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo. As a Psychology and Child Development major she hopes to someday work in an elementary school setting. Olivia has always been interested in how gender inequality manifests itself in the education system, and what we can do to combat the incredibly detrimental effects this problem can have on young children. She hopes that with an intersection between the fields of psychology and feminist studies, we can come up with new and innovative ways to educate a new generation free from the restrictions of gendered inequality.

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**Beyond Essentialism: Criticisms of  
Mainstream Feminism**

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# Reproductive Rights as a Tactic of Necropolitics Under Neoimperialism

By Haley Kimberlin

**ABSTRACT.** Necropolitics, or “politics as a work of death” are evident in the reproductive injustices faced by marginalized groups of women such as Black, indigenous, and immigrant women. Tactics including coercive sterilizations and severe lack of access to reproductive care are employed within a neoimperial state with the intent of upholding an “imagined originary state”. This paper analyzes these tactics of necropolitics as a method of controlling bodies to uphold this perceived neoimperial sovereignty. It also offers a brief critique of the rights framework employed by current reproductive movements and the failure to address the reproductive issues of marginalized groups in a way that recognizes their restricted access to these rights, particularly the idea of choice.

Necropolitics, or “politics as a work of death”, have been studied as a facet of colonialism and evidence of its continued use can be seen in modern neoimperial eras. The post-colonial neoimperial system, according to Alexander, rejects those bodies that have the “capacity to destabilize a newly imagined homeland, threatening national sovereignty” (2006, p. 208). The politics of death are evident in the way reproductive rights movements have operated to control certain populations and thus in the continued struggles faced by Black, indigenous, and immigrant women living under a neoimperial power that places limits on who is actually able to access those rights. In a reproductive rights movement intrinsically warped by racism and therefore the control of certain populations, necropolitics are explicitly at work in the effort to uphold a strong, “imagined originary state”. Sovereignty as established under a neoimperial system rejects the idea of

the true originary citizens and seeks to eliminate this threat of upheaval through coercive reproductive tactics on indigenous women. Relatedly, immigrant women present a similar threat to the security of the “originary” nation and therefore necropolitics can be observed in the reproductive oppression of these women by the state. The reproductive realities of marginalized women, all of whom have been marked as threats by the neoimperial state, exist outside the realm of “choice” and therefore a rights-centered movement does not address these issues as well as an alternative focus on reproductive justice would.

The fight for women’s reproductive rights has been entrenched in racism by emphasizing the desirability of the white race over all others, and been used as a necropolitical ploy of neoimperial power. As Roberts states, “Race completely changes the significance of birth control to the story of women’s reproductive freedom” (1997, p. 56). This is especially evident in the forced sterilizations of thousands of Black women throughout history and the increasingly limited access to contraceptives that have forced difficult reproductive choices on poor women, particularly poor Black women. Angela Davis (1981) argues that many Black women have been victims of these sterilization practices since there is currently no other alternative other than abortion, which is inaccessible, and sterilizations remain free and easily available to poor women, provided by federal funds. These options, funded by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, are federal and state sponsored attempts to control the Black population by forcing the option of permanent infertility based on the idea of improving social well-being. This power over life and death allows the government to combat the “dark, inside threat that must be cordoned off, imprisoned, expelled...” (Alexander, 2006, p. 210). Davis reasons, “The birth control campaign would be called upon to serve in an essential capacity in the execution of the U.S. government’s imperialist and racist population policy” (1981, p. 215). Throughout the history of the reproductive

rights movement, the reproductive rights of women of color, those deemed outside the idea of patriotic citizens, have been utilized to control the expanse of these populations through government coercion. Necropolitics as a device of neoimperialism are explicitly at work in the accessibility and administration of birth control for those not included in the neoimperial view of citizens, in this case Black women of lower socio-economic status.

Necropolitics by way of reproductive coercion has also served to maintain the sovereignty of a neoimperial United States against indigenous peoples. Native American women of childbearing age have faced compulsory sterilizations at the hands of the United States government as a tactic to disenfranchise them from their indigenous identity. Ralstin-Lewis writes,

This long term strategy of the federal government has removed Indian people from their aboriginal homelands and subjected them to coercive medical practices, including sterilization, with the intent of reducing the number of Indians that can claim rights to Native land (2005, p. 82).

Since the idea of indigenous sovereignty infringes upon that of American autonomy by invalidating the status of the American nation as the entirely sovereign power, necropolitics in the form of reproductive violence have been enacted in order to render native people powerless. This necessary claim of a neoimperial state over the indigenous population is used to shift the perception of sovereignty in a very tangible way. "The sterilization of Indian women, and the resulting loss of children, endangers the sovereignty and economics of Indian nations" (Ralstin-Lewis, 2005, p. 83). By reducing the number of indigenous people through forced sterilizations the social, economic, and therefore political power of the Native American populace is undermined. Necropolitics have been enacted through enforced sterilization practices on native women

with the intent of destabilizing the true originary citizen in the face of maintaining sovereignty.

The preservation of the United States' sovereignty is further constructed through the prevention of immigrant women's access to reproductive health, a display of necropolitics that seeks to remove the threat of the dark external Other. Immigrant women face the unique challenge of attempting to access reproductive healthcare in a system that either does not recognize their existence or expulses them at the detection of their presence within the state. Henriquez and Hooton found, "For an undocumented immigrant Latina, her need to access reproductive health care is inextricably connected to her immigration status, her fear of deportation..." (206, p. 39). Due to immigrant women's status on the fringes of society and thus the increased risk of deportation, arrest, discrimination, or violence forces the abandonment of reproductive rights, and thus justice. This vulnerable position of immigrant women has resulted in a greater risk of reproductive health difficulties, some of them deadly.

A 1987 study of Colorado migrant farmworkers found that among sexually active women, 24% had been sterilized; one-third had had one or more miscarriages or abortions; and one in eight had an infant die within the first year of life (Golichenko & Sarang, 2013, p. 46).

These women face severely limited access to prenatal care, contraceptives and other forms of birth control, as well as a greater threat of reproductive abuse such as sterilization. There is no coincidence between the marginalized status of immigrants and the prevention of reproductive care for immigrant women as this occurs within a state that regards them as an inherent threat to national security. As Alexander argues of neoimperial sovereignty,

Ultimately, it is the immigrant who is positioned as perennial suspect, risky by virtue of status and bearing the disproportionate brunt of enemy, further

criminalized and made to function as nonpatriot in this matrix where status and implied propensity meet...(2006, p. 212).

The neoimperial vision of these women, and therefore the state's regard for them, is embedded in the idea that the status of immigrants as outsiders exists separate from the concept of the ideal patriot and thus must be removed. This exercise of power over who lives and who dies by way of lack of access to reproductive care for immigrant women is enacted as a function of a neoimperial power in order to maintain a strong, sovereign state against an external threat.

Given the wide variety of reproductive injustices faced by Black, indigenous, and immigrant women, the current rights-based reproductive movement does not appropriately address the ways in which the neoimperial state enacts necropolitics against communities of color. A reproductive rights movement that operates within a neoimperial system and emphasizes *rights* over *freedoms* inherently places restrictions on who is able access those rights. The roots of the current mainstream movement lie in the rights framework of traditional white feminist movements that places emphasis on the rights of "individuals" and thus applies only to a select group of women. Under neoimperialism, this group excludes those women that do not align with the vision of the putative originary citizen (Alexander, 2006) and thus are undeserving of the protections that rights provide, namely Black, indigenous, and/or immigrant women. This rights-centered approach does little to address the limits of combatting reproductive injustices committed towards marginalized groups who do not reap the benefits of fully realized rights, such as the forced sterilizations of thousands of Black and indigenous women. In particular, the rhetoric of choice regarding abortion rights that is the cornerstone of the mainstream reproductive rights movement presents problems because is centered on



certain assumptions of privilege that are only relevant to a few women who have access to a variety of choices (Price, 2010). By emphasizing choice above all other reproductive issues the movement only succeeds in excluding marginalized women from the movement, rather than affording them an alternative to the reproductive coercion or neglect they experience at the hands of the state. As Smith argues, "...the pro-choice position actually does not ascribe inherent rights to women either. Rather, women are viewed as having reproductive choices if they can afford them or if they are deemed legitimate choice-makers" (2005, p. 128). Given the way the statuses of Black, indigenous, and immigrant women have been constructed outside of the neoimperial state, the application of a rights-based reproductive movement does not fully address the necropolitical tactics faced by these communities. In combatting necropolitics in the reproductive rights arena, there is a need for a more intersectional approach that separates reproductive "rights" from reproductive "justice".

Necropolitics manifest in the continuation of the fight for reproductive freedom by Black, indigenous, and immigrant women who exist under a neoimperial system that regards them as outside the realm of full citizenship. The neoimperial power's use of necropolitical tactics have included the institutionalized sterilizations of Black and indigenous women, as well as the severely restricted access to reproductive care for immigrant women, all of which are enacted with the purpose of upholding the perceived originary nature of the state. Since necropolitics have been a constant method of a reproductive rights movement that targets race and enacts population control, the application of a rights framework does little to protect those bodies that have been marked as "perennially threatening" and thus are not afforded the same "rights" as others. Within the neoimperial state, it is imperative to distinguish between this existing rights discourse and the necessity of fighting for a more intersectional reproductive movement that emphasizes the objectives of reproductive justice and

freedom. The hope is that this new framework will embolden marginalized communities to become more active in the politics of reproductive freedom for all (Price, 2010).

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# Western Nations' Use of the Malala Fund

By Austin Greitz

**ABSTRACT.** One of the fastest-growing feminist discourses over the past several years has surrounded the expansion of global girls' education movements. The story of the assassination attempt of Malala Yousafzai in October 2012 has helped to facilitate these discussions within the Global North, as has the subsequent founding of global girls' education organization The Malala Fund in 2013. This essay follows the story of the failed assassination attempt on Malala Yousafzai through the creation of The Malala Fund and focuses on how media in the Global North has used the images of Malala and The Malala Fund to reassert stereotypes of the Global South and to rearticulate the hierarchy of power which places the Global North as superior to the Global South.

Over the past several years, one of the most quickly-growing feminist discourses has been around the education of girls in the Global South, and on the role of the girl as a tool for economic and social change in communities within the Global South. Campaigns such as Nike's The Girl Effect, Plan International's Because I am a Girl, and even the United Nations Foundation's Girl Up campaign have all come into the limelight recently for their attention to the education of girls globally, and the positioning of girls' education as the key to the problems of global poverty and social injustices. While many of these sorts of campaigns are run by well-known and trusted political organizations (such as the United Nations, the White House, and the NoVo Foundation), and the focusing on girls' issues often seems to be commonsensical for outsiders, these girls' education programs in fact do little to create change and construct a biased image of the Global South. The turn to girls'

education as a solution to global poverty does not find any solutions, but in fact actually regurgitates some of the misconceptions held about the Global South that lead to the creation of these programs in the first place, and are thus used by the Global North in order to maintain the Global North/Global South dichotomy that pits Global North cultures as inherently superior to Global South cultures.

Perhaps the most well-known of the girls-as-solution-to-poverty campaigns is The Malala Fund. Created in the wake of a failed assassination attempt on Malala Yousafzai, a then-thirteen-year-old girl in Pakistan who championed for girls' education alongside her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, the Malala Fund's mission is to "work with partners all over the world helping to empower girls and amplify their voices; we invest in local education leaders and programs; and we advocate for more resources for education and safe schools for every child" (New Venture Fund, 2015). The Fund has programs for educating girls in Pakistan, alternative learning programs and safe space creation in Nigeria, education programs for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, and information technology as well as life skill training for girls in Nigeria. The Malala Fund's work has gotten quite the recognition, as Malala herself has been awarded Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize, the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, and the Nobel Peace Prize, all for her work on global girls' education (Biography.com, 2015). But although Malala certainly has worked to rectify serious issues and has acted with good intentions, the Global North has latched on to her story and her life's work and have presented them to the public again and again as examples of how inferior the cultures of the Global South are to those of the Global North.

One of the most notable aspects of The Malala Fund's mission is that it focuses on Black and Brown girls in the Global South, which helps to assert the assumption that global poverty lies in the Global South. By not working to aid poor girls in nations in the Global North, The Malala

Fund furthers the belief that all of the Global South lives in poverty, and that there is no development and no hope for girls in these nations. Even the origins of Malala's work are steeped in the re-assertion of these beliefs: a *New Yorker* article by Basharat Peer states that Malala's work for girls' education came in response to the Swat Valley's rule by Taliban head Maulana Fazlullah, an extremist who "banned TV, music, and girls' education" (2012). What is of note here is the description of Fazlullah—he was an extremist who took control of the Swat Valley, not an everyday political figure ruling the nation of Pakistan as a whole. It was not wrong of Malala to write against a tyrant who had taken her rights to education away, and in fact the act of voicing an opinion against such a powerful authority figure can be seen as incredibly powerful; but the manner in which her words and actions have been construed by news outlets in the Global North support the hegemonic hierarchy between the Global North and Global South.

Even before the failed assassination attempt, Malala Yousafzai had been a prominent figure in Global North news outlets' coverage of education in Pakistan. In 2008, BBC Urdu was searching for a schoolgirl from the Swat Valley to anonymously cover the growing influence of the Taliban in this region. When finding such a girl proved difficult, Ziauddin Yousafzai, a schoolteacher from the Swat Valley who had been in contact with BBC correspondents in Peshawar, suggested that his own daughter, Malala Yousafzai, be asked. She agreed, and under the pseudonym of Gul Makai, began to have her personal stories of life under Taliban rule published in both Urdu and English for the first half of 2009, which proved to be "just the sort of personal story the Urdu desk had been looking for" (Cooke, 2012).

That Malala's stories of everyday life under the Taliban were just what BBC were looking for comes as no surprise. Arab-American feminist scholar Mohja Kahf (2011) claims that "the Western stereotype of the Muslim woman as Victim" is reproduced everywhere in the Global

North (p. 111). Malala's personal writings for BBC perfectly reflect this notion, rearticulating the notion that Islam is a force which seeks to victimize women and silence their voices. By publishing the work of a young schoolgirl whom audiences of the Global North could sympathize with, BBC reasserted the stereotype of the Arab world (as Global North media tends to see "Arab" and "Muslim" as one and the same (Abdulhadi, Asultany, & Naber, 2011)) as a totalitarian and misogynistic landscape, which ultimately maintained the ideology that nations of the Global North had a duty to invade these nations and "liberate" them by introducing them to democracy. When Malala was shot by the Taliban three years later, this new story only intensified the narrative constructed by news outlets of the Global North; now, Malala had become a young Muslim girl who was *literally* victimized by Muslim extremists. Yet instead of portraying this attack as the result of complex factors including both the takeover of the Swat Valley by the Taliban and the interference of local politics by outside forces such as BBC, media of the Global North continued to reassert the same Islam-threatens-girls story that has been told thousands of times before.

Following the failed assassination attempt, Malala was flown to several treatment facilities across Pakistan and eventually to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England (*Telegraph*, 2012). Today, Malala remains in England due to the threat of further militant action against her should she return to Pakistan. This fact points to yet another stereotype of Muslim women which Mohja Kahf (2011) details: "the Muslim woman as rebellious escapee from Islam" (p. 111). In November 2012, following her recovery from the October 2012 shooting, Malala Yousafzai founded The Malala Fund with her father and other supporters while still stationed out of England (Vital Voices, 2013). The organization, whose ultimate goal is to provide girls across the globe with safe access to twelve years of education, has been used by media outlets to further play up this stereotype, positioning the Taliban

and other extremist groups as examples of Islam, which stand in the way of human rights; and positioning The Malala Fund and other similar global educational programs as the Global North's response, a rebellious and freeing escape from the oppressive world of Islam.

Many of the responses from both inside and outside Pakistan mirror this criticism of The Malala Fund's mission, claiming that the organization functions as a tool of the Global North's neoliberal agenda. Freelance English journalist Assed Baig (2013) claims that Malala's story has been used so that "the Western world can feel good about itself as they save the native woman from the savage men of her home nation," a criticism which could be extended to the mission of The Malala Fund itself, which aims to empower women through education but does not recognize other issues facing women in the Global South, including the negative effects of globalization, military action by foreign powers, and environmental devastation. Many Pakistanis criticize The Malala Fund in this way, with many responding to a 2013 talk at the United Nations by Malala by asking such questions as "Why had Malala not spoken out about drones at the UN?" and "Why did everyone care so much about Malala and not the other girls murdered by drones?" (Shah, 2013). Still others argue that even outside of the ways in which Malala is portrayed in media in the Global North, Malala's activism itself is based off Western principles—an argument so common in her homeland of Pakistan that the nation did not acknowledge the first UN-designated Malala Day on July 12, 2013 (Yusuf, 2013). Yet still, the Global North successfully uses the image of Malala and the goals of her fund to create the very dissonance that Pakistanis seem to be protesting when they call out Malala's neoliberal positions.

Related to this idea is the idea of a sort of Global North savior in the context of global girls' education programs such as The Malala Fund. In a *New Yorker* article, Basharat Peer writes that Malala "was young but she was promoting Western culture in Pashtun areas" (2012). This



positioning of Western voices as right and all other voices as archaic or barbaric reflects a lack of what Pakistani feminist Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2015) refers to as the “work of hearing” (p. 1). Although The Malala Fund uses the voices of some of the girls that are centered in the Fund’s work, these voices are used to “re-amplify the already-established consensus around possibilities and limitations for girls in the global south, and often serve to reinforce the solutions/programs already in place” (p. 2). The Fund does not use the girls’ voices to direct their mission or to take into account more localized issues and solutions, but instead uses their voices to re-assert the Global North’s beliefs of limitation in the Global South. If The Malala Fund was accurately doing the “work of hearing,” then the solutions they offered would differ regionally, instead of being the single monolith that they are presented as across the globe.

Apart from The Malala Fund’s lack of input from the very people it aims to empower, the organization has also come under fire for its representation of the Global South. The Fund’s mission of allowing girls across the globe to safely attend twelve years of schooling seems, in reality, to only focus on the girls of the Global South, as the organization focuses on missions in Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and for Syrian refugees. By not focusing on the education of girls in other underrepresented nations or populations, The Malala Fund works to paint the picture of the Global South as failing their youth in terms of education. Furthermore, the initial video displayed on The Malala Fund’s website, which features a majority of Black and Brown girls in headscarves, silently conveys to the audience that it is both Black and Brown girls, as well as Muslim girls, who are not receiving education and who must be saved by the well-educated Global North. It is for these reasons that media outlets of the Global North have latched on to the organization and helped advocate its message—because the images the Fund

conveys support the construction of the Global South as uneducated and culturally inferior.

It would perhaps not be as worrisome for the Global North to use the image of Malala and The Malala Fund in this way if the Fund only impacted education goals of nations across the globe in a minor way. But the usage of the Fund's image to reinstate the power relationship between the Global North and the Global South has repercussions reaching far beyond the sphere of education. The ability for NGOs to shape national foreign policy is extremely powerful (Kim, 2011; Pitner, 2000), and the Malala Fund is no exception. By displaying the Global South as uneducated and unable to work towards their own goals, the Fund is used by the Global North to ethicize policies (such as drone strikes) that place members of the Global South in harm's way all in the name of liberation as well as to ethicize those policies (such as global arms agreements) that take power away from the Global South by claiming that such nations are unfit to govern themselves. Furthermore, the popularity of organizations such as The Malala Fund allows for political climate to evolve in ways that can capitalize on the image of the Global South as uneducated and helpless—such as the racist and xenophobic climate witnessed in today's electoral politics in which Donald Trump is seen as a viable candidate.

Although the work of The Malala Fund has been shown to have several issues, that is not to say that the work of the Fund is not in some ways commendable or that Malala Yousafzai is not herself attempting to uplift her own community—and communities she sees as similar to her own—in what she believes is the best manner in which she can. What is evident, however, is that neoliberal thought permeates her fund's mission, and that critical reflection may be needed on the part of the program and its leaders if it is to be as beneficial as it can be to the communities it serves. In addition, it is necessary for the Global North to recognize what aims programs such as The Malala Fund serve, and to not use such programs to promote their own

agendas. Global education programs have before been challenged, and it is certainly possible for them to be challenged again, even at the level of recognition that The Malala Fund has. As a feminist scholar and a creator of a human rights education program, Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2014) has critically reflected on her own education program in Pakistan, taking note of neoliberal thoughts inherent in the program and the ways in which the program could be more efficient, stating “I, thus, disturb my own linear reading of the unfolding of [Women Leaders of Tomorrow] by reflecting on moments of resistances where participants not only interrogated its assumptions but also engaged in self-stylizations that produced new mutations of [human rights education]” (p. 103). The Malala Fund could take note of this practice and perhaps integrate some self-reflection into their own programs, thus affecting those they attempt to serve in ways more effective than they do now. In addition, taking the voices of those served into consideration will render it less likely for the media of the Global North to use The Malala Fund in its own reassertion of hegemonic hierarchies.

The privileging of the voices of the Global North and the reassertion of Global South cultures as inferior are some of the greatest issues within global education movements such as The Malala Fund, yet are simultaneously the very reasons that such movements gain global exposure. It is through the popularization of certain movements—such as The Malala Fund—that the Global North is able to rearticulate its moral and cultural superiority while seemingly advocating for a more equitable world. It is thus imperative that individuals be aware of the ends to which global education programs are used and promoted in media; it is only through this awareness that change can be brought about in the representation of global education programs and only then can the Global North/Global South dichotomy accurately be challenged.

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# Intersectionality in the Case of CeCe McDonald

By Austin Greitz

**ABSTRACT.** The concept of intersectionality has played an integral part in modern feminist theory since its coining by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991. Although the concept has been criticized in recent memory for its apparent lack of a universal methodology, cases such as the arrest and incarceration of CeCe McDonald prove that intersectionality is still a valid concept that remains critical to modern feminist theory. This article follows the altercation that led to the arrest of CeCe McDonald and further explores how the intersection of identities at which McDonald lives lead to her incarceration and the issues she faced within the prison system. This article concludes with a look into the future possibilities for the theory of intersectionality.

In the contemporary study of issues surrounding gender and sexuality, the theory of intersectionality has arisen as a dominant voice for social justice. Although the idea of intersectionality has existed within feminist and antiracist circles for a large part of the 20th century, the idea did not gain prominence until Kimberlé Crenshaw, a scholar in the field of critical race theory, published her landmark “Mapping the Margins” in 1991. Crenshaw’s definition of intersectionality was based around the observation that “contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses [had] failed to consider the intersections of racism and patriarchy” (p. 93). Intersectionality was then defined as a way of seeing how structures of oppression overlap with one another, and as a lens through which individuals could compare current antiracist or feminist movements against social justice movements as a whole. As feminist theory continues to evolve, the theory of intersectionality has

taken some criticism for having no solid methodological approach (Nash, 2008; McCall, 2005). However, intersectionality remains a tool that is necessary for understanding how certain acts of oppression happen and how societies can attempt to prevent similar acts of oppression in the future, as evidenced by the case of CeCe McDonald. CeCe McDonald's intersecting identities of being Black, poor, transgender, and a woman played a major role in her being assaulted, her incarceration, and her further interactions with the legal system.

As stated by Johnson (2013), in June of 2011, the Black trans woman CeCe McDonald was assaulted by Dean Schmitz and Molly Shannon Flaherty after McDonald and a group of friends left McDonald's apartment to walk to a nearby grocery store in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The assault took place outside of the Schooner Tavern around closing time while McDonald was en route to the local liquor store. Flaherty and Schmitz yelled slurs at McDonald's entourage and labeled McDonald specifically as a "nigger," "faggot," and a "chick with a dick" (p.140). After confronting the harassers, McDonald's face was cut open with broken glass by Flaherty. Attempting to flee the scene, but followed by Schmitz, McDonald took a pair of scissors out from her purse and stabbed Schmitz, who died at the scene. McDonald would soon be arrested on charges of manslaughter and sent to a men's prison for 41 months.

When analyzing the events that unfolded with regards to McDonald and Schmitz, one must look through the lens of intersectionality. Johnson (2013) claims that Schmitz not only referred to McDonald with racist slurs, but also with homophobic, cissexist, and transphobic ones to further denigrate McDonald's identities, and that this action "[demonstrated] how transfemininity is a threat to heteronormative masculinity and patriarchy" (p.140). In this way, it becomes evident that no single identity was at play when Schmitz and his conglomerate targeted McDonald and hers; instead, it was McDonald's intersection of identities that allowed Schmitz to feel validated in his



assault. McDonald's socioeconomic class also comes into play in this scenario; if McDonald did not come from a low socioeconomic standing, it is fair to suppose that she would not have had to walk the half-mile from her apartment to the liquor store, thus bypassing the Schmitz incident altogether. In addition, it is these same intersections that caused McDonald to react in the way that she did—in a nation where murders of trans women of color continue (Dalton, 2015), McDonald no doubt felt that the only way to defend herself against death was to violently defend herself.

Intersectionality is also the key to understanding the events that unraveled with regard to McDonald as she made her way through the legal system. It may initially appear that McDonald's being charged with a crime was merely a racialized issue—McDonald is Black, Schmitz was white—but this is not the whole story. As Johnson (2013) once again notes, Black cis men are “the population most targeted by the penal system” (p. 141), and this is how McDonald is presented to the jury—through structural transphobia, McDonald's case is heard as a man's case, and when coupled with her Black identity, this discrimination had a powerfully negative outcome. Additionally, the treatment of trans bodies played a role in the hearing of McDonald's case, as trans bodies are increasingly criminalized in modern society (Glickman, 2016; Stanley and Smith, 2011). During the hearing, McDonald's prior hospitalization for depression was also brought up, while Schmitz's violent history was never discussed (p. 139); this exemplifies how the stigmatization of mental illness differs when it is associated with a Black or a white body. It is clear that the guilty verdict given to McDonald was an effect of what Anderson and Collins (2009) refer to as the “matrix of domination” (p. 6). No one oppression was at play in McDonald's case, because many were at play simultaneously.

Within the prison system, McDonald was also victimized by the intersectionality of her identity and the

corresponding matrix of domination. Like her experience in court, McDonald was also placed into a men's prison after being convicted of manslaughter. This preoccupation with anatomical sex, and not gender identity, was not only emotionally demeaning, but also physically harmful. Bevenssee (2014) found that within male prisons, "behaviors demarcate trans bodies as sub-human and thus deserving of less than human conditions" (105). Not only did McDonald have to struggle with issues regarding her personal safety as a trans woman and her medical rights to hormone treatment (which Johnson (2013) notes was stopped for the first two months of incarceration), but McDonald also had to deal with navigating the prison complex itself, which is known to be an incredibly racialized and race-segregated institution (Kerness and Lewey, 2014).

In a world in which one in three Black men are incarcerated in their lifetime (Explains, 2015) and trans bodies are increasingly criminalized and incarcerated (Glickman, 2016; Stanley and Smith, 2011), it is important to recognize that although the intersections of McDonald's identities trapped her within a matrix of domination, the intersecting of identities can also be used in the future to more fully understand individuals and better react to them. The rage of the oppressed has been identified as a powerful agent for change in today's world (Jordan, 2014), and thus the matrix of domination that is at once so devastating can also perhaps serve as the motivator in the fight for freedom. In addition, an understanding of the intersections of identity at which an individual lives can also be utilized in order to understand the issues affecting such an individual better, and thus can be applied to social justice movements in order to more effectively create change.

It is apparent that intersectionality is a theory that is effective for understanding how oppression and the matrix of domination exist today. The case of CeCe McDonald has further elucidated this fact, and stands to show social constructionists that work can still be made on

combating oppression, especially within multi-marginalized communities. The only way that progress can be made is by understanding how intersectionality plays a part not only in the lives of individuals, but also in the functioning of hierarchical structures as a rule, and then by working to dismantle the ways in which these structures elevate specific intersectionalities over others.

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# Queering Feminism: Rejecting Imperialist Methods of Silencing

By Mikayla Burress

**ABSTRACT.** This paper examines how certain non-trans feminist discourses silence transpersons and reinforce heteronormativity. Relying on recent feminist epistemology, I argue that the silencing of transgender persons constitutes both epistemic and ethical injustice. Epistemic injustice occurs when transpersons are invalidated as knowers and marginalized in epistemic communities established by feminists. The ethical injustice is produced by reinforcing the oppressive norms of heteronormativity. In the second half of this essay I rely on the assumption that there is an intimate connection between feminist and transgender studies—that is, there are grounds for non-trans and trans feminist solidarity and an imperative to make feminism more hospitable to transpersons. Drawing upon queer theory and trans scholarship, I conclude by suggesting how feminism can become more inhabitable for transpersons by adopting an antifoundationalist approach to coalition building.

## Introduction

Recent theoretical work in feminist epistemology contends that social disadvantages produce unjust epistemic environments that exclude women and racial minorities. Feminist epistemologists like Miranda Fricker, José Medina, and Kristie Dotson have elucidated the imbrication of epistemic injustice and social stigmatization—that is, women and racial minorities disproportionately experience epistemic injustices due to social prejudices that wrongly demarcated these groups as untrustworthy, unknowledgeable, and intellectually inferior (Fricker 2007,

Dotson 2011, Medina 2013). While this work indisputably has opened up new a domain of epistemological inquiry, it lacks an analysis of how cisgender privilege affects epistemic interactions and contributes to the marginalization of trans and genderqueer persons.<sup>15</sup> In this paper I am interested in examining how cis-, or non-trans feminists commit epistemic injustices against transpersons. Specifically, I elucidate how non-trans feminists' deployment of essentialist rhetoric silences trans voices and reinforces heteronormativity—which, I argue, constitutes epistemic and ethical injustices. Additionally, I suggest how feminism can become more inhabitable for transpersons. My central aim is to elucidate the need for non-trans and trans feminist solidarity. I write this essay as a white, Anglo, cis-woman. This essay reflects my commitment eliminating trans-exclusion within feminist spaces and is a personal attempt to think through the meaning of transphobic discourses amongst non-trans feminists.

### **Epistemic Violence, Essentialist Rhetoric, and Trans Exclusion**

Essentialism relies on the contention that a casual relationship exists between biological sex and gender expression, or as Judith Butler explains, it is “the notion of an essential gender cored tied in some irreversible way to anatomy and to a determinist sense of biology,” (2001, 625). Essentialist rhetoric anchors some feminists' justifications for trans-exclusion. Janice Raymond uses essentialist reasoning to argue that trans-women cannot be considered *de facto* women because they were not born with female anatomy or socialized into feminine norms

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<sup>15</sup> The term 'cisgender' calls attention to the privilege possessed by normatively gendered subjects, or those who experience comfortability and ease performing the gender that they were assigned at birth (Shotwell & Sangrey 2009, 67).

during childhood: “Central to Raymond’s work is the invalidation of trans self-identification, justified through appeal to karyotype and history of social experience as belonging to a particular sex,” (Bettcher & Garry 2009, 2). While this line of reasoning may seem outdated, it is still employed to authorize “women-born-women” spaces (Shotwell & Sangrey 2009, 61). Julia Serano, a trans-woman who has written extensively about feminism’s exclusionary practices, describes her experience at a conference where essentialist remarks made her and other transpersons feel unwelcome:

...[the keynote speaker] referred to herself as a ‘bio-dyke’ and defined that as someone who is born female and who is attracted to other women who are born female...I may be a trans-woman, but the last time I checked, I was not inorganic or nonbiological in any way...I found the atmosphere and rhetoric in that room to be intolerable. (2012, 179)

Serano’s experience illuminates yet another manner in which trans-women are conceptualized as unnatural because they are not born with female genitalia. Finally, essentialism grounds the assumption that all female-to-male (FTM) transpersons will perform patriarchal masculinity by virtue of identifying as male, suggesting that behavior shares a casual relationship with gender and that masculine gender expression is inexorably patriarchal. Jacob Hale describes this phenomena by recounting their experience at a feminist conference, “a feminist philosopher told me that now that I was a man I seemed all too ready to take up too much verbal space... [my] transsexual subject position was *reduced* to nontranssexual manhood,” (2009, 52; my emphasis). While certainly not all non-trans feminists engage in this kind of divisive discourse—those who do foreclose transpersons from feminist spaces in ways that are evocative of the exclusion of women of color in early feminist movements.

In the remainder of this section, I examine how essentialist rhetoric silences trans voices within feminists spaces and argue that practices of silencing constitute epistemic and ethical injustices. In “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing,” Kristie Dotson characterizes epistemic injustice as a type of violence that damages a group’s ability to speak and be heard and argues that epistemic injustices are due to pernicious ignorance, “any reliable ignorance that, in given context, harms another person,” (2011, 238). What is absent from Dotson’s account of epistemic injustice is the function that group identity plays, a point that Miranda Fricker articulates in her expanded account of epistemic injustice by writing:

...the injustice cuts him to the quick. Not only does it undermine him in some capacity (the capacity for knowledge) that is essential to his value as a human being, it does so on grounds that discriminate against him in respect of some essential feature of him as a social being. (2007, 54)

Fricker’s account of epistemic injustice is conceptualized as a group’s inability to speak and be heard that is not only due to ignorance, but it is also inextricably linked to the pervasive influence of social stigmatizations—that is, the epistemic injustice occurs because some category of social identity (race, sexuality, gender, religion, etc.) that is integral to the groups self-identification is stigmatized and rendered epistemically invalid. Thus, the epistemic injustice enacted against transpersons—i.e. silencing—occurs precisely because trans-women identify (or are identified) as *trans*-women. With this expanded notion of harm in place, I can now specify the nuances of the silencing that non-trans feminists engage in when utilizing essentialist rhetoric.

Dotson articulates two practices of silencing that constitute epistemic injustices: testimonial smothering and testimonial quieting. My analysis focuses on how testimonial smothering is practiced by non-trans feminists



who employ essentialism. Testimonial smothering occurs when a speaker truncates their own testimony because they perceive that listeners are unwilling to appropriately respond, demonstrates an inability to understand the content of the testimony, or holds a pernicious ignorance, (Dotson 2011, 244). Testimonial smothering is exemplified by Julia Serano's experience of unease sharing her history in feminist spaces:

Sometimes I find it difficult to talk about my very different history—specifically, the fact that I was socialized male (or, as I put it, forced against my will into boyhood)—because it is so often cited by trans-misogynistic women as evidence that I do not belong in lesbian or women's spaces, because I am not a 'real' woman. (2012, 179)

Serano's narrative speaks to the three perceptions that induce testimonial smothering: 1) she recognizes that trans-misogynistic women refuse to appropriately respond to her testimony; 2) there is an inability to understand the context of Serano's testimony because trans-misogynistic women refuse empathize with trans-women; 3) there is a pernicious ignorance present—namely, the false conception that Serano is not 'a real woman' or that she 'does not belong in women's spaces' because her karyotype and adolescent social experience are male. The notion that trans women are not 'real women' is a pernicious ignorance because it is epistemically harmful inasmuch as it excludes, invalidates, and erases the knowledge of trans women; Additionally, this ignorance ignores the oppression and injustice that trans-women endure indubitably because they are identified as women and they inhabit a sexist society.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> I am not implying that trans-women are the only trans or genderqueer persons that endure testimonial smothering. As I mentioned before, the false belief that masculine gender expression is inexorably patriarchal endures the same phenomena and should be considered an ignorance because it erases the sexist oppression that FTM transpersons have

Pernicious ignorance and the testimonial smothering that often accompanies it constitute an ethical harm in the following way: the epistemic privilege that transpersons may possess is silenced; silencing the knowledge the transpersons possess contributes to the perpetuation of heteronormativity, which constitutes an ethical harm insofar as the system of heteronormativity regulates, disciplines, and oppresses transpersons.

According to standpoint theory, silencing discredits the epistemic privilege that lived experience *may* afford transpersons because of their social position as transgender.<sup>17</sup> Alison Wylie articulates standpoint theory's central insight by writing:

...those who are subjected to structures of domination that systemically marginalize and oppress them may, in fact, be epistemically privileged in some crucial respect. *They may...know some things better than those who are comparatively privileged (socially, politically), by virtue of what they typically experience and how they understand their experience.* (2003, 26; my emphasis)

By contending that transpersons may have epistemic privilege, I mean that transgender persons are ideally situated to critique the social structures and practices that perpetuate hierarchical, dichotomous gender because they have less social and political privilege than cis-presenting, non-transgender feminists—meaning, they have more opportunities to develop the critical consciousness that is

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experienced: “Many FTMs have experienced sexist oppression and violence both before transition and also after (when taken to be ‘really a woman’),” (Bettcher & Garry 2009, 5).

<sup>17</sup> There is a condition placed on the epistemic privilege that transpersons have due to the fact that epistemic privilege is not granted solely by occupying a marginalized social position—rather, one must also develop a critical consciousness in order to critique the norms that enacted marginalization. This can be done by inhabiting a non-normative community that does not adhere to dominant understandings; occupying such a community provides the opportunity to compare and contrast the dominant views with alternative, subaltern understandings of the social order.

necessary to critique heteronormative and essentialist discourses. Phrased differently, transgender individuals are best situated to critique what Judith Butler calls “the matrix of cultural intelligibility,” or the set of norms that place masculinity, maleness, and manhood on top of the gender hierarchy, while maintaining the relationship between “biological sex, culturally constituted gender, and... the ‘effect’ of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice,” (Butler 1990, 23). This is because the very existence of transgender beings challenges the dominant assumption foundational to the matrix of cultural intelligibility—namely that sex, gender, and sexuality are correlating, natural facts. Melissa Vick contends that transpersons’ epistemic privilege is rooted in the experiences that they’ve gathered while inhabiting different gendered positions:

Their crossing of gendered epistemic position...[which] can make visible to them assumptions, especially concerning the character of gender - its naturalness and its binary character—shared by both men and women whose gendered positions and identities have rarely, if ever, been in question, and who have had little or no opportunity to know the world from the position of their gendered ‘other.’ (2012)

Vick illuminates how transpersons may inhabit an epistemically privilege positions due to the knowledge gathered from their experience of occupying different (sometimes contrasting) social positions as well as the unique oppressions that are suffered by trans and genderqueer persons. Stone notes the liberatory possibilities of transpersons’ lived experience when she writes “...in the transsexual’s erased history we can find a story disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender, which originates from within the gender minority itself and *which can make common cause with other oppositional discourses*,” (2006, 230; my emphasis). Thus, when non-trans feminists silence trans feminists they are

perpetuating the amoral, oppressive regulatory systems that they desire to challenge; furthermore, because they are perpetuating the oppressive gender regulatory system, non-transgender feminist who engage in silencing practices share moral culpability for the harms produced by that system—namely, the regulation of gender expression, disciplining of gender transgressors, and the invalidation of transpersons existence.

The silencing of transpersons and exclusion impedes the formation of relations of solidarity and erases the intimate connections that exist between trans and feminist studies. Leslie Feinberg describes how trans-exclusionary practices perpetuate heteronormative oppression: “Like racism and all forms of prejudice, bigotry towards transgendered people is a deadly carcinogen. We are pitted against each other in order to keep us from seeing each other as allies,” (2010, 143). It is only when non-trans and trans feminists work together as allies that we will engage in productive critiques of the regulatory regimes that hierarchize masculinity, manhood, and maleness because these constructs have not been created solely in relation to womanhood, womanliness, and femininity—but in opposition to *all* other gender embodiments.

In this section I have contended that the existence of essentialist ideology within feminism alludes to the challenges that transpersons face when confronting some non-trans feminists or entering feminist spaces laced with essentialist rhetoric. The alienating barriers erected by feminists that deploy essentialist reasoning point toward the need to reconsider the category of ‘real women,’ especially since, “...the very existence of trans people reveals the simplistic and false nature of the traditional categories of sex and gender,” (Bailey 2009, 182). Additionally, the category ‘real women’ needs to be reconsidered because it reinforces heteronormativity by assuming that there is a natural connection between the genitalia that one is born with and the gender that one

expresses. Lastly, essentialism promotes the silencing of transpersons, resulting in the invalidation of the epistemic privilege that transpersons may have by virtue disrupting assumptions that are foundational to the matrix of cultural intelligibility.

In the next section of this paper, I suggest that non-trans feminists can actively create more hospitable feminist spaces for transpersons by shifting towards a *postfeminism*, a feminism that does not rely on fixed identity categories.

### **Queering Feminism: An Antifoundationalist Approach**

The epistemic injustices produced by essentialist rhetoric introduce an imperative to rethink the concept of 'women' as feminism's starting point since such a narrow starting point serves as an impetus for marginalization and exclusion of transpersons. Serano notes the importance of expanding the category on which feminism bases its community by writing, "...community is not so much about surrounding myself with people who are 'just like me' but about learning from and supporting others who share issues and experience that are similar (yet somewhat different) from my own," (2012, 178). Serano's conception of community also points towards an important contention that must be raised: while trans issues and feminist issues possess their own nuanced foundations, they are imbricated enough to argue that trans issues are feminist issues and vice versa.

Just as the Women of Color Feminism movement taught us that we must not assume that the concept of woman is a unified category, we must also not make essentialist assumptions about transpersons and their relation to the dubious category of 'real women.' These assumptions will only ostracize the very persons with which we should be coalition building. Antifoundationalist coalition politics refuses to assume that "identity" can be generalized. Rather, identity concepts are left open, allowing them to continually shift in resistance to totalizing,

hegemonic, imperialistic, and normalizing conceptions. A coalition based on shifting, un-foreclosed identity concepts engage in the ethic of coalition that María Lugones articulates when she urges us to maintain differences in order to build relations of solidarity that are rooted in difference:

The emphasis is on maintaining multiplicity at the point of reduction, not in maintaining a hybrid, but in the tense workings of more than one logic, not to be synthesized but gone beyond... *the logic of coalition at the colonial difference is constituted by a rejection of dichotomous constructions of realities.* The multiplicity is never reduced. (2012, 85)

By rejecting dichotomous constructions of reality, antifoundationalist politics rejects the matrix of culturally intelligibility's foreclosure of identity expression. Maintaining multiplicity makes feminist spaces inhabitable for those who fall outside the confines of normative discourse by enabling us to connect with one another through points of solidarity without reducing our own uniquenesses.

Creating inhabitable feminist coalitions requires that we recognize that dialogue is filled with cultural assumptions and power relations—meaning, each member of a dialogue is not socially situated in sameness (Butler 1990, 20). Rather, the members of dialogue are always speaking from different social positions that will either enhance or limit their ability to be understood or silenced. Thus, we must make a concerted effort to recognize those who are speaking from the decentralized position that Hale calls “the dislocated space of the margins,” the spaces that those who are culturally unintelligible inhabit (Hale 2009, 58). Recognizing those who are located in the dislocated space of the margins involves choosing to move towards the margins so that the center becomes a place where excluded voices are validated and heard; centralizing marginalized voices demands that those who are relatively

privileged inhabit the margins as a learner, listener, and ally. Utilizing an antifoundationalist coalition strategy, feminism becomes a “queer feminism”: a feminist that does not establish the category “woman” as its core aspect, rather its core aspect becomes the unstable category of “gendered other”, all subjectivities and embodiment that are constructed in opposition to dominant masculinities.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay I have argued that non-trans feminists use of essentialism has actively silenced transgender persons, constituting epistemic and ethical harms. Furthermore, marginalizing essentialist rhetoric signifies the need to foster epistemically responsible relations between non-trans and trans feminists—that is, the deployment of essentialism constitutes an epistemic injustice, illuminating the need for non-trans feminist to create more trans-inclusive environments. By appealing to standpoint theory, I have iterated the importance of making feminism more hospitable for transgender people; namely, feminists aim to critique and dismantle the gender binary that hierarchizes masculinity, manhood, and maleness—but this will only be achieved by halting silencing practices that erase the knowledge transgender persons have by virtue of challenging the regulatory matrix of cultural intelligibility. I urge non-trans feminists to recall that the construct ‘man’ is not hierarchized solely in relation to ‘woman’; rather it is constructed in relation to all othered gender embodiments. Finally, I suggested that feminism move towards a queer feminism that relies on antifoundationalist coalition politics, a politics in which feminism’s core aspect is the ever-changing category of gendered other. Queer Feminism recognizes the truth of Audre Lorde’s famous assertion:

“the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110-114. 2007. Print.



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