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Editorial: *Sprinkle throughout the Years*

Throughout my three years with *Sprinkle*, I can say with certainty that both the journal and the cultural context for the journal have changed. When I originally got involved with the *Sprinkle* Editorial Board back in 2015, helping out felt like a cool, nerdy, and niche thing to do. The prospect of creating some kind of social change back then also had its appeal, but only after seeing the changes over the years have I fully come to understand the potential impact for a journal like *Sprinkle*.

At California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, where *Sprinkle* is edited and printed, marginalized and non-traditional students have long experienced an unwelcoming campus climate. Recently this unwelcoming campus climate has come under more intense scrutiny, even gaining national media attention. Although it’s promising that these conversations have been happening and have brought many groups and individuals together, it’s also created tension on campus, if not outright hostility at times.

Within the larger scope of the United States, we’ve also seen several threats to limit free speech in the past year, including the repealing of net neutrality and the passing of FOSTA/SESTA, both of which impact marginalized individuals most severely. With all of these tensions at play, it becomes increasingly important for journals like *Sprinkle* to keep sharing, fostering community, and providing space for nuanced knowledge production within feminist and queer studies. When so many of us are busy having to defend the very existence of safe spaces, queerness, or social justice centered fields, it becomes harder to allocate energy to create knowledge within these fields.

It is amongst all this chaos and tension that I thank all the authors for finding the time, emotional energy, and dedication for creating the pieces showcased in this year’s volume. I am continually amazed with the nuance, sensitivity, and fascinating topics authors contribute each year. Just in
my time with the journal, I've seen the content grow far beyond the narrow scope of sexuality and gender and more holistically address other identity factors such as class, race, and immigration status. This doesn't seem like a shift away from conversations about sexuality and gender, rather an enrichment of them, bringing more depth and complexity to the fields that better reflects the complexity of the overlapping systems of oppression present in the world. I am excited to see how the fields continue to grow and how *Sprinkle* plays a role in elevating traditionally silenced voices as a part of that growth.

Once again, thank you to the authors for your hard work, as well as the Cal Poly Women's and Gender Studies Department, the Freire Project, and the rest of the *Sprinkle* Editorial Board for their continued support.

Emma Sturm
*Graduate Assistant*
Editorial: Continuing Our Work

While 2018 marks the publication of the eleventh volume of *Sprinkle: An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies*, and the sixth volume published at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, it is my first year of involvement with the journal, working in tandem with Dr. Jane Lehr prior to and during her sabbatical leave in Winter and Spring 2018. Dr. Lehr has remained an active participant in the editorial process throughout her sabbatical, for which I am deeply grateful, and it has been an honor for me to share Editor-in-Chief duties with her this year.

It has also been an honor for me to work with the dedicated members of this year’s editorial team, all of whom have generously volunteered their time and energies in order to make the 2018 volume of *Sprinkle* another impressive entry in the journal’s ongoing contributions to feminist and queer studies and to the larger project of envisioning and enacting a more inclusive, just, and equitable world. I thank them for their enthusiastic commitment to this work.

Working on this volume of *Sprinkle* has been a rewarding experience for me in many ways, but there are three features of this year’s journal that I consider particularly noteworthy. First, the essays published in the eleventh volume of *Sprinkle* demonstrate the depth and sophistication of undergraduate and early graduate-level engagement with feminist and queer studies, which is especially encouraging given the difficulties of our current political moment, both at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and in the world at large. Second, the published essays span a wide range of subjects and disciplines, indicating the integral role that feminist and queer studies play across myriad academic fields and intellectual and activist projects. Third, a number of the essays in this volume reconsider existing methodological frameworks in the fields of feminist and queer studies, further demonstrating that feminist and queer studies continue to remake approaches to knowledge.
production not only in more long-standing disciplines (e.g., English, History, Political Science, and the like) but also from within our own interdisciplinary contexts.

This latter point strikes me as especially important in relation to this volume of *Sprinkle*, because it highlights the ways in which feminist and queer studies function as neither an origin point nor a final destination but are instead ever-expanding projects that continue to unfold and take us in as-yet unknowable directions. It is my hope that the eleventh volume of *Sprinkle* will spark additional new ideas, experiments, and debates, both within feminist and queer studies and throughout disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields of inquiry and practice, some of which might appear in the pages of *Sprinkle* in years to come.

I would also like to thank the Cal Poly Instructionally-Related Activities (IRA) Program and the College of Liberal Arts for providing funding and other resources that enable us to continue to publish print copies of *Sprinkle*, and I thank the Paolo and Nita Friere International Project for Critical Pedagogy for support in hosting online editions of *Sprinkle*. Finally, I thank all the authors who submitted their work to this year’s volume of *Sprinkle* along with our readers, all of whom continue to build community around the far-reaching work of feminist and queer studies and the efforts of emerging scholars in these vitally important fields.

Elizabeth Adan, Ph.D.
*Co-Editor in Chief*
Rethinking Classic Queer Theory
The Only Thing We Have to Queer Is Queer Itself: Naming the Cultural Machine of Radical Sexual Politics

By Cassiopeia Mulholland-London

ABSTRACT. Language is a machine, and words are individual technologies within that machine. Sociocultural theory applied as activism is also a machine. Over the course of the past thirty years, the linguistic technology of “queer” has been recalibrated, moving from naming a cultural machine of radical, anti-capitalist sexual politics to naming a cultural machine of assimilationist, identity-based sexual politics. This has left the machine of radical sexual politics without a name, making it more difficult for people to find it and integrate it into their technological existences. The machine of radical sexual politics is essential because it focuses on dismantling the societal systems that assign life opportunities to people with normative gender and sexual alignments—in contrast to the machine of assimilationist sexual politics, which only seeks to address surface-level legal inequalities. Analyzing the problems with assimilationist sexual politics and addressing problematic uses and interpretations of the word “queer” creates a compelling argument for recalibrating the term back to a more radical definition.

Language is the technology that allows humans to interface with each other and with society. It makes us cultural cyborgs, starting when our uterine parents speak to us in their wombs. Considering language as a potential machine—and it fits the definition, having a multitude of interlocking parts that come together as a whole to serve a specific function—then humans are certainly, as Donna Haraway (1984/2000) puts it in A Cyborg Manifesto, “a hybrid of machine and organism”
Indeed, our ability to communicate complex concepts in highly efficient ways, our ability to better ourselves by learning and teaching these concepts, and our constant interaction via such communication meets Haraway’s fundamental definition of a cyborg: “a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1984/2000, p. 291). What makes us creatures of social reality more than language? What enables fiction more than language? This essay concerns a single word in Standard American English—a single piece of linguistic technology—and the cultural machines (mechanisms by which people form communities and alter or reify the dominant cultural landscape) to which it refers. That word is “queer.” The evolution of the term has taken it from referring to a slur, a cultural machine of oppression; to referring to a radical political ideology, a cultural machine of transformation; to a general descriptor of LGBT+ identity, which currently fits into a cultural machine of assimilation. The final shift—from ideology to identity—is the most concerning, as, while it names the machine of the mainstream LGBT+ rights movement, it does so by appropriating the name of the machine of radical sexual politics. In order to prevent the latter from continuing to grow less accessible, activists must reverse the development of the word “queer,” restoring the name of the machine of radical sexual politics.

While the study of the reclamation of linguistic technology—disarmament, in the case of turning slurs into identities, and reprogramming, in the case of turning slurs into ideological descriptors—is fascinating, it will not be a focus of this paper. Instead, this paper will focus exclusively on the evolution of the term “queer” after its reclamation processes began in
earnest. Thus, it will analyze the use of “queer” to refer to radical sexual politics and assimilationist sexual politics.

Much of this essay's definition of these machines comes from Dean Spade’s (2015) excellent book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law*. Throughout the book, Spade describes the cultural machine of assimilationist sexual politics as structured around what Alan Freeman describes as the “perpetrator perspective,” which Freeman initially defined through the lens of critical race theory (as cited in Spade, 2015, p. 42). The perpetrator perspective claims that oppression “is about bad individuals who intentionally make discriminatory choices and must be punished” (Spade, 2015, p. 42). This is the dominant perspective on sexual politics in the United States, and the perspective around which assimilationist sexual politics has been constructed. Said politics focuses on passing antidiscrimination laws in order to prevent hate crimes or to allow the justice system to prosecute those crimes more aggressively (with the implication that more aggressive prosecution deters would-be perpetrators). The machine of assimilationist sexual politics focuses on activism surrounding same-gender marriage, gender-based bathroom rights, and access to job opportunities (including admittance into the military) for LGBT+ people. It seeks to establish tolerance and equal opportunity.

Spade (2015) criticizes the focus on antidiscrimination protections and hate crime statutes. He writes that “hate crime laws do not have a deterrent effect. They focus on punishment and cannot be argued to actually prevent bias-motivated violence” (Spade, 2015, p. 40). The reasoning behind this is, in addition to
a lack of adequate enforcement, “most people who experience discrimination cannot afford to access legal help” (Spade, 2015, p. 40), so “anti-discrimination laws provide little relief to the most vulnerable people” (Spade, 2015, p. 41). Furthermore, Spade argues that those laws are actively harmful because they “strengthen and legitimize the criminal punishment system, a system that targets the very people these laws are supposedly passed to protect .... and constantly reproduces the same harmful systems” (2015, p. 45).

The machine of radical sexual politics recognizes that, based on Foucault’s analysis of population-management power, “power is not primarily operating through prohibition or permission but rather through the arrangement and distribution of security and insecurity” (Spade, 2015, p. 57). Radical sexual politics seeks transformation rather than inclusion--the activism and theory that comprises the machine thereof advocates for demilitarization rather than military inclusion, aims “to abolish marriage and achieve more just methods of distribution” (Spade, 2015, p. 70), calls for an end to the tiered welfare system, and challenges the expansive criminal punishment system that disproportionately targets LGBT+ people, poor people, disabled people, immigrants, and people of color. The cultural machine of radical sexual politics is designed only to be fully functional when operating in concert with other radical cultural machines, including those that challenge ableism, classism, and racism. Ultimately, the goal of the machine of radical sexual politics is to transform how the institutions of power in the United States (including but not limited to laws and the government) distribute health, security, and even life itself.
An important framework for how the gamut of scholars and activists sees queerness exists in Langdon Winner’s (1986) discussion of the stronger and weaker paradigms around inherently political technologies, which is conducted in his book *The Whale and the Reactor*. The weaker paradigm Winner describes holds that “a given kind of technology is strongly compatible with, but does not strictly require, social and political relationships of a particular stripe” (1986, p. 32). This aligns with the perception of “queer” as assimilationist, in which mainstream queer activists suggest that, while the machine of radical sexual politics may be more suited to liberated socialism, it can exist and flourish within colonial capitalism as long as there is tolerance. Thus, those activists would argue that the machine of radical sexual politics has not lost its name but rather has been recalibrated, and the shift in the meaning (the function) of “queer” is a logical result of that recalibration.

Winner’s (1986) other version of the argument around said technologies, that “the adoption of a given technical system actually requires the creation and maintenance of a particular set of social conditions as the operating environment of that system” (p. 32), applies to the perception of “queer” as transformational—in essence, radical queer activists believe that the machine of radical sexual politics is inherently unable to coexist in the “operating environment” of oppressive colonial capitalism, and as such cannot effectively be recalibrated. This is because colonial capitalism’s primary goal is to generate economic inequality, wherein those who assimilate into the system receive better access to health, security, and happiness than those who are unable to assimilate into the system (including many LGBT+ people). Thus,
radical queer activists--and this paper--argue that, rather than recalibrating the machine of radical sexual politics, assimilationists have instead recalibrated “queer” to refer to an entirely different cultural machine: one of LGBT+ assimilation. This has left the machine of radical sexual politics unnamed.

Cathy J. Cohen discusses in detail the shifts in the use of the word “queer” in her 1997 essay “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens.” Cohen explains for the sake of context that “it was not until the early 1990s that the term ‘queer’ began to be used with any regularity” (1997/2005, p. 22). Cohen is specifically referring to the use of the term in the contexts of politics, activism, and identity that are the focus of this paper, rather than the use of the term as a slur. Cohen goes on to assert that

the roots of a lived ‘queer’ existence are experiences with domination...that form the basis for genuine transformational politics ... a politics that does not search for opportunities to integrate into dominant institutions and normative social relationships but instead ... seeks to change values, definitions, and laws that make these institutions and relationships oppressive. (1997/2005, p. 29).

Here, Cohen illustrates the use of the word “queer” to refer to a cultural machine of radical sexual politics. However, she proceeds to explain the unfortunate reality that “queer politics has often been built around a simple dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual” (1997/2005, p. 24). This unfortunate reality is the use of the word “queer” to refer to an assimilationist cultural machine rather than a radical one. Cohen’s descriptions also provide more concrete definitions of the two machines of relevance: the machine of radical sexual politics sees the power
structure of heteronormativity as the enemy, while the machine of assimilationist sexual politics sees the people enforcing those structures—heterosexual people—as a temporary enemy, one which will cease to require fighting once tolerance has been achieved.

The first chapter of bell hooks’s (2000) book *Feminism Is for Everybody*, published a mere three years after “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” describes how feminism has faced similar issues to queerness: its primary cultural machine has also shifted from transformationist to assimilationist. hooks summarizes the shift thusly: “Reformist feminist thinking focusing primarily on equality with men in the workforce overshadowed the original radical foundations of contemporary feminism which called for reform as well as overall restructuring of society so that our nation would be fundamentally anti-sexist” (2000, p. 4). hooks then takes this analysis one step further by creating the linguistic technology of “lifestyle feminism,” which is “the notion that there could be as many versions of feminism as there are women” (2000, p. 5). According to hooks, lifestyle feminism’s “underlying assumption is that women can be feminists without fundamentally challenging or changing themselves or the culture” (2000, p. 6). This takes the linguistic technology of feminism—designed to refer to a radical machine that strives to provide oppressed women and femmes with a transformative increase in health, security, and happiness—and repurposes it to refer to an assimilationist machine that propagates the idea that people can become feminists simply by labeling themselves as such. The concept of queerness has evolved in a similar fashion—it has become “lifestyle queerness,” where the machine of assimilationist sexual politics endorses people identifying as queer without
dedicating themselves to dismantling the systems of power that actually harm the most vulnerable LGBT+ people.

In 2012, Jane Bryant Meek surveyed a number of students at a prominent Midwestern university about how they interpret the word “queer.” One student, named Javier, explained that “with gay you think of rainbows and Pride in general, and then when it comes to queer, it seems more of a natural, low-profile kind of setting” (as cited in Meek, 2012, p. 192). Another student, Paul, wondered if “the ones that are in the gay community that don’t understand the word queer, maybe are living too much of a heterosexual life, I don’t know” (as cited in Meek, 2012, p. 192). Meek interprets the students’ thoughts, which indicate their attraction to the term “queer,” as responses to the “commodification” (2012, p. 192) of gay and lesbian culture--in essence, Meek portrays the students as setting themselves against the assimilationist nature of mainstream homosexuality. This is optimistic on Meek’s part; however, Javier and Paul are discussing lifestyles rather than politics, even suggesting that queerness should be “low-profile” rather than something as publicized as a pride parade. In essence, Meek unknowingly furthers a vision of queerness where the term names an assimilationist cultural machine that can be calibrated to function in contemporary American society. Gay and lesbian culture, Meek suggests, has integrated itself into mainstream society by optimizing itself to function within colonial capitalism, while queerness is still calibrated to function optimally outside of colonial capitalism.

The error Meek (2012) makes is that those are not the only two options. Meek relies entirely on a worldview mirroring Winner’s weaker lens: that
technology cannot be incompatible with a given political system, but rather functions suboptimally within a system for which it is not configured. However, the machine of radical sexual politics cannot be configured in that way because it simply does not function within colonial capitalism. Although lifestyle queerness is opposed to gay and lesbian culture being optimized for capitalism, it still fails to recognize that, while the cultural machine of assimilationist sexual politics is reconfigurable, the cultural machine of radical sexual politics is not. The latter is designed from the ground up to be incompatible with the current American method of assigning health and happiness to people based upon their assimilation into mainstream society.

In her essay “From Queer to Gay: The Rise and Fall of Milo” (2017), Yasmin Nair’s (2017) interpretation seems to be the opposite of Meek’s. Nair argues that the downfall of Milo Yiannopoulos demonstrated that the terms “queer” and “gay” are in fact the opposite of how many perceive them. Nair suggests that the machine of “queerness [emphasis Nair’s] has moved from a theoretical, academically inflected identity to a widely understood constellation of harmless non-straightness, a set of characteristics that straight people will endure as adorable, sweet, fun traits” (2017). In contrast, while the gay community would like the linguistic technology of “gay” to refer to “devoted community members devoted to each other, people willing to fight unjust wars for their countries, good parents to sweet, adorable children”--an assimilationist machine--in truth, “‘gay’ in America has never actually shifted” (Nair, 2017) from being seen as predatory to being seen as mainstream. In essence, Nair is arguing that the cultural machine of radical sexual
politics has been reconfigured from transformational to assimilationist, while “gay” has, despite the community's efforts, failed to be reconfigured at all. Under Nair’s interpretation, when people think of gayness, they think of a cultural machine whose primary function is radicalism, whereas when people think of queerness, they think of a machine whose primary function is flamboyant assimilation. Additionally, Nair suggests that the reconfiguration of queerness allows the machine's new function to serve people as dangerous as Milo Yiannopoulos, provided those people align with the machine’s goal of upholding the status quo.

While Nair and Meek seem on the surface to be arguing for opposite things, they have actually fallen into the same trap: the trap of assuming that a piece of linguistic technology is synonymous with the cultural machine to which it refers. “Queer” as a piece of linguistic technology has been recalibrated, certainly, but the machine to which it used to refer has not been. It is as if, over a period of a decade or two, people slowly transitioned from calling refrigerators “refrigerators” to calling them “freezers,” simply because the two served similar (but distinct) functions and were positioned next to each other. The word “freezer” would then mean something entirely different, even though the machine to which it referred performed the exact same function as before the naming change. Furthermore, the machine that used to be a freezer would no longer have a functional name.

That same process has happened to queerness: the linguistic technology of the word “queer” has been repurposed, moved from referring to the cultural machine of radical sexual politics to instead referring to “a constellation of harmless non-straightness,” as Nair
so eloquently described (2017). However, the cultural machine of radical sexual politics still exists, simply without a name. This namelessness is ultimately the core of the problem. Radical sexual politics has not been destroyed by the changing definition of “queer”--it has merely become anonymized. Radical sexual activists no longer have the linguistic technology to refer to the cultural machine of their movement, which prevents many people from finding it and integrating it into their cyborgian existences. Just as a computer cannot run a program if given the wrong name, so too do people struggle to access anonymized cultural machines.

The solution is for activists to recalibrate “queer” a second time, returning it to its original function: to refer to the cultural machine of radical sexual politics. This recalibration will not be fast or easy, but with deliberate effort to educate the public about the optimal function of the word “queer,” especially in context to the vital importance of radical sexual politics, linguistic recalibration is possible, and the result will be worth the effort. By once again naming radical sexual politics, we can allow for a broader swath of people to integrate it into their current cultural hard drive, giving them access to a movement they likely did not even know existed.

Cassiopeia Mulholland-London is a 23-year-old junior at the University of Arizona. They are majoring in gender and women's studies with a concentration in queer, trans, and sexuality studies and minoring in creative writing. Cassiopeia is a teacher at Paulo Freire Freedom School, a middle school specializing in social justice and environmental stability, at which they have started the Umbrella Club, a safe space for LGBT+ and
questioning students to discuss critical issues around gender and sexuality. Cassiopeia’s dream is to write novels that depict community and compassion triumphing over oppression and hate.
References


Does Racial Triangulation Unravel Intersectionality?

By Samantha Keng

ABSTRACT. This essay explores how Claire Kim’s idea of racial triangulation complicates intersectionality in its classic sense. Specifically, I argue that the racial triangulation of Asian Americans introduces new dilemmas for intersectional frameworks by destabilizing analyses of subject formation and understandings of privilege and oppression. How, for example, can Asian American complicity in anti-Blackness be incorporated into understandings of identity and its mobilization? By expanding discussions of race beyond binary thinking, racial triangulation both poses new questions and creates new possibilities in the realm of intersectional theory. Especially given today’s racial landscape, this paper attempts to engage in the critical work of addressing obstacles to Black-Asian solidarity and imagining ways of theorizing that prove congruent to lived experience.

I. What lies beyond the Black-white binary?

In her book Asian American Dreams, Chinese American journalist and activist Helen Zia recounts an experience from her youth in the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights era. During a conversation with two friends, one of them told her: “Helen, you’ve got to decide if you’re black or white!” The idea of this racial limbo is a consistently recurring theme in the work of Asian American scholars.¹ Ethnic Studies

¹ Recent work in the realm of Asian American Studies has called attention to the East Asian-centric tendencies of the discipline, a bias that homogenizes Asian Americans as a group and obscures the particular racialized oppressions that Southeast and South Asians face. Adequate discussion of this
professor Gary Okihiro (1994) posed it as a question: “Is yellow black or white?” (p. 32) Cultural critic Jeff Chang (2016) deemed Asian Americans “the in-betweens” (p. 137). These observations suggest that the dilemma of Asian American racialization directly undermines conventional binary thinking.

Academics and activists have increasingly pushed for scholarship and organizing that go “beyond the binary.” Their claim is that the Black-white binary marginalizes Asians and other communities of color who are not easily slotted into categories of “Black” and “white,” such as Indigenous and Latinx folks. Confining analyses to this binary thus reproduces exclusions and slights that anti-racist work is supposedly designed to dismantle. The call for scholarship that transcends the binary has also left its mark on feminist theory, as non-Black women of color advocate for intersectional frameworks attentive to the collision of racialized and gendered oppression in their lives.

Political scientist Claire J. Kim (1999) introduced a groundbreaking, non-binary conceptualization of race in 1990 through her theory of “racial triangulation” (p. 105). Instead of a Black-white binary or a strict racial hierarchy, Kim (1999) proposes a “field” of identities generated in relation to one another (p.106). According to this formulation, Asian Americans are “triangulated” vis-à-vis Black and white folks in order to subordinate Blackness and

problem would require analyses of colorism, religion, and histories of colonialism that this paper does not contain space to explore, but the use of “Asian American” as an umbrella term is highly contested, and the conflation of “East Asian” and “Asian American” is a dangerous one. As this language continues to evolve, I hope that more specific, less universalizing terminologies will emerge.

2 Notably, critics of the push to expand analyses beyond the Black-white binary highlight how the effort can actually distract from the centrality of anti-Black racism as a foundational organizing logic throughout U.S. history.
inhibit interracial solidarity. The “uplifting” of Asian Americans as success stories that allegedly vindicate meritocracy—via the model minority myth, for example—is a key function of white supremacy.

This paper explores how the racial triangulation of Asian Americans complicates Kimberlé Crenshaw’s foundational theory of intersectionality. Although Black feminists had long ago articulated the interplay of gender and race, Crenshaw is credited with popularizing intersectionality through her 1989 paper on the shortcomings of anti-discrimination law in accounting for Black women’s experiences. My analysis takes Kim’s model as the basis for challenging intersectionality in its classic sense. I argue that racial triangulation impairs the ability of intersectional frameworks to manage the complex ways in which racial hierarchy is organized. Specifically, I show that intersectionality and racial triangulation diverge in two ways—in their analyses of subject formation and their understandings of privilege and oppression. By expanding discussions of race beyond binary thinking, racial triangulation poses new questions and creates new possibilities in the realm of intersectional theory.

To be clear, my analysis is not an indictment of Crenshaw, nor is it a proposal to abandon intersectionality altogether. At the time that Crenshaw wrote her 1989 essay, the idea of racial triangulation was not even in circulation, given that Kim did not publish her work until the following year. The argument that Crenshaw’s intersectionality cannot accommodate racial triangulation theory also does not presume that intersectionality is rendered ineffectual. On the contrary, this paper suggests that incorporating the idea of triangulation into our analyses of race, gender, and their intersections in fact leads us to richer, more nuanced frameworks. If anything, the messiness of this theorizing is an indication of how multifaceted and contorted systems of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy truly are. The logic of them—preserving domination—may be straightforward,
but their inner workings are tangled and often hard to discern.

This paper begins with a brief overview of two central theories—Crenshaw's intersectionality and Kim's racial triangulation. I will then examine the particular ways in which racial triangulation challenges intersectionality's understanding of identity. Because Kim's model lacks a specifically gendered dimension, I introduce Karen Pyke and Denise Johnson's racialized femininities as an alternative framework. Finally, I discuss the implications of this research that compel us to widen the margins of intersectional thinking.

II. From intersections to networks: How do identities emerge?

Crenshaw's (1989) work on intersectionality is predicated on the rejection of a “single-axis framework” that erases Black women and invisibilizes those who are “multiply-burdened” (p. 140). Oppression is re-entrenched, she argues, when privileged experiences become codified as normative—when white women’s experiences become synonymous with “womanhood” or when Black men’s experiences become synonymous with “Blackness.” In her critique of anti-discrimination law, Crenshaw highlights how formal legal structures fail to account for the specificity of Black women’s experiences at the crossroads of race and gender. In her most famous analogy, she compares incidents of discrimination to a traffic accident that occurs at an intersection. When a Black woman is harmed in a “collision,” it is difficult to place blame on either sex discrimination or race discrimination alone. Crenshaw presents an analogy of vulnerability, based on the idea that overarching structures make certain identities more susceptible to injury while simultaneously obscuring the fact that injury stems from racialized and gendered oppression.

Kim’s theory employs a different spatial metaphor, one that contains two axes of analysis. The first axis, “civic
ostracism,” situates individuals along a foreigner/insider scale; the second, “relative valorization,” operates along an inferior/superior scale (Kim, 1999, p. 108). Through racial triangulation, Asian Americans are coded as “hardworking” and “well-behaved” yet “perpetually foreign.” In contrast, Black folks are labeled “lazy” and “disorderly,” yet their American-ness is not typically called into question. Because the axes of Asian exclusion and Black subjugation operate concurrently, whiteness is re-centered as the normative standard – undeniably “American” and the embodiment of proper, upstanding citizenship.

In Crenshaw’s model, identities are fixed, represented by the streets that form an intersection. If one street is “gender” and the other “race,” then Black women are positioned where the two streets meet, which is also the site of injury. The underlying assumption is that there are identities that pre-exist the collision, readily recognizable notions of “womanhood” and “Blackness” that are tied to degrees of vulnerability but that presumably exist on their own. For Crenshaw, the metaphor at work is based on an organized grid—a map of linear streets and discrete identities. Where non-Black women of color are located within this grid is a question Crenshaw leaves unaddressed. Do their experiences unfold at a different intersection? Is there a discrepancy in how frequently they suffer collisions compared to Black women or men of color?

According to racial triangulation theory, racial identities are not autonomous, nor can they be disentangled from the structure and context in which they were produced. As Daryl Maeda (2009) explains: “Racial triangulation asserts that the formation of the category ‘Asian American’ always occurs in dialogue and dispute with both blackness and whiteness” (p. 11). In other words, racial subjectivities are generated against each other. A triangulation framework sheds light on three aspects of racial identity that diverge from Crenshaw. First, identities are constructed by systems of power; they do not pre-exist systems of power. Second, identities are relational, firmly embedded in a social
structure alongside other identities, giving each other meaning. Lastly, identities are *mobilized* and used in active pursuit of preserving racial hierarchy.

The framing of identity in racial triangulation theory disrupts intersectionality’s notion of identity as fixed and autonomous. In racial triangulation, Blackness cannot be understood apart from whiteness or Asian American-ness; there are no unitary, stable racial categories that exist outside of power relations. If racial triangulation is adopted as the framework for analyzing oppression, then Crenshaw’s grid is revealed as too simplistic of a metaphor. One alternative conceptualization of identity can be adapted from assemblage theory, in which “specific connections with other concepts” is precisely what imbues identities with meaning (Puar, 2012, p. 57). As Jasbir Puar (2012) writes: “Concepts do not prescribe relations, nor do they exist prior to them; rather, relations of force, connection, resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts” (p. 57). An assemblage model problematizes intersectionality’s “fixing” of identity; instead of a grid, it proposes a network resembling Kim’s field of racial positions—a cluster of entities that can only be understood in relation to each other.

**III. Internally divided subjects: How do privilege and oppression converge?**

Racial triangulation also pushes against intersectionality’s assumption of privilege and oppression as separate spheres that do not bleed into each other. In her critique of Crenshaw’s framework, Jennifer Nash (2008) identifies one shortcoming of intersectionality as a failure to explore “the way in which privilege and oppression can be co-constituted on the subjective level” (p. 11). By glossing over the “intimate connections between privilege and oppression,” Nash argues that intersectionality ignores how subjects can be “both victimized by patriarchy and privileged by race” (Nash, 2008, p. 12). According to Nash, individuals can inhabit worlds of
privilege and oppression all at once, an acknowledgment left out of Crenshaw’s intersectional model.

The concept of privilege and oppression not as discrete and distant but as often overlapping is particularly relevant in racial triangulation theory. A critical element of racial triangulation is the notion of complicity—specifically, Asian American complicity in the preservation of white supremacy. Kim (1999) observes: “If the Black struggle for advancement has historically rested upon appeals to racial equality, the Asian American struggle has at times rested upon appeals to be considered White” (p. 112). While the “civic ostracism” axis (i.e. the “perpetual foreigner” myth) has prevented Asian Americans from accessing the full privileges of whiteness, Kim emphasizes that the racial triangulation model is sustained through Asian American participation. This participation consists of a range of strategies—defending “colorblind meritocracy,” attacking affirmative action initiatives, choosing to assume apolitical stances, actively engaging anti-Blackness. In this way, Asian Americans come to represent the intimate coexistence of privilege and oppression within a single subject position.

Race theorists like Charles Mills (1997) have characterized Asian Americans as “probationary whites,” (p. 81) highlighting how they are denied genuine inclusion yet afforded racial privilege according to their willingness to be complicit in maintaining structural violence. Although they may face persistent discrimination that challenges their belonging, they are not subject to racialized violence (e.g. mass incarceration, state surveillance) to the same extent that Black folks are.³ To return to the metaphor of spatialization, a network of subjectivities in assemblage theory contains sites of varying intensity. In spite of patterns

³ This holds true assuming that “race” is the only factor of analysis, excluding other factors such as skin color/physicality, socioeconomic status, citizenship status, ability, etc. that change the equation.
of relationality, oppression is more concentrated at certain points in a network, not evenly distributed throughout.

IV. Racialized Femininities: An alternative framework

If we acknowledge that racial triangulation disrupts intersectionality, our work then turns to locating alternatives that give voice to these complexities. I propose that Karen Pyke and Denise Johnson’s theory of racialized femininities in particular has made valuable contributions to this effort. Recognizing that the category of “woman” itself is, in Nash’s (2008) words, “contested and fractured terrain” (p. 3), Pyke and Johnson (2003) propose a more multifaceted “plurality of femininities” (p. 35). Drawing upon sociologist R.W. Connell’s theory of “hegemonic” and “subordinated” masculinities, Pyke and Johnson (2003) suggest that the interplay of race and gender creates parallel hegemonic and subordinated femininities (p. 35). To illustrate this point, they juxtapose the trope of the “angry Black woman” with the “Lotus Blossom stereotype” that characterizes Asian women as exotic and submissive: “By casting Black women as not feminine enough and Asian women as too feminine, white forms of gender are racialized as normal and superior” (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 35). In stigmatizing Black and Asian femininity as aberrant and problematic, white femininity is stabilized as hegemonic—dominant, ascendant, and “normal.”

Pyke and Johnson’s work can be interpreted as a mirroring of racial triangulation in conversation with theories of gender. Asian femininity is distortedly “valorized” by patriarchy through hypersexualization, yet is still coded as undeniably Other. By situating Black and Asian femininities at opposite poles, white femininity is established as the idealized norm. The process of racializing femininities again produces a re-centering of whiteness, a reification of white, gendered hegemony. Like in triangulation theory, the idea of racialized femininities rejects the notion of hierarchy as natural or organic, instead
emphasizing the “integration of gender and race within a social constructionist framework” (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 34).

V. Implications

In closing, I hope to demonstrate the high stakes of these conversations for both intersectional and anti-racist scholarship. Particularly in our current political moment, forces of white supremacy are determined to pit Asian and Black communities against each other, leveraging Asian Americans as a “wedge” against those seeking redress for systemic oppression. Take, for instance, Chinese Americans protesting en masse against the indictment of Brooklyn police officer Peter Liang, who fatally shot an unarmed Black man, Akai Gurley, in 2014. Or the recent anti-affirmative action movement alleging that race-conscious admissions policies deny educational opportunity to Asians—a conservative tactic described by Sumi Cho as “racial mascoting” (as cited in Chang, 2008). This splintering of Black-Asian solidarity reinforces white supremacy at large while also exposing the complicity of Asian Americans in perpetuating anti-Blackness. How can we better enable critical theories—like intersectionality—to attend to these urgent realities?

The debate over which framework best attends to axes of oppression and multitudes of experience is not merely a question of semantics but a question of how solidarity and resistance should be pursued. The primacy of intersectionality in feminist writings since the late 1980s is not a harmful trend by any means. In fact, the popular discourse of intersectionality has allowed women of color to produce scholarship that is increasingly reflective of their lived experiences. Intersectionality as a broad idea – the insistence on multi-axis analyses that consider not only gender and race but an abundance of other identities – is a powerful tool in countering mainstream feminisms that center white, middle-class, able-bodied, cisgender,
heterosexual women as normative. Recognizing intersectionality’s critical interventions, this paper has intentionally remained specific in its critique. As Nash (2008) describes, intersectionality is “a tool particularly adept at capturing and theorizing the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes” (p. 2). I contend that intersectionality’s limitations ultimately stem from the complexity within these social processes.

Racial triangulation introduces new dilemmas into intersectional theory, and taking these dilemmas seriously expands our ability to manage the “fractures and incommensurabilities” (Shih, 2008, p. 1349) that characterize worlds of race and gender. The shortcoming of Crenshaw’s intersectional model is that it implies a “fixity of racial and sexual taxonomies” (Puar, 2007, p. 215) that is often irreconcilable with the disorder of lived experience. Embracing a more dispersed model—resembling assemblage’s network or triangulation’s field—allows us to conceptualize violence in ways that are not uniformly vertical or top-down. Like particles in motion, violence can also occur horizontally and diagonally, or with more concentrated intensity at certain sites; there is a certain chaos to these interactions that cannot be captured through theories of structure and grids. Oppression is not located in a singular, unmoving source but is distributed throughout uneven terrain, scattered and subject to other forces and shifts. The takeaway, then, is that we lose a certain degree of nuance when we confine our analyses to more rigid configurations. Our theories and conceptual frameworks should seek to mirror the intricacy and entanglement of lived experience, which rarely unfolds at a single juncture.

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4 In this sense, using terms such as “injury,” “disadvantage,” and “violence” may be more accurate than “oppression” and “subjugation,” which assume a vertical structure of power.
Samantha Keng is currently completing her undergraduate degree in History and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. She is broadly interested in Asian American racial politics and formation, with a particular focus on examining the roots of anti-Blackness within Chinese American communities. Through her work at Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Atlanta and with a campus activist group, she hopes to participate in growing a contingent of young Asian Americans committed to racial, immigrant, and economic justice. She enjoys making dumplings and egg tarts with her grandma and napping in the sun.
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Revisiting Classic Feminist Literature and Literary Systems
ABSTRACT. This paper will discuss the cases in which illicit sex becomes mechanisms of disruption. The first section will explore the theoretical underpinnings of sex and the body as an access point to politics and normative critique. Then, I will discuss the examples of illicit sex in the novels *Women of Sand and Myrrh* and *Woman at Point Zero*. It is important to study the role of sex in literature to expand the symbolic understanding of sex and sexuality. It is also necessary to bring an analysis of colonial dynamics to sexuality studies in order to fully critique the racial and historical dynamics within sexuality and the establishment of sexual norms.

Illicit Sex

Forbidden sex, bad sex, illicit sex: it is more than just an act of pleasure and science; it is a symbolic act against the greater normative regime. Illicit sex involves sexual acts marked outside the androcentric heterosexual norms, including queer sex, extramarital sex, sex work, and sex between the colonizer and the colonized. This paper will base the concept of “illicit sex” as discussed in earlier works, such as *Thinking Sex*, that analyze sexuality in a framework of social organization. In *Thinking Sex*, Rubin (1984) shapes the concept of forbidden sex and non-normativity. Rubin (1984) defines forbidden sex as non-heterosexual, non-normative sexual-gender relations and argues that societal modernization created sexual stratification that othered, non-normative sex, like queer sex and sex work (p. 18). Rubin’s conceptualizations of illicit sex and sexual
stratification are at the foundation of this paper’s analysis of sex as a radical paradigmatic act in colonized societies.

In the novels *Women of Sand and Myrrh* by Hanan Al-Shaykh (1989/2010) and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi (1975/2007), illicit sex—or non-normative sexual relations—creates real and theoretical pathways for women to disrupt the colonial heterosexual matrix. Both novels are set in the Middle East and center on the lives of women, specifically how both women navigate colonial patriarchy and sexual crises. Centering this paper’s analysis on Middle Eastern literature strives to incorporate feminist voices from a region widely disparaged in neocolonial rhetoric on the issues of women’s rights and sexuality. The framework of illicit sex as resistance against colonial heterosexuality can be applied to other literary pieces from colonized regions.

**Theory: Colonial Heterosexuality**

Understanding that sex and sexuality interact with a normative framework established by the Western patriarchy is integral to analyzing the novels. Patriarchy as a modulator of female sexuality is not a new concept in feminist theory. Judith Butler’s (1988) discussion of gender as a temporary, historicized state created from the repetition of certain acts places theoretical importance on the concept of an “act.” Butler (1988) argues that these gender “acts” are not individual instances, but rather a collective transaction that is both discrete and explicit. In this framework, heterosexuality is a biological and cultural reproductive act; heterosexual intercourse reinforces the binary gender difference. Adrienne Rich’s (1980) work on “compulsory heterosexuality” frames normative heterosexual intercourse as not just the construction of gender relations, but the deconstruction of queer existence and community. Rich (1980) highlights instances of “marriage resistance.” of women refusing to marry, as a consistent historical example of women exerting autonomy through the rejection of heteronormative acts.
Butler (1988) and Rich’s (1980) work demonstrates how sex is both an individual act and an emblem of a larger paradigm. This concept is the foundation of this paper’s argument that non-normative sex, sex marked outside the bounds of marital heterosexuality, is an act of women’s resistance, as well as women’s production of alternative sexual spaces. In the context of colonial politics, the conceptualization of heterosexual sex as an integral act to upholding normative power dynamics offers insight into the role of sex and gender configurations in the assertion of colonial power. Analyzing heteronormativity and colonialism together creates a framework of multiple relations of power and represents an intersection of gender, sexuality, and colonial white supremacy as overlapping historical processes. Lugones (2007) in “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System” argues that the gender binary and heteronormative paradigm is a violent reconfiguration of identity and behavior among colonized peoples by historical Western powers. In the colonial framework, compulsory heterosexuality as a buttress of the gender binary is not just a mechanism of male dominance, but of white European male dominance over colonized people, particularly women of color. Moreover, colonial heterosexual dominance is not just a matter of white men’s sexual access to brown bodies, but also an issue of colonial control over the social classification system and the reproduction of the European gender system within colonized societies. Lugones (2007) highlights this process as the crux of the transformation of colonized societies from egalitarian to hierarchical patriarchies, which structurally inhibits colonized women.

In the context of the Middle East, in which the two novels are set, the colonialism of gender and sexuality is important. In Policing Egyptian Women, Kozma (2011) argues that the formalization of the state and codification of laws, constructed by colonial processes and legacies, enforced oppressive restrictions on women’s bodies. In her discussion of prostitution and women’s sexuality, Kozma
(2011) argues that the empowerment of a post-colonial police force intended to control female sexuality through the regulation of women’s bodies in public space (p. 79). On a spectrum, women who had to occupy public space for economic survival—whether or not they were sex workers—were all deemed ambiguously “disreputable,” but women who were engaging in the “illicit activity” of sex work were treated as a public moral crisis by the state and self-policing elites (Kozma 2011, p. 80). Kozma (2011) states that “the prostitute was threatening because women’s sexuality was believed to be treacherous” (p. 80). In Kozma’s (2011) argument, the police force is a manifestation of the colonial penetrative concepts of modernity and statehood, and the police subsequently regulate women’s sexuality as a mode of social control and maintenance of colonial patriarchal power. In the framework of illicit sex as an act of resistance and disruption, Kozma’s (2011) description of sex workers as a highly-marginalized member of society reinforces the idea that non-normative sex is a compelling act against state norms.

In “Living Sexualities: non-hetero female sexualities in urban middle-class Bangladesh,” Karim (2012) makes a less historical argument than Kozma (2011) and concerns Bangladesh, not an Arab country, but still demonstrates how female sexuality and colonialism intersect. Karim (2011) discusses non-hetero female sexuality as a non-normative sexuality in confrontation with both Bengali spatial-social norms and Western colonial lexicon. In Karim’s (2011) piece, labelling is an integral aspect to decolonizing non-normative sexuality; Bengali women create a plurality of culturally-specific and personally-appropriate terms to deconstruct the colonial and confining dynamics of “lesbian” (p. 282). In Karim’s (2011) it is not just the act of non-normative sex that is lived resistance, but the surrounding intentionality that decolonizes female sexuality.

This section has described sexual and gender theory as well as historical and social contexts for sexual dynamics in colonized lands. The formation of a colonial vision of a
modern state has been a mechanism of policing women’s bodies in law and recreation of a violent heteronormative gender binary regime in colonized societies. By inserting the concept of illicit sex as a paradigmatic act, one can see how non-normative sex confronts the normative sexual-gender system imposed on non-Western states through colonialism. Theoretical and social context regarding the relationships between colonialism, sexual norms, and patriarchal gender regimes is necessary for analyzing the novels in the remainder of the paper.

**Women of Sand and Myrrh**

*Women of Sand and Myrrh* is a 1989 novel by Hanan Al-Shaykh, a Lebanese author. The novel is set in an unnamed desert country undergoing industrialization, potentially in reference to Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. The structure of the novel follows the stories of four women in this desert country as they cope with depression, restricted mobility, marital crises, and cultural tension. This paper is mainly concerned with the relationship between two characters, Suha and Nur, as their friendship transforms into an indulgent and chaotic extramarital affair. Both women engage in queer intimacy—non-normative sex—to find relief from, not only their crumbling heterosexual marriages, but also the limitations of the patriarchal state. Ultimately, their relationship ends in abandonment and mutual distress, but their queer intimacy is a crucial precursor for both characters’ self-realization and final liberation from their circumstances.

A significant moment in Suha and Nur’s relationship is Suha’s burgeoning acceptance of her affair with Nur after an initial struggle. Al-Shaykh (1989/2010) writes:

> We’d begun to live our lives together, going to the department store, visiting Suzanne, entering the hotel in fear and trembling and ordering tea and cake only to rise up together after hastily swallowing the tea, because the looks of the other guests were almost beginning to be directed
towards, almost becoming a reproach. We went deep into the desert and saw a mirage of many colours. Instead of receding into the distance, it had come closer to us as we approached it in the car, and then it wasn’t a mirage after all.

(p. 55)

The passage is a portrayal of how Suha and Nur extricated themselves from state restrictions within their relationship. Al-Shaykh’s description of their new daily activities is in direct contrast to the previous illustration of mobility in the section, which is limited to domestic spaces. In this way, Suha’s acceptance of her relationship with Nur—demonstrated in the initial “We’d begun to live our lives together”—represents a dramatic shift in Suha’s engagement of public space. Not only does their relationship prompt a new wave of movement outside of the home, their coupled interactions with the public also begin to mark them as other. The reproachful looks of the hotel guests is the knowing gaze of the state, the subliminal recognition of Suha and Nur’s nonconforming behavior. While shopping and visiting another woman was still in the realm of acceptability, Al-Shaykh introduces a discrete crossing of social boundaries, indicating the point at which the continuing public consummation of their queer relationship became transgressive.

After this moment of transgression, the passage suddenly shifts into a different space. Al-Shaykh turns from the public space into a nature scene of a mirage-like oasis. Nur and Suha’s journey “deep into the desert” represents their rejection of the state’s heteronormative gaze. The desert oasis is without the structures and supervision of the public, as described earlier in the passage. Al-Shaykh’s use of the word “mirage” and “oasis” evokes fantastical imagery of a dreamlike, temporary haven. The oasis is far from the public, isolated, and untouched by the familiar markers of development. Suha and Nur’s transition from the public to the dreamy refuge of the oasis symbolizes the escapism of their queerness; with their relationship, they gain access to
space outside the colonial heterosexual regime that defines both public and domestic orders.

As Suha grew in her relationship with Nur, she simultaneously distances herself from her husband, Basem. Al-Shaykh (1989/2010) writes, “My relationship with Basem only existed inside the four walls of the house now; it didn’t even extend to the garden or the car or the street” (p. 56). The limitation of Suha’s marriage to Basem—its conditionality to the domestic space—indicates both the restrictive nature of heterosexual marriage and Suha’s rejection of her marriage. Al-Shaykh’s description of Suha’s marriage to Basem as perfunctory and conditional relates to the compulsory nature of heterosexual marriage; societal functionality and reproduction are the basic characteristics of compulsory heterosexuality as described by Butler (1988) and Rich (1980). At this point, Suha’s intimacy has shifted towards Nur and away from Basem, which is punctuated when Al-Shaykh (1989/2010) continues to write about Suha’s sexual rejection of Basem as well (p. 56).

Ultimately, the relationship between Nur and Suha ends and both of them leave the nameless desert country. While tying the characters’ liberation to their departures from the desert country must be problematized, Suha and Nur’s respective flights are important to understand as the escalation of their affair. Suha and Nur do not leave the desert country because of the Muslim-ness or Arab-ness demonstrated in the novel; they leave because of their marriages and their dissatisfaction with the gender order of society. Their final departures are the external manifestation of the self-actualization the characters underwent throughout their affair. While their queerness created an experiential space in which the two characters could escape the structures of colonial heteronormativity, Suha and Nur’s departures emphasize the women’s need to extricate themselves from the system.
**Woman at Point Zero**

*Woman at Point Zero* is a 1975 novel written by the acclaimed Egyptian activist Nawal El Saadawi. The novel follows the life of Firdaus, who is in prison facing execution for murder.

As Firdaus tells the story of her life from the prison cell, the reader learns that Firdaus became a successful sex worker after being tricked into prostitution while escaping her abusive family home. Unlike in *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, the illicit, non-normative sex in *Woman at Point Zero* is not primarily concerned with sexual orientation or an intimate relationship, but is instead Firdaus’s sex work. Throughout the novel, Firdaus reflects on her sex work as a means to be freer than other women, accumulating in a strong critique of normative heterosexual relationships. While the sex portrayed in the novel is heterosexual, the sex is marked as illicit because of the transactional nature, the illegality, and the marital status of Firdaus’s male clients.

El Saadawi’s critique of normative heterosexuality and gender roles takes place throughout the novel, but intensifies at the end of the novel upon Firdaus’s return to sex work. El Saadawi (1975/2007) writes:

> A woman’s life is always miserable. A prostitute, however, is a little better off. I was able to convince myself that I had chosen this life of my own free will. The fact that I rejected [men’s] noble attempts to save me, my insistence on remaining a prostitute, proved to me that this was my choice and that I had some freedom, at least the freedom to live in a situation better than that of other women. (p. 121)

The passage showcases the straightforward voice of Firdaus and El Saadawi and explicitly addresses the positionality of women in society in relation to sexual access. There are two significant aspects of this passage that underline the role of sex as a disruptive act of resistance: the focus on choice and the comparison between sex work and wives. El Saadawi’s emphasis on free will in this passage is noteworthy because
Firdaus’s concept of her own freedom is contingent on her ability to choose. This passage is in direct contrast with previous sections in the novel in which Firdaus had no choice to engage in intercourse, whether that be rape or others tricking her into prostitution. In the framework of illicit sex as resistance, the focus on choice as the arbiter of freedom reinforces the concept that sex as an act can liberate women from restrictive sexuality norms.

While the passage does not directly refer to married women in contrast to prostitutes, the comparison Firdaus makes between herself and “other women” is repeated throughout the novel to juxtapose prostitution and marriage. By arguing that sex work allows women more freedom than she would otherwise have, El Saadawi is directly framing illicit, non-normative sex as a liberating act. El Saadawi confronts the transactional nature of the heterosexual paradigm by emphasizing Firdaus’s free will and economic success and raising it above the subliminal exchanges of normative, heterosexual relations that do not benefit or empower women. Earlier in the novel, El Saadawi (1975/2007) widens the concept of transactional sexual relations: “All of us were prostitutes who sold themselves at varying prices, and [an] expensive prostitute was better than a cheap one” (p. 102). In this framework, all (heterosexual) sex is oppressive and normative heterosexuality—sex in marriage, sexual access in exchange for implicit benefits—strips women of their ability to own their sexual access, but non-normative sex is a space in which women can exert power over their body, sex, and existence.

When Firdaus is luxuriating in her free will, she states “My body was my property alone, but the land of our country was [men’s] alone” (p. 123). Not only is Firdaus exerting agency over her body, she is juxtaposing her body to the state; this comparison reinforces the concept of the state’s relationship to the female body and sexual access. In the novel, Firdaus refuses to be carted by the police to a head of state’s bed. El Saadawi (1975/2007) writes “I knew nothing about patriotism, [my] country had not only given
me nothing, but had also taken away anything I might have had, including my honor and dignity” (p. 122). Firdaus’s refusal to bed a head of state on police orders is not just a sexual rejection, but a rejection of the state’s intrusion into her body and the state itself. Firdaus is refusing to be colonized; the police and the anonymous head of state are emblematic of colonial state authorities seeking sexual access to her body. In this way, Firdaus’s agency over her body and sexual access is not just about non-normative sex, but it is also about the rejection of the male colonial access to her body.

In *Woman at Point Zero*, illicit sex is not an alternative to heterosexual norms, but rather a mirror-image of normative heterosexuality that frames the transactional nature of sex and oppression of women in more explicit and economic terms. As seen in the passage, choice is the crucial factor in the use of non-normative sex to reject normative heterosexuality. While Firdaus thrives economically and actively rejects the institution of heterosexual marriage, it is her choice to be a prostitute, not prostitution itself that makes her sex acts disruptive.

**Conclusion**

The novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *Women of Sand and Myrrh* portray two different versions of non-normative sex as an act of resistance. Queerness and sex work in the novels show that non-normative sex is both an act and a sexual orientation; it can involve intimacy, and it can involve trauma. In the case of *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, Nur and Suha’s affair was an interpersonal mobilization of non-normative sex to find relief from the restrictive structures of the colonial heteronormative state—their husbands, their limited mobility, their atomization. In contrast, Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* intentionally rejected the entire system of heteronormative society with her sex work. Despite their differences, both novels portray female characters extricating themselves from the oppressive colonial
heteronormative state by choosing to engage in non-normative sex. Suha, Nur, and Firdaus in their respective circumstances all reject the normative institution of marriage in favor of sexual choice and freedom from restrictive gender orders.

The novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *Women of Sand and Myrrh* are both strong cases of illicit sex manifesting in different ways but still accumulating in a rejection of colonial heterosexual normativity. By focusing on these two works, this paper intends to include a narrative of colonized women’s voices who are denied agency in mainstream neocolonial rhetoric about gender in the Middle East. Moreover, it is necessary to focus on literary works from the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America to draw a stronger connection between historic colonialism by Western powers and the sexual stratification in various societies. The theoretical framework presented in this paper is key for understanding not only the sexual argument, but rather an overarching argument about the colonial imposition of restrictive gender and sexuality. This framework is also significant for study of both sexuality and post-colonial societies because it centers women’s autonomy and focuses on sex as a liberating act. In future research, the framework of non-normative sex as disruptive to the colonial heteronormative state can be applied to other literary works to include other forms of illicit sex.

**Rain Tiller** is a fourth-year student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, studying political science, international relations, and gender studies. Tiller seeks to analyze foreign affairs through an Intersectional framework sensitive to multiple relations of power. Tiller’s research focuses on the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the relationship between identity and political change.
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Banning Blackness: Race, Gender-Based Violence, and Classroom Censorship

By Amelia Roskin-Frazee

ABSTRACT. This paper examines how the relationship between race and gender-based violence impacts how schools choose which books to ban. In particular, this paper focuses on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and the novel's place on the American Library Association's compiled lists of the most frequently banned books in the United States. Using an analysis of *The Bluest Eye* in conversation with the work of academics such as Spillers (1987) and Crenshaw (1991), this paper posits the intersection between race and rape in *The Bluest Eye* — and how that intersection implicates white supremacy in gendered violence — which leads to schools banning *The Bluest Eye* more frequently than other books involving rape without a racialized lens.

The American Library Association’s list of the most frequently banned books in the United States makes an easy reading list for up-and-coming rebels, but reveals a disturbing reality: books that challenge deep beliefs — especially those rooted in unexamined morality or the destruction of existing systems of power — elicit strong, negative reactions. Despite the Supreme Court’s ruling in the case *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico* (1982) that schools could not ban books on the basis of restricting diversity, the court granted schools leeway to ban books if administrators provided a “non-discriminatory” explanation for the books’ removal, giving schools the leeway to eliminate most books by labelling them “educationally unsuitable.”
The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison epitomizes this problem; the novel, which focuses on an 11-year-old Black girl named Pecola in the 1940s, appears on three of the ALA’s Top Ten Most Banned Books lists from 2001-2014 (ALA, 2017). The Bluest Eye bears the label of containing “sexually explicit content,” presumably referring to a scene in which Cholly, Pecola’s father, violently rapes her. While school districts scrutinizing a book containing graphic rape is understandable, the frequency with which The Bluest Eye stars on banned books lists compared to its thematically-similar counterparts with white protagonists demonstrates how the novel’s banning is predicated upon more than sexual assault. Other books that portray the rape of children just as graphically as The Bluest Eye — Lolita, which portrays the graphic rape of a white 12-year-old, or Speak, which portrays the graphic rape of a white 14-year-old — appear far less frequently on the ALA’s banned books lists, or not at all.

The difference between The Bluest Eye and novels such as Lolita and Speak lies in Pecola’s race. Pecola is Black. More importantly, Pecola’s blackness is tied to her sexual assault through her conflation of blue eyes and safety and the racism behind her rapist’s anger. Even though Pecola’s sexual assault is a short scene in the novel, Pecola’s rape illuminates how racism often intersects with sexual violence. The Bluest Eye incriminates not only Cholly, but everyone complicit in institutional racism, rendering the novel’s content a greater threat to white supremacy and patriarchy than the content of books with sexual assaults divorced from racism. School districts banning The Bluest Eye continues a larger project of white-dominated educational institutions preventing the dissemination of material acknowledging Black women’s humanity and bodily integrity.

Violence Against Black Women

While violence against women is endemic in all communities, it has a particular resonance when men who are subjugated turn against women within their community. Cholly’s
powerlessness in *The Bluest Eye* must be understood in a larger history of white people presuming Black men were sexual predators and rapacious toward white women. In addition, Black men were unable to protect Black women from white men’s abuse and knew lynching was the overarching threat to any Black man who crossed the line (Williams, 1986). A legacy of slavery and domination over Black bodies in the United States leads to what academic Hortense Spillers (1987) terms the “ungendering” of Black bodies in her work, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” This ungendering is a process of stripping Black people of humanity through rendering their bodies mere flesh, rather than extensions of their humanity. Elaine Brown, a former chairperson for the Black Panther Party, echoes this sentiment in *NO! The Rape Documentary* when she states, “To be poor and Black and female in America is about the bottom of all that, because we are so irrelevant ... that’s why we can be raped, because what difference does it make?” (Simmons, 2006). Perhaps Pecola’s rape threatens white supremacist institutions because it actively works against a larger project of ungendering Black bodies. The scene’s location near the end of the novel, a climax after a hundred pages of readers empathizing with Pecola, forces readers to recognize the rape as a violation of a body, rather than a physical action against ungendered flesh. In creating Pecola’s character and providing specific details about Pecola’s life (such as how Pecola identifies with the weeds she sees in sidewalk cracks and how she deals with daily bullying in school), Morrison humanizes Pecola, therefore eliciting feelings of injustice as Pecola’s rape unfolds.

The increased prevalence of violence against Black women, and people treating Black women’s bodies as “lesser” or illegitimate, permeates society beyond school bookshelves. Toni Irving (2007), an assistant English professor at University of Notre Dame, examined police reports of sexual assault perpetrated against Black women in Philadelphia over several years. Irving’s evaluation of police
reports revealed police repeatedly treated Black rape victims as not-victims and unworthy of protection; police often accusing Black victims of being prostitutes. In her analysis of these reports, Irving (2007) asserts, “Failure to investigate implicitly suggests that the women do not live under ‘normal’ standards of social or sexual propriety, that they are outside the community and ineligible for its protection and thus beyond the scope of citizenship” (p. 76). The historical disenfranchisement of Black women plays into the indifference the legal system has to violence against Black bodies, allowing gendered violence against Black women to continue unaddressed. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) similarly evaluated violence against women of color, with a particular focus on the intersection between racism, sexism, and gender-based violence. In her groundbreaking essay, “Mapping the Margins,” Crenshaw conducted a field study of battered women’s shelters in Los Angeles with a focus on shelters situated in minority communities. Crenshaw found a strong correlation between the type of racial discrimination Pecola faces in *The Bluest Eye* — inability to access education or employment, lower socioeconomic status, increased stigmatization— and the difficulty women of color had in Los Angeles accessing anti-violence resources, and consequently, being able to leave their abusive partners. As Crenshaw (1991) notes, shelters “must also confront the other multilayered and routinized forms of domination that often converge in these women’s lives, hindering their ability to create alternatives to the abusive relationships that brought them to shelters in the first place” (p. 1245). Crenshaw’s essay illustrates a societal inability to adequately address the needs of Black survivors of violence.

**Cholly’s Racialized Anger and Dehumanization**

Morrison (1970) frames the rape scene at the heart of *The Bluest Eye*’s banning in a larger narrative of Cholly’s life story. Thus Cholly’s anger at white people forms the backdrop of his violence toward Pecola. Years before Cholly rapes Pecola,
two white men catch Cholly having sex with a girl, Darlene. The men ask Cholly to finish in front of them and shine a flashlight on Cholly as he completes the sex act — an event befitting a “sexual assault” through coercion label, in modern terms. However, rather than hate the two white men for Cholly’s traumatizing experience, the narrator states Cholly “had not hated the white men; he hated, despised, the girl” (Morrison, 1970, p. 42). Cholly transfers his anger regarding his sexual shame and powerlessness to women in his community. Morrison brings up the scene again shortly before Cholly rapes Pecola; this time, Morrison displays the scene in agonizing detail akin to how she describes Pecola’s rape. The proximity of Cholly’s flashback to his decision to rape Pecola creates a powerful fusion between Cholly’s anger at white men and compulsive need to assert dominance over women. The merging of these scenes connects Pecola’s rape to the racist actions of the white men (and thus, institutional racism), implicating white supremacy in the gender-based violence Pecola experiences.

Morrison also reminds the reader of Cholly’s helplessness as a Black man both after he is caught with Darlene and right before he rapes Pecola. This reminder draws a powerful connection between the two scenes. In Cholly reflecting upon what happened with Darlene, the narrator states Cholly “was small, black, helpless” (Morrison, 1970, p. 150). The reference to Cholly’s race in this description reminds the reader that racialized violence forms the basis of Cholly’s feelings of helplessness. Then, only pages after this comment — and right before Cholly rapes Pecola — Cholly’s feelings of helplessness surface when the narrator asks, “What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter?” (Morrison, 1970, p. 161). As with the aftermath of Cholly’s sexual encounter with Darlene, the premise of Pecola’s rape is helplessness, anger, and racism.

Morrison’s image mirroring during scenes of the racial violence Cholly experiences and the sexual violence Pecola experiences furthers the connection between
racialized and sexual violence in *The Bluest Eye*. When Cholly has flashbacks to the Darlene incident, the narrator reveals Cholly “could think only of … Darlene’s hands” (Morrison, 1970, p. 150). In describing Cholly’s rape of Pecola, the narrator remarks Cholly “was conscious of her wet, soapy hands on his wrists” (Morrison, 1970, p. 163). In both incidents, Cholly’s consciousness drifts toward the same imagery — the hands of the girl. The repeated imagery anchors Pecola’s rape in the racism perpetrated against Cholly, thus anchoring rape in racial violence.

**Conclusion**

There are, of course, problems with introducing serious material in high school classrooms — particularly material containing sexual violence like *The Bluest Eye* — due to students’ immaturity. Sharon Bernstein (1995), a sociologist from University of California-Berkeley, recounted her experience observing an eleventh grade English class in a California high school for six weeks as they read *The Bluest Eye*. The class of twenty students contained predominantly Black students with a few more boys than girls (in Bernstein’s binary gender classification). Bernstein’s recollections of the events that took place are disturbing. Bernstein charts the shaming of Black female sexuality in class discussions and the boys’ tendencies to mock or silence the girls in the class. While girls in the class engaged in a conversation directly implicating racism in Pecola’s rape, boys in the class failed to engage in discussions about the intersection of racism and gender-based violence, and further, mocked the violence itself. One boy, Bernstein (1995) recalls, “started swinging his arms as if he were beating someone, and exclaimed ‘But he will tell you as he’s beating you! Clean the house! Clean the house!’” (p. 27). The boy’s comment elicited laughter. In conclusion, Bernstein insinuates perhaps the immaturity with which that high school class approached *The Bluest Eye* is reason to question its use in classrooms.
However, despite the challenges of assigning *The Bluest Eye*, the novel initiates a vital dialogue about racism’s role in motivating gender-based violence. The novel’s subject matter remains relevant to a high school audience, perhaps explaining why the novel provokes discomfort; Black girls are far more likely to experience sexual assault before age eighteen than their white peers and an estimated 40% of Black girls experience sexual abuse or assault before age eighteen (Africana Voices Against Violence, 2002). As Irving (2007) argues, “For the assaulted, silenced, and imprisoned, literature is that rare opportunity to lend voice with wide distribution to thousands of women mired by false classification, disinclination, and devaluation” (p. 80). *The Bluest Eye* offers a small window into a world of violence and discrimination inaccessible in most other literary works portraying gender-based violence, such as the less-frequently banned novels *Lolita* and *Speak*. When schools ignore Black characters, particularly characters who experience sexual violence, schools send a message that Black narratives are inherently obscene and sexual assault only matters if its victims are white. The erasure of Black bodies in accepted literature reverberates in the larger framework of society; for example, Black women are less likely to report instances of rape than their white peers (17% compared to 44%, according to a 2005 Justice Department study), and media coverage around sexual violence focuses principally on white narratives (Adams, 2015). As one student at Morgan State quoted in Allante Adams’ article in *City Paper* puts it, “If a black man rapes a white woman, it’s wrong because white is pure. But as a black woman, if I get raped it’s because I deserved it” (2015).

Pecola may be a fictional character, but schools’ erasure of her plight through banning *The Bluest Eye*, and schools’ classification of Pecola’s story as obscurer than the stories of white female rape victims, accentuates a dangerous norm of ignoring Black survivors of gender-based violence. The fact that gender-based violence is often invisible, and violence against Black women doubly so, makes
understanding Pecola’s plight as a racialized denial of her fundamental rights so crucial.

Amelia Roskin-Frazee is an undergraduate student at Columbia University in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She is an organizer with the anti-sexual violence group No Red Tape and the Founder and President of The Make It Safe Project. She has written about Title IX, gender-based violence, and queer rights in The New York Times, The Huffington Post, and Everyday Feminism.
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The Legacy of the Feminist Bookstore Network: Lesbianism’s Indelible Bookstore Beginnings

By Hannah Quire

ABSTRACT. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, lesbian feminist bookstores exploded across the United States, facilitating the creation and spread of a network that would be fleeting but impactful for those involved. Through its brief vibrancy, the lesbian feminist bookstore network not only provided an outlet through which women could discover their own local communities, but also served as a catalyst through which lesbian feminist politics was expanded, enforced, and encouraged. The positivity of the movement, however, was branded with a distinct lack of intersectional politics, a move that would ultimately see the movement to its demise.

In the “Studying Sexuality” chapter of his book Sex Cultures, Amin Ghaziani (2017) writes:

A real shadows girl or an evening girl, someone who prefers the hour just after dusk, a gal with her own library card, who pays her own way, is well read, scholarly, and independent-minded, a woman who is standoffish, incurable, keeps her hands in her pockets, and stands up on a night train, a shirts-and-trousers female, or a real pal who carries her own purse – in classic films, all of these phrases characterized lesbians. (p. 129)

These allusions all share a core value: the idea that, simply put, lesbian women are women who read. Amidst this imagery stands the feminist bookstore movement, a lesbian-fronted effort to create communities where women could meet to discuss but also congregate and form activist groups with other lesbian feminists in the area. Although at one
point there existed over a hundred lesbian-feminist bookstores, an estimated thirteen total in the United States and Canada remain. In our modern “post-gay” period, with gayborhoods evaporating before our very eyes and the necessity of lesbian feminist meeting places seeming to diminish, we are forced to grapple with the aftermath of such a foundational element of the lesbian feminist movement – what it was, what it means, and where we go from here.

Amidst the proliferation of social movements throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the lesbian feminist bookstore began to emerge. Although they served primarily as feminist bookstores and most took their names to that effect, “historically, the majority of such stores have been owned and operated by lesbians,” thus allowing feminist bookstores to serve as a predominantly lesbian space (Chestnut & Gable, 1997, p. 241). The bookstores themselves existed independently of one another for several years before the coalition took place, with the two earliest feminist bookstores – ICI: A Woman’s Place and Amazon – both opening in 1970. Feminist bookstores thus originally had a local purpose, functioning as meeting places, community centers, and information hubs, acting effectively as the epicenter of lesbian and feminist experience for a particular area. Hogan (2016) writes:

> In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, women used feminist bookstores as resource centers to find out what was happening in each city, who had a place to stay to offer to travelers, and where to find a job when they found a city that felt like home. (p. 2-3)

Feminist bookstores operated with more emphasis on community than anything else. These bookstores of the early 1970s also “function[ed] as organizational structures within the feminist movement,” despite the lack of a concretized system at the time (Chestnut & Gable, 1997, p. 241), contributing textual and interpersonal support throughout a small, close-knit neighborhood.
In this manner, the lesbian feminist bookstore was founded in order to facilitate discourse and community amongst an ostracized group of people. Particularly in the 1970s, public opinion regarding LGBTQ+ people in the United States was abysmally low, forcing men and women underground and into bar culture as a means of finding a community. In the aftermath of the Stonewall Riots in 1969, however, the safety, security, and anonymity of the bar scene was destroyed, leaving LGBTQ+ men and women adrift while still trying to find their place in an unwilling society. Not only was bar culture not always an option for LGBTQ+ men and women in the wake of police exposure and brutality, for many it was not a comfortable place at all; thus, the feminist bookstore was developed as a means of consecrating the lesbian community externally to bar culture, presenting a place where patrons could visit in the daylight and find support, love, and validation. In regards to Carol Seajay’s bookstore, Old Wives Tales:

Most people easily felt comfortable upon entering, because the vision behind the project was a women-owned store where the whole community was welcome. Over the next few years, Seajay watched it grow into an integral and bustling corner of the women’s community on Valencia Street. (Sullivan, 1997)

By creating a safe space in the middle of the tumult surrounding the LGBTQ+ world at the time, the feminist bookstores of the early 1970s built a foundation for what was to come: the Feminist Bookstore Network and Newsletter (FBN), and the proliferation of the women’s movement. In 1976, the first-ever Women in Print Conference took place, bringing together bookwomen across the country, creating what was to become the watershed moment in feminist bookstores’ history. As Kristen Hogan (2017) writes, “Someone had the idea to map out the movement, to take a picture of everyone at the Women in Print Conference standing where their city stood; this was a national network” (p. 29). This moment thus catapulted the bookwomen who
created these local organizations into the national sphere, connecting them across the country in order to facilitate a larger, stronger base. Historically, it was an essential moment; the coalescence of these lesbian feminists was able to bridge gaps that previously left lesbian feminists on the outskirts, rather than part of a cohesive, overarching movement towards social consciousness. By creating this unit, women began to find strength in numbers; just as the aftermath of World War II served to establish gayborhoods in major cities as a result of servicemen and women’s dishonorable discharges for “their real or perceived homosexuality,” the merging of feminist bookstores into an organized network facilitated a similar type of expansionary experience (Ghaziani, 2017, p. 31).

The movement continued to blossom when, in 1977, Carol Seajay founded the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* (the name of which was later changed to the *Feminist Bookstore Network*) as a means of connecting the women of the movement day-to-day. Hogan (2017) writes:

> As the distribution and networking engine of the feminist bookstore movement, the FBN made it possible for bookwomen to build a vocabulary, to document and share important changes in publishing, and to wield influence in numbers to shape and sustain feminist information. (p. 34)

Seajay effectively spearheaded the consolidation of the movement, acting as the driving force; as Laura Tanenbaum (2016) notes, “She [Seajay] helped bookstores change the standard practice of returning books to the publishers if they didn’t sell fast enough, which sent publishers the message that there was ‘no audience’ for feminist books.” In reality, lesbian feminist culture merely lacked a firm communicative network between the women who were “out” and the women who were still struggling to come to terms with their reality; as Ghaziani (2017) notes in regard to urban sex cultures, “[T]he imagery of the closet doesn’t mean an absence of queer life” (p. 30). This imagery is a strictly delimiting and isolating experience, leaving lesbian women
in particular shorted from the rather illuminating moment of group consciousness. A great deal of intersectional feminist theory highlights the necessity of such a consolidation – acknowledging the strengths of individual groups and being able to put those strengths together into a cohesive unit. As Audre Lorde (1980) beautifully notes, “It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we all flourish” (p. 112).

Isolating the lesbian feminist nature of these bookstores is essential, of course, to understanding the sociopolitical functions of such organizations, but even just as a facet of the gayborhood mentality, these bookstores perform important work. The culmination of lesbian feminist bookstores facilitates a conversation about lesbian feminism in that it exposes their existences; Ghaziani (2017) discusses the political importance of the creation of gayborhoods, notably “the success that activists achieved in convincing psychiatrists to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973, among other efforts at social change” (p. 39). Gayborhoods are also typically defined by institutions first and foremost: “The identity of an area as a gayborhood, therefore, emerges more apparently when it houses gay-owned and gay-friendly bookstores” amongst other businesses (Ghaziani, 2017, p. 35). Given the fact that the foundations of the feminist bookstore movement are rooted in lesbian space, lesbian feminist bookstores are equally embedded in this gayborhood identity. Gayborhoods also serve as critical sites of LGBTQ+ social, economic, and political power, echoing the sentiments of feminist bookstores as “movement spaces” (Hogan, 2016, p. 32). It is important to note the historical and social significance of these lesbian feminist bookstores within their individual communities because of the work being done on an individual, community-based level; while the broadening of lesbian feminist bookstores’ horizons and the national expansion of this association of bookwomen is essential for
entirely different reasons, the efforts being made on the local level are critical to the proliferation of positive LGBTQ+ space beyond.

However, despite the positivity of lesbian feminist bookstores and gayborhoods at large, problems lurk beneath the surface. Although Hogan’s book attempts to target the ways women of color were incorporated into the lesbian feminist movement and their essential impact, the separatism of lesbians and feminists (both as individual entities and as a combined movement) participated in an extreme exclusion of women of color. As Chestnut and Gable (1997) mention,

> In the 1970s, all of the feminist presses and most (if not all) of the journals were operated and edited by white, working- and middle-class feminists. Although women of color were published and most of the feminist presses and journals had an articulated antiracist stance, the defining presence in print was that of white feminists and lesbian feminists. (p. 249-250)

This is exemplified in a great deal of the contemporary research and reporting on the lesbian feminist movement of the 1970s and those involved in the process. Kit Quan, cited in the preface of Hogan’s book, is nearly undetectable in modern conversations; articles written both in the late 1990s and in the 2000s neglect to mention her at all, despite the fact that she is a “bookwoman, activist, and author” by Hogan’s (2017) account. Not only did she work in Seajay’s Old Wives Tales, but she did so from the time she was just a teenager, thus indicating the important ways she contributed to one of the most famous lesbian feminist bookstores of the time.

Not only is Quan largely ignored in modern renderings of the lesbian feminist bookstore movement overall, but she is also neglected by Seajay herself. Hogan was the one who made the association between the two bookwomen, connecting their separate recollections:
I had asked, “How many women were in the collective?” Definitely a first interview kind of question. Seajay listed the women: “And then we also had this young woman who was the best friend of my foster daughter. Who, actually, from the first summer the store was open, came in and started volunteering, and then we started paying her... She was an immigrant from Hong Kong, and was having a hard time, wanted to get a job... What do you do with this fifteen-year-old little dykelet? Well, of course.” (Hogan, 2017, p. xiv)

Despite the fact that Quan was her foster daughter’s best friend, acted as a critical component to the continuation of Old Wives’ Tales, and is a notable contributor to the larger lesbian feminist movement as indicated by Hogan’s designation, Seajay elected to keep her name out of the discussion. Instead she chose to focus on her own generosity in Quan’s story, admittedly an important case of lesbian feminist community and the effects of Seajay’s collective; however, the act of leaving Quan out from her narrative illustrates the ways in which white lesbians and feminists effectively silenced women of color throughout their efforts. Furthermore, her depiction of her relationship with Quan in this particular instance is one of pity, using language that prompts the reader to devalue Quan’s contributions.

Understandably, it is rather difficult to extricate the feminist bookstore movement from this white-centered culture given its traditional history. Hogan (2017) attempts to complicate this account, writing, “In Oakland and New York, women of color participated in founding these early feminist bookstores, and lesbians of color or white lesbians participated in founding each bookstore. These founding narratives, then, contradict remembrances of 1970s feminism as straight and white” (p. 4). This is undoubtedly true, but the issues with the white-centric experiences of the lesbian feminist bookstore as an entity are not exclusively entrenched in who was doing the founding or participating. Many of the women involved in the early feminist movement, and in the LGBTQ+ movements of the 1960s-1980s, were people of color. There is a stark difference between recognizing people of color’s involvement in the systems at
work and their inclusion in the movement at large; for although it is quite possible, and probable, that lesbians of color were involved at the local level in the creation and proliferation of lesbian feminist bookstores, their narratives were heavily excluded or censored when it came to the movement, as indicated by Seajay’s thoughtless omission of Kit Quan’s name from her collective’s history.

This is also not limited to the lesbian feminist bookstore, either, of course, but rather a facet of the complicated history lesbianism encounters with people of color in general. Intersectional feminist theory of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries emphasize the essential nature of a community of diversity and inclusion, where the differences are not merely tolerated but celebrated and needed to push the movement forward. As Lorde (1980) writes,

> [O]ur future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality. As women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals... (p.122)

In this manner, we can understand the importance of inclusion within all elements of lesbian feminist discourse; although the intention of Carol Seajay’s recollection of Kit Quan may have been the opposite of malicious, in fact rather harmless, the reality is not the case. Intentionality is not important when harm is still done, and this is a difficult lesson the lesbian feminist movement – and, in this instance, bookstore movement – has been forced to learn repeatedly, oftentimes to its detriment.

The breakdown of the lesbian feminist bookstore and its movement did not occur overnight, although dramatic changes did take place in rapid succession. In 1997, an interview with Carol Seajay was published following the close of Old Wives Tales, with its author writing:
Although San Francisco is poorer for the loss of our women’s bookstore, today there are 120 feminist bookstores all over the United States and Canada (150 loosely counted). In April of 1997, Feminist Bookstore News will celebrate its twenty year anniversary of connecting bookstores across the country. (Sullivan, 1997)

These numbers seem staggering today, and they are; just three years after this publication, Seajay ended the _FBN_, and as the organization tethering independent feminist bookstores together fell apart, so did their broader connection. But the feminist bookstore movement was faltering even before the _FBN_ officially sent out its last edition, due to attacks being waged on all sides and the aforementioned exclusions limiting women of color from being active participants. Amazon, one of the first feminist bookstores opened in Minnesota in 1970, was another unlucky casualty:

In 1999 the store sued the online giant [Amazon.com] for trademark infringement, claiming that confusion had led their customers to the online store and led vendors to offer and then pull discounts. Amazon.com lawyers grilled the bookwomen about their sexuality in court. (Amazon.com lawyer Paul Weller argued that “it’s important for the jury to know whether people who work in the bookstore have a particular sexual orientation.”) The costs of the suit forced the store into a largely unfavorable settlement. In 2008 new owners were forced to use a different name, and the store closed in 2012 (Tanenbaum, 2016).

Amazon fell into the trap of modernity; crippled not only by financial difficulties but more largely the Internet age, Amazon was just one victim of a society clinging to technology. Gayborhoods experienced a comparable decline in the wake of the Internet burst, with LGTBQ+ youth turning to online websites instead of in-person bars, clubs, or bookstores.

The lesbian feminist bookstore movement was, in the grand scope of history, a rather fleeting one. Spanning from the mid-1970s until the early 2000s, not only did the
sociopolitical elements of the movement and the greater connectivity of such bookstores fizzle, but the bookstores themselves did, as well. Today, there are only a handful of such institutions left, but the meager thirteen that remain is stark in comparison to the over 120 the country boasted circa 1997. Given that a meager twenty years has elapsed, it is a bit staggering to come to terms with the vast dismissal so many issued upon lesbian feminist bookstores in the wake of the FBN’s end. Seajay, in the article published around the twentieth anniversary of her publication, stated, “We had a vision that women could learn to do for ourselves, that we could make our own mistakes, and I still believe this passionately” (Sullivan, 1997). Although that sentiment is heartwarming, the reality is far grimmer – there is much more to maintaining a social movement than passionate belief alone. As Tanenbaum writes:

Activists often criticize these projects [of prefiguration] as a distraction from the real work of organizing. To some extent this is true: Women’s bookstores alone could not fight the massive backlash against feminism of the 1980s from which we have not fully recovered. And yet their loss remains a powerful one. (Tanenbaum, 2016)

However, in spite of the great tragedy that remains at the desecration of such a powerful and necessary women-fronted movement, hope still remains: those thirteen lesbian feminist bookstores are still in operation today, which is certainly more than zero. As Seajay says, “But I do think that there being lesbian books changed even the lives of the women who didn’t read. Because it changed the lives around them” (Hogan, 2017, p. 2).

Hannah Quire is a third year English and Women's and Gender Studies double major in the Honors College at the University of South Carolina. She is a member of her university's Women's and Gender Studies Partnership Council, is an active member of her sorority Chi Omega, and
also acts as a University Ambassador. She is currently in the process of preparing her senior thesis, which will combine postcolonial and transnational feminist theories in order to uncover the unique effects globalization and migration have upon women and the ways in which literature has sought to portray that struggle.
References


Integrating Trans Identities into Knowledge Production
(C)locked Up: Transgender Women in the American Prison System

By Krystina Millar

ABSTRACT. The most recent statistics indicate there are an estimated 3,200 transgender inmates in the United States correctional system. The majority of trans inmates in prison are trans women. Regardless of criminal status, transgender individuals face social isolation, violence, and both explicit and implicit discrimination. These hardships are often magnified inside the walls of a correctional facility. In addition to facing institutional challenges, transgender women must navigate the culture of prison as someone who falls outside of normative conceptions of gender in a sex-segregated environment, often characterized by androcentrism, hypermasculinity and violence. This article aims to review the literature on the experiences of transgender women using theoretical conceptions of gender and gender performance, as well as highlight some of the unique challenges faced by trans women behind bars. Specific problems faced by trans women include violence and sexual abuse, lack of adequate healthcare, and being denied gender affirming accommodations. Research grounded in feminist standpoint theory is needed in order to prioritize the voices of trans women in prison, increase awareness of the hardships faced by trans women, inform activism efforts, and achieve institutional change.

The most recent statistics indicate there are an estimated 3,200 transgender inmates in the United States correctional system (Beck, 2014), the majority of them being trans women. Institutional discrimination, such as lack of trans-specific healthcare, failing to provide protection from violence and sexual assault, and placing inmates in prisons according to sex assigned at birth, creates mental and physical danger for trans women behind bars. In addition to facing institutional challenges, trans women must navigate
the culture of prison as someone who falls outside of normative conceptions of gender in a sex-segregated environment, often characterized by androcentrism, hypermasculinity and violence.

Regardless of criminal status, transgender individuals face social isolation, violence, and both explicit and implicit discrimination. These hardships are often magnified inside the walls of a correctional facility. This article aims to review the literature on the experiences of transgender women using theoretical conceptions of gender and gender performance, as well as identify some of the unique challenges faced by trans individuals behind bars. Inmate-centered research, and research on trans inmates in general, has only minimally informed policy. This is likely due to the trans population being small, trans issues not being prioritized by policy makers, lack of visibility and awareness of the trans population, and the prevalence of institutional problems, such as inmate mistreatment, inadequate resources, and high rates of recidivism. By employing feminist standpoint theory and grounding advocacy work in the lived experiences of incarcerated trans women, activism efforts can focus on specific issues and institutional changes as identified by the inmates themselves.

**The Standpoint of Trans Women**

Research on the incarcerated trans population should not be an end itself, but a means to achieve social justice and social change. Given the marginalized nature of the trans population, research efforts must be conducted that prioritize the well-being and protection of trans women, and with the ultimate goal of improving conditions for the incarcerated trans population. Feminist standpoint theory refers to “a method of inquiry that works from the actualities of people’s everyday lives and experience to discover the social as it extends beyond experience” (Smith, 2005, p. 10). Oppressed groups experience reality differently than
dominant groups, and their standpoints reveal aspects of society invisible to those in power (Collins, 1989; Smith, 1992). Knowledge and claims of reality are determined by experts who represent the epistemic standpoint of their own social position. When dominant groups, such as cisgender individuals, are the experts who validate new claims and knowledge, the experiences, thoughts, and realities of marginalized populations are discredited (Collins, 1989). By implementing research methodology that is grounded in the experiences and realities of incarcerated trans women, policy and change that accurately addresses the experiences, needs, and safety of trans women can be put into place.

Despite the limited amount of empirical research on the experiences of and unique problems faced by incarcerated trans women, there is an overall consensus in the literature that suggests trans women are a vulnerable population that faces harms related to violence, healthcare, lack of gender affirmation, and sexual abuse (Bassichis, 2007; Clark, White Hughto, & Pachankis, 2017; Dorsey, 2015; Jenness, Maxson, Matsuda, & Sumner, 2007; National Center for Transgender Equality, 2012; Sexton, Jenness, Sumner, & Macy, 2010). Nearly all research that has been conducted on the experiences of trans individuals in prison is qualitative given the relatively small population of trans inmates (Beck, 2014), and the difficulty of conducting research on small populations in prison (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Sumner & Sexton 2016). Due to the qualitative methodologies used in most of the studies reviewed, researchers have been able to convey in great detail the highly personal experiences of trans individuals navigating the prison system. The lived experiences of trans inmates should provide starting points for future research and efforts to promote institutional change to improve the lives of individuals from across the gender spectrum in prison.
Prison as a Gendered Institution

As demonstrated by the fact that most correctional facilities are sex-segregated, prison as a social institution assumes cisnormativity, or the ideology that everyone is cisgender. Sumner and Sexton (2016) compared how trans inmates interact with the larger institution of the sex-segregated correctional system to Minow’s (1990 as cited in Sumner & Sexton, 2016) idea of the dilemma of difference. According to Minow, focusing on difference is likely to introduce objections from the majority, and promote harmful ideologies and stigma. On the other hand, ignoring difference can silence harmful ideologies and stigma, but often fails to meet the needs of marginalized groups. When applied to the case of trans inmates, the dilemma of correctional institutions is either to acknowledge the sex-segregated correctional system that has historically been uncontested, failed a marginalized population, and begun to provide more inclusive accommodations for trans inmates, or to deny that the system is inherently flawed and refuse to change the institution to fit the needs of others apart from the sex-segregated cisgender inmates for whom it was designed (Sumner & Sexton, 2016). Ignoring differences between trans and cisgender inmates is unjust because it fails to protect trans inmates from harm, as well as neglects their unique physical and mental health needs.

The primarily sex-segregated United States correctional system is a social institution in which gender is highly salient. The reality of life as a trans woman in an all-male prison is characterized by the inability to pass as a cisgender female and woman. The fact that a prison is all-male immediately reveals the sex assigned at birth of each inmate, regardless of an inmate’s gender performance. Instead of aiming to pass, many trans women aim to conform to a set of traditionally upheld gender norms in order to be affirmed as women (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014).

An overarching theme among trans women was the pursuit of being “the real deal,” defined by Jenness and
Fenstermaker (2014) as “the complicated dynamic whereby transgender prisoners claim and assert their femininity in prison—a hegemonically defined hypermasculine and heteronormative environment with an abundance of alpha males, sexism, and violence” (p.13). Trans women consistently vocalized their acknowledgement of themselves as male, and being recognized by others as male. However, if a trans woman was able to perform gender in a way that is traditionally prescribed to women, they were able to achieve a status of being seen as a “real woman” by the “real men” that lived among them. Being seen as a cisgender woman was unable to be achieved, so a different standard of being seen as a “real woman” was to be constantly pursued by trans women (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Sumner & Sexton, 2016). This new standard is for trans women to continuously pursue a context-oriented feminine gender performance and live according to normative standards for femininity set by the prison culture, such as earning the affection of men and pursuing an increasingly feminine appearance.

Often used by the trans community, “clocked” is a slang term for one’s status as trans being revealed. Because of their inability to pass, many trans women reported feeling less pressure to hide aspects of their bodies or deny their anatomical differences from cisgender women. One woman reported her fears of wearing shorts due to perceiving her legs as manly, but her fear of being clocked, or “outed,” was not applicable in the prison environment. She stated, “Now I’ll wear shorts, too, even though I have manly legs” (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, p.15). On the other hand, there are serious risks to being known as trans in an all-male prison. Some trans women reported never having the issue or fear of being clocked outside of prison (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014). Being known as trans increases one’s chances of being the victim of sexual or physical assault (Jenness et. al., 2007)—a risk that may have not existed in such capacity prior to being incarcerated.
Trans women reported utilizing their unique position in the social hierarchy of an all-male prison environment to receive protection from victimization due to one’s trans identity. Trans women reported trying to earn the respect of other inmates—specifically cisgender inmates they considered “real men”—by behaving in a way one described as “staying in the woman’s spot” (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, p.18). Trans women shunned promiscuity and excessive aggression, and praised passivity and being “lady-like” (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, p.7; Sumner & Sexton, 2016). Participants reported receiving greater attention from men inmates, such as men letting them go first in line at meals, men defending them in altercations, or receiving increased sexual attention. Trans women reported feeling affirmed in their gender identity and felt recognized as “real women”—even when this treatment was characterized by increased unwanted sexual attention (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Sumner & Sexton, 2016). One woman said, “I’ve found that men need women to be vulnerable. They want to take care of you—almost like a pet. I like it” (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, p. 25). The fact that trans women spoke positively of their often exploitative treatment from men is indicative of internalized transmisogyny in that trans women experienced benevolent sexism and as a sign of privilege, or affirming of their identity as a woman.

The Experience of Being Trans Behind Bars Correctional Facility Placement

Prisons are segregated by sex, and placement in a prison facility is often determined by sex assigned at birth. Therefore, trans women have historically been placed in all-male prisons (Bassichis, 2007; Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Jenness et al., 2011; Sexton et al., 2010). In addition to being placed in a sex-segregated facility, the inmates are placed in either a general population setting or in protective custody. Protective custody is used to protect vulnerable
inmates from violence or other harm enacted by other inmates. While some trans women have reported protective custody being desirable, some reported missing out on vocational or educational programming, or being more vulnerable to harassment and violence from correctional officers because of a lack of security cameras or oversight (Bassichis, 2007). This vulnerability is especially dangerous for trans women due to their marginalized status and already increased likelihood of being victims of sexual and physical assault (Jenness et al., 2007).

**Violence and Sexual Abuse**

Physical and sexual violence disproportionately affect incarcerated trans individuals. Incarcerated trans women are 13 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than cisgender inmates (Jenness, et al., 2007), and 58.5% of transgender inmates in California reported experiencing sexual assault since being incarcerated (Jenness et. al., 2011). Reports of sexual misconduct were even higher; 69.4% of trans inmates report being the victim of some type of sexual misconduct since being incarcerated (Jenness et al., 2011). Interviews with trans women conducted by the Sylvia Rivera Law Project discussed the issue of trans inmates experiencing violence and sexual abuse. Every inmate interviewed reported some sort of harassment or assault during their time in prison. When physically, sexually, or verbally assaulted by other inmates, trans women reported the corrections officers failing to intervene, giving explicit permission, or even participating in the abuse themselves. Trans women reported frequently being involved in forced prostitution and coerced sexual activity by both inmates and correctional officers. (Bassichis, 2007).

The violence experienced by trans women was influenced by one’s status as trans and the social implications of fighting with a trans woman. The prison environment is characterized by androcentrism, hypermasculinity and violence, and trans women’s subordinate status make them
likely targets. Trans women spoke of the frequent harassment and violence they faced on a daily basis, which ranged from derogatory comments, to fights, to stabbings. A cisgender inmate acknowledged that despite a trans woman’s gender identity, he recognized she was “still a man” and “can fight me as hard as anyone” (Sumner & Sexton, 2016, p.632). One trans woman spoke of violence among trans and cisgender inmates as a “lose-lose situation” because of the lack of status awarded to an individual who “beat up a dude with breasts,” and the shaming of inmates who, if they lose the fight, get ridiculed for getting “beat up by a dude with breasts” (Sumner & Sexton, 2016, p.632). Staff shared similar opinions regarding victimization and violence towards trans women. More often than not, staff did not think trans women were more likely to be victims of violence because being violent towards a trans woman did not lead to an increase in prison status (Sumner & Sexton, 2016). However, this perception is inaccurate, as shown by the high rates of victimization of trans individuals in prison (Jenness et al., 2007).

Medical Treatment

Trans individuals often have specialized medical needs ranging from hormone treatment, to gender confirmation surgery. Additionally, many trans individuals benefit from psychotherapy or support groups with others who identify as trans (Bockting, 2008). Upon incarceration, trans inmates can lose the ability to get the care they need. Gender-related services are often seen as cosmetic, and unnecessary (Clark et. al., 2017), despite transition-related procedures being considered medically necessary (American Medical Association, 2008).

Federal prison policy states that trans inmates must have been diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder and on hormones prior to incarceration in order to receive hormones while in prison (United States Department of Justice, 2017). Many trans women could not obtain a
prescription for hormones from a doctor because of poverty, discrimination, or lack of insurance. Some resorted to obtaining hormones from non-medical sources (including other inmates) once being incarcerated. However, even trans inmates who had gone through the means necessary to receive hormones reported their treatment has not been consistent nor correct. Several inmates reported being arbitrarily denied their doses, or having their hormones incorrectly dosed (Bassichis, 2007).

Additionally, sex-reassignment surgery, or gender-confirmation surgery, is a medical procedure that some trans individuals elect to undergo in their lifetime. Gender confirmation surgery is not an option for inmates in nearly all states. Only recently did California become the first state to allow a trans woman to receive state-financed gender confirmation surgery (Phillips, 2017). Because of the severe distress experienced by trans women who are not able to receive the medical treatment they need, several reported resorting to attempting to perform surgery on themselves, or know other inmates who did the same (Bassichis, 2007).

**Gender-Affirming Accommodations**

In addition to the more severe harms of violence and denial of appropriate medical treatment, trans women are faced with a host of everyday problems ranging from issues with clothing, to lack of privacy. Specific policies vary by jurisdiction, but trans women in all-male prisons are not allowed to have certain hairstyles, wear makeup, have longer nails, wear nail polish (Bassichis, 2007). Until very recently, trans women were not permitted to wear bras. Federal prison policy now permits trans women to wear undergarments of their identified gender (United States Department of Justice, 2017). Inmates who have experienced these denials of the opportunity to express their gender reported feeling traumatized and experiencing other negative mental health outcomes (Bassichis, 2007; Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014; Sumner & Sexton, 2016). This is
unlikely to cause many problems for most cisgender inmates, but this policy effectively denies some trans women one of the only feasible ways to express their gender identity in prison.

Additionally, because of the communal nature of the showers and bathrooms, trans women reported often not being given privacy. Trans women who are on hormones or have undergone surgical body-modification procedures reported increased unwanted sexual attention from other inmates, even when fully-clothed. Several trans women reported experiencing both verbal and physical sexual harassment as a result of using communal bathrooms (Bassichis, 2007). These denials of everyday aspects of performing gender have much larger consequences, such as increased gender dysphoria, increased risk for violence and harassment, and negative mental health consequences, that must be taken into consideration by the powers at large of the prison system.

**Moving Forward**

Social scientists often aim to cultivate an ethic of objectivity, or prioritizing separating their own interests from the subjects and objectives of their research. While this objectivity can be necessary in order to generate sound and unbiased results, being interested in a subject or invested in a cause does not equate to invalidating knowledge generated by one’s research (Smith, 1972). Researchers whose primary objective is to be neutral on issues related to the negative experiences and treatment of incarcerated transwomen are neglecting to use their position of authority and privilege to improve the lives and living conditions of a marginalized population—at times translating to being neutral to situations of life and death. Therefore, it is imperative to marry research with advocacy efforts to improve living conditions, policy, and resources for incarcerated trans women.
Given the marginalized status and increased risk of discrimination, trans inmates should be protected by formal policy informed by inmate-centered research prioritizing the voices and needs of those personally affected by a broken system. Dorothy Smith’s (2005) conception of relations of ruling can be applied to prison as a social institution. Relations of ruling refers to the “extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our everyday lives—the corporations, government bureaucracies, academic and professional discourses, mass media, and the complex of relations that interconnect them” (Smith, 2005, p.10). Institutional organization, policy, administration, and change in prison are governed by the dominant group of cisgender men. Effective social change occurs when the needs of a particular group are prioritized in a way that validates and holds as true lived experiences in informing the identification of injustice. In order to put standpoint theory into practice and allow marginalized voices to enter into the system of ruling relations, institutional change must be grounded in the lived experiences of incarcerated trans women.

Based on the existing research on the experiences of incarcerated trans women, trans inmates as a whole should be given agency to be a part of the decision making process of determining the gendered facility in which they are to be housed in order to prioritize their safety, wellbeing, and access to gender-affirming accommodations. Additionally, there is a need for increased protection for trans women, whom are at increased risk for violence and abuse, that does not employ the use of solitary confinement. The perpetrators of abuse should be punished, not the survivors.

Trans inmates should not be required to stop their transition process, or be restricted from beginning the transition process, as a result of being incarcerated. Correctional facilities should employ preferred name policies and the ability to legally change one’s name and/or gender. In terms of access to trans-specific medical care,
correctional facilities should provide trans inmates with access to hormone replacement therapy regardless of inmate possession of a prescription prior to incarceration. Trans individuals may not have a medical prescription for hormones for a variety of reasons, such as being unable to afford medical care or hormones themselves, not being ready to begin hormone therapy, being on street hormones, or being in the process of obtaining a prescription prior to arrest. Similarly, gender confirmation surgery and other medical procedures should be accessible for trans inmates if deemed medically-necessary as determined by a healthcare provider experienced in treating the trans population.

Trans inmates are given little to no visibility due to their marginalized status and scarcity in the prison system. The harms faced by trans inmates warrant greater advocacy and change to improve prison conditions for not just trans inmates, but all inmates. The injustices faced by trans inmates, such as not receiving medically-necessary care, being frequent targets of sexual violence, and hostile discrimination from fellow inmates and staff, are symptoms of a larger failing correctional system. By using feminist standpoint theory to inform and direct research and advocacy efforts, priority is given to the voices and experiences of those directly affected by the oppressive and discriminatory practices of the prison system. Mental and physical safety are basic human rights, regardless of incarceration status. Prisons should not be places where individuals struggle to survive, but places of rehabilitation, education, and centers of assistance aimed at preventing recidivism and improving inmate well-being.

Krystina Millar is a junior at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, South Carolina. She is majoring in sociology with a concentration in social justice, and minoring in women’s and gender studies. She is the president of CCU’s feminist student organization, Students Advocating Gender Equality, and is involved with the Social Justice Research Initiative.
and CCU Social Justice Warriors. After graduating from CCU, she plans on attending a PhD program in sociology, and eventually pursue a career as a professor and a researcher. Her areas of interest include gender, sexuality, environmental sociology, social justice, and social inequality.
References


A Gender-Non-Conforming Method: 
Trans* Methodologies for Trans* Subjects

By ilia Forkin

ABSTRACT. This paper analyses the methodology of sociological studies on gender-non-conforming (GNC) subjects in the context of prominent critiques by GNC theorists who have asserted the necessity of centering the needs, perspectives, and cultural work of transgender (trans*) and GNC academics and subjects. The paper explains how studies which favor an interactionist model of sociology prioritize notions of gender which uphold heteronormativity and erase the lived-experiences of the subjects they concern. As a solution to this obstacle, this paper proposes strategies to assist in the creation of participatory models of sociology which engage with gender in a way which reflects the diverse interests and needs of GNC people along the entire spectrum of marginalized gender identities. This paper attempts to act as a reference tool for both trans* and cisgender academics who hope to do work which contributes to equitable treatment and representation of all oppressed subjects.

Recent increases in the visibility and awareness of transgender (trans*), non-binary (NB), and gender queer (GQ) individuals and communities have led to an explosion of new sociological studies concerning these groups. The increase of interest in pursuing academic inquiries of people of marginalized gender identities (hereafter referred to using the umbrella term “gender non-conforming,” or GNC) has lead theorists and sociologists to expand on the vocabulary and methods they use to locate patterns in GNC communities. Contemporary studies have explored new interpretations of the performance and process of gender, coining terms like “redoing gender,” “doing transgender,”
and even “doing non-binary gender” (Darwin, 2017). It is essential that as the field of transgender studies progresses, sociologists and theorists who engage with it remember to not only build on the breakthroughs in GNC studies of the past several decades, but revisit failures that led sociologists to publish studies which have actively harmed or silenced GNC communities. To this end, I will analyze the methods used in several recent studies that focus on NB youth, as well as some more tangential studies of trans* and queer communities which contextualize the current academic treatment of GNC subjects.

To inform my position on what I believe are the next steps for these sorts of scholarly investigations, I will also draw on a few guidelines for ethical treatment of GNC people in sociology published in the last fifteen years. Transgender sociologist J. Hale published a numbered list in response to unfair treatment of transsexuals in the field of sociology that emphasized the importance of regarding transsexual people as the ultimate experts on their own experience. Hale recommended incorporating transsexual voices and personal accounts into all scientific studies of their lives and warned against sociological treatments that pathologize or generalize transsexual people by representing them in a “monolithic or univocal” manner (J. Hale, 2006). Because Hale’s suggested rules are rooted in a vocabulary and culture of transness specific to their publishing in the late 1990s, my analysis is also heavily informed by a slightly more recent synthesis of Hale’s work which articulates the importance of giving GNC subjects space to exert their own agency and contribute their own dialogues about their lives and struggles (Shelley, 2008). To broach this issue, I will focus specifically on NB youth in order to lend visibility to an oft-forgotten group, applying Hale’s lens to address the contradictions between some essentialist sociological analyses of young NB people such as Rimes, et al.’s (2017) study, and the desire that many NB people have expressed to be defined in terms that reject or move beyond a binary understanding of biological sex (Darwin, 2017). As a
contrasting example, I will highlight Darwin’s (2017) use of an online GQ forum as a data source and articulate how her methodological approach gives way to a more comprehensive understanding of the main struggles young GNC communities face, and how to overcome them. Throughout my analysis, I will reference perspectives from GNC individuals interviewed by CN Lester, a GNC activist and journalist, in order to augment this paper’s definitions of 21st century trans* notions of gender with the other GNC individuals’ life experience. In discussing instances where sociologists studying NB youth have met, exceeded, or fallen short of the expectations laid out for them by GNC theorists, I hope to create a base from which sociologists can build new strategies for studying GNC people and their lives which conscientiously center their safety and empowerment.

Rimes et al.’s quantitative study of NB youth attempts to assess and locate the source of mental health issues in NB people through a comparison along two axes: comparing the experiences of NB youth with binary transgender youth, and the experience of “female sex assigned at birth” (SAAB) and “male SAAB” GNC subjects (Rimes et al., 2017). This study’s dependency on SAAB as a key variable strays from Hale and Shelley’s guidelines significantly by emphasizing some elements of the subjects’ lives while leaving out others, enforcing a monolithic view of NB identities. For example, it fails to acknowledge factors such as the age at which the subject transitioned or the fluidity or stability of their gender identity and expression. Rimes et al.’s methodology also excludes any mention of the diversity along the spectrums of biological sex and gender identity embodied by NB people, leading to a dichotomous view of all people as either biologically male or female, and either cisgender or transgender. In order to analyze the effects that this approach had on Rimes et al.’s interpretation of their data, I have isolated two significant trespasses against NB agency which their methods engage in: physiological essentialism and intersex exclusion.
Rimes et al.’s study shows that “female SAAB” participants (binary and NB) were significantly more likely than their male SAAB “counterparts” to report a current mental health condition, a history of self-harm, and childhood sexual abuse. Their choice to divide their subjects by SAAB did reveal a statistically significant pattern, but one which has already been well explored (ONS, 2016), and one which leads them to name biology as the most significant influence on the health of NB youth. Their decision to emphasize biological maleness or femaleness in their method diverts attention from the lived experiences of NB people and is antithetical to many NB peoples’ understanding of sex and how it interacts with gender. This practice reifies a physiological essentialism which defines GNC people’s identities by how they deviate from a supposedly static and essential assigned sex category, rather than recognizing their expressions of gender as unique, fluid, and complex beyond a separation from their biology. As GQ writer Hel Gurney puts it in an interview with Lester,

As for sex – well, I believe... that ‘sex’ (as commonly understood in my cultural context) is a discursive construct that’s used to make sense of bodies, but one that is frequently erasing of their variety and complexity. Humans are not uncomplicatedly divided into ‘male’ and ‘female.’ (2013)

Just as the Rimes et al. study situates NB peoples’ identities within a biological binary without their consent, it also erases a demographic within the NB community that has a non-binary relationship to their own biological sex. The practice of excluding all intersex interviewees from data collection (Rimes et al.), while simplifying data interpretation, produces an incomplete picture of the physiological diversity within GNC communities, rendering the experiences of some NB people, for whom the “...relationship to [their] gender is informed by [their] experience of physiological difference” (Kermode, 2013), invisible.
Avoiding the precarious terrain of creating surveys which might include inherently cis-centric or essentialist biases, some academics have chosen instead to analyze already available first-hand narratives from NB and other GNC people. Aviv's (2012) construction of a narrative of queer homeless youth in New York, for example, explains the circumstances of these young people from the perspective of a queer woman, using quotes from her and members of her chosen family to ground the story in the authentic voice of the people it involves. This strategy is especially potent in that it allows the researcher to play the role of arbiter, organizing and contextualizing the information they have gathered, while still leaving space for them to step aside and let subjects use their own words to articulate sensitive and personal topics like identity, intimacy, abuse, house insecurity, assault, and the impacts of HIV and AIDS on their community.

Following suit, Darwin's qualitative study (2017) gathers its data from comment threads on the GQ subsection of Reddit.com, a forum created by GNC people to be a supportive environment to host dialogues about identity and expression. Darwin draws on Goffman’s (1959) sociological concept of a “backstage,” to describe this subreddit as a location where marginalized people who share common experiences are free from the gaze of the normative structures that enforce their oppression and can openly express themselves. Despite its significant lack of ethnic/racial diversity (Darwin, 2017), this backstage is an exemplary site of genuine, unedited GNC voices describing their own experiences. Their accounts reveal the key issues preoccupying GQ youths (gender identities, gender expression, and coming out), elucidate an understanding of what the interactive process of “doing gender” means for GNC people, and reveal the vast gender diversity within those subjects who identify on the GNC spectrum. These revelations may serve as useful tools to clarify NB people’s understanding of their own gender, and may also help gender conforming individuals who have never been...
exposed to the idea of a person who identifies as “...a big mish mash of gender” (p. 8), understand what their GNC child, friend, employee, or relative might be trying to articulate.

Highlighting queer voices in sociological studies regarding GNC people is essential for producing work that serves GNC communities. To grant them genuine ownership over work which uses their experiences as material, sociologists must also be weary when they extrapolate their studies’ conclusions for the greater field of gender. Sociologists foreclose on their research’s potential as a conduit for delivering information and insight between different GNC communities when they project their own formulations of what is potent or useful back onto GNC experience. This practice obfuscates the social changes GNC people are actually looking for, and possibly reinscribes binaries or terminologies that constitute the structures of oppression that the GNC subject’s interventions seek to problematize. It is likely true that people who have an untraditional relationship to gender identity think about gender in exceptional ways (Darwin, 2017), but that alone does not justify the appropriation of their experiences. By simplifying GNC people’s experiences into rhetorical mantras about NB peoples’ “...potential to redo gender” (p. 15), for example, sociologists no longer play the useful role of a conduit for delivering information and advice between different GNC communities, and instead project their own concept of what is potent or useful about these experiences, obfuscating what social changes GNC people are really looking for in the process. This practice is accentuated by sociologists who treat GNC lives as sensational oddities and, in their excitement, reduce their subjects’ worlds and interactions into specimens. Studies like Pfeffer’s (2012) analyses of trans families, by choosing only to interview the cisgender female partners of transgender and transsexual men, silence GNC voices. Furthermore, by claiming to be working towards centering marginalized voices while failing to include the words of any of the GNC people they purport to study, sociologists speak in their stead, proclaiming that
GNC peoples’ experiences with intimacy will “work to usefully reconfigure the very notion of “family” itself” (p. 4) without asking if that is what GNC communities intend, want, or need.

Sociologists like Darwin and Pfeffer are engaging with an interactionist model, which derives qualities of society from the practices of individuals and communities (Mead, 1934). Essentially, these academics are suggesting that the behaviors and lifestyles of GNC people have the potential to shift widespread social understandings and gendered interactions, framing GNC practices in terms of what they can do for those who are gender conforming. By using their own terminology to propose how GNC people’s experiences might interact with society at large, and by framing that interaction in terms of “success” (Darwin, p. 15), while failing to provide first-hand opinions from GNC people about what successful social change looks like to them, these studies have placed themselves at odds with Hale’s insistence that researchers refrain from “imagin[ing] that you can write about … [trans] discourse … without writing about [trans] subjectivities.”

The cultural spotlight which once completely eclipsed GNC people has expanded to include a more diverse spectrum of identities. But as visibility for diverse gender identities and expressions increases, the degree to which sociologists and other researchers reflect on their own practices must remain apace to the challenges inherent in studying marginalized subjects. Not only does the exclusion of GNC perspectives increase the risk of disseminating pathologizing or misleading vocabulary, it also seriously affects data interpretations. As the results of Darwin’s study has shown, studies which give space for GNC people to speak for themselves produce data which is respectful, relevant, and accessible to GNC communities and theorists who wish to expand on the concepts most important to those communities. To conduct future studies which emulate the supportive treatment of queer and GNC people in some of the research discussed here, sociologists should engage in the
following practices: (1) using first-hand narratives from the subjects; (2) looking for qualitative data in “backstage” locations; (3) coupling interactionist interpretations with GNC voices; and (4) using language that acknowledges the diversity within GNC identities and respects the subjects own interpretation of the significance of gender, identity, expression, SAAB, and biology. Above all, it is essential that researchers both revisit critiques like Hale’s and Shelley’s to inform an ethical methodology and use institutional resources to search for other, new editorial pieces like theirs. In Hale’s own words, “If [GNC people] attend to your work closely enough to engage in angry, detailed criticism, don’t take this as a rejection, crankiness, disordered ranting and raving, or the effects of testosterone poisoning. It’s a gift.”

ilia Forkin is a transfeminine Women's & Gender Studies and Theatre major at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Her academic and artistic projects are focused on creating alternative trans* narratives, mythologies, and modes of embodiment, and exploring ways to corporealize them through performance and collaborative storytelling. She recently facilitated and acted in Willamette University Theatre department's first main-stage performance to feature openly trans* actors in roles which reflected their gender identities.
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Transnational Feminism
Decolonizing Gender-Based Violence Advocacy: The Development of an Undocumented Survivor Resource Training

By Zulema Aleman

ABSTRACT. The field of advocacy for the end of gender-based violence has constantly grown. Some could say that there is continual action taking place at multiple levels to ensure the protection of survivors, but the direction is often influenced by the perspective of those in positions of power. Regardless, both the social and legal movements have focused primarily on gender and often disregarded how other social identities, such as immigration status and race, intersect with sexual violence and thus create a range of experiences. The undocumented community is one of these groups who face higher rates of gender-based violence due to multiple systems of oppression. In order to address this issue holistically, specifically within the university setting, the advocacy field needs to be informed of the range of experiences of undocumented immigrant survivors, the steps towards cultural competency that need to be taken, and the unique support and resources needed to advocate for this community. This training seeks to be part of the solution by providing education to campus communities in the following areas: (1) foundational knowledge regarding the undocumented community, (2) cultural considerations, and (3) expanding awareness of resources available across the university, county, state, and nation.
Gender-Based Violence in the University Environment

It has been reported that 20 to 25% of college women experience rape or attempted rape during their time in college (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen & Stevens, 2011). This statistic is commonly known as the “one in five college women” statistic in universities. In addition to this statistic, gender-based violence is considered to be the most underreported violent crime in the United States. Less than 5% of completed and attempted rapes of college students are reported to campus or local law enforcement and in 80 to 90% of sexual assault cases the survivor knows their perpetrator, which plays a role in the survivor deciding to report and pursue justice (Karjane, Fisher & Cullen, 2005).

Federal and State-level Legal Action

Since the 1990s there have been various legal efforts to end gender-based violence on campuses and therefore provide a safer learning environment. An example can be found in the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 which requires (1) for federally funded higher education institutions to give timely warnings of possible threats to the campus community; (2) to keep a log of crimes reported within 60 days; (3) to keep crime statistics from up to eight years; and (4) to make available an annual security report to both prospective and current students as well as staff and faculty (Karjane, Fisher & Cullen, 2005). This act was later renamed to “Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act” in honor of the college student who was a victim of rape and murder and whose parents pursued a lawsuit to hold colleges accountable. This act is now is commonly referred to as the Clery Act.
Title IX is another example of a measure taken to promote a safe learning environment for college students, especially with the inclusion of gender-based violence under Title IX. This federal law protects students in federally funded institutions from gendered discrimination. The creation of the “Dear Colleagues Letter” issued by the United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in April 2011, under the Obama Administration, stresses that sexual assault is a form of gender-based discrimination that is actionable under Title IX (Karjane, Fisher & Cullen, 2005).

As of 2017, with the appointing of Mrs. Betsy DeVos as the Secretary of Education under the Trump Administration, it was announced that she would be reviewing the Obama-era guidance on campus sexual assault. She has expressed concern that the current policy denies due process to students who have been accused, therefore favoring and protecting perpetrators on college campuses. This potential change in how to interpret Title IX and the way gender-based violence is handled in higher education institutions has left survivors uncertain of their protection on their campuses. This uncertainty creates a barrier to seeking resources even to the most privileged.

The Undocumented Community and Gender-Based Violence

Even though gender-based violence is a phenomenon that affects people of all backgrounds and identities, historically, marginalized communities experience it at higher rates, with immigrant women being two times more likely to experience gender-based violence (Tahirih Justice Center, 2017). While gender-based violence is already an underreported crime, undocumented immigrants face additional and unique factors that can influence their decision to report, such as
their residency status and cultural and religious beliefs (The White House Council on Women and Girls, 2014).

In a group of Latina immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence from the Central Coast of California who were surveyed on reasons to why not disclose their abuse and seek help, 98.4% of the participants who were undocumented listed a fear of detainment and deportation by the police as one of the primary reasons. In support of this finding, a survey done by a coalition of national organizations involving 700 victim advocates and attorneys found that 78% of the immigrant survivors who were in contact with the victim advocates and attorneys had concerns about contacting the police. In one case, a 16-year old survivor attempted suicide due to fear that her offender would report her and her family to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, et al., 2017). This community finds themselves in a paradox where the institution that holds their protection and key to justice is the same one who could detain them due to their residency status.

Financial stability is another key influencer that affects the decision an undocumented survivor might make about seeking resources and protections. For example, if a survivor is financially dependent on an abusive partner, there is an additional barrier for them to achieve an independent and safe life. In the data collected from the group of Latina immigrants in the Central Coast of California it was found that more than 80% of the participants made less than $24,001, with 23% of them reporting no independent income at all (Aleman, 2017). This creates a situation where undocumented survivors, who often have children, have decide to either stay in an abusive household or fall into poverty and potentially homelessness (Zorza, 1991; Baker, Cook, and Norris, 2003; Browne and Bassuk 1997; Moe, 2007).
Even if an undocumented survivor generates their own an income, due to their documentation status, the job opportunities available are ones with low wages, little to no benefits and a labor-intensive environment, which makes them more vulnerable to sexual violence in the workplace (Bergman & Cediel, 2013). An example of this can be seen in a study done in San Diego with undocumented immigrant workers, 17% of 826 employees reported some kind of physical threat, which in several cases included sexual violence from supervisors (Zhang, Spiller, Finch & Qin, 2014). ASISTA, an advocacy group focused on immigrant survivors of gender-based violence, surveyed 100 immigrant women in Iowa and found that 41% had reported unwanted touching, 30% reported receiving sexual propositions while at work, and 26% reported being threatened to be fired or demoted if they defended themselves from the advances from their superiors (Yeung & Rubenstein, 2013). Undocumented survivors require financial stability in order to have access to basic human needs such as food and housing, but they must remain in a place where sexual violence is prevalent, whether that be their home, their workplace, or both.

The Undocumented Community and Legal Action

In our society, there are different legal protections available to undocumented survivors in order to ensure their safety and prosecute offenders. Three forms of relief for undocumented survivors, intended to alleviate the factors that make undocumented survivors most vulnerable to sexual violence, will be emphasized in this section. Through receiving work authorizations, creating a path towards citizenship, and gaining access to public benefits, undocumented survivors can work toward creating a safe and independent life for themselves and their family.
The first form of relief is The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) which provides a form of relief for non-citizens who have been victims of gender-based violence perpetrated by a citizen who is related to them, such as their spouse, child, or parent. Through the “Self-Petitioning” process, a survivor can petition for work authorization, citizenship for themselves and qualifying family members, and other public benefits that will support them in gaining independence from their spouse, parent or child. In order to be considered for this, survivors must provide proof of the abuse or assault (Immigration Center for Women and Children, 2017).

In 2000, Congress introduced the U Nonimmigrant Visa (U-Visa) under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act with the reauthorization of VAWA in 2000. This visa protects immigrant workers who are survivors of sexual assault in the workplace. Like the “Self-Petitioning” process through VAWA, the U-Visa provides undocumented survivors a path towards citizenship for themselves (and qualifying members) and other public benefits, as long they contribute to the investigation of their sexual assault and prosecution of the perpetrator (National Immigration Law Center, 2010).

The third form of relief is for those in a university setting, which can include both students and employees. Title IX, which was defined previously, cannot retaliate against undocumented survivors for their residency status and should treat all students, regardless of their immigration status, equally. Title IX can actually protect immigrant students from retaliation from other parties involved if they report to the office (Jahangiri, 2017).

Although there are forms of relief for immigrant survivors available it does not mean all immigrant survivors have access to or qualify for them. The social identities they exist in, the social culture they live in, as well as their
independent feelings and experiences can prevent them from reaching out to these resources.

**Steps Needed Towards Culturally Competent Advocacy**

Even though legal action exists towards ending gender-based violence and providing support and resources on college campuses and beyond, it is important to push for programs and advocacy work that focus specifically on the undocumented community and for intensive research and resources to include the specific racial and ethnic groups that could fall into this category. Programs should work with cultural competency as the center and should pay attention to the range in experiences, languages, and religions. These topics are necessary to build inclusive advocacy work and decolonize gender-based violence.

Often times in advocacy work, the individual experience of the undocumented survivor community goes overlooked, and this leads to stereotyping. In order to best support this community, it is vital to work from a lens that does not homogenize the “undocumented survivor” identity. An immigrant survivor’s country of origin, access to a path towards citizenship, language proficiency, location in the United States, social economic status, range of abilities, and class are all identities that can affect how one might experience gender-based violence, as well as what protections they have access to (Reina, Lohman, & Maldonado, 2014). As posed by Reina and her fellow researchers, the historical, political, and economic context as well as the intersections of various identities (e.g. race, class, gender, and sexuality) need to be taken in consideration when advocating and being a resource to the undocumented community. Therefore, in order to provide resources and advocacy for this community, it is essential to dismantle the homogenous perspective of immigrants and the
“undocumented survivor” experience, as it does not exist as a singular experience.

Due to differences in experiences, the needs of undocumented survivors differ when it comes to resources required in recovery and legal advocacy. For example, it is essential to provide advocates who speak various languages as well as resources for this variety in language. When 92 intimate partner violence resource agencies were surveyed, 25% of agencies had no services available in other languages for their clients. Half of these agencies also reported that their clients’ native language was one other than English (Medina & Vasquez, 2004). Explored by Reina and her colleagues in their research, the intersections of an individual’s identities and the contexts in which gender-based violence occurs must be taken into consideration in order to provide robust and culturally competent advocacy before those resources are available.

Choi, Elkins, and Disney (2016) found that undocumented survivors reach out to faith communities before other advocacy-focused resources and thus, the inclusion of the faith community is essential to reach these communities. This can be done by providing resources to religious institutions and creating partnerships with local religious leaders. Through outreach and education of local religious institutions of various types, this community can find advocates within their own group who can empathize at a deeper level than advocates who come from more privileged identities.

**Introduction of Intervention at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo**

The intervention described below was initially started as a senior project in 2017 which sought to fill in the gap in culturally competent resources for undocumented survivors of gender-based violence at California Polytechnic State
University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly). Through my role as the first-ever Undocumented Student Liaison at Safer (Cal Poly’s confidential resource for sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking), I began researching and developed curriculum and resources to improve services for undocumented student survivors of gender-based violence. This culminated in the 60-minute Undocumented Survivor Resource Training, which has since been updated and offered multiple times as a supplemental training for staff, faculty, and students at Cal Poly.

Participants

The participants for this presentation have varied but remained members of the Cal Poly community, specifically those involved in diversity and inclusion efforts at the university. In the initial stages of development (January 2017 to May 2017), the training was exclusive to Safer-affiliated students. Safer is the gender-based violence education, prevention, and advocacy resource at Cal Poly.

In June 2017, the training’s audience was extended to individuals across the university who were affiliated with the UndocuAlly Working Group through their training series. The UndocuAlly Working Group (previously named Undocumented Student Working Group) is a working group on campus established in 2015 and focused on creating an “UndocuFriendly” Cal Poly through their trainings and events, as well as support of the development and opening of the Cal Poly Dream Center. Since January 2018, this training was offered to the wider campus community as a supplemental training to the main training series by the UndocuAlly Working Group.
Training

There were 27 slides used for the 60-minute training. (See Appendix A for excerpts and a link to the full set.) This training was meant to be informative and interactive. It can be divided into six major topics, which include: (1) Introductory material to gender-based violence and the undocumented community, (2) Research on this topic both at a national and local level, (3) Cultural considerations in this field of advocacy, (4) Understand legal basics and forms of relief for immigrant survivors, (5) Immediate steps participants can take to support this work, and (6) Resources available on campus, in the county, and nationally.

Supplemental Material

There are three items that are supplemental to the training. The first was an adapted Power and Control Wheel (see Appendix B). The general Power and Control Wheel is a tool used to demonstrate the ways an abusive partner can use power and control to manipulate a relationship by giving specific examples of how tactics like emotional, financial, and psychological abuse are used. The wheel was reformatted to highlight the unique situations undocumented survivors are in when involved in an abusive relationship.

The second item was a two-page summary titled, “Key Findings: 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors” (Appendix C). This handout, published in May 2017, is used to supplement the main activity and give a narrative to the training.

The third item is an informative pamphlet for participants to take with them (Appendix D). The pamphlet includes graphics regarding the undocumented survivor community, an excerpt from research quoted in the presentation, contact information to resources available in
the county, state and nation for undocumented survivors, as well as steps individuals can take to be a more effective ally.

**Procedure**

In early 2017, the 2016-2017 Safer staff received a 60-minute training on introductory material of the undocumented students population, as well as the undocumented survivors population. Due to the amount of information covered, it was determined that a focused training on being a resource to undocumented survivors was needed as part of the campuses initiative of diversity and inclusion. With the guidance of the UndocuAlly Working Group and Safer, I began to do independent library research in order to create foundational knowledge. At the time, this information did not exist publicly at Cal Poly, and many were unaware about the experiences of undocumented survivors and the resources they need. This training went through several revisions to adapt to the political climate surrounding undocumented immigrants and gender-based violence since it was first created and continues to change.

The most recent version of the training is 60 minutes long. The beginning of the training is focused on introductory content and takes six minutes to complete. The second slide is used to review the objectives of the training, which included: (1) Examine the context of undocumented/immigrant survivors in the world of SA/DV advocacy; (2) Understand the role of cultural competency within SA/DV advocacy; (3) Understand Legal Basics — Common Forms of Relief for Survivors, (4) Identify next steps to support undocumented students who are survivors and; (5) Recognize resources available to undocumented survivors at a county, state and national level. After introducing the objectives for the training, key terms are reviewed as
introductionary information about gender-based violence and the undocumented community.

The next portion of the training is focused on the current climate and includes the main activity of the training. It begins with slide 5 and takes 15 minutes to complete, with active participation from the attendees. Slide 5 features headlines from news stories published from February 2017 through January 2018, which give examples of the experiences undocumented survivors have had under the Trump administration. These headlines are used to support the main activity, and take a look at specific research done by seven national organizations focused on gender-based violence and immigrant survivors. The National Network to End Domestic Violence, ASISTA Immigration Assistance, Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network, Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Tahirih Justice Center, National Domestic Violence Hotline collected data from April 12 to April 25 of 2017 by surveying 715 advocacy centers and attorneys from 46 states in order to better understand how current immigration enforcement policies and the push for stronger enforcement efforts under the Trump Administration has affected immigrant survivors.

Participants are asked to get into groups with people around them and review the handout titled “Key Findings: 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors,” and then discuss their thoughts and initial reactions with their group for 5 minutes. This handout covers quantitative data such as percentages and ratios, as well qualitative data in the form of statements from attorneys and advocates on their clients’ narrative. After having time to discuss with the people around them, slide 7 which displays the key findings is introduced and the groups are brought back to the larger group to have share out
what they had discussed, to the extent that they feel comfortable doing so.

Since this information is new to a lot of people, some participants might not know how to express their thoughts and reactions. In order to help start the discussion, the facilitator should share their initial reaction or a statistic they found surprising in order to encourage others to share. Additionally, allowing space for silence is important. Participants are also encouraged to respond to each other and ask clarifying questions during this section. Time can be extended, if necessary.

Following the group discussion, statistics regarding Latina immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence in the San Luis Obispo County are reviewed put this this experience in perspective and bring it closer to home. This portion takes 7 minutes to cover. The data shared was gathered by RISE, the county’s gender-based violence prevention and resource center, in 2015 and then published in an article titled “The Complex Intersections of Being a Latina Immigrant Survivor” (Aleman, 2017). The article discloses information regarding the abuse 78 Latina immigrant survivors had experienced, why they had not disclosed to anyone about it, as well as their reported income, primary language and residency status. All of this information was utilized to demonstrate how these experiences are not foreign to our county, and action needs to be taken.

The section that follows the political climate covers cultural considerations in gender-based violence survivor advocacy. This section takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. This section serves to remind participants that in order to wholly be a resource to undocumented survivors; it is essential to understand the role of intersectionality within gender-based violence and how culture can play a role. The Power and Control Wheel, along with quotes from Dr. Sujata
Warrier and research from Angelica S. Reina, is used to aid a discussion about the economic, political, and historical context in which gender-based violence occurs. The discussion also explores how race, gender, class, and sexuality (among many other identities) have an impact on the type of abuse a person may receive and the resources that are available to them. The work of Dr. Warrier and Reina are also used to discuss how culture must be taken into consideration without stereotyping. As this section can be hard to understand, participants are given time to ask clarifying questions.

The next portion of the training takes about 10 minutes to complete and covers common forms of relief for survivors. Two common forms of relief are covered, as well as their limitations. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is the first legal resource discussed with participants. The “Self-Petitioning” process that was added to VAWA allows undocumented survivors to petition for protection from the government through stay and employment authorization, a path towards citizenship and government benefits, which all allow for survivors to be able to start independent and safe lives. The U-Visa is discussed as other available legal resources. This resource came from the reauthorization of VAWA in 2000 through The Battered Immigrant Women Protection Act of 2000. The U-Visa is focused more on sexual assault occurring within the workplace and its benefits, requirements of eligibility and limitations are discussed. To wrap up this section, participants are reminded that they are not expected to become legal experts and the reason why we share this information is for them to be aware that resources do exist. Participants are encouraged to refer individuals to confidential resources and legal experts in the county, and a list is displayed and explained.
The last section of this training takes about 7 minutes to complete and shares how participants can be a resource. Mandated reporting is explained to participants, as many participants might be employed through the university and therefore be considered mandated reporters. Safer is offered as a resource for participants if they have additional questions. Immediate steps participants can take are also shared in ways they can be a resource. The steps cover information such as creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, furthering their education on the topics by taking other trainings, staying updated on news, seeking resources from groups on and off-campus and remembering that they do not have to become a legal expert, as confidential resources are readily available on and off-campus.

The training is wrapped up by going over local and state resources and going over national resources focused on immigrant survivors, as well as contact information for on-campus advocates and resources, such as Safer, the UndocuAlly Working Group and the Dream Center.

**Results**

Since being incorporated as a supplemental training to the UndocuAlly Training Series by the UndocuAlly Working Group, participants have not been given the opportunity to formally evaluate this training. Instead, indicators such as attendance and the review and approval of the UndocuAlly Working Group members have been used to measure its success.

This training has been offered three times privately to Safer staff, volunteers and volunteers in training as well as members of the campus community who are affiliated with the UndocuAlly Working Group during the 2016-2017 academic year. The three times it was offered, attendance...
was very high, to the point where there were no seats and participants had to stand in the back. This training was offered again in January 2018 as part of a campus-wide Teach-in through the Office of University Diversity and Inclusion and attendance reached 45 participants. This training was asked to be presented again to the campus community in April 2018 in the continuation of the campus-wide Teach-in, due to its popularity and success.

In February 2018, the most updated version of this training was presented to the UndocuAlly Working Group and the overall feedback was positive. They provided feedback such as extending the training’s duration and providing additional information about the undocumented community since this training is open to anyone on campus and some participants might not have foundational knowledge. The latter feedback was adapted prior to the April 2018 presentation.

Discussion

Being a survivor or victim of gender-based violence in college is a common narrative for many, and the undocumented community is not exempt from being part of the statistic. Establishing resources catered to this community and their unique needs as well as providing and institutionalizing trainings for advocates which educate them on the resources available to this community is necessary in order to ensure this field of advocacy is decolonize. This training intended to highlight how other social identities besides gender intersect with sexual violence in order to ensure many more marginalized communities are served.

Though this training was not formally evaluated, the push by the Office of University Diversity and Inclusion and UndocuAlly Working Group to have this material available
for the campus community as well as the reception to the training the various times it was offered showed that this information was something not a lot of people had knowledge about, even if they were involved in this field. Various participants have reached out after each presentation to discuss what they had learned and said they felt confident in being a resource if someone who was undocumented disclosed that they were a victim/survivor of sexual violence.

Limitations and Solutions

The main limitation of this training is that it has not been formally evaluated, so it is difficult to say it is as successful as we believe it to be. By creating a pre- and post-evaluation form for participants, data could be gathered that could be helpful to better evaluate and improve this training. The pre-evaluation form could ask participants questions about their knowledge on the undocumented community, gender-based violence at large and resources available. This would give a baseline for the level of knowledge of the participants who take this training. The post-evaluation form could show a learning curve of the participants by asking their ratings in the usefulness of the material and training as a whole, and ask how comfortable they feel being a resource to undocumented survivors.

Another limitation is the length of this presentation. Though an hour is ideal in the university setting, as many staff, faculty, and students might not have more time to spare due to their busy schedules, expanding this training even by 30 minutes could improve it, as it would provide more time for discussion, reflection and the addition of the pre- and post-evaluation. It could also give space to discuss non-legal forms of reliefs such as shelters available for a survivor, food
pantries in the area, and other support that can help a survivor begin an independent and safe life.

The last limitation is the audience of the training. Even though this training was offered three times to individuals who were part of advocacy efforts at the university, the rest of the times it was offered, it did not have audience from advocacy organizations. It is beneficial for outsiders to know this information and be aware of how they can be a resource, as someone could disclose to them in their lifetime. In order to ensure that this transformation is institutionalized though, advocacy organizations should work towards ensuring that this type of curriculum becomes embedded and constant in their trainings for their staff every year, and therefore provide this community with more active support.

Conclusion

The inclusion of the undocumented community in gender-based violence advocacy is crucial in order to move towards the liberation of all people from sexual violence. This training seeks to be part of that liberation and the decolonization of the field of advocacy in order to move towards ensuring marginalized groups, such as the undocumented community, are aware of their rights and protections, as well as all available resources that can alleviate the violence they experienced. By educating advocates and allies of the undocumented community, more awareness on cultural competency and resources and a better understanding of the community can occur. Formally evaluating this training, expanding the length of the presentation, and ensuring this becomes part of the curriculum in advocacy organizations would improve the support available to the undocumented community when it comes to gender-based violence.
Zulema Aleman is a Cal Poly Alumni, with a Bachelor's of Science in Psychology. As someone who comes from a mixed-status household, Zulema has focused her career in serving the undocumented community and doing research on the intersection of gender-based violence and documentation status, with a focus on Latinas. She is currently serving a year as an AmeriCorps CSU STEM VISTA where she supports undocumented students through her roles as the Coordinator of the UndocuAlly Working Group and the Student Support Lead at the Dream Center.
References


Appendix A:

The full slide presentation can be found at: www.scribd.com/document/379197002/Decolonizing-Gender-based-Violence-Advocacy

Please contact zulema.alemann@gmail.com for a copy of the full training including handouts in Appendix C and D.

Excerpt from training slides:

Figure 1:
“We argue that research on domestic violence within minority groups must not solely focus on victims, perpetrators, communities, or cultures, but rather must be viewed within the political, historical, and economic context in which domestic violence takes place. The intersectionality framework provides a multilevel analysis of multiple systems of oppressions, namely, race, class, gender, and sexuality to explain power dynamics and the structures and mechanisms that undergird oppression in our society.”

- “He Said They’d Deport Me”: Factors Influencing Domestic Violence Help-Seeking Practices Among Latina Immigrants by Angelica S. Reina, Brenda J. Lohman, and Marta María Maldonado
Figure 3:

- U Visa
- Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act
- VAWA (1994, 2013)
- Self-Petitioning

Legal Basics: Wrap-up

- You are not responsible for becoming a legal expert.
- Refer students to confidential resources and legal experts such as:
  - Safer (Cal Poly Campus)
  - RISE (Off-Campus)
  - Amber Heffner, Immigration Attorney in SLO County
Immediate Steps

1. Create a welcoming environment by:
   a. Getting to know the resources available through the Dream Center and Safer.
   b. Becoming an ally + advocate through trainings offered by Safer and the UndocuAlly Working Group.
   c. Placing Safer and UndocuAlly stickers + resources in your office and space on campus.
   d. Being aware of the language you use when discussing issues of gender-based violence and immigration.

2. Staying informed on immigration and gender-based violence related news.

3. Seeking clarification from Safer and the UndocuAlly Working Group, if necessary.

4. Feeling comfortable referring students to legal + confidential resources.

   a. "I cannot offer legal advice, but here are resources that will help."

   More information at: https://safer.calpoly.edu/faculty-and-staff

Office of University Diversity + Inclusivity | Cal Poly, Dream Center

Winter 2018
Appendix B:

Power and Control Wheel:

**Forms of Domestic Violence that Immigrants Experience**

- **Physical Abuse**
  - Isolation
  - Emotional Abuse
  - Economic Abuse
  - Sexual Abuse
  - Intimidation
  - Using Citizenship or Residency Privilege
  - Threats
  - Using Children

Adapted by Future Without Violence // www.futurewithoutviolence.org
Appendix C:

**Sprinkle: An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies | Vol. 11, 2018**

**3 OUT OF 4 ADVOCATES**

Survivors’ Fear of Seeking Legal Remedies

**KEY FINDINGS**

2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey

Regarding Immigrant Survivors

- Increase
- No change
- Other
- Decrease

Are your agency observing a change in the number of immigration-related questions from survivors?

Yes

78%
Appendix D: Gender-based Violence and Undocumented Immigrant Survivors

Resource Handout By:
UndocuAlly Working Group
In Collaboration with
Cal Poly Dream Center
Office of University Diversity & Inclusion

**Gender-based Violence and Undocumented Immigrant Survivors**

**Additional Resources**
*Resources with an asterisk are not confidential.

**Cal Poly Resources**
- Safer (Cal Poly) [http://safer.calpoly.edu](http://safer.calpoly.edu)
- Title IX Office* [https://equalopportunity.calpoly.edu](https://equalopportunity.calpoly.edu)
- Dream Center* [http://dreamcenter.calpoly.edu](http://dreamcenter.calpoly.edu)
- UndocuAlly Working Group* [http://undocually.calpoly.edu](http://undocually.calpoly.edu)

**SLO County Resources**
- RISE (SLO) [http://risesk.org](http://risesk.org)
- Stand Strong [https://standstrongnow.org](https://standstrongnow.org)
- Amber Hoffner, Immigration Attorney [http://www.amberhoffnerlaw.com](http://www.amberhoffnerlaw.com)

**State Resources**
- California Coalition Against Sexual Assault [http://calcasa.org](http://calcasa.org)

**National Immigrant Focused Resources**
- Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network [http://nationallatinonetwork.org](http://nationallatinonetwork.org)
- Tahini Justice Center [https://www.tahini.org/](https://www.tahini.org/)

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**On Being a Proactive Ally**

1. Create a welcoming environment by:
   a) Getting to know the resources available through resource centers like the Dream Center and Safer.
   b) Becoming an ally and advocate through trainings offered by Safer and the UndocuAlly Working Group.
   c) Placing a Safer and UndocuAlly sticker in resources in your office and space on campus.
   d) Being aware of the language you use when discussing issues of gender-based violence and immigration.

2. Staying informed on immigration and gender-based violence related news.

3. Seeking clarification from Safer and the UndocuAlly Working Group, if necessary.

4. Feeling comfortable referring students to legal-confidential resources
   a) "I cannot offer legal advice, but here are resources that will help."
“Each victim is not only a member of their community, but a unique individual with their own responses. The complexity of a person’s response to gender-based violence is shaped by multiple factors.”

- Dr. Sujata Warrier, Director of New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

The Complex Intersections of Being a Latina Immigrant Survivor: How Multiple Systems of Oppression Enable Intimate Partner Violence

Zulma Alman, 2017

“Looking into the experiences of Latina immigrants allows for a deeper understanding of intimate partner violence within marginalized communities... During this political climate, undocumented survivors might decide to not file a domestic violence case, but still could benefit from other resources... [which could be] ways that a survivor can get away from an abusive partner and begin building their own life. Expanding the subjects of our research is essential as it allows for translation into advocacy for more effective and culturally sensitive organizations.”

By Gianna Bissa

**ABSTRACT.** U.S. American law has been responsible for slavery and genocide through the use of imperial forces such as the military and policing since the beginning of the formation of this nation. In this essay, I present contemporary forms of State sanctioned violence that have ultimately increased the United States' economy through rendering particular communities as disposable. I use examples of war, removal, occupation, and murder perpetrated by American law in order to disrupt the notion that law guarantees security. Furthermore; I build from Foucault's theories of biopolitics and apply a more modern framework of necrocapitalism to further contextualize and problematize concurrent, violent injustices being executed through the weaponization of American law.

The necessity of law in the U.S. is something so fundamentally ingrained into social consciousness that its cultural function and utility may go unquestioned. Standardized education conditions students in the U.S. to believe that the current system of democracy and equal justice is carefully formulated and fully matured. Unfortunately, the U.S. frequently engages in undemocratic practices, as well as violent ones. In this essay, I engage with theories of biopolitics first developed by Michel Foucault and explore the potential of “necrocapitalism” as a means of reframing key episodes from recent U.S. history. Foucault’s concept of biopolitics calls attention to the numerous, disparate ways in which regimes of authority value, devalue, commodify, or eradicate human life. In building on Foucault
and thinking with the concept of necrocapitalism, I aim to highlight the particularities of violence, displacement, enslavement, and imperialism that shape how biopolitics is practiced in the U.S. Throughout my discussion, I draw on recent episodes from U.S. history to put forth an argument about how the concept of “necropolitics” can be a generative way of thinking critically about law and its mechanisms. In this essay, I hope to amplify the voices of the authors and pieces I interrelate to demonstrate how the Gulf War, Hurricane Katrina, the illegal occupation of Palestine, displacement through Gentrification in the U.S., and Police Violence have been used intentionally to sustain and contribute to the embodiment of racism and classism that materializes into modern necrocapitalism.

The Misconception of Law as Security

According to Nunn (2013), law professor Robert Gordon describes law as “one of the many systems of meaning that people construct in order to deal with one of the most threatening aspects of social existence: the danger posed by other people” (p. 558). After explaining this phenomenon of why law is created, Nunn (2013) then points out that it is actually the State that may kill and enslave us (Nunn, 2013). Therefore, a fear of law might be, or even should be, more justified than a fear of each other. Law is a system to determine what is rewarded, and what is punished by famine, death, captivity, or even genocide (Nunn, 2013, p. 558). Cultural critic Henry Giroux (2016) applies the framework to the horrific aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to expand of Foucault’s theory of biopolitics. The devastating events that followed Hurricane Katrina serve as impeccable examples of how biopolitics in the modern United States is executed. Days after Katrina had nearly annihilated the Gulf Coast, the aftermath was revealed:

hundreds of thousands of poor people – mostly black, some Latinos, many elderly, and a few white people – packed into the New Orleans Superdome and the city’s convention
center, stranded on rooftops, or isolated on patches of dry highway without any food, water, or any place to wash, urinate, or find relief from the scorching sun. (Giroux, 7-8)

There was either a clear lack of urgency to protect the lives and dignity of millions of people under the Bush administration or existing law and policy allowed for an urgency to be practiced in uneven, undemocratic ways.

According to Giroux (2016), news broadcasters depicted videos and images of “dead people, mostly poor African-Americans, left uncollected in the streets, on porches, and in hospitals, nursing homes, electric wheelchairs, and collapsed houses, prompted some people to claim that America had become like a ‘Third World Country’” (p.8) after the initial storm of Katrina. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) forbid “journalists to accompany rescue boats as they went out to search for storm victims” (Giroux, 2016, p. 9). As an elementary school student, I remember learning that Katrina was a natural disaster. Our classrooms raised money for the helpless victims of the catastrophe, with no concrete information about how the country was repairing the damages. Giroux (2016) applies Foucault’s theory of biopolitics that exemplifies “the death-function in the economy” where biopolitics is justified primarily through a form of racism in which biopower “is bound up with the workings of a State that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power” (p. 14). The primary bodies and lives that Katrina devastated and trapped were seemingly disposable under the Bush administration, despite the pervasive adherence to ideas of democracy and rule by law within U.S. society.

Fifteen years prior to Katrina, President George H. W. Bush administered the war in Iraq. In 1991, the Gulf War was executed in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait (“Gulf War Fast Facts,” 2018). The U.S. Department of Defense has estimated the incremental costs of the Gulf War at $61 billion (Daggett, 2010). During this time, unpleasant images of the war were censored or white washed (Giroux, 2016, p. 4). In
fact, “instead of providing images of the real consequences of war, the Bush administration and the dominant media present[ed] images of the Gulf War that offer[ed] viewers a visual celebration of high-tech weaponry” (Giroux, 2016, p. 4). This blatant censorship and redirection of public attention is difficult to align with U.S. ideals. Thousands of people were slaughtered, billions of dollars were spent, but public understandings of the military campaign were contradictory and confused. The U.S.’s obsession with exhibiting unmatched military technology rather than the tragedies of the war demonstrated unconcern with not only the lives of people in the Middle East, but also with the lives of Americans on the frontline.

Nunn (2013) alludes to the ways in which laws are supposedly enforced to keep people safe. Laws are advertised to the people as the State’s mechanisms of protection and security. However, as Nunn (2013) indicates, protection is only afforded to a specific demographic of the most privileged people in society. Ultimately, the government is run by an elite group of people that does not represent the diversity of racial or class status that represents the U.S. This lack of representation manifests as the acceptance of the Katrina-affected poor people of color and people in the Middle East dying due to the U.S. government’s unwillingness to respect their humanity. The resources, funding, and volunteers were available to assist people devastated by Katrina, but the Bush administration preferred to let people perish in horrifyingly undignified ways. This failure to act during a time of duress parallels how the law and the State directly sanctioned a meaningless war that resulted in hundreds of deaths that were not at all broadcasted to the public. Keeping the realities of these injustices out of the media is yet another mechanism that enables necrocapitalism to persist.
Colonization, Palestine, and Imperialism

English professor Steven Salaita was offered a position at the University of Illinois in 2013, but the offer was withdrawn in 2014 due to a series of remarks he made on Twitter condemning Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine (Mackey, 2013). In Salaita’s (2016) work, “How Palestine Became Important to American Indian Studies,” he discloses how “American Indian studies has recently forged connections with Palestine at an institutional level – that is, scholars in the field are now producing systematic analyses of Palestine as a geography of interest to our understanding of decolonization in North America” (Salaita, 2016, p. 2). The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS) emphasizes how Palestinian dispossession must be recognized as part of a “framework of world-wide neoliberal practices, rather than merely as a consequence of communal strife or historical misfortune” (Salaita, 2016, p. 5). Much like the war in the Middle East and Katrina, it is crucial that the occupation of Palestine is to be understood as a political and economic issue that arises from the U.S.’s system of biopolitics enacted domestically and abroad. Tremendous parallels have been articulated between the colonization of the Americas and the current situation in Palestine (Salaita, 2016). Salaita (2016) argues that the U.S. actually functions through plutocratic governance that “invariably dispossesses Indigenous peoples and further impoverishes them through resource appropriation, military occupation, environmental destruction, and sponsorship of neocolonial corruption” (p. 9).

As part of his arguments, Salaita shows that social, economic, and ideological incentives exist to encourage U.S. citizens to move into Jewish settlements (Salaita, 2016, p. 11). These incentives are a prime example of the dangers of Western law Nunn (2013) presents in his essay “Law as a Eurocentric Enterprise.” In the U.S., Nunn (2013) argues, it is taken for granted how often our politicians and courts practice “self-congratulatory references to the majesty of the
law, the continual praise of European thinkers, the unconscious reliance on European traditions, values, and ways of thinking all become unremarkable and expected” (Nunn, 2013, p. 560). Americans are socialized from a young age to believe that their country’s laws have been carefully refined over centuries. What is sometimes forgotten is that:

law was used at each step in the conquest and enslavement of African and other native peoples...whenever the European American majority in the United States desires to ostracize, control, or mistreat a group of people perceived as different, it passes a law—an immigration law, a zoning law, or a criminal law. (Nunn, 2013, p. 558)

U.S. citizens need to critically access their laws in a historical context and understand that, while they are continuously told they live in a democracy, citizens and noncitizens are afforded limited political agency to challenge the established legal systems.

Under American law, rigidly set boundaries exist for what is deemed acceptable as political resistance (Nunn, 2013, p. 559). According to Nunn (2013), “Black resistance can go but so far; it cannot infringe on the law of white Eurocentric societies” (p. 559). Western thought is positioned in a framework of dichotomous reasoning, separating self from objects, and then asserting dominance over anything that is not the self. Through this understanding of legitimacy, hierarchies are created to categorize the “superior” and “inferior.” This conceptualization is an extremely harmful. Nunn (2013) emphasizes how this method of forming conclusions has been persistent in upholding racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and more. He juxtaposes this Eurocentric ideal of reasoning with Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity allows for a more holistic understanding of reason and existence. Rather than valuing only what is deemed objective and solidified according to Western empiricism, an Afrocentric worldview includes subjectivity, emotion, and an array of possibilities. It is extremely unfortunate that law school is:
[not only] one of the most conservative educational experiences possible; it is also one of the most racist. Additionally, black law students are forced to reason in the doctrinal and analytical way that Eurocentricity prefers. They are taught to think in narrow, rule-bound terms and to write in the detached, sparse, technical style that lawyers favor.” (Nunn, 2013, p. 560)

American law is becoming increasingly untouchable as law school becomes even more unattainable due to the expanding unequal distribution of wealth and poverty. Even if completing law school is possible for an underrepresented person, they are still subject to traditional Western ways of thinking rooted in bigotry and empiricism.

The traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous peoples around the globe is another alternative worldview. In the collaborative book, *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future,* Priscilla Settee (2008) demonstrates how “Indigenous Knowledge represents the accumulated experience, wisdom and know-how unique to cultures, societies and/or communities of people, living in an intimate relationship of balance and harmony with their local environments” (Settee, 2008, p. 45). She condemns the ways in which neocolonial greed legalizes genocide and biopiracy (Settee, 2008, p. 43). She and many other Indigenous authors expose Western science as irresponsible and unethical. As I presented at the beginning of this essay, the Bush administration glorified military technology as a strategy to redirect the attention away from the war. But, this technology is rooted in a culture that needs to be condemned for its violent and domineering characteristics.

**Death as Profit: From Palestine to Police Violence**

I will now help to further develop the concept of necrocapitalism to expand upon how the U.S. requires physical and social death to sustain the current systems of government. In Achille Mbembé’s (2017) work
“Necropolitics,” he identifies the current occupation of Palestine as the most accomplished contemporary form of necropower (p. 27). He stresses that:

military manpower is bought and sold on a market in which the identity of suppliers and purchasers means almost nothing. Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill. (Mbembé, 2017, p. 32)

He argues that biopower is an economy (Mbembé, 2017). Mbembé (2017) claims that the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death (p. 17). The state creates an acceptability of certain deaths, even in the masses, further illuminating my argument throughout this essay that law, specifically enforced by the U.S., currently and historically holds the power to determine which deaths are legitimate and which deaths are crimes. Some fatalities under Western law are considered massacres, while others are simply bureaucratic decisions.

While I agree with Mbembé that Palestine is a nearly perfect example of the U.S.’s’ monopoly on biopower, I want to expand this idea to American prisons and police violence that disproportionately persecute people of color, specifically Black, brown, and Native peoples. Kwame Holmes’s (n.d.) “Necrocapitalism” details the deliberateness of police brutality against Black people in the United States. Holmes (n.d.) argues that “police have been empowered to treat poverty with deadly force” and that this is evident in the deaths of Oscar Grant, Rekia Boyd, Eric Garner, Alton Sterling who were murdered by police in the same low-income neighborhoods (Holmes, n.d.). Holmes also emphasizes how gentrification and the emergence of suburbs are posing a new threat to Black folks in regard to police violence. In the year following Philando Castile’s death at the hands of a police officer in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, the price of homes in that area increased by 13% (Holmes, n.d.). Holmes states that Castile’s murder sent “potential homeowners in Falcon Heights a clear message: the state, via the police, will
protect the long-term value of your home against the stain of Blackness” (Holmes, n.d.). This chilling statistic and interpretation demonstrates how the middle class directly benefits from racist, killer cops.

In Holmes’s (n.d.) other project, “Not in the Family Way: Urban ‘Life Cycles’ and the Culture of Black Displacement,” he demonstrates the criminalization of Black folks whose neighborhoods are invaded by whites attracted to developing infrastructure or the revitalization of “deteriorating neighborhoods” (p. 6). In this work, Holmes (n.d.) specifically focuses on Washington D.C.’s staggering loss of “94,703 or 25% of its Black population to emigration, incarceration or death” since the 1950s (p. 1). The cost of living in D.C. has skyrocketed and the economic developments have completely failed to reach the Black working class in these areas (Holmes, n.d., p. 1). A specific project on U street has especially harmed and displaced Black folks who traditionally occupied this area. While the project on U street was to exemplify the area’s rich history, especially in the Civil Rights movement, it ultimately resulted in this region fluctuating from 71% Black to 65.4% white between 1990 and 2010 (Holmes, n.d., p. 3). This displacement is exactly how the U.S. economy profits. Even a well-intentioned project acted as modern colonialism over its supporters, many of whom were non-profits and Black organizations that sought to empower Black folks and their history.

When people are displaced, their options become very limited. Poverty makes people much more vulnerable to incarceration. The hyper-surveillance of the poor is one of the mechanisms that allows the prison industrial complex to exist and flourish. Angela Davis (2003) shines light on how “prison building and operation began to attract vast amount of capital from the construction industry to food and health care provision” (p. 12). Hundreds of corporations rely on prison labor for profit. Over the last few decades, the risk of being imprisoned in the United States has skyrocketed, especially for poor people and people of color. Gentrification
makes it easier for people to become displaced; therefore, displaced are more susceptible to arrest.


rather than pursue universal basic income or full employment, California built prisons; and expanded the punitive power of the criminal justice system in order to fill them. The militarization of municipal police departments—so powerfully on display during the Ferguson and Baltimore uprisings—has strengthened the bottom line of private defense contractors at the expense of black suffering. (Holmes, n.d.)

From the Gulf War to Katrina, to Palestine and prisons, death has been hidden, mandated, and economically advantageous by and for American imperialism. American law has proven to work solely within a rigid framework of Western objectivity and binary ways of thinking. Other world views, such as Afrocentricity and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, have been erased and devalued in our cultural practices that ultimately produce policy and justice. The ugly truths of the U.S. government must be exposed and disrupted. The history and existence of the laws must be challenged. And at this point, effective social and political reform will largely need to be acts of resistance that are currently forbidden in the precious State.

**Conclusion**

Necrocapitalism is a useful framework to apply to U.S. imperialism’s modern displays of injustice sanctioned. By critically analyzing the ways in which the systematic displacement and disposal of certain lives and bodies economically benefits American capitalism, we can hold such systems accountable for their massively disturbing and destructive practices. We need to recognize the ways in
which outdated philosophies and ideologies influence our
government to organize state institutions that are opposed
to the well-being and livelihood of millions of people. The
way we define and attempt to solve “crime” through prisons
and excessive policing is completely irresponsible and
extremely racist. But, these responses are immensely
profitable for the labor markets that lie as the foundation
of American capitalism. Requiring people to commit their lives
to producing cheap labor by law has served as the backbone
for the financial success of American capitalism since chattel
slavery. Furthermore, gentrification and infrastructure
marketed as “progressive developments” further
disenfranchise low-income communities, making people
more susceptible to homelessness, food insecurity, and
police brutality. Rather than investing in affordable housing
and healthy community building, people are being displaced
from their homes and neighborhoods that are becoming
exceedingly expensive and unlivable. The framework of
necrocapitalism can demonstrate through empirical data
and research how much money is spent to fund imperialist
projects, such as wars like the Gulf War and occupations like
that of Palestine. I hope this essay has exposed readers to
how modern practices of violence are authorized by the law
and State that have been contingent on the U.S.’s reliance on
racism to justify these displays of brutality. I hope that
necrocapitalism has been explained clearly so that you, as the
readers, can apply this framework to different instances of
injustices that you experience or witness in your own life. We
need to hold U.S. imperialism accountable for the ways in
which it thrives upon the disposal of certain bodies and lives,
and continue to critically think about the material
implications law and policy has on people’s lives and
freedom.
Gianna Bissa is a third-year Ethnic Studies student with five minors including Women’s and Gender Studies, Political Science, Indigenous Studies Natural Resources and the Environment, Science and Technology Studies and Queer Studies. This paper explores different ways in which the United States determines who lives and who dies within our nation and outside of our constructed borders through the framework of necrocapitalism. They discuss recent and contemporary events including the Gulf War, Hurricane Katrina, Palestine, Police Violence, Gentrification, and Prisons to demonstrate the ways in which the State dictates people’s lives depending on economic benefits or burdens.
References


Cyber Fantasies: Rina Sawayama, Asian Feminism, and Techno-Orientalism in the Age of Neoliberalism

By June Kuoch & Allegro Wang

ABSTRACT. In the 21st century, neoliberalism and technological innovations in Asia produce techno-Orientalism, a “new” framework by which the West dominates Asia. In this process, Asian bodies are configured as inherently technological beings who exist solely for the production of information and neoliberal goods. Techno-Orientalism is a byproduct of the violence wrought by modernity. Yet, Rina Sawayama, a British-Japanese music artist, produces a new form of resistance that can be characterized as diasporic Asian cultural production. Her work challenges the white hegemonic masculine gaze by interrogating modernity in her lyrics, aesthetic, and performance. Sawayama’s aesthetic and music videos produce a new sense of Asian subjectivity via the “hacking” of Western epistemologies. Sawayama’s artistry provides a new praxis of counter-hegemonic resistance within the neoliberal era.

[Chorus]
Came here on my own
Party on my phone
Came here on my own
But I start to feel alone
Better late than never so I’ll be alright
Happiest whenever I’m with you online

[Verse 2]
Better together
Ever the overrated touch
I am connected
I am the girl you want to watch
Lips full of glitter glow
Spinning like mirror balls  
Phone in a strobe  
Stuck in a crazy cyber world

[Pre-Chorus]  
And she said  
I'm not here for love tonight  
The way you touch just don't feel right  
Used to feeling things so cold  
Cyber Stockholm Syndrome  
“Cyber Stockholm Syndrome” (Sawayama, 2017)

Introduction

Rina Sawayama is a British-Japanese music artist who hybridizes J-pop, R&B, and cyber-punk, but her music aesthetically exceeds the bounds of these genres. In 2017, Sawayama released her critically acclaimed album entitled Rina. Fader¹ included Sawayama in their article “13 need to know artist in 2017;” she has been producing music since 2013 (“13 need to know artists in 2017,” 2017; Clark, 2017). Western audiences have been perplexed yet infatuated with her audio-visual artistry. Unable to be pinned down by the Occident, Rina gives a new futuristic voice for Asian people throughout the diaspora. Sawayama intentionally uses her artistry and platform to produce a cultural production that challenges the subjectification of East Asian women brought by Orientalism, specifically the dualism of the fierce dragon lady/submissive lotus blossom. But, what allowed for her rise within this particular moment in time?

In the era of 21st century globalization and technological development, Asians are constructed as (hyper-)technological beings in both cultural and political terms. Prior to the technologization of Asian countries in this period, Orientalist logics framed Asian countries as backwards, primitive, and inferior to the West. Post-colonial theorist Edward Said (1987), writes that Orientalism, “create[s] not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (p. 94). Under an Orientalist framework,
the West constructs and over-determines Asian countries. It is the Occident that inscribes logics which produce the conditions for threats and that we must be eradicated and/or exploited for capitalist gain.

Through the incorporation of specific Asian countries (Japan, China, and now India) into capitalist institutions through globalization, however, techno-Orientalism manifested as a form of white panic over the perceived foreign threat to Western hegemonic primacy. “Techno-Orientalism” is a phrase coined by David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995) in *Spaces of Identity*, which they originally contextualized to the rise and commodification of Japan writing:

If the future is technological, and if technology has become 'Japanised', then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity. (p. 167)

Techno-Orientalism refers to a frame in which the nation-state, subjectivity, and geography have been relegated to Western neoliberal epistemologies. Techno-Orientalist logics arose after WWII and during the Cold War through the United States’ “re-vitalization” and investment in Asian nations, particularly Japan and Korea, and with the hegemonic rise of China (Morley and Robins, 1995). Cold War logics evolved into subjugating techno-Orientalist epistemologies. By constructing Asians as unfeeling, robotic, and technologized, Western power was reaffirmed and the exploitation of Asian technologies and economies was legitimised (Said, 1978; Sohn, 2008). A contemporary example is the film *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). Directed by Rupert Sanders and starring Scarlett Johansson, both being white, it propagates Japan as an inherent technologically advanced society. Johansson plays a Japanese cyborg. The white-washing of the film serves a process of thief and interpolation of Masamune Shirow's seminal manga, which reifies techno-Orientalist epistemologies.
Despite this, Asians use techno-Orientalist themes within speculative fiction, music, and film. Thus, techno-Orientalism is simultaneously debilitating and liberating. How do we locate Sawayama’s music within a larger frame of quotidian violence? How is her utopian aesthetic a means of subversion to neoliberal governance? What can we learn from Rina about Asian resistance and liberation?

Techno-Orientalism and the Hegemonic Rise of Japan

In a techno-Orientalist framework, Western countries require the expansion of globalization to attain technology and information from a futuristic East Asia, which is a key way to secure a Western future. Techno-Orientalism is located within the neoliberal era of the present. In this age, the Orient is no longer a site to fear because it is barbaric, but it is required for the development and expansion of the West and feared because of its economic growth. Globalization thus becomes a tactic to ensure that an “Asianized future” does not displace Western modernity or dominance; a fear developed throughout the late 1900s as Japan and China, in particular, grew in economic and political strength (Roh et al., pp. 2, 2015).

Japan’s development as a technological threat to the West occurred concurrent to the fetishization of Japan by cyberpunk theorists and artists. Within the age of techno-Orientalism, Japan manifested as a site of technological and futuristic innovation, but was simultaneously shrouded in ancient traditions and mystery. Japan is thus not only configured as Alien to the West, but also inherently technological and cyborgian in essence as Orientalism transforms into techno-Orientalism (Sohn, 2008).

The ways in which techno-Orientalism manifests in Asia are predicated on Cold War logics, a kind of Western militarized violence. Jodi Kim (2010) finds in Ends of Empire that the Cold War brought spatial and temporal distinctions for racialized Asian bodies via proxy wars. The United States’ relationship with Asian nations is overdetermined by the
events of that era: “The Cold War, as a geopolitical, cultural, and epistemological project of gendered racial formation and imperialism undergirding U.S. global hegemony” (Kim, 2010, p. 4). The United States’ investment in nations like South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam is predicated on Western interests in the geopolitical sphere. The United States rebuilt Japan after World War II as a means of gaining capital and hegemonic power, which is a neo-imperialist and gendered project that undergirds U.S.-Japan relations. Okinawa is a focal point for empires to collide—Japan’s settlement and the US military occupation—both of which have brought gender-based violence to indigenous Okinawans (Yoneyama, 2015). The racialized, gendered dynamic produces a taxonomy of Asian subjectivity in that Asians are tools for the West. Within hegemonic systems, Asian women are pushed to the periphery of Empire. Their subservience and domination are used to further neo-colonial, white, hegemonic, masculine interests, which is evident in the advent of comfort women and the military sex industry (Yoneyama, 2015). Western nations, specifically white men, are invested in Asia because they perceive themselves as “saving” Asian women from an Orientalized depiction of violent Asian men, which propagates a racialized and heteronormative notion of Asia (Park, 2012). The political and economic rise of Asian principalities such as China, Japan, and India transform Oriental epistemologies via a disruption of white hegemonic power. In the attempt of Asian nations to secure capital, security anxieties manifest from white fears of emasculation or the loss of power. In a discursive response to maintain international white supremacy, a new form of othering occurs (Park, 2012; Agathangelou, 2016).

Thus, Cold War logics spectrally transform, haunt, and underlie techno-Orientalism. Asian subjectivity is always within a state of flux or being and exists in nonlinear spatio-temporalities as a result of Western modernities:

the Cold War between capitalism and communism is actually a “civil war” within the selfsame Western
modernity. As Odd Arne Westad argues, both the United States and the Soviet Union saw themselves as the successors of Western modernity and, the Cold War was waged over which one would be the sole rightful successor, and would thus be able to articulate its own conception of Western modernity and attempt to universalize it. (Kim, 2010, p. 24)

The spectral violence that manifests in Cold War logics, techno-Orientalism, and racial capitalism finds its origin in modernity itself. Thus, the Cold War is a lynchpin for the neoliberal era. The revitalization of specific Asian nations becomes a means of securing new means of neoliberal production. Asian countries, specifically in Southeast Asia, are locked in Cold War temporalities due to their history of colonization and neo-colonial geopolitical relationship with the West. Yet within new technologized nations, racial capitalism produces industries such as sweatshops and call centers, equating Asian subjectivity with technology (Roh et al., 2015).

Kim (2010) articulates a methodological praxis to challenge these systems of domination through her theorization of Asian American cultural production:

Asian American culture as also engaging in a politics of refusal. In refusing the seductive will to total knowledge or revelation of the “truth” of the “Asian American experience,” what it means to be Asian American, or what the United States “really did” in Asia during the Cold War, Asian American culture enact what in anthropological term has been called “ethnographic refusal” (Kim, 2010, p. 6).

Although Kim’s (2010) work is germane to notions of America, it is also produced through a transnational lens. Applying her work to the Asiatic Diaspora as a whole, we

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begin to understand how we can collectively work to produce counter-hegemonic resistance. Additionally, as Asian scholars located within the United States, our frame of analysis cannot be separated from our positionality which begins these points of inquiry. Diaspora produces a condition of melancholia from loss which can be described as a process of subjectivization because loss is an overdetermined sense of self (Eng, 2010). Diasporic Asian cultural production thus rejects and critiques gendered and racialized quotidian violence. It is a refusal to become respectable and docile subjects. It is a refusal to have Asians be flattened and made into technocratic tools. It is a refusal to be integrated within liberal multicultural institutions. It is a refusal to be consumed by the white masculine hegemonic gaze. Furthermore, it attempts to bridge, build, and empower Asians across many geographic locations brought by diaspora. Diasporic Asian cultural production attempts to build transnational solidarity. Transnationality, here, comes from Lisa Yoneyama (2015) in Cold War in Ruins:

...transnationality means much more than mere movements across nation-states, borders, or exchanges among multiple national actors and locations. It comprises of insurgent memories, counterknowledge, and inauthentic identities that have been regimented by the discourse and institution center on nation-state. (p. 7)

Such cultural production is a “productive refusal.” Transnationalism is about producing radical connections within diaspora and across national borders through counter-hegemonic praxis; it is about the ability to produce new forms of sociality and liberatory visions for such a heterogeneous group. For Sawayama, transnationality is rooted in her production of “inauthentic” code which is scripted by Western modernity and diaspora.
Rina Sawayama and Asian Feminist Resistance

Rina Sawayama is a young emerging Japanese British artist. She was born in Niigata, Japan. She later moved to London with her family where she continued her education. Sawayama studied sociology, political science, and psychology at Cambridge University in London. Like many other students of color at a predominantly white institution, she felt the brunt of racist attacks from stereotypes such as the forever foreigner:

> When people found out that I was a home student, they did [not] know what to do. That was the first ever time that I really encountered white privilege and how people viewed me. When I [realized] that you can work as hard as you want but you will still get knocked down, that was really heartbreaking. (Davies, 2018)

Yet, she remained in school because she felt as if it made her family proud — a feeling of indebtedness many Asians have pertaining to family. Thus, she turned to music for catharsis (Myers, 2017).

Her music is produced within the frame of healing and finding new modes of social life within diaspora. Sawayama sought inspiration for music in J-pop, yet the current state of the genre could not describe her Asian feminist identity. It was if she had to be hyper-sexualized like the girl group AK-B48, or infantilized-like singer Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, so she looked to the 90’s J-pop queen Utada Hikaru (Kim, 2017; Davies, 2018). Utada’s electric beats became the anthems of infamous J-RPG fantasy games Kingdom Hearts and Final Fantasy, which Sawayama would play to escape reality. When speaking about her music, Sawayama states, “People’s ideas about the future are so reductive [...] What about the actual content of your music? How are you addressing any of our actual lived futures?” (Clarke, 2017). Sawayama’s use of technology is an effective assertion of her fantasy of new modes sociality in Asian women that are no longer bound by the white hegemonic
masculine gaze. It can be categorized as a new wave of Asian feminism. Thus, her music is an act of diasporic Asian cultural production; it is a speculative fiction which re-appropriates techno-Orientalist epistemologies for her survival and liberation.

Sawayama’s music videos, futuristic aesthetic, and lyricism deconstructs the West’s normalization of Asian women’s subservience. In “Cyber Stockholm Syndrome,” she sings about her personal relationship with technology as a site of solidarity and support, specifically singing, “Came here on my own / But I start to feel alone / Better late than never so I’ll be alright / Happiest whenever I’m with you online” (Sawayama, 2017). Here, she also demonstrates how she found an escape from white supremacy through music and the cyber world. Specifically, this song was a project of catharsis to escape whiteness in a different world (Clarke, 2017; Myers, 2017). This production confronts how the cyber realm is traditionally encoded as a sphere of white men’s power as they control narratives of development, innovation, and technological “progress,” establishing technocratic, intangible spaces of dominance. Sawayama’s performativity thus becomes a means to subvert or “hack” the gendered racial formation forced upon Asian women. Hacking, here, “offers an eccentric mode of expression, a means to rupture[...]symbolic currencies and tendencies[...]which can be then decoded or scrambled” (Bui, 2014). Sawayama’s “hacking” of techno-Orientalism is a process of unintelligibility that creates new modes of sociality in that her performance deconstructs Western norms imposed on Asian women. This emerges as people are unable to auditorily grasp and categorize her music. Hacking is produced from her sense of hybridity. She hacks the dragon lady/lotus blossom binary imposed on Asian women. She hacks the West/East binary via the production of diaspora.

In A Cyborg Manifesto, Donna Haraway (1991) expands upon how technology can be utilized as a means of subversion writing, “coded texts through which we engage in
the play of writing and reading the world” (p. 152). For Haraway, the cyborg exists in the liminal space between human and technology, which is similar to the configuration of Asians in a techno-Orientalist framework (Haraway, 1991; Roh et al, 2015). Here, the cyborg disturbs a Western understanding of what does/does not constitute the human self by disrupting normative forms of embodiment, subjectivity, and sociality (Haraway, 1991).

In her utilization of cyborgism in the music video for “Cyber Stockholm Syndrome,” Sawayama breaks the boundaries between what is technological and what is human, a subversion of the technologization of Asiatic bodies and a form of self-empowerment (Bui, 2014; Haraway, 1991). Sawayama becomes cyborgian through the digitization of her body and surroundings (her steampunk aesthetic, the futuristic background surrounding the car, and the scripting of binary code across her face), which operate as a manifestation of techno-Orientalist logics as she becomes one with technology the same way Asiatic bodies are digitized in the 21st century. Her choice to physically embody technology is thus an instance of overidentification used to disrupt the Occidental gaze and subvert techno-Orientalist norms. In Digitizing Race, Lisa Nakamura (2008) highlights the simultaneous debilitating and liberating use of technology on and by Asian bodies. In relation to race neutrality and the erasure of racial violence in the West, Nakamura (2008) states that “the ‘cyberspace model’...ignores these crucial differences. The reduction of all images to sets of binary code seems to pool them all into an undifferentiated soup of bits and bytes” (p. 7). Thus, the Western (white) relationship with technology hinges on a method of erasing difference, a model of racial neutrality that only white individuals are capable of accessing in that only white individuals can distance themselves from their race, whereas people of color are always already racialized and coded into particular stereotypes. Sawayama’s overidentification with technology, a source of Asiatic stereotyping, then, is a physical and metaphysical
embodiment that escapes the universalization of the cyber
realm as understood by the West, instead using cyberspace
to create her own sphere of agency.

Simultaneously, Sawayama’s music disturbs racial
and gendered norms, such as in the song “Valentine (What’s
it Gonna Be)”: [Verse 1]
Irresponsible, tired of taking control
It’s not impossible for us to have it all
Your gendered principles were so incompatible
But it’s not impossible for us to have it all
“Valentine (What’s it Gonna Be)” (Sawayama, 2017)

Here, Sawayama directly interrogates the Western cultural
production of white, heteronormative family structures that
manifests during Valentine’s Day, a micropolitical reflection
of the West’s macropolitical norms (Lowe, 2015). The line
“your gendered principles were so incompatible / but it’s not
impossible for us to have it all” becomes an instance of Asian
feminist praxis that refuses Western impositions of Asian
women’s subjectivity and what they are/are not allowed to
“have” in terms of agency and fungibility (Sawayama, 2017).
Technology is thus both a means of subjugation and a tactic
of resistance; the digitization of her body and music operates
in a non-linear temporality, occurring at an unknown point
in time as an unknown futurity that operates outside of
Western spatio-temporal logics (Bui, 2014; Chang, 2012).

In tandem with this, Sawayama’s insertion of herself
and her relationship to Asian feminist praxis in her music
and music videos becomes a form of digitized embodiment.
Edmond Chang (2012), professor of English at Ohio
University, articulates how “hacking” challenges the West’s
framing of “cyberspace” as a site of disembodiment and
distancing from personal identity. Sawayama, like other
“hackers,” refuses to “giv[e] into the fantasies of
disembodiment that so often characterizes cyberspatial
narratives and subjectivities[...]we recover cyberspace as
metaphor and model that encourages and embraces
intersectionality, interconnectivity, and intertextuality” (Chang, 2012, p. 77). The Western illusion of the definition of cyberspace necessarily becomes a form of disembodiment within the libidinal economy: it is a place in which the manifestation of (white) furtivity — desires of power — occur, such as through the production of Western narratives of dominance over Asian countries that manifest and spread rapidly through cyberspace (Bui, 2014; Chang, 2012). Sawayama’s physical and metaphysical embodiment in her music is thus a disruption of the Western fantasy of detachment from personal identity, culture, and loss. Her utilization of J-pop in her hybridization of music genres is thus an attempt to reclaim cultural and identarian ties lost in the process of Asiatic diaspora (Eng, 2010). Her interweaving of J-pop with R&B and cyberpunk becomes a means of embodying and producing multiple aspects of her identity as a Japanese-British individual, a “hybridity” of Japanese and British cultures through musical exchange and contact (Lowe, 1991; Lowe, 2015). Her music is thus also a transnational challenge to Occidental socio-political norms as her work is not as strictly J-pop or normative Western genres.

**Conclusion: Techno-Orientalist Futures of Freedom**

While techno-Orientalism is a manifestation of Western fears of Asian futurities, Sawayama’s hybridization of genres creates new visions not only of Asian feminist resistance, but also of music in its unintelligibility to the West. Sawayama’s collusion of cyberpunk with other genres confronts “what it means to be gendered and raced in an age when technology transcends...borders” (Allan, pp. 153, 2015). In this instance, Sawayama’s music “transcends” the borders dividing music genres in that her music is undefinable in a static genre. The attempt to categorize her music, then, becomes a product of whiteness that attempts to code Asian work into Western discourse. Instead, Sawayama’s work pushes the boundaries
of what constitutes music and, with it, the limits of Asian feminist resistance. In tandem with this, Sawayama writes:

[Chorus]
Away-ay-ay I go
See me flying in my spaceship to the moon
Away, away from you
Singing to my own tune
Cause baby all I needed is time
Time out
"Time Out (Interlude)" (Sawayama, 2017)

Here, Sawayama’s music envisions a world and time outside of Western modernity. The lyrics imagine “flying away” from the Occident, towards a space where she can “sing to [her] own tune” by being herself without the imposition of Western norms. Tied to this, a “time out” disrupts the linear temporality imposed by modernity, instead envisaging a non-linear relationship towards time and non-normative futures. In this way, space and technology are a means of liberation for Asian Diasporic subject like Sawayama. Her fans are known as “pixels,” which allows us to participate in her performative resistance. Diasporic Asian cultural production can be future explored with other female artists, like Korean American singer and DJ Yaeji, Filipina artist K Rizz, and Japanese American singer and songwriter Mitski.

June Kuoch is a queer and trans Southeast Asian American. Kuoch uses they/them/their pronouns. They are a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in Sociology with a focus in policy analysis and minoring in Asian American Studies, Gender Women and Sexuality Studies, and Comparative Race and Ethnicity in the United States. Kuoch is a local community organizer focusing on abolition through a queer and trans of color lens. Their work has been inspired the activist Yuri Kochiyama. Their current research focuses on haunting brought by United States empire building as it
intersects with critical refugee studies, Asian American studies, critical archival studies, and queer of color critic.

**Allegro Wang** is a queer, trans Chinese-American and an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota. Allegro uses they/them/theirs pronouns. They are currently a sophomore in the U of MN's College of Science and Engineering and double-majoring in Computer Sciences and Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies. Allegro's primary area of interest in research is in how technology emerges as a site of both subjugation and resistance in its intersection with whiteness, queerness, and transness.
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model-singer-japanese-beauty-standards-orange-hair


The Challenges LGBT+ Asylum-Seekers and Refugees Face in the United States

By Yordanos Molla

Abstract. The discussion surrounding LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees is becoming more prominent as advocacy for LGBT+ rights increases around the world. LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees encounter unique challenges due to their identities that shape their journey to find sanctuary, such as history of discrimination, requirement to validate one’s LGBT+ identity, and detrimental issues of mental health. Other problems regarding LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees involve mental health and active global legislation prohibiting homosexuality. These problems are analyzed throughout this research paper in order to provide solutions to improve the current resettlement process for LGBT+ refugees. Resolutions that assist LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees include LGBT+ training for employees of refugee agencies and informative handouts.

Defining LGBT+

Due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, LGBT+ individuals face aversion from their communities because they do not adhere to society’s heterosexual and cisgender standards. LGBT+ individuals are often rejected as deviant relative to the social norms of heterosexual and cisgender identities in their home countries (Pfitsch, 2006). In the United States, sex assigned at birth is categorized as male or female and is typically based on a person’s “anatomy and genetics” (Lerner, Lerner, & Lerner, 2006, p. 3), such as genitalia and chromosomes. However, a person may not
identify with the given sex of male or female and as a result be shunned from their community.

Defining Refugee and Asylum-Seeker

Refugee status became internationally recognized through the United Nations. In 1948, the UN General Assembly constructed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to set standards of basic rights for all individuals in the world. This document was the first official affirmation of refugee rights recognized world-wide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2005). In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14 states, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (United Nations, 1948, art. 14). The recognition of this liberty led to the creation of programs, such as the UNHCR, that solely focus on addressing refugee issues. They also outlined the qualifications for refugee status in the document 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which was used as a “foundation for international refugee law” (Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2001). According to this document, a refugee is one who is forced to flee one’s home country because of well-founded fear of persecution based on “race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2001).

It is important to note the differences between asylum-seekers and refugees in order to understand the process of becoming a refugee. The difference between a refugee and an asylum-seeker is that a refugee has been officially approved by the UNHCR and is already living in another country. However, asylum-seekers’ application “has not yet been finally decided” (UNHCR, 2005, p. 13) by the country in which the asylum-seekers applied for resettlement. This period is considered the waiting stage for asylum-seekers as they anticipate the UNHCR to accept their application to seek sanctuary as an official refugee.
Brief History of Discrimination on LGBT+ Immigration

There has been a long history of discrimination against and exclusion of LGBT+ immigrants and refugees in the United States. Such discrimination can be traced all the way back to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952, where immigrants who identified as LGBT+ were prohibited from entering the United States (Heller, 2009). Although there was no explicit prohibition against LGBT+ immigrants, such intent was implied through the process of excluding people with “psychopathic personalities” (Pfitsch, 2006, p. 62). Homosexuals and other sexual minorities were diagnosed with sexual psychopathy by the U.S Public Health Service (Heller, 2009). Such individuals were undesirable, and thus would not be allowed to become a part of American society. The U.S. Congress continued its efforts to continue excluding LGBT+ individuals through the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which “explicitly added ‘sexual deviation’” (Pfitsch, 2006, 62) as a reason for prohibiting immigrants from entering the United States. The U.S. Supreme Court also affirmed this exclusion in 1967 and “upheld the ban” to apply “to gay and lesbian immigrants” (Pfitsch, 2006, 62). These exclusions exemplify the discrimination the U.S. government practiced against LGBT+ immigrants.

As the U.S. government’s aversion towards LGBT+ individuals started to weaken with the lifting of the ban, more LGBT+ asylum-seekers began to apply for refuge in the United States during the 1990s. The landmark case initiating the acceptance of LGBT+ refugees entering the United States was the case of Fidel Toboso-Alfonso, who is a homosexual Cuban (Pfitsch, 2006). When the Cuban government became aware of his identity, it transferred him to “a forced labor camp for sixty days as punishment for being homosexual” (Pfitsch, 2006, p. 66). As a result, he sought refuge in the United States in 1990. However, the United States did not officially acknowledge sexual orientation as a reason for persecution until 1994. In 1994, former Attorney General
Janet Reno officially declared his case a “precedent for all immigration courts” (Heller, 2009, p. 300), allowing LGBT+ asylum-seekers to apply for refuge based on their sexual orientation. This action validated their identities and created a foundation for future LGBT+ refugees to migrate to the United States.

The Problems of Verifying One’s Identity

As the number of LGBT+ asylum-seekers in the United States increased in the 1990s, such asylum-seekers were faced with new challenges because of their identities. A particular challenge involves the UNHCR disputing whether sexual orientation and gender identity should become protected classes for refugee status. A reoccurring problem that LGBT+ asylum-seekers specifically encounter is the questioning of the validity of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Since only “race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion” (Inter-Parliamentary Union and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2001) are protected classes, the UNHCR currently has to recognize sexual orientation and gender identity as social groups in order for LGBT+ asylum-seekers to gain refugee status (UNHCR, 2005). Since there is no universal nor national definition of a social group, there has been discrepancy between UN member states on whether or not sexual orientation and gender identity should be considered social groups at all. As a result, different U.S. circuit courts established their own definitions of social groups. The United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit required an “association test” (Pfitsch, 2006, p. 65), in which LGBT+ asylum-seekers have to demonstrate characteristics, such as effeminate behavior for gay males, that can distinguish them as a part of the LGBT+ community. However, this can be problematic, especially if their identity is not publicly known, because they are forced to out themselves to prove their identity with stereotypical behavior to gain asylum. The varying qualifications in the
United States for LGBT+ asylum-seekers to be recognized as part of a social group demonstrate the inconsistency among the U.S. circuits caused by the lack of guidelines from the UNHCR.

It remains difficult for LGBT+ asylum-seekers to prove their LGBT+ identity due to the requirement to obtain proof of persecution. Many of them do not immediately inform their caseworker or other refugee officials about their identity for fear of rejection or even more harm. Currently, there is a requirement for documentation of persecution, such as photos, hospital records, or police records, in order to gain refugee status. If such records are available, the LGBT+ asylum-seekers might not wish to retrieve the records because doing so may reveal their identity. They are often too afraid to seek help from the local police because of fear of more violence by the police or by others in the community. This predicament has left LGBT+ asylum-seekers to juggle the consequences of acquiring such documents in order to be granted refuge. Several have also previously been in heterosexual relationships and marriages, but those relationships should not negate their LGBT+ identity. Their individual experiences and thoughts should be utilized as proof rather than relying solely on physical evidence. Experiences can include “sexual feelings...relationships with other LGBT persons, and sexual behavior” (Ahola & Shidlo, 2013, p. 10). Allowing individuals to self-identify shifts the power back to them to have autonomy in expressing their own identity without the need for official documentation.

Current Discrimination

One of the sources of fear for LGBT+ individuals is the illegality of same-sex acts in their home countries. Aengus Carroll (2017), a researcher on human rights, and Lucas Ramón Mendos (2017), a human rights lawyer, developed a survey of the current state of LGBT+ rights around the world.
In the survey, they listed the current discriminatory laws against LGBT+ people, as well as proactive anti-discrimination laws. They found that as of May 2017, 72 countries criminalize homosexual acts (Carroll & Mendos, 2017). In the 2016 report, 13 of those countries permitted the death penalty for homosexual acts. One missing aspect from the survey is research on how social stigma plays a role in damaging pro-LGBT+ equality. Although the main scope of this research was to provide data on LGBT+ laws, the research does not cover the social impacts on LGBT+ individuals. Beliefs, such as the idea that homosexuality is unnatural, allow hate crimes and harassment against homosexuals to persist. The continuation of such beliefs exemplifies how social stigmas, not just enacted laws, contribute to violence against LGBT+ people and thus highlights the need for more research.

**Mental Health**

An obstacle that LGBT+ refugees face specifically is the prevalence of mental health issues stemming from social and political rejection of their identities. Mental illness is widespread among the refugee community due to the trauma many refugees face from persecution. They are reported to have higher levels of illness than the average population, “particularly depression and PTSD” (Tabak & Levitan, 2014, p. 38-39). LGBT+ refugees often endure violence from their communities, which adds trauma to their experience as a refugee. This causes concern because these refugees can commit harmful behavior towards themselves or others as a result of their traumatic experiences, including “suicidal tendencies, social withdrawal, self-neglect, and aggression” (Tabak & Levitan, 2014, p. 40). They can also re-experience trauma triggered by certain sights, sounds, or smells, and even by retelling their stories to mental health officials. Mental health officials have to be trained to “minimize the level of re-traumatization” (Ahola & Shidlo, 2013, p. 9). These
considerations need to be emphasized for the LGBT+ refugee population.

Additional obstacles are ways in which mental health is defined and recognized differently in other countries. Consequently, it can be difficult for LGBT+ refugees to assess themselves for mental health treatment. Even when they do recognize a problem, they do not gain support from other people in their communities and instead face isolation (Ahola & Shidlo, 2013). LGBT+ asylum-seekers who have experience in detention centers suffer additional stressors that exacerbate mental illness. Some have been ostracized or harassed in detention centers because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In one case in Santa Ana, California, 17 LGBT+ asylum-seekers “filed the first official multi-plaintiff complaint” based on the “abusive conditions in the US civil immigration detention” (Fialho, 2013, p. 50). They suffered from violence committed by guards and other detainees and were put in isolation as punishment. As a result of the class action, the Santa Ana City Jail developed the first program in the United States for protecting LGBT+ immigrants in detention centers. In this new plan, LGBT+ asylum-seekers are given their own space while in custody, which improves their living conditions in the detention center.

Safe Spaces for LGBT+ Refugees

This section provides examples on how the UNHCR should integrate more comprehensive training programs designed to provide a more inclusive environment for LGBT+ refugees. An eight-hour LGBT+ training is required by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement for employees in detention centers of immigrants. It includes “vulnerability to sexual abuse/assault and intervention approaches, sensitivity in search methods, and use of preferred pronouns” (Fialho, 2013, p. 50). However, there are a few critiques of this model. Eight hours is not enough time to fully encapsulate the history and disparities of LGBT+ people, in addition to
covering the challenges that LGBT+ people from other cultures endure. The training needs to be more comprehensive and broken out into parts in order to approach topics more deeply. Also, the training does not cover any discussion on intersex people or how to create more inclusive speech and behavior for them as well as other minorities included under the LGBT+ umbrella.

Practices refugee agencies can implement to create a sense of security for LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees include visual and verbal support. It is difficult for LGBT+ asylum-seekers to come out to their caseworkers and other officials for fear of further violence or discrimination (Rumbach, 2013). That is why it remains important for employees, such as caseworkers, to explicitly demonstrate their support of all sexual orientations and gender identities in order to reassure them. For example, to ensure safety, employees can display safe space signs stating their support and verbally assure all refugees that they can confide in them and their identity will remain confidential. This can create a comfortable environment and ease LGBT+ asylum-seekers’ apprehension of disclosing their identity. If they do not feel at ease to express their identity in interviews or other face-to-face contact, LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees should have access to hotlines in every refugee organization as an alternative. This provides a more confidential option for those who do not want to expose their identity. In fact, a 24-hour hotline was introduced in Iraq after “widespread anti-LGBTI violence in 2012” (Rumbach, 2013, p. 41). This tactic can be useful to increase safety measures for LGBT+ victims of discrimination and violence globally.

Refugee organizations can help create an inclusive environment specifically for LGBT+ refugees by providing useful resources, including informative handouts and training programs. If employees from such organizations only give handouts on LGBT+ issues to refugees who publicly identify as LGBT+, then closeted refugees are neglected from that information. As a resolution, refugee agencies should provide those handouts to all refugee clients, regardless of
their identity, so those who do not openly identify as LGBT+ can still receive the information. Such a practice has the added benefit of communicating inclusiveness regarding all sexual orientations and gender identities to all clients. Information can include online LGBT+ communities, counseling resources, and “LGBTI-friendly health-care or psycho-social programs” (Rumbach, 2013, p. 42). In-depth training that promotes LGBT-inclusive behavior for staff in refugee agencies will also generate a more hospitable atmosphere. Training programs should help employees become more aware of their behaviors when talking to LGBT+ clients, such as using LGBT+ inclusive language in their interviews, being aware of signs of anxiety from potential LGBT+ asylum-seekers, and knowing what questions might be triggering. By applying these techniques, the staff can provide a welcoming space for LGBT+ asylum-seekers.

**Conclusion**

While research on LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees has been conducted within the past couple decades, immigration based on LGBT+ status can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Yet persecution against LGBT+ individuals continues today, and those individuals are forced to search for asylum as a result. Furthermore, LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees endure additional burdens during the resettlement process, such as the requirement to verify their identity and increased risks for mental health issues. Future research is also needed to focus on assisting LGBT+ asylum-seekers and refugees more efficiently with continuing the implementation and progression of LGBT+ inclusive programs.
Yordanos Molla is a 2018 graduate from the University of South Florida, with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies. As a daughter of a refugee, she became interested in merging her two majors together by dissecting how queer identities affect refugees. She will begin a master’s program at American University in Ethics, Peace, and Human Rights this fall. Yordanos plans to concentrate her studies on human rights and social justice and hopes to work for a social justice organization in D.C. after graduation.
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