



That's
What
[WE]
Said

UNLEARNING VOL 5. NO 1 (2023)

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We want to acknowledge that UBC Okanagan is situated on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation. As an editorial team of settlers/guests/visitors who are not from these lands, we deem it essential to learn what it means to be on these lands from the Syilx people and their *captikwł*. If you are a settler, guest, or visitor to Syilx territory, we urge you to actively engage in learning directly from Syilx people. The Syilx people provide ample opportunity to learn from and alongside them, please take a look at the resources we have listed below that will direct you to engage in this learning.

As a feminist journal operating within an academic institution, we recognize our part in involuntarily reinforcing systems of power that are currently in place. We also acknowledge that much of feminist thought has been, and continues to be, rooted in colonial ethos. Every year, we aim to do our part in decolonizing these discourses by centering the works and voices of our BIPOC students, authors, and artists.

We are grateful to the Syilx Peoples for their stewardship, teachings, and decolonial efforts which make conversations and work around anti-racism and feminism possible.

Syilx Okanagan Nation

OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE'S 8 MEMBERS AND WEBSITES:

1. [Okanagan Indian Band](#)
2. [Osoyoos Indian Band](#)
3. [Penticton Indian Band](#)
4. [Upper Nicola Band – Nicola Valley](#)
5. Upper Similkameen Indian Band
Doesn't have an official website, see resources below about:
 - [Upper Similkameen](#)
 - [Snaza'ist Discovery Centre](#)
6. [Lower Similkameen Indian Band – Smelqmix](#)
7. [Westbank First Nation](#)
8. [Colville Confederated Tribes](#) (In what is colonially known as Washington State, USA)

Resources

1. [Sncewips Heritage Museum](#)
2. [Syilx Nation Events](#) * Pay attention to which events are open to everyone versus only Syilx people*
3. [En'owkin Centre](#)

FACULTY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The journal is an initiative of the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies Program in the Community, Culture, and Global Studies Department at University of British Columbia, Okanagan. We are grateful for the funding generously provided by the Irving K Barber Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Endowment Fund.

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DEAR READER

Thank you for picking up this journal. We are very excited to have you here!

This issue has been curated from a place of healing. As we, the editorial team, reflected on the world-shifting events of the past few years, we found it necessary to consider what theme could spur action and hope. Grounded in these reflections and building on our previous issues, we selected **UNLEARNING** as our theme. In previous years, we have had to reckon with deep political unrest which has once again reflected the global capitalist and neoliberal structures of injustice and inequity and asked us to radically rethink our complacencies in these political systems. However, we have also seen communities come together, showcasing agency and activism to embark on the long and hard journey to social justice. Through protests in Iran, reproductive justice, continued Black Lives Matter action, climate change action, Indigenous Land Back resistance, and more, communities are making their voices heard to prompt all of us to unlearn and move towards a better, brighter, and more hopeful future.

When we say unlearning, we are asking you to reconsider what we think we know and question if it benefits all of us in the diverse global community. Unlearning encourages us to decentre dominant western and colonial modes of knowledge building and sharing. It requires sitting with discomfort and working through the ways we may benefit from the systems that harm others. While this process of unlearning is perhaps troubling and uncomfortable, it also creates communal spaces of joy. As you read through this edition of *That's What [We] Said*, we ask you to take a moment to ponder on the unlearning you may need to take on to better support our communities.

We have received a record-breaking number of submissions this year. They included everything from poetry to prose to art. Our submitters have created these pieces to reflect on where they are in the process of unlearning or how they have encouraged those around them to unlearn. They problematize assumptions about whiteness, wellness, mental health, and more while offering personal narratives of their own journeys of unlearning.

We would like to thank all of our contributors, who come from different backgrounds and represent diverse identities, for allowing us to showcase their intimate experiences of unlearning with our readers. Your work allows us to continue this journal and present people with a space for joy, equity, activism, agency, and resistance.

We feel that this issue does an excellent job of imagining a hopeful future as we meditate on what we need to do to actively unlearn our preconceptions and prejudices. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did. Editing this journal has brought our team closer to one another as we supported each other in our unlearning journeys. We are so grateful for the support of the department to create this magnificent space for feminist undergraduate leadership.

Thank you,

That's What [We] Said Editorial Team

ALL MY RELATIONS

Jade Palmer

Belonging, all my relations. My Indigeneity is central to my sense of belonging. Indigenous culture is rooted in interconnectivity. I find kinship in the soil beneath my feet, the air I breathe, the water I drink, and the billions of people surrounding me. Growing up, my mother would say an Indigenous prayer, one that creates a deep sense of belonging for me. She would repeat, “all my relations.” Fostering interconnectivity is ingrained into Indigenous culture by embracing harmony, unity, and equity.

Harmony has become the foundation of my belonging and the central focus of reconnection with self. It’s easy to lose sight of interconnectivity; we live in a colonialist settler society that seeks to disrupt interconnection. I found my interconnectivity disrupted through racism. In high school, I was told on many occasions to “go back to the red room” or that I did not deserve the “rewards” I was getting by being Indigenous. As an Indigenous student I had access to the Indigenous room, an area of the school where I was supplied with food and academic support. Support others felt I did not deserve.

I could not relate with my peers; I was naïve in nature to believe others did not internalize suffering the way I did. In Indigenous culture, when one person suffers, the community rallies around them. We seek to heal what has been broken. I couldn’t understand the ideology of every person for themselves. Racism as disruption caused

profound damage to my sense of belonging. I made every attempt to isolate myself from my community. I constantly punished myself for my desire to be interconnected. I felt the best way to mould myself to fit within the settler colonist framework was to “other” the Indigenous in me. I wore my Indigeneity like a costume only when it benefitted me. By doing so, I reaffirmed negative connotations about my culture. I bought into settler colonist ideologies.

My reconnection came in the form of harmony with the earth. My mother took me on a hike; she asked me to take off my shoes and bury my feet in the soil beneath me. She told me, “When you feel a loss of interconnection and isolation, all you must do is bury your feet in the soil.” She reminded me that I am never alone; I will always be connected. At that moment, my feet grew roots; her words created a forever home. My journey started then, I was hungry for the knowledge my ancestors could provide. I internalize their teachings and embed myself in harmony with the land. In Indigenous culture, we have reverence for the land, we believe in reciprocity, we only take what we need, and we give back when we can. I found a spiritual connection to mother earth and all she blesses us with. The earth gives me all I need; it sustains me, and I respect and sustain it in return. I find peace in knowing I will one day return to the land. My bones and the very essence of my being will feed her.

Indigenous culture inherently differs from dominant worldviews, which can create a sense of unbelonging. Community is central to Indigenous culture. We are interconnected; we create

I have struggled a lot with the idea of equity. Equity, to me, is about equal opportunity.

communities wherever we go. We understand that, above all else, we are all children of the land. We find our power within the kinship we create with others. Dominant worldviews are very different from this. The Western world is established around the dominant view that implies every person is a single entity. Examples of this can be seen in our current unhoused population here in Kelowna. Leon Avenue is a central street downtown, it is also home to many of our unhoused peoples and known to the public as a dangerous area. Instead of embracing interconnectivity and helping our fellow people, we are warned to stay away from streets like Leon Avenue; it is deemed hazardous or dirty, and its people are diminished to drug addicts and throw-aways. I will be the first to admit, I bought into those stereotypes, until I met the people who live around Leon Avenue on a human level. I allowed myself to seek kinship with the people that lived there; I threw away my judgments and biases and leaned into my interconnectivity. The Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society is located in the middle of Leon Avenue.

Barbra Jogdics, an employment practitioner and friend with the Friendship Society, honoured me by giving me a tour of their facilities; she also allowed me the opportunity to meet the people within the area. As we walked the street, Barbra talked to every person in depth. She creates

kinship and community by referring to everyone as brothers and sisters. Barbra asked them what they needed and welcomed them to seek her out. Barbra demonstrates interconnectivity and its ability to create spaces of belonging. My experience with her further cemented my sense of belonging and gives me the knowledge to create places of belonging within my own community. My understanding of community leads me to the idea of equity for all.

I have struggled a lot with the idea of equity. Equity, to me, is about equal opportunity. When I think about equal opportunity, I think about it in terms of representation. Do I see my people? University life has not always been easy for me. I have struggled with the knowledge that I am one of a limited population of Indigenous people that are attending university. I often am the only Indigenous voice in my classrooms. When researching my future profession, I am met with the telltale faces of white people. I can only find other Indigenous people in selected areas, such as Indigenous classes and assigned buildings. The university can seem inaccessible to my people. This creates feelings of loneliness. For generations, Indigenous people have fought to reconcile this; we fight to build equity. Indigenous culture believes in providing to everyone in ways that meet their unique needs; we understand that all people have different circumstances.

I am an Indigenous status person from the ancestral land of Tk’emlups te Secwepemc; being recognized by the government as a status Indian means, among other things, I am provided funding for my university studies. Funding is used to

create equity; it incentivizes and supports Indigenous peoples to access academia. My funding has always been a hot topic. I often avoid mentioning it or excuse myself from conversations when it is discussed. Others use my funding as a weapon. I have been told that I don't look indigenous enough to receive help; they tell me I am lucky and attempt high-fiving me as if I am defrauding the system. They ask about my family; they wonder if I have undergone enough trauma to receive the help I do. Equity is about understanding the complexity of humans, our differing culture, race, gender, identity, economic status, and history. It's about understanding where we come from and creating fair platforms to get us where we need. My mother's teachings about my ancestry made a guiding light for me; she showed me that I will always belong. With the knowledge of harmony, unity, and equity now under my belt, I can create communities and spaces of belonging wherever I go.

My mother taught me "all my relations."

Kukwstsetsemc

BLOOMING SEASON

Shiza Maqbool

ARTIST STATEMENT

My piece relates to the theme of unlearning and feminism because the woman is not only hugging herself but a mirror image of her younger self (representing her inner child). Her inner child is also unlearning or healing from her past to become her authentic self - the woman hugging her. This is why the mirror image is also hugging



a damaged heart; it is her coming to terms with herself and unlearning all the negativity to make way for a positive future, represented through the leaves and flowers surrounding her.

ALLYSHIP: BEING STRAIGHT BUT QUEER

Charlotte Barker

Throughout my academic studies, specifically in my Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies classes, I have noticed that people who identify as white, cisgender, and heterosexual are hesitant to participate in queer spaces due to their privilege. It is important for those with privilege to be conscious of not speaking over marginal-

ized people and contribute to amplifying unheard voices. However, the focus on particular identities limits what we imagine queer to be. I think there is true opportunity here. I, myself, am a white, female, heterosexual settler with a privileged upbringing and life situation. Despite feeling drawn to the community, I constantly think to myself, "do I belong in queer spaces?" I think the answer is yes. I may not be queer in the realms of my sexuality or gender, but that does not mean I do not think queerly. I believe in the principles of queering heteropatriarchal society and norms. I believe in rejecting compulsory heterosexuality and leveling the playing field for queer/marginalized peoples and voices. What we need a lot more of in this world is for people to realize their privilege and queer their thinking - not reproduce dominant narratives of heteropatriarchy. This is a call to all the white, heterosexual, privileged people (like me) to be authentic allies and create space for queer thinkers, whoever that may be. Use your privilege as a tool to the advantage of the queer community and queer thinkers alike. Do not reproduce and perpetuate the structures of settler colonialism and heteronormativity but instead, make space to unlearn them.

The ongoing work of unlearning is vital. It may be a challenging task, but I think it is all about the baby steps. YOU can help, no matter who you are. Allyship is important, use your privilege to lift others up. Be the person who creates space for marginalized voices. Be an ally. By practicing self awareness, it is possible to share space equitably - you can have valuable contributions as a queer thinker. Be an ally. Voice your opinions and use your voice to challenge the assumptions

I believe in rejecting compulsory heterosexuality and leveling the playing field for queer/marginalized peoples and voices.

that society has set upon you as a white heterosexual settler. Share in carrying the burden by being an ally. Yes, you may be a white heterosexual settler, but you can surround yourself with queer relationships. You can educate those who are ignorant to their privilege and possibly queer their thinking, even if just for a moment. Be an ally, educate those around you and lift up those who surround you.

Do I belong in queer spaces? The answer is yes, I do. I may not be queer in the realms of my sexuality or gender but I do think and act queerly. Yes, I am straight but I am also queer. And I am an ally.

ARE YOU DOING IT FOR YOUR FAMILY?

Marco Adriko

"Are you here for your family? Trying to get them PR? Cause they must be struggling right?"

Angel, a 19-year-old tattoo artist, asked me at my friend's housewarming party when I mentioned I was Ugandan.

The smell of Marijuana and cheap beer clung to

BEING TRANSGENDER IN A GYM: HOW GYMS FUNCTION TO CONSTRUCT GENDER

Kaiden Jezowski

In our daily lives, we do not fully embrace our surroundings and fail to consider how spaces affect different bodies. We only notice something about a room when there is an inconvenience. For instance, when a women's bathroom line is exceptionally long, one could look at how there is no line for the men's bathroom and consider how this space could improve. With building design, we take for granted the way in which buildings are gendered. We take for granted that gender affects everyone's lives and not only the lives of transgender people. Furthermore, our environment reflects gender ideologies. Gyms are heteronormative spaces that cause trans people discomfort when participating in gym culture, others to feel distressed by their presence, and gyms demonstrate how gender is a social construction. However, there are solutions to make gyms a more inclusive environment for gender-diverse people and break down gender divisions.

The initial concept for my project was to observe how gender is presented, performed, and maintained at a gym. The construction of gender continues to be a crucial part of this project; however, I also discovered more. When I entered the gym, I became acutely aware of my unwell-

the air and filled my nostrils as I mulled over her question; the buzz of conversation and laughter failing to drown out the intrusive thoughts I had worked so hard to keep at bay since I arrived in January. I had starved these thoughts until they were nothing but pellets, yet still, I felt them rattling around the back of my skull, taunting me with their newly-acquired immortality. They were feeding on Angel's question...nourishing themselves in preparation for a full-frontal attack.

In the background, Kendrick Lamar's "King Kunta" played on a loop.

"*King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off him...Kunta, black man taking no losses!*" Kendrick shouted into the mic, emanating bravado, charisma and tenacity. He had made it. He'd taken on the white man's world without sacrificing his blackness and won.

"Ironic," I thought as I looked around the room and registered that I was the only black man in it. In my mind's eye, I could see Kendrick laughing at the answer I was about to give. I could see him cackling at my persistent attempts to accommodate...to fit.

"Nah bro, I'm jus' tryna get my degree," I responded two minutes later in a Canadian adjacent accent, a fake smile plastered on my face. I chided myself after for the code switch, but at least she didn't ask me to repeat myself.

"How can you afford it?" She asked innocently, her big brown eyes staring intently into mine as though trying to see through them a memory of

me scavenging for food on the side of the road with a loincloth around my waist and leaves in my hair.

"Haha, how can I, indeed?" I responded, smiling, working furiously to assuage my growing desire to throw my drink in her face before turning her attention towards her friend, who was limp and unmoving on the seat next to me.

Angel wasn't a racist. She was just ignorant. But at that moment, I realized that my own bubble of self-imposed ignorance had been pierced. At that moment, the pellets grew into boulders.

I swore I'd never write, think or talk about racism. I watched Rick and Morty ridicule the concept and swore to myself that I'd rise above it all. I shielded myself with ignorance because I believed it would allow me to assimilate better. I thought it would keep my thoughts clear...turn the bewildered looks I received from white people wherever I go into adoring glances from fans invested in my killer style. I thought it would make me more interesting...more palatable...a pillar of intelligence. I thought it would save me from drowning in a sadness I couldn't even begin to navigate through or understand. "I'm a Young African Man," I repeated to myself. "These aren't your problems," I said to myself as I apologized to the guy my friends admonished after he asked to touch my dreadlocks at the bonfire behind Academy Hill.

God knows I didn't want them to be my problems.

God knows I don't want them to be my problems.

But they became mine when the car I was passing by on my way back from The Well chirped and locked when I was the only one walking down the road. They became mine when someone I had talked to three times and planned to go skiing with, clutched his bag closer to his chest as he passed by me on the bridge connecting the university to the residential hill behind it. They became mine when a waitress at Earl's mistook me for my much shorter, hatless friend.

They've burrowed deep. They've rooted themselves in my subconscious, festered and are growing into monstrous behemoths with agency eclipsing my own. They make me wonder whether the people I talk to in class will be the same people crossing the street to get away from me when they see me running up the hill and don't recognize me. They make me wonder whether white boys my age worry about making people they're passing by on their walks uncomfortable. They make me wonder whether my professors actively support and praise me because of the colour of my skin rather than the quality of my work.

They *make* me.

The problems I worked so hard to avoid thinking about are now my rulers. I see them now, staring back intently at me as I look in the mirror, goading me into pleading with them for a reprieve...one I know will only be granted if I sacrifice everything I've done to reach this point and leave.

"How did you become this person?" I whisper into it, mourning for my bubble...wishing guiltily for the ease that accompanied my indifference.

comed presence. I had to decide where to place my belongings; my options were the men's change room and bathroom or the women's change room and bathroom. In this instance, I chose the women's because I attended the gym with my mother, and we could put our items together this way, but I did not enjoy this decision. After placing our belongings in the women's changing room, we made our way to the women's only section of the gym. Upon entering, a woman looks at me. At this moment, I remember I am very masculine presenting, I may not be read as a woman. Then, my mother begins talking to me and the woman looks away. A combination of the woman staring at me long enough to notice features like my voice and breasts and my mother allow me to get out of this situation. However, what I noticed most in this instance was how my body responded.

Affect relates to emotions and how bodies respond to these feelings created by the environment. The significance of feelings is how, in public, we negotiate these feelings and experience them in our bodies (Gorton, 2007, p. 334). Gyms are places where affect may come through in a variety of ways. In the instance where I entered the women's section, my affective response was that I instantly wanted to leave, and my body immediately turned to my mother for help. Moreover, central to this moment is the transmission of affect. The transmission of affect is how bodies catch others' feelings (Gorton, 2007, p. 338). My mother felt discomfort in the atmosphere, and while she was not what caused the distress, she also felt uncomfortable there. My mother, speaking to me, signaled to the woman that we were

together. In this way, her presence works to affirm that I belong there. Her company as a woman and being with me conveys that we must know this is the women's section and both be women. My mother's presence soothed the unease in the room. If the woman was uncomfortable upon my entrance, she later was not after getting enough confirmation that I could be there.

My affective responses varied significantly depending on the areas we were in. Particularly, in the women's washroom and change room. Like many trans people, I find going to the bathroom in public deeply concerning. Bovens and Marcoci (2020) found that many trans people refrained from using public bathrooms and the main reason was that they feared confrontation (p. 1). Confrontation is something I fear every time I need to use the bathroom in public, and the gym is no different. Like with all bathrooms, my affective response is constantly looking around to see if anyone is in the bathroom. If the washroom is vacant, there is a sense of relief but also a drive to hurry before someone comes. Entering the women's bathroom caused me anxiety, and this anxiety was felt with a pain in my stomach and unconsciously fidgeting with my rings. When exiting the washroom, I took deep breaths to calm my anxiety. My queer presence causes me great anxiety in gendered spaces, but it also causes displeasure for others.

Stigma threat is how people who recognize a stigmatized person may feel anxious and threatened by that person's presence (Escalera, 2009, p. 206). Stigma threat means the recognition of my transgender body can cause people discom-

“My queer presence causes me great anxiety in gendered spaces, but it also causes displeasure for others.”

fort in a gym. Most noticeably, my masculine appearance caused distress for the women in the women's section. Strübel and Goswami (2022) discussed, “how others respond to us depends on their perception or interpretation of our appearance, and we construct an understanding of others through our interpretations of their appearance” (p. 388). This quote indicates that people's appearances are impactful, and they determine how we understand and perceive others. My masculine appearance was impactful and was a cause of stigma threat for the women at the gym. Each time I entered the women's section, women stared at me. This is because of my masculine presentation in terms of clothes and other bodily features. For instance, I have short hair and hairy legs, and I wore baggy long shorts and a loose t-shirt; typically, what men wear at the gym. For all these reasons, I do not blame the women for staring at me because, at a glance, I could be read as a man. My masculine appearance made some women uncomfortable, and some did leave out of discomfort. Strübel and Goswami (2022) argued, “because clothing symbolizes arbitrary and culturally constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity it is an accessible mechanism to socially, and individually, affirm of one's gender” (p. 400). This demonstrates how people use clothes to affirm their gender, but clothes can also be ways others perceive our genders.

For instance, people see masculine clothes and assume the person wearing them is a man. People use this belief to negotiate my appearance into the gender binary. They look at my features, for example, masculine dress and hair, feminine breasts and height, and compare these qualities with the environment. When in the women's section, women determined I might be masculine but based on feminine features along with where we were, they assumed I was a woman. This illustrates that my masculine appearance caused an initial concern but was disregarded after further observation. While my appearance affects how others construct my gender, it is also noteworthy how others' appearances and their clothes construct gender.

Post-structuralist scholars look at how gender and sex are not naturally existing categories but are culturally constructed concepts (Coole, 2013, p. 168). Using a post-structuralist approach, it is apparent how gyms are heteronormative spaces that work to construct gender. What this means is that gyms are environments that reinforce the gender binary, as well as gendered norms. Gyms are places people can conform to gendered beauty standards; for example, men gain muscles to be strong, and women lose weight to be small/thin and pretty. Additionally, labeling which genders can use which spaces exhibits the construction of gender. These constructed spaces convey that there are two genders and that these genders are so different that they need their own spaces. The construction of gender is present in both the physical spaces and the people in the environment.

Creating and maintaining gender is apparent

when recognizing how men's and women's workout routines differ. Cosmetic fitness relates to how cultural expectations of body appearances affect how people work out and how they dress (Coakley, 2021, p. 228). In Western culture, the ideal for women is to be in shape but thin and maintain femininity. At the gym, I saw how cultural ideals influence the equipment people use. Women were mostly doing cardio activities, such as using treadmills or bikes, and men were predominantly doing weightlifting. This reflects how men in society are encouraged to be strong and muscular. Moreover, in cases where I did see women doing weightlifting, they used lighter weights, echoing the idea that women should be in shape but not too muscular. A unique instance where women would use heavier weights was when they would be doing squats or other exercises to work out their glutes. This reflects the cultural change in the last ten years in how big thighs and buttocks are now attractive. Cosmetic fitness and gender were also reflected in the clothes people choose to wear.

As mentioned above, women follow beauty ideals by keeping muscles minimal, but they also follow beauty ideals in gyms by maintaining their femininity. Coakley (2021) suggested that when women first started sports participation, they emphasized femininity by wearing bows, makeup, and wedding rings, and this was to downplay any connection to masculinity (p. 204). This emphasis on femininity and de-emphasis on masculinity is known as the female apologetic. Coakley (2021) argues that today female athletes perform a reformed apologetic "that involves proudly expressing their assertiveness, toughness, and

“Using a post-structuralist approach, it is apparent how gyms are heteronormative spaces that work to construct gender.”

rightful place in sport at the same time that they communicate their femininity through clothes, makeup, accessories, and posing with and without clothes in magazines” (p. 205). This quote reveals that women now challenge gender boundaries by pushing into masculine spaces, but they do not erase the gender division. In gyms, women assert their femininity by wearing tight form-fitting clothes, for example, leggings, short shorts, sports bras, and crop tops, and some women also wear makeup. Men did not wear tight or revealing clothes, instead, they wore baggy shorts, hoodies, and t-shirts. The noticeable ways gyms are gendered causes gender-diverse people to be uncomfortable, but there are ways gyms can be more inclusive.

Gender-segregated bathrooms and change rooms exclude gender non-conforming people and are unnecessary. The gym could create one massive gender-neutral space where bathrooms are large enough to double as change rooms. This would encourage trans people's participation at gyms and demonstrate that gender divides are socially constructed and do not need to remain. Lockers could be placed in the open and not behind a gender binary divide. Herrick, Baum, and Duncan (2021) found that to feel more included in phys-

ical activity, queer people wanted changes in advertisements, policies, and increased diversity (p. 462). Putting queer people in advertisements and posters in gyms promoting diversity would make the gym feel more welcoming. Policies are crucial as well. Plenty of companies are using queer people in advertisements but are not protecting them; for example, policies preventing discrimination by using bans can be a start.

Participating in gym culture as a trans person was an uncomfortable experience for me and my peers. The gender binary is heavily present in gyms, and the construction of gender is apparent, but changes can be made to make gyms a more inclusive environment. Going to the gym as a trans person caused me to feel anxious and unwelcome, and bathrooms were a prime source of this affective response. Secondly, my masculine appearance in the women's section caused women to feel anxious, uncomfortable and threatened. Thirdly, the construction of gender in gyms is apparent through people's clothes and how cultural ideals shape workout routines. Lastly, gyms can be more inclusive to gender-diverse people by creating gender-neutral bathrooms, having diversity in advertisements and posters, and policies. This project makes me think about how our bodies affect the spaces we inhabit and how the spaces themselves affect our bodies. Spaces can cause discomfort for certain bodies when they were not considered during the design. I encourage others to take in the spaces they inhabit and consider that they are constructed and that they can change to include others

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CHALLENGING THE DOMINANT MONOLITHIC UNDERSTANDING OF HIJRA COMMUNITIES IN INDIA AND BANGLADESH

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INTRODUCTION

Hijra communities and identities have had an “enduring presence in the South Asian imagination” (Saria, 2021, p.9), particularly in the realm of religious myths, texts, sex work, blessing rituals and royal courts. Hijra communities are most often represented as a “distinct transvestite socio-religious group” (Dutta, 2012, p.839) who neither identify as a man nor a woman. With diverse practices rooted in both Hindu and Muslim traditions, Hijra communities have played integral roles in preserving pre-colonial traditions and realities of gender and sexuality in both India and Bangladesh. These communities have also been able to revitalise indigenous regional understandings of devotion, worship and eroticism through their practices, kinship structures and labor. However, the impacts of colonialism, the HIV-AIDs epidemic and nation-building projects in the post-colonial era have highly politi-

cised the representation of Hijra communities. This has led to a monolithic understanding of the Hijra identity which is often based on Gharanas and “asexual religiosity” (Dutta, 2012, p.832). This paper will challenge this dominant monolithic understanding of Hijra identities by showcasing how diverse practices have been preserved. This paper will also emphasize the agency of Hijra individuals to project the vast difference in practices and understandings of what Hijra-hood entails.

COLONISATION AND ERASURE OF HIJRA IDENTITIES

Through the arrival of British colonizers, Hijra bodies, lifestyles, and identities became a site of “spectacular abhorrence” (Pamment, 2021, p.266) as the Indian savagery was marked onto this “malformed and repulsive” (Dutta, 2012, p.826) identity. British colonizers also constructed a “vilifying” narrative of Hijras as “unnatural prostitutes, beggars, kidnappers of young boys, and castrators” (Pamment, 2021, p.266), thus justifying their criminalization. Qwo-Li Driskill in “Stolen From Our Bodies” (2004) points to how colonizers continued to “enforce” the idea that “sexuality and non-dichotomous gender are a sin” (Driskill, 2004, p.54) thereby imposing the colonial gender binary. Paralleling “queer sexualities and genders” (Driskill, 2004, p.52) within Indigenous cultures in North America, Hijra identities were also “degraded, ignored, condemned and destroyed” (Driskill, 2004, p.54) through various forms of colonial legislation and violence. Specifically, under the guise of restoring moral order, the project of importing “gender and sexual regimes from England” (Pamment, 2021, p.266) became the foundation for “anti-Hijra” legislation.

BLOOMING

Rachel Hubick

I can feel the child I was,
unaware and unsure
tip-toeing and twisting her spine
and tearing away at herself
All to make sure she fits
Make sure she’s quiet enough
thin enough
pretty enough
submissive enough
unimposing enough
Enough enough enough to be almost *nothing*.
I’m trying to pull miles of barbed-wire ideas and icy-cold thoughts out of my consciousness
but it feels harder to take things out than to stuff more in
So I’m pushing and pushing and pushing soft ribbons and growing roots
Sometimes I feel like my head will burst
and when it does, I’ll be one big mess laid out
A mess I didn’t make but for me to clean up.
I don’t feel like I can deconstruct this monster
Like the network of these vicious ideas
is a block I can just remove and paint and return to the house
It’s not a block,
it’s the cement they poured into my foundation after they discarded the earth that was there
My home is in that earth
my truth
In the dirt and mud and rock of the worlds I’m built from
So I can’t deconstruct
It’s not that simple and not that pretty
I have to dig it all out and destroy it
I have to plant flowers and trees in the pit left behind
I have to run straight into barbed wire for that tired lilac ribbon
Over and over again
It hurts now and I’m dizzy and hot
but when I finally crawl out
bloody, broken, and free
I will see the blooms I’ve created
and one day, my children will run playing in a garden
where my cement used to be.

Many accounts of “British interactions with” (Dutta, 2012, p.828) Hijra communities, indicate that prior to early settlement in 1817, Hijras, particularly within Western Indian regions, enjoyed various “hereditary rights” (Dutta, 2012, p.828) such as “revenue shares under the indigenous Maratha regime” (Dutta, 2012, p.828). They were also revered members of various royal courts, religious ceremonies, and dance communities. However, during the early settlement of British colonizers, the rights of the Hijra communities all over pre-colonial India were “curtailed” (Dutta, 2012, p.828). Communities were pushed toward destitution as major sources of their revenues were cut off and they were forced into the “expanding underworld of low caste workers, prostitutes, and beggars” (Dutta, 2012, p.828). Furthermore, the “Criminal Tribes Act” was implemented in 1871, which tried to systematically root out Hijra identities, alongside other gender variant communities that did not fit the colonial “heteronormative” ideals (Pamment, 2021, p.265).

Under this act, British colonizers tried to systematically “register” (Pamment, 2021, p.266) various communities under the derogatory label of “eunuchs” (Pamment, 2021, p.266). The purpose of this registration was so that police could further “prevent” traditional practices of castration, “remove” children from “hijra households”, eliminate “hijras performances and feminine dresses” (Pamment, 2021, p.266) and make Hijras completely “invisible” from “public spaces” (Pamment, 2021, p.267). This also parallels Driskill’s detailing of how various colonial institutions, such as the churches and “boarding

“The diversity of cultures within these communities was not completely erased but rather adapted in order to escape the policing by colonizers.”

schools”, were used to completely “root out” and police Indigenous gender identities and sexualities (Driskill, 2004, p.54). However, scholars argue that in contrast to Indigenous gender variant populations, who were targeted for assimilation, Hijra communities were subjected to violence and abuse so that they could just “die out”, “thus ending succession practices” (Pamment, 2021, p.266).

However, scholars suggest that “while attempting to register “criminal” and “sexually immoral” eunuchs” (Pamment, 2021, p.267), British colonizers were often faced with the constant problem of categorization as they met more communities of gender-variant people (Pamment, 2021, p.267). The collapsing of all gender variant communities into the idea of “impotent men” or “eunuchs” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.3) failed as colonizers were “unable to fix a true eunuch body or coherent ‘authentic’ category” (Dutta, 2012, p.829). This was mainly because they tried to collapse the diverse practices, occupations, bodies, and identities of Hijra, Kothi, and other gender-variant communities into one category. Even within the Hijra communities, there were vast differences, especially in “occupations” and therefore it was difficult for the “colonial officers” to recognize and

point to an “authentic” category of the “eunuchs” (Pamment, 2021, p.267). Echoing Driskill’s argument about why it is critical to avoid “monolithic understandings” (Driskill, 2004, p.52) of gender variance within Indigenous communities, the categorization of “eunuch” further provides the evidence for the collapsing of a multitude of identities and practices through colonial institutions and linguistics.

Despite the attempts at erasure, it is important to note that various gender-variant communities, including Hijras, had “learned how to evade the limited colonial categorization” (Pamment, 2021, p.267) and preserve their traditions and practices. The diversity of cultures within these communities was not completely erased but rather adapted in order to escape the policing by colonizers.

RECOGNITION OF THE “THIRD GENDER,” RIGHTS ADVOCACY, AND “AUTHENTICITY”

It is also important to note that, while, primarily, British officers implemented anti-hijra legislations and policing, they also “worked in collusion with a small cohort of middle-class Indian men” (Pamment, 2021, p.266) in order to carry out the erasure of hijra practices. This was also followed by deepening class, caste, and religious divides as many community leaders like Muslim reformer Syed Ahmad Khan became “anti-hijra” advocates in order to appeal to respectability (Pamment, 2021, p.266). Furthermore, with the introduction of colonial laws against sodomy, hyper-masculinization of men during the colonial period, and the rise in “Hindu nationalism in the post-colonial period” (Roy, 2016, p.425), Hijra communities had to live through constant stigmatization,

discrimination, and criminalization, even in the post-colonial era. “Gender-nonconforming” Hijra dance forms like “Lavani” (Roy, 2016, p.423) and practices during this time were not revitalized but pushed into “obscurity” (Roy, 2016, p.425). The most publicly visible Hijra representations across different regions in the countries became that of “asexual religiosity” (Dutta, 2012, p.832). Hijras were commonly known to the public as people who demanded alms through “ritual blessing” (Dutta, 2012, p.826) in temples/mosques and houses or engaged in the much-disgraced profession of sex work.

However, with the “growing global awareness of the AIDs epidemic” (Dutta, 2012, p.841) in the 1980s, there was an increasing availability of funding for queer organizations and Hijra communities in both India and Bangladesh. The “HIV-AIDS prevention” (Dutta, 2012, p.841) funding included both “western and multilateral fundraising” (Dutta, 2012, p.841) as well as state-based funding. In order to acquire these funds, “Hijra leaders represented themselves to the national media as sexually underprivileged” (Dutta, 2012, p.839). This significantly strayed away from the popularised public image of “asexual religiosity” (?). However, with the rise of this representation, many Hijra communities have engaged in the discourse of “authenticity and respectability” (Dutta, 2012, p.839) by distinguishing the “real” from the “fake”. An “authentic” Hijra was constructed to be one who is based in a “Gharana” (household) and engages in the respectable practices of that “Gharana”. Snorton’s arguments about “genuine transvestism” and “good transexual” (Snorton, 2017, p.141)

The term “third gender” is highly problematic because it demarks the “subaltern status” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4) of Hijra identities.

parallel these claims of Hijra’s “authenticity and respectability” (Dutta, 2012, p.839). To attain public sympathy and funding, Hijra communities had to embody an “acceptable subject position” (Snorton, 2017, p.141) and adopt the “norms” of “womanhood” (Snorton, 2017, p.141), particularly as it relates to promiscuity and kinship. By demarking a Hijra’s authenticity to “Gharana” affiliations, they construct an image that parallels the norms of Indian/ Bengali womanhood, whereby sex work is shunned, and practices are based on “domesticity” (Snorton, 2017, p.141), maintaining kinship and religiosity are encouraged. And even though, Hijras were represented in the “national AIDs policy” (Dutta, 2012, p.839) in India as a “distinct transvestite socio-religious group” (Dutta, 2012, p.839), their definition was based on “Gharanah” affiliations and excluded “non-Gharanah” Hijra communities who engaged in sex work. “Middle-class” Hijra led organizations such as “Dancing Queens” (Roy, 2016, p.) also exclude “lower-class hijra and Kothi values” (Roy, 2016, p.) to be more respectable to not only the “mainstream Indian” (Roy, 2016, p.) public but also the global transgender movement.

The “authentic” and “pan-Indian” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4) image of the Hijra was further solidi-

fied through the advocacy and activism surrounding “the official umbrella of the third gender introduced by the Supreme Court of India in 2014” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.1). The official designation of “third gender” was indicative of the “alternative gender roles” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4) embodied by Hijra communities in India. Many also justified the designation of “third gender” within the “historical legitimacy of three categories of sex and gender within Hindu traditions” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4). However, this legal designation, alongside its justification within Hinduism has been criticized for projecting a monolithic “pan-Indian” and Hindu-normative definition of the Hijra that is based on essentialist ideas. The term “third gender” is highly problematic because it demarks the “subaltern status” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4) of Hijra identities. The legislation also does not identify how Hijra communities can face struggles in relation to their caste, class, and religious backgrounds within India. It fixes Hijra oppressions and subalternate to gender-related discriminations and further pushes a “monolithic image” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.5) of Hijras and “their oppressions” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.5).

The term “third” also uses the baseline assumption of the gender binary and adds to its essentialist ideologies. Kunihiro argues that “thirdness”, as a consecutive number, parallels the “first and second sex and gender” (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4) and constructs an image of incompleteness. She argues that many have interpreted this “thirdness” as the Hijra identity failing to be “completely” male or female in accordance with biologically essentialist ideas rooted in the gender binary (Kunihiro, 2022, p.4). Furthermore, as

Bangladesh also went on to adopt the official “third gender” designation in their legislature, Hijra communities were officially deemed to be “sexually and genitally handicapped” (Hossain, 2017, p.1425). Thus, within the Bangladeshi legislature, Hijra people are recognized as “disabled” (Hossain, 2017, p.1424) due to the non-normativity of their gender identity. However, in contrast to Indian understandings of a non-normative Hijra body, Bangladeshi legislature does not consider “castrated” Hijras as “real” and pins “authenticity” and “disability” onto a Hijra body that exhibits “genital ambiguity or indeterminacy” (Hossain, 2017, p.1427). This institutional policing of an “authentic” Hijra category fails to account for the diverse communities, identities, and practices.

The “autobiographies” (Sequeira, 2022, p.452) of famous Hijra activists like A.Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi also strengthen essentialist ideas about the Hijra identity, playing into the idea of an “authentic Hijra” (Sequeira, 2022, p.451). A.Revathi’s book, “The Truth About Me” (2010) sheds light on how, only by joining a Hijra Gharana in Delhi, after running away from South India, was she more able to not only escape abusive situations but also gain respect. Her story is “told as a narrative of aspiration to respectability and to normative bourgeois goods, services, and social structures as empowerment” (Sequeira, 2022, p.460). She often distinguishes between the respectable practices of the Gharanas like participating in “badhais” and sex work. She also “frequently analogizes hijra kinship structures with mainstream (upper-caste Hindu) familial relations to minimize the gap between

them” (Sequeira, 2022, p.460). Similarly, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi’s “Me Hijra, Me Laxmi” (2015) also projects respectability politics by showcasing how Laxmi put her “disreputable past behind” (Sequeira, 2022, p.465) to become an activist. Both A.Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi project a linear progression from having a “disreputable” and “violent” past as sex workers to becoming reputable community leaders and activists (Sequeira, 2022, p.461).

Furthermore, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi’s representation of Hijras in “international conventions” (Sequeira, 2022, p.467) is highly politicized by the right-wing Hindu nationalist government of India. Tripathi attends these “international conferences” (Sequeira, 2022, p.467) as the primary ambassador from India and the representative of the Hijra people. However, during these visits, she roots the Hijra identity within primarily Hindu traditions (Sequeira, 2022, p.468). For example, during a “dance festival in Amsterdam” (Sequeira, 2022, p.467), she performed only Hindu-based dances from most regions across India. By representing the “Hijra identity” within only “selective Hindu religious traditions” (Sequeira, 2022, p.468), Tripathi not only erases the “pluralistic” (Sequeira, 2022, p.468) and secular nature of this community and its practices but also, partakes in the political right wing’s “Brahmanical nationalist projects” (Sequeira, 2022, p.468). Similarly, the government of Bangladesh also has used the “legal recognition” of “third gender” Hijra communities to project itself as a “progressive-minded” (Hossain, 2017, p.1425) and “pro-minority” (Hossain, 2017, p.1425) nation. The monolithic and “authentic”

Hijra identity has been highly politicized and folded into nation-building projects in both India and Bangladesh.

AGENCY, KINSHIP, PRESERVATION OF PRACTICES AND NETWORKS

Although A.Revathi and Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiographies play into the respectability politics of the "good transexual" (Snorton, 2017, p.141), they also project how Hijra identities can differ "by class, caste, ability, gender, religion, linguistic, regional, and national affiliations, which are complexly positioned at different times and spaces" (Sequeira, 2022, p.469). They also project the differences in the ways one embodies their Hijra identity. A.Revathi expresses her journey as someone who A "born in the wrong body" (Sequeira, 2022, p.456) and undergoes surgery to better embrace her Hijra identity. Undergoing surgery also makes her more comfortable in engaging in intimate relationships, even though it is discouraged by her Hijra Gharana. She also leaves her "Hijra Pari-var" (family) (Sequeira, 2022, p.457) and engages in sex work as an "individual choice" (Sequeira, 2022, p.461) that is driven by her "agency" outside the Gharana (household). Furthermore, when she joins activism, she solidifies coalitions between caste-based organizing and those related to sexuality and gender. Her story shines a light on Hijra's individualism and agency (Sequeira, 2022, p.462). Unlike A.Revathi, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi bases her Hijra identity on being "neither man nor woman" (Sequeira, 2022, p.464). She understands the "primacy of her experiences" (Sequeira, 2022, p.464) as central to her Hijra identity and loves displaying her desires through the theatrics of Bollywood. Both A.Revathi and

“The monolithic and “authentic” Hijra identity has been highly politicized and folded into nation-building projects in both India and Bangladesh.”

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's "life story" concretizes a sense of agency (Sequeira, 2022, p.469).

Even though most Hijras, across India and Bangladesh, join Gharanas (households) that have identical kinship hierarchies, these households vary greatly in their practices, customs, and understanding of hijra-hood. These practices have been largely preserved and adapted from pre-colonial eras wherein Hijra communities within "indigenous" regions would aid worship, blessing rituals, and royal ceremonies. And while many of the Gharanas have similar kinship hierarchies comprising of "guru-ma (mother gurus)", "chelas (disciples)" and "nati chelas (chela of chelas) (Dutta, 2012, p.832), these relationships work in very different ways based on locality, caste, and religion. For example, Hijras who are devotees of "Bahucharā Mātā" in Gujarat, primarily engage in the practice of claiming their "hakk (right)" (Kunihiro, 2022, p.7) outside of temples. This practice was banned by the British during the colonial era but is being reclaimed by different Gharanas in Gujarat. Hijras distinguish this practice from begging by wearing dressing up in "flashy dresses and gold accessories" (Kunihiro, 2022, p.7) and shouting curses at worshippers if they choose to ignore them. Hijras of "Bahucharā

Mātā" (Kunihiro, 2022, p.7) often also opt to undergo castration as a central part of their devotion and are often placed in isolation for a varied amount of time afterward (Kunihiro, 2022, p.9). This often parallels how "mothers and babies are kept isolated after birth" (Kunihiro, 2022, p.9) and therefore marks their new life as devotees.

In contrast to the Hijras who are devotees of "Bahucharā Mātā" in Gujarat, Hijra Gharanas in West Bengal, most often undertake practices of "badhai" ("offering blessings in return for money and gifts at houses with newborn children, and sometimes, visiting local shops for donations as well") (Dutta, 2012, p.832) and have rare practices of castration. Hijras in West Bengal are particularly territorial about the practices of "badhai" (Dutta, 2012, p.832) as that is their main source of generating income as well as consolidating ties of religiosity and respect with the larger community. Furthermore, scholars also point to the diversity in non-Gharana Hijra communities, who typically engage in sex work, and their kinship practices. Particularly in West Bengal, even if Hijras do not belong to a particular Gharana, they still maintain a respectful relationship with the seniors and other members of all the Gharanas (Dutta, 2012, p.835). Even without undergoing a "full initiation" (Dutta, 2012, p.835) within a household, non-Gharana Hijras exist in a dynamic relationship with others. The lines between Gharana and non-Gharana Hijras within Bangladesh are a little bit more blurred because of the high levels of class divide and segregation in the country. However, Hijra communities in Bangladesh work alongside other working-class communities, which also heavily informs their

practices (Hossain, 2017, p.1421).

It is critical to therefore recognize the agency of Hijra individuals and the diversity of Hijra communities across India and Bangladesh to challenge the monolithic image of these communities.

SEX, SEX WORK AND EROTIC DESIRES

Hijra communities across India and Bangladesh are highly involved in the sex work industry. And while many scholars have drawn a "logical connection between trans abjection and trans sex work" (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.118), Rev and Geist argue that this argument erases the agency and diversity of trans individuals engaging in sex work by primarily painting a picture of "victimhood" (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.121). A similar understanding can be applied to Hijra communities who are always victimised for engaging in this "criminalised labour" (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.118) due to poverty, "institutional rejection" and abjection (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.118). Rev and Geist also argue that trans "hypersexuality" "starkly contrasts" the "representations of trans normativity such as those of Christine Jorgensen" (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.115). It has been discussed how many Hijra Gharanas prohibit sex work to preserve respectability and also appeal to "trans normativity" (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.115). However, despite this prohibition and stigmatisation of sex work, Hijra communities who are also closely tied with other gender variant communities through "informal networks" (Dutta, 2012, p.840) occasionally engage in sex work. And while sex work occurs within an informal, underground setting, especially in poverty-stricken arenas, Rev and

Geist argue that it is important to reject the “poverty porn narrative” (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.125) and acknowledge the “variegated experiences of sex work” (Rev & Geist, 2017, p.125).

Furthermore, Vaibhav Saria in “Hijras, Lovers, Brothers: Surviving Sex and Poverty in Rural India” (2021) challenges the common rhetoric of “irresponsibility” (Saria, 2021, p.145) that is connected to Hijras sexuality (including those who choose to engage in sex work or not), especially in the rise of the HIV/AIDs epidemic. This notion is commonly attached to Hijra practices of intimacy which seemingly do not fit into the model of “safe sex” (Saria, 2021, p.145). Saria dispels common misconceptions about Hijra communities engaging in “irresponsible sex” by showcasing that the “unpredictability of desire makes sure that the topography of marriage, sexuality, and gender do not always match up with each other” (Saria, 2021, p.148). Especially within the cases of Hijra communities, wherein kinships are expansive and do not parallel western normative structures of relationships. Saria also projects how “safe sex” education, primarily emphasizes “genitals and identities rather than invitations of desire” (Saria, 2021, p.152) and therefore excludes Hijra communities and practices from the conversation. They also point to how “ideas of condom fatigue are folded into” (Saria, 2021, p.149) the everyday lives of Hijra people as they navigate the “aesthetics of living” (Saria, 2021, p.148) which includes exploring eroticism and intimacies in many forms.

Paralleling Driskill’s conception of a “Sovereign Erotic” (Driskill, 2004, p.51), Hijra peoples practices with erotics and intimacies are complex and

nuanced. They also shed light on the “realities of gender and sexuality” (Driskill, 2004, p.56) that are ever present in both “human and more-than-human world” (Driskill, 2004, p.56). The diverse practices of Hijra communities allow them to reclaim this erotic that has been subjected to erasure in colonial and post-colonial regimes. As Saria suggests, Hijra erotics are very closely linked to the “labour of their loving” (Saria, 2021, p.149), alongside the reclamation of their body, agency, community, and kinships. It is therefore critical to acknowledge and understand the complex Hijra practices of intimacy in order to challenge the dominant monolithic understanding of these communities.

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COLONIALISM IN LIBRARIES:

THE DISPARITIES OF CATEGORIES AND THE ORGANIZATION OF MATERIALS

Elise Boisvert

Indigenous people’s knowledge has been cast aside by white settlers as inferior in comparison to Western knowledge and ideologies. Western thought and ideology hierarchized itself as the ultimate and universal knowledge, ranking any other (specifically Indigenous) ways of know-

ing as fictitious, lesser, mythical, and “other.” As the construction of educational institutions commenced, these new (Western) systems of organization upheld these ideologies. Libraries, in particular, were the places where colonizers could preserve their narratives, ideologies, and knowledge. Libraries, in turn, were the epicenters of colonialist thought; and the organization of material in libraries has not changed in over 140 years. The current organizational system of educational libraries is perpetuating colonialism and the miseducation, misattribution, and harmful stereotypes about Indigenous peoples.

To understand how current libraries have perpetuated colonization through the centering of Western knowledge, it is important to understand how this knowledge came to be regarded as superior and in turn, Indigenous ways of knowing as inferior. It is a common misconception that Indigenous communities were illiterate prior to European explorers ‘discovering’ Turtle Island (Edwards 3). Indigenous communities expressed their knowledge through other types of media than the Western standard of paper and ink; such as wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, hieroglyphs, petroglyphs, and pictographs (Edwards 3). These unrecognizable and unfamiliar materials used by Indigenous peoples caused Europeans to render Indigenous communities as unenlightened and without a history (Edwards 3); and, a people without the Western standard of education or civilization. Because of these beliefs, Europeans justified their actions to assimilate or ‘civilize’ Indigenous peoples with Western books and ways of education (Edwards 3). With European colonizers came Western structures of education, such as libraries.

Libraries are an institution of knowledge, organized in a way that perpetuates colonialism. In libraries, materials are prearranged in a way that implies the use of many worldviews, however, this is almost never the case; and they often portray a Eurocentric ideology (White 3). As Akena states, European colonizers have defined legitimate knowledge as Western knowledge that imposes a monolithic worldview, and it is often taken as objective and universal knowledge (600). During research for this paper, I found that nearly all books about Indigenous communities were placed in the history section. Putting information about Indigenous communities in the history section leaves Indigenous peoples in the past (Worth). Another problematic issue is that information about Indigenous peoples of Canada in the history category written by white authors was found in the non-fiction section, whereas many books written by Indigenous authors or books that were in collaboration with Indigenous communities were categorized as fiction. For example, *Orange Shirt Day*, written by Phyllis Webstad, is in the fiction section even though it is based on the true story of her first day in residential school, where she was stripped of the new orange shirt given to her by her grandmother – an event that was symbolic of her being stripped of her Indigenous identity. This is a substantial event in Canada, given that *Orange Shirt Day* (also known as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation) is now a national holiday, yet this novel continues to be placed in the fiction section. This is a clear example of the ways in which the current organization of books in libraries perpetuates colonialism. Indigenous stories and authors are being put in the fiction

“It is a common misconception that Indigenous communities were illiterate prior to European explorers ‘discovering’ Turtle Island (Edwards 3).”

and history section, left to be discredited, disregarded, and forgotten.

Another problem discovered in current libraries is the issue of not being able to tell what stories are authentically Indigenous. Misattributed stories perpetuate ignorance about Indigenous cultures, and confuse non-Indigenous people as well as some Indigenous peoples (Vowel 93). Stories in Indigenous cultures have origin – meaning one can find where and when the story was told, and who told it (Vowel 95). Unfortunately, many white colonialists appropriated Indigenous stories and did not give credit; other stories were made up and were passed off as “Native American”. As Vowel states, the fabrication of Native American stories is colonialist because it silences the real voices of Indigenous peoples by presenting (non-Indigenous) listeners and readers with something that is safe and familiar (94). Vowel mentions a specific novel called *Raven the Trickster* by Gail Robinson, a novel that takes stories from Indigenous peoples and reiterates them in a book written by a white settler without any specific credit to the Indigenous peoples that participated. Here Vowel states her discomfort when she starts reading the novel:

“For example, once a friend picked up a book for me, called *Raven the Trickster*, at a library sale. I immediately became uneasy when I read the inside covers. Here are some partial quotes that stood out for me:

- “This book contains nine stories about the wily Raven...”
 - No mention of where those stories originated other than from “the North West coast of the Pacific Ocean.”
 - “The tales collected and retold here by Gail Robison, a distinguished Canadian poet who has lived among the North American Indians and listened first-hand to the stories they tell...”
- No actual communities are listed. No actual Indigenous people are named. There is zero attribution here. I have no idea if these stories are made up, mistranslated, or ripped off wholesale and profited from without any recognition given to those who carry traditional stories from generation to generation.” (95)

This novel is available in the Educational Library in the fiction section of the history category and has no indication that this novel may have misattributed Indigenous people’s stories. This can be detrimental as it perpetuates stereotypes and miseducation about Indigenous peoples. Yes, one can argue that this is in the fiction section, so one should take the information lightly, but as is the novel *Orange Shirt Day*, which has proved to be very real and an important part of Canada’s current and historical social, political, and educational events. As Vowel states, all it takes is asking the right questions and caring enough to bypass the fakes (98). But the issue here is that it is not common knowledge that there are fake and

misattributed stories to begin with; let alone how to weed them out. Decolonizing and unlearning our current library system is essential in allowing Indigenous stories to be heard and put in the present.

The Xwi7xwa (whei-wha) Library at UBC Vancouver’s campus has been actively pursuing the decolonization of libraries. The Xwi7xwa Library was founded by Indigenous peoples, and uses Indigenous ways of knowledge to organize information (Worth). The library aims to decolonize the way information is traditionally sorted and organized in Western libraries – such as organizing information about Indigenous communities geographically according to region, reflecting a sense of place, rather than alphabetically (Worth). The Xwi7xwa Library recognizes that Indigenous stories often get sorted into the fiction section as folklore or fairy-tales, whereas tales from Western points of view are in the non-fiction section (Worth). We can see this difference in the categorization of *My Name is Seepeetza* by Shirley Sterling and *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* by John Milloy in the illustration, acquired from novels provided by the Educational Library at UBC. *My Name is Seepeetza* is an autobiography of Shirley Sterling detailing her childhood that was spent in a residential school in British Columbia, Canada. However, this book is in the fiction section. While a book discussing the same topic, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System* by John Milloy is in the non-fiction section due to the fact that it was written by a white author, and contained “facts”. The Xwi7xwa Library has created a system

We have become so accustomed to the hidden systematic colonialism within the organization of information, that it has become hard to notice.

to dismantle the colonial pattern that harms and undermines Indigenous culture by accurately representing Indigenous knowledge and culture in their own way (Worth). They do this by sorting information by region instead of alphabetically, and they do not use subject headings that sort Indigenous topics into the history-related sections that render Indigenous peoples as historic artifacts instead of a living group of people with present-day struggles (Worth). To further educate those who enter this library, Xwi7xwa has a section dedicated to books that have harmful stereotypes and false information about Indigenous communities (Worth) – this section can help avoid the issues of misattribution that Vowel presented us with in relation to the novel *Raven the Trickster*. Xwi7xwa wanted to keep these harmful novels out of their collections to avoid confusion, but wanted to provide an opportunity to explain to non-Indigenous people why such material perpetuates stereotypes (Worth). The Xwi7xwa Library is a significant contribution to unlearning Western ways of organization and in dismantling colonialism at a systematic level.

We have become so accustomed to the hidden systematic colonialism within the organization of information, that it has become hard to notice. By having more Indigenous authors in the fiction section than white authors perpetuates the idea

that Indigenous people’s narratives are not as legitimate as Western knowledge or voices. The Xwi7xwa Library’s way of organizing information is newer to Western practice, and will most likely be uncomfortable to non-Indigenous people at first – but the librarians at Xwi7xwa are more than willing to teach any student who is willing to learn. It is not just Indigenous students who will benefit from this, the library is intended to serve as a learning tool for all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (Worth). I hope that our Okanagan UBC campus will provide a space for Indigenous learning like UBC Vancouver’s Xwi7xwa Library in the near future. We all have (un)learning to do, and making an effort to decolonize our libraries is a start. While decolonization is far from complete, the Xwi7xwa Library is a step in the right direction. It is safe to say that Western ways of organizing are now the ideologies and systems that need to be left in the history section.

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DECONSTRUCTING FAILURE

Leah Watetu

The very prospect of failure haunts the nature of humankind, and the fear of it is embedded deep within our very shadow; consciously or subconsciously. For all of my academic life, it has loomed within the very wake of every single assignment, test, exam or application. Whilst this is something we all relate to, because to fail is in fact, to be human, I have come to realize that not many of us are able, or even ready to sit and postulate on how failure constructs and reconfigures our lives and our humanity; blending together every reclu-

sive element within ourselves that we keep hidden from both the world and our own awareness, and forging our identities that are most authentic to our higher selves through trials of fire, but only to those who heed its calling. We struggle to understand failure and all of its multi-dimensionality because seeking to understand its true cosmological meaning and how deeply interwoven it is within the fabric of the human condition juxtaposes how we have been socialized into examining it, especially within the capitalistic colonial construct. This is evident in how failure has been commercialized and sold to us as an inevitability to becoming the best version of you; a bump in the road that is there to help you realize your true power by gaining the strength to get back up again and again. We’ve seen this in every self-help book possible, every inspirational story by artists, actors, politicians, authors and of course, billionaires. You might’ve heard about Mark Zuckerberg dropping out of college to stake his entire life and career on Facebook, or how Diddy being fired from Uptown Records was the leeway to his establishment of Bad Boy Entertainment, which made him a hip-hop mogul and billionaire. This is because it is a cliché that has been sold to us time and time again; that if they can make something out of themselves from nothing, and the threat of failure kicking them down time and time again, what is stopping you from doing the same?

The truth is, commodifying failure as just another stop along the way on the journey to achieving your dreams is a capitalist construct. It detaches humanity from failure by pegging it as simply an excuse; because the entity of capitalism itself detaches our own humanity by perceiving us as

labor. In this regard, the true lessons that we gain from failure become lost in the hopeless search for delusions obfuscated as dreams and destiny, and we resent who we are in the present moment. The reality is, failure is present in every aspect of our lived experiences, because to fail is to be human. As a Kenyan woman studying in Canada, when examining my life through the lens of Kikuyu customs and socio-culture, my womanhood is already delegitimized by my not being circumcised, and I have failed as a daughter and a woman by not being married with children by my current age of 23. There is not one set way to understand failure, and I believe that grasping this concept will help us fear it less and gain a healthier relationship with this fundamental aspect of our psyche rather than run from it.

Fundamentally, I want us to ask ourselves what the antithesis of failure would be in this current age. Would studying all the way up to PhD level quantify success? Opening a huge business? Selling a million records? Signing a multi-million dollar sports deal? Being able to afford all the diamonds and jewels you could ask for? Becoming a successful model? Everyone has their individual measures of what success entails; and all these examples hinge on the exploitation of others. Becoming a staple in the fashion industry means not only succumbing to, but also aiding in the cultivation of the harmful beauty constructs that have contributed to the destruction of multiple forms of womanhood. Succeeding in the sports industry also means participating in the exploitation of underpaid workers in the Global South, as most athletes often become sponsors for companies such as Nike and Adidas. The reality is, much

“
The truth is, commodifying failure as just another stop along the way on the journey to achieving your dreams is a capitalist construct.
”

of our ideations of success can only be attainable at the cost of the greater collective. As a result, the colonial structures in place are further solidified. In this regard, if our ideals of success somehow cannot be attained without the suffering of others, does this not also account for failure? Not just of our own internalized moral compasses, but also of our sense of community that has been heavily compromised by our hyper-capitalistic landscape?

I say all that to get at this: At the end of the day, your life is yours to define. It is your choice to use the failures of your life as one step in your constant pursuit of self-improvement. It is also your choice to seek deeper understanding through them, and how each failed moment places us at a crossroad, no matter how insignificant or life defining. There is nothing wrong with using failure as an excuse, because not everybody's path is the same. Rather, it is imperative that we reconstruct our perceptions of failure; this would draw us closer to true discovery and understanding of self, as well as how we connect with nature and each other.

DYNAMIC REFLECTIONS ON UNLEARNING WELLNESS

Erin Delfs

BACKGROUND

As I have transitioned from a largely positivist undergraduate degree in health and exercise sciences; have begun a more critical master's degree with a focus on youth suicide prevention and health equity in particular; received recent diagnoses of polycystic ovary syndrome (infertility) and mitral valve prolapse (heart disease); grappled increasingly with my whiteness and associated privileges; become a loud anti-capitalist; and engaged with the works of hooks (2000, 2004), Belcourt (2018, 2020), Róisín (2022), and many more, I have been challenged to **unlearn wellness**.

With this stretch of prose, I move through sporadic reflections on my unlearning. I come to such reflections as a cis, queer, white woman who, even though did not always realize it, has always been an uninvited settler – mostly on Treaty 7 lands of Tsuut'ina Nation and more recently on unceded lands of Syilx Okanagan Nation. The following writing mosaics my interactions with a non-exhaustive list of scholars/artists/creators/activists (such as those aforementioned) and their invaluable outputs; the incredible professors, supervisors, and classmates I am surrounded by; the people I meet on the bus/street/in the library, and the trees, skies, and lakes I move through.

As I learn, unlearn, and reflect, I do not wish to (nor deludedly think I will) arrive at some totally unique, publishable, and proliferative epiphany on fostering wellness for all. I do not seek to reinvent the various wheels built by collectivist, anti-capitalist, and non-Westernized cultures and communities across time. I simply wish to roll alongside them, shifting my gaze, reorienting my body, and unravelling myself - and my conceptualizations of wellness - with each rotation.

REFLECTIONS

i. Shifting gaze

My undergraduate conceptualizations of wellness developed synaptically, snapping from lectures and lab manuals to pencils pressed to paper in a surveilled gymnasium. I learned to draw wellness from A to B (letters extracted and abstracted from a much larger alphabet), whereby **A** symbolizes one's personal beliefs, choices, and behaviours, and **B** symbolizes how said person feels, how their physical body tends to function. I was taught that everyone can be well – all it takes are individual-level actions like, **inhale**, refraining from drinking and smoking, getting a standing desk at work, engaging in 150 minutes of moderate-vigorous aerobic exercise and 2-3 sessions of strength training per week, eating a balanced diet, and defaulting to the unquestionable expertise of physiotherapists, psychologists, researchers, and physicians along the way. **exhale**

As I progressively learn, see, and feel how embedded we (as people) are in interlocking and imbalanced systems and structures of power (e.g., settler colonialism, neoliberal capitalism,

ableism, etc.), however, I sense my individual-focused undergraduate degree edging towards frivolity. What, I now wonder, is the point in convincing someone to exercise more when they cannot afford to take time off from work, let alone purchase a gym pass? To assume that a person can and should participate in any given health behaviour is to assume that they have the relevant time, resources, and power to do so. v Rather, it seems interested in levelling-up wellness for those who already have access to it (via access to sufficient time, resources, power, and privilege).

I have further realized that localizing wellness to individual bodies and behaviours is problematic in the ways that it causes us to lose sight of the larger systems and structures of power to which individuals are anchored, of the entangled pathways through which their wellness is contoured. Dominant approaches to youth suicide prevention, for instance, funnel resources, efforts, and attention down streamlined avenues of surveillance (e.g., screening for risk factors), biomedicine (e.g., pharmaceutical treatments), and personal responsibility (e.g. building good coping skills) (Gill & Orad, 2018; Orr, 2010 White, 2017). These approaches shift gaze towards a pathologized, isolated individual and away from more upstream and contextual factors, such as income inequality (Stack, 2021) and structural racism (Alvarez et al., 2022), that research names as more influential to suicidality (Ansloos & Petlier, 2022; White, 2017). This narrow, one-way line of sight is problematic in two key ways. Firstly, when kept in the shadows, systems and structures of power (e.g. neoliberal capitalism) remain unquestioned and thereby free to function in natural-

“ Discussing wellness without deeply and continuously addressing the inequitable ways in which time, resources, and power are distributed, then, sends the message that health and exercise science is not interested in cultivating wellness for everyone. ”

ized and often invisibilized ways, perpetuating various harms as they do so (Morgensen, 2011). Secondly, when focusing solely on the individual, imagined solutions to various health and social problems become constrained, simultaneously constraining the effectiveness of their impacts. We see this boundedness as a wealth of individual-level prevention research and efforts are advanced, yet youth continue to die by suicide at stable and often increasing rates (Shahram et al., 2021). If we were to perceive suicide not simply as the result of mental illnesses, chemical imbalances, or risky behaviours, but rather “as a kind of politically charged reaction to a world that makes living at the intersections of social loci untenable” (Belcourt, 2020, p. 139), what reimagined directions, efforts, and promising solutions might result?

In “Close to the Knives,” Wojnarowicz (1991; as cited in Róisín, 2022) says:

Most people tend to [...] feel quite safe from any

terrible event or problem such as homelessness or AIDs or nonexistent medical care or rampant crime or hunger or unemployment or racism or sexism simply because they go to sleep every night in a house or apartment or dormitory whose clean rooms or smooth walls or regular structures of repeated daily routines provide them with a feeling of safety that never gets intruded upon by the events outside. (p. 515; p. 101).

When a wellness-focused program, teacher, student, practitioner, community member, or researcher does not venture - deeply and consistently - to address and deconstruct the imbalanced power systems in which the wellness of individuals is deeply embedded, they build themselves into “clean rooms” with “smooth walls.” What reductions in suffering, and improvements in wellness for all can possibly occur within the space of one room, especially when the forces that most impactfully shape and limit wellness are obscured from view, beyond the walls?

ii. *Reorienting body*

Shifting my gaze away from wellness as localized to individuals and towards wellness as embedded in and shaped by various systems and structures of power, has served as a precursor to finding new directions to orient my body (AKA the capsule of my thinking, my actions, my research, and my general ways of being in the world). Here, I seek to illustrate my unlearning process of finding/being shown new points of focus, and then slowly but actively moving towards them. Before I describe such orientations, however, I am compelled to acknowledge the unabashed critique I have thus far released onto individual-level approaches to

wellness. “Either/or” thinking (e.g. the idea that either individual-level solutions, or systems-level solutions, but not both, are an answer to suffering) does not offer an effective path towards wellness for all (and is actually a characteristic of white supremacy culture; Okun, 2022). As such, I would like to make clear that I view individual-level practices of wellness (e.g. being active) as important, particularly as they help people cope with and within violent contexts and systems, and are made increasingly accessible to all. Ultimately, though, I follow the lead of prolific writers and activists (e.g., Murphy, 2018; Róisín, 2022; White, 2017) to argue that true wellness for all requires that these individual practices be woven throughout larger, organized, and collective struggles to break down unjust systems, rather than whispers of the latter being tacked onto the former (as is so frequently practiced, such as in the curriculum of my undergraduate degree).

Firstly, and perhaps most counterintuitively, I have been slowly orienting my research away from wellness, and towards illness. This movement is ushered along by my growing understanding of the ways in which our conceptualizations of wellness are broadly and deeply governed by a series of dominant and strategic discourses. Framing wellness through rhetoric of “self-improvement,” “personal goals,” and “self-care,” for instance, conveys neoliberal capitalist values of individualism, driving people towards consumption (e.g. of over-glorified food products, workout classes, etc.), towards their jobs (where they acquire capital to purchase products), and away from community (wherein which they might find slower, less arduous, and more anti-capitalistic

ways to experience wellness and contentment) (Gill & Orad, 2018). Or, to offer an even more blatant example of how understandings of wellness are constructed by power forces, think of the quietly capitalist way we so often view one's ability to work productively as a direct indicator of their wellness (Woke Scientist, 2022). Are discourses and associated understandings of illness shaped by power structures in a similar way? Woolf (1926) argues that there is "a childish outspokenness in illness; things are said, truths blurted out, which the cautious respectability of health conceals" (p. 36). A person's wellness does not always offer useful data – this wellness could be perceived according to one's ability to go to work, for instance. Or, it could be attributed to an inequitably large share of power, resources, and privilege which allow the person in question to thrive within tough systems. Illness, on the other hand, could be argued to offer more information, more transparency. In the case of youth suicidality, for instance, especially as it is concentrated disproportionately among queer and racialized youth (Barker et al., 2017; Government of Canada, 2016; Craig et al., 2015), illness and suffering suggest that the context/systems in which many young people exist are failing, harmful, and often unliveable.

Following the notion that capitalism does NOT offer pathways towards genuine, equitable experiences of wellness, I wish to personally explore wellness by further orienting myself away from markets and consumption, and towards stillness in the natural environment, whenever and wherever possible. Doing this feels anti-capitalist, especially as I pause to tilt my head back,

let the sun kiss my forehead, and remind myself that productivity is not the cornerstone of my worth and my purpose. Cultivating a strong and slow relationship with nature is certainly not a new idea, and is often inextricable from certain Indigenous worldviews (e.g., Little Bear, 2000). As a white settler who has been sadly but surely conditioned by colonial capitalist values of the Canadian project, however, establishing this relationship feels new (or at least renewed). I have been seeing a similar surge in this inclination towards stillness and nature, and away from "the grind" and hustle culture, made evident through a particular subset of memes (e.g., Fig. 1). I am left wondering whether the circulation of such memes offers an opportunity to disrupt the dominant discourses that adhere wellness to capitalism.

CONCLUSION

The creation of this rambling reflection offered me time and space to question dominant, individual-level approaches to wellness that are shaped by systems and structures of power, yet keep these systems and structures of power in the shadows. As I hopelessly seek to find a common thread from which to tie a summative knot, I instead think repeatedly of the moments of affinity I've experienced at transit townhalls, climate strikes, and protests against RBC's investments in the CGL pipeline, all led by students in my graduate program. I think of the warmth we shared when a classmate shared a photo of a singular rose to depict her feelings of isolation on campus, and fellow classmates responded by planting tulips around it. I think of the reprieve I've felt from two years of intermittent depression and suicidal thoughts. I think of the way my heart palpitations

have decreased. I think of how the wellness of one is intricately and inextricably tied to that of others, and I feel myself unravel.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. "Stop glamorizing the grind" meme (Owe, 2022).

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GROWING PAINS: A STUDY OF DISIDENTIFICATION AND ABJECTION REGARDING CHRONIC MENSTRUAL PAIN Jessica Auger

Healthcare is a societal institution that allows individuals to be vulnerable and open when seeking medical treatment from expert doctors. This means disclosure and compassion are at the forefront of the system, ensuring individuals get what they need in a safe environment. However, the inherent abjection, societal dismissal and negative bias that many Canadians face while accessing these institutions, particularly surrounding reproductive health, causes a blatant dismissal of patient care and awareness for silent chronic pain sufferers. The internalization of the stickiness of abjection, gendered reinforcement treatment, as well as patient disidentification leads to misdiagnoses, underdiagnoses and silencing of chronic menstruators.

Chronic menstrual pain, specifically endometriosis - a "gynecological disorder characterized by the relocation of endometrial tissue from inside the uterus to other organs" (Mercer & Wren, 2021, p. 1) - often goes undiagnosed or overlooked for a "delay of five years" (AbbVie, 2020). In Canada, "it's estimated that seven percent of women will develop endometriosis" (AbbVie, 2020). Reproductive health is chronically dismissed in the medical system as well as in small-scale institutions such as the workforce and education system. Individuals suffering from chronic menstrual

pain experience "reduced job productivity, an increased number of sick days and pain-related work disturbances" (Mercer & Wren, 2021, p. 1) without proper medical recognition and resources available.

My journey with chronic pain has taken away opportunities in comparison to those who do not experience chronic pain. From missing shifts at work, education instability from leaving school for a semester due to unreliable health, and also friendships as I am often seen as "flaky" or "introverted" because my unpredictable pain causes me to stay in bed instead of participating in able-ist activities. This is a physical form of disidentification which relates to certain theories or ideologies that "the disidentifying subject takes up, uses, or revamps while leaving behind or being critical of other problematic or damaging elements" (Schalk, 2013, para. 14). Capitalistic society is extremely disabling towards individuals with chronic pain, however, I do not consider myself to be a person with a disability purely through the form of chronic pain. My sense of disidentification follows me through the immense pressure "to perform as much able-ness as possible, even when the strain and fatigue of such effort cause health problems" (Schalk, 2013, para. 24). The pressure then leads to an incomplete feeling of self-worth, which is often reinforced through the dismissal of physicians while seeking treatment.

Following this sense of disidentification, is a sense of abjection that lingers around reproductive healthcare and endometriosis. Upon my journey for understanding the chronic pain I experience, I was dismissed, ignored, and treated as if my pain

“My journey with chronic pain has taken away opportunities in comparison to those who do not experience chronic pain.”

was understandable for a woman of childbearing age. I was consistently met with pregnancy tests from doctors and sent home when it was negative, despite showing up for reasons of pain, not for reasons of wondering if I was pregnant, nor offered any diagnosis. This reinforces that there is a "distinction between involuntary abjection by dominant social forces" (Hennefeld & Sammond, 2020, p. 4) which include the Canadian healthcare system but are not limited to employers or academic institutions. Creating a normative abject terminology in society decreases the importance of language, specifically surrounding private bodily functions. Explaining to a doctor your in-depth sexual life, bleeding cycles, vaginal discharge patterns, and weight fluctuations are simultaneously seen as "gross" or even "taboo" despite the medical necessity surrounding the small symptoms that may go unnoticed for a large diagnosis. This sense of abject terminology and inherent self-consciousness decreases discourse surrounding bodily functions and may limit patient disclosure. This goes to show the abjection that society holds upon menstruators and the pain experienced with it as if it is a blessing instead of a silent curse.

For this project, I decided to resist societal abjection by allowing participants, four cis-gender men and two cis-gender women, to experience a

menstrual pain simulator using a TENS (Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) machine. I set it to my daily pain threshold that I experience on a daily basis when I am not menstruating; 4.5 out of 8 scales. I received verbal consent from my participants before starting which included their rights to begin and stop at any time and the recognition that they do not need to go to the 4.5 thresholds to continue the study; ensuring they are in full control. I then asked them a series of questions pertaining to their immediate experience and future experience if this pain was something they experienced in their daily lives (See Appendix A).

Once the TENS machine was attached to the participants, the two cis-gender women were able to go to my pain threshold for the full 15 minutes and exclaimed that “the pain is worse than I feel normally, but I can get used to it” (Participant LV, 2022). Both women said they would continue going to work and would not call in sick due to a lack of understanding from their boss and fear of employment dismissal. Regarding their sexual lives, one woman explained that she would be able to engage in sexual intercourse, but not be able to have an orgasm, whereas the other said she would not engage due to feeling “too uncomfortable to focus” (Participant CP, 2022). Once asked if they would seek healthcare treatment, both women said they would not for fear of not being “taken seriously since this is something all women experience when they have their periods, right?” (Participant CP, 2022). I found this statement simultaneously validating of my medical experience while also infuriating since the concept of abjection was quite inherent before

even speaking with a medical professional in regards that “all women experience this” as if this pain should be considered normal and not worthy of further medical investigation.

In comparison, the results in regards to the four cis-gender men were quite different. Three of the participants were able to go to my pain threshold, while one went to one level below (3.5). When asked about their work attendance, two of the men said they would go to work because their boss would “tell me to ‘man up’ and get the job done” (Participant CH, 2022) whereas the other two would call in sick and be unable to perform daily work duties. The notion of having to ‘man up,’ while in obvious pain, is not only inherently reinforcing toxic masculinity, but also sheds light on the gendered abjection within women’s reproductive health. Once asked about sexual activity, three of the men said they would not be able to engage in sexual intercourse while one said he could since “it wasn’t pain, just uncomfortable” (Participant TB, 2022). Finally, when asked about seeking medical care, all male participants said they would seek help from a doctor “even after one day” (Participant TB, 2022). The men all agreed that they would be seen by a physician and expect a diagnosis as “an educated doctor would be able to tell me what is happening just from my symptoms” (Participant TB, 2022). Along with a diagnosis, three men exclaimed that they would seek disability leave as a viable option to manage their pain since they could not function, as they normally would, on a daily basis. (See Appendix B for full results).

The gendered differences with these results rein-

“ The gendered differences with these results reinforce the notion that reproductive pain is particularly abject within our society. ”

force the notion that reproductive pain is particularly abject within our society. Being unable to go to work, engage in sexual intercourse, or be an able body caused more distress for the men than the women within these study. Women who are subjected to this kind of abjection inherently know that their pain is something that needs to be resolved privately because of the immediate dismissal from physicians due to the biological nature of menstruation. This sort of abjection has ties toward “knowledge-based stigma” (Vickers, 2000, p. 139), particularly surrounding disabilities. The common conception for invisible disabilities in emergency rooms is “that disabled people are incompetent, ... and that disabled people are overly sensitive about their condition” (Vickers, 2000, p. 139). This has an immense impact on disclosure and feelings of self-worth within a medical institution. The gender difference in medical treatment seeking for men versus women also reinforces the concept of disidentification that some women experience by knowing they will be met with subpar medical treatment because of their gendered biological mechanics, despite knowing the pain they are experiencing is very real and out of the norm.

To conclude my project, I asked the participants how their view on chronic menstrual pain has

changed since participating in the study. For both women, they agreed that menstrual pain should be taken more seriously and they have “always known a lot of people have it worse than I do, but that if [th]is is a constant for people, I can’t imagine how the day-to-day functioning is impacted by that and mood is insane” (Participant LV, 2022). The men were particularly enlightened and explained “I was curious [as] to how I could relate to it. In the past I pictured it as cramps from sports and related it to that” (Participant CH, 2022) and “I now understand what you feel a little bit. If it isn’t the same, it is a representation of the kind of pain level that you feel” (Participant TB, 2022). It also went as far as some participants exclaiming “I definitely won’t bug another girl about it or say anything in my life” (Participant TC, 2022) and “chronic pain should be considered a disability, this is insane” (Participant DC, 2022). Hearing the sense of activism among all participants was extremely emotional as I was able to shed light on the silent suffering chronic pain individuals often experience.

The aim of my project was to spread first-experience menstruation pain that is often considered “normal” and abject. The amount of discomfort it had on the participants proved that the dismissal of physicians for a biological mechanism such as menstruation is taken less seriously than other forms of pain. While analyzing these responses, I am careful to acknowledge that my daily pain threshold, along with other menstruators, is personal and different, which causes a subjective lens. However, this experience was very much telling of the disidentification women experience within their own menstruation expe-

rience in comparison to non-menstruators and goes beyond the scope of our personal subjective bodies by bleeding into larger institutionalized settings.

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[PLEASE VISIT THE THAT’S WHAT \[WE\] SAID WEBSITE FOR THE APPENDIX](#)

HOW DO I FEEL ABOUT THE MAN IN THE PHOTOS SMILING WIDE LIKE ME

Mackenzie Shaw

Now knowing

You make more sense

The orange mountains

And the distance

Make more sense

He hit you so you hit Sam

(was it inheritance

Or disease digging in?)

There is the cold terracotta pot

And then there is the cactus

And I still worry for them

(Both)

on winter’s windowsill

I AM FINE

Mahan Sahu

At the moment, when I am writing this piece, I am fine. I have worked on this piece of art, I am Fine, in which I have written the words “I,” “am,” and

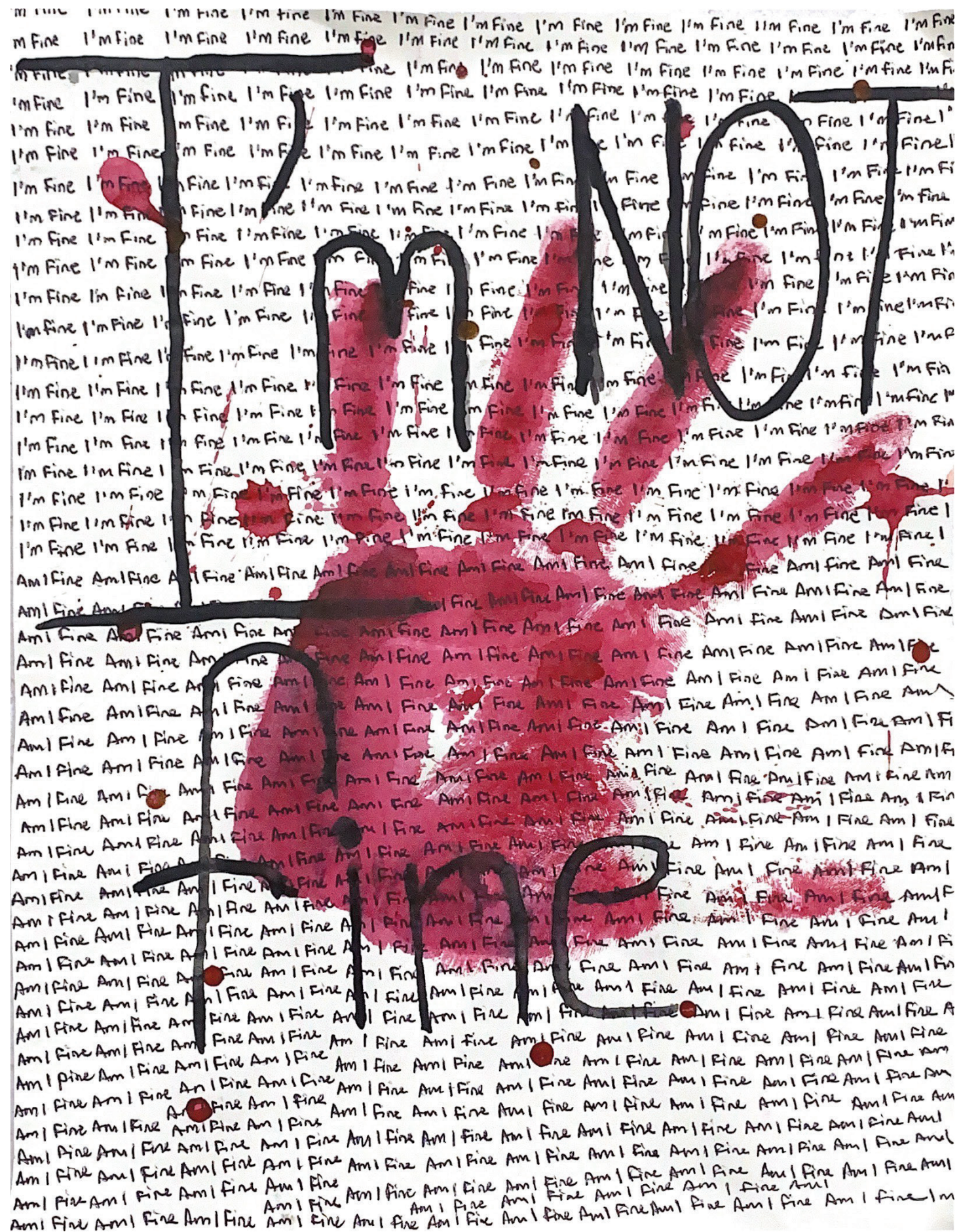
“fine” numerous times. If you have noticed, I have changed the statement “I am Fine” to “Am I Fine,” halfway through, questioning my state of being, my sanity, and my mental health. I drew inspiration based on how I have been conditioned by society to ask a personal question, “How are you,” followed by answering “I am fine.” Some choose to speak their minds, while others intentionally dodge the question, and fake their appearance. I often find myself not being able to validate one’s answer to the statement, I instead treat it as a filler statement for the sake of being courteous. For a society to ask such questions is a step in the right direction, but what is the point if such questions are undermined most of the time? Do we, as a society, really take the time and effort in putting meaning to these “How are you” questions? Why do we ask such an arbitrary question that has no intent to it? How come is it so difficult to be genuine with our feeling and thoughts, and share them with others?

The day-to-day hustle and bustle might challenge us to take the time to mean it when we say, “How are you?” We simply do not have the time and energy to become who we are by nature. Our social skills have plummeted due to the rise of human advancements. We invest ourselves into our work, our lives, and our world so much so that we have lost sight of others around us and are unable to form connections. Without social skills, we are unable to make the effort of making authentic human connections. This is why society encourages us to socialize, form bonds, make friendships, etc. How much of that socializing is genuine? Are we connecting because we must, or we are doing it because we are supposed to? On

top of that, today’s Institutes and organizations are willing to give up human connections for their company profit. They demand progress by making us work tirelessly and around the clock. After all that, what time does it leave for us to participate socially? This much time working ourselves away affects how much we give meaning to a “how are you” question. Or how we answer by mindlessly saying “I am Fine.” We are tired, we are stressed, and we are depleted of our energy to be real with ourselves. To say that we are not fine, that we could be happy, but we are not.

It’s difficult to become vulnerable in front of strangers, so in response to such a mundane question, we often say that we are “fine” or “good.” These answers are nothing more than a word of validation for the questioner. Moreover, saying “fine” does not reveal too much about the person’s state of being. It’s a shallow act of hiding oneself from their true emotions, it also leaves the explanation too. Being truthful to the question puts unnecessary stress on how much truth to say. Plus, it might not be their business to handle emotional adversity. It also makes it look like the person answering the question feels as if they might be burdening the questioner with their truth. It is reasonable to assume that the question itself stands to acknowledge the person’s feelings even if it is meant or not. And answering, “it’s all good,” validating the questioner, even if it’s not true. Being open is like being vulnerable, and being vulnerable is scary.

My work on the piece, I am Fine, was supposed to resemble how we lose sight of our own emotions when no one is truly asking or truly answering



the question. We, as a society, are slowly losing our humanity to other priorities that drain our energy. Although nothing much we can do about it, we still need to pay bills. In a way, are losing the purpose and meaning of the question itself. By not giving much effort into the question we lose its purpose too. And while we don't mean what we ask, we don't even tell the truth about how we truly feel in fear of opening up to our true feelings in front of strangers. In the foginess of the two worlds, we sometimes lose the meaning of our feelings. We lose sight of knowing if 'we are fine' or 'are we fine.' Let us set aside and unlearn the western nature of society, where people don't have the time or energy to mean what they ask, but rather learn to make an effort to truly mean when we ask, "How are you?"

QUEER MANIFESTO

Enya Duffield

WHO ARE WE?

We are every group of friends who will never be represented on TV because it's "not realistic" to have that many gay people, or multiple people of colour, or multiple disabled people, or the most "unrealistic" of all – a gay, disabled, person of colour.

Except that I am both queer and disabled. Most of my friends are at least one of those things – most are more than one. We are every combination of marginalizations and privileges. Even amongst those of us who identify as queer, we are not singular – we are bisexual trans women, we are aromantic homosexual cis people, we are demisexual nonbinary transmascs. And we are

all queer. We are all multiply 'other'. We exist, as a testament to the infinite breadth and variety of human existence. We are beautiful.

WHAT IS QUEER?

Queer is the solidarity between me, a bisexual woman, and my cousin, an asexual panromantic trans man. Queer is my "token Straight" cousin who is perceived as gay more often than any of us because she fits every stereotype of a butch lesbian you can think of.

Queer is love so big that it does not fit into the bounds of monogamy, that it transcends geography, that it disregards labels and definition. Queer is networks of lovers and friends and found families that create communities and abundant support.

Queer is two generations of my family with an open door and food and a bed and love for anyone who might need it. Queer is siblings and aunts and uncles who have no blood relation, and children growing up with no comprehension of why that would matter.

Queer is a life built from choices made to serve our genuine desires and needs, not societal expectations. Queer is radical acceptance and love for ourselves and those around us, and the celebration of all the variation that exists within that.

Queer is not just identity, it is not just a specific experience of oppression. Queer is not gatekeeping and division. Queer is not a rebellion on a pendulum, concerned with fighting one structure by pushing the opposite.

Queer is an ideology, a shared experience of constantly asking “What if? Does this serve us? What could we be?”. Queer is radical acceptance and solidarity. Queer is a revolution of demolition and reconceptualization.

Queer has very little to do with who I love, and everything to do with how I love – that is to say: expansively, passionately, openly, and fiercely.

WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

For liberation. For freedom to exist in all our infinite variety. For the right to love and live and engage with the world as our most authentic selves.

But the structures that limit us do not do so in a vacuum, nor do we exist in one.

If I am fighting for queer rights, I am also fighting for the rights of my queer Black and Brown and Indigenous comrades in arms. I am fighting for the rights of the disabled queers, the poor queers, the mentally ill queers.

If I am fighting for the right to exist authentically, free from gendered expectations, I am also fighting for the right of my straight, white, cis male lovers and friends to exist without those expectations. I am fighting for their right to be emotional and vulnerable and weak, because the structures that oppress me are the same ones that oppress them, and those are the same structures that teach them that to harm me is to protect and empower themselves.

I have no desire to fight against oppression only

“**Queer is networks of lovers and friends and found families that create communities and abundant support.**”

on one front, because there is no singular front, and I have no desire to be accepted into a structure that puts conditions on my existence. I have no desire to be included in a structure that excludes the people I love, or even the people I don't.

To achieve liberation for all queer people, we must achieve liberation for all people.

This is not a new idea.

It has been said before time and again, in different combinations of words with hundreds of different voices. It is Audre Lorde saying “in liberation ... there can be no hierarchy of oppressions”. It is Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality. It is even Pastor Martin Niemoller saying “first they came for the socialists... the trade unionists... the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist... a trade unionist... a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me”.

It has been shown before, time and again, in hundreds of actions by hundreds of people, in big and small ways. It is the lesbians caring for gay men dying of AIDS when everyone else was afraid to come close. It is the leather community protecting their queer friends at Pride. It is white people holding the front line of a Black

MY GENDER JUST IS. Em Isaak

my gender is neither up nor is it down.

it is neither here nor there.

my gender is not in the middle.

really, what is gender?

if anything, my gender is like leaves changing colors in the fall.

so stop asking me about it...my gender just is.

my gender isn't pink but it's also not blue.

and it definitely isn't purple.

i'm not she, or he, and i don't even feel that great about they.

i just exist.

so stop fucking asking me... my gender just is.

why does it matter what's in my pants? or what clothes i wear?

if anything, my gender is like the ocean, never the same.

so please, for the love of whatever, stop fucking asking me.

my gender just is.

Lives Matter protest because they are less likely to be brutalized by police, less easily portrayed as angry and dangerous by the media. It is standing behind my friend, a trans woman of color, while she demands the equal treatment she is owed by the academic institution. It is my hand on her shoulder when her voice breaks.

We stand on the shoulders of our forebears, all the past radical queers who rose up and demanded better, not just for themselves but for those who stood beside them.

I do not want to spend my life fighting for one accommodation, one right, one concession at a time. I will cheer with the rest of my people when we win the right to marriage, to exist openly, to do what we want with our bodies. I will fight viciously when those rights are challenged, when they say we cannot speak our truth in schools or support our children.

But that is not the battle I want to pick. I want to dismantle the structure that upholds each and every one of those inequalities, from the right for queer people to exist authentically, to the rights of people of colour to exist without fear of systemic harm, to the rights of people with disabilities to access all spaces and opportunities, to the obscene wealth gap that leaves the majority in poverty while a select few destroy the environment to feed their own egos. I want the powers that be to quake in fear and feel the structures of oppression they have built crumble while we, the ever growing collective of 'others' they themselves created through their endless attempts to control and divide, show what we can be when we cele-

brate and encourage the breadth of our existence. They seek to divide us because they are afraid of what we could be when we stand together. Let's show them just how right they are.

Let's build something beautiful.

REIMAGINING COMMUNITY Melissa Curatolo

I feel so small
because humans
are ants crawling
in my neighbour's
backyard. Social
creatures, squished

and burnt out
by pressure,
by sunbeam into

magnifying glass
focused on
all our collective
issues. Despite this,
we are strong —
sometimes. What if
we were ants?

Yesterday, they carried
tulip bulbs into the next
dip of dirt, no, soil, no, earth,
yes, the meaning is all the same.
Growth is found within
acknowledgement — I forget
how kindness is chosen,

how vulnerability
can be compassion.

My memory could
be the ocean tide:
whisking debris away,
coming back again —
and again! — to say
hello, goodbye,

I forgot to ask you a question...

if I burrowed
into the dirt,
if I died on this
anthill, if I drowned
in the Pacific, no,
in the boiling water
from my neighbour's
kettle, no, if I turned into
a hermit crab, if I were
looking for something
bigger than myself me to call my own,
if I were searching for a home
to protect the tender
meat of my body,
if I were isolated
from myself, or others,
if I were an orange slice
shared amongst friends
on a picnic blanket at lunch,
or an orange peel, alone,
if I were biodegradable,
or just degradable,
what I mean is,

do you know
that brief pause
when you begin to feel

the sand or moss or grass or soil
from the Pacific or my neighbour's
backyard before the boiling water,
if you felt the squelch
and scratch of granules
or mud or plant matter
or salt water or insects
or seashells or pebbles
as you walk towards me,

if you found me in a tide pool,
if you scooped me out of the water
and cupped me in your hands,
if you were the pallbearer
for my discarded crab shell,
if you were the moon
pulling me this way and that,
if you were the sun
and its beam through
a magnifying glass,
if you were speculative fiction,
if you were a tulip bulb,
if you were a tulip
and I were a rose,
if you were a garden,
if you were a deity,
if you were the peeled orange,
if you were soapstone,
limestone, or calcified rock,
if you were the kettle,
if you were the lunch,
if you were the anthill,
if you were a crab shell,

if you were my neighbour,
if you were a memory,
if you were the picnic blanket,
if you were an ant
and I were a tulip bulb,
if you were the earth
I burrowed into,

what I mean to say is,
would you be merciful?
If you were,
if I were,
we — ? It is painful,
trying to connect.
I meant to say: what
if we were to become
known to one another?

THE CALM AFTER THE STORM

Pritika Wadhwa

Abandoned in my shell,
I feel small and hopeless.
It is dark,
But it feels like home.
The water crashed at high speed,
I did not think I would be seasick.
Night after night
I begin to seek a spark.
Cracks through my shell.
It leads to brightness.
The water was now speechless.
I can finally look around.
I broke my home,
But I am now at peace.

UNLEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM: COLLABORATIVES, ARTS- BASED, AND RESTFUL MODES OF LEARNING

Dani Pierson

This piece is the product of a collaborative, arts-based, and restful intervention into the individualized and hierarchical modes of academic learning. I have long been suspicious of academia's compulsion to name the method of sitting and listening as the best form of learning. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy giving and receiving a good lecture every now and then, but I am also intrigued by the creative interventions that take place in classrooms that shake up our ideas of what fruitful learning looks like. I think it is essential that we begin to unlearn the assumption that the best form of learning takes place in hands-off, hierarchical settings.

As a Métis-settler student, I feel a deep responsibility to attend to the ways that I am simultaneously complicit in the harms of colonial institutions and the target of this violence. As Michelle Murphy states, "to be a white-coded Métis in settler colonial spaces is to be messily pulled between systems intent on Indigenous erasure interconnected with structures of white entitlement" (114). Part of tending to this responsibility, then, is intervening in spaces that overwhelmingly prioritize colonial methods of producing and disseminating knowledge.

My research as a graduate student focuses on articulating a way to respond to the deeply exhausting ways that the settler state has (historically and presently) attempted to subdue/oppress/assimilate/annihilate Indigenous communities. This response sees rest not as succumbing to these oppressive powers but as a method to actively resist them. It is difficult to present this work without a significant emotional toll as well-meaning peers and professors ask for more details on the violence than the response. So, instead of asking them to listen to me, I asked them to take a break.

Instead of presenting my work to them, I provided them with one piece of this artwork to colour while they reflected on the meaning of rest. For my work, I do mean the actual act of sleeping, but I also call upon an expansive understanding of rest that sees itself as anything that operates as a break from everyday stressors or routines that soothe and rejuvenate – whether that be for the physical, spiritual, mental, emotion self or a combination of those. Jenny Odell's concept of 'doing nothing' shapes this expansive understanding as she states that "‘doing nothing’ – in the sense of refusing productivity and stopping to listen – entails an active process of listening that seeks out the effects of racial, environmental, and economic injustice and brings about real change" (22). Tricia Hersey reflects this sentiment in her argument that rest is "not a place to waste time but instead a generative place of freedom and resistance" (27). Rest is not a place to pretend that the stressors and violence around us do not exist, but it is a place to tend to the wounds and injuries of this violence.



A tangible method of engaging in this sort of expansive rest is presented in collaborative, arts-based interventions into our ways of learning. Kim Anderson contends that "the need for creative expression as a means of healing and identity recovery is crucial in many Native women's lives" (142). Collaboration is essential, though, because it "emphasize[s] building strategies of community, not just individual, survival and flourishing" (Murphy 109). In stepping away from the colo-

nial and capitalistic pressure to always formulate the best question or response, we open space for reflection. Jenny Odell asserts that “having recourse to periods of and spaces for “doing nothing” is of utmost importance, because without them we have no way to think, reflect, heal, and sustain ourselves” (22). Bringing in low-stakes, reflective art practices to our spaces of learning gives us the room to reckon with the ways that we inherit and enact harm and tend to the exhausting and complex emotions that reckoning brings.

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UNLEARNING WHAT I USED TO KNOW AND BELIEVE IN Alexander Dow

Throughout my lifetime, there has been a continuous process of change and development, both in my physical and mental state of being. Of course everyone has, after all, every being grows and

changes as times go on, but nevertheless one must notice their own changes to see what needs to be unlearned.

To me, unlearning is a process of being informed and understanding why an old belief is no longer valid in the modern era and therefore critically challenged. I was never exposed to such challenges before entering university. However, I have always been driven to question what is right and wrong.

Before moving to Canada, I had not heard much regarding Indigenous cultures and peoples. It changed after the confirmation of the mass graves in Kamloops during the summer of 2021. This shocked me and provided a different perspective on my known Canadian history; the ones taught and shared at a mainstream level. Taking the action of learning about Indigenous history and other information became a necessity for me. Through this, I unlearned the stigmas surrounding Indigenous peoples which are harmful and pervasive. Being significantly exposed to different understandings enhances the unlearning experience. It is not only limited to ignorance but the personal misunderstandings of other ideas that I encountered, thereby relearning them and realizing that my old apprehension was incorrect and needed to be updated.

Furthermore, I unlearned the rigid definition of masculinity. Growing up, I used to adhere to all the traditional traits of toxic masculinity, such as being aggressive, getting into physical fights, believing men and women need to have distinct roles in society, etc. I have come to realize at a

point that it was an unhealthy and condescending perspective to carry when living in a changing world. Masculinity is a socially constructed concept and should be up to the individual to decide their personal relationship with it, which is a conclusion I have been drawn to.

What I have come to recognize is that unlearning is an essential step toward decolonization and destigmatization. An important result of my unlearning journey is that, recently, I have accepted that when an individual is presented with ideas that are understandable, one does not necessarily always have to agree with them. This is a dichotomy that I did not believe existed and aided my process to comprehend different ideas. A benefit of unlearning is that it also helps bring the privileges people have to light and it relies on individuals to make the change. At times, unlearning is an arduous process but still nonetheless important to progress within communities and for a better world.

WOMEN AND POPULATION POLITICS

Valeriia Pelevina

The relationship between economic growth, population, and technology has been present since before the Industrial Revolution. The definition of technology is complex, and it includes various “activities that create economic value” (Lipsev et al. 58). Technology has been present as long as humans have existed; however, with technological advances and a growing economy

during the Industrial Revolution, there was an increase in population that followed “from an estimated 10 million to 1 billion” (Lipsev et al. 291). This rapid growth of the population and its prospective exponential increase has led women to be the focal point of population politics due to their involvement in reproductive labor. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that population control strategies make assumptions that disregard people’s autonomy, especially regarding having children. They fail to account for the ‘baby bust’ as well as for the transition of a majority of women from the private to the public sphere of work. Thus, population control theories, such as Malthus’ theory, need to be unlearned as they fail to account for women’s autonomy of choice in regard to entering the paid labour force and having children.

WOMEN AND LABOUR

Historically, women were seen to be involved in domestic labour and were not involved in the formal economy. Gardiner explains that “in the 1950s and early 1960s all the social science virtually ignored housework and domestic caring work,” so women’s labour has only recently been studied (3). House and domestic work can be defined as “unpaid household activities which could be done by someone other than the person who actually carries them out or could be purchased if a market for those activities existed” (Gardiner 11). Domestic labour is viewed as part of the private sphere of activities since it is done in the home and is not market-based, as its performance does not yield monetary transactions or exchanges. Further, domestic labour renders itself invisible to GDP due to its lack of monetary valuation. However, domestic labour and its

knowledge are valuable to productivity as, without the performance of domestic labour, such as cooking and cleaning, the labour done in the public sphere will not be productive. The private sphere also includes child care and reproductive labour. Child care is often naturalized to women due to their perceived biological function of child-rearing. However, it is socially constructed since “the ideas and practices of mothering are not universal and timeless but developed in specific historical and political conditions” (Gardiner 189). Historically, women have done most of the child care due to the societal division of gender roles. Gardiner explains, “men perceive themselves as a backup for their wives and often resist an active engagement in parenting as a learning process for themselves” which further contributes to women performing most of child caring needs (192). “Children’s dependence on their mother can give women a sense of purpose lacking elsewhere in their lives and this can prevent women seeking to share parenting equally with their husbands” (Gardiner 192). Thus, women were tied into the private sphere by their own and societal influences which historically lead to a lower labour participation rate.

Moreover, this was not the case after the Second World War and the labour force participation rate of women increased with both married and single women seeking employment (Gardiner 194). The participation of women in the labour force increased due to the increase in income (Gardiner 41). However, “the time married women spent in the production of goods for the home and family, their labour supply choice was not simply between work and leisure” (Gardiner 41). Women were

moving into the labour force and they were forced to choose between their household work and their work in the economic market. Women and men were faced with different kinds of choices in the economy where women choose “between working in the home (and leisure) and working in the market” while men only choose between leisure and market work (Gardiner 43). While this may still be the case in some places, in the West today, we are moving towards a reliance on two-income households as expenses rise. However, most housework and reproductive labour is still done by women, thus yielding a double-burden.

Even though women entered the labour force later than men, they were still becoming a part of the labour market as they were “working longer hours” and taking more jobs (Crush and Williams 158). Older theories regarding population politics, for example, Malthus’s theory, did not account for the agency of women to go into the labour force and the need for multiple incomes to sustain subsistence wages. Since “domestic labour associated with children tends to reduce market labour supply, the extra financial cost associated with children tends to enhance it” (Gardiner 195). The cost of children continued to rise, which causes women, especially those of low income, to enter the labour force. Also, as children grew older, more and more women were compelled to earn money. Hence, the added expenses of children as well as other factors, like birth control methods, and the agency of women and their partners to control their family size, drew women into the labour market which were not taken into not take into account by population control strategies.

FERTILITY AND THE ECONOMY

Moreover, population strategies, such as Malthus’s population theory, did not account for the ‘baby bust’ many developing and developed economies are currently experiencing (Eswaran 249). The population was on the rise in the 1960s but “a Malthusian crisis was averted as fertility more than halved in the developing world, from six children per woman to fewer than three today, while both GDP per worker and GDP per capita more than doubled” (Chatterjee and Vogl 1440). Nonetheless, this is not the case everywhere as “in many African countries,” women are choosing to have more children “to provide more labour to farming, water fetching, and fuelwood gathering tasks” and more which will be discussed (Crush and Williams 155).

Firstly, bearing children involved opportunity cost and hence involved a lot of decision-making. If consumers were to have children, they would “have to make do with less of all other good” or give up economic activity to care for the child, which was previously discussed (Eswaran 250). If the cost of children increases, the substitution effect will be in a place where “the couple will substitute relatively cheaper goods for a more expensive good (children),” and the couple will end up poorer due to the increased spending on children (Eswaran 252). This contributes to the situation today where an “increase in the cost of children will decrease fertility” (Eswaran 253). Malthus predicted this in his theory, arguing that “in times of abundance, when income levels rise above subsistence levels, fertility rises”, suggesting that if people were to make more money, they would decide to have more children (Eswaran

253). However, he did not account for the “other factors [that] might intervene” with the decision to have more children, such as children becoming less desirable, birth control methods, and women entering the labour force (Eswaran 253). Furthermore, in lower-income countries, fertility rates tend to be high. This is the case due to a lack of available family planning and birth control options. Other reasons include “parents view[ing] children as vehicles for ensuring security in old age” and providing a “benefit” to the parents when the child becomes an adult and earns their own income (Eswaran 255-6). As a result, the decision to have children would depend on the couple’s environment and other factors mentioned.

This further leads to the question of how economic development and fertility are related. Eswaran argues that “economic development...eliminat[es] the wedge between the private and the social net benefits of children, plays an important role in reducing fertility” (256). It does so by providing pension plans so that individuals are less reliant on their children to support them after retirement (Eswaran 256). Therefore, economic development and increasing social benefits provided by the government might serve as one of the factors to discourage having children. Further, when economic development raises income, higher income in a more economically developed society would be overwhelmed by the higher costs, which also contributes to the declining fertility rates. This, however, depends on the income of women as there is an opportunity cost “of the woman’s opting out of market work during and after pregnancy” (Eswaran 257). Hence, economic development will impact ferti-

ity choices made by couples.

Nevertheless, societal expectations and birth control methods have created choices for families about the number of children they could have and the prospect of having any children. As previously mentioned, children have become less desirable. Consumer “tastes can change to lower the direct utility generated by any size of family” (Lipsey et al. 314). They also “can become less productive” as child labour laws regulate that children would not work and that increased costs of having children may not make it seem worth it. This would account for the ‘baby bust’ as income rises and the population falls. In addition, birth control is more readily available than ever before in Western society. “Modern birth control technologies have given women a considerable degree of control over their own bodies” which gave women “freedom to unilaterally ensure that they do not become pregnant and, if they do by accident, they have resources to abortion” (Eswaran 275-287). Legalizing the use of birth control and abortion increases women’s bargaining power which contributes to their agency.

AGENCY

Female agency and the ability to make their own reproductive choices is a variable that was ignored by Malthus in his theory on population politics. Eswaran suggests that bargaining power, that is, the influence in decision-making that women have over their partners in heterosexual relationships, should have been considered in theories regarding population politics. Bargaining power is what gives women the autonomy to make decisions regarding fertility and other subjects. In the

“Legalizing the use of birth control and abortion increases women’s bargaining power which contributes to their agency.”

patriarchal society, bargaining power “in couples is tilted in favour of males,” which is assumed by Malthus. This contributes to his theory being centered around the male agency in fertility and labour, which was previously mentioned. Due to the wage gap being in favour of men as well as the “cultural and social norms”, women are often found in weaker bargaining positions. This contributes to lower female agency. Nevertheless, Eswaran also argues that because fathers spend less time with their children than mothers, they “prefer to have many children and devote little by way of resources to each of them” (264). Therefore they argue for the empowerment of women in order to give them more bargaining power to benefit children (Eswaran 264). This is a generalization and in Western society today, men may not possess the same views as Eswaran is describing. However, a key takeaway from this is that women may not possess enough agency over their decisions in households. This is in line with the patriarchal society that Malthus illustrated in his theory.

However, women are becoming more autonomous regarding their reproductive choices. Mayhew also argues for the importance of women’s autonomy when discussing population demographics. They discuss that “depressing the

“Many countries around the world have already “pushed against a socially and politically dominant culture profoundly opposed to birth control access and reproductive freedom, especially for women” (Mayhew 272).”

rate of child mortality, educating girls, empowering women and making fertility management ubiquitously available” are the first things to do in order for society to ensure that women are allowed to make autonomous choices regarding reproduction (Mayhew 267). Many countries around the world have already “pushed against a socially and politically dominant culture profoundly opposed to birth control access and reproductive freedom, especially for women” (Mayhew 272). That was not the case during Malthusian times and “for most of the twentieth century” where the patriarchal structures are denying women access to autonomous choice-making, such as legal birth control and abortion (Mayhew 272). Though ironically, “the women’s movement and Malthusianism often overlapped” where the reduction of the population was one of the arguments used to push for the creation of new birth control technologies such as “the birth control pill and the intrauterine device (IUD)” (Mayhew 272). This gave women the autonomy to control the possibility of reproduction. This created the dominant view of the population today where “planning one’s family is a human right and hoping that growing accep-

tance of this stance will both empower women generally and reduce birth-rates” (Mayhew 281). Thus, agency in reproduction choices has transitioned to become a human right which was not considered in Malthus’ theory. This contributed to public policies being created to allow and promote contraception and family planning. This can be seen in international bodied engaging in the promotion of women’s reproductive autonomy where “Cairo 1994 was the last United Nations conference held specifically dedicated to population, perhaps because the policy positions that emerged from it, such as empowering women in fertility decisions, have become the reigning logic among non-conservatives” (Mayhew 284).

FEMINIST VIEW - RETHINKING MALTHUS

As previously mentioned, women are involved in economics now more than ever before, with an increased number of women entering the labour force. Nevertheless, neoclassical economics, which is one of the dominant economic theories, “deems itself... neutral, [but] its approach is fraught with unwarranted assumptions and male-centric biases that work to the disadvantage of women” (Eswaran 51). This has constructed challenges for women entering the labour force. The disadvantageous outcomes for women in the neoclassical theory are also evident in Malthus’ theory as it is rooted in naturalizing sexual desire and submission of women to men who are the only ones that can engage in autonomous choices. This is further observed by Robbins and Smith who argue that theories that relate to demography, were “patriarchal models that together re-instantiate hegemonic Masculinity” (McCann qtd. in Robbins and Smith 213). This can be seen

RESOURCES:

THE BCAAFC DOULAS FOR ABORIGINAL FAMILIES

GRANT PROGRAM:

"OFFERED BY THE BC ASSOCIATION OF ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP CENTRES (BCAAFC). THE GOAL OF THE PROGRAM IS TO INCREASE HEALTHY BIRTH OUTCOMES FOR INDIGENOUS FAMILIES BY REMOVING THE COST BARRIER TO ACCESSING DOULA SERVICES. THE GRANT PROGRAM PROVIDES INDIGENOUS FAMILIES LIVING IN BC UP TO \$1,200.00 OF COVERAGE FOR DOULA SERVICES WITH EACH PREGNANCY"



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THANK YOU ELISE FOR GENEROUSLY OFFERING YOUR TIME AND WISDOM TOWARDS THIS DOCUMENT.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

ALL TEXT IN QUOTATIONS ARE ELISE'S WORDS

WHAT IS AN INDIGENOUS BIRTH KEEPER?



HEALING AND EMPOWERING ONE BIRTH AT A TIME

ADVOCACY:

AN INDIGENOUS BIRTH KEEPER CAN ACT AS AN ADVOCATE ON YOUR BEHALF AS YOU NAVIGATE YOUR BIRTH. BIRTH CAN BE AN INCREDIBLY VULNERABLE EXPERIENCE: HAVING SOMEONE WHO HONOURS YOUR INDIGENITY AND UNDERSTANDS THE UNIQUE CONTEXTS OF INDIGENOUS FOLKS CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO YOUR INTRODUCTION TO PARENTHOOD.

HOLISTIC HEALTH:

"WE THINK ABOUT OUR HEALTH IN SIX YEARS' TIME: OUR COMMUNITY'S HEALTH IN SIX GENERATIONS' TIME"

- PRENATAL, BIRTH AND POSTPARTUM EDUCATION
- EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL SUPPORT DURING BIRTH
- ADVOCATING INDIGENOUS BIRTHING PRACTICES AND CEREMONIES
- DEVELOPING A BIRTH PLAN
- POSTPARTUM FOLLOW UPS AND CARE

SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS:

INDIGENOUS BIRTH KEEPERS WILL ADVOCATE FOR YOUR PHYSICAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH WITH CULTURALLY SPECIFIC TEACHINGS, STORIES AND KNOWLEDGE.



in Malthus' theory as he discusses only male autonomy, which perpetuates patriarchal ideas and hegemonic masculinity due to its male-centeredness. Moreover, demography and the way it is studied is "resistant to feminist scholarly innovations, owing to its wholly biological view of gender as a natural, inevitable, and determinant category" (Robbins and Smith 213). Therefore, even Malthus' theory which tries to predict future demography, relies on societal categories to construct its arguments. Theory, as a technology, does not exist in a vacuum and depends on societal constructions. Thus, since "feminism insists on explicit discussion of the influence of power on knowledge production as well as the political nature of research", it suggests that theories as technology are inherently biased from their creator (Robbins and Smith 210). Hence why Malthus' theory could not exist outside his patriarchal beliefs during his time. Following this, a critical examination of his theory and his biases provides a way for society to reflect on the intersectional influence of the author's identity on the theory.

Further, Robbins and Smith discuss the implications of Malthus' theory. They argue that "the reasons that demographic change has been overlooked... are numerous and justified, and linked to a resistance to a Malthusian legacy, one that attributes catastrophic effects of demographic growth and that reinforces patriarchal...logics of human and household behavior" (Robbins and Smith 201). This evidence reinforces that Malthus' theory has ingrained patriarchal ideas into the decision-making regarding reproduction that is done by families. They also suggest that

"Malthusian logic [has] been unable to adequately predict resource conditions or scarcities, its deployment as [an] ideology has been consistently pernicious" (Robbins and Smith 201). This contributes to the argument of refuting Malthus' theory. This is further confirmed by saying that Malthus' theory is rooted in the ideas of the "state, colonialism, and the patriarchy" which will affect everything from "the conditions for rural farms, households, and family decisions, with implications for family size" (Robbins and Smith 202-3). His theory does not take into account peoples' relationships "between culture, everyday life, [and] state practice" (Robbins and Smith 205). Thus, Malthusian theory ignores people's intersectional background and the impacts it may have on choosing the number of children a couple will have, whether they will have one at all or whether will choose to adopt. This was also mentioned by Eswaran where they point out how "other factors" which are listed above "might intervene" in fertility choices that are not mentioned in Malthus' theory (253).

On top of that, Mayhew and Dzelzainis point out how the Malthusian essay was "conducting an implicit critique of the gender politics of the men's wives" (156). This further showcases how he constructed women as being subordinate to men. "As Deborah Valenze has argued, Malthus's Essay did much to reinforce the notion of separate gender spheres in that it assumed women's dependency on men" (Valenze qtd. in Mayhew and Dzelzainis 157). This furthers the patriarchal ideas of naturalization of the two sex categories that are illustrated in his theory. Another point that Mayhew and Dzelzainis made is that the

theory came from a philosophical point of view rather than one grounded in social science (157). Due to this, he was able to construct "the natural laws governing the universe and such knowledge was a source of power" (Mayhew and Dzelzainis 162). This allowed only men to have access to such power as Malthus' theory only gave the power to them and did not promote "egalitarianism" in society (Mayhew and Dzelzainis 162). Further, the theory also "construed the sexual double standard" where women who had children without getting married were more "disgraced" than men. This created a stigma around women's autonomy in having children without a partner since the theory was grounded in a patriarchal society.

In conclusion, due to the reasons stated above, Malthus' theory of population politics can be refuted as it is centered on patriarchal ideas. The bases of this theory are rooted in the stereotypical preconceptions of gender roles that undermine women's reproductive labour as well as patriarchal ideas of the superiority of men and the subordination of women. The theory does not take into account women's intersectionality or agency in regard to birth control and parenting options. Therefore, it is crucial that we unlearn these theories on population control and adopt a feminist outlook on population politics. Nevertheless, this paper also has limitations and opportunities for further research. Firstly, in a world of 8 billion people, Malthusian theory propositions keep arising. Our capitalist society has invented a way to produce food, however, as evident by environmentalists and climate change activists, it is not sustainable. The environmental impact of our agricultural production, which was mentioned

Our capitalist society has invented a way to produce food, however, as evident by environmentalists and climate change activists, it is not sustainable.

in a few research appears, has been another cause for the revival of the Malthusian argument (Crush and Williams; Hodgson and Watkins; Mayhew; Robbins and Smith). This is one of the limitations of my paper. This will be important in the future when humanity will look back on the planet's resources and its sustainability. The impact of climate change on sustaining 8 billion people on one planet may eventually decrease our quality of life but we cannot be sure. Secondly, another limitation of my paper is the assumption of heterosexual relationships being used to reproduce. The research used failed to mention how homosexual relationships or the adoption of children will factor into reflection on Malthus' theory. The way that gender roles are shared in homosexual relationships will also impact the opportunity cost of children, which would create more opportunities for gathering data to find out how homosexual relationships are impacted to make choices regarding possible reproduction. This could be an opportunity for further research.

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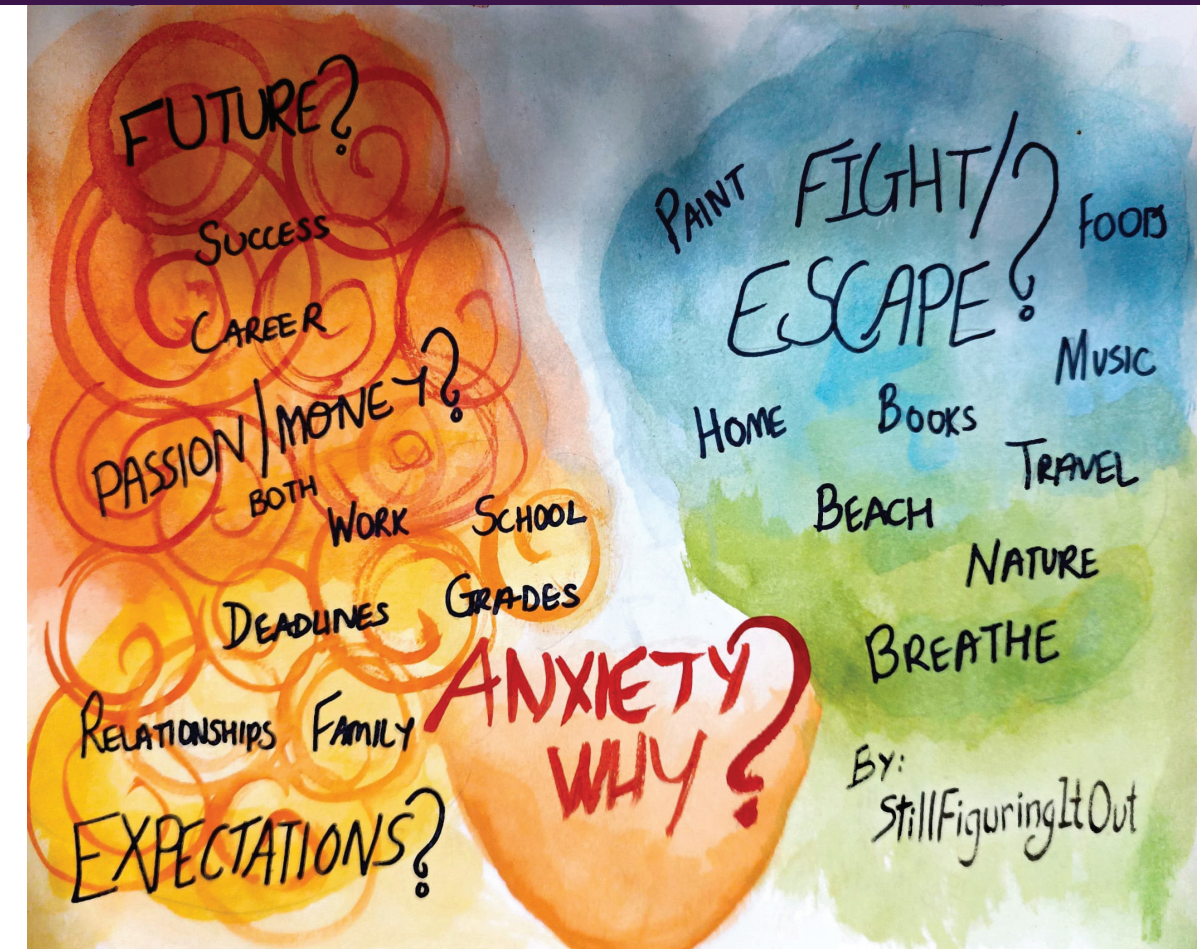
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UNLEARNING THE STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

Khushi Jain



This painting, titled “Unlearning the Stigma around Mental Health”, aims to disrupt the notion that mental illness is a myth and the negative belief that people with mental illness are ‘dangerous’ or ‘crazy.’ It is important to recognize mental illness and engage in healing as mental health governs our daily life by maintaining our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences our attitudes, feelings, and behaviour. Thus, only by being both mentally and physically healthy can we manage stress and make healthy choices. This painting is a self-reflection of my anxiety in which I try to break down the

reasons behind it so that the awareness of these thoughts and feelings allows me to think them through, and get rid of the unnecessary negativity they bring upon my mental health. Only by recognizing these thoughts and feelings instead of repressing them and by changing our attitude toward mental illness can we unlearn the negativity that affects our mental health daily. Moreover, being mentally healthy improves our ability to manage the stressors in our lives and promotes a positive outlook wherein we realize our full potential for having good relationships, working productively, and making valuable contributions to the community.

That's all, folks!

Thank you for reading the Vol. 5 No.1 (2023) issue of That's What [We] Said: 'Unlearning'.

We hope that reading this journal has allowed you to reflect on how the theme of unlearning plays out in your own life and how you would like to bring it forward into your unique future. Thank you for taking the time to read this student-led publication that we have all put so much effort into materializing!

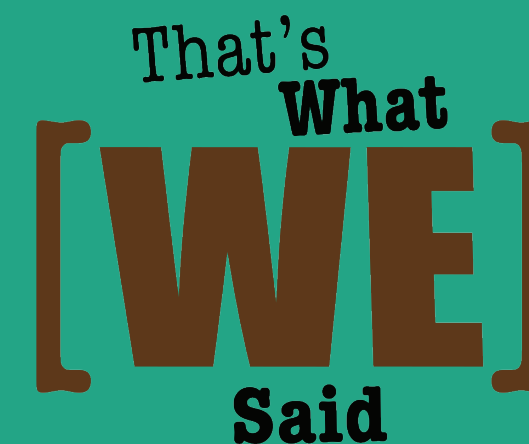
Forever grateful,

TWWS Collective

ATTN: UBCO Students, Alumni, and Community

Keep a lookout this upcoming (2023) fall for the release of That's What [We] Said's 2024 publication theme and call for submissions!

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