

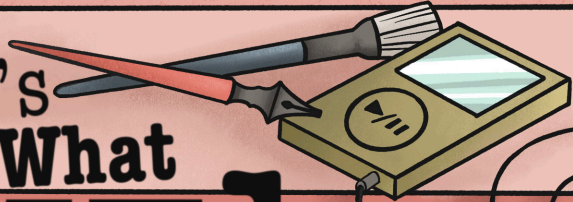


That's
What

[WE]

Said

PLEASURE VOL. 6 NO 1 (2024)



LAND & PALESTINE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Way'

The That's What [We] Said Journal wants to take the time to recognize that our sixth edition, *Pleasure*, was created, edited, and produced as Palestinians are experiencing overt genocide. We remind ourselves and our readers that as we engage with this journal within the realm of relative safety, Palestinians have been facing 76 years of settler colonialism and since October 7th 2023 undergoing an ethnic cleansing and currently do not have access to basic human needs. We, also, acknowledge that our journal is produced on the traditional, unceded land of the Syilx Peoples. We recognize that our board members are uninvited guests on this territory and we are deeply grateful to live, work and play on this land that profoundly sustains us. We remind our readers that the Syilx Peoples are the rightful stewards of this land, who have been living, honoring and caring for this land for time immemorial.

As settlers/guests/visitors, we recognize that this land acknowledgment does not absolve us of further, more in-depth actions toward decolonizing our lives and community. We encourage our readers to learn from and alongside the Syilx People through the ample amount of resources provided by the Syilx People about the land on which we live on. Please take a look and continue to actively engage with and revisit the resources we provide below.

As a feminist journal, we recognize the parallels between the colonial context in which we are producing this edition and the genocidal destruction that is occurring around the world. We acknowledge a shared struggle for decolonization, one that spans across oceans, land, languages and kinships. Our liberations are interconnected.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LAND & PALESTINE ACKNOWLEDGMENT	1
CREDITS.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
FINDING MY WAY BACK.....	8
Skylar Dubois	
MY BODY HOLDS SHAME AS WELL AS BEAUTY	9
Kira Friesen	
THIS KITCHEN IS NOT MY KITCHEN.....	10
Clara Jurgenliemk	
I WILL NOT HOLD HIS SHAME.....	11
Georgia Gomez	
SUN OF OUR PALESTINE.....	12
Amira Maturo	
THE MAN IN THE MOON.....	13
My Journey of Healing Through New Kinship	
Ashley Cowger	
LEA DELARIA	14
How Butch Lesbians Have Demanded Queer Visibility in Comedy	
Brittany Bell	
THE FIRST TIME.....	17
Lily Taylor	
MANDELA ART	18
Harshita Gupta	
THERE THERE THEY/THEIR	18
Jeena	
ABORTION HUMOUR	19
It's Not That Serious	
Sophie Harms	
TRANSFORMATIVE PLEASURE.....	22
Finding Joy in the Discomfort	
Jordyn Kort	
TWO GUYS WALK INTO A BAR... DO YOU THINK THEIR MENSTRUAL CYCLES EVER SYNCED UP?	24
The unexplored potential of queer period humour	
Alexa Bartlett	

PLEASURE THROUGH THE ABSENCE OF (MIS)PERCEPTION 27
 Maia Tobias

ORIGAMI CRANE:..... 30
 Defiance Through Self-Care
 Veronica Fabian

FINDING PLEASURE IN CONTRAST..... 35
 Inspired by Taylor Swift’s “Snow on the Beach”
 Khushi Jain

AVIK THE BELOVED 36
 Teddy Potlog

DISCOVERING WHETHER IDENTIFYING AS FAT FEELS GOOD TO ME THROUGH FASHION..... 41
 Valeriia Pelevina

SANDALWOOD..... 44
 Hannah Eastland

USES OF EROTIC EXPRESSIVE CULTURE 45
 Queer Erotic Art and Literature as Power
 Sophie Hogan

MY GUILTY PLEASURE..... 49
 It’s For Me, Not For You
 Alexander Dow

UNPLEASANT PLEASURE..... 50
 Kelsey Szoke

GIRL’S NIGHT..... 50
 The Upper Limit of Gender Euphoria
 Maria Mcglashan

RECLAIMING BREATH..... 54
 Tethering Thoughts
 Zubin Paul

GODLESS WOMAN 54
 Laviynia Akashi

PLEASURE LOST UNDER THE RUBBLE 55
 Haneen

IN MY HOSPITAL..... 57
 Amy Wang

CLOSING 58

RESOURCE LIST

SYILX OKANAGAN NATION

OKANAGAN NATION ALLIANCE'S 8 MEMBERS AND WEBSITES:

- Okanagan Indian Band www.okib.ca
- Osoyoos Indian Band www.oib.ca
- Penticton Indian Band www.pib.ca
- Upper Nicola Band www.uppernicola.com
- Lower Similkameen Indian Band www.lsjib.net
- Westbank First Nation www.wfn.ca
- Upper Similkameen Indian Band (no official website)
- www.bcafn.ca/first-nations-bc/thompson-okanagan/upper-similkameen
- www.mascotmine.com
- Colville Confederated Tribes (In what is colonially known as Washington State, USA) www.colvilletribes.com

INDIGENOUS RESOURCES

- [Sncewips Heritage Museum](#)
- [Syilx Nation Events](#) * Pay attention to which events are open to everyone versus only Syilx people*
- [En'owkin Centre](#)
- [Resources on MMIWG2s: \[www.guides.library.ubc.ca/mmiwg\]\(http://www.guides.library.ubc.ca/mmiwg\)](#)
- [Hope for Wellness Helpline \(Indigenous Crisis Support Line\): 1-855-242-3310 or online chat at \[www.hopeforwellness.ca\]\(http://www.hopeforwellness.ca\)](#)
- [Residential School Survivor hotline: 1-866-925-4419](#)
- [Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society: 250.763.4905 or \[www.kelowna.cioc.ca/record/KNA0189\]\(http://www.kelowna.cioc.ca/record/KNA0189\)](#)
- [Metis Community Services Society of BC: 250.868.0351 or \[www.mcsbc.org/\]\(http://www.mcsbc.org/\)](#)

PALESTINE RESOURCES

BOOKS

- Canada as a Settler Colony on the Question of Palestine by Wildeman Jeremy
- The Hundred Years' War on Palestine by Rashid Khalidi
- On Palestine by Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé
- In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story by Ghada Karmi
- Palestinian Walks by Raja Shehadeh

WEBSITES

- Palestine resource guide www.protectpalestine.org
- Decolonize Palestine www.decolonizepalestine.com
- Institute for Palestine Studies www.palestine-studies.org
- The Palestine Academy www.thepalestineacademy.com
- BDS Movement www.bdsmovement.net

REPORTERS

- [@MOTAZ_AZAIZA](#)
- [@BYPLESTIA](#)
- [@ANAT.INTERINTERNATIONAL](#)
- [@WIZARD_BISAN1](#)

COMMUNITY/CAMPUS RESOURCES

- Mamas For Mamas
www.mamasformamas.org
- UBCO Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office
www.svpro.ubc.ca
- UBCO The Pantry: Student Food Bank
www.suo.ca/pantry
- The Foundry
www.foundrybc.ca/kelowna
- UBC Walk-In Wellness Service
www.psych.ok.ubc.ca/psychology-clinic/walk-in-wellness
- Living Positive Resources Centre
www.lprc.ca
- Kelowna Pride
www.kelownapride.com
- Suicide Hotline: 988
- Kelowna Community Resources: www.kcr.ca
- Options for Sexual Health- West Bank
www.kelowna.cioc.ca/record/KNA1533
- Student Health Clinic
www.students.ok.ubc.ca/health-wellness/student-health-clinic/
- Okanagan Advocacy & Resources Society (Provides advocacy for mental health support): 250.979.0201
- TransParent Okanagan
www.transparentokanagan.ca/resources
- SUO Pride Resource Centre
www.suo.ca/resource/pride-resource-centre/
- Kelowna General Hospital– Women’s Services Clinic (Abortions)
www.interiorhealth.ca/locations/kelowna-general-hospital-womens-services-clinic call 250-980-1399 to book an appointment.
- Elizabeth Fry Society
www.efryokanagan.com/

HOUSING SUPPORT

- Alexandra Gardner Women’s Shelter (for women and children only): 250.763.2262
- Kelowna Gospel Mission (short term housing for men): 250.763.3737
- Kelowna Women’s Shelter (Women leaving domestic violence or abuse): 250.763.1040

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FACULTY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

THE JOURNAL IS AN INITIATIVE OF THE GENDER, WOMEN, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES PROGRAM IN THE COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND GLOBAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT AT THE 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.

**A note on citation styles: Our journal embraces a dynamic approach to citations, diverging from rigid adherence to a single citation style or strict formal guidelines. This deliberate deviation is rooted in our commitment to fostering accessibility and promoting artistic expression. By allowing flexibility in citation practices, we aim to create a welcoming platform that encourages diverse voices and facilitates a more engaging and inclusive reading experience, while still honouring where our knowledge comes from and its interconnected uses within our submissions.*

DEAR READER,

We are writing this piece at a time when several genocides are taking place around the world. How are we supposed to find pleasure and/or joy in these times? How do we expect you to find such pleasure or reflect on the ways our submitters did so? Sara Ahmed recently wrote on this topic, quoting Sarah Ihmoud's question:

“What does it mean to practice feminism in a moment of bearing witness to genocide? In her beautiful piece, Ihmoud talks about her exchanges with Mona Ameen, a young Palestinian scholar in Gaza. She asks Mona if she has any messages for women and feminists around the world. Mona answers, ‘Keep posting and posting and posting about us ... keep us in your prayers.’ Sarah writes “ghassa/غصّة, that lump in our throat when the grief is thick and suffocating, to boldly disrupt the noise of complacency. We must loudly denounce this genocidal violence.”

This is our attempt to do so— by talking about Palestine and resisting the occupation before it becomes another empty land acknowledgement.

In reflection of this, we would like you to take this time to reflect on what our theme, **PLEASURE**, means to you. Have you ever thought about how you define pleasure or what it represents to you? How is pleasure being expressed (or not) in your everyday life?

We chose this theme as we reflect on the state of our community and solidarities held across the globe. This past year has comprised of much darkness in the form of oppressive and hegemonic violence directed against marginalized groups, including but not limited to anti-SOGI rallies across so-called Canada, anti-trans legislation in Alberta, the continued Palestinian genocide, the war in Ukraine, the genocides happening in Sudan, Congo, Haiti and Yemen, MMIWG, issues of water inaccessibility on Indigenous reservations, pipeline man camps on Secwépemc land, and the continued recovery of gravesites on residential schoolgrounds. These are violent and extremely difficult times to find ourselves within, but our committee is in awe of the ways in which these affected groups carve out time for pleasure, joy, kindness, and solidarity that are necessary for survival.

In our sixth edition, We, and many artists/authors, defined, negotiated, reclaimed and expressed a multitude of types of pleasure. For some folks, pleasure is easy to access. For some, it is difficult to find whilst navigating oppressive systems aimed not just at snuffing out pleasure but also non-normative modes of living. For many of us, pleasure is something that must be carved out and reclaimed in defiance of oppressive structures and systems. Our journal recognizes and honours these forms of queer, unlikely, unexpected and radical modes of pleasure. For this edition, it is our intention to provide a home for these voices and acts of reparative, radical pleasure. We would like to thank our submitters whose work reflects examples of joy, connection, kinship, humour and solidarity that can be found in unlikely, inhospitable places. On behalf of the That's What [We] Said Journal, we want to extend a wholehearted thank you to our readers, submitters, cover artist, graphic designer and faculty liaison.

Our sixth edition is our largest yet! On behalf of our committee, we hope you enjoy these submissions as much as we have while editing and curating them for you. As you engage with these submissions, we hope you find connection, reflexivity, solidarity and just maybe, pleasure.

Limlt.

That's What [We] Said Editorial Team

FINDING MY WAY BACK

SKYLAR DUBOIS

Nothing could have prepared me for the words she was about to say.

“I want to fuck you. Can I?”

The ventricles in my heart pulsate and then skip,

I have no idea what is about to come.

“Lean back and spread your legs,”

They tell me.

As my mind races with possibilities,

I gladly oblige.

It’s a familiar feeling.

Twisted with anxiety, I had forgotten.

Sensations that send me into a frenzy of desire,

Aching for their skin.

One, and I’m not exactly sure where I start and stop.

Two, and my head is light and my eyes full.

Three, and I can’t get rid of this feeling in my stomach--a mix of the feeling from years ago with a deep and tender intimacy.

I had forgotten,

What it was like,

To be at your mercy.

To be putty in your hands.

To be vulnerable like that.

I’m not quite sure what lies ahead, but I do know

That I could never,

Ever,

Get enough of you.

MY BODY HOLDS SHAME AS WELL AS BEAUTY

KIRA FRIESEN



THIS KITCHEN IS NOT MY KITCHEN

CLARA JURGENLIEMK

The kitchen is the workplace,
Our boss: patriarchy.
The kitchen is unpaid labour,
Slavery with a smile,
Asking for “help.”

The kitchen is a broken fan,
The sweltering heat of the stove
Demanding, “Don’t let it burn.”
The kitchen is our worth,
To earn a seat at the dining table
Father at the head,
We pass the dishes.

My kitchen is a matriarchy.
My kitchen is teamwork,
Equal parts for all
My kitchen is not asking for “help.”
My kitchen just knows.

My kitchen is a girl-boss
A choice
It is what I make it.
My kitchen is a home-cooked meal or a smoothie to go
My kitchen is the end of a long day,
Meditation, gratification, reward.

My kitchen is forgiveness.
A day off
The preserving cool of the fridge
Patient for my return.
My kitchen is carried with me,
Nurturing and nourishing,
Hope in a Tupperware.

I WILL NOT HOLD HIS SHAME

GEORGIA GOMEZ

A man talked to me the other day. I once thought I knew him, but he started to speak, and I thought, what in a million years have I done to suffer through your words?

He told me my nose was too big and my ass was too small. He said my hair looked better longer, my eyes were crooked, and I was far too short.

And he called that love.

And I told him that a friend of mine, a good friend, had said to me that artists should study my face and model their sculptures, paintings, and drawings after me. I should soon find myself as a muse because my face would never go without recognition.

But instead, I was there having a conversation with him.

The man told me he wanted to get me something nice, and I told him to get me flowers. He asked me three more times that day what he should get me if he was to get me something nice. He told me he would never want to get me flowers and wanted to change my answer to something other than nature's gift to the feminine.

So I told him, my best friend sends me flowers whenever she is not close enough to dry my tears. I have never had to beg, ask, or argue with her over the state of a few plants. She graciously offers me so much consolation, yet I know you do not taste empathy. Still, an act of compassion would be common sense.

You tell me I am the one who has something wrong with me, and you shift your blame to me.

You tell me I'm immature.

You tell me I never loved you.

You tell me I never cared about you.

You tell me I never tried to.

And so, I dedicate this to you. The receipts of your deceits are piling up, with your dirty paw marks suffocating everything you touch.

It might be time to let go.

SUN OF OUR PALESTINE

AMIRA MATURO

Oh my beautiful Sun!

Umm yeah. This feels good!
Your warmth and reassuring rays on my face
Entering my bedroom and landing directly on
my soul
Tell me that everything is okay and I can enjoy
this moment
The sun you are –
Feeding me and my plants of gratitude
Sun, you are –
our nourishing star that will always be shining
and you always come back every morning
Sun, you are –
Marking our days and nights with your presence
Sun, we are –
all connected to you and we need you!

Oh my beautiful Sun!

Umm yeah. This feels good!
That is how it should be
That is how I want to start all of my mornings
That is how I want the whole world to feel every
damn second of their day

Oh my beautiful Sun!

Umm yeah. This feels good!
Sun, why can't it be that way?
Why can't we just enjoy you?
Why can I enjoy you today but tomorrow I might
lose you and all I have?
Why can't my equals enjoy you like I am?
Why can't we all have you on our faces instead of
tears and dust from bombs?
Why can't we ALL?

Sun, look at me, look at everything I have accom-
plished thanks to you
Look at my beautiful garden I have taken care of,
thanks to your presence
Look at all my grown-up fruits, they have come
a long way
From the river to the seed
My green, white, bright red, and black seed fruits
have matured and lived through the seasons
From the river to the seed my garden you can see

Oh my beautiful Sun!

This feels good! You feel good on my skin!
I am happy, lucky, grateful, safe, and privileged
to be enjoying you today
Tomorrow is another day I might not be able to
spend time with you
But I know. Today. I am. FREE!

THE MAN IN THE MOON:

My Journey of Healing Through New Kinship

ASHLEY COWGER

Content note: *Discussion of deconstructing relationship to Christianity*

I grew up in a family that fits close to the definition of the nuclear family. My mom and dad got married before having my two sisters and I, and we were raised attending Christian churches. Kim Tallbear describes her Indigenous family system in the piece “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family” as large gatherings with grandmothers, uncles, children, and everyone in large family circles as one unit, which sounds beautiful (Tallbear, 149). It is the exact opposite of my settler family. It has always been the five of us, as I have never had a close relationship or kinship with any of our extended family.

I believe this separation in my family is one of the reasons I loved attending church as a child. Church was a place of community, familiar faces, and relationships with Christians that I looked up to. Even though I could feel how superficial these Sunday interactions were as a child, grappling with why I could not connect with God at a young age and pretending I could feel his presence to fit in, it all still felt meaningful. As I grew up, I began to notice the intentions of the church and saw the prejudices the congregation was willing to uphold for the Lord. I realized I no longer fit in. Losing one’s religion is an extremely strange and difficult process, especially in Christianity where I lived my life trying to stay in God’s good light. Realizing that this figure I had been taught

to idolize no longer meant anything to me left an empty space in my heart.

High school is when I first began talking to the moon, I mean really talking to it. Late nights when I would be driving home from work in the dark, stressed from school and life, I would pull over on the empty country roads near my house, get out under the stars and speak to the sky. Our conversations are usually quite simple, I typically give little updates on how things are going, and I say my gratitude. Sometimes I don’t speak at all, just spend time being conscious in the moon’s dull light.

I have never been interested in astronomy or astrology, I don’t complicate the moon in those ways. There is just a feeling I have toward the moon that is one of comfort and quiet guidance. No matter what is happening in life, I know that most nights I can have a quick look, a simple nod, or have a short chat with the moon.

Perhaps my religious background and the routine of praying is what guided me to begin looking up for something to speak with. The physical sign of seeing the moon each night, whether it is listening or not, creates a comfort of dependability that I think I always sought when I was younger. My love for the moon could also be because of *The Little Grey Rabbit*, a children’s show I adored when I was little. The show had a character called the Man in the Moon that watched over the animals. I think I have always looked up to the Man in the Moon in some ways. I even have a tattoo of him.

I have been nurturing my relationship with the moon for years now, yet it is difficult for me to describe it to someone. I really appreciate the quote from Audre Lorde “[b]eyond the superficial, the considered phrase, ‘It feels right to me,’ acknowledges the strength of the erotic into a true knowledge” (Lorde, 89). This beautifully encapsulates my kinship with the moon, as it does not have to make sense to those around me.

I have come to understand the erotic from Lorde’s work. Like many others, I first thought of the erotic as different forms of intimacy. I now know the erotic as a deep source of self-trust and knowledge; as a source of power that one must learn to listen to in a colonial world that has taught us not to. A purposeful move away from expectations of what “normal” relations, sex, and understanding are, and filling it instead with what feels right to each of us as individuals (Lorde, 88). Through my own erotic understanding, I can see the power the moon holds for me and know I have a valid, innate attachment to such a huge star in the sky. Kim Tallbear focuses on the reclaiming of Indigenous practices that colonization attempted to strip from peoples such as their community-based family groups, and spiritual relationships through different forms of kinship. Kinship in a Western perspective typically only refers to family of blood relation. Tallbear writes “by focusing on actual states of relation—on being in good relation with, making kin—and with less monitoring and regulation of categories, might that spur more interactions” (Tallbear, 161). This sentiment is meaningful for any relationship, but also notably for mine with the moon. It is a kinship that is unique and does not fit a social norm, and that is

fine because I know my interactions and relation to this entity are strong and significant.

What I have learned about erotics from Lorde and kinship from Tallbear is that the terms can be completely individual and independent of anyone else’s definition. Erotics and kinship are places to find power and intention, and that is what the moon helps me do.

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Kim Tallbear (2018). “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family” *Making Kin Not Population*. Eds Adele E Clarke and Donna Haraway. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 145-209.

LEA DELARIA:

How Butch Lesbians Have Demanded Queer Visibility in Comedy

BRITTANY BELL

Content warning: *Mention of violent homophobia and lesbophobia.*

Loudly bursting through the television comedy scene in 1993, Lea DeLaria performed her marginality to force audiences to see her for who she authentically was: A biiiig dyke!

Lea DeLaria paved the way for queer visibility in comedy, using radical humor as a tool for butch liberation and social justice.



Note. Photograph By Michelson, N. (2018).

Because LGBTQ people have historically been excluded from the media, many queer people opted to hide their sexual orientations and present as straight in order to be included, recognized, and acknowledged in their fields. This was never an option for butch lesbians, as their masculine appearance did not allow them to be perceived as anything other than queer. With the combined forces of misogyny, homophobia, and patriarchal beauty standards, the butch lesbian defies everything that a woman “should be.” Thus, butch lesbians had two options: put on a heterosexual costume and succeed, or be authentically queer and face the consequences. Lea DeLaria chose

the second option, learning to use her butchness to her advantage, and paving a career for herself and others.

DeLaria began her comedy career in 1982 and made history in 1993 when she performed on *The Arsenio Hall Show*, becoming the first openly queer comic to appear on American television (MOR Comedy Clips, 2018). She combined outspoken political commentary with humorous anecdotes about the lesbian experience to create her own unique brand of comedy. DeLaria faced many obstacles as her career took off. Several comedy venues ostracized her, and protesters

gathered outside of her performances. In an interview with LA times, DeLaria recounts the unsettling feeling of seeing one protester holding a sign that read “Lea DeLaria is going to hell” (Karlin, 1993). Despite these challenges, her popularity grew steadily, leading to a booming career as a comedian, actress, and musician.

DeLaria’s in-your-face brand of comedy has been deemed as “radical” or even “Bitch comedy” (Gilbert, 2014), as she loudly degrades presidents (Wolfe Video, 2007) and unashamedly jokes about “eating pussy” (Team Coco, 2017). Her brash jokes no doubt cause nervousness among her straight audiences and interviewers, but nevertheless, they laugh nervously along with her. As DeLaria performs her marginality, she demands that audiences see her for her authentically queer self.

This “radical” approach to comedy is what makes DeLaria so influential for queer visibility, as she never waters down her queerness to appeal to straight audiences. She never takes the mainstream approach that many other queer comics take, insisting that they are just like everybody else, but just happen to be queer. She embraces her queerness fully, embodying her butch identity in the way she talks, moves, and dresses. Her comedy was a safe haven for other queer people who had perhaps never heard someone speak so openly about their gay experiences.

This radical approach to comedy is as much a tool for social justice as it is for laughter. By taking up space as a butch lesbian comedian at a time when homophobic jokes and attitudes

“...she never **waters down her queerness** to appeal to straight audiences...”

ran rampant (Thecomedyclubchannel, 2011), DeLaria put her queer foot in the door, allowing more LGBTQ comedians to funnel in behind her. DeLaria says that she started comedy to bring the gay and straight communities together and be a role model for other marginalized people (Karlin, 1993). In her interview with StyleLikeU, DeLaria recalls being called a dyke on the street, being queer bashed during gay pride, and she says that she probably would have “put a gun in her mouth” if she hadn’t found stand-up comedy (StyleLikeU, 2015). This historically widespread violence and hatred towards butch lesbians is exactly why we need outspoken lesbian role models in comedy.

Critics of DeLaria may claim that taking such a radical approach to comedy alienates straight audiences, whereas taking a gentler approach could make more progress for LGBT exposure in the media. I agree that mainstream queer comedy appeals more to straight people than radical comedy – just look at Ellen DeGeneres’s success. However, I think there is so much value in comedy that is unapologetically queer, not concerned about pandering to straight folks. In her interview with Curve, Lea DeLaria claps back at those who criticized her sexual jokes about Hillary Clinton, saying, “People want to make us palatable to the mainstream, so that we’re supposed to behave in

a certain way (Curve Staff, 1996). See, we have to pretend to be straight. We have to act like them in order for us to become accepted by them. I don't go for that." I see Lea DeLaria's "radical" comedy as a form of empowerment. To stand in front of an audience, proudly calling yourself a dyke is a form of liberation; it is taking back your power from a world that constantly degrades and ignores you. Butch lesbians in particular have a target on their backs in society and are one of the most underrepresented LGBTQ identities in the media (Buckley, 2023). This is why butch visibility is so crucial. The comedy industry is steadily improving in its diversity and inclusion, but much more work must be done to include butch lesbians in the media.

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THE FIRST TIME

LILY TAYLOR

It seemed so innocent the first time.

As if every conversation had prepared me for that moment.

It came out of your mouth the way a whisper sinks into your ear except the words sunk into my soul, And ate away at my tissue.

My throat plunged and

for the first time you said something that would grow on my organs and cause diseases.

How could someone I love infect my body with this need to please?

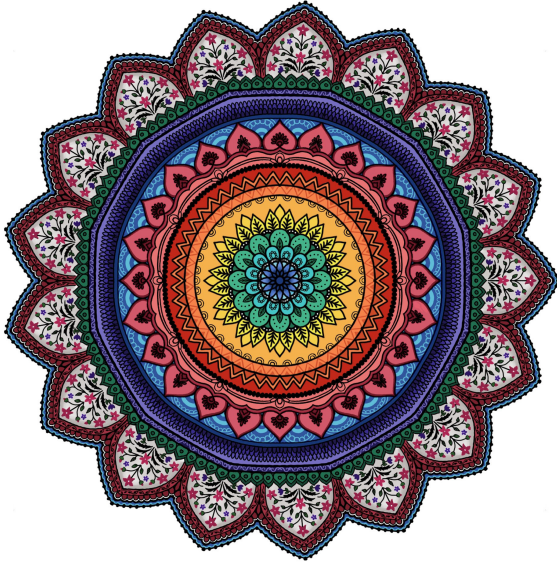
But I know how you did it,

your words were soft of nature and not harsh of tongue, the words you used were just enough to flush my cheeks, but not enough to lose my breath.

It became a common thing you would do and somehow you always followed it with "I love you"

MANDELA ART

HARSHITA GUPTA



Self-care means taking time out of one's schedule to improve mental and physical health. It can range from engaging in meditation or fun activities (like art, dance, or music) as well as spending time with friends and family. However, the fast-paced, busy schedule and domination of academic achievements make it difficult. Due to daily stressors and constant pressures, self-care was never my priority. Whenever I engaged in non-academic tasks, I felt guilty for wasting my time and not working hard. The constant burden of doing better and not giving myself enough breaks to destress, led to burnout. The burnout caused excessive exhaustion and made every task strenuous. It led to constant headaches, drop in grades, loss of interest, and feeling useless. After months of therapy, I slowly learned work-life balance. It was not easy spending time in activities that had no direct link to my academics without regret or guilt. Sometimes, I still struggle to put myself and my health before the demands of life. However,

with kindness and patience towards myself, I am able to invest in myself. The following art piece is called Mandela, and it is something I made as a part of my self-care journey. Mandala is a common art form in Hinduism and Buddhism. It denotes the everlasting life, unity, wholeness, and transformation. I believe this piece captures the time when I decided to choose myself.

THERE THERE THEY/THEIR

JEENA

You ask boys if you can kiss them, if they're okay
And they find it funny, but you meant it
You hold doors open, buy them flowers, gentlemanly in your pursuit
But maybe men want to chase, and so they break your heart like you're a woman, because that is what they thought of you.
Maybe you encouraged it, with your doe-eyed giggly sweetheart routine, but maybe they should have paid more attention to the way you sat, the way you fought
Is it misogyny if you find it emasculating to grieve them like a woman scorned, compare yourself to every girl they date after? Does the misogyny count as internalized to think this way?

You put a they/them pin on your backpack, add your pronouns on every platform, but people still default to she/her. You don't correct them, call it a common misconception because you're an hourglass through and through, and too vain to not work with what you're given
"It's like drag", you tell yourself, but it's actually the thrill of deceit

It doesn't bother you very much when your friends slip up, and "girl" is gender-neutral if you follow it up with "let me tell you about this bitch". It doesn't bother you when your parents call you their daughter because they find you quite peculiar for one. Your father gives you his best men's settu mundu, and your mother raises you like a son. Your grandmother jokes about how God meant to make you a boy but then changed His mind very last minute. There's no malice in it, nor judgment, so you know even if they never get the terminology right there's space for you to be who you are, how you are, as long as you're working a cushy tech job while doing it

You work a careful balance of how to live in the world, exist in it. There's power in demanding to be seen the way you see yourself, but there's effort in it too and you're lazy. "I don't have anything to prove" but it would be so nice if they just knew. There's also a coward's comfort in the ambiguity, in existing neither here nor there, in knowing you can turn back at any moment. You're lucky, your gender is in your mind, your heart; easy to hide in bathrooms and at family gatherings. You call it being "soft trans", and accept the rejection of your transness from those that carry the weight of who they are in their blood and bones. When there isn't enough space under the umbrella you'll politely step outside

You love it when you're asked to open a jar though, or reach the top shelf. You love when pretty women tell you they love your arms and when your shirt hangs off your broad shoulders in sharp angular lines, delightful pretense, absence of curvature. You love your father's hand-

me-downs and how they sometimes freak your roommate out because she thought "there was a random man in the house but it's just you". You love the unbridled joy of coming out to someone and being met with a shining moment of realization, of comprehension "actually that makes a lot of sense".

Being seen and heard and described the way you want and knowing it's rooted in truth, your truth, because who are you if not honest, on purpose? And despite everything that is difficult, you remind yourself your life is luxury — what a celebration it is to sow the seeds of your identity in euphoria! You get to put on shoes and clothes that fit, tailor them to perfection when they don't, and with the knowledge this reality can exist you hope for a world where everyone can experience the same.

ABORTION HUMOUR:

It's Not That Serious

SOPHIE HARMS

Content Note: *This article discusses topics of abortion. While the purpose of this article is to reclaim abortion from notions of it being an inherently traumatic or taboo experience, the author honours and recognizes a myriad of heavy emotions that may arise through discussions of this topic. If it is not within your capacity to engage with this article at this time, the author extends a wholehearted invitation to prioritize your mental wellbeing and to withhold from reading the article.*

Abortion is often understood as a traumatic experience. This constructed notion is perpetuated through various cultural institutions, such as Crisis Pregnancy Centres. In fact, the Okana-

gan Valley Pregnancy Care Centre (OVPCC), states that “[they] empower women by affirming life. [they] affirm life by empowering women” (OVPCC). This non-profit, faith-based organization offers counseling for people experiencing unplanned pregnancies to “explore all options” surrounding adoption, parenting as well as abortion, including “post-abortion care for patients experiencing distress” (OVPCC). OVPCC states that post-abortion symptoms may occur long after the procedure, even impacting men, and while there may be immediate relief, women may experience regret (OVPCC).

According to the American Medical Association, “crisis pregnancy centers ... are organizations that seek to intercept women with unintended pregnancies who might be considering abortion. Their mission is to prevent abortions by persuading women that adoption or parenting is a better option” (Bryant and Swartz). Despite appearing like legitimate medical clinics, crisis pregnancy centres will go as far as to link the post-abortion period to the subsequent experience of serious mental health disorders, even though this relationship has been debunked by multiple scientific research studies (Bryant and Swartz; Kelly 20). In fact, Post-Abortion Syndrome (PAS), sometimes known as Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome (PSS), posits that women* who undergo abortion will subsequently experience symptoms similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Kelly 20). In addition to the echoing of PTSD, proponents of PAS also describe symptoms such as,

avoidance of any person or event associated with the abortion; inability to establish or

maintain relationships with men; development of eating disorders in a subconscious attempt to appear unattractive to the opposite sex thus avoiding sexual intimacy and pregnancy; an obsession with becoming pregnant again with a “replacement” or “atonement” baby; inability to bond with one’s present or future children; sexual dysfunction, including promiscuity or a loss of interest in sex; overly intense involvement with either pro-life or pro-choice activism; and/or anniversary syndrome, an increase in symptoms coinciding with the date of the abortion or projected due date for a birth. (Kelly 20)

The gendered medicalization of PAS, especially regarding its assumptions of motherhood as a natural and innately desired life process, solidifies abortion as an unnatural, harmful and traumatic procedure. This medicalization of the post-abortion period reflects the social control that the dominant culture’s abortion stigma weaponizes through its perpetuation of traditional gender norms to ultimately dissuade women* from accessing their reproductive rights.

What does it mean then, to laugh at something the dominant culture has cemented as traumatic, serious and taboo? I was inspired to explore reparative abortion humour after organizing a local protest in response to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. The protest was emotionally heavy at times, with attendees sharing harrowing experiences of being denied reproductive care. We marched collectively in deep fear and anger to show our solidarity with those who have lost their reproductive rights in the United States. We also



(Laughter At Our Protest courtesy of Amethyst Skye, protest attendee)

raised awareness of Canada’s abortion accessibility issues, especially for those living in rural communities.

But simultaneously, I noticed a large presence of humour at the event too. As anti-abortion proponents met us with the same sputtering solemnity in the likes of “Mommy, don’t kill me” signage, most pro-abortion attendees paid no notice—instead laughing and finding joy as a collective of feminists. We cultivated humour in the presence of assumed formality, shame and desperate contrite. None of us were sorry about standing up for abortion. And this fearlessness and lack of shame was most intensely displayed in the comedic signage carried by fellow pro-abortion protest attendees.

Some of the signage read as follows:

“Hands off my coochie”

“Not every ejaculation needs a last name”

“An abortion could have saved Zoey 101” (this was my sign).

“Babies are stupid noobs, choose abortion”

“Paws off” (this was displayed on the vest of a protest attendee’s puppy).

“Legislate your dick” (this sign was flaunted by a badass elderly woman).

The humour in these slogans is the exact opposite of the hushed tone of voice that so often accompanies any mention of abortion. These slogans were flippant, unapologetic, and blunt. They contradicted the lasting, sticky legacy of PAS. Abortion is not inherently traumatic or serious. It can be an easy decision. It can be made light of. It can be funny. In fact, according to Major et al., “Two years postabortion, 301 (72%) of 418 women were satisfied with their decision; 306 (69%) of 441 said they would have the abortion again; 315 (72%) of 440 reported more benefit than harm from their abortion; and 308 (80%) of 386 were not depressed” (777). This data directly contradicts the understanding of abortion as necessarily traumatic. It is not necessarily a traumatic life event, and the hilarity that this topic was met with during the protest further unravels these claims of trauma. This humour cackles in the face of the dominant culture’s weaponization of medical rhetoric. It breathes laughter into the taboo. It serves as a blunt punchline in response to the dominant culture’s attempt to bar access to abortion. In doing so, it makes abortion that much more accessible, that much more normalized and accepted within our collective cultural consciousness. And that is powerful.

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TRANSFORMATIVE PLEASURE:

Finding Joy in the Discomfort

JORDYN KORT

Living with a physical disability is something that induces anxiety and discomfort in many different individuals. Digging deeper into why individuals, once including myself, feel this way reveals that society views those with physical impairments as abject. The concept of abject acts as a disruption, or challenge to one's identity. The abject causes us to turn our eyes and avoid what makes us uncomfortable whether consciously or subconsciously. This disruption in identity comes from the idea that once an individual becomes disabled, their life becomes extremely limited. This narrow-minded belief restrains an individual from discovering the abject is not something that needs to be avoided or feared. I would argue

that abstaining from things that are abject causes an individual to miss out on things that have the possibility of bringing them pleasure and joy.

The avoidance of things abject is something that I was unknowingly buying into, and recently, my subconscious avoidance of this was challenged when I was invited by a group of paraplegics to spend the evening with them in a wheelchair connected to an electric wheel. The electric wheel, also known as a "front-drive," is a cyborg device that aids those in wheelchairs to manoeuvre around quicker. My connection and invitation from this group, also known as the Krips of Liions, came from my uncle, who has been paralyzed since 2008. I had been invited to go front driving with this group in the past, but I always declined due to my discomfort with the abject. Unknowingly, I was giving in to society's attempt to avoid things that challenged my identity and comfort, or things labelled as abject. I did not want to place myself in a situation where I knew I would feel uncomfortable. In declining these offers, I had no idea that I was denying myself an extremely joyful experience. After many invitations from my uncle and a class project that required me to place my body outside its comfort zone, I agreed to spend the evening in a wheelchair with my uncle and his friends. Through spending the day with the Krips of Liions, my discomfort was challenged. By the end of the night, I was amazed at how my discomfort also brought so much pleasure.

The Krips of Liions set some guidelines for me to follow, so that I was able to experience the reality of life in a chair. These guidelines forced me outside of my comfort and allowed me to learn



new things which, in turn, led me into a new area of enjoyment that I had not experienced before. Some of these experiences included learning how to connect and properly use a front drive and using ramps, which proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. One particular event that sticks out from that evening was learning how to open doors while in a wheelchair. The group encouraged me to be the one to open the door for everyone, so I could experience the difficulties of doing so while in a chair. This door was heavy, swung in, and when I tried to push, the wheelchair I was sitting in would roll backward. It would have been easier to ask a more experienced wheelchair user for physical assistance. I am thankful that was not an option, as the Krips of Liions wanted me to have the full experience. Instead, I received so much encouragement and tips from the Krips of Liions on how to most effectively open the

door. After a lot of struggling and embarrassment (and probably a push from behind), I was finally able to open the door. Such a seemingly trivial thing brought me so much gratification. Not only this but to be celebrated and embraced by the Krips of Liions is something that I never would have experienced if I had chosen to stay in my comfort zone. By the end of the night, I was amazed at how quickly something that brought me so much discomfort became something that gave me so much joy. Finding enjoyment in my discomfort was not something I expected to experience that evening. Looking back, I am thankful for my uncle's persistence and the class project that forced me out of my comfort zone. I only look back on this experience with fond memories and a new sense of how pleasure can be achieved.

When the evening ended, I decided to paint something to depict the night and what I had learned. In creating this piece, my goal was to produce something that showed my preconceived beliefs going into the evening, and how they evolved into something different. I wanted to somehow show that the discomfort that I felt transformed into pleasure. I started with a black and grey in the middle to show the narrow-minded belief that life in a wheelchair is restricting and bleak. I wanted to make sure that this was not a large portion of the painting as I did not want this to be the main focus. Instead, I used bright colours around the black and greys to show the joy and pleasure that is experienced by those in wheelchairs, despite societal attitudes towards what is often perceived as a constricted life. I intentionally made these colours stand out because the purpose of the painting was to challenge preconceived notions

that able-bodied people have about those in chairs. When painting, I wanted to make sure that the shapes were fluid. This was intentional to show that life in a wheelchair is not restricting in the way society understands it. Instead, one just has to learn how to be creative in tasks that are not seemingly made for those in chairs. I also wanted to incorporate blacks and greys into the rest of the painting to remember that there are unfavourable moments, just as there are for those in able bodies. This needed to be part of the piece, but again, was not the main focus. Lastly, is the wheelchair connected to a front-drive with the skeleton hand in the middle. The skeleton hand is a logo that the Krips of Liions use. It is specific to the paraplegic community, as many with spinal cord injuries cannot extend their thumb. Instead, there is a slight bend to the digit which is displayed in the painting. I wanted to ensure that the paraplegic thumbs up made it into my painting in some way to show the community and joy of the Krips of Liions. The Krips of Liions were a crucial part of challenging and redefining how I experience pleasure and joy. They taught me to push the bounds of my comfort zone and to embrace the uncomfortable moments. Somehow while doing all of this, joy seeps through. Overall, this painting challenges the view that those in able bodies subconsciously have towards those in wheelchairs. Living life in a wheelchair gives people an opportunity to be creative in finding a way to live in a world made for able bodies. In doing this, it creates an opportunity to experience pleasure in a way that you never thought would be enjoyable. Surprisingly, as I have learned through my evening with the Krips of Liions, there is so much pleasure hidden within the discomfort.

TWO GUYS WALK INTO A BAR... DO YOU THINK THEIR MENSTRUAL CYCLES EVER SYNCED UP?:

The unexplored potential of queer period humour

ALEXA BARTLETT

Period jokes are changing comedy — and not just for women.



A personal favourite recent period joke, from Fleabag (2016-2019).

Nearly every piece of comedy targeted at women features at least one joke about menstruation. This is a way for female comics to call-in their target audience, and align themselves with the groups of people who you want to make laugh. Joking about menstrual cycles is the perfect way to do this — as it targets, historically, cisgendered women.

I would argue, though, that there is even more

unexplored potential in the period joke. As conversations around queerness become more prominent in our society, I think there is a space to be made for more intersectional approaches to period humour. In the wake of TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) ideology working its way into popular culture, I believe now is the time to put a little distance between the essentialist relationship of womanhood and menstruation. Early period humour often framed those who menstruate as irrational or crazy, paired alongside the ideas that periods were grotesque and something not to be discussed. In this way, the comedy around periods has simultaneously been influenced by and created the social attitudes towards menstruation. Though this has shifted dramatically in recent years, as cultural conversations around menstruation have been on their way to becoming more normalized. This kind of representation is critically important, as Nadya Okamoto (author of “PERIOD POWER”) writes: “Changing media portrayals of menstruators



A popular internet meme using Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham, from the NBC TV series Hannibal (2013-2015).

is a crucial aspect of changing public opinion and making menstruation an open conversation, so that menstruators aren’t held back from reaching their full potential.” This speaks to the ever-changing nature of period-related humour and the potential it has to reframe social ideas about things and people.

Joking about menstruation may strip it of its taboo, which helps us unlearn preconceived notions about women and menstruation — however, I don’t think the potential of period humour ends at cisgendered women.

The meme above, featuring two cisgendered men, does very interesting work in terms of queering the space of period jokes. In context, Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham have an queer-coded relationship, which has led to the show having a dominantly queer fanbase. I think this joke in particular is so interesting because it’s clearly meant to make a joke about how deep the bond between the two men is. This is an intriguing bridge made between typically feminized experience and queerness, two things you would have to have some knowledge of in order for the joke to be funny. So it still functions in a similar way to period jokes of the past, in that they call-in specific groups; however this one includes a broader scope of people in a meaningful, intersectional way.

This bridging of experience could lead to a formation of kinship, which I believe is something that comedy absolutely grants space for. Kylie Cheung writes for Salon: “Period stories are unifying, whether from the perspective of a young girl in

the global south who struggles in school without menstrual hygiene products, or a detained immigrant woman who's denied these products, or even a woman in a corporate setting whose office bathroom doesn't offer tampons and pads." I think there is potential for period stories to be even more inclusive than that as we broaden the scope and invite more people in.

Allowing more identities and communities to participate in humour and storytelling about menstruation can make space for bodies and anecdotes previously considered abject within the public realm. Jokes like the Hannibal meme complicate ideas around who menstruates and what it means to be someone who menstruates in a way that I feel has a lot of potential in terms of representation — in acknowledging that not all women menstruate and not all those who menstruate are women.

I would also argue that this type of joke not only fosters kinship between marginalized identities, but it reframes menstruation away from something scary and into something almost joyous. Likening the experiences of menstruation to ones of deep connection can rewrite the shame around periods.

This is not to say that we should silence voices of cisgendered women and their experiences of menstruation but rather push to acknowledge the potential of allowing other voices into the discussion. I believe this would also benefit cisgendered women, as it confuses and denaturalizes the narrative that women exist to menstruate and procreate. In this way, I believe there are



Phoebe Bridgers shares a similar meme featuring the members of The Beatles.

radical possibilities within the context of period humour and its ability to bridge identity gaps, as well as queer a comedic space that was once used to shame certain bodies.

The future of comedy could work towards something intersectional, that creates the opportunity for serious societal change and a total shift in popular narratives. So, I encourage you to go and speculate if your favourite male characters or celebrities have had their menstrual cycles sync up!

PLEASURE THROUGH THE ABSENCE OF (MIS) PERCEPTION

MAIA TOBIAS

INTRODUCTION

Because moving in society requires being perceived and being gendered, for transgender and non-binary people it regularly means being misperceived and misgendered. Research undertaken by Johnson, LeBlanc, Deardorff and Bockting (2020) and by Jones, Bouman, Haycraft and Arcelus (2020) explores the mental health of non-binary adolescents and adults. They reveal that many of the difficulties that non-binary people face can be related to transphobia, but non-binary people also experience specific invalidation based on their identity outside the gender binary. Daily, non-binary people have to navigate spaces that do not account for them. I, therefore, want to engage with potential ways for non-binary people to experience freedom and pleasure through the absence of misperception, outside of the gender binary.

In order to not be perceived, or at least to only be perceived rarely, I spent time on hiking trails and in urban green spaces. One group that inspired my project was Fat Girls Hiking. “Fat Girls Hiking is fat activism, body liberation & outdoor community” (Fat Girls Hiking, n.d.). What inspired me was not only the hiking but also the community they created.

I ended up doing three hikes in the company of others as well as spending time alone in

green spaces. I went on each hike with different people. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, I decided to not go on hikes alone due to safety concerns. Secondly, I wanted to examine the impact that different companies had on the nuances of being perceived. This is why I compare being alone to being with others and the different levels of disclosure involved. These differences were based on whether and in how much detail I had discussed both my identity and the project. I drew from my own experience, which is dominated by western gender norms. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge the variety of possible relationships with Queerness and nature. Active learning and unlearning is necessary for queer people’s joy and freedom. It is essential to include the variety of experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ people. This is important to note as I carried out my project on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

My activity as well as the subsequent reflection were guided by several concepts from Gender and Sexuality Studies, as well as Political Science. In what follows, I analyse the activity and its outcomes guided by these, such as the panopticon, social flesh, and being “unnatural.”

THE PANOPTICON

The concept of the panopticon played a crucial role in the motivation for the project as well as its execution and analysis. The constant surveillance and visibility represented by the panopticon influenced my goal to circumvent perception. The concept of the panopticon illustrates how the constant possibility of surveillance influ-

ences people to self-monitor (Duncan, 1994). The panopticon has particularly gendered characteristics by being impacted by the patriarchy and the male gaze. It is therefore described by Barkley (2016) as “patriarchal panopticism” (p. 12). “Women internalize the gaze and turn it against themselves” (Duncan, 1994, p. 50). Based on their gender expression and/or by being assigned female at birth, many non-binary people face difficulties not only based on their non-binary identity but based on their perceived femininity as well. There are a variety of ways in which western society reinforces the gender binary through media, education and the design of public spaces. For example, Bender-Baird (2015) examines how public bathrooms can be understood as panoptic since they contribute to the production of docile bodies by enforcing the gender binary.

On the one hand I aimed to escape panoptic institutions, but on the other hand I anticipated my own internalized panoptic gaze to present a barrier in my attempt to circumvent the gender binary. This expectation was confirmed repeatedly. In an attempt to centre my own perception and experience, I reflected on the activities through sketching. The sketches, however, reinforced my inability to escape internalized effects of panoptic structures. I automatically sketched myself as I would be perceived by someone else. Only after reflecting on this, I drew sketches which reflected my own perception of my surroundings. This underlines how through the panopticon we additionally can focus on our “output,” opposed to “input.” Besides the external reinforcement of dominant norms, their internalization consequently presents another obstacle in the way of

experiencing pleasure.

SOCIAL FLESH

Lorber and Moore (2011) argue that “individual bodies are constrained and conditioned by social circumstances and are produced through the ongoing negotiation of social power, historical trends, and cultural expectations” (p. 219). The social trends and expectations that are particularly influential in the production of non-binary bodies arise from the gender binary, and consequently lead to a construction of non-binary bodies as abject by falling outside these norms. Being perceived as non-binary then can lead to social punishments for non-conformity. At the same time, passing as cisgender comes with privileges for example in terms of safety, but also entails psychological as well as social burdens, as Anderson (2020) explains. It demands a continuous assessment of one’s surroundings in order to decide which identity aspects to disclose to whom. This in turn can lead to distance and isolation from others. This emotional discomfort is an aspect that I aimed to explore through the different levels of disclosure in my project. I reflected that I was most comfortable, in terms of my gender identity, in the presence of another non-binary person, as I felt that my identity was not only known or accepted but understood.

I first treated my company as standing in for social circumstances. Analysing this experience in the context of social flesh, I relied on the argument that “[c]ommunity norms and expectations determine the meanings of bodies and their relative value” (Lorber & Moore, 2011, p. 224). The only “community” where being non-binary

can sincerely be said to fall within the community norms would be with my non-binary friend. Second, I treated the situation as an imaginary social vacuum. Lorber and Moore (2011) argue that “individual bodies are constrained and conditioned by social circumstances” (p. 219). By reframing the situation as a vacuum, I was able to observe a relative absence of constraint and conditioning. Through this absence of outside perception, I experienced an absence of misperception. Based on the understanding of gender as socially constructed, this construction of a hypothetical vacuum however means a change in the conceptualisation of gender identities. Non-binary identities, after all, are defined in relation to the gender binary. Imagining a space where the gender binary does not exist, I am not non-binary, I just am. This thought experiment was maybe the most freeing aspect of my reflection. It emphasized how labels reflect normative assumptions, as Braithwaite and Orr (2016) argue, and highlighted how the construction of gender in our society demands people to position themselves in relation to the dominant norm, even if they fall outside of it. Besides reinforcing the understanding of gender as a social construct, my activities highlighted the social construction of the relevance of gender. If nothing else, I realised how I did not think about gender when I was too busy keeping a meaningless but very loud conversation going to avoid bears.

BEING “UNNATURAL”

Because of the role that nature played in my activities, it is relevant to take into consideration that queer people in general are frequently regarded

as unnatural in many societies. I had two main approaches in dealing with this in my project. The first was through my activity, during which I learned to alter my own perception through the positive experiences in nature. While I am sure that I was disturbing wildlife with my presence, the disturbance was not based on my gender identity. The second was active unlearning through information. I looked into different academic approaches such as queer ecology or projects such as the Queerness in Nature exhibition at Kew Gardens (Johnston, 2023). I learned that removing one’s body spatially is not sufficient in the pursuit of pleasure. Instead, continuous and active unlearning is necessary to counter internalized dominant ideologies.

CAUTIONS

There were several elements of my activity which I reflected on more critically, such as mentioned limitations of my own perspective. Every non-binary person has a unique experience with gender and nature. Additionally, it is important to note my privilege in being able to spend time outdoors in terms of safety, resources, time and access. Finally, I think that it is critical to avoid an oversimplification or romanticisation of the idea of escaping into nature. Due to the mentioned unequal access and also because non-binary people, like everyone else, should not have to forego community.

CONCLUSIONS

The absence of perception highlights potentials as well as limitations for non-binary people’s pleasure. It can be a valuable aspect in feeling joy as

a non-binary person since it does allow one to experience the absence of misperception and misgendering. However, this “escape” needs to be combined with active unlearning and, as the concept of social flesh highlights, community inclusion, particularly the inclusion in communities in which we are accepted and understood.

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ORIGAMI CRANE:

Defiance Through Self-Care

VERONICA FABIAN

Self-care is a necessary tool that stands in opposition to capitalism's focus on producing a profit. I challenged myself to engage with self-care through origami rather than participate in capitalism's work-oriented mentality. I chose to conduct the project at the University of British Columbia since academia is another variant of constant production, and by focusing primarily on myself, I spent time away from the stressors of labour. I chose origami because I wanted to struggle with an unfamiliar craft. My main objective was to gain a new hobby that brought me joy rather than strengthening a skill so as to avoid turning my self-care activity into a side-hustle. My

project has taught me about the potential of the queer art of failure, the relief of being a feminist killjoy, and how self-care is primarily accepted if it helps to improve one's physical wellness.

Side-hustles are a part of hustle culture that tries to disguise profit-centered labour "as a site of fun, leisure and sociality, so much so that it no longer feels like work" (Allen & Finn, 2023, p. 7). Although side-hustles may seem less dangerous because the producer determines the terms of production and can quit whenever they want, this mentality ignores how side-hustles are still an exploitative form of labour. Many low-income households buy into the illusion of side-hustles because of its incentive as an "income-generating activity" (Allen & Finn, 2023, p. 2). Allen and Finn's (2023) article explores the toxic framing of the "girlboss" hashtag's "distinctly gendered mode of entrepreneurialism invoked" when it comes to student side-hustles (p. 2). The girlboss hashtag frames women as objects that are capable of whatever comes their way. However, that mentality harms women unable to accomplish these idealized expectations about work. It is especially harmful for low-income women as the girlboss hashtag supports this myth about "escaping" poverty and "completely negates the impact of longstanding, inequitable systemic policies and practices that present impenetrable barriers to upward mobility for minoritized populations" (Caldera, 2020, p. 712). Pierce's article about BimboTok offers alternatives to the girlboss by using self-care to divert energy from capitalism. Pierce's (2022) article about BimboTok rejects the girlboss ideology of "leaning in' to corporate success to close gaps of inequality for middle-class

white women" (p. 204). BimboTok heavily relies on excessive displays of femininity to convey the ridiculousness of femininity and to cater to the self. However, to achieve the forms of femininity that are broadcasted on BimboTok means participating in consumerism, such as buying clothes, getting one's hair or makeup done, and buying oneself a treat. BimboTok's version of self-care may be difficult for certain people to replicate because of class barriers. However, arguments about BimboTok participating in consumerism fail to acknowledge that capitalism is currently inescapable.

The issue with consumerism led me to pick a self-care activity that would not rely on the labour of others or expensive purchases that would impact me negatively as an international college student. I encountered several issues when I began my project. Instantly, I was aware of my body and those around me. I felt embarrassed about my paper supplies, even though I only got cursory glances. And the most challenging aspect of this project was how I constantly worried about looming academic priorities. I only conducted the project because it was an assignment for class; otherwise, I would not have tried origami because it would be a waste of time. Despite my project's goal to avoid academia, I was actively participating in it.

Caldera (2020) found ways to engage with self-care through "[l]ow- and no-cost activities such as rest" and yet felt guilty about resting (p. 714). For Caldera, she did not want to be deemed "lazy" as that would support the stereotype placed on Black and fat people. She explains the difficulty with

accepting and allowing oneself to rest because of how much being active is incentivized. Caldera's experiences demonstrate that physical wellness is often a priority over mental health and exposes another issue with self-care. Butcher et al. explore visible wellness progress by discussing how companies execute bodily control over employees through the promotion of physical fitness. Butcher et al. primarily focus on the implementation of CrossFit within the workplace to promote "health" and "wellness." The issue with corporations incentivizing employees to participate in physical wellness in the working environment is the mentality of "being a 'good worker' but also being physically exceptional" (Butcher et al., 2023, p. 454). In the eyes of corporations, wellness involves visible results and configures the body towards the ideals of being thin and fit.

Employees working for the corporation provide monetary gain and must be visually appealing, which touches on ugliness politics about who is allowed within public spaces and who is not because of their appearance. Butcher et al. (2023) speak about body capital's exploitation of one's physical appearance such as how the "fit body at work embodies professionalism" (p. 457). Corporations gain control over employees' bodies by establishing an ideal body type within the workforce where those that do not conform risk being "morally judged and relegated for having a 'deviant' body" (Butcher et al., 2023, p. 457). A sense of isolation occurs for those who cannot meet these body expectations. Additionally, this physical wellness environment becomes a culture that is mandatory for workers. Some workers will only participate out of the necessity to keep their jobs

and are reluctant to argue for better treatment. Another harmful aspect of corporations promoting physical wellness in the workplace is that everyone has different ways they would like to live and look, and participating in the CrossFit initiative would result in some alteration that the worker may not desire.

The corporate promotion of fitness exposes that wellness is acceptable in the workplace if it focuses on the body's physical improvement. Opportunities for improvement should also include mental health and a variety of "alternative and potentially more emancipatory workplace wellness outlets" (Butcher et al., 2023, p. 459). Caldera's article shows the importance of providing resources for mental health. When medical providers suggest that Caldera should exercise or diet, they are implying that the only way to improve one's health is through physical means, and it should have visible results. However, Caldera notes how the pandemic, although emotionally draining, allowed her time to slow down and unwind. As a result, she found joy by engaging in relaxing activities. Less work-related stress and more time to herself led to Caldera's involvement in physical activities and making dietary changes. Caldera improved her physical well-being by focusing on her mental health.

I wanted to focus on my mental well-being while conducting my project. Although feelings of inadequacy and dread about due dates never went away, I found joy through failure. The queer art of failure is a subsection of self-care that challenges hustle culture by allowing me to focus on the art form instead of worrying about messing

up origami since it was my first time trying. This project demonstrates that “[f]ailure...goes hand in hand with capitalism” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 88). To engage with failure means to abandon perfectionism when spending time on an activity that brings a person joy. Therefore, we can connect queer failure with “nonconformity, anti-capitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 89). Queer failure echoes BimboTok’s desire to not engage with capitalism whilst challenging the girlboss ideology that women should be capable of doing anything. The queer art of failure shares similar goals with Pierce’s bimbo by challenging the ways in which queerness “has been bound epistemologically to negativity, to nonsense, to anti production, and to unintelligibility” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 106). The figure of the bimbo reveals an aspect of the feminist killjoy by purposefully drawing attention to our ideals of happiness about femininity and making it an abject visual. Ahmed’s argument that happiness can be transmitted to an object is useful when thinking about the ways that capitalism and self-care overlap when it comes to purchases that are or have been disguised as places of joy. When objects become synonymous with happiness, they become good, or at least thought to be, and these objects hold the promise of happiness. Ahmed’s (2010) research about the feminist killjoy “offer[s] us an alternative history of happiness by suspending belief that happiness is a good thing” (p. 572). Ahmed’s point can be seen in how side-hustles are identified as “fun” hobbies that make a profit for the creator rather than a labour-intensive job. Happiness can be used to make social norms a social good. Ideals about

who and what makes happiness then become political because of the personal attachment to the object that brings happiness. For example, Ahmed (2010) looks at the “happy housewife” as a “fantasy figure that erases the signs of labor under the sign of happiness” (p. 572). The happy-housewife narrative fails to recognize the unpaid and undermined labour put into ensuring the imagined happiness of others. The girlboss is a version of the happy-housewife that attempts to transform labour into an idealized goal and possibility within the new generation. They both carry a note of women needing to perform excessive amounts of labour, mentally and physically, to be considered useful and necessary for the production and good of the community.

Ahmed (2010) addresses the issue of conditional happiness, where certain bodies are “positioned as coming after, happiness means following somebody else’s goods” (p. 576). This issue is evident in Caldera’s article about the treatment of certain bodies enforced to perform labour for the benefit of others. Caldera (2020) contributes to this critique of forced labour for the happiness of others by acknowledging the history of Black women as exploited labourers and mentions watching how “Black women, like the ones in my family, perform paid and unpaid labor that is considered essential but is devalued in social status and pay” (p. 710). This echoes initiatives of the girlboss hashtag through the “strong black women” narrative that makes it an expectation that women should perform intensive labour for others’ happiness. We return to the issue of capitalism which prioritizes making a profit that “succeeds based on its dehumanization of

women and people of color as well as its destruction of the environment” (Caldera, 2020, p. 711). Caldera (2020) talks about needing to move away from myths surrounding the cycle of poverty and towards a lifestyle that provides support and affirmation about labour as she encourages through self-care. Black feminist and womanist scholars support Caldera’s (2020) reframing of self-care into a process where loving the self means “refusing to be complicit in my own destruction in a society determined to destroy the bodies, minds, and spirits of Black women” (p. 713). Therefore, we must become feminist killjoys to “disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 582). The feminist killjoy is someone who will point out the discrepancies of our world and put it into question even if it is not talked about because unearthing it means confronting unhappy feelings. It may be beneficial to consider living as someone who can happily claim to be unhappy.

My project has led me to understand that queer failure and feminist killjoy are ways to engage with self-care that focuses primarily on the person’s well-being and not ways to contribute to the world. However, class barriers are a common issue of self-care and capitalism as it leaves the lower class unable to participate in expensive leisure activities and tricks impoverished people with the illusion of escaping. Focusing on physical fitness as the primary way of managing wellness ignores the alternative ways people can improve their bodies. Mental health standards would challenge corporations’ control over workers since people would be spending time on the self instead of work. Performing labour for others

at the detriment of the self is exactly what capitalism hopes to achieve. There is no immediate solution to self-care’s prevailing issues as I have discovered through my project. However, self-care is still important for the body and to infuriate capitalism.

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FINDING PLEASURE IN CONTRAST:

Inspired by Taylor Swift's "Snow on the Beach"

KHUSHI JAIN

For me, pleasure is a constellation of excitement, satisfaction, and joy. It helps me savour small things in life, energizes me when I feel stuck, allows me to connect to the world I live in, and motivates me to continue working towards my goals. I derive pleasure in contrasts, especially when it is reflected in songs and paintings. This inspired me to paint this picture titled 'Finding Pleasure in Contrast' while listening to Taylor Swift's song "Snow on the Beach". Listening to

her song made me think of Kelowna at night in the winter when the beach and the surrounding mountains are covered with snow, and there are rare sightings of northern lights. The contrast that the snow creates on the beach is similar to those created by blends of warm and cold energies, darkness and light, or yin and yang, where inherently different phenomena complement each other. It invites me to indulge in this rare sight that is weird but extremely breathtaking. The contrast of fluffy snow and a full moon against the darkness gives me hope and warms my heart. The reflections of different colours on the water give it a magical feeling that excites me. When I feel anxious or stressed and unable to go to the beach, I look at this painting as it takes me back to that beautiful scenery. It makes me feel happy



and content and inspires me to eliminate negative feelings and think through issues again from a new perspective. Finding pleasure in contrast opens my mind to novel forms of beauty that heal me from within.

AVIK THE BELOVED

TEDDY POTLOG

Content Note: *Explicit sexual content and mentions of homophobia.*

Avik was a good boy. A righteous one. His hands, hands that lacked the calluses of a life lived, only knew prayer and work. Avik studied hard and prayed harder, never had time for friends, never had time for relationships. Avik studied, he prayed. Avik kept his hands busy.

Avik learned that virtues get dull when prayers go unanswered. Avik studied hard and went to university, and Avik explored. He explored tastes; the bitterness of tobacco and the sweet burn of brandy were especially enticing. They kept his hands busy, brain occupied. He felt like he had to keep busy. He didn't know why he had to, but he did. Avik explored sensations: the prick of a tattoo needle, the sting of a piercing gun, and the kiss of a girl on New Year's Eve. That last one was rather anticlimactic, just as dull as prayers and studies, so he resigned himself to those instead. Maybe relationships weren't for him, and sex wasn't as satisfying as his other vices. One less thing to repent at the altar for, he thought.

At the end of his first year, Avik saw his pastor almost every day. He would fill the hours with

long diatribes about his drinking and smoking and partying and beg the Lord to forgive him. The pastor was patient for the first five days.

On the sixth, the pastor asked, firmly, "Is there something else you're not confessing to?"

Avik went silent before hurrying out of the confessional, muttering that he would be back. He returned on the seventh day and, though the pastor could not see his face, he could see the skittishness had now transformed into an intense despair.

"Forgive me Father, for I have sinned." He starts, "Yes, I have been drinking and smoking and defiling my body and taking the Lord's name in vain. But I have also lied to you, for these are not the only things I seek your forgiveness for. I made a friend, Will. He was sitting alone at a party nursing a glass of wine, rhythmically tapping the countertop of the bar. It wasn't the song that was playing on the speakers — he was out of sync, anyone could tell — so I went to ask him what he was doing. He smiled and said he'd tell me if I let him buy us a round of drinks, some more wine. 'I don't like wine,' I tried to tell him, but he insisted I hadn't tried this wine. He bet me \$20 that I would. I don't know how he pegged me for a betting man so quickly, but he did. There was this spark he had in his eyes that pierced clean through me. I'd never seen anything like it, it made me breathless. So, I agreed. I hate to admit he was right; it was damn good wine. Oh sh-darn. Sorry, Father."

The apology disrupted the flow of Avik's thoughts,

and he went silent as deep shaky breaths filled the space where his words used to be. The pastor was quick to speak, fearing that if he didn't, only silence would remain.

"It's alright. So, was this your sin? That you lied to your friend about the wine?"

It was an out, a denial of the reality barreling towards them. For a moment, Avik contemplated taking that out, but his jaw clenched at the thought. If the truth of his situation was going to crash into him no matter what he did, he might as well confront it head on.

"No, I didn't lie to him. Even if I did, I don't think I could've fooled him. Will was able to see me in a way I hated... But I also loved it, Father. I think that's what kept me at that table, listening to him ramble about music in ways that flew entirely over my head, yet captivated me. The song he was tapping was a song he was writing; he was in college out of obligation, but his passion was in music. We talked for hours about any small thing that crossed our minds: music, politics, film, our days, our years, our whole lives. I told him things I had never told anyone before or since."

Avik let out a laugh, the absurdity of the situation registering finally. His eyes squeezed shut as he covered his mouth, letting his mind catch up with the words.

"Maybe it was the wine that compelled me; maybe this is why I don't drink wine."

The words were said with the firmness of prayer,

as if that would make them true. It wouldn't, Avik realized, faltering in his conviction on the last word as it tripped over his trembling lip. He dug his nails into his palms, focusing his mind on the sharp pain to steady his shaking body.

"We talked for so long the party was about to end, so we went back to his place for a nightcap. Despite the hours that had passed, I didn't want our time together to end. I'd never had a friend like this, someone who made me feel alive instead of exhausted by the time we were done talking. When I woke up on his couch the next morning, I asked if we could do this again. He told me he'd love to, so we met every Friday night at his place. One night, our conversation turned to romance."

Avik's voice cracked on the word romance; he felt the pastor wince. The bubble of plausible deniability had shattered, the words pouring out of Avik faster and faster.

"He asked about my first kiss and I told him there was nothing to tell because, well, it was nothing. I felt nothing. He might as well have been asking about my breakfast that morning. 'Maybe it wasn't the right girl?' he said, and I told him I'd kissed other girls after the first and still nothing. It just wasn't for me. He then got this awkward look on his face, unsure if he should speak his mind. I pushed him to tell me, and he asked, 'What if you're just not into girls?' I went silent, then I laughed. 'No... no, I'm not into men either.' Maybe I laughed too hard or too quickly or maybe it was me specifying men without his prompting, because he didn't drop it. He asked if I ever wanted to kiss a man. I laughed again and said I

don't even know any gay men, let alone one who would want to kiss me. 'I'm queer.' he told me, 'Bi, if you want to get into specifics.'"

The barrage of words began to slow and soften as Avik fell into the memory, the coarseness that had previously cracked his voice now giving his words a melodic rumbling on each harsh consonant.

"The room was so silent after that, the sudden heat flushing my cheeks made me dizzy. After a moment of studying my expression, he smiled sweetly and said, 'I would be okay with kissing you, if you want to try it just once.' I couldn't speak — it felt like I didn't need to, like he was hearing each of my thoughts as they came to me. I just nodded, and he leaned in. His lips were soft, and he smelled like lilac and cedar. It's such an odd combination, but it made sense — I can't imagine him smelling like anything else. He tasted like the wine he was drinking; it made me wonder if he could taste the brandy on me. If he could, I wondered why he didn't recoil at the taste. I know he hates brandy. Maybe... maybe he didn't because I kissed back."

Avik let out a choked cry at that admission, the words burning into his skin like a branding iron. He lurched forward in pain and clung to the gates of the confessional as he wept.

"When he pulled back, he just smiled sweetly, asking if I actually enjoyed that or if I was just putting on a show for his sake. All I could think about is how his eyes are the colour of brandy — a deep amber, with a softness that pulls you in and a fire that warms your soul. I thought, how fitting

since that wasn't the only way Will and brandy were alike. They both left an electric tingle on my lips, ignited a fire in my stomach that spread across my body, and clouded my mind making my thoughts incomprehensible in my drunken stupor. I couldn't speak, couldn't answer him — so I just did what I knew I wanted most. I kissed him again. And again. And again. With tobacco and brandy, you gain a tolerance, each cigarette or drink having a weaker punch than that first time. This, however, was different. Each kiss with him felt stronger.. Maybe it was the little things; the way he pulled me in, how soft his hair felt, how his unshaved stubble grazed my skin. I just kept kissing him, to the point where he had to stop me from taking it further. Saying that, as much as he enjoyed this, he wanted to take things slow because he really likes me and doesn't want to rush me. Reality finally set in, Father, and I panicked. I rushed out of that apartment with some half-baked excuse about studying and came here. To amend."

"For kissing another man?"

"For liking it. For wanting more. I haven't stopped thinking about him. I want to see him so badly my bones ache. I've never felt so... I can't even describe it. I've never felt this before."

The bars of the gate shook as Avik's trembling body pushed into them, tears dripping onto their polished wood only to slide down and pool in the divot between his knees and the wall.

"I've also never felt so terrified of myself. Please help me, Father. I don't want to feel like this."

Maybe it was luck that it was this pastor on this day. Maybe he recognized the nauseating shame of this realization and felt a pang of pity, of regret. Or maybe this pastor always knew there was something going on with the boy who held his head lowest when the altar boys passed him. Whatever it was, rather than the usual speech of total disavowal he was meant to give, the pastor asked a question.

“Do you feel guilty?”

There was a tenderness in the question, one that stopped Avik from instinctively saying yes. A tenderness that made Avik think back to that kiss, that moment where what was expected of him fell away. A tenderness let him admit that, even when he had remembered the scrutiny of God, he still wanted to kiss Will again. If he were to choose between Hell or never having kissed Will, to never kiss him again, he would choose Hell in a heartbeat.

“No. I want to. I feel guilty for not feeling guilty that I did what I did.”

“What do you feel?”

“Shame.”

“That it felt good?”

“Yes.”

“Then, give that shame to God and let him carry it for you.”

Avik almost laughed at that, thinking the pastor

was joking. But the intensity of the pastor’s voice was unmistakable; it wasn’t a suggestion but a demand. A plea. It was then, Avik realized, that the tenderness that had eased the truth out of him was born not from pity but an understanding. He stared at the tear stain trails on the gate, his fingers absentmindedly tracing the lines, wondering if the pastor had taken the same path.

“But if I don’t feel that shame for myself, how will I know if it is sin? What’s to stop me from doing that again?”

“It’s not sin to feel happy or loved.”

“But what about—”

“You’ve confessed. Any transgressions you’ve made have been washed free, and that can be done over and over again.”

The pastor’s voice was hushed yet stern, a mix of conviction and secrecy colouring his words.

“This pleasure you feel for this act isn’t solipsism, and you’ve been lacking it for as long as I’ve known you, so I think it is a sign you should pursue this. To... understand yourself, explore this.”

Avik tried to imitate the pastor’s tone, as if that would be enough to mask the precarious excitement that bubbled beneath his words.

“Even if it means sinning again? Indulging in that – in him – again?”

“Yes. You can always come back and confess that

sin. God will love you just the same, just as long as you repent.”

That was enough for Avik, he could tell the pastor had said all he could, so he thanked him and wrapped up their session. He left the booth lighter; he could have both worlds. He would call Will, tell him he had decided he wanted to try being with him. He just had to pray for his transgressions, confess to make amends.

Every day, after any interaction with Will or thoughts about Will, Avik would pray and pray. But those prayers turned acrid on his tongue, the taste growing fouler with each passing day. The self-imposed guilt over the only thing in his life that felt right to him began to fill him with a growing frustration rather than that familiar sadness.

The last time Avik prayed was Easter. Instead of going to church that night, as he'd always done, Avik went to Will's. Will, who had been so careful with touching Avik since that night. Will, who let Avik take a whole two weeks to work up to a simple cuddle. Will, who Avik kissed for the first time since that fateful night the moment he opened the door.

Prayers always made Avik feel worse. The self pity of Christianity weighed heavier and heavier after every session. Avik always thought he just hated being on his knees, the ache it gave his legs from hours on the hardwood floor. But it must've been the prayer, because here Avik was before Will, on his knees. He's the happiest he's ever been and he's on his knees.

Avik was never one for art, but he finally understood the artists of those church murals when he took off Will's shirt, imagining his hands as the strokes of a paintbrush as he traced the curves and divots of Will's body. He understood why someone would want to preserve one moment, one person, for eternity. Will made him feel everything church had promised and failed to invoke devotion as Will's hands held his face, humility as Will pinned him down as to train his body with kisses and bites, and worship as he got down on his knees and sucked Will's dick, watching him get flushed and breathless with each stroke. The taste of his skin, the salt of his sweat, the sweetness of his saliva – this was Avik's new communion, his holy salvation. That night, Avik was meant to behold God, and instead all he saw was Will. It was the closest he'd ever felt to spiritual bliss, to Heaven, as he let himself cum underneath Will.

After it was all done, Avik wouldn't pray for forgiveness. He would feel that familiar twinge of shame as he held his lover in his arms, but he didn't try to pray it away. He held onto it, resenting it, and buried it as deep as he could reach. Then, he would kiss Will's forehead, falling asleep soundly and deeply by his side. Avik couldn't remember the last time he rested this easily. He shouldn't have; he still hadn't found the redemption he so desperately craved.

Avik knew, as he rested his head on Will's chest and heard the rhythmic thumping of his heart, that he no longer needed it.

Avik is not a good man. He is a sinner; he sometimes drinks too much and speaks too bluntly. He

loves harder, indulges more. Avik's hands are no longer accustomed to prayer, hands clasped not with himself but with Will. By all accounts, Avik is a sinner — he chases the thrill of a vice, seeks no repentance, and feels no shame. Avik is not a good man, but he is happy.

DISCOVERING WHETHER IDENTIFYING AS FAT FEELS GOOD TO ME THROUGH FASHION

VALERIJA PELEVINA

I decided to disrupt my current identity and find out whether the fat identity feels good to me by going to the plus-size store Torrid. Growing up in Asia, I have always been unable to find clothing that fit me as I outgrew straight sizes quickly and was always the biggest girl at the store. Clothing is connected to and representative of my identity; hence being unable to get clothes that I like due to a lack of sizing options diminished my identity and agency in choosing clothing. Clothing is also political, and by wearing clothes made for fat folks, I wanted to see whether that could be my way of engaging in micro-activism as well as embracing my identity. By going to a plus-size store, as well as getting rid of my ill-fitting clothes, I want to see if identifying as fat will feel good. Thus, I will explore if discovering fatness feels good by trying to see if I 'fit in' with Torrid.

First, I want to examine fat identity formation through fashion. Peters (2014) argues that fat bodies are historically not viewed as fashion-

able and are excluded from fashion media. Even though plus-sized women have high buying power, there is still a "demand for slimming-tucking-trimming- hiding-camouflaging clothing," which is higher than "wear-whatever-we-want clothing" (Baker, 2015, p. 184). Plus-size women often shop in the men's section to "find pants with longer inseam" or other clothing that wasn't available in the straight-size section (Peters, 2014, p. 53). Relating this to my experience, when most clothes in the kid's or adult's sections did not fit me, I experienced shame regarding my fat identity even as a child (Peters, 2014). Not finding clothes that are fashionable or representative of my identity became the norm. Fat folks had to start making their clothes, and some stated that "if it covers me up, I'll take it" (Cooper, 1998, p. 20). I always tried to prioritize clothes that I liked and that also fit me; otherwise, I would not wear them. Currently, I have outgrown some of my clothing pieces, which puts me in the in-between space of plus-size and straight-size. Thus, with this essay, I hope to find where I fit in and whether it would feel good to 'try on' fat identity.

Furthermore, I want to discuss my experiences at Torrid. At the store entrance, I saw a wheelchair-accessible sign I hadn't seen anywhere else. However, upon entering the store, I was disappointed to see that the shelves were very close together, making them inaccessible and not fat-friendly. Hence, I thought that Torrid would have been designed differently after having this sign and designing a store that caters to fat people. This could be due to capitalism, where the more products displayed on the floor, the more folks can buy. Moreover, fatness and disability

are interrelated and socially constructed (Schalk, 2013). Fat bodies and disabled bodies are “pathologized” and are unwelcome in public spaces; thus, there are few spaces that cater to their needs (Schalk, 2013, para. 28). These bodies are invisible and hypervisible at the same time. Thus, making clothing with them in mind will encourage the normalization of fatness and disability in society, thereby going against the ideal ‘white, hetero, cis, abled bodies’ that are privileged. Further, the only thing that stood out to me that was fat-friendly and accessible was their fitting rooms. They featured rooms with a lot of space, places to sit outside, and a catwalk-like space. However, I noticed there were fans in the fitting rooms. On the one hand, it would be an excellent addition to control the temperature; on the other hand, it perpetuates fatphobic stereotypes of fat people always being hot and sweaty. Therefore, although Torrid tries to be fat-friendly in its clothing, shoes, accessories, and fitting rooms, it still fails fat and disabled folks by not meeting their most basic needs.

Another way Torrid fails to be accessible is that their clothing is expensive. Fat and disabled folks experience barriers to accessing higher-income jobs or financial support, and they often can be of lower income. Hence, making inclusive clothing inaccessible to some folks contributes to discrimination. Although the clothes felt nice and high quality, I felt the high price was unjustified. This is common with plus-size clothing as retailers often charge more due to the hypothetical ‘lack of its mass-market appeal’ or ‘more materials used’ or the ‘fat tax,’ thereby becoming a form of discrimination. However, particular clothing

challenges some stereotypes of fat and disabled folks being “nonsexual” or “incapable of having satisfying sexual relationships” since the store offers sheer clothes, lingerie, and so on (Schalk, 2013, para. 31). This showcases that fat folks are ‘allowed’ to feel and be sexy as many other lingerie stores do not carry big sizes.

Some clothing in Torrid challenges ‘plus-size fashion rules’ by having stripes, see-through elements, bright colors, no sleeves, etc. (Baker, 2015) These rules can be seen as biopedagogies used to discipline, police, and cover up the fat body as it is not representative of a model citizen. Women are often socialized into these rules, rather than actively seeking them out (Peters, 2014). By breaking these rules, Torrid is allowing more freedom of expression for fat folks. However, most of its clothing is still feminine featuring lace, feminine cuts, and “tunics” reinforcing the stereotypes of hyper feminine clothing for fat women (Baker, 2015, p. 176). It was tough for me to find a gender-neutral outfit at the store, thereby limiting what kind of folks could shop there and use the clothes to construct their gender identity. Barry et al. (2022) showcase the pleasures and dangers of dressing fat bodies by using the concept of “fabulousness,” which is an “embodied practice” performed by “Black and brown queer and trans people” who utilize fashion to transform gender norms (p. 303). This allows folks to experience pleasure in wearing ‘fabulous’ clothing (Barry et al., 2022). However, I think that perhaps ‘fabulousness’ or pleasure may be hard to achieve while shopping in Torrid as queer folks or folks who want to dress in a gender-neutral way may not have many options.

However, fashion functions as a form of identity construction, and it can also be used to make folks feel good. Although Torrid's lack of gender-neutral clothing hinders it from helping fat folks in their identity construction, some still find joy and pleasure in finding clothes there.

For instance, Cooper (1998) argues that "being with other fat women...is profoundly liberating" (p. 64). Fat women were working in the store, and being there felt good since, for a long time, clothes shopping felt dreadful to me due to the lack of sizing options. Cooper (1998) states that "being in touch with the way our bodies look and feel helps us feel good," hence bringing embodied pleasure to the wearer, which historically for fat folks and me was hard to achieve (p. 64). When I looked at clothes in the store, it was very liberating to see that I could size up as much as I wanted, and I did not have to reach to get the back piece on the rack. Because Torrid uses its own sizing, it also felt good to pick up what was size 0 or 1. While I acknowledge this thinking is problematic as smaller clothing sizes should not be connected to feelings, due to smaller people being privileged in society, they still are. I think that having their own sizing scale that mirrors straight sizes furthers fat stigma. Feeling good about picking up smaller sizes due to my internalized fatphobia perpetuates the privilege of smaller sizes even in the plus-size store, which should not be the case. Hence, perhaps sticking to '2X', '3X', etc., might have been better since they do not mirror straight sizes and do not confuse the person shopping.

Fashioning a non-normative body can also be political. Baker (2015) argues that "fatshion" or fat fashion is political and that dressing up your

fat body in whatever you like and what scares you "is revolutionary" (pp. 170-171). Having a non-normative body take up space and become visible through fashion can be seen as a political act (Baker, 2015). Cooper (2016) argues that "micro fat activism" is usually performed by one person, and it happens in "everyday spaces" (p. 78). Hence, dressing in clothing that fits fat bodies, wearing what scares you, or breaking 'plus-size fashion rules' can be ways of engaging in such micro activism. Going to Torrid and being in an inclusive space made it feel like I was doing something political. Outside the store, I observed many people looking in, walking by, and possibly intimidated by the plus-size mannequins or the store's name. Therefore, by going in, it felt like I was crossing a threshold into my fatness as well as committing a political act of activism, which felt pleasurable and liberating.

I edited my wardrobe as part of this project as well. Woodward (2007) argues that one's wardrobe is a collection of "memories and former selves" that we constantly add to or edit (p. 52). I kept my clothes as a reminder of who I once was and in hopes that I would fit into it someday. By removing all ill-fitting items like jeans and workout shirts from my closet, I removed my old identities and made room for new ones, which felt liberating. At the same time, I understand that removing ill-fitting clothes does not work for everyone. Since some folks may have deep emotional connections to their clothing, their memories with it, and their former selves, this can be the last step towards the acceptance of their fat identity. Talking about experiences with fat identity can be a step toward acceptance. This

can allow some to see that identifying as fat can be liberating. Then, the next step would be to go to a ‘straight-size’ store and “just try it on” since, due to inconsistency in sizing, you may be able to find something that fits without having to go into a plus-size store (Peters, 2014, p. 56). Going to a plus-size store can be done when the person feels comfortable with their new size. Some stores will have online options for plus sizes, allowing them to avoid the possible retraumatizing shopping experience.

My research has highlighted a binary between plus-size and straight-size, accounting for the slight variation of in-between sizes (Peters, 2014). Torrid offered various in-between sizes, making it easier for me to fit in and feel good. It allowed me to feel ‘fat enough’ compared to my experience of sizing in other stores. Although I was disappointed by Torrid’s disregard for accessibility, both physically and financially, as well as gender diversity in clothing, I think it offers more options for fat folks. The fact that my size was not the last on the rack, and the option of sizing up as many times as I wanted, was liberating. It also allowed me to engage in fat activism, which I was not able to do anywhere else in Kelowna, as there is a lack of fat-positive spaces. Overall, I would go back to Torrid, and it did change my feelings towards accepting that fatness can and does feel good to me. However, the store still has many flaws to consider to avoid further discrimination.

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SANDALWOOD

HANNAH EASTLAND

That first breath of sandalwood
earthy and rich
Sweeping me through the mountains
Through the dewy coniferous trees
An aroma that brought me home
Reminding me of tranquility

That first embrace
Like hot chocolate by a fire
 warm and sweet
Lights a flame in my soul
Illuminating dark nights
One touch from you
Could put stars in an empty sky

That first sip of red wine
 full-bodied and fruity
The only liquor to grace our lips
The thing that turns a night-out to a night-in
Reminds me how to laugh
Nothing tastes as good
As that bottle with you

That first I love you.
That last I'll see you soon.

USES OF EROTIC EXPRESSIVE CULTURE:

Queer Erotic Art and Literature as Power
SOPHIE HOGAN

Jacqueline Rose argues that our culture's inability to reconcile with the sexual unconscious is leading to active harm against women and queer individuals. Audre Lorde suggests that the erotic, which stems from the sexual unconscious, is a source of power that has been intentionally devalued and suppressed within our culture to maintain patriarchy. In order to fight against the oppressive way our society structures sexuality, women and queer individuals must embrace the power of erotic pleasure within their work. Christina Sharpe points to expressive culture, such as

art and literature, as a way to resist structures of oppression and make real change in the world. Using three contemporary artists as a case study, I argue that expressive culture which embraces the sexual unconscious is the best way to resist patriarchy and queer oppression.

In "The Call of the Unconscious: Trans, Sexual Harassment—Returning to the Question," Jacqueline Rose brings attention to Freud's theory that sexuality arises within the unconscious, that there is something about sexuality our minds cannot fully grasp. In Euro-American society, we prefer to look away from this unknown. We subscribe to the closed door policy and pretend that what goes on behind said closed doors has no effect on our lives beyond. Rose explains that "Sexuality is tarred with the brush of violence, the phantom limb of the normality we are all so blithely and deceptively meant to share" (16). She argues that this disavowal of the mystery and complexity of sexuality is what leads to violence against women. Men use rape in order to mark a woman as 'woman' and to keep her in her sanctified role of subservience (Rose 4).

Rose also sees this inability to confront the sexual unconscious as the reason why our society has a problem supporting trans people. Trans individuals pose an obvious threat to the sanctified world of heteronormativity. This deviation from what is deemed normal is looked away from and never accepted (Rose 12-14). Our culture's patriarchal version of sexuality must be challenged in order for women and queer individuals to be able to live freely. Embracing eroticism, in all its intricacies and unknowns, is the only way to fight against the

oppressive way our society structures sexuality. In “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Audre Lorde explains how women have been taught to ignore the erotic or to embrace it superficially as a tool of oppression. Lorde views the erotic as a powerful tool that has been restricted to the bedroom in order to make people look to other sources for their satisfaction. This detachment from the erotic also serves to remove affect from work. This affects the work of women most notably because sexually empowered women are a threat to patriarchy. Lorde explains:

The very word erotic comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (55).

In this way, Lorde extends the erotic into ways of living, working, and being that lie far beyond sex and sexuality. She looks toward, instead of away from, the sexual unconscious in order to draw from that energy and pleasure in every aspect of her life. Though she qualifies the erotic as the life force of women, I believe this concept can be applied to any sexually repressed group including the queer community. Lorde explains how being attuned to the erotic aids in being attuned to affect in general and overall being more aware of our desires. When we listen to our desires we are less likely to accept the oppression that has

become banal in our society.

Lorde suggests the erotic is a way of extending oneself but also of reminding oneself that our capacity for joy comes from within and does not have to be drawn from external forces. Acknowledging the erotic demands that we apply that capacity for joy to all facets of life and recognize that “satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called marriage, nor god, nor an afterlife” (Lorde 57, Lorde’s emphasis). Lorde sees this joy, and its applications within her work, as a way of resisting oppression against women and queer people whose eroticism has been shamed or erased. Christina Sharpe similarly sees joy as resistance. In an anti-Black world where Black life can be defined by an intimacy with death, expressions and representations of Black joy are essential for the survival of Black bodies. Sharpe looks to Black expressive culture as the best possible form of resistance to the oppression of Black people for its ability to represent the complicated reality of living in the wake of slavery, to simultaneously capture both the joy and the horror (14). As such, complicated and queer representations of eroticism in art and literature can challenge the oppressive way in which our society structures sexuality.

Expressive culture is one avenue in which we can embrace and look towards the sexual unconscious in order to counter oppressive heteronormative versions of sexuality. Because of its ability to convey complex and contradictory affect, expressive culture allows access to the sexual unconscious that is ignored in popular media and everyday life. Mainstream culture would rather us hide our queer sexual desires in

order to conform to their narrow definition of normalcy. Attempting to keep up this facade is actively hurting people, most notably women and queer people. Using three contemporary artists as a case study, I will demonstrate how their work embodies the erotic and highlights the mystery of the sexual unconscious in order to counter the mainstream's narrow definition of what normal eroticism should look and feel like.

Nico Mazza is an Argentinian textile artist who uses embroidery to create convoluted figural scenes that question how bodies and eroticism are represented in mainstream culture. Her works typically feature bodies that are proportionally unnatural and often intertwined with other bodies or creatures. At first glance, the women she depicts may appear to be simply docile and sensual, but something more sinister often lurks beneath. Mazza draws both from her personal and ancestral history and the Euro-American canon in order to create her works. Her latest exhibition, *The Desire of Not Wanting*, takes inspiration from the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan in which Zeus takes the form of a swan in order to seduce Leda. This myth has been the subject of many artists throughout history who depict Leda's consent to varying degrees. Mazza's reference to this ancient story of convoluted sexual fantasies shows her commitment to embracing the sexual unconscious and reminds us that humans have always had queer ideas about sex. However, her use of this story in particular questions why European culture iconizes narratives of female subordination and male domination.

Mazza's version of the myth is much more compli-

cated than the original. Through a series of works of embroidery, women and swans collide and intersect, sometimes in an intimate embrace and sometimes for a more violent cause. The collection takes the viewer on a journey, including scenes of mutual masturbation and of women and swans intertwining in intimacy under white sheets. These scenes contrast scenes in which women are depicted fighting, hanging, and stabbing swans with Mazza's leitmotif: a pair of scissors. To me, this exhibition symbolizes women reclaiming and facing, head on, their erotic power against a long history in which it has been denied or written over. Mazza embraces the sexual unconscious in order to refute our society's patriarchal version of sexuality and by doing this she empowers her audience to do the same.

Miles Greenberg is a Black queer performance artist based in the United States. His work centers Black bodies, placing them within high art gallery spaces to demonstrate their inherent beauty and worth amongst artworks the racist Euro-American art system has previously deemed beautiful and valuable. His 2020 work *The Embrace* is a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is his attempt to archive intimate and sensual contact between strangers during a time when this type of contact was sparse. *The Embrace* consists of a glass box that holds a large flat rock atop which two live models perch in an embrace. Wearing only nude illusion garments and blinding contact lenses, the models meet through touch alone during the exhibition, preserving their intimate meeting behind museum glass. The models, who are of all genders, remain for hours at a time melding into one another and creat-

ing an erotic scene that is free of sex and relies completely on intimacy. In this way, *The Embrace* presents a version of eroticism that is in direct contrast to pornography. It is also experienced live as opposed to through a screen. The audience, therefore, is invited to participate in an embodied experience of eroticism that is free of sex. Additionally, because Greenberg uses exclusively Black models in his work, *The Embrace* creates a necessary scene of Black intimacy within an anti-Black world and strongly asserts itself as art worthy of artistic contemplation. Therefore, *The Embrace* both provides an alternate and queer definition of eroticism, one that is free of sex but propelled by the intimate contact of strangers, and also serves as a reminder that Black intimacy is alive and well and can be embraced in order to resist the oppression of the anti-Black world.

David Wojnarowicz was an American artist based out of New York whose work often centered around queer life in the midst of the AIDS epidemic. His memoir, *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, brings the audience into his intimate life through scenes that depict his sexual experiences in visceral detail. Wojnarowicz expertly contrasts his pleasurable and intimate experiences of violence within sex to the cold and harsh violence enacted by the state towards the queer community during the AIDS epidemic. He embraces the combination of violence and intimacy that is often denied in our culture. To Wojnarowicz, sex is the space in which he can forget the oppression and sorrow that have come to define his life due to the epidemic and ensuing homophobia exhibited by his society. The combination of sex and violence is a way of further

disorienting the body and surrendering oneself to another in order to completely submerge into the experience. There is intimacy in the trust that is built within these types of relationships. Wojnarowicz uses both the passion and rage of his erotic experiences in his AIDS activism, embodying Lorde's theory of erotic power.

All three of these artists, Mazza, Greenberg and Wojanrowicz, turn toward the sexual unconscious in order to refute our society's patriarchal and heteronormative version of sexuality. The work of these artists is vital in order for our world to become more inclusive and less fear-inducing for marginalized people. Intimacy and eroticism influence much more of our daily lives and political attitudes than we often acknowledge. Becoming more attuned to this and exploring the unconscious erotic through expressive culture is the only way to find salvation from the sanctified world of heteronormativity and oppressive gender roles.

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MY GUILTY PLEASURE:

It's For Me, Not For You

ALEXANDER DOW

After learning so many things in life, whether it would be in academia, a skill, professional opportunities and more, I started to grow my interests and indulge in the ones I enjoy. Good examples are reading historical facts and learning about new places to potentially travel to and dream about it. This is to further explore the possibilities of how much more joy I can feel and grow as a person as well, a time in which I could dedicate to doing tasks I enjoyed, for pleasure's sake.

There are so many forms of policing to what I should be allowed to tell others about my interests or hobbies, what is considered 'acceptable' to not tarnish my reputation; to be potentially called 'weird', a 'freak' or made to feel bad and rethink my interests. There are always questions of whether I should tell people that I like something when they don't? Will I look silly if I do? What will people think of me? Am I truly strange compared to my peers?

Growing up, I enjoyed listening to older music - mostly 1980s rock music (i.e. Rush, AC/DC, Genesis, Scorpions, etc.). According to social media, where folks my age are attending clubs, and music festivals that blast modern-day pop music, even talking about songs which I have never heard of, I feel that I cannot relate. I envy

folks who attended the concerts in the 1980s. I imagine what it would be like to be back then and listen to these performers live, what they were like alive. For many years, I slowly tell people that I am not a fan of modern-day music and that I like 1980s rock. Why? Because it blows me away. Rush's lyrics, each band's synchronized guitar playing, epic bass sounds, and the grand stage presence. All of these provide an escape for a few minutes while I indulge in their artistry, being captivated by lyrics that make me reflect on myself and the world around me but still make me feel warm as it increases my adrenaline, even when I sit for hours on end. Nonetheless, I still feel judged or viewed as different, but listening to this music is a form of pleasure.

As a teenager, instead of going to parties or getting drunk at Khaosan Road in Bangkok, I stayed in my room, locked the door and embraced my inner imagination - a connection dear to me but also brings me great comfort in times of uncertainty, such as now. I created an imaginary country, where there was a made-up language, a system of government with a President, foreign policies that are both controversial and progressive, a currency and diverse population demographics. Creating and shaping this imagination was my everyday activity for over six years, whenever I had time away from my school. I guess this is where my love for International Relations and Political Science started and encouraged me to stay motivated in my studies here.

Overall, I hope this little piece resonates with you in some manner, in a sense as a reminder that pleasure is meant to be for you, it should not have

to impress your friends, family, or anyone. After all, it's you who feels the joy of doing what you like for your emotional benefit, as long as it does not harm others of course.

UNPLEASANT PLEASURE

KELSEY SZOKE

Content Note: *Mentions of sexual violence.*

You took my idea of pleasure and redefined it. I was with my friends, having fun at the bar the summer I turned nineteen with my friends. You flirted with me all night across the room until you finally came up to me. Tall, brown, curly hair with a bright smile. I got lost in your eyes. I fell weak to the sound of your voice. It was like a movie scene; everything else around us became a blur of drowned-out noise and statues of people. We talked all night, exchanged numbers, and then I went outside to find my friends. I thought I was alone. I thought I was safe. I thought I would go home that night. I thought wrong.

You decided that your personal needs were more important than my consent. You forced me to be defenceless and have no control of my own body. YOU decided. While I lay there, with shame, you feel pleasure. You got to walk away feeling good; I got to spend the following day in the hospital. You controlled me for months; you redefined what pleasure meant to me. I hid in the shadows of self-consciousness, feelings of fault and lack of trust towards any male who approached me. You still had control.

It took time, but I finally gained that control back. You don't get to control me. It wasn't my

fault, and you don't have the right to define what pleasure means to ME. Your idea of pleasure is sickening, and I acknowledge that. The way you used my body against my will is disgusting. That is not pleasure. Pleasure is laughing with my friends, spending time with my family and most importantly, loving me. Loving myself is pleasurable. Pleasure does not have one definition but is subject to a personal meaning to all. I can control what I deem pleasurable. There are unpleasantnesses within pleasure; however, these only attribute to the individualism of pleasure. You may have momentarily redefined my idea of pleasure, but ultimately, I have control.

GIRL'S NIGHT:

The Upper Limit of Gender Euphoria

MARIA MCGLASHAN

Content Note: *Descriptions of gender dysphoria, historical medical malpractice.*

Being nonbinary is a lifelong search for gender euphoria among all the possibilities of presentation, language, and identity. I found my identity not by running away from dysphoria, but by running towards pleasure wherever I found it (regardless of whether the pleasure was marked with pink or blue). By refusing to choose between the joys of manhood and the joys of womanhood, I gained access to both; it feels like a waste not to fully explore the options this affords me. In light of this, I am always looking for new facets of gender I have not yet explored to see what pleasure I might find within them. Through the writing of past and present "gender hackers" (Preciado, 2013, p. 55), I discovered new places to look for euphoria and eagerly tried to put their

theory into practice. Unfortunately, the theory did not survive the jump into my reality. The pleasure I was seeking failed to materialize; instead, my experimentation revealed a painful, ugly, inescapable truth. Seeking pleasure through gender exploration is possible in theory, but in practice, the structure of gender punishes deviance and incentivizes conformity because of its origins and continued use as a tool of biopower. Thus, the concept of gender destroys gender nonconforming people's ability to seek pleasure freely.

Gender as a construct is maintained by many components and structures, thus opening all of these structures to being repurposed for pleasure. The components of gender are wide-ranging and varied, as described by Paul B. Preciado in *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (2013). There are technologies of gender, which are the media images and real-world bodies that represent and thus reinforce the gender binary (de Lauretis, 1987, as cited in Preciado, 2013, p. 107). There are gender performances, which are the rules, norms, and actions associated with each gender, repeated to reinforce and reproduce the binary (Butler, 1990, as cited in Preciado, 2013, p. 110). Finally, there is Preciado's exploration of biotechnology, where "corrective" surgeries are used to reinforce a sex and thus a gender binary that does not exist (Preciado, 2013, p. 119). All of these systems assemble the categories of "man" and "woman"; without them, the categories would cease to exist. Gender's constructedness implicitly opens it up to deconstruction; every tool required to maintain gender is a potential starting point through which gender can be dismantled. In addition,

each tool of gender can be used in a myriad of ways beyond its current place in the machinery. Thus, we are inevitably heading towards a world where the machine of gender is broken down and used for parts, where technologies and tools of gender are freely used and discarded when they stop being enjoyable (Preciado, 2013, p. 125). This type of use was what I wanted to attempt. I am generally masculine-leaning and androgynous in my presentation, but I do not want to limit my expression because of in-group nonbinary norms (Cusack et al., 2020, p. 431). I have looked butch for my entire adult life, so I did not know what joys I could be missing out on on the other side of the spectrum. Thus, I decided to use the gendered technologies of femininity that I previously avoided. In pursuit of potential gender euphoria, I donned a pink dress, fake nails, a full face of makeup, and a wig and took my friends to a club for a "Girl's Night". Following Preciado's logic, I wanted to repurpose gender's tools and find my nonbinary pleasure in technologies created for womanhood. At first, I was almost giddy with the newness of it all. I liked the way my hand gestures looked with the fake nails. I took a million pictures of my makeup, enjoying the novelty of my unrecognizable face. Most of all, after 10 years of having a buzzcut, I could not stop playing with my "hair". I truly wish this story stopped here, with straightforward pleasure and freedom. Unfortunately, my joy became complicated when it entered the world beyond my apartment.

Because I found my gender through the pursuit of pleasure, I failed to recognize the extent of the pain that gender exploration could cause. After

spending most of my adolescence and entire adulthood as a gender deviant, I had no concept of how the world treated gender-conforming people. This experiment with feminine technologies showed me just how different my life had been. In my wig and my dress, I was let into the nightclub for \$10 less than usual. I easily became a part of the crowd, shoulder to shoulder with strangers. I went to the girl's bathroom and made fast friends with everyone who walked through the door, dancing with each other and giving compliments freely. In short, I had a standard club experience. This type of night may feel mundane to most, but I have never experienced this before. Normally, when I go to a club, I am never part of a crowd; people move away from me when I come near them. I am perpetually surrounded by a buffer of empty space as if the other people in the room are afraid that whatever is wrong with me is contagious. Normally, when I walk into a girl's washroom, the friend-making stops. Something about my presence turns the easy flow of compliments into tense silence, and the room is always louder behind me when I leave. These experiences follow me out of the club and into the rest of the world, inescapable. People glare openly wherever I go, regardless of whether I am wearing flashy clothes or a crewneck and sweatpants. No matter how many people are standing, I am always surrounded by empty seats on the bus. I am stared at so often that I have stopped noticing. Even in gay bars, spaces designed for deviants, I draw scowls and repel crowds. There is nowhere I can go to escape this. Before my experiment, I had no frame of reference for what was "normal". I know now that my life has been anything but. The pain of this knowledge flooded into me from

all sides. It was the pain of realizing how much mistreatment I had endured without knowing any better. It was the pain of suddenly understanding how much easier life could be, and the grief of knowing that I would never experience it again. Above all, it was the pain of a failed experiment in joy; in my attempt to play with gender and seek my own queer pleasure, I had stumbled into indescribable pain, and the contrast between expectation and result made the sting so much worse. The kindness I experienced in my long brown wig was the reward incentivizing gender conformity. The treatment I usually receive is the punishment for gender deviance. The message was clear: if I wanted the reward, I needed to conform. Otherwise, it was back to the suddenly silent bathrooms and my perpetual halo of empty seats on the bus. If I cannot seek pleasure in deviance without punishment and I cannot receive the rewards of conformity without doing something I find painful, I have no ability to seek pleasure through gender. Even when I attempt to play with conformity, the stark contrast between my normal life and the new treatment turns the pleasure sour; the joy of my makeup and my fake nails seeped out of me when I registered how much kinder the world had suddenly become. That night, in my wig and my dress, the tools of gender were not free to use as Preciado claimed. Putting them on only showed me how limited my capacity to seek pleasure through gender exploration really was. This policing is not a bug in the system of gender; it is the feature that the system was built for in the first place.

Gender's use and origins are inextricable from biopower and policing, making it impossible

to seek pleasure and play with gender freely. Biopower is the power not to make die, as sovereign power can, but the power to “make live” (Foucault 2003, as cited in Harwood, 2008, p. 16). Gender is one arm of this system; the gender binary creates men and women, which creates heterosexuality, which creates heterosexual sex, which creates reproduction, which creates life (Repo, 2013, p. 231). Thus, reinforcing gender reinforces the continuation of life, making gender a key part of biopower. Biopower is not reinforced by a central authority; instead, it requires a whole system of biopedagogy to teach, reaffirm, and reproduce itself (Foucault, 1983, as cited in Harwood, 2008, p. 19). To maintain itself, gender must be reinforced in schools, hospitals, legislation, media, and everyday life. From the women’s bathroom to the seats of the bus, gender is policed everywhere. The system requires an unfathomable amount of effort to maintain because it is not natural. Gender as a “psychological sex” distinct from sex was invented by Dr. John Money in the 1950s for the express purpose of forcing medical interventions on intersex infants to create gender conformity (Repo, 2013, p. 229). Money theorized that gender was not born, but was taught, and advocated this teaching needed to be aggressive (Repo, 2013, p. 229). Gender was built by the pedagogies that reinforced it even then, from the doctors performing the “corrective” surgeries to the parents of the intersex children who reinforced the divide in gender roles (Repo, 2013, p. 235). From the very beginning, gender was created to reinforce an artificial binary by force. Thus, it is no wonder that it is so difficult to explore the possibilities of gender without incurring the wrath of biopedagogy. Gender cannot

tolerate deviance because the gender binary has to be reaffirmed by everything. Anyone who is publicly visible and deviant is a threat to the whole system. Because of this, nonbinary people are a massive target. Gender resists our deviance with medicalization, social ostracization, and outright violence. This is why I cannot play with gender freely to seek pleasure as a nonbinary person; my pleasure, my very existence, is a threat to biopower that must be “fixed” or simply eradicated. Gender’s constructedness theoretically makes it a playground for gender deviants, but gender’s purpose is and always has been to erase these deviants from existence.

Through theory, I discovered a world where gender could be taken apart and put back together in a new shape. I discovered gender’s constructedness and dreamed about the joy I could invent with its repurposed tools. Then, through my experiences, I discovered how powerfully gender had constrained my capacity to find joy through gender experimentation. Gender was created to reinforce itself by destroying deviants, and it continues to serve this purpose today; this is what made my pursuit of pleasure impossible. Put simply, I cannot live freely in a world structured by gender. Queer joy is incredibly, beautifully resilient, and I have no doubt that we will all continue to find our little corners of gender euphoria amongst the pain. With that being said, I am not content to live in corners forever. If I ever want to experience real, uncomplicated pleasure through gender exploration - not just pleasure in spite of the punishment - I cannot continue politely coexisting with a system designed to destroy me. We all deserve better. In the words

of Marquis Bey, “[I am frustrated]...because of the stubbornness in not wishing to push, to take another step, to say it is not simply about making these orders a little easier on us but refusing the system tout court. I need us to go there.” (Bey, 2023, p. 314).

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RECLAIMING BREATH:

Tethering Thoughts

ZUBIN PAUL

My ADHD is a disability that formed before I took my first breath. I have not done much breathing, at least not on my own terms. I foolishly assumed the process only worked on autopilot, exclud-

ing my conscious capacity. I used to unquestionably believe that breathing ran on my biological clock and, therefore, lay outside of my control. My ADHD had cursed me with reliving traumatic thoughts repeatedly. My suffering could only be quelled by box breathing. Inhaling through my nose for four seconds. The air filled my belly. I held my air baby for four seconds. Expanded state. I slowly exhale through my mouth for four seconds. Bodily tensions loosen up. Positive energy radiates from me. I repeat the box breathing, soothing my soul exponentially every time. I box breathe in the bathroom. I box breathe in my bedroom. I box breathe during an exam. Box breathing is my first act when I wake up in the morning. Box breathing has become routine. Prioritizing taking more care of my mental health is vital in order to revitalize myself.

GODLESS WOMAN

LAVIYNIA AKASHI

I love you, he whispers,
She giggles, her heart blisters.

Her tiny dress covets the cold,
Eyes lay upon her—a statue of gold,
He begs, he pleads to touch,
Her eyes soften, she is a crutch.

Will you touch me again?

And suddenly gold is dust
Love was nothing more than lust,
For all the gold King Midas could make in his
glove,

He could never touch his love.

A sob, a wail, a plea,

Why did he just leave her be?

She grabs onto him, a crutch,

What did I do? Was it too much?

Godless woman,

Did you expect such

Love and care? Of what heaven gives?

*Heaven is so far from where a woman like you
lives.*

What shall she do then?

Stand outside the gates—until when?

For a man is able to touch as he pleases

A woman—touched, is nothing more than disease.

Oh God. So holy thou.

I shall never have heaven's grace now.

But I will not plead for your perversity

I do not need a place in your eternity.

PLEASURE LOST UNDER THE RUBBLE

HANEEN

Content Note: *References to violent world events.*

On some days, I am filled with poetry.

On some days, I find myself chiseling words until
they become sharp enough to stab through flesh.

On some days, I teach my words how to find your
soul.

Today is not one of those days.

Today, I have to fight for every smile.

So, today, I cannot fight to find the poetry in me.

Today, my words cannot teach you the things my
land has taught me.

Today, my words cannot make you feel the weight
of our dead.

Today, my words hide from me while I wait for
the end.

Today, I spare my words from the pain of know-
ing that this might be the death of all hopes and
dreams.

Today, no clever wordplay could even begin to
explain the horrors I have seen on my screen.

The horrors. The horrors. The horrors.

So, I hope you excuse me when I say that,

Today, my words cannot find a ribbon to tie
around them.

Today, my words are stripped of their polish.

Today, my words are messy. naked. vulnerable.

Today, my words bleed.

I am sure that I will find hopeful words tomorrow,
Words of freedom and liberation.

Words dreaming of a free sky.

Words of pleasure as resistance.

Words on community joy as a lifeline.

Words about laughter loud enough to drown out
the sound of fighter jets.

But, today, I have questions.

Today, that has to be enough.

How do you find pleasure when rain turns into
white phosphorus?

How do you find pleasure in perpetual darkness?

How do you find pleasure while counting the days
until the bombs come for you next?

How do you find pleasure while counting your dead?

How do you find pleasure when your past, present, and future all live in the same tent?

How do you find pleasure when you no longer have a neighborhood to go back to?

How do you find pleasure while your body turns into a new massacre every day?

How do you find pleasure when you start to lose yourself, limb after limb?

How do you find pleasure when your life becomes the funeral?

How do you find pleasure when your blood starts to flood the streets?

How do you find pleasure when your children turn into dust?

If you are lucky you might find a piece of their skin so that you can give them one last kiss. How do you find pleasure in a last kiss?

How do you find pleasure when the cold hugs you so tight, it steals your last breath?

How do you find pleasure when hunger starts to eat through your own flesh?

How do you find pleasure when your babies are left to cry until they decompose?

How do you find pleasure as you watch the last university explode?

How do you find pleasure as the last hospital crumbles?

How do you find pleasure when your memories become the target?

How do you find pleasure while watching the world debate if your life is worth saving?

How do you find pleasure when being alive becomes worse than death?

How do they find pleasure while they live in our

stolen homes?

How do they find pleasure while ignoring the smell of our burning flesh?

How do they find pleasure while blowing up a whole universe, day after day?

How do they find pleasure while killing hundreds of us, day after day?

How do they find pleasure while shooting our children, day after day?

How do they find pleasure while being haunted by the living?

Are they not haunted by our dead?

How does the world turn down the volume of the children as they scream?

How does the world find pleasure while profiting off of genocide?

How do I find pleasure when my other cannot find bread?

How do I find pleasure while watching my people's genocide being live-streamed?

How do I find pleasure while I try to scream,
We are here.

We are here.

We, the Palestinian people, are here, and we deserve pleasure just as much as you do.

IN MY HOSPITAL

AMY WANG

in my hospital

dreams of vivid things, beautiful frightening
illusions scraped from brainscape to fool me
into believing this medicine was pleasure
and its related sensations

and every individual is innocent, victim of
brainwave along insatiable current—the rhythm
moves without mercy and makes you believe in
inadequacy, of being unable to run
with these feelings

or without the medication—and all these times
i turn hamster wheel in chase of pleasure that
eludes me, but every doctor says: i will find it
outside of me

and that healing is within medicated belief
so i turn my face towards
the stranger who doesn't recognize me,
asking for pleasure (sweet, delicious
fragments of relief)

dopamine / serotonin / already overripe in my
dendrites as fruiting bodies—

i didn't know the pleasure existed inside of me.

That's all, folks!

Thank you for reading the Vol. 6 No.1 (2024) issue of That's What [We] Said: 'Pleasure'. We hope that reading this journal has allowed you to reflect on the ways pleasure can be radical and implemented as a form of resistance. We also hope that in these tough times, you can find the space for pleasure, in whatever ways you see fit. 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 (2024) fall for the release of That's What [We] Said's 2025 publication theme and call for submissions! We gratefully accept submissions in a wide variety of forms (essays, artwork, poetry, music, etc.) from all departments across campus. This is a great opportunity to have your work published and to be featured in our 2025 publication. Additionally, if you are interested in joining the editorial committee, please reach out by email: thatwhatwesaid07@gmail.com. Until then, you can follow our Instagram page for updates [@thatwhatwesaidjournal](https://www.instagram.com/thatwhatwesaidjournal).

That's
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2024