Mission Statement

We are a Feminist and Queer Collective working to counter misconceptions surrounding Women’s and Gender Studies through the publication of an annual Feminist and Queer review. We are increasing awareness and knowledge of Feminist and Queer issues through the voices, opinions, and experiences of University of Manitoba undergraduate students from all faculties. We firmly believe in multiplicity of meaning and we therefore reject the idea of singular definitions. For this reason, we are often left with more questions than answers. But, through our publication we strive to empower ourselves and other undergraduate students with the tools necessary to address these important questions.

This publication will be a catalyst for change.
We would like to thank the following donors for their generous support:

+ Margaret Laurence Endowment Fund
+ Women’s and Gender Studies Program

We would like to thank the following individuals and groups for their consideration, commitment, and generosity in the support of this publication:

+ University of Manitoba Students’ Union Womyn’s Centre
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+ Dr. Liz Millward
+ Dr. Shawna Ferris

We would also like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed their work to this issue.
Editors’ note

This is the Feminist and Queer Collective’s fourth publication of the FAQ review. As members, we continually aim to provide a forum for which undergraduate students can contribute to feminist and queer discourse.

This publication is meant to give value to the voices of undergraduate students who use their experiences, knowledge, creativity and passions to address feminist and queer issues. The FAQ represents (re)evolution, curiosity and discovery.

Women’s and Gender studies is an interdisciplinary program that provides a safe space to express individual perspectives. Within the faculty, as our understandings develop and we discover and learn from assigned readings, we are also encouraged by faculty members and supported by fellow peers. The FAQ review is an extension of this sharing. It includes academic undergraduate work as well as personal works created beyond the boundaries of the university.

This publication not only acts as a source to which our audience can critically engage with feminist and queer issues but, also as a blank canvas for which contributors can express and address themes, issues, and ideas related to personal conflict, social/political/sexual/and cultural schemas.

This publication reflects a certain time and place; an artifact which can be reflected upon in the future. It may even act as a tool to better understand the process of our individual journeys while simultaneously expanding our social and cultural consciousness.

We thank-you, our readers, for taking interest in feminist and queer issues and we encourage all to actively participate in the sharing of feminist and queer voices.

Editorial Board

Rae Hutton / Charly Wreggitt / Breann Maxwell / Ryn Broz
Stefania Alessandra / Jenna Modha / Marcia Toms / Tokini Fubara
The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of those involved in its creation.

**Trigger Warning:** this is a general trigger warning as we do not want to assume what may trigger or offend our readers.
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African art and queerness in Africa bear an unfortunate similarity – they are both silenced and forced to debate legitimacy under the colonial gaze. It is this same colonial gaze that simultaneously promotes the invisibility of “African art” as it appropriates the “sourceless” pieces as its own. This colonial gaze also assists dominant countries in forcing ideologies on colonized populations, which is regarded as neo-colonization. In this article, there is a basic explanation of the historical construction of racialized African sexualities as queer. More recently in this century of human rights activism, there is a construction of “other” countries as homophobic as opposed to the West. These constructs create a situation for racialized people, in which in order to validate one’s race, one cannot perform behaviors that are ascribed to whiteness such as same sex romantic relationships. Therefore under this context, queer Africans face not only rejection from their race and country, but also rejection through racism from the LGBT community.

In this article, art is seen as a tool for homing outcasts that are exiled as a result of colonization and its construct, homophobia. Queer Africans usually have to pick between identities as the social construction of both identities conflict with each other. In other words, this article explains how queer Africans voice their silences through art, not in order to claim legitimacy in relation to the West but to create an identity for themselves in which they can feel at home. It is in art that the present moment is appreciated, instead of longing for the pre-colonial and “accepting” past – the nostalgic state of being “home” even when home has never been known.

In an analysis of postcolonial fiction, Desai (2001) explains how queer Africans are placed and rejected as abnormal outsiders who identify more with their colonizers than their people. The writer reminds readers that colonization imported homophobia, and not homosexuality, into Africa as queer relationships were incorporated into some African cultures before the rampant spread of Christianity in Africa which was used as a tool to control “heathen” practices. Hawley (2001) adds agency to Desai’s (2001) brief historical re-contextualization, explaining that new identities are formed from the displacing effects of colonization. One of these identities is that of “queer” Africans. Queerness in this context is heavily postcolonial as it resists the western concept of “sexual orientation” that divides people into clean and clear categories while perpetuating the colonial power of white supremacy.

Morgan (2006) expounds on the understanding of sexuality and race, placing this into the legal context where racialized asylum seekers are denied asylum because of the association of whiteness and same-sex relationships. The governing ideology requests a specific performance of queer sexuality, which ascribes to its definition of same-sex relations. That is to say to be gay means to lounge in gay villages, have brunch with artsy friends, and wear one’s sexuality as one’s primary identity. The requirements vary with gender. This clearly is a western conceptualization of same-gender loving persons. Morgan (2006) explains how these stereotypes about race and sexuality construct the sexuality of racialized people simultaneously as queer and homophobic. This construction places racialized people into a defensive position where they have to repeatedly fight for the legitimacy of their sexuality, whether queer or heterosexual.

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1 Due to the history of the author of this article, the term “homosexual” is eschewed as it triggers the notion of same-sex relationships as pathology. Same-sex/gender relations in this article refer to romantic relationships between people who identify with the same gender.
Vidal-Ortiz (2008) explains the construction of othered nations or ethnicities as homophobic in relation to the West. The author discusses the popular assumption of queerness as ‘un-African’. The construction of the “homophobic other” supports the assumption that “only white people are gay” and to be queer is to identify with whiteness. Vidal-Ortiz (2008) re-members home to queer Africans, invoking the ever hanging cloud of displacement.

Fortier (2003) discusses the process of coming out and how it is constituted within the process of finding “home,” due to homophobia-induced displacement. The author explains that for queer people, coming out in a heterosexist world is associated with self-identification as a ‘true’ homosexual. Sometimes this process leads to rejection from their familial homes. In the context of this paper, this familial home is one’s nation, which for any reason may be constructed as homophobic. The author gives home a new meaning in relation to movement as a process of leaving home, returning home and homing. The last movement – homing – is pivotal to this paper as the chosen artist uses art as a tool for homing, making a home wherever one may be located.

**Introducing the Artists**

Gunkel (2009) discusses the postcolonial and queer art of South African photographer, Zanele Muholi. The writer describes what seems to be a definitive theme in this study – while some visitors, after viewing some of Muholi’s work in South Africa express their discomfort in seeing Muholi’s vivid and subversive portrayal of sexuality, some commend her for her pride in her sexuality and her work. The article also explains the gendered portions of sexuality explaining the sexism that leads Muholi to depict women in masculine roles. Zaya (1996) focuses on the work of Rotimi Fani-Kayode, the late British- Nigerian photographer. Zaya (1996) explains the silencing of African art by the West, stating that the history of African arts in relation to the West leaves art without sources thereby passing the claim of ownership to the patron who buys the piece. This seems to be the case of Rotimi Fani-Kayode’s pictures because he left no will, creating validation for his partner, a white man, to claim ownership on certain images. The article also analyzes Rotimi’s work, which explores black African queerness as a resistance to association with whiteness and homosexuality. The comparison of Robert Mapplethorpe’s picture in this article creates a visual dialogue to explain racism in gay communities.

**The EXODUS:**

As explained earlier, the problem of exclusion, discrimination, and silencing pushes queer Africans out of the mainstream LGBT community and the African community. The following pictures describe this exodus. This friction, or constant push and pull of queer African identities is depicted in Figure 1. As the person in the picture clenches his butt-cheeks as though to protect himself from being hurt, he sexualizes the African bronze head. The bronze head, in turn, is solid and secure in its position but the man is penetrable and soft. This picture signifies conflict between the identity as queer and African, as it seems both subjects in the picture are rejecting each other. It also demonstrates the development of “thick skin” in being both queer and African.
In Zaya’s (1996), article Robert Mapplethorpe is mentioned as a white photographer whose work bears similarity to Fani-Kayode’s, but lacks the sophisticated analysis of the identities of his subjects. Fani-Kayode’s work lends this sophistication to his viewers. As his work is rooted in identity, it makes identity the subject in each piece. In Figure 2 Fani-Kayode opens his mind to the world, showing the thought processes and identity negotiation a queer African may practice. As the hands of the white man covers the view of the black man, the idea of being blinded by the colonizers is illustrated. The black subject, who is always queer in Fani-Kayode’s work, has his hands together as though there is an invisible shackle. While this picture may depict racism in discussion of queer Africans, it also portrays a postcolonial condition in which Africans view queer Africans to be blinded by their colonizers. Therefore, depending on the viewer, this may be an accurate portrayal of queer Africans.

Compare the picture above to Mapplethorpe’s picture below. There is a doubtless similarity between both pieces that could question the actual creators of each piece. This paper is not going to focus on that. Still, depending on the viewer, Figure 3 may also be an accurate depiction of black African queerness. The re-representation of the power dynamics in mainstream LGBT community in art depicting black or African queerness should be noted as an important theme. It not only re-presents white ownership of sexual minorities but it places blackness in a subservient position, if they must be paired together. While Fani-Kayode’s pieces in Figure 2 may also be interpreted as “love is blind”, regarding his relationship with his white partner, the pairing with Mapplethorpe’s piece cancels out that interpretation as primary – this is definitely about race relations in LGBT communities, after all, the black person could have been in the position of power.
Consider, Muholi’s piece in Figure 4. Gunkel’s (2009) article explains that this picture symbolizes masculinity, in term of sex – penetration – without men, which could cause a gendered form of violence against lesbians. The dildo threatens men as it challenges their masculinity, bearing its transience in the lesbian performance of masculinity. The picture is in corroboration with the last two pictures. If masculinity is represented in the dildo and the dildo is white, what masculinity is being normalized? The picture in itself is an oddity, not because of the white dildo but the person strapping it on – a clearly feminine black woman. The image is the ultimate exodus as it transcends conceptualizations of race, gender, bodies, and sexuality.

Gunkel (2009) explains that it was pictures like this that enraged Muholi’s visitors to write angry comments deriding her for her “immoral” art works. The motherly figure of the woman, instead of a muscle-bound, butch, or even white woman, confronts African viewers with the existence and closeness of lesbians. It is problematic that the dildo is used to signify masculinity or penetration as masculinity can be receiving, and the definitions of sex are beyond penetration. Other than that, this picture remains an oddity.
The PROMISED LAND:

Although queer African sexualities are displaced through stereotypes and schematic thinking, the comfort of being at home for the queer African, is obtained through a process of negotiation and intersecting identities. In other words, this negotiation process develops an acceptance of one's self as one is, not as one could be or might be in the near future. It is living life in a matter-of-fact manner, unapologetically at home with one's identity. Rotimi Fani-Kayode depicts this comfort and matter-of-fact living at its best. Figure 5, with its aura of magnificence, epitomize the loudness of postcolonial queer Africans. Noting that the lovers are under a blanket signifying a closeness to home, subversion is manifest in its discussion about race, as Jesus is usually depicted as a white asexual man.

The picture portrays what looks like a black Jesus cuddled up with his male lover. This picture speaks out the existence of African queerness. The queerness is the point of the picture but a sense of self-acceptance and pride is the subject. Regardless of the viewer, this picture focuses on a certain “coziness.”

As the artists present their work in such a matter-of-fact manner, African queerness is reconstituted. None of the pieces by Fani-Kayode or Muholi try to explain African queer sexuality or even apologize for it. It is not made to placate audiences or fool heterosexual-identified individuals into believing ‘we are just like you’; nor does it try to explain African sexuality to Westerners or to Africans – the art simply is. It does not embark on a time-bending journey to pre-colonial Africa to say this is what we were before the white men came. It does not even try to explain the pictures as what we are now. The art is used mostly for the artists and their community. “Take it or leave it” is the underlying theme and that should never be undermined.

Figure 5. Every Moment Counts, 1989 by Rotimi Fani-Kayode. Two men wrapped in blanket with a halo behind the taller man.

References
Renting Skates

Brisk sharp silver metal of the blade. White dirty laces crossed in X’s. Black skate linings thick scrubby canvas. My hockey skates!

My skinny fingers struggle to pull these laces tightly.

Swift strides as the wind streams like cool blades past my ears. I shoot snow in the air with -sharp diagonal stops-. I paint X’s in the ice,

but my feet always burn at the edges in these hockey skates. No matter what size of skate I try to fit my feet into these skates never seem to fit right!

Skinny fingers struggle to pull these laces tightly.

Fighting the laces of my skates. Sitting on a blue plastic chair. I look up sweating to see a dark haired girl at the warm counter of Iceland skate rentals. The barrel bellied man with a blue Winnipeg Jets hat asks the girl, “figure or hockey skates?”

Why am I never asked, figure or hockey skates?

How she spins so lightly in her sleek white skate coverings. She’s a glass ballerina in ice slippers sailing through the spiky air.

She never seems to struggle to pull those laces tightly.

She’s carried by the breeze. When she stops a cool wave of snow covers the glass floor. She spreads her white wings, and one foot she floats across the frozen water!

and if I wore figure skates would I still struggle to pull those laces tightly?

Girls I know who choose the rugged option struggle with worn laces sliced through the thick black canvas spread rumors that, “the white doves top’s too stiff. They scuttle like worn claws across the bumpy ice.”

But who wants to stream fast when you can glaze across the pane of a breeze?

and what would they say to me if I approached the worn wood counter of Iceland skate Rentals.

Could I spread my wings and say, “I’ll take a size nine in figure skates.”
Critical Analysis of Ursal Biemann's

Performing the Border: A Video Essay

Performing the Border: A Video Essay, directed by Ursula Biemann, portrays the realities of “border culture,” meaning, embodying attitudes and ideologies surrounding some form of separation, physical, land or otherwise. Biemann displays to viewers a space in which women’s bodies become commodified for the purpose of technological and material gain. The film is set in Mexican-U.S. border town of Ciudad Juarez, where giant corporations operate factories, mostly ones that produce electronics. Moreover, the video essay illustrates the intense process of the feminization of labour, and ways in which the concept of the “border” contributes to such. Biemann discusses women’s bodies as “technologized,” and focuses on the way in which women’s labour translates into corporate ownership. The video essay depicts women divided between the opportunity for financial independence and selling their time and life to a company. The women’s labour is devalued, as Biemann states; in border culture they are “disposable, interchangeable, marketable component.”

Biemann further develops ideas surrounding border culture, discussing the internalization of this culture. More specifically, the construction of the “assembly line worker” contributes largely to the concept of Biemann’s overall portrayal of women’s labour. “The assembly process can be easily transferred onto the person doing the work. In the process, the worker becomes associated with language normally used to speak about machines, like speed, efficiency and production number” (Biemann Performing the Border). Women’s bodies therefore are similar to the machines they produce.

Moreover, women’s bodies connect to the concept of the border. During in-class presentations for a course on international feminism, a group presented the concept of the border as a “performance or imaginary line” (Tokini and Jenel). Women’s role as assembly line workers is, under this concept, a performance that is sadly not fixed, but nonetheless disposable. Although the notion of border seems concrete, it is for the most part created, reinforced and imagined, therefore a performance. Performing the border, as the title of
Biemann’s film suggests, follows the creation, control, regulation, reinforcement, surveillance, and the implementation of rules. Such regulations of physical space translate onto women assembly line workers, as although jobs are not permanent, regulations are.

The notion of a border is common and understood as necessary by a population made to command, obey and restrict. The entire force behind such a normalized concept is dangerous. Normalizing the idea of a border reinforces the power, violence and surveillance of an invisible line, which only creates the idea that control is in fact necessary. This control and violence is a part of the internalized border culture, which is then projected onto the assembly line worker. Therefore, concepts intertwine and become inseparable: worker, control, violence.

The concept of land border is deeper than physical barrier. Borders are everywhere. *Performing the Border* displayed numerous borders in regards of power systems: wealthy/impoverished, powerful/powerless, controller/controlled, gendered authority/gendered workers. The idea of border or separation is concretized, normalized, and gendered in the video essay. Specifically, *Performing the Border* visualizes gendered borders, whether internal or physical. Viewers witness how male/man is constructed as wealthy/powerful/controller/authority and female/women are constructed as impoverished/powerless/controlled/worker. In conclusion, borders surround us, and regulations implemented for invisible spaces are not solely related to land anymore.

**Works Cited**


The irony of the forceful nature of female passivity, enforced then reinforced. We hire ourselves and each other as full-time police officers, making sure women do not presume to be important enough to warrant too much legitimate attention.

Enforced passivity demands that we speak less, and softer
seen in the higher rates at which elementary school teachers hush their female pupils compared to their male students.
It’s maintained with threats of and shouts of bitch and pushy and uppity and shrill.

Reinforced passivity discounts and belittles what we do say
seen in like mocking feminized speech and like claiming that talking this way makes you like inherently less intelligent.

Qualifiers for our words apologize for our opinions and ideas and delegitimize our knowledge, while we wait for approval before we speak again.
Also seen in like... um, I mean this is just what I think, and you don’t have to agree with me or anything, but like I kind of had this almost idea... sorry, am I being too loud?

Reinforced passivity discourages the vocalization of our needs and desires
seen in the dominant heterosexual understanding of sex in phallocentric terms
Expressions of female needs are put down as whiny, overbearing, and demanding.

Enforced passivity puts our needs and actions in the hands of men
seen when a boyfriend asks a woman’s father for permission to propose to her enacted later when her father symbolically transfers ownership of his daughter at her wedding.
We become legitimate when we are somehow validated by masculine forces.

Reinforced passivity polices female bodies, especially for taking up too much space (aka being fat)
seen in euphemisms like “obesity epidemic” and “plus-size” and “curvy” when talking about fat women, as well as the statement “you've lost weight!” being generally interpreted positively, or that women must find clothes to flatter their fatter figure.
Expectations that a tall woman will avoid heels unless her male partner is tall enough to make up for her uncomely altitude.

Enforced passivity objectifies our bodies, converting them from useful tools and sources of understanding into flesh-and-blood Barbies, blow-up dolls, and birthing machines
seen in the wage gap, wherein women’s bodies are quantifiably undervalued and under-rewarded.
Also seen in shouts from car windows of “go to the gym!” or “nice tits!” or “wanna get raped?” which are all synonymous phrases.
Passivity divides us along lines that patriarchy already uses to oppress us, dictating whose voice and presence is worthwhile.

The wisest woman on earth silences herself, in fear of ridicule and condescension should she voice her brilliance in non-standard English.

This denial of our agency and subjectivity leads to our rape and acts of violence, and our general dehumanization.

I am not calling for oppressively dominant women.
I am not calling for the elimination of grey zones or ambiguity or the evaluation of issues from all sides.
I am not calling for the shame of some women who do consent to being dominated and being passive in certain situations, if you know what I mean wink wink.

I am calling for the mutual give and take between two people, not enacted in a hierarchy.
I am calling for the dismantling of female passivity as a tool to subvert hierarchies and disrupt the gendered ideologies that oppress us.

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**Strategies**

- When speaking with a man (or anyone, really) who feels entitled to talk over you, gradually increase your volume and talk over them until they address the issue, or until the conversation devolves into an indécipherable exchange between two very loud people.
- Wear high heels or platform boots as a way to claim the space above your head.
- Don't correct others' speech; language is not static or singular and policing linguistic expression reinforces racist, sexist, classist, ableist, and Eurocentric oppressions.
- When someone says, "Hey, you look great, you've lost weight. What's your secret?" respond with "Thanks, I've developed an eating disorder!" This provides them with an extreme example of the negative consequences of their thinking, and will probably dissuade them from asking it again.
- Don't tolerate news stories about whether a female politician has breast implants or whether the First Lady shows too much arm.
- Express rage when appropriate.
- Express pleasure when you feel it.
- Express your knowledge in whatever way you want.

Aren't you tired of constantly apologizing for your existence?

I demand that we stop belittling women, and instead affirm each other and ourselves as valid, capable, and worthwhile human beings.
I use art as an outlet for my anxiety. This piece is an expression of my frustration toward my anxiety and the feeling like I don’t belong. I use digital painting when I feel I am not being heard, I started to draw on the computer and to see what the outcome of my emotions are visually. I drew the eyes very large to show how I feel visible. In this painting I am trying to explain how I feel the gaze of others. The “Abstract Eyes” of other people represent my feelings of being watched but not being listened to. Because of my disability people often judge me. I feel that I get constantly assessed and stereotyped. I feel that people treat me like a child and think that I am not capable of performing due to my disability. Through my art I am trying to voice my thoughts. They express my frustration towards people not listening or understanding me. My art is a way to release my inner conflicts.
Sex testing in sport has been used for decades in order to divide males and females into the “correct” sex categories. This paper will put forth a brief history of the different sex testing determinants in sport, illustrating how they have changed as technological advancements have been made. The paper will also examine the reasoning behind sex testing in order to determine why societies feel it is necessary to label athletes into two binaries of sex, as well as why sex testing within sport only negatively affects female athletes. The Caster Semenya case is discussed in order to show the detrimental affects sex testing can have on athletes. It will also be used in order to frame the ways in which sex testing can potentially result in a violation of human rights. The essay concludes with a discussion of Bruce Kidd’s theory of gender self-determination as a counter argument against sex testing within professional athletics.

Gender verification in sport was initially issued to female competing athletes in the early 1960’s by the IAAF (International Amateur Athletic Federation) and the IOC (International Olympic Committee), however it should be noted that as early as 1946 female athletes were expected to produce a medical certificate that proved they were female and thus, eligible to compete (Heggie, 2010). During the early period of sex testing, the primary form of testing was an external visual exam. Female athletes were made to stand “before a committee of experts, in what became known as the ‘nude parade’” (Tucker & Collins, 2009). Often women were also instructed to undergo probing gynecological exams. The IOC eventually moved away from this form of verification, due to complaints from athletes, and began performing sex chromatin/buccal smear tests in 1968 (Simpson, Ijungyrist, de la Chapelle, Ferguson-Smith, Genel, Carlson, Enhardt & Ferris, 1993). This test is done by (painlessly) removing cells from the inside of an individual’s mouth (inner cheek or tongue), which are then sent for chromosome and DNA analysis. Specifically in the case of sex testing within sport, the cell samples are looked at under a microscope for the presence of Barr bodies, which are “a mass seen in a normal female sex chromosome” (UMMC, 2011).

The buccal smear test did not last long. Issues arose for two reasons; first, there was a lack of laboratories currently performing this type of test and so the IOC ran into problems with “inexperienced workers, yielding false-positive and false-negative results” (Simpson et al., 1993). More importantly was the issue of genetic make-up; some females contain a chromatin pattern comparable to that of a male, or they may have a chromatin pattern that does not mirror the “normal” genetic make-up of either female or male. Examples include androgen insensitivity disorder, XY gonadal dysgenesis, Turner’s syndrome and Klinefelter’s syndrome. Androgen insensitivity disorder occurs when a person is “genetically male. [but] is resistant to make hormones called androgens” (A.D.A.M. Medical Encyclopedia, 2010). A second example is Turner's syndrome which occurs when females have only one X chromosome. They would therefore test as male because of an absence of a second X sex chromosome, however they would have the overall appearance of a female (Tucker & Collins, 2009). In both these cases the individuals often look like women, have the physical characteristics of women and are raised as women. The levels of athletic advantage can vary between the varying disorders of sex development (DSD), ranging from no advantage to some level of advantage (Simpson, et al., 1993, & Tucker & Collins, 2009). The buccal smear test, also referred to as the Barr body test, was more likely to “out” athletes who were unaware that they had a DSD, than they were to catch athletes that were actually cheating.
The IAAF stopped compulsory testing in the early 90's, however they did strongly suggest that both male and female athletes partake in general physical exams by their team physician prior to competitions (IAAF Medical Manual, 2009). The IOC continued screening female athletes using a “PCR analysis to detect the SRY gene, which is found on the male Y chromosome” (Tucker & Collins, 2009). The SRY (sex-determining region Y gene) is found on the Y chromosome and is an important factor for the formation of testes. In the early 90s it was believed to be the primary (possibly the only) gene required in order to turn the internal foetal gonad into testis. As more gene technology was produced it was eventually discovered that other genes are required within the development of testes; it is now known that individuals with XX sex chromosomes can also have testes. Another issue that can arise causing this test to be invalid is translocations during meiosis, which can cause an SRY gene to exist on an X chromosome.

In 1999 the IOC stopped compulsory sex testing of their female athletes. The current IOC Eligibility Conditions Form, as well as the current Olympic Charter, indicates nothing about sex testing or sex identity requirements. The current IAAF Medical Manual has a section in Chapter thirteen on gender verification and sex reassignment policies. The manual states that a “general health check is strongly recommended, but no longer required” and a “visual examination of the genitalia during the delivery of a urine specimen in the women’s doping control station is a sufficient method” for determining the athlete’s sex (IAAF, 2012). The manual also indicates that if an athlete’s gender is either questioned and/or ambiguous, the athlete can be put through additional testing at the authority of the Medical Delegate (IAAF, 2012).

Sex testing originally arose out of public fear that male athletes would compete in female athletics in order to gain an advantage. This is the primary reason as to why only female athletes are subject to sex testing (both historically and in modern day). The idea that a female athlete might attempt to compete within male athletics seems preposterous, given the clear “disadvantage” she is assumed to have in comparison to her male counterparts. As stated by Caplan, “the reasons for undertaking gender discrimination in sports are partly conventional and partly from a concern for fairness” (2010). Kidd also discusses similar ideas of sex testing due to moral physiology, fear/demonization of difference and the patriarchal control of sport (2012). If we look at athletics in a historical context we will find that most sports were made up of by men (particularly those involving a great deal of strength, endurance or stamina). The first modern Olympics in 1896 held no women’s events, and generally women were discouraged from competing in sports all together (Guttmann, 1992). Women’s sports eventually began to grow and in modern day athletics women compete in almost all the same sporting events as men do, including within mixed sexed teams for some sports and directly against males in other sporting events. However, segregation of the sexes is still widely present and enforced through a norm of social convention and sex testing. Caplan states, “segregation of athletes by gender is a matter of culture, convention and history” (2010).

However, if we were simply to disallow women from conventional, modern day activities based on historical contexts, cultural ideals and public fear then women would still not be considered persons under the law, be entitled to ownership of land, have rights to their own bodies (such as with the case of birth control or abortion), would still be subject to spousal rape under the condition that they were their husbands property and would be afforded no rights to their own children. How is it possible that women have managed to come so far in gaining rights for themselves under the law, and yet their rights seem to lag behind when it comes to sex testing within sport?

Sex testing is created out of societal fear of a mixing of the sexes. The problem with sex testing is not just the testing itself, which often results in basic human rights violations, degrading medical probing and ultimately issues of concern surrounding intersex and DSD individuals. Sex testing also pushes clear boundaries of what is male/masculine, and what is considered female/feminine. It places limits on what is acceptable by providing “an upper limit for women’s sporting performance [which creates] a point at which [an athlete’s] masculine-style body is declared ‘too masculine’, and you are disqualified” (Heggie, 2010). This idea reinforces a notion of femininity, which is required of females in order to be considered “real women”. Further, there is no “equivalent upper physiological limit” (Heggie, 2010) for males, establishing that only females can be “too good” at sports, and that males should and are expected to maintain the highest athletic levels possible without fear of being seen as abnormal. This double standard works to reinforce already prevalent stereotypes surrounding feminine and masculine bodies.

The other reason discussed for sex segregation (and thus sex testing) within sports involves an idea of fair competition. Men generally have higher muscle-to-fat ratio, heart capacity, testosterone and lung capacities, all
of which can lead to a higher chance of athletic advantage within many sports. This rationale is used in order to maintain a fair playing field by keeping the “athletically advantaged” male athletes out of female sports. Male athletes also tend to be larger than female athletes, and so a reasoning of safety is often used as a means to separate the sexes, particularly in sports involving more bodily contact (or chance of bodily contact).

As discussed by Kidd in his 2012 lecture about gender self-declaration, humans (males, females and intersex individuals) have a huge variation amongst them. Advantages can be gained by household and community resources, such as mechanical training technology, altitude machines and advancements in running surfaces and clothing, as well as knowledge surrounding nutrition. Further developed countries, it could be argued, tend to do better in competitive sports because they can afford “better”, higher quality training facilities, medical rehabilitation centers and work out areas. Varying cultural practices may cause advantage or disadvantage to competing athletes; for instance countries under stricter patriarchal rule may not even allow female athletes. Other countries may only allow athletes to wear specific clothing, which could inhibit their abilities to compete at a higher level. Why is sex the only “difference” that is singled out and established as creating an “unfair” playing field, thus causing it to be regulated?

An interesting aspect of sex testing within athletics is the extreme rarity surrounding the disqualification of an athlete based on their sex. According to Heggie (2010) no athletes were officially reported to have failed the Barr Body test between 1968 and the demise of it’s use in the late 1980’s. Also, as of August 1992, the testing used to seek out the SRY gene within athletes had not been used to disqualify any athletes, “it simply leads to an in-depth study by a medical commission” (Dingeon, B., Hamon, P., Robert, M., Schamasch, P., & Pugeat, M., 1992). It is argued that this form of testing was used more as a deterrent for cheating, opposed to a test that actually caught cheaters (Dingeon, et al., 1992). This same test yielded 8 “fails” in the 1996 Atlanta games, and yet all 8 women were allowed to compete after further testing (Heggie, 2010). With so few disqualifications being handed out due to sex, it seems ridiculous to even continue with sex testing, given the repercussions it has on athletes. Further, in my opinion, using sex testing as a deterrent in order to keep males from competing in female sporting events is not a valid enough reason to expect people to go through medical testing and possible defamation.

Bruce Kidd briefly touches on the idea of sex testing as a deterrent for cheating. He argues that the different levels of recognition between male sporting events and female sporting events, is essentially a deterrent on its own. He suggests that a male athlete would not willingly and deliberately compete within a female sporting event because he would not gain the same recognition, monies and incentives that he does while competing within male sporting events (Kidd, 2012).

If sex testing within sport does not produce a relevant number of disqualifications, and is not valid as a deterrent for cheating, then is it even necessary? Based on Wilson (1992) and Fausto-Sterling’s (1993) discussion’s of intersex bodies, along with external knowledge surrounding DSD’s, I would argue no. Wilson (1992) argues that the main consequence, and major problem with sex testing within sport, stems from individuals with “human intersex states”. She argues that the problematic public exposure, and essentially the following ridicule, is a major consequence to this form of testing and often the advantages are comparable to unequal athletic prowess amongst all athletes (1992). The idea that any individual should fit neatly into one of two categories, male or female, is outrageous given the extensive possibilities of our genetic make-up.

Fausto-Sterling (1993), argues for the acceptance of at least 5 sexes (if not more) in her article titled “The five sexes: Why male and female are not enough”. The article establishes a basis for a wide spectrum of sexual variations, which helps to argue against sex testing within sport. There are three major subgroups of “intersex” individuals; true hermaphrodites who have both a testis and an ovary, the male pseudohermaphrodites who have testes and also some form of female genitalia but no ovaries, and the female pseudohermaphrodites who have ovaries and some form of male genitalia but no testes (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Within these groups the characteristics associated with societal norms of male and female can vary greatly. These subgroups, along with the two “main” groups (male/female) make up the five sexes that Fausto-Sterling discusses, and easily establishes a range of genetic make-ups that make it nearly impossible to categorize people strictly into two binaries of sex. Even amongst the two “main” categories of male and female the genetic make-up can range, causing variations that could cause or hinder advantages within sport. With an estimated 4% of births (Fausto-Sterling, 1993), intersex individuals could potentially make up a large number of possible competing athletes. Being that it would be nearly impossible to determine whether each individual
athlete’s genetic make-up procures them an advantage within athletics, it seems ridiculous to insinuate we should test only females in order to determine whether they are “true” or not. Finally, considering the vast surgical and physiological advancements dealing with sexual anatomy, most individuals are instantly placed into “hormonal and surgical management so they can slip quietly into society as ‘normal’ heterosexual males or females” (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Since most sexual abnormalities are caught and “corrected” at birth, many individuals are raised within one of the two binaries of sex/gender, never being made aware of their initial DSD. So, is it responsible to “out” these individuals years later, leaving them at the mercy of current media and societal norms surrounding sexual disorders/abnormalities?

I turn to the Caster Semenya case and her subsequent documentary titled “Too Fast to Be a Woman?: The Story of Caster Semenya” (2010), in order to illustrate the repercussions that sex testing can have on athletes. Semenya was an 18 year old 800m female runner competing in the 2009 Berlin Olympics when the media got wind of rumors that she was currently being sex tested based on accusations that she was a man. Semenya was suspended from running and was instructed by the IAAF to undergo sex testing. Speculations of Semenya’s sexual identity came from Sports 24, a local African blog. These speculations eventually turned into accusations from outside sources due to Semenya’s “incredible improvement in… performance” (Wonkham, 2010).

The IAAF requested confirmation of sex from the African Sport Association (ASA), which Semenya runs on behalf of. The ASA contacted Semenya for what she believed was a routine doping test. The doping test was used as a cover for sex testing, and Semenya was not made aware of the fact that she was actually undergoing a sex test. The ASA then proceeded with naming Semenya in their Olympic team before they had received the confirmation back from the tests. Once the media found out about the accusations surrounding Semenya’s sex identity, the IAAF took it upon themselves to speak out on the issue, publically affirming that Semenya was indeed undergoing sex testing. Nick Davies states in the documentary (2011), that the IAAF was looking into “suspicions and rumors, doubts really about her gender” and that the IAAF was “working that out, quietly behind the scenes to resolve the issue”. Semenya went on to win the gold in the 800m race, and then was sent home, suspended from racing but not officially banned from competing. Semenya was left to deal with the controversy and media backlash on her own, with little to no contact from the IAAF in regards to the issue and no support or counseling recommendations from the organization.

The ASA violated Semenya’s personal rights by conducting medical testing without her consent. This is essentially a violation of Article 3 (right to liberty) under the UDHR. The IAAF violated Semenya’s personal human rights by not respecting her privacy with regards to medical testing (as illustrated in Article 12 of the UDHR). These violations are made clear by both organizations; ASA President Lenord Chuene states “I believed at the time I was acting in the best interest of Semenya. I believed that my constant denials would help her, that’s what I believed” (Ginnane, 2011). Chuene’s statement reads like a cover up, he believed he was right even though it is becoming apparent that he may not have been. On the other hand Nick Davies states, “We can’t afford any mistakes, particularly as we already face threats to be taken to the United Nations Human Rights Council and because it has become a political matter in South Africa” (Wonkham, 2010). The IAAF is clearly aware that they are in the wrong, and fearful of being taken to court over the violation of Semenya’s Human Rights.

The adequate counseling and support that is ethically required during sex testing of any form was not given, resulting in a violation of Article 12 within the ICESCR which states that everyone has the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Lack of consent, knowledge, support and privacy surrounding the sex testing, coupled with the widespread effects of the media, lead Semenya into what can only be described as a state of depression. The documentary by Ginnane (2011) gives voice to Semenya’s ordeal. She is shown stating “I don’t have rights” in regards to athletics, “Most important thing is respect… I don’t call that respect” in reference to the IAAF and SAS, and “I don’t give a shit about athletics anymore… I don’t care about competitions, so, I don’t care anymore” once she was officially banned from running competitions. The documentary also illustrates a lack of motivation, missing practices, refusing to see friends, a feeling of humiliation and staying locked up in her room. Her friend Violet is shown stating that Semenya had expressed a desire to “give up on life”. Semenya’s mental state was clearly negatively effected by the sex testing being made public and the lack of proper knowledge and counseling surrounding the issue.

On top of the mental effect sex testing has on athletes, it also has the potential to affect them physically. As in
the case of Semenya, being out of competition for 11 months (after which the official ban was removed and she was allowed to compete again), knocked off 10 seconds within her running time from her world record. This seems minor, but in running events this is the difference between winning and losing. She also felt as though her muscles were heavy, that she was slower, and that she couldn’t compete adequately anymore. A ban of this extent could cause an athlete to lose their athletic career.

So, what in effect makes a lady? According to Semenya, it does not mean wearing skirts and dresses. She states instead that “the way you were born is the way you were born [and] nothing can change it”. Tim Noakes, also seen in the documentary by Ginnane, agrees. He says that “gender is what you perceive yourself to be and that’s it. You cannot scientifically determine that. If Caster believes herself to be a woman, then that is what she is” (2011). Other theorists, such as Dregger (2010), Wilson (1992) and Kidd (2012) agree with this assertion and suggest that gender self-declaration replace any form of sex testing within sport, and I am inclined to agree.

Gender self-declaration, according to Kidd, is “fundamental to human rights and the ideal of self-expression that is the basis of Olympic sport” (2012). Gender self-declaration is simple; it resides on the fact that an individual chooses their own sex and gender identity and maintains a lifestyle cohesive to that choice. Basically, if someone says they are a woman, lives life as a woman, then they are allowed to compete as a woman.

Sex identity should not be left up to scientific technology, as we have seen that genetics are not the only markers of sex identity. We have also seen that people’s genetic make-ups vary so drastically that it is impossible to perform sex testing that establishes “either/or” categories of sex. Further, the roots of sex testing are out-dated and no longer adequately relevant enough within today’s societies to warrant administering invasive, humiliating tests to individuals. The effects of sex testing are dramatic, and rarely used to eliminate contenders. Sex testing should be banned, not athletes, and in its place should be a newly integrated system of gender-self declaration.

Works Cited


On That Bridge

On that bridge, between the rock and the hard place, is home.
Where wingless birds place their eggs in raffia baskets sewn
for a congregation of weak bones and their comfort women.
Too helpless, too naïve to run.
Rematriate, v.

His suit; white skin, white collar with Authority. authority granted to him by the institution of medicine.

He tells me, “The goal is to repatriate birth to northern communities”

I am pleased that white male medical professionals see some value in northern Aboriginal women becoming midwives... I guess. My stomach aches. The word ‘repatriate’ sits heavy in my womb.

repatriate, v.¹ to return to one’s native country

patria ancestral, relating to one’s father

pater (Christian church) a priest belonging to a religious order

...oh.

I had come to the following conclusion while learning of the history of birthing in Canadian Aboriginal communities: the displacement of power from the traditional midwife, the birthing Aboriginal mother, and her community has resulted from two intersecting sources of oppression of Aboriginal women in Canada. These are the European colonization and ongoing assimilation of Indigenous peoples through racist policies and institutions, and the patriarchal medicalization of childbirth through its construction as pathological and requiring intervention.² I had come to learn that autonomous and culturally rooted childbirth, guided by Aboriginal childbearers, could contribute to decolonization.³,⁴

The goal is clearly not to repatriate birth to northern communities. I envision a Rematriation.

Katsi Cook, an Aboriginal midwife, has used the term ‘rematriate’ to describe ‘the process of returning sacred, human biological remains, productions of women’s bodies, whether blood, breast milk or other genetic materials, to their place of origin.’⁵ This visceral definition is in reference to the respectful rematriation of Northern Plains infants’ remains that had been studied by Canadian scientists. She praises the researchers for their culturally respectful protocols that enabled the infants’ ashes to be returned to the families’ Sundance grounds and released ceremoniously.

So, to rematriate from matria ancestral, relating to one’s mother (earth)

I propose a return of birthing knowledge, ability, and autonomy to Aboriginal women, not given, but reclaimed.

The goal is to Rematriate birth.

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She Had Choices Made for Her: Hegemony

Tererai has not been granted the ability or opportunity to award her consent. From birth, she is socialized into being what her significant others expect her to be. Authoritative figures, throughout her childhood, require her consent, even at an age when she does not know the consequences of what she is consenting to. If Tererai is fortunate enough to be educated, her education will serve as a tool to indoctrinate her into patriarchy. Any independent ideas that are classified as ‘other’ are cast off. She will only be recognized as a subject, if her goals are in unison with those of her educators. She never has a chance to choose, all her choices are defined for her. She will learn how to cook, how to clean, how to care for, all in order to be a good woman. Instinctively, the lesson is learnt that women who cannot cook, clean or care for are bad women. Perhaps this is why her father named her ‘Listen’.

Her marriage will perhaps be the most notable example of how these power structures work in ensuring her subordination. Traditionally, she is viewed as a token to be bartered and exchanged among the men in her life, through a traditional marriage process called kuroora or lobola. Only her father’s consent is necessary. This process makes her believe that her worth is equivalent to father’s appraisal. Once “purchased”, she is made to abandon all her own desires and thoughts in order to become what her husband’s family expects her to be. In the traditional setting, she has no power to assert her will. She can only exert her agency through the men she is affiliated with (Himani 195), be it her polygamist husband, her father or her sons. She accepts this quite easily because, this is the way things are done, this is what it means to be a good woman, and there is no room for questioning.

Tererai is dominated most notably through her spirituality. Her ties to her colonial religion make it unfeasible for her to exert her own will. If like many Zimbabweans, she is a Christian, it is required of her to submit to the will of her husband. According to the Bible, wives must be “subject to their husbands, as to the lord. For the husband is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (The New English Bible, Ephe. 5:22 24)” She is made to believe that acting against her husband is acting against God, thus counterproductive to her efforts to everlasting life.

Tererai is just one woman, but she represents the struggles of many oppressed women all over the world. As such her womanhood is marked with acts that reinforce the continuation of these oppressive cycles. She will employ the same social devices used against her to subjugate those that do not meet the standards she has been taught. Tererai will construct as evil, immoral, less fortunate and promiscuous, any woman who falls out of the prescribed norms. A widow will arouse her pity; an independent woman, she may brand as artificial; an unwed mother, she will look upon with sympathy. She will reveal that often, marginalized and oppressed people who unconsciously give up their consent, feel the need to oppress those that fall short of these expectations in an attempt to justify the same system that oppresses them. (Himani 195). Her life will be nothing more than another brick in the wall of patriarchy. All the choices she makes are those that are expected of her.

Works Cited
I have always talked about falling as a discretionary act. The irony.
I had nothing else to grasp when your hand met mine. The water so effortlessly tosses us, our faces rising to the surface, gasping for air. There is no letting go, only accepting that we are being swept under. Allowing our bodies to reveal that you/I, two women forged in the same desire, can cut so faultlessly into one another.

Your kiss tastes of salt. Running smooth tongues over dry lips, shedding away, falling into one another, over, and over.
Twisting and pulling from inside, your/my veins merging until I no longer recognize the boundaries of our skin.

Waves crash, wet and naked together birthed by the ocean, you/I emerge, fingers sheltering one another, feet planted in soil. Roots intertwining, we touch down. How extraordinary to be in my/your body, landing with you.
The purpose of this paper is to analyze and consider the geographical writings of Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst (2010). More specifically, I will deconstruct Johnston and Longhurst’s statement claiming, “Particular hegemonic forms of heterosexual identity […] are embodied and embedded in rural society” (100). An overview of the term “hegemonic heterosexual” will first be addressed to aid in a fuller understanding of the concept. Ideologies surrounding the nuclear family and the dominant heteronormative assumption that hegemonic heterosexuality is the only natural form of sexuality will be examined and directly related to rural spaces. In addition, the assumption that rural spaces consider all forms of sexuality apart from heterosexuality as “Other” will be critiqued. With the assistance of Johnston and Longhurst’s analysis on rural space and sexuality, I will expand their examples of “Tomboyism” (104) and gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender-identified individuals in rural spaces with my own arguments. Hegemonic forms of heterosexual identity will be recognized through examining the relationships between sexuality and space. It is necessary to address rural space, as the ideologies and discourses surrounding the rural has led to the oppression and marginalization of many individuals that do not identify with or conform to dominant discourses and ideologies of heteronormativity within a Western context.

The term ‘hegemonic’ refers to taken for granted assumptions, or of common sense knowledge (Millward, lecture, Mar.1). The term heterosexuality refers to individuals who identify as a particular sex being attracted to individuals of the opposite sex as theirs. Hegemonic heterosexuality is a particular form of heterosexuality relating to the nuclear family. The construction of the nuclear family, which Johnston and Longhurst (2010) describe as a “heterosexual formation with traditional gender roles” (98), refers to one man marrying one woman, who engage in a monogamous relationship and eventually procreate and live with their biological children. This is a dominant idea that is achieved through social institutions that shape how we consider and address the world around us. There is an implied assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural sexual identity and therefore any identity that does not fit this description is formulated as “Other”, or unnatural. This powerful understanding that dominates Western society constructs hegemonic heterosexuality as the only accepted form of heterosexuality. Millward explains that the assumption surrounding hegemonic heterosexuality is a “powerful idea that is so common that we do not even see it” (lecture, Mar.1). Researchers and academics such as Johnston and Longhurst give insight and exposure to additional forms of heterosexuality that have been constructed as “Other”, specifically relating their analysis to rural communities.

Rural spaces have been constructed as representations of pure space: spaces that allow individuals peace and natural surroundings. The ideology that urban settings, along with individuals from these spaces as well as their sexualities, is equivalent to immorality and otherness, sustains hegemonic or taken for granted assumptions. Johnston and Longhurst (2010) explain, “rural relationships and identities need to be set apart from urban relationships” (98), as there is a common conception that heterosexuality and rural space go hand in hand. Moreover, there is an understanding that the dominant norm in rural communities is not only heterosexuality, more specifically hegemonic heterosexuality. There are many additional forms of sexuality and gender identities involved in rural spaces, however dominant ideologies suggest that these identities are often considered abnormal, especially in rural space. This is significant to the argument and discussion around the constructions of rural life, specifically hegemonic forms of heterosexual identity. It begins to illustrate how constructions and assumptions embedded in rural and urban populations continue to sustain the idea that there is only one form of heterosexuality, and that this one form is predominant in all rural communities.

Johnston and Longhurst (2010) describe in detail many identities that are considered alternative to normative rural behaviors. One significant example Johnston and Longhurst discuss is the idea of “Tomboyism” (104). The authors’ explanation of “Tomboyism” as “a resistance to narrow and strict gender delineations, also revealing the gendered basis of constructions of childhood” (104) illustrates the power of gender ideologies that individuals are encouraged to abide by. Constructions of gender ideologies create a hyperawareness of, for example, an adolescent girl who would rather engage in a typically perceived masculine activity, such as engaging in physical sports, than learning the qualities of domesticity, which has largely been perceived as feminine, and continues to be regarded as resisting the societal order of everyday
life. Labeling young girls as “tomboys” is labeling them as unnatural - unnatural because it does not fit within the dominant ideologies of hegemonic heterosexuality. Young girls are then expected to grow out of the “tomboy phase” as they age into puberty and adulthood, highly focusing on “sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood” (105). The assumption is that tomboy-girls will eventually conform to gendered expectations of sexuality that have been put in place through dominant norms. Johnston and Longhurst also identify the connection between “tomboys” and rural space and the dominant presumption that these young, tomboy-girls are from the country. The creation of a “country girl” image and the placement of this identity on someone can further limit individuals and femininity as it creates labels and restrictions on an individual’s agency. This marginalization and limited agency intensifies as they lose the power and opportunity to form the identities and classifications they want for themselves.

A second example discussed by Johnston and Longhurst (2010) relating to their analysis of identities perceived as alternative is “gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people that live in the country” (105). This example directly relates to the particular hegemonic forms of heterosexuality that are embedded in rural society. As mentioned earlier, any identity that is not considered under the category of hegemonic heterosexuality is seen as “Other” to the accepted dominant norms of the rural, and therefore would be considered to be in relation or connection to urban settings, a space which has been labeled as impure or immoral. The authors explain how “rural spaces tend to be understood as sites of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender oppression and absence where same-sex desires remain hidden” (105).

For the remainder of this paper, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender-identified individuals will be addressed as LGBT*. A frequent hypothesis made in relation to this understanding is that LGBT* individuals leave rural society due to exclusion relating to their varying identities regarded as “Other” in relation to hegemonic heterosexuality, and ultimately do not live in rural spaces for these reasons. However, as this may be a reliable consideration for some individuals, it does not relate to all. There are many LGBT*-identified individuals who want, and indeed do, live in rural communities, who remain in rural communities after growing up there, or perhaps move out of urban settings into rural spaces (105). There are numerous locations individuals choose to reside, inconsequential of how they identify or why they choose a specific area. Additionally, these discourses falsely contextualize all rural communities as oppressive towards LGBT*-identified individuals. Hegemonic ideologies that have become embedded in our society construct misleading conceptions of individuals, as well as representations in relation to rural society.

Through analyzing and considering the geographical writings of Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst (2010), this paper has examined the relationships between sexuality and space, questioning ideologies that suggest hegemonic forms of heterosexuality as superior. This is crucial to the understanding of rural spaces in relation to the dominant ideologies and discourses that potentially marginalize individuals that do not identify as or conform to specific norms. The examples of “Tomboyism” and gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender-identified individuals, has further deconstructed dominant ideologies of heterosexuality in rural space and the relation to forms of sexuality seen as “Other”. This paper has highlighted the significance of acknowledging how dominant discourses can construct false assumptions around rural and urban spaces specifically regarding identities that are not explicit to hegemonic heterosexuality. It is important for readers to engage in a critical awareness of how dominant discourses and ideologies that prevail within society are problematic as these can never be comprehensive to an entire group, sexuality, space or place they attempt to portray.

Resources

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ON MY ILL PREPARATION FOR
THE NEW PUBLICATION OF THE FAQ:
by Sarah Aurella Bell

fiction by Sarah−Marie Chaillot

I mean, not to suggest I am famous or anything. There is no unending chorus singing: "Ella B! Ella B!" If I am famous, people shuffle in their seats nervously should I not arrive. There is always soup saved for me – yes, a bowl saved for Ella B! Nope. I am not famous. I have no intention of being famous. I make my own soup.

And there is no expectant party waiting for my invariably perfect paper to be submitted by the stroke of September First. As a looming deadline swallows the humidity of these days, maybe my peers and neighbours remind me that there is, indeed, a deadline and that I am, of course, a nice person. But I’m not famous. As the cold and leaves fold to rot I do not revise.

So if no one is expecting me to publish anything – and I mean no one – why should I write some sappy letter apologizing with the utmost profundity and charm for not meeting a publishing deadline no one expects me to meet?

Because I want desperately to meet it.

I suggest to you, dear friends and readers, the warm company around the fire of these words, should I be so lucky, that publishing art can be transgressive; that disseminating a sound over the effluent ruse of some meandering river, imagining the world as if it were a fiction, as if one word could change the content of that universe, does so; that reeling an ego into the recesses of echoing, and loveable thunder, and the iridescent dance of mottling storm clouds, is absolutely imperative.

Considering the urgency of such a thing, I have some advice to share, if you will permit me:

1. I is a Name. I is what it eats. And at a beckon, birdcall, muddled bellow, I answers.

2. Do not expect some miraculous or authentic core to project through your publication, your “own” craft and artistry, as if this singular You is so unmoving, or so easily traced along its outlines, unshakeably statically. True. You is a constituent of Us.

3. Do not wallow in a perfectionism waiting for this authentic, authorial You.

4. Don’t wait.

5. Y’know, time is so long and one day we will never be right, or wrong, or judged maliciously, or tempered by whatever it is you think to be unchangeable. And I will roll in my grave, as it were, neither happy nor sad but bliss-ed in both moments, wondering what kind of absurd terror, fearful dream, could come to quiet the joyous, elated screaming of my life. Singing for no one to hear may be an exercise in love. But how are we to encourage people to love themselves also? How am I supposed to help myself along the way?


What if there is no start and no finish to anything? Do you ever feel dizzy, inexplicably, as if the world’s spiraling has momentarily possessed you? As if you are a visitor here? I could lick lap petroleum from this ancient plastic sink well.

Don’t wait. You will make mistakes. We can talk about it. Call me.

S. A. Bell is currently dissecting dice at the University of Manitoba.
Studying the roles of women in the Orthodox Christian Church, the importance of history and tradition is shown in its influence over decisions in contemporary times. There are three important aspects to study while looking at the roles of women in orthodox Christianity. The first is the treatment of women by Jesus, as well as the nurturing roles allocated to women as widows, nuns, and deaconesses. It is then important to discuss how patriarchy affects the roles allowed to women in the Church, and the ways it is used to keep women in subordination to men. The third aspect is to look at the current discourse around the ordination of women as priests in the Church. Connecting the prevalence of patriarchy in the Church to history and tradition, current debates over the priesthood of women in orthodox Christianity can be better understood.

Early Roles for Women in the Orthodox Church

The expectations of how women should be treated and their role within the Orthodox Church is often analyzed by looking at the examples set by Jesus in the Bible. The information recorded about him, and the translation of these writings, often reference the connection he had with many women; bonds of friendships, trust, and respect that Jewish men at the time did not engage in. It has been interpreted that Jesus “did not distinguish between men and women; [he] dared to discuss theological issues with Samaritan women; visited the house of Mary and Martha; showed himself as the resurrected Lord first to women” (Jones, 59). The interactions that Jesus had with women are important when considering the roles of women in Orthodox Christianity for two main reasons. The first is the immediate set up of women into roles of nurturers and caregivers. Looking at passages that reference women’s roles in the church, they often fit into the category of caregivers; women were considered to be spiritual, physical, and emotional bearers for their families, community members, and the church. Examples of this includes the disciple Tabitha, known for her “acts of benevolence,” (Fitzgerald, 4), she served as an important community member, assisting widows and others in need of help, providing emotional and physical assistance. Another woman known for her charitable acts is Lydia, who provided spiritual assistance to her family, and is therefore best known for bringing her whole family to Christ (Fitzgerald, 4).

The second reason to study the history of women’s relations with Jesus, is when taking into consideration the astonishment experienced by many people in the 1st Century at the treatment of women by Jesus. Looking at the non-political roles given to women in the Church at that time, it is interesting to reflect on what it would have meant for the Child of God to have been a woman. In current debates over the ordination of priesthood for women, one of the reasons used by those opposing female priests, is the belief of the priest embodying Christ; justifying the need for Orthodox priests to be male. As Father Maximos Aghiorgoussis states, “it is imperative to preserve the symbolic correspondence between Christ as a male and the ordained priest…[there is a] symbolic and iconic value of male priesthood, both as representing Christ’s male-hood and the fatherly role of the Father in the Trinity” (Ware, 25).

In a patriarchal setting that, from the beginning of the Bible with Adam and Eve, to the secondary roles seen for women during the 1st Century sets up women as submissive to men, the idea of a successful, dominant female Messiah seems unlikely. This argument provides the reasoning that women cannot become priests because, “although Jesus never said anything about this, either for or against, his actions speak for themselves” (Ware, 13). In arguing this, it is important to take into consideration that it was already viewed a drastic act on the part of Jesus to communicate with
women the way that he did. To allow them to lead church services as priests would have been completely unheard of, and the chances of female priests having a faithful following would not have been likely.

Despite having no roles in the higher up authorities of the clergy, such as bishop or patriarch, many roles were available for women on the level of laity. An example of one of the roles allowed to women is that of the widow. The role of widowhood referred to any woman who did not have a husband; whether she was once married and he had deceased or if she chose never to marry and to instead remain celibate. Women who pursued this ideal were thought to be more spiritually pure, and widowhood came to represent “a privileged opportunity for spiritual progress through chastity and service, offering a new social role for independent women that granted them respectability outside the patriarchal constraints of their society” (Izmirlieva). Another important role for women in Orthodox Christianity, including to present times, is that of choosing to dedicate one’s life to celibacy as a nun. Nuns were considered to be equal to monks of the time, with differences between the two groups being based solely on differences between the monasteries they resided in. For women, becoming a nun was a decision that involved pledging their virginity, spirituality, and life completely to the church (Korennaya).

The major role for women in the Orthodox Church, up until the 11th to 12th Centuries, was that of the deaconess; a position that arguably did require the ordination of women to the clergy. While it is generally stated that deaconesses were held to the same position as deacons, or just slightly below, there is still disagreement on the importance of their role. Debates also revolve around if the ceremony they participated in to become a deaconess did in fact result in their ordination. Professor John Karmiris argues that the roles between male and female deacons differ vastly and are not to be confused as having similar positions. He claims that deacons roles were “purely priestly ministry” while deaconesses were an “auxiliary institution in the work of the Church” (Ware, 84). Karmiris’ arguments are drawn from the same sources that are used to argue against his interpretation. This shows how the translation of texts is an important factor to take into consideration when studying documents not originally written in English. The main sources for analyzing the role of deaconesses can be found in the Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions; two important historic documents tracing back to Syria in the late 3rd and 4th Centuries, that highlight and discuss the roles of deaconesses during the set time each document was produced (Fitzgerald, 18). From these documents, another theologian, Theodorou, makes the claim that deaconesses and deacons were ordained equally, in the same way as other orders of the clergy “because their ordination took place ‘within the altar area and before the altar table, during the Divine Liturgy’” (Jones, 56).

Studying the Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions, the tasks that deaconesses partook in are recorded, alongside the similarities these roles had to those assigned to male deacons of the time. There is no known universal practice of the roles of deaconesses, as their roles are recorded as shifting and changing from place to place and between periods of time (Ware, 76). The first recognized deaconess is Phoebe who became known as a prototype for female deacons. Her position as a prominent deaconess is a result of the letters of St. Paul, who often commended her to other churches as “our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church of Cenchreae” (Fitzgerald, 5). Once again the translation of this event is debated; while many feel that the term identified as ‘deacon’ really means just that, others believe it translates more as ‘helper’ or ‘minister’ (Fitzgerald, 5). Looking at the documents that describe the roles of deaconesses, they are continually referred to as the female equivalent of male deacons, with roles that are comparable to those of their male counterparts. In keeping with the tradition of a separation between roles of men and women, many authors’ state that while the roles of male and female deacons were similar, they were by no means interchangeable, and deaconesses were never able to engage in any form of priestly activity (Ware, 83). The main role of the deaconess was to work with the female section of the congregation. This involved tasks such as receiving “female visitors into the worshipping community” (Ware, 81). It also involved being a spiritual mother to the female congregation, distributing charitable donations to women and widows, as well as visiting and ministering to the sick (Ware, 81).
All of these roles of ministering to women that were given to deaconesses, mirror the roles of deacons who worked with and spiritually guided men outside of the church setting. Other roles of deaconesses that can assist the opinion that they were in fact ordained are writings on how "the deaconess received communion at the altar with the clergy. She was also responsible for bringing Holy Communion to women who were ill and not able to come to the Eucharist" (Ware, 87). Despite the importance that was placed on having a female deacon in the church, by the eleventh century there was a large decline in deaconesses, leading to an eventual erasure of the role. While the position of female deacons is not completely eradicated, efforts to reclaim the position in the Orthodox Church for women, has yet to successfully gain prominence.

**Patriarchy's Role in Women's Ordination**

Women's passive role in society is not a phenomenon of contemporary times, and is not a unique aspect of Orthodox Christianity. The effect of the extreme patriarchy in the Church is a factor to consider though, when looking at the roles allowed to women in the clergy. It is often argued that, "the subordination of woman to man and her exploitation do not reflect the order of nature created by God, but the contranatural conditions resulting from original sin" (Ware, 30). Original sin as the reason for women's subordination may be seen as a legitimate justification, but a church set-up led by male 'patriarchs' shows a strong inherent involvement of patriarchy in the system that should not be ignored. As with most histories, the female roles are often unknown and unexplored, and Orthodox Christianity is no exception to this issue. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, an Orthodox philosopher and theologian, states that, "little is known of the life of Christian women during the dark centuries following the Hellenistic period and during the times of Byzantine splendor" and what is known is "buried beneath the dead wood of outmoded taboos (like the concept of the monthly ritual impurity of women based on a misogynist interpretation of Leviticus) and truisms about their weakness and inferiority" (Behr-Sigel, 4).

Reading Behr-Sigel's work, the issue of interpretation is once again brought to the attention of the reader, and the effects of using translated documents as a continued basis for a religious group. She also brings to focus the ways that women are historically overlooked in the history of Orthodox Christianity. Much of the evidence that discusses women as being ordained is presumed, according to one author, to have "been changed or destroyed by subsequent editors who were either ignorant of or unable to tolerate the idea of women, and especially married women, being called to this form of ministry within the life of the Church" (Fitzgerald, 29).

Focusing on the issues of women as seen in a subordinate position to men, one author writes that Jesus' role was to unite people to God and his nature, which he shares with both women and men; in that sense then, "women, created in the image of God, are fully human and thus capable of sharing in the divine life and action in union with Christ" (Behr-Sigel, 39). An even stronger argument for the equality of men and women in the church is found by a statement made during an Orthodox theological conference that declared it was a sin to discriminate between men and women, and to deny dignity to anyone based on their sex (Behr-Sigel, 8). While unanimous decisions made during a conference may appear to be a step forward and a way to eradicate the division between male and female roles in the Orthodox Church, it's actual effect is little when viewed in the context of a religion steeped in strong traditions that devalue women's roles in the clergy. Following the logic of Professor John Karmiris, women are completely equal to men in their duties and rights in the Church, and perform an equally accountable function in it, as well as having the same mission and responsibility both within and through the Church as do men, with the only difference being that they are excluded from the priesthood" (Ware, 85). Despite this continuous re-enforcement of women as equal to men within the Church, this concept appears to be time and time again, overlooked during debates on the ordination of women into clergy positions.

**Orthodox Women and Priesthood**

While the debate on the ordination of women as priests in the Orthodox Church is not a new topic, despite the presence of feminist groups and other religions shifting to incorporate female priests, it is a topic that remains
unmovable in Orthodoxy. The subject of the ordination of women is one that is often considered not for debate, as “it is contrary to the Christology, ecclesiology, Tradition and practice of the early Church” (Behr-Sigel, 11), according to the World Council of Churches in 1989. While the maleness of the priest can be argued as being symbolic of the living embodiment of Christ, the inability to move forward in a time period that is so revolutionarily quick to change, is viewed by critics as a weakness of orthodoxy. In disagreement against this, and in relation to the ordination of women as an important step forward for contemporary churches to participate in, the argument has been made by Orthodox groups that this move forward is synonymous with an eradication of priesthood. One author states that, “those Western Christians who do not in fact regard the priest as an icon of Christ are of course free to ordain women priests, but dispensing with priesthood altogether” (Ware, 22). The continued insistence of ordaining women into the clergy, is seen as futile, and a distraction from the other roles available to women in the church. The alternative roles offered to women are problematic in their lack of ordination to clergy positions, and their continued emphasis of women as nurturers, not leaders, within the church.

In complete declination of priesthood, four other ministries are offered to women. 1. They can be “equal to apostles”; no women were ever chosen as apostles in the New Testament, and as thus they cannot be actual apostles; but apostle-like roles have been witnessed as historically performed by women, leading to recognition of their “equal to” status. 2. While becoming priests themselves is not an option, women have the opportunity to play the role of the priest’s wife. This is considered a “more hidden form of ministry that Orthodox women have never ceased to perform” (Ware, 31), giving it credibility as an influential role in the church available to women. 3. Becoming ordained as a deaconess is still open for women in the Orthodox Church, but since it’s fall into disuse around the eleventh and twelve centuries, it is a pathway not often chosen. While a few attempts have been made to fully reinstate deaconesses into the church, no success has yet been recorded. 4. Spiritual Motherhood. While most of the talks around this tradition have been around Spiritual Fatherhood, the Church recognizes the importance of women as spiritual guides; this role is closely linked to gifts of prophecy and mediation of prayer (Ware, 31).

A last concept to speculate on is what the push for the ordination of women as priests means for the Orthodox Church. As Fr. Alexander Schmemann states, the “ordination of women to priesthood is tantamount for us to a radical and irreparable mutilation of the entire faith, the rejection of the whole Scripture, and needless to say, the end of all ‘dialogues’…the threat of an irreversible act which, if it become reality, will produce a new, and this time, I am convinced, final division among Christians” (Ware, 11). A division between Orthodox Christians based on an interpretation of traditions or beliefs is not a new concept to the religion; and what the potential outcome of this division could achieve is necessary to consider. Using the example of Nestorianism in the church, and its effects on Orthodox Christianity, a case study can be made on the risks of pushing female priests before the unity of the Church is ready to accept this. In the case of the Nestorians, a group of followers arose who favored the humanity of Jesus over his divinity. The central Orthodox Church believes in a unity between Jesus’ humanity and divinity in relation to his nature, and to his will and energy; the Nestorians asserted that Jesus’ nature and will and energy were only human, erasing the divinity of Jesus completely. At the Third Ecumenical Council in 433, the Orthodox Church named the Nestorian belief as heresy and the followers of Nestorianism were banished to
Upper Egypt. The central Orthodox Church remained in a hierarchal position of power, with little affect after the decision of the Third Council (Schmemann, 123). While Nestorianism remains today, it has a small following of people and is often overlooked in conversations of Orthodoxy. The risk of pushing the Orthodox Church to accept women as priests could lead to a division where those who support female priests are put into the same position as Nestorians. The Orthodox Church would remain dominant, and an outer strand of Orthodoxy would split itself from the central church to continue their teachings, but in a framework that allowed more mobility in the clergy of women. While this could be argued as a step towards getting the Orthodox faith to accept female priests, it could also easily serve the opposite function, and create a greater division between accepting women into the clergy. If people within the central Church began to ask again for female priests, it would be easier for the church to ignore their requests and place them into a category with Orthodox supporters of female priests. As Behr-Sigel comments, "in its present state any decision to ordain women to the priesthood would almost inevitably give rise to schism in the orthodox Church. In view of this risk, we must be patiently impatient” (Behr-Sigel, 44).

Conclusion

While the ordination of women in Orthodox Christianity into priesthood is not a new topic to discuss, it is important to continue to study it from a perspective that is respectful of the history and traditions of the Church. While studying contemporary roles of women it is important to first look at the historic roles given to them and the treatment to women by Jesus. The historic roles of women in the 1st Century as nurturers and caregivers within the Church as well as society as a whole is an important factor to keep in consideration while looking at the lack of political roles given to women. The lack of ordained roles for women is a projection of the views of society in general on the subordination of women. It is then important to look at the affects of patriarchy on women, and the ongoing effects this has had on women’s roles in the Church. The last factor to look at is the current debates around female priesthood in the Orthodox Church and the discourse used. Pushing the Church to recognize women as equal to men is a shift that has to take place slowly if it is to take place effectively.

Works Cited


The Problem with no Name

In 1963, Betty Friedan introduced the Problem with No Name in the Feminist Mystique. It discusses the disappointment and dissatisfaction that housewives of the 1950s felt, because of a lack of options available to them. Even though these housewives had husbands, children, and houses, they did not feel fulfilled and wanted something more than to clean the house over and over again. These photographs represent this idea.

Photographer: Alberta Johnson
Model: Sharon McCullough
All history is a negotiation between familiarity and strangeness.
Simon Schama

—and what to do about this body?

I

Hidden behind
her bland sunken eyes
and little black hairs cascaded
across her faulty arms.

Her glossed pupils
unable to reveal
hidden textures buried beneath her clammy skin.

Her Smooth sleek shine
like a well kept porcelain doll,

but these bulging arms
disconnected from her heart
like a tree chopped at its roots.

Your body
the power of your curvature,
deep cool calm moist
smooth nature embedded in your sleek skin.

The radiance
of your skinny palm settled
diagonal against your cheek bone
as your elbow leans horizontal against your desk
as you say to her, “you are not a woman.”

Your history imminent within that elbow.
The grit of your smile, your simple blond eyebrows,
and even your small breasts.

Your body an encyclopedia.
Definitions, dates and descriptions written
in the length of your finger nails.

II

and we remain hidden—no
confided in—bathroom mirrors.

Our jaws too square,
our shoulders ox-wide, and can we fit
our big fat feet into those tiny cute black boots.

Our stucco faces
torn away from bathroom mirrors.

Stumble over scuffed linoleum gleaming
under bright white fluorescents.

The blue plastic door of the bathroom
heaves open. Roll into white hallway
looking over our shoulders
suspicious of being witnessed
of never being sure
of symbols on bathroom doorways:
A stick figure wearing a dress?
A stick figure without a dress?
III

We are like the dead without tombstones. Our quiet histories. Repulsion of our charred black skin, and how to rise from this earth? Her plastic palm angled from the dirt As if trying to block the sun from her eyes. She holds a book of poetry by Rita Dove, in her fleshy hands On the bus with Rosa park, her index finger trails over the black font. (Her history was hidden to When they went to retrieve her purse she was disregarded as being another type of woman, but she can feel this womyn’s warm breath and the blackness of her skin burning through the thickness of the font. Through this image of her courtesy) a time so right it was ready And we too shall take our seats on buses, toilets, in churches, womyn’s circles, anywhere they say “You are not womyn!”

A vigilant statement passes her mind for a second, but clawing a silver pack of estrogen pills she pops a pill out of its silver plastic package into her meat slab hand, and she places the pill gently on her tongue and swallows. She whispers a prayer for her body, “this body can never tell my story.”

IV

A cadaver emerges pink puffy cheeks bloomed through embalming. What to do next? Now what story will they say this body told? To rise through wooden doors like paper. To reveal brilliant scars hidden by those old hairy palms. An ascension of long wooden stairs like air. To have them witness her story, “and what will it do next?” She can hear them thinking, Can they still mouth the words sitting there on that circle on a hardwood floor “you are not a women” To stumble through that apartment door, and to revive herself. To have them smile at the gloss of her new skin. To reveal these curves with a swing of her hips -- a staggered courtesy. To lift the shroud of mist that covered that old body. Her new legs illuminate her voice, her gritty smile, and green eyes. Her stunted grace.
Jafari Allen’s Use of Theory in Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba

In *Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba*, anthropologist Jafari Allen presents an unflinching examination of the collision of race, sexuality, and citizenship in identity formation in post-Revolutionary Cuba. Allen argues that Cuba’s black men and women construct and articulate dynamic and complex identities through the negotiation of expectations and influences at the global, state, and individual level. This is illustrated through his exploration of the ways in which this marginalized segment of the population uses erotic subjectivity to carve out space for themselves in a country which is often reluctant to recognize their mere existence. Although the entirety of *Venceremos* is extremely insightful and well-researched, Chapter three, entitled “The Erotics and Politics of Self-making,” contains the main arguments which provide the foundation for Allen’s theorization of black erotic subjectivity. This portion of the work familiarizes the reader with the theory and supporting scholarship Jafari Allen relies upon to construct his fascinating and revealing examination of identity formation in twenty-first century Cuba.

Allen begins the third chapter of his text with a description of the appearance of one of his subjects, Octavio, leaving his home as Lili, a voluptuous and lighter skinned womanly iteration of himself. In conversation with the researcher later, Octavio describes Lili as an accentuation of himself and what Allen notes is an “idealized feminine type borne of his acculturated imagination of what a woman is” (77 – 78). This reveals not only Octavio’s nuanced perception of himself as both man and woman, but also his understanding of what makes an ideal Cuban woman: lightness of skin, sensual curves, and flirtatious mannerisms. Octavio’s expression of himself as Lili is a transgression of the roles and behaviours expected from him as a Cuban man, while Lili herself is an affirmation of his – as well as Cuba’s – cultural interpretation of feminine desirability, the coquettish mulata (80). Thus, Allen presents Octavio/Lili as an example of an individual moving across gender boundaries, conforming to and rejecting expectations as they suit one’s conceptions of oneself in various acts of erotic self-making.

Allen’s argument is both provocative and engaging and he supports his explanation of the processes of identity formation, or self-making, with the help of a scholarly heavyweight, Michel Foucault. Allen considers Octavio/Lili’s actions to be expressions of resistance and personal and political agency which reclaim “quotidian spaces,” producing a counterhegemony based on one’s own “recognition of self, intentions, and desires” (80). Octavio’s conception and public articulation of himself as Lili reflects a deeper knowledge of his identity which ultimately challenges hegemonic constraints and expectations and thus becomes an expression of political agency. Here, Allen invokes Foucault’s assertion that such refusals of ideological state violence and
interrogation revolve around the individual’s attempts to understand and define a unique sense of self (81). Thus the personal becomes political as citizens such as Octavio carve out space for themselves within Cuba’s cultural milieu.

Allen pursues the power of personal political agency further with the help of Cathy Cohen, as well as with the work of numerous other scholars including Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Robin D. G. Kelley. Using research examining deviance as resistance, Allen states that individuals with complex and intersecting identities endeavour to establish autonomous space for themselves employing agency that is both restricted and contradictory, delineating two forms of agency – that which is improvised and that which is organized and intentional (84-85). Coupled with Foucault’s theory of self-determination independent of hegemonic influence, the research of Cohen, Hall, Gilroy, and Kelley allow Allen to engage in a deeper analysis of the actions and expressions of individuals such as Octavio/Lili.

Having considered abstract explanations of agency, Allen delves into an exploration of the real processes individuals pursue in acts of self-making with support from scholars Jose Esteban Munoz and Patricia Hill Collins. After relating the experiences of subjects Aria, Cole, and Delores, Allen names what Munoz calls the practice of disidentification as the first step in a process of recognizing the ramifications of one’s intersecting identity positions and strategically rearticulating them (93). This is supported by the example of Octavio, who simultaneously realizes and denies his ascribed identity position as a black Cuban man while crafting his alternative identity position as that of a Cuban mulata woman, in the form of Lili. Allen, with the help of Collins, argues that with disidentification comes one’s critical expression of competing narratives and ideologies, which are debated and performed in a public arena (94). The negotiations involved in one’s self-making processes are both private and public, resist and conform, and are most telling when examining one’s erotic proclivities and manifestations.

Allen has described and established the intricacies of identity formation and now comes upon one of the pivotal concepts around which Venceremos is shaped: one’s body as a site of transcendent erotic subjectivity. Here, the text calls on Audre Lorde’s cerebral analysis of the individual’s profoundly powerful sexual energy. Allen cites Lorde, who describes sexuality as not merely involving erotic encounters, but also as a site of personal invention and reinvention, of deep and intimate knowledge which cannot be determined or controlled by outside forces such as state and dominant culture (96). Thus, one’s engagement in disidentification processes, efforts at delineating an autonomous space, and at expressing personal agency are all hugely informed by a sovereign erotic subjective. This argument, while recognizing the insidious influences of outside forces such as hegemonic expectations and ideologies, ultimately locates an authentic agency within the individual’s most intimate space. Allen fortifies this with the concept of erotic autonomy, M. Jacqui Alexander’s assertion of one’s belonging to oneself “beyond state interpellations, inscriptions, and exclusions” (97). This absolute belonging to oneself is not more powerfully articulated than in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, when Allen describes Octavio, dressed in brightly coloured capris and a floral top, stepping out his front door and into a street filled with neighbours who openly ridicule and deride him.

Jafari Allen’s work, Venceremos: The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba, is a provocative examination of the intersection of race, sexuality, and citizenship in the erotic self-making of Cuba’s black men and women. The anthropologist builds a coherent and well-researched argument upon relevant and deeply powerful theories from numerous scholars, particularly that of Audre Lorde. Thus the third chapter of this text is the axis upon which Allen’s work revolves, providing a foundational premise for his assertion of erotic self-making as the means by which black Cubans articulate intersectional identities on their own terms.

References
A history of colonialism, normalized worldwide, constructing dichotomies of colonizer and colonized; progress and tradition; future and past; culture and nature; dominant and subordinate; superior and inferior; masculine and feminine; man and woman; conqueror and conquered.

Colonialism: A history of conquering land and people.

Conquerable meaning:
Feminine: weak, passive, less than, inferior, exploitable, subordinate, other

Other: defined as different, but more so less than. Colonizers, men, rely on othering to justify their plans to conquer, and to overcome their fear of the unknown. Unknown: Indigenous people and land.

Language of objectification and dominance; power over that which is natural or feminine in order for the progress of the dominant group:

Women described in animal terms such as cows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, passions. Nature described in female and sexual terms where it is raped, mastered, conquered, controlled, mined. Their secrets are penetrated and their wombs are put into the services of man and science.

Do YOU see the connection?
Connected as other, as lesser than, in need of "saving" and "molding," irrational and incomplete without men's touch: their violence and degradation ignored and justified.

I turn on the news and it depresses me. I learn my history and it depresses me. I discuss with women our experiences as women and it depresses me. I listen to lost cultural knowledge and practice and it depresses me. I learn about lost species and destruction of land, and it depresses me. I see the disconnection of people from land and animal and it depresses me. I see diversity separating us rather than unifying us and it depresses me. I share my knowledge and depression with others to learn more in hopes of working for a better future in which values of human and nonhuman life are equally respected and I'm met with hostility, indifference, and hopelessness... and it depresses me.

Othering and the isms of dominance:

- Racism
- Sexism
- Classism
- Naturism
- Ageism
- Ableism
- Heterosexism

Can WE name more?

The construction of capitalism and patriarchy by colonizers:

An economy based on truly **valueless** money considered more valuable than environmental sustainability or safety of half the population.

Masculine **dominance** that dictates what is superior and inferior, placing women and nature in the latter category.

Together, sustaining the existing power structure that allows for harms against humans and nonhumans to continue with barely a glance; naturalized and normalized so that those constructed as inferior internalize their status and believe it to be true; silent in its power.

I urge you all to **SPEAK UP AND ACT OUT.**

Do not allow another to dictate to you that you must feel inferior.

Do not allow another to identify you without your consent.

Do not allow the structure of capitalism to justify the harm of this Earth humans and nonhumans share together from birth to death of all individuals and life in every generation.

Do not allow the present actions in the name of ‘progress’ to silence future consequences and allow them to occur until it is too late.

- Embrace our unity.
- Embrace our diversity.
- Embrace our surroundings.
- Embrace our interconnectedness; let this be our power against the dominant heterosexual, white, male powers that devalue that which is natural and necessary for life.

Recognize the dysfunctionality of the power structures we experience daily that lead all humans and nonhumans into a life of dissatisfaction and destruction. Do not be afraid to speak up against unnecessary harm, violations against humans and nonhumans. Let us work together to restructure society as non-hierarchical and collaborative instead of dominating; a continuum of diversity and experience instead. Recognize your privileges and use these to the advantage of all. Do not be afraid to give up power for another, it will be more liberating than you ever imagined.

It matters not your culture, gender, sex, sexual orientation, age, ability or class.

**ALL**

will benefit from a functional society that values its diversity.

rejects dichotomies that ignore the spectrum of real life, honors all ways of life and recognizes the harm in constructing caretaking and nurturance as inferior and its equally harmful construction of dominance and individualism as superior.

**Solidarity:**

Because humans and nonhumans alike share this one Earth.

Let all people work together for their value and the value of the environment we rely upon for continual survival. Collaborations between movements against the isms of domination SHOULD come together and recognize their connection. We should work together against the underlying systems that oppress them and take power from a select minority of the whole population – male, white, heterosexual individuals and corporations – and share its power with all life on Earth for a future of respect, safety, justice, freedom, and equality.

**Respect:**

Traditions of Indigenous people that were conquered and devalued through the process of colonialism and learn from their ways through a critical lens to find existing solutions and ways of improvement for overthrowing the dysfunctional system of patriarchy and capitalism.

**Reject:**

The woman-nature versus man-culture dichotomy and instead acknowledge the interconnectedness and embeddedness of all things living and sharing the world.

**Deconstruct:**

Oppositional binaries through this acknowledgement and recognize all else that has been ignored in the spectrums they belong to.

Ultimately,

**Demand:**

Radical reformation of society and break down the interlocking systems of oppression that those constructed as feminine, whether they identify so or not, experience daily. Respect the power of individual efforts and come together in solidarity for land and people othered and devalued. Do not underestimate their connections as we work towards a better future.
The trial and conviction of Jean-Paul Akayesu, the man who incited rapes against Tutsi during the Rwandan genocide, was a groundbreaking moment in human history (Totten, 2009, p.116). Jean-Paul Akayesu was the first man ever held responsible for horrific rapes, and thus his conviction represented the shift in the conceptualization and understanding of rapes during the warfare. The International Criminal Court found “that rapes were widespread, the accused knew of and aided and abetted in the rapes, and rapes were committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group, namely the Tutsi” (Buss, 2009, p.7).

Until recently, sexual assaults were perceived as a natural consequence of warfare, and they were not seen as a violation of humanitarian law (Farwell, 2004, p.2). The reason for why the rape crimes were ignored and neglected for such a long time, is embedded in the social structures of our society and result from the complex interplay of ideologies and social roles of men and women. In patriarchal societies men have more power than women, which is demonstrated in all aspects of social life. As a consequence of this unequal relationship, women often experience physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. The view that sexual assaults result from an unequal power distribution, rather than as an exceptional event, is still controversial. This is because of the popular belief that sexual offenders are mentally ill people who have uncontrollable sexual urges, and if they cannot fulfill them through consenting sexual intercourse, they attack and rape. Rule says that, “bracketing person as “sick” rather than as perverse, evil, or merely bizarre creates a license, and perhaps even an imperative, for some form of treatment” (1971, p.50). The view that rapists are “sick” convinces the public that normal people could never commit a rape. However, most sexual offenders are not mentally ill strangers, but rather your family members and friends (Littleton, 2011, p.3).

Similarly, rape during wartime is perceived as the inevitable by-product of war, which is itself seen as an extraordinary event that occurs when people are unable to solve their conflicts in more “humane” manners. The war, genocide, and sexual violence are often perceived as the barbaric outbursts that occur when the social institutions fail to work properly. Furthermore, Powell argues that many scholars tend to “put genocide in a category by itself, separate from other social events, and to explain it as an extraordinary event, an exception to social life” (Powell, 2011, p.86). In the same manner, rape is perceived as an “unnatural” and “barbaric” act perpetrated by “sick” and violent individuals. However, this is not at all true as women’s experiences during the war, “such as victimization connected to sexuality, women’s role as mother, as well as societal expectations of women” (Totten, 2009, p.25), are socially constructed and rooted in social institutions. Furthermore, rape is not the by-product of the war, but rather a part of women’s position and treatment in the society.

Farwell demonstrates that the conceptualization of rape during the warfare has changed since the last few decades (2004, p.3). She argues that rape during the
armed conflicts was finally recognized as the weapon of war for many reasons. “Rape is both an attack on women (as women) and part of an attack against ‘the enemy’. It is a message passed between men—vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other” (Buss, 2009, p.4). Buss further explains that the national ideology sees the women as the symbol of the body politic, because they give birth and nurture the children of the nation (2009, p.4). Thus, the violence against women can be interpreted as the symbolic attack on the nation itself. The rape is not committed for the purpose of sexual pleasure, but rather as the exercise of one’s domination and power over the other.

Furthermore, war rape was legally defined as the crime against humanity after the conflicts in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Buss argues that:

“Prosecuting rape as a crime against humanity requires showing that the act of rape, however defined, took place as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population on national, political, ethnic, racial or religious grounds. Rape as genocide requires that the act of rape was “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group” (Buss, 2009, p.6).

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) were established in order to prove how rapes were used as the tool for the destruction of the nation (Farwell, 2004, p.3). Mullins explains that genocidal rapes, unlike opportunistic rapes for example, are used as the tactic for the mass destruction of the group (Mullins, 2009, p.10). Therefore, they are not driven by sexual desires as opportunistic rapes are, but rather as yet another way to annihilate undesirable populations. Mullins argues that sexual assault “is used to generate fear in subdued populations, humiliate the population (both men and women), derogate women (through spoilage of identity), and create a cohort of mixed ethnic children to maintain the humiliation/spoilage/domination” (Mullins, 2009, p.4).

The use of sexual assault as the means to annihilate one group of people was evident during the conflicts in Rwanda. Mullins explains that the killings and sexual assaults of Tutsi civilians was not the unintended consequence of the military conflict but rather “killings were being carried out from a list that had been prepared months in advance” (Mullins, 2009, p.5). Hutu had a plan to systematically annihilate their fellow Tutsi citizens. First they spread the propaganda in which the Hutu supremacy was celebrated and encouraged. The main goal was to present Tutsi as the enemy of Hutu national integrity, and create hatred that would animate Hutu to start killing Tutsi (Mullins, 2009, p.5). The rest of the world was well aware of this negative propaganda, and they could have done something to prevent the genocide, but they did not. For example, “there were the warning signs that the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda was picking up and relying back to the United Nations headquarters on a regular basis” (Totten, 2009, p.110).

On April 7, 1994 the mass killings, tortures, and rapes began. “Tutsi were dragged out of homes and hiding places and murdered, often after prolonged torture and rape” (Jones, 2011, p.352). Enraged Hutu did not want to exempt anybody who even just looked like Tutsi. Furthermore, thousands of Tutsi women and girls were “raped in front of their families, in their homes, along village paths, in the bush, and in roadways – indeed, in virtually any and all places where they were caught” (Totten, 2009, p.108). In addition, women were usually killed after being raped or they died from the injuries. Some were deliberately infected with HIV virus, which is one of the main problems in Rwanda today (Totten, 2009, p.111). Those that survived gave birth to “rape babies”, who serve as a constant reminder of the horrific violence that the women had undergone (Totten, 2009, p.108).

The atrocious events in Rwanda changed the way that rapes during the warfare were conceptualized. Farwell argues that rape was finally recognized as a weapon and a strategy of war (Farwell, 2004, p.6). "As a weapon, it attacks women's physical and emotional sense of security while simultaneously launching an assault, through women's bodies, upon the genealogy of security as constructed by the body politic" (Farwell, 2004, p.6). Furthermore, the International Criminal Court for Rwanda was established in order to try and sentence the perpetrators of rape. Jean-Paul Akayesu was the first man ever convicted for sexual assaults during the warfare, even if he did not participate in them (Mullins, 2009, p.9). However, he promoted the rape and humiliation of Tutsi women and girls, and also encouraged Hutu soldiers to kill their victims after. Shockingly, Hutu women also supported their husbands and sons to rape Tutsi women and perform other sadistic violence against them (Totten, 2009, p.108).
The Rwandan case clearly illustrates that sexual assault is not the uncontrolled by-product of war, but rather initiated by the state and social institutions for the purpose of the destruction of a group. The distinct social identity of Hutu and Tutsi were deliberately invented and propagated. They were presented as inherently different, even though they had the same identity until the twentieth century (Jones, 2011, p.348). Furthermore, the social institutions “did not fail but functioned normally and in functioning normally they engendered the very thing we might want and expect them to prevent (Powell, 2011, p.3).

The ICTR recognized rape as the weapon of war and tried the men involved. However, Buss argues that it is disappointing that “only five men in total have been found guilty of rape-related charges. Eight men have pleaded guilty before the Tribunal, five of whom were charged with sexual violence crimes. All five were able to have their sexual violence charges dropped in exchange for guilty pleas on other counts” (Buss, 2009, p.7). The main reasons for low conviction rate are the time-consuming investigations, lack of evidence, and the cost of trials (Buss, 2009, p.7). Thus, it is questionable whether the ICTR is cost-effective and able to aid the victims of sexual assault. The ICTR recognized and morally disapproved rape as the weapon of war, but this did not change everyday lives of rape victims who still have to cope with severe consequences. “The lives of a vast number of female survivors are incredibly difficult, and it doesn’t appear as if they will improve dramatically anytime soon. Many returned to their villages to be greeted by destroyed homes, uprooted crops, land “littered” with dead bodies, and the families of the perpetrators who killed their families (the victims’) still living next door to them” (Totten, 2009, p.119).

Finally, it is important to wonder what kind of future women can hope for now that sexual assaults during the warfare have been internationally recognized. First of all, it is necessary to examine why and how rape occurs. In every patriarchal country, women experience rape both during peace and during wartime as sex is traditionally seen as a man’s right. Therefore, because men have more power than women they are able to incorporate their dominance into social institutions, becoming more oppressive toward women. If we believe that genocide occurs not when social institutions fail to work properly, but instead when they perform their usual tasks, then we can conclude that genocidal rape occurs because the society created and encouraged it. If we are going to prevent genocidal sexual assaults from happening again, we have to take radical approaches and drastically change the foundations of our society. By this I mean that women need to be empowered and given the right over their own bodies. We must stop treating women as “others” and punishing them for not having the same identity as men. "A civil people cannot go on calling themselves civil without expanding the scope of their civility to include the Others of civilization" (Powell, 2011, p.302). Instead of creating the world of exclusion we have to advocate for inclusion and openness toward differences.

References:
It’s already cold and dark here.
Unfamiliar without the light of the sun.
The news talks everyday about the shadows and the knives, guns.
And so, I feel uncomfortable here already.
I’ve heard tips. About keeping my head down.
Walking with a purpose.
Walking and singing.
No electronics.
None of this make me feel less exposed here.
Waiting for the bus to take me to the safety of bed.

I was all by myself.
There was no one around. All out of earshot. But me.
And you saw. You saw me standing, waiting. You know
it’s not safe down here.

Yet you still do it.
Roll down your windows.
Yell out sexist words.
Things you think are so funny.

I shiver. But it’s not the cold.
It’s you. And it’s your pal beside you.
Who feel safe inside the warmth of the truck and behind
the words that you shout out.
Even though I am out here in the open air, and you are there
in the vehicle, you have made my world small.
Because you’ve shown me that there are still people who
take advantage of the darkness in the street.
A Response:

“You know, you could be hot if you tried”

His eyes narrowed before he spoke, attempting to see past my shaved head, hairy legs, loose shirt, the aggressive stance; all that which blatantly, and intentionally, marks me as beyond interested. It is the ease by which he wields his gaze that turns my stomach, the effortlessness. He licks his lips, and the words fall from his mouth. I meet his stare and reflected back is my silhouette, and in that instant I can suddenly see myself morphed into a more pleasing shape for his hunger, a body ready for him to consume. I am disgusted.

In this statement he turns me over and points between my legs, ‘but isn’t this for me? His gaze shouts, ‘you are supposed to be for me’. The effort of his dissection and reimagining of my appearance forces him to tell me that I have made a mistake. That I am not meeting what has been promised to him.

I am standing in violation to what his world dictates. That is why he must speak, why he must explain my potential to me. That I can, and I should, live through his approval. To build my body for his satisfaction, to pour my energy into his self-worth, to strip my soul of love for myself, to minimize my mind, small enough to fit into his grasp, placing my power into the proper place. To him.

“You know, you could be hot if you tried”

In his words he scolds me for having the audacity to suggest the possibility of a life beyond interest in him. This is why I must remind him,

My body is not for you.

I am not for you.
I am not here to smile, laugh, and please you.
To tell you how great or strong or powerful you are.
To lick my lips, to bat my eyes,
To hide my disappointment.
I am not a mirror that reflects your power.

My body is not something you can take pleasure from.
I am not here for you to lay your conquest upon.
You cannot touch me, you cannot own me.

I will not make you feel at ease in the privilege you have claimed.

My body is not for you.

This you cannot understand, your eyes covered by the hands of your brothers and fathers. Blind to any world that is not for you. You cannot bear the thought that I would not be in existence to please you, to stroke your masculinity.

But here I am. I don’t care if you like it. I am not here to make you feel good.

In fact, I am here to threaten your privilege. The mirror that I hold shows that I too can claim the power you have held belongs only to your kind.

And that is why you tell me to stop: “You know, you could be hot if you tried”

Not only because I am not here to please you,
Not only because you cannot have my body,
Not only because I threaten how you’ve ordered your world,

But really, at the heart of it, because I love women.

“You know, you could be hot if you tried”

No. No I couldn’t.
Not in the way you want.
Never in the way you want.

For although my masculinity challenges you, it is my lesbianism that denies you. That is what forces you to explain to me how I should be under your control.

And that is what forces me to explain that I could never, no matter how I looked, because:

I am not here for men, I am here to love women.

You have lived in ignorance believing women are only here for your pleasure.

So know,

My power is not for your taking,
My mind is not something you can mold,
My identity is not defined through you,
My soul could never give love to you.
My body is not for you.
An Investigation of Gender Hierarchy within Christianity

Author’s Note:
Prior to reading this research paper, it is important to note that as the author, the information provided is not meant to belittle the power, effectiveness, and benefits of religion or Christianity. I am a firm believer that spirituality and religion have the ability to enrich the lives of many and that faith can be defined, practiced, and appreciated in different forms and for different reasons. This paper is not meant to place blame on religion or on Christianity, it is meant to reinforce the pervasiveness of interpretation and the ways in which dominant ideologies affect all persons in a direct or indirect way.

Christianity’s pervasiveness and historical influence on society (defined in this context as persons residing in North America) has impacted the societal and cultural construction of women. Specifically, women are represented as subordinate/inferior, forced to abide by specific gender roles and performances.

This paper, through the investigation of literature and imagery will demonstrate the ways in which women are represented as subordinate and how their construction influences the cultural consciousness of human beings universally. This research does not aim to identify difference between man and woman but a hierarchy which places men above women. Although Religious Studies and Gender Studies have addressed the subordination of women evident in Christianity, the way in which Christianity has influenced gender constructions, existing in present day North America, is an area of research that has been neglected. Evidence of the subordination of women in Christianity addressed through the field of Religious Studies is addressed in Mary Pat Fisher’s book entitled Living Religions. This research paper aims to fill a knowledge gap while highlighting the intersection of religion more generally within societies beyond Canadian and American borders.

Christianity is one of the world’s largest religions which began in Jerusalem in the first century AD (Religionfacts.com). In order to understand the ways in which Christianity has influenced cultural consciousness and societal ideologies, one must look at the history of this religion. I argue that Christian doctrines are embedded in North American society to which its ideologies have been made to seem natural and inevitable. For example, the institution of marriage and the symbolism of the white wedding dress are direct influences of Christianity and have become accustomed traditions for Christian followers and even among North American persons (who do not identify as Christian) of different religions, cultures, races and ethnicities. The “rules” set in place by Christianity have camouflaged themselves beyond the walls of the church, seeping into all sectors of life. Citizens within a North American context abide by the doctrines of the church through governmental policy, judicial laws and regulations, and more generally by the expected and understood “morals” of society. Right and wrong, good and bad, are defined by North American society mimicking the ten commandments of Christian religious scripture. As defined by the Oxford dictionary, morals are, “concerned with or derived from the code of behaviour that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society: they have a moral obligation to pay the money back” (Oxforddictionary.com).

One might question the ways in which these “communal general codes” were created. Although Christianity may not be the sole influence on the ways in which gender and normative practices are conceptualized in North America, Christianity has certainly proven the ability to permeate its beliefs within greater communities. One way in which Christianity has shaped gender is through interpretation of religious literature, language and imagery.
Interpretation, defined as, "the action of explaining the meaning of something”, influences the ways in which Christianity is taught, read, explained, understood and perceived, which in turn, affects the way it translates across cultures and societies and how persons “believe” and conceive faith (Oxforddictionary.com).

The Synoptic Gospels are known in the Christian faith as representing inconsistencies in the interpretation of similar events. George Shillington, the author of The New Testament: In Context identifies the ways in which these three accounts differ and he states,

The Synoptic gospels are three highly important documents of the New Testament, in that they focus directly on the central figure of the testament and the founder of the movement that was to become a world religion known as Christianity. But more than that, in their presentation of the central figure these three Gospels also pose some problems for interpretation (97).

Shillington's chapter entitled, One in Three: The Synoptic Gospels, discusses the differing details within the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. For example, the omission or inclusion of specific women within the infancy narrative are a direct reflection of their author. The New Testament and the Bible are often referred to as a way to seek truth among the believers and leaders of the Christian faith. The stories, the "characters", and the language that is chosen to portray them affect Christians and society at large. As mentioned within the Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels,

We find this approach [a social science approach] much fairer than the approach of those who would make the New Testament mean whatever they need it to mean in the twenty-first century. Such manipulation of the texts in the name of contextualization or appropriation or some other buzzword simply does violence to what our ancestors in faith witnessed (s).

This quotation from Bruce J. Malina is referring to the use of exegesis, through a social science perspective, to critically explain textual, Biblical, interpretation. After the passing of thousands of years since the origins of Christianity, it is evident that the stories have changed and transformed as a result of interpretation. This quotation also denotes the idea that in order to adhere to religious doctrines and traditions, persons may have wielded original “stories” to suit their immediate lifestyles and views. In addition, it is valuable to look at who wrote the Synoptic Gospels and those who have been given the privilege of retelling or “passing on” religious stories. In an attempt to challenge biased interpretations, and as a way to “locate” the origins of the ascribed gender roles within Christianity, one must identify the position men and women exercise as leaders and symbols within this faith.

The participation of women as authority figures within the Christian Church has changed in recent decades, although, it is well documented that in the past, and in many current instances, men occupy some of the most revered and respected roles as priests, bishops, ministers, and deacons. As Mary Pat Fisher states,

If church leadership is seen as a pyramid, the broad base of least skilled and prestigious work is filled largely with women, while the more skilled and prestigious positions toward the top of the pyramid have traditionally been filled by men, although this is changing (210-211).

Fisher effectively categorizes Christian church leadership, addressing that it values men’s participation above the participation of women. It is interesting to note that although men are venerated in relation to women at the Christian church administrative level, women are the primary persons to engage in devotional activities and volunteer work (Fisher 210). To abstain from overgeneralization, it is significant to acknowledge that there are many Christian denominations which have their own set of regulations which may omit or encourage women’s participation. Although women within Christianity participate in the “behind the scenes” running of the church, priests within Christianity, are those who encourage others to join in the mission of Christ. Priests also preach, instruct, guide, unite, encourage and administer sacraments upon Christian believers (Nypriest.com). Additionally, men, interpret and retell the teachings found in religious scriptures which are also written by men.

When thinking about human behaviours, human perceptions and understandings, and the ways in which Christianity profoundly impacts society, one must also consider the position of Christian followers, and persons within North American society in more conventional terms. From a psychological perspective relating to human development, it is proven that “nature and nurture are mutually interactive influences” (Human Development: A lifespan view 4). This statement is related to scientific research concerning human beings’ characteristics or attributes and whether or not they are a result of one’s biology: one’s genetic makeup or a result of one’s environment; one’s surroundings and experiences. If, according to this perspective, nature and nurture play a balanced role in human development,
then faith, such as Christianity has a considerable possibility to influence human beings. Christian doctrines and Christian scripture, if understood as external influences, reinforce faith as a substantial authority in shaping human beings’ “understanding”. Thus, religious constructions of gender are indeed pervasive in affecting the hierarchal categorization of women and men (in a North American context where Christianity is one of the dominant religions).

In addition to interpretation, visual Christian depictions of men and women and language used to describe men and women, influence societal perceptions of femininity and masculinity which reinforce the subordination of women and the dominance of men. The language used in the Bible as well as popular Christian imagery, specifically depictions of The Virgin Mary, express explicit gender scripts in which men and women are expected to perform.

Language, in this context, can be defined as “the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way” (Oxforddictionary.com). Imagery for the purpose of this paper will be utilized in an attempt to unravel the visual construction of the Virgin Mary and Jesus through a critical feminist lens.

Born and bred in a land of patriarchy, the Bible abounds in male imagery and language. For centuries interpreters have explored and exploited this male language to articulate theology; to shape the contours and content of the church, synagogue and academia; and to instruct human beings—female and male—in who they are, what roles they should play, and how they should behave. So harmonious has seemed this association of Scripture with sexism, of faith with culture, that only a few even questioned it (Fisher 211).

Whether it is the paintings of Raphael or Botticelli or sculptures by Michelangelo, the images of the Virgin Mary represent a variety of interpretations of the same image. The virgin mother of Jesus is depicted in blue and red robes; she has youthful, pale skin with fair coloured hair. Through investigation of the imagery of the Virgin Mary, the most valuable aspect to note is that she is almost always shown holding her baby or surrounded by infants. The role she depicts through imagery represents her as mother. As reiterated by the author Mary Pat Fisher, “But many Christians take the story of the virgin birth as a unique and literal fact, and Mary is held up to Christian women as the prime example of piety and self-effacing surrender” (189). Reproduction and virginity are the two most valuable characteristics Mary possesses. They are also essential markers of “womanhood” that inform ideal femininity in Christianity and in North American societies. The Sexual Politics of Sickness, an essay written by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, looks at nineteenth century America and the medical interpretation of women and their “innate” bodily functions. These authors provide an informed description of the ways in which women were viewed and how their “woman status” was reduced to their “woman function”. Further, looking at the history of America, and how women were valued merely for their ability to have children with complete remission of all sexual desire, proves the extension of the Christian ideal upon society. Nineteenth century America is well known for being heavily entrenched in Christianity as its primary religion. A brief introduction related to the historical analysis of religion in parts of North America is valuable when tracking the influence of Christianity in current North American contexts. “Female sexuality was seen as unwomanly and possibly detrimental to the supreme function of reproduction” (Ehrenreich 120). In medical terms, centuries ago, it was reinforced among numerous disciplines, primarily within the male-dominated field of medicine, that women’s primary function was reproduction and that sexual desire had detrimental effects on women individually, on women’s offspring, and on society. Although in today’s society, medicine does not uphold such claims, the devaluation of women and the representation of women as “vessels” used to house future generations is not far removed in this century. The virgin-whore binary is a relevant representation of the good girl-bad girl that is represented in twenty-first century North American popular culture and media. The virgin-whore binary is a patriarchal construction which defines women as either-or. Further, this dichotomy, which is also the basis for teachings related to “right and wrong”, is visible in ancient Christian scripture and imagery which subordinates and oppresses women. In this context, the standard of “perfect behaviour” would be for women to follow the path of the Virgin Mary; procreate, without engaging in sexual intercourse, with complete dismissal or repression of all or any sexual pleasure. The Virgin Mary ideal is a construction of femininity that is unattainable and thus makes women appear unfit, and inadequate. This impossibility sets women up to fail, ultimately placing women beneath men. Further, these “rules” have been adopted by societies, cultures, and passed on through generations.

In addition to the representation of the Virgin Mary, is the prominent portrayal of Adam and Eve. There are numerous variations of this story, similar to the variations evident within the Synoptic Gospels. According to numerous
feminist perspectives, one of the most controversial representations related to the subordination of women is apparent in the Creation Narrative. Within variations of this narrative, it is said that Eve was born of Adam’s rib. “Thus Christians typically have concluded that God created woman after man to be his subordinate. That the woman was first to disobey God was proof of her derivative status." (Kvam 4). Further, within this iconic story, Eve is portrayed as weak and unworthy. It is also interpreted that Eve, going against the request of God, gives into temptation while convincing and tempting Adam to follow suit. Feminine qualities and attributes in current North American society are often associated with temptation and weakness, the very qualities embodied by Eve. In turn, Eve’s inability to follow the word of God equates her as the lesser of the sexes.

This research paper focuses specifically on the gender hierarchy that exists in Christianity and its influence on North American society, although, it is also valuable to mention that intersectional oppressors must also be acknowledged. Race, in addition to gender is also vertically categorized. The Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, and Christian images more generally depict Caucasian persons.

Through increased modes of communication and as a result of the popularity of Christianity over centuries, the gender hierarchy which places men above women visible in imagery, language and interpretation has also surmounted.

“The constant availability of images and ideas, and their rapid transmission even from continent to continent, have profound consequences, both positive and negative, for the psychological, moral, and societal development of persons, the structure and functioning of societies, intercultural communications, and the perception and transmission of values, world views, ideologies, and religious beliefs. The communications revolution affects perceptions even of the Church, and has a significant impact on the Church’s own structures and modes of functioning" (Badaracco 240-241).

Advances put forth as a result of the industrial revolution, made the transferring of knowledge possible across countries and nations. As Badaracco mentions within her book entitled Quoting God: How Media Shape Ideas about Religion and Culture, media and advanced forms of communication influence religion and cultures in both beneficial and detrimental ways. The subordination of women appears to be depicted in all societies, across all generations, and among all universal religions. Anthropologists largely agree that women have never occupied a position of higher status or greater political power than men in any society, anywhere, anytime” (Jackson 29). Although it would be impossible to evade the fact that Christianity and religion more generally has shown to provide personal wellbeing, the ways in which interpretation has influenced Christianity and North American society has unequivocally impacted constructions of gender and the submission of women and attributes ascribed to femininity (Human Development).

This research paper, through the investigation of numerous sources and with reinforcement of notable authors with diverse interdisciplinary backgrounds, has provided the basis for the ways in which Christianity has influenced constructions of gender in North America. The images and symbols revered in the Christian faith as well as the language, literature, and interpretation of this religion has proven to greatly inform current gender binaries. Additionally, gender scripts and prescribed gender roles influence the ways in which persons act, think, speak, and express themselves.

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Artist Statement

The older I grow and the more I know about my ancestry. With this I see myself more and more changing the music I listen to and the spirituality I perform.

At one point I stumbled upon one of Betty Davis’ pictures (nee Mabry) in which she was seated in a seemingly meditative pose; her lips wide apart, her head tilted backwards and her hands placed close to her crotch from which an orange orb was generating. The colours and Betty’s pose made me read more spirituality into the picture’s portrayal of sexuality. The two paintings presented are my first steps at capturing the spirituality in the black musicians I listen to, who have pride in their sexuality - Sex Goddesses.
George Gissing’s powerful novel *The Nether World* contains several lengthy passages describing domestic violence. Central to the majority of these passages is the character of Pennyloaf Candy, who represents the typical working-class wife. Pennyloaf experiences emotional, mental and physical abuse at the hands of her husband Bob Hewett. Bob abuses Pennyloaf emotionally by expressly forbidding her to see her only friend (229-230). Bob also controls and torments Pennyloaf by keeping money from her and forcing her to come to him whenever she needs to purchase even the most basic items (266). The level of violence escalates until Bob finally leaps at the chance to beat Pennyloaf when she accidentally breaks a dish. Gissing’s account is disturbing:

Pennyloaf had the ill luck to drop a saucer, and it broke on the floor. In the same instant he leapt up and sprang on her, seized her brutally by the shoulders and flung her with all his force against the nearest wall. At her scream the child took up a shrill cry, and this increased his rage. With his clenched fist he dealt blow after blow at the half-prostrate woman, speaking no word, but uttering a strange sound, such as might come from some infuriate animal. (334)

These episodes, horrifying to a modern reader, accurately depict the domestic violence that was so common in working-class Victorian families. Why was domestic violence so prevalent during this period? I will examine the factors that contributed to Victorian domestic violence, and the attitudes that condoned it.

The Victorian period was a time of change, and one of the greatest shifts came in the form of the new domestic structure advocated by the middle-class. The man of the family was the ultimate authority; this had always been so. However, the concepts of the husband and the father were central to Victorian society, whereas in past centuries that had not been the case. As Lucy Delap writes in her book *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800*, a man’s masculinity was essentially tied to his ability to provide for and protect his family, and his authority became contingent on this role (27). Accordingly, working-class men experienced a frustrated relationship with family duties and masculinity. Laura Baker Whelan, author of *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era*, argues that men could not very well rely on the middle-class ideal to assert their authority when they were often unemployed and thus unable to provide for their families (47-48). Furthermore, in his book *Work, Gender, and Family in Victorian England*, Karl Ittmann asserts that even men who managed to obtain employment, often in factories, felt an extreme loss of individuality and agency, stating:

Men derived a sense of identity from both their roles as workers, engaged in physical labour, and as heads of the family. The loss of control over work, symbolized by the factory, undermined the assertion of independence critical to the artisan’s sense of masculinity. (223-224)

The middle-class model was simply an impossible reality for members of working-class society.

The extreme discrepancy between the ideal middle-class husband and father, and the working-class man was caused and amplified by many factors.
In particular, there was industrialization and the movement from rural areas to urban centers. While the middle-classes promoted strict adherence to gender roles—men at work providing and women at home nesting—gender roles in the working-class were becoming more fluid. Men had difficulty finding and keeping jobs, while the cheaper unskilled labour of women and children presented those inferior family members with more opportunities. A prominent Victorian scholar, Jim Hammerton, explains in his book *Cruelty and Companionship: conflict in nineteenth century married life* that the increased demand for cheap labour threatened men’s “breadwinning ideal” (15). In addition, as rural residents relocated to the cities in search of work, the demand for work already far surpassed the demand for workers. This resulted in a significant proportion of the working-class population surviving day to day on whatever they could get their hands on. Unemployment skyrocketed and massive slums became features of London’s geography. The disgusting and degrading living conditions were associated with humiliation, deep feelings of injustice and utter misery.

The lack of funds within a family often led to rigid budgeting that proved to be unfeasible. Men expected certain household luxuries while women were forced to make tough financial decisions in order to survive. Jim Hammerton explains,

> Inadequate family income; unequal distribution of the income within the family, often dictated by husbands’ drinking and leisure activities; and a variety of women’s survival strategies, from self-deprivation to surreptitious pawning of husbands’ property, all sowed potential seeds of explosive conflict. (45)

Another challenge in working-class life was the number of children in a family. The larger the family, the more difficult it was for the man of the house to provide for them all. In a society where motherhood and fatherhood were so important, the working-class family was told that successful marriages resulted in children, but a man was frequently unable to adequately provide for the children he begot. Ittmann argues “the expectation that children followed naturally from marriage conflicted with the realization that too many children could threaten the family” (230). This is also a prominent issue in *The Nether World*. Gissing writes,

> “I suppose she must not be blamed for bringing children into the world when those already born to her were but half-clothed, half-fed; she increased the sum total of the world’s misery in obedience to the laws of the Book of Genesis.” (57)

Furthermore, throughout the novel parents, are openly relieved when the newest member in their already large family dies. The very fact that the infant casualties brought a sense of relief in working-class families speaks to the grave state of affairs in that stratum of society.

In a time of such social upheaval, domestic relations were tense. Men felt that they were losing control of their lives and struggled to regain some sort of command. It was a social and domestic environment that proved conducive to the widespread domestic abuse in the working-class during the nineteenth century. Families were also more isolated from one another. This was a fairly new social development, originating with the migration from villages to cities. The increased privacy meant a weaker community influence and allowed men to perpetrate private acts of domestic violence. Anthea Trodd, author of *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* writes, “The home as never before was a place quite distinct from the public world...it sought to protect itself against the public world and operate according to different rules” (5). Hidden within their homes, without the watchful eyes of small-town neighbors, domestic violence abounded.

As a result of societal changes working-class men felt that they needed to assert their authority over the members of their family by whatever means were left to them. Delap writes, “Men who were breadwinners demanded respect; if they did not get it, they might enforce their wishes with violence, against both women and children” (27). Recent research has shown that the relationship between masculinity and intimate partner violence is very complex. In their 2005 review, Moore and Stuart discovered that the relationship was strongest when it was defined in terms of the gender role stress/conflict approach paradigm, where shifting gender roles cause stress and lead to female directed violence. (Renzetti et. al., 120). It has been demonstrated that this was exactly the domestic situation evolving during the Victorian era particularly in the working-class. Another very important factor was the society’s attitudes toward “wife beating” (Renzetti et. al., 120). Social acceptance
or rejection of behaviour is an extremely important determinant of the persistence of that behaviour.

So, what were the Victorian attitudes towards domestic violence, in particular the attitudes toward abuse prevalent in the working classes? Victorian historians, like Jim Hammerton, agree that violence in working-class communities was taken for granted (19). Delap also asserts that “working-class men had a different view of violence that tolerated far more domestic violence than the idealized middle-class home allowed” (38). Lisa Surridge, author of Bleak Houses states that even after the 1828 Offences Against the Person Act, which opened magistrates’ courts to trials and sentencing of abusive husbands, there was “considerable anxiety and doubt as to whether this kind of violence belonged in the courts at all” (7-19). Punishment of spouses and children had previously been a matter of personal preference, but now men were being told how and how not to assert their authority at home, something they considered their own private matter.

Women were expected to be obedient and to remain silent about! ny sort of punishment they received. The patriarchal culture of the Victorian era wherein men could, and should, freely “chastise” their wife had been in place for centuries, and was firmly supported by social, political and legal facets. In Ordinary Violence: everyday assaults against women Mary White Stewart asserts:

Most people are familiar with the rule-of-thumb dictum, which allowed a husband to discipline his wife with a rod no thicker than his thumb early in the nineteenth century, a ruling that was later changed to a policy of benign neglect or non-interference in family violence so long as no permanent injury was inflicted on the wife. (6)

However, as Littmann indicates, philanthropists and feminists vehemently opposed the "policy of benign neglect" (230). They demanded justice for the victims of intimate partner violence. Hence, during the mid-nineteenth century, the battle against what was termed “wife abuse” truly began. More than ever before, men were prosecuted for beating or killing their wives. Some historians associate the increased interest in domestic abuse not only with the changing definitions of a "good husband" and a "good wife," but also with Charles Dickens’ novel Oliver Twist, first published in 1838. In Dickens’ novel, the hardened criminal named Sykes murders his partner Nancy. Surridge writes, “the figures of Sykes and Nancy became a kind of shorthand for wife beater and victim in the Victorian period” (15-16).

However, the message presented in Oliver Twist is not a simple appeal for a change in the perception of domestic abuse. Surridge argues that the scene also glorifies the submissive and loyal woman idealized in Victorian culture (43). Nancy, who first goes back to her abuser, then tries to convince him to give up his immoral ways, and then prays rather than screams for help, is essentially martyred by Sykes. The Victorian reader would have been profoundly impacted by her final moments. Surridge stresses:

At this key moment in early nineteenth century culture, the emergent ideal of marital privacy was pitted against the impulse to intervene in wife-beating cases. Nancy, then, stands on the fault line of early Victorian views on the regulation of marital violence. In her loyalty to Bill, she exemplifies the middle-class value of marital privacy; in her death, she brings down the full force of public intervention. This powerful literary figure thus emerged from the newfound visibility of wife assault in the print culture of the 1830s and, through her enormous popularity throughout the century, worked to consolidate the feminine ideal of passive loyalty that she so signally embodied. (43)

Domestic violence was in the spotlight, but the message was far from clear. This ambiguity was reflected in the legal proceedings of the period.

As the century progressed, domestic violence became a public discourse rather than a taboo subject. Hammerton writes that more than ever before abusive husbands were put on trial. The most common result was for magistrates to recommend reconciliations rather than continue with the prosecution (40). Convictions were few. This heedless response led first to a decline in domestic assault convictions and, eventually, to even to a decline in “wife abuse” trials during the late nineteenth century. Women understood that the primary goal of the courts was to uphold the ideal of the Victorian family, even when it meant recommending the wives stay with their abuser. For this reason, it is likely that many women did not even try to prosecute. Despite
the fact that the newfound discourse of domestic violence, brought about by decades of ambiguous reactions to this problem, provided women with a way to voice their grievances, as Hammerton states, the justice system's dealings with female victims reinforced the notion that the safest form of relationship was the ideal Victorian marriage. “Wives traded their new-found security for relative loss of power in the family, increased isolation and conformity to standards of respectability influenced by middle-class values” (16). In submitting to such a polarizing dynamic, women who became victims of abuse were even less able seek help. Again Hammerton explains:

“The solutions offered (in response to domestic violence) invariably required a more thorough commitment to respectable family values, where the worlds of men and women were more rigidly separate, where women's economic dependence and marginality were entrenched, and where women were thus more vulnerable to male abuse. The 'solution' to domestic violence thus re-emphasized the very structures and values of inequality from which it sprung. (53)

Women were kept economically, politically and socially powerless.

Where does this leave Pennyloaf Candy? This evidence certainly gives the impression that the outcome for many victims of domestic abuse during the Victorian era was bleak. For the most part that was indeed the case. However, through friendships one finds a ray of hope. In Gissing’s novel Pennyloaf’s husband Bob is struck by a cab and dies shortly thereafter. Pennyloaf, who has one surviving child and is therefore unable to go back to work, is in a dangerous situation. Rather than desperately searching for another husband, or bemoaning her misfortune, Pennyloaf combines her resources with another single mother, and both women are able to survive and even thrive. Pennyloaf watches the children in a room at the back of their shop and repairs garments while the other woman sells the mended clothing out front. In the end, as Emma Liggins, author of George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture writes, “the vision of Pennyloaf and Jane laughing and sewing together and joking with the five children partially atones for the generally bleak tone of the novel’s ending” (50).

Pennyloaf, a downtrodden, pathetic woman throughout much of the novel, becomes the one character that the reader feels might one day be truly happy. She gains this potential through abandoning the Victorian womanly ideal, and instead tailoring her life to fit her needs. Pennyloaf thus symbolizes the inadequacy of the Victorian family ideals in the face of working-class struggles, as well as the hope one can feel once he or she abandons that unachievable model. In the end, the “soft Candy” of this title takes her life into her own hands and finds her strength.

References:
You're young and naive... you will change your mind

I am 24 years old. Yes, to some this seems young. Let me remind you that many people are married and have children by this age. Let me also remind you that I am an adult who has already begun building my life the way I want it. I have found a loving and supportive spouse who shares my life goals. I continue to put myself through school in order to successfully work my way towards my chosen career path. I have purchased a home, make a good income and am a staple for people to turn to when in need. I am not still dreaming up a future, I am not still finding myself, I am not wild and out of control. I am stable, I am happy and I am completely satisfied with my current life choices. I am not young, dumb or naive. If we were discussing any other topic then these words would not be considered because I do not come off as unsure in any aspect of my life. Maybe I will change my mind, but it is my mind to change. Do not use these statements as a threat, or a way of making me feel wrong in my current choice. You are just making me feel belittled, which is fueling my anger.

You will regret this decision

What I will regret is not being able to finish school because I have to work more than I already do in order to support my family. What I will regret is not having been able to travel to the places I want to see because I cannot afford to take my family or making sacrifices and compromises on these trips so that they are family oriented. What I will regret is not being able to build a career because I need to take maternity leave. What I will regret is not being able to move up in my chosen career because I am not taken seriously since I miss so much work because of sick children, holidays and in-service days. What I will regret is having a child that I am not ready for, becoming a parent before I truly want to be one, giving up on my goals because someone once told me I would regret not becoming a mother.

You don't know what you are missing

I agree; I don't know what I am missing. But, by not knowing I am also not in longing over or hurting for motherhood. I can pose the question right back - you don't know what you are missing. You don't know how wonderful it is to be able to pick up and go anywhere I want at any time. You don't know how great it is to be able to stay out as late as I want and sleep in as long as I desire. You don't know how amazing it is to be able to sit quietly in my house and be able to worry about nobody but myself. You don't know how much I cherish being able to do nothing with my spouse but curl up on the couch and watch TV, go quading when we feel like it, or have sex as loud and for as long as we desire. You don't know what you are missing either, but you are happy with your life and so not knowing what you are missing would not make you want to switch to my life and I do not wish to switch to yours.

But you'd be soooo good at it

Yes, children love me. I am good with them. I can chase them around and make funny faces. I am good with children for the 1-2 hours that I am placed with them. I can be trusted to look after your children, and there are many children and babies within my life that I love. I however do not want to take those children home with me. I do not play mom to these children. I do not want to change diapers, or chase after them all day long. I do not want to read them bedtime stories every night, worry about them all day long or hang hundreds of homemade pictures around my house. I do not want a house full of toys. So yes, I am good with your children because they are yours and I love you and them. Yes, I would be good with my own children because they will be mine and I will love them unconditionally. This is however, not enough to make me WANT children. I am good with many people of varying ages, I am good with many animals of varying species, I am good with a lot of things. This does not mean I want to fill my house with them.
"You’re just being difficult"

This comment always baffles me. This is my life. This decision affects me and my spouse. Neither of us believes this choice is difficult. It is not complicating our lives. We do not dwell on it or feel bad over it. You are being difficult, not me. You are fighting for something that in no way has any bearing on your life at all. My lack of desire in having children was not decided so that this discussion could take place; so that I could fight back against your ideals. I am not saying there is anything wrong with motherhood. I do not believe that the choice to become a parent is a bad choice, it is just not my choice at this moment in my life. I am content. If you think I am being difficult for not succumbing to your desires then maybe you should stop attempting to push your desires onto me. I think that would eliminate the difficulty in this discussion.

"Always the radical one, fighting social norms... don’t you think this is something you should decide without the help of your crazy feminist studies"

My lack of desire in having children started long before my University courses in Women’s and Gender studies. Long before I knew anything about the feminist movements. This is not a snap decision that I made over night. This was not a choice that I have made hastily or without a great deal of consideration. My lack of desire in having children was not brought on by something that was said in a classroom or a reading that was assigned to me. This is an internal feeling. My studies may have helped to reinforce my FEELING in that they made me realize that it was ok to feel this way; very much unlike the people in my life that were supposed to support and love me for who I am – feelings and all. This is not me fighting societal norms or being radical, this decision is me being true to who I am and what I want in life.

"You are being very selfish; do you know how many people aren’t able to make this decision? How many people couldn’t even if they tried?"

What would be selfish is for me to give up on my life goals and dreams to appease the people around me. It would be selfish to bring a child into this world before I truly wanted them. Do you know how many unwanted children there are in this world? How many children that need good homes?

How many children that have loving parents that cannot feasibly support their families no matter how hard they try? This world is not worse off for having less children in it. Families are created through more than blood and choices to create a family when you cannot conceive occur all the time. I am not being selfish; people that push their ideals of what a “family” is onto me are being selfish. Those people lack the understanding of what it truly means to be a family. I have a family; even if it does not include children. My acts are not selfish because I choose me; my goals and dreams. It would be wrong to choose what other people want me to. How would you look at me if I brought a child into this world and then continued to pursue my goals, continued to choose me? Women that do this are still considered selfish. How do I win?

"But you’re supposed to"

This is the most ridiculous statement to me. I am supposed to become a mom because I have a uterus? Because someone millions of years ago decided that women are only put on earth to procreate? What about all the women that cannot have children, are they just a waste of skin? What about all the men that wish they could have children but are incapable of carrying a child, are denied the right to adopt because their “family” situation does not fit societies expectations, cannot find a spouse at all or one who wants to have children; are they abnormal like me? Are they NOT supposed to have children? What about all the women in this world that have children and then are deemed unworthy, unready, incapable, were they not simply fulfilling their womanly duties? Does having a uterus automatically denote that I will be a good mother, that I will enjoy being a mother, that this is the path I am supposed to take in life? Having a uterus is all that is needed? Absurd.

Authors Note:

I am in no way against motherhood. I truthfully believe that being a parent can be one of the most wonderful gifts a person can be granted. I believe that being a parent is difficult and challenging, rewarding and worrisome. Many of the people I respect the most within my own life are mothers, and part of the reason I respect them so much is because of the type of women they are, part of which encompasses their role as ‘mother’. When I have the above discussions with people in my life (family, friends, colleagues and strangers) I always make it clear that I am aware that my decision can change. However, I need to WANT to be a mother before I become one. Above everything else, WANTING it is number one to me. There are bits and pieces of me that desire and romanticizes the idea of motherhood, but these bits and pieces are not enough. I know deep down that I need to want it whole heartedly, which I don’t, and until then I will not take the plunge to make anyone else happy.
Hey Baby, I’m Sorry

Your usual renunciation
stapled by a magnet to the fridge.

Hey baby,
I’m sorry about last night.
It’s just you really should have asked before you took the car.

love you always,
Jared.

Pick the note up gently with thumb and index finger,
starring at the note like a filthy lesion.
“but baby,” I say to myself.

Your love is like a vice Steel grip
clamped around my thin wrists
as I turn the round golden handle
my attempt to open our brown cedar door
that leads to our wooden porch
gleaming fictitious as a holy gate.

“I have to go for coffee
with Sarah at 3,” I say
my eyes dance cautiously across our hardwood floor.

Or sometimes baby,
maybe

Your love is like a broken alarm
clock. There’s no set time
that you’ll go off
you just go
off over things like
a sink full of dirty dishes. The nicotine grit
of your spit as you
corner me against our stove.
Sam crying in his highchair
his shaking arms,
and the pulsating vibrations of your chest,
Or how you say
you’ll slit your wrist because
you swore I made eyes
with the dark haired cashier
at the drug store
buying your razors.

And if I’m really lucky
baby,

Your love is like a legal parchment. A decree
that says,
“You’ll get what’s coming.”

The clamp
of your steel grip
tempered around my neck
If I could lift the thick tangled metal sponge
of your hairy chest
off my body, but all my strength
amounts to
a weak push up against
your bulldozer body
lashing into me as
the sharpness of tears
cuts my cheeks as your
skin surrounds me, flesh covers me
melting over my body as I
am engulfed, undone under
your pulsating arms and dull nicotine breath
lapsing at my neck
and all I can taste is salt
as my skin is devoured.

Baby,
I close my eyes like a soft note.

I’m sorry I took the car
without leaving a note.
It’s 8:30am; I’ve been up for an hour. It’s time to get dressed for the day. The exhaustive routine that comes next is an everyday practice, and has been for years. I walk over to my dresser and pick up my black binder that I have lightly tossed on top of the dresser. I slowly inch and pull the tight, constricting compression t-shirt material over my head until it is fully pulled down and in the exact place it needs to be. I put on my “men’s” pants, walk to the stand up mirror in my bedroom, and adjust. I adjust until my chest looks as flat as it ever will. I pull my black muscle shirt on, and my “men’s” charcoal grey t-shirt over top. Adjust once more and realize this is as good as it is going to get. This is my daily routine of getting dressed in the mornings; it is the beginning point of my everyday performance of masculinity. By the end of the day, the back, neck and rib cage aches can be agonizing at times, but worth it; all in the name of ideal masculinity.

[Field Notes, 23 March 2012]

The excerpt above is taken from field notes documented for the purpose of this exploratory, auto-ethnographic research project. I chose to include this excerpt in an attempt to emphasize my personal daily performance of masculinity from the very start of my mornings, until I go to sleep at night. Although I am a masculine-being daily, my performance of masculinity is negotiated and managed throughout the day, and is dependent on the spaces and context I am in as well as the people I am around. I also chose this excerpt to highlight the commodification of masculinity; in this case, my binder or compression t-shirt, and the clothes I wear. The performance of masculinity is embodied and through the commodification of accessories this performance is further accessible. Throughout my auto-ethnographic research, I aim to disrupt and question dominant discourses. More specifically, I am separating masculinity from the male body and the suggestion that masculinity is exclusively attached to cisgender male bodies, in an attempt to engage readers in a broader outlook. Through the auto-ethnographic research presented, my objective is to produce an understanding of masculine subjectivity whereby biological sex does not determine or produce gender identity; rather, gender identity is produced through space and social processes.
This auto-ethnographic research project will explore the following research questions: How do I negotiate, manage and perform my masculine identity differently within distinct spaces and different people? and, in what context and how am I “de-masculinized” by “more masculine individuals”? The formulation of my research questions have been constructed on the basis of the “foreshadowed problem” (Reimer 206) surrounding my interest in the study of my personal masculinity, and the relationships between my masculinity and the daily experiences and encounters observed within natural, everyday settings.

The purpose of this auto-ethnographic research project is to conduct original research, which will allow me to observe, document, and formulate conclusions or theories surrounding my personal relationship with masculinity. I will be focusing this auto-ethnographic research entirely on my own performance, negotiation and management of masculinity within varying contexts and around different individuals. Through the examination and reflection of my own lived experiences and everyday encounters, I will demonstrate and explore how masculinity, and what constitutes masculinity, is socially learned. In addition, I will expand upon and analyze current everyday gender scripts and performances. Additionally, I will also address how an individual’s position in a discrete “masculine hierarchy” adapts throughout contexts and settings. Lastly, in response to limiting dominant discourses, I will provide insight to the realities of navigating masculinity and identity in the binary culture that I live in and the feelings of being ‘in the middle’. It is important to note that this auto-ethnographic research is entirely from my own white, Western perspective.

The ethnographic research carried out was conducted with the use of two methodological approaches: observations of my public interactions and environments, as well as observations of individuals I interacted with or was situated around; and field notes, which provides documentation to enhance my recollection of the spaces I was in, the individuals within these spaces, and the experiences I encountered. Additionally, my analysis is informed through my lived experiences, past reflections and constant awareness of my surroundings and how individuals perceive and converse with me. My research was conducted, as Frances Julia Riemer clarifies, with a “multi-sited” (211) focus, referring to the observation and analysis of multiple everyday spaces and environments. The use of multiple contexts that are encountered daily illuminates the natural element within ethnographies. Riemer explains “fieldwork...involves documenting people’s beliefs and practices from the people’s own perspectives” (205), further highlighting the importance of maintaining routines and etiquettes in one’s natural setting.

Ethnographic research was documented during a portion of the month of March. The findings discussed and analyzed throughout the auto-ethnography are from March 11th to 18th. To begin the analysis of my research, I will first deconstruct an in-class discussion (11 January 2012) on characterizations of masculinity the class proposed in order to highlight dominant, Western essentialist discourses of masculinity. The purpose of this is to create a space for readers to begin to challenge dominant assumptions of masculinity and remain open to differing possibilities. The in-class exercise was used to draw attention to the coding of dominant discourses of masculinity. For example, one idea suggested is that “masculinity =
This statement illustrates my awareness of my masculinity and negotiating the probability of how my masculine identity could be tainted by individuals, regardless if they are people I know or not, associating the feminized love songs of Whitney Houston to my masculine self. My recognition of individuals who may or may not perceive me as less masculine illuminates the internal and external struggles of managing my masculinity, and my attempts to strive for an ideal masculinity - which may or may not even be attainable.

In direct relation to my second research question, many occurrences of individuals “de-masculinizing” my sense of masculine self becomes apparent in my fieldwork. I found that in many instances, I felt de-masculinized in certain spaces, mainly by individuals perceived as stereotypically “more masculine” than myself; individuals regarded as fitting dominant stereotypes of masculinity. I have also questioned whether I would regard these individuals as more masculine than myself, or perhaps it was just the fact that they were male-bodied individuals that they were perceived as “more masculine” than myself. My field notes document that I am part of two separate co-ed (mixed gender) athletic sports teams on two separate evenings of the week: Tuesday evenings, indoor soccer, and Sunday evenings, volleyball. While recording notes on this atmosphere, I addressed these environments as spaces that construct potentially unrecognizable masculine hierarchies of the people involved, with white, heterosexual, biological males being at the top. Whether unintentionally or not, the unmindfulness of the masculine hierarchy by the individuals within the space, created an atmosphere that de-masculinized my masculine identity. Throughout this research project, I have documented many instances where I recognize that my masculine identity continues to be perceived by individuals as either not masculine enough, or too masculine at times. This is illustrated through my recorded statement on 11 March 2012:

There are two members of my volleyball team, who are male-bodied individuals who present their gender as “men”. They are white, athletic, muscular, and tall. During warm up before the games, as well as during the games, they practice, stretch and pass together. The female-bodied individuals on the team (who present their gender as “women”) usually pass amongst themselves. I feel left out by the two men who create a space in the gymnasium atmosphere where they become camaraderie’s based on their male-ness, and on their performed masculinity.
The analysis of this field note could propose that I regard myself as not being “masculine enough” in the presence of these two team members to be included into their space and companionship, resulting in the de-masculinization of my sense of self. A second proposition directly relates to the questionable relationship of gender and sex. This questions whether it is in fact my masculinity being disregarded or, in contrast, is the sense of de-masculinization in relation to my lack of biological “male-ness” as to why they disregard me, as dominant ideologies influence individuals to equate sex with gender.

The theory I have suggested regarding an individual’s position on a potentially unrecognizable masculine hierarchy is illustrated through these research findings as well. During the analysis of my research, I also found that an individual’s position on this hierarchy could change as an individual changes environments. A recording I found in relation to this discussion, was documented on 14 March, 2012 and stated:

During the guest lecture, I felt as though my masculinity was accepted. It was not because of the individuals situated within the environment I was in; it was more through a masculinity and identity connection I felt with the speaker. It was like my masculine identity mattered in this setting, as it was recognized as a part of my identity. But there was no judgment like in other spaces.

This example relates to the management and negotiation of one’s masculinity within specific environments. It is also important to recognize the varying levels of influence over one’s performance of masculinity by peers, family, wider society, and the university setting, as my research findings will demonstrate. The idea that masculinity is always changing and can be embodied and performed differently in different spaces is the basis of CJ Pascoe’s concept of “managing masculinity.” Managing masculinity within certain environments and around certain individuals can mean the constrictions of masculinity. To further illustrate this point, I am constantly aware of my masculinity around specific individuals, and at times this means I have to adapt my masculine identity. I present myself and my gender as masculine, however I am aware of being more “reserved” around family members than peers. Even as dominant discourses suggest that biological sex should determine or produce gender identity, all of my family and peers love me for who I am. However, I have had many instances in the university setting where my gender identity and masculinity are negatively reacted to and questioned resulting in a different sense of de-masculinization by a group of individuals.

An example from my field notes describes a university class setting and the lack of awareness presented by some individuals:

The professor began talking about the term “incoherence”, providing an example to the class of a time when they were a member of a board and could not determine the gender of another board member. The entire class began sharing their daily experiences of encounters with individuals whose gender presentations are unintelligible to them. It became a sharing circle of each other’s stories. As the only masculine presenting person in the room, I remained sitting in the back row, feeling uncomfortable, while the rest of the class was unaware of how this could affect someone.

This documentation highlights constrictions of managing one’s masculinity in certain settings, and further demonstrates the dominant discourses within many spaces, that individuals’ biological sex determines the “appropriate” gender. When this equation is not followed, confusion and sometimes ignorance are presented.

Dominant discourses such as biological sex determines the appropriate gender presentation and identity of an individual are limiting and exclusionary. Because dominant discourses are so engrained in Western culture, it becomes difficult to address social transformations and notions that need to be addressed; such as the limited, narrow notion of what constitutes masculinity. The false idea that there are “non-normative” ways of being masculine only remains because there is a continual acceptance of a dominant discourse that suggests a single notion of masculinity. The question becomes, who is it non-normative to? The struggles and difficulties related to navigating one’s identity in a binary culture, and being regarded as “in the middle”, are realities many individuals do not consider. Navigating within the current binary culture is a constant struggle. I reflect upon this in much of my research, and can track multiple codings within my field notes asking the question: where do I fit? One example of this is present in a lounge setting, where both men-identified individuals and women-identified individuals were present. Observing the atmosphere, I very quickly noticed the men interacting on one side...
of the table, and the women interacting on the other, and I was right in the middle. I noted in my field notes “women conversing separately from men…where do I fit in?” For individuals who are physically different, or perceived as different according to a binary culture, attempts at identification with an ideal that is outside of what you are or who you feel you are, can be very difficult.

Through the understanding of the difficulties and negotiations that are intrinsic within a binary culture, the concepts “Other” and “abject” arise. These two concepts are closely related, the distinction being that the Other is already outside of you, whereas the abject could potentially be a part of you (21 March). I find this to be an important connection to my research questions, and reveals how gender is central to social organization. For example, the idea of being “de-masculinized” by individuals, or in relation to specific individuals, in certain spaces constructs an internal and external distancing away from the abject, in this case, being demasculinized, ultimately resulting in being feminized. Disregarding or ignoring my masculine identity produces a discourse much like the “fag discourse” presented by CJ Pascoe. This is apparent through the feminized construction of individuals who present themselves as masculine and want to be regarded this way. It becomes a constant internal struggle that illuminates an attempted erasure of masculine, female-bodied individuals. Much like the fag discourse which produces an abject that individuals continuously attempt to distance themselves from, the de-masculinization theory I presented of being de-masculinized by individuals on a regular basis also constructs an abject to which I continuously attempt to distance myself from.

Throughout the course of my auto-ethnographic project, I have reflected on my own lived experiences and everyday encounters. I have demonstrated how masculinity, and what constitutes masculinity, is socially learned, and have provided a continual analysis of current everyday gender scripts and performances. Although I present myself as a masculine-being daily, through my research I have demonstrated how my performance of masculinity is negotiated and managed throughout the day, and is dependent on the spaces and context I am in as well as the people I am around. Through the collection and analysis of original research for this auto-ethnographic project, I have addressed a multitude of areas, and have directly related these areas to the research questions I initially posed: How do I negotiate, manage and perform my masculine identity differently within distinct spaces and different people? and, in what context and how am I “de-masculinized” by “more masculine individuals”? My aim was to disrupt and question dominant discourses; specifically I addressed the dominant discourse that posits masculinity as inherent to male bodies only. Through the auto-ethnographic research presented, I have produced an understanding whereby biological sex does not determine or produce gender identity; rather, gender identity is produced by and reinforced through daily navigations of space, social institutions and dominant social processes.

Works Cited
Crimson Lightning

I’ve seen this unnatural storm consume many people in my life:
this storm has never known sex, race, class, age, gender, orientation, or ability
now they all walk with the scars that the storm gave them:
on their skin, hearts, personality, memory, life
the souvenirs of always being told its their fault

I’ve seen this storm lash its Crimson Lightning at those who try to speak up, defend, or question:
at those that provide shelter from the storm and its horrible Lightning
I’ve lost friends and allies to that Lightning
who found themselves trapped in its Nightmare Claw

I’ve watched people lose themselves in its Nightmare Claw
watched as they buried away important parts of themselves
watched as they slowly started to believe the things that the storm tells them

This Lightning is the tool that the storm uses to assert its control, its power
that’s what the storm really wants, is power
dominance
power over not only their own world
but also yours
the storm believes that this is its rightful place
and your power is rightfully its to command; control

the storm believes that it is its rightful duty to rule
to control;
control of your friends, your finances, your autonomy, even your dreams
The storm will try to eliminate these pieces of yourself so that you need to count on the storm for
safety, and shelter and love;
as much as it needs you

But you can find yourself again
you can wake up from the storms Nightmare Claw
escape its Crimson Lightning
and spread your beautiful wings of light for all to see
The True you that the storm suppressed
On Innocence, Filth, and the CBC

In the CBC’s “Sinclair Project,” Donna Carriero and Terry MacLeod ask two central questions regarding Carolyn Sinclair: Who was she really? And: Who failed her? While the CBC attempts to affirm Sinclair’s life, the project also reifies deadly ideas of the pure and the damned, making it difficult to imagine a more collective, mobilizing, description of who could be responsible for violence in the context of white supremacist, capitalist, colonial, hetero-patriarchy in Canada.

The online article, organized into an interactive triptych featuring portraits of Carolyn Sinclair, Brian Sinclair, and Phoenix Sinclair, explicitly connects them through their last names – and their experiences of violence. Thus while the CBC purports to affirm their lives and personhoods, the very project fixates on their deaths. The article opens with an address to a specific audience: “They’re all household names to most of us. Not because of how they lived, but how they died” (CBC Online). The audience is supposedly “most of us,” or those that only know these names as brutal headlines. It is as if the friends and family that are interviewed for the feature, or those who are moved by each Sinclair’s life, do not make up an important audience. While the authors claim to be life-affirming, the project’s very organization orients around a kind of death spectacle.

Carriero and MacLeod introduce the radio edition with a statement of intent: to find out who the Real Carolyn was, and to identify who failed this (Pure) Carolyn. This implies there is an authentic core to a person, a pure essence (one that happens to be guilty or innocent). Carriero begins: “Today we’re going to find out about Carolyn, the person she really was, as opposed to what she did or who she became – a crime statistic, another name to add onto the list of missing and murdered First Nations woman [sic]” (CBC Radio). This insistence to know who Sinclair really was fixates on a static, singular, or pure identity, as if one must be judged as save-able or damned. Criminal. Indeed, a grieve-able Carolyn is made incompatible with the sex work she does and the “victim” (CBC Radio) she becomes. The hosts’ determination to “find out” the Real Carolyn holds moralistic, fragmenting, violent, and colonial undertones.

Using a pathologizing narrative, the authors construct Sinclair as a person of “lost innocence.” Indeed, the Real Carolyn is to be found in childhood stories. In an interview with Carriero, Rachael and Jennifer Tichborne, Sinclair’s “oldest, closest” friends (CBC Radio), speak powerfully of Sinclair’s life and inspiration. Interjecting the interview clips, MacLeod and Carriero take part in this exchange:

“Now, Donna, though, I’m, I’m a bit puzzled here. All of this paints a pretty innocent childhood for Carolyn. So what went wrong?”

“Well it was innocent, but, at some point, something did go wrong. Now, you know Rachael tells me they got into a bit of trouble together, pretty typical of the – she taught her to smoke, uh, cigarettes, and she taught her to smoke pot. After that, Rachael’s family moved out of province for a while. Now when they returned, Carolyn had started to get into the heavier stuff” (CBC Radio).

Here, “the heavier stuff” is constructed as compromising Sinclair’s childhood innocence; afterwards, her life is tainted “working the streets” (CBC Radio). This is a pathologizing narrative, suggesting causal links (PEERS 143) between experiences in Sinclair’s life.

By cultivating concern around the idea of an innocent person who should have been saved, the authors reify ideas of purity and thus its opposite: filth.

Indeed, this lost innocence is paired with literal absence, and contributes to local (mainstream) media archetypes of the Missing Woman. By constructing Sinclair as “lost”, the CBC uses her absence to make room for the interventions

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1 Childhood innocence is apparently summed up in Barbies, sandboxes, and school pranks (or, as Carriero describes this, “crime of a far more innocent sort?”) (CBC Radio).

2 Here, the absent referent is who one works with on the streets.

3 Note: “Street workers have come to embody, symbolically, the danger and ‘filth’ that, once integral to the image of the metropolis, must now, with the increasing urbanization demanded by global capitalism, be eliminated from the street in particular neighbourhoods” (Ferris 86).
of a general, supposedly benevolent Society. Consider that, alongside stories of Sinclair’s own childhood, the authors focus on Sinclair’s motherhood and pregnancy. Indeed:

Such commentary and images work to facilitate public concern about the fate of the disappeared and murdered women of Vancouver or Winnipeg by suggesting that, while these women – devoted mothers or not – are lost, we must care about their fate/s for the sake of their children (Ferris 94).

In this project, it is Sinclair’s children, and Sinclair’s childhood innocence, that are put at stake. Society is at stake. Sinclair herself seems less important. By constructing Sinclair as a Missing Woman, the CBC makes room for “social services” (CBC Radio) or general “parts of society” (CBC Online) to intervene in her place. Indeed, this seems to be thematic: a Society (one that supposedly includes everyone but seemingly no one will identify with), “must attempt to make amends for… collective failure” (Ferris 94), the Missing Woman having failed her child, and Society, naturally, being benevolent but not omnipotent. This theme is, again, effectively moralistic, fragmenting, violent, and colonial.

The conversation between Carriero and MacLeod is one that de-historicizes Sinclair’s life and representation, all while claiming to provide more context for knowing her. History, and a history of “innocence,” is made to be an absent referent. When Jennifer discusses the racialized elements of the headline: “Sex trade worker found in trash bag,” Carriero actually describes this as “where the race card comes into play” before a confusing interlude on “denial” (CBC Radio). Indeed, “[as] the lover of purity, the impartial reasoner is outside history, outside culture” (Lugones 466). The CBC’s impartial reasoning will not play that race card stuff. Nor will it acknowledge a “colonial imagination” that constructs “Native bodies [as] immanently polluted with sexual sin” (Smith 10) – a colonial history that imparts the CBC with its “very name: Canada. The term “Empire,” or “Colonialism,” or “Oppression,” or any variant thereof, is not mentioned once during Sinclair’s feature.

When stories are de-historicized, people become personas, archetypes, suspended in figurative speech. This makes it difficult to feel responsible for collective violence. In the CBC’s project, “the murdered women become important insofar as their images and life stories may be used to impart object lessons to ‘good’ citizens about the violent fallout from cultural, especially sexual, deviance” (Ferris 95). If one witnesses these stories and uses them only as a metaphor for one’s immaculate goodwill, or one’s moral purity, people are fetishized and relationships are obscured. However, “[as] inheritors of this racist culture, we are all lovers of purity, and we are all responsible for rethinking this value” (Berthold 2). We are each accountable for our collective participation, in whatever form, in oppressive systems.

There are three images included in the online publication. First as a banner over the article, is a family photo of Sinclair “with one of her children” (CBC Online). Last is Sinclair in graduation dress. While these images are humanizing, they “set motherhood up [or education status] as one of the few redeeming features of …disappeared or murdered women’s existences” (Ferris 93). The third image is of Jennifer Tichborne and her friends, each wearing shirts memorializing Sinclair at a “walk for justice” (CBC Online). So will these images encourage certain readers to care? Will listeners feel mobilized, and inspired, and accountable? And how reliable could this caring activist character be if it is based on valuing purity and, by default, abjecting filth?

In reference to a future Sinclair “deserved”, Rachael imagines Sinclair “just being full of life. And happy. Real happy. Because that was the kind of person Carolyn was” (CBC Radio). Let us be the kind of people who are so full of life, and happy, real happy, so as to feed into and flourish in a world that does not orbit around violent abjection, vicious judgment, or the nation-state.

Works Cited


See Ferris for a detail of this archetype.

“Ferris 95” comes before another exchange in which MacLeod, at hearing that Jennifer mothers six children, exclaims: “Six? Six of them.” “Wow.” This is Ostering, normalizing a very specific kind of family form.
He peered into my eyes, with the face of a child, the voice of a man, and said, “I would rape you.”

I stood still, shocked, confused, angry. I walked over to the boy, stood directly in front of him and posed the question again.

“If I walked in to teach this class today, wearing a short skirt, would you rape me?”

The other students shook their heads, “no.”

He held my gaze and said “yes.”

Again, I stood still. This time I felt more angry, more frightened of this boy I had come to know so well, I felt the tears come so I ran.

I went outside to be alone.

The sun was hot on my skin, drying the tears as they streamed down my face. I fell back against the strong brick wall, the impact jolted me back into consciousness.

I replayed his words in my head, over and over, hoping they would change if I just thought about it hard enough. Hoping he would take it back and never think those words about anyone else ever again.

I had never felt so small.
I had never felt so empty and so full of rage all at the same time.
I wanted to get out of this strange land and go back home where I was safe.

But you can never really be safe from something which penetrates so many corners of the world.

I try hard not to let myself acknowledge that I am rape-able, the very thought of it terrifies me to my core. And here I am with this boy who so honestly confessed he would rape me if my skirt was short.

Then it hit me.

He was honest.

He looked me in the eyes and told me something which obviously upset me. He spoke out while his peers were quiet.

His words hurt me but what caused the most concern was a simple question:

Who taught him to think this way?

What hurt most of all was the realization that someone had taught him to believe that women could be faulted for the violence perpetrated against them. He was taught to believe this. And he does.

Is it his fault? How many of his peers think the same thing but couldn’t tell me? How many of the young girls in that room believe that the violence they’ve experienced has been because of something they’ve done?

I went back into the classroom feeling vulnerable but also knowing that this was an opportunity for an important conversation.

We deviated from the plan for the day and spent the rest of our time as a group discussing victim blaming and the fact that clothing is not synonymous with consent.

It was a difficult discussion to have, it was obvious that much of the group had been socialized to believe that if a woman is raped it is her fault. That she did something to deserve it.

No one deserves it. It is never the victim’s fault.

Perhaps not everyone changed the way they think about rape and victim blaming during that short afternoon but everyone thought about it. Questioned it. Began to create a dialogue around it.

This is what we need.

Dialogue.

The opportunity to question the things we’ve never had a reason to doubt.

We need young people who are courageous enough to speak their minds when their peers remain silent.

We need opportunities to learn from one another. These will foster environments in which new ideas can flourish and overcome hegemonic ideologies which perpetuate and normalize violence against women.
“Lady Skits”

“Lady Skits” a sketch comedy piece collaborated
by Anne Tuma, Dana Smith, Jaclyn Kozak, and Kaitlynn Porath

The seed was planted in the winter. It grew (along with our armpit hair) up until the Spring when “Lady Skits” was first performed for a test-audience at the Black Hole Theatre’s “Fire in the Hole!” festival for new local plays. From there, the idea matured into fruition for Winnipeg’s 2012 Fringe Festival. It was a collective collaborative piece written, directed and acted by the MUFFstache Collective. Upon hearing the word feminist many critics were searching for voices other than our own, but the ideas were formed off our shared experiences as middle class, twenty-something women. The reviews were mixed, receiving immense praise and intense condemnation.

“Allow me to boldly claim that Lady Skits is the funniest show at this year’s Fringe. The ladies of Lady Skits — Anne Tuma, Dana Smith, Jaclyn Kozak and Kaitlynn Porath — have put together a show that will forever silence those dumbshits who say women aren’t funny. Let me tell you: these women are fucking hilarious. […]— Lady Skits is a shining example of smart, funny, feminist theatre.”

— Jen Zoratti from Uptown Magazine

And from another source, only two stars and this condemnation:

“ […] There are laughs but it’s hard to see how scenes featuring women peeing, watching porn and rapping about being “a girl in this motherf—ing world” advances the cause. It only proves that some young women can be as sophomoric and vulgar as the guys.

The lament is that educated, talented women given an opportunity to do whatever they want onstage could not make a more insightful statement about their sex in 2012.”

— Kevin Prokosh from The Winnipeg Free Press
With scenes ranging from Greek Goddesses and booty call texts to Macbeth witches, the sketch comedy Lady Skits despite mixed reviews sold out nine out of ten shows. We have included some excerpts for you to make your own judgement.

Keep in mind theatre is meant to be seen—reading does not always do a script justice. BUT NEVER FEAR-- "Lady Skits" will be remounted January 4th & 5th 2013 at Patrick’s Cabaret in Minneapolis, Minnesota for your viewing pleasure.

Cheers!

A Theatrical Presentation of the Manifestation of Patriarchy in Contemporary Western Society; A Sample of the 2012 Fringe Production: "Lady Skits". —"Inspired by the Muffs of Women and the Stache of Dennis Smith.

**SCENE 2:** Bush Wives & Their Man-Eating Bush

An Explorer—much like Australia’s famous crocodile hunter Steve Irwin, is out in the bush, doing what he does. He always speaks to audience, unless he’s speaking to the women as animals.

**EXPLORER:** As you can see, I’ve made it to the borderlands, and uh, still nothing. Not much survives out here in these conditions, but I haven’t given up hope. People say that I’m crazy, that it’s myth, it’s not possible. Well I guess that’s what I’m here to find out. If I survive.

The Explorer hears a “noise”. He puts finger to lips, approaches cautiously… sees Women laughing, holding hands, joking around. Doing normal human things.

**EXPLORER:** Crikey. We’ve found them! Look at these beauties! So rare, almost extinct, but here they are. Good thing they didn’t see me, better keep my distance. I hear these creatures can be extremely aggressive when they are confronted. I can’t believe it… A real pack of feminists!

Women hear him, then go back to what they were doing.

**EXPLORER:** I’ve heard stories, we’ve all heard them, but they’ve come to be known as legend. Look at them, behaving much the way humans would... but don’t let them fool you. These guys, they are as feral as they come. Legend has it they used to be a part of society as we know back before the war on bra-burning, but no one really knows whether these, well I suppose they were women once, whether they were pressured out of society by our trusted leaders or whether they left on their own, realizing that there was no place for their savage lifestyle. Either way, they’re out here now, isolated from mankind and uh, living off the elements, I suppose.

Women still joking, looking normal, doing normal things.

**EXPLORER:** There’s really no telling what they would do if they found me here, they’ve been without male companionship for so long, it’s enough to drive anyone wild. But I’m going to try the impossible: I’m going to try to establish contact with these creatures.

Women finally spot the Explorer and attempt salutations.

**FEMINIST 1:** Hi...?
Explorer attempts to hide himself, but his arse juts out from behind a rock.

**FEMINIST 2**: Excuse me!

Explorer... still hiding...

**FEMINIST 5**: You know we can see you...

Explorer pops out to camera.

**EXPLORER**: I would be lying if I said I wasn’t scared but I’ve come prepared, luckily I brought some offerings and I’ve read up on their customs. Everyone makes mistakes though, and all I can do now is hope for the best.

Explorer begins to approach the women

I mean you no harm. Come on buddy.

**FEMINIST 1**: Can I help you?

**EXPLORER**: Easy, easy. I think this one might be the leader, you can see she’s tense and slightly larger than the others. What a ripper! Let’s have a go at giving em some treats...

Explorer pulls out some tampons and dangles them enticingly to Women.

**EXPLORER**: ...They don’t get much of these out here, I think they’ll like it. I know I’m taking a risk, she could pull my arm right outta the socket.

**FEMINIST 2**: What?

**EXPLORER**: I’ve heard that they’ve got teeth in the vaginas. Huge razor sharp fangs that would [his hands re-enact a snake being gobbled] eat a penis like dinner. Careful now... .

Women reject his gift of tampons.

**FEMINIST 5**: No, thanks.

**EXPLORER**: Don’t seem to like that. [Quickly backs away, crouched like Irwin] Luckily, I brought something else that might interest them. Let’s have a go at this. [Pulls out razor.] I’ve been waiting for this my whole life, I’m not about to give up now. [Holds out razor.] Come on mate, soo-ee! Here ya go.

**FEMINIST 1**: Okay, who are you?

**EXPLORER**: Saving animals is my passion, and I’m willing to die for it.

**FEMINIST 2**: I think you should go.

**EXPLORER**: All my instincts are telling me I should go. But it’s now or never. It’s always dangerous working with massive predators like these-

**FEMINIST 5**: Hey!

**EXPLORER**: – Can’t afford to make too many mistakes-

**FEMINIST 2**: We can hear you!

**EXPLORER**: – They’re getting aggressive now and I’m outnumbered ...so I think I should be on my way before...

A giant man-eating vagina puppet appears out of no where. The clit darts vigourously towards its awaiting meal. The Explorer in his feeble attempt to back away from the Women, trips and falls right into the MAN-EATING VAGINA.

**EXPLORER**: Crikey me arm!!!

Black-out. We hear the blood-smacking noise of flesh being bitten and clothing being shredded. Silence.
**SCENE 5: Barbara Girl**

BARBARA enters nervously and MOM enters anxiously, trying to comfort and stay strong for Barbara.

**DAD:** Barbara, your mother and I need to talk to you about something.

**MOM:** Please have a seat.

**DAD:** Nancy please!

**BARBARA:** Am I in trouble?

MOM & DAD look at each other, look away.

**DAD:** Nobody’s “in trouble”, honey. We just, want to have a chat.

**MOM:** A friendly chitchat!

**DAD:** Yes……

Silence.

**DAD:** Go ahead Nancy.

**MOM:** Oh. Well, um, you see Barbara, you’ve been growing up. You’re probably experiencing some changes.

**DAD:** Too true!

**MOM:** And well, you may have certain urges or confusing feelings. We want you to know that it’s okay. You aren’t alone.

Dad clears throat.

**MOM:** It’s a confusing time for everyone of your age. A transition which may bring up some questions. We want you to come to us with these questions. We want to answer them for you instead of maybe some of the older girls.

**DAD:** Your mother is a fountain of information!

**MOM:** You see Barbara, your experience is slightly different from the other girls. Not bad! Just different.

**BARBARA:** What -

**DAD:** – You’re a boy, Barbara.

Silence.

**BARBARA:** What.

**MOM:** I’m sorry honey. I know you’re confused. But you need to know the truth.

**BARBARA:** What are you talking about? I’m not a boy.

**DAD:** When you were born, the doctor told us that your… intimate area… contained traces of both boy and girl parts. He said that as you grew it your body might – uh… make a clearer decision. We decided that you were to be brought up as a girl… but as your body has been growing… it’s become clear…. 
MOM: It’s nothing to be embarrassed about! You just need to be aware of some of the changes that might be happening. And you’re family can help you through this time—WESLEY! Get in here!

WES: Chill out mom…

DAD: I’ve already signed you up to play hockey.

MOM: Oh thanks for that, I completely forgot.

DAD: Maybe we’ll finally have a hockey player in the family, hey? The next Evander Kane??

WES: Wanna go set something on fire?

BARBARA: But —

DAD: Barbara, you need to look at this in a positive light! Really, look on the bright side—you’ll probably be much funnier.

MOM: You need to know what’s ahead of you. You may start to find it difficult to talk about your feelings… and start to take pleasure in excessive violence.

DAD: I’ll have to teach you some of my tricks. The ol’ one-two!

MOM: You might feel the need to, when you’re driving, take shortcuts. Or fix things.

DAD: You’ll probably start noticing higher levels of aggression, and a desire to chop down trees.

MOM: It’s too bad you’re so good at knitting, you’ll lose interest in that soon.

DAD: – But you’ll become good at walking away from explosions without looking back.

BARBARA: I... I -

MOM: Look honey, he’s learning already!

DAD: I’m so proud of you son. Tomorrow morning we’ll go out and play some ball, your mom can read her book and I’ll show you how to throw like a boy.

MOM: Would you like to barbeque the meat tomorrow?

DAD: Nancy, you’re coddling him.

MOM: I’m sorry, I’ll give you your space. Let me get this for you. [Takes away Barbie] Good night Barbara.

WES: I’ve always wanted a brother.

BARBARA left alone onstage without her doll.

BARBARA: …but it’s my birthday.

Black-out.
Scene 13: Ragin’ Menstural Rap

[side note to reader—this is one of four menstruation raps]

ALL:
Cause I’m a girl in this motherfucking world
Hardships of a bitch, getting crampy and shit—
Bleedin’ all da time, so I’m making this rhyme
Cause I’m a girl in this motherfucking world

DANA:
I’m in Cambodia
On the motha fuckin pill,
Haven’t had my period I’m feelin kinda ill
It’s been 4 months,
Getting kinda sketchy,
Run all your pills together
Uterus starts getting tetchy.
I can’t hold it together,
Need some fuckin release
I hate this feeling more
than the fuckin police
[background “fuck da police! just fuck da police!”]
Go to the little girls room and next thing I know
Had a little visit from my old aunt flo.
Throw the dirty underwear into a zip lock
“I’ll deal with it later yo it’s time to party rock”
[background “fuck da police! just fuck da police!”]
little while later took a look in the bag
what I saw next better believe it made me gag
[What?]
Motha fuckin hole where the blood used to be
fuckin dirty ass rats went on an eatin’ spree!!
ate right through my underwear
in all the tasty spots
licked up all the blood like it was fuckin tater tots
Moral of the story,
I fuckin hate rats!
I bite off all their heads
and feed the bodies to my cats!!

ALL:
Hey boy I’m as cute as can be
but when I’m on my rag
there’s no way you’ll touch me
Hey boy I like when you’re around
but when I’m on my rag
there’s no way you’re going down
Hey boy you always stay away
when I’m on my rag
guess we’ll fuck another day
Cause I’m a girl in this motherfucking world,
Hardships of a bitch, getting crampy and shit--
Bleedin’ all da time, so I’m making this rhyme!
CAUSE I’M A GIRL IN THIS MOTHERFUCKING WORLD
World… world… world…

CURTAIN
The existence of sweatshops nationally and internationally, historically and at present, relies on constructions of identity that produce binaries in which the sweated labour of the subordinate group is justified through a discourse of ‘other’ or ‘them’ by the dominant group. Furthermore, while anti-sweatshop movements work against the persistence of sweatshop labour globally, efforts on their behalf rely on these constructions of ‘other’ and often result in reinforcing the very hierarchies and binaries the movement seeks to deconstruct. Therefore, a complete understanding of gender, “race”, class and immigration status and its inseparable influence on global issues, such as sweatshop labour, is mandatory in order to understand why and how sweatshop labour prevails despite anti-sweatshop movements. It is important to note that these factors do not influence global sweatshop prevalence and resistance separately, but are linked to one another and therefore require an intersectional approach in deconstructing its powerful role in global production. Through the literature on global sweatshops, the garment industry is repeatedly used as exemplary in discussing constructions and discourses that exist in sweatshop labour and will be the main focus of this paper as well.

First, gender is a social construction which places women as a group in direct opposition to men as a group. Within patriarchal society, this binary manifests into a hierarchy in which women are placed in the subordinate position. Although gender is a social construction, it has real effects on the occurrence, as well as the resulting movement against, sweatshops which prey upon vulnerability. As women, gender constructs an image of powerlessness which makes them suitable for domestic chores that are connected to women’s reproductive capabilities, thus justifying their prevalence in sweatshop factories, especially the garment industry. Men do work in sweatshop factories, but L. Sluiter (2009) explains that even so “poor women … were unskilled, and the money they earned was considered extra to the breadwinner’s income, which was an excuse for low wage. Many women were homemakers, the most deprived and outlawed division of the labour force.” (16). The power relations between men and women places women in a more vulnerable state because they are neither meant to work, therefore justifying low wages, and are working under the control of an almost exclusively male leadership.

Next, “race” is another social construction which places ethnic differences in a hierarchal structure in which “white” or Western people are given superiority in relation to racialized Others. Often the prevalence of racialized Others in particular industries incites contempt on the part of Western people under the belief that the Others are stealing jobs they feel they are more deserving of. As discussed in lecture, “reformers often attributed the cut-throat economics of the garment industry to the ethnicity of employers” (J. Guard, personal communication, January 11, 2012). Many judgements of sweatshops in general have relied on racial assumptions that suggest “they” are innately immoral and filthy, thus blaming the prevalence of sweatshops not on the structure of the industry, but on the workers themselves. This argument promotes the racial hierarchy which places “whites” above all else and works to protect Western societies, not from sweatshop conditions, but from the inferiority of racialized workers that threaten health and morality. Furthermore, J. Guglielmo (2003) discusses “racial privilege” (199) with the example of Italian American
workers’ ability to pass as white and focus on policing outside “races” in order to privilege their presence in the garment industry. The film Made in Canada – Sweatshops (2004) discusses the ways in which “race” and class blend in order to define a group’s worth and are thus important to consider in relation to one another. Class becomes important because women and racialized immigrants also often represent the lower class and thus create a large supply of cheap disposable labour. Furthermore, the construction that belonging to the lower class is one’s own fault due to poor choices is dictated through neoliberal discourse, so these workers are met with little sympathy. Because gender and its relationship to the division of labour idealizes men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere, racial morality becomes partly defined by the ability to assimilate into American culture and “be” American which becomes symbolized by the reproduction of male breadwinner and female housewife ideal. Furthermore, racialized women experience a double Othering of their identity which inflates their vulnerability.

Lastly, immigration status further complicates the experience of workers in sweatshops as it related to globalization and the movement of different “races” around the world, particularly in search of sustainable living through their labours. People who have immigrated away from their home country, due to varying hardships they or their families have or are experiencing, are vulnerable due to their obvious need for work, but also because they may be uneducated on Canada’s labour laws, unable to transfer hard skills and lack support. Furthermore, becoming a citizen is timely and tedious, therefore in order to begin making a living as soon as possible, immigrants without status will seek any employment they can, creating a supply for labour that is cheap and often trying to avoid the radar of the government. In this situation, immigrants without status are willing to overlook poor working conditions and treatment because of the necessity of paid labour to survive. Looking at the history of sweatshops, the majority of workers were Jewish or Italian, until globalization increased the numbers of outsourced labour as opposed to immigrant labour. Despite the negative assumptions of immigrant prevalence in sweatshops, Made in Canada – Sweatshops (2004) documents two Chinese immigrants whose desire to avoid burdening the state through social programs such as welfare also made up a part of their vulnerability. Similarly, the desire to avoid complaining about a situation that is better than where they originated from and out of fear of having to return, workers do not voice their concerns.

Gender, race and immigration status all influence the efforts of resistance against sweatshop labour whether on behalf of the workers themselves or outside activists. Due to the overwhelming numbers of women represented in sweatshop factories, and the increased Othering and resulting vulnerability that women who are racialized, immigrant or both endure, the construction of these workers as victims is significant. Even as they resist and have demonstrated successful resistance in the past, workers’ resistance overall is forgotten in the construction of the helpless victim (J. Guard, personal communication, February 15, 2012). This construction promotes the belief that they require being saved by innocent, well-meaning consumers against evil corporate, and overwhelmingly male, owners. As such, consumers who are mostly from the West become represented as women as well, but because they are neither racialized nor immigrant, their status becomes that of an innocent bystander rather than a helpless victim. On the other hand, there is a potentially positive aspect of women’s resistance to sweatshops which has been powerful and demonstrates their ability to organize, increasing their public exposure and value, even while maintaining gendered differences such as femininity.

Resistance against sweatshop factories by outside reformers, often middle to upper class women, has relied on the traditional, and often religious, belief that women belong in the home and should not work for pay at all. Furthermore, it encourages “paternalistic laws” (J. Guard, personal communication, January 25, 2012) which seek to protect women in ways they cannot do on their own because of the fact that they are women, therefore weak and powerless. Also, race and immigration status affect worker resistance in addition to gender. For instance, L. Sluiter (2009) discusses how unions are often more likely to protect native workers than immigrant workers, because traditionally “unions have a national perspective, they are protective of their own labour force” (193). Furthermore, E. Brooks (2005)
uses the term "symbolic politics" (268) to discuss the ways in which women’s bodies in relation to patriarchy both support the existence of sweatshops, as fitting for women, especially racialized women, due to their supposed innate domestic role, while being used in anti-sweatshop campaigns to incite efforts to fight for women’s rights by white women for non-white women which results in justifying purchases of their products. It is therefore pertinent for Western activists to consider their privileges, whether racial, geographical and gendered, in order to address the issues of racialized, immigrant, and predominantly women sweatshop workers to provide a space in which they can use their voice and demonstrate agency.

It is through constructions of Other that sweatshops and many forms of resistance rely on in order to continue the prevalence of sweatshops on a global level. Simply put, the more "othered" one is, the greater their vulnerability and likelihood of exploitation. Gender constructions promote ideas that women should not be working; racial constructions emphasize the inferiority and immorality of non-white identities; and immigration status plays an overwhelming role in one’s experience working in Canada with regards to law, available work, assumptions, and rights. Therefore, workers in sweatshop factories experience their exploitation in differing ways and their individual experiences should be taken into consideration in order to promote positive resistance against sweatshop labour injustices. Furthermore, resistance is constructed differently depending on whose efforts are being made, whether worker or consumer of sweatshop production, and must be interrogated and improved with attention to the different experiences related to one’s identity. This paper thus concludes the importance of an intersectional approach when considering the roles of gender, race, immigration status, and additional factors that influence the prevalence of sweatshops and its persistence in relation to anti-sweatshop movements.

References


Towards Equilibrium: A Manifesta for Women in Science

As women navigating science undergraduate degrees, we often recognize aspects of the culture of science that challenge our feminist values. This is an entropic compilation of some of our critiques, suggestions, and frustrated observations.

Rosalind Franklin was an integral part of the team that discovered the structure of DNA. Stop glossing over this in class. She has the potential to inspire young women, and her struggles represent those of all women in science. Do you really believe her death was the only reason she was unfairly excluded from the group that won the Nobel Prize for this achievement?

We should not have to choose between grad school and a family. Young women should not have to consider work-life balance as a factor in deciding their career paths. Research supervisors should not admonish grad students, publicly or privately, for becoming pregnant at a time that is inconvenient for them. We believe that male colleagues should not have to make this decision either. Build this into the tenure clock to benefit all parents.

We demand to learn as much about abortion in class as we do about viagra. We demand that our female bodies are not taught as derivatives of, entirely separate from, or inferior to male anatomy.

We are tired of watching our favourite women professors get passed over for permanent positions in the faculty. We deserve women mentors. We deserve network environments that do not involve activities that are coded masculine, middle to upper class, and white.

We reject a science that values competitiveness rather than collaboration as the only way to create and accumulate knowledge, that lacks critical self-evaluation, that caters to economic gain, that claims complete objectivity is a possibility, and that echoes dominant ideology rather than undermines it.

We reject a science so hegemonic and arrogant that it continues to unapologetically use ethically questionable research methodologies. We reject a science that discredits generational, Indigenous, and embodied knowledges.

We are tired of advocating the benefits of women in science, instead of concentrating on our work. No one would ask a male scientist to justify his presence in the field or ask him to advocate for his position based on his gender.

Don’t assume we can’t do math because Barbie told us it is hard, because you have never met a woman who can, or because we may not flaunt it in class.

The thoughts we express deserve respect. Don’t interrupt us, talk over us, or dismiss our ideas. Speaking up can be difficult; when we take a risk, express our thoughts, and are wrong, we worry that we are reinforcing stereotypes about women’s ability to think logically and linearly. We always have something to prove. When you take a risk, express your thoughts, and are wrong, your error will not be attributed to your gender. This is privilege.

When you consider derisively telling us we “want it all,” consider that we are asking only what our masculine colleagues have. Consider that we will all reap the benefits of a diverse, collaborative science.
SELF-CARE
As university students we, the FAQ Collective members, understand the stress and frustration that can sometimes occur within the arts and academia. We are all too aware of the late nights spent studying, followed by early morning classes; long hours of reading, followed by even longer hours of writing; cramming for tests and the anxiety that often accompanies writing a test or handing in a finished assignment. Over the years we have also gained knowledge on how extremely important self-care is for individuals within the arts and academia worlds. We wanted to take this opportunity to share with our readers some of our favourite self-care activities and to remind everyone that as important as it is to do well in your studies, research, political movements and careers, it is equally important to take care of yourself. Take a moment and de-stress your body, clear your mind, and enjoy the world around you.

Self-Care