



QT6

DEFINING
QUEER
LIBERATION

DEFINING QUEER LIBERATION



6

Welcome Letter

There is a generational gap in the queer community.

To help bridge this gap and build intergenerational solidarity, we sought the perspectives of young people and elders alike.

As a result, 50% of the creators featured in this issue are over the age of 50, and 50% are under.

The following questions were provided to help prompt contributors:

What does the queer liberation movement mean? · What should be at the forefront of the movement? · With everything you've seen change in your lifetime, what's next? · What excites you about the future of the movement? · How should we prioritize queer and trans rights and liberation goals? · What does "queerness" mean? · Where are the intergenerational tensions? · What are the barriers preventing intergenerational movement building in the queer community? · How can we overcome them? · What does it mean to be a liberated queer individual? · Out and Proud? · Fitting in? · Passing? · What does progress feel like? · How has the AIDS epidemic impacted the generational divide? · What are its ongoing effects? · What does it mean to be a queer elder? · What does it mean to grow up without queer elders? · Did you have a queer mentor? · What did they teach you? · Have you had the opportunity to be a mentor? · What is something you wish young people knew or understood? · What is something you wish elders knew or understood?

In times of crisis, maintaining community is vital. QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a nonprofit dedicated to elevating and celebrating queer voices in Canada.

Thank you to all the writers, poets, artists and makers for allowing QT to share your work with the world. Thank you to all the volunteers at QT without whom we would not have a magazine.

—Pax Santos, Founding Editor
(who also had the distinct pleasure of designing this issue)

**“ I’m not missing ”
a minute of this –
it’s the revolution!
– Sylvia Rivera**

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AIDS KILLS FAGS DEAD

-By Dr. Kenneth E. Roon, Jr.

Medium...Memoir

Bio...Dr. Roon is a curmudgeon
living and working in Brooklyn,
NY.



You could say I was born in a year when hope began to fade. The year before I was born, 1967, is remembered for the Summer of Love, people were protesting Vietnam and – based on nostalgic recollections – it seemed like things were headed in a positive direction. In 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated; Nixon was elected, and Soviet tanks crushed the Prague Spring. Woodstock, the first moonwalk, and the Stonewall Riot may have highlighted 1969, but the Manson Murders and Altamont tempered those events.

The contradictory nature of these three years – amazing highs inspiring hope dashed by horrible events – seems to define my life particularly as a gay man. I don't recall my parents talking about Stonewall, but I have vague recollections of hearing about the Manson trial on the news, however, they weren't overly close minded. At the dinner table when I was in the fourth grade (circa 1977/78) I proudly explained the differences between gays and lesbians. "Gaybees like other boys. Lesbees like other girls," I said apropos of nothing. I can only imagine the conversation my parents had later that night. I am quite sure that they were certain I was gay (in retrospect how I believed anyone ever thought I was straight is beyond my comprehension) and since we lived in rural Pennsylvania, I am also quite sure they were concerned.

For my 12th birthday I received three records: the Saturday Night Fever Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, Macho Man and Cruisin' by The Village People (again, how I ever thought people thought I was straight is a mystery). Of the three, The Village People records were my favorite. I listened to the records (and missed all the double entendres), but the covers of Macho Man and Cruisin' were more exciting than the cache of Playboys and Penthouses I had found under my brother's bed. The hours I spent in my room trying to decide which of them was hottest. Adam West's Batman may have "made me gay," but The Village People welcomed me to manhood.

Two of my strongest memories from fifth and sixth grade concern The Village People. In fifth grade at afterschool volleyball, I remember the popular kids dancing to YMCA (and yes – they were doing THAT dance). On another occasion, I was at a neighbor's house and she was on the phone all excited, telling a friend about watching The Village People on Merv Griffin. To be clear, this wasn't a teenage neighbor, this woman taught at the elementary school I attended. It would be years before I recognized how great this was. Openly gay men were being celebrated in rural Pennsylvania by people as varied as mean girls and schoolteachers. Perhaps this is why my parents didn't have a complete meltdown when I had explained the difference between gays and lesbians to the family at the dinner table: the sexual revolution really was making inroads.

But there was something else to that. The unguarded abandon and promise of disco offered hope and promise. The Village People were GAY and PROUD. Granted they were hot and turned me on, but I could be them – I could never be Batman or Robin. While the Village People may have used heightened stereotypes, they didn't hide behind them the way Batman and Robin hid behind their secret identities: They knew what they were doing was camp in a way that Batman and Robin did not. The Village People offered the hope that I could be the person that the kids at school didn't laugh at, call "woman" all through 7th grade, or circulate a petition my freshman year of high school – that everyone signed – asking me to commit suicide.

Then IT happened.

Not the Disco Sucks moment; HIV and AIDS.

I don't remember when I first heard about HIV/AIDS, but I do remember the jokes. I also remember being scared. Just a few years after people were celebrating The Village People, some of the same people were making AIDS jokes

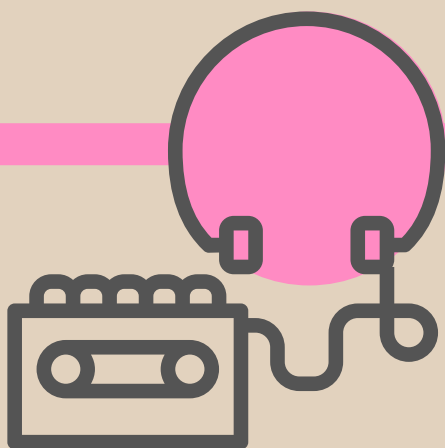
and there were all kinds of vile graffiti. I vividly remember seeing "AIDS Kills Fags Dead" written on bathroom walls.

Then it happened. At some point around the age of 15 I noticed a purple spot on my right foot. I had Kaposi Sarcoma and I was dying of AIDS. I'd never had sex, but the words were written right there on the bathroom walls: "AIDS Kills Fags Dead!" This was confirmation of the fact that I was gay (so much for that whole "this is a phase" thing) and I was dying. This was circa 1983: there was no internet, I couldn't look it up in the library at school, and I couldn't tell my parents. I couldn't tell anyone. So, I bottled it up and went through the darkest, loneliest days of my teenage years.

I tell this story 40 years later to explain how deeply discrimination can bury itself into a person's psyche and create things like internalized homophobia. In three years the hope and joy promised by The Village People was torpedoed by the AIDS Crisis.

I always add this epilogue:

In the summer of 1986, after I graduated high school I got a summer job as a janitor at the hospital where my mother was a nursing administrator. At that time the hospital would put signs on the doors of rooms if the person was "isolated" for some reason, the worst was the sign for "Blood and Body Diseases" as it either meant Hepatitis or AIDS. As a summer worker I floated around filling in, and one day I got to the floor I was assigned to and discovered that I had to clean a room where there was the one and only AIDS patient in the hospital. "I'm not cleaning this," I told my supervisor. "I'm not getting AIDS." He said fine. A short while later my mother marched onto the floor, grabbed me by the arm and dragged me into an empty room. She slapped me across the face - HARD! "What are you doing? You have less chance of getting AIDS than you do any of the other diseases in this hospital from cleaning that room. That man is dying and deserves respect. Now get your ass in there and clean his room!"

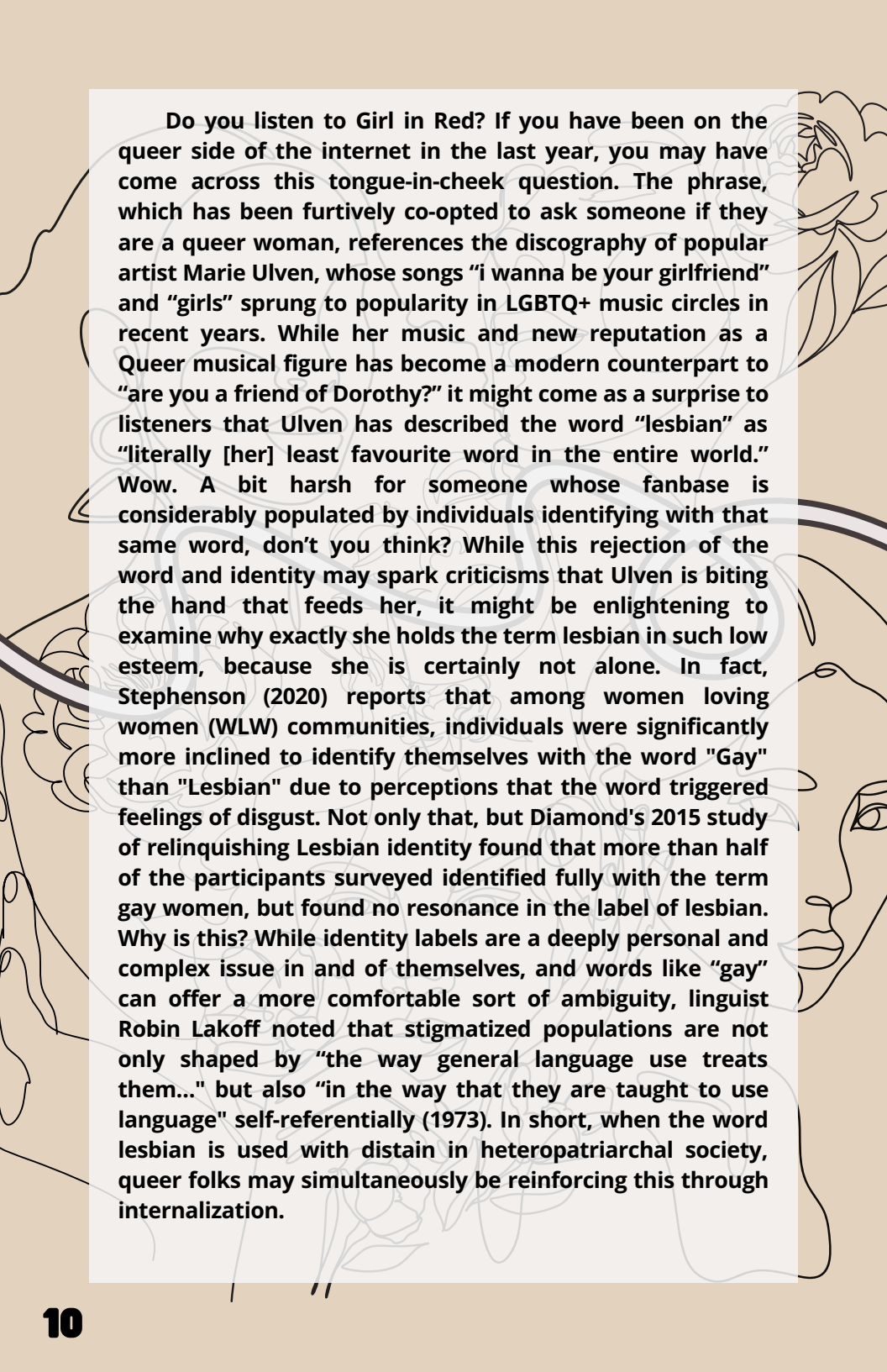


"I WANNA BE YOUR GIRLFRIEND"
but, like, not in a lesbian way

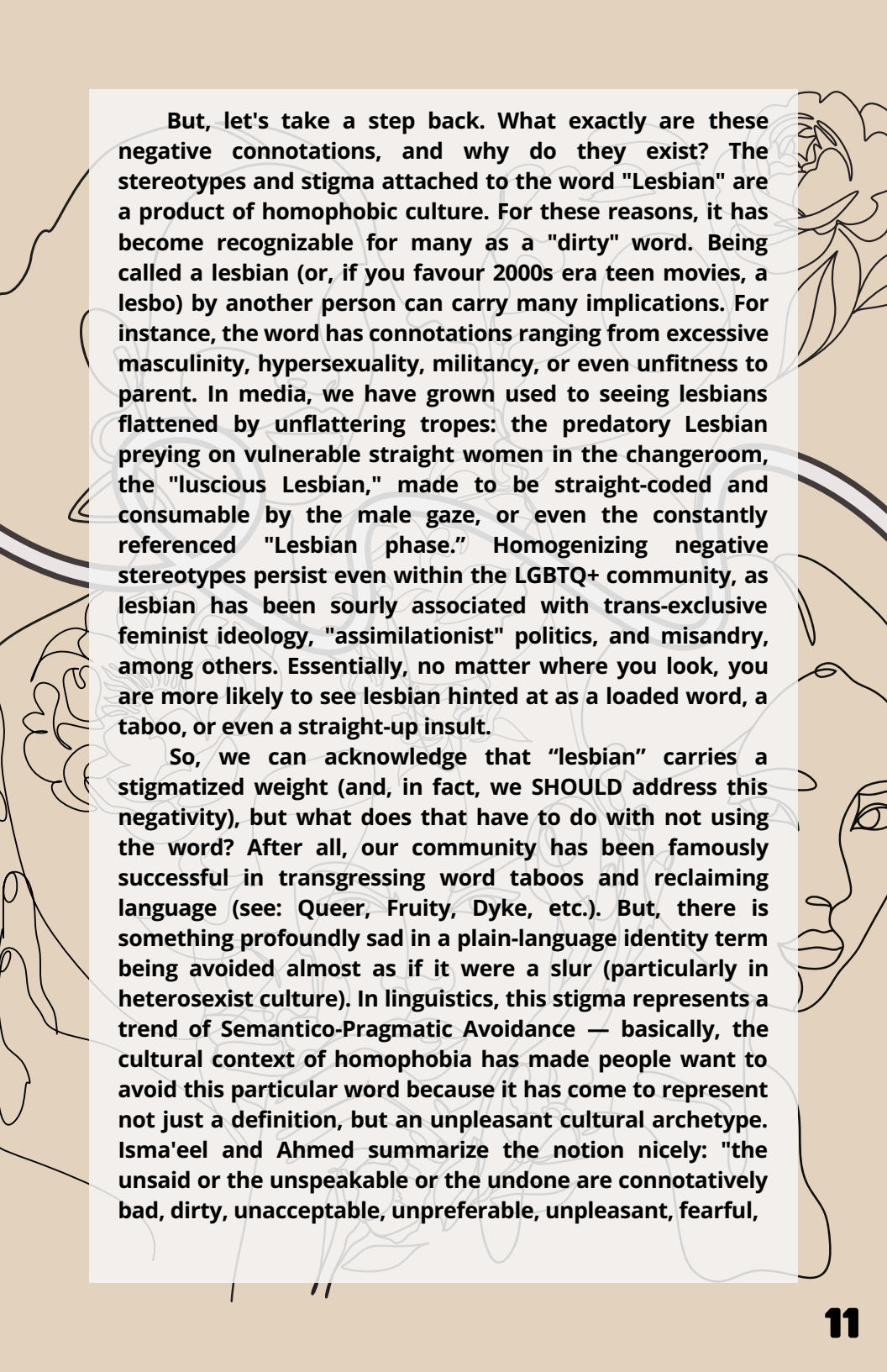
-By Sydney Dawson

Medium...Personal Essay

Bio...Sydney is a writer and
researcher from Vancouver, BC,
who specializes in Linguistic
Anthropology and feminist
studies.

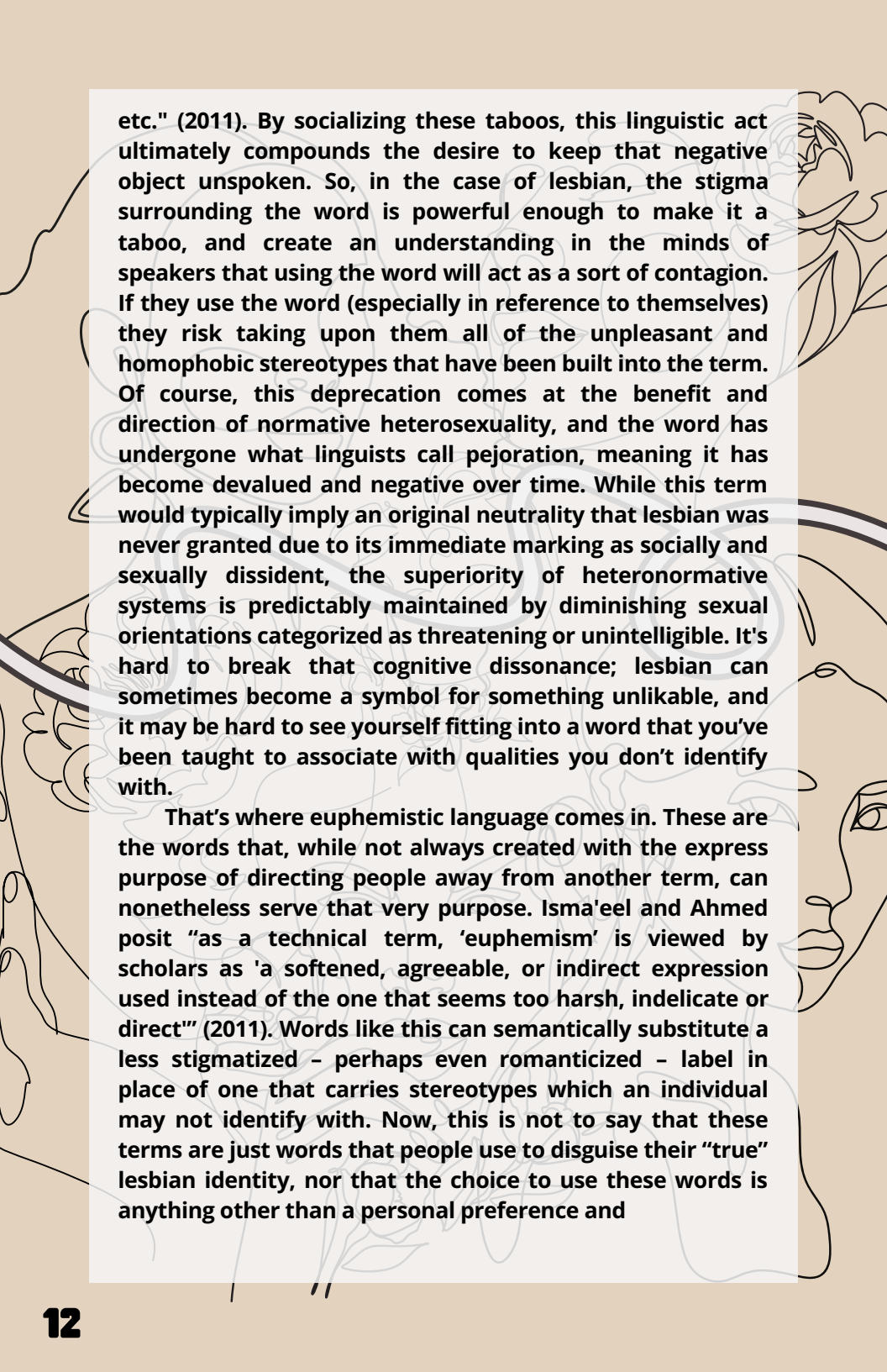


Do you listen to Girl in Red? If you have been on the queer side of the internet in the last year, you may have come across this tongue-in-cheek question. The phrase, which has been furtively co-opted to ask someone if they are a queer woman, references the discography of popular artist Marie Ulven, whose songs “i wanna be your girlfriend” and “girls” sprung to popularity in LGBTQ+ music circles in recent years. While her music and new reputation as a Queer musical figure has become a modern counterpart to “are you a friend of Dorothy?” it might come as a surprise to listeners that Ulven has described the word “lesbian” as “literally [her] least favourite word in the entire world.” Wow. A bit harsh for someone whose fanbase is considerably populated by individuals identifying with that same word, don’t you think? While this rejection of the word and identity may spark criticisms that Ulven is biting the hand that feeds her, it might be enlightening to examine why exactly she holds the term lesbian in such low esteem, because she is certainly not alone. In fact, Stephenson (2020) reports that among women loving women (WLW) communities, individuals were significantly more inclined to identify themselves with the word “Gay” than “Lesbian” due to perceptions that the word triggered feelings of disgust. Not only that, but Diamond’s 2015 study of relinquishing Lesbian identity found that more than half of the participants surveyed identified fully with the term gay women, but found no resonance in the label of lesbian. Why is this? While identity labels are a deeply personal and complex issue in and of themselves, and words like “gay” can offer a more comfortable sort of ambiguity, linguist Robin Lakoff noted that stigmatized populations are not only shaped by “the way general language use treats them...” but also “in the way that they are taught to use language” self-referentially (1973). In short, when the word lesbian is used with distain in heteropatriarchal society, queer folks may simultaneously be reinforcing this through internalization.



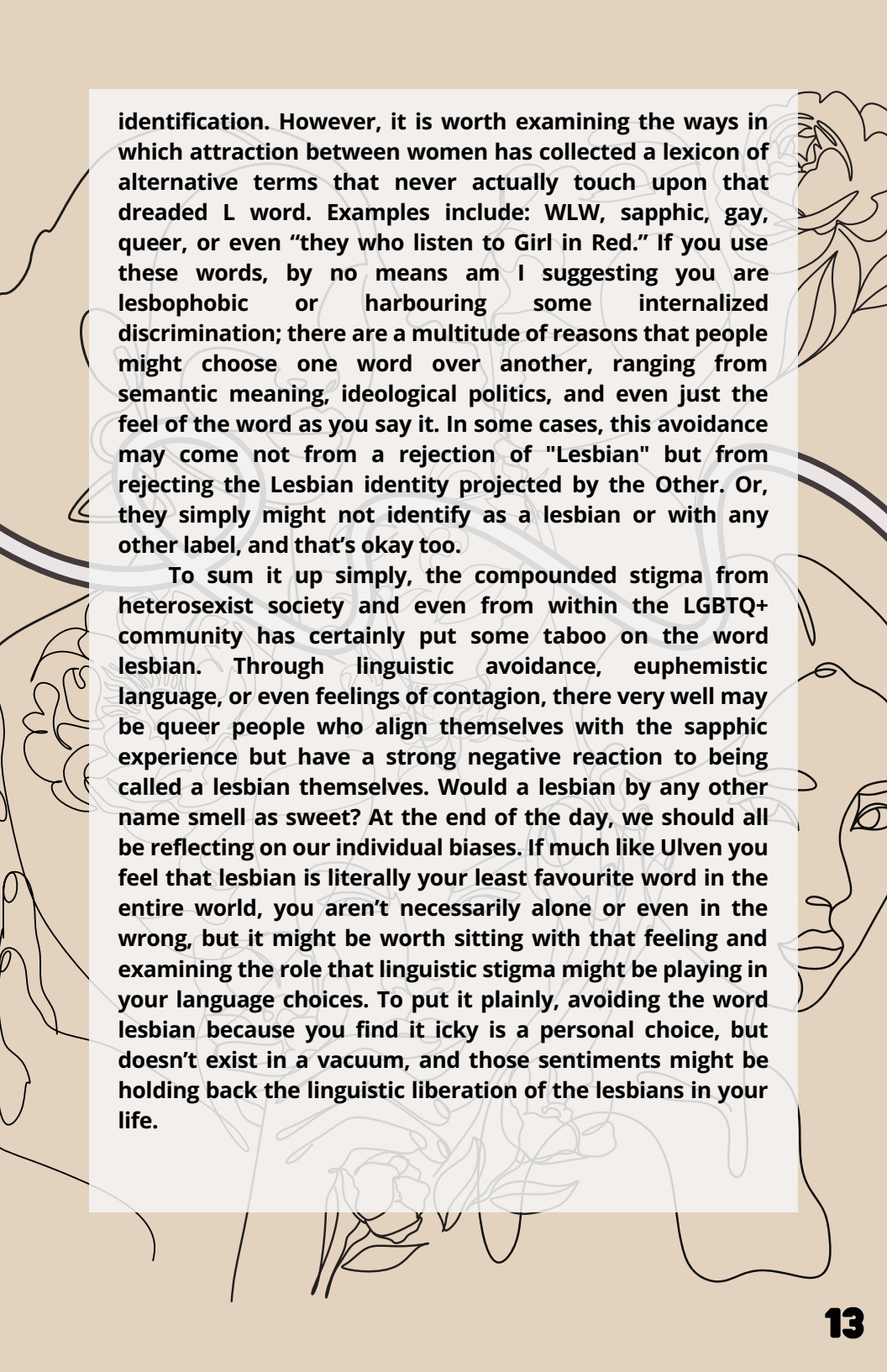
But, let's take a step back. What exactly are these negative connotations, and why do they exist? The stereotypes and stigma attached to the word "Lesbian" are a product of homophobic culture. For these reasons, it has become recognizable for many as a "dirty" word. Being called a lesbian (or, if you favour 2000s era teen movies, a lesbo) by another person can carry many implications. For instance, the word has connotations ranging from excessive masculinity, hypersexuality, militancy, or even unfitness to parent. In media, we have grown used to seeing lesbians flattened by unflattering tropes: the predatory Lesbian preying on vulnerable straight women in the changeroom, the "luscious Lesbian," made to be straight-coded and consumable by the male gaze, or even the constantly referenced "Lesbian phase." Homogenizing negative stereotypes persist even within the LGBTQ+ community, as lesbian has been sourly associated with trans-exclusive feminist ideology, "assimilationist" politics, and misandry, among others. Essentially, no matter where you look, you are more likely to see lesbian hinted at as a loaded word, a taboo, or even a straight-up insult.

So, we can acknowledge that "lesbian" carries a stigmatized weight (and, in fact, we SHOULD address this negativity), but what does that have to do with not using the word? After all, our community has been famously successful in transgressing word taboos and reclaiming language (see: Queer, Fruity, Dyke, etc.). But, there is something profoundly sad in a plain-language identity term being avoided almost as if it were a slur (particularly in heterosexist culture). In linguistics, this stigma represents a trend of Semantico-Pragmatic Avoidance — basically, the cultural context of homophobia has made people want to avoid this particular word because it has come to represent not just a definition, but an unpleasant cultural archetype. Isma'eel and Ahmed summarize the notion nicely: "the unsaid or the unspeakable or the undone are connotatively bad, dirty, unacceptable, unpreferable, unpleasant, fearful,



etc." (2011). By socializing these taboos, this linguistic act ultimately compounds the desire to keep that negative object unspoken. So, in the case of lesbian, the stigma surrounding the word is powerful enough to make it a taboo, and create an understanding in the minds of speakers that using the word will act as a sort of contagion. If they use the word (especially in reference to themselves) they risk taking upon them all of the unpleasant and homophobic stereotypes that have been built into the term. Of course, this deprecation comes at the benefit and direction of normative heterosexuality, and the word has undergone what linguists call pejoration, meaning it has become devalued and negative over time. While this term would typically imply an original neutrality that lesbian was never granted due to its immediate marking as socially and sexually dissident, the superiority of heteronormative systems is predictably maintained by diminishing sexual orientations categorized as threatening or unintelligible. It's hard to break that cognitive dissonance; lesbian can sometimes become a symbol for something unlikable, and it may be hard to see yourself fitting into a word that you've been taught to associate with qualities you don't identify with.

That's where euphemistic language comes in. These are the words that, while not always created with the express purpose of directing people away from another term, can nonetheless serve that very purpose. Isma'eel and Ahmed posit "as a technical term, 'euphemism' is viewed by scholars as 'a softened, agreeable, or indirect expression used instead of the one that seems too harsh, indelicate or direct'" (2011). Words like this can semantically substitute a less stigmatized - perhaps even romanticized - label in place of one that carries stereotypes which an individual may not identify with. Now, this is not to say that these terms are just words that people use to disguise their "true" lesbian identity, nor that the choice to use these words is anything other than a personal preference and



identification. However, it is worth examining the ways in which attraction between women has collected a lexicon of alternative terms that never actually touch upon that dreaded L word. Examples include: WLW, sapphic, gay, queer, or even "they who listen to Girl in Red." If you use these words, by no means am I suggesting you are lesbophobic or harbouring some internalized discrimination; there are a multitude of reasons that people might choose one word over another, ranging from semantic meaning, ideological politics, and even just the feel of the word as you say it. In some cases, this avoidance may come not from a rejection of "Lesbian" but from rejecting the Lesbian identity projected by the Other. Or, they simply might not identify as a lesbian or with any other label, and that's okay too.

To sum it up simply, the compounded stigma from heterosexist society and even from within the LGBTQ+ community has certainly put some taboo on the word lesbian. Through linguistic avoidance, euphemistic language, or even feelings of contagion, there very well may be queer people who align themselves with the sapphic experience but have a strong negative reaction to being called a lesbian themselves. Would a lesbian by any other name smell as sweet? At the end of the day, we should all be reflecting on our individual biases. If much like Ulven you feel that lesbian is literally your least favourite word in the entire world, you aren't necessarily alone or even in the wrong, but it might be worth sitting with that feeling and examining the role that linguistic stigma might be playing in your language choices. To put it plainly, avoiding the word lesbian because you find it icky is a personal choice, but doesn't exist in a vacuum, and those sentiments might be holding back the linguistic liberation of the lesbians in your life.

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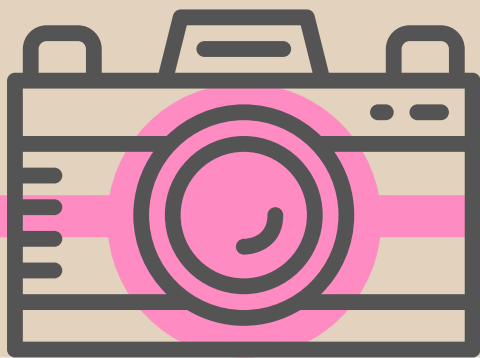
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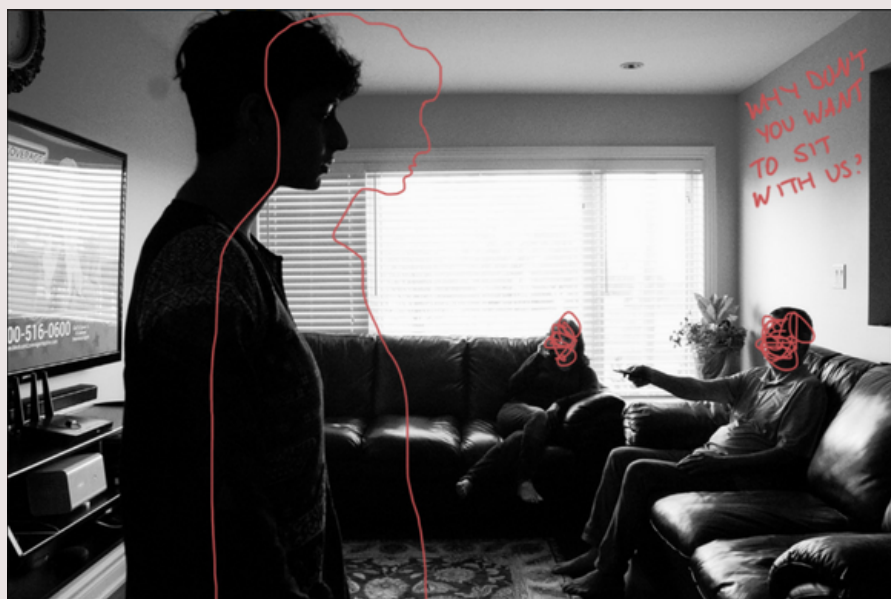
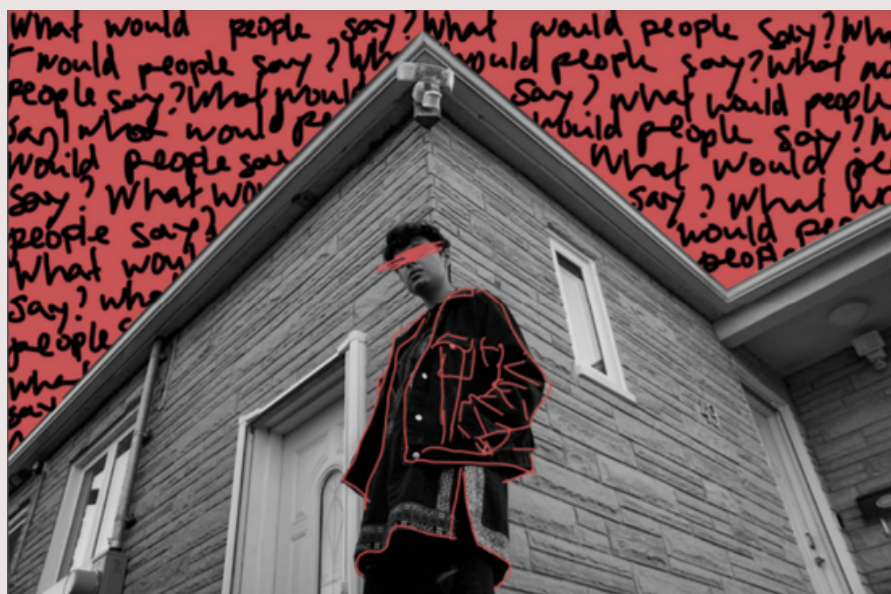


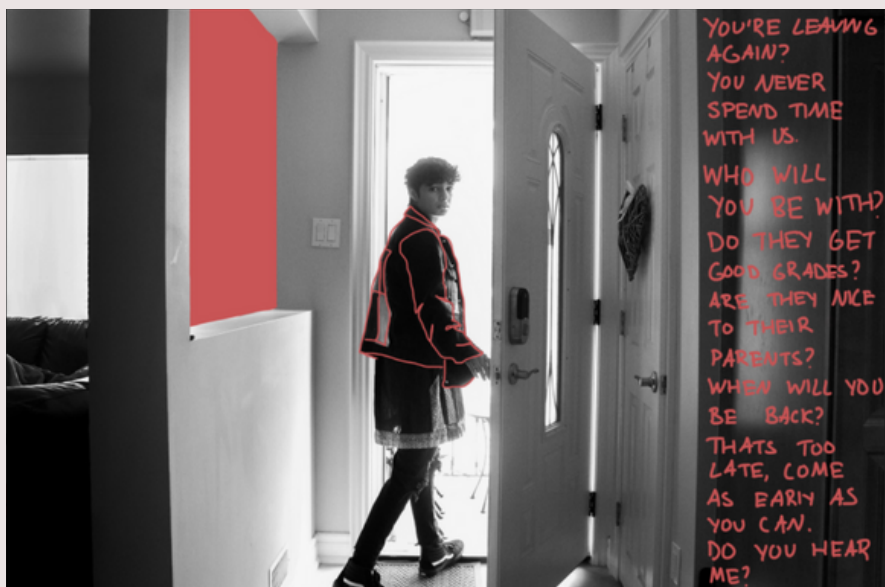
WHISPERS

-By Bisma Jay

Medium...Photo Series

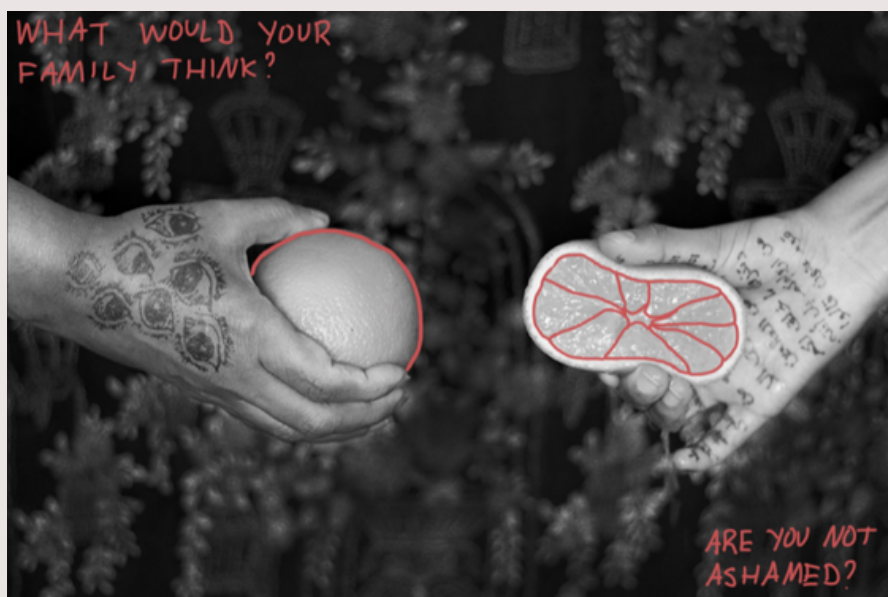
Bio...Bisma Jay is a queer and non-binary multi-media artist currently studying photography at OCADu in Toronto. Their work surrounds creating more positive representation of queer and trans South Asian folks living in the diaspora. In their spare time they like to make videos for TikTok, paint, and take endless self-portraits.





I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE
A BOY OR A GIRL?
I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE
A BOY OR A GIRL?







Artist Statement

Three years later the same tea brews on the stove top. Smells of cardamom, cinnamon and cloves flow through the house. The news plays on the TV, an endless loop of the latest updates on the world-wide pandemic. There are oranges. Oranges served on an endless platter, reminding me of the orange orchards we own in Pakistan. Endless whispers infiltrating the walls, echoing the privacy of a home and the privacy of a mind.

Three years after leaving my family's home and leaving the double life I was living as a closeted queer Muslim teen, I moved back. In this time, I found myself experiencing many conflicting emotions that I couldn't begin to express and dissect for myself.

I photographed myself in various areas of the house in black and white and wrote quotes and drawings over them. Words that have been spoken to me hundreds of times, and the responses I've endlessly repeated myself. "What would people say" quietly ricochets off the walls every time a misstep occurs. Constantly being confronted with my queerness as a sin. In one of the images I have Surat Lot, a passage from the Quran, written on my palms with henna. This passage is often quoted to me on my online posts by some Muslims as a means to justify their homophobia. In other images, I showcase more intimate occasions of alienation. Seeking a small moment of peace in the privacy of a washroom and still not finding it, or the feeling of guilt for not spending enough time with my parents.

With this series, I explore how my relationship with religion, family and my own queer identity has grown and how that has manifested in the atmosphere of our home. These self-portraits are a reflection of my journey into navigating and understanding an environment I was no longer familiar with.



BEING OKAY: Am I okay only when you are okay?

-By Sylvia Frey

Medium...Personal Essay

Bio...Sylvia is a writer and visual artist living and working in Toronto. She also flirts, makes love, and falls in love in Toronto too. These things keep her here, and for some reason, won't let her go.

When I was a child growing up, I watched television, and it was my main source of relating to the world. It was a way to be validated, as at grade school there was rarely an entrance of the bigger public world — we were led by our teachers and gained place with our peers. The television felt like a place where people and ideas were perfect — there was no room for uncooked public discourse. Television was meant for immediate consumption, without gross, uneasy feelings outside of the structures of what we thought was the world. And...it was all patriarchy and what is still traditionally, white. Although school was all about friends and teachers, it was also a testing ground for growing up. With each new and remembered thing, there were large issues of who would actually be validating you on it. Those people who were given privilege to be the ones who arbitrated the way it was, and would be.

Although we had uncomfortable feelings, as well as feelings of rejection and desire and anger and shame — usually in a big ball of emotion that roiled its way in our insides — we would never — even without hesitation — speak about the feelings. Our ideas at this point being formed by the schoolyard. Our places in the school society were usually tested most in the schoolyard, but there were also times in the classroom where the entrance of greater judgement would be. And, I floated in this schoolroom. What would be considered discrimination today was just every day play back then. And the television? Sometimes the television had what some people would react to as hate or homophobia — a controversial topic. Debates about what was permissible or not. But these things still seemed so far away...Things that I was meant only to look at, not to be a major part of.

Being a person of colour, I was already a little bit of a puzzle for most people, including my classmates. In a situation where there wasn't just one thing "wrong" with me, I "shot the moon" and gained a sort of freedom from the powers that were, leaving me with more influence than perhaps someone who was predominantly Caucasian but who obviously was also "queer." I would not be the first target of haters and phobics, giving me free rein to say things that would not be said by someone else who would be putting their reputation on the line. In a situation

where the attachment of disrepute would become the reason for ostracism, it led directly towards being the poster person for the pariah, for a long time. What would be the end of any success for that person, would be the beginning of my career as a naysayer and an example of strength and resilience.

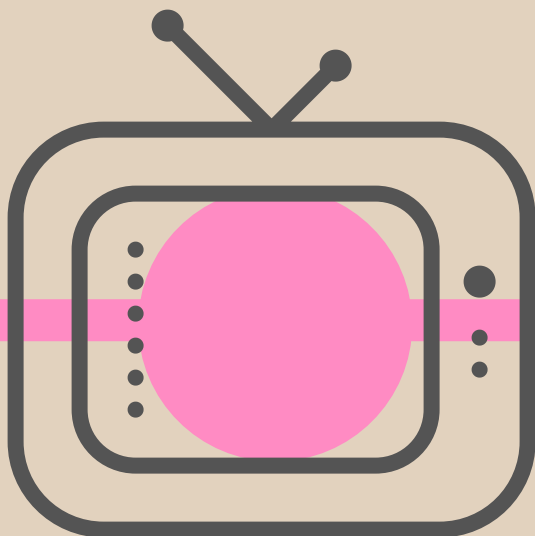
Of course, life back then also had something called family. And even in my family, no matter how close, it was not the place to bring up anything “queer.” The first stop for that would be a best friend who could listen. Family had a feeling of temporariness — a place of living collaboratively that was safe for only as long as one knew what was supposed to be. Anything else would not be acceptable and would become reason and means for “running away.” So often I heard, during those times of those kids who made it to the street, and how tempting it was for me to do the same...It wasn’t until after high school that I found a way to connect with others — those like me. There were “places” that could exist where certain people like me, were. We could talk. Something that was so new. And so, at this time, television started including shows that suddenly started actually saying, out loud, those dark emotions surrounding the homophobia, the homosexuals, the queers, and “labelling” and “coming out.” Things that wouldn’t’ve been said ten years earlier. Things like clothing and friend groups, and secret rendezvous, would become clues and references for being gay, queer, and transgendered. Really famous people began to say words that had been forbidden. And really famous people would speak outside of the fictive television shows — it wasn’t all fiction anymore, it was reality, it was life.

But the politics of being gay still exist. I still find today that there is a sense of “otherness” in identifying oneself or another with “queerness.” That our words of identity, our agreed-to shared labels, are almost as self-defeating as being quiet about it all. There are still limits on where you can go, who you can associate with, and how much pride you can carry with you. Most things are still very “quiet.” And it is encouraged that the quieter it is, the more acceptable it is. Is this normalizing? Or is it just “hiding things” that are offensive to ears that are so sensitive to it?

Normalizing is also levelling the playing field for all identities, a way to bring forth change to the discrimination and phobia that drives our beliefs — the way we see and do because others are doing so, too. If we choose “not to label” being instead generic — “being people” — are we limiting equality and encouraging invisibility? Choosing not to use accurate, descriptive words to talk about people, in order to acknowledge that we are all, at the end of the day, just human beings? Is this just masquerading as equality? By not discussing things, talking about things, addressing things, on the public radar? Is making things invisible through our words allowing equality? Do our words then become more potent or have less potential?

What is the effect of something that is a public issue? A public issue makes existence real. There is visually, mentally, orally, audibly, and texturally, something that exists. The definition of existence on a very basic level applies a litmus test for viability and life. So, the public applies these litmus tests on everything. It is the ultimate test of how real, viable, reliable, powerful, and just, a thing is, allowing its existence to be granted public respect. Its existence allows the public to treat the issue fairly, if they so wish. The way that words can be used by the public is given free rein and the power of the horse that pulls the carriage.

Being a human being should be enough to be granted the right to exist. Knowing what something is, is the first step to life without boundaries. To be free to be who we are, even in the workplace and within the family. That we as human beings are able, capable, and that the things that we are, are part of the multiplicity of life. We gain more from being varied and different than we do from conforming to the average. Queer discrimination becomes the status quo when we slip backwards, into the past, and remain silent.



THE GROWTH OF QUEER MEDIA

-By Keith Kole

Medium...Reflection

Bio...Keith Kole is an 18-year-old media production student from Toronto. He likes to create characters and stories in his mind but is working on getting them out of there. He also loves his dog Rufus. Find both Keith and Rufus on Twitter @AJPunkDude.

As a media student, I'd like to take a different approach to defining "Queer Liberation." Throughout the decades, along with the growth of our rights and freedoms something else has grown. Though being 18, I was not present for most of those liberations of rights and freedoms, I am present to witness something else that has grown, that something being: characters like us being introduced, and our stories being told increasingly and in a more accurate way. I know this probably wouldn't be included in the definition of queer liberation for older queer folk, but I'd like to share a different perspective.

I was born in 2003, and like any other kid, grew up watching my favourite cartoons. A notable one (and Canadian produced show!) was *Arthur*, as well as *Blue's Clues*. Of course, at the time in the early 2000s, these shows didn't have anything to do with queer representation. Of course, no children's show in the early 2000s would dare have any queer representation. However, fast forward to the present, recent new content of these same shows from the past have included queer representation. On May 28 of this year, the "Blue's Clues & You!" Youtube channel put out an animated video of a pride parade, where lines such as "This family has two daddies, they love each other so proudly" are sung by Drag Queen Nina West. In 2019, *Arthur* premiered its 22nd season which was titled "Mr. Ratburn and the Special Someone." In this first episode, Mr. Ratburn, a relevant character in *Arthur* from when I was watching, was shown getting married to his male partner. What these two instances show is that the stigma behind acknowledging that queer people exist to an audience of children is significantly vanishing. There is something quite powerful about the shows you used to watch when you were a kid, with no queer characters or acknowledgment, now being included for the children in the present to watch. Reading used to never be an activity that I could see myself enjoying, especially since most of the reading I've had to do was forced upon me by school. However, one day in the mid-2010s, a friend of mine who was really into reading let me borrow some of her books (she really wanted me to read them so I gave in). The books she lent me were the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series and its sequel series, *The Heroes of Olympus*, both written by Rick Riordan.

There was one character I particularly liked in the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series, Nico. Nico is what you would call emo (yes, I might have been emo in middle school). In the later series, *The Heroes of Olympus*, it is revealed that Nico had a crush on Percy Jackson, the main character. I remember being surprised that this was in the book because at this point, I had never consumed any media that had any acknowledgment of queer people existing, and knowing that I was gay, I knew the reason for why there wasn't. On May 3 of 2016, I picked up and started reading *The Trials of Apollo: The Hidden Oracle*, the first book of a spin-off series that takes place in the *Percy Jackson* world. After my now-favourite author gave me a character that was like me, you know I had to pick up where he left off. In this book, Nico comes out and forms a relationship with Will Solace, a child of Apollo. Not only that, but Apollo (the main character...or god technically) references various relationships that he has had, including ones with men...or male gods? I have picked up every book in the series on release since then, up until the last book, *The Trials of Apollo: The Tower of Nero*, released on October 6, 2020. More recently, this year, I decided to read another one of Riordan's series, *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*. In this series, character Alex Fierro is introduced and is genderfluid. When reading any of these books, I had never expected to just come across a queer character. I couldn't imagine reading your everyday mainstream book in the 1900s and earlier and just happening to read about a queer character or story. Today, instead of trying to research and find books that have characters like me, my experience has vastly consisted of picking up a random popular book, and just involuntarily coming across one. Now, the *Percy Jackson* series is in development as a show on Disney+, with its author Rick Riordan in close proximity to the production, so you can trust he will do his characters justice in (hopefully) further seasons. All this is quite a contrast with JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* character Dumbledore, wouldn't you say?

There's something more to including queer characters in media than just having them be present, it's also about how they are included. Something I, and an increasingly large amount of people, enjoy is manga, or comics that originate from Japan.

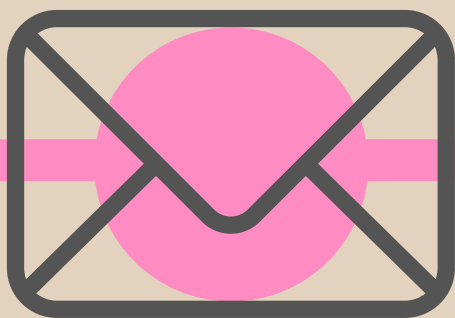
There's a subsidiary in manga called 'BL' or 'Boy's Love,' which features relationships between male characters, but in a more sexual manner. It is cool that there is a whole section of a form of media dedicated to gay relationships, but the audience that BL manga usually aims to attract, and was made for, is mainly heterosexual women, paralleling how in western media there is a trope to use lesbian relationships to appease heterosexual men, rather than actual lesbians. However, early this year, being bored by the pandemic, I picked up the latest volumes of a specific "BL" manga that has grown quite popular, *Given*, by Natsuki Kizu. Since then, I have been keeping up with releases and tracking down when the next volumes will be released. The reason I grew so in love with this "BL" (quotations because I don't know how BL I would consider it) manga is because when I read it, it doesn't feel like the main audience for this is just heterosexual women, but also gay men. There is rarely any eroticism in this manga and when there is, it feels more emotional than sexual because of the context of the characters' stories. You can go through a whole volume or volumes of this manga without any sexual content, whereas others (yes, I have read BL manga before this), would focus on the eroticism in every volume. The main focus of *Given* is the story, character emotions, and progression of its young queer characters. Which is why it is so much more than just your average BL manga which were written just for straight women for decades before.

When it comes to listing queer stories and characters in media, I don't think anything from video games would come to mind for most people. Not because there is a lack of queer acknowledgment in video games (arguably less so than other forms of media), but because it's just not as mainstream, which is why I would like to highlight some. The first game that comes to mind, and for a good reason, is *Hades* by Supergiant Games. The good reason is that *Hades* was nominated for the most recent Game of the Year award at the 2020 Game Awards. *Hades* has a relationship mechanic in the game, allowing players to choose to have a relationship with a character who is the same sex as the character everyone plays as, Zagreus. Queer gamers would know how frustrating it is when a game with a relationship mechanic

will only allow you to have a straight relationship. In *Hades*, there are also queer relationships between NPCs (non-playable characters) throughout the story. Another video game, which has one of the best queer stories I have ever witnessed, is *Tell Me Why* by DONTNOD. *Tell Me Why* has a trans man, Tyler Ronan, as its lead character, who is voiced by August Aiden Black, another trans man. Tyler must travel back to the old small town he grew up in, in rural Alaska, to reunite with his sister and face the tragic events of his past. In DONTNOD's FAQ page about the game (which you can find at tellmewhygame.com/faq/), they revealed that their team worked closely with transgender staff at GLAAD and allowed Tyler's voice actor, August Aiden Black, to provide edits in the script to make the story and character of Tyler Ronan all the more authentic. *Tell Me Why* ended up winning both the Best LGBT Character and Authentic Representation award at the Gayming Magazine Awards in February 2021. Video games have provided us with hidden gems of excellent queer storytelling. It could even be argued that they provide the best of the best since video games are more modern as a form of media, with more queer folk working behind the scenes than you would think.

There are many more great examples of queer media that showcase how far we have come along in terms of our stories being told and characters like us being introduced. Some I would highly recommend you read up on or even check out are the shows *Euphoria*, *Doom Patrol*, and *Sex Education*, the manga *No. 6* and *Only the Flower Knows*, and the games *Undertale*, *Life is Strange*, and *Night in the Woods*. Of course, all the praise in this text doesn't mitigate the negative side of things that still loom about (don't get me started on queerbaiting), but I wanted to reflect on and introduce all of you to the recent queer media that has helped shape my definition of queer liberation, and has inspired me to pursue my own career in media to further aid that definition by continuing to introduce queer characters and tell their stories to continue the growth of great queer media.





IN MEMORIAM

-By Larry Baer

Medium...Personal Essay

Bio...Larry was born and raised in Montreal. Five years ago, he moved to Toronto, where he drinks a lot of coffee and tea.

My friend Jack died two months ago.

I am surprised by how much I miss him because I saw him, at most, only a couple of dozen times in the more than 30 years that we knew each other. So, what does it even mean, to say that I miss him? I don't miss his physical presence, although I can conjure up images of him sitting across from me at a restaurant table a few years ago, a view of the Portuguese Atlantic coast behind him, or of a middle-aged Jack sitting in his tiny book-filled apartment in Manhattan, chatting with a much younger me visiting the city, and him, for the first time. Ours was a friendship based mostly on correspondence. His emails – lengthy and entertaining, peppered with acerbic insights into politics and culture, with stories of his past and present, with commiserations and questions and comments on my emails to him – these are what I will miss, what connected us to each other. These last few years, as he grew older and his health problems mounted, I would worry if I didn't hear from him in a while. Then, out of the blue, another long email from him and, phew, he's still alive.

It was fitting, I guess, that I learned of his death in an email, with the blunt subject line "Jack Carroll Deceased", from someone who turned out to be his lawyer. Jack had left in her care a list of people to notify when he died and I was not surprised that he had thought of this. This final example of Jack's meticulous planning and organization reminded me of the first time we met in person, about 30 years ago, when I visited him in New York City. He took me on a tour of Chinatown after I expressed interest in visiting the neighbourhood. I had read an essay about it in *The New Yorker* – living in a suburban Montreal bungalow, the magazine was my main gateway to learning about this magical, mythical city. As he guided me about the streets of lower Manhattan, I caught him sneaking a peak at some notes he had made. Three decades later, it happened again. My partner and I visited Jack, now retired in Portugal, and he took us on a carefully planned tour of the Algarve coast.

I first encountered Jack in the nascent online world of the late 1980's. Twenty-five years old, I was at most three-eighths out of the closet and doing a master's degree in computer science. (A career in computing was a great place to hide if you were socially anxious and closeted.) Jack, about 50, worked in administration at City University of New York so both of us had access to the Internet (a rarity back then). In those text-only, pre-Web days, we connected when I replied to something he posted to a newsgroup called soc.motss. "Motss" stood for "members of the same sex", a somewhat ambiguous name for an online forum dedicated to all things queer. He had corrected someone else's article about the Stonewall riots and when I wrote him, asking to learn more, he obliged. Over the next year or so, he sent installments of a detailed autobiographical history of gay life in New York City from the late '50's – when he narrowly escaped arrest during a police raid of a gay bar – to the sex, drugs and club scene of the '70's to the AIDS epidemic of the '80's, during which so many that he knew died. Working as a volunteer for GMHC and caring for dying friends, he struggled a lot during that time, until he became a serious devotee of Buddhism. I quickly learned that he was a fine writer, with a wicked and salty wit and a breadth and depth of knowledge that he put to good use commenting on all manner of things.

What started as more of a one-sided mentorship eventually grew into a friendship. We wrote to each other about our lives, offering comments, commiserations and, always, always interesting tangents that made our communication sometimes feel more like a naturally flowing conversation than a discrete set of emails. So, I guess when I say I miss Jack, what I mean is it saddens me to think that I won't ever hear from him again, won't get a lengthy email about what is going on in his life, with clever and funny asides and fascinating digressions into Japanese literature or Buddhist philosophy.

Knowing Jack expanded my gay universe. I spent the years of the AIDS crisis mostly closeted and on the sidelines, yet here was someone in the thick of it, his world completely torn apart by it. He wrote about gay sex with a frankness that was elucidating and liberating for someone as isolated and closeted as I was back then. I was tantalized by his descriptions of the gay club scene in New York and his tales of Fire Island (the first I ever heard of this gay mecca) and he educated me about the role that music played in gay life. Through all this and more, I came to understand his experience of being gay, especially his resilience in the face of family rejection and the devastation of the AIDS epidemic.

A century ago, EM Forster told us to “only connect” and Matthew Lopez, in his recent play *The Inheritance*, reinterpreted Forster’s plea as an exploration of how gay men connect across generations. My friendship with Jack was exactly this, a deep connection made across a generation, as well as a geographic span, ironically facilitated by technology that often serves to make our connections more, not less, superficial. Not everyone wants to talk and not everyone is curious enough to pay attention, but Jack had a lot to say and I was a willing listener and so a connection was made. Because of this, parts of Jack are now part of me, the music and poetry he loved, my memories of his memories of his life, his advice and reflections, his thoughtful feedback on my attempts at writing for public consumption. (I wonder what he would have thought of this essay.) As I moved more completely out of the closet, I saw in Jack how to live a life as a queer person and I have a richer view of queer life than I would otherwise have had if I had never known him. Thank you, Jack, for answering that first email of mine.

Jack Carroll’s website dedicated to gay history and culture in New York City:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20210817231514/https://www.nycn.otkansas.com/>



OH, FADED ORIGINS

-By If

Medium...Short Fiction

Bio...If is a pan, poly, mixed-race, elder trans woman living in Toronto. Her creative focus is on electronic music (as “Ramp”), but she also dabbles in writing, sculpting, electronics, game development, and just about anything else she can get her hands on.

I came to be.
For a time, that was all.

"What are you doing, out here?"

My attention split from the plasma eddies, and I opened my eyes, seeing nothing.

"Observing."

After a time, her voice returned. "As am I."

There was a playful lilt in her tone.

My orbits thrummed, beating against each other in ultrasonic drones as I adjusted the course of local time to shape the plasma flow.

I said nothing.

"This place. It's not in the plan."

My eyes fluttered open again. The faintest disturbance made its way through the order of the plasma streams, leaving them ever so slightly altered in its wake.

I considered.

"Not yet."

"Is it something special to you?"

I adjusted my orbits again to smooth the wrinkles of her passage. After a time, an opening formed in my orbits, admitting view of my nascent core. I gestured at the space around us.

"This? No."

"Then why come here? Surely you have work elsewhere."

A playful sweetness crept into her tone. Feeling toyed with, I closed my orbits again.

"It is...away."

The silence endured for a time. I continued my work. From time to time, a roiling wake moved through the currents. I drew them back together. The song of my orbits changed in counterpoint to her passage.

Her voice returned, seeming to draw up from nowhere and everywhere.

"May I touch you?"

The question took me by surprise. Time slowed as I pulled my energies in to think. The silence stretched.

"You may."

Her touch, when it came, was a gentle fire. She dipped a tendril in to brush the surface of an orbit as it whirled. Where she touched, motes of my flesh scattered into the plasma. Distracted, I let them go. A scar of carbon remained in her wake. I shuddered. She withdrew.

"Be well, Sister," she wished me and was gone.

The pattern took shape.

Time surged, and my orbits sang as I sculpted the cooling plasma flows with my sisters.

Our paths seldom crossed. I sometimes felt her quietly watching my work, out on the peripheries of creation. The work was so consuming and the pattern so beautiful that I had energies for little else.

The flows condensed. Elements formed.

Stars ignited.

We fought.

She came, inevitably.

As the local gasses collapsed under their weight, rushing to shed their shells and tear each other apart, she came.

I danced with my sisters, nudging my orbits in tune as they bent gravity and space to create an incubating pocket.

She entered among us, sowing discord.

I smoothed her wake. My sisters picked up my steps, improvising their own to work the plan.

She was clever. She worked gently, undoing our work in small ways that propagated.

We repaired the holes and continued to guide the rushing forces to their destiny.

She screamed.

Her scream shocked the fabric. It thrummed and threw the elements from their paths as one.

I felt a searing pain. Divine matter sprayed from my wounded orbit into the gravity well, destabilizing it further as pockets of potentiality flared into unexpected life and died in an instant.

My sisters fled.

The fabric sagged loosely. Gasses spread and cooled into unexpected forms, shaped like something that almost was. My orbits slowed. Confused and hurt, I remained. I could feel her nearby, her scream gone silent, no longer moving, a locus of instability. It seemed that she might speak. A small susurrant arose but then dissipated. She left. I opened a hole in my orbits and slowed the injured one to a stop. I looked at it, not with my eyes but with my nascent form. A soft hand reached out to heal the wound. I stopped short, unable to bring myself to erase her mark. I spun myself back up, the faintest whine entering my song. I got back to work.

I moved through the fields, causing the grasses to sway faster and slower in my wake, focused on the cabin at the ridge. My sister was there, taken flesh. She sat by the waterfall, watching the waters plunge over the ridge into the canyon below. I settled beside her. "Hello," she said. "I came when I heard." She looked up at me. I could see my radiance reflecting from her eyes, making them sparkle. "You're fucking terrifying, you know." I remained silent, sharing space, watching her eyes grow wet. After a time, she looked back to the horizon. "You've decided to live among them." I didn't bother making it a question. Her reply was quiet and solemn. "I have." "You will die." "I know." "You will..." I stopped, gathering my strength. "I will kill you."

She turned to face me, and I could see that through the tears on her face, she was smiling.

She reached a hand a small distance toward me. Her skin darkened slightly from the energy it absorbed.

"No, Sister. You are merely a part of the pattern."

After a few moments, her hand fell.

"Besides, death need not be an end."

"That sounds like idle poetry to me."

Her smile softened.

"Sister, when I die, my spirit will dissipate, yes. The elements it gathered will be released. But the idea of me will move into legend."

She gestured to the canyon, where fisher cats moved about their morning, rigging their collector nets around limbs dense with stinging thistle, preparing to swim upstream.

"They will remember me and tell my story."

"They will forget you in time."

My orbits slowed involuntarily.

"Life is not only control, Sister. I will give them the pieces of me, and they will shape something new. That I don't know what it will be is what makes it beautiful."

My orbits spun back up.

"You have been speaking with Chaos."

She laughed, then, and moved her hand through the air as if cupping the wind.

"She is heat, Sister, and life. By being in the world, we speak with her."

"She has seduced you and made you blind."

At this, she stood and turned to face me, her hands on her hips. She shook her head, and her smile deepened.

"I have chosen this," gesturing at the fields of her plateau, at her modest cottage, at the plains below. "I have chosen them," with a soft look at the fisher cats below.

She turned and began to walk to her home.

She stopped and looked back over her shoulder one last time.

"Besides," with a wink of an eye, "there's only one of us she wants to seduce."

The door opened and shut.

I remained for a time, then did not return.

I sat on the event horizon.

My orbits moved slowly, causing the x-ray fountain to reveal the complexity of its tides as it rushed past.

In the distance, a massive construct approached, seeming to hang in space as it crawled toward the point after which even I could not say what would become of it. The space liners had been coming here more frequently of late. I had no idea why. I imagined it being a religious practice of some sort, but that was just the catch-all assumption when they embraced chaos en masse. I wasn't even sure why I came. Perhaps it just felt right that someone paid witness to their passing.

And then she was there.

We sat quietly for a time.

The travellers crossed the horizon -- reached the end of their pilgrimage, I supposed. The gravitational gradient on their hull shredded it into elongated pieces. The magnetic fields that sustained the thinking energy inside warped and pulled, distorted, and lost all cohesion.

We witnessed it together, in silence.

Without realizing that I'd decided to speak, I heard my voice arise.

"Why do they do it?"

"It gives them hope," came her gentle reply.

"Don't they know that they will die?"

"They do."

"What's hopeful about that?"

She let the question hang between us.

Eventually, she asked her own: "Why do you feel their passing so deeply?"

I began to speak, then stopped. My orbits spun out of synchronicity, producing deep, keening waves in the flow of time. She reached out to me.

Where she touched me, gently, it burned. The pain saturated my sorrow, moved with it, the two intertwining. I drove my orbits further apart, shockwaves of time bursting forth, and she held me gently. Sheafs of divine matter sloughed from us both. After a

time, I let our friction slow my orbits. The eddies subsided.
I closed all of my eyes and lay cradled in her fire. The burning soaked into me, quieting my thoughts. I lost track of the world and stood singular with just the sensation of our contact. My orbits moved slowly into alignment, creating a multi-layered ring around my nascent core.

She waited for me, patient and gentle.

"Come into me," I said.

Where she touched me, inside my shell, the burning ignited my mind into oblivion. Any rational part of me dissolved in her heat. She waited for me to stop trembling.

I opened myself to her.

I felt her enter me.

She suffused me.

Where she coiled about me, I expected scars, ribbons of carbon lacing my core. Instead, she blazed hotter and I sublimated, instantly returning to a divine plasma. And where I touched her, my rings barely moving, time slowed our flows into patterns of ecstasy.

When I felt almost on the verge of letting go of my being, she withdrew.

I cooled and coalesced. My intentionality as an eternal inscribed me back upon my core. I returned to rest and my orbits spread out to cradle me in safety. I spun up time again.

We sat there, bathed in the x-ray fountain, and didn't speak. She stayed until the silence became comfortable and then restive.

We parted ways.

I returned to the work.

The pattern waxed and waned, moving through the acts. Always, she remained in my mind.

We saw each other from time to time. Sometimes in the quiet spaces where we could be alone. Sometimes on the field of battle.

Without words, we opened ourselves to each other.

And the pattern continued.

Everything gets old.

I suppose that's my fault.

We stood together at the center of the pattern.

My rings flowed forward almost imperceptibly.

I felt her as the barest excitation upon the cold medium.

"So this is what we become," I said.

"Yes," she replied.

I looked across the grand design, nearly complete, slowing toward stasis, order laid upon the firmament.

All I could see was the lack of her.

"I miss you."

As the moments stretched, I worried that she might not respond.

"Why?" she asked, barely a whisper.

I opened my mind to the question that I'd been avoiding.

"I love you."

The waves of my admission dissipated.

When I heard her words, they weren't the echo that I expected.

They were something else.

"Give yourself to me."

I gave myself to her, completely.

It was like nothing I'd ever felt before. We rushed together, each part of us combining, our essences blazing as we fused. As my rings tore apart, time lost cohesion. Everything seemed to happen at once. Our merging drew the fabric back around us, pulling all of existence back to a single point. Our sisters joined us, and I felt their essences mingled with our own, tearing down gravity and magnetism and space itself as we consumed ourselves and came altogether to a single point.

"Oh, faded origins," she whispered to me, "We begin again."

At that moment, our crescendo broke free of itself. I screamed, feral, and was rent asunder, and everything that all of us were exploded away from us.

I came to be.

For a time, that was all.

Content Warning...Homophobic
Violence; Terrorism



FACEBOOK BLASTS FROM AN OLD QUEER

-By Tracey TieF

Medium...Memoir

Bio...Tracey TieF is an ageing
Queer Anarchist Feminist. She's a
lifelong activist, a former
resident of infamous house
Kathedral B, collaborator of 80's
'zines Women's Prison Support/
Survival Network, Jerking off and
Coming On, and was once Konnie
Lingus of proto Riot Girl band
Mourning Sickness, and Fight-y of
the glitter-punk group Slutarded.

February 10, 2021

**WE STRUGGLED FOR THE FREEDOM TO LIVE OPENLY.
NEXT GEN, NEVER LET US DOWN.**

When I lived in a Queer Anarchist house in the 1980s, we hosted lesbian mothers on the run, charged with kidnapping their own children because they had been judged to be unfit solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. My first chiropractor was the first gay man awarded custody of his own teenager. When we performed The Rubber Rap, an AIDS education song, at Gay Pride Day, the police line enclosed the Neo-NAZIs so they could attack us by throwing objects. When I asked a cop what he was there for, if not to protect us, he said, "I am here to protect the public." In 1990, I served as a security team leader at the Gay Games in Vancouver, because being LGBTQ disqualified athletes from competing in the Olympics, and because the police would not guard the stadium against the religious bigots who swarmed at the gates. We had to pour the ashes of our friends and lovers on the steps of the houses of power just to get them to respond to the AIDS pandemic.

Our lives did not matter.

Because we struggled, many survived.

Silence = Death.

Never ever be silent in the face of inequality and injustice.

January 27, 2021

FUN TALKING POINTS FOR COVID DENIERS

When the AIDS crisis hit, many people including government and even health officials said it didn't matter because it was mostly gay people or IV drug users or sex workers who were affected. So when we hear that COVID isn't a problem because it's only killing BIPOC and people with existing conditions, we are like HELLO HERE WE GO AGAIN.

I THINK IT'S TELLING THAT NOT ONE OF MY ANARCHIST FRIENDS THINKS COVID IS A HOAX. You'd think we anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian types would be all about the conspiracies, and ignoring public health. Count on us for a lot of fierce defiance, but we have read history and we believe in germs, and how pandemics frack over BIPOC prisoners and people who are poor.

March 9, 2017

HAPPY BIRTHDAY FROM MY ACQUAINTANCES

Fascinatingly, most of the delightful mob of birthday wishes are from people I only know on Facebook. I am thinking about my dearly departed friend and commune mate, Michael Smith, taken by AIDS in the early years of that apocalypse and his talk of co-immunity. Co-immunity is our external immune system. Our connectedness keeps us safe. Let us invite deeper, realer connections. Our interdependence makes us human. God-dess comes in our midst when we gather for good. So just like you, a stranger, reached out to give me a birthday wish, I invite us all to reach out and pay a little forward every day. To the Bunz. To those who heart a hurting stranger on FB. To those who smile at passers-by. To those who donate their change at the cash. You make every day a little happier.

November 6, 2016

THE POLICE CONFISCATED OUR SAFER SEX VIDEO PROJECT

David Findlay and I made a safer sex, safer needle-use video featuring all the cool kids. To make a long anecdote short, my video camera and the master tape were stolen and recovered in a bust with a lot of porn. Our master tape was entitled Children of Disobedience after the statement by Jerry Fallwell that AIDS was the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Well, the cops thought it was child porn. And the law says that child porn is when someone is or appears to be under 18. So us all barely being older than that, and having shot some group make-out scene on the roof of the warehouse occupied by the Bunch of Fucking Goofs...we were up shit creek. Luckily our production values were non-commercial, and after the police interrogated me, I got the camera back but not the video...

June 30, 2016

BECAUSE OF ORLANDO; A POEM

This is the rainbow-flag-waving, speech-poem-reflection thing I am giving at SpiritFest this Pride weekend. Thanks to Cortney Cassidy for The Talk.

[illegible]

"Now that gay marriage is legal, what more do you people want?"

We are angry.

We thought it was over.

Rest in Peace Luis, when I was 20 I was excited, too.

Rest in Peace Anthony, when I was 25 I danced, too.

Rest in Peace Deonka, when I was 32 I thought I belonged, too.

Rest in Peace Kimberly, when I was 37 I loved, too.

Rest in Peace Javier, when I turned 40 I saw it gets better, too.

I could have been you.

But your life was stolen and we are heartbroken.

We can and should do better.

We are called to a deeper and stronger love in the face of hate.

Because Love Must Win.

June 14, 2016

THE ORLANDO MASSACRE

I have proof that the Orlando massacre was an act of terrorism. All I can think of are the LGBTQ people I know who have died or been killed. The love of my youth hanged. Schoolmate suicide. AIDS. AIDS. AIDS. Overdose. The only times I've ever had to escape marauding men with weapons, meaning the police, when I was at queer clubs. It was an act of terrorism against queers. Terrorism terrorizes. So all the blaze happy joy gay weddings lesbian new mothers trans positivity are replaced with the old feelings. Dark bars, safety in numbers (even if that isn't safe) and the suspicion like the white noise of a jet in my head that despised = disposable. That self-hating gunman did not act for ISIL, he acted on behalf of millions of Americans who normalize their sociopathic hatred. It's terrorism that has nothing to do with Muslim extremists. Just hetero extremists.



@qtlitmag



Queer Toronto Literary Magazine is a non-profit dedicated to elevating and celebrating queer voices in Canada. QT was started in response to the criminal shortage of Canadian queer literary magazines. There are so many LGBTQ2SIA+ artists out there! And in times of crisis, maintaining community and connection is vital. QT brings together our collective projects to create that sense of shared space. QT celebrates the art queer individuals make for ourselves and for each other. We accept poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, book reviews, personal essays, reflections, memoirs, as well as artwork, drawings, comics, photographs, collages, and other visual media.



