

Y E M A Y A



SYDNEY UNIVERSITY LAW SOCIETY
JOURNAL OF GENDER & SEXUALITY



BY MILENA BOJOVIC

“ Women are the only exploited group in history to have been idealised into powerlessness. ”

- *Erica Jong*

The word 'yemaya' is written in a large, flowing, orange brushstroke font. The letters are connected and have a textured, hand-painted appearance. The 'y' has a long, sweeping tail that extends downwards and to the left. The 'a' at the end has a small, upward-pointing tail.

yemaya

COMPLICITY

Issue 8, 2013

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YEMAYA**Issue 8**

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RECOGNITION

The editors of *Yemaya* acknowledge the original owners and custodians of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

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CONTENTS

- iv Editorial
Christina White
- 1 When the Police Stand By: India's Hesitance to Prosecute Rape
Greta Ulbrick
- 8 The Double Bind on Women of Colour: Recognising a Racialised Rape Culture
Judy Zhu
- 12 The Bystander Effect: Complicity in Human Psychology
Nicole Doughty
- 17 Smiling Women
Sonia Diab
- 20 The Pathologisation of Diversity: Medical Treatment of Trans* and Intersex Individuals
Isabella Partridge
- 25 The Ban on Gay Blood in Australia: Stubborn or Sensible Policy?
Alistair Stephenson
- 29 Human Genitalia and the Vulgar Tongue
Lucinda Ower
- 31 "Masc 4 Masc": Performance, Patriarchy and the Impossible Ideal of Grindr
Daniel Farinha
- 36 Assumptions and Androgyny: A Personal Essay
Angela Street
- 39 Am I Even Pretty?
Humyara Mahbub
- 41 The Cult of Tolerance: Sexism and the Multicultural West
Calvin Chan
- 45 "Where the Wild Roses Grow": Sexual Violence in the Work of Nick Cave
John-Ernest Dinamarca
- 50 Pop Feminists?
Mikaela Bartels
- 51 "Is Rob Gay?": The Role of Gossip Magazines in Reinforcing Normative Sexuality
Lucy Watson
- 57 Selected Poems
Alexander Cigana
- 60 A Fair Share
Shu Ran Michael Li
- 64 Closing Artworks
Milena Bojovic
- 66 Reference List

ORIGIN OF THE JOURNAL'S NAME

by Marianna Leishman

Yemaya is the African-Yoruban, Afro-Brasilian and Afro-Caribbean Goddess of the Ocean, whose waters broke and created a flood that created the oceans. While she can be destructive and violent, Yemaya is primarily known for her compassion, protection and water magic. In Cuba, she is referred to as Yemaya Olokun, who can only be seen in dreams, and her name is a contraction of Yey Omo Eja: “Mother Whose Children are the Fish”. Canonised as the Virgin Mary, and appearing as river goddess Emanjah in Trinidad, Yemaya rules the sea, the moon, dreams, secrets, wisdom, fresh water and the collective unconscious. In Brazil, crowds gather on the beach of Bahia to celebrate Candalaria: a Candomble ceremony on 31 December. Candles are lit on the beach while votive boats made from flowers and letters are thrown into the sea for Yemaya to wash away their sorrows.

EDITORIAL: COMPLICITY

In a legal context, an individual is complicit in a crime if they are aware of its occurrence but fail to report it, thereby effectively enabling the crime to occur. This issue of *Yemaya* critically analyses contemporary ways of thinking, and asks: how are we each complicit in the harms brought about by social prejudices? If we can identify a disturbing lack of women in positions of power, an ongoing wage gap, and a pervasive rape culture, then we must ask: how are misogynistic attitudes being perpetuated?

Today, many people seem to think that feminism is no longer needed. Even in this educated environment, there is widespread apathy and a tendency to assume that rights at law are sufficient. This is concerning because the right to vote is no guarantee of equality. We should not be content with the fact that men can no longer own us as property when our bodies are still controlled by society's values. Ongoing prejudices are deeply embedded in the cultures and norms around us. Australia is still not used to the idea of women in power, and Julia Gillard was the victim of vicious gender discrimination. Yet when she dared to point this out, she was accused of 'playing the gender card'. If individuals choose to remain passive and refuse to acknowledge this persistent sexism, they are complicit in its lingering potency.

Society as a whole can be complicit in a crime by refusing to prevent or prosecute certain behaviour. Taking sexual violence in India as a case study, Greta Ulbrick exposes widespread responsibility for a culture of impunity for rapists. Applying an intersectional lens to rape culture, Judy Zhu highlights how women of colour are doubly bound by behavioural expectations. Any feminist who ignores the lingering salience of race is willfully blind to complex inequities around us. In the face of such disturbing apathy, why are observers so inert? An observer's hesitance to act when part of a group has been documented in psychology, and Nicole Doughty explores this so called 'bystander effect'.

Most people in the Western world trust the authority of the medical profession, but its understanding of what is 'normal' is historically contingent on, and determined by, discourses of social reality. Isabella Partridge and Alistair Stephenson challenge the revered institution of knowledge to show how it acts to reinforce traditional values, such as a strict gender binary, and outdated attitudes to sexual health. Stigma around LGBT sexualities is only heightened by continuing beliefs in biological determinism.

Turning then to the individual, our contributors explore individual responsibility for how we present ourselves in order to conform to gender expectations. Daniel Farinha evaluates Grindr profiles, and argues that hyper-masculinity is an attempt by gay men to retain a privileged position in the patriarchy. Angela Street describes her personal experience with lesbian stereotypes and the power of sartorial choices. Further considering the individual-group dynamic, Calvin Chan discusses the ethics of multiculturalism. In a bold critique of moral relativism, he argues that cultures should only be tolerated insofar as they represent each individuals' desires.

A significant marker of any culture is its media, and the final articles investigate the media's responsibility for preserving double standards for men and women. In the year of 'Yeezus' and 'Blurred Lines', we need no reminder of society's apathy to sexism in music, but how far should artistic license extend? John-Ernest Dinamarca investigates the fine line between transgressive art and misogyny, perhaps leaving you with an unsettling sense of guilt for singing along to some of Nick Cave's songs. Moving to print media, Lucy Watson argues that gossip magazines are culpable for enforcing traditional values, by depicting sexual behaviour as scandalous if it is not heterosexual or monogamous.

Our contributors come from different faculties across the University of Sydney, which has made this issue truly interdisciplinary and eclectic. I would like to thank Judy Zhu for committing her creativity and time to this journal, making it the most beautiful publication of the year. Also, to the editorial board for their dedication, as well as our talented contributors. It is inspiring to have such engaged peers who think critically about surrounding injustices and refuse to stand idly by.

Christina White
Editor-in-Chief

*when the
police
stand by*

INDIA'S HESITANCE TO PROSECUTE RAPE

by Greta Ulbrick

In December 2012, the brutal gang rape of a young woman on a Delhi bus made newspaper headlines around the world. The physical therapy student had been travelling home from a screening of the newly released movie *'Life of Pi'* with a male friend when six men on the young woman's bus attacked. All six men, including the driver, raped the woman.¹ She died of multiple organ failure thirteen days after the incident, having been thrown from the vehicle and left to bleed in the dirt.² Her companion, severely beaten when he attempted to intervene, was forced to witness the gruesome scene unfold in total helplessness.

eye. Falerio found that 'Of the more than 600 rape cases reported in Delhi in 2012, only one led to a conviction.'³

Despite the apparent absence of a collective will to see rape punished, the high-profile Delhi bus rape incident clearly struck a chord with Indian men and women. After all, the occurrence of rape is so common in India that a measure of ambivalence regarding sexual violence would be unsurprising. Why then, did the Indian public react so strongly to the Delhi bus rape?

“This complicity is deep-rooted in a society unwilling to allow women a place and a voice in the public sphere”

Following the crime, large-scale anti-rape protests erupted and brought parts of the city to a standstill. The world looked on as India's mothers and daughters filled the streets to march on behalf of a young woman whose suffering had taken on symbolic value. Her experience became representative of India's thousands of rape victims, silenced in a society lacking both the institutional mechanisms and the will to punish these crimes.

In the months since the attack, attention has shifted to the role of the Indian police force in facilitating a culture of impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence. Encouragingly, the aftermath of the Delhi rape incident has seen Indian women come forward and communicate their frustration with a police system that would rather ignore their reports of rape than prosecute the individuals responsible. Although women across the globe grapple with accusations of 'crying rape' in reporting incidents of sexual assault to police, the subordinate status of women in India has seen this problem magnified. Indian writer and reporter Sonia Falerio's *New York Times* opinion piece provides a chilling summary of the extent to which India's justice system turns a blind

From the outset, the victim's class was particularly important. She came from an educated middle class background, and it was primarily college women that orchestrated the street protests.⁴ This suggests that the young woman's peers could not distance themselves from the incident, nor could they see themselves as unlikely victims of attack.

Moreover, the particularly gruesome brand of cruelty to which the Delhi bus rape victim was subjected undoubtedly fuelled the revulsion and anger that led to cries for capital punishment. The abhorrent and degrading behaviour of the six attackers left no room for narratives of excuse, victim-blaming, or other such attempts to justify the perpetrators' acts. That said, as the bloodlust surrounding calls for the rapists to receive sentences of capital punishment began to subside, it remained unclear whether the Delhi bus rape would be enough to force a proper reevaluation of India's ingrained tolerance of sexual assault.

The widespread public protests criticised lenient sentences for rapists. In response, the Indian government introduced stringent new laws introducing harsher penalties for the

offence of rape earlier this year.⁵ However, commentators have expressed doubts about the impact of such measures given persistent apathy in the police force. The laws will have little effect if police continue to refuse to take victims of sexual assault seriously. Recent press coverage suggests that greater scrutiny has done little to change this culture in Delhi's police force. A recent rape incident in Delhi involving a five-year-old girl saw the victim's parents ignored by police when they reported their daughter missing, and then offered a bribe to keep the incident quiet.⁶ Repeated accounts of police hindering rather than facilitating rape investigations has only added weight to the scepticism expressed by those trying to engage in police reform.

“Two hundred and sixty Indian politicians have been charged with sexual assaults against women”

In recognition of the need to fundamentally alter the dismissive attitudes of police towards claims of sexual assault, the new rape laws also impose a two-year jail sentence on police that fail to record complaints of rape.⁷ However, there is clearly a disconnect between the passage of legislative reforms at the top levels of Indian government and the implementation of those changes by law enforcement authorities on a day-to-day basis. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), a non-government organisation ‘working for the practical realisation of human rights in countries of the Commonwealth’⁸, has expressed doubt as to whether the law has been successful in promoting a change of attitude in police institutions. Similarly, the former director-general of police in the state of Haryana, Vikash Narain Rai, expressed doubt that reforming the police system would succeed unless accompanied by “judicial reforms, an overhaul of correctional services and

real empowerment of society.”⁹ The culture of corruption in law enforcement is also exacerbated by the poor pay and limited opportunities for advancement within police institutions, which disincentivises the investigation of crimes against women unlikely to offer bribes.¹⁰ Police departments are understaffed and under-resourced, with the ratio of police officers to citizens the second-lowest of fifty nations ranked by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.¹¹

If India is to see the lot of women improve, those institutions entrusted with protecting them from violent crime must stop being complicit in their abuse. This complicity is deep-rooted in a society unwilling to allow women a place and a voice in the public sphere. Victim-blaming narratives attributing rape to the allegedly risky behaviour or provocative clothing of the woman assaulted, and attempts to excuse and dismiss rape as a manifestation of the ‘natural urges’ of young Indian men, continue to have currency in political and social debate. Defence lawyer Manohar Lal Sharma, representing three of the six men charged in the Delhi bus rape, made clear his stance on women inviting rape in his inflammatory comment to the press; that “I have not seen a single incident or example of rape with a respected lady.”¹²

Victim-blaming was also evident in an incident in February 2012. After a young woman was gang-raped leaving a nightclub in Kolkata, the chief minister of West Bengal accused the victim of lying in an attempt to discredit the government.¹³ In its discussion of the Kolkata story, *The Economist* revealed that ‘the policewoman who then tracked down the perpetrators was herself punished, being transferred to an unpopular post.’¹⁴ The Kolkata woman herself has since spoken out to international media, describing the discrimination and isolation she now faces as a known rape victim. Since reporting the attack she is no stranger to snide remarks, and she is shunned by landlords and future employers who quickly become uneasy when they discover her identity.¹⁵ These examples



PHOTOGRAPHS: GRETA ULBRICK



PHOTOGRAPHS: GRETA ULBRICK

give insight into a worrying culture that shames and punishes those who try to take action against sexual violence.

Unfortunately, this willingness to turn a blind eye to rape is present in every level of Indian society. The culture of impunity surrounding rape also infiltrates the upper echelons of India's political life. Politicians routinely trivialise the issue of rape and joke about its victims. In a recent regional debate about a rape victim compensation policy, former minister Anisur Rehman asked a fellow female politician "what her fee will be" if she was raped.¹⁶ The Association for Democratic Reform in India provides some staggering statistics; not only are six sitting members of parliament currently facing charges of rape, but two hundred and sixty Indian politicians have been charged with sexual assaults against women.¹⁷ For the majority, the crime of sexual assault has little bearing on their perceived eligibility or capacity to take public office. If even politicians, typically subject to intense public scrutiny, are not forced to account for allegations of sexual abuse, it is hardly surprising that other Indian men remain unconcerned about the likelihood of a criminal conviction. Such statistics also point to India's culture of official corruption, where a man's wealth and status will guarantee him a favourable outcome in any police investigation.¹⁸

Another key concern is the complete disempowerment of women in India's more isolated communities. These women are powerless not just in the aftermath of an attack, but also in preventing sexual violence in the first place. Simon Denyer's *Washington Post* article explains how women in India's rural areas face insurmountable challenges in seeking to adequately protect themselves from sexual assault.¹⁹ Modern notions of gender equality that have entered public discourse in the urban middle-class communities of Delhi and Mumbai remain largely unrecognised in India's impoverished villages. Thus, women in rural regions face gender discrimination in terms of access to education, employment

opportunities and participation in public life. In the northern state of Rajasthan, a predominantly agricultural region, only fifty-three per cent of women are literate.²⁰ Denyer's article clarifies that brutal rapes 'draw scarcely any attention, let alone outrage'²¹ in rural towns because of the lack of respect accorded women and the rigid preservation of traditional patriarchal structures. Women who challenge the status quo, by having 'romantic relationships' before marriage or by entering the workforce, become targets of sexual abuse. Rape is thus used as a behaviour correcting tool, and justified through victim-blaming narratives. Such attitudes are deeply entrenched in local responses to heinous crimes and continue to propagate in isolated and patriarchal communities.

"The laws will have little effect if police continue to refuse to take victims of sexual assault seriously"

This culture of victim-blaming actively deters rape victims and their families from coming forward to report crimes, because their communities will not support their claims. Instead, victims are often accused of ruining the futures of young men.²² Claims mirroring those made about the complicity of the Delhi police in allowing rapists to walk free are reiterated in rural areas. Police are accused of intentionally transcribing victims' statements incorrectly and avoid charging perpetrators from upper-caste families.²³ This demonstrates how rape is turned into a fabrication if it runs against the grain of other social values, like India's caste hierarchy. Before victims can contend with those institutions that turn a blind eye to sexual violence, women must first mount a challenge to the attitude of misogyny embedded in the social and cultural fabric of their traditional communities. Women's bodies are placed on the bottom rung of India's ladder of values.

Evidently, a brief investigation of the complexities surrounding incidences of sexual assault in India reveals a pattern of procedural injustices rather than successful rape convictions, and a society that continues to attribute responsibility for sexual violence to its victims instead of its perpetrators. Nonetheless, the Delhi bus rape acted as a poignant reminder to the world of a frighteningly common fate shared by hundreds of thousands of Indian women. In doing so, the incident reinvigorated a dialogue between India's citizens and government institutions about the attitude of complicity that has permeated police process in responding to rape. Given the problems are so deeply entrenched in the social fabric of the country, change must start with a discussion of the role of women in India and their right to bodily autonomy.



*the double
bind on
women
of colour*

RECOGNISING A RACIALIZED
RAPE CULTURE

by Judy Zhu

Introduction

In high profile rape cases, society scrutinises every aspect of the victim. Their personal history, sexual past, appearance and credibility are discussed in excruciating detail by the media. As the media demonstrates a host of assumptions about ‘legitimate victims’, this discourse provides a fruitful site to study cultural assumptions about gender and race which act as intersectional lines of oppression. This essay will take the Dominique Strauss-Kahn rape trial as a case study to critically examine the assumptions and norms that govern socio-cultural narratives of rape. In particular it will look at the media’s portrayal of Nafissatou Diallo, the hotel employee who was the black female victim at the centre of the case. It will seek to deconstruct the common media assumptions made about her, arguing that these assumptions are located within an intersectional “matrix of oppression”¹. The bodies of black women are both gendered and racialised, creating a “multiple jeopardy”² of gender and race where black women face a double bind of social regulation.

‘Legitimate Victims’ and Ideal Femininity

Rape culture functions by creating socially accepted scripts of what a ‘real rape’ is, and thereby excluding other incidents that do not fit this mould. The traditional script of the male aggressor and passive female reinforces hegemonic configurations of consent and non-consent.³ The sum effect of such male/female oppositional dichotomies is that the burden lies on women to say no.⁴ As such, rape victims are often questioned as having ‘asked for it’ or consented in some way. This is enforced by the way society judges them against predetermined standards of what makes a ‘good’ victim.

This in turn ties into gender norms that discipline accepted and unaccepted modes of being female. Victims are more likely to be perceived to have had a hand in their own rape, or consented to the rape, if

they deviate from accepted gender roles and constructions of ideal femininity. For example, the consumption of alcohol or perceived ‘promiscuity’ feeds into victim-blaming myths, causing the victim’s story to be questioned.⁵

“Anyone who believes we inhabit a post-racial society needs to open their eyes to intersectional oppression”

Racialising Rape

This essay takes an intersectional approach to rape culture, locating it within a “mutually constitutive” system of social categories.⁶ Because black women do not experience gender oppression the same way white women do⁷ Their experiences of sexual violence are therefore necessarily racialised as well as gendered. Indeed, if we continue the vein of discussion regarding docile bodies and discipline, black women face the two-fold enactment of disciplinary practices – not only are they expected to conform to ideals of femininity, but this mode of femininity is predicated on an institutionalised privileging of whiteness and colonial discourse.⁸

One of the most pertinent ways in which race and gender intersect in rape culture is the way that colonial discourse about black female sexuality intersects with the standards of ‘good girl’ behaviour imposed upon women as a whole. The colonial history of America in regards to slavery propagated stereotypes labelling black women as promiscuous.⁹ During the era of American slavery, the rape of female slaves was often dismissed by way of assumptions about their supposed “sexual nature”¹⁰ purporting them to be “un-rapeable”.¹¹ The legacy of these stereotypes is still embedded in social consciousness, and thus they still affect black female victims of sexual violence. White-male-on-black-female rape is largely unreported on in mainstream

media,¹² whilst black-male-on-white-female sexual violence receives a huge amount of attention in the media.¹³

Furthermore, it is noticeable that many high profile cases involving a white male perpetrator (or perpetrators) and a black female victim have resulted in accusations of “false rape claims” – see, for example, the Duke Lacrosse case, the Megan Williams case, or the Mike Tyson case. The continued existence of such racial hierarchies means that black women face a ‘multiple jeopardy’ application of disciplinary standards; when they are being already questioned by virtue of rape culture, they are faced with further scrutiny due to their race.

“This mode of femininity is predicated on an institutionalised privileging of whiteness & colonial discourse”

“She was a Hooker”

“Dominique Strauss-Kahn’s accuser wasn’t just a girl working at a hotel -- she was a working girl,”¹⁴ wrote the *New York Post*, citing an unnamed source who alleged that Diallo received disproportionately high tips. This opening line was followed up with other phrases such as “[she did] double duty as a prostitute” and “hotel hooker.”¹⁵ In accordance with the Madonna-whore dichotomy that informs much of the rhetoric of ‘legitimate’ victims versus women who supposedly ‘asked for it’, this alleged expression of sexuality (regardless of its veracity – indeed, Diallo later sued the *New York Post* for defamation) was clearly framed in a way to suggest that it affected her credibility.

As outlined above, cultural narratives about black female sexuality mean that comments about Diallo’s alleged status as a sex worker

cannot be viewed as taking place in a vacuum, but rather must be located within hegemonic definitions of what it means to be black and female in America. This is particularly relevant for the consideration of how she was framed as a “hooker” by the media, as such framing goes to the notion of ‘racial priming’¹⁶ – where as opposed to explicitly referencing race, there are ‘codes’ that recollect implicit racial messages, regardless of whether the viewer is cognisant of this. As such, regardless of whether the *New York Post* intended to draw on these cultural stereotypes, the fact that they exist and are prevalent enough in America that “the scene of a black woman being raped by a white man is one that remains unspeakable in popular culture”¹⁷ means that we cannot remove their statements from this historical and social context. Such covert racism continues to this day, meaning Diallo was subject to a two-fold enacting of disciplinary structures.

‘Playing the Race Card’

Despite the fact that race remains a key locus of meaning, identity and oppression, people who point this out are often accused of exploiting race for their own benefit. For instance, after Diallo’s lawyer said “If it weren’t for race, if it weren’t for class, do you think [she] would be treated this way?” mainstream newspapers levelled this accusation; *The Telegraph* suggested her lawyer was painting her as a “victim of a racial conspiracy” and the *New York Post* claimed she was “playing the race card”.¹⁸ This shows that people of colour who bring up the lingering spectre of race have their credibility questioned even further.¹⁹ The notion of a ‘post-racial’ society feeds into this by fuelling the assumption that race is no longer an issue and thus claims of racism are ‘fabricated’.

Moreover, the media used Diallo’s personal history to embolden the claim she was lying for personal gain. News stories focused on questions about her asylum application

repeatedly stressing that she “lied” about a gang-rape before coming to America – see, for example, the *Reuters* piece titled “Lies told by DSK accuser”.²⁰ Rape victims’ pasts are scrutinised endlessly and any failings are taken to be indications of untrustworthiness. When Diallo’s lawyer questioned the issue of race, that was in itself seen to indicate that her story lacked veracity. The media implied she was only drawing on a ‘race card’ because she lacked other options, ignoring the presence of real racism in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, the double bind of race and gender acts to restrict not just behaviour, but also the individual’s freedom to discuss their experiences.

The Privileging of White Beauty

While it has been generally accepted in academia that rape is actually predicated on power, media coverage of sexual assaults has a tendency to focus disproportionately on the attractiveness of the victim, given the myths about how rape is based on sexual desire. This is evidenced in *Newsweek*’s coverage, where they wrote “[Diallo] is not glamorous,” going on at length to describe how she was “considerably taller than Strauss-Kahn, and [had] a sturdy build” and “her brown skin [was] pitted with... faint acne scars”.²¹

“The Telegraph suggested her lawyer was painting her as a ‘victim of a racial conspiracy”

This is particularly relevant to the experiences of women of colour, as it provides a window into how cultural narratives of attractiveness affect their experience of rape culture. Discussion of the imposition of beauty standards on women by white feminists often neglects the fact that beauty in the West carries with it an embedded assumption of whiteness²² and thus for black women and other women of colour, they are automatically excluded from this idealised construction of

femininity.²³ By virtue of this exclusion, there exists the implication that non-whiteness is somehow ‘less attractive’. This is borne out in any number of mediated images – see, for example, the recent Dove ads, which reinforced the idea that purportedly ‘white’ traits such as blue eyes are more attractive. These attitudes help entrench Eurocentric constructions of beauty, subjugating women of colour to a white-centric femininity.

As a result, the bodies of women of colour are disciplined not only by patriarchal images of the ideal female body, but also by racial hierarchies. Consequently, the way in which rape culture suggests a link women’s attractiveness and their veracity is, for women of colour, even more problematic. This is borne out by how, as a black woman, Diallo is found to further deviate from the norms of the ‘perfect’ victim due to perceived levels of attractiveness that are in turn shaped by her race, with some of the commentary carrying this underlying implication.

Conclusion

Gender and race are inescapable parts of life for women of colour. The dynamics of rape culture in America show that victims are judged against standards of ‘real’ rape victims, which are expected to be white, passive women devoid of sexuality. The media’s portrayal of Nafissatou Diallo shows how racialised cultural assumptions act to restrict women of colour, and punish them when they try to act outside the prescriptive norms. Those behavioural standards for black women are applied vigorously, demonstrating the cultural legacy of colonialism and patriarchy. Anyone who believes we inhabit a post-racial society needs to open their eyes to intersectional oppression.



*the bystander
effect*

COMPLICITY IN
HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

by Nicole Doughty

Introduction

In 1964 a woman named Kitty Genovese was raped and murdered in New York, in an attack that was reported to have been at least partially witnessed by at least thirty-eight people, none of whom raised the alarm. According to later reports,¹ the original story of Genovese's murder was hugely exaggerated by the media. There were not thirty-eight eyewitnesses, the police were contacted at least once during the attack, and many of the bystanders who overheard the attack could not actually see the event. However, the exaggerated version of the story lives on in lectures and textbooks because it serves as a dramatic example for students of the horrors that can be perpetuated when individuals allow themselves to become bystanders, de facto accessories to the crimes themselves.

The incident also served as a trigger for the pioneering psychological research work conducted by psychologists John Darley and Bibb Latané, which led to the discovery of what is now called the 'bystander effect'. The bystander effect is where, paradoxically, the more bystanders there are in any given crisis, the less likely it is that someone will actually help any victims, since everyone assumes that somebody else will deal with the problem instead of them. This is one of the most pervasive and disturbing examples of complicity in human psychology.

“Research has shown that it is frighteningly easy to induce unempathetic reactions in ‘normal’ people”

The Power of Situational Factors

Research carried out in the last four decades has shown that there are a range of factors which help create the bystander effect. This means that the simplistic explanation

developed by the media for the Genovese attack – that New Yorkers were apathetic and uncaring – was false. Bystander inaction is a reflection of situational and individual factors, not just the underlying personality traits of any particular bystander.² Some of these situational factors include the size of the group of bystanders,³ time pressures on those individual bystanders,⁴ and the victim's characteristics.⁵

Most social psychology research into the effect is conducted by having the participants turn up to a university experiment (usually for a small payment, or course credit) under the mistaken assumption that they are participating in research into an entirely different area. Then, a scenario is staged in which one of the 'participants' (in reality, an insider into the research – referred to in psychology research as the 'confederate') will fake some kind of medical emergency. Researchers then observe the likelihood that the real participants will help the 'victim', and how the likelihood changes based on the number of other participants in the room.⁶

Group size has always been the most important factor in determining whether or not bystanders will assist an individual. In Darley's 1968 experiments, the confederate faked an epileptic fit in the experiment room in two different scenarios: in one, there was only one other genuine participant, and in the other, there were five genuine participants. When the genuine participant was in the room alone with the epileptic fit victim, they all sought assistance. In contrast, when the participants were in a group of six, only 62% sought help.

Time pressures also have a significant impact on whether bystanders stop to assist a victim. In Darley and Batson's 1973 studies,⁷ it was found that 63% of those participants who were not in a hurry stopped to assist a sick person on their way to another building, compared to 10% of those who were pushed for time. Personality variables, as measured before the experiment, were not in any way

linked to the likelihood of helping the sick person. This particular experiment was laced in irony, as the participants were students at Princeton Theological Seminary who were told that they needed to deliver a lecture on the Good Samaritan. Many of these aspiring priests and nuns rushed past a sick person huddled on the ground, and in several cases, participants actually stepped over the sick person who was lying on the walkway.⁸

The characteristics of the victim will also influence whether assistance is received from bystanders. Researchers have shown that we are more likely to help those with whom we feel some sort of association, even if the association is only superficial or temporary.⁹ This is because we rely on a mental shortcut (known as 'heuristics' in psychology) that says we should agree with requests from people whom we like, or with whom we have similarities. In one experiment conducted in 2005, it was found that bystanders were more likely to help an injured person if that person was wearing a football jersey of a team the bystander liked (as opposed to a team the bystander did not like).¹⁰ However, when their shared identity as football fans was emphasised instead, victims wearing a football jersey were more likely to be helped (regardless of which jersey they wore) when compared to a person just wearing a plain shirt. This demonstrates that even in a situation where someone is plainly in need of help, we are still unlikely to help them if we perceive them as 'others'.

The Universality of the Effect

One consistent factor to emerge throughout the last four decades of research, is that the bystander effect is universal. No matter how much an individual insists 'I would help in that situation!' – a thought that has probably occurred to you whilst reading this article – the overwhelming odds are that they wouldn't. Research has shown that it is frighteningly easy to induce unempathetic reactions in normal people.¹¹ The above experiments demonstrate the vastly differing

behaviours that can be provoked simply by altering situational variables, and provide a strong indication that bystander inaction is influenced primarily by situational forces, rather than people of inherently "evil" dispositions.

The reason that many of us would prefer to point to personality traits rather than situational factors, is the result of another common psychological effect known as the 'fundamental attribution error'.¹² This theory asserts that people tend to overlook the power of a situation and put too much emphasis on disposition. In Milgram's infamous obedience experiments, 65% of participants administered what they thought were electric shocks to another participant in the next room, to the point where many believed they were shocking an unconscious or dead body (note: there was in fact no participant in the next room).¹³ Yet prior to the experiments being conducted, outside observers estimated that only 1% of participants would do so.¹⁴ This incredible underestimation reveals the inability of observers to comprehend the situational influences on behaviour, preferring to centre the blame on participants' imagined personal deficiencies.¹⁵

Another infamous experiment from the 1970s – a golden age for highly unethical yet informative psychological research – is Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment, in which a group of outwardly normal young men were quickly transformed into either masochistic guards or victimised prisoners simply because of a role they were asked to fill.¹⁶ The creation of a simulated prison revealed that many human atrocities are the fault of 'bad soil', as opposed to so-called 'bad seeds', where blame is usually laid.¹⁷ The experiment, which was scheduled to last two weeks but was cancelled after merely six days due to escalating abuse and sadism by the 'prison guards' and signs of psychological trauma being exhibited by the 'prisoners', demonstrated how quickly and completely one's identity as a human being can be subsumed in a certain social

role that dictates behaviour. It also provided further evidence for the level of control that situations and social perceptions can exert over individuals.¹⁸

Standing By Domestic Violence

A stark example of the way the bystander effect manifests in modern Australian society is in the treatment of the issue of domestic violence. This is not a gender neutral issue by any stretch, given that women are the primary targets of abuse and men comprise the large majority of perpetrators.¹⁹ A recent report by the World Health Organisation found that violence against women had reached “a global health problem of epidemic proportions.”²⁰ Domestic violence continues to occur at alarming rates and the widely-held belief that what happens in someone else’s home is none of our business could be seen as a manifestation of the bystander effect. Whilst we might empathise with its victims in an abstract sense, society often apportions blame to victims to differentiate them from ‘the rest of us’. By somehow imagining that our superior judgment or reasoning has stopped us from becoming victims – instead of challenging a culture that condones violence against women – we all become complicit in such violence. We become bystanders ourselves.

Fighting the Bystander Effect

Milgram’s abovementioned obedience research is widely cited as evidence that good people can be easily persuaded into performing cruel actions. Social psychology often emphasises the power of the situation over the individual. However, there is equally striking evidence that many people refuse to perform such actions, even under unrelenting authoritarian commands, if their victim is personalised – that is, if they are forced to inflict the electric shocks by direct personal action rather than remotely

(remembering that in the original experiments, the ‘participant’ was in the next room).²¹

Studies have shown that bystanders are certainly capable of breaking the norm. In a large study of schoolchildren, it was found that vulnerable children were less likely to be victimised in classrooms when other children defended them.²² In the real world, cases of remarkable moral courage occur in which the individual triumphs over situational pressures to perform good deeds. In fact Ervin Staub, a leading researcher into the bystander effect, was heavily influenced by his childhood experiences in which he was saved from the Holocaust by his family’s maid, a Christian woman who risked her life to shelter Staub and his sister.²³

How then is the bystander effect to be overcome? Researchers have identified some actions a victim can take to break the bystander effect. One such action is to make the situation clear to witnesses, another is to target a specific person for help. These tactics help to overcome the two biggest obstacles to intervention: they prevent bystanders from concluding that there is no real emergency, and from thinking that somebody else will help.²⁴ The point these researchers make is that more people need to learn about the pressures that can cause the bystander effect, rather than automatically assuming that they would behave in an altruistic and helpful way.²⁵

Conclusion

It is important to remember that the bystander effect exists for a reason. It may be a cliché, but humans are inherently social creatures, and we take many of our cues for appropriate and safe behaviour from the actions of those around us. This explains why so many people are reluctant to intervene – if no one

“Where someone is plainly in need of help, we are still unlikely to help them if we perceive them as ‘others’”

else is stepping in, their choice to speak up may cause them to become uncomfortably involved, particularly if the altercation is a physical one. However these assumptions are not always a realistic excuse for being a passive bystander and failing to help others.

The complicity inherent in the bystander effect can have severe consequences. Leaving aside the extreme (and likely unrelatable) examples of failing to assist a murder victim screaming for help, or pointing out to the Gestapo the location of hiding spots, sometimes everyday encounters can prompt us, middle class Sydneysiders, to slip into the bystander role. Ignoring a woman almost passing out with intoxication on the train, failing to look for the nearby parents of a toddler walking perilously close to the road, ignoring a man verbally intimidating his girlfriend at a dinner party, or turning a blind eye to offensive jokes and comments in a social setting, are surely familiar scenes for many of us.

Most of the time, it is more than likely we 'did' nothing, and that nothing came of our failure to intervene, but we must question our omissions. On a wider scale it's obvious that the bystander effect can cause normal people to be directly linked to horrific acts. As C.P. Snow rightly pointed out, "more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been in the name of rebellion".²⁶ The ability to resist becoming a complicit bystander lies within every individual.

Smiling Women

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

by Sonia Diab

We can talk about our complicity in the formation of stereotypes of women, cultures, religions, and socio-economic statuses, but how can we display this flaw in society? Here are two women. Two smiling women. You do not know who they are, or what their story is. You do not know their life goals or views on politics. You have absolutely no clue about them just by looking at them. And this is the way that it should be. They are smiling humans. The fact that we experience confusion, frustration and difficulty in understanding people without a stereotype seems proof of our 'need' as individuals to be able to typecast everyone, and everything on first glance. This painting is of two smiling women, and nothing more.





Untitled

Ink, watercolour and pencil

BY JUDY ZHU

the pathologisation of diversity

MEDICAL TREATMENT OF TRANS*
AND INTERSEX INDIVIDUALS

by Isabella Partridge

Introduction

The gender binary is arguably the most entrenched of all social divisions.¹ According to prevailing understandings of sex and gender, humans can only be socially intelligible if they present a stable physical sex expressed through a corresponding gender identity.² This article argues that current medical responses to ‘gender variance’ are complicit in ensuring continuing investments in this binary. As these responses are predominantly created by the medical field rather than derived from the voices of gender variant individuals themselves, they fail to capture the subtleties of many people’s experiences.³ Instead, they perpetuate certain ‘truths’ about sexed embodiment and subjective gender identity development. For the purposes of this article, the term ‘gender variant’ refers to trans* and intersex individuals. This article will examine historical and modern responses to such gender variance, particularly the pathologisation of transsexuality and early medical interventions performed on intersex infants.

Ultimately, the medical insistence upon a binary distinction is at odds with the lived experiences of many gender variant individuals, who do not identify with either side of the binary. The controversy surrounding the inclusion of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) further emphasises the discord between medical responses and the concerns of the gender variant community. The medical field will remain complicit in this stigmatisation of individuals who disrupt normative conceptions of sex and gender until their discourses can fully recognise and embrace the ‘complex specificity’⁴ of gender variant embodiment and experiences.

Medical Approaches to Trans*

The medical community has demonstrated its habit of pathologising difference throughout history. As early as the nineteenth

century, sexuality was conceptualised as an innate, biological drive and evolutionary imperative.⁵ Consequently, sexual practices that departed from the norm of heterosexual procreative intercourse were categorised by the medical field as deviant.⁶ The ‘illnesses’ of homosexuality and hysteria have been previously included in the DSM, though have since been removed as the medical community plays catch up to social progress.

Transsexuality remains in the DSM-IV in the form of GID. This medical understanding is largely based on the work of nineteenth century psychologists, physicians and sexologists. In medical terminology, ‘trans*’ refers to a range of identities and practices where the sex assigned to an individual at birth is not concordant with their gender expression. Significantly, this classification positions transsexuality as a biological condition that may only be addressed by a reconstruction of the body.⁷ The mind thus becomes the site of disorder or the origin of disease.⁸

Medical responses throughout the twentieth century have consistently implied that any divergence between assigned sex and embodied gender identity signals a psychiatric disorder.⁹ By framing gender nonconformity as a mental illness, it is evident that medical responses to trans* identities and practices perpetuate a binary model of gender intelligibility. Such a view leaves little opportunity to advance a model of gender as a fluid, shifting continuum, as opposed to a fixed and binary opposition.

The Diagnostic Criteria of GID

As it currently exists in the DSM-IV, Gender Identity Disorder (GID) has a principal requirement of ‘strong and persistent cross-gender identification’.¹⁰ This is colloquially described as the ‘wrong body’ discourse, that is, the sense of being born ‘in the wrong body’. Medical authorities consider the dissonance experienced by gender variant individuals to be a problem that is ‘correctable’

through medical intervention, by aligning an individual's physical characteristics with their socially expressed gender identity.¹¹

On the face of it, this criterion may seem straightforward and largely unproblematic. However, it assumes that the trans* experience is an uncomplicated transition from one sex to another, which reveals the medical profession's inability to recognise any form of gender identity existing outside the binary of male and female. This perpetuates a biological determinist view wherein gender is seen as a 'natural' expression of sex rather than a social construction, and that there are two exclusive gender categories that are sometimes incorrectly assigned.¹² Moreover, it functions as a medically constructed 'truth' of transsexuality, which gender variant individuals are required to present in order to access medical intervention.¹³ Whilst this may be the case for some individuals, this assumption obscures the multiplicity of experiences that exist within the trans* community.

“The intervention begins shortly after an infant is born, which renders the phenomenon of intersex ‘culturally invisible’”

Additionally, it is widely presumed that a trans* person will seek to 'pass' unambiguously in their chosen gender post-transition. As explained by a gender variant individual, 'in order to be a good – or successful – transsexual person, one is not supposed to be a transsexual at all.'¹⁴ Indeed, it is common practice for individuals to be denied medical intervention if they do not express desire for the complete set of surgeries that would allow them to transition fully into a particular chosen sex;¹⁵ for example, if they will identify as homosexual post-transition, or if they are unwilling to pass as non-transsexual. For the many

gender variant individuals who do not desire a transition from one unambiguously sexed body to another, this requirement designates them as 'role inappropriate'.¹⁶ It is apparent that current understandings of gender cannot conceptualise a form of subjectivity beyond that of male or female. Such a characterisation is deeply problematic for many gender variant individuals, as it assumes a universal experience of transsexuality. It also fails to recognise that some individuals may identify on a 'continuum' of gender, or 'in the interces of the binary'¹⁷ rather than at one end of a dual opposition.

Medical Responses to Intersex: Further Strengthening the Fiction of a Binary

The extent of the medical profession's investment in maintaining a binary understanding of sex and gender is not limited to those whose gender-role performance does not correlate with their 'biological specificity'.¹⁸ It also extends to the intersex: individuals who are born with ambiguous sexual anatomy or sex chromosomes, such that they cannot be easily distinguished as male or female.¹⁹ One in one thousand five hundred births will produce a child whose genitalia is ambiguous enough to necessitate intervention.²⁰ However, the proportion of more subtle genetic and anatomical variations is much higher.²¹

Most of the current medical research regarding intersex individuals focuses on the biological influences that impact on physical development.²² There is very little material that addresses the experiences of intersex individuals who choose to live *as intersex*, that is, outside the gender binary.²³ This is partly because prevailing medical practice is to 'choose' a gender for an intersexed baby, rather than to let them grow up as they are born. This demonstrates that current medical discourses deny the possibility of existing beyond the 'gender dimorphism'²⁴ and insist that bodies can and should only contain one sex²⁵, yet the very existence of the intersexed proves otherwise.²⁶ In consequence, many

intersex political activists have conceptualised intersexuality as a ‘biological uniqueness of their own form’,²⁷ rather than as some hybrid of two sexes.

“In order to be a good - or successful - transsexual person, one is not supposed to be a transexual at all”

The Intersex Society of North America (‘ISNA’) has campaigned to end surgical procedures performed on intersex infants, including the removal of phallic tissue and the construction of artificial vaginas. This occurs when an intersex baby is classified as either being ‘closest to’ or as ‘more likely to grow up feeling like’ male or female.²⁸ The practice has been widely condemned, especially by adult recipients of such surgeries, on the grounds that it completely obliterates self-determination. It can cause significant psychological damage to these children, who are not normally informed of their medical histories as they grow up. Thus, ‘the harm begins when the birth is treated as a medical crisis, and the consequences of that initial treatment ripple out ever afterward’.²⁹ There is now a significant emerging body of research that documents the problematic experiences of now-adults who were born intersex and underwent surgery as children, but were never informed of their histories.³⁰ Additionally, because the intervention begins shortly after an infant is born, it renders the phenomenon of intersex ‘culturally invisible’ as such children are denied the opportunity to grow up identifying with an intersex subjectivity.³¹ In this way, the power of the medical profession to perpetuate the gender binary becomes starkly apparent.

Complicating the Binary

The proliferation of narratives from within the trans* and intersex communities challenges medical professionals’ imposition of the gender binary. The recent expansion of Transgender Studies within the disciplines of Gender, Sexualities and Queer Studies

is significant as it empowers a community that has previously been stigmatised and censored. This facilitates the emergence of a wide range of stories and experiences, which demonstrate that ‘gender’, as it is ‘lived, embodied, experienced, performed and encountered’³² is far more diverse than the

current binary framework would suggest. For example, Arthur Freeheart, a female-to-male transsexual, challenges the idea that trans* individuals must feel an ongoing sense of ‘inappropriateness’ in their assigned sex. He described his pre-transition appearance as ‘pretty feminine’, which was unprecedented for the professionals he encountered, and significantly complicated his attainment of hormonal and surgical intervention.³³ Del LaGrace Volcano’s personal narrative challenges the normative ‘wrong body’ discourse: ‘I see myself as BOTH male and female rather than NEITHER...I am simply gender-variant’.³⁴

The difference between the prevailing medical gender binary classification and true gender identity is also reflected in the lived experiences of those who undergo sex reassignment surgery. Some individuals may opt for partial reconstruction, which results in the existence of both male and female characteristics on one body, showing that it is possible to live physically outside the binary.

As a result of growing awareness around these issues, there is significant debate regarding whether GID should be removed from the DSM. One argument is that the continued inclusion of GID limits the possible range of gender expression for those who identify outside the normative binary. Activists argue for the removal of GID as a mental illness on the grounds that it is wrong for the medical profession to classify expressions of gender variance or ‘atypicality’ as symptomatic of disease.³⁵ This is explored in the compelling documentary *Diagnosing Difference*,³⁶ which considers the impact of the GID diagnosis

from the perspective of individuals who identify on the trans spectrum. Notably, one participant states:

“I’ve always had this sense that there’s something wrong about the world that I didn’t fit into. I’ve always just been who I am and who I know myself to be...that the society around me doesn’t have room for me? That’s the problem.”³⁷

Assertions such as these coming from within the gender variant community strongly contest the pathologisation of gender variance. They suggest that broad social change is required to ensure that individuals who identify outside the gender binary may do so without stigma or prejudice.

“Gender is seen as a ‘natural’ expression of sex rather than a social construction”

However, others disagree that this policy prescription would lead to the best outcome for gender variant individuals. Some advocate for the continued inclusion of GID in future editions of the DSM. Rather than seeing medical authorities as purely repressive, Spade suggests that gender variant individuals can strategically use them to access treatment.³⁸ The de-medicalisation of GID may also remove the current legitimate basis for gender variant individuals to receive psychological, hormonal or surgical services.³⁹ Currently, the only way for trans* individuals to access medical interventions is via a diagnosis of GID, as surgery and/or hormonal treatment is seen as the ‘solution’ to a medical problem. Arguably, it may be preferable to reconceptualise the framework in which surgical intervention is considered, so that individuals may choose to undertake such procedures without a diagnosis of mental illness.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay has argued that medical discourses are particularly powerful modes of constructing knowledge. By positioning themselves as the authority on sex, gender and sexuality, they have succeeded in perpetuating the fiction of a gender binary. Effectively, this has rendered the subjectivities of those who identify outside the binary as ‘culturally invisible’. Undeniably, progress has been made, for example by facilitating the surgical treatment of transsexual individuals. However, the criteria required to access these interventions arguably upholds dominant medical discourses.

The medical profession’s denial of an intersex subjectivity also demonstrates the problem of framing gender as a binary classification. Some activists have focused on the limits of language in describing sexuality and gender, whilst others advocate for an increased awareness of the range of gender expressions. Ultimately, the future direction for the role of medical authorities remains unclear, but there is an overwhelming consensus for policies that ‘do no harm to those they are intended to help.’⁴¹ The medical field cannot continue being complicit in perpetuating a false dichotomy of gender upon the people it is supposed to be trying to assist.

the ban on *gay blood* in Australia

STUBBORN OR SENSIBLE POLICY?

by Alistair Stephenson

In the face of historic and sweeping changes to the rights of LGBT citizens the world over, the blood donation ban on men who have sex with men (MSM) has received remarkably little attention. In Australia, blood donors must abstain from MSM activity for twelve months before they are permitted to donate. Different forms of this deferral policy have been in place since 1984. In recent years, the policy has been thrown into the spotlight as authorities evaluate whether it accords with sound scientific research – many scientists from around the world have claimed that it doesn't. The Australian Red Cross, once celebrated for its fast-moving and progressive policy development,¹ has failed to lead the charge. This essay aims to shed light on the history of Australia's deferral policy as well as a recent case that suggests a clear need for policy reform. If we choose to fight discrimination on some fronts alone, and ignore other discriminatory prohibitions, then we are complicit in letting those outdated policies remain.

Opponents of the MSM blood donation ban belong to a wide church. On the one hand, the policy is decried as homophobic and bigoted. These critics argue that banning all MSM from donating blood, in spite of their sexual activity, is black-and-white thinking that encourages out-of-date prejudice. It ignores individual health, and perpetuates the idea that all gay men are the same – all unable to manage the risks of sexual activity, unlike their heterosexual counterparts – instead of focusing on high and low-risk groups.² On the other hand, some opponents choose not to engage in the issue of discrimination and instead emphasise scientific advances that suggest the ban is no longer necessary from a medical standpoint.

As public opinion shifts towards legalizing same-sex marriage in Australia, advocates from both schools are attempting to bring the blood ban to the public consciousness. The results have been mixed, but irrespective of how they choose to organise from here it is clear that there is comparatively lower

awareness around this issue.

The severity of the HIV/AIDS crisis of the mid-1980s has left a cloud over reform efforts. The epidemic had a harrowing effect on the Australian gay community and in turn presented uniquely complex blood-banking problems to the Blood Transfusion Services. A 1984 report found that Australia had the highest rate of transfusion-related AIDS in the world – one in every 450 donations was infected.³ The disease was spreading at an alarming rate, but it was far from being widely understood. Several years passed before the government and medical community were able to confirm that it was not an airborne disease, but in fact blood-borne one.⁴ It was established that testing was most likely to expose the virus between 10 and 21 days after initial infection. It is usual risk management practice to add a margin for error; this calculus led the policy groups to put forward the 12-month deferral period.⁵ The measure is the same one in force today.

“Medical organisations like the Australian Red Cross must heed the ‘precautionary principle’”

Prior to making a blood donation, all donors must complete a registration questionnaire and undergo a private interview with a nurse before a basic health check is performed. Once donated, the blood is then tested for HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne infections before it is provided to a recipient. These checks ensure that no infections are passed on through blood transfusions and have helped bolster the excellent reputation of the Australian Red Cross Blood Service from the mid-1980s through to the present. Leading blood researchers Seed, Kiely and Keller claim that the Australian blood is the safest in the world.⁶ There has not been a single case of HIV/AIDS infection through

blood transfusion in Australia as a result of this policy, which is remarkable when compared to countries with similar testing regimes; for example the United States sees approximately ten HIV-infected units slip through 12 million units every year.⁷ At the time, and in an environment of imperfect testing and medical uncertainty, Australia's deferral policy was praised as appropriate and responsive.

Twenty-five years later, the science of HIV/AIDS is well understood and well managed. MSM who wish to donate blood need only point to these very effective testing regimes now in place to wonder why it is that their blood is considered unacceptable for the Australian Red Cross blood banks. A recent Tasmanian case, *Cain v Australian Red Cross Society*, addressed this issue. Michael Cain, the complainant, was refused the opportunity to donate blood at an Australian Red Cross Blood Service collection centre because he had had male-to-male sex within the twelve months prior. He did not seek compensation from his claim of discrimination, but rather that the policy be amended to consider the safety of sexual practice instead of the gender of a sexual partner. His case was not the first of its kind, but it is notable for its breadth of inquiry and the extensive scientific literature considered.

“The severity of the HIV/AIDS crisis of the mid-1980s has left a cloud over reform efforts.”

Although the outcome of the case did not overturn the policy (the tribunal ultimately defended the policy, claiming that the 12 months was “reasonable”), it brought to the fore a significant concession by the Australian Red Cross in their consideration of a full repeal. Rodney Croome and Benedict Bartl, in their commentary of *Cain*, signalled that the case was an “important step forward... given the consensus reached by many of the

experts who gave evidence and importantly the tribunal's implicit rejection of the MSM donor deferral policies of most of the world's industrialised countries.”⁸ This begs the question – why was the evidence not compelling enough for the tribunal to reject the policy *explicitly*?

The answer can be found in the nature of the evidence itself; the “authoritative” studies are based on problematic methodologies. The two most commonly cited studies on HIV/AIDS infection through blood transfusion (a United Kingdom study by Soldan and Sinka⁹ and a North American study by Germain et al¹⁰) conclude that eliminating deferral periods for MSM would increase the risk of HIV entering the blood supply. However, these studies have not considered modelling that bases donor screening on the safety of sexual practices as opposed to sexual orientation.¹¹ A full analysis of this shortcoming is outside the scope of this article, but the most significant flaw is the consistent failure of these studies to sample the MSM community at large, and not merely the “at risk” subgroups.¹² Many MSM who live in suburbia, as gay monogamous couples, have never been sampled, which clearly distorts the results. Many critics have argued that these groups are “deliberately excluded from studies”.¹³

These studies thus propagate archaic stereotypes by failing to take into account the full data range. The challenge for researchers is to demonstrate that there is a much larger group of the gay community who are not “at risk” and who should be eligible to donate blood. Unfortunately, studies that include such comprehensive LGBT samples are few and far between. A rare example is seen in a University of Vermont study that sought to survey all couples in civil unions *in addition* to “convenience” samples – those organised by niche bookstores, bars or LGBT advocacy groups. The results were interesting in how banal they were – civil union households did not differ much from those of the general population.¹⁴ This confirms that,

unsurprising to any enlightened Australian, MSM do not present a disproportionate and uncontrollable risk to blood banks any more so than other Australians.

The tribunal took heed of these nuances and recognised that the contemporary policy was a particularly blunt instrument. In their decision they stated: “Focusing on the risk posed by particular individuals rather than groups, there are some individuals who are homosexual whose blood would pose less of

the “rights” of gay men to donate blood have failed to garner support.²¹ Sceptics question whether the donor discrimination really has led to stigmatisation.²² Some emphasise that, while removing the discrimination would lead to equality, it is sadly true that the vast majority of men that do become infected with HIV are MSM (76% in Australia).²³ Although disturbing, this is only a relevant statistic to blood donations in an environment where blood-screening mechanisms are not sound; this is certainly not the case in Australia.

“It perpetuates the idea that all gay men are the same – all unable to manage the risks of sexual activity, unlike their heterosexual counterparts”

a risk than the blood of some heterosexuals who are permitted to donate.”¹⁵ The tribunal emphasised the studies that have shown that the 12-month deferral is “very conservative”.¹⁶ It endorsed further review of the policy — “new data, enhanced research and refined methods can be considered and... will assist in maintaining public confidence in the blood supply”¹⁷ — and pointed again to regimes overseas that use deferral periods based on different criteria. For example, in France the policy defers *any* donor if they have had sexual intercourse with a new partner within the previous four months.¹⁸

Despite these unprecedented concessions, the restrictive policy was still upheld. In medical contexts, organisations like the Australian Red Cross must heed the ‘precautionary principle’ – the pessimistic view that ‘what can go wrong will go wrong’.¹⁹ In 2000, the U.S. Blood Products Advisory Committee stated that “the discriminatory effect of the policy is not in question. To policymakers, the question is whether or not that discrimination is justified by the risk a repeal of the policy would bring.”²⁰ This ethical framework poses undeniable roadblocks for advocates, many of whom appeal to justice-based arguments to promote change. Arguments that focus on

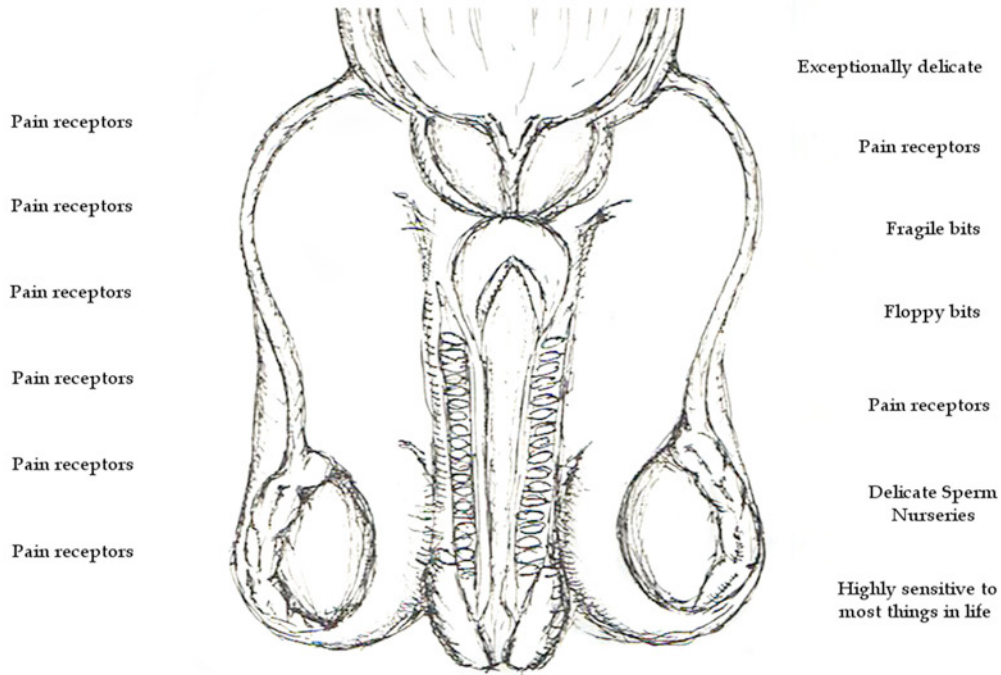
Ultimately, without “new data” and “enhanced research” before the courts it is unlikely that a repeal can be made in full confidence. The onus is now on researchers to conduct fresh modelling in line with sound science. Indeed, the biggest push for reform in the United States is now coming from the American Medical Association. After having analysed hundreds of studies conducted within their own country, the ban in the United States is being slammed as “out-dated”.²⁴ It is time for Australian medical authorities to conduct the same broad research so that our ban can be comprehensively reviewed as well.

Human Genitalia and the Vulgar Tongue: An Anatomical Correction

BY LUCINDA OWER

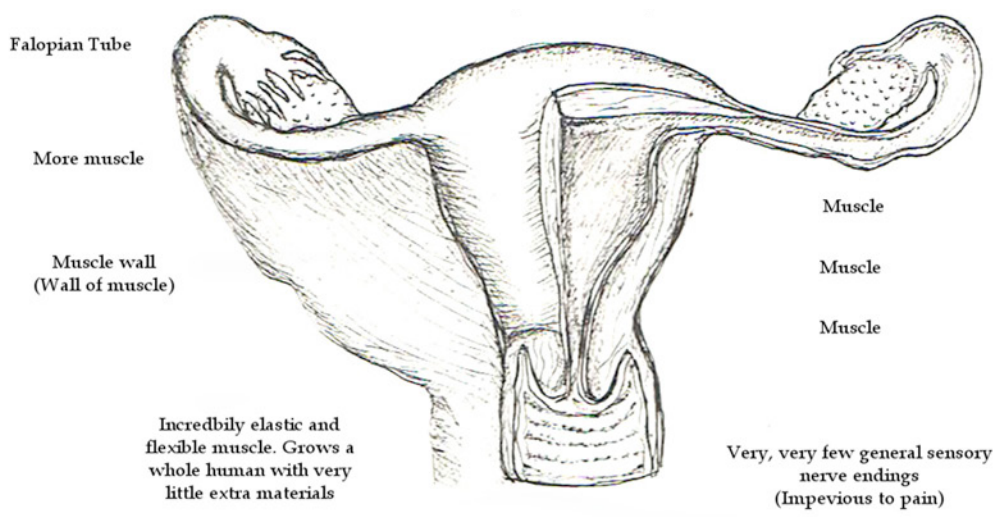
Colloquial English in the twenty-first century has unfortunately recorded and perpetuated a physiological fallacy. “Ballsy” or “to have balls” carries the meaning of a strong, resilient individual, who has apparently attained success by being effectively immune to pain or pressure. A “pussy” on the other hand, denotes the polar opposite; a weak, overly sensitive individual who is largely incapable of any particularly extraordinary feat. The following anatomical drawings should clarify this mistake.

Figure 1: Balls



External Structure: Appears Retrofitted
 In certain, particularly common circumstances (such as the application of any force), this structure will produce systemic distress, incapacitation, and man-tears

Figure 2: Pussy



Internal System: Fully Integrated
 In certain, relatively rare circumstances, this structure can produce one or more fully formed small humans



**“*masc*
4 *masc*”**

**PERFORMANCE,
PATRIARCHY AND
THE IMPOSSIBLE
IDEAL OF GRINDR**

by Daniel Farinha

Introduction

Grindr is exceptionally theatrical. Beneath the proscenium arch of the iPhone, characters are developed in pornographic tableaux vivants, sexual scripts are rehearsed in shorthand (NSA, fun, bb, vers), and the fourth wall is broken by memorised soliloquies. In this play, there is undoubtedly one character whose stage presence is the greatest, a particular identity that seems to recur in profile after profile as one scrolls down the interface. He associates himself with the words “masc(uline)”, “straight-acting”, “fit” and “dte (down-to-earth)”, the last of which curiously associates effeminacy with arrogance or aloofness. He declares with pride not only that he identifies with the traditional, hegemonic construction of masculinity, but demands the same of potential partners; he expects them to self-select out of conversation with him if they do not meet this standard.

“Straight-acting/Masculine
Versatile and fit. Feminine guys =
instant block. If your voice sounds gay
= instant block. NO QUEENS.”

This paper offers a character study for the straight-actor. It asks primarily what motivates his idiosyncratic behaviour before interrogating how problematic we should find it. Importantly, it rejects the view that his straight-acting is a manifestation of internalised homophobia or self-loathing, preferring to emphasise its patriarchal dimensions. It finds that the straight-actor is interested primarily in retaining a male privilege that his sexuality might otherwise compromise. His actions, then, make out the case for his complicity in a particularly damaging form of male power which, if anything, is more condemnable than allegations of self-loathing.

Portrait of a Straight-Actor

Arguably the most important feature of this essay's subject is his body, which is characterised by an above-average

musculature. He offers and demands shirtless body pics, always carefully posed and involving bodily contortions to emphasize chiselled six-packs and rounded pecs. This creates a culture of ‘bodyfascism’, the unchecked pursuit of and demand for a chiselled physique. Bodyfascism and the increased bodily dissatisfaction amongst gay men have already received extensive academic treatment.¹ Such dynamics are no more prominent than on Grindr, and in the straight-actor himself.

This character seems to wholeheartedly accept a discourse that presumes some positive correlation between the size of biologically male features (one in particular) and degree of masculinity. In his interactions on Grindr, he demands visual evidence to validate any claims made by others on the app.

The activities he engages in are consistently Anglo-Saxon and working class in the aesthetic they aspire to: footy, beer, mates, gym, surfing, fishing, sky-diving. He recognises that the mere listing of these activities will often suffice to identify him to other “masc 4 masc” individuals. He draws them from a particular brand of Australian male culture termed variously as “okka” or “bogan”. In all ways, he is hyper-aware of his own masculinity.

“Like young Aussie guys, blond tradies
are A1”

It is rather curious that he uses the word ‘straight-acting’ to describe himself. Sometimes he doesn't, and he has been known to object to the word itself (“Hate the term straight ‘acting’. Just a typical 21 year old guy.”) However, generally his character embraces a certain postmodern self-referential, his singular point of self-awareness being the knowledge that he is not straight, much as he may regard himself as 99% so.

Power, Sex and Self-Loathing

The first question of academic interest with this character is what motivates his performance. Hyper-masculinity amongst gay men is traditionally, and most commonly, seen as an indication of self-loathing.² Proponents of this view suggest that gay men who consciously distance themselves from a particular gender presentation associated with male homosexuality do so because of an underlying discomfort with their sexuality. It is argued that after having internalised the homophobia surrounding them, they accept their sexuality only in the limited sense of having sex with other men, disavowing all else that is “gay”.

“masc musc HIV neg buds 18-35
masculine is not subjective. if people
can tell you’re gay....you’re not
masculine”

This explanation is clearly simplistic and logically problematic. Firstly, it cannot be presumed that what it means to be a gay man is more than displaying sexual attraction to other males. By claiming that a person is uncomfortable with their own sexuality if they reject effeminacy is to perpetuate a discourse associating masculinity with heterosexuality.³ This criticism is more strategic and political than descriptive; it merely establishes that the argument is itself problematic and open to the immediate response of “Just because I’m gay doesn’t mean I have to be effeminate”.

“This account of masculinity structured around patriarchy renders the straight-actor more condemnable than if he were simply self-loathing”

Additionally, and more powerfully, the self-loathing theory, in many instances, cannot account for the statements actually made by straight-actors on Grindr. Firstly, the literature consistently supports a correlation between internalised homophobia and

discomfort with anal sex.⁴ One would expect, then, that the straight-actor would be reticent to declare openly that their intentions with the app are to obtain sexual partners, if they are in fact self-loathing. This is by no means the case; this particular character on Grindr is overwhelmingly proud of their sexual promiscuity. In that way, they extol the fact that Grindr facilitates this in a way not necessarily available to heterosexuals.

“Straight guy just wanting to pump u bent over”

Secondly, Grindr’s straight-actors appear to regard homosexuality as the most authentic display of masculinity and “dude sex” as the most authentic form of ‘gayness’.⁵ The first part of this is supported by the misogyny present in their descriptions of undesirable sexual partners. In the straight-actor’s signalling of preferred partners, they reject those who are feminine, rather than just “camp”. They are able to express pride in a homosexuality that is to the exclusion of women. Moreover, it would be open to a person observing Grindr to conclude that many of its users come closer to realising the impossible “ideal” of masculinity than many heterosexuals, whose gender performance is typically less conscious or confected.

The second half of the statement hinges upon a view that sexual relationships with effeminate men are essentially parodies of straight sex. In this way, they reject the tendency to gender anal sex, to regard the penetrative partner (the top) as “the man” and the receptive partner (the bottom) as “the woman”.⁶ Rather than conform to heteronormative assumptions, these characters are looking “to fuck and be fucked by real men”. The inference to draw from this is that the individuals do not display discomfort towards their sexuality, but are prepared to embrace it to the extent it is not conflated with effeminacy in any way.

A third observation in this context is that the behaviour engaged in by the straight-actor is intensely regulatory. Although some statements suggest that they see effeminacy as innate and unchangeable, they also demonstrate an intention to alter the behaviour of other users and engender masculinity amongst them.

“Be normal.”

The attempt to condition other gay men into a gender presentation that mirrors one’s own would seem to indicate a desire that social perceptions of one’s sexuality, not the sexuality itself, be altered. This further shows that the straight-actor’s hypermasculinity is primarily a response to external gendered assumptions about their sexuality, rather than internalised homophobia. They position themselves and their sex lives as an ideal expression of masculinity precisely because they have some ideological commitment to the concept of masculinity as inalienable despite homosexuality.

“Looking for studs
Masc, bi, athletic, not out, yes thats me:
no fats, fems, or anyone over 30. If
Looking for friends then get facebook”

Grindr and the Choice of Patriarchy

Given that Grindr’s dominant narrative is unlikely to be explained by internalised homophobia, this paper would suggest that it instead reflects a choice by users to opt into patriarchy. By disrupting the connection between homosexuality and effeminacy, the straight-actor positions himself as an ideal candidate for male privilege, able to excise women entirely from his life. As noted above, his performance of masculinity is heightened and conscious, an attempt to be accepted into the male heterosexual elite, to remain “one of the boys” in spite of being gay.

“Guy who happens to like guys”

Much of the previous evidence provided already supports this contention; his distaste for women, his claims of sexual potency, his gendered language. Additionally, it coheres with intersectional accounts of the ways power reconstitutes itself within minority communities.⁷ By establishing a normative hierarchy of gender identities amongst gay men, he establishes himself as most likely to retain the benefits of discursive gender inequality.

“They are able to express pride in a homosexuality that is to the exclusion of women”

Further support for this thesis is found in the way he otherises Asians on Grindr. “No Asians” is a popular mantra on the profiles of the masc and others. In this way, he is seen to engage generally in self-interested behaviour that carves out divisions on lines of oppression. The straight actor seeks white privilege as well as male privilege. A further consequence of this identity projection is that patriarchy is itself emboldened. The straight-actor’s preparedness to be labelled as ‘self-loathing’, in order to construct an artificial identity, and to intimidate other users gives value to male power. As the cause of gay rights is advanced, focus can be redirected from undercutting privilege to accruing it. As the pressures to “pass” as a heterosexual abate, the desire to “pass” as masculine intensifies.⁸ In so doing, he promotes the position of gender to the foreground of his identity and that of any prospective partner.

“If you have a broken wrist keep movin...to all that are masc say hi!!!”

If this account of the straight-actor’s intentions is accepted, the question arises of to what extent this should unsettle us. On one hand, the alternative presumption that homosexuals are effeminate creates unfair expectations of their public behaviour,

making a countervailing discourse of gay masculinity less pernicious. However, if camp and performative effeminacy itself are strategies to undermine social norms, a preference for the conservative mode of acting as a male is, indeed, more harmful.⁹

Conclusion

The sexual script needs editing. These identities — grounded in reality, layered with artifice and developed through aspiration — embolden a “gay-triarchy” that has already emerged within LGBTIQA politics. This account of masculinity structured around patriarchy renders the straight-actor more condemnable than if he were simply self-loathing. He is not one of its victims, except insofar as it limits the freedom he enjoys to construct his identity. His victims are women and other gay men who find themselves unable to attain his impossible ideal. These individuals are disparaged on the basis of their gender presentation. They are thus absent or excluded from the space he adopts.

“In men we thrust
Grab beers first and go from there.
Headless profiles asking for face pics
make me laugh.
Comes with ute and dog.”

This paper demands more of Grindr users. Those who parade as superior on account of their bodies or voices or language must be seen as perpetuating norms of male power. Their self presentation is problematic not only because it opts into narrow stereotypes of masculinity, but also because it acts to exclude those who do not conform, and denigrates femininity in the process.

The background of the cover is an abstract, painterly composition of green and blue brushstrokes. The colors are layered and blended, creating a sense of movement and depth. The strokes vary in thickness and direction, some being broad and sweeping, while others are more delicate and textured. The overall effect is a soft, organic, and somewhat ethereal aesthetic.

Assumptions & androgyny

A P E R S O N A L E S S A Y

by Angela Street

Some months ago a conversation with a friend revealed we both own dresses and heels for ‘straight clubbing’. Initially funny, the revelation quickly soured as we realized what it meant: we had not eschewed heteronormativity quite so much as we had given ourselves credit for.

As Inner West lesbians, we do everything we are supposed to do: get short, alternative haircuts; wear printed tees worn under flannelette shirts and Vans on our feet. When we first adopted this style, breaking free from the constraints of our conservative hometowns, we saw our new selves as radical. In reality, we had transgressed few boundaries. Although our adoption of the classic lesbian style set us apart from straight culture, we had become the new majority within a minority. Our choice was sartorial, not political.

As a result, our superficial boldness did not stretch into those places where it was most needed. The dresses hanging in our wardrobe betrayed that our fight against gender restrictions could be discarded when it suited us. Worse still, in refusing to be complicit in traditional femininity, we had inadvertently become complicit in propelling lesbian stereotypes, potentially alienating queer women who did not feel comfortable adopting the characteristics of the subculture.

* * *

I am fortunate in that the stereotype suits me. I feel far more comfortable in casual men’s clothes than traditionally feminine clothing. There are days when I dislike my breasts, and layer sports bras to create the illusion of a flat chest. There are even more days when I lament the mere existence of my hips and thighs — not overly curvy, by most standards — but far too pear-shaped for me. Among the crowds of lesbians that frequent King Street, this is rarely a problem. In fact, within my subculture of choice, I am positively trendy, a word which was sadly elusive to me throughout my teenage years. The revelation

that I could feel good about the way I wanted to dress *and* fit in was as wonderful as it was surprising.

What is not surprising, however, is that when I step outside the safety of lesbian subculture my gender identity is misread. This manifests in both subtle and overt ways. Every now and then an unsuspecting store employee refers to me as “young man”. A trip to the ladies bathroom often earns me a glance that says “You shouldn’t be in here.”

These incidents are sometimes hurtful and often awkward, but rarely malicious. It is human nature to make assumptions about other people’s genders, unpleasant a notion as that is. However, sometimes it is not mere ignorance, but pure spite, which drives the conversation. A sneering confrontation with two boys in a pub— “Is *that* a boy or a girl?” — left me on the verge of tears.

When I tell this story, it is invariably met with; “But you don’t look like a man!” But it is not the question “boy or girl?” that makes me feel afraid. It is not my masculine clothing of which I am ashamed. It is the sneering tone, the disgust, the dehumanizing ‘that’. It is times like this that I wish I had worn my straight clubbing dress, utterly convinced in the moment that adherence to gender norms is a small price to pay to avoid humiliation.

But outside those moments, I strongly believe it is a large price to pay. It is the basic premise of Slutwalk, revisited: I should be able to dress in a way that makes me feel attractive and comfortable without feeling threatened, judged or having labels placed upon me that I do not identify with.

I should not have to change myself to please others.

With this mantra, I successfully reassure myself that sticking to the classic lesbian dress code means I am sticking it to the man and his gender norms.

However, the niggling feeling that I am complicit in a smaller but equally important oppression remains. I can easily draw parallels between my frequent rejections from straight culture and the complete erasure of traditional femininity from the lesbian culture within Sydney's inner West. Both are based on gender expression, appearance and assumption; both leave the person in question feeling alienated and small.

This erasure, like my occasional misgendering, manifests in both subtle and overt ways. The vast majority of the time, lesbians who perform traditional femininity are simply read as straight, and not considered a sexual or romantic possibility. This unspoken exclusion from lesbian dating circles is particularly damaging, as the women in question feel part of neither lesbian subculture nor mainstream dating culture.

“We had become the new majority within a minority. Our choice was sartorial, not political”

In this way, I obtain a niche privilege by my inherent desire to adopt the lesbian style: at least my deviance fits neatly into a group. But for many women, lesbian culture is as exclusive as straight culture, and perhaps even more so due to its insular nature.

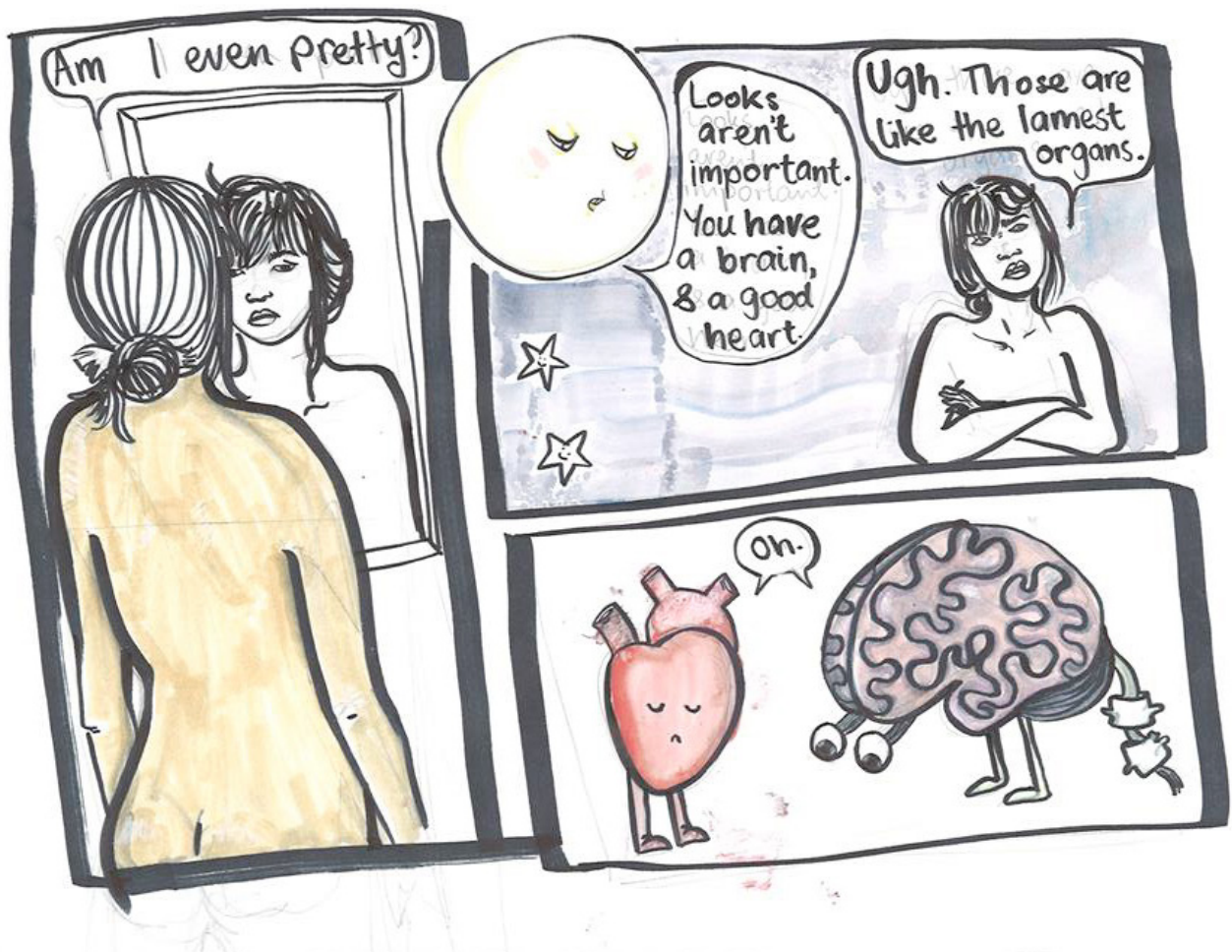
The way we express our gender is important, but not because people and their stereotypes must be catered to. Every expression of gender is a choice, reflecting on neither gender identity, nor sexuality, nor any other aspect of life.

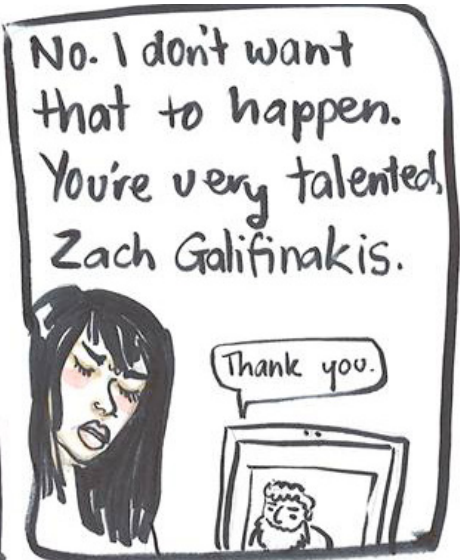
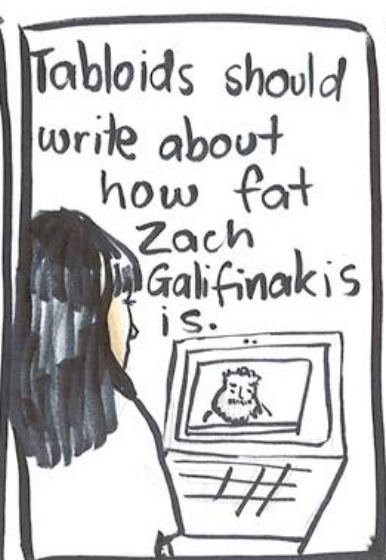
I haven't worn the straight clubbing dress in over a year. It sits in my cupboard as a reminder of a time when I could not help but acquiesce to the pressure of expectation. But I also refuse to see myself as some kind

of noble gender warrior, for the majority of my personal campaign thus far has been tragically misguided. I mistook adopting the style of a subculture as political activism, and have since become aware of my error. In the future, rather than selfishly revel in my boyish swagger, I am determined to swim harder against the approaching tidal wave of assumptions, lest it envelop us all.

'Am I Even Pretty?'

CREATED BY
HUMYARA MAHBUB





the cult of tolerance

SEXISM AND THE MULTICULTURAL WEST

by Calvin Chan



Suppose that you are an explorer and you come across a tribe of cannibals in the forest you are visiting. Should you respect the custom of the locals and let them go about their business or should you try to talk these people out of their barbaric practice, and if that fails, stop them by force? Should you leave them alone or should you intervene? This hypothetical is a choice between adopting an interventionist and an isolationist policy. In this particular case, it seems that the only defensible course of action is to intervene. If we believe in each individual's right to life then we *should not* leave them alone. Cannibalism is wrong, and we have a duty to prevent it if we can.

However, suppose that in pursuing this interventionist route, the cannibals complain that you are interfering with their way of life. They say it is arrogant for you to suppose that your Western, anti-cannibalist values are superior to their pro-cannibalist values. They say that by intervening, you fail to recognize their autonomy. Since such acts of intervention assume the superiority of one's own set of values, they can be seen as paternalistic.

The above fictional example exaggerates a very real problem in modern society. Although we are not explorers, we inhabit an increasingly globalised and interconnected world. We frequently come into contact with people whose values and practices are foreign to us.

“The idea that groups have the same right to autonomy as individuals is highly problematic”

When such practices are harmless there is no objection to simply letting people do what they wish. But when such practices are open to moral criticism, we are torn between the choices of isolationism and interventionism. We feel obliged to intervene to prevent what we perceive to be atrocities however we also want to respect other peoples' way of life. Indeed, Western nations are often reminded to mind their own business when pursuing

interventionist policies.

The first aim of this article is to argue that we in the West are biased in favour of isolationist policies. Modern society, with its emphasis on the autonomy of individuals, tends to unthinkingly apply the same autonomy-first philosophy to groups. When autonomy is placed on groups and not on individuals, the consequence is that we sacrifice important moral values for the sake of showing respect to other cultures and communities. We should reconsider our general support for isolationist policies and be more open to pursuing interventionist policies.

The kind of problem described above is sharply manifested in the context of gender equality. Such cases arise when interacting with people from religious traditions or cultural backgrounds that do not share our commitment to (or at least our understanding of) gender-equal norms. For example, when we confront immigrant communities that cite cultural identity to defend polygamy, female genital mutilation or unequal inheritance arrangements, an uneasy tension emerges between our commitment to gender equality and our commitment to multicultural tolerance. We are made to decide between respecting the autonomy of these groups and imposing our moral standards onto those who defend sexist practices under the auspices of their cultural heritage.

Perhaps the most striking example of the Western bias against intervention is a 2007 German court case.¹ A German Muslim woman in an abusive relationship requested a speedy divorce, however her request was rejected by the judge on the grounds that “in [her] cultural background [...] it is not unusual that the husband uses physical punishment against the wife”.² The intention of this judge was no doubt well-meaning - trying as she was to respect cultural differences - however the ruling is morally horrific. In a confused

affirmation of cultural tolerance the judge sided with a physically abusive spouse. By permitting such acts, she is complicit in perpetuating domestic violence. Offenders may now believe they can get away with such crimes as long as abusive practices are “permitted” by their culture. It sets a repugnant legal precedent according to which domestic violence is acceptable if a religious or cultural tradition can be loosely raised as a defence.

Countless other such cases exist.³ The above example involves an institutional sanction of gender-based violence, but other, non-political organizations are also inclined to take the view that in such conflicts of values, non-interventionist policies are to be preferred. In Saudi Arabia companies such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks conform to local customs by maintaining segregated seating zones for men and women, where the “men’s sections are typically lavish and comfortable, whereas the women’s or families’ sections are often run-down, neglected and, in the case of Starbucks, have no seats”.² These companies defend such arrangements by appealing, as we have come to expect, to the need to respect local customs. But in showing such respect they are complicit in perpetuating gender-based discrimination.

It is perhaps surprising that, given our otherwise vocal support for gender equality in the West, we should be so tolerant of oppressive and discriminatory practices when they are defended as “cultural”. If we truly believe that abused women have a right to divorce their husbands, or that it is wrong for seats in restaurants to be arranged so that only men are entitled to the good spots, then why do we tend to act as if we do not when we are presented with the “cultural” defence?

One suggested reason is our reluctance to impose our values on others. We treat groups as if they were individuals and suppose that it is a violation of their autonomy to act paternalistically. However the idea that groups have the same right to autonomy

as individuals is highly problematic. It first requires the assumption that members of a group all subscribe to the same set of values and that the collective can be treated as a singular, coherent, deliberating agent. But this is never the case. Even when people belong to the same religion, the same political party and so on, they inevitably deviate from one another in the details of their beliefs and convictions.

The result of respecting group rights over individual rights is that dissenting members are under-represented, or not represented at all. Only the interests of the dominant majority are recognized. Thus the interests of women in gender-biased cultures are often neglected since they belong to groups that have historically been led and represented by men. Respecting group rights leads, absurdly, to the consequence that individual rights become ignored. The abused German woman was never asked whether she endorsed the cited Koranic passages. She had her beliefs interpreted for her by the judge.

“Offenders may now believe they can get away with such crimes as long as abusive practices are ‘permitted’ by their culture”

The mistake of respecting the autonomy of groups consists in shifting the unit of moral concern from the individual to the group. We should not regard “the Workers”, “the Hindus”, “the Teachers Union”, or “the Immigrants” as units of moral concern on whose will we can place moral value. Only individual workers, individual Hindus, individual teachers, or individual immigrants deserve to have their autonomy recognized. In deciding the legitimacy of a shared practice, the question we should ask ourselves is not whether gender biased practices are approved by the cultures or religions in which they are practiced, but whether *individual*

women consent to these practices. Our bias in favour of isolationist policies depends on the assumption that groups are entitled to claims of autonomy similar to those of the individual. We must challenge this assumption and should reconsider our knee-jerk resistance to interventionist policies.

When we clarify the distinction between groups and individuals, we nullify much of the debate over the ‘clash of civilizations’ or cultures. In the hypothetical encounter with cannibals, we do not need to address the more substantive, first-order moral question over whether cannibalism is wrong. We can simply ask whether those who are being eaten can agree to such treatment and not whether the tribe as a whole affirms the legitimacy of the arrangement.

In the case of the abused German woman it is no longer necessary to regard it as an instance of western vs non-western values. The morally important question is not whether the non-western culture to which the woman belongs approves of domestic violence but whether the individual woman herself approves of such violence. Similarly, the question is not whether Saudi Arabian culture approves of seating arrangements in which women are less favourably placed, but whether individual Saudi women agree such treatment.

The cultural defence represents a sizeable barrier to the push for gender equality. However, it would be remiss to end on a pessimistic note. Although the problems mentioned above are challenging, more has been done to address the issue. In the 57th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women this year, the commission urged that states “refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations” when it comes to eliminating violence against women.⁵ It is too soon to tell if such “urging” will prove to be effective, but this is progress of sorts; given how pitifully shy our political institutions have been in the past when confronted with

the cultural defence. An official recognition of the issue is at least the beginning of a much needed change.



*“where
the wild
roses
grow”*

SEXUAL VIOLENCE
IN THE WORK OF NICK CAVE

by John-Ernest Dinamarca

Nick Cave was described as a “pale-gilled, smack-addled misogynist Gothic monster”¹ by novelist John Birmingham. Despite the outlandish hyperbole, Birmingham’s allegation of the musician’s misogyny strikes a definite nerve. Earlier this year, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds attracted similar criticisms over the cover art of their new album *Push the Sky Away*. This article will examine the lyrical content of Nick Cave’s music throughout his career, across his different musical groups; The Birthday Party, the Bad Seeds, and Grinderman. It will focus on Cave’s lyrical obsession with murdered women, a motif that has recurred throughout his career, and ask whether artistic license is a legitimate excuse. Does writing in character legitimise Cave’s sometimes brutal and disturbing treatment of women as high-art, or does it simply glorify female suffering? Moreover, are fans of ostensibly misogynistic music complicit in the mistreatment of women in popular culture?

Murder Ballads

Deborah Finding of *The Guardian* observed that Cave has made a “career out of his fascination with murdered women.”² In an interview with *Melody Maker*, Nick Cave admitted that “I’ve always enjoyed writing songs about dead women... It’s something that crops up that still holds some mystery, even to me.” Like his kindred Gothic laureate Edgar Allan Poe, many songs in Nick Cave’s back catalogue reveal a fascination with the “death of a beautiful woman as, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.”³

One of the earliest examples of Nick Cave’s grizzly fixation with the feminine macabre comes in The Birthday Party’s song ‘6” Gold Blade’. Amidst the martial stomp of drums, a hypnotically throbbing bass line and the industrial scrape of a distorted, bastardised blues riff, Cave details taking revenge on an unfaithful lover. “I stuck a six-inch gold blade in the head of a girl”, Cave snarls, “she lying through her teeth: him on his back.”⁴

The song climaxes in a coruscating clatter of abrasive guitar skronk, with Cave fiendishly shrieking “shake it baby, c’mon, shake it baby!”⁵ In coupling the gory image of the dead lover with the perverse innuendo of “shake it baby”, Cave “conflates carnality and carnage, copulation and stabbing.”⁶

‘Song of Joy’, the opening track off Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds’ goriest album *Murder Ballads*, offers one of Cave’s most confronting ruminations on women and death. Written with creepy, pathological obsession from the perspective of a lonely traveller, the ‘protagonist’ offers a harrowing account of the murder of his wife and children:

“Joy was bound with electrical tape
In her mouth a gag.
She’d been stabbed repeatedly
And stuffed into a sleeping bag.
In their very cots my girls were robbed
of their lives
Method of murder much the same as
my wife’s
Method of murder much the same as
my wife’s”⁷

Lyrically, Cave demonstrates a complex relationship with women. Cave’s oeuvre oscillates between exalting women as redemptive muses and demeaning them as the victims of man’s basest libidinous and violent impulses. The treatment of females as gender tropes is in itself problematic. According to Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, much of Cave’s allure lies in his romanticising of murder. Under an existentialist reading, sex murderers “might be the ultimate rebels, the ultimate actors-out of eroticism in its purest form.”⁸ Peter Conrad extends on this, noting that passionate killers are “Cave’s deputies and idols.”⁹ They are admired for their “god-like refusal to behave as it they were timorous earthbound citizens” and envied for “the uninhibited courage with which... they surrender to their obsessions.”¹⁰

One can see the strong influence of the Marquis de Sade on Cave’s works. Like

Sade, Cave expresses extreme freedom and individualism through an emphasis on transgressive acts of sexualised violence and criminality; acts which are unrestrained by morality, religion or law. There are also distinct parallels between Cave's lyrical predilection to gynocide and George Bataille's gendered notion of erotic transgression. Bataille asserts that "the point of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives."¹¹ Central to this is the notion that the "male destroyer is more essential to the erotic experience than the female who is destroyed."¹²

Their tight interiors I explore
Sharpened utensils of torture
Now inserted inside of her"¹⁵

Within the Australian cultural landscape, Cave's worrisome lyrics have not just been excused as artistic license. Rather, they have been elevated to a level of musical idolatry. Cave, like The Stranglers¹⁶ and The Rolling Stones¹⁷, holds a disconcerting place in popular culture. Far from the ghoulish, Luciferian junkie king of his earlier days, Cave today has been "fully embraced by the tastemakers and the gatekeepers of Australian cultural life."¹⁸

"Perpetuating the notion that acts of violence against women in the throes of passion are not simply justified, but should be heralded"

Public Participation and Idolatry

Anwyn Crawford wrote "a great part of pop's thrill lies in its creation of a space for highly ritualised transgression", arguing that "pop music is not a health spa for the soul but a space for self-mythologising and excess."¹³ Many music fans enjoy songs by artists whose sexual politics can best be described as dubious. Recently, fans of Kanye West had to grapple with *Yeezus*, which included West rapping "I'd rather be a dick than a swallower" in 'New Slaves' and "Uh, black girl sippin' white wine/ Put my fist in her like a Civil rights sign" in 'I'm In It'. Excruciating misogyny is present throughout the modern music industry. Notorious B.I.G's album *Ready to Die* features the lines

"Sex gettin' rougher when it come to
the nut buster
Pussy crusher
Black nasty motherfucker"¹⁴

and the tone of Cannibal Corpse's *Tomb of the Mutilated* is overwhelmingly aggressive, for example. One song includes the lyrics

"Virgins are my victims

Australian rock'n'roll culture is in many ways overtly masculine. Constructions of male identity through Australian music have been informed by the 'aggressive wild child rock'¹⁹ popularised by front-men such as AC/DC's Bon Scott, Angry Anderson of Rose Tattoo and Cold Chisel's Jimmy Barnes; rugged, blue collar blokes who were celebrated for their love of boisterous drinking and sexual excesses. Cave's gothic grandeur never quite fit into the rigid gendered space of pub rock. However, Oz rock's dominance in the Australian musical landscape and its perpetuation of masculine hegemony²⁰ is a useful prism through which to explain the lack of critical engagement with the gendered issues that arise from Cave's lyrics. In a cultural context where the female voice is often overlooked or suppressed, lyrical depictions of sexualised violence against women can be explained as simply being part of the aggressively masculinised lexicon of 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll.'

The Extent of 'Artistic Liscence'

Defenders of Nick Cave would be quick to point out that Cave's fascination with lustmord is by no means a reflection of his own

attitudes towards women, and should not be taken at face value. They argue that Cave is a storyteller whose lyrics are very much written from the perspective of fictionalised personas, rather than from his own perspective. Matthew Bannister categorises Nick Cave as a ‘sadistic intellectual’²¹ whose extreme approach to abjection and suffering is done for purely aesthetic purposes. The bubbling brooks of blood and visceral acts of sexual violence that characterise much of Cave’s lyrical (particularly earlier) output are “treated with a detached sense of irony.”²² Applying a post-structuralist reading to Nick Cave’s work, the motif of the ‘exquisite corpse’ can be understood as a multifaceted signifier, whose meaning is contingent upon the significance and purpose that we as the audience apply when we listen to Cave’s music or read his lyrics.

“Pop music is not a health spa for the soul, but a space for self-mythologising and excess”

Others have pointed towards Cave’s use of satire and his pitch-black sense of humour. As Karen Welberry notes, “Cave not only conjures Romantic scenes of literary production, he over-conjures them. He not only writes poetry, he camps it up to the max.”²³ This extends not just to Cave’s uncanny ability to juxtapose poetic Romantic imagery with “late twentieth Century ocker banality”²⁴, but also to Cave’s morbidly hilarious treatment of carnage. Like fellow agent provocateur Quentin Tarantino, Cave relishes in the absurd hilarity of brutality. In the song Stagger Lee, Cave gleefully inverts the heterosexual virility of African-American counter-cultural hero Stagger Lee. Cave transforms Lee into a bad-arse queer gunslinger that “would crawl over fifty good pussies just to get one fat boy’s asshole”²⁵ and is amusingly taken to referring to himself as “a bad motherfucker”.²⁶

These defences are redundant when dealing with Cave’s fixation with female suffering in his lyrics. In Cave’s canon, love is inherently intertwined with the darkest depths of the human condition; where devotion gives way to possession, where a veneration of the feminine transforms into a need to preserve her beauty through death.²⁷ Cave sings:

“On the last day I took her where the wild roses grow
And she lay on the bank, the wind light as a thief
And I kissed her goodbye, said, ‘All beauty must die’
And lent down and planted a rose between her teeth”²⁸

For all this talk of humour, literary reference and writing in character, it seems that the sadism committed against women in Cave’s lyrics is rarely framed to elicit sympathy for the victims (the fact that women are usually victims is in itself problematic) or condemnation for the killers. On the contrary, Cave romanticises those who are taken by the excesses of their desire and commit amorous murder. Linda Kouvaras notes that the “unassailable heroism of [Cave’s] protagonists through their tough-guy, rebel-male posturing ... engender a willing identification on the part of the listener with the murderer.”²⁹ Furthermore, compassion for the suffering female figure is eschewed for presenting a strong male subject. As such, “the very essence of the maleness of the protagonist is given flesh, substance and raison d’être by the violence against his victim.”³⁰ The argument that ‘writing in character’ absolves Nick Cave from the responsibility of his lyrical mistreatment of women does not stand tall when one considers the asymmetrical power dynamics, and regularity with which Cave sings about female suffering.

Perpetuating Problematic Myths

The romanticising of lustmord reinforces misogynist myths, perpetuating the notion

that acts of violence against women in the throes of passion are not simply justified, but should be heralded. Perhaps depicting desire at its most depraved makes a cautionary point about the dangers of giving in to our basest urges. However, the opposite seems more apparent in Cave's lyrics.

Most fans tend to listen uncritically, and praise the music. Given this passive response, to what extent then are Cave's fans complicit in the violent mistreatment of women? Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that the "interstice between death, femininity and aesthetics is negotiated over the representation of a dead feminine body clearly marked as being other, as being not mine. To represent over her dead body signals that the represented feminine body also stands in for concepts other than death or body."³¹ Cultural attitudes towards representations of gynocide and sexual violence in art and music, in this sense, are predicated on them being symbols – "the gesture of an aesthetic substitution is such that what is literally represented – femininity and death – often entirely escapes observation."³²

This seems to be true of Cave, whose proclivity for literary references and symbolism often leads to fans excusing the misogynistic violence as 'character-driven' allegory. By not identifying with the victims in Cave's murder ballads and overlooking the dubious sexual attitudes implicit in many of Cave's lyrics, there is an element of complicity in the role of the fan in perpetuating and normalising violent attitudes towards women within popular culture.

Conclusion

Nick Cave's bleak lyrical ruminations are indeed intended to be provocative and cathartic. Music can be appreciated despite problematic social messages but we should not simply be passive spectators of depicted sexualised violence and misogyny. Rather, we should use the lyrical output of Cave as a locus for discussing representations of gender. After all, an important feature of

transgressive art is its capacity to challenge its audience, and elicit genuine dialogue about confronting issues. The visceral thrill and emotional gravitas of Cave's work arise from female suffering; a deathly denouement that enthralls as much as it appals. Let us not blindly praise misogyny in the name of 'art', but actively engage in discourse that addresses the mistreatment of women in music and art.



Pop Feminists?

BY MIKAELA BARTELS



*“is Rob
gay?”*

by Lucy Watson

THE ROLE OF GOSSIP
MAGAZINES IN REINFORCING
NORMATIVE SEXUALITY

Introduction

It is the unique role of the gossip magazine to turn an ordinary occurrence in the life of a celebrity into news – whether they're eating their lunch, playing with their child, or having sex and entering relationships. In order to make a story newsworthy, gossip magazines frame stories as scandalous, thereby worthy of reader attention. Some common frames include 'anti-monogamy', 'not-heterosexual', and 'promiscuity'. By trading on sexuality and scandal to sell magazines, gossip magazines uphold certain biases by normalising some types of sex while scandalising others. Through this process of framing certain actions as scandalous, they are active participants in cultural discourse and complicit in reinforcing traditional cultural norms.

There is much scholarly work on the celebrity; however, there is a gap in this research regarding the role of sexuality in driving gossip. As Kathleen Feeley claims, while "celebrity journalism has helped to reshape public life in America in ways profound and profane," little has been done to engage questions of "sexuality in the study of the creation, management, transmission, and reception of celebrity gossip".¹ This paper looks at how gossip magazines *Famous* and *NW* frame non-normative sexualities as scandalous, thereby turning them into news, and normalising their more 'vanilla' alternatives.

Methodology

This essay focuses on one month of *Famous* and *NW* magazines: editions published on and between September 3rd and October 1st, 2012. The majority of *Famous* and *NW* readers are female (around 85% for both magazines), and aged 18-34, with *Famous* tending to attract ages 18-24 in stronger numbers, and *NW* with stronger numbers in age groups outside this demographic.² The largest proportion of female *NW* readers were white collar workers and earned upwards

of \$60 000, while *Famous* did not have this information.³ Thus, we can infer that the largely female audience of these magazines is young, middle class, invariably upwardly mobile, and therefore are likely to form part of the mainstream, or dominant social group.

Newsworthiness: Value Judgements Shaping Attitudes

News is that which "is judged to be newsworthy by journalists, who exercise their news sense within the constraints of the news organisations within which they operate"⁴. The selection of news is subjective, based on what the journalist believes to be most important or upholding of the most news values.⁵ Therefore, news is often decided by the creators of news, and as such, news values are an ideological code that privileges dominant groups and powerful ideologies.⁶

The subjectivity of news values also shapes how stories are framed. According to Entman, "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular ... moral evaluation".⁷ Reese and Tankard both believe that framing is a conscious decision, an active process, sometimes undertaken by journalists to deceive their audiences.⁸ Frames are indicated through things like keywords, headlines, images, and font size.⁹ The magazine producers are therefore framing their stories in a certain way to heighten the scandal, the newsworthiness, and thereby increase the selling power of the magazine.

The consumerist motivations behind these 'news stories' indicate that the producers of these stories are actively responsible in creating scandal in order to sell magazines, and by portraying a narrow view of gender and sexuality they are complicit in the restrictive social attitudes that continue to exist in society.

Why are Gossip Magazines Worthy of Academic Research?

Celebrity news is one of the largest elements of popular culture.¹⁰ The ‘gossipy’ feel of many tabloid media forms implicitly questions what some feminist critics call the ‘male-stream’ embodied in the ‘hard-nosed’ knowledges associated with Western patriarchal rationalism and empiricism”.¹¹

“By turning this alleged kiss into ‘girl-on-girl’ action Famous is participating in the sensationalisation of non-normative sexualities”

Drama and visual attractiveness are pivotal to newsworthiness.¹² These are two key elements for celebrity news, and Turner states “celebrities become the locations for the discussion and evaluation of the dramatic happenings of everyday life” which Deuze specifies as “lifestyles” and “sex”.¹³ Therefore, celebrities become news when they have something ‘negative’ or ‘dramatic’ happen to them, and there are pictures to show for it.

One way for celebrities to become news is by deviating from sexual norms of their contemporary culture, breaching, as Deuze would claim “the (fine) lines of civil morality”.¹⁴ Gender transgressions are particularly common in the popular media, showing that tabloid media has an “intense interest in the gender politics of everyday life”, and often report on “issues around gender, performance, identity and difference – areas where norms work hard to insinuate order”.¹⁵ Feeley notes “celebrity gossip offers insight into contemporary attitudes” and because of this, “has helped to shape and reflect personal, group, and national identity and reinforce and challenge social norms and ideals”.¹⁶

Most scholars agree that celebrity news works to reinforce more than challenge

social norms. Johansson believes discussions “about celebrity and morality, then, can serve a normative function”.¹⁷ Similarly, Langer suggests that the “celebrity can operate as a site from which key ideological themes can be reiterated and played out,” while Marshall agrees that the celebrity commodity participates in “active construction of identity in the social world”.¹⁸ The saturation of a kind of media, value, or opinion increases its pervasiveness amongst its audience. The

more a perspective saturates the media, the more likely wider audiences are going to accept it, without considering alternatives (that are often not visible in the saturated climate). Celebrity culture has become so pervasive that it is easy for the media to use celebrity news as a way to exalt normative values.

Non-Normative Sexualities

We have seen how celebrity gossip can serve a normative function in establishing social mores.¹⁹ In the context of human sexuality, scholars talk of a binary between normative and non-normative sexualities. Gossip magazines present stories through frames that present non-normative sexualities as ‘wrong’, and therefore, by extension, their binary opposites as ‘right’.

Gayle Rubin, in her definitive 1984 essay, ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’ also sees sexuality as a binary. She defines “‘good’, ‘normal’ and ‘natural’” sex as “heterosexual, married, monogamous, procreative, non commercial”, also in pairs, within the same generation, without pornography, in private, and without toys.²⁰ The “‘bad’, ‘abnormal’ or ‘unnatural’” sex (or non-normative as this paper defines it) is “any sex that violates these rules”, or particularly, “homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial” as well as masturbatory, or sex in groups, in public,

casual, cross-generational, kinky, or with toys or pornography.²¹ Rubin also presents her binary on a scale, with some acts of ‘unnatural’ sex privileged before others; for instance, non-monogamous heterosexuality is privileged above homosexuality, which is above transsexuality.²²

Certain types of sexuality have been labelled non-normative as a result of tradition and statistical norms.²³ The culture of embracing one type of identity over another contributes to stigmatisation of non-normative sexual forms. Many conservatives see the “antiquity of sexual norms” as a reason to obey them and believe “that marital hetero sex has a rationale in nature, however Darwinian, and it is therefore normative”.²⁴ The Darwinian function of normative sexuality serves to reinforce the binary idea that anything other than reproductive sex is ‘not-normal’ and therefore conflated with ‘wrong’.

Deuze points out that gossip magazines love stories imbued with “moral indignation”, particularly with relation to the “dominant, heterosexual and family-oriented view of civil life”.²⁵ These stories, he claims, usually revolve around divorce, cheating, break ups, extreme sexual preference, breaches of monogamy – or, in other words, non-normative sexualities.²⁶ This article will discuss *Famous* and *NW*’s use of three key frames in turn.

The ‘Anti-Monogamy’ Frame

The term ‘anti-monogamy’ is used to refer to stories where the celebrities appear to be defying monogamy. The best example of this frame occurs on the 3rd September, simultaneously in *Famous* and *NW*, both documenting Kim Kardashian’s alleged orgy. *NW* categorises the story as “news just in”, and in the headline signifies the ‘anti-monogamy’ frame by emphasising that she was caught “with a man & woman” – which also can signify the ‘not heterosexual’ frame, making the story even more scandalous.²⁷ The lead emphasises that this type of sex is non-

normative, labelling the event a “scandal”.²⁸ The ‘anti monogamy’ frame is again reiterated through the photo and caption, which depicts Kardashian walking, smiling, ahead of a sullen Kanye West, her current partner²⁹. West has his hands in his pockets and is frowning; his body language demonstrates that he is unimpressed. The caption reads “Naughty girl: Kanye is sure to be unimpressed with Kim’s saucy shenanigans”.³⁰ Regardless of the fact that this orgy took place in 2001, by pairing the story with implications of West’s negative reaction the story emphasises the ‘anti-monogamy’ frame while placing the blame squarely on Kardashian’s shoulders, as though she is now in trouble for being “naughty” and not-normative.

“These sexualities are just ‘non-normative’ enough to be titilating and scandalous, but not too deviant that they should be hidden from view”

The ‘Not Heterosexual’ Frame

Stories of celebrities straying from heterosexuality are, arguably, some of the most scandalous for gossip magazines. On September 3rd, *NW* had splashed across its cover “World Exclusive: Bombshell tell all book: Is Rob Gay?” with a large picture of Robert Pattinson, looking angry (and interestingly enough; stereotypically not-gay – unshaven, unkempt, unfashionable). The corresponding article under the same headline ropes its readers in with the bold lead, with key words like “exclusive”, “explosive”, “lifts the lid”, and, to end, “pretty bloody juicy!”³¹ It is clear through their use of headline, location on the cover and keywords that the authors are presenting this news “exclusive” through a homosexual frame.

However, the headlines are entirely misleading. Beyond a reference to Pattinson once claiming he is “allergic to vagina”, the article then goes on to affirm Pattinson’s heterosexuality, by claiming “A close friend of Rob’s told me... the chances of Rob being gay ‘are the same as Hugh Hefner being gay. Rob loves the ladies’”.³² Therefore, it is evident that by using the ‘not-heterosexual’ frame, *NW* has been able to recycle an old story (news of Stewart’s cheating first broke in July) through a new lens, in order to sell copies, particularly apparent given the cover placement of the story.

On September 10th, *Famous* published their own ‘not-heterosexual’ story, this time about Miley Cyrus.³³ The large picture, of Cyrus’ new grunge hair and style, described as “radical”, reinforces the bisexual frame.³⁴ The lead states: “Proving she can’t be tamed, the star has cheated on fiancé Liam – with another woman!”³⁵ The emphasis on the final statement is apparent, as it earns itself its own line, as well as the sentence break to accentuate the statement when read. Some of the key phrases in the article that present the non-normative frame as voyeuristic, and therefore more scandalous (and thus containing more celebrity news values, making it more newsworthy) include “Miley’s girl-on-girl action”, “her hot all-girl hook-up”, and her “experimenting” behaviour.³⁶ The frame has been employed to amplify and indeed create the scandal of the story. By turning this alleged kiss into ‘girl-on-girl action’ *Famous* is participating in the sensationalisation of non-normative sexualities, perpetuating mainstream prejudices and furthering the idea that this type of behaviour is not ‘normal’.

The idea that people become newsworthy when they have done something scandalous is fitting for a story in *Famous* on September 17th. Way back on page 78, the profile piece on DJ Ruby Rose, is not really news, and precisely because Rose has not done something

to fit her lesbian stereotype. In the article, she comments on this stereotyping: “I’m always referred to as ‘lesbian DJ’ or ‘lesbian television presenter’”.³⁷ *Famous* claims there is a “fascination” with homosexuality, to which Rose responds “I understand it’s all very titillating”.³⁸ This short piece helps to explain the way that not-heterosexual frames are employed in stories specifically to add scandal and interest. Employing this frame continues to perpetuate the idea in mainstream society that these [stereotyped] minority groups are indeed scandalous, or at least, not normal.

The ‘Promiscuity’ Frame

As Rubin has claimed, female promiscuity is far more non-normative than male promiscuity,³⁹ perpetuating a double standard of sexual behaviour between the genders. Gossip magazines tend to report on both, although the language employed tends to be far more disapproving when a woman is promiscuous.

“Celebrity commodity participates in ‘active construction’ of identity in the social world”

In “Katy Vs Riri: The Battle for Rob” published in *NW* on 10th September, we see the promiscuity frame employed to illustrate the magazine’s disapproval of Katy Perry and Rihanna’s assertive behaviour. The lead makes mention of “‘aggressive’ sexts” sent by the women as they “try to win R-Patz’ affection”.⁴⁰ The article emphasizes both women in relation to who they have recently been sleeping with, and even puts Rihanna’s recent sexual exploits in a breakout box, labelling her as “provocative”, and includes a photo of her partying with other men. The language of the article is what most spells out the magazine’s disapproval. Animalistic metaphors are littered throughout the text, calling the women “songbirds” with “their

perfectly manicured claws out”, before “pouncing into action” and “laying on the charm and playing the minx”.⁴¹ These metaphors frame the story in a negative way, assigning in that news value and thus implying the disapproval of female promiscuity and assertive sexuality.

It’s also interesting to note that stories about John Mayer’s promiscuity are framed in such a way so as to blame the woman. In *Famous*, Katy Perry “let her guard down” and therefore allowed her heart to be broken.⁴² *NW* claims that Perry is “clinging to John” and links the story to her ex and “serial womaniser”, Russell Brand.⁴³ By linking Brand to the story in a breakout box, the article implies that Perry is at fault for dating men who hop “from bed to bed”.⁴⁴

Based on these examples, stories of promiscuity on behalf of men or women are framed in such a way so that the women are more at fault, in order to enhance the scandal by tipping sexuality further down Rubin’s normative scale.

Conclusions

The stories that appear in *Famous* and *NW* are overwhelmingly framed in terms of non-normative sexuality in order to present the scandal that is at the heart of celebrity “news”. This method of turning non-normative sexuality into news demonstrates the ways in which popular media continue to privilege normative forms of sexuality over others. This point is even more dramatically proven by the choice of stories: affairs, extra-marital monogamy and multiple heterosexual relationships were the most popular, because these sexualities are just ‘non-normative’ enough to be titillating and scandalous, but not too deviant that they should be hidden from view. Incredibly deviant sexual behaviour is swept under the carpet, and gossip magazines are only ever lifting the tiniest corner of the rug, so that society may catch the briefest of glimpses of what lies beneath.

*miss
theorist's
love* & *the
retreat*

by Alexander Cigana

Miss Theorist's Love

darling, i've spent all day
(re)navigating hegemonic de-situations of feminine multiplicity -

but don't tell me i'm beached
sexless among the lunatic eggshells of some empty lettered maze.

and don't enforce i speak
as myself either, and make one country from polyvocality

and so potentialise power,
for identity and punctuation are a conquering architecture -

trust me (though vows are
empty) it interested the sorbonne for three whole winters.

discourse decays, dear,
to the real dialectic (i've read) when our bodies lie in bed;

the mind we conspire
to call 'mine' aches and burns, ineffable by available terms,

so i (de)constructed, chipped
away and now i'm here at the un-here i always never suspected

existed, and fall into your arms
but it's not submission, just parody of the gendered condition;

we all have foibles, and mine's
temporary pose of damsel and to picture you manful in knighthood.

kings and capitalists bend
to contextualise my sex, i bet, and narrativise lover's eyes within

paradigms that whet
our weakness to lend our inscribed specificities to generic ends, but

what i mean is 'i love you',
though there's this thing; i love you because i lack something i mask,

and somebody said it,
so extend to the footnotes your gaze, and believe me

(which is all i can ask)
or forget it.

The Retreat

Love spoke his name
But the retinue was disappointed -
Years of voluble enthrallment depleted,
And all saw the same

Ignorant but serviceable territory
Appear where past revelatory

Rhetoric of gesture
Mined a promise from histories
Of suppleness detained by mysteries
Or God's selfish posture.

Undressed thus of difference,
No whisper-garment over impotence,

As instances of men
They regarded a summary earth
Of mythless death and physical birth,
Then put on again

Trappings of neighbourhood,
Took to business and motherhood.



*a fair
share*

BY SHU RAN MICHAEL LI

Graham saw his brother's grip loosen. His slender, effeminate hands flapped open after the reel like a startled heron, taking to its wings. The line and tin-can reel fell, breaking the green stillness of the water, not be seen again.

'You have hands like fucken' chicken's feet.' He heard his father say, 'Useless.'

Hearing those words, Graham was ashamed that he felt relief first. All the same, it made him a little proud that this tone could never have been meant for him. He looked over to his brother: younger by three years, his scrawny limbs didn't hold the promise of Dad's arms, which were thick, tanned, leathery, and covered with coarse, black hair. He looked like someone from mum's mob, who dad referred to occasionally as the 'little people'. David was short, even for a twelve year old. 'He's skinnier than I was at that age', thought Graham.

The boy kept his eyes down. 'I'm sorry.' he said with a soft, hoarse voice. Neither of them rose or fell to their father's words. That was their fellowship. They waited for Dad's anger to evaporate. The aluminium boat felt smaller than ever.

They were hobo-fishing. That spring, the dead trees in the dam did not seem eerie, and the magpies, galahs and cockatoos squabbled noisily in them. The farm's pastures were green, and the sun shone through the more tender shoots, showing emerald. No dogs came to maul the sheep.

That was the year when things began to change. David gave up trying to impress Dad, and Dad stopped trying to change him. The boy simply didn't fit. As much as Graham tried to help his brother, David never seemed to have the gumption.

'Here, around this wire. Twice, then this way, around the tensioner. This strainer, I mean. Then knock the strainer out of the knot.'

'Okay.'

'Tighter, Dave. You know the knot, you're clever. But you need to pull harder. This fence needs to be like guitar strings.'

Graham ended up doing the knot himself. 'Now you knock the strainer out.'

David gave it a slap with his hand. The wire hummed back. 'I'll get a mallet.'

'No, mate, like this.' Graham gave it the callused heel of his palm. 'Just a bit rusty. See? The knot stays, there are no pointy bits coming out. None of the sheep'll get cut, and this is so strong, if they push they get pushed back on. Isn't that clever?'

'Okay. Yeah.'

'Come on, we better hurry or we'll both be in the shit.'

Next to his brother, Graham secretly felt strong and useful, he felt that farming was something that people like himself were born to do, and that other people, like David, were not suited for, and that this made them somehow weaker, lesser men. David was not what Dad wanted in a son. Graham used to compare himself and feel a perverse sense of pride. David was delicate, and you could see the blue veins, webbed under the milky skin inside his joints. Graham enjoyed the remembrance of his own body, the way it was in the boarding school days: how the rugby jersey fitted around his chest and stomach, how firm the muscles were under his fingers, how he looked at the water's edge at a swimming carnival, lit by the sun that shimmered off the pool. Looking back on the past now, he wished that he could have understood that there were other ways to be, and that he had been more like David. He even occasionally wished that he was mistreated like David.

The crunch of hard heels brought him back to the present. The dead trees in the dam were

taller now, unless the water had simply gotten lower. Leaning into each other, and bleached bone-white by the sun's glare, they looked like the carcass of some great leviathan, long dead. He saw his brother walking up the road to the dam. David was forty now, but still lithe and slim as he strode up the path. Dark, narrow, and leather, his elegant city shoes that Graham didn't know the name of were covered in dust. David picked them deliberately through the stones. He had worn a simple black suit to the funeral, and if he was hot, he didn't show it. The dry summer wind showed the suit's lining: a silky blue that seemed incongruous with the red dust, with the drought. Graham felt plain and ugly in the plain polo shirt; tucked over his belly - into his blue jeans and Blundstone shit-kickers.

But David, as was his way, was unconceited about his taste and sophistication in front of his brother.

'We're missing the wake. You had something important to tell me, I gather?' He asked.

'Our aunt's on it. They won't notice for a bit.' For months now, Graham had rehearsed this moment in his mind, turning the possibilities over and over, like a knife on a whetstone. There was no nice way of doing something bad. 'I saw the will. Have you seen it?'

'Yes,' David said. He sat down on the bare earth next to Graham, and drew out a pack of Benson and Hedges, taking one for himself and giving another to Graham. 'Half of this farm to you, and half to me. Do you have a light?'

Graham gave his brother a match and watched. He had left for the city on bad terms, he had more or less run away, but some of the countryside stayed with him: he shook the match out, and put the burnt out cinder back into the box. 'My brother still.' thought Graham.

'What will you do with your share?'

'Not sure. Farming's not my life. All I can do is lease it. Maybe sell it.'

'Do you think it's fair? Fifty-fifty?'

David took a long drag of the cigarette and let the smoke out slowly. Graham knew that this was to busy his lips. He searched his brother's face for the next move.

'No.'

It was easier than Graham expected.

'Will you sell it to me? Market price?' It sounded cold, mercenary, and suspicious even as Graham said it, but there was no easier way.

'Sure.' David replied, almost without hesitation. 'I'm no farmer. You deserve it. You stuck with them when things went pear-shaped. You did the right thing.'

'And you were too weak to,' thought Graham. Instead he said, 'You didn't have it easy either. You're a success now, but you cleaned pub toilets, for a good five years, didn't you?'

'That built character.'

'When you started to write me, at first, it sounded so hard we all wondered why you'd done it.' It was something Graham said a lot, and he only meant the question rhetorically, half-knowing the answer, and afraid of it.

'You were the better man, to have stayed with them. You made a sacrifice. I couldn't have done that.'

Something stirred in Graham. He wanted to tell about the debt, and the drought: having to shoot the dying lambs, the packs of dogs that would maul a ewe but leave it alive, opening up a throat, or a belly; and, as if to insult him, eat nothing. Most of all, he wanted to tell him that all of this was his whole world entire, and that he had nothing

else. But Graham said nothing. He wanted to be admired.

‘Have you ever noticed that in all the families we know, one kid stays on the farm, the fortunate son gets sent to school, or to the city?’

‘Yes.’

‘It’s usually the better liked one, the one more praised.’

‘Is it?’

‘I thought that was going to be you. I thought I was going to stay on the farm, look after Mum and Dad when they get old.’

He said nothing, and let David continue.

‘I was selfish. But I was no good at this, you know I hated this, and you know the grades I got. I couldn’t be happy here.’ He put out the cigarette in a burnt out rifle cartridge that he got from somewhere. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘It’s alright.’ His eyes look wet, thought Graham.

‘What you’ve done, Graham, it’s noble. You were a good son. All I ever thought about was myself.’

Graham wanted to tell him that the years have eaten him alive. He used to feel warm and happy when people called him ‘a good son’, or a ‘good bloke’. He told himself that it was good to choose his parent’s desires over his own. But as the years wore on, he couldn’t say if it was because he was kind and unselfish, or if he was gullible and subservient.

Things that might have been can now never be. He wondered if he had been too afraid to show initiative, of running in the same race as David, and losing.

‘I should have helped you all.’

He wanted to tell David that they had found coal under the farm, a lot of it, and that he was buying the other half under value. He wanted to come clean, and to be understood. But he held on: *I am the good son. I deserve this. It is all I have.*

Closing Artworks



BY MILENA BOJOVIC



BY MILENA BOJOVIC

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THE DOUBLE BIND ON WOMEN OF COLOUR

Judy Zhu

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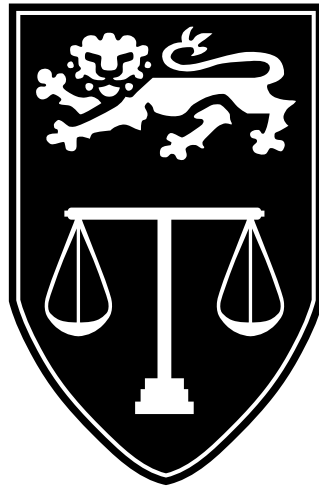
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