

THE TERLOPER

Virginia Tech's LGBT Magazine

Spring 2014, Issue #1



From *The Missing You Poems* Collection

by Lisa Summe

Missing you has something to do with
the new faculty-staff planning calendar,
which is all I find in my school mailbox
after not checking it until the second week of school.
It tells me that classes meet on Labor Day, that October is
LGBT history month, that I'm not getting paid soon,
that this is one more way we aren't together.
Sometimes I take home my boring mail,
a flier for a canned food drive, and I write a poem on it
and mail it to your house to help us remember
how we used to put secret letters in each other's
school mailboxes. I'd say *Stop torturing me*
with your V-necks. You'd say *Meet me*
in the copy room at 4:45. We'd both get there early.

THE TERLOPER

theinterlopervt@gmail.com

EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief Matty Bennett

Features Editor Sam Huff

Arts & Entertainment Editor Josh Thompson

Sex & Health Editor Jennie Brogan

Social Politics Editor Aaron Horst

Narrative Editor Nora Salem

Copy Editor Lisa Moskowitz

Fact Checker Cory Brunson

DESIGN

Design Director Sarah Gugercin

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Julia Brankley, Josh Kim, Anthony Szczurek, Lady Amalthea,
Danny Mathews, Katherine Hickey, Lisa Summe, Will Scott

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS

Phim Her, Brian Craig, Katherine Flores, Sarah Anthony,
Will Scott, Kenna Day

SPECIAL THANKS

VT Printing, Graduate School Diversity Scholars Program,
Jeff Mann, Shaun Janis, The OutCrowd Magazine

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Letter from the Editor

Moving to Blacksburg from New York was rough. Like, real rough. First I had to adjust to the fact that there wasn't a gay bar in the town I lived in. That was rough. Then I found out that the (yes, "the") gay bar in Roanoke had closed down. That was even more rough. I was going to go there for my birthday. Instead, I had a sad attempt at a dance party in my living room. It sucked.

Why did it suck? Because there weren't a bunch of queer people crammed into a shitty bar dancing to "Work, Bitch!" by Britney Spears. It sucked because I couldn't go somewhere in town—hell, somewhere within a hundred miles—and grind against some random stud and make out with him for the hell of it. I'm honestly more of a stay in and play video games or watch Netflix kind of guy, but the fact that I didn't have the option, that I don't have the option, to go out to a gay bar in my town and dance like a wild fuck really sucks.

There's something about having a physical space where queer people congregate that is very important. Although with this project, *The Interloper*, I'm not able to provide a physical space for queer people and allies, I am able to provide something physical. Something tangible. Something to hold on to, to cling to, that represents the



Photo by Will Scott

voices and visions of dozens of advocates of the queer community here at Virginia Tech and beyond.

In this issue, the first issue ever of *The Interloper*, you'll get a glimpse into what it means to be queer when you're in a "straight" relationship; whether or not Beyoncé is really just perpetuating archaic, hegemonic gender roles with her new visual album; and a top ten list of inclusive country anthems and artists.

I am so proud of all the hard work that went into the first issue of *The Interloper*. So take this copy—hold it, touch it, feel its physicality, and realize that a bunch of people worked their asses off to manifest queer advocacy into the physical realm at Virginia Tech.

xoxo,
Matty

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CATAPULTED BACK

into Heteronormativity

A woman's guide to queering
“heterosexual” relationships

by Lady Amalthea

Illustration by Brian Craig



Allow me to introduce myself: I'm a queer-identified femme, a cisgendered Trini-Jamerican, and a fiend for performing one's identities—and I'm currently dating a dude. Over the years, I've gone through various identity phases that have ranged from sex-o-phobic and virgin, reluctantly monogamous, briefly polyamorous, anti-relationship-labels, avid sexual experimenter, serious with women/casual with men, and (now) happily monogamous with a very straight, fairly butch cisgendered man. After spending so much time in various queer communities (social, political, romantic), it became a bit jarring to suddenly be catapulted back into heteronormativity. Now that I feel perfectly content within my heterosexual relationship that could (potentially) last a lifetime, what does this mean for my queer identity? What does it mean to be queer outside of being in a queer relationship? And is it possible to queer a straight relationship?

Feminist columnist and sex educator Tristan Taormino was one of the first to coin the term “The Queer Heterosexual” in her 2003 *Village Voice* article. She defines the term primarily as people in a straight relationship who deviate somehow from mainstream notions of straightness (e.g., butch straight women, femme straight men, polyamorous couples, straight cross-dressers, BDSM enthusiasts, or those who align themselves with queer or intersectional politics/communities in other ways). I am including her definition of the queer heterosexual here, but also extend this term to those who identify as anything under the LGBT umbrella and yet find themselves in a relationship with a straight-identified person.

Here is a quick list of ways for all you women to queer that everyday heteronormative relationship of yours:

1. Own your heteronormative privilege

First things first. Whether you identify as queer, straight, bi, gay, pansexual, etc., it is important to remember that once you are in a heterosexual relationship (or read as being in one), you have access to certain freedoms and privileges that you wouldn't have if you were dating a woman, trans person, intersex person, etc. For instance, in a straight relationship, you have the ability to *not* queer your relationship in public spaces that may be homophobic; your relationship will probably not be invalidated on homophobic grounds by family members, colleagues, or co-workers; you can easily find media, laws, and benefits that validate relationships that “look like yours;” the list goes on and on.

2. Use a dildo on your man

The fluidity in being able to role-play during sex to be both the enter-er and the enter-ee during intercourse is an amazing tenet that exists in many queer relationships. Regardless of how much you might currently role play in other ways with your cis dude, being the only one in your partnership to be physically penetrated can start to feel a bit rote and let's face it—straight. Buy a dildo and strap-on at your local feminist sex toy shop or purchase one online. *Babeland* is a great place to start and has a pretty extensive

website where you can purchase a whole range of sex toys and have them sent straight to your door. And while we're on the topic, why stop there? Have your guy give you a blow job. The visual can be a turn on for both parties and the pressure against your clit from the dildo (while he's blowing) is also an event to remember. If your man is feeling particularly attached to his “masculine” penetrating role, remind him that there's nothing a man-identified-man can ever do to make him “less of a man,” that it can be sexy to lose control to someone you trust, and that it's not sexy to hold onto archaic sex roles rooted in misogyny and homophobia. **Side note:** The above suggestions are not meant to take anything away from those in the LGBT community who prefer to have more fixed roles during sex (e.g., some who identify as stone butch, high femme, or trans may prefer sex where one partner is the primary “penetrator”).

3. Let go of your birth assigned gender for a night and dress in drag

Are there times where you feel yourself playing the role of the “girlfriend” in a way that feels rigid, sexist, or otherwise unenjoyable? Try swapping roles or clothes. Try sharing hobbies that feel gendered in your relationship and see what happens next.

4. Be more open about your sex life with straight people


From personal experience, sex positivity seems more prominent in queer communities, perhaps because queer sex is often read as >>

being “deviant” or “taboo” in the wider heteronormative society, making it easier to openly discuss sex with my fellow queers than with my fellow straights. Things like how often we have sex, what kinds of orgasms we want, what kinds of sex toys we want, what are our sexual fantasies, etc. come up often in casual queer conversations. There are, of course, a myriad of reasons these conversations could benefit straight women as well. It can be quite liberating to talk openly about sex for straight women who are also survivors of sexual violence, women who have been objectified and made to feel like they should be ashamed of taking agency over their bodies. Try starting casual conversations with straight friends about queering your relationship and try and get a dialogue going about the concerns the straight community so often faces with issues of sex-positivity. I mean, sexist outdated notions like waiting until the 3rd or 5th or 8th date before a straight woman can have sex with a straight man or not having any kind of sex while on your period really ought to be deconstructed — and perhaps thrown out the window entirely.

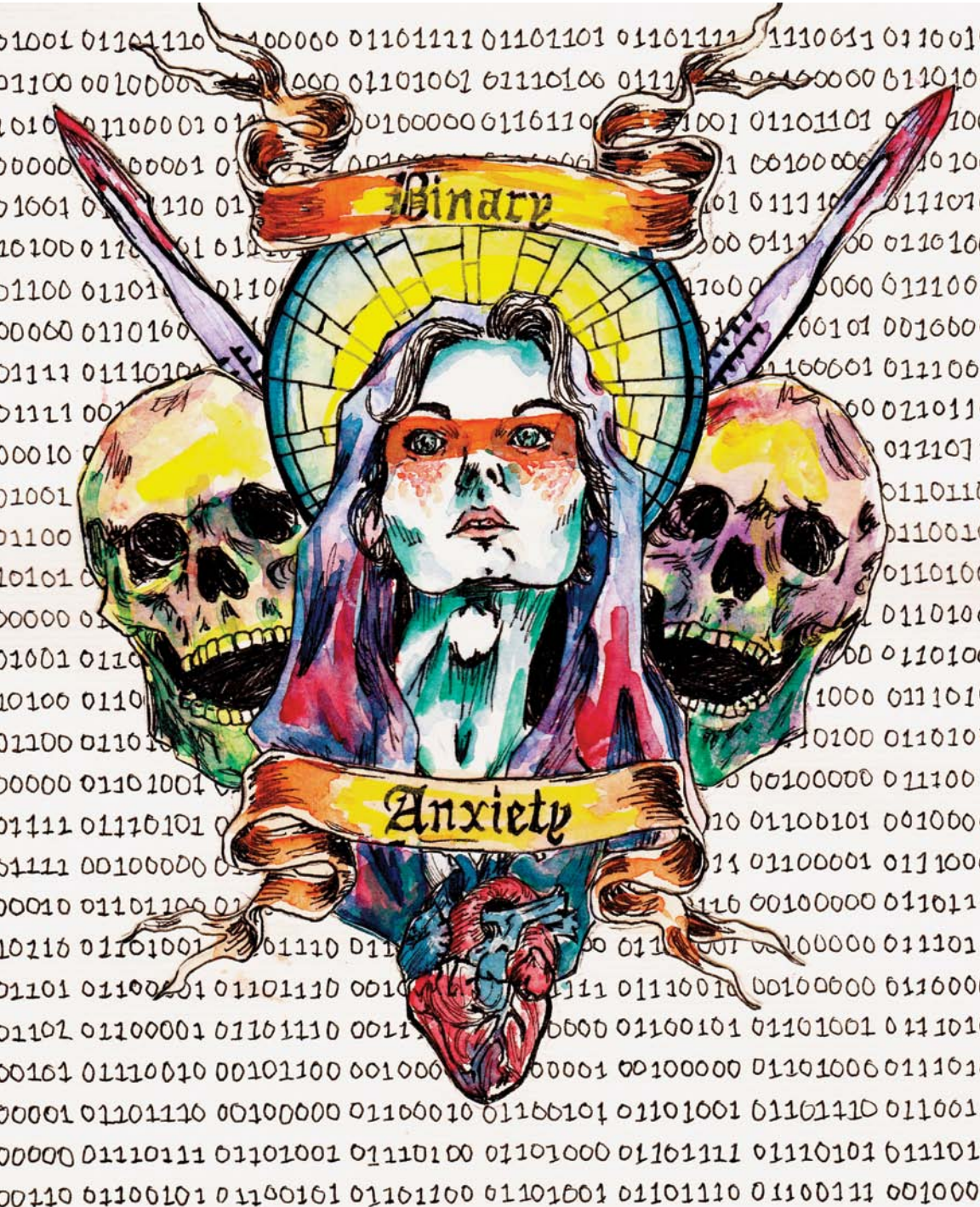
5. Find ways to use your relationship as a platform for change

Try using gender neutral/gender inclusive language more: (e.g., rather than saying boyfriend, try saying “partner”). Fight to ensure that everyone in the world can love as freely as you can whether this be through educating youth about anti-bullying, through volunteering with a marriage equality organization, or through donating what you can to a cause you support. Fight for things besides marriage equality that affect the LGBT community worldwide such as police brutality, street harassment, homelessness, healthcare issues, the injustice of single sex bathrooms for trans people, and more.

So in the name of confusing the hell out of people, let’s blur these lines even further, let’s play more in our romantic relationships, let’s reclaim our queer identities in new ways—beyond who we bring into the bedroom, let’s start using new words to define us, even if those words are fleeting or performances more than they are words. And to end with a quote from the great Tristan Taormino:

“It’s the religious right’s worst nightmare: We’ve infiltrated the ranks! Our men have taught your men how to dress better, and our women have sold your women devices to replace your men! And now that we’re in your most private and sacred of spaces—the bedroom—you’re having sex like queers and you don’t even know it!” 

Binary Anxiety by Kenna Day



GAY OLE OPRY

A TOP TEN LIST OF LGBT-INCLUSIVE COUNTRY ANTHEMS AND ARTISTS

BY JOSH THOMPSON

In a world of mud and tires, coon dogs and chewing tobacco, and Daisy Dukes and good ol' boys, it's hard to imagine that there's room for the gay community. But if we look behind the hay bale, we'll see that country music is more inclusive than we might think. While it's not all steers and queers, here's my list of the top ten gay-friendly country music artists and queer-themed country songs, in no particular order.

LAVENDER COUNTRY

While Steve Grand is often referred to as the first openly gay country singer, the title probably goes to Patrick Haggerty, creator of Lavender Country in 1972. The band released its self-titled album in 1973 and remained active in the Seattle area until dissolving in 1976. With songs like "Come Out Singin'" and "Cryin' Those Cocksucking Tears," Lavender Country paved the way for the LGBT community in the country music genre by blending the traditions of country and western music with a queer sensitivity.

LEANN RIMES

Best known for such songs as "Blue" and "How Do I Live?," LeAnn Rimes is a longtime equality advocate. This sultry singer has filmed an It Gets

Better video, posed for the NOH8 campaign, and performed with the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, including a touching performance of "The Rose" in memory of LGBT teens who committed suicide as a result of bullying.

DOLLY PARTON, "TRAVELIN' THRU"

The boobs, the lips, the dresses, the big hair and bigger personality: Dolly Parton is a drag queen's dream. But she's also worked her way into the LGBT niche of country music with a song written for the 2005 transgender-themed drama *TransAmerica*. On its surface, "Travelin' Thru" sounds like a song about perseverance, but its message of being on a journey to discover one's true self is an experience familiar to many transgender people.

STEVE GRAND, “ALL-AMERICAN BOY”

Imagine your life savings resting on the success of a YouTube video. Welcome to the world of Steve Grand, whose country-tinged rock ballad “All-American Boy” put him on the gaydar last summer. It’s a tale of unrequited love between a gay man and an apparently straight “all-American” male friend. When the gay man misreads signals from Mr. All-American, he is left confused and longing. But this is a story that crosses all sexualities. After the video went viral, Grand received hundreds of messages from people saying something like, “Your story is my story. Thank you for this.”



Illustration by Brian Craig

RASCAL FLATTS, “LOVE WHO YOU LOVE”

With its carpe diem undertones and inclusive message, “Love Who You Love” could be regarded as the “Same Love” of country music—but let’s not go there. With that iconic Rascal Flatts feel, this song urges us to not waste time and love who we love. While no gender or sexual orientation is ever referred to, many regard “Love Who You Love” as an LGBT-inclusive anthem.



Illustration by Brian Craig

KACEY MUSGRAVES, “FOLLOW YOUR ARROW”

Damned if I do, and damned if I don’t. Kacey Musgraves’ “Follow Your Arrow” suggests that what you do isn’t going to please everyone, so you might as well just “follow your arrow.” And one way of doing this gets a little gay: “When the straight and narrow gets a little too straight,” you can “kiss lots of girls if that’s something you’re into.” >>

WILLIE NELSON, “COWBOYS ARE FREQUENTLY SECRETLY FOND OF EACH OTHER”

Willie Nelson, Burt Reynolds, and a troupe of dancing cowboys ... No, this isn't a gay western-themed joke. It's "Cowboys are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other." This gay cowboy song satirizes stereotypes usually associated with cowboys and gay men, such as the relation of western wear to the leather subculture. (What did you think all those saddles and boots were about anyway?) And while the lyrics seem to reinforce heteronormativity, the messages of accepting oneself and others speak to embracing both the traditionally masculine and feminine sides within all of us.

COURT YARD HOUNDS, “AIN’T NO SON”

Unfortunately, many gay teens find themselves kicked out of their homes every year. Dixie Chicks members Emily Robison and Martie Maguire (Court Yard Hounds) wrote the song "Ain't No Son" after watching a documentary about these homeless gay teens. The song opens with a son's plea to his father of "I'm still your little man." The rest is the father's response that the boy "ain't no son" of his. The juxtaposition of the son's call and his father's response is meant to highlight the awful situation.

CHELY WRIGHT


Chely Wright is regarded as the first major country musician to come out as a lesbian. While her reception in the



Illustration by Brian Craig

country music scene wasn't the warmest at times, she found support from several artists, including Tim McGraw and Faith Hill. Since coming out, Wright has founded the LIKE ME Organization whose mission is to speak out about the need for LGBT equality and against classroom and LGBT bullying.

CHRIS CARMACK, “WHAT IF I WAS WILLING”

Coming out can be difficult and oftentimes scary, but remaining in the closet can be just as stressful. So some choose to navigate the often-awkward grounds of dating with the ambiguous pronoun, like Chris Carmack playing Will Lexington on ABC's "Nashville". The song could refer to a woman but, given Lexington's hidden sexuality, probably refers to a guy. In a genre that hasn't always been welcoming to the queer community, this is sometimes how to survive. While it's not out in the open, it does reflect a very real part of life in the LGBT country music world. 

IF THE SPIRIT MOVES YOU

QUEER CHRISTIANS ARE
REDEFINING SPIRITUALITY
IN SURPRISING WAYS

BY KATHERINE HICKEY



Photo by Sarah Anthony

Rebecca's smile widens as she describes her time at Grace Baptist Church. She gleefully describes the sense of belonging and community she has found in her Bible study, her love for the youth group, and the friendships she has developed over years of Sunday morning attendance. For Rebecca, church activities and worship are not mere physical spaces, they are a home that model love and community.

Grace Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla. would seem an unlikely spiritual home for Rebecca, a young, vibrant, educated lesbian. The Southern Baptist Convention has repeatedly stated that same-sex relationships are sinful "alternative lifestyles." And yet, each Sunday, she sits in the pews of a community that has officially rejected an identity she claims as her own.

Matthew, a self-identified Catholic pansexual man, has made a similar decision to attend, serve, and love a church that rejects his relationships as "disordered." Within the walls of his private Catholic high school, same-sex

attractions were framed as a "struggle" or "a cross to bear." Celibacy was presented as the only option for Matthew and other students attracted to same-sex partners if they wanted to stay committed to their religious tradition. It was only once he began attending college that the idea of entering a same-sex relationship shifted from an inconceivable scenario to a possible reality. Principles of love and personhood expanded his understanding of Catholic theology until he arrived at the conclusion that same-sex relationships could indeed fit within the framework of God-honoring relationships.

Matthew's Catholic family and Catholic education created a strong sense of belonging to the church institution, as well as to the tenants of the Catholic faith. In fact, he frames his pansexual identity within Catholic theology.

"I don't work with separate loves," Matthew said. "I was raised in the ideas and the logic and the Catholic understanding that are always going to be with me. I realize that even in that system, >>

maybe even motivated by that religious understanding, I [will] find someone that loves and accepts me.”

LGBT communities would often classify both the Catholic and Baptist churches as unaffirming in light of their teachings on same-sex relationships. And yet Rebecca and Matthew describe their church experiences as powerfully transformative. Within the confines of the unaffirming rhetoric of their communities, they are challenged to live a life of service articulated around the principles of faith, hope, and love. Rebecca is aware of the irony of the situation and understands the confusion her lesbian identity and church membership trigger in her peers.

Matthew’s understanding of marriage rooted in love and not procreation conflict for several individuals in his community.

“For me personally, they don’t clash,” Matthew said, “but I know for other people they clash.”

After explaining the reconciliation of his pansexual and Catholic identities with a friend, he sensed the conversation could not move forward because they were both approaching the topic with their own beliefs about the nature of child-bearing.

While the Roman Catholic Church is not affirming of same-sex relationships, 54 percent of American Catholics support marriage equality, and only a third believe same-sex relationships are sinful, according to two different surveys done by PewResearch in 2013. Matthew describes the sense of security fostered among his Catholic friends.

“I don’t think I felt any safer than with the friends and connections I had made at the Catholic ministry.”



With a majority of his Catholic peers supportive of his identity, he is able to cognitively detach the official church teachings from the meaningful experiences in his community. Matthew spoke fondly of the service trips he took with his university’s Catholic Campus Ministry. Their commitment to social justice and helping those in need motivated him to increase his involvement and even become a student leader. It became a place where his voice mattered and his presence was valued.

Similarly, Rebecca was born and raised Southern Baptist with a strong adherence to Southern Baptist theology. However, she has been more hesitant to disclose her sexual identity to her church peers and temporarily sought a Christian LGBT community to no avail. She attended an LGBT Bible study at a local affirming Lutheran church. She describes the event as fully centered on LGBT-identity, eclipsing its religious purpose.

“I want to have gay friends who are Christian,” Rebecca said, “but if we meet together, I want to talk about Jesus, about the Bible, about what we can do in the community.”

And perhaps this is what Grace Baptist Church of Orlando is able to offer her.

Rebecca perceives it as a space where she is valued primarily as a person.

On a practical level, she recognizes that her sexual identity might raise barriers in her future involvement with the church. However, the weekly experience of going to a place where she feels at home, valued, and active is enough for her today. Disclosing her lesbian identity remains tentative and speculative.


“I don’t know if I could talk about it,” she confessed. “I think maybe I could, but I am not really sure.” Her doubt, while significant, is not a deal-breaker, nor is it the hinge upon which she bases her attendance.

Rebecca and Matthew’s stories reveal that the church experiences of LGBT Christians transcend the simple dichotomy of affirming and unaffirming, and changing church landscapes are

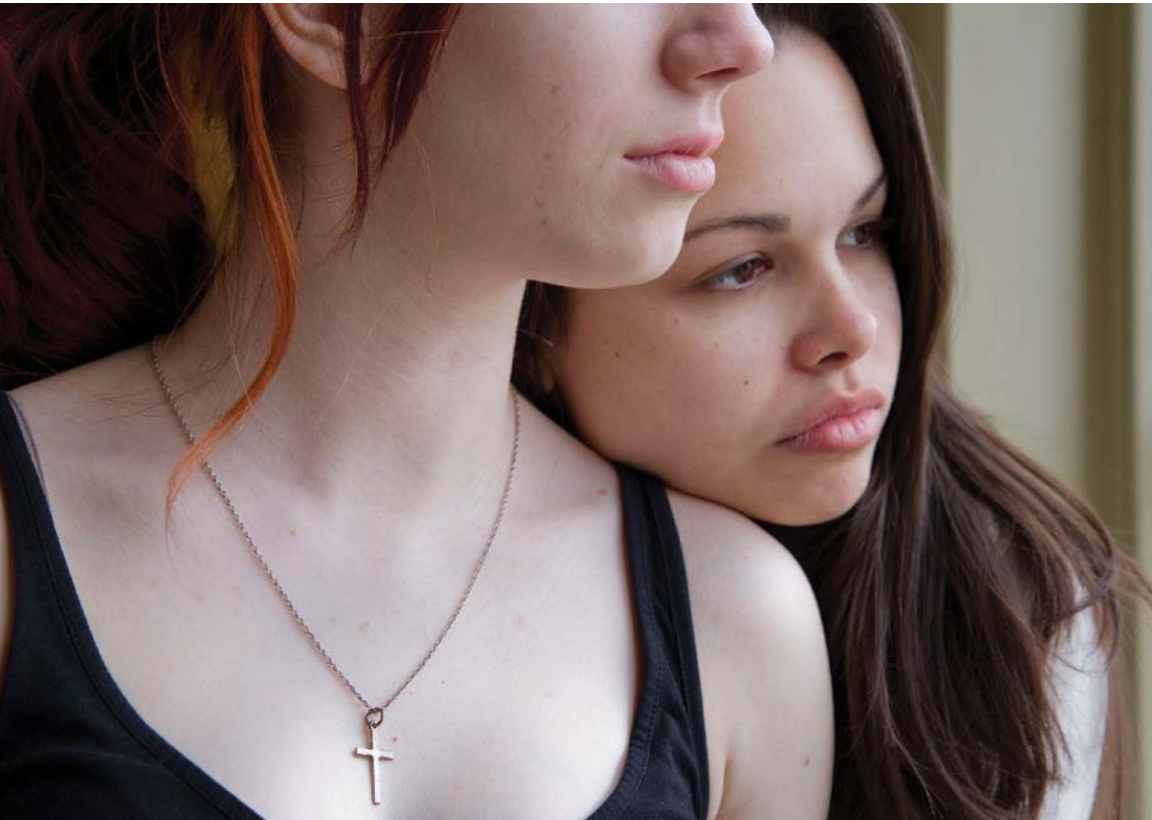
fostering new ways to think about and participate in church. The possibility that churches that do not support same-sex relationships can be safe spaces challenges the clear boundaries set up around the words “safe” and “unsafe,” “affirming” and “unaffirming.” Matthew only had words of praise and thanks toward his Catholic community.

“I haven’t felt excluded or ostracized,” he explained. “I haven’t felt attacked. I haven’t felt unsafe at any point, and that’s been amazing. I never anticipated that being the case. It’s been a blessing.”

While Rebecca is still learning to navigate her role and place in her church, she echoed similar feelings, saying, “I love my church so much.”

Names and identifying information have been altered to preserve confidentiality. 

Photos by Sarah Anthony



PrEParing for a sexual (r)evolution

by Danny Mathews

Almost 60 years ago, the birth control pill gave way to a sexual revolution. For arguably the first time, women could stand firmly in their sexual agency. Sex started to be this whole other thing — an expression of bodily autonomy, nihilistic sexuality, and let us not forget, a booming business. Since then, the discussion of sexual health has been eclipsed by the discovery of sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS. Now, it seems there's a new pill that may be bringing the gay community to the bank—I mean brink—of a new sexual (r)evolution.

In the 1980s, HIV/AIDS, commonly referred to as “gay cancer,” was an epidemic of global proportion. Scientists across the world raced to be the first to discover the autoimmune condition. Once doctors were able to pinpoint the virus responsible for the mass devastation, the conversation and business concerning HIV moved from one of discovery to one of treatment. Soon, doctors were pushing their positive patients to a new happy hour of medicinal anti-retroviral (ARV) cocktails designed to hinder the reproduction of the human immunodeficiency virus. Since then, HIV/AIDS treatment has helped hundreds of thousands of people live longer and healthier lives.

But the buck doesn't stop there, and why would it? It hasn't taken pharmaceutical big business very long to figure out that if new medications are keeping those with HIV alive longer, then their latest customer demographic could be captured with a “new

pill” that helps reduce the risk of someone with a negative status from becoming infected. *EUREKA*. Enter Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, also lovingly known as PrEP.

Without foreseeable news of a cure for the virus that leads to AIDS, scientists have forged on with the biomedical technology they have. Follow their logic: If ARV medications can greatly reduce the rate of viral reproduction in the body, then if introduced before initial exposure maybe that same medication can actually keep a healthy body from becoming host to the virus at all. As you catch your breath from what I'm sure was a big gay gasp at this news, let me hold your hand as I break it down for you. Instead of a cure, doctors —*ehh hem— pharmaceutical companies* — are marketing their wares to a new group of wide-eyed kids in the candy store — healthy, non-infected gay men, men who have sex with men, and transgender men.

After two national studies, the Food and Drug Administration approved the ARV drug Truvada to be used as PrEP treatment in 2012. A combination of two ARV materials, TDF, known as Viread, and emtricitabine, known as FTC, Truvada is an ARV therapy now used to treat both those living with HIV as well as those hoping to maintain a negative status. A recent Bangkok Tenofovir Study reported PrEP reducing the risk of infection by up to 75 percent for those with significant amounts of the drug in their system (with as little as 44 percent reduced risk with varied levels).

PrEP is pretty far off, though, in terms of its availability in Southwest Virginia. Pam Meador, Director of The Roanoke Drop-In Center, an HIV testing services site with a monthly mobile unit at Virginia Tech, reports that the conversation around PrEP just hasn't happened here.

"We're consistently last on the train when it comes to offering such services in the Commonwealth," Meador said. "Too many opponents to such efforts consistently argue that [PrEP] simply encourages high risk behavior."

With trusted entities like the Center for Disease Control asking painfully obvious and insulting questions of the gay community such as, "*Are you HIV negative but worry you might become positive?*" it seems like PrEP is coming down the pipeline of initiatives surrounding the dialogue of HIV/AIDS education and prevention. Get your coins together, though, because a thirty day dosage of Truvada (not anticipated to become available in generic form until 2021)

is \$1360.37 with a discount at Walmart pharmacies. Despite the sticker shock, people like Cornelius Jones, Jr., a triple threat Broadway performer and HIV/AIDS educator who recently visited Virginia Tech for LGBTQA of VT's 2013 AIDS Awareness Week, are optimistic.

"[PrEP] could potentially provide a more transparent and honest relationship with youth and their intimate partners," Jones said, "as well as their primary care doctors and/or nurses."


So, maybe PrEP isn't the harbinger of a new sexual revolution. In fact, it seems like the cost alone could problematize the issue further with aspects of class and drug accessibility to consider—à la Magic Johnson. The one thing we can hope for is that by knowing about the options available to help reduce the risk of HIV infection, there will be an evolution of the conversation many people are already having. After all, as someone once told me, "*Awareness is PrEParedness.*" 

Illustration by Brian Craig





TWO WOMEN, HOT— TWO MEN, NOT

BISEXUALITY IN THE SWINGER COMMUNITY AND OUR SOCIETY

BY SAM HUFF

Photo by Tyrone Phillips

It's after 11 p.m. on a Saturday in Carolina Friends, a popular North Carolina swinger club. Over thirty couples move together on the dance floor, mingle at the bar, and undress each other with their eyes as they get to know each other more intimately. Tanya, an attractive woman in her twenties, is sitting with an unmarried couple on one of the many cushioned benches lining the raised platform running around the walls of the club. Karen, a petite woman in a short dress sitting between her boyfriend, Mark, and Tanya, leaves to get a drink from the bar.

"If you could do anything to her, what would you do?" Mark asks with a sly smile.

"Anything she wanted me to," Tanya replies.

"You two should kiss when she gets back."

"Would she like that?"

"Oh yes, you should make out with her."

When the woman returns with a glass of bubbly pink liquid, Tanya leans in to her as her boyfriend leaves the cushions to get a drink of his own.

"Do you like women?" Tanya asks.

"Not really. I'm straight."

"I see. Your boyfriend told me that we should kiss and suggested you were bi."

Karen rolls her eyes as she takes a sip of her drink. "He would. No, I'm not bi—he just wishes I was."

This is the third time Tanya has heard this type of story since she arrived at the club two hours ago. There must be something the guys just aren't getting if so many think, incorrectly, that their girlfriends want to have sex with other women.

People in “The Lifestyle,” a term used among swingers to refer to themselves, are known for being open about expressing their desires and being comfortable with their bodies. So why, in a venue as appropriate for open communication and free expression of sexuality as a swinger’s club, do so many men think the women around them are bisexual?

Often times, bisexuality among women in the swinger community is commonplace, or is at least advertised that way, as a couple containing a bisexual girl is more desirable than a fully straight couple due to male fantasy fulfillment.

Clark, a straight male involved with the swinger community, discussed his experience of this phenomenon.

“I know a guy who is bisexual but says he’s straight on his swinger profile,” he said, referring to the popular swinger website, SwingLifeStyle. “Conversely, many women will put ‘bicurious’ or ‘bisexual’ on their profiles even if they prefer straight interactions. I understand a lot of women do this to make the men in their relationships happy.”

At swinger events and in more private settings, husbands and boyfriends often encourage their female partners to engage in girl-on-girl action as a precursor to group play, which may involve all partners participating in sex or the couples swapping partners. Girl-on-girl action seems to be held up as foreplay

for the men, rather than a pleasurable activity for the women themselves outside of the context of pleasing their men.

When asked about what place female bisexuality has in the eyes of society in general, Annika, a Virginia Tech junior studying animal science, confirmed the attitude most prevalent within the swinger clubs.

“I think female bisexuality is more accepted because, in general, our society is uncomfortable with sexuality that isn’t geared toward straight males,” Annika said. “Female bisexuality gives straight men the hope that they can ‘get in on that’ while male bisexuality does not.”

To be sure, there are many women that are truly bisexual

and enjoy sexual encounters with other women while they are in a “straight” relationship. However, there are many more who do so mainly to please the men they come with, sometimes against their true desires. Moreover, these homosexual activities do not generally extend to men and are not encouraged enthusiastically like girl-on-girl. Stephanie, a VT freshman studying computer science, feels that bisexuality in women, or at least bi-curiousness, is the rule rather than the norm at these events—but this is not the case for men.

“Bisexuality is often viewed as a ‘fun college phase,’ or it’s assumed that women are confused about their sexuality or are >>

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trying to get attention,” Stephanie said. “With girls, it’s accepted because it’s ‘fun and flirty,’ and the sex appeal of girls is doubled when they’re together—it’s simple math—but with guys, the straight male population becomes alarmed, because why would two men do that if they weren’t sure?”

When it comes down to it, it seems that this lack of acceptance for homosexual or bisexual men is due to much of society still viewing two men together as weird or off-putting, while two women together as sexy.

“With some women being pressured into some semblance of bisexuality, women who are truly bisexual may have to worry that the woman they’d like to play with isn’t actually into it, and that’s not fun at all,” noted Clark. “Women are put in situations where they have to toe the line between male fantasy and their own fantasy. But they do have it easier than bisexual men, because it’s more acceptable to be a bisexual woman than it is to be a bisexual man.”

So what would it take for male bisexuality to be as accepted and encouraged? Devin, a senior majoring in mechanical engineering, thinks a lot will have to change.

“I think it’s going to take a long time,” Devin said. “On a small scale, guys interested in other guys being more open about it would help, but the risk of judgment would still be there. Also the word ‘bi-curious’ being struck from the record wouldn’t hurt.”

Female bisexuality should not strictly be seen as foreplay for men, but should instead be recognized as a legitimate sexual preference. Women and men should always be in complete control over the partners they choose for sex. Females who identify as bisexual or straight should do what feels right to them and not let others determine their sexual expressions. In the end, no matter how people pursue sexual experiences and express their sexuality, they should be true to themselves and be clear about what they want. 

About THE TERLOPER

Background:

Matty Bennett was selected as a 2014 Diversity Scholar at Virginia Tech. The Interloper is a part of his project to enhance diversity on campus.

Mission Statement:

The Interloper’s focus is to create a space for advocates of the queer community to voice their perspectives and opinions. We are dedicated to

opening up discussion regarding queer issues and presenting progressive content through a queer lens. With this in mind, we hope to provide a reflection of the diverse queer community in Southwestern Virginia and beyond.

Want to get involved in the conversation? Like us on Facebook at “The Interloper” or email us at theinterlopervt@gmail.com

I'm Pretending this is Normal

by Matthew Bennett Jr.

I have these churning, restless feelings inside my stomach tonight—they're telling me I must leave my room. All too often I fall into the same routine: I hang my head over the edge of my bedpost, listen to the hum of my fan while I masturbate, and wonder whether those are moths or snowflakes floating in the streetlamp incandescence. I like to think my thoughts are mine alone, confined within the walls of this third floor attic bedroom, but I am somehow alive beyond this space. The night always goes on without me—but tonight, if just for this one night, I will not simply exist in the minds of others. I reach for my phone and call Christine.

* * *

Daisy Duke's is a sweaty conglomeration of faux-country breeders. Every once and a while they might play a song that's not a piece of shit, like "Chattahoochee" or "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under?" Otherwise, it's a sloppy mess of twenty-somethings grinding to the warmth of sweat and liquor that the never-ending winter outside can't provide. Near the mechanical bull stands Christine (my beautiful best friend that wears crop tops to bars—no matter how cold it is—and destroys men), and we watch two cowboys line dance underneath white Stetsons. I desperately want one of them to want me—but then again, I always want the straight ones. I think it was Oprah, or some motivational person, who said you need to become the person you want to be with. Well,

it seems like I want to be with straight, masculine men, so I'm not sure that will work out.

I'd seen Griffin before tonight, but I never paid him much attention. Tonight he's wearing a plain yellow t-shirt and blue jeans—apparently trying to blend in. He's getting a beer from the bar. He leans on one elbow while he talks to a few adoring girls, smiling a big white smile framed by a strong jaw dabbled with black scruff. His body language is relaxed and confident. He stares at me for a few seconds out of the corner of his eye, and that's when I know it—I want him. Thirty minutes later, we're on our way to the bus stop.

* * * >>

We sit down on the curb in the light snowfall, and Griffin tells me he's from the upper east side. The way he slowly leans his head back when he says it, I'm not sure if I'm supposed to be impressed or if warning signals should be going off in my brain. There are a few other people at the warehouse bus stop standing in a group, smoking, chatting. Eventually the bus comes, and I climb in after him. It's not until we're sitting together in the back of the bus that it hits me—I don't know where I'm going. I look over at Griffin in the sharp, unflattering fluorescent lights, and damn, he's still cute—it's always a crapshoot coming out of a dark bar. The bus rolls on, and I find my head on his shoulder. Part of me doesn't know how it got there—I just put it there. I don't mind it.

* * *

We're in his room. I'm sitting on the edge of his bed, and I'm just about to close my eyes from pleasure when it happens. Griffin looks up from the blowjob he's giving me and says—*my roommates are gone, so moan as loud as you want to.*

Wait—what? Who the fuck says that? I can feel my dick getting softer by the second. He keeps on going for some time, and I decide I have to be honest. *I'm not going to come.* He argues and claims I need to give it more time. *Trust me, I'm not going to come.* Griffin climbs toward me, pushing me onto my back, kisses me, and starts sucking on my neck. Honestly, I don't want this attempt at intimacy, and I really don't want marks on my neck that make me

look like I got rope burn (like the time I went inner-tubing on Mark Twain Lake with Kate).

His dick is small, and it's all over me, and I'm pretending this is normal. Maybe this is normal. People do this right? I don't want to do this. He's not Peter; he's not Garrett, Harrison, Sean, or Nate, but he might as well be. I know I'm not supposed to care that his dick is small, but this is obviously going nowhere, so I think I'm allowed to care. I don't want marks on my neck, and I don't want to be here, and I don't want his small dick touching me. I roll out from under him—I'm *probably gonna go.*

* * *

I'm standing barefoot on the wooden floor pulling my jeans back on, and Griffin's naked, lying on top of his made bed. He looks completely unattractive to me now with his tiny beer gut, his tiny dick, and the smug look on his face. Some guys have this look where they could be a genuinely nice guy, but they have that douchebag face—that half-smile. It's as if his face is incapable of forming a full smile and only one half moves, like he's half-hearted, half-here with me now. In Griffin's case though, it's not just his face. I can tell—he's actually a douchebag.

The walls of his room are bare, the floor is bare, and there's no emotion in this space, like no one lives here. *You wanna get lunch tomorrow?* He says to me. I'm just trying to put my shirt back on. Why the fuck did I wear a shirt

with buttons? This is taking ten times longer than I want it to, and Griffin just keeps talking. *There's this day party tomorrow, and you should totally go*—he's just saying. Right now, all I'm trying to do is get my dick back into these tight jeans.

* * *

I've never seen Euclid Avenue at three in the morning before—maybe that says something about my undergraduate career. The street lamps cast a dusty orange haze on the underside of leaves, and the stop lights never seem to change. There's a green glow at every block all the way down to the Westcott church. A drunk guy

wanders over the sidewalks, swaying left and right as he stumbles toward nothing. Across the street, an old man walks his dog, disappearing and reappearing behind the row of cars parked on Euclid. Maybe to him, this is the most peaceful time, the best time, to walk his dog.

There's Sumner. Ackerman. Lancaster. Maryland. Westcott. Street signs I've seen for years but never at this time. I keep walking, hands in my pockets because I don't know what else to do with them. I shudder even though I'm not cold. Eventually I will make it home. Eventually I will make it into bed, alone. **||**

Meet Katie Dupere:

Editor-in-Chief of The OutCrowd Magazine, Syracuse University's LGBT magazine.

She talks to us about her experiences working on The OutCrowd and the importance of LGBT campus publications.

“The OutCrowd is important because we help people be heard through all the heteronormative noise that is present on the Syracuse campus. I think LGBTQ publications help to give students a tangible platform to make their identities visible no matter the push back they receive on campus or in their day-to-day lives.”

“The OutCrowd found me when I was really just becoming sort of radically interested in LGBTQ issues. It saw me through my growth as a budding activist, and helped me put into action my activism. I was never the girl that was going to be writing for Vogue, but The OutCrowd let me see I was the girl that *needed* to be writing about social justice issues now and forever.”

“My favorite part of being editor of The OutCrowd is the collective experience this magazine, and our community, is really all about. The OutCrowd has never been about me as a leader. It's always been about us. And that's really my favorite thing.” **||**

Go to issuu.com/theoutcrowd to view The OutCrowd issues.



Photo by Michael Isenburg

PAIN GENDER IDENTITY BRAV
ANGER BRAVERY PAIN BRAV

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

RAGING INSIDE ME

REVIEW OF “TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES”

BY ANTHONY SZCZUREK

Making waves within the hyperbolic world of punk rock might seem a difficult task, but Laura Jane Grace, the founder and lead singer of the group Against Me!, has certainly found an effective way. The main thrust of the group’s new album, “Transgender Dysphoria Blues”, is focused on the tragic story of a transgender sex worker, a marginalized figure to say the least. But it is not this figure per se from which the album draws its notoriety, but is instead the group’s attempt at echoing Grace’s recent revelation that she is seeking male-to-female confirmation surgery.

If the average cisgender readers believe themselves immune from understanding what it is like to be transgender, they are right. But one need not *be something* to understand it. This album does a remarkable job of bridging this gap—the songs on the album are painful to listen to. It is not only because many lines drip with raw sorrow and rage, but also because the pain discussed is universal. The questions it asks (Who am I really? How do I deal with my community’s expectations of me and those I desire?) are human ones, especially in the West

where we are expected to “construct” our own unique identity. Hence, it is relatively easy for the listener to identify with the feelings of isolation and almost indifferent anger that permeates many of the tracks. This is not to say that a cisgender listener will fully “understand” what it means to be transgender, but it does mean that Against Me! succeeded at making the blues of someone “suffering” from gender dysphoria at least approachable for a wide audience.

Gender dysphoria is a clinical term that indicates one’s sex assigned at birth does not match one’s own gender identity. The use of a dry, unassuming term in the title is interesting. The title’s banality only underscores the agony of what the album is about. Similarly, the clinical nature of the title is not matched with any lines on how dehumanizing the experience of winding through the mental health and medical systems can be for someone of trans experience. Almost all the songs’ themes deal with pain that arises from relationships with partners and friends, not therapists and doctors. If this juxtaposition between the clinical and the personal was intentional, then

VERY ANGER BRAVERY IDENTITIY
GENDER PAIN

AGAINST ME!
TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES



Album cover art via Againstme.net

Grace has succeeded in transcending the usual marginalized narratives of the transgender experience (taking hormones or undergoing surgery, for example).

Grace is clearly the mind behind most of the album's tracks, and hence, this album has been widely viewed as a coming out statement of sorts. Grace came out as a woman in 2012, not an easy thing to do, especially in the punk world, a community that has been known for its insistence on a narrow form of masculinity. She has been very upfront about her life experiences, making clear that her "not feeling quite right" is something that has followed her her entire life. Her choice to so publicly come out is staggeringly brave.

In the past decade, it has become almost cliché in the United States for gay, lesbian, and bisexual celebrities to come out. Not so for people of transgender experience, for whom coming out remains a sensational event. Maybe it would have been much easier for Grace to have simply kept the pain and the struggles to herself, not to verbalize it or put it down on paper, let alone release an entire album on the topic. Yet doing so is a testament to how much Grace's internal ragings, the "brave new world" that she has described as always yearning to be manifested, have launched her into a position as role model for people still too scared to acknowledge who they really are. **///**

How Much is Too Much?

Navigating queer PDA on campus

by Sam Huff

From hand holding to heavy petting and everything in between, PDA is an issue that affects couples of all kinds. How much is too much? This is a tricky enough question for straight couples, but when applied to queer couples, it becomes even more complicated. While a straight couple holding hands in public could make onlookers smile or at least ignore them, a gay couple doing the same thing could lead to homophobic remarks or even violence.

Firstly, what do Virginia Tech students think is acceptable PDA? Amy Skowronski, a sophomore university studies major, has distinct ideas about what kind of PDA is appropriate for any couple.

“In public, I don’t mind holding hands, hugging, sitting on each other’s laps,” Skowronski said. “I’m not a big fan of ass-grabbing, so you only get one or two before I’m uncomfortable—or kissing until tongues get involved, and any sort of noises should be kept to a minimum.”

Skowronski admits to only having seen one instance of queer PDA on campus, and Daniel Bishop, a senior majoring in chemical engineering, reported not having seen any at all.

“I figure the reason is that such a

couple would get one of four responses: being politely ignored, being judged by strangers, making strangers feel uncomfortable, or causing strangers to feel accomplished in their ability to not judge you,” Bishop said. “If I was holding hands with my significant other, all but the first response would make me uneasy.”

“Holding hands isn’t a political statement—it’s showing affection for another human being”

Beyond being an affectionate gesture, PDA can be an undervalued outlet for queer couples to express themselves and show pride in their sexuality within a society that rejects them. However, that doesn’t mean it should only

be considered a political statement. But before anything else, Bishop argues, PDA is a sign of endearment between two people.

“It’s easy for people to see being homosexual as a political statement nowadays,” Bishop noted. “Holding hands isn’t a political statement—it’s showing affection for another human being, bringing the idea home that homosexuals don’t feel love any differently.”

From online articles and discussions with people in the community, holding hands, hugging, linking arms, and quick



Photo courtesy of QUIP

kisses seem to be widely accepted. However, even the smallest amounts of PDA between homosexual couples can be disconcerting to more conservative minds.

In response to being harassed multiple times holding her girlfriend's hand in New York City, Courtney Baxter created Queer in Public or QUIP, a grassroots street photography movement that captures images of real queer couples showing affection toward each other.

"It's an effort to familiarize and normalize being queer in public while also hoping to transform 'queer love' into plain old 'love,'" Baxter wrote on her website queerinpublic.tumblr.com. "Those of us in the queer community are confronted with the daily choice to boldly hold the hand of our partners, or to stay invisible. And as QUIP's mission states, visibility begets change."

PDA is a risk each person has to decide for themselves if they can handle, but hopefully more and more couples will find it a risk worth taking. By simply showing affection for each other and shoving aside the hang-ups and fears society imposes on the LGBT community, perhaps couples can change the way people think about

queer relationships. If homosexual PDA becomes commonplace, then it will hopefully stop garnering unwanted hostility and discomfort. Once the queer community is just as visible as the heterosexual majority, maybe "queer PDA" will just become "PDA."

"So much of acceptance, visibility, and culture change starts with the small steps," Baxter explained. "It's this road that will soon lead to a place where two women holding hands in Union Square, or two men kissing as they each leave for work, won't be reason to stop, stare, or harass. For some, the threat of violence is too real, and the simple act of holding hands or kissing on a street corner would be unwise and unsafe. But for the rest of us, we have the capability to shift the tides by making ourselves visible. Kissing my girlfriend in Flatbush, Brooklyn could double as an act of love and as a political act of changing the culture. By living out 'the personal is political' mantra, we transform from invisible to visible and provide hope for our queer sisters and brothers in less tolerant nooks of the world."



Illustration by Brian Craig

The Sex Change She's Always Wanted

Problematic portrayals of trans characters in film & TV

by Julia Brankley

When even the angelic love interest can't use the correct pronouns, there's little a movie can do to regain merit in regards to its treatment of characters who are transgender or transsexual. Yet Jared Leto's performance of Rayon, a transsexual woman, in "Dallas Buyers Club" is winning him stacks of awards and nominations.

And really, he deserves credit. His acting was indeed fantastic, and every interview indicates he respects Rayon as a woman. If this is the case, though, why does Rayon not defend herself? Never in the entire movie is she referred to as "she," not by her doctor and not even

as a redeeming moment to show that Ron Woodroof has improved against his bigotry. This last omission is especially glaring, since Rayon as a character is undeniably a tool to benefit Woodroof's development. Though "Dallas Buyers Club" is based on the experience of the real Ronald Woodroof, Rayon is a fictional character created specifically for the film. This means the director, Jean-Marc Vallée, had complete control over how Rayon was portrayed and how her experience is framed. It's questionable enough that a trans character was created solely to benefit the portrayal of a bigot, but to completely neglect respecting her identity in dialog is inexcusable.


Critics and defenders can come up with reasonable explanations, sure—I've heard everything from "It's just the time period!" to "Maybe she was okay with it." But if that was the case, then the director should have shown the audience why. Framing is everything, and leaving Rayon's treatment unaddressed is harmful to real trans people—especially when we instead get a scene involving Ron pointing a gun at Rayon's crotch, threatening to give her "that sex change" she's "always wanted."

When confronted with concerns about a cisgender man portraying a trans woman, Leto reportedly responded, "Because I'm a man, I don't deserve to play that part? So you want to hold a role against someone who happened to be gay or lesbian – they can't play a straight part?" Taken at face value, yes, it is unfair to restrict certain parts to certain actors. However, this is a false equivalence. Actors who do not fall within the cis-white-straight formula have a hard enough time being pigeonholed into limited, underrepresented roles. So when a cis man takes the role of a trans woman, it also seems unfair. Not only is a job opportunity taken away from that woman, but so is the opportunity to tell her own story and have control over how trans women are portrayed.

However, trans actors have been gaining more mainstream opportunity lately. In the past year, even the most casual TV watcher has probably encountered "The Fosters" Tom Phelan as Cole, "Elementary's" Candis Cayne as Mrs. Hudson, or "Orange is the New Black's" Laverne Cox as Sophia. Unfortunately, what all of these characters have in common is the fact

that they are small-screen roles. Even more distressingly, only one character is not subjected to either frequent misgendering or a barrage of slurs—Mrs. Hudson. She is also on screen the least of these three characters. But her portrayal is probably the most bearable; in the quest to be realistic, it seems every portrayal of a trans character comes with at least one t-slur included, with the refreshing exception of Candis' so-far single "Elementary" episode. Why, in the search for relatable characters, must trans people endure such attacks? The painful experiences many trans people face are indeed experiences the public should be educated about, but trans people deserve happy narratives free of triggering material as well.

Yet every one of these relatively minor roles was more bearable and felt more respectful than Rayon's portrayal. In the end, they simply seem more real, perhaps because these actors don't need to put on a lisp or wear drag-queen-style makeup to convince themselves they're in the role of a trans person.

On one hand, it's great that these issues are receiving mainstream attention. Casting any old actor as a trans character does help depoliticize the topic of transgender issues and normalizes trans characters by treating them just like any other role an actor might seek. On the other hand, public view of trans people is so divisive and misinformed that we badly need accurate, respectful representation. Rayon as a character is beautiful and tragic, but the politics of her situation cannot be ignored. The underrepresented deserve to have a say in what little representation they do get. 

Wishing Peace Upon Strangers

by Matthew Bennett Jr.

I'm not sure why everyone claims the fact that I sleep with a stuffed animal is so attractive (his name's Spotty Dog), yet there's a box of condoms by my bed that expires in a month. I bought them three summers ago when I was dating Nate,

and only used one, which explains why when he walked into the cafe where I was studying with my friend Christine, I started talking loudly and laughing and acting like my life was sort of amazing. I guess it's just like when I mumble

the words in church and don't wince when the floorboards pierce my kneecaps. I have to look left and right to check I'm making the appropriate gestures. What I know how to do is wish peace upon strangers and smile lightly to fit in.

I know how to pretend I'm not thinking about getting fucked by a straight-acting lacrosse player on south campus.

There's no emotional attachment, but I think there could be. The sweat on his forehead glistens in the orange glow outside

his window. We fuck for fifteen minutes, and I walk home two blocks from church and type manhub.com in my browser.

PRESENT | HERE

photospread by Will Scott

These photos seek to reflect the queer challenge to belong to a place. Specifically, this series discusses the setting of our campus, where tradition and history are glorified and existence outside heteronormativity is usually quiet and separate. Revealing our faces is uncomfortable, but it is critical to challenge notions about who and where we are at Virginia Tech.



Photo by Tamanna Tiku

A native of Greenbrier County, West Virginia, Will Scott grew up within farmland surrounded by the Allegheny Mountains. Currently he is a second-year architecture student in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies, where he spends most of his time cutting chipboard and looking out the window. In addition to his design studies, he enjoys playing piano, riding Amtrak, and following Lady Gaga. Like his mother, he chooses to perceive the world as somewhere “between reality and fantasy.”

>>



I am present, but I am not here.
I explore my context but remain detached.



I search for faces but avoid revealing mine,
and obsess over my image, losing focus and skewing perception.



It isn't that I'm unable
to display myself.
I simply feel most
vulnerable when
exposed.



LOOKING FOR THE NEXT **queer**asfolk

A review of the new HBO drama

by Josh Kim

Quick question. Is there a “right way” to be gay?

Does it involve secret societies’ gay night clubs with their blinding strobe lights flashing through the hundreds of gay men flaunting their sensual dance moves while men have sex with other men in every stall of the bathroom? Must the “right way” induce a proclamation to the entire world with something along the lines of “Look! Look at me! I’m gay! I really am! I promise! Pay attention to me!” Wait, wait, wait. Is there, in fact, a “right way”?

Well, according to HBO’s “Looking”, this answer is yes and no. “Looking” attempts to break the glass ceiling of pop culture’s standard portrayal of gay men. For a long time, there’s been the “Queer as Folk” gay, but now HBO is showing that there are more types of gay than the dancing twink in a nightclub.

“Looking”, which premiered on January 19, 2014, is almost avant-garde in its portrayal of the 21st century gay man. At the very core of the show are the everyday lives of three gay friends living in San Francisco: Patrick, Agustín, and Dom. The show takes a reflective step back and shows that gay men lead similar lives to the rest of Americans. “Looking”, through its unique portrayal, takes apart the dehumanizing, one-dimensional myth of the gay man, the image of sex-crazed men dancing the night away to the beat of a techno remix of Lady Gaga.


“Queer as Folk” (another TV show known for its portrayal of gay men) often places its characters in gay night clubs, usually talking about sex, about past one-night stands, about forming a relationship, and sometimes just to have sex. As a result, viewers may think that gay men are pretentious, selfish, self-absorbed and



Illustration by Phim Her

sex-obsessed. On the other hand, the gay nightclubs, the blinding strobe lights, and the sensual dance moves are barely present in “Looking”. The show primarily sets its characters in their daily occupations, amidst everyday struggles with their true identities, and questions them about what a romantic and emotional relationship really entails and the loneliness of being gay men in a more tolerant but still polarized society.

“Looking” offers a uniquely humanizing portrait of gay men by going beyond the usually stereotypical portrayals of gay men constantly going to nightclubs, living in expensive-looking lofts (does anyone even live there? because it looks flawless every episode) and hooking up with effeminate, sensitive, pretty-looking seventeen-year-olds (ahem, QAF’s Brian and Justin).

“Looking” instead focuses on what it means to be human more so than what it means to be a gay man. “Looking” is, in a different sense of the phrase, a “reality show” in its portrayals of real human characters, one that is needed against the backdrop of an increasingly groundbreaking social movement. Amidst the oftentimes polemic discussion of gay rights, “Looking” reminds us that gay people are, first and foremost, people too. 

None of Your Business

Asking awkward questions to our transgender friends

by Jennie Brogan

On January 6, 2014, Katie Couric interviewed Carmen Carrera and Laverne Cox on her daytime talk show “Katie,” which will not be renewed for a third season, to discuss their successes as transgender models and actors. In the interviews, Couric spoke with Carrera first, a drag performer and reality television personality on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, *RuPaul’s Drag U*, and other various television programs. According to ABC News, Carrera has identified as a trans woman since May 2012.

Carrera answered questions about her modeling and how she publicly shared her physical transition experiences on YouTube. Carrera mentioned surgeries on her nose and breasts. Katie then asked a cringeworthy question: “Your private parts are different now, aren’t they?” Carrera did not answer, instead commenting on the fact that she is constantly asked questions about her genitals and surgeries, while she would much rather talk about her modeling and other endeavors. Couric stopped prodding, but explained that she asked such an intimate question because people are curious and want to better understand the transgender community.

Cox was interviewed next. Couric asked her for her perspective on Carrera’s response. Cox explained that these types of questions objectify the transgender community and block them from sharing other stories and issues they experience



Illustration by Katherine Flores

beyond physical transitions. Cox then redirected the conversation, sharing statistics on the murder, suicide, and unemployment rates of trans people, especially trans women of color.

Do transgender people face the awkward genitals question every time they meet someone new? If so, what questions do they want new acquaintances to ask instead when they come out as trans to them? What issues are missed when people focus on genitals and surgeries? I asked these questions to three trans friends of mine — Eli, Aaron, and Tori — to see what they had to say about the Couric interview.

Eli and Aaron are trans men who have gone through various transition experiences for nearly two and a half and

three years, respectively. Both are on hormone therapy, but Eli has had chest reconstruction surgery, whereas Aaron has not had any surgeries. Tori is a trans woman who started hormone therapy nearly a year ago and has received hair transplants.

Initial reactions after watching Couric's interview varied. Eli felt Carrera handled herself eloquently and noticed Couric used phrases and terms offensive to the transgender community like "still a man" and "transgenders." Aaron focused on Couric's use of the "private parts" euphemism, wondering why discussing privates was necessary if she couldn't say genitals, penis, scrotum, or vagina.

Next, I asked my friends about their experiences with others asking about their genitals. People ask them about getting genital reassignment surgery in both eloquent and crass ways.

For example, Tori was asked, "Are you getting your dick cut off?" by a coworker.

Aaron was told, "If you haven't had surgery, you are not really a man," also by a coworker.


All three shared that they are asked more questions about their genitals than about any other aspect of their transgender identity. They want people to ask more questions about how they came to affirm being transgender, how are they doing mentally and emotionally in the transition process, their favorite aspects of transitioning, how others can be allies, and their pronoun preferences. Through appropriate Q&A, they could use this opportunity to educate others and build a foundation of knowledge of being transgender. But they also know that most people who ask the less appropriate questions are usually just

genuinely curious and are not trying to treat them like freaks. The awkward genitals question can feel dehumanizing and objectifying but is less so if asked by people in close relationships with them or people who seem sincere and open-minded.

That being said, all three wish these sort of bodily questions were never asked.

"I prefer they weren't asked, that people accepted me at face value," Aaron confessed. "The questions are embarrassing, can induce dysphoria, and cause harm, they objectify the body and may increase violence and stigmatization."

When people focus on genitals and other physical transition experiences, so much is missed in educating the public and making the transgender community seem less mysterious and foreign. Eli, Aaron, and Tori want the conversation to expand beyond what is usually covered in the media. It's important to start a discussion and expose other aspects of transgender life, like the way Cox successfully redirected her interview. "[People don't learn about] the cultural aspects, such as choosing what bathroom to use if there are no gender neutral ones, which room to try on clothes at a store, being called 'sir' or 'ma'am,'" explained Eli.

Many of our transgender friends do not want conversations to be focused on the physical and more private aspects of transitioning because they want to feel human and relatable to their friends. So next time you find yourself preparing to ask the awkward genitals question to a transgender friend or acquaintance, think about all the other things you could learn, and ask those questions instead. 



Appalachian Reflection

story and photos by Will Scott

On a restless afternoon at home, I decided to drive. My route, predetermined by the single lane roads of my county, allowed me to indulge in the isolation of the region. I wanted to lose touch with reality and location, and search for some connection to the narrative of the landscape.

I am not an Appalachian by birth, but I am by ancestry. Most of my family hails from this rugged landscape, having been some of the first settlers in the region. My families are still landmarks of the area — known for their large farms, numerous descendants, and stubborn attitudes.

Growing up, I largely ignored this part of my background. My emerging queer identity clashed with my place of residence and I attached shame to the latter. West Virginia is the black sheep of the country—the state that wasn't supposed to exist, that isn't known for anything beyond its coal industry-driven poverty and backwoods culture. At university in the neighboring state

of Virginia, I was slow to reveal my hometown to others, mostly because it almost always brought about a shocked reaction.


Appalachia is distinct. It's a region defined by irregularities and disorder. The meandering hillsides, sinkholes, and long mountains create spaces that are narrow and hidden, and there is little room for development. This geography has helped keep West Virginia so rural and secluded. West Virginians are proud of their separatist nature, and often have defiance towards the people and ideas originating in flat land.

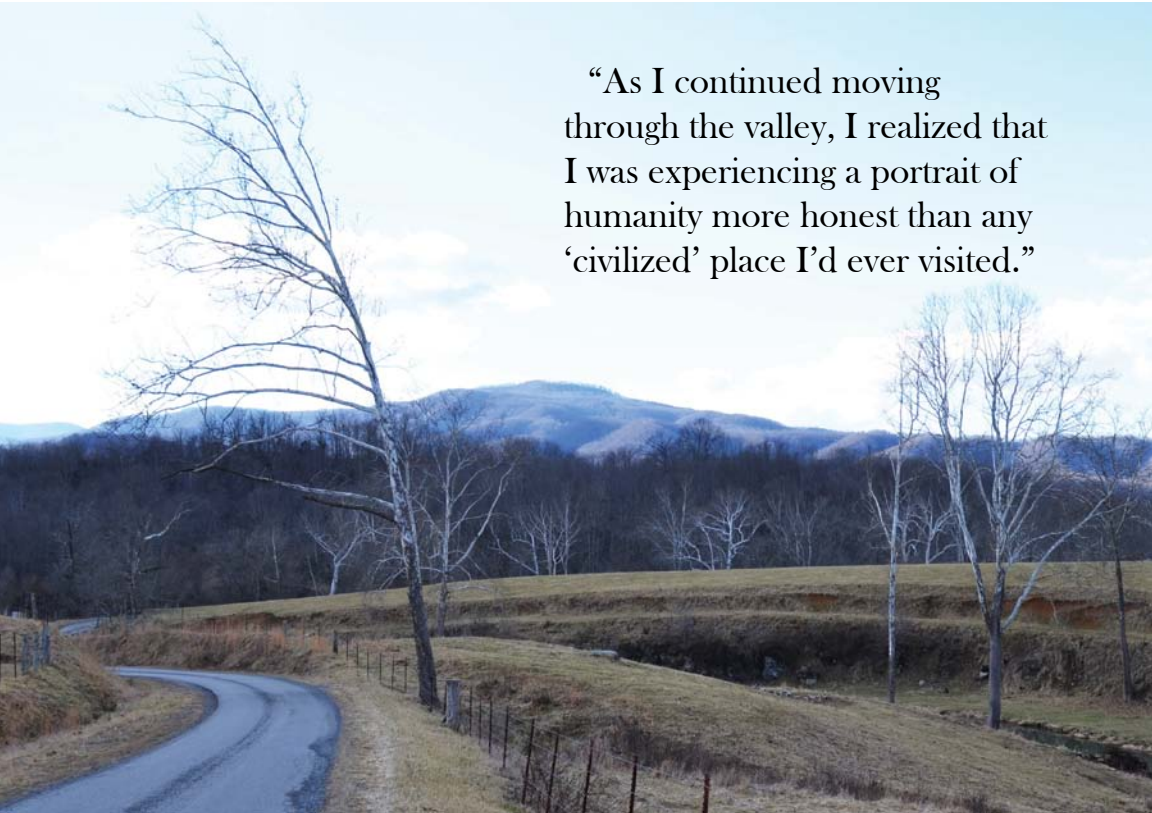
My drive through the hills took me by surprise. As I passed old barns, crossed wooden bridges, and followed the winding telephone line, the era of the place became indiscernible. The yellow-grey fields perforated by sinkholes seemed untouched by society, tamed only by the invisible farmer, who was as much a part of the static landscape. Tractors sat abandoned on the hills and fences

leaned over the hillsides from the road. I crossed a mountain and on the way down a structure stood out among the view of farmhouses and sheds. A sulfur spring pavilion sat quietly in the middle of the valley. Small and dilapidated, it served as a monument to its surroundings— a relic from a resort burned during the Civil War, a reminder of the luxury that was once pursued within the valley. With a neoclassical form, it was a temple to Appalachia.

Discovering a shrine to my heritage, I reflected on my conflicted relationship with Appalachia. What makes its history more shameful than that of any place? Human history is defined by struggle, and Appalachia is a testament to that. It has a history of its land and its people being abused by resource exploiters. But this shouldn't be a reason to dismiss its

cultural validity. It is actually a reason to celebrate the region's strength. As I continued moving through the valley, I realized that I was experiencing a portrait of humanity more honest than any "civilized" place I'd ever visited.

As a person who seeks truth through the visual world, I embrace the honesty of Appalachia. It is not a region with invisible social disparity or quiet environmental destruction. It is a region that wears its struggles on its sleeve. In my creative pursuits, I want to wear Appalachia on my sleeve. I don't want to construct buildings that serve half-truths to the public or allow the wealthy to ignore their privilege. I want to create things that are meaningful to everyone—that embody all aspects of the human experience—and that serve as shrines to our collective heritage. 



“As I continued moving through the valley, I realized that I was experiencing a portrait of humanity more honest than any ‘civilized’ place I’d ever visited.”

From *The Missing You Poems* Collection

by Lisa Summe

Missing you has something to do with
all the lesbian talk in sexualities class. Sometimes
even the most academic discourse about girls turns me on
and I can do nothing but sit there and think about
your collarbone, your chin, the backs of your
knees, your eyelashes on my cheek, your clothes
on the floor, your hand on my leg, and very rough car sex.
Sara, your body. This isn't a poem all about missing
your body. Of course it is. So what
if all I learn in class tonight is how
to take off your clothes. It's a thing
I already knew, but if only you were here.
I'd show you what I learned in my own daydreams.
I'd show you everything.



Photo by Will Scott

They're Coming for our Children

Second-parent adoption struggles in Virginia and beyond

by Aaron Horst

The ongoing project of queer rights in the United States can often feel like a series of minor victories and major setbacks (or, occasionally, the reverse). Pursuing a state-by-state or incremental approach results in a confusing, headache-inducing maze of laws for queer individuals crossing state lines. Thus, LGBT individuals are embroiled in a series of shifting answers to frequently asked questions: Where can same-sex couples get married? Which states protect queer individuals in the workplace? And where can same-sex couples raise children together with the least amount of legal pushback?

Virginia, like many other states across America, has a mixed if not hostile record of providing legal protections for queer individuals and their families. Though the state supreme court has ruled in favor of legal protections for recognized second-parent adoptions performed in other states, Virginia has not established the same rights to same-sex couples within the commonwealth.

This concerns Bekah Parker and her partner Shannon, who are considering moving to Washington state because of legal marriage and the possibility of >>

second parent adoption. “Shannon is our daughter’s other parent,” Bekah said, “and I would want no other person on this earth raising her if something were to happen to me.” When combined with life’s other uncertainties, the lack of rights afforded to Shannon has a potentially damaging effect on the well-being and future of her and Bekah’s daughter.

Not every queer couple is willing or able to move to another state. Marti Tomlin-Allen is a Virginia mother of twin boys Knox and Logan with her partner Farah. “We would not [consider moving] because we are surrounded by our families who love and accept us and show the boys all the love in the world,” Marti explained. “What we would lose by moving is greater than what we encounter by staying.”

The complexities that face all families are often magnified within queer families by the patchwork of laws governing marriage, child-care, custody, and insurance. An everyday event such as an out-of-town trip can become fraught with anxiety.

“It was obvious when I went to Chicago recently and took our daughter that it made Shannon anxious for us to be away,” Bekah said, “because we have no legal paperwork giving her power of attorney for me or for guardianship of Eleanor.”

Marti recounted a similar story.

“I was traveling for work, and the doctor ordered an x-ray on Logan. When Farah went to take Logan to the hospital, they wouldn’t see him because she wasn’t his ‘parent.’” Though the hospital eventually completed Logan’s appointment, such outcomes are by no means certain.

Marti and Farah went the route of many lesbian couples when they decided to conceive and had Farah’s harvested and



Photo by Will Scott

inseminated eggs implanted into Marti via in vitro fertilization. Marti is therefore the parent listed on the birth certificate, while Farah is genetically related to the twins. Though this method of conception has yet to be fully tested legally, it seems to hold the promise of both parents being legally recognized. As a precautionary measure, however, Marti and Farah drew up a co-parenting agreement.

“It outlines that if one of us dies the other has sole responsibility that we would file for co-guardianship (which we did and the court awarded us),” Marti said. “If we were to break up we would have joint custody, and it states we will prepare wills listing each other as guardians (which we also did). While any of these documents could be fought in court, we hope that the combination of legal protections we put in place would ensure that the boys never got taken from Farah or I.”

While Bekah and Shannon have not encountered an abundance of legal obstacles, ensuring legal protections for Shannon is a goal, if not a source of outright anxiety. In discussing their impending move to Washington, a state that recognizes and permits same-sex marriage, Bekah said, “While we had a wedding two and a half years ago, we want to get [officially] married so that Shannon’s connection to our children cannot be legally questioned.”

In spite of the myriad difficulties facing queer couples raising children, both Bekah and Marti spoke of the deep desire to do so which led them into parenthood.

“[Shannon] will swear to you that one of the reasons she knew she wanted to be with me is because she knew I would be a good momma,” Bekah said. I have always had a momma beariness about me.”

Marti always thought of parenting as something fun to discuss, until she got

“Laws really do not define families.”


As for second-parent adoption in Virginia, state senator Janet Howell (D – Arlington) and Delegate Joseph Yost (R – Giles) have proposed recent legislation to allow the recognition of second-parent adoptions in Virginia by individuals other than the biological or legal parent’s spouse. As of this writing, the legislation had been tabled in the House and rejected in the Senate.

Equality Virginia, a statewide LGBT advocacy organization, notes that “this legislation allows both parents to make key decisions regarding the health, well-being, and education of their child; to provide benefits including health and life insurance to their child; and to retain legal custody and be held financially responsible for their child in the event of a breakup or death.” Such protections are commonplace to straight and married couples in the United States. By contrast, queer couples often find themselves caught in a net of contradictory and piecemeal laws governing marriage, property, healthcare decisions, and adoption — all overlapping issues within any family.

older and realized she was ready to make parenting a reality.

“For me, I am a planner so I came up with a plan,” Marti said, “and about a year later we met Knox and Logan.”

There is a resilience defining these relationships that, while not unique to those raising children, is a definitive characteristic of queer families who make the decision to parent in spite of the hurdles and uncertainties particular to the queer experience.

Marti speaks of extended family playing a central role as her and Farah settled on the question of whether or not to have children. “Farah’s mother was diagnosed about six years ago with early onset dementia, and we have always hoped our boys will get a few good memories with her before she is no longer able to function on her own,” Marti said. “Her being diagnosed and Farah being one of her main caregivers gives a whole new perspective to a parent-child relationship and makes you realize that laws really do not define families.” 

#QUEENBEY OVERLOAD

Mrs. Carter's new album perpetuates hegemonic, heteronormative values

by Matthew Bennett Jr.

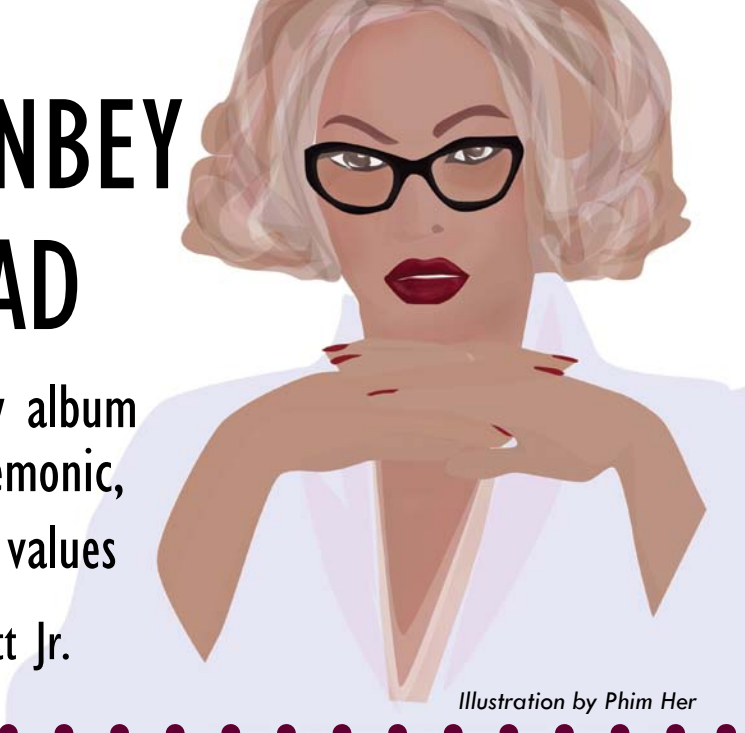


Illustration by Phim Her

The internet had a communal massive heart attack in December 2013 when Beyoncé released her super-secret album “Beyoncé”. Every other one of my Facebook friends was posting something along the lines of, “I CAN’T WITH BEYONCÉ’S NEW ALBUM,” or “CHRISTMAS CAME EARLY THIS YEAR #QUEENBEY,” and “I LITERALLY JUST DIED,” etc. And yes, the posts were always in all caps.

And honestly, the initial social media uproar makes sense—for whatever reason, people are absolutely obsessed with Beyoncé. Maybe it’s her music. Her lyrics. Her wardrobe. Her over-the-top glamor. Her beautiful family. Or maybe it’s the fact that she’s fucking sexy as all hell.

Now, I have to admit, I was probably one of the few people who didn’t instantly click over to the iTunes store as fast as I could to purchase Beyoncé’s album when it dropped. Yes, as shocking as it may be, there are gay men (well, at least one) who aren’t fans of

her music. A few months later, however, I finally decided to listen to all the songs and watch the videos to see what all the brouhaha was about.

I was honestly overwhelmed with the extraordinary amount of sex and glamor. Everything was hot and high class, draped in fur and sweaty sex. Even in the video for “Blue,” we get scantily, though still luxuriously, clad Beyoncé rolling around in the sand—this is a track dedicated to her daughter. Yet even with all the breeder sex, high class outfits and mansions that I can’t begin to relate to, and monotonous beats that bored me to tears, I was able to find a few lines from her album that spoke to me:

Pretty Hurts

We try to fix something
but you can’t fix what you can’t see
It’s the soul that needs the surgery

And there were lines where I was like, oh shit, Bey!

Haunted

You want me? I walk down the hallway
You like it? The bedroom's my runway
Slap me! I'm pinned to the doorway
Kiss, bite, foreplay

With songs and lyrics like these, it's clear to me that Beyoncé has created a feminist declaration, which conveys some strong messages. Yet I feel these messages are conflicted with what she presents in her videos. Among other things, Bey is saying you don't have to be perfect (of course, in every video she looks flawless with her blonde weave and glamorous clothing), women and people of color can command power (through sex, glamor, fashion, money, etc.), and it's OK to be hot as hell and have steaming hot sex (if you're monogamous and married). What great concepts—all hail Queen Bey! We “bow down” to you! Etc., etc.

Now, let's move on from our daily ritualistic worshiping of Beyoncé and notice what's she's left out of her new album. Can you think of what it is? Think hard. If you guessed queers, you're absolutely right. Whether Beyoncé is “Crazy in Love” or “Drunk in Love,” she's clearly not in the right state of mind to focus on making her music accessible to her adoring gay fans.


Which is fine. It's Beyoncé's manifesto. She is focused on her glamorous, reproductive family. Which, to me, seems to be the main, recurring theme through Beyoncé's new album: marriage, monogamy, and reproductive family values. Is anyone else seeing a trend of how privileged this album is? It ends with a

sample of her daughter Blue's voice, and the video for “Blue” is a collection of images of Beyoncé with Blue, mothers and their children, and a bunch of straight couples.

With incessant images like these, Beyoncé deliberately and consistently perpetuates hegemonic, heteronormative values and stereotypes, completely leaving queer people out of the picture. You would think with the marriage equality movement, and how clearly important marriage and family is to Beyoncé, that she would include queer married couples and their families somewhere in the mix. But she doesn't.

There is not one explicit shout out or nod to LGBT people on Beyoncé's album. Everything is heterosexual fucking. Heterosexual marriage. Heterosexual privilege. There may be ambiguous nods to the queer community, like in “Haunted” where we see images of people who may not exactly fit “the norm.” Then again, in the video for “Haunted,” it seems as though Beyoncé is staring at these “queers” like they're some sort of circus freak show from her distant, privileged, heteronormative gaze.

Often times, we don't like to critically analyze what our favorite pop divas might think about the queer community. We're more focused on adoring them, grinding to their music at the club, or turning them into some sort of farcical gay icon. In actuality, many of the pop divas, including Beyoncé, have done next to nothing for the queer community. OK, so she scribbled “if you like it then you should be able to put a ring on it” on a napkin. Big fucking deal. Beyoncé keeps her dotting gay fans at a distance and will continue to do so for the indefinite future.

#QUEENBEY, we beg of you—don't keep us at a distance any longer. 

Out

Jennie Brogan

I remember liking the way she smelled. I remember how I used to wash my hair with her shampoo because it smelled so nice, so much like her. At the time, I probably thought I wanted to smell as good as her, to have nice hair like her. Thinking back, it was more than admiration—she was my first crush. She was one of my best friends; I didn't want to freak her out by telling her I thought she was pretty or that she smelled nice. Plus, I had crushes on boys. I didn't know what to think.

So I just shoved and blocked out all of those thoughts and feelings. I didn't want to feel any more excluded than I already felt. I continued dating boys, and I worked on appearing more feminine.

Just before my high school graduation, I met and fell in love with a man. While in college, I had a brief attraction to a roommate, but I shoved it away. I was invested in my relationship with my boyfriend, and when things were good with him, these side-attractions were easier to ignore. In 2002 we graduated from college, and he proposed.

During grad school I became friends with more openly gay and lesbian people.



Photo by Terri Burgess

A lesbian classmate had a girlfriend who looked just like me and part of me freaked out over the idea that that could be me—that I could be bisexual. But I shoved these thoughts away and got married instead.

Fast forward through 4 years of an awful marriage and divorce. I've recovered and I'm strong enough to be on my own. I'm confident. I'm excited! I decided to act on my attractions and I had my first romantic relationship with a woman. It felt good to be right and to be honest.

After coming out to myself, I worked hard to plan out how I would come out to others. I wasn't terribly worried about being rejected by most family members, friends, and colleagues, but I wanted to be careful to not hurt these relationships.

I first came out to my mom. I knew it was not ideal to come out during holidays, so I planned to tell her after the year ended. But I met a girl (who would be the first girl I ever dated), and I forgot to call and check in with my parents when I was later than they expected me. I tried to vaguely explain to my mom what happened, trying not to spill too

out to my brother, Ian, was also a simple process, and he's been very supportive as well.

I'm not out to all my friends and extended family yet, but many likely assume that I'm gay but don't ask. To some, I've introduced a partner to them, or my mom or dad outed me, and I haven't suffered any significant fallout.

I decided to act on my attractions, and I had my first romantic relationship with a woman. It felt good to be right and to be honest.

much information about "the friend," but when she asked me more questions about the person I met that night, I couldn't quickly think of a plausible explanation for being late. Mom eventually asked if there was something more going on than what I was sharing, and I couldn't keep bluffing. I told mom that I have been attracted to women for a long time, and that I'm "interested in dating women." I don't remember a lot more of the conversation, but I do remember it going well and since then, my mom has warmed up to it a lot. She's gone from dropping "is it a phase?" to attending a coming out event at VT in 2012; she's been awesome.

Mom outed me to my dad a few weeks after I came out to her. My dad is also supportive of me, and he welcomes former and current partners I've introduced to him. We don't really talk about my being gay or LGBT rights, but I am thankful for his support. Coming

At Virginia Tech, I'm an academic advisor. I'm not openly out to my colleagues because I purposely choose to tell those I know I can trust. I haven't experienced any consequences for being "out-ish" at work.

I'm also not actively out to students with whom I have regular interactions (such as advisees and student employees); however, it's not too hard to deduce with my stickers for LGBT organizations, my Safe Zone card in my office, and my rainbow flag tattoo on my ankle that I show off with pride. I'm not afraid to come out to my students, but I'm a fairly private person, and LGBT concerns are rare conversations in academic advising. I have minor concerns about students responding negatively to me after learning I'm gay, but if I do come out to a student, it will come up naturally in a relevant conversation.

I consider myself very lucky. 

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