

THE TERLOPER

Virginia Tech's LGBTQ Magazine

Fall 2017, Issue #7



Letter from the Editor

I hate to admit it, but this issue of *The Interloper* almost didn't happen.

Don't get me wrong—we had the highest turnout of people emailing and wanting to work with the magazine this issue than ever before. I feel like we're really beginning to be seen and known around campus. We have a dedicated staff of editors that have worked tirelessly on these pieces. Our donors have been a great support and gracious in their sponsorship of the magazine.

Yet, it almost didn't happen.

Why, you may ask? Well, let me explain. Each issue of the magazine, all the way back to Issue #1 in the Spring of 2014, has followed the same structure, same outline, same design. I think that's part of *The Interloper's* success—we have a great magazine. Yet, print media is a dying art. It's getting harder and harder to fund *The Interloper* (which, if you didn't know, is funded solely by donations each semester). It's hard to find people who want to wait an entire semester to read our issue, rather than have more up-to-date and virtual news. It's hard to find artists and photographers and poets and writers who think that LGBTQ+ news is worthy to stand on its own, rather than be “normal” and “regular” news. We face the 21st century dilemma of being true to our mission and the tradition of LGBTQ+ arts-based news that was a radically political act while reaching newer and younger audiences that want the *Buzzfeed*-speed of news today.

I feel like that is our inspiration for this piece. Why are we here? Why is having *The Interloper* so important? What role do we have on campus? What do we inspire? Our stories in this issue take these topics head on, starting with our feature story about the history and importance of LGBTQ+ print media which features other campus LGBTQ+ magazines across the nation. We look to these magazines as our inspiration, our support, our friends in solidarity for doing the hard, yet rewarding, work that is



The Interloper. Authors in this issue sought to acknowledge and respect the work that got us to where we are but also to push the boundaries of where *The Interloper* has been and where we can go, including an interview featuring Virginia Tech's first out gay student body president, letters to our past selves, and thinking about new ways and shapes that *The Interloper* can look through campus collaborations such as with WUVT.

This issue of *The Interloper* almost didn't happen not because we failed at our task, nor because we were told no, but because we are thinking of new ways to become. We hope you enjoy our vision for this issue and we hope that you join us in making *The Interloper* all that is and more. Be on the lookout for some big news about what is to come in our future (hint: more publishing opportunities, virtual presence, and an important position opening!)

In solidarity,
Maggie

THE TERLOPER

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Photo by Vrajbala Tejaswi Mukkala

To the LGBTQ+ Resource Center at Virginia Tech,

Happy one year anniversary! I write reflecting about the past year and the major accomplishments of the center.

Last year during LGBTQ+ History Month 2016 there were programs for the Virginia Tech community ranging from trainings, socials, and speakers. For the Center, it kicked off “Coffee and Tea with the LGBTQ+RC.” The idea was to build community in a social environment while also supporting a local business in Blacksburg: Bollo’s. This event was very successful and we now host it monthly. In the spring we hosted Pride Week 2017 with the theme “We Are Here.” We hosted both Mya Taylor of “Tangerine” as the keynote speaker and Kit Yan returned to perform “Queer Heartache.” The Spring semester also saw trans student organizing and activism which led to an all gender multi-stall restroom established for the first time ever at Virginia Tech.

This year we are kicking off strong with LGBTQ+ History Month as well as two other projects, an LGBTQ+ climate survey and crowdfunding for a LGBTQ+ Student Leadership Development

Scholarship. Through history month, we are continuing our work of community building as well as intentional programs for the bisexual, asexual, and aromantic communities. The hope is to ensure all identities that encompass the LGBTQ+ community feel seen. We implemented two major programs and initiatives. The first is the monthly lunches with the LGBT Caucus bringing together LGBTQ+ undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty and staff. The second is QTSalon, an initiative to highlight the scholarship and research interest of LGBTQ+ faculty.

Guiding the work of the Center for the second year, I look to the following quote from Sylvia Rivera: “*We have to be visible. We should not be ashamed of who we are. We have to show the world that we are numerous. There are many of us out there.*”

To next year and beyond,

Luis H. Garay
Assistant Director, LGBTQ+ Resource Center

Dear D

by Mat Wenzel

I read your letters like literature, like the books in the bible-school library with blank checkout cards. My finger on the crease of the envelope, tearing it open, thickened my blood, like the first time I clicked an ad for gay porn in the bible-school computer lab. When I opened the slender bronze door of my mailbox, I opened 1,000 nerve endings to the mythology that our twin handwriting, twin frames, twin mannerisms—the kind the bible-school girls didn't have a name for—could make us something more than pen-pals, something I dared not name. I couldn't have known we'd meet, with beards, or that you'd chase my bus down the street in your tailored pants, or that you'd drive me around Kentucky in your truck, or that you, my monastery window, my dusty field guide, might hear, aloud, the secret we both knew we both knew.

THE PRIMARY DIVIDER:

LANGUAGE AS VIOLENCE

WRITTEN BY EMMA KLEIN

Deep within Hate Mountain, Tomi Lahren’s “Here’s-What-I-Think-Of-Your-Safe-Spaces” underground bunker and fun complex is alive and bustling with the repetitive thrum of a timeless axiom: “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” People are so quick to accept this phrase without posing any question about its exigence – what called this phrase into being, what made it necessary? Was it, perhaps, that people discovered they could experience pain (read: emotional, physical, psychological pain) as a result of spoken or written language? On the surface level, the phrase certainly seems grounded in common sense; you can’t use a word to smash a skull or break a bone. However, with a critical eye, it becomes evident that there are actually many ways, covert and overt, of using language violently.

Before we dig in, it is worth recognizing that the same people shrieking the “sticks and stones” adage while mocking snowflakes and safe spaces with forehead veins throbbing and flapping jowls stained scarlet with visible fury are unarguably, almost laughably, full of shit. If this saying were true, why would religious leaders and texts forbid followers from using malicious, abrasive, untrue, or irresponsible speech? If words are harmless and cannot hurt

people, why is it illegal to curse in public in Virginia? Why are there serious charges against libel and slander? Why do some conservative Christians claim that we are “attacking” their culture if we say “Happy Holidays” instead of other words? Why are cops able to arrest people for cursing at them (or even flipping them off) because they feel threatened? Why has Trump claimed, on multiple occasions, that he feels “attacked” by media and celebrities? >>

The use of language is widely considered to be not only a foundational aspect of a structured and socialized people, but also an obvious marker of the eschewal of violence: people consciously choose to reject violence and resort to communication through language. Slavoj Žižek, a continental philosopher, complicates this idea by asking if "... humans exceed animals in their capacity for violence precisely because they *speak*?"¹ He explains that in order to determine whether a certain speech act is violent or not, we must attack it with the standards and norms of a non-violent situation; this means that language, a form of communication defined by "non-violence [and] mutual recognition, involves unconditional violence." Language always involves violence; humans have simply managed to abstract physical violence into a non-physical form. We've managed to find ways of hurting, oppressing, even killing people without having to move anything but our lips, pencils, or keyboards.

For centuries, humans have used language to wield power, to oppress, to delineate between perceived inferior and superior people, to perpetuate harmful ideologies and power binaries, and to commit violent acts. Žižek offers that "language, not primitive egotistic interests, 'is the first and greatest divider, and it is because of language that we and our neighbors (can) 'live in different worlds' even when we live on the same street." Language is used as violence to create and perpetuate social divisions with the intent of harming members of oppressed communities; this is especially true for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF VERBAL VIOLENCE

Numerous clinical studies have yielded reliable data proving that verbal stimuli trigger reactions in areas of the brain dedicated to processing and producing physical pain. Dr. Martin Teicher's studies on the effects of verbal abuse on people, especially children and young adults, demonstrate how little truth there is to the "sticks and stones" mentality regarding violent language. After a variety of tests and observations,

Teicher and his colleagues discovered that exposure to bullying, peer pressure, and verbal abuse had visible effects on the white matter in the human brain².

Using functional magnetic resonance tomography (fMRT), Dr. Thomas Weiss and his team of researchers at Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena studied how healthy subjects process words associated with pain and discovered that the pain matrix, or regions of the brain related to processing and producing painful sensations, became active when subjects imagined situations corresponding to keywords (and even when they just said the words)³.

These studies, and many others, have only begun to prove the physical toll violent language can take on humans; despite centuries of the "sticks and stones" mentality, words absolutely have a distinct physical effect on people. Systemic and cultural discrimination, most of which is carried out via spoken communication (harassment) and legal text, against members of the LGBTQIA+ community has very real, very physical consequences. This population experiences statistically higher rates of suicide, stress, anxiety, and exhaustion and is at a higher risk for mental illness and substance abuse stemming from facing constant discrimination and delegitimizing⁴.

THE POWER OF TWO SYLLABLES

It is no secret that LGBTQIA+ individuals face a staggering amount of discrimination in the form of verbal or written harassment, threats, and derogatory names. The anxiety, frustration, exhaustive self-consciousness, and genuine fear that comes along with experiencing or constantly anticipating being publicly identified (against your will), shamed, targeted, and/or harassed not only gradually wears down the mental and emotional health of LGBTQIA+ people, but makes routine parts of daily life feel unsafe and debilitating. While one can certainly choose a stick or a rock to compromise a person's mental state physically, verbal discrimination is an excellent, subtle substitute.

WE'VE MANAGED TO FIND WAYS
OF HURTING, OPPRESSING,
EVEN KILLING PEOPLE
WITHOUT HAVING TO MOVE
ANYTHING BUT OUR LIPS,
PENCILS, OR KEYBOARDS.

NO PROMO HOMO LAWS

As of January 2017, eight states have passed bills limiting or even forbidding the discussion or verbal/written acknowledgement of LGBTQIA+ people, lifestyles, and struggles⁵. Most of the limitations revolve around topics taught in health class, but some of the language is vague enough to prevent teachers and counselors from mentoring, counseling, validating, or providing any kind of support for LGBTQIA+ students. If words are so powerless, then why are states creating and enforcing these laws? Forbidding the acknowledgement of LGBTQIA+ people and cultivating a culture of silence promotes the utter erasure and identity/cultural death of these already marginalized individuals.

HE SAID, SHE SAID

Violent speech acts or threats are perhaps the most obvious forms of language as violence, but there are passive and more abstract ways symbolic communication can hurt others. "That's so gay" is a phrase that echoed constantly through the hallways of many middle and high schools; in this context, gay is meant to serve as a synonym for stupid. People often justify using this phrase with lines like "well, everyone else is saying it" and "it has nothing to do with

gay people." However, it has everything to do with gay people; the speaker is implying that there is an inherent connection between homosexuality and stupidity. What an efficient way to wear someone down – by automatically associating part of the core of their identity with ignorance.

Intentional pronoun misuse is another method of covertly using language as violence. Trans people already experience massive systemic oppression, such as military service denial, the erasure of census questions confirming their identity and part within the U.S. population, physical and verbal harassment over bathroom usage, constant mockery in pop culture, the list goes on. Because of this, maliciously toying with the mental and emotional health of trans people by purposely calling them by the wrong pronoun, gender, or name is absolutely violent. As stated above, this constant wearing down and mocking of trans people results in very real physical and mental pain. In the fall of 2008, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force conducted a survey of over 6,000 transgender and gender non-conforming adults, the U.S. National Transgender Discrimination Survey, and discovered something alarming; 42% of trans men and 46% of trans women reported making suicide attempts⁶. This high prevalence >>



of suicide attempts was consistent across all surveyed demographics (class, race, age, education, physical ability, etc.) which means that there is one blaring consistency: the constant maltreatment and harassment, both physical and verbal, has devastating effects.

WE DON'T NEED YOUR STICKS AND STONES

While the shrieking, insult-slinging champions of a dusty old adage may beg (probably very loudly and in 140 characters or less) to differ, I think it's time to recognize the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who suffer physical and psychological consequences as a direct result of verbal violence. While the mountains of undeniable scientific and survey data grow, we must reject those who lean on the sticks and stones mentality and leave them behind; it is time to recognize the consequences of violent language and seek out ways of not only repairing the damage it has done but avoiding further linguistic harm masquerading as harmless wordplay. Žižek said it best: "verbal violence is not a secondary distortion, but the ultimate resort of every specifically human violence." 

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A Spark of Hope: A Queer Reflection on Video Games

Written by Cory Haines

There is a vocal community within the video game scene that pressures the industry to become more diverse in its character designs. The industry responds, evolving to lessen the harsh (and justified) criticisms aimed against it. However, when it comes to LGBTQ representation in video games; this industry takes baby-steps to advance their diversity. Very small... very slow... and often very clumsy. A common example of these steps is the practice of including same-sex romanceable characters in narrative driven games; this is noticeably apparent in “protagonist-sexual” narratives. Those familiar with the concept should know how this plays out: choosing your favorite character, going through dialogue paths to find the option you liked the most—all leading up to the time you unlock their romance event. Your gay little heart goes pitter patter and then the story moves on as if nothing happened. My character (and the chosen NPC love-interest) being queer has no significant impact beyond this; the narrative goes on, but I got my one copy-and-paste cutscene! Such a diverse fantasy world!

There are some issues with this becoming the dominant form of LGBTQ representation in video games. One is the lack of context for how these “romance

options” are framed and constructed; with the same scene playing out regardless of the player character’s gender. Aleah Kiley, professor of media and film studies at University of California Santa Barbara, discusses the concept of “safe sexuality” when LGBTQ narratives are reduced to single-dimensional experiences devoid of any context. A common way I articulate this is, “all romanceable characters are assumed pansexual until proven differently.” The same critique is echoed directly in Evan Lauteria’s¹ piece, “Procedurally and Fictively Relevant: Exploring the Potential for Queer Content in Video Games.” These protagonist-sexual narratives contribute next to nothing for LGBTQ narratives; simply providing a “re-skinning” of heteronormative options.

In my own research, the “protagonist-sexual” characters count for nothing when I am searching for representation of non-heterosexual attractions in the game’s narrative. A common rebuttal to my critiques is the freedom of fantasy, the idea that within a fantasy universe, a character’s sexuality is defined and created uniquely. This rebuttal is often tied to the notion of keeping identity politics out of game spaces. So, while I may be throwing down a tyrannical leader and >>



questioning the social structure within the game's narrative, I am not allowed to ponder on how my in-game partner interprets their identity and relationship with my character (aka; they gay). While I am given context and lore on how various fantasy institutions came to be and how they constructed their culture, not once am I given information on how sexuality and gender are constructed within the narrative.

It gets pretty old being the only queer person in these fantasy worlds. Don't even get me started on exploring beyond the gender-binary.

Critical challenges to game narratives is something of an odd-ball in game communities, especially critically queer challenges. We have canonically LGBTQ characters in game narratives after all, should we not be happy? No, we should not be. LGBTQ characters have been identified through queer readings and analysis into the 1980s, but explicitly stated LGBTQ characters have been a grab-bag of stereotypes that we have learned to love due to their rarity. That was so until around 2010 when the

number of queer representations in standalone video game titles skyrocketed. This increase, however, focused primarily on gay men and lesbian women².

Would it kill game developers and players to explore beyond the gender binary? Both have unlimited creative potential. I can be a lizard-person who can conjure the power of legends, but because my lizard has a noticeable chest, I gotta stay within the gender-binary...

My own research yielded dismal results for LGBTQ representation. Game characters who express same-sex attraction are usually the sole character of their kind within the narrative, and they are usually minor or static characters at best. Additionally, their characterization typically revolves primarily around sexuality. Upon examining gender in video games, I discovered that the results are even more dismal; representations of transgender characters boil down to their character suffering from their chosen gender or they exist as a derogatory joke. Non-binary characters only existed through a queer reading of them; but the specific usage of "they/them"



Cover artwork from the videogame publishers, fair use.

or other non-binary pronouns signified no explicitly non-binary characters. During my research, none of these characters were ever the main character.

This pessimistic exploration of the video game industry does end on a high note. Racial and transgender representations of the LGBTQ community are seen in *Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator*; a game that deserves praise for including transgender character creation options, canonical transgender characters, and multiple LGBTQ men of color. Additionally, AAA (a publishing shorthand signifying mainstream, big-budget titles) game series *Dishonored* rolled out a standalone story featuring (slight spoiler incoming) a queer, disabled black woman as a protagonist. *Night in the Woods* is a charming adventure which also champions a female protagonist who is attracted to women and it features a LGBTQ main cast. The indie hit *Undertale* also deserves a spotlight here in having a non-binary youth as the protagonist in a world filled with queer content (lesbian monster girlfriends and a quirky androgynous robot-superstar, all in the same universe!).

Slowly, as the industry begins to open itself up to diverse ideas and methods, more LGBTQ content is being introduced into video games. Our spark of hope... 

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² Cole, A.M., Shaw, A., and Zammit, J. (2017, July). Presenter. Representations of Queer Identity in Games from 2013–2015. Digital Game Researcher Association Conference. Melbourne, Australia.

Schrodinger

Out at School, In at Home

Written by Meagan Webb

As summer turns to fall, both Thanksgiving and winter breaks approach, bringing trepidation over not just final exams, but of going home for the holidays. There's certainly no place like home when it comes to enjoying home-cooked meals while also suffering through visits with relatives that remind me why I'm still in the closet at home. My family prays to a god I don't believe in before we eat, but I don't close my eyes with a bowed head. This is my silent protest against the religion that they use as justification for hating people like me.

Even when we get to the enjoyable part of eating food, it's tempered by the requirement for uncomfortable dinner conversation. When politics come up, I find myself wishing for a return to the mundane discussions on gardening; at least debates about the best way to grow a tomato

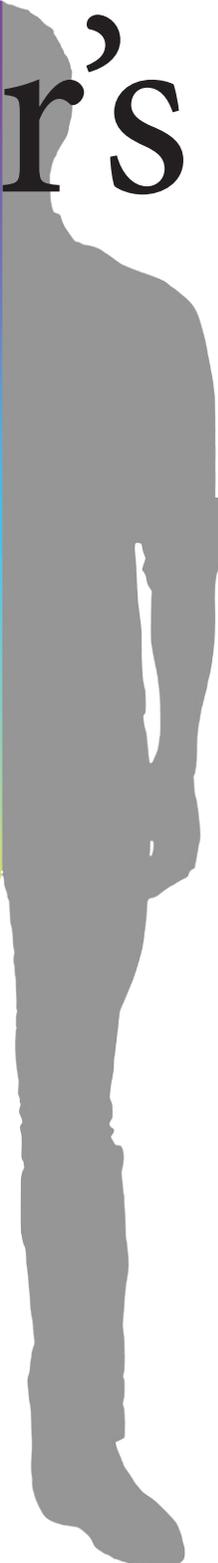
don't leave me with a strong sense of alienation from the people I call kin. Last year my Aunt Kitty was talking about how so-and-so's kids turned out bad—one a drug addict and the other a "queer." I remember especially the latter term being spoken with such venom that it felt like a pocket knife stabbing through the packaging tape that had once connected us. Even my brother, who's young enough to know better, would say this word—this category, my identity—as a slur. Moments like these shove me a bit back into the closet, reinforcing why I've yet to come out to any of my family.

"Coming out" is a continuous process. I came out to my best friends in my junior year of high school, after they mentioned they weren't straight. I came out to some people from theater because I couldn't resist making a pun about my sexuality,

Image by Madeline Price Ball via Wikimedia Commons edited by Sarah Gugercin



r's Closet:



and I felt safe because half of them were gay anyway. I came out to two friends in bio class when one outright asked, but they made an offensive joke so I'm still not sure if they took me seriously. But in high school, with a brother one mere grade ahead of me, I came out to less than 15 people over the course of four years, afraid of too many people knowing.

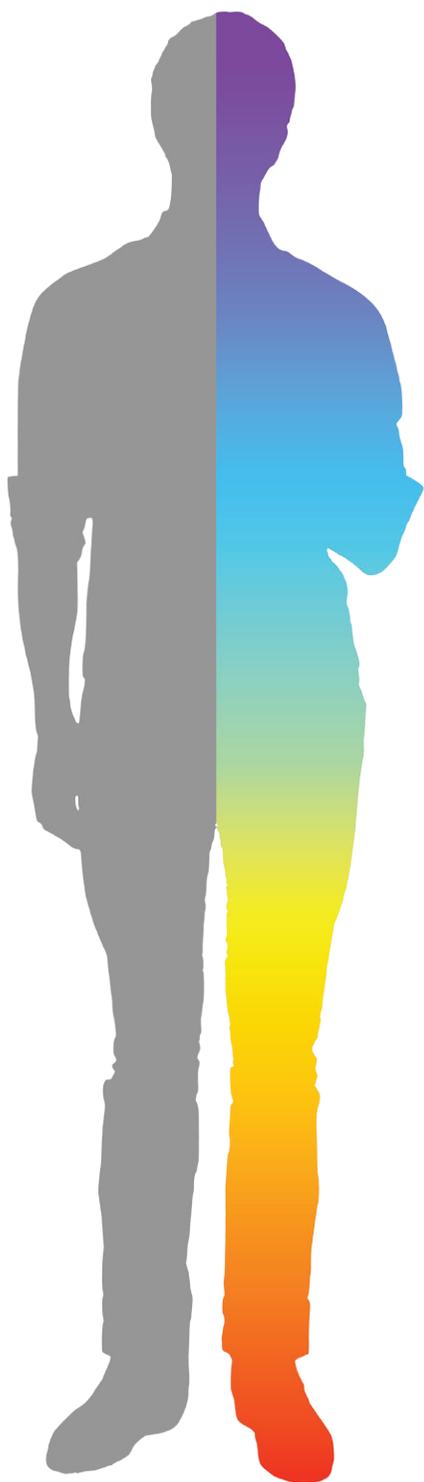
Contrastingly, I've come out to at least 30 people at college in just a few months. But even as I've gotten increasingly comfortable with people knowing, I've yet to tell people in certain groups. I've told people from clubs, but not my hallmates. I've told people I met once, but not my roommate. I still haven't told a single person in my family.

I have a multitude of reasons for not coming out. Sometimes it's just inconvenient—I'm too socially awkward to mention my sexuality if the conversation hasn't prompted it. This is certainly why I haven't told my roommate, and a part of why I haven't told my parents. I might drop hints—like not agreeing with my hallmates that some guy is “super hot,” or telling my parents I don't want kids— but I don't actually admit anything. I also limit telling certain people

because I don't want the info to get back to other individuals second hand. Part of this is because it eliminates my ability to defend myself if needed; some people are inclined towards harmful misconceptions or have negative reactions which could snowball into significant issues if approached the wrong way. I don't come out because I want to maintain control over my identity, my story, and the bigotry fueled reactions directed towards who I am.

Being partially out puts me in a strange state of constant vigilance: I'll tell my mom I'm going to a theater thing when I'm really going to a Pride meeting. I hesitate every time I add something to my Snapchat story, because my cousins follow me there. I cringe when my uncle makes Facebook posts bashing trans people and marriage equality, but I dare not start a confrontation. If I did, they might wonder why I care— might realize I'm not straight. Unfortunately, if caught between loyalty to their divisive ideals and familial affection towards me, I do not expect to win.

As much as I worry about the ramifications of coming out, a part of me does it anyway. Each time I come out to >>

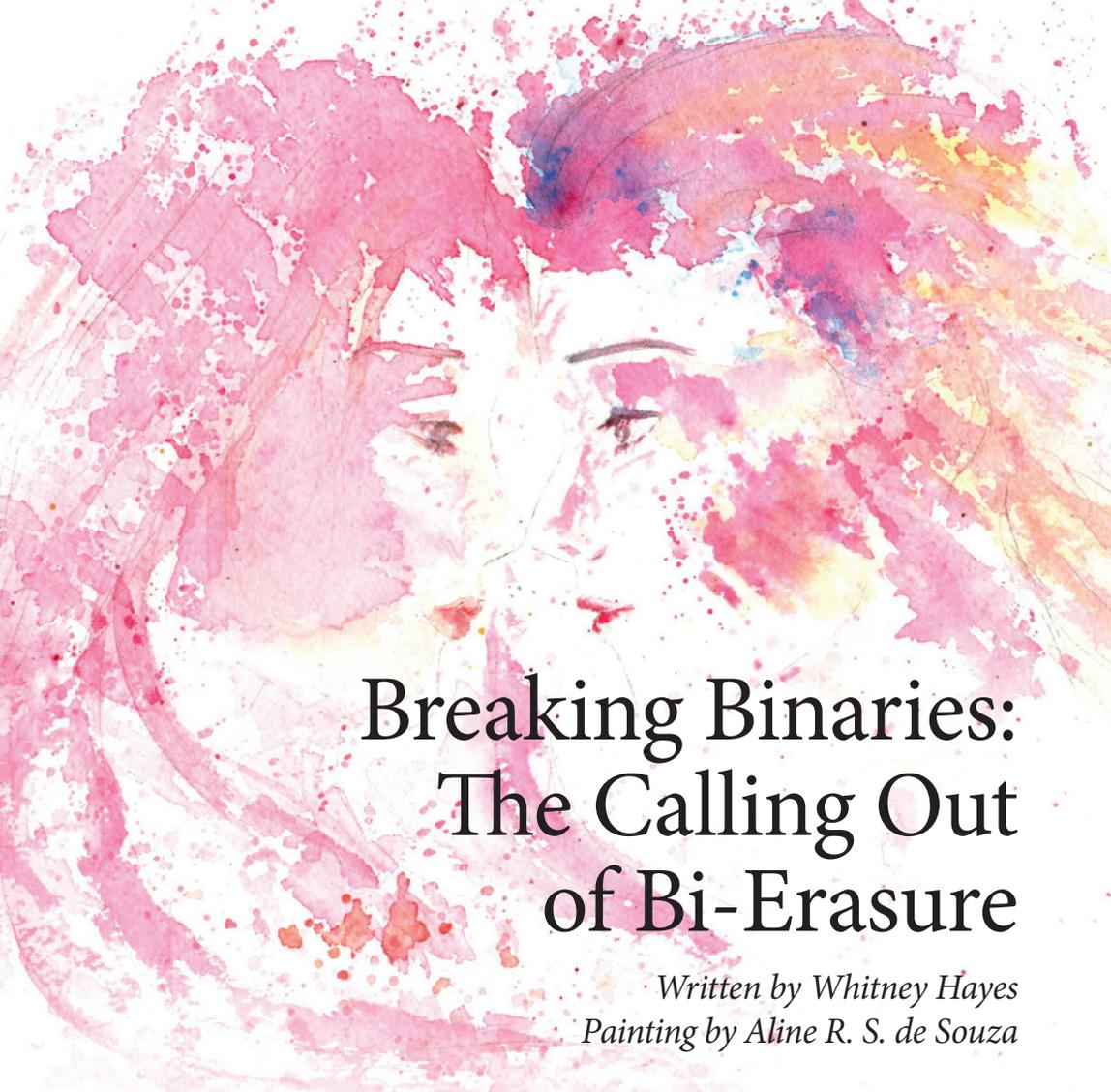


someone at school it requires a piece of bravery I don't expect to have, but I do it. Each time, it becomes just a little bit easier. A part of me wants to come out completely, to step firmly from the closet and lock the door behind me: I want to post a picture of me with a Pride flag on Facebook for everyone to see, to wear rainbow buttons visibly everywhere I go, to be unabashedly out and confident in who I am.

But I don't.

Because I am afraid. Will my brother call me queer the same way he did with some celebrity he didn't like? Would my amicable roommate be uncomfortable and grow to hate me? Will my normally nice aunt shun me, telling someone else about how I'd "gone bad"? Will my parents think I'm broken? There is a part of me that waited until I turned 18 before considering telling them, just in case they tried send me to therapy to try to change who I am.

Ultimately, I think they'll be okay with my sexuality, so part of me wants to tell them but simply doesn't know how. The rest of my family is a different story, but I hope at least my parents will accept me. I'll come out to them someday, and maybe one day I'll feel safe enough to come out completely, free of worries and the vigilance I carry with it. In the meantime, I'm in Schrodinger's closet: in at home, out at school. I am simultaneously in two somewhat paradoxical conditions, but that's okay. Someday, I won't be afraid to be me. 

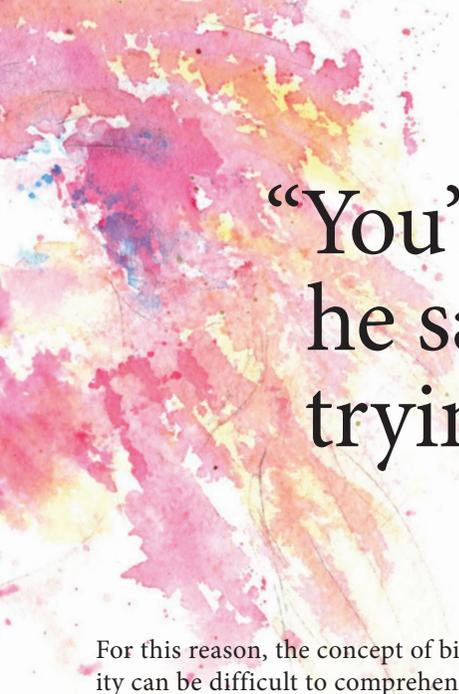


Breaking Binaries: The Calling Out of Bi-Erasure

*Written by Whitney Hayes
Painting by Aline R. S. de Souza*

**Gay or straight. Male or female.
Republican or Democrat.
Coffee or tea.**

We live in a world of binaries— a realm that many people are actively training themselves out of. But the reality is stark: it's difficult to resist the impulse to pick a side. So often, you're either one thing, or another. >>



“You’re not bisexual,”
he said, “you’re just
trying to be cool.”

For this reason, the concept of bisexuality can be difficult to comprehend. Even within the queer community, there are stereotypes about individuals who identify as bisexual. Some might claim that bisexuality is simply “a stopping point” before a person fully comes out as gay, for instance. There is also the notion that bisexual people are “easy” or “slutty.”

Perhaps one of the reasons bisexuality is a tricky topic is because the definition can be difficult to pin down. Even those who identify as such don’t always describe it the same way. One person might claim that to actively seek both male and female partners is to be bisexual. Another might say bisexuality is simply being open to relations with either sex. The difference might seem subtle at first, but is hugely enormous when it comes to making assumptions about another person’s identity.

It’s important here to note that bisexual people often have the ability to “pass,” whether it’s within a heteronormative community or a homonormative one. Depending on their current partner of choice, it’s easy to conclude that someone is gay or straight when in actuality, there is an entire

other layer to their identity that isn’t always recognized or performed.

These assumptions about another person’s identity are always harmful, and can lead to bi-erasure, which GLAAD says is when “the existence or legitimacy of bisexuality...is questioned or denied outright.” This act of diminishment happened to me several months ago. I came out as queer— or bisexual— to a man I’d been hooking up with on and off for nearly three years. Though he didn’t say much at first, a few weeks later he commented on my attraction to women, saying point blank: “I think you’re forcing it.”

Chloe Caldwell, in her essay, “The Laziest Coming Out Story You’ve Ever Heard” experienced this same type of criticism of her own identity. She writes: “At a bar one night, I sat on the patio with a friend from high school. “You’re not bisexual,” he said, “you’re just trying to be cool.”

This disavowal of another person’s self-proclaimed identity is bi-erasure exemplified— ignoring the mere concept of bisexuality. This happens even in pop culture, specifically in the Netflix

series, *Orange is the New Black*. The main character, Piper, is referred to as an “ex-lesbian,” rather than someone who is bisexual. In a *Huffington Post* piece about the show, bisexual activist Aud Traher commented on this premise, claiming, “I [think] the idea of calling anyone ‘ex-lesbian’ is incredibly dangerous. It gives credence to not only bisexual invisibility but...cements it further into the dominant discourse that queer people can be ‘cured,’ that queer women only need to find the right man or have sex with one to ‘cure’ them.”

This striking statement makes acknowledging the bisexual identity all the more crucial. Discrimination about one orientation can so easily lead to the negative

evaluation of another, which makes it vital to cultivate fully inclusive communities. As members of the overarching LGBTQ+ community, we owe it to ourselves to honor and recognize each individual identity. By excluding labels we might not understand, we deny ourselves the very community we seek to build. 

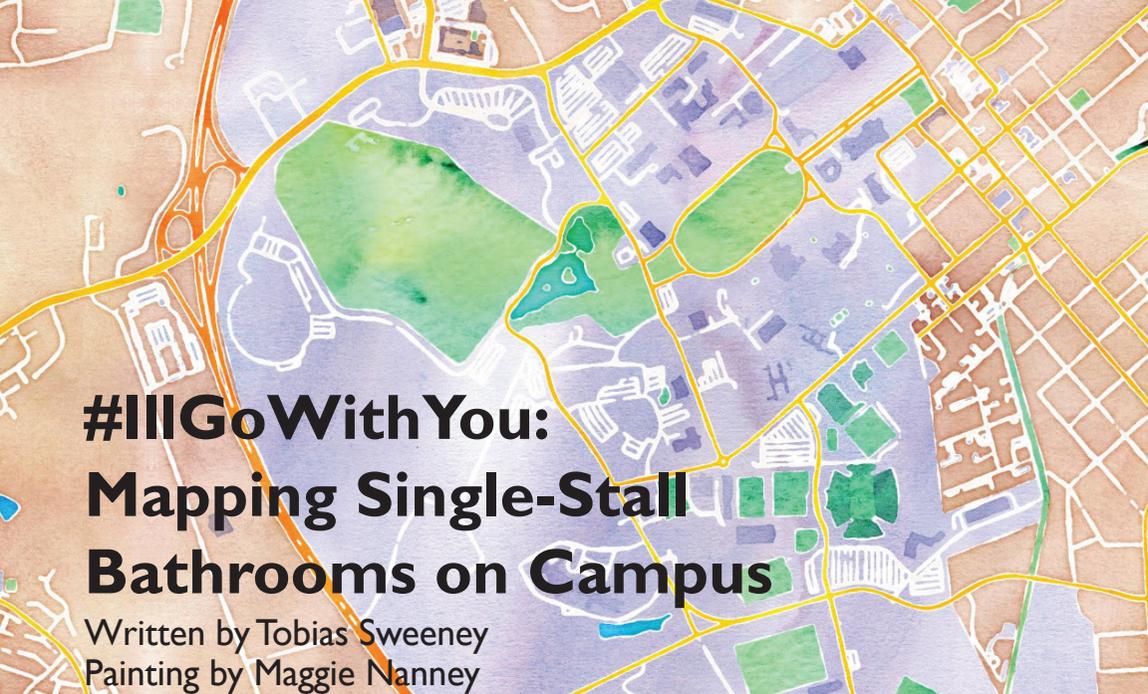
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THE TERLOPER

The Interloper’s mission is to create a platform for the Virginia Tech queer community to voice their perspectives through an intersectional lens. We aim to represent and amplify the full queer spectrum of experiences not by acting as a singular voice but by providing a space for dialogue. We work to expose and deconstruct systems that marginalize our community’s identities in order to promote equity and justice.



#IllGoWithYou: Mapping Single-Stall Bathrooms on Campus

Written by Tobias Sweeney
Painting by Maggie Nanney

“Bathrooms” and “transgender” – those two words alone are likely to provoke endless conflict on most any social media site. The issue of ensuring safe and accessible bathroom access has risen to the forefront with the introduction of various bathroom bills, such as the infamous HB2 out of North Carolina, passed in March 2016. These bills generally share a focus of requiring multi-stall changing and bathroom facilities to be designated for a single sex while defining sex as a category assigned to one at birth. These bills – which are rooted in fears of increased sexual harassment and a loss of privacy – often ignore that transgender people already face frequent harassment in bathrooms. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, more than a quarter of the close to 28,000 transgender-identified respondents “were denied access to restrooms, had their presence in a restroom questioned, and/or were verbal harassed, physically attacked, or sexually assaulted in a restroom.” No rise in sexual violence has been seen in jurisdictions with nondiscrimination laws for transgender people. (National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, 2016). Despite these statistics, the fight over bathrooms drags on both in Virginia and across the nation.

With the continued conflict sparked by bathroom bills, single-stall bathrooms have increasingly taken on the role as safe havens for transgender people. Numerous activists have sparked campaigns, such as #IllGoWithYou and Refuge

Restrooms. The latter, a crowdsourced database of transgender-friendly bathrooms in the United States, inspired me to create my own project. I had wanted a more accurate map of Virginia Tech’s single-stall bathrooms since my freshman year and finally had the time to do so as of late.

My quest began with exploring campus in my free time – trudging up numerous flights of stairs and traveling via elevators that would be more suited to a haunted house. The oppressive mugginess of some of the older buildings, coupled with a lack of findings, disparaged me in my early forays. I turned to Facebook, adapting a form I had been using to a survey for others to fill out regarding where these bathrooms are on campus. After one or two joke answers (no, I do not believe you that there is a “69th” floor), I received several responses. This, on top of pledges of support from a number of students and locals, boosted my confidence to new levels. I hope to continue this project in the future, not only to develop a more accurate map, but also to identify which parts of campus are lacking in facilities. Virginia Tech should be a safe place for everyone to pee.

To access a current map of single-stall and inclusive restrooms on campus, please scan the QR code. If spaces need updated, please contact *The Interloper*. 



Which Queer TV Universe Do You Belong In?

quiz by Maggie Nanney
layout by Mariana Sierra

lights! camera! action!

1. The opening scene of the show about your life begins. It is:
 - A) Dramatic: Packed so full of moody looks that this is basically a soap opera.
 - B) Suspenseful: So far on the edge of your seat that you're in someone else's lap (oh joy!)
 - C) Comedic: The *punnier* the better.
 - D) A recap: How much time do you have to catch up on this backstory drama?
2. The soundtrack to your life is:
 - A) The latest top hits!
 - B) Pssh! Please, my life is a musical. I randomly break out in song.
 - C) Simple, classic solo piano.
 - D) Laugh track please!
3. Oh no! It's on of those dreaded "body switch" episodes. You switch bodies with:
 - A) Your co-star.
 - B) Your arch-nemesis.
 - C) Your nagging family relative.
 - D) An animal.
4. At last: the series finale. How does it end?
 - A) What!? It's the finale? Oh shit, there's a ton to wrap up.
 - B) A death and drama.
 - C) A flash forward and reunion.
 - D) A panorama of the infamous scene where it all took place. >>

Answers

If you answered mostly A's:

You belong in the classic show **Will & Grace**! A foundational comedy for the LGBTQ community, every queer person has a Will, a Grace, a Karen, and a Jack-- who are you? Now, with its renewed season on air, we can't wait to find out how things unfold!

← It's on Hulu!

If you answered mostly B's:

Sing with me: Talking, laughing, loving, breathing, fighting, fucking, crying, drinking, writing, winning, losing, cheating, kissing, thinking, dreaming. What ever was up with that theme song to begin with? Welcome to sunny LA and **The L Word**! How these classy lesbians ever afforded their lavish lifestyle we may never know, but we do know that we're all glad Jenny is gone.

Binge on Netflix! →

If you answered mostly C's:

Hey naughty! Welcome to Litchfield Prison and **Orange is the New Black**! This Netflix showstopper is all about you, well, until the next episode focuses on one of the other 29520 main characters' backstory. Hey, at least you're not Piper, right?!

If you answered mostly D's:

Good music, good jokes, good friends, and good representation: you're a perfect fit for **Steven Universe**! With an emotional backstory and beautiful animation, this world is perfect for someone who just wants to watch gay aliens fight monsters and ↗ eat fry bits. Go watch some VHS tapes of Lil Butler to celebrate!

Watch on Hulu!

Contrary to Popculture

by Melissa Velez Nazario

Here's how they think you should wake up:

Hair combed, perfectly mussed,
Laid out in a halo beneath your head.
Eyelashes fluttering open in
Perfectly placed morning sunlight.
Stretching gracefully like a dancer before
The big show, ready to make men
and women and everyone else
Prostrate themselves at your feet,
All in awe at your beauty.

Here's what I see:

You, groaning in protest at 6 A.M.,
Alarm clock calling us up
Against our will.
You relent first, like always,
Squinting in the dark before
Stretching, joints popping,
Yawning loudly. Your breath stinks.

I blearily watch your form, half-asleep,
Get up and stumble toward the
Bathroom, hair defying gravity as you go.
You curse as you fumble for the light,
Find it, and are illuminated instantly.
Tan lines and stretch marks glow
In cheap yellow light, and I
Have never known a sight
That makes my heart
Beat so unsteady.

Moments later, I follow
And you smile lazily at me
Through the mirror.
“G'morning,” you mumble,
Taking out your toothbrush to reach up
And kiss my cheek, leaving an imprint
Of your lips in mint foam.
My heart skips a beat.

What would you say?

written by: the editors of Issue #7



Katie Ayers

Don't get hung up on labels. It sounds cliché, but you're going to change – bi...to gay...to lesbian...to gay/queer...to "I don't need a label, I'm too cool for all that"...then back to lesbian. All the labels are smoke and mirrors anyhow; as you continue to grow, you'll change in ways you can't even imagine yet — just go with it. The relationship you think is THE ONE...well it isn't. There'll be more and better ones on the horizon. Don't hurt people intentionally, don't sleep with them if you don't mean it, and don't be a jerk when you break up with them, even if you think it's in their best interest. Find a good therapist. Be kinder to yourself than you think necessary. Listen to your gut. When you find your tribe, hang onto them. Take time to take a nap. And call your momma.



Rachel Hargrave

Allow for contradictions in yourself. Let yourself grow outside of the boundaries others place on you. Binaries aren't real – you don't belong in one. One day, you will learn how to make your body yours so that it feels less like a cage and more like a home. Cutting your hair will be the first step towards that – don't listen to mom when she tells you no, or says you look too butch. Love your body like you love your partners. Dye your hair pink like you've always wanted to. Spread love of all kinds. Embrace your inner Aquarian Plant Witch. Toughen up, babe, cause you've got some curve balls coming your way, but don't worry – you're strong enough. Even when you can only sleep once you've cried yourself to exhaustion, you're strong enough. Even when you can't get out of bed, you're strong enough. And when you finally learn to be the bold and bright queer femmeboi you are, you'll know that you're strong enough – you'll get that phoenix tattoo one day. You'll earn it.



Whitney Hayes

Don't attach yourself to people who will shame you. Whether it's a friend or a partner, there is no reason to tolerate someone who minimizes your experiences, or guilts you for your desires and preferences. You're allowed to like those kisses with girls. You're allowed to enjoy sex. You're allowed to seek an identity outside the norm— there is a space for you and for the things you like. Let yourself explore and question. Don't be afraid to say no— to tell men to leave you alone, that you're not interested. You don't always have to be nice. And most importantly, own your body. Love it, use it, make it stronger.

o your younger self?



Jessica Herling

It's okay to feel frustrated with how people respond to your coming out. People are not necessarily going to act in the way that you expect and it's okay to feel that frustration. Some will be really supportive, but for others it might take awhile to understand and some might never get it. As someone who studies women and gender studies, you will find it disheartening when people do not listen to you or react in a way that you have learned to respond as an advocate. To have to do that advocate labor on your own behalf can be awkward and frustrating, and it's okay to feel that. It will be difficult when you have to advocate for yourself, but don't let that frustration burn you out. Learn from it and be that resource for someone else.



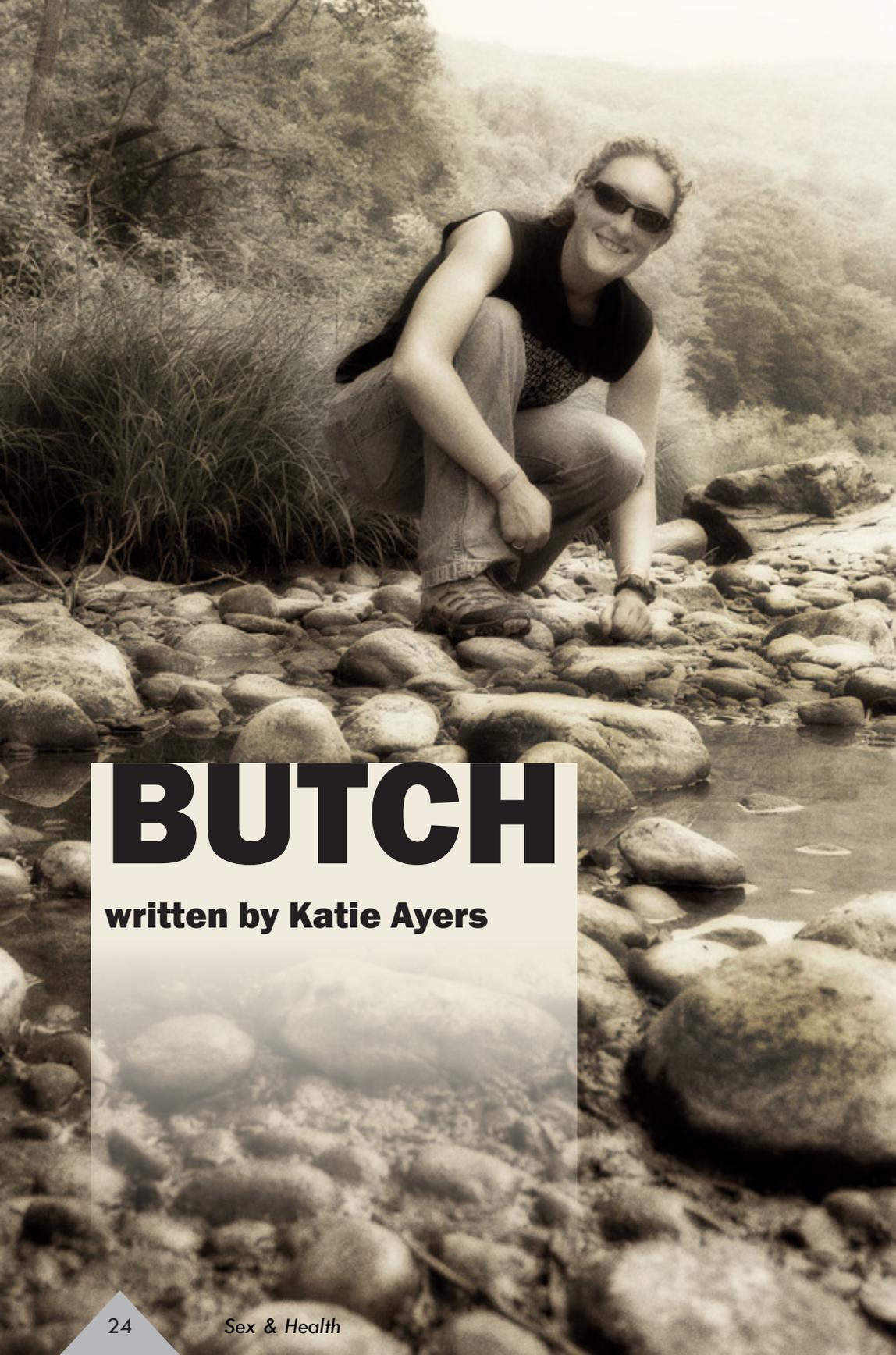
Maggie Nanney

It's kind of funny, because I daydream my future a lot, but I also perseverate on my past too. So I think that I would tell my past self that the future is never what you imagine it to be. You can try. You can spend countless hours creating lists and writing and rewriting so that everything is perfect. You can do that. Being perfect isn't going to stop those kids from bullying you. It isn't going to make those people love you any more. It isn't going to make a fairytale daydream come true. That doesn't mean not to dream. Dream big and reach for those damn stars. But life is also so much more than that. Look up from your books, look up and really feel the moment you're in. You don't have to be in control all the time because you have an amazing support system that want to be—and are—there for you. Finally, I think I would tell my younger self to embrace queer theory—that is your home. I don't know why I was so turned off (literally, pun also intended) from it at the time, but I would tell myself to give it another go.



Melissa Velez Nazario

Almost exclusively attending private Catholic schools in the south for 14 years, I wasn't exposed to very positive views on queerness. If I could talk to my younger self, I'd tell them not to be afraid of the internet as a source of support. The priests and the politics around me were not the whole world. I would tell them that our identity and faith don't have to be separate. I'd say that our first crush wasn't worth it, but that's okay because our first love is far from our only love. I'd tell them that it's okay to be scared now, because in high school, we'll become more confident. We'll find friends who not only accept us, but can relate to our struggles and love us for who we are. I'd tell my younger self that things will get better – they just need to find the right people. 



BUTCH

written by Katie Ayers

This story was initially written as part of a 2015 theater class that explored personal identity as performance. I chose to explore butch or masculine-of-center identity, partly because I have resonated with the aesthetic myself for some time and partly because masculine-of-center women almost always catch my eye in a crowd.

My first exploration into the butch/femme culture was at 21 years old, as I was just beginning college. Miami University had a very strong butch/femme dating scene. Butch women were expected to look somewhat masculine and pursue only femme women. Single butch women hung together, as did femmes. Because I fit squarely in the middle of the butch/femme spectrum (what I now see as “soft-butch”), I could not find a date to save my life – no one knew which box to put me in. While “butch” did not feel entirely natural to me, I certainly felt aesthetically more masculine than feminine. If I had to pick one, I was going butch, so I cut my hair short, threw out all my skirts and wore a baseball cap and white t-shirt so often it began to feel like a uniform. I bought the femmes drinks at the bars, brought flowers on first dates and carried my butch role through to the classroom, bedroom, and beyond. For me, this butch identity felt like a performance, different than how my butch friends Amy and Blaze understand it. To see that difference, I interviewed them. Below are the interviews, edited for length and clarity.

BUTCH AS PERFORMANCE

Blaze, a 50-year-old, self-employed handywoman from Washington said it “took a few good girlfriends”

before she understood who she was. “I just realized that that’s what society called people like me,” she said. “I was always a tomboy, masculine of center, always into sports, always into the outdoors.”

When I mentioned that tomboy was a word that had come up in other interviews, Blaze was not surprised.

“People call you (that) when you’re pre-puberty. When you’re a dyke they call you a tomboy. They don’t know what to call you. They don’t want to say you’re a young lesbian, or a young dyke or a young butch, that’s supposed to be a derogatory thing.”

REPERCUSSIONS OF BEING BUTCH

Amy, a 50-year-old computer systems analyst from Maryland, described being in “no-woman’s land” the minute she walks out her front door everyday.

“You go out in the world and you’re not a woman, but you’re not a man, but you’re not a woman. So I go to work and the people at work don’t know how to treat me because I’m not a woman, but I’m not a man. So they’re not sure if they should talk around me like a man and yet they’re not, they definitely know they can’t talk with me in certain ways they would talk to women they consider to be women.”

DEFINING WHO YOU ARE

Amy said the challenges she faced helped define who she is now. >>

“I think early on when you’re first coming out, early on you feel a little shifty. But I think as you get further along in terms of being an adult ... certainly into my 30s, 40s and now into 50s you get to a point where it’s just yeah, no, I just do what I want and here I am, I don’t really care what you think there’s not much I can do and I’m not gonna please you at all, I’m not gonna try to please you.”

STRENGTH IN BUTCH IDENTITY

Amy described the difference between those women who are butch and those who are trying to be — “it’s like putting on an ill-fitting pair of pants. And for me, just how I am in the world, not fitting certain gender norms and not caring about it really, is part of how I am butch in this world.”

Blaze was even more succinct — “I couldn’t shake this shit if I wanted to!” She continued:

“No, I can’t be bothered with all that adjustment of image. I long ago gave up the preoccupation with whether I make people uncomfortable or not. I do make people very uncomfortable. People are very uncomfortable with a strong woman. Because most women really try to hide that they’re strong and when you make a decision to enhance that you’re strong it’s a major change.

CONCLUSION

As I’ve become more comfortable in my own skin, and even just in the two years since initially wrote this piece for class, my identity has evolved. In trying on a “super butch” identity, I realized I was wearing the “ill-fitting pair of pants” Amy described. I learned that what I wanted was the confidence with which my butch friends carried themselves, not the outside butch aesthetic. Some days I still dress more masculine than usual — think button downs and bow ties — but often it’s just broken-in jeans and a pair of faded leather Doc Martins, and it’s less about presenting an image than what’s clean in my closet. I’m thankful for Blaze and Amy who took time to talk with me, and to all the older butch women I met in my 20s who helped me find my way back to the middle and the truest sense of me. 



The Demise of PWR BTTM

Written by Rachel Hargrave and
Andrew Pregnall

On May 12, 2017 PWR BTTM released its second studio album, *Pageant*, which was met with critical acclaim by both mainstream and underground publications. On May 13, 2017, PWR BTTM's record label and management agency dropped PWR BTTM from their services, cancelled their tour, removed their music from streaming services, and refunded customers for their purchase of *Pageant*. Why? Because a May 11 Facebook post accused PWR BTTM lead singer Ben Hopkins of sexual assault and "unwanted advances towards minors," a claim which was subsequently corroborated by a May 12 *Jezebel* article. In less than 48 hours, PWR BTTM went from being at the height of their career to rock bottom.

Let's get one thing clear: the purported sexual abuse of PWR BTTM fans by PWR BTTM lead singer Ben Hopkins is problematic af and this article is not a justification or defense of their alleged actions. This article is meant to serve as an exploration of socio-cultural dynamics surrounding PWR BTTM's demise and many of the double standards they are held to compared to other figures in the music industry or celebrity culture in general.

Chris Brown beat and threatened to kill Rihanna and plead guilty in court, and went on to avoid jail time and maintain a successful music career. Dr. Luke kept his career after being accused of sexual, physical, verbal, and emotional >>



abuse by Kesha in one of the most public gender-based violence cases in recent memory. Oh, and there's that guy who grabbed women by the pussy, admitted to it on a hot mic, and went on to become president of a certain country.

*Cough... Cough... *

Another layer to this is the issue of the “risk” queer bands pose to their record labels and the venues that book them. Just as hiring a female director is seen as a larger risk than hiring a male director, booking a queer band is perceived as a higher risk than booking a cis/straight band. This also means that when these marginalized groups fail, it's considered a bigger and more damaging failure than when traditional groups fail. This means that queer bands are often held to a higher standard than non-queer bands, as well as subjected to myriad double standards. It's very possible, if not likely, that part of why PWR BTM was dropped so quickly from its label and venues was because they're queer. Because of the higher inherent “risk” of them being a queer band, they received a quicker and stronger response than many other music acts in their same position have not received.

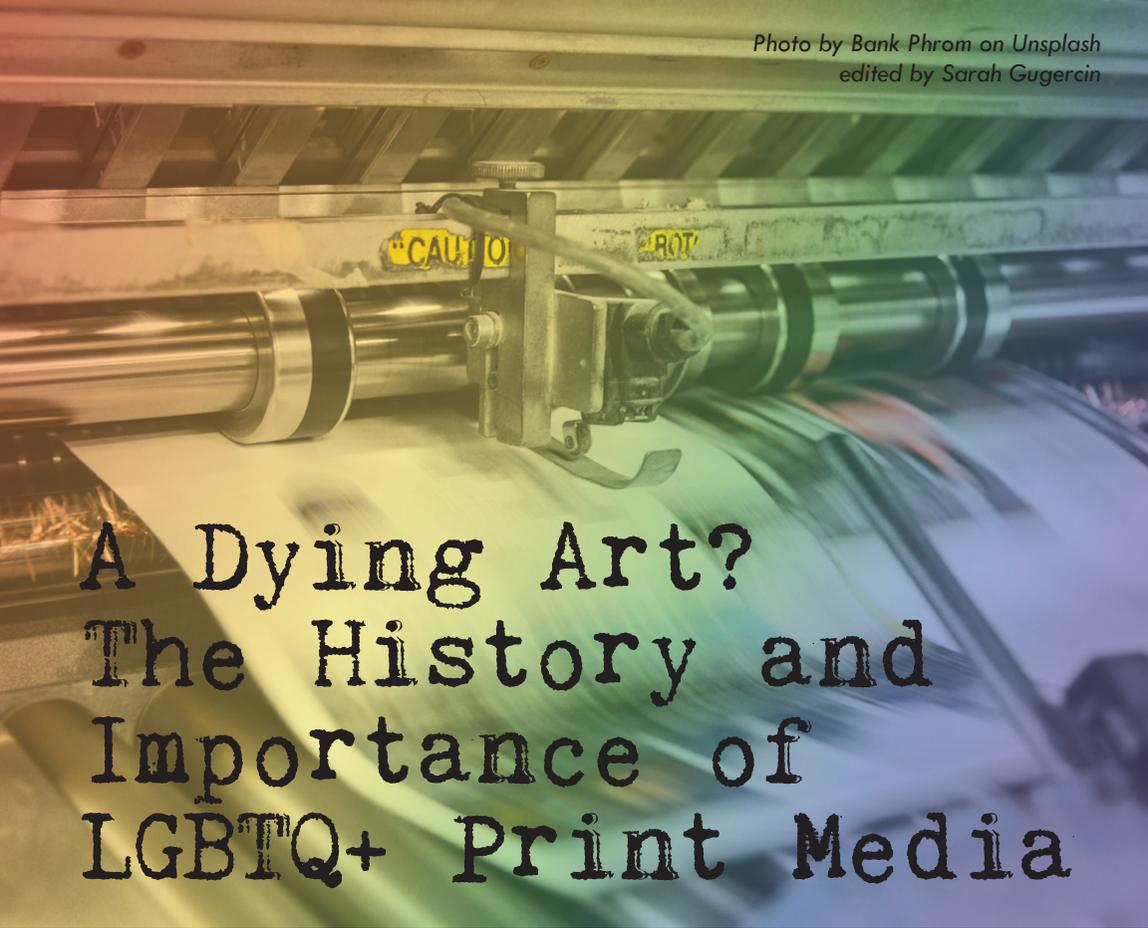
While the professional response – venues, record label, partner acts – can be explained by the “risk” a queer band poses, the response from their fanbase can't be explained with the same reasons

since their fanbase is largely queer themselves. Many queer youth have low to zero tolerance for abuse allegations, as many of us have experienced various forms of abuse and mistreatment over the years and know how to identify it. We've grown up in social circles where those around us are more emphatic about believing victims, and therefore tend to give artists less leeway on abusive behavior or purported abusive behavior. While we as a society are starting to get better at cutting out abusers, we are still terrible at doing so consistently and immediately. Minority communities often tend to call out abuse quicker and have less tolerance for it; hence the aggressive and immediate reaction from PWR BTM's fanbase. 

Sources:

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A Dying Art? The History and Importance of LGBTQ+ Print Media

Written by Andrew Pregnall
(with Interviews by Maggie Nanney)

“Very different was the reward of the true love of Achilles towards his lover Patroclus-his lover and not his love (the notion that Patroclus was the beloved one is a foolish error into which Aeschylus has fallen, for Achilles was surely the fairer of the two, fairer also than all the other heroes; and, as Homer informs us, he was still beardless, and younger far).”

-Plato's Symposium >>



You may be wondering what a quote from some old dead guy you learned about in 9th grade has to do with the history of LGBTQ+ print, and the answer is a weird combination of “everything” and “nothing at all.” In *Symposium*, Plato argues that in the pederastic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, Achilles was the eromenos while Patroclus was the erastes. Though pederastic relationships do not neatly fall into our western definitions of sexuality, love, or mentorship, they are nevertheless a queer relationship, and *Symposium* simply shows that people have been writing about queer topics for a very long time.

How, then, should one examine the history and importance of LGBTQ+ print media? One could certainly focus on literature and radical works like Shakespeare’s “Sonnet XX” or Oscar Wilde’s *A Picture of Dorian Gray*. In a similar vein, one could focus on the history of queer readings of other pieces of literature, or one could ignore literature at all and instead focus on the history of LGBTQ+ newspapers and magazines. Ultimately, regardless of what area of LGBTQ+ print one focuses on, there are common characteristics between them, all of which speak to the importance and necessity of having LGBTQ+ print.

First, LGBTQ+ print media often publishes politically engaged work. For example, in 1956, the Daughters of Bilitis founded their magazine *The Ladder*, which was the first nationally distributed lesbian publication in the United States. In 1963, the magazine came under the editorship of Barbara Gittings, a pioneer for LGBTQ+ rights, and it took on a noticeably political stance, urging its

readers to show up at picket rallies in Washington D.C. and replacing the pen drawings of lesbian women on its cover with actual photos of out lesbian women. Let’s take a step back here: A nationally distributed magazine published photographs of out lesbian women in 1963. That action represents a radical political action in a time when people were still arrested and jailed for being queer.

Later, *The Advocate*, which is the oldest and largest continuously published LGBTQ+ magazine in the country, found itself at the forefront of reporting on the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. At a time when mainstream news outlets viewed publishing stories on ‘homosexuality’ as a risk to their business, *The Advocate* and other gay newspapers like it were there reporting on a crisis that affected the entire nation and bringing necessary, life-saving information to the queer community.

Second, LGBTQ+ print amplifies queer voices, lenses, and politics as is evident through their content. This said, I believe more ‘mainstream’ queer print needs to do a better job of examining queer issues through intersectional lenses, and amplifying the voices of those in our community who experience marginalization in many forms. There are certainly queer publications which focus on examining intersectional issues. For instance, zines by Nia King highlight the issues and experiences of queer and trans artists of color; however, publications like hers lack the reach of more ‘mainstream’ queer publications, especially amongst the individuals who need to hear these stories the most (like white gays and lesbians).

Finally, LGBTQ+ print creates a physical representation of our presence in the world. I remember working for *The Interloper* at Gobblerfest two years ago when a girl came over to our table, looked at our banner (which read, “The Interloper | Virginia Tech’s LGBTQ+ Magazine”) and said to Maggie and me, “Oh, I didn’t realize *you* had a magazine.” While I’m not sure exactly what she was thinking in that moment, I’m tempted to believe she forgot queer people existed (on Virginia Tech’s campus or in general, it doesn’t matter), and, as frustrating as that is, that is exactly why we have a magazine: Its physical presence allows us to take space in environments where we are all too often erased.

Ultimately, our magazine and other queer print publications are present in spaces when we cannot; they remind people that we are present in their communities when we cannot. Our magazine and other queer magazines remind people that we face unique issues that deserve to be acknowledged and addressed by everyone, not just by the people who sacrifice their mental, emotional, and physical health to bring light to these issues. Without the physicality of our print, people will forget that we are here and that we are queer.

What other campus LGBTQ+ magazines are out there, you may ask? Well, we did some digging and came up with only 3 others. Check them out!

FUSION

Kent State University (OH)
Editor: MJ Eckhouse

Founded in 2003 by Kate Common, Marie Forca Conuelle, and Mandy Jenkins. MJ explains, “I think it’s important to emphasize that year because sodomy laws were still on the books within our lifetimes. I like to place *Fusion’s* founding in that broader LGBTQ context.”

Fusion is housed within Kent State’s Department of Journalism and is funded through student fees for student media. With nearly 20 writers and photographers, *Fusion* produces one “long form” print issue every spring and a continual online publication cycle. Each writer and editor must go through an application process to work for the magazine, which creates a higher quality product in the end.

I, Maggie, personally met with MJ during a trip home and it was so cool to sit and be able to talk about common and different experiences in running a campus publication. Check out their online site to see stories, donate, and even purchase some merchandise! >>

OUTWRITE

EST. 1979

University of California,
Los Angeles (CA)
Editor: Andrew Hall

OutWrite, originally known as TenPercent, was established in 1979, becoming the first college queer news-magazine in the country. In 2005, the magazine's staff petitioned to change the name to *OutWrite*, due to the emphasis that the title

placed on the white, gay male identity, and instead used a name which better represents the queer community's vast number of identities. Similarly in the past, the magazine referred to itself as a LGBTQ magazine, but has since changed this label to queer. *OutWrite* publishes 2-3 print issues a year, each varying in style and format depending on the staff of 57 people's interests.

"The importance of having a print publication mainly rests in our ability to reach the campus. While we have an online readership, people react more emphatically to being handed a beautiful, tangible copy. We have had our readership and staff increase dramatically with the re-institution of a print issue. Print somehow deems permanence, as well – something we can archive and that won't be lost among thousands of webpages."

OutWrite loves to receive guest contributors/writers and we encourage anyone who would like to write for them to email outwritebruins@gmail.com!!



Syracuse
University (NY)
Editor: Grae Gleason

The Interloper is heavily inspired by *The OutCrowd*, Syracuse's LGBT magazine. Our founder, Matty, went to Syracuse for undergrad and was inspired to begin a similarly important project at Tech.

The *OutCrowd's* focus is to provide advocates of the queer and trans communities a platform to express their otherwise overlooked opinions and perspectives. With this focus in mind, *The OutCrowd* is determined to present progressive content through a queer lens by challenging what is often deemed "socially acceptable." *The OutCrowd* is important because they help people be heard through all the heteronormative noise that is present on the Syracuse campus. LGBT 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. 



HBCU/MSI Summit

Written by Katie Ayers

On Oct. 15 and 16, Virginia Tech – in partnership with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) – hosted the second annual HBCU/MSI Research Summit at the Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center. The event was co-hosted by the Office of Inclusion and Diversity and, according to the event website, the summit was designed as a networking event for “faculty from Virginia Tech to identify partner faculty and students at HBCUs/MSIs to engage in summer research opportunities and grant proposals.” It featured tours of campus, chances for individual students to meet with various department representatives, and hear from a panel of current VT graduate students.

More than 300 people attended the summit, including 80 faculty members from Virginia Tech and 60 from other HBCUs and MSIs, a five-fold increase from the 60 total attendees last year. Seventeen HBCUs and MSIs were represented, up from five in 2016. Seven VT colleges and three VT institutes played a role in making the summit a

success this year. Represented colleges included: Agriculture and Life Sciences, Architecture and Urban Studies, Pamplin College of Business, Engineering, Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, and Science. Programs included: Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science, Nano Earth-Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science, the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Translational Biology, Medicine and Health, and Health Sciences and Technology.

Christian Matheis, director of recruitment and diversity initiatives at Virginia Tech, called the summit a success. “Overall, the event far exceeded our hopes and expectations,” he said. “Initial comments and evaluation feedback from guests and VT participants indicates very strong support and interest in refining and expanding the 2018 research summit.”

Matheis said the committee will begin planning next year’s summit in April 2018. 

A Queer Compilation

By: Rachel Hargrave

In the final installment of Rachel's music series, and in collaboration with WUVT, we've compiled a playlist of queer artists for you to listen to. Scan the QR code to listen to the entire list on Spotify!



Sufjan Stevens:

Let's play our favorite game, "Is Sufjan singing about God or his boyfriend"? I don't know if he's really gay for God or just really gay but either way, he's in my favorite genre: "gay with good vocals." Sufjan is soft and melancholy like a letter from a missed connections lover you never met melting into mist.

Listen to: "The Predatory Wasp of the Palisades is Out to Get Us," "Wallowa Lake Monster," cover of "A Little Lost"

Tegan and Sara:

The original Gay™ Queens, Tegan and Sara have been out and proud and making music since 1995. Looking back, I realized that watching their music video for "Closer" was a formative experience in Baby Rachel's life, being one of the first times I'd ever seen queer relationships portrayed in media. Not only is their music like the bright bouncy pop of a pack of 90s era Pop Rocks, but you can feel good listening to them knowing that you're supporting a band with a long-running history of activism and outspoken support for the LGBTQ+ community.

Listen to: "Stop Desire," "Drove Me Wild," "Closer," "Walking With a Ghost"

Blood Orange:

Smooth, soulful, and beautifully layered, Dev Hynes weaves together melodies and narratives with masterful precision. Listening to a Blood Orange song is like being simultaneously serenaded by a full choir, a slam poet, a rapper, and the voices of 7 angels. Hynes has explained that he loves the interplay of homoeroticism and religious language, and his music routinely deals with topics of sexism, racism, and homophobia.

Listen to: "Hadron Collider," "Augustine," "Better Than Me," "By Ourselves"

Frank Ocean:

Our good soft boi came out awhile back, writing about his first love in 2012. Given hip hop's sketchy record with inclusivity regarding queer artists, he's been a positive voice for the LGBTQ+ community, as well as a stellar music artist. Listening to Frank is like being wrapped in a blanket fresh out of the dryer while you sit on your porch and listen to the rain on an autumn day.

Listen to: "Nikes," "White Ferrari," "Thinkin Bout You"



Lelf:

Lelf is so incredibly gay, and so incredibly talented, it's a shame the rap world is sleeping on him when they should be sleeping with him. He made an incredible song called "Wut" in 2012 that Macklemore ripped off when he did "Thrift Shop." As he's released material over the years, he's gotten simultaneously weirder, more energetic, and more attractive.

Listen to: "Koi," "Wut," "Rage"

Florist:

Florist is a poem whispered on the wind while you lay by a stream, watching sunlight dance in the leaves. It's love and adulthood and feeling lost but knowing exactly where you are. It feels like you've wandered your whole life looking for someone who can say exactly what Emily Sprague is saying, and it's magic. Also checkout the related side projects by other bandmembers including Told Slant and Bellows.

Listen to: "Thank You," "1914," "Glowing Brightly," "Understanding Light"

Cub Sport:

Australian band Cub Sport is good soft stuff with solid vocals. Listening feels like being wrapped in a warm, rainbow blanket made of equality and beautiful harmonies. While listening, bask in the adorableness that is the fact that the two lead singers have been best friends since high school and are now engaged! Basically, I'm obsessed with this band, please listen to it and love it dearly.

Listen to: "O Lord," "Come On Mess Me Up," and their cover of "Ultralight Beam"

Sigur Ros:

An experimental rock band from Iceland, Sigur Ros definitely produces beautiful music from beautiful people. The frontman, Jón Þór "Jónsi" Birgisson, sings like he's from another planet and their music makes you want to transcend reality into an elevated plane of existence. Jónsi and his partner Alex Somers release music under "Jónsi and Alex" and they're worth checking out as well.

Listen to: "Hoppípolla," "Sæglópur," and "Starálfur"



Adult Mom:

When you listen to Adult Mom, you can't help but feel at home. Steph Knipe is queer and non-binary, dealing with love and relationships and gender identity in their music. Their brutally honest lyrics hold back no emotions, and you truly feel like there is someone on the other side of those headphones who understands you.

Listen to: "Survival," "Tenderness," "Drive Me Home" >>





Sam Smith:

More of my favorite “gay with good vocals” genre! We all know and love Sam Smith – we’ve seen him through his rise to fame, him coming out, and now our sweet baby boi has a new album! But that ain’t the only thing coming out – Smith also came out this month as non-binary; he stated in an interview that “I feel just as much woman as I am man” and SLAYED a pair of sparkly red heels in a recent Instagram post.

Listen to: “Too Good at Goodbyes,” “Burning,” “Latch”

ANOJNI:

The second openly-transgender person nominated for an Academy Award, Anohni is raw and powerful, tearing into difficult topics with brutal emotionality. There’s something that feels at once vulnerable and effortlessly strong about Anohni’s voice, and that duality creates a beautiful dialogue in her music.

Listen to: “Hopelessness,” “Drone Bomb Me,” “Crisis”

Perfume Genius:

Perfume Genius’s music is at once painful and hauntingly beautiful, echoing his difficult journey as a gay man. Mike Hadreas received death threats in high school and ultimately dropped out, and later was attacked in his neighborhood, events which have heavily influenced his music. There’s something about his music which hits the core of your soul and resonates within your bones.

Listen to: “Wreath,” “Queen,” “Hood”

Carly Rae Jepsen:

Everyone’s favourite non-gay Gay Icon™ Carly Rae Jepsen may not be queer herself but she’s been wholeheartedly welcomed and loved by the queer community because of her message of universal love and willingness to explore and represent queer love in her music and music videos. Fun Fact: Dev Hynes, AKA Blood Orange, co-wrote her song “All That”!

Listen to: “All That,” “Boy Trouble,” “Cut to the Feeling”

Beast or Burden

by Phoebe Gregg

Am I a dragon or a griffin?
Am I flame or Beast?
Though truly both are monsters
One is west and the other east

If I head towards the sun
Embrace my fiery core
I fear I truly will succumb
To fears I've feared before

But if I head away from there
To fight the roaring wind
I worry that my choice is wrong
For I cannot hear within

But no matter what my choice
Be it fearsome beast or flame
I am only just a monster
Feared and hated all the same





POWER TO THE PEOPLE: AN INTERVIEW WITH VT'S FIRST OUT GAY STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT

WRITTEN BY PHOEBE GREGG

Being Virginia Tech's first openly gay student body president is a very big deal, and that fact is not lost on Rex Willis. One of the first things he did when he won the election was to send announcements out on every social media he could to share this great triumph with the community. However, despite his excitement, the campaign focused far less on his sexuality than Willis had expected.

"I didn't go out of my way to make my sexual orientation a part of my campaign," says Rex. It wasn't that people didn't care about that part of him; it just wasn't what they focused on.

Rex's campaign focused on inclusiveness in the Virginia Tech community. Not just for LGBTQ+ members, but for cultural organizations all over campus. Rex said recent downsizing in the SGA's legislative body has led to a loss of representation for many of the clubs and organizations on campus.

Rex encourages students and organizations alike to come to the SGA with the things they want changed now that the organizations are not there to do it

directly. Instead of making the SGA the center of everything, they strive to make it a pipeline for the ideas of the students to get to our school's administration.

As far as directly supporting the LGBTQ+ community, Rex has a very simple statement:

"Yes, I'm a gay man, but I'm also a White, Cis-gender Man. I don't have the same experience that a lot of other people in the LBGT community have."

He knows that his understanding of what it is to be a Virginia Tech LGBTQ+ is not necessarily the norm. Again he encourages us to talk to him and the SGA so they know how to help us.

"We have an open-door policy," he says, smiling. "There should always be someone here to talk to."

In the end, Rex and his administration want us to communicate with them about our needs. We stand together or we fall apart. We need to be aware of our differences and celebrate them by learning about each other's stories and experiences. 

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Photo by Jessie Almquist

Trey Kerr OUT

It was October 11, 2014, the day we as an LGBTQ+ community cherish as National Coming Out Day. I woke up that day feeling like I never had before, ready to make a change.

I was home in Roanoke for Fall Break, so the first person I wanted to tell was my Mom (my best friends knew already). I assumed that she would take it well because my mom and I are extremely close, but I still was uneasy.

She and I were just casually watching *50 First Dates* together, and I remember trying to make out the words to her so many different times. I was literally shaking.

Then, with a simple, “Hey Mom, I want to tell you something,” *I said it.*

She paused.

In that few seconds of silence, I expected to feel scared, but I felt empowered. In that moment, no matter what she said, I recognized that I was finally taking steps to being the person I wanted to be.

She smiled and immediately gave me a hug that calmed all of my fears. With a simple, “No matter what you do in life, I will always love you, be your mother, and support you,” I realized that I had made the right decision to share with her my secret.

Later that day, I curated a Facebook post to let everyone else know, which to me, was the easy part because it wasn’t directly in front of everyone.

Looking back, I never realized how truly blessed I was for how easily I was able to transition from being in the closet to being out. Being a cisgender male who doesn’t deviate much from heteronormative behaviors, I realize that for a lot of LGBTQ+ individuals this privilege isn’t as prevalent.

What I will say is that we as a community are all here for each other because we share similar struggles. We might experience them in different intensities, and that’s why I am OUT, and stand with the LGBTQ+ people of the world. 



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