GENDER & ETHNIC STUDIES.

THE TRAP OF TRANSMEDICALIZATION:

HOLDING COMMUNITIES AND IDENTIES HOSTAGE

Chris Hendrie

In recent years, there has been an insurgence of public discourses involving non-normative identities and experiences. The field of Transgender Studies focuses on and highlights the experiences of trans identified individuals, exploring trans subjectivities and what 'transness' really means. Much modern scholarship on trans identity frames gender as entirely socially constructed, which has received a variety of responses from both trans and cisgender individuals. These conflicts are ongoing, with the 'truth' of transness still hotly debated. One of the most prevalent and controversial ways of framing trans identity is transmedicalism.

Transmedicalism is a view of transgender identity that holds that experiencing dysphoria is required for 'legitimate' trans identity. This belief asserts that gender dysphoria, generally described as a feeling of distress originating from the incongruence between one's assigned gender and gender identity, is a condition to be treated through medical intervention such as hormone therapy and gender affirming surgeries. Transmedicalism grounds transness in gender dysphoria, asserting that a lack of gender dysphoria is a lack of transness.

This paper will utilize author, scholar, and Professor Finn Enke's definition of 'transgender,' describing the term as "an ever-expanding social category that incorporates the broadest possible range of gender nonconformity" as well as a "gender identity that differs from the sex assigned at birth" (Enke, 18). Outside of the realm of trans studies, the latter definition tends to be more familiar and widely circulated. Jumping off from this definition, this paper explores the way that transness is constructed and defined in the context of an increasingly medicalized world.

Transmedicalism did not come to be one of the dominant narratives about transgender identity by coincidence. Its modern prevalence speaks to way transmedicalism has cemented itself in the histories and modern realities of trans subjectivities. This paper contends that transmedicalism is a nuanced framework of pathologizing transgender identity that depends on and perpetuates systems of oppression, intracommunity conflict, and limited visibility of trans subjects.

Systemic Underpinnings of Transmedical Ideology

Participating in transmedicalism entails being an agent of a system that promotes hegemonic ideas about what constitutes a valid body. Operating under transmedical narratives, "only certain genres of identity are deemed legibly trans, and only legible transness is permitted to access a wide variety of medical, legal, and social privileges, including intracommunity recognition and legitimacy" (Cavar, 35). Legible and legitimate transness is then afforded to trans bodies that most fit normative categories ('normative' being positioned as that which is white, wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, binary, and cis passing). Situating transmedicalism within its historical context reveals how these systems of hierarchy and exploitation ingrained themselves into transmedical ideologies—and their ultimate implementations.

Medical and psychiatric institutions have long been used as means to reinforce social norms, especially through the medical manipulation of subjugated identities. Even the gender binary, upon which transmedicalism relies, was established and implemented by processes of settler colonialism, which aims to eradicate Indigenous perspectives on sex and gender. Non-white bodies have been constructed as inherently deviant, including in realm of gender. Scholar Che Gossett articulates how "the grammar of 'cisgender' lacks the explanatory power to account for the colonial and anti-Black foundational violence of slavery and settler colonialism through which the gender and sex binary were forcibly rendered" (Gossett, 185). The racialized sex-gender binary regards whiteness as a requirement for 'successful' gender production and embodiment. Current politics on transmedicalism and the enforcement of medicalized trans identity, by nature of their own history, live in the ghost of the slave trade, settler colonialism, and cultural genocide.

Transmedicalism justifies and encourages the surveillance of trans bodies. Marking medical intervention as the only gateway to legitimacy is inherently exclusionary to countless social groups, especially given the racialized nature of exploitive capitalism. Dan Irving explores these subjectivities at length in his academic work, criticizing how medical experts have been granted excessive power and influence over the production of trans subjectivities. The results of this consolidation of power are exemplified through the living legacy left behind by American sexologist David O. Cauldwell, who famously 'treated' transgender patients in the early 20th century. Cauldwell and many other sexologists categorized transsexuality as a self-hating psychosis that severely infringed on one's productive capacity (Irving). Doctors and medical professionals often denied certain patients medical care or transition on account of their race, class, and sexuality, refusing treatment to non-white, non-heterosexual, disabled, or otherwise

'unproductive' bodies. In doing so the medical profession was able to literally construct the next generation of visible and viable transgender subjects, formally constructing successful trans embodiment to be incompatible with other non-normative identities.

Intracommunity Conflicts

Systems of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism all profit from the illusion that identity policing is vital to the integrity and respectability of trans people. These systems work intentionally to integrate themselves with the collective consciousness of the trans community. The internalization of social norms is the most insidious and effective method of establishing social control and ensuring the perpetuation of oppressive systems of power (Villatoro et al.). Once the myth of medicalization is internalized within trans spaces, it actuates a witch hunt to find the trans 'impostor.'

"Truscum" (aka transmedicalists) and "tucute" (aka transtrenders, 'imposters') occupy opposing positions in the debate of transmedicalism and dysphoria as it unfolds in online spaces. Truscum are people, cisgender or transgender, that support and promote transmedicalism. By extension, truscum believe trans identified people who do not experience dysphoria or desire medical transition are appropriating transness. These appropriators are often referred to as tucutes or transtrenders, trans-identified individuals who are deemed illegitimate due to a lack of dysphoria. Transtrenders and tucutes are typically described as pretending to be trans for the sake of gaining pity or attention. These 'trenders' are often blamed for the rising number of openly trans-identified people. As trans people become more visible in mainstream media and discourses, these terms are becoming more ubiquitous.

This self-policing and gatekeeping of trans identity is a prime example of respectability politics. Respectability politics refers to a collection of practices and attitudes that reinforce dominant norms, especially as a method for producing a successful counter-narrative to the stereotypes imposed on marginalized groups (Pitcan et al.). The truscum vs. tucute debates are reflective of trans people internalizing and adopting hegemonic social norms in trans spaces. Oftentimes, truscum who are binary transgender people will justify the legitimacy of their own transness by contrasting their experiences with tucutes. One transfeminine truscum YouTube commenter wrote, "I have too much disdain for the transtrenders. They just want to feel special. I just want to feel comfortable in my own skin and function in society. I need estrogen to function, those twats just need attention" (Beibee). Another openly transmedicalist YouTube commentor wrote, "The transgender activist movement isn't even for real transgender people anymore" (Alpine Ink). This sentiment imposes a hierarchy within the transgender community, with 'real transgender people' (implied to be those that are dysphoric and seek medical transition) posed as

being oppressed in part due to 'fake' transgender people hijacking the movement. Respectability politics exchanges the empowerment and recognition of these people for the creation of 'successful' transgender subjects who can serve as agents of oppressive systems; it muffles the voices and perspectives of trans people of color and nonbinary people, dismissing them as fake or damaging to the community.

The success of transmedical discourses is based on the belief that transness is finite and incapable of existing outside of arbitrarily defined parameters of normalcy. When transness is viewed as a medical rather than a social phenomenon, it is all too easy to impose statistical and medical logics that do not apply to socially constructed identities. People are not statistics. Constructions of what constitutes normalcy are subjective and cannot be confined to statistical measures and logics. It is not as though a finite number of people can be 'gender outliers.' The allegedly rising proportion of transgender people poses a threat to cisnormativity by implying that cis-ness may not be a sound standard for normalcy. Transmedicalism is deployed as a countermeasure to this threat, with the ultimate aim of restoring cisnormativity and assuring cis subjects that the number of 'real" transgender people is small and nonthreatening to social norms. However, transness is not finite or limited. It is not a commodity that must be diligently divided among its recipients. Allowing access to shared identity categories does not rob anything from existing members of that identity. Intracommunity conflicts such as the truscum vs tucute debates reveal the damage that transmedical ideologies inflict upon communities and individuals.

You Are Not Trapped in the Wrong Body, You Are Oppressed

This all begs the question: if the transmedical narrative perpetuates oppressive norms and destabilizes the transgender community, then why is this politics still so commonly adopted by individual trans people? What does transmedicalism offer its adherents?

The relationship between trans people and the medical community has become intimately connected. Medical and psychiatric approval or diagnosis is typically required to move forward with legal processes like changing gender markers and names on legal documents. As such, those who are granted access to legitimate transness through medical narratives are also granted legal benefits. Those that can successfully embody transness (as defined by cisgender metrics) are granted access to resources that can make daily life easier. Medical discourses are also affirmed by the large number of transgender people who do seek medical transition such as hormones or affirmative surgeries. Many people find that medical intervention drastically decreases their dysphoria and grants them agency over their body

This sense of agency is crucial, especially for a community which is often deprived of choice or feelings of control. Ultimately, the degree of agency with which an individual adopts certain views of

themselves is the most important determinant of whether that framework is constructive or destructive. Transmedicalism is problematic in that it denies the validity of other constructions of transness and often monopolizes mainstream discourse about trans identity. This renders the pathologized trans individual as one of the only visible narratives, limiting the extent to which individuals can choose to identify with other frameworks while still being granted societal legitimacy in their identity. This is the trap of transmedicalism: it presents itself as the only valid way to embody transness, restricting the agency with which trans subjects can choose how to relate to themselves (Gossett et al.).

Even before transsexuality was recognized as a disorder in the 1980s, medical professionals categorized transgender people as being "depressed, schizoid, manipulative, and controlling" as a result of being 'trapped in the wrong body' which was (and continues to be) the dominant narrative of what it is like to embody trans identity (Stone, 229). This translates to the narrative that transgender people do, and should, hate their bodies. Transgender bodies are not portrayed as desirable or empowering, but rather as a source of shame and disgust. When the perceived legitimacy of one's identity hinges on the extent to which that individual hates their body, it can actuate a self-fulfilling cycle of dysphoria. When transmedical views of self are internalized, the hegemonic systems of hierarchy constructed to oppress trans subjects are internalized as well.

Ultimately, transmedicalism restricts transness, reducing it to self-loathing and discontentment. Transness is not monolithic, nor does it need to be unpleasant to embody. Thinking outside of a transmedical framework allows for a transness that is expansive, joyful, and free. Transness can be medical, but it can also be magic, joy, and freedom.

Visibility and Demedicalizing Transness

The trap of visibility is explored at length by Gossett, Stanley, and Burton in the text "Trap Door: The Politics of Trans Visibility." Medicalized trans bodies engage with trans visibility in very nuanced ways. Some trans subjects, especially those that most embody normative categories, are granted a unique and conditional form of visibility via the pathologizing and medical 'treatment' of their identity. Passing, the ability for trans individuals be perceived as cisgender, is often especially attainable for these subjects who have undergone some extent of medical transition. This allows a sort of pseudo-trans-visibility, where the transgender subject is afforded visibility and legitimacy in mainstream discourses due to their ability to be un-transed. This begs the question: Are transgender people truly being accepted and granted visibility, or are they only being offered this sort of illusory visibility on the condition that they otherwise embody and uphold cisnormativity?

Data on violence and hate crimes propose that this form of visibility is not working in favor of all transgender people. Transgender people, especially trans people of color, are victims of higher rates of crime and violence each year (Gossett et al.). The ludicrous idea that there are vast numbers of 'fake' transgender people is validated by transmedicalist rhetoric, cementing transphobic tropes like the misguided teen seeking attention, conniving hookup baiter, and sexual predator playing dress-up into mainstream narratives. While granting validity to some trans people, transmedicalism also perpetuates these stereotypes that have been used to justify anti-trans violence. It allows white cis-passing transgender people to essentially evade transness— or at least its societal consequences—while the consequences of transness are still being enforced on other members of the community. These impacts are ignored, as they point to the harsh reality that trans visibility and inclusion as we know it simply is not working.

Perhaps the source of discomfort associated with transness is not the trans body. Transmedicalism dismisses the difficulties associated with holding a transgender identity as being innate to the identity itself rather than a consequence of living in a transphobic society. The body is not the prison. The prison is living in a world that polices, controls, manages, and devalues certain bodies. The body is not the problem. The problem is the consequences non-medicalized trans bodies generate for their subjects in how they are regarded by mainstream society. Instead of trying to heal healthy bodies, we need to direct our attention to healing our sick society.

WORKS CITED

Alpine Ink. Comment on "The Science of the Transgender Issue VS. the Pseudoscience Surrounding Gender and Biology!" You Tube, 13 January 2017, https://youtu.be/os7bOBlre5E.

Beibee. Comment on "The Science of the Transgender Issue VS. the Pseudoscience Surrounding Gender and Biology!" YouTube, 13 January 2017, https://youtu.be/os7bOBlre5E.

Cavar, Sarah. (2020). Enacting Transbutch: Queer Narratives Beyond Essentialism. [Master's thesis, Mount Holyoke College]. Mount Holyoke College Institutional Digital Archive.

Enke, Finn. "Note on Terms and Concepts." Transfeminist Perspec tives in and Beyond Transgender and Gender Studies, edited by Finn Enke, Temple University Press, 2012. Pro Quest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/.

Gossett, Che. "Blackness and the Trouble of Trans Visibility." Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibil ity, The MIT Press, 2017.

Gossett, Reina, et al. "Known Unknowns: An Introduction to Trap Door." Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Poli tics of Visibility, The MIT Press, 2017.

Irving, Dan. "Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transsex ual Body as Productive." Radical History Review, vol. 2008,

no. 100, 2008, pp. 38–59. Silverchair, doi:10.1215/01636545-2007-021.

Pitcan, Mikaela, et al. Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World. 2018, p. 17.

Stone, Sandy. "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto." Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies, vol. 10, no. 2, 1998, 150–176, doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-10-2_29-150.

Villatoro, Daniel, et al. "Self-Policing Through Norm Internalization: A Cognitive Solution to the Tragedy of the Digital Commons in Social Networks." Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation, vol. 18, no. 2, 2015, doi: 10.18564/jasss.2759.

SAY YES TO CONSENT

Katherine Storm

"I firmly believe that by instilling in young minds the importance of affirmative consent and relationships built on love and respect, that we can reduce the sexual violence inflicted on young women" (Silva 2016). Teaching comprehensive affirmative consent is a subject that has all too often been pushed aside for other topics and frowned upon teaching in early childhood classrooms. The reality is that a comprehensive education on consent when children are young leads to a greater understanding of sexual consent, and therefore fewer assaults. In addition, it helps children learn how to say no and have bodily autonomy at a young age, setting them up to know what is right and wrong when they reach secondary education and beyond. The purpose of this policy proposal and research was to prove that teaching consent throughout a student's life is productive and beneficial to everyone, and to require on the federal level that all states, districts, and schools must integrate lessons of consent in kindergarten through high school graduation.

My proposal is to make the inclusion of comprehensive affirmative consent education mandatory for all states, thus giving students all equal education regardless of their given communities' political undertones. As summarized in an article from Education Week, "Making understanding and negotiating consent a life skill gives children and adolescents ways to understand and respect both their own desires and those of other people" (Sparks 2019). Not only will teaching children consent support their bodily autonomy and wellbeing as they grow up, but it will teach them the skills to listen to others and be able to understand when something is not right. If given a good understanding in their primary years, it is the hope that students will know what is right and wrong when they grow older and enter secondary education or the workforce, and promote safe and respectful behavior wherever they choose to go.

For many, hesitations can be made when approaching teaching young children about consent, as they see it only relating to sex and sexual assault. Although it can sometimes be a difficult topic to bring up with students in the classroom, there are many resources available to educators to teach about consent to their young students who would find the most success learning about how to say no to hugs, dangerous situations, and the like. It also teaches kids how to respect when their friend or classmate says no. I found several options in my research as to how to incorporate consent education into lessons for young kids.

In an article from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, author Grace Tatter lays out some options on how to talk about consent with young children. Tatter recommends videos which

outline consent and children's books to share during story time such as "My Body! What I Say Goes!" by Jayneen Sanders, and, "I Said No" by Kimberly King and Zach King. She also offers this advice: "Model consent and empower students. Of course, some of consent is skill-based: learning to simply ask questions about what behavior or actions are appropriate. 'Would you rather a hug or a high-five?' Give children agency over what is age-appropriate, like what snack to have, or what to read at story time" (Tatter 2018). The goal of teaching students about consent when they are young is to give them the tools to grow up respectful of each other and themselves and make sure they know what is right and wrong, as well as what is comfortable for them.

In kindergarten, students would ideally learn how to say no and respect when their classmates do not want physical contact. Teachers would read stories about consent and answer questions asked by children about what they are learning. Parents would be kept in the loop and understand what conversations are being had at school so they may continue at home in regards to family members. A first grade classroom would look similar, still reading stories and talking about the importance of bodily autonomy, and adding in an aspect of understanding body parts and what is okay and not okay to touch. In addition to introducing the topic of different body parts and "swimsuit areas," a conversation could begin both at home and in the classroom about stranger danger and identifying an untrustworthy adult. Second through fifth grade would look similar, still instilling the morals around respecting your body and your friends' bodies, while bringing in more conversation about potentially dangerous situations. By introducing the topic in elementary school and keeping it consistent in school and at home through the years, children will be effectively instilled with an understanding of affirmative consent, which will then support them as they continue learning about relationships, sexual assault, and other topics to be introduced in middle and high school.

By the time students reach middle school, they are much more aware of their surroundings and those around them. Likely at this point, they are thinking about relationships, but not always in them. Many sexual assaults happen in middle schools due to the ignorance and hormone-filled halls, so it is a good time to begin having more serious conversations with students about consent in regard to sexual assault and harassment. "Emphasize the importance of talking with a trusted adult. At this age, some students think, 'Well adults just don't understand,' Schneider says. 'I remind my students, though, that for teachers and parents, it's our job to keep them safe' and that if they

have an interaction they're uncomfortable with, with either a peer or an adult, they should tell an adult who they trust" (Tatter 2018). This quote from Tatter does a good job of acknowledging the difficulty in asking for help while in middle school and the importance of present trusted adult figures for students to rely on.

A large issue of middle school which directly impacts the proper education of consent is the developmental stage at which most students in middle school are. A mistake often made by educators when attempting to teach students about these topics is bringing them all into an auditorium where it is easier for them to get away with joking with their friends and separating students based on gender. By attempting to give a presentation on an uncomfortable topic with hundreds of middle schoolers packed together, the importance and severity of the topic can be lost (especially if the students have not received education on the topic before). Separating students creates many issues, including needlessly discriminating against transgender and nonbinary students, as well as giving students an unequal education.

Most students take a health class in seventh or eighth grade, and then again in high school, most likely in tenth grade. By the time students have reached high school and their high school sex education class, they are aware of sex and relationships and may be engaging in activities themselves. For these classes, it is important to talk about the effects of alcohol and drugs on consent; for example, if one or both partners are under the influence no matter what, consent cannot be given. Another important topic often skipped over is consent and comfortability in relationships. Especially in high school with high hormones and the excitement of new relationships, conversations of consent can be forgotten. It is important to make sure students are aware that just because they have engaged in an activity before or are dating does not give automatic consent. This is a topic that I have found to be forgotten and disassociated, which can be damaging to youth when navigating what is right and wrong.

For both middle and high schoolers, clear resources should be provided so that they can do reliable research on their own time. Because of the inquisitive nature of teenagers, many may feel the need to look into different topics on their own, and without correct sites and research habits, they can stumble across negative resources which give an inaccurate notion of consent and healthy sex and relationships. For example, Willis et al. (2019) quoted another source saying that "even though young people label pornography as their primary sex education, they identify sexual consent as an area that pornography does not teach them about." Although an uncomfortable topic, it is important that the presence of pornography be covered in classes.

The inclusion of affirmative consent education in health classes and throughout early childhood is severely lacking in the state legislature, and therefore damaging children who do not receive comprehensive lessons elsewhere on the subject. An article from CNN discussed a study that found that, "as it is, only 24 states and the District of Columbia mandate sex education in public schools…. Of those, only eight states require mention of consent or sexual assault…: California, Hawaii, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia" (Maxouris & Ahmed 2018). In another study looked at by Malachi Willis, Kristen N. Jozkowski & Julia Read, the word consent rarely appeared in health class requirements for different states, with it appearing the most in Ohio's legislation three times. According to a study reviewed by NPR, "87 percent of students said that they, personally, would believe someone who reported a sexual assault. But only 51 percent of students thought their peers would believe such a report" (NPR Morning Edition 2018). Looking at these statistics is shocking; students do not believe their peers would believe a reported sexual assault. Included in educating students about consent would be teaching them how to believe and respect victims when they come forward, thus fostering an environment where they felt comfortable sharing their truths. In addition to the #MeToo movement, #WhyIDidntReport has brought attention to various concerns stopping victims from reporting the assault they endured. As good as it is that these issues are being brought forward now, it would be better to be able to avoid this altogether and give survivors a society and environment where they feel safe to report.

With my proposal, the teaching of comprehensive, affirmative consent would be mandatory across the states, beginning as early as kindergarten, with the goal of educating children on consent and respecting themselves as well as others. With this baseline from childhood, we would hope that by the time they reach post-secondary education or the workplace, they have the tools to stand up for themselves and others, understand and accept no as an answer, and give victims of sexual assault a safe environment to be heard and respected. While the topic of consent is often frowned upon in public school discussions (especially with young kids), the root of the issue is about teaching respect and boundaries in a way that will grow and mature with the student.

WORKS CITED

Gordon, P. (n.d.). Sexuality education and the prevention of sexual violence. Retrieved from https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/1in5/Source/PublicationSexualViolence/Gordon.pdf.

Kamenetz, A. (2018, November 13). How Schools Can Reduce Sexual Violence. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2018/11/13/660644128/how-schools-can-reduce-sexual-violence.

Kunichoff, Y. (2019, June 16). How one Chicago classroom is grappling with the evolving idea of sex ed. Retrieved from https://chalkbeat.org/posts/chicago/2019/06/14/the-birds-the-bees-and-consent-how-one-chicago-classroom-navig

ates-evolving-sexual-education/.

Maxouris, C., & Ahmed, S. (2018, September 29). Only these 8 states require sex education classes to mention consent. Retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/29/health/sex-education-consent-in-public-schools-trnd/index.html.

Should we teach about consent in K-12? Brett Kavanaugh's home state says yes (2018). Washington, D.C: NPR. http://tinyurl.com/rqq37fe

Silva, K. (2016, January 5). Sex Ed Isn't Enough, Our Schools Should Be Teaching Sexual Consent. Retrieved from https://educationpost.org/sex-ed-isnt-enough-our-schools-should-be-teaching-sexual-consent/.

Sparks, S. D. (2019, November 18). We're Teaching Cosent All Wrong. Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/01/09/were-teaching-consent-all-wrong.html?cmp=eml-eb-sr-bigideas19-01092019&M=58715478&U=2928792&UUID=deeab2630e733a7f5c145060d57e73f5.

Tatter, G. (2018, December 19). Consent at Every Age. Retrieved from https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/12/consent-every-age.

Teaching Consent Doesn't Have to Be Hard. (2018, February 14). Retrieved from https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-consent-doesnt-have-to-be-hard.

Willis, M., Jozkowski, K. N., & Read, J. (2019). Sexual consent in K-12 sex education: An analysis of current health education standards in the United Atates. Sex Education, 19(2).

GENDER, GRAPHICS AND GLITTER:
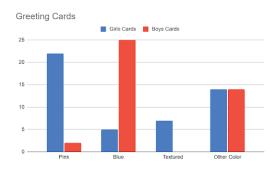## How Children's Greeting Cards Enforce Gender Stereotypes

Katherine Storm

Greeting cards have been a social staple of politeness and good wishes tracing all the way back to Ancient China and Egypt. Although the sentiment has stayed the same, the practice of greeting cards has changed drastically through time. There have been many iterations of greeting cards, with more specific and themed ones appearing in more recent history. Today, when going to the store, one is likely to find shelves with messages of a "Merry Christmas," "Get Well Soon," "Happy Birthday," "Sorry For Your Loss," and many more. One thing mainly seen in Birthday and Anniversary cards is the unnecessarily gendered colors and text. I elected to study greeting cards, specifically birthday greeting cards for young children because I saw a striking difference between cards meant for young girls versus cards meant for young boys. I initially saw it as gendered because, just from an initial look at the greeting card display case, there was a "line" of sorts separating the pink cards from the blue cards, thus separating the girls' from the boys' cards. On closer inspection, I saw vast differences in text, color, and texture between the cards intended for girls versus boys.

I think this difference is important in how we discuss differences between girls and boys, and how the gender binary starts at such a young age. We have talked quite a bit about how performative gender is, and how people actively do gender. In this case of child's greeting cards, we can see how companies are creating and enforcing this gender binary onto consumers, and therefore children. Chances are, children will receive many cards throughout their young lives, and if they all are perpetuating this idea of what girls are and what boys are, what does that tell the children? Some articles I found important to this discussion were: "Mom transforms American Girl doll into a boy for her son," and "Blame the Princess" because both writings examined the idea of performing gender, and how we not only perform gender on a daily basis, but enforce said gender ideals on listening youth. Another article I found illuminating on the subject is titled: "How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes." Several great points are brought up, and the author discusses many of the same things I noticed in my research in regards to the unnecessary gendering of children's birthday cards.

To gather data, I went to my local Target and viewed the children's birthday card aisle. I took pictures of both specific cards, as well as the displays as a whole. At home, I narrowed in on one shelf in particular, assuring there were the same number of cards for the boys' vs. girls' section, and went through and counted how many of the cards were pink, blue, different colors, and textured. I then placed these numbers in a spreadsheet to make a graph, and graphed out the differences between cards meant for girls and cards meant for boys. I decided to focus on color (specifically pink and blue) and texture on the cards because I noticed most differences in these distinguishing features. In my picture, I had a sample size of 82 cards, 41 of those intended for girls and 41 intended for boys.

In my research for the graph for greeting cards, I found some striking differences in cards marketed towards girls or boys. In the Target where I conducted my research, they had labels on the shelves indicating if the cards were meant for girls or boys. My sample picture where I gathered the data is from said display case, where I took a sample of 82 cards: 41 girls' and 41 boys'. Of the girls' cards, 22 were mostly pink, 5 were blue, 14 were another color (mostly orange or yellow), and 7 had an element of texture, meaning glitter, shiny print, or fluff on the card. From the boys' cards, 2 were pink, 25 were blue, and 14 were another color (mostly black, red, or orange), and none of the cards had glitter, shiny lettering, or fluff.

Greeting Cards

It is a popular distinction between gender to assign pink to girls and blue to boys. But where does this idea come from? I turned to some writing by Maleigha Michael, who, in an article titled "Sexism in Colors - Why is Pink for Girls and Blue for Boys?" discusses the history behind the color assignments. She explains that, in the 19th century, people began using pastel colors for babies. Blue was meant to compliment blue eyed and blonde haired children, whereas pink was meant to compliment brown eyed and brown haired children. Blue was then associated with girls, with it being seen as a dainty color, and pink with boys being seen as a powerful strong color. Then, as people began associating red with romance and romance with women, pink became a "girls'" color. Although there have been many movements to disregard this color binary, the idea persists through capitalist consumption, and therefore through our society and children. When I was a nanny, I once had a conversation with the

five year old girl I cared for about colors, and she was very insistent that pink was for girls and blue was for boys, and that because of that, her brother could not like pink. It was interesting, as an adult, to see how much importance she put both on the color assignment, and the binary based on that.

One of the other most important findings I had with greeting cards was the text both on the front of the card and on the inside, as well as the toys or games some cards came with. I took special note of four cards (two for girls and two for boys) that paralleled each other, as well as two additional cards meant for girls. For the four cards, I made sure to pick ones that paralleled each other, for example, making sure both had superhero themes, so that I could directly compare the two.

My first example is "Frozen" themed, with the girls' card featuring Elsa and the boys' card featuring Sven and Olaf. On the front of the girls' card it says, "Wishing You a Perfect Birthday," with sparkly snow fluttering around Elsa and a pink and light blue color theme. On the front of the boys' card is written "On Your Birthday, Everything's COOL!" with no special sparkles or textured text, and a royal blue and orange color theme. Inside the "Elsa" card is the text: "You're as bright as sunshine, a princess through and through – That's why this birthday wish is filled with hugs for you!" and " Enjoy Your Special Day." The card also boasts a cut-out paper doll, once again full of sparkles. Inside the "Sven and Olaf" card is written "...but not as cool as YOU! Hope it's the happiest!" and a memory game along with stickers. Aside from the cosmetic differences in look and color, a big issue I found with these cards were the toys they came with. The card intended for girls came with a doll whereas the card intended for boys came with stickers and a memory game. This perpetuates the idea that girls are to sit quietly and play with dolls (thus practicing their caretaking), whereas boys are to think and learn.

Next, I analyzed two cards that had superhero themes. The card intended for girls shows Wonder Woman, and the card intended for boys shows Batman. The text on the girls' card reads, "A hero is kind, smart, courageous, and true…" in a shiny gold print, surrounded by shiny gold stars with a light blue and red color theme, whereas the boys' card reads "Birthday Hero… It's your day to hang out and have fun!" with a black, red, and yellow color theme. Inside the Wonder Woman card, it continues, "that's why a hero is someone like you! Happy birthday" with a wearable button of Wonder Woman. On the other hand, the Batman card says "...you can always save the world later! Happy birthday to a great kid." The card comes with a toy Batman mask for kids to wear. The issue in these cards comes in how they relate with children and their relationship with superheroes. For girls, they are stating that the recipient of the card is someone like a superhero, not an actual superhero, and on top of that, the only aspects they list and deem worthy for a female superhero are her at-

tributes surrounding what she can do for others in an emotional and caretaking way. On the other hand, the boys' card assumes the boy is a superhero and knows it, and acknowledges him taking a day off to have some fun. Never in the girls' card does it mention her resting and having fun, only how she can emotionally serve others like a superhero.

Finally, the two girls' cards I analyzed separately both had pink and sparkly themes. On the cover, one reads "Future Girl Boss" over a pink cheetah print background full of sparkles. Why must the card specify that she will be a girl boss? Why can't she simply be a boss? This negatively plays into the notion that women are not full bosses as men are, but simply women play acting as bosses as girls. The word girl in many contexts has been associated with more negative connotations, such as being weak, or not as intelligent, which adds another dimension of sexism and suppressing women from youth to this birthday card. The second card reads "Little Miss" over a dark blue background, with bright pink sparkly shoes with bows and flowers. "Little miss" is a term often used with young girls, as a way to both compliment them and age them in a way. The title "miss" is used with women to distinguish them as being unmarried women who have not been married, essentially categorizing and labeling them based on their relationship (or lack thereof) with a man. By calling young girls "little miss," we unfortunately subsequently categorize children with the same notion. In addition to this, the nickname can be used and seen as a way of demeaning children—somehow both aging them up and aging them down for a confusing dynamic and power play.

The class readings I connected strongly with this topic were "Mom transforms American Girl doll into a boy for her son," and "Blame the Princess," due to their discussions of performing gender. In "Mom transforms American Girl doll into a boy for her son," a mother is described creating an American boy doll for her son, who is sad he could not buy one like his sister had. The child wants to take care of his doll and interact with it, but because of the binary which barred him from getting a doll, he did not have the same option as his sister. This connects to the greeting cards because as seen with the "Frozen" cards, the girls were given a paper doll and the boys stickers and a game, failing to take into account the young boys who like Elsa more or may want a doll. In "Blame the Princess," the author describes how, for girls and women, their end all be all goal is to get married and have a family. The article describes many women who have been planning their wedding for years, longing for that fairytale perfect princess wedding. I believe that the greeting cards connect here because many of them refer to women based on their emotions and the emotional services they can give others, which strongly links them to the construct of emotions and therefore weddings. In more general terms, there are also many more greeting cards designed for women which have to do with marriage than for men. For example

anniversary cards, wedding shower cards, and wedding cards in general are more heavily marketed with women as the recipient in mind. The way in which we perform gender is highly evident in both the greeting cards and in weddings, given how the narrative is often "the woman getting married, usually a princess, is often the center of attention, she wears a long white dress, has a huge bouquet of flowers, a huge wedding party and so on. As girls age, they mimic this script. 'While little boys also get scripts, those usually focus on empowerment, like being a superhero or firefighter'" (Ellin 2014). By having children's birthday cards focus heavily on girls being princesses and caretakers and boys being superheroes and manly men, it drives home this narrative that the wedding is the end all be all for women and a career is the end all be all for men.

The article "How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes" also lends insight into this discussion about cards, and the author laments how "card companies portray two and three year-olds—who may or may not even know their full name or address—to have narrow personalities that fit into one mold: a teensy, tiny, smile-bringing girl" ("How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes" 2020). In her research for her blog, the author also pulls together visual aids documenting words used for girls' cards and boys' cards. As shown below, girl cards are likely to display soft and emotional wordage, whereas boy cards are likely to display more active and rigid words. gender stereotypes in kids' birthday cards gender stereotypes in kids' birthday cards

In my research I found stark differences between birthday cards meant for girls and birthday cards meant for boys. The cards intended for girls painted a pink picture of fluff, sparkles, and an emotional child who is dainty and small, whereas cards intended for boys painted a black and blue picture of heroes, duty, and fun, and a carefree child whose only focus should be on bettering himself and learning. These harmful stereotypes connect to major ideas in class in discussions of how we do gender, and how we force gender onto children from a young age with items such as greeting cards.

As they currently stand, the concept of gendered greeting cards, specifically gendered birthday cards for children, damages youth's perception of gender and gender roles, and therefore what their gender role should be. By the logic of these cards, girls should hope to be like superheroes, and they should value being kind, compassionate, and (emotionally) intelligent above all else. On the other hand, boys should expect to be superheroes, and expect days off to relax and have fun. Not once is importance placed on young boys worrying about being kind or thoughtful of others—no, his whole focus should be on himself and his enjoyment of life. By giving children these notions, they have the potential to grow up thinking of themselves in unnecessarily gendered ways and further packing themselves into the box made by society to be the ideal versions of women and men who will continue to perpetuate the gender binary.

WORKS CITED

Ellin, Abby. "Blame the Princess." The New York Times, 21 Nov. 2014.
    Flam, Lisa. "Mom Transforms American Girl Doll into a
    Boy for Her Son." NBC, 27 Jan. 2015.

Michael, Maleigha. "Sexism in Colors—Why Is Pink for Girls and
    Blue for Boys?" UMKC Women's Center, 25 June 2018, info.
    umkc.edu/womenc/2018/06/25/8369/.

"How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes." Think or
    Blue, 11 June 2020, thinkorblue.com/birthdaycards/.

Figure 1. Words used for girls' cards and boys' cards. From https://thinkorblue.com/birthdaycards/

TIKTOK TURNED ME GAY

Katherine Storm

Since its release in 2016—growing more popular in the last two years—TikTok has been an important feature of pop culture, particularly for Generation Z. The app features 15-60 second videos on a variety of topics, vastly differentiating between social groups, based on what content is repeatedly "liked." With the impacts of COVID-19 moving people into a time of self isolation, the app grew in popularity, as it provided easy to access entertainment. One of the trends I noticed in the app, notably within my own "side" of it, was a new openness and focus on inclusion, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community. As I interacted with more videos made by and for queer folx, my For You Page (FYP) quickly became full of queer content, in the form of jokes, education, shared interests, and more. Around this same time, seemingly in conjunction, I made the discovery that I was a lesbian, whereas I had previously been identifying as bisexual. It is my belief that I was able to make this discovery, in part, due to the influence of the TikTok app, through the content I was regularly interacting with. By analyzing the algorithm and FYP and its grouping strategies, the lack of heteronormative societal pressure due to COVID-19 isolation, and the community created through TikTok, I will discuss how TikTok aided in my discovery of my sexuality, as well as countless others' discoveries surrounding gender and sexuality. One of the most prominent aspects of TikTok is the For You Page, abbreviated as FYP. This is the main aspect of consumption on the app, where posted videos appear. Although used in other forms of social media, the algorithm on TikTok is a huge part of the app and influences quite a bit of how content is viewed. Because of this, different "sides" of TikTok have been created, in a way forming different communities in each one. Examples of sides of TikTok I have been on are Frog TikTok, Cottagecore TikTok, Gay TikTok, Non-binary TikTok, Bread TikTok... and the list goes on. This video[1] shows how different "sides" of the app can be indicative of people's interests beyond the app. It is this occurrence I want to focus on. Through the content we interact with, users of the app are able to express themselves in like-minded communities.

While many people end up on different "sides" because of facets of their identity they are already aware of, as this TikTok[2] references, sometimes the algorithm gives people videos they do not immediately connect with, that then provide an opportunity to learn and potentially discover something new about themselves, in this case, about their gender and or sexuality. For myself, this was definitely the case. After having the app for a couple months, and using it an increasing amount at the end of last spring, I found my content being very focused around queer women, and importantly for me, women discovering their sexuality as lesbians. Not only did the app provide a space for me to interact with other queer individuals, but it provided stories of others' experiences[3] that others and I could connect with, and information about different resources surrounding discovery of gender and sexuality.

One of the things discussed quite frequently on the app was compulsory heterosexuality (comphet)—such as this video,[4] which makes the argument that Cher from Clueless is a closeted lesbian, and discusses what that means. Watching videos discussing the issue, as well as reading comments about different further resources (such as the "Am I a Lesbian Masterdoc,"[5] which I found through the app), is a huge part of what helped me discover my sexuality.

Another important aspect of TikTok and how the app created a community for people to express and discover themselves is the isolating outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. In mid-March, when people began to isolate, many of my peers and I took to social media as a way to fill our days and pass our time. For some it meant creating content, and for others it meant taking in that content. With the self-isolation and worldwide quarantines, many people found themselves taken out of the society they had grown up in and lived in, instead getting the opportunity to create their own reality through TikTok and their communities within the app. So, by allowing teens and young adults to foster their own world of creativity and self discovery during a time when they are essentially only seeing each other through their screens, it is no surprise that so many people like myself made discoveries about their gender identity and sexuality. By essentially removing the society which enforced heteronormative agendas onto youth, and giving them a space to be authentic, many identities were unsurprisingly discovered and fostered through the app. As discussed above, with a lot of content on the app focused around education and sharing experiences, it seems the perfect space

1   https://www.tiktok.com/@rcoveringhetero/video/6883495589271620869?lang=en

2   https://www.tiktok.com/@bluenbroke/video/6887128233637203201?lang=en

3   https://www.tiktok.com/@teoisthey/video/6885712518006721793?lang=en

4   https://www.tiktok.com/@justellysa/video/6889197221900733701?lang=en

5   https://www.docdroid.net/N46Ea3o/copy-of-am-i-a-lesbian-masterdoc-pdf

was created for queer people to be queer.

As I have mentioned many times, an important aspect of Tik-Tok and my discussion is the community which has been fostered in the app. This community has done many things—spreading awareness about political issues, sharing thoughts and ideas, creating a safe space, and discussing the communal need for media which represents queer people in normalized, positive ways. As discussed in the article "Normalizing of Queerness and Modern Family," author Steven Edward Doran critiques modern shows, namely Modern Family for their inclusion of queer people and gay couples only in the realm of homodomesticity.

The same grievance for the way queer people are portrayed in blockbuster movies and popular TV shows can be seen on TikTok, where the gay community has rallied in a way behind the want for positive, normalized queer representation in media. This want comes out in many ways on TikTok, such as TikToker Emily, @emskindafitkindagay, who has a few videos [6]tracking the Gay Christmas Rom-Com starring Kristen Stewart and Mackenzie Davis titled "Happiest Season." Since the movie was announced and minor details and photos were released, members of the queer TikTok community were overjoyed with the promise of a Rom-Com which seemed to be like any other Christmas Rom-Com, just about queer women. Hopeful viewers were disappointed, however, when the trailer[7]was released to show it is another coming out story, just as "Love, Simon"[8]was.
In the search for positive, normalized queer content, TikTok creator Anna @anna.writes began a series of short video episodes titled "Dyke the Halls,"[9]which will hopefully turn into a cheesy, gay, take on a Hallmark Christmas movie. It is indicative of how much the queer community (namely on TikTok) wants movies and media they can relate to, even in, and sometimes especially in, the most cheesy, low production-value way.

TikTok has created a space during the COVID-era for people of similar interests and identities to come together and connect across physical and virtual space. In fostering this community through the algorithm and FYP feature, along with less contact with the outside world than before, TikTok inadvertently led to many Gen Zers discovering their gender identity and sexuality. And, due to this community and the increased awareness of similar needs and desires in our media, it also led to a movement to see more positive and normalized queer content on our screens, both big and little. Due to the discussed factors, I was able to discover my sexuality, as well as many of my peers, on the app. Discussions of gender and sexuality have been increasingly brought into the mainstream in recent years; however, I believe that with the existence of TikTok and the app's features and prominence, we are likely to continue seeing discussions of gender and sexuality come into mainstream discussions and media in a more positive and inclusive way.

WORKS CITED

Doran, Steven Edward. "Housebroken: Homodomesticity and the Normalization of Queerness in Modern Family." Queer Love in Film and Television, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 95–103.

6 https://www.tiktok.com/@emskindafitkindagay/video/6888331041115802886?lang=en

7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL0Pf5gYWww

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0cbWdlQg_8

9 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0cbWdlQg_8

SHIFTING THE PURPOSE OF ENDING VOTER SUPPRESSION

Maria Martinez

After an intense 2020 presidential election cycle, Joe Biden is the 46th president of the United States. Stacey Abrams is a politician who is passionate about being a voting rights activist. During the 2020 election cycle, she was often credited as the person who increased Democratic voters making it possible for Georgia to vote blue in 2020. However, Stacey Abrams' efforts were not completely centered on winning electoral votes, as her get out the vote campaign is centered around combating voter suppression. For Black women to thrive in elections, there needs to be a shift in the election system. Stacey Abrams' get out the vote campaign proves that voter suppression exists and eliminating this will give Black women the opportunity to hold a position in office. This paper explores how the current electoral system is flawed for Black women and other marginalized groups, eradicating voter suppression will increase the representation of Black women, and voter suppression is a product of white supremacy.

The election system is flawed due to prioritizing votes of some rather than all. Stacey Abrams' 2018 governor's race only served to prove that elections have historically been controlled by those in power. Georgia's gubernatorial race in 2018 perpetuated voter suppression, racial bias, and sexism. Stacey Abrams was running against Georgia's Secretary of state Brian Kemp, an adamant conversative. After months of grassroot movements, getting out the vote campaigns, and encouraging citizens to vote, she lost the race. Stacey Abrams' non-concession speech states, "We all understand challenges and complications; however, this year, more than two hundred years into Georgia's democratic experiment, the state failed its voters." In her speech, Stacey Abrams explains that many citizens of Georgia wanted to practice their right to vote but there were a multitude of barriers prohibiting them in doing so. Abrams was not able to successfully gain these positions of power because of these walls. Later in her speech, Abrams claims, "Georgia citizens tried to exercise their Constitutional rights and were still denied the ability to elect their leaders. Under the watch of the now former Secretary of State, democracy failed Georgians of every political party, every race, every region. Again." Abrams is decentralizing the arguments from associating voter suppression to political parties and centering it back to having the ability to pick your leaders and not have those barriers that prohibit it in the first place.

The election system is meant to allow people to vote for the candidate that fits their interest without having to jump through hoops. The flawed electoral system prohibits Black women from having the ability to run for positions of power, while, simultaneously, Black women are also fighting other forms of oppression when running for office. Stacey Abrams' non-concession speech also states,

"Which is why on Election Night, I declared that our fight to count every vote is not about me. It is about us." Even though not everyone who was affected by voter suppression was someone who supported Abrams, the effort was done to ensure this election system was effective. Abrams also stated, "It's about the democracy we share and our responsibility to preserve our way of life. Our democracy—because voting is a right and not a privilege." In a society that has racial hierarchies, privileges exist when being born white or in closer proximity to white. Race is a social construction that dictates who can hold power. If voting was more equitable then Black women would have the same opportunities as their white counterparts to run for these positions.

Eliminating voter suppression will create a pathway for Women of Color to not only vote but hold positions in office. The tactics of voter suppression affect marginalized communities by having strict voting regulations, voter ID law, and lack of access to voting centers. Voting has not been exclusively for everyone, as those in power have always dictated who has the ability to vote. Since most of the people who are affected by voter suppression are marginalized people, it is, in turn, harder for politicians who come from marginalized groups to get votes from their community. In the paper "Media Framing Of Black Women's Campaigns of the US House of Representatives" by Orlanda Ward, it states, "Black women are framed as having advantages due to their race and gender, but at the same time failing to win over White voters, despite evidence to the contrary" (Ward, 2016). In a racialized society it can be very difficult to reach the interest of others who do not share your same experience. The full enfranchisement of Black Voters would mean that Black candidates would have similar support as White candidates.

Black women are also subjected to many harmful stereotypes. In the podcast The United States of Anxiety episode "What Does the Right Woman Sound Like?" the host invited Rena Cook who is a specialist in teaching women on how to use their voice. She states, " Of course the double standard still handicaps outspoken women but here is the bottom line, we can't control that" (Wright 2018). There may not be the full abolishment of sexism under white supremacy but fully enfranchised Black voters would help women of color take these positions.

Stacey Abrams' strategy of combating voter suppression is a shift that could be adopted to other races' empowerment, especially for women of color. King describes the strategy of "expanding their coalition to include disengaged voters of color, as opposed to continuing the focus on persuading undecided, moderate, often white voters"

(King, 2020). The power of voters of color has impacted democracy before; another time where voters of color came in huge numbers was in 2008. In 2008, voters of color aided greatly in electing president Barack Obama to office. Through the power of white supremacy, new voter restrictions were put into place: "The substantial and accelerating population growth among minority populations shows that the 2008 display of minority voting strength is not a passing phenomenon" (Haygood, 2012). For a system of white supremacy, having marginalized communities succeed in elections is a threat. The disenfranchisement of BIPOC people was done purposely to keep control of the power.

Abrams and her team's approach to include those disengaged voters of color is a shift that needs to occur overall to ensure that people can practice their right to vote. Abrams has been working for this movement for a long time, even after her close loss in 2018, her efforts did not change. Georgia turning blue in the 2020 election was not necessarily a win only for the Democrats but a win for Black women who have been unfairly treated by this election system. It has revived the idea that people can elect the leaders that will serve them. Abrams told POLITICO shortly before Election Day, "Only the message is not trying to persuade them to share Democratic values. Your message is to persuade them that voting can actually yield change" (King, 2020). This strategy has brought back the idea that voting can make an impact with the potential to encourage Black women to pursue these positions because they have the support of their community. Removing barriers to voting will allow for more representation of Black women in office that will transcend into different policy changes. It is true that descriptive representation matters.

In the video "Stop Killing Us: Black Transgender Women's Lived experiences," Bela stated, "You can't have a cis women advocating for a trans women because that woman don't know our needs, you can't have a caucasian male advocating for us because he don't know our needs, you need a trans women of color" (Complex News, 2020). Although this advocates for Trans Rights, it is important to listen to the message. People within communities know their issues the best, and electing officials fairly will allow for this change to take place. In Lecture 1 of week 11 it is mentioned how political representation holds power in the form of "who has political voice through elected representatives" or "who benefits from political representation." If political representation is so impactful it is obvious why white men benefit from electing their leaders. White rich men are aware of the needs of other white rich men. Removing barriers to vote can eventually lead to a cycle where more Black women will go into office for the needs of the black community especially Black women. "In a role model capacity, the elected representatives of a group may likewise influence public perceptions of the group, and public, and legislator preferences concerning policies related to the group" (Haid-

er-Markel, 2010). Therefore, ending voter suppression will increase the turnout of voters of color, allowing voters of color to choose people who represent them and therefore allow for policies to change.

There are those who question methods to combat voter suppression, like increasing voters of color, are upholding the values of white supremacy. The 2008 presidential election mobilized voters of color to cast their votes and have that platform to participate in democracy. However, after the election, those against it worked to create barriers: "The states that have passed these restrictions are, in many cases, the very same states that experienced high rates of minority population growth and political participation over the last decade" (Haygood, 2012). We have seen an increase of people voicing that voting should be easier. In states like Colorado there is a mail-in ballot strategy that has increased voter turnout on all sides. There are many strategies that can combat voter suppression, but instead certain states have continued to set these barriers. Racism is the main driver in white supremacy policies pursued by state legislators who are aware that they are capable of these strategies. They will continue to ignore the strategy to uphold power over others.

Stacey Abrams is one of many Black female leaders who have come up with strategies to combat white supremacy. It is only hopeful for the future of democracy that these grassroot movements continue. The adoption of Abrams' strategy should not be the only mission, it should encourage others to see the needs of their community. In the 2020 election we saw other states also have amazing turnout because people are invested in democracy. Stacey Abrams is a Black woman who has continued to fight voter suppression, so there can be more equitable elections for other Black women. Black women will thrive in political office if the shift continues to occur within communities. Mobilization does not stop with the currently elected president, it is only the continuation of the greater fight against white supremacy.

WORKS CITED

Brown, N. E., & Gershon, S. A. (2016). Media Framing of Black Women's campaigns for the U.S House of Representatives. Distinct identities: Minority Women in U.S. Politics, 148-164. ProQuest Ebook Central https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315661018.

Complex News, (2020). Stop Killing Us: Black Transgender Women's Lived Experiences. Video. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzMI3JUNp7c

Galloway, J. (2018, November 16). Stacey Abrams: 'I will not concede because the erosion of our democracy is not right.' https://www.ajc.com/blog/politics/stacey-abrams-will-not-concede-because-the-erosion-our-democracy-not-right/JQqttbuF09NYkMQbIYx9BM/

Haider-Markel, D. P. (2010). In the Legislature: Case Studies on Political Representation and LGBT State Legislators. Out and

running: Gay and lesbian candidates, elections, and policy
representation, 84-117. Washington D.C: Georgetown Uni
versity Press.

Haygood, R. P. (2012). The past as prologue: Defending democracy
against voter suppression tactics on the eve of the 2012
elections. Rutgers Law Review, 64(4), 1019-1064.

King, M. (2020, November 08). How Stacey Abrams and her
band of believers turned Georgia blue. https://www.politico.
com/news/2020/11/08/stacey-abrams-believers-geor
gia-blue-434985

Ward, O. (2016). Media Framing of Black Women's Campaigns for
the U.S. House of Representatives. In Distinct Identities:
Minority Women in U.S. Politics, ed. by N. E. Brown, S. A.
Gershon, 153-170. New York: Routledge.

Wright, K., host. "What Does the Right Kind of Woman Sound Like?"
The United States of Anxiety, 5 Nov. 2018. https://www.
wnycstudios.org/podcasts/anxiety/episodes/episode-9-wom
ens-voice

DISMANTLING THE HIDDEN HIERARCHY IN SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS AND GENDER IDENTITIES

Eleanor Schnee

Jackson Bird is a transgender man who makes YouTube videos online discussing various LGBTQIA+ topics, as well as throwing random food into a waffling iron. In his memoir titled Sorted, Bird remarked that in college his "gender dysphoria…manifested in a steady contemplation of my sexuality" (Bird, 2020, p. 82). Bird was able to repress his true gender for so long because he often conflicted and confused his gender with his sexuality. This confusion was due in part because heteronormativity has no interest in educating people about identities outside the norm, but also because our systems for labeling sexual orientation and gender identities are inherently confusing. While there are conventional ways I could explain the differences between sexuality and gender as to help distinguish truth from misconception, they tend not to address the system itself. I also do not wish to simply provide a list of definitions for all the sexualities and all the genders to create a "complete" description of both, because such a complete list does not exist. Our sexual orientation and gender identities are not only lacking in their capacity and ability to describe people, but also create expectations and normalities that are used in unjust and oppressive hierarchies. And we can't meaningfully discuss how Bird repressed his gender due to convoluted identities without first addressing how to free ourselves from those same identities.

We tend to organize around oppressive hierarchies, some of which permeate through all our institutions and have existed for hundreds of years. With regards to sexual orientation and gender, the dominant structure is heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the societal assumption that everyone conforms to heterosexuality and that there is attraction between "opposite" genders and neutrality among the same gender (Hutch 9/23/2021). As such, it includes all the confining expectations of heterosexual relationships like monogamous, long term relationships between cis-men and cis-women. With little flexibility, heteronormativity is a hierarchy that is constructed from the normalities and expectations of heterosexuality and has a very restrictive view of what relationships between people can look like. We can conclude that by embracing relationships outside of the norm, we can begin to deconstruct the hierarchical structure of heteronormativity.

Among the anthology Queering Anarchism, Abbey Volcano talks in her essay about how she often felt pressured by friends to be more promiscuous and to not be in exclusive relationships (Volcano 2013, pg. 37). Only because she held a queer identity were these assumptions laid on her. While these expectations were outside the normal, they can be and are just as restrictive as those of heteronor-

mativity. And so, Volcano's experiences highlight how society applies certain restrictive expectations to everyone according to their sexuality. In order to free ourselves from restrictive views on relationships, we cannot simply embrace relationships outside the norm, we must break down the normalities and expectations that we associate with sexual orientation identities.

I believe dismantling normalities is a necessary action to take in order to prevent any hierarchies from being constructed. In her paper, Volcano also argues that instead of liberating people from the bounds of heteronormativity, we have "create[d] new borders and new limitations around sexuality—we have simply inverted the hierarchy and excluded those deemed "not queer enough""(Volcano 2013, pg. 34). One of the philosophies of anarchism is that in order to bring about equality, we have to dismantle or tear down all 'unjust' hierarchies—though some argue all hierarchies are unjust by definition. Through that lens, we can see that inverting a hierarchy by creating new normals will never achieve equality, even though it may make the lives of marginalized people somewhat better. Breaking down normalities associated with all sexual orientation identities is one way to ensure no unjust hierarchies can be constructed. However, inverted hierarchies don't only occur with sexual orientation. Since heteronormativity insists "on there only being two genders and two sexual orientations" (Hutch 9/23)[a], gender can just as easily be constructed into inverted hierarchies. Therefore, breaking down norms associated with gender identities will aid in deconstruction of the gender hierarchies within heteronormativity.

For example, by dismantling the norms around being transgender—removing the expectations we have of trans people and or what it means to be a good trans person—we will be lifting the restrictive borders on who can hold the trans identity. While a consequence will be the trans identity becoming more broad and less unique as a descriptor, it will also remove its ability to prescribe what someone should be if they choose to take it as an identity. This is in contrast to our modern idea, which suggests that being trans is at the core of whoever holds that identity. The proposal of diluting or removing identity terms is a bit of a frightening concept given how we treat them today, but again taking a page out of Abbey Volcano's queer anarchist theory, "the ways we fuck, love, and gender ourselves are not inherently revolutionary" (Volcano 2013, p. 35). And if our identities are not at the core of our struggle, then we can continue to fight for equality without them. Thus, if we wish to radically change society to be more equal for all genders and sexualities, we must focus on

dismantling societal norms and not on creating more identities to attach norms to.

We could gain another perspective on the relationship between gender and sexuality by looking through the lens of the patriarchy. Specifically, how "[h]omosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behaviors) on the basis of sex" (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 153[b]). By challenging the approved behaviors set forth by the patriarchy, we can begin to deconstruct homosexuality. And deconstructing homosexuality is in the same vein as deconstructing sexual orientation hierarchies on a whole. As such, we can challenge the hierarchy of heteronormativity by also challenging the patriarchy.

This type of analysis was not present in Jackson Bird's life when he was trying to figure out who he was. He only had limited knowledge from a high school psychology class, "there were only two sexual orientations: gay and straight. Bisexuals have to choose one" (Bird, 2020, p. 82). While this mindset was a start, it did a very big disservice to him. We say that every person has two separate identities, a sexual orientation and a gender; but something we do not often realize is that almost all of our sexual orientation identities are intrinsically tied to our gender identity. When talking in the dominant culture, one would not need to specify a lesbian woman because that definition of lesbian includes being a woman. From here, we can trace out a lot of confusions between and about sexuality and gender that most people have. As a consequence of this implicit gendering of sexualities, the confusion and uncertainty that arise among individuals who question their gender is only compounded. For example, a cis-man who likes women is straight, while a trans-women who likes women is a lesbian. With our current system, finding a correct gender identity may necessitate a change in sexual orientation even though no newfound or less-found attraction was discovered.

In middle school, Jackson Bird found himself watching an Oprah special about trans kids and remarked, "that…episode made me feel like my interest in boys disqualified me from being transgender" (Bird, 2020, p. 53). The inadequacy of our system for determining sexuality really shined in this moment for Bird. He was able to convince himself, at least for a while, that who he was attracted to had the ability to determine what his gender was. Even as he later realized that he could like men and be a trans-man, it would necessitate that he be gay, and thus make him "some extra-special kind of freak" (Bird, 2020, p. 53). While Bird is particularly harsh with his wording, I think he highlights the intersection of sexuality and gender hierarchies very well; being a gay cis-man or even a straight trans-man would be seen as more normal than who he was, a gay trans-man. The hierarchy that heteronormativity creates was threatening to place Bird at the bottom—as a gay trans-man—if he continued to have feelings about being a man or came out as such. This threat coerced him into repressing his gender for the sake of staying on top of the hierarchy as a means of survival. "Threat" is a somewhat nebulous term but here I use it to refer to the discrimination, prejudice, and/or violence from both homophobia and transphobia that Bird would have faced as a result of being placed lower on these hierarchies. Later in the book, Bird remarks, "The big mistake I had made was assuming that there was only one way to be trans" (Bird, 2020, p. 102). Throughout his childhood, Bird had picked up on what expectations and normalities were associated with both straight trans-men and gay cis-men and felt as though, since his experiences didn't match the norms, then he couldn't be those things. Therefore, we can remove confusion—and coercion through violence—in people's lives with regards to their sexual orientation and gender identities by dismantling expectations and normalities that we associate with those identities.

Jackson Bird's childhood was filled with uncertainty and confusion because of our current system for sorting sexual orientation and gender identities. We must eliminate such uncertainties and remove these confusions by foregoing the normalities and expectations—set in place by the oppressive structure of heteronormativity—that we associate with sexual and gender identities in order to reach a more equitable future. And, if we keep in the back of our minds that dismantling normalities is more important than holding onto identities, then I believe we will reach this future one day.

WORKS CITED

Bird, J. (2020). Sorted: Growing up, coming out, and finding my place: A transgender memoir. New York, New York: Tiller Press.

"Hatch, A. 2021. Sexuality. Personal Collection of A. Hatch, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado."

"Radicalesbians. 1970. "The Woman Identified Woman." pp. 153 in Introduction to Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies: Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Approaches, edited by Saraswati, L. A., Shaw, B. L., & Rellihan, H, New York: Oxford University Press."

Volcano, Abbey. 2013. "Police at the Borders." pp. 33-42 in Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire, edited by C. B. Daring, J. Rogue, Deric Shannon, & Abbey Volcano, AK Press, Oakland, CA.