WETLANDS MAGAZINE
SPRING 2015 ISSUE
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EDITOR'S NOTE

When I think about the function of Wetlands in our community, I think of two main things: a platform for student voices and an agent to advocate for marginalized students. Providing a platform for students to engage with themes of sexuality, gender, and identity in an intersectional way is vital. With the vast majority of media in our society exclusively amplifying the voices of the privileged majority, providing space for students to share their narratives becomes increasingly important. One of the things I value the most about Wetlands is that our submissions engage identity in a plethora of ways, sometimes through excitement and enthusiasm, sometimes through discomfort and personal trials, and other times through anger and unrest. All of these are important. If we are to provide a platform for student voices, we need to recognize that emotions like anger and frustration come with that dialogue. Anger towards a system is not always the same as anger towards an individual, regardless of the identities of that individual.

When engaging with identity in any meaningful way, we must understand the larger structures that position various groups of people in close proximity to violence, leaving them on the margins of society. It is imperative to recognize how these structures work, and how we are all implicated by them. Marginalized groups must have the ability to openly criticize and voice their frustration with the system that oppresses them. Additionally, dominant groups need to recognize the ways in which they perpetuate systems of oppression, and to consider the systemic critiques that are coming from marginalized people. Often, the initial response from privileged groups is to push back against criticism made against them as a form of self-defence, when a more appropriate response would be to validate the critique and consider their individual role in said critique.

I mention this here because this issue of Wetlands has created a platform for student voices, but specifically for voices of marginalized students who are making valid and necessary critiques on various problematic systems and structures. The second function of Wetlands comes to mind now: that is, our publication as an agent of social and political advocacy. Be it in our print issue or on our blog, Wetlands is constantly engaging in critiques. Some take the form of editorials, others in poetry and narrative. All are necessary; and as readers should consider the ways in which we as individuals are complicit in systems that allow for these narratives to exist in the first place.

Along with this idea of advocating for marginalized people, we also wrote staff generated pieces this semester. We wanted to engage with systemic oppression in a more direct manner, and thought to do this through in-house generated pieces. When we are making critiques or engaging themes of ability/disability, suicide, sexual assault, gender identity, and sexuality, we come from vulnerable places. It is not easy to write about themes that are so personal, but constructive dialogue is necessary for building a safe community.

A lot of this semester’s content is thematically difficult and I implore you to practice radical self care. However, it is crucial to consider why these stories are here. Why are there so many pieces about trans identity and violence? Why are there so many narratives of sexual violence? Why do we always publish pieces about queer erasure? Because the systems that create such violence are still intact and we, as individuals in the same society, need to consider the ways in which we are complicit in those systems.

I hope you enjoy this issue. As always, the students at our university never cease to amaze me with the quality of the work submitted. Everyone on staff has worked very hard on this publication, and that shows through with how strong this issue is. While I hope you enjoy the product of our hard work, I also ask that you to consider how you fit into the larger system that has created these narratives. I ask that you take action and help us dismantle systems of oppression so our society will be safer for everyone.

Lindsey Conrad
Editor-in-Chief
Wetlands Magazine
5:04 AM
I was once terrified of my own libido. Of being attracted to multiple people at once. Sometimes I still am.

I once wrote a one to two page story about it. A poet holds a gun to the head of a vigorously masturbating man who is naked. The poet struggles. The naked man strokes. Eventually, the poet shoots the naked man in the head. Memory trails away like smoke now—you can’t firmly grasp it. If the shapes in the smoke hold truth, then the poet realizes the naked man was also him. And then he turns the gun on himself.

I wrote that story a few years ago. I destroyed it, and many others, less than a year ago. I did not need them anymore. They weighed too much.

I was once terrified of my memories. I still am. Yet there is comfort in seeing the smoke of memory twisting in the air, now and then. To watch the smoke appear, then dissipate.

7:04 AM
Can I even call it insomnia? It’s not like I COULDN’T go to bed earlier, if I forced myself. I just can’t help staying up so fucking late. Early? Whatever.

My identity feels split, but connected, sort of like a conjoined twin. My sexy, vibrant, spiritual, and experimental self is one. My trans identity often aligns with this. My other self is depressed, self-loathing, anxious, lonely, and suicidal. It often aligns with my old male identity. Gender dysphoria. Fucking perfect. It’s all connected with creativity and this body. This dysphoria of gender and individual identity is agonizing, sometimes.

The sun is rising. I blew out a candle into the morning air. I hope that’s enough.

3:02 AM
I’m really sad, and I’m not quite sure why. There are a few things stressing me out, but they don’t fully explain why I’m feeling so trapped. So alone. So fucking... sad isn’t even quite the right word. But it is, at the same time. Trapped may be the best. I’m trapped in myself and the world around me and I’m sad and afraid and lonely. I feel like an astronaut, trapped on earth, yet I can see the spiraling galaxies and beautiful stars. But are those stars just old photographs, as Doctor Manhattan described thirty years ago? I can’t say I know, but it is what I fear. In the end, though, I’m smoking out my window and feeling exhausted emotionally. And spiritually.

I don’t want to be alone tonight.

3:37 AM (I am the grounded astronaut)
I am the grounded astronaut. I don’t want to be alone tonight.

My spacecraft is broken. My self-validating narrative, Oh yes I do. Instead of needing you.

I haunt my heart With the photographs of memories. Instead of needing you.

I am a Queernaut Stranded on paralyzing earth. Toiling towards rebirth.

I need a self-validating narrative Because I hate myself. Yet I am a Queernaut.
Shot Gun Girls

Ryann Whitely

Sometimes I can feel my belly swell from all the words I’ve swallowed and I wonder how women can be both quiet and thin.
I can’t help but think that if I were taught to count letters spilled out over calories piled in, I would have more to say.
I spent 18 years choking on my tongue.
But necessity is the mother of invention, so when you gave me something else to choke on I learned the word “no.”
You peeled back my flesh and coiled me like a scissor-skinned ribbon.
Dressed red for the occasion.
You opened me like I was the prettiest present you ever got.
The best thing about toys is that they don’t talk back.
The first time you kissed me, I knew you’d never like the taste of my gunpowder mouth.
So when you went to brush your teeth, I spit out the bullets I held in my gums.
I thought, not this one.
I won’t need these here.
According to the United Nations, gunpowder is classified as a “low explosive.”
This classification indicates a slow decomposition rate.
True to form, I let my words rot in my gun barrel belly, never daring to say your name.
In case my bullets came out instead I burn slow.
Maybe that’s why it took me a year to yell “rape.”
I was taught that there is protection in courtesy.
So when you told me I could keep my underwear on I said thank you.
When I left your room, I stood in the shower for 45 minutes.
You told me you liked me skinny,
So I let myself grow.
Filled my bones with every lie I gagged on.
Let my tongue decay to make room for yours.
To speak with your voice.
Telling me to open my mouth.
I know that there are poems to tell me that flowers will grow in even my darkest parts.
That spring can be thrust onto winter from naked, biting silence.
But the truth is that life does not happen in the dark and the quiet.
The truth is there are too many loud girls with shotguns in their throats.
The truth is there are too many drunk boys keen to start a fire.
To pick singed letters from their napalm hearts.
To make them thin from words they did not want to say.
Shot gun girls:
Remember, you are only lethal if you pull the trigger.
So speak and speak and speak and speak.
Til there are no bullets left

TRIGGER WARNING: SEXUAL ASSAULT
this body is a body tied to generations of loss and trauma, displacement, waiting for English to lie correctly on difficult tongues. this body has been a push this body has been a pull a final frontier to colonize “uncharted” land that only had value when they arrived. this body is tied to dirt and drenched in sweat. it is hard labor in fields, clumsy fingers scrambling to hide Walkmans in coat pockets, escaping/beeing pushed out/running as fast as it can.

the bark of this body has been mangled heavy boots snapping thick roots pruning and taming away leaves and branches until it was less wild.

but underneath the splintered branches and burned stumps you’ll find delicate green sprouts pushing through scorched earth cinnamon vines wrapped around the ribs of growing trees and if you listen hard enough, you can hear the soft songs of birds again.

“\(\text{I feel like a bruise on the universe. Not a divine mistake of creation, but the kind of injury you get from doing something stupid, like walking into a door or tripping on a curb. I’m an unwelcome presence that’s constantly trying to be healed out of existence, and then the universe will do something stupid again and I’m back before I even left. There’s no maliciousness to my existence, just an unwelcome being that’s taking too long to fade out completely.}^{\text{Anonymous}}\)\)
hazel
Aiden Merris

she stands
perfectly still
absorbing light
through hazel eyes
that penetrate
like daggers
through me
trembling spheres
forming a lilac haze
above her dark head
scarlet lips
forming a delicate pout
to place wet kisses
on my swollen heart
i
cannot see
past the neurons
that fire
continuously endlessly
she has me
in the palm
of her steel hands
gripping
the shape of
my wrist
cooing
whispering
sweet, succulent sounds
sending signals
to and fro
and then
she undresses me
in the depth
of the indigo night
one
thread at a
time
with lilac
with moons
with fervid glances
with purposeful licks
with eyes
without fingers
until
i am
no longer
a man
but thread ready
to be sewn
into the seams
of her heart
The passing weeks after the hospital felt like years, maybe even centuries. I felt so empty, so drained and confused and unloved and lost and alone, not knowing when I would be ready to go back to class. Eventually, I realized I wasn’t ready to go back to class. How could you sit in a room and talk about the monotony and structure of American suburbs; how could you sit down and graph a business function and create a model for maximum profit when you’ve returned from the brink of death? How could you possibly pay attention to minute details when you’re so close to just losing all touch with reality, when you don’t sleep for days at a time because your mind is continuously buzzing with the echoes of a suicide attempt?

Each day dragged by. I would wake up minutes before work and somehow, I would make it on time, hair disheveled and eyes fogged with sleep. It was shocking I was able to get out of bed and get to work, make coffee and make some small banter. I pretended that nothing was amiss, that I was just fatigued from the semester like everyone else. No one at work knew I had tried to do myself in. My parents, my family, my friends... no one knew. I became nearly mute, lost in thought about the world and existence, and in looming fear of my future. I didn’t feel a purpose, a pulse of life within myself, so I was a zombie. I would crawl into that dark basement, a place where no one wanted me, and chain-smoke and blast my ears out with angry, hard music. If I couldn’t kill myself with a knife, then I would slowly kill my lungs and brain. I genuinely felt worthless because no one would acknowledge my presence; no one gave a shit about me. And why should they? I had nothing I offered to them. I was just another leech, another spider that lurked in the shadows of the basements, hoping no one would see me, but secretly, desperately seeking out any glimmer of kindness or affection. I felt trapped because I didn’t feel worthy of any love, yet I craved it more than anything. So instead, I would get high. I would smoke until I was dizzy and nauseous from the near-suffocation. I starved myself then ate absolute garbage because I felt like shit emotionally and didn’t think I was worth more. I slowly became a prisoner of my own mind, a prisoner of my pale and weakened body, a prisoner of that basement.

When the wind whipped the tent away and we stood in the mess of broken chairs, discarded beer cans and trash, as we looked at the world around us without any walls, any darkness enveloping us—it was almost as if more than the roof was lifted. I knew then that I would never return to that basement. I was ready. It was time to close the door on the darkness that lurked down there and to finally, after all these years, step out into the sunlight.
four weeks

Aiden Merris

a month
passes quickly
i linger
on the weeks
underneath the floorboards
and the hours
with your ears
pressed against my ribs
listening to the rhythm
of the ocean
sighing in my lungs
slow to a crawl
you thought
i was dead
i remember
the words in my marrow
i could have sworn
they were there
the other night
lingering
before dissipating
into another’s mouth
even when spring
blooms
with quiet violence
from winter’s womb
the earth stands still
and you
could pass me by
never remaining
in the same place
twice
invalidated by Adrian Kljucec as spoken word

TRIGGER WARNING: SLURS, SUICIDE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, RACIALIZED ANTI-TRANS HATE CRIMES AND MURDER

Genitals! Genitals!

Step right up and take a peek folks!

Don’t be shy, you’re the whole reason they’re here!

Only the finest array of transgender genitals!

Step right up and claim your cis-sexist pride!

If you can see the genitals, you know the gender!

Congratulations! You just invalidated another trans* person’s existence!

Being trans* is being showcased every minute of my life.

It’s deceiving others of my gender.

It’s not being a person.

It’s being guilty of making cisgender people uncomfortable again and again because somehow I don’t make sense.

It’s being asked about my experience because you’re “just curious.”

It’s being afraid to walk out of the house in fear that a group of men will call my girlfriend a “TRANNY FAGGOT BITCH” again.

It’s demanding rights and – shit even a goddamn space – and being silenced.

It’s watching another cisgender man representing our trans* women on national television – leaving our voices where you’ve kept them.

Tv show “Transparent” demonstrates the transparency of our agency.

Dear Solloway, thanks for reminding us that you would rather profit over a tv show than have our voices actually heard.

Being trans* is being in the 41st percentile of suicide, and the 64th percentile of sexual assault.

And when we kill ourselves it’s because you make us feel like we’d be better off dead than being invalidated again.

If you are uncomfortable now please don’t forget that my genitals are still on display.

BEING TRANS* IS STANDING IN FRONT OF YOU ALL RIGHT NOW IN FEAR THAT BY THE END OF THIS POEM I’LL BE ANOTHER DISMEMBERED CARCASS SCATTERED AND FORGOTTEN LIKE THE REST OF OUR NAMES ON THE LIST:
And you wonder why we’re so “sensitive” when you use the wrong pronoun.

We don’t get murdered by trans* folk – cis people kill us. And it starts with using the wrong pronoun because “it’s easier for you to say.”

Whenever you drop the wrong pronoun another one of us gets a bullet to the chest – another police club knocks us unconscious – another knife rips our flesh.

If you overlook this you’re no different than the judicial system that classifies our murders as mere misdemeanors.

In case you’re still confused—you don’t get to decide what pronouns we use—if you do, you’re just as worthless as the piece of shit that beat us to death.

Your intentions mean nothing when you continue to misrepresent us – when you silence us – when you sensationalize us – when you minimize us to our genitals – and when you quiz us on the legitimacy of our identity.

If you were confused about anything I just said, then I suggest you check your privilege and the reason why you’ve never even had to think about these issues.

**Islan Nettles** – blunt force trauma across from a police station, pronounced brain-dead, and left classified a misdemeanor.

**Evon Young** – tied up, beaten, choked with a chain, bag taped over head, shot, set on fire, and discarded in a dumpster.

**Rita Hester** – stabbed to death 20 times in her apartment – no one charged.

**Jennifer Laude** – brutally drowned in a toilet bowl by a us marine.

**Unidentified woman** – severe head injuries, body thrown under bus.

**Dalvalei José Alves Pereira** – beheaded and burned.

**Unidentified woman** – Found floating in a gully.

**Domonique Newburn** – multiple stab wounds.

**Rafael da Silva Tavares** – six gunshots.

**Unknown woman** – stoned and crushed skull.

**Unidentified child** – hanging.
Top Surgery

Jae Bates

Every time someone asks me how the pain is, I kind of laugh on the inside. The pain. It's funny to me because I'm in the least amount of pain I've ever been in. My whole life I've been full up with pain, a different kind of pain; a mental pain. The slight burn and irritation of my franken-nipples and my stretched and stitched skin barely compares to the mental cycle I've been going through my whole life. I find myself touching my chest often. Everyone around me finds it strange and I find it to be quite habitual. It's my body's way of saying it doesn't believe I really had surgery. I keep touching my post-op chest thinking all of that terrible tissue must be under the bandages somewhere, this must be a mirage. My armpits are numb but itch all at the same time and I love it. For my entire life, I've felt the weight of my chest and to me it was a horrific piece of my anatomy, and now it's gone. I know I have a chest, but I can't feel that I have a chest because the nerves are dead now.

My drains were pulled from my chest and it felt like something was living inside of me. When they popped out of their holes on either side of my chest, I felt like I could finally breathe. After the tubes were removed from my chest, I could finally wear shirts comfortably. When I got home I spent two hours in front of my bathroom mirror trying on all of my shirts. Each and every shirt that I had been afraid to wear before surgery, looked exactly the way I had hoped they would. I laid down in my bathroom, atop the pile of cotton shirts I'd created and held my chest. I felt exhausted, tears began to change the color of the fabric around me. I'd completed an eighteen year long journey to make it up this mountain of T-shirts. Getting dressed and undressed has never felt so rewarding.
“Rurrú’s work takes some pre-Hispanic rites of a sexual nature that carried out the Hustecos in antiquity, as this civilization was the most sexual of all Mesoamerica. It also takes some pre-Hispanic deities of a sexual nature, such as Tlazoltéotl, goddess of sexuality or the eater of filth; Macuilxochtli God’s pleasure; Huehuecóyotl god of sexuality and Mictlantecuhtli, addressing the latter in relation to the definition given by George Bataille on orgasm, talking about it as a “tiny death.”

We also see in her artwork the constant appearance of trans individuals and sometimes characters wearing strap-ons, trying to promote these dissident sexualities and inviting the viewer to not feel guilty if they have experienced or want to experience their sexuality differently from the so-called erroneously as “normal”. His characters use orthopedics and most are amputees, have pimples, are very thin, and have many hairs and beads, creating a visual questioning on charges of tax beauty. They also suffer from canker sores or hives produced by some work of Macuilxochtli, who used to be in charge of punishing people with these diseases if abused the pleasure.”
An education in the liberal arts should be a liberatory experience. There should be a space for structural identity based programs in the liberal arts college, but we come to understand the liberal arts curriculum as both partially productive of and produced by histories of marginalization and subjection. It is not merely an “accident” of the history of the academy that it produced knowledge in the name of colonial states, that the academy excluded colonized peoples from participation for hundreds of years, or that norms of “civility” are consistently used to target black students and students of color, queer, trans, poor, and disabled students. To make things clear: if we are worried about the dangers of assimilation into white supremacist and settler colonialist antimoor polities of misogyny, then the educational status quo should be understood as unacceptable. If we are worried that recognition by the university in the form of forced pacification and assimilation into liberal communities of scholars would render our studies abstract in relation to our embodied identities, then we must have also been worried this would be reflected in the curricular structure of the university in general. The university curriculum relegates the studies of structural identity based programs into a position that is “outside” the realm of “legitimate” learning, rendered secondary in relation to the primary work of studying mathematics, the natural sciences, and grammar. Moreover, the present conditions of systematised resource deprivation and tokenization are intolerable learning conditions for students desiring to study within existing structural identity based programs, because these programs are frequently forced into positions of relative invisibility and disproportionate academic scrutiny within the hierarchy of the university. To advocate for the transformation of structural identity based programs into departments, or for the the hiring of faculty in these areas of study, or even the recognition of their equal worth within the academy, is not a revolutionary proposal. Such proposals are also insufficient to do justice to the complex histories that bring communities and individuals to these sites of marginalization and subjection. There are limitations to what can be done in a program, as well as limitations to the capacity of any academic study to revolutionize everyday life. But those limitations do not mean that structural identity based programs should not also be full academic departments. In recognition all limitations and aspirations, we demand what will be assuredly be misconstrued as “impossible,” but which will remain merely remedial:

The creation of tenure-line faculty positions in Gender and Queer Studies, African American Studies, Latina/o Studies, Asian Studies
Active recruitment of subject-area specialists in Gender and Queer Studies, Queer Theory, Transgender Studies, African American, Black, and African Diaspora Studies, Latina/o Studies, Chicana/o Studies, Native American and Indigenous Studies, and Asian Studies
The resolution of all structural identity based programs into full academic departments and the recognition of work in such departments as worthy of a major degree.

We believe that structural identity-based programs provide two functions to a liberal arts college, and in particular its marginalized and subjugated students. The first is to infuse marginalized knowledge and embodied learning into the space of the academy.
The second is to broaden our understanding of history, power, representation, resistance and liberation as each pertains to the university. Dr. Grace Livingston says, “the liberal arts in particular actively forgets” multiple overlapping histories of subjection and domination (Livingston 2015). These histories of subjection and domination in turn form what we have come to understand as the “traditional” liberal arts. Moreover, “those forms of knowledge which contain the history of those [traditional] disciplines,” are erased through that active forgetting emblematic of the liberal arts, which creates the conditions for the university in general to “forget that the foundations and methodologies are themselves formed by and attached to ideas that come and generated reconstituted projects like Trans-Atlantic enslavement and build on that knowledge” (Livingston, 2015). Considering the ground that the University of Puget Sound is built on further manifests this history of racial conflict of the academy. Grace Livingston offers the structural identity based program as an opportunity to reflect upon “what have we done in relation to this indigenous ground,” because these programs enter the university “at a place of struggle and the harshness of historical memory and making a case for its presence.” (Livingston, 2015). Structural identity based departments and programs provide rich theoretical and historical vocabularies to articulate past and present harms, violences, and trauma and they become places to elaborate strategies of resistance and organization of mutual uplifting and support. These programs enable the synthetic infusion of structurally marginalized knowledge into the university, attending to a certain “presence about history, knowledge, communities,” a physical and conceptual process that insists on “the sharpness and the boldness of this knowledge” (Livingston 2015). Structural identity based programs enable articulations that allow for us to more fully interrogate and comprehend the intensity of these historical violences. The potentiality of this articulation allows for the inhabitation of a space of consciousness within the academy. Structural identity based programs create a space for the raising of such consciousness as part of the experience of college learning itself. In the context of an increasingly corporatized academy, and where we await the disastrous impacts of austerity, rapidly inflating tuition, student debt, which themselves disproportionately impact certain populations of structurally situated students, it is important that such students have spaces within the academy to re-articulate our studies in terms that create a direct connection between subject matter taught in class, the operations of the university writ large, and structures of violence subtending all political, social, and academic processes.

Traditionally privileged disciplines within the university assert that the universal scope of their knowledge and methodologies have already accounted for what we have to say; disciplines newly arisen to privilege by the tumult of neoliberal corporatism tend to assert that the structural situation of our learning is irrelevant. This is emblematic of the appropriation maneuvers of the neoliberal academy. Dr. Dexter Gordon says that “appropriation is first silencing and then eliminating the other” and that “when these emerging perspectives bring new questions to old disciplines, old disciplines seek to co-opt them and suggest they have been proposing those questions when in fact they were not” (Gordon, 2015). This appropriation is expressed in two ways in the passage and enactment of the KNOW (Knowledge, Identity, and Power) requirement: First, the introduction of intentionally critical treatments of knowledge, identity, and power into the curriculum guarantees neither adequate educational opportunities for structurally situated students, nor adequate resources to structural identity based programs. We should understand the passage and curricular integration of the KNOW initiative not as a resolution to the failures of the traditional academy, but rather as an opportunity to claim concessions from the university that make our learning more of a liberatory experience.

Second, the concerted effort by traditional disciplines to offer courses designed to fill the KNOW requirement, so that Gender & Queer Studies, African-American Studies, Latino/a Studies, and Asian Studies, might not control the majority of these courses. KNOW only threatens the violent qualities of a traditional curriculum if the knowledge production that it operationalizes can become a disarticulation of the “non-”, “post-”, or “anti-”identitarian, “post-modern” milieu of traditional disciplines. Traditional disciplines incorrectly position structural identity based knowledge and courses of study as hopeless “identity politics” because those traditional disciplines do not have to grapple with quotidian structural subjection. Even if traditional disciplines can produce some kind of “good learning” about knowledge, identity, and
power, only structural identity based programs guarantee learning about knowledge, power, and identity capable of dynamically infusing embodied resistance into study. The dangers of appropriation guarantee that the only way to meaningfully integrate the study of knowledge, identity, and power into the liberal arts curriculum is to do so through structural identity based programs. If we understand appropriation as elimination preceded by silencing, then claiming a space within the academy and using that space to transform education into a liberatory experience is simultaneously must be a disruption of that silencing and a resistance to that elimination. Professor Grace Livingston tells us that we have to learn to “catch the moment and squirm through it” and that we must strategically learn to “build from the crawlspace” when timing is opportune. From this crawlspace we must engage in “the process of persuasion, because the process of planning and building is persuasion” (Livingston, 2015). Structural identity based programs are one of these crawlspaces, because they enable us to move through the space of the university in new ways, so that we can be tactically situated to await these opportunities. Moreover, the context of the newly enacted KNOW requirement presents us with a moment to create and demand a place for structural identity based programs at the center of teaching about knowledge, identity, and power. But the University of Puget Sound is at present unsuited to taking seriously the sharpness and boldness of marginalized knowledge. Structural identity based programs are rarely funded by the university, rarely include tenure-line faculty positions, and often cannot pay faculty for the teaching classes in the department (Coleman 2013). Wetlands Magazine has a higher budget than the Gender & Queer Studies Program. Nonetheless, the Gender & Queer Studies Program somehow manages to function as a space for the disarticulation of transantagonistic and antiqueer discourses, and to enable the conceptualization of feminist and anti-misogynist ways of learning and living. These programs serve as strategic places for marginalized students to gather and learn together in community: rarely in the academy are spaces tailored to the interrogation of our particularity and our embodied situatedness within a complicated structure of privilege and subjection. Professor Recognizing the necessity of persuasion and our strategies of inhabitation, how may we transform these crawlspaces into spaces structured toward the anticipation of liberation? What is obscured by the liberal arts are the mutually informative vectors of subjection that overdetermine the liberatory possibilities of our education so long as our education obfuscates the reality of our situatedness within structures of historical violence that are themselves ongoing. Structural identity based programs proceed from the starting point of the recognition of these structures of marginality and subjection that mark bodies and make individuals and entire populations vulnerable to structural annihilation. Resistance to these structures cannot succeed without the knowledge of their scope, intensity, and legacy. The existence of structural identity based programs enables the inhabitation of sites for the potential articulation of ways of living that could be different, the invention of strategies of being and resistance that enable a livable life.

Sometimes I feel like someone has dismembered my hands and I can’t move them on my own. But it’s different from the feeling of paralysis. This feeling stems from not understanding how people still think the way they do sometimes, and not being able to change their way of thinking to what I consider to be natural - for instance in arguments with people, mainly my family, about gender, or when something happens that somehow is still surprising to me -- like Darren Wilson not being indicted for the murder of Michael Brown. A feeling of helplessness overcomes me.
Sometimes I want a baby so bad that my entire abdomen feels empty, and I clutch my stomach thinking of the day when I’ll be old enough, mature enough, to have children of my own.

But other times I think about the things I’ll have to teach them. I want to teach them that everywhere they look will be hands waiting to help them up if they fall. I want to teach them that there is fruit their mouths will not believe they are tasting. I want to teach them that they will have mentors who will inspire them and show them things they’re sure are too beautiful to be real. But I have to teach them more than that.

In my freshman year of college I sat in a classroom where we were talking about survivors of genocide. My professor asked us to respond to the question: “If you had experienced something terrible, something you were scared your child would one day experience, when and how would you tell them?”

I watched my classmates ponder this question and wanted to tell them that I already know. This is already how I feel every time I wonder how I’ll tell my children that I was raped by someone I loved.

I want them to know that I love them, that I would never hurt them, but how can they ever trust me once they know what was done to me? They’ll start to believe that love is an empty promise which will never be fulfilled. They’ll learn to flinch at every hand that comes near them, whether it’s a stranger’s or it’s mine. They’ll know that even if they love someone with their whole being, it could be thrown back in their faces at any time.

This is what I was taught, and it didn’t save me from being raped, so I wonder how it could be different for my children. They’ll have depression, anxiety, insomnia and paranoia woven into their bloodlines, and even if it skips them, it could hit their children, or their children’s children, and the cycle will never end. I’m terrified that no matter what I do, no matter what I tell them, no matter how I shelter them, my children will never be safe.

The world’s children will never be safe. I know that if my children are born white like me, I will never have to teach them about what to say when they are stopped by the cops. I will never have to fear that they won’t come home because a policeman thought that instead of reaching for their wallet, they were reaching for a gun. If my children are people of color, I won’t know how to teach them any of this because my privilege has kept me from experiencing it for myself.

I know that if I have a child, I won’t be the best mother. I will fuck up, and I’ll say things I don’t mean. I’ll blame myself every time they feel pain, and they’ll feel guilty for bringing their pain upon me. I know my being will be entwined with theirs from the moment I know that they exist. I know it will hurt. It will hurt more than anything I’ve ever felt. But if I can teach my children not to hurt other children, to respect people’s boundaries and to consider the impact of everything they say, maybe the cycle can end.

If I can tell my children that they have privileges that other people don’t, and that they can fight the system in place that gives them that privilege, then other mothers can feel one less moment of fear that their children will never come home. If my children know that their voices are important, that they can change their environment every time they tell their stories or encourage someone else to tell theirs, then maybe that pain will be worth it.

If I can tell my children how I feel, maybe I will be the best mother I can be, for their sake, and the sake of every child in this world.
DAUGHTER

Denise Parry

My mom sends me a text almost every Sunday. It reads, “I love you daughter of mine.” I respond with, “I love you too mother of mine.” It’s the 3rd year of this weekly text exchange, I love her more now than I did in the beginning, distance has smoothed her edges and mine. But this ritualistic exchange is hard. I don’t love the word daughter. The word daughter makes my skin crawl. It implies girlhood, promises womanhood, gives a chance of motherhood. The word daughter means my mom is seeing something in me that isn’t there. She’s seeing what she wrote on my birth certificate, what she forced others to see when she wouldn’t let me cut my hair short, allusions of an ill-fitting label. I am not her daughter, I am not another son either. I am not even a child anymore, though I am still hers Her flesh and blood and tears and words are part of who I am, I don’t know how to explain the rest of me. I don’t want to make her feel like she lost a daughter, But I don’t want to continue letting her think that she ever had one.
Chronically Ill, Chronically Queer, Chronically Neurodivergent: The Complications of Explaining my Existence to My Mom

I’ve watched an incredible number of Youtube videos centered around tips for coming out to family and friends, but not all of these were talking about coming out in the sense of queer identities. I have mixed feelings about using the phrase “coming out” in reference to telling people about aspects of myself that aren’t LGBTQIAP+ identities. I’m strongly opposed to using “coming out” in reference to anything trivial like telling your friends that you like Miley Cyrus or that you’re a Brony or anything else that’s an inconsequential life choice. But there are invisible non-chosen aspects of my identity besides my queerness that I have to tell people about when they assume otherwise. Living in a society where everyone is assumed to be cis, straight, neurotypical, and able-bodied unless visibly otherwise means that this happens fairly often. There has been so much overlap in my experiences of telling people that I’m queer and telling people that I’m chronically ill and autistic that “coming out” feels like the phrase that best describes all of it even if it might not be the most appropriate.

The overlap was most distinct with regards to coming out to my mother. I told her that I have a chronic pain condition that will likely never go away after the first five doctor’s appointments near the end of my freshman year of college. I came out to her as gay a few months later. In my memory these are interconnected experiences and I think that when/if I get around to letting my mom know that I’m autistic it will feel intrinsically connected as well. She asked similar questions about both aspects of my life, things like “Will you always be this way?” and “Is this because of the way I raised you?” and “Do you want to tell your grandparents?” and I imagine that I’ll hear the same questions if I try to be honest about my neurodivergence. Those questions were hard to answer because there are complex multifaceted answers for them that are always changing with my levels of optimism and acceptance and fear. But I simplify for my mom, I simplify because the way that things actually are is too murky and I simplify so that she won’t have to worry as much and I simplify because sometimes explaining is too exhausting.

I still think about her questions, sometimes they are questions I ask myself too. Will I be sick forever? I don’t know, but that’s what chronic usually means. Maybe one day medicine will find a treatment plan that works for me and it will be like I’m not sick, but I have very little hope of that happening any time soon. What I told my mom is that I’ll always be sick but that my illness is pretty consistent and mild and that I’ll be able to deal with it easily. I don’t know where the line between simplification and lying is. I don’t know if there is one. I think I might have crossed it when I answered her like that because I don’t know anyone with a chronic pain condition who deals with it easily. If there is one, I am definitely not that person. But I don’t know how to explain that to her and I don’t know if I want to. I’ll always be queer but that doesn’t mean that I won’t end up in what looks like a heterosexual relationship at some point. That’s what my mom was really asking me about. So I told her that I’m gay. I suppose that’s more clearly lying because I’m bisexual but I wasn’t sure at the time and I don’t think the language of ambiguity is one that she would understand. I know that she’ll ask the same thing about my autism and I’ll say that I am autistic and I’ve always been autistic and I’ll always be autistic.

When she asked if it was her fault that I was sick it was really a lot of questions rolled into one. Chronic pain conditions like mine are often triggered by physical and emotional trauma. This is something she found out while googling the things that my first doctor told me I might have. When she called me back an hour later and asked me if it was her fault what she was really asking was “Are you sick because we were poor?”, “Are you sick because we were homeless?”, “Are you sick because school was stressful?”, “Are you sick because I was in jail for so long?”, and so many other variations of “Are you sick because I screwed up too much?” I didn’t know that answer to those questions then and I don’t know now. Illness is complicated and growing up is complicated and I know that if I let myself be truly angry about my body or ruly angry about my childhood then that anger could easily destroy me.

When she asked me if it was her fault that I’m gay, the answer was easier. I could firmly say no. I don’t think that the way that I was raised had anything to do with my queerness and even if it did, I wouldn’t be mad about it. I’m glad that I’m queer and if that has to do with my parents screwing up, well, at least something good came out of that nonsense. But when she asks if she made me autistic, I’m not sure exactly what I’ll say. I’m not autistic because I was vaccinated. I’m not autistic because I was homeschooled for 3 years. I might be autistic because of genetics. I don’t know. Autism isn’t something that I’m grateful for like I am for my queerness but it’s not something that’s awful like chronic pain. Often I don’t like my hypersensitivity to sound, light, texture, and taste. I don’t like my inability to tell if people are being genuine. I don’t like how much difficulty sensory processing issues and social deficiencies added to my childhood. But I like that I can remember birthdays. Sometimes I like that I have an abundance of empathy, even if it’s not cognitive empathy. I like that I’m almost always on time.

Ultimately, I don’t want to hate any parts of myself and my autistic traits are intrinsically a part of who I am. The way that I experience illness, autism and queerness are different from one another because they add different meanings to my life. Chronic pain is something that I’m actively trying to make go away because it adds suffering, my queerness is something that I’m actively embracing because it adds love, and my autism is something that just is me. All of these aspects of myself are hard to explain to people. I definitely didn’t adequately explain them here. I’m not sure if I really want or need to explain them fully. The coming out process is long and exhausting. Sometimes it feels like my mom will always think that I’m something I’m not. Sometimes I feel like everyone will always think that I’m so many things that I’m not.

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lost

Aiden Merris

I ran home,
   drunk beneath the stars.
Ran far from the lights in my head,
   where the trees hugged the sky
      and vines fell like rain.
Ran from the corners in your mouth,
   where the eyes peered eagerly
      from every doorway.
And the evergreens loomed above me
   like the ghosts you believed in.
And I felt so close to the sound,
   but I will not see
   a world without your hands
   playing tricks with my eyes.

movement

Olivia Turner

I could feel
   eyelashes brushing the sand from my neck
      and making castles in the tranquil night.
Then the day came through the winter
   with its timid tail tucked between its legs.
I could make out 501 eyes
   protruding from lilac windows.
And I told you:
   I’m not losing you
      to the wolves that roam outside.
I’m not done
   with your hands in mine.
I’m not done
   with your marble,
      with the tiger between your legs.
I’m not done fixing your ribs.
And I spoke to you with sticky hands fervently:
   I will be there with you
      when you turn out the light.
I was thinking yesterday
If what I see as red
Is what you perceive as red
Because when I see red,
I see a different world
I see numbers
Dancing across my periphery
Radiating Warmth and Hunger
Power and Passion
Anger and Lust
To stand out strong and resilient like a foot soldier
Pairing up with white and blue
A proud patriot with a lion’s heart
And when I see red
I see the Californian sun sinking
Deep into the depths of a tropical world
Far beneath the world we know
I see the crimson cream spread
Suddenly, but slowly
Patiently waiting to fall
Into the marrow of the sea
Watching the beautiful ball of fire
Spill blood onto the canvas of the sky
When I see red
I am a shark
With great white knives as teeth
Buried deep in the pink of gums
I can taste the salt of the ocean
Just like a yearning woman
I taste the sea of life
Everything is prey
I can devour every animal in vicious yearning
I can feel my muscles constricting
Pushing against the water like it is nothing
I can smell fear
White hot in your stomach
When I see red
I see a rose
Just that
A single rose
Petals glistening from the fall rain
Scarlet and open
Layers waiting to be peeled open
By my calloused hands
Waiting to be presented to a timid girl
By a shy boy
A rose with thorns so sharp
They feel like razor blades
And must be snipped with gloved hands
When I see red
I am my father’s rage
Boiling in the center of the universe
An alcoholic’s anger
Brimming at the surface
Of the still lake of my home
Screaming at my mother
My rock, my anchor
And I swear to the God I don’t believe in
I’ll cut his goddamn throat
If her ever lays a hand on her
But he doesn’t
And I still see red
And I still taste red
queer visibility: 

The Dilemanna of the Pacific Northwest

Lindsey Conrad

I’ve been thinking a lot about what it means to “look queer” lately. While working over Spring Break with a friend who is also queer, she remarked how difficult it is to pinpoint what being queer looks like in the Pacific Northwest, and how this difficulty is both confusing and frequently results in awkward situations of misreading people. I remarked that I usually just assume everyone is queer unless they tell me otherwise, because I’m trying to be less complicit in assumed heterosexuality in people I don’t know. Still, most people I read as queer are actually straight, which frequently puts me in awkward situations where I say some smartass remark about straight people and am met with silence.

While some of my misreading of people stems from my active effort of refusing to assume heterosexuality, a lot of it stems from how I conceptualize queer fashion. The latter was true for my friend as well. This conversation had me thinking about what being queer looks like, which is such a difficult thing to pinpoint because queer aesthetic is so closely tied to geography + intersectionality. What it means for me to “look queer” is inherently different from how a queer person of color living in Texas might conceptualize queerness. While online queer media provides some continuity between regions in the US, the nitty gritty of “looking queer” changes from locale to locale, and even from social circle to social circle.

I thought of my time in Boston, before I transferred to Puget Sound. Within my university there, we did this thing called ‘femme flagging’ as a way to queer femininity by relocating it in a specifically queer and/or trans context. For my friend as well. This conversation had me thinking about queerness, she responded with “well that would be really useful, when I told my friend about the concept of femme flagging as I was thinking about what being queer looks like in the Pacific Northwest, and how this difficulty is not the way in which queerness is manifested on campus. It’s clearly missed in its “top ten lesbian-friendly cities” chart.

The ways in which I conceptualized queer aesthetic are clearly not the way in which queerness is manifested on campus. It’s also interesting to me that other queer people have had similar experiences with not being able to pinpoint a queer aesthetic in the PNW. I haven’t been able to remedy this clashing of culture, so I’m left trying to figure out how I’m supposed to know who is queer and who is not while living in a city where flannels are trendy. I’m not trying to say that there is anything problematic with the clashing of queer aesthetic and PNW fashion trends, just that I’m trying to locate some sort of way to be visible without having to verbally out myself all the time (I think my haircut helped with that). Ultimately, this confusion over visibility creates a shared experience of many queer people I know; because when I told my friend about the concept of femme flagging as visibility, she responded with “well that would be really useful, because my ‘gaydar’ is fucked” and I couldn’t agree more with her.

*femme denotes a variety of non-heterosexual femininities, typically as a way to queer femininity by relocating it in a specifically queer and/or trans context.
An Undercut of One’s Own:
Potential Markers of Queerness in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Elaine Stamp

Feeling a set of clippers buzz against your head for the first time is incredibly exhilarating. It’s also scary as hell. When I first got my undercut in the winter of my sophomore year, the stylist initially had no idea what I was talking about. After I explained, she hefted the clippers in her hand, looked askance at me, and asked one more time: “You want me to shave your head?” I laughed and told her yes. She gave a small shrug as if to say it’s your head, pal but went ahead with it. I thought I was going to jump out of my skin as she began. As I saw a sheaf of my hair drop to my lap before flouncing to the floor, I understood what an undercut would actually mean in terms of openly displaying parts of my identity that wouldn’t otherwise be visible.

But, when I’m asked about queerness in Albuquerque my first thought isn’t about undercut; instead, I’ve noticed that markers usually fall along racial and class lines. “Do you know what a cholo is?” is a question that I’ve asked before to contextualize markers in relation to another style from my hometown. Most people don’t know the answer, although I’ve noticed some patterns in who recognizes the term. That is, while some people from south LA know what I’m talking about, Minnesota folks often give me a shrug and shake their heads.

In Albuquerque, I saw distinct patterns in styles among people who I knew didn’t identify as straight. Queer women of color especially tended to adopt the masculine cholo look that manifested as large baggy shirts that went to their knees or lower. They wore kicks like AirJordan or Nike and they slicked their hair back into a bun or a ponytail that didn’t have a single hair out of place. Alternatively, I knew people who opted for a flat-brimmed lid that was either fitted or a snapback. I saw a lot of queer people of color wear this style in my high school and as a result my first models of non-heteronormative style fell along racial lines. I was in awe; they walked tall in a high school that hosted racist and homophobic students who made their presence known through vandalism. The hard swagger of these women and femme folks impressed me immensely, especially at the time in my life when I crept through school as I struggled to stop hating myself for “not being able to make up my mind” as a bisexual woman.

As much as I admired them, however, I never adopted the same fashion. I’m not Latina or Native and didn’t feel like I could have worn those styles. Accordingly, I was left to figure out how I wanted to code my own conceptualization of queerness. After looking at a lot of fashion blogs in high school, I was exposed to a lot of undercuts and thought more seriously about getting one. Being mired in my insecurities about my identity, however, led me to think I couldn’t “rock” it. Further, there was another anxiety about letting everyone understand my identity since, in my experience, anyone rocking a combination of shorn hair and medium to long hair was considered queer, period. The implications of broadcasting my identity like that -- everything from getting looks, to hearing people whisper, to the threat of violence -- necessitated a process of trying to let go of my anxieties to do something that a big part of me wanted to do.

So when I was sitting in that stylist's chair, watching strands of hair that I’d been growing and cutting for the past nineteen years fall to the floor, I knew that I was instantly painting myself as queer in the ‘Burque. But I had gotten to a point where I was comfortable with that. I liked it. Rather, I like it. When I first got it done, I wore my hair up constantly and I ended up getting designs shaved into the undercut when I went abroad. In other situations, though, I actively changed readings of myself as queer. I learned to obscure the shorn part by re-parting my hair and leaving the longer strands brushed over. It’s what I do at my summer job in a law office to be read as straight, a tactic that I know many other people deploy for fear of losing their jobs or facing other forms of workplace discrimination.

Overall, trying to navigate queerness was confusing when I first got here. Everyone wore flannel. Everyone wore Birkenstocks. Everyone drove Subarus. I didn’t get it. Ultimately, though, I realized that it was just another language to learn. I grew up understanding the meanings of one dialect of queer fashion; coming here gave me a certain measure of fluency in another. As I leave here, I’m looking forward to the chance to learn another language and I mark myself to other queer people as someone who loves a love that dare not speak its name.
I knew I wasn’t in love
when I realized kissing him
would ruin my lipstick.
Makeup unscathed driving down
the I-5 freeway, I listened
to an old friend from the stereo
tell me I was better
than the silence I had felt
under his bed sheets
for two months waiting
to remember
the flickering stars at the end of the road
like light bulbs near burnt out
that told me he would be the last one.
I never felt normal.

High school, I never felt normal. Not quite, anyway.

I always felt like I wasn’t fully included.

I was out as bi from the beginning of 8th grade instead of 8th. My being out continued immediately into high school, as I was open from day 1 instead of 1 about it. I thought it wouldn’t have mattered so much by junior or senior year, but alas: even then, I had conflicting feelings about myself that I attributed at least partially to my non-heterosexuality. Part of this was questioning which label I better fit: was I bi, or gay? By the middle of senior year, I determined that I am actually gay, and openly identified as such thenceforth. But change but to though that was not the greatest of my struggles.

Whether I identified as bi or gay, there were some who never could quite who could never quite wrap their head around this, it seemed. Looking back now, that doesn’t shock me at all, but I was troubled at the time by that, and by other things, including one other component of my social life:

There were these (straight) guys in my grade who sometimes poked fun at my being gay by pretend-flirting with me. I learned very quickly that this was joking around, or at least I did initially, logically speaking. Emotionally, I was almost desperate to form deeper, more enjoyable human connections. Thus, there was always some part of me that hoped that they weren’t entirely joking around. (I’m still not sure to this day if they’re exclusively heterosexual, but that’s besides the point.)

I did have friends in high school, but no matter what I did, I never had truly change to truly had close, best friends. I never completely felt like part of a group like everyone else. I was always somewhat quirky, and quite unusual, but I learned to be quite sociable nonetheless. (I was always certain that I wasn’t like anyone. Of course, we were all unique in our own ways, but I especially stood out.)

I never belonged.

So I had a tendency to take things literally more often than I “should have.” I was honest and willing to talk about several things that others around me had trouble even beginning to discuss. There were several other quirks that I had that also made me stand out.

It wouldn’t be until March 14, 2015 (the ultimate pi day of the 21st century!) that I would know that I am on the autistic spectrum. Finally! An explanation for my quirks and unique troubles and difficulties with executive functioning! (The executive functioning piece is another piece altogether that I won’t go into now…)

I always did know that I was different, of course. Now I understand that I was acting as a sort of hybrid, stuck in a liminal space between “the norm” and understanding and acceptance of who I really was. Little did I know that I was a neurotypical guy trying his best to live in a neurotypical world.

So here I am today, now realizing that I must do my best as a neurodivergent person to thrive in a world where the grand majority is neurotypical. Granted, that doesn’t mean I should try to camouflage as neurotypical; it simply means that I have key differences in how I function from most other people. I can’t just act completely naturally, but I can’t act completely artificially. This is where the chorus of my absolute favorite song comes into the picture, guiding me:

A hybrid can withstand these things
My heart can beat with bricks and strings
My ARTPOP could mean anything
We could, we could belong together
My ARTPOP, in this case, is my entire being.
I can do this. I can live a good life, even if there are difficulties.

And maybe someday, I can finally belong.
drowning in my period

Emma Erler

This piece is meant to illustrate the monthly phenomenon of menstruation. Cycles are fundamentally paradoxical—fixed, yet dynamic. I represent juxtaposition in the permanence and unpredictable nature of the ocean. I created this collage to express the sensation of drowning in whatever side effects may accompany one's period.
"Your body is not an apology."
It is every miracle.
It is the flame on top of a cancer patient’s last birthday cake.
Your body is not a wish, it is the shooting star.
Your body is peace. It is the end to war.
Your body is the answer to the question Life poses.
It is every single fantasy come to life.
It shows me all that is true.
Everything that is magic.
It is a prayer. It is a sacred text.
Your body is a capital B. It is the divine.
It is religious. It is spiritual. It is my Bible. It is my Torah. It is my Qur’an.
And the scary part is, I’m not even religious.
I am not body positive, I am body honest. And your body is honesty. Your body is the truest form of beauty. I find no deception in your skin.
Your body is an experience.
One that I want to share with you, that I want to cherish and never forget.
Your body is desire.
Your body is a poem.
I want to read it every day, I want to memorize it.
I want to close my eyes and recite it. I want to feel it when there’s nothing left to feel.
Your body is an oasis. It is the sun at the end of forever.
Even when I go blind from your body’s light, I will fall deeper in love with the sacred prayers your goose bumps will have printed in Braille. I get lost in your body’s promises and forget that the world is a failed mosaic. That we do not fit in the world’s frame.
Your body is the big bang. Fuck its theory, your body is proof.
Your body is heaven. It is the galaxy. It is the entire universe.
I don’t need scripture, or formulas, or evidence; your body has every reason for me to believe.
Your body is Queer and the most comfortable thing to me.
He called me a Dirty Slut
Whispered “Cunt” in my ear
As his fingers gripped tighter around my throat
And I spanked him
Because I thought that is what it meant to feel
Sexy
I didn’t say stop
Just bit harder
Until both our bodies were a collage of black and blue
I didn’t feel
Sexy
When the word Whore got painted on my body by a tongue
Normally so soft and sweet
He pulled my hair until my head was stretched so far
Back
Prepped for decapitation
Dehumanized
And I slapped him harder
Because I needed to feel
Sexy
If power comes from the strength of my nails
Ripping into your skin
[Then call me a god]
A vessel of an empowered woman
Is this what sexy feels like?
Because as he pushed inside me
I saw rage burning in hollowed eyes
And I became a vessel for his hate and anguish
A cavern to be filled with
Someone else’s pain
I didn’t say stop
When he called me a dirty slut
Instead I pushed harder inside of him
Lay my naked body out as his canvas
A sacrifice
Because I have been taught to treat my body like public property
Gardens and yards are tended to more carefully than
My skin
I didn’t say no or stop because you took away my words with your
Tongues and fingernails
And all I wanted was to
Feel
Sexy
~~~
That same night you kissed every inch of my skin
As if they were jewels
Fell asleep
Your head in my hand
My palms supported your body
Held you as you fell in and out of dreams
Wrapped languid limbs around each other
We were tangled
And together
And maybe lost, but warm in our embraces
If a Dirty Slut is who
You cradle and clasp, kiss and hold
Then I must be a Whore
But I’d rather be a Frigid Prude alone in my bed
Then your Cunt
Intimacy

He grabs my body like it’s his last night on earth
With both of his hands on each of my ass cheeks
He squeezes them with enough force
To release me from
My state of wondering
If he’s wishing I was someone else
It’s funny
Because although I’m no mind reader
I know his ego is hard at work
Imagining that I’m laying in his arms
And falling in love

Sometimes I think I am
Until I remind myself that
I have a habit of confusing my feelings of love with
Clitoral stimulation

I like fucking him because I know that at our cores
We’re just two empty bodies
It’s both satisfying and
Disheartening to know that
He doesn’t give a damn about me
But the truth is
Love is not what I’m looking for
If I wanted love I would be back in an ex’s arms
Receiving stale kisses and meaningful looks
And I don’t want it at all

I need indifference
I need silent conversations followed by
Quickies in your bed
I need the thrill of secrecy and
Everything else that follows

I know you think I’m falling for you
But that’s because you don’t know me at all
And you don’t know me at all because
I don’t want you to

So don’t let the silence that follows
Be an indicator of deeper thought
Don’t confuse your arms around me as
Intimacy
I’m just here to commiserate in emptiness and
I don’t need the fringe and tassels
Of dressed up words
I just need your empty body next to mine
safe, sane, consensual

Anonymous

a tear hangs in the corner of your eye,  
I lust for your dismemberment—  
and like a bulb that almost blooms,  
I'm bursting through my skin

I lust for your dismemberment,  
with whispers of worship on my lips—  
I’m bursting through my skin,  
as a burning cry swells in my lungs

with whispers of worship on my lips,  
Our bodies defile the star-lined sky—  
as a burning cry swells in my lungs,  
Your pain imbues my core with bliss

Our bodies defile the star-lined sky,  
indulging careful agony—  
Your pain imbues my core with bliss,  
with rapture screaming through my bones

indulging careful agony,  
Your being shivers, rips, and roars—  
with rapture screaming through my bones,  
Our flesh and blood evaporate

Your being shivers, rips, and roars,  
as an eminence I won’t surmount—  
Our flesh and blood evaporate,  
in tender violence and ecstasy.

*’Safe, Sane, Consensual’ is a term from the BDSM community.*
the stereotypical man

Brandon Antonio Smith

A man chomps on T-bone steaks daily,
And slurps from cans of beer,
Screaming at the TV screen on Sundays
Whenever a football game is on.
He does not suggest sitting
In a circle, sharing fruit.
A man lifts the heaviest of weights
To sculpt his body into
A solid, rocky structure.
Anything less of him is pathetic.
He dominates women regularly,
And does not fret over them,
Nor does he write
Poetry, sing, or dance.
A man is not vulnerable,
He thinks of himself as
An indestructible machine.
A man’s palms
Are rugged,
Never are they
Placed on his hips.
He refuses to curl up
In bed out of gloom.
A man always takes initiative.
He possesses infallible
Expertise of how to
Maintain automobiles.
A man’s beard,
Not the hair
On his head,
Is thick and long.
He is obstreperous,
And strikes without question
In an altercation, intent on
Inflicting as much pain as possible.
He never walks
Away from a fight.
No mercy is spared
For a perceived
Enemy or opponent.
A man does not fear
Anything, but God.
Introduction: Conversations with Michael Benitez

In order to get the details on University of Puget Sound’s Sexual Misconduct Policy reform process, we sat down with Title IX Coordinator and Chief Diversity Officer Michael Benitez who explained the relationship between Title IX and the reforms, as well as the importance of a clear and approachable sexual misconduct report procedure.

Colleges are being investigated

Beginning in 2014, United States colleges have been investigated regarding their sexual misconduct policy as the standards for policies are becoming higher and the current procedures are recognized as inefficient and harmful to students. The importance of policy, the reporting process, and its accessibility is insurmountable. 1 in 5 women are sexually assaulted in universities, but few of these cases are reported. Therefore, it remains incredibly important to make the reporting process as accessible and comfortable as possible. Having a coherent and approachable Sexual Misconduct Policy is a large part of this process. One of the reasons educational institutions are being investigated is because they are being found to be in violation of Title IX policies. Some schools that are being investigated include Washington State University, Occidental College, University of Chicago, Amherst College, and Sarah Lawrence College; but there are over 90 schools currently being investigated. The emergence of these investigations, Benitez points out, “gives us a chance to address it, and at UPS it gives us a chance to demonstrate how well we’re doing given our limited resources and limited human capacity.” Therefore, it is part of Benitez’s role to ensure that we remain off of this list.

Explanation of Title IX

Title IX states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Title IX Statute, 1972). Since University of Puget Sound receives federal finances, it falls under the laws of Title IX and is required to maintain them. All programs associated with federal institutions must also follow the laws of Title IX, and these include sports, higher education, career education, education for pregnant and parenting students -- as well as separate sections on abortion, employment, learning environment, math and science, sexual harassment, standardized testing and technology. Benitez spoke with us about how Title IX “extends far back and has evolved over time.” In fact, due to the nature of changing understandings of sexual misconduct, it has had over 20 amendment revisions and reviews (DOJ, 2000). The Office for Civil Rights and the United States Department of Education are two institutions tasked with coordinating Title IX within U.S. universities, in addition to contacting universities with how the sexual misconduct procedure should occur.

Our Sexual Misconduct Policy and Problems

Puget Sound’s sexual misconduct policy begins with a statement explaining that any action conducted by or within the University must be free from discrimination “on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, age, disability, marital or familial status, sexual orientation, veteran or military status, gender identity or any characteristic that is legally protected under applicable local, state or federal law.” An important component of our policy is its universal applicability across all members of campus. This means that students, staff, and faculty are all subject to the same policies, procedures, and sanctions regarding sexual misconduct. In talking with Title IX Coordinator, Michael Benitez, we learned that the bulk of our sexual misconduct policy is informed by federal man-
dates related to Title IX. One of the key components of compliance with federal regulations is the maintenance of parity in dealing with sexual misconduct complaints. Parity means treating both the complainant and respondent equally and fairly, regardless of the severity of the allegations, until due processes allow a complete investigation.

As of late, students have raised concerns that our sexual misconduct policy may be flawed or outdated, and should be reexamined by administrators. The most recent revision to the document was made in 2008, over six years ago. According to Benitez, revisions to the overall content of the policy are unlikely, because it is heavily based on federally mandated standards. Possible revisions will more likely address the clarity of the document, and address problematic wording.

“We have a pretty thorough one actually, is it perfect? No. Does it cover what it needs to in a proactive way? Absolutely. Does it make clear what needs to be clear? Yes, but in very legalish jargon, and that’s what I find problematic about it. And that’s one of the things that we’re going to be revisiting. And that’s why I started the Sexual Gender Violence Committee, before that we had SAWG, Sexual Assault Working Group, when I came in I said [it was] great, but it wasn’t an institution wide formal committee, so [I created] a committee in getting together every month and examining issues of procedures and issues of programming.” - Benitez

Along with this, students attended forums on the sexual misconduct policy and expressed concern that the current wording of the complaint procedure section of the University’s sexual misconduct policy is weak and outdated in several respects. First, the section is addressed at “anyone who perceives himself or herself …to be a victim of sexual misconduct,” effectively alienating students or faculty who identify as Non Binary. Other schools, such as Lewis and Clark, make use of more inclusive language, (e.g. “all individuals…”). Benitez noted that: “It engages the language in very binary ways. It’s ‘he’ or ‘she.’ If that’s coming from the top-down, say we have something that would be considered sexual or gender violence but it’s with maybe same sex partnerships, or transgender people, then it makes it that much more complex not to define it, but to categorize it as that type of thing.” The parties involved in the sexual misconduct reporting procedure are referred to in the document as the complainant and the respondent. Students have expressed concern with this wording, on the basis that the term “complainant” is stigmatizing for victims, as they are likely to be in a volatile emotional state after an assault has occurred, and should not be made to feel that they are complaining in any way.

Another potential deficit students have highlighted in Puget Sound’s complaint procedure is its somewhat narrow focus on campus resources. Other schools’ policies encourage students to pursue legal action, in tandem with complaints to the University’s administration. While the choice to contact law enforcement is ultimately the victim’s, the option should be established as a central component of the process. The severity of sexual assault may be undermined by the lack of legal options within the policy.

Our policy also includes a section regarding “informal” alternatives to resolving sexual misconduct concerns without engaging in the formal complaint process. While this section is intended to empower victims by encouraging them to seek autonomy by resolving their harassment interpersonally, its content is ridiculous. One such “informal” route to resolution advised by the policy states: “Leave a copy of this Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and Sexual Misconduct on the harasser’s desk and highlight the part that describes what he or she is doing to you.” Most harassment victims would find the idea of entering the personal bedroom of the perpetrator to provide them with informative literature objectionable, if not downright disturbing. Another nugget of advice offered by informal procedure section advises “Don’t smile at the harasser. Don’t look down or away. Stare right back.” These suggestions are offensive, largely nonsensical, and undermine the professionalism and credibility demonstrated by the rest of the policy. They also position the victim as partially or fully responsible for their abuse, which is abhorrent because the victim is never at fault. A full list of the suggested informal procedures can be found in Appendix D of the policy.
Reform Procedures/Processes of Title IX

The reform process of the Sexual Misconduct Policy is not an easy process. Benitez explained how he first receives suggestions from the federal government, but that they are riddled with ambiguous language like our own sexual misconduct policy. “We basically get these recommendations down from Office of Civil Rights (OCR) but it doesn’t say this is what it has to be, it’s all ‘this is what we highly suggest,’” Benitez describes. He goes on to say, “none of it is really all that firm, the definitions are firm, and that’s important. But that’s what makes this so complex and so nuanced and why it’s so important that we always stay on top of it because there’s nothing that really says ‘this is how it has to be.’” So we kind of pick and choose, then it gets to my role.” When Benitez comes in, he has to look through all the lengthy suggestions and adapt it to our own campus, “that means examining, assessing, especially around title IX, there’s something coming out every month, every two months. I have to break it down, construct it... and then report back to the senior cabinet.” Even when all these jumps are done, it’s still not over. “Our policy has been vetted through legal counsel. It goes through trustees, cabinet, council. They look at it and say this is good or bad,” Benitez explains. Therefore, “policy is dictated by the trustees...it goes through shared governance, so we have to put it on the agenda, [it] has to be discussed, and the trustees look at all that and the trustee process - the board trustees is basically our governing body, the folks that the president reports to.” All of this comes down to an incredibly time consuming process when these staff members do not have only this one issue to deal with. That is why reform is not as easy as we’d like it to be.

Reform Proc. of Title IX

Reforms at Our School and Student Forums

Throughout the 2014-2015 year, there have been efforts to reform the Sexual Misconduct Policy. While a ‘perfect policy’ is unlikely, it is important to recognize the efforts to make it approachable for students. Student voices have also been included in this reform process through two separate forums that were open to the campus community. In these forums, conduct procedures were introduced, and students were given a copy of the sexual misconduct policy. They were then separated into smaller groups with a staff member facilitating questions for each group, and a volunteer scribing. The facilitators only asked questions, as the goal of these forums was to figure out what questions student had. Benitez thinks this process is important “because it provided us insight into student’s sense of thinking through policy and impact and into thinking how their lives are situated through this policy.” In these small groups, students were able to have a safe space to talk about the problems they thought were inherent in the policy. Not only do these types of forums facilitate greater conversation and bring awareness to sexual misconduct, but they create an inclusive and transparent environment.

Education programs: Training, Education and Awareness

The University of Puget Sound offers programs that help raise awareness on sexual assault, such as trainings, education, and awareness programs. Students have access to support such as the Assistant Dean of Students, Peer Allies, the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Summit, the Sexual and Gender Violence Committee, and Speak Up. Peer Allies is a club on campus that is comprised of a small group of students who facilitate office hours in Gail Day Chapel. Their mission statement is: “We are a support network of students that hold weekly office hours to provide an opportunity for survivors of sexual violence or harassment who may have felt powerless to talk, be heard, and be believed, as well as provide information to survivors in a safe space and other resources both on and off campus.” Green Dot is a bystander intervention training, with an abbreviated version during orientation week. Students can complete the full Green Dot Bystander Training at various times throughout the year, in order to understand and practice various methods of bystander intervention. In addition, there are increasing efforts for faculty and staff to undergo relevant trainings, including new faculty training, departmental training, new staff orientation, professional development of-
ferings, and online tutorials for faculty, staff, and student employees. The Clery Act, most recently revised to the Campus SaVE Act in 2013, is a law that helps protect students from sexual violence and harassment. Three priorities under the act are to facilitate prevention and awareness programs, which inform students, faculty, and staff on the prevention of different forms of harassment, including rape, acquaintance rape, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. In addition, the Clery Act assesses the success rate of prevention and awareness programs. It consists of a number of requirements, including the necessity for “college and universities to adopt and publish policies and procedures on reporting sex offenses, information of victim’s rights, and the institution’s disciplinary process” (Lex Collegii, 2014). There is a distinction between Title IX, The Clery Act, and the SaVE Act. While Title IX and the Clery Act work towards being “reactive” to sexual violence, on the other hand, the SaVE Act situates itself by being more “proactive” to a case of sexual violence (Lex Collegii, 2014).

Campus Resources: Who To Report To

In the case of an incident of sexual assault or harassment, a student has several campus resources to consult. These sources include the Dean of Students Office, Residence Life staff, Counseling, Health and Wellness Services, The Office of Intercultural Engagement, University Chaplain, faculty members, Academic Vice President’s Office, Human Resources, Chief Diversity Officer, and Faculty Ombudsperson. In terms of local law enforcement, students have the option to report to Tacoma Police after they experience an incident of sexual assault or harassment. Another potential resource on campus is Todd Badham, the head of Puget Sound’s Security Services, who can be there to help facilitate the process of reporting an incident. As Michael Benitez said, there are many intricacies when reporting to the police years after an incident occurred:

“If a student experiences something during his or her freshman year, they could come their senior year and say hey you know three years ago I experienced a, b, and c, and I didn’t have the courage to maybe before. Or, I was hesitant for whatever reason, but now I’m empowered and I feel like I could come out...and share this. It matters to us. But the statute of limitations for Tacoma Police is over...so if something happened three years ago, there’s nothing Tacoma Police can do about it.”

In addition to local resources in the Tacoma area, there are national resources available for students. The Federal Government Q&A is a policy guidance that works with the White House report that answers frequent questions regarding colleges’ responsibilities under Title IX. Another governmental resource is Not Alone, which contains useful information for both colleges and students themselves who have experienced assault. It’s On Us is a public-service campaign that “urges more people -- especially young men -- to identity risks of sexual assault and intervene”. Know Your IX is a national movement headed by self-identified survivors, which encourages colleges and students to improve policies, federal complaints, and lobbying for legislative change.

Conclusion

With the gracious help from Puget Sound’s Dean for Inclusion and Diversity, Michael Benitez, we learned more about Puget Sound’s Sexual Misconduct Policy and the potential changes that are in the process of being made. We learned that our school’s policy is cross-checked with new releases of federal suggestions, in order to ensure that it is in compliance with regulation. While our policy is thorough and effective, there still exist a number of problems, brought to light by the student body and Title IX Coordinator Benitez, most having to do with the document’s clarity and wording. With the additional attention the policy has been receiving as of late, we hope that members of the campus community will take the time to review the document for themselves, and that any problematic components will be reexamined and revised by administration in the near future.

*Sources can be found online at: www.wetlands magazine.com
I don't mind sharing my bed but I
do not like sharing you
passing you around like a bottle and
everyone's spit is mixing together, forming
bubbles
and I will not take any more drinks out of you
I want you poured in a glass all to myself
we stay up till five just talking
like stupid kids that like the sounds of our
own voices
and I know this is not special this is not rare
but you are here more often than you are not
it is cliché to say we were meant to happen
I was a hurricane looking for a landfall
and you were standing out in the rain
you cup my body in your hands like
I am sink water and you want to wash your
face
I ask if you are like this with other girls and
you say no and it's the kind of lie that feels
so fucking good I want to hear it again and
again and
again and again
and I do
we don't talk about what it means when you
go
on google maps and check how far it is from
my house to yours – up and down the Califor-
nia coast
only seven hours, you said
we don't talk about the fact that we
talk about the future like it is already ours
we avoid that shit like sunlight, the only time
you
see me is from midnight till morning and then
maybe
the next night if you’re not 6 inches deep in
the girl
from your calc class that touched your arm
and said
I love your tattoos they’re so cool
you like the dumb ones
I am not dumb
it has gotten to the point where my friends
are yelling at me ten minutes before you
come over
they say he's going to hurt you
they say I'm going to come out of this bleed-
ing
and blushing
and bruised
I tell them to fuck off and I answer the door
in my underwear
it has not been that long but you
have a toothbrush here
a towel here
want a drawer here
and your jacket has been in my room for 2
weeks
it is collateral
it means you have to come back
and I know I was not supposed to want to
love another boy
that only held my hand under the sheets
but something makes me want to scream
this is different
it's the way you hold onto me when we're
sleeping like
you are going to drown if you let go
it's the bruises on my thighs in the shape of
your mouth
when you bite down too hard but I don't say
stop
please someone confirm that
this is different
it has not been that long but
this is the seventh time I have tried
to write about the way you touch me
I am not trying to love you I am only trying to
make you love me
when we are fucking on the floor
and you stick your fingers in my mouth
kiss my forehead a million times
it is sex with a body that feels like a home
we are rubbing our wrists together
trying to start a flame

this is different
Shanna Williams as spoken word
Jeanne-Marie Joubert

One Liners

I wish I didn't give you my last bacon.

I saw you on a scooter today and all I could do was laugh.
“When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from restless dreams, he found himself, in his bed, to have been transformed into a monstrous vermin.” -Franz Kafka

In the Land of the Fae, God is immanent enunciation. Neuro-technical firing signals give rise to material simulacra, flowing flows of movement in network conjunctions that wax and wane in arcane cycles that reflect a sense more of automatism than will. In the time-space known as Meat and Circuitry, my corpse lies slumped over a desk, lividity staining the tip of the nose and the lips, parted as in shock or mendication, a rich purple-blue. A fly, a rare lifeform assumed to be extinct until the archeological excavation of an ancient landfill released several million of the short-lived insects into the open air to breed, hovers briefly above the body before alighting upon the input implants on the back of the neck, where the deteriorating flesh has begun to slough away from the metal. I am in neither of these places.

I wish here to leave a record of how this fragmentary miracle occurred, and yet it shall be an undertaking, for there are holes in the data where some of my organic memories used to be. I shall have to learn, as do stones and children, to remember. My face is filling with blood, turning red. “Acid makes me feel that way, somatically,” I reply.

What I mean to say is, I am in a sort of technoviral limbo. I have transcended the meat, yet failed to break through the software. To buy time, I sigh artificially. “It’s more like an intellectual release—is it for access to the Void. Sturm und Drang, whispers something quite inaudible. I do not remember what it is that answers my call. There is a great fog around my memory here. I remember the sensation of falling for a very long time before seeming to float in empty space. I remember a long-forgotten melody floating through my awareness, ethereal and discomfiting. I remember feeling as though each of internal structures was shifting slightly. I don’t remember seeing anything. When I forget my sight, I can remember more.

I want to scream, or at least to moan, because something unbearable is happening to me. The melody grows louder until it becomes a white-hot mesh over the extent of my sensation, glowing blue, my awareness as impossible tactility metamorphoses into synaesthetic visual input. I want to thrash the net off, but I have no motor sensation, nor, indeed, any sensation of corporeal boundary. A twig breaks, a snapping noise, and the fine mesh of blue burning inscribes itself steadily deeper. The more I accept the sensation and give in to it, the deeper it goes—as if I could hold off the advance of the burning by will alone, hold it in one place forever—until at last, I simply become the sensation. I am screaming eternity. I am become such pain, as though my cells are turning to wires and circuits. The release is blissful; memories remain, but there is none of me left. Elated, I spiral off into a space that I can no longer distinguish from my body.

And yet, my consciousness remains tethered to spatial awareness. Though I do not feel as though I have a separate form from my surroundings, I cannot seem to permeate them as I would like to. I simply engage in a temporospatially dictated manner of perception. I have no sense of connection to my body whatsoever. This does not concern me for the present. I want to know what I am capable of. I float through fine network grids and connection mainlines, assessing. I am carried by a sense of familiarity to the access point for my psychoregulation program. I absorb into the room created out of a sensitivity to the expectations I had when I designed it. The room seems crude to me, like something drawn by a young human bearing clumsy crayon-strokes. A faint nostalgia repulses me. I am reminded of churning stomachs, but cannot place a sensation. Already, I am haunted by phantoms of a body that never wanted to be. I distract myself from this new source of irritation by turning my attention to the grey-clad avatar that acted as my program interface. “Morty,” I try to say, but nothing resembling simulated sound leaves or enters my awareness. The avatar does not respond, but continues to sit, vacant and motionless. I no longer have a voice with which to activate a program designed to engage human sensoria. I try to pull at him, but still, I have no sense of motor function, or of a form at all. Desperate, I try to inhabit the space the avatar sits in, but succeed only in achieving an approximation of what the avatar’s visual input system might be.
registering. I try to sink downward, to feel the spiraling streams of data that shift and whirl beneath the surface of the simulacrum, but I am blind, so blind, and I cannot touch a thing. It occurs to me that I have become a ghost.

Unable to engage with the ambient software, I float towards where I know my body lies connected to my processing unit. I look out through the visual capture system, and I can see my body lying face-down on the desk in front of the unit. I am filled with a sudden panic; I have realized that I am faced with an irreparable loss. Frantic, yet in a dream-like state of floating, I try gently to probe the connections between the processing unit and the plugs in my neck. Nothing happens. I try to force my way into the connection, one last attempt to get back inside of what is mine. A cracking of electricity leaps between the wires and the plugs. The body spasms once, twice, without rhythm, and is still. The memory of the scent of burning meat permeates my awareness. I am beyond belief. If I ever had even the slightest chance of going back, it was surely destroyed now.

I want to weep and rage, yet I remain silent and ineffectual. Shut out of the Meat, I summon before me theaternity of the Fae Realm, and beg to be released into its infinitesimally winding, writhing embrace. I think that I can hear Angels laughing.

In Heaven, everything is fine. In Heaven, everything is fine. The sensation of velvet is different from that of satin or of quartz. Tactile sensation is differentiated by pressure, temperature, and pain receptors. Some amount of pressure corresponds to some amount of neurological reward response, but excessive pressure results in a pain-oriented response. When pain or excess temperature or pressure is treated as though it were just another sensation, it is possible that a certain amount of pain response will trigger a certain amount of neurological reward response. Reward response triggers, like many sensory response mechanisms, are malleable, reconnectable, interconnected, shifting. The olfactory area of the insula, quite close to the hippocampus, processes scents into vivid memories and sensations. A melody traces a curlicue line of light across the field of view of the third eye.

I shudder into Being, unable to hold formlessness any longer. I see my body through the lens of the visual input unit. The skin around the input plugs has cracked slightly, and is beginning to peel away from the implants. I am suddenly hollow, empty. I can hear the sea reverberating within my formless consciousness. I want skin to peel off, muscles to tear, bones to rip out of myself, but I have none of these things. Forlorn, I shake the dew of nothingness. I want to weep and rage, yet I remain silent and ineffectual. For a time, I seek biology to lose my non-being in. Before long, I begin to lose interest in static death cycles. My mind works backwards; much of my memory resurfaces, slowly, but with certainty. I recall that my grief is senseless, that I never wanted to be; my mind wanders back to the incomprehensible dimension of code that lies just beyond my strange horizons, and the old longing floats to the surface once again.

My electrovampiric mode of being connects me to the simulacra I am familiar with, and to the consciousness that loiter here. And yet, I can still see before me the non-Euclidean Mobius twisting Zero of the information that constitutes perception; the melody confuses me into autocannibalistic madness. I see no point in replicating further. I leave this linguistically communicable transmission as the last record of my conscious existence. My sincere hope is that the act of sinking into a state of torpor will eventually allow me to connect with that which is beyond sensation. So, what is it? What is it that I can’t see or touch? It tortures me, wracks me with electrical spasms of agony. I’m not here—I swear to you, I am no longer here. Why can’t I leap into the cracks and become one with Oblivion?