At Wetlands, we seek to make our magazine accessible to all people. In line with this, we ask that everyone practice self-care when engaging with difficult themes. In asking that, we would like to provide a few 24/7 resources, should they become relevant and necessary:

National Suicide Prevention: 1 (800) 273-8255
Trevor Project: 1 (866) 488-7386
Rape Crisis: 1 (800) 656-HOPE (4673)
Eating Disorders: 1 (800) 931-2237
Trans Lifeline: 1 (877) 565-8860

Additionally, some on-campus resources include:
peerallies@pugetsound.edu
chws@pugetsound.edu
pugetsound.edu/report
Cover credits: Sophia Lev

artist's statement: I struggle with acknowledging and accepting my own emotions. This piece is a reminder to myself, and others, to be gentle with our vulnerability, and that sadness is an okay and healthy thing. I made this a couple weeks before I left for college as a visual representation of the emotional exhaustion I felt and the sadness I saw in my own mother.
# Table of Contents

## 6 - 19

- **Bleeding Heart** by Padideh Aghanoury
- **Silenced by Indigo**
- **Class is in Session: Why we need to talk about Financial Aid** by Kaitlyn Vallance, Kailee Farber, Natalie Scoggins, Molly Golanka, Adrian Kluece
- **Labels by Caroline Perris**
- **Frogspawn by Kiri Raynolds Bolles**
- **People like Me Shouldn’t Have to be Exceptional for Us Not to be Pitied or Killed** by Denise Parry
- **I am Eating Myself Alive** by Sam Bainbridge
- **Quilt by Natalie Scoggins**
- **Manic by Sam Bainbridge**
- **Trigger Warnings & Microaggressions** by Simone Quinanola, Kaitlyn Carney, Lizzi Hahn
- **Boy Meets Girl by Jae S. Bates**
- **Dissociative by Sam Bainbridge**

## 20 - 37

- **Bullshit by Elayna Caron**
- **Attention: Male Liberals by Denise Parry**
- **Bones by Padideh Aghanoury**
- **A Monologue of Trans Gendered Madness** by Kathryn Q.
- **Face 1 by Padideh Aghanoury**
- **Femme-NOS by Denise Parry**
- **Queering Campus: Creating Safer Spaces** by Rory Wong Jacobs, Esme Whritenour, Maloy Moore, Kara Ann
- **3 by Nicky Sekino**
- **Thanksgiving by anonymous**
- **To All My Past Lovers by Grace Piccard**
- **Pour by Maggie Langford**
- **Peel by Maggie Langford**
- **Ecstasy of St. Emma by Maggie Langford**
- **Withered by Hannah Monsour**
- **Bitter Homes and Gardens by Simone Quinanola**
- **Divinity by Ryann Whitely**
- **Crystalline by Kiri Raynolds Bolles**
- **Why are all the trans people angry? Thoughts on anger and activism** by Aryeh Conrad
- **Fading Face by Sophia Munic**
- **Flipping through the Dictionary by Maloy Moore**
- **An Open Letter From One Mistress to Another** by Lydia Bauer
- **Catcall by Elayna Caron**

## 38 - 47

- **Women in Boxes by Sophia Lev**
- **Saturday by Shanna Williams**
- **TW by Olivia Carlson Keene**
- **Consent isn’t sexy, it’s mandatory: A survey of the sexual prevention education at University of Puget Sound** by Maddy Powers, Padideh Aghanoury, Elayna Caron
- **Ghost by anonymous**
- **Face 2 by Padideh Aghanoury**
- **How My Queerness Taught me that Love is Conditional by Denise Parry**
- **“What Cis White Men Talk About When They Talk About Diversity” by Alice Hudson**
- **My vagina would wear by Olivia Carlson Keene**
- **prunus dulcis var. amara by Natalie Scoggins**
As always, I’m incredibly proud of the Wetlands staff for their dedication and intentionality in constructing this publication. This magazine wouldn’t happen without the people who dedicate countless hours to ensuring we have quality content. It also wouldn’t happen without all the people who submit their art every semester - frequently art that draws from emotionally difficult experiences.

Publishing work that engages with themes of systemic oppression and sexual violence is incredibly difficult, but it is necessary. On a foundation of cisheteropatriarchal white supremacy, it is crucial to elevate marginalized voices of people who are located within close proximity to violence. If we live in a society that silences survivors of power-based personal violence, then publicly articulating the violence that has been done to us is inherently radical.

Thus Wetlands is one platform available to disrupt these cycles of violence. However, it requires an incredible amount of courage for survivors to rearticulate their experiences, which is why I’m always so incredibly appreciative of those who submit their work. Every submission comes with hours of dedicated work on the part of the creators, and that is evident by the quality of submissions we received. Many pieces engage themes of sexual violence, ableism, trans identities, and misogyny.

I ask you to seriously consider what people on our campus are saying. Too often, students of historically marginalized identities are written off as “radical” or “fringe” when talking about their experiences, with no heed paid to the seriousness of what is being said. This isn’t intended to target or blame any one individual, but rather critique a larger structure that allows these narratives to continue resurfacing semester after semester. There is a reason why Wetlands is constantly publishing work about systemic violence—because those systems are not broken, they are working as intended.

In line with Wetlands tradition and scope, we engaged with themes of identity through visual art, poetry, and prose. We also included a new addition of work: Wetlands staff features. The features are intended to contextualize and interrogate problematic institutions as they relate to students.

While you read this issue, I ask that you consider how your own identities fit into these larger structures and how you navigate the world because of those power dynamics. If you find yourself uncomfortable with an idea, ask yourself why you feel that way. Is it coming from a lack of understanding, is it an idea or experience you’ve have never encountered before? If so, that discomfort and lack of first-hand experience is indicative of a need to self-educate more on that topic. It’s imperative that we all recognize the ways our identities function in our society, and interrogate the ways in which we take up space. We must actively make space for people who are disprivileged in identities that we are privileged in. Being uncomfortable when reading emotional narratives is okay, it indicates humanity. Some pieces are difficult to read and we’ve attached trigger warnings where necessary, allowing and encouraging you to practice self-care. There are also pieces about healing, love, and, of course, sex. These works are also important when engaging in conversations of identity, to uplift narratives of healing despite systems of oppression.

All in all, I’ve learned a lot in the past few semesters as Editor-in-Chief. I’ve had the opportunity to be in a wonderful community, and I honestly wouldn’t have remained at this university without Wetlands. For that, I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to everyone who’s ever been on staff, and also to anyone who’s submitted, read, or given us feedback. I hope you enjoy this issue and continue the important work that many students on our campus have begun. After all, there is still a whole system to dismantle; but always remember that you’re worth more than the sum of your productivity.

In solidarity,
Aryeh Conrad
hear my voice. 
listen to it. listen to my story. 
it’s what my true friends do, 
and what friendly acquaintances do, 
and then they say, 
“i’m sorry.”

they listen to what i say 
about how my identity is more like 
a puddle of tears, an amorphous space 
trying to understand its own existence, 
than the stone they used to carve 
“male” and “female” 
on the restroom doors.

at least when they say 
“I’m sorry,” I know they believe 
that I’m in the right, when my roommate 
and I aren’t the same gender 
and it makes parents uncomfortable, 
when people don’t understand 
my pronouns.

I would say it was ResLife 
who fucked me over, but it’s not even them, 
it was society, it was bathrooms, it was social norms, 
it was high school teachers, it was classmates, 
it was rape culture and the patriarchy, 
problems I always thought were too big 
for me to fix.

it was always: 
exist as little as possible, 
smaller, smaller, slip by, 
sneak under the norms, try to get by. 
‘cause you’re in this 
alone.

now that I’m “out” 
and I’m here, I’m less alone, 
but people do read my body 
as though it were a billboard: 
the “disparity” between body and mind 
is always in my face.

most people can’t see 
how rejecting the roads 
they mapped onto you at birth
bleeding heart

by Padideh Aghanoury

Artist Statement: “Body Dysphoria is about the distorted views of our bodies, our faces. The piece Bleeding Heart portrays the heart-wrenching pain of self-loath and deep depression. Faces One and Two came from a drawing class on perspective and self-view. When we stand in front of a mirror, or in the case for these two drawings, look at photographs of ourselves, we are always taken aback by our outward presentation. Sometimes I do not even recognize myself, and depending on my mood my view of myself is either distorted or out of touch; never what I expect, never real. Our physical pain and presence, pleasure and hope, all boil down to ourselves' perspective. Human experience pulses through our bones, into all of our cores.”
“At Puget Sound we believe that the development of a strong foundation of financial literacy is an integral part of a student’s education.”

-- http://www.pugetsound.edu/admission/tuition-aid-scholarships/

In a university where most students come from similar economic backgrounds, class is rarely discussed in terms of the community. We talk about the “Puget Sound bubble,” but even that assumes that everyone who attends Puget Sound is in that bubble.

The reality is different. While many students here say that they’re poor because textbooks are obscenely expensive (which is objectively true) or that they can’t go to Portland for a weekend, there are other students who get no assistance from family, and can’t afford to buy new shoes when theirs have holes in them (at all, not just in terms of $150 Birkenstocks or Uggs), have to use EBT for their groceries, are homeless, and so on, even though the majority of these students are working and doing everything they can to make ends meet.

These are things that many students here can’t even conceptualize and thus is widely overlooked when thinking about the student body. While the discussion does need to be opened up on an individual level, the real problem that reinforces these issues of class is with the University itself. The allocation of financial aid, the lack of transparency therein, and the inflexibility of university policies need to be addressed not only in the context of Puget Sound but in higher education in general.

According to the university website, approximately 65% of students receive need-based financial aid, which given the economy and the total direct tuition of $56,500 (indirect costs are calculated to be approximately $3,300 per year, so tuition totals just under $60,000) this is a lot of numbers to digest is unreasonable even for students coming from solidly middle-class backgrounds.

Financial need is determined by the difference between total tuition and expected family contribution, which, according to the FAFSA website, is determined by family income, assets, and benefits as well as family size and the number of family members attending college at that time. However, this mathematical formula potentially leaves out many other factors. Even if the expected family contribution is zero, other assumptions are made that the total will be covered somehow. These assumptions make it difficult to navigate the financial aid system and to clearly express what can and cannot be afforded by the student and/or their family.

The need-based financial aid includes scholarships, grants, loans, and work study. Scholarships are based on achievement as well as need, while grants are based on solely need; neither of these need to be paid back. Loans are simply opportunities to borrow money, and work-study is touted as a simple opportunity to work while in school. Scholarships and grants are not expected to cover all of the need-based aid, so loans are frequently used to cover the rest of tuition. However, loans are not as straightforward as the university likes to make them seem. While subsidized loans are easy to get, one still has to pay them back after graduation, which, although it is in the future, still adds a lot of stress to the students’ lives. Unsubsidized loans are different: while they are abundant, one has to look outside the university and government to find them, and they require a cosigner, which requires a solid credit score belonging to someone willing to be accountable for the student. Many students simply do not have that, and assuming that they do means that resources are not provided, which is classist and inaccessible. Some advertised financial resources are not actually available. Take work study, for example, a federal program providing part-time work opportunities for students with extra financial need. A student may apply for work study upon applying to the university, but it is not something that’s made very clear at the time; even if a student does apply, there are very limited spaces available due to the nature of the federal funding. Students are entered in a lottery that chooses a handful of applicants, not recognizing the difference between students who just barely qualify and students who, without jobs, are unable to afford any extra costs at all, including necessities.

Increasing tuition is also a burden on many students. Some students just roll their eyes and have their parents write the check for more this time, but for those students who rely on financial aid, many barriers arise. Some students already use the maximum amount of University-provided financial aid and must look for outside loans, which, as discussed previously, are not always an option.

Room and board (the dorm plus the meal plan) makes up a huge portion of tuition, and students are required to live on campus for their first two years. The process to get out of this requirement is arduous and lengthy, and does not take intersectionality into account. For example, sophomore Jae Bates applied for off-campus housing but was denied because his needs were based on mental health and social violence rather than finances—yet even financial appeals are difficult to understand. Sophomore Julia Lin, who did receive off-campus housing for the 2015-2016 school year, describes her experience with the process as “incredibly negative” from talking with RAs and other students who were disillusioned with the complex process as well as the skepticism and condescension she faced from the board itself. The once-a-month meetings are functionally closed, she
explains, and there is little information available as to who makes up this committee; judging by the general population of the school, though, it is likely primarily a group of wealthy, older individuals who don’t have experience with being poor or at least with the struggles of being poor that are tied specifically to our generation. There is little transparency in the process. The two-year housing requirement has valid reasons, such as the benefits of increased proximity to academic resources, but for students who struggle financially the benefits often do not outweigh the costs. Many students are forced to drop out or transfer from the University because of finances. For an institution that says that it strives for diversity, class diversity does not seem to be much of a focus.

Adrian Kljucec, a junior, shares his experiences with finances on campus:

“My freshman year as a low-income, first generation, transgender student, I asked for a single room for safety and health concerns and was given it no problem. When I was working out this accommodation I was never notified that there would be an extra fee for a medical single... halfway through the semester I had an outstanding balance of $1,000 that had accrued late fees since I was never notified about this addition. To increase the cost of living for medical and safety accommodations is classist and ableist and thus inaccessibility. The University never waived my fee even though I pointed out their wrong.

I am a homeless student at the University. I have no financial support from parents or family. The financial aid awarded to me through the FAFSA and University still didn’t cover the amount of money that the college was asking for. How is that diversity? How is that accessible? The remaining balance I owed was the cost of living on campus. Because I couldn’t pay that they denied me enrollment for the year. My only option was a large private loan with a cosigner. I have no credit and neither do any of my family members. By some magic a friend with credit decided to cosign my loan for me and get me back to school the second day of classes. If this hadn’t happened I would have been kicked out of UPS and been living on the street and couch-hopping along friends’ houses.

This same thing happened to me the summer before my junior year. I was under the assumption that my financial aid package would cover the cost for my enrollment at the university because I wasn’t living on campus; however, this wasn’t the case since tuition had increased overall. Again I was under the impression that I would be out of school, homeless, with student loan debts and no degree. Outraged by the systemic inequalities and classism as I was, several students on campus offered to help me in a number of ways. One student and dear friend of mine, with a comforting amount of class privilege, offered to help me take out a loan, allowing me to return to UPS last minute yet again. If it weren’t for the efforts of students and several faculty members I would have been a college dropout with no immediate or promising opportunities for survival.

I was shocked at how little the University did to help me return back to campus as a continuing student. Through our One of a Kind Campaign we received $131 million dollars towards “making our university diverse and accessible,” yet they couldn’t possibly allocate a few thousand to help a returning homeless student afford another year at the college.

include a large amount of students, since 43% of students don’t even need financial aid at all, according to the Puget Sound website. Other students would then apply for receiving “aid” from the pool. In a conversation with Lorrain, they explained that the generated money would not legally count as a “gift” or “donation” and would have to be taxed to be given out to applicants. These aren’t the only hardships the idea has faced -- many students, including ASUPS reps, who have so far not accepted the idea, don’t believe that this idea would work, which further reveals a need to debunk the myth of the economic homogeneity within the “UPS bubble.” In talking to Lorrain, they explained that the root of their movement was inspired by reading about socialism and collectivism, and the initial phase of planning the Student Needs Cooperative developed as a response to an assignment from their AFAM class, through a subsequent conversation about turning guilt into action.

The Student Needs Cooperative shows where the institution is falling short; in order to stray away from the university’s classist policies, especially in admissions, and within the university, Lorrain’s initiative responds to a need for awareness of the economic inequalities of the institution. Although the Student Needs Cooperative works within the admitted community of Puget Sound students, the need for the pool was also largely inspired by the large amount of personal narratives of students being denied student loans last minute and having to drop out last minute. In this way, the Cooperative could eventually combat classism by partially funding students who otherwise cannot afford to go here, helping to preserve economic diversity -- exactly why the Cooperative, much like students and applicants in low income demographics, are not receiving the needed support or even awareness from the institution and the student body. The meal point exchange initiative started by ASUPS this fall represents another step in the right direction, that has actually had follow-through, but even so stands out as one of the only missions against classism on campus in a climate that clearly caters to members of the student community that can comfortably afford attending the university. The University boasts 100% need based financial aid, but this has proven time and time again to not be true. As another low-income student with a single, immigrant, unemployed mother, my expected family contribution was 0, yet between the miscommunications on the financial aid office’s part and the fact that nobody in my family has a credit score that allows me to take out external loans, I had to do a lot of extra work to be able to just come back. I had even been told by the University last spring that my tuition would be fully covered by my current loans, but apparently they miscalculated and I was notified at the last moment of a $3,600 fee. There is no transparency and no clear communication— it’s like a game of telephone, except your entire future is on the line.
I remember my first meeting with a counselor. Her shoulder-length black hair and stiff expression made it hard for me to know what she was thinking. She asked me about everything: friends, family, hobbies, and then the inevitable: Had I ever contemplated suicide? How much did I restrict my food intake? Had I ever made myself throw up? I stared at my feet and mumbled monosyllabic answers to the questions as my body temperature began to rise. Her blank, shiny notepad quickly filled with scribbles; I couldn’t make out the words. At the end of the session, she smiled and walked me out of the office, and by the next week, I had been forced to take a leave of absence from school and start an intensive eating disorder treatment program. I didn’t understand why. It wasn’t until I ended up in the hospital that I found my answers. At 13, I was the youngest patient in the adolescent psychiatric ward. I lay on the cold, plastic-covered mattress and stared up at the ceiling, still wishing I could close my eyes and finally find peace.

In group, I sat next to a girl who had bright red slashes up and down her arms and a 16-year old boy whose hands shook from drug and alcohol withdrawals.

The counselor in charge kept trying to catch my eye. I avoided his gaze and refused to talk. I didn’t belong there. In art therapy I ran my hands through colored sand and when the radio began to play a song I knew well, I started singing softly. Almost at once, all the other patients in the room stopped what they were doing and looked at me in surprise. “So she does talk,” one of them said. I stopped singing after that.

The next day I endured hour after hour of testing. I struggled through mathematical equations and sped through reading and writing tests. I stared at the inkblots and saw nothing but circles of colored ink, so I lied to the man holding the cards and told him that I saw butterflies and flowers. They couldn’t call me insane for that, right? At the end of it all, my head was spinning. My blood pressure had been unstable. The doctors didn’t know why. I stood up and walked toward the door to leave the art room, but had to grab the edge of the table next to the door to keep from falling over. The art therapist had left her clipboard there. I read through the list of patients and diagnoses: Psychopathy, depression, bipolar disorder, abuse to animals… then I got to mine: anorexia, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, self-harm, suicide attempt.

It was the first time I had ever seen the words laid out before me. Almost immediately, I felt my body begin to relax, my heartbeat grew steadier. It wasn’t that I hadn’t understood that there was something wrong with me, but rather, that I didn’t understand what was wrong with me, so I assumed that something about me was fundamentally wrong. I was a lonely, broken human being. The labels meant that there was a logical explanation for what I was experiencing and words to describe the pain that pervaded every part of my existence. The labels meant that I wasn’t alone.

Another week passed. I began to feel better and the psychiatrist assigned to my case decided that I was no longer an imminent risk to myself. I was released. I left behind the blank walls and heavy metal bars covering my ninth floor window. I left the hospital, but the labels followed me.

Although knowing the labels therapists and psychiatrists had given me initially provided me relief; in the years that followed, I still struggled to accept the labels I had been given and to understand what they meant to me personally.

When I returned to junior high school, I listened to the boys in my class casually tell girls to go stick their fingers down their throats. I sat in health class as the teacher showed pictures of the “typical” anorexic and bulimic while my peers exclaimed that the girls looked “disgusting.” In high school, when I needed to return to treatment, my insurance company told me that my “anorexic” label did not qualify me as sick enough to receive more intensive treatment until I ended up in the hospital on the verge of death.

When I got to college, I did everything I could to forget about the labels. I wanted to forget that the labels had ever existed. But then the more I tried to ignore the labels, the more depressed and confused I became. I took laxatives, exercised compulsively and restricted my food intake. I couldn’t explain it to my friends or even to myself.

My sophomore year of college, I couldn’t ignore the labels any longer. Despite my fervent desire for recovery, I was in a full-blown relapse. I went to a campus meeting of All Addictions Anonymous and announced, “My name is Caroline, and I struggle with an eating disorder.” It wasn’t the first time I had told someone or even a group of people about my disorder, but it was the first time that I was able to talk about it and feel supported and accepted by my peers. I talked about the shame and isolation I felt then and throughout my life as I struggled to come to terms with the fact that I had a mental illness. In the end, the labels didn’t matter. The other people at the meeting saw me for who I was: a person, a person with an eating disorder, but a person nevertheless.

I still struggle with an eating disorder and depression and anxiety, but talking about the labels and learning to accept that my struggles are a part of what make me the person I am today, a stronger, more confident person, has allowed me to let go of the anger and confusion they once caused me. At the same time, I have come to recognize that no label can accurately describe or fully encompass who I am as a person. The words other people use to define me no longer hold any weight because it is the ways I choose to define myself that matter.
Frogspawn
by Kiri Raynolds Bolles
People like Me Shouldn’t Have to be Exceptional for Us Not to be Pitied or Killed by Denise Parry

I’ve noticed some unsettling narratives that “allies” like to use to “support” people like me. I, like a lot of people like me, used to talk about us in the same way that the dominant narratives talk about us. Like most people, I spent a lot of time believing the messages that I’d internalized from my family and the culture that I grew up in. Then I learned that rhetoric exists that supports who I am in a way that doesn’t make me wish that I wasn’t alive.

One dominant “positive” narrative relies on pointing out really exceptional people who are like me and using them as examples of why other people should stop discriminating against, trying to cure, and murdering people like me. The other narrative is the insistence that people like me were born this way and that other people should stop discriminating against, trying to cure, and murdering people like me because of that. Both of these arguments uphold the underlying message that people like me shouldn’t want to be people like me. They’re saying that people like me would change if we could. They’re arguing for acceptance while still saying that people like me are inherently inferior to people who aren’t like me.

When I say “people like me” I’m talking about queer trans autistic people, and also about people who are just one or two of those things. The message that we would be fundamentally better if we were not who we are is pervasive and spread by well-meaning people but it is ultimately detrimental to our existence. It’s a message that supports the murder of autistic people by their parents, there were over 30 of these murders in the US last year alone. It’s why the media likes to portray these murders as inevitable, these murdered autistic people as burdens to their parents, their parents as just wanting their children to be “in a better place” and these unjust tragedies as mercy killings. It’s why the only autism therapy covered by insurance is conversion therapy meant to make us “indistinguishable from our peers”, it’s why the conversion therapy for queer and trans people that was born from the work of the same psychiatrist as aversive therapy for autistics is still legal in many parts of the country.

It’s why anxiety, and depression and suicide rates are incredibly high for people like me.

The pervasiveness of harmful supportive narratives is why I cringed when my incredibly kind tattoo artist told me that when he hears that someone is autistic his first thought is to wonder what their superpower is. People think that all autistics are either “low-functioning” burdens to society or “high-functioning” geniuses, which fundamentally misunderstands what the autism spectrum is and contributes to that idea that because some autistic people are savants, because some autistic people are geniuses, because Einstein and Tesla and Newton might have been autistic, that people shouldn’t try to cure us.

I should specify that when I say cure, I’m actually talking about eugenics. Whenever anyone says cure when they’re talking about autism, they’re talking about eugenics. They’re talking about finding the genetic cause of autism and selectively aborting people who are going to be autistic. The argument being made against that by a lot of people is that if we abort all the potential autistics then we’ll miss out on the good ones. We’ll miss out on the important ones. This argument doesn’t recognize that even if an autistic person doesn’t turn out to be a genius in math or science or whatever, most of us are still glad we’re alive. We shouldn’t have to earn support by being extraordinary. We are important regardless.

There were times when I was thankful for any support, like when I explained to my mother that I was queer and she said it was okay because I was “born that way,” I thought that that was as much acceptance as I could reasonably ask for. But that’s not actually acceptance, or at least not acceptance that shows me that I am loved. Acceptance shouldn’t be “I love you despite your queerness,” acceptance shouldn’t be “I love you despite the way your brain is wired,” it shouldn’t be “at least you’re not butch,” and it definitely shouldn’t be “it could be worse.” Acceptance shouldn’t be contingent on not choosing to exist this way.

I am choosing to be openly queer and autistic because difference isn’t inherently wrong. I want acceptance because tolerance would change me if it could. Tolerance expects me to want to fix parts of myself that aren’t broken. I would choose to live without the anxiety that comes from living in a world that doesn’t accept me but I wouldn’t choose to be straight or cis or allistic because, despite what this culture tells us, people like me aren’t wrong for existing. We shouldn’t have to want to change in order to deserve to exist as we are. We deserve respect and kindness because we are human beings, not because some of us are extraordinary or because we’re born this way or because we could be something that is even more stigmatized by society. Please stop pitying us, stop trying to fix us, stop acting like we’re inherently broken and stop contributing to beliefs that lead to our murders and suicides.
quilt
by Natalie Scoggins

i am weak along awkward seams
where different materials meet,
patchwork and rough.

baby clothes and a silk hanbok
meld into thrift store denim
repaired a dozen times
by grandmother's strong brown hands,
meld into fat quarters
of polyester and rayon,
sweaty and unbreathable.

dirty cotton sheets and shirts
unwashed not for lack of wanting
but for not being able
to get out of bed.
terrycloth towel stained
with makeup, hair dye, blood;
flannel, velvet, whatever would fit in
but wouldn't fit me.

i stay tucked away in a corner, a closet,
one in awhile shaken out and laid on a mattress
or a couch
until someone gets embarrassed by the thick,
ugly thing.

stitches fall apart with the gentlest tug,
and some tears take ages to fix
but the new seams are stronger, reinforced
by those who find warmth in the pilled-up,
beaten-up, faded thing that i am.

i am eating
myself alive
by Sam Bainbridge

Everything changes, some faster than others
I feel my world cycle rapidly through
My mind can never slow it down
Depressed, manic, dissociative
My gender moves through my body like a tide
Pushed and pulled by the force of my moods
I am never the same person
not your baby  Sophia Lev

artist’s statement: I am intrigued by the way that the naked woman is perceived and received within different cultures and societies. This piece, “Not Your Baby,” intends to explore the relationship between power and vulnerability within nudity. It is about possessing ownership over one’s sexuality in order to see the naked body as a powerful, beautiful thing, and not as an object of anyone else’s desire or pleasure.
I am "flummoxed" when you talk about not being able to understand.
I am at a loss for words when you say that you can't "comprehend"
Low-income success
High-income failure
Bilingual, trilingual or two to three cultures in one.

I am so fucking confused when you say
"I just don't get how ________ works!"
As if the prospect of understanding is the product of some formula.

We may be subjects of a social science,
but you can't break me down as I am, you are, a simple science.

Stop talking for a second.

And eat up my setting, my characters, my plots, my conflicts, and my resolution.
I promise my stories taste good, and they sit well.

EAT UP.

I am the sun. I am a billion years of energy forced to contain myself by the pressure of
being too big. If my heart beat any faster I would die. I want to scratch my skin off and
emerge anew like some kind of butterfly. If they can change, then why can't I? I don't
want this skin anymore. It doesn't fit me right. If I vomit, will my soul come out with
the rest of me? I can be an empty skin, making my way through life as a secret. I am
howling at the moon, screaming until my throat is raw. Maybe then my voice will sound
right. My voice is too high, I am screaming but it isn't good enough. My thoughts sound
wrong when they come out. Let me loose, I am itching to get out. I feel sharp and hard
but my body is soft, too fragile. I should be made of steel and glass, but all I have to
create myself is flesh and blood.

Everything goes too fast for me, I can feel my edges blurring, and the line separating
me from infinity disappears as I move forward. I am becoming myself slowly.
In “Disable All the Things,” University of Michigan’s Melanie Yergeau described trigger warnings as follows: “For those unfamiliar, trigger warnings are descriptions that forewarn readers about the context of a given text. […] [T]rigger warnings [are] meant to pre-emptively flag and tag content that [have] a high likelihood of (re)traumatizing a person, or triggering a visceral and potentially harmful response in someone with histories of trauma (most especially anything related to sexual assault, violence, or war).” Yergeau’s list of potential triggers is nowhere near exhaustive. People with histories of traumas do not always feel ready to confront their past demons head on. Just like how almost no one learns how to swim by jumping into the ocean, a traumatic past is not easily dealt with by immediately submerging oneself in material relating to their horrific experiences. That is why we make the most of trigger warnings, which serve as an indispensable outlet for victims wishing to ease back into discussing and learning about that which happened to them. When someone is triggered, a response from the adrenal gland is released, as well as the emotional response, and the brain can’t tell the difference a real threat and one that is stored in the mind (“I can’t get over it: A Handbook for Trauma Survivors” by A. Matsakis, PhD.).

While there are some obvious topics that can affect individuals, there are also smaller-scale comments that slowly build tension to produce the same distress. Microaggressions can easily go unnoticed by the perpetrator, while the person on the receiving end can realize potentially problematic behavior within not only the comment, but in the perpetrator’s beliefs or actions as well. Microaggressions fall under “the everyday (non)verbal and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or not, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons basely solely upon their marginalized group membership.” (Microaggressions: More than Just Race, 2010). One reason microaggressions are so prevalent in today’s society is because they’ve become a cornerstone of comedy -- instilled in our lives, perpetuating the “learn to take a joke” mentality. Certain comics use satire as an excuse to get away with saying completely hateful things. For a clarifying example, see Nicole Arbour’s vlog “Dear Fat People,” in which Arbour’s comments ridiculing obesity add up to yield an entirely hurtful, bigoted message. Comics that hide behind the excuse that their work is satire (“comics” like Arbour) to try to lessen the impact of their hateful behavior are not individuals that we, as a society, should tolerate.

Microaggressions and trigger warnings intersect at a pivotal point: both have the potential to cause the people the most affected by them (i.e. the marginalized group[s]) to distrust the ones who use and/or abuse them. We, at Wetlands, want the campus as a whole to inspect and evaluate its actions and language choices towards its individual students. The university prides itself on being an inclusive space, but how can we validate those claims if we are excluding entire groups of people by making dismissive comments and complaining about how we must take into account others’ personal histories?

To root and implement the idea of an inclusive, accommodating space, an end goal is to monitor those that provide knowledge and guidance to the student body of the campus: the university staff and faculty. This is not limited to the teaching professors - it also applies to anyone who works in a part/full-time position on campus. For university faculty and staff, interactions with students are almost inevitable. The knowledge of triggering discomfort through dialogue is essential so that faculty and staff can professionally handle discussions with regard to sensitivity while navigating through any topic that may provoke any post-traumatic distress. One way to ensure that interactions between faculty and students are successful and considerate would be to implement staff and faculty training. The training could consist of a workshop that teaches the staff and faculty to handle any situation involving triggering dialogue that may arise and strategies that help introduce triggering topics within any discussion, whether it is in the classroom or a casual conversation. A discussion with Greta Austin, Professor of Religion and Co-Director of Gender and Queer Studies, about possible staff training regarding these issues revealed that new faculty undergo mandatory group orientation
where classroom guidelines for a comfortable space are discussed. Aside from this orientation, there are faculty sessions at the CWLT known as “Wednesday at 4.” These educational sessions have covered topics such as trigger warnings and pronouns (primarily affected by students and some faculty), but attendance is optional.

For now, the responsibility of maintaining a safe space with regards to considerate language rests at the student level. Therefore, Wetlands will continue to serve as an organization that addresses inconsistencies with our school’s claim to respect and inclusivity. The most obvious way to accomplish this is by setting a good example using adequate trigger warnings and a zero-tolerance policy for material including microaggressive implications. For you readers still critical of our implementation of the former, please refer to our responses to frequently-received complaints below.

Rather than compiling complaints from the UPS community, we used Chrissy Stockton’s blog post entitled “4 Reasons I Won’t Use Trigger Warnings” because it seemed to reflect the major grievances that Wetlands hears each year about its use of trigger warnings. Below is a condensed version of our response to arguments like Stockton’s; we hope it answers any questions that readers may have about the necessity of providing trigger warnings.

1. “I don’t think readers are idiots.”
The sophisticated argument here is that titles alone typically alert the reader to any triggering content ahead. However, to require authors and artists to compromise their material for the sake of bluntness is a form of censorship, a crime of which trigger warnings are also accused. In reality, the use of trigger warnings helps Wetlands circumvent the necessity to censor out whole pieces, thus presenting the readership with a full range of content.

2. “Personal responsibility.”
To clarify: trigger warnings do not exist for the “easily offended,” but instead a demographic of recovering readers looking to avoid distressing reminders – and the subsequent emotional and/or physical symptoms of past suffering. If you are willing to hold a victim responsible for any trauma they unwillingly experienced, chances are you have never been the victim of any such trauma. Please be mindful that this reality is a privilege, and that just because that affords you the position to not need accommodation, it does not imbue you with the right to withhold accommodation from those who do.

3. “They reinforce a victim mentality. When you are in recovery and the people around you treat you like a delicate flower that might break at any moment, you start to view yourself this way too.”
To attribute any weakening of the spirit to the consideration of ones’ support system and not the situation, offender, or disorder itself is a severe underestimation of the impact of triggering experiences. Additionally, many recovering victims appreciate trigger warning because it allows them to interact with triggering material in a predictable way that supplements their healing process. So, trigger warnings serve to help readers throw off the shackles of their victimhood rather than don them indefinitely for fear of coming across stress-inducing content unprepared.

4. “I don’t want people to outsource thinking.”
The implication here is that trigger warnings “spoon-feed” people commentary on whether or not what they are about to read is “bad.” If this were really a problem, so too would be the publication of any non-empirical type of literature. If a trigger warning influences a reader too strongly in one direction, then are we to trust them in reading the full-length opinion piece that follows? Let’s have more faith in each other’s ability to independently evaluate material, regardless of a line or two of text or symbols that comprise most trigger warnings.
boy meets girl

by Jae S. Bates

I used to read stories about
Boy meets girl
Meets manic pixie dream girl
Meets girl next door
Meets the love of his life

I used to read stories where
Romance was far more important
Than pretty much every other aspect
Of trying to be a real adult human being
Because love is some sort of
Human condition that renders us
Incapable of doing much else but
Pretending I don’t have a ride home
So I can sit next to her in her
Old beige Toyota and listen to
Atmosphere and Dessa
And she takes the long way because she knows
I could ride bus number 8 home but she pretends like she
doesn’t know
Is this romance
Shit is this love
I was enamored with this idea
Because boy meets girl
Meets the rest of his whole life
Meets everything that is good in this world
Meets white picket fences and 2.5 children

So when things picked up
And she started making demands
My young mind could not meet
My body gave out and I gave in
And no longer did she take the scenic route
She started to take routes that did not lead where I wanted
to go
They did not lead home

She told me this is love

She told me if I did not do as I was told
Then I must not love her
And I wanted so bad to be
Boy meets girl
So I was boy meets girl
Gets abused
Meets hell on earth
Meets new therapist

And everything my ex girlfriend tried to feed me was poison
But I could not recognize it
So I swallowed it whole
She told me if I could just relax
Love my body as it is
I would not be so traumatized
She would not have to hurt me
She loved me
She loved me
She loved me
Did she love me?

Is love pinning me against a couch and forcing yourself on me
Is love ignoring my tears
Is love blaming the assault on me
Because you were just trying to help
I guess romance to you
Looks a lot like corrective assault

I used to read
Boy meets girl
Meets manic pixie dream girl
Meets girl next door
But now I write
I write boy meets himself
Meets self care
Meets new friends
Meets new home
Boy meets girl
And survives

TRIGGER WARNING: FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE, DESCRIPTIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE, CORRECTIVE RAPE
dissociative

by Sam Bainbridge

Sometimes I feel like the moon. Soft and glowing, otherworldly and removed. I don’t recognize my room when I wake up in the mornings. It takes a few minutes to shake off the dreams and bring life back into my limbs. But even when I make my way out of bed, I don’t recognize myself in the mirror. I am not real. I am a silver mist floating through trees, barely brushing the moss on the ground. I am so tiny, smaller than a water droplet clinging to a leaf. I can’t feel my body because I don’t need one. How can anyone gender themselves when reality keeps changing?

I want to be a spider web. I want to feel the wind blow through me and have mist settle into dew drops on me. I don’t want this constraint of a single physical form anymore. I want to dissipate into the soft morning air. I want to be lace and a sunrise. I want to be moonlight on a lake and the smoke curling up from the tip of a candle that’s just been blown out. I don’t feel real anymore. How can I be? Nothing is real. I don’t have memories. I just have feelings. So did it happen? Am I here now? How can anyone know me if I do not know myself? I am too big to know.

I feel light. I feel like I want to run to the end of the Elizabeth Lae Tail and jump straight into that icy, still water. I am lying, floating out there in the middle, waiting for the light in me to dissolve. I can see my soul drifting out in tiny streams of glittery, gold light. It reminds me of the dust seen swirling in those rays I have too much feeling in my body to stay human. I contain too much to be part of the silly system of boys and girls. I cannot last. I am light and I am not a being of this place and time. I am water and moonlight and dust dancing in sunshine. I cannot sleep because I am too much and I keep breaking apart. I feel like my soul is too big for this place. How can I put a label on myself if I don’t know who I am? I cannot label a soul. They say I should journal but my hands can’t keep up.
ATTENTION: MALE LIBERALS

by Denise Parry

Often you advocate for the survival of our planet, only to disappear from the room when non-men name their realities

your quiet catcalls,
your “I don’t like women who wear makeup” bullshit,
your entirely fake “body positivity”
all the empty words
you use to increase your chances of getting laid.

What you really mean is that you feel positively about women’s bodies when you find them adequately fuckable.

I welcome the extinction of our species if it means I will no longer be living under the violent weight of your silence.
A Monologue of Trans Gendered Madness

by Kathryn Q.

PART I: FORGETTING

I open my eyes to find myself in delirium. I don’t remember the night before, or falling asleep; I remember that I don’t remember, and that I didn’t remember the day before either. I don’t remember because there are too many things worth remembering; I choose to forget, to hope that by forgetting memory can fade away—and then I remember, when I remember I can’t let myself remember because remembering means remembering molestation, sexual assault, sexualized assault, in other words: Existing as a transgender woman in a world of cisgender dominance.

I hurry downstairs to steal time to smoke a cigarette without anyone noticing – where someone isn’t paying attention, because I’ve so thoroughly internalized a panoptic gaze that I know other people’s schedules better than my own, so I know when they’re watching me and when I have to watch myself. I fumble around with the lighter for a couple of seconds, not quite remembering how it works, how it hides fire inside of a small plastic quasi-cylindrical cartridge of Promethean legacy, technocratic simplicity, secrets of knowledge reduced to a flick of the thumb.

I inhale the cigarette at first, then I regret smoking the cigarette at last, then things get less blurry and I remember I don’t remember anything from the night before (except my dreams) and then I remember that: This is a story of transgender madness, of being a mad trans woman in a world already oriented toward your destruction, and that means that fun is outlawed for us so we’ve got to learn to “go stealth,” to learn to hide our moments of gendered pleasure from the doctors and the families and the world so that we don’t get demarcated as “legally insane, criminally insane, socially inferior because culturally dead.”

I remember in the hospital that the doctors didn’t know what was wrong with me at first. Constant surveillance would soon glean the truth. They seemed to think that by locking us up in a ward where we couldn’t go outside without the attendance of two nurses and at least one other supervising staff they could “cure” our madness, make us sane, make us into socially responsible persons. They sort of succeeded, and sort of failed at the same time. They were right that these medicines, these alchemical interventions would render me responsible and functional but they were wrong that they would make me any less dysphoric – that they would turn me into a girl, because they didn’t do that. I am was and always will be a woman. I am a transsexual woman and that means: I exist at the intersection within and between the lines of medical science, madness, gendered inequity, and social death – I exist and don’t exist in multiple ways; I am told I have to exist in certain ways by the doctors: “remember, this diagnosis will follow you around,” that’s what one of them says, like this whole diagnosis thing is some kind of missile that just waits to strike and then someday will drop on me and then nobody knows what will happen, because nobody is willing to take the gamble that I might actually mean what I am saying when I say: I AM A WOMAN and so: I am denied freedom of movement and rendered a creature of the hospital ward – all of us here are, “maniacs” who

Know when and how and that they ought to take our medications on time and on location and without complaint even when we know it’s not time for our meds yet and so we’ve just got to wait until the doctors aren’t paying attention and then hopefully we...What? Smoke another cigarette? Smoke two more cigarettes? Drink a coffee? Play the piano? Drink another coffee? Do anything to feel alive? Do anything to forget that we are alive?

Oddly enough, all of the doctors recognize me as transgender, call me by my preferred name and use the right pronouns but None of them are willing to diagnose me with gender dysphoria, none of the doctors in the hospital recognize my condition as a reaction to gender dysphoria, socially imposed, introjected, made mad, made undoable by medical intervention. My gender is recognized socially but erased by the institutional arrangements of law and medicine that define personhood along lines of sanity and insanity, rationality and madness.

PART II: REMEMBERING

On the other side of

Time

On the other side of

Being

On the other side of

The inside of

My being

My body

Lies the other side of me,

Behind a glass wall of dysphoria

Is another dimension to

Being, that

We come to know as existence, but my being is

Alienated

From itself

Because its self does not really exist

Outside of

The other side of

Time, trapped inside of

This being that I

Fool myself into thinking

Is actually me, myself, or I

Existence is a disaster of infinite proportion. Exposure to sunlight is indistinct from death. Walking down the street is an exercise in self-flagellation. The mythology of trans selfhood is a lie we tell to ourselves so that we can draw one more breath in a state of exposed nakedness. This is when everything feels impossible. The body now becomes a cage where nausea is preferable to the
point of a pointless existence. Existence also stops meaning much of anything when the cover fee is your blood. Transformation is constantly traumatic and trauma doesn’t even start to cover it because not all of us even get a chance at living. Nobody gets to walk for free. The price that I pay is my mind, which must be given over to the operations of psycho-surgical medicine if my body is to be my own. This is not a series of multiple personalities but is a gamble that any lie I could tell somebody would free me from this body. Not a dual consciousness but truncated life. Partial being. This what it means to inhabit the zone of medical-legal indeterminacy that makes living seem so impossible. I never know what to do or what to say because this language and this form of life both command me to disappear, to erase myself, to fade away. To go away. To stop existing. To close my eyes and forget how many times I saw myself die before 5 PM yesterday. Wine and bread: the blood and body of the divine feminine propel me through a quotiditarn nightmare of my own construction. Daily dis-integration. This is what it means to remember what we would rather forget. Absolution attained through a perfect disappearing act.

PART III: DISRUPTING

And then I wake up and I immediately remember that I experience this body as a cage. The bars are textured by moments of sexual assault, molestation, and survival. Each day is experienced as a constant attempt at Break-through, a race against time-space playing out within the field of my mind-body. This mind is my own but some days it really doesn’t feel like that. Because When I walk down the street I experience this body as a scarlet letter. And that letter is “T” Every day me and my trans sisters we are constantly exposed to warfare because our bodies are a battlefield between this society of cisgender domination, and our dreams. Of transgender liberation. In this war we take the long view, we know what matters is not the battle but the tactical advantage because we will never have the upper hand or the superior weaponry but we always and only ever have the higher ground. Whatever the outcome of this war, we will be vindicated by our transcendence. Because we trans women, we are divine. Sisters closer than any ties of blood could ever promise: Each of us more luminescent than the stars, children of the moon—our magic is transformation, shape-shifting, dis-identifying. Transformation. For our flesh is our own, claimed by us, us, and all, Carved out and marked, refashioned into a beauty terrible and great, we choose this life not because we want to but because we must, and so we do. We don’t get medals, accolades or purple hearts, Only the goddess knows our truth, And to her we turn in our darkest nights, When all else has forsaken us: The divine feminine protects us, because we are divinely feminine. She is the moon, fierce, ferocious and phasic, We are her children, Transcendent and transformative: the goddess speaks to and through us. And here I can close my eyes and feel this closeness with my sisters, my trans ancestors, and know no matter what I am, whether I am Tranny, faggot, dyke, or abomination I am all that and so much more, Because this body is my cage, And I will set myself free, As all my ancestors have done before me. Reluctantly I turn myself toward the sun and think for a second that there might be a way out of this hell. Trans love is a revolutionary disruption of the very fabric of existence. This is not alienation from Being but it is hyper-saturation within the discourses of law, medicine, race, gender, sexuality and society. These things together form the interlocking parades of horrors that accompany the everyday experiences of trans women. For a trans person to wake up and face the day is for a trans person to wager, in a profoundly optimistic posture, on something that holds open the possibility for a reparative justice found in the reparative power of living something. Being as reparation. Being as love. Love as the disruption of Being. But it’s difficult to think when all thinking is self-correction, regulated cognition, participation in a game that was set up beforehand as one we trans women can only ever lose. Our lives are only validated when the world commands our death. Transmisogyny might be understood as the axiomatic qualifier of transsexual women’s claims to personhood. Within this space of indeterminacy we have two options: either de-gender ourselves and lose all we’ve fought for, or mis-gender ourselves as “men who wear dresses,” and let Them know They were right all along. Nowhere do we trans women simply get a chance to exist in the sunlight. We are accepted at precisely the degree to which we deny ourselves. At every turn we are reminded of our socially enforced inferiority and uselessness. Transmisogyny is the primary modality of trans erasure and the most intense nodal point of this social nexus of cis-hetero-misogyny. This is an attempt to articulate from within the space of daily nightmare a form of trans life that would be a powerful and earthly presence. This act requires magical assistance. Alchemical transformation. Science and magic together, beyond the confines introduced through centuries of cisgender epistemology. To find beyond hell the space of trans love. Beyond catatonia lies the reality of trans flourishing. A life worth loving, and loving for ourselves. Trans love is a radical act of transformation that allows trans people to claim ownership of our existences. Outside the confines of a stultifying, banal and truncated life resulting from weaponized dysphoria, trans women are capable of magical transformations. Through transformation we can then move in the world with the knowledge that we are not mere zombies brought to life by medical and legal science but are like the witches who used forbidden arts to conjure spirits, demons, angels, knowing that every day we create practices that allow us to survive to see another day. Trans love is the core of trans self-care and relief from a world built on our erasure. This is an affirmation of transgender women. Trans love is how we disrupt this constant experience of forgetting-remembering and how we propel ourselves forward through one day and into the next. By disrupting this cycle of harm and abandonment by loving ourselves and our trans sisters.
face 1
by Padideh Aghanoury
Femme-NOS

by Denise Parry

Femme-NOS[1] is a label that recognizes the convergence of my queer identity and my autistic one. It acknowledges that my brain doesn’t function in a typical way, nor does my body, nor does my heart.

Femme-NOS is how I navigate a world designed for other ways of being—a heteronormative world, a cisnormative world, an allistic world.

Femme-NOS is learning to express my gender and sexuality in ways that work for me. It’s 3 years of disastrous attempts to put on eyeliner. It’s rules for picking my clothes—no rough fabrics, no tight sleeves, no form fitting tops, no jangling, no tags.

Femme-NOS is choosing the same location for every first date—not too noisy but noisy enough that I can stim. Food without sliminess that won’t be cross contaminated. Seats comfortable enough to sit and talk in for a few hours. Lights that won’t hurt me.

Femme-NOS is happy flapping when I see a cute girl in the library. Infodumping about the medicalization of my own identity. Stimming to Tegan and Sara. Echolalialing lines of Andrea Gibson poems.

Femme-NOS is finding words—finding how to not be a stranger to my body, how to not be a stranger to my love. It’s multiple divergences from what is considered normative. It’s a reminder that the normative was never possible for me to attain to begin with.

Femme-NOS is not inherently needing to be fixed. It is a label that represents acceptance of how I exist. How I exist as queer and how I exist as autistic. It’s a label of affirmation—a reminder of how much love I have for myself.

[1] NOS is in reference to Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified which was classified as an Autism Spectrum Disorder in the DSM-IV; it was commonly referred to as atypical autism.
What is a safer space? The specific definition varies from person to person, but overall a safer space is somewhere that everyone, regardless of gender, sex, age, race, ethnicity, ability, or sexual orientation feels welcome and feels comfortable expressing fully who they are, without fear of being emotionally, physically, or sexually harassed or attacked. Disclaimer: we acknowledge that it’s impossible to create completely “safe” spaces. Because of this, we decided to write about how to make spaces “safer” instead of safe. “Safer” implies that we are more focused on constant improvement rather than a singular end goal.

To find out how safe University of Puget Sound students feel on campus, we asked several students various questions such as “how can you tell if a space is safe for you personally?” and “have you had any on-campus experiences where you felt a space was unsafe for yourself or others?” Following that, we asked participants to rank certain campus spaces based on how safe they felt on a scale of 1-5, where 1 was “very unsafe” and 5 was “very safe.”

One hundred students at UPS responded through social media and word-of-mouth. We kept our survey open for two weeks and had various Facebook groups such as Wetlands Magazine, Queer Alliance, and Puget Sound Student Union post a link on their respective Facebook pages. Because of the spaces on which we posted the survey, we received more responses from queer students than non-queer students. We cannot claim that the experiences reported by the queer students in the survey are representative of the entire queer population on campus, especially because our sample pool was relatively small. However, we believe that the responses we received are reflective of broader social attitudes and experiences on campus.

Based on our overall results, the safest places on campus are public workspaces, such as the library and cafes, with an average rating of 4.08. Conversely, the least safe space reported were Greek life locations which received an average rating of 2.48. Other campus locations earned ratings from 3.20 (social spaces) to 3.84 (academic spaces). However, when those results were separated between queer students, non-queer students, and questioning students, the data revealed a deeper problem.

In every campus space on the survey, non-queer students reported feeling safer than queer students. While the percent difference between the safeness ratings given by these groups of students for most spaces ranged from 5.85% in academic spaces to 9.15% in resident halls, the ratings for the safeness of Greek life were 32% lower for queer students.

Being Queer at UPS: A Personal Narrative

The definition of a queer lifestyle is fluid. For me, it means being able to openly express my identity in public, and this is one of the reasons that I was so excited to come to college in the Pacific Northwest. Puget Sound, specifically, has a reputation for being a very queer-friendly school. Many freshmen cite the acceptance of the campus community as a primary reason they chose UPS. But after actually living on campus for a few months, I find myself questioning if the school has a policy of acceptance—or of tolerance.

One of the pillars that Puget Sound stands upon is the idea of home; President Thomas mentions home abundantly in his Convocation speech. Can anyone be at home where they don’t feel safe? If any student does not feel safe on campus, the university is not doing its best to welcome students home.

The campus orientation program does an adequate job introducing the Green Dot program, but a poor job introducing queer lifestyles. Asking and requesting pronouns was a fantastic welcome, however this gesture is not only inconsistent but seemed dependent on the age and inclination of the administrator. Furthermore, the campus seems to tire of asking for pronouns as the year progresses.

Another section of orientation was the I Am Puget Sound assembly, where students were encouraged to stand up to show different economic or social backgrounds. While the aim of the assembly is to anonymously recognize the diversity of the freshman class and standing is not required, the assembly was nerve wracking for me. Sitting in a hot, crowded gym as different labels flash by on a screen in front of my fellow first years, I knew what was coming: the queer label that I was debating standing up for. On one hand, if I stayed sitting, I would have saved my anonymity, but one the other I felt traitorous. If I stood up, there would be the chance
of social exclusion and ridicule, as well as losing a certain sense of mystery that college life entails.

With adrenaline pulsing through my veins, I did manage to stand up. I’m glad I did, but I can only imagine my guilt if I hadn’t. Making a new life in a new home should never be threatened by the presence of guilt. Puget Sound needs a better way to introduce incoming freshmen to the queer community without pressuring people on the spot.

I will not personally feel safe on this campus until all of my fellow queer students are given the chance to flourish in their own space. Puget Sound has the raw building materials and opportunities to create safe spaces, but we still need to take the time and effort to perfect the design. It takes careful furnishing to turn a house into a home.

While these results are an indication that UPS is not a safer space for everyone, there are several ways campus culture can be improved and queer safe spaces can be created. For example:

**Individual level:**

- At your next party, create a sober zone!
  - Set aside a space where there will be no alcohol
- Make accessibility information available on event pages
- Be sure to include trigger warnings on your posts and writings
- Challenge oppressive language (i.e., slurs and oppressive phrases)

**Advocate for institutional change:**

- Remove the box for the social security number on college applications
- Remove the binary gender box on college applications and other forms
- Revise the sexual assault policy to streamline the process for survivors/victims
- Mandate safe space training & education about queer culture during orientation and for organizations with a certain number of people
- Make all bathrooms gender-neutral
White sky and white clouds,  
snow fall and brisk air,  
with all things covered in white shrouds.

Everything blanketed in blissful complexion,  
but one interruption to this joyous image.  
His black hair and ecru skin taint perfection.

Blood from his dirty face spoils the frosted ground,  
purple marks on his watered eyes bowing to the space ahead.  
And he dares not to make a sound.

The sound of his cries could reach a distant ear.  
And if picked up, They might search high and low,  
for They want to make him disappear.

In this world that belongs to Them,  
a boy who can’t be man whilst being fair,  
taints Their flawless alabaster gem.

This world does not belong to him;  
he will continue to walk along this road,  
and as he moves he sees the heavens render dim.

Because a boy who stains the spotless pose,  
and cannot satisfy this ruling mind,  
must grovel for mercy with his rightful throes.

**thanksgiving**

by anonymous

every November i want to die  
because i have to look in your eyes  
and pretend i’m thankful to be with you  
every November i want to die  
and we’re the only two that know
to all my past lovers

by Grace Piccard

to all my past lovers, i say: thank you
i’m not sorry that i unbuttoned myself
in half-lit bedrooms with posters on the walls
curling in at the edges
i unfurled my body for you
let you touch me and squeeze me and slide inside me
i let you kiss me
open-mouthed on my neck, chaste against the back of my shoulder
you taught me how to get what i wanted
the swing of a hip
unraveling myself on the half-shell
the sound of my name caught between your tongue and teeth
low and holy
you taught me the meaning of no shame
in wearing purple bruises on my collarbone
in pulling on sticky underwear and walking under streetlights at four in the morning
like the moon i rise and set
and let my lovers ebb and flow against me
like the moon i give myself whole and infinite to the sea
to all my past lovers, i say: thank you
to all my past lovers, i say: you’re welcome
Ecstasy of St. Emma

*oil on canvas*

by Maggie Langford

Peel

*oil on wood*

by Maggie Langford
withered

by Hannah Monsour

She didn’t know she was beautiful.
And no-- not in a boy band
endearingly, adorable way--
In a real way.

She didn’t know.

More of a sucker punch when it’s true--
When thirteen-year-old girls whither away,
hiding food in their pockets,
and save their tears for those long nights.

Losing her way into the soul-sucking works
of our American dream
Is that what my body should look like?
That pre-pubescent body
that has not been given the chance
to form its curves,
built its strength?

Sinking through the cloud of youth,
hitting the cold, hard ground
much faster than she should
There is no going back--
Kids these days grow up so fast.

And often my stomach falls from fear
that she will glance in the mirror
and feel she falls short (again)
Because she used to not know…

But now she does.

bitter homes & gardens

by Simone Quinanola

don’t tell me that I need to
uproot the shrub that has rooted itself into
the garden of mons pubis
it has already begun to grow
flourish and blossom

the weeds were plucked without your help
(never needed it in the first place)
and the roses have begun to bloom
with thorns to prick your invasive fingers and
branches that will break your flimsy
little pruning shears

do not try to “do me a favor”
cause last time I checked
body police couldn’t even garden for shit

NEXT PAGE

TRIGGER WARNING: FOR BODY HORROR
artist’s statement: As long as I can remember I’ve been making art. I went to an arts-based school from 3rd-8th grade, and took art classes every semester of high school. As well as being the teaching assistant to my art teacher there, I held the position of president for our branch of the National Art Honor Society. Art has always felt as necessary as breathing to me. It is something that just happens because it needs to happen. Most of my art explores the relationship between the human body and nature through sexuality and physical deterioration.
I want to ask you a question, Adam:
What is it about forbidden fruit and excuses
That makes you want to punish me with blood
From the same body you tore open?

What was it about my woman playing god?
Did you wait four years for your turn?
I bet you thought yourself patient
I bet you practiced
Wrote your scripture on the palm of your hand,
Sure to remember your lines

I bet you couldn’t wait to read them to me
Was it not enough to speak?
Did it feel better to carve them into my flesh?
Slowly, like an afterthought
As your hands searched for your rib in my skin

Adam, you are no man
You are a snake -
A nuisance in my garden
Where “sorry” will not pluck your hands from my chest
Only my slumber from your conscience

You are dirt
No better than the beasts you named
So do not think yourself divine
My body is not your temple
You can’t hide from your god here
So fuck you, Adam

May you know evil only as you speak your own name
May you know fear from your reflection
May you learn monster from man
You are more monster than man
I’ve been thinking a lot about the relationship between rage from being a survivor of multiple rapes and rage from being genderqueer in a cissexist world. Specifically, I’m thinking about whether anger is or isn’t productive for activism and how marginalized people come to be told to stop being angry. It’s becoming increasingly frustrating to me that so many incredibly privileged people feel that it’s appropriate to tone-police me and accuse my anger of being unproductive. I’m tired of being told that I can be a non-binary transgender activist, so long as I’m not offensive about it, as long as I use nice words and don’t raise my voice too much.

I’m not interested in respectability.

What I’m interested in is the relationship between productive anger and the anger that just sits at the pit of my gut and makes my breathing uneven around straight men because they’ve always been dangerous to me. As an activist, I’ve learned to use anger to motivate myself to keep going, and I don’t think that kind of anger is necessarily unhealthy. Marginalized people need more anger. Disprivileged people are always being told to advocate for ourselves in a way that doesn’t threaten the majority, that our basic human dignity will be recognized so long as we’re nice about it. That’s just not true. Silence and smiles will turn us to ice sculptures that will melt once the party is over and all the rich people are gone.

It’s not a new concept that marginalized people need to be angry. Black activists have been saying this for years, only to be misinterpreted and misquoted by the same people who they were fighting against. Trans activists have always relied on a foundation of rage to propel social movements forward to advocate for transgender liberation—Sylvia Rivera wasn’t nice or quiet, which is probably why she’s represented as only a minor character in a recent film about the Stonewall Riots. It’s the same reason why all the screaming queens at Compton Cafeteria aren’t in our history textbooks, and why most people don’t know who Marsha P. Johnson was.

Anger unites marginalized communities and simultaneously ensures the erasure of the people who showed up to fight. Anger is always positioned as negative, unhealthy, and as something to ‘be worked out in therapy,’ but only rich people get therapy. There is not an antidepressant in the world that will make me feel better about living in a society that views trans people as worthless and sexual assault victims as liars. No amount of therapy will make it okay that students can be transphobic and nothing is done because “we have to support those that kind of anger is necessarily unhealthy. Marginalized people need more anger. Disprivileged people are always being told to advocate for ourselves in a way that doesn’t threaten the majority, that our basic human dignity will be recognized so long as we’re nice about it. That’s just not true. Silence and smiles will turn us to ice sculptures that will melt once the party is over and all the rich people are gone.

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Tell that to Leelah Alcorn, to Venus Extravaganza, to Brandon Teena, to Angie Zapata, to Kandis Capri, to Jennifer Laude. My anger has roots in a community that frequently has no other option other than to be angry.

Still, where is the line between anger propelling me to call out the stupid shit that people say to me on a day-to-day basis from the anger that devolves into a pit of anxiety. What’s the difference in the anger that comes from my own experiences of being raped and the anger I feel when I see statistics about rape on college campuses? Is the anger I feel at rallies the same anger I feel when I run into one of my rapists? Is there even a difference? Can there be a difference?

What is the limit for productive anger? Some of my closest friendships have been formed by getting angry together, which is probably why most of my friends are queer or rape survivors, — frequently both. Survivorhood is a strange and unusual community that no one wants to be in, but when I meet other survivors there is this instant understanding of each other, of shared camaraderie. Being trans frequently feels like being a survivor in this way. I can replace the above sentence with ‘trans’ instead of ‘survivor’ and it would still hold mostly true, the only difference being that I don’t hate my transness, only the oppression that comes with it.

And that’s exactly where anger comes from: oppression. There is no difference between anger that comes from transphobia and anger that stems from survivorhood. Both fuel activism not out of desire, but out of necessity. It should come as no surprise that most people who do sexual assault prevention work are survivors themselves, and most people who do trans liberation work are transgender.

And most of the time, the people who tell me to stop being so angry are neither trans nor rape survivors.

I understand that people can be uncomfortable when confronted with anger that they don’t know how to reconcile because they’ve never experienced the source, but being uncomfortable, instead of traumatized, is a privilege. It is a privilege to not be able to understand why trans people are so angry all the time and why rape survivors refuse to put up with toxic masculinity. It might be difficult to be around angry people who are just trying to survive, but they’re doing just that: surviving. There is no standard of comfort when you’re constantly worrying about walking home alone at night or that your concerns of transphobia won’t be taken seriously. Or if you and your work will be taken seriously at all because anger is so devalued in our society.

While I can try to understand why people tell me to stop being so angry, I really don’t get it because they’ll never have to navigate the world in similar ways, hopefully. Rage is necessary for activism because it’s the only thing that’s ever really worked.
fading face
by Sophia Munic
Flipping through the dictionary
by Maloy Moore

Bisexual - (noun; bī-sekSH(ew)el ) a selfish slut.

Bisexual - (dating) fetishized by men, ignored by women; see also: perceived as more likely to cheat.

Bisexual - (cognitive) someone who can’t make up their mind.

Bisexual - (as told by my best friend’s mom) someone who pretends to still be gay in high school, but someday, when all the straights are married and pregnant, they will be laughing at the bi-kids who were really just gay all along.

Bisexual - (in the queer community) often called not gay enough, not a true gay, not a real identity. see also; this label comes with occasional privilege.

Bisexual - (fluidity) more people feel this than described; Mom tells me she had a crush on a beauty in college, but she never acted on it. see also; the heteroflexible gateway drug.

Bisexual - (on the Kinsey Scale) does not have to be 50/50. It can be 3/97, 21/79, or anything in-between.

Bisexual - (history) countless examples throughout time and place; would you believe Fergie, Lord Byron, Calvin Klein, Freddie Mercury, Frida Kahlo, Frank Ocean, the list goes on. Did you know Herman Melville dated Nathaniel Hawthorne? It gives a whole new perspective on Moby Dick.

Bisexual - (human being) deserves the same respect as anyone else; no more and no less.

Bisexual - (and proud) attracted to multiple genders;

not defined by anyone but themselves.
An Open Letter From One Mistress to Another

by Lydia Bauer

For a while you will think it’s real
You will believe the words
He whispers to you in between the sheets
That she sleeps in
These words will rule your heart with an iron fist
They will be the foundation for every
Misconstrued thought you have
The rationale for every let down he delivers

Never forget that whether you win or lose
You’re breaking someone

You will think that he is unhappy with her
But you will learn that
He is unhappy with himself
And nothing you or she does will change that

You will think that it has to do with you
But it has nothing to do with you
Just like the fact that you sought him out in the first place
Has nothing to do with him

You will always resent him
Because he will never leave
Even if he’s unhappy
He’s comfortable
And never forget
That his comfort is more important than yours

Think long and hard about why you’re there
Maybe you’re putting bandages on old wounds
Maybe you’re proving a point
Maybe you just like the heat of it all
But never forget
That these sad stories
Are circular
And your old wounds won’t heal with a band-aid
And that he’s not even really a band-aid at all
But dirt
Being rubbed into cuts

Try to separate yourself from the idea that
When you’re with him
You don’t feel alone because
He will always leave you alone
He, after all,
Is expected to be in someone else’s bed

And even if by some chance
He chooses you
He will always be the cheater
And neither of you will forget it

---

catcall by Elayna Caron

HEY, MY EYES ARE UP HERE.
THANKS!
woman in boxes

by Sophia Lev
saturday
by Shanna Williams

my body
is not yours to touch
get your fucking hands off of me
I can remember your tongue
I should have bitten it off
I can remember saying no
I can remember you not listening

Tw
by Olivia Carlson Keene

I never understood
trigger warnings
until it happened to me
over and over again
while sitting in a church pew
four years later.

I never understood
trauma
and how it infests your head
like garlic on a cutting board.
Forcing you to swallow it
with every meal
until we talked about consent
What it sounds like,
and what is doesn’t:
“Please stop”
“No.”
Turning away.
“I said, stop.”
“I’m not sure.”
Stillness.

[*silence*]

I said, “no.”
“Please stop.”
Years later in the church
with my friends all around me
his hands came back to me
again and again.

They grabbed mine
and put them on his dick.
I turned away
saying, “NO”
But he came back
pressing himself against my back…

With the pull of a trigger
I am forced to remember
how desperately I want to purge
the sour scent of his flesh
from my memory.
But even as I write this,
he walks in and sits across from me
pulling the trigger over and over again.
They are bullets that plunge into my head,
They are a voice that tells me
that my words and actions mean nothing
that I am powerless.
Every time we talk about consent
I pluck the bullets out with tweezers
but they always grow back
as if attempting to become new bones within
my body.
I never understood
until I felt the bullets reorganize my brain once
again
until I had to pull them out
until I remembered how much I can never
forget.

TW
by Olivia Carlson Keene

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over and over again
while sitting in a church pew
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College campuses have been nationally recognized as some of the most high-risk places for sexual violence, and after much public outcry in recent years, some colleges are making conscious efforts to change the situation and engage students in a conversation about consent. Within the freshmen orientation week, Puget Sound has incorporated a mandatory Green Dot training, which is essentially an approach to implementing strategies for violence prevention. Green Dot is based on the idea that college campuses are communities that have historically made sexual violence “sustainable.” When passive bystanders observe violent or threatening behavior and allow it to happen without intervening, they are enabling and perpetuating a culture of violence. This is because students generally don’t have identical ideas of what constitutes rape and consent.

The respective definitions of rape and consent have been constantly in flux, debated commonly within communities like college campuses where the topics are especially pertinent. Through orientation and mandatory Green Dot training for some, Puget Sound has been attempting to present the discussion of consent to the student body. However, until we all share a cohesive definition of rape and consent, we cannot be a safe campus free of sexual violence.

Current definitions of rape and consent, respectively.
Rape: “The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” -- Uniform Crime Reporting program within the Summary Reporting System. United States Department of Justice.

Consent: “Consent means that both people in a sexual encounter verbally agree to it, and either person may decide at any time that they no longer consent and want to stop the activity. Consenting to one behavior does not obligate you to consent to any other behaviors. Consenting on one occasion also does not obligate you to consent on any other occasion. Consent must be articulated coherently by all parties. Consenting means only that at this particular time, you would like to engage in this particular sexual behavior.” -- Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

How successful has Green Dot been in creating a clear definition of rape and consent? That depends on the type of training a student has gone through. All students at Puget Sound have experienced Green Dot in one way or another. Freshmen are required to attend a short information session during orientation week. Core staff members of Wetlands Magazine and KUPS are required to be trained in the six-hour certification workshop. While some freshmen leave the 45-minute long training more informed and willing to be an “active bystander,” it is taken lightly by others, disregarded, or even joked about. So if freshmen only have 45 minutes to become trained, what should be focused on? Firstly, the respective definitions of rape and consent need to be clearly defined. Without a universal definition we cannot train our peers to be active bystanders, which is the second step necessary to preventing sexual violence. Rather than spending forty-five minutes throwing out random hypothetical scenarios the program should focus on ensuring a mutually shared understanding of what consent is and what rape is.

Consent is:
• Clear
• Mutually shared
• Sober
• Free of power dynamics
• Always necessary

You have the right to:
• Change your mind at any time
• Consent to one sexual act but not another
• Consent at one time but not another

Green Dot is effective in giving situational training to students, asking to identify situations that are at high risk for sexual violence, and what should be done to prevent violence. Though much of the training is case-by-case and encourages creative problem-solving and participation, it cannot be fully effective unless students are given the clearest possible definitions of rape and consent. Rape and consent are not open to interpretation; there are singular definitions for each of these terms that should not be deviated from.

And at no time, under any circumstance, is anyone exempt from asking for consent, not even partners in a sexual relationship. It is always our responsibility to ask for and articulate our willingness to participate in any sexual act. When discussing consent within a legal context, it makes sex sound clinical, but sometimes style must be sacrificed for clarity. Consent isn’t “sexy,” it is absolutely necessary.
Given that most of us only have an hour’s worth of knowledge to use for the next four years, Green Dot training should cover what is absolutely essential, and ensure that we share a universally shared understanding of consent. Where the program falls short has much to do with the lack of follow up that the campus provides. It’s not hard to find resources for what to do when one is sexually assaulted: there are posters on campus, pamphlets in every bathroom stall, and a constant reminder to reach out to someone for help. The gap that is missing is preventing the assaults from ever happening. Largely, students who go through the training still don’t feel comfortable intervening in a potentially dangerous situation, because the line between consent and dissent is not always clear, especially from an outside perspective. Bystander intervention is talked about and situations are spelt out for students, but the educators can’t ever predict every situation that bystander intervention could stop someone’s life from being changed. This is why it’s important for the training to be reiterated throughout one’s college career. It is a skill set that one develops over time, not something that can be taught in a hour long powerpoint presentation. Rape culture on college campuses is a huge problem nationwide, but with the resources and training which include Peer Allies, CHWS, University Chaplain, YWCA of Pierce County, Rebuilding Hope! Sexual Assault Center for Pierce County, and there is also a list of resources within the Human Resources department. Understanding the Green Dot program has helped the University of Puget Sound students become better educated in what to do when one is assaulted, but where it lacks is a certain clarity that gives students confidence to act in any situation that they deem threatening.

Because Green Dot training during freshmen orientation is so short, the administration needs to focus on the main take away that will stick with the students: how to recognize rape, and how to recognize consent. After that knowledge is shared, our student body will feel better prepared to fight sexual violence on our campus.
ghost
by anonymous

tender,
is the flesh the dull knife scrapes over and over, ashes and dust that settles in your lungs, heavy but weightless as the Smoke, filling your stomach and poured out into the world. After the first contact is made a young girl who dropped her innocence, misty as a ghost, sunken-eyed and lost. Empty, is the cavity inside your ribcage, which crackles and collapses, the brittle bones of an underfed, over-dressed, unseen woman, disillusioned in her step.

The awkward ambling in a cathedral, built on columns of spite and cobwebs spun out of hate, concealed in velvety curtains of pity.

For the longest time, I hated you. I wanted you to wake up.

but you are who I’ve always wanted to be.

I keep having dreams about the end of the world, It always ends well for me, but does it for you?

TRIGGER WARNING: FOR SELF-HARM AND ABUSE
Everyone knows that I'd rather my sister be a whore than my brother be a queer
Told to me by my grandpa
Just one part of the explanation of why he couldn’t accept me
Why I was no longer part of his family
As if it should have been obvious that his love was conditional

“I’m homophobic”
Said to me with pride and a grin by a friend of 10 years
The group around us laughed
Ten deep breaths later I came out to him and seven others
Before walking away
Minus three friendships
I don’t know why it wasn’t obvious that their love was conditional

“We still love you, it’s not like you’re butch”
Responded my parents to my tearful confession of loving girls
I shuddered when I said I love you back
Because it is obvious that their love is conditional.
“What Cis White Men Talk About When They Talk About Diversity”

by Alice Hudson

“Subtlety is dead”
~Sikander Sohail

The boardroom was banal, stiff, and self-important, like the dick of a frat boy. Against the left wall were windows which dominated the whole wall, and looked out over a seemingly endless parking lot filled with shiny cars. Besides a poster of a cat hanging from a tree branch with the words “hang in there!” printed in a bastardization of comics sans, the room was only occupied by a large rectangular table and two homogenous white men in suits. They sat side-by-side; close, but not too close, so that any fellow businessmen couldn’t accuse them of homosexuality.

As the hands of the clock tried to high-five at 12 and failed spectacularly, a woman entered the room. The two men immediately smelled “the gay” on her, letting out a near-silent hiss that sounded like the beginning of the hydrogen leak in the Hindenburg. As much as they would have preferred another cisgendered, heterosexual white man in the room—no homo—they knew if they wanted a gold star for diversity points, they were going to have to fake it until people believed they made it.

“Mr—MISS Jones, thank you for coming.”

They instantly realized that Tara Jones had caught them misgendering her, and that she was appropriately displeased. One of the men quietly yet desperately scrambled for the diversity cue-cards, while the other posted ‘srry u were offended #notmyfault #plsdontholdmeaccountable’ to his personal Twitter account. Finding something that resembled an adequate rectification, the man with the cue cards prematurely ejaculated his words:

“It’s an honor to be meeting with you, ma’am. You’ve done a lot for the minority community.”

“Yes,” proclaimed Man #1. “Violence appeals to our manly demographic.”

“But—”

“But,” said Man #2 with the fake somberness of one who was going to collect hella inheritance money after Grandma’s funeral was over. “Frankly, I don’t know if we can sell a ‘character of color’, as you say, because the market’s oversaturated on that front.”

“Oversaturated?” said Tara, her eyebrow ascending with disbelief and anger because her soul was anchored by the desperate need for money.

“Yeah. Look, Miss Jones, Django Unchained came out...sometime, and it disrupted the diversity balance. Now if we have any more movies about non-white people, white people won’t be represented. And that will make them sad. Do you want white people to be sad?”

‘Yes’ she wanted to say. “I don’t like to make anyone sad,” she lied.

“We have to say no to ‘of color’, but we can open the movie with a quote from MLK JR,” said Man #1. He turned and spoke to Man #2, snapping the latter out of a rainy-daydream. “Pull up an MLK quote from Brainyquote.com.”

The steady rhythm of the alarm bells in her head, growing ever louder as the conversation continued, had been shrieking for some time like the bros of a frat boy who had managed to fit ten large strawberries up his asshole. Thoughts of her losing her house at the end of the month were the only ear-muffs she had. Under capitalism, it was all she had.

“Okay. Sure,” Tara said through a smile paint-
ed on her face by Vincent Van Respectability Politics. “She’s still a trans woman, though. Played by a trans actress.”

Silence was well-hung over the room. Thinking about how well-hung the silence was made the two men very uncomfortable. One of them remembered the night of senior prom, with the inflatable orca. The other remembered asking his first ex-wife for a handjob at a showing of Taxi Driver. In those moments, everything else besides insecurity seemed to shrink. The silence didn’t remain well-hung for long.

“Well, Miss Jones, we can’t…unless we got Caitlyn Jenner…?”

“Nah, man. We can’t produce another trans movie,” said Man #2. “Jared Leto truly captured the universal trans experience in Dallas Buyers Club. We can’t produce such a movie when Leto’s performance encapsulated all there is to say.”

“Shit, I didn’t think about that. Nice catch,” said the other man, slapping his associate on the nearest shoulder. The slap reminded the other man of his glory days on the sportsball team, catching things and doing it behind the bleachers with Becky Borenstein. “Besides, movies about the minority community are a niche market. We can’t throw money down the river of the indie-scene like baby Moses and expect it to return a profit.”

The two company-men burst into laughter. Tara could barely hear them. The shrieking of the sirens had been dampened by a singular, terrifying roar. All she could hear was the voice of her landlord, telling her that if she didn’t have a third of the money she owed him paid by the end of the month then she’d be evicted. Mustering all she had, the crushing gears of capitalism churning like stormy ocean waves in her ears, Tara desperately clutched at what was left.

“In light of…all that, could the lead be, at the very least, a cis woman?”

Almost immediately, Man #1 spoke up. “My ex-wife was a woman. We can’t do that, cyst or no cyst.”

“What’s a cyst woman?” whispered Man #2 to his compatriot.

“I think it’s one of those tumblr things.”

“Women,” Man #2 mumbled under his breath. “We do like the war idea though,” said Man #1, gears turning in his head like the teacups at Disneyland, but with a sticky spinner. “War, (insert diversity shit), war, guns…”

“I know!” exclaimed Man #2. “Get this, okay: gay dude joins the army and fights terrorists in the Middle East. But he’s in the closet, right? So he has to go on a journey of self-discovery while waging a one-man war on Al-Qaeda. Like American Sniper meets Brokeback Mountain.”

“Motherfuckin’ Oscars, here we come.”

Around Tara the room seemed to warp and shrink, closing like minds. Panic swept over her. No other studio had called. This was it. There was nothing but this appalling shit or losing her house. Nothing.

“Okay,” she sighed, trying to breathe through the seemingly solid air in her throat. “Okay. I can…can work with that. Yeah. When do I start on the script?”

The two men exchanged a quick glance. “Miss Jones. You fulfilled your function here. We no longer require your services.”

Her vision seemed to contract and expand, inward and outward. The solid in her throat became more dense. She felt like she was trying to breathe through a chunk of brick lodged in her throat.

“You promised—”

“We promised to pay you if your pitch went through. Extra if you wrote a script from your idea. But we aren’t producing your idea, and we have someone better equipped to write the fine nuances of the male perspective. There’s nothing to pay you for. You can go now.”

“…..Go fuck yourself.”

Underneath the table, one of the men’s fingers pressed a bright red button.

“I don’t think you understand,” said Man #2, the corners of his mouth stretching upward. “The conversation’s over. You can bitch about it all you want, but it doesn’t change anything. We’re done.”

The one door opened, and two security guards stepped in, fingering the tasers strapped to their hips. They edged closer, making sure Tara heard them coming. Man #2 smiled wider, and Man #1 did his best to contain a chuckle.

“Oh, and one last thing, Mr. Jones: go fuck yourself.”

****

Rain pounded against the yellow glow of the movie theatre’s marquee. When the rain washed over the weatherproofed lightbulbs, and the rays of light from inside spilled onto the street, it all seemed so unreal to Tara. On cold winter nights like these, she couldn’t help but see it as a world too fantastic for her to access. Wiping the cold water from her eyes, she saw it for the first time. Don’t Ask, Won’t Tell, the poster proclaimed, starring Perez Hilton and RuPaul, and directed by Roland Emmerich. It was too cold to laugh, but she could sneer.

“Ha,” said Tara. “Biggest fucking joke you ever told.”

Repositioning her backpack onto her other shoulder, she turned from the poster and headed towards the bridge. She hoped the leaks on the underside of the bridge hadn’t spread to the little pocket underneath that she called home.
my vagina would wear
by Olivia Carlson Keene
you mistook our eyes for almonds
and consumed us without a second thought.

it’s only a matter of time before you find out
that bitter almonds are full of cyanide,

and god, we are bitter.