Dear readers,

Over the summer, I was lucky enough to work on the magazine Re-Imagined, a joint production by several medias at the University of Puget Sound in conjunction with the 2018 Race and Pedagogy National Conference. As part of my position, I was expected to read through all of the back issues of Wetlands to find pieces that related to this year’s theme: “Radically Re-Imagining the Project of Justice: Narratives of Rupture, Resilience, and Liberation.” My heart was absolutely full as I read over five years of magazines, each with the goal of pushing our campus toward inclusivity, broader horizons, and a deeper understanding of the experiences of marginalized groups both within and beyond the boundaries of the University. Things were not perfect, by any measure. But what was most consistent was the tangible progress and intentional growth.

The magazine you’re holding in your hands (or reading online, or listening to a dramatic reading of) is the product of a lot of hard work, most of it unpaid and often unsung. I know members of our community are balancing busy academic schedules, jobs, and social demands, so I’m always comforted when I get a chance to see that students at the University of Puget Sound manage to carve out space to make meaningful art. It takes trust on the part of the student body to submit their personal pieces, hoping they will be treated with respect and integrity. Self-expression is so, so necessary, and I can only hope Wetlands is a place where those leaps of faith can be celebrated.

So many people play a part in the creation of this magazine. We are funded through students’ tuition dollars and supported by Media Board and the Gender & Queer Studies department. We receive the majority of our content from campus contributors and supporters. The staff is made up of members of GQS 291, which meets weekly to discuss assignments related to Wetlands and collaborate on the final decisions. The layout and production responsibilities fall to our smaller stipended staff, who make sure the magazine is consistent, beautiful, and something we can all be proud of. Readers, thank you for your confidence in our staff. This magazine would be nothing without their dedication, creativity, and time.

As of the publication of this letter in November, however, much of that time has been spent without the compensation for which members of the executive staff were contracted. Some of their stipends have been held in a dispute regarding budgets and the powers and responsibilities of media heads. I do not write this to sound ungrateful; I know we are very lucky to have the resources of the University funding us to the generous extent that they do. However, it would be dishonest to leave out this critical piece of information: the semester is almost over, and some people still have not gotten paid. It has felt unfair to expect members of the staff to do the work that is needed to turn this magazine into a reality, without being able to give them any information about when they will receive the paychecks that they have every right to expect.

Transparency and equity are core to the mission of Wetlands. I think that our audience deserves to know that, while so much of this work will always be done out of an intrinsic motivation to showcase the creativity on this campus, there remains an imbalance that we are still working to rectify. I am filled with gratitude to have been a part of this magazine that encourages sharing the truth, even when it’s neither simple nor sweet. This experience has been an exercise in vulnerability, and I can’t express my gratitude enough.

With all my love,

Nayla Azzouz Lee

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Our faculty advisor is Dr. Priti Joshi
If you have questions, concerns, or feedback, please don’t hesitate to reach out to wetlands@pugetsound.edu

Find us on Facebook or follow us on Instagram @wetlandsmagazine
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HAND MODEL: MALCOLM WILLIG
When you were born, your daddy said your lungs were full of morning song. He held you in warm hands, lifting you toward the sunlight, and it was almost as if he knew you were made like a solar star—a guiding light to those who wander, sad, sadder, and lost.

They break open the old barn and it’s like the world ends all over again. Your mama, your brother, that little girl those people were desperate for. It ain’t fair or pretty or good. So what’s the point. When you slice open your wrist with mirror glass, a rosy ribbon of blood sweetened with fear slipping to the sink, you find the whetting need to live, to live.

A sweet baby is placed in your thin arms, and no one notices they are asking a girl to be mother, but the word woman feels right in your heart. You begin to understand who you are and like a caged bird they let you fold out a melody, fold the laundry, fold, but not fly.

In the woods, the earth falls quiet as you grow tiny thorns. Sweat drips down the column of your back, the promise of moonshine lit aflame tugging you on by the yearn and yarn. You ache for the family, both alive and gone, balancing on the edge of hope and pragmatism, understanding of your own worth. You watch feral angel wings, watch the way he tracks, watch the way he turns to you, eyes clear, rough hands, and his silence a litany.

Don’t give me lies and tell me they’re roses, you murmur, gaze piercing like a knife blade, mouth a knotted bow. I don’t even f—ing like roses.

You see a light, and your ribs fall from your body like the petals of a forget-me-not, and your sweet wisp of a soul floats into the velvet inhale of galaxy. O, whispers the universe and your soul sparks.
untitled  Anonymous

Relationships can be hard to navigate, especially when he also likes someone else.

the moon shines down on us
his lips tease mine
he leans in close
but pulls back at the last second
he says he wants me but
we can’t be together
he says he wants her too but
they can’t be together either
he smirks at me as he lays atop me
he grimaces as he says
“we shouldn’t be doing this”

the clouds hover above us
when I tell him my fears
he tells me he’s scared
of being alone
he’s scared
that he doesn’t deserve love
we stare at each other
as if we are enough
then I think of her

the rain falls around us
but all I can see is him
he only has eyes for her
his laugh rips through the air
when we are together
and echoes around me
after he leaves
my friends say I deserve better
but I don’t want better
I want him
he wants her

the fog surrounds us
as he holds me close
my body presses against him
I’ve never felt so warm
he gets a text from her
I’ve never felt so cold
he tells me about his depression
I tell him about my anxiety
he thinks we can heal what’s broken

Eve Sedgwick writes about the significance of the “homosocial” connection between the two men in a love triangle (specifically those in which there are two men and one woman). Sedgwick writes that in literature, this connection is often as important as, if not more important than, the heteronormative romantic connections. In my lived experience, I don’t know if I agree. What further complicates this theory in my life is that I am bisexual and may be polyamorous—so it’s possible for me to love both the “other man” as well as the woman. But that doesn’t mean that I do. These are the thoughts that inform this poem. I am also transgender, which to me personally, “queers” all of my relationships, both those that would otherwise be “gay” and “straight.”

Sophia Munic
i was never all
that good with
goodbyes

Eve Sedgwick
This struggle is a lifetime one

It is looking at the body in the mirror
And crying at another thing it can't do
Or does too well

It is thinking that it'll never be
Flat enough
Deep enough
Small enough
Me enough

It is looking at a lover and seeing only issues
With the body I have to call mine
A body chaining me to expectations I'll never meet

It is not eating because I forget that this body is mine
Or not caring about nourishing it
Out of fear of it getting larger

It is pain at the sound of the voice escaping this mouth

It is waiting for the day that this body will finally feel like me
But thinking that day will never come

This struggle is constant pain from a body at war with itself
It is voluntary trauma in the hope that one day I will actually feel normal

No one ever told me recovery would take this long
Or hurt this much

“Individuals have many social identities that may be donned or shed, muted or made more salient, depending on the situation... but we are always women or men — unless we shift into another sex category.” (West & Zimmerman, 139)

How does this concept act for those are neither women nor men? What sex category are they a part of? What category are they placed in if their sex category cannot be presumed?

“Doing gender” is not a universal experience, especially for those who are nonbinary or genderqueer - these rules of the shedding and putting on of various social gendered identities is something that they may consciously be choosing not to participate in.
it's starting again

Kyle Julian Parkhurst

It's starting again.
I can see you twitch when I ask, “do you love me?” for what must be the hundredth
time today.
I can feel the weight of your arms when you pull me in for another hug
“Don't be sad. Please. Not today.”
The more tired your love gets the more panicked mine becomes
And I start to lay awake at night
And this time it's not because I can't wait to see you in the morning
This time I'm left wondering if this is the same story I've lived so many times before.
The words from the boy in 10th grade keep repeating in my head over and over again.
“You're smothering me. You're smothering me. You're smothering me.”
Once from him, and then another, and now you.
Please don't let them come from you.
I remember trying to describe nicotine cravings like a hunger in your lungs
But I also remember walking past where you work every night, breathing in the smoke,
hoping you would pass me by.
I don't think I was ever addicted to nicotine
My lungs were hungry for your kind words, and your eyes on me in a crowded room.
I'm hungry for the small smile you give when I say something dumb, once again.
I'm hungry, I'm starving.
Tell me you love me. Tell me you love me.
Don't let this fade.
I remember the first night you told me you wanted me
That was also the night I broke down crying, already waiting for you to change your mind.
You said, “Don't cry.”
It was love, not exhaustion.
You said “I think you'll get bored of me. But I'm not crying about it.”
That would've sounded harsh coming from anyone but you.
My hands ache to hold you.
Don't shake me off.
Please, please
Don't push me away.

vagrant

Maiorme

The different slices of DNA that make up my whole swell away from one another.
I am but a mutt, and the tender portions of my being attempt to fit together like
stones and pebbles. I have no origin, no homeland. I emigrated from places I have
never seen, and I belong in too many cities to touch in one lifetime. The world's
gene pool has swallowed me whole, and I am left with nothing more than mixed
parts and a sense of alienation. What am I, for I cannot be more than a mutation, a
monster, a breed of its own with no home and no friendly hand to take me in and
convince me otherwise.

what now?

Sophia Munic
Snochia Mosley murdered three people at a Rite Aid in Aberdeen, Maryland on September 20, 2018 before taking their own life. The queer community ignored the blatant misgendering by Rite Aid and media outlets who simultaneously attached their crime to the inaccurate and racist “violent black” stereotype. News coverage ignored the fact that they were earning nowhere near a living wage in the pharmaceutical industry; one with a history of discrimination against trans individuals (e.g. Arizona CVS pharmacy in June 2018).

Snitch

The following essay is split into three parts. The first two explore two kinds of corporeal dissonance which have emerged (somewhat confusedly) in the medical discourse: Snapchat Dysmorphia and Gender Dysphoria. The third part compares the two phenomena in an attempt to ditch the blinders of the medical gaze, clarify how and why these experiences happen, and offer hope that they can be overcome.

Snapchat Dysmorphia

At the beginning of the 20th century, Edward Bernays (whose obituary christened him the “father of public relations” and who was Sigmund Freud’s nephew twice over) brought his uncle’s theories of psychology to American advertising in a revolutionary attempt to let businesses harness the public’s subconscious desires. Before his advertising campaigns, businesses advertised their products straightforwardly by showing what those products did. But after his entry into marketing, businesses began advertising their products by showing who the consumer would be if they owned them. For instance, Bernays’ campaign to make cigarettes appealing to women included the promotion of an ideal of thinness (alongside the idea that smoking could replace eating) and a parade of first wave feminists smoking “torches of freedom,” ushering in the stereotype—which persists to this day—that women who smoke are more independent. Bernays’ coercive marketing strategies were paired with new forms of mass media and eventually photo editing techniques to influence users’ desires without us realizing it was even happening. Ever since, heavily edited images of models and celebrities have flooded our society, drenching it with unattainable beauty standards and normalized aesthetic judgements as a way to drive corporate profits. Consumers make these judgements at the preconscious level, but for the advertisers they are very much intentional. The constant influx of these images over the past hundred years has led to widespread dissatisfaction with and dislike of our bodies, and it has been these images that patients typically bring as reference to surgeons in the recently-emerged market for cosmetic surgeries.

Today, heavily doctored images aren’t just produced in the image of models and celebrities, nor are they the sole domain of advertisers. Selfie filters in apps like Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and Facetune instantly alter the user’s face to give them larger eyes and lips, a smaller or larger nose and a slimmer chin, contoured cheekbones, different eye colors, and flawless skin. Oftentimes these edits exist paired with harmless and more distracting features like dog ears and flower crowns. But ultimately, these filters play off the same beauty standards forged by mass media’s coercive strategies. The social expectation to look a certain way creates a subliminal desire to look that way, and vice versa. The fun of selfies and appeal of filters is precisely their ability to feed that desire. But the fun has a price; in a 2017 survey by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, 55% of surgeons reported seeing patients who request...
surgery to look better in selfies. Just four years earlier, that number was 13%. But more and more people don’t just want to look better in selfies—they want to look exactly the way the filters make them look, and are bringing their filtered selfies to cosmetic surgeons for reference in ever-increasing numbers.

On August 2, 2018, three researchers from Boston University School of Medicine’s Department of Dermatology published the first outline of this alarming new trend in an article titled “Selfies—Living in the Era of Filtered Photographs,” in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) for Facial Plastic Surgery. With their article, a new term entered medical discourse: Snapchat Dysmorphia. Cited by the British cosmetic doctor Tijioni Esho, this is a new form of Body Dysmorphic Disorder spurred on by overexposure to selfie filters. It’s the driving force behind a new wave of people (mostly under 30) seeking cosmetic surgeries, and may result in an increase of eating disorders and the continued decrease of self-esteem already correlated with social media use.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) has been around for much longer than Snapchat Dysmorphia. It first entered the medical discourse in 1891 as “Dysmorphophobia.” Classified on the obsessive–compulsive spectrum, the Mayo Clinic describes BDD as “a mental disorder in which you can’t stop thinking about one or more perceived defects or flaws in your appearance” which “cause you significant distress, and impact your ability to function in your daily life.” BDD currently affects one in every 50 people, and a 2007 study in Primary Psychiatry found that 80% of people suffering from Body Dysmorphia “experience lifetime suicidal ideation and 24% to 28% have attempted suicide.” Snapchat Dysmorphia is a significantly newer subset of BDD, having only appeared over the last few years alongside the popularization of photo apps with selfie filters.

According to the aforementioned JAMA article, “filtered selfies often present an unattainable line and are blurring the line of reality and fantasy for these patients.” In the same way that mass media hijacked our beauty standards with heavily doctored images of others, we are now barraged by the same edits applied to ourselves each time we pick up the phone. The desires we’ve been fed have invaded the fabric of our reality and pushed us even further away from seeing those desires for what they truly are. We’ve begun comparing our real bodies with alternate reality images of our bodies, and this change does more than skew our aesthetic judgements and define what we find attractive or beautiful. It creates a dissociation with our own self image, a dissonance between the reflection we see in a smartphone and that which we see in a mirror. It mutates bodily dislike into bodily dysmorphia.

II. Gender Dysphoria

Elagabalus was a Roman emperor who ruled between 218 to 222 before being assassinated at just 18 years old. Among other controversial behaviour, Elagabalus painted their eyes, shaved their body hair, wore wigs, and married a man. According to their contemporary Cassius Dio, Elagabalus even “asked the physicians to contrive a woman’s vagina in his body—promising them large sums for doing so.” Despite the controversy this behaviour caused in Rome, it was nothing new as long as there has been gender, there have been those who reject the one they’re assigned to. That phenomenon hasn’t changed much in the 1800 years since Elagabalus assumed the throne, but the language we use to talk about it has. In 2013, the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) reclassified what had been previously called “gender identity disorder” as “gender dysphoria.” Also called gender dysmorphia, the American Psychiatric Association (which publishes the DSM-5) defines gender dysphoria as “significant distress and/or problems functioning associated with this conflict between the way [transgender individuals] feel and think of themselves (referred to as experienced or expressed gender) and their physical or assigned gender.” According to the DSM-5, gender dysphoria may be diagnosed when a patient fulfills at least two of six criteria:

1. A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics
2. A strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics
3. A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
4. A strong desire to be of the other gender
5. A strong desire to be treated as the other gender
6. A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender

These criteria reiterate an artificially constructed binary model of gender (note the repeated use of “the other gender”) but fulfilling them for the diagnosis is often required for necessary medical treatments such as hormone replacement therapy.

Not all people who are transgender experience gender dysphoria, nor do they experience it in the same ways. And like the medical understanding of gender dysphoria, my personal experience with gender dysphoria has morphed several times over the course of my life. I generally experience it in two overlapping dimensions: its social objects are the expected roles (behaviors, dispositions, attitudes, etc.) of the gender I was assigned at birth, and its bodily objects are those physical traits which are socially associated with a gender that isn’t mine—my height, my deep voice, and my facial hair are just some examples. At its most manageable, it manifests as a general dislike of those traits. At its most challenging, those traits make me dissociate from my experience and undergo body dysmorphia, feeling as though my body isn’t mine. It’s a startling and terrifying experience. It’s illuminating, too, as a perspective that few people have had or can relate to.

My experience of gender dysphoria became much more acute after I’d realized what it was I had been experiencing. Realizing I was transgender was like putting on glasses for the first time, and taking up the mantle of a transgender identity changed my perspective considerably. Many experiences I’d had but hadn’t thought to connect crystallized into a definite pattern; I could see how and why they were related. “Gender dysphoria” became one of those patterns, and having a name for it turned it into an object of knowledge which I could feel a certain way about. It turns out that much of what I feel has less to do with my direct experiences and more to do with how I feel about having them. Sadness is most poignant when I’m anxious about being sad. Joy is most elating when I feel good about feeling joyful. The attachment I feel to these states turns them into a kind of emotional feedback loop. Correspondingly, learning about gender dysphoria didn’t cause it for me, but it certainly shaped and sharpened the experience. Feeling dysphoria is one thing, but feeling it and knowing I do is another. How far past its name does suffering reach?
Names aren't all confusion though—they may cause the illusion of separateness, but naming is also the powerful and uniquely human ability that lets us identify and solve problems. Without a name for gender dysphoria, there would be no way to treat it, as so many transgender people need. At the same time, the conception of gender dysphoria as an ailment to be treated has resulted in the medical pathologization of those who experience it. The medical gaze is blind to the true causes of gender dysphoria: the friction between the oppressive, outdated social ideology we call “gender” and the individuals who are forced to contend with it (and I believe everyone experiences this friction to some degree, be it from unattainable beauty standards or being told to “man up” or any of the other innumerable ways gender is thrust upon us). Instead of treating the causes, the medical gaze seeks to remedy the hellish symptoms that we call gender dysphoria.

The pathologization of gender dysphoria rampant in the medical discourse confuses the symptom for the cause, providing only sisyphan (and cis-yphean) remedies to problems that are much broader in scope than any individual body. Too often, doctors treat transgender identity and the problems transgender individuals face as the result of gender dysphoria, as is evident in the prerequisite diagnosis for medical transition. But to me, it’s obvious that the exact opposite is true; gender dysphoria is caused by transgender identity and its social rejection. The primacy of gender dysphoria in medical discourse is responsible for other myths about the transgender experience as well. Foremost among them is the myth that transgender people are “in the wrong body,” which makes no sense. It’s obvious to me that I’m not in the wrong body, I’m clearly in my body (or I am my body, or my body is in me). Any sense of wrongness I feel when experiencing gender dysphoria comes from my past and ongoing socialization, not my body.

It took me so long to claim my transgender identity because these myths inform the way we talk about those identities. Namely, they stress gender as a feeling rather than an experience. I had always heard the refrain that transgender people “feel like men” or “feel like women” in opposition to the gender they were assigned at birth. But I have no idea what it means to feel like my gender! And I’m sure that if you asked 100 different people what their gender feels like you’d get 100 different answers. Gender may involve feelings, but it’s not a feeling. It’s a relationship with the world, with other people, and with myself. It took me a long time to realize that thinking of gender as a relationship and experience is much more honest than thinking of it as a feeling or identity. Ultimately, it’s the former that unites us and the latter that divides us.

III. Dissonance

Gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia are separate phenomena. Although they often come intertwined, they are by no means synonymous or mutually constitutive, and they are medically treated in different ways—BDD typically with therapy and medication, gender dysphoria typically with hormone replacement therapy and surgery. Yet they share two revealing characteristics: both are embodied experiences understood through dissonance between body and body image, and both are pathologized experiences (mis) understood through the medical gaze. In those senses the two psychological phenomena are comparable, and in comparing them each can be better understood. Particularly, many of the all-pervasive misconceptions about gender dysphoria can be traced out through the new and relatively clear-cut phenomenon of Snapchat Dysmorphia.

The chain of causality that results in Snapchat Dysmorphia is easy to follow. We’re the products of a society; our collective beauty standards socialize us to make certain aesthetic judgments, and the “beautifying” effects of selfie filters are an extension of those judgements. By seeing filtered versions of ourselves constantly reflected back, a dissonance emerges between how we expect to look and how we actually do, resulting in body dysmorphia.

The same model works to explain gender dysphoria. Our collective (and ever changing!) ideas about what someone of a particular gender looks like or how they behave lead us to make preconscious aesthetic judgements. When our self-understanding—especially when it takes the form of an identity to cling to—doesn’t correlate with our aesthetic judgements; when who we know ourselves to be doesn’t match the symbology attached to our physical traits, a similar dissonance emerges. That dissonance is gender dysphoria.

Both conditions are informed by social values like beauty, masculinity, femininity, or androgyny, which we apply to our bodies. Both are the result of attachment to an identity, be it a social media presence or a particular gender, which conflicts with how we see ourselves in actuality. And both end with the rejection of our bodies. Yet, as Slavoj Žižek writes, “an ideology is really ‘holding us’ only when we do not feel any opposition between it and reality.” If that’s the case, then the distressing feeling of dissonance is really the first step toward freedom.

Again, I must stress that these are fundamentally different experiences. Through comparison, the relationships we have with our bodies come more fully into view, but equating body dysmorphia and gender dysphoria with one another would lead us even deeper down the path of misunderstanding. Furthermore, each individual’s experience of corporeal dissonance is naturally going to be unique and will likely lead them to different conclusions and different resolutions. That’s okay. The experience of dissonance within your body is deeply personal, but it is ultimately a social phenomenon. It can be bandaged through an individualized medical response, but never solved. I believe that suffering can be overcome if we’re willing to learn from it, to grow from it, and to do so without sequestering ourselves into the kinds of categories which distort our perception in the first place. “Training oneself to see the specific and particular beauty of bodies...is a profoundly countercultural act,” writes Margaret R. Miles. “To see beauty is not to make an aesthetic judgement, but to experience the person we meet as beautiful at the level of perception.” Changing our perception can seem impossible, but it has been done before—if Edward Bernays and his successors could do it, so can we. And just as surely as the cure for suffering is in the suffering, the cure for perception is in the perception.
her body decays

paper thin skin
peels away from fair flesh
(once pink)
it has become the brown of rot

(she used to shine so sweetly)
now she floats in her sickly sugared
pool of decomposition

(that curved body was desired
by the lips of those who wanted
to sink their teeth into her
to taste the sweetness
feel her skin break against teeth)

now that body has shrunken
moldy and wrinkled
one withered leaf
dusted green on her stem

the beauty of the
pink lady
has expired

It's kind of unbearable, isn't it?
Me crying into your neck as quietly as possible
Trying my hardest not to shake
Trying my hardest to take shallow breaths
I know you can't help it
I understand, I understand, I understand
I feel your eyes on me
I know you can't help it
I feel devastated
I'm squeezing my shoulder
I'm trying not to think about what you just said
I know you can't help it
"I'm so glad you're being honest with me."
A lump in my throat
Of course. Of course. Of course. I already knew this. This body is cursed.
I want to destroy it.
God, I can't tell you how much I want that
I want the sting, I want the bubbles of red
I want to hurt this cursed body in every way I can
I want my bones to shatter, I want my skin to bleed "I love you."
Why did I have to be like this
Why does it have to be like this
I want to cut this lump out of my throat
I want my teeth scattered across the floor
I want to feel the ache deep underneath my skin
"It's okay."
I know you can't help it.
This is all my fault.
A burn, a sting, a heat.
My love is pouring out for you.
All over the fucking floor.
I grew up in a culture of aggressive body positivity. In this piece, I hope to reflect the way that these messages that I had to love my body at all costs, regardless of how I actually felt, drove me to hide any negativity. It took a long time for me to realize that in addition to a genuine appreciation and adoration of my body, I was still finding hidden ways to express my desire to change it, sometimes drastically.

you are an anomaly—a smudge made human. there’s the smudgeness of your existence. you smudge yourself and those around you, because your hands are dirty and want too much. you soil the clothes of the girls around you, that strange anomaly that comes out and gets them dirty, with your hands and your eyes. the eyes that look at her and wonder what her mouth would taste like, what it would be like to kiss her under the burnt glow of the lights that line the straight streets of your narrow town. is there something in that light that could solve the ache? or are you always stuck on the verge, burnt but still leaning in?

the wrong kind of love

Two men hold each other in their arms
How could God accidentally make two so perfectly molded to each other’s bodies?
The girls hold hands, suppressing smiles that have been there for years and plan to stay
How is it wrong to love someone so deeply?
To complete the other so efficiently, so gracefully, with such little effort?
The Bible implies that sexual sin is among the most harmful
It’s harm against one’s own body
It speaks of the very identity of the perpetrator
Why do I get sad smiles, encouragement, and pills for slashing my own legs
When two of the most lovely women I know are shunned from the Church for holding hands?
I identify myself as a self harmer, a smoker, a masochist, and I consider myself a Christian
But if I identified as a homosexual, one who loves, who’s loyal to the wrong gender, I couldn’t be a Christian
Bigotry, that’s what I call this
and I plan to do so until the day I die with pink, velvet scars kissing my ivory-colored flesh and a small, rainbow flag in my right hand
I hope I see you all in Paradise, when the Holy One heals my soul’s wounds
Because you’re beautiful, your love is real, and it, too, is Holy
He doesn’t make mistakes.
I like the rain better because it makes it easier to forget her
It's getting harder to remember the way her hair fell right on her shoulders
And the way her eyelashes would reach her eyebrows
And the blue color of her iris that seemed magnetic from the dark hair on her head
I'm forgetting how she would back my with the tips of her fingers writing me messages
I forgot how she would wear my clothes and stain them with her scent
I'm forgetting how she would take up all the space in the bed and how she never quite meant what she said
One day she loved me and the next wanted to feel free, that's what it was, right?
I cannot remember if it was the morning or night when we decided to end it
But I remember the rain
When my eyes could not swell the clouds did it for me
When I felt numb the sky gave me permission to feel it all
Was that my first love or a feeling of deep longing?
I can't remember now because it is raining

To Whom it May Concern (and you should be concerned):
Aren't you tired?
It has been a very long, difficult road. You had to struggle into power, create racial divides to appease your colonizing guilt, set up reservations to make room for your manifest destiny and your manspreading, create hysteria and virginity to feel superior to your wives, and then you had to sustain the whole mess.

Worst thing is? You made a rule that you couldn't even cry about it.

Aren't you tired?
It's been a long road, we know.
We, the folks you've had to squash down day after day to get your way and make sure you stay on top.
You've got to be at least a little tired.
I mean, you've had to stretch the bounds of your creativity. You've had to fathom how on earth someone could possibly not want to have sex with you and the meaning of the word no. You've had to consider how, just because someone does not have the same skin color as you, they are not dangerous. You've had to fathom how actions have consequences. And all the while, you've had to imagine what it's like to be incarcerated or pregnant to make sure the legislation you're making makes sense.

To whom it may concern
Payton Gubser

This piece is asking for an immediate and voluntary transition of power to people who are actually representative of and who want to represent this country.

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(heaven forbid you ask anyone that your legislation would affect).

How are you not tired already?

You've had a good run. Not really, but if that makes you more likely to hang your hat up and step into retirement, we could say that. Actually, we already are saying that. In the history books you whitewashed.

Don't you want a break?

Throw in the towel. Something about an eighth inning? It's your final quarter?

Please don't go into overtime.

Let someone else take the wheel.

Tear your walls down (and quit putting more up).

If you start shaping up, there's no need to be afraid.

She's been waiting for it.

They've been waiting for it.

We've been waiting for it.

Take a step back.

While we want reparations, we won't mistreat you if you aren't in command. We know how awful that feels.

So have a seat, class is in session. It's time for you to do a lot of learning and remember: we will dismiss you, not the bell.

Signed,
Literally everyone else.

lost and found

Anonymous

I lost myself in the grass behind my house pieces scattered across the green glittering in the sunlight

I forget where I am who I am who I'm going to be forgetting is my specialty trained for years the only thing left is the moss between my fingers and the sun on my back

I wrote this piece when, after a long day of overstimulation and anxiety, I collapsed in my backyard and spent a few hours laying in the grass trying to self-soothe. As an autistic person with anxiety and trauma, I become overwhelmed easily, and spending time in nature helps me ground myself, as well as being a wonderful way to stim with texture, light and sound. Being outside in that moment allowed me to forget myself for a few moments and heal from the day’s exhaustion.
A young man starts his journey of coming out as transgender to his family and to himself in full and complete bliss.

I grew up unsure in life, but an educated old man with a Greek accent taught me how to make it in all forms. He told me that his daughter, his granddaughter, and his great granddaughter were all named Zoe. He asked me if I knew what it meant, and I told him it meant “life” in Greek. He seemed impressed and asked me if I knew how to conjugate the verb. Of course, I didn’t, so he taught me how as I helped him with his bags. I live–ZΩ—pronounced zoh, and we live–ZOYME—pronounced zou—meh, were the ones that stood out to me. I thought that if I had the ideas etched into my skin I would have no choice but to obey them. I held my wrists to look at them, as I sat there on a large rock. The shore of Lake Washington was just an arm’s length away.

Every day as I looked at the ink, I understood and remembered who I was, and what I needed to do. I had gotten it before I came out to myself as transgender. But it never felt related to the name I was given, to Zoe. They were words that meant something else. Something more. I wanted to live, for me, for the person I needed to become. As I clenched my fists my whole body tensed. The splash of the water to. But that’s Zoe, a slow burn until she becomes completely numb and fades away.

I let out a warm breath into the night air and relaxed. I saw the cool, dark water lap gently at the small pebbles of the shore. It was so peaceful.

I knew there was something wrong as early as eight years old. My emotions and feelings toward other people and myself did not match up with Zoe. It got to be unbearable. Every time my mother said, “my little girl,” “she,” “her,” “my daughter,” “Zoe,” I felt the pain in my chest. It was a pain I could never put a name to. I didn’t understand what I was going through at the time, I couldn’t. The fights, tantrums, insomnia, visions, anxiety, panic attacks, and the fear of EVERYTHING—it all crept into my head where it would fester and eat away at what was left of my deteriorating sense of self. But the way the artist’s needle burned through my flesh was a soothing, yet unsettling burn, and it felt right. Just like the razor blades used to. But that’s Zoe, a slow burn until she becomes completely numb and fades away. I let out a warm breath into the night air and relaxed. I saw the cool, dark water lap gently at the small pebbles of the shore. It was so peaceful.

All throughout my life, I had to tell myself, it’s just a name. But it wasn’t the right one anymore. It felt dirty, demeaning, undignified, knotted in my throat, like the words of my father that would make me cry because I felt like it was my fault. Everything was my fault. When I was younger, I didn’t give off any obvious signs that I was not the gender I was assigned at birth. Therefore, it couldn’t possibly be true, it was just a phase. I didn’t want them to feel that way about who I was. I stopped reminding my parents that I was transgender, because I didn’t want them to keep rejecting me—the me I knew I was. The knot in my throat every time they said she or Zoe was better than the inevitable fight between my identity and their version of my identity. I leapt at the chance to live with my uncle. At least he didn’t know and didn’t knowingly invalidate me at every turn. I felt a pang of guilt as I remembered how I left him an hour previously.

“Zoe, you need to see someone! I can’t just stand by and watch you cut yourself apart! I love you so much! You are like a daughter to me,” he said, his voice quivering with emotion as he stood there and watched me. I grabbed my jacket jerkily and in two steps I was at the door without saying a word or looking at him. My knuckles were white as I gripped the knob. “Please don’t do this... I want to help you. Your parents—” I opened the door and was out of there before he could plead any more. I could hear the slam of the door echoing throughout the neighborhood as I took off down the street.

I couldn’t lose him too. I ended up on Lake Washington Boulevard, where I sat on my rock and rubbed the scars on my wrists, beneath the ink. I looked out onto the lake at the moon’s reflection. I knew I had to tell him, just like I’d told my parents. I was no longer his niece. I was no longer the Zoe he had known for 20 years. I was a young man, a sapling, waiting for the right moment to take root. But a seed doesn’t choose where it lands, it can only decide what to do with the resources it falls into. I hoped that my uncle was going to be the one to replenish me with water and some much-needed sunlight.

The moon was low over the water and the reflection was still as I broke my own stillness and slipped off my shoes and socks. I tossed them in a pile near the rock as I stood. The boats were tucked in and silent. This was why I always liked coming here in the middle of the night. It was always easier for me to think in the stillness and slipped off my shoes and socks. I tossed them in a pile near the rock as I stood. The boats were tucked in and silent. This was why I always liked coming here in the middle of the night. It was always easier for me to think in the stillness of the starlit sky. I shivered. This was the place I knew I could be alone with myself, with the water as my support. Its calm and cool touch comforted me, even on my worst days.

I whipped off my jacket, a hand-me-down from my uncle, and tossed it onto the rock. I pushed my jeans and boxer briefs down over my deeply scarred and stretch-marked hips. They joined my jacket on the rocks. I was looking at the water as I lifted up my shirt and slipped it off quickly, over the unwelcome bumps I was afraid to even acknowledge. My shirt landed on the pebbles of the shore as I stepped into the water. It was chilly, but the shock was exhilarating. I cracked a smile and took a few shaky gulps of air as I lifted off my precious binder and tossed it back to shore. I took a breath and dove in.
The moon's facade broke apart in the water. The foliage of leaves and tree branches, whispered in the wind, perfection. It was just me, myself, and the water. I looked up at the stars and watched my breath dissipate into the air above me. I saw the bright, clear moon shining back at me. Its reflection never did it justice. The water hugged my whole body and kissed at my chin and cheeks. I was myself and the water loved me; I was perfect. That was all I needed. All I wanted. So, I was a late bloomer. I knew that wasn't my fault. Not everyone knows themselves at the same time. But I knew who I was now. That was all that mattered.

There was a sudden illumination from the boulevard. I touched the bottom of the shallows and stood up in the lake, clear sparkling water was dripping from my naked skin.

"Zoe? Is that you?" I heard a familiar voice coming toward me.

"Uncle Ted? What are you do—" he ran over to me, splashing through the shallows to get to where I was standing. He pulled me to him and gripped me tightly, soaking himself in the process.

"Don't do this to me..." he trailed off but didn't loosen his grip, "I love you. I don't... I just... I was so worried I love you so much..." He whispered. He let go after a tight squeeze. He wiped his face and smiled, lips trembling. Tears were streaming down his face.

"I'm... I'm sorry." I was attempting to cover what I could as I shivered slightly. My uncle finally noticed and quickly took off his jacket and draped it around me.

"Wait, what are you doing out here like this!? It's freezing!" He led me to shore where he found my clothes and gave them to me. I barely began my shiver induced stuttering when he pulled me into a tight hug again, my clothes still in my arms. "Let's go home. We need to warm you up." He immediately turned the heat on as high as it could go and helped me layer my clothes around my body. He stopped and sat back and watched my shivering subside as I sat in the passenger seat, a look of confusion and fear plastered on his face. "Zoe, I don't know why you won't talk to me. But I—" he stopped and bit his lip. He looked away and reached over and made sure the vents were facing toward me. "I want you to know that I don't care. You can tell me anything. I'm no psychiatrist but getting things off my chest helps me. Yeah, just..." He sat back in his seat and looked at the steering wheel.

I looked out onto the water as my shivering came to a stop. The glistening lake rippled slightly. The moon was fractured across the surface. The facade was broken. I looked up.

"My name is Emmet."
In Sweden, there isn’t a word for “sex”–its rough equivalent more translates to “joy,” and the children begin their school days shouting it. They learn how to use a condom in the first grade, around the time they wrap up learning theoretical physics. And on the subject, the schools are not even what we would label a “school.” Children spend their days in “Viskerdamner,” roughly translating to “friendship bridge.” Not only is it readily accessible and free, the children actually get paid to attend. Studies show that 80% of the children use their money to donate to American GoFundMe pages for people who cannot afford their healthcare. Healthcare, too, is radical; every Swede considers themselves sick, because, you know, society. Every doctor goes to mime school for four years to qualify for medical school, not to mention grueling summers at circus camp. The most commonly used word they have for “clown” roughly translates to “empathy conduit.” There are seventeen words in Swedish for clowns. Some of the words reference their capacity for justice, others toward the utility of laughter. Of course, the phrase “burst of joy” means something closer to “orgasm” for them, but is closely related to the word “equity.” The “justice” system in the Swedish government has three options for convicts: community service as an amusement park mascot, cultivating bonsai trees for museums, or building houses for homeless birds. The only homeless population in Sweden is birds. Of course, many birds have fled their decrepit nests for the comfort of the roofs of the lightning-fast trains that access 81% of villages and 100% of hamlets. All of the public transportation services are free, funded by the 677% tax on trans fats. Every morning when you wake up in Sweden, a government official knocks on your door to inform you of new statistics and percentages. One such fact is that 75% of all Swedes are employed by the government. The other 25% are on parental leave. The government is very large, yet you can hold it in your hand. No one in Sweden considers themselves “white,” since everyone is white. Nationalism in Sweden has never been an issue, since each Swede ends their lunchtime, or “flütenhäven,” by laughing at the flag. Immigration is not a contentious issue, because everyone agrees that Muslim refugees are bad. In Sweden, they do not play sports. In Sweden, there are three hundred political parties, each of which hates their own ethnic group. In Sweden, sociology professors are unemployed since their jobs are already done.
Wetlands Magazine aims to provide an inclusive, accessible, critical and safe forum for students to amplify marginalized narratives and facilitate mutual education through the celebration of intersectional art, poetry, literature, advocacy and performance on the University of Puget Sound campus