

**Pink Lemonade:
An Autoethnographic Fantasia**

by

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Abstract

Pink Lemonade provides a campus climate study of queer experience on a rural, Southern campus in the United States. The researcher employs autoethnographic methods under a post-qualitative paradigm to explore the lives of ten men, who self-identify as gay. The study is dual-pronged: 1) the researcher explores the paradigmatic conventions often applied to queer student experience on college campuses and provides a theoretical treatise on the benefits of post-qualitative paradigmatic approaches using autoethnographic methods, and 2) a nuanced and visceral account, through myriad data sources, of how it feels to be a gay/queer college man in the early twenty-first century so that readers can assume a consciousness of gay/queer experience.

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Contrary to convention in educational research, this text follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Ed. I chose *Chicago* to preserve my intent that this research document be exclusively data; the body is free from overt analytical intervention (read: distraction). The body privileges participant voice free from disciplinary jargon or interpretive speculation. The body resists interrupting participant voice with unsightly parenthetical citations or the aesthetically ghastly imperative, under APA style, to place URLs within the text itself, which often take up whole paragraphs. I employ footnotes to provide scholarly commentary throughout the document without disrupting the data structures; this tactic is not possible with APA style. Readers may consider the footnotes as scholarly “live tweeting.” I clarify terms, timelines, contexts, speakers, and other “factual” information as necessary and on the page for which clarification may be necessary.¹ I give clues to methodological, curatorial, or analytical choices made in the research process as necessary for inquiring minds (or for the larger population of skeptics). Despite my onto-epistemological belief that data curation need not include additional analysis,² if curated and narrated effectively, I provide occasional flourishes of

¹ The *Chicago Manual* notes that “readers of printed works usually prefer footnotes for ease of reference. This is especially true where the notes are closely integrated into the text and make interesting reading, or if immediate knowledge of the sources is essential to readers” (764). I prefer using “substantive notes,” which are “discursive” and “amplify the text” (761). CMS cautions against “very long” footnotes. But I will ignore that suggestion with as much fervor as I ignore APA resistance to footnotes at all. For an example of my rebellion, see footnote 2.

² I base this onto-epistemological belief on a new materialist ontology. Diane Coole and Samantha Frost, in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), write that new materialism creates, “new concepts and images of nature that affirm matter’s immanent vitality,” believes that, “inorganic phenomena...enjoy a certain efficacy that defies human will,” and that, “‘matter becomes’ rather than ‘matter is’” (8-10). They direct our attention to material “choreographies of becoming.” New materialist ethnographers (and, by extension, autoethnographers), then, are obliged to position themselves in view of choreographies of becoming. More important, they are not to explain or interpret; rather, the new materialist ethnographer *observes* and *bears*. I argue, too, that new materialist ethnographers’ reporting should enable others to hear without the over-infiltration of ethnographer analysis and interpretation, which cloud’s one’s view of subject(s) becoming (to the extent that the view was/is ever clear to begin). Jerry Lee Rosiek and Jimmy Snyder, in “Narrative Inquiry and New Materialism: Stories as (Not Necessarily Benign) Agents,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 00, no. 0 (2018): 1-12, note that conventional ethnographic “interaction” fails to account for subject agency *prior* to inquiry, “‘Interaction’ implies the entities involved in an experiment are fully formed prior to a research process...The ‘objects’ of our inquiry are partially constituted by the way we frame our questions and by the material features of our inquiry apparatuses” (2). The method for ethnographic reporting, in a new materialist ontology, thus rests on curation as a form of analysis. Curation is all that is needed since the narrative curated depicts the entanglements and “becomings” of both researcher and researched. The end result of methodological logic implies an eventual stripping of introductions, positionality statements, methods, theories, analyses, and conclusions from the

analysis to provide readers with that which they often idolize: articulations of discrete interpretations and actionable results. Such an analytical flourish exists, in long form, after the final chapter under the title “Postlude.”

research product. Readers need only read the curated choreography of becoming, rendered through text on paper, to hear, observe, and be transformed. The materially rendered “choreography of becoming” viewed and heard by the ethnographer is curated; of course, researcher positionality dictates that which is curated; the elements selected for presentation say as much about the researcher as the researcher need say, and the material curated may speak for itself. This form may be the most socially just form of reporting. Rosiek and Snyder ask researchers to answer more questions than “Is the story true?” Instead, “What are our stories becoming together? What are we and the story doing? What is our responsibility to the story?” (3). The ethical dimensions of these questions are traced to, among other things, indigenous philosophies of agential realism and, more recently, the history of counternarratives. Rosiek and Snyder write that literary modes of sharing stories is most transformative; aimed at shaping the reader, the mode registers along multiple physical and spiritual dimensions; literary narratives “sensitize people to the experiences of others” and enable scholars to imagine futurities of being that differ from present being. Most important, though, literary rendering (representation) of “data” (always material) seek to “produce particular ontological entanglements, which are understood to be one among many possible entanglements” (8-9). Curation as analysis itself is essential to the literary representation of narrative. At its simplest, curation identifies the most salient, transformative moments to share from data observation and data listening. Since salience in this process is connected to the researcher (who curates), then the act of curation is inherently analytical and illustrative of researcher positionality. Curation also depicts the entanglements of countertransference (an idea of George Devereux outlined by Phil C. Langer in “The Research Vignette: Reflexive Writing as Interpretive Representation of Qualitative Inquiry—A Methodological Proposition,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 22, no. 9 (2016): 735-744) in which the researcher is transformed by observing and listening to the subject. Curation hopes to spread transformation to others through a literary tale (see John van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011)). The whole process of data observation (not generation, since generation implies human sovereignty over creation, see Melissa Orlic, “Impersonal Matter”; or as Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre demonstrates, data appear, they are not created, see “The Appearance of Data”) and curation exhibits what Coole and Frost call the, “mercurial stabilization of dynamic processes” (13). Stories told by researchers, as mercurial stabilizations, acknowledge that stories are active and dynamic. The storyteller becomes the story in the telling and they will continue to become even after the story is told. The goal of translating the story to paper is not to assert an essence of the story, but to help illustrate how becoming and sense operate. More to the new materialist point, the goal of translating the story is to underscore the fact of constant material inertia and kinesis that enables and disables individual, static meaning-making. Now, wouldn’t this foray into materialism been too distracting as part of the body of the “Note on the Text”? That’s why footnotes are useful. If you read all the way to the end of this one, bless your heart.

PROLOGUE

We have enough *research*. Now is the time to *search*. Drop the pre-fix “re” and adopt an exploratory means of viewing the world. Many mistake *research* as exploratory. However, within queer studies, research tends to be heavy on the re. Replicate, review, revise, rest (on established convention). Light on the search.³ Christopher M. Schulte implies that research is too dependent on established concepts. He writes that concepts generate a habit of convenient research practice, and that, “such habits relegate our concepts of research methodology, and, in particular, the experience of thinking and doing inquiry, to a form of ‘shorthand’ that we assume is established from the

³ Get ready for a list. For examples of “research” in queer studies that is light on “search,” see: Thomas Ylloja, Gerald Cochran, Michael R. Woodford, and Kristen A. Renn, “Frequent Experience of LGBQ Microaggression on Campus Associated with Smoking Among Sexual Minority College Students,” *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* (2018): 340-346. I will say, it’s interesting the researchers note that people who smoke (which usually involves being outside, and thus exposed) are more likely to be recipients of harassment. See also: Michael R. Woodford, Perry Silverschanz, Eric Swank, Kristin S. Scherrer, and Lisa Raiz, “Predictors of Heterosexual College Students’ Attitudes Toward LGBT People,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 9, no. 4 (2012): 297-320; Perry Silverschanz, Lilia M. Cortina, Julie Konik, and Vicki J. Magley, “Slurs, Snubs, and Queer Jokes: Incidence and Impact of Heterosexist Harassment in Academia,” *Sex Roles* 58 (2008): 179-191; Jill M. Chonody, Michael R. Woodford, David J. Brennan, Bernie Newman, and Donna Wang, “Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women Among Heterosexual Social Work Faculty,” *Journal of Social Work Education* 50 (2014): 136-152; Michael R. Woodford, Jill M. Chonody, Alex Kulick, David J. Brennan, and Kristen Renn, “The LGBQ Microaggressions on Campus Scale: A Scale Development and Validation Study,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, no. 12 (2015): 1660-1687; Susan R. Rankin, “Campus Climates for Sexual Minorities,” *New Directions for Student Services* 111 (2005): 17-23; Susan Rankin and Jason C. Garvey, “Identifying, Quantifying, and Operationalizing [shoot me in the motherfucking face at this title XOXO –Benjamin] Queer-Spectrum and Trans-Spectrum Students: Assessment and Research in Student Affairs,” *New Directions for Student Services* 152 (2015): 73-84; Jodi L. Linley, David Nguyen, G. Blue Brazelton, Brianna Becker, Kristen Renn, and Michael Woodford, “Faculty as Sources of Support for LGBTQ College Students,” *College Teaching* 64, no. 2 (2016): 55-63 (many of you in-depth readers may have noticed by now that Michael Woodford, Kristen Renn, Perry Silverschanz, Susan Rankin, and Jason Garvey are repeat offenders in my list so far; note how they never use the same acronym, nor do they even refer to themselves in the same manner with each publication; one gets the sense that these reports are generated in such a shorthand, concept-driven, and banal manner that the authors can’t even recognize when their haphazard construction is inconsistent in its own semantics; yes, I am petty); Jason C. Garvey, Dian D. Squire, Brett Stachler, and Susan Rankin, “The Impact of Campus Climate on Queer-Spectrum Student Academic Success,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 15, no. 2 (2018): 89-105; Martin A. Swanbrow Becker, Stacey F. Nemeth Roberts, Sam M. Ritts, William Tyler Branagan, Alia R. Warner, and Sheri L. Clark, “Supporting Transgender College Students: Implications for Clinical Intervention and Campus Prevention,” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 31, no. 2 (2017): 155-176; Jason C. Garvey, Susan Rankin, Genny Beemyn, and Shane Windmeyer, “Improving the Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students Using the Campus Pride Index,” *New Directions for Student Services* 159 (2017): 61-70; Jason C. Garvey, Laura A. Sanders, and Maureen A. Flint, “Generational Perceptions of Campus Climate Among LGBTQ Undergraduates,” *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 6 (2017): 795-817; Kimberly F. Balsam, Yamile Molina, Blair Beadnell, Jane Simoni, and Karma Walters, “Measuring Multiple Minority Stress: The LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale,” *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 17, no. 2 (2011): 163-174; Robert D. Brown and Valerie J. Gortmaker, “Assessing Campus Climates for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Students: Methodological and Political Issues,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 6, no. 4 (2009): 416-435; and Matthew J. Mayhew, Alyssa N. Rockenbach, Nicholas A. Bowman, Tricia A. Seifert, Gregory C. Wolniak, Ernest T. Pascarella, and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works*, Volume 3 (San Francisco, CA: Wiley: 2016).

start.”⁴ He adds, “Given that research methodology is often envisioned in terms of preexisting models, concepts, and processes, which are already *knowable* rather than always potentially *thinkable* in new and interesting ways, we acquiesce, establishing instead a relationship to our concept of research methodology that is ‘stale’ and ‘flimsy.’”⁵

I became frustrated with *research* after reading three reports of queer experience two years ago, when I first began observing and interviewing participants in autumn of 2016. The first: a mixed methods study of the campus climate for queer students at American community colleges.⁶ The team produced a 96-item survey built around three “strands” identified by Kristen Renn⁷ as common to queer students. These strands were: visibility, identity, and campus climate. Vague, no? And banal. Maggie MacLure wrote that research must “offend” and that “banality marks sites of political closure and philosophical ennui.”⁸ I bring MacLure’s work into the discussion, since designing a study around strands identified in a “state and status of the field” (which implies that those strands routinely exist elsewhere in the literature), is banal in that it is driven by the impulse to replicate, not to explore. That drive troubled me, in consideration of the fact that Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin’s study occurred (well, was published) in 2015, five years after Renn’s “status.” Much can change in five years (for example, after the election of Donald Trump in 2016, LGBTQ rights were rolled back immediately; indeed, within a week of his inauguration, LGBTQ policy resources were removed from the White House website, and President Trump wrote an executive order

⁴ See “Deleuze, Concept Formation, and the Habit of Shorthand Inquiry,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (2018): 194-202. Quote from page 195.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶ That study was Jason C. Garvey, Jason L. Taylor, and Susan Rankin, “An Examination of Campus Climate for LGBTQ Community College Students,” *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 39, no. 6 (2015): 527-541.

⁷ They referenced Kristen Renn, “LGBT and Queer Research in Higher Education: The State and Status of the Field,” *Educational Researcher* 39, no. 2 (2010): 132-141.

⁸ Maggie MacLure, “The Offence of Theory,” *Journal of Education Policy* 25, no. 2 (2010): 277-286. Quote from 278.

banning transgender individuals from serving in the military).⁹ I was left asking: what strands developed in five years that might have been ignored?

Garvey's, Taylor's, and Rankin's survey was augmented by "several" open-ended questions. No face-to-face interaction occurred, nor did any visit to a campus at which students were surveyed. The researchers led with quantitative results, using qualitative analysis only to confirm significant findings of quantitative analyses. This "concurrent triangulation strategy" along with the sample size of over 5,000 students led to these researchers assuming they generated valid and significant findings depicting the experiences of queer students across America's community college campuses.¹⁰ According to MacLure's standards, the study fell into the category of "banal" since it failed to "counter the common-sensical appeal and the pedestrian contributions to knowledge of audit-driven approaches such as evidence-based practice and systematic review."¹¹

When I compared their results to the qualitative data I generated at my home institution, I could not find many shards of my participants' experiences within those results. Yes, I had one or two students mention being called a "fag" or feeling the need to dress in butch clothes to avoid harassment.¹² However, these narratives of harassment were usually mentioned in passing and did not seem to be the most salient components of their experiences on campus, at least not in such simple terms. I revisited the mixed methods study and decided what Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin

⁹ As of writing this prologue, the transgender ban has made its way to the United States Supreme Court. The most current reporting comes from Adam Liptak, "Trump Asks Supreme Court for Fast Appeal on Transgender Military Ban," *New York Times* (November 23, 2018): A17, and Ann E. Marimow, "Trump administration: It's 'extraordinary' judges won't let military restrict transgender troops," *Washington Post* (December 10, 2018): https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/president-trumps-transgender-military-ban-is-back-in-court/2018/12/09/56a0c13a-f965-11e8-8c9a-860cce2a8148f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8b23f42ee9e8. Regarding the web changes, see Colby Itkowitz, "LGBT rights page disappears from White House web site," *Washington Post* (January 20, 2017). Itkowitz purposely identified the time written (2:15 p.m.), since January 20 was inauguration day. Festivities were still in process when the LGBT rights page "disappeared" from the web site. #visibility

¹⁰ Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin, 534.

¹¹ MacLure, 278.

¹² Perhaps the most widely cited study on homophobic slurs is Michael R. Woodford, Michael L. Howell, Perry Silverschanz, and Lotus Yu, "That's So Gay!?: Examining the Covariates of Hearing This Expression Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual College Students," *Journal of American College Health* 60, no. 6 (2012): 429-434. Within this study, the researchers made the shocking and novel discovery that, guess what?, slurs hurt. "Florals? For spring? Groundbreaking," said Miranda Priestley. I'd footnote that quote, but gay readers will already know from whence it came.

found merited the label “valid” (to the extent that validity is ever possible)¹³ but their work did not illuminate, inspire, or imagine. There was no depth of understanding beyond what was found through previous national surveys (including Rankin’s own *2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*).¹⁴ They demonstrated the field’s preoccupation with research rather than search.

I remain stuck on building questionnaires upon “strands” of common experience previously located in the body of research. Visibility, identity, campus climate. Are these the only dimensions of life felt by LGBT people? Even if they are, how many more surveys are needed to convince us that those strands are universally true? More to the point: What are we overlooking? And, what more about visibility, identity, and campus climate needs to be explored? Who is visible and when and in what circumstances and what does that feel like? If a climate is negative, where is it negative? Where is it positive? Who makes it either way? How does that transform targeted populations’ psychosocial development? Who even are queer people anyway?¹⁵

You may wonder why I complain. More scholars have turned their attention to queer student experience since the late 1970s, when Vivienne Cass developed the first comprehensive

¹³ It’s not. More on that soon.

¹⁴ The third report that prompted my “Prologue” (and, by extension, post-qualitative commitment within this project) was the 2013 *Survey of LGBT Americans* sponsored by PEW. I refrain from extensive discussion of this study; however, I want to mention that one of the major components of the survey was to identify which celebrities were most meaningful to LGBT individuals. Ellen DeGeneres and Barack Obama ranked highest. I found that component of the study to be vapid and void of much importance in the everyday lives of LGBT people. Ellen’s popularity, for example, is not going to get a gay person hired in a hostile climate if there are no EEOC protections for those of marginalized sexual orientations.

¹⁵ The last question, “Who even are queer people anyway?” takes us into the troubled world of gender/sexuality semantics. No consensus exists within the literature about who to call what and when to call who what pre- or post-op, coming out, hooking up, doing drag...Are transgender women, post-op, still gay if they’re now women who sleep with cis-men? Or are they “straight,” since they’re women sleeping with men? Are cis-men gay if they sleep with a transgender man? Or are they straight because they’re sleeping with a man who was once a woman? These are questions my students asked me in autumn 2018 during a unit on gender in public schools. Should we use LGBT? LGBTQ? LGBTQIA? What’s the + for? Or, as conservatives like to do, LGBTQABCDEFG? I will clarify that I use the term “queer” as an umbrella term to identify anyone who embraces the fact that sexuality and gender fall along a spectrum, as opposed to a binary, and who thus identify as anything other than cisgender and straight. I preserve whatever terminology participants and/or scholars use when referring to their words or work; however, I revert to “queer” when shifting back into my analyses and exposition. For example, if a participant refers to himself as “gay,” I will use “gay” to refer to him.

model of homosexual identity development for college students (well, young adults, really) and “homosexuality” was removed from the DSM as a mental illness. But, as one of my participants said, “When are we going to have a study that moves past the tragedy and proves that we have richer lives than what’s measured on a climate study?” When, indeed?

That participant, who chose to be referred to as Adolfo, lamented the *re* in research. We’ve been there, done that. What next?

Next is a fundamental revision of the research project in social science. We must put aside what Elizabeth St. Pierre calls “conventional humanist qualitative methods”¹⁶ as well as post-positivist quantitative methods and embrace a post-qualitative and post-modern turn in which we shed method altogether¹⁷ and focus instead on what MacLure calls “frisson” or “glow.”¹⁸ We must generate searches¹⁹ that allow the process of discovery to be flexible. Results should be imaginative, theoretical, concoct new ways of being into existence, and resonate bodily within the reader. The results must resist conventional categories and reporting mechanisms, and researchers must resist mapping data into simplistic methods or simplistic conclusions. The role of the researcher becomes

¹⁶ See Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, “Haecceity: Laying Out a Plane for Post Qualitative Inquiry,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 9 (2017): 686-698.

¹⁷ I presented this prologue to the Australian Association for Research in Education conference in Sydney on December 5, 2018. During the Q/A session, an ethnographer from the UK pressed me, “But there’s always a method, because you always hypothesize and have research questions.” Do we, though? The research questions I started with evaporated immediately, and I did not replace them. Hypothesizing and asking questions seems antithetical to a post-qualitative orientation, especially when considering my curation-as-analysis approach. I do not ask questions as much as I identify what I’m going to observe. Then I observe it. Thus, it’s possible to eliminate method beyond the most simple task: look, listen, feel. That’s the start and finish of the method. Oh, and write the shit down.

¹⁸ See MacLure, “Researching Without Representation? Language and Materiality in Post-Qualitative Methodology,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26, no. 6 (2013): 658-667.

¹⁹ *I reiterate: when you’re gifted, then you’re gifted. These are facts. I’ve got no ax to griiiiiind...* Hold up, sorry. Switched gears into Barbra Streisand’s “I’m the Greatest Star” from the opening act of *Funny Girl*. But to reiterate, searches need not involve methods. Research will always have a method. A search will always have an open agenda. The post-qualitative text documents how it came to be, from a retrospective position. It does not create a map, then follow it. To create maps risks foreclosing on the possibility of spontaneous meandering.

less about interpretation and more about curation.²⁰ Sometimes participation, since the researcher is perfectly situated within the context to curate that which is most glowing and resonant.

²⁰ I'm going to pick back up where I left off in footnote 2...trying to cleverly subvert the "short substantive footnote" convention by splitting the same discussion into two sections of the text. New materialism merits further scrutiny and curation-as-analysis merits a further genealogical connection to the post-qualitative paradigm. When Coole and Frost write that "matter becomes," they echo Gilles Deleuze (reference to follow discussion) who wrote of the difference between green as a color to be detected and the phenomenon of trees greening (21). In his illustration, a tree is not inherently and always green; it becomes green through a continuous biological process that photosynthesizes light and absorbs nutrients from the soil to generate chlorophyll and reproduce greenness. And yet, in some cases, a tree's greenness is labeled evergreen, and trees' defining attribute (in the human imagination) is its greenness. Indeed, an entire political movement dedicated to conservation of "natural" forests adopts the concept "green" as a label, as if green is a static entity in need of protecting by the intellectually superior human. New materialists collapse the dichotomous relationship inherent in human conservation in which humans are cast as saviors of an inert natural world (LOLZ). A tree is nourished, in part, by soil. Soil is enriched by decay from animal flesh. Animal flesh is nourished by tree byproducts. Tree flesh forms the material on which (some of) you are reading this very text. One could say, then, that you are holding your own body as you read, since some parts of your past self may have been absorbed into the tree and the output of the tree (oxygen) has been absorbed into yourself. We are trees. Sara Ahmed (reference also to follow) clarifies Deleuzian thought, inadvertently, when she applies Marxist analysis to orientation to objects, specifically tables: "Commodities are made up of two elements, 'matter and labour.' Labor is understood as 'changing the form of matter.' The commodity is assumed to have value or a life of its own only if we forget this labor: 'It becomes value only in its congealed state, when embodied in the form of some object.' Marx uses the example of 'the table' to suggest that the table is made from wood (which provides, as it were, the matter) and that the work of the table, the work that it takes to 'make the table,' changes the form of the wood, even though the table 'is' still made out of wood" (241-242). The table remains wood even as a table, but as a commodity it transcends both matter (wood) and labor (the human effort to transform the wood) to become the table, which consequently consistently becomes each time a new agent approaches it through application of various purposes (i.e. a writer with a pad makes the table a desk; a family with plates makes the table a dining room). We can extrapolate the becoming and purpose of narrative from the metaphors of the tree and the table. Narrative research is brought through the labor of observation, listening, and curating. Narrative is transformed through this labor into text, but it is still narrative, in different form. However, it is now simultaneously narrative and ink and paper with multiple purposes and possibilities. The narrative can now literally cut people (and aren't paper cuts the worst?). Narrative's embodiment in paper gives both paper and narrative power and legitimacy because it is through existence on paper that narrative transcends obscurity by becoming distributable to readers not present at the moment of "mercurial stabilization" of the "dynamic process" of becoming a narrative. Narrative, on paper, can be heard without the presence of the physical body of the narrator. In this vein, the body of the tree is as essential to the transformation of social reality as the narrative of the human subject becoming and sensing social reality. New materialists are biotic egalitarians who privilege all forms of material reality in their analyses of social construction; they critically study the "actual conditions" that manifest social realities (Coole and Frost, 25). Coole and Frost cite the butterfly effect in meteorology to illustrate how minute biotic forms (a butterfly flapping its wings and displacing air, which leads to tiny shifts in pressure and currents that end in a hurricane) can influence global weather conditions, thus rendering themselves the most powerful matter on Earth. A constructivist-only approach to analyzing social realities risks eliminating biotic accounts for shifting choreographies of social becoming (yet another reference on this point to follow). For example, Jasper, whose choreography of becoming exists in blank-verse form, spoke of making spaces "gay friendly." To make a space gay friendly, one must be present, be gay, and be friendly. He echoes Goodman and Bowman (reference number four to follow) who note that inclusive attitudes are best formed through frequent and prolonged interactions with the bodies of diverse others (not the theories of diverse others that exist in consciousness coursework). Jasper's account of creating socially acceptable places for his gay body is new materialist in that he emphasizes the necessity of his body to render his identity socially acceptable. His body must be present, visible, and friendly to move the needle of gay inclusion in his (and our) favor. However, the presence of gay, friendly bodies is not the sole material factor influencing gay inclusion. I (Benjamin) recall an instance in which "nature" intervened to prevent my body from influencing gay inclusion. I was invited to a reception at the home of the President of my institution. The reception honored the newly appointed Chief Diversity Officer. I served on a panel during the search as the voice of the gay student population, hence my invitation. I dressed in a black Brooks Brothers suit, accessorized with Thom Browne pebble grain wingtips, and an orange Hermes tie (a materiality I note because of its performative role of exerting status

The post-qualitative turn is rooted in Deleuzian thought.²¹ It focuses on sense and instinct as guiding principles in the search to conjure new possibilities for being. Deleuze turns our attention to

and belonging, becoming acceptable in a particular space and time). When I opened my front door to leave, I stepped on a rattle snake resting on the doorstep. It writhed and rattled. I retreated inside before the snake could strike. I peered through the window to see whether the snake fled after being disturbed. It did not. I remained trapped in my home, unable to attend the reception. The snake prevented me from turning the President's home into a more gay-friendly space because I was prevented from being present, gay, friendly, and dressed in the material clothing of status and confidence (which depathologizes gayness, in a way). Thus, the snake could be said to have as much of an impact on campus climate as any queer theory or affiliated inclusion policy. New materialism's collapsed hierarchy of biotic value opens a series of paradoxes for the social justice scholar, though. It turns our attention to the potential for previously de- or under-valued matter to have "immanent vitality." It decentralizes human redemption and cognition as evolutionary end goals. It advocates, by implication, the security and wellbeing of all biotic life, and decouples "human" from "rights" thus extending rights to all matter (such as the rights of trees to have uninterrupted opportunity to become green instead of being chopped down for use as paper on which "superior" human ideas reside). These positions seem socially just, since the positions are rooted in egalitarianism and proliferated rights. However, the decoupling of "human" from "rights" is troublesome when we consider that queer people, for example, are already underserved in the academy, underprivileged in the social world, and invalidated as "abnormal" human beings without legitimate claim to human rights (we were literally criminalized in the USA until 2003). Returning to the rattle snake narrative, at the time of the reception (which I could not attend), our institution did not include "sexual orientation" as a protected class in its human resources hiring policies. Maybe I could have helped speed up that "choreography of becoming" had I been present? It's narcissistic to think I have that much influence. However, I wonder whether new materialism risks diluting the force of social justice activism for marginalized humans in its goal of proliferating rights to all material life. As my story illustrates, that risk is not inherent in the paradigm. The snake is treated as influential in social reality as myself. More to the point, new materialism insists upon matter becoming, which underscores much of the work done in the vein of queer theory. If matter becomes, so too does social reality influenced by material realities. One is not inherently man or woman, in a queer analysis. One becomes man. One becomes woman (See Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman, 1981). In the same way, one becomes straight (See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990). I stop short of saying one becomes queer, because queerness is more illustrative of a natural state than straightness, in social becoming. Becoming straight involves much more elaborate performances (and bodily, material discipline) than being queer. How does this connect to curation-as-analysis, though? For one, curation rejects coding, since codes attempt to fixate narratives into replicable categories or themes. Coding is also, mostly, deductive (try as you might not to be a priori). Rosiek and Snyder warned of the fallacy in assuming that data exist prior to our observing them. Thus, deductive approaches to data are fallacious for they assume that pre-existing theories can explain the existence of contemporary phenomena. Curation, as mentioned in footnote 2, attempts no explanation. Curation enables a reader to observe and/or hear data and react in an individual manner based upon the actual conditions in which they find themselves at the moment the data is seen/heard. St. Pierre highlights the necessity for post-qualitative researchers to dispense with method and methodology altogether, since post-qualitative inquiry seeks the "not yet." New materialism advocates the same dispensation of method, since it understands that realities (material and social) are in a constant state of becoming and thus all social science research is a look at the "not yet" because all social science research looks at the "not yet" being made (whether they understand that this is what's happening is beside the point; it is happening, though most refuse to acknowledge that). The ensuing report of watching "not yet" become is merely an artifact of how a researcher became by watching someone else become so that readers may become conscious of that possibility in their own lives. Now for the promised references: See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. C.V. Boundas, trans. M. Lester (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1990). See Sara Ahmed, "Orientations Matter," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 234-257. For a comparison of constructivism and queer theory, see Elisa S. Abes, "Theoretical Borderlands: Using Multiple Theoretical Perspectives to Challenge Inequitable Power Structures in Student Development Theory," *Journal of College Student Development* 50, no. 2 (2009): 141-156. Regarding inclusive practice, see Kathleen M. Goodman and Nicholas A. Bowman, "Making Diversity Work to Improve College Student Learning," in *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 147, ed. G.L. Martin and M.S. Hevel (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014): 37-48.

²¹ I must begin by highlighting Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, David Carlson, Marek Tesar, and Kate Anderson. In their estimation, post-qualitative work is concerned with "thinking the unthinkable" by using philosophy as the method: "Philosophy as method is an engagement, an ethical relationship with thought" (617) and that "The more

sense, writing that “the event is sense itself;” in addition, he complicates our idolatry of validation by indicating inherent absurdity in the validation project.²² He writes, the absurd is “that which is without signification or that which may be neither true nor false.”²³ This liminality need not confound exploration since all human experience exists on the plane of absurdity. St. Pierre redirects us to a more obscure strand of Deleuze and Guttari’s (1980/1987) thought that better addresses absurdity: haecceity. In her summation, “Haecceity is a singularity that has ‘neither a beginning nor an end, origin, nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome’ composed of ‘floating times,’ and they are ‘singularities always becoming in relations of speed and slowness, so that they have no essence that forms and stabilizes them into a substance that can be subsumed under another concept or category.’”²⁴ With this in mind, the reliance on Renn’s strands seems archaic and pedestrian, or as MacLure argues, strands are “the arcane preserve of an elite caste of scholars intent on preserving their own power and privilege.”²⁵

We attempt to mitigate absurdity through language and labeling and processing and socializing, but we merely ascribe cultural meaning onto that which pre-existed meaning itself and will outlast the meanings we ascribe to it in individual moments.²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin brought analysis of absurdity into the realm of language when he noted that there are no “neutral words” and that one can never communicate truths nor reality since words bear the weight of speaker intent and the

(post)qualitative inquiry engages with thought, and utilizes philosophy as a method, the more it may become attacked by neo-liberal or neo-positivist discourses. Risky! However, (post)qualitative research is about life itself, and its subjects and objects, and about the un-doing of established borders and boundaries, settings and developmentalisms, and dominant discourses. Life is also risky! Instead of answers, it creates new questions, and the notion of un-doing the traditional way creates spaces for doing things differently” (618). See, “Methodology *brut*: Philosophy, Ecstatic Thinking, and Some Other (Unfinished) Things,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 21, no. 7 (2014): 612-619. I am enamored of the notion that “philosophy is an ethical relationship with thought.” That notion is liberating in the sense that we, as searchers, remain faithful to thought first, in whichever capacity thought emerges. Koro-Ljungberg et al. inform a discussion I will have on anti-method in a few pages; for now, I will state that their work endorses a position to remain ethical to thought, not method.

²² Deleuze, 1990, 22.

²³ Ibid., 15.

²⁴ St. Pierre, 2017, 688-689.

²⁵ MacLure, 2010, 280.

²⁶ Jean Beaudrillard’s work on simulacra, and the precession of, is useful here if you have not read it. See, *Simulations*, trans. P. Beitchman, P. Foss, and P. Patton (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext€/Foreign Agents, 1983).

recipient bears the weight of translation without ever being fully cognizant of the speaker's intent. Full understanding is never possible, no matter how finely tuned definitions become.²⁷ MacLure underscores the failure of language in the post-qualitative paradigm, writing, "definition is problematic, if not downright disreputable...definition, as a practice, assumes a secure distinction between words and the things or concepts to which they refer...but this boundary is always contested. Definitions falter, meaning shifts."²⁸ In the old research paradigms, preoccupation with reviewing and replicating is perpetually doomed to fail since it has no measure for absurdity, since absurdity is perpetually without signification and can never be measured. Captured, perhaps. Acknowledged. But never measured.

It is thus important for researchers and searchers to first acknowledge that omniscient and permanent absurdity is the only valid truth that we can identify in social science research. That truth becomes poignant for LGBT people since they are personifications of absurdity. Their lives are neither true nor false. Their lives, as is the case with all lives, are loaded with meaning even before they exist bodily. Judith Butler underscored the absurdity of gender and performance in relation to authentic "I" ness writing, "Gender is performative insofar as it is the *effect* of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*. Social constraints...operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization. There is no subject who precedes or

²⁷ See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1980). The full quote reads: "There are no 'neutral' words and forms—words and forms that can belong to 'no one;' language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word. As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own and expressive intention" (293).

²⁸ MacLure, 2010, 279.

enacts this repetition of norms.”²⁹ Subjects never are L nor G nor B nor T, they are always becoming, never are, and in so doing they are always opposing S, straight. Their very existence undermines the conventional notion of human straightness as possible. LGBT people are not straight nor do they have the potential to ever fully be polarized as “man” or “woman.” In a heteronormative social structure, LGBT people are perpetual failures as human “men” and “women.” They are something else altogether. Halberstam highlights that failure is a queer art; LGBT lives are perpetually situated as failures of heteronormative assimilation. Attempts at assimilation are then perceived as failures to live authentically.³⁰ David Halperin notes the inherent paradox of being gay: being gay, for example, is something one is and something one learns to be.³¹ Eve Sedgwick long ago noted that coming out of the closet is an ongoing, not singular, act. Ongoing coming out constitutes queer existence. Closets assume different forms for different people.³² Since being a LGBT person involves living in a consistently absurd, non-valid, non-normal, non-definable manner, why study their experiences through methods that insist upon objectivity, validation, generalizability, normalization, convention, and categorization? Butler’s conception of gender performativity, then, can call conventional humanist methodology onto the carpet. There is no method that precedes or enacts this repetition of norms. Ethnography does not pre-exist research projects. Grounded theory did not come to Earth prepackaged with an imperative to saturate a data field. We cannot continue to act as if methods are stable. We cannot keep idolizing methodological validity.³³ Human subjects and the conventional humanist qualitative and quantitative methodologies cannot coexist.

²⁹ See Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ*, no. 1 (1993): 17-32. Quote from 21.

³⁰ See Judith (now Jack) Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011). Specifically the introduction and chapters 1 and 2.

³¹ See David Halperin, *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

³² See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

³³ Recent scholarly discussion has turned to a methodology of research play that focuses on “Emergence as a playful element means anything can be relevant, and so each thing, event, thought, sight, accident is treated with as much weight: Everything contributes to whatever is emerging... animation as a playful element means that as many nonhuman

The purpose of this project is devoted to identifying a non-method that can coexist with the absurdity inherent in LGBT life and in the search project. I shudder at even saying the word “method” or even “non-method” since non-method itself is a method. There is the paradox of the search. The shedding of prescribed method is a method, albeit a shorter method with greater room for theoretical and interpretive anarchy. Post-qualitative inquiry asks us to shed many things. First is method itself. Method implies a hypothesis to be tested through a process that will most effectively yield confirming or disconfirming evidence. The potential for “disconfirming” evidence to appear in a human-subjects study is, to me, a kind of intellectual fascism. That which does not confirm the hypothesis is fit to be disposed. That which is without signification is outside the real. Non-replicable. Non-reliable. In the realm of human experience, there can be no “disconfirming.” What does it say if we do? The marginalized are further marginalized because a single individual yields evidence that does not already exist as a “strand” and that same evidence is never replicated again. Does that mean it did not happen? That it was not meaningful? It did not and is not in post-positivist and conventional humanist qualitative inquiry.

Hence, post-qualitative inquirers dispense with method.³⁴ Without method, a proliferation of data enters. Data are not necessarily brute in a post-qualitative paradigm. They may never appear,

elements as possible are animated and brought forward to participate alongside humans” (713). I exhibit play with the nonhuman when the ghost of my closeted self comes back to haunt me in my office; his name is Longitude, and he is a principal character in *Fox: An Opera Comique*. For an example of research play in action, see Jennifer R. Wolgemuth, Paulina Rautio, Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Travis M. Marn, Susan Nordstrom, and Adam Clark,

“Work/Think/Play/Birth/Death/Terror/Qualitative/Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 9 (2018): 712-719.

³⁴ Susan Naomi Nordstrom articulates an “antimethodology” that “is an ongoing practice...that is not a thing or an entity. As such, antimethodology is not a successor regime, something that can be easily replicated, or ‘the answer’ to methodological questions in postqualitative inquiry” (223). Antimethodology is useful in articulating the Who? What? Where? and What the Hell? of this study. A researcher is almost always asked to identify timelines, deadlines, lifelines...according to Nordstrom, “The ‘beginning’ and ‘ending’ points of a study became arbitrary markers of space and time that momentarily pause around the points that are usually determined by outside forces. Data keep *dataing*. They always were *dataing* and they will continue to *data*” (219). Antimethodology is based on “ontogenesis” which identifies reality as an ongoing construction, never static, never inert, never fully realized. I use the term “generated” throughout the text; when using said term, I imply an ontogenetic orientation. See, “Antimethodology: Postqualitative Generative Conventions,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 3 (2018): 215-226.

ocularly.³⁵ Nor may they register through sound.³⁶ There is no hierarchy of epistemological value based upon a datum's visibility, hear-ability, or resilience to validation tactics. A post-qualitative inquirer treats sense itself as data in addition to memory, bodily resonance, instinct, feeling, frisson, and glow. The timeline of reality and events is collapsed such that each aspect of human existence is occurring simultaneously, since humans are products of past socialization and even subject to alterations of identity in the exact moment of study. Who they were two minutes ago will not be who they are two minutes from now. The very text you read today will yield different interpretations ten minutes from now than it does if I read it to you ten years from now.³⁷

I shall pivot to discussing the data presented. Formal, brute data were generated over the years 2016 to 2018 on the campus of my home institution in a rural, Southern town in the American Bible belt. The campus is often cited among the most conservative and least LGBT friendly campuses in the United States.³⁸ Other forms of data were generated over a period of thirty-one years, my lifetime, since I was reared within a sixty-mile radius of the campus and have been a

³⁵ See Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "The Appearance of Data," *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 4 (2013): 223-227.

³⁶ Lisa A. Mazzei's work extensively covers the ground of sound and silence within a post-qualitative project. See "A Voice Without Organs: Interviewing in Posthumanist Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26, no. 6 (2013): 732-740. She writes "interview data (and/or voice) is not bound by speech but can be found in inhabited silence, both purpose full and meaning full" (733). She asks, "A question for a posthumanist researcher would be what kind of voice, what kind of human being can be thought once voice no longer has to be present, emanating from a unique, essentialist subject conscious of itself?" (733). Regarding agency (which must be considered in a discussion of data/matter becoming), Mazzei writes, "In a shift to posthumanist agency, intentionality is not attributable to humans but, for example, is, 'understood as attributable to a complex network of human and nonhuman agents, including historically specific sets of material conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individual' [quoting Haraway, 23]. Agency then, is an enactment of an entanglement like the one I described earlier, an entanglement of researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis, as opposed to an innate attribute of an individual human being. In other words, agency to change the world and be changed by the world emerges within the intra-actions of multiple people and things and does not pre-exist those encounters" (733-734).

³⁷ Teri Holbrook and Nicole M. Pourchier discuss "fabricated meaning" through assemblage and lament the dominant imperative to create clearly articulated processes by which data were generated, analyzed, and presented. They use the metaphor and practice of a collage to illuminate how final text (or art) comes into being. Their work has ramifications for data generation, as well; they write, "As collagists, we literally fabricate meaning through our texts. Therefore, we find that terms such as *data*, *data collection*, and *data analysis* fail to describe what we do when we research" (758) and that "in other post-inquiries, researchers seek contingent articulations and ongoing questionings; therefore, we consider our produced pieces—imagistic and written—as an ongoing assemblage" (755). See, "Collage as Analysis: Remixing in the Crisis of Doubt," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014): 754-763.

³⁸ Campuspride.org created a score sheet with 40+ criteria by which one may score the LGBT inclusivity of his or her or their campus. It is this score sheet to which I subjected my home institution for a "formal" classification of inclusivity.

student, administrator, and teacher on and off this campus for over thirteen years. These data include observations, reflections on personal experience, art generated and consumed during the period with salience to queer people, and cultural studies (material culture).³⁹ I use the term “generated” to indicate that, through a post-qualitative inquiry, data do not pre-exist the search project. Rather data are generated as the project occurs, since participants often make meaning based on interviewer prompts and vice versa. In addition, sense and memory data are generated by me, the searcher, as I encounter alternative perspectives to the so-called reality of our campus climate. In this manner, the timeline of the search project expands and collapses constantly. A single interview, for example, occurs within the time span of an hour on a specific day between 2016 and 2018; however, the narrative within that interview covers decades of lived experience occurring across municipalities, states, and even continents. Each interview is colored by multiple contexts and time periods. Even different dimensions, since much narration captures imagined possibilities rather than observable phenomena. The data are then curated to provide an individual account of living within the context studied. Data from my life are curated as well to stand in conversation with my participants’ narratives to flesh out context or to illustrate scale. Otherwise, these data are not shaped by interpretation, nor do I draw conclusions from them, since to draw conclusions would

³⁹ My proliferation of data forms (as well as methodological commitments) is akin to bricolage, as defined by Joe L. Kinchelhoe; he writes, “bricolage is concerned not only with multiple methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various elements encountered in the research act” (682). Regarding deep interdisciplinarity, Kinchelhoe writes, “An ethnographer who is conversant with social theory and its recent history is better equipped to transcend certain forms of formulaic ethnography that are reduced by the so-called ‘observational constraint’ on the methodology. Using the x-ray vision of contemporary social-theoretically informed strategies of discourse analysis, poststructural analysis, and ideology-critique, the ethnographer gains the ability to see beyond the literalness of the observed. In this maneuver, the ethnographer-as-bricoleur moves to a deeper level of data analysis as he or she sees ‘what’s not there’ in physical presence, what is not discernible by the ethnographic eye” (686). I hesitate at Kinchelhoe’s linking bricolage with “deep analysis,” since I view curation as the only means of analysis necessary; however, a bricoleur operating at the intersection of multiple methods and theories (with personal commitments to a population under study) is better positioned to generate, review, and select the proper assortment of data to curate and or stand for analysis. See, “Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 6 (2001): 679-692.

ascribe meanings to narratives that the participant may not have intended.⁴⁰ In addition, conclusions serve as prescriptions for actions in other contexts in which those prescriptions may be unsuitable. As Laurel Richardson⁴¹ and, separately, Richardson and St. Pierre note, prescriptive research inhibits crystallization. Without crystallization, readers are left with few available directions in which to take data further or to practice post-qualitative paradigmatic commitments within their individual contexts.⁴² What matters in this project, then, is to demonstrate that data generated without method, hypotheses, or attempts at validation may still offer insights into the lived experiences of marginalized others. I use this work to show that it is possible to find value in methodological anarchy.

⁴⁰ I resist conclusion making based on a reluctance to “code,” following conventional coding methods (i.e. Saldana, 2016). Elliott W. Eisner wrote that “Recognition is the act of assigning a label to an object. Once assigned and classification has occurred, exploration ceases... Knowledge of forms is as important and indispensable as knowledge of causes” (17). Data need not point to causes and effects, in other words, to be transformative. See, “The Primacy of Experience and the Politics of Method,” *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 5 (1988): 15-20.

⁴¹ I refer here specifically to Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997). The second mention is Richardson and St. Pierre, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005): 959-978.

⁴² Crystallization is a relatively contentious term in qualitative methods literature, with scholars using it in radically liberal or radically conservative modes (liberal would indicate that crystallization is a data and reader-driven enterprise; conservative would indicate that crystallization is a researcher-driven enterprise with links to validity and credibility). Richardson and St. Pierre read crystallization as more liberal (i.e. not prescriptive or researcher-driven); however, some scholars view crystallization as a validity measure and as a marker of rigor, which I view to be more conservative, since “validity” is a more conventional paradigmatic commitment. For example, Sarah J. Tracy paired crystallization with triangulation as a “Big-Tent” marker of credibility (which is not, exactly, wrong; it’s just not quite as progressive as I view crystallization). See “Qualitative Quality: Eight ‘Big-Tent’ Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 16, no. 10 (2010): 837-851. Within her discussion, Tracy notes that crystallization transcends, using Richardson’s terms, a “two-dimensional” triangle; “crystallization encourages researchers to gather multiple types of data and employ various methods, multiple researchers, and numerous theoretical frameworks. However, it assumes that the goal of doing so is not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (844). But her statement is contradictory; “in-depth” understanding, that is researcher-driven, is still a validation procedure that is conservative. I view crystallization as more data-driven in which assemblage proliferates what constitutes data and presents said data without researcher interference, allowing the data to speak for themselves and for readers to interpret the data however they choose. Heather Stewart, Rod Gapp, and Ian Harwood also link crystallization to rigor and credibility in “Exploring the Alchemy of Qualitative Management Research: Seeking Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Rigor Through Crystallization,” *The Qualitative Report* 22, no. 1 (2017): 1-19. And Adrian D. Martin and George Kamberelis use crystallization as an essential component of edgy, incisive qualitative research in “Mapping Not Tracing: Qualitative Educational Research with Political Teeth,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26, no. 6 (2013): 668-679. They refer to crystallization as “assemblages” that comprise a “multiplicity” of data that merge in unpredictable ways (referring to Laura L. Ellingson, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An Introduction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009).

If a method is said to exist in this paper, it exists solely in the fact that I recorded what I saw, heard, and felt. Sometimes tasted and sniffed. My writing method involves curating data into brief research vignettes. These are composed under the guidance of Langer's conception of vignettes that capture counter-transference in which the dynamic between searcher and participant is the subject of study rather than either individual separately. I capture, "significant single cases to illustrate complex research findings" that "entwine poetic and philosophical fragments with analytical and self-reflexive elements."⁴³ Vignette writing of this style practices Richardson's and St. Pierre's "writing-as-inquiry" approach in which data illuminate method after the fact and in which the process of writing and curating generates meaning and imagines futurity. These vignettes exhibit a sociological style pioneered by Richardson in which one writes "sociological protagonists." I also attempt to answer Gloviczki's question, "How can we communicate the most information within the tightest spatial boundaries?"⁴⁴ Within these tight spatial boundaries, I compose under Van Maanen's conception of impressionistic tales, which show rather than tell, and evoke mood, place, and emotion without burdening the reader with superfluous detail. To Van Maanen's impressionism, I present data as exhibits of musical genres and rhythms based on each participant's speech patterns, musical tastes, or sound-linked performance. Anna Deavere Smith tells us that people speak in "organic poems," so I attempt to preserve organic poetry in the curation.⁴⁵ Everything you need to know about the climate in which we live should appear within these vignettes. Everything you need to know about measuring climate at your home institutions should appear as well.

Regarding visual presentation: each chapter mimics the aesthetic conventions of the genre upon which it is inspired. For example, *Fox: An Opera Comique* bears aesthetic resemblance to an opera libretto. *Teddy and Adolfo: A Queen Out* mimics the stage placement of dancers. Dusty's

⁴³ Langer, 236.

⁴⁴ See Peter Joseph Gloviczki, "After Wilmington," *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (2018): 87.

⁴⁵ Deavere Smith frequently refers to "organic poetry" in interviews and speaking engagements. However, her most concise rendering of the concept occurred in her TED Talk "Four American Characters," available on *YouTube*.

narrative, the closing chapter, incorporates word clusters that are visually composed to mimic jazz scats. If a song is mentioned, the experience of reading the text is enhanced by listening to it. If words appear in italics, one should assume that the text is sung.

I already mentioned my choice of footnotes. When reading this text, you can treat the primary text (the data) as the heart of the project. You can treat the footnotes as the head of the project. Reading the data, one should feel transformed. Reading the footnotes, one should feel educated. However, one need not read all the footnotes. Nor must one read all the data. Nor does one need to read the chapters in any particular order. The effect should be the same if you started from the end as it would if you started from the beginning. Jasper occupies the emotional center (as an interlude) separating the more emotionally “tragic” pieces (Fox, Hamp, Gray, and Absence) from the more emotionally “triumphant” pieces (Teddy, Adolfo, Jason, Rex, and Dusty).

The choices made in data curation follow an autoethnographic mode of searching and reporting. Autoethnography is often treated as a method (even though I attempt non-method), but autoethnography is also a genre of textual reporting. As method, I appreciate Judith C. Lapadat’s description of autoethnography as a practice wherein, “researchers democratize research, critique racist and hetero-gender normative dominant discourses,” to create a, “courageous moral act that says: I am singular and unique; I am telling this story so that you can bear witness; I witness that your story is unique; and, as we are each unique and singular, every person and every person’s experience must be acknowledged and treasured; no-one is expendable.”⁴⁶ Autoethnography acknowledges that “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed,” and approaches the search task through an explicitly articulated positionality that is treated as merit rather than

⁴⁶ Judith C. Lapadat, “Ethics in Autoethnography and Collaborative Autoethnography,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 8 (2017): 589-603. Quotes from page 591.

hindrance.⁴⁷ Autoethnography has a human, democratic mission. It attempts to correct the identity erasure that inevitably comes from albatross-like quantitative study. Norman K. Denzin writes:

Ethnography is not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical, and political. Through our writing and our talk we enact the worlds we study...Critical pedagogy, folded into and through performance (auto) ethnography attempts to disrupt and deconstruct these cultural and methodological practices performatively in the name of a more just, democratic and egalitarian society.⁴⁸

Elissa Foster, in an autoethnography about the rigor of autoethnography (so meta), writes, “analytic autoethnography is rigorous when it employs personal narrative to synthesize, to illustrate, to interrogate, and even to critique current research. The literary and sometimes even poetic form of the narrative writing also serves to draw in readers, calling on their experiences as humans to make sense of the story.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Quote from Alan Peshkin, “In Search of Subjectivity—One’s Own,” *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 7 (1988): 17-21. Quote from page 17. Peshkin notes, “If researchers are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their research, they can at least disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined. They can at best be enabled to write unshackled from orientations that they did not realize were intervening in their research process” (17). Peshkin’s pervasive reflexivity (pervasive in the sense that it happened throughout the process of research, not afterwards) establishes a form of rigor that I attempt to employ throughout this text, which is why I provide footnotes throughout (sometimes repeating source material) to indicate my thought process at the moment a research or literary decision was made. Pairing Peshkin with Elliott W. Eisner led me to another conclusion: autoethnography is inevitable. So why not choose it? Peshkin demonstrates that subjectivity can never be fully realized. Research choices exhibit some form of personal positioning starting with glimpses of onto-epistemological political perspectives that are illustrative of personal and professional upbringing and relationship to privilege. Some of us (autoethnographers) choose to be more explicit about the fallacy of objectivity, which makes us (tbh) more honest and reliable. Eisner notes, “Qualities we cannot experience, we cannot know” (15). He critiques “propositional language,” and the impulse to “warrant” assertions, writing, “Knowledge, we are told, consists of making warranted assertions. To provide a warrant, assertions must be as unambiguous as possible and the ability to specify the referents to support the claim must be demonstrated. We worry about claims that cannot be tested, and we believe that unless assertions are made in propositional terms, we have no good way to test their truth...Knowledge need not—and I would say should not—be restricted to what one can claim” (16). These statements inform autoethnography (as method or as genre) since autoethnography is not preoccupied with claims, propositions, or testing “knowledge.” Indeed, autoethnography presents narratives as if they are inherently knowledge-producing, without the imperative to prompt conclusions or further testing. I argue that well-constructed autoethnographies should not seek replication of findings. If anything is to be replicated, it’s the theoretical lens under which an autoethnography was generated, applied to a new context by individual researchers.

⁴⁸ “Pedagogy, Performance, and Autoethnography,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2006): 333-338. Quote from page 333.

⁴⁹ See Elissa Foster, “Communicating Beyond the Discipline: Autoethnography and the ‘N of 1,’” *Communication Studies* 65, no. 4 (2014): 446-450. Quote from page 447. Foster uses the term “analytic autoethnography” as her mode of composing autoethnography, which has its own onto-epistemological political ramifications (since analytic

Within queer studies, autoethnography diminishes some of the sterile, diagnostic residue of much extant national surveys that over-simplify queer experience, most egregiously within the world of sexual health (“How many sexual partners have you had?” or “How frequently are you tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases?”). Even my initial interview protocol for this study contained the question: “Have you ever been treated as transgressive simply because you are gay?” That question presumed a monolithic condition of outcast experience and treatment as socially or sexually pathological. It was research. I replaced the question with: “If you wanted me to sense exactly what it means to be you on a daily basis, what would you make me do?” Tony E. Adams writes, “personal experience allows insight into everyday, lived moments of the closet, coming out, and same-sex attraction—constitutive phenomena of LGBTQ cultures. I am able to tap into and analyze my ‘firsthand familiarity’ with these characteristics and, as such, observe what happens in social life under my nose.” Adams cautions that “for others to find personal experience important—an author must say something new about cultural experience by way of countering dominant narratives, adding to hegemonic storylines, disrupting storytelling convention(s), and/or developing a new genre of writing.”⁵⁰ Perry Silverschanz inadvertently endorses autoethnography as a social justice tool when writing about standpoint theory. He writes, “Standpoint theory (viewing the center from the margins) allows for a better understanding of the ‘multifocal nature of reality’. People in power do not need to pay attention to those with little power. But those who are marginalized,

autoethnography is the most akin to “conventional humanist qualitative inquiry” in that it privileges rigor over aesthetics or resonance). Though Foster refers to analytic autoethnography, her nod toward “poetic” dimensions of personal narratives within “research” illuminates the potential of evocative methods built on the paradigms of literature. Leon Anderson attempts a clearer distinction between analytic and evocative autoethnography. Quoting Denzin (1997), “evocative autoethnographers ‘bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other’” (377) as opposed to analytic autoethnography, which features “analytic reflexivity, narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, dialogue with informants beyond the self, and commitment to theoretical analysis” (378). I argue that one can be simultaneously analytic and evocative; yet again, I mention the choice of footnote to illustrate how “rigor” may co-exist with an epistemology of emotion. See, “Analytic Autoethnography,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 373-395.

⁵⁰ Tony E. Adams, *Narrating the Closet: An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016). Quotes from pages 160 and 161, respectively.

because they *must* pay attention to those in power, are able to see what is invisible to those in control.”⁵¹ Autoethnography is powerful by virtue of accomplishing what no other text can: insider reflections on what it means to be a particular form of marginalized from the standpoint of a marginalized subject who depicts a choir of similarly-situated marginalized subjects. A campus climate study on queer experience, using qualitative methods, could never be as insightful or transformative if conducted by a self-identified straight person. Thus, it seems, that a queer autoethnography is the premier means of studying the climate. Autoethnography is not only emic, but ultra-emic.⁵² Mathias Detamore underscores my assertion in his discussion of queer research ethics, writing, “An ethics as method is understood to be ‘queer’ in its ability to destabilise our assumptions about the ethical in research, disrupt the researcher/researched relationship and cultivate the intimacies necessary to shape new types of alliances and strategies for alternative social worlds.”⁵³ Detamore continues, “Intimacy is a risk, and if the argument for an entangled, co-production of knowledge can be valued as a legitimate means to understand the multiple and nuanced circumstances that constitute human socialization and experience, then the relationships that are established between the researcher and the researched are inherently intimate.” Detamore’s most revolutionary assertion? That anything other than researcher/researched intimacy is

⁵¹ See Perry Silverschanz, “What’s ‘Queer’ Got to Do With It?,” in *Handbook of Research with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations*, ed. William Meezan and James I. Martin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009): 3-16. Quote from page 4.

⁵² Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln highlight that “Qualitative data, it is affirmed, are useful for uncovering emic views; theories, to be valid, should be qualitatively grounded. Such grounding is particularly crucial in view of the mounting criticism of social science as failing to provide adequate accounts of nonmainstream lives or to provide the material for a criticism of our own western culture” (106). Emic refers to insider; ethnographers may often be granted emic status through a relationship to the gatekeeper or through prolonged immersion in the field. However, autoethnographers arrive with emic status since they possess a similar major identity component and are similarly situated in the social context. Hence why I call them ultra-emic. See, “Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994): 105-117.

⁵³ See Mathias Detamore, “Queer(y)ing the Ethics of Research Methods: Toward a Politics of Intimacy in Researcher/Researched Relations,” in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010): 167-182. Quotes from pages 170-171.

imperialistic in that it represents that which was not personally experienced and thus always risks partial understanding, if not misrepresentation.

PRELUDE

The following text was generated through formal interaction with nine men who attended Persimmon University during the period of 2005-2018. Persimmon University is an alias for the institution, chosen to add an additional layer of anonymity to the participants in this study. The title of this text, *Pink Lemonade: An Autoethnographic Fantasia on Queer Campus Themes*, is inspired by a local tradition: fresh-squeezed lemonade. Lemonade has been served at a local drug store for over a century; graduates serve it at weddings, retirement parties, graduation ceremonies, and at athletic events. Some even hang lemons on their Christmas trees. Lemonade is also a cultural cliché: When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. The gay men in my study have been handed a lot of lemons, but we're making (pink) lemonade.

Institutional approval was granted for formal interactions with these nine men for the period of 2016-2019. Formal interviews were collected and observations of participants made during the period of 2016-2018. All nine men identified themselves as gay and cis-gendered. Three men also articulated experiences as drag performers. Two men self-identified themselves as Latino. One as Hispanic and Native American. Six as white. These men were recruited through network sampling, aided by my work with the local Pride organization and through the recommendations of gay men who worked in my office (who are not participants in this study). Due to network sampling limitations, I was unable to include the fullest representation of the ethnic and gender spectrum on Persimmon's campus; thus, future work should take into consideration the experiences of more queer men of color and trans-spectrum students.

I (Benjamin) am the tenth man; I am a white, cis-gendered, gay man aged thirty-one at the project's formal conclusion. I share nothing of a participant's experiences that I would not (or did

not) share about myself, and no information is provided that the participants objected to having shared publicly, including sexual experiences, mental illness, and drug abuse.⁵⁴

Everything you will read is true.

⁵⁴ My comment here outlines an ethical commitment. Judith C. Lapadat informs my ethical commitments by identifying paths to address “relational ethics,” which are most vulnerable in autoethnography. Lapadat writes, “Unlike most qualitative research, where participants’ identities are anonymized, autoethnographers typically use their own name in publishing the research. This makes it difficult to protect the anonymity of others mentioned in the story...When a known researcher is speaking about his or her own life, a finger points back directly to those identifiable others in that researcher’s life” (593). She adds that researchers must, “repeatedly reexamine and make ethical decisions within each situational context accepting that often there is no unambiguous solution” (594) and to have, “repeated discussions about the implications of consent as the study evolves, and opportunities for the participant to choose to give or withhold consent for each different use of the data” (591). The latter two comments are vital to my method. I use member-checking throughout my process, specifically when narrating “trauma” or “intimacy,” to ensure that participants are comfortable with those components of their lives being made public. In addition, I start with formal consent, but ask for informal consent at each subsequent interaction (usually observations) and indicate when I may use a component of my observation in the final product. For example, Hamp consented to my using his first trip to an Atlanta gay bar as a component of his narrative, a year after he signed the formal consent form.

FOX: AN OPERA COMIQUE⁵⁵

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

BENJAMIN: A student and teacher; alto (or a soprano, if he's had some vodka and a few ibuprofen to relax his vocal chords)

FOX⁵⁶: A member of the administration; self-described cub; tenor

LONGITUDE⁵⁷: A spirit of Alistair Hall; sometimes tenor, sometimes alto, sometimes soprano, sometimes mute; he is the ghost of Benjamin's straight identity who still sometimes haunts Benjamin to remind him of his previous worldview

HELIOS⁵⁸: A lawyer and senior administrator; baritone

CIRCE⁵⁹: A senior administrator serving under Helios; contralto

⁵⁵ I refer to opera comique the genre, not the opera company in France. According to Allison Latham, *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), "the use of spoken dialogue remained a distinctive characteristic" of the genre, despite "traditional requirements" of French opera requiring all acts be sung through. I adopted the genre of opera comique to accommodate spoken data. My opera comique does not contain original music and lyrics, nor does it contain references to classic works of opera comique (such as Bizet's *Carmen*); it does, however, contain arias from classical operas as well as contemporary rock operas.

⁵⁶ Fox is a pseudonym selected by my participant on which this opera comique is based. He claimed to be a tenor when I asked him about which musical genre his life story would most effectively map onto. Other indications of vocal range within this opera are speculative. I did not, for example, contact Laurel Richardson to inquire about her singing capabilities as I do not anticipate her performing in this opera.

⁵⁷ Longitude the character and the dialogue associated with Longitude are drawn from memory data. Longitude, as mentioned, represents the ghost of my closeted self. Thus, the dialogue is rendered from memory rather than transcribed verbatim. When Longitude speaks in conversation with other characters, I depict what I would have said or interpreted based on memories of my mindset while still closeted. The use of memory as data is drawn from an example set by Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Haecceity: Laying Out a Plane for Post Qualitative Inquiry," *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 9 (2017): 686-698.

⁵⁸ Helios is a pseudonym.

⁵⁹ Circe is a pseudonym. I paused over selecting the pseudonym "Circe," considering that I prefer Madeline Miller's feminist recasting of the myth of Circe in which Circe is a not a one-dimensional witch but a heroine who overcomes (among other things) body shaming, betrayal, sexual assault, and exile. Circe, in my context, retains her more traditional status as villain, if for no other reason than to preserve a parallel in which Helios is "father" to Circe (in my campus context, Helios was Circe's former boss and mentor) and to indicate how Acontius, Glaucus, and other figures with Greek pseudonyms in the opera are related to her professionally and socially. Admittedly, my

ACONTIUS⁶⁰: An advisor caught in an affair with a student; tenor
LAUREL: A scholar; alto
DAVID: A scholar; tenor
STACY: A scholar; lyric soprano
TONY: A scholar; baritone
PHIL: A scholar; bass
EMILIA: An administrator who is also an old friend of Benjamin's;
dramatic soprano
FELICIA ELLERY: A woman of color who finds that condition to
be an obstacle for succeeding in Acontius's office; contralto
QUINCY: A stripper; singing is not his preferred mode of
expression; nude
AVERY COTTON: A trans woman; eight octave range
DONNA BRAQUET: A survivor; dramatic soprano
CHORUS: Carrie, Jack, Armand, Bernadette, Lucille, Imaginary Chief
Diversity Officer, Professor Stevens, Yellowhammer, Knoxnewsboy,
Inside Higher Ed Newsboy, Scott, Zandra, Albert, Dancer One,
Dancer Two, Blazing Saddles Dancers, Choreographer, Cowboy.
THE DIVAS: Tosca, Dido, Isolde, Turandot, Paul, Madame
Armfeldt, Desiree Armfeldt, Mary Magdalene⁶¹

construction of mythological parallel is simplistic, but I'm not writing a dissertation on the classics. I'm writing a dissertation on the present state of queer folk. For more on feminist reinterpretations of Greek myths, see Madeline Miller, *Circe* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2018) and Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (New York, NY: Liveright, 2017).

⁶⁰ Acontius is a pseudonym.

⁶¹ To better create the frisson I expect to generate from this opera, I suggest you listen to the following opera singers' interpretations of these iconic roles within the canon. For Tosca, listen to Leontyne Price from the 1962 Metropolitan Opera production; for Dido, listen to Jessye Norman accompanied by the English Chamber Orchestra in 1990; for Isolde, listen to Waltraud Meier from the 1995 Berliner Philharmoniker recording; for Turandot, listen to the 1972 Joan Sutherland recording accompanied by the London Philharmonic Orchestra; for Paul, Madame Armfeldt, Desiree Armfeldt, and Mary Magdalene, one may listen to the original cast albums of *A Chorus Line*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, respectively.

SCENE:

(Persimmon University.⁶² A semi-rural campus in the American South. Oft referred to as a Bible-belt campus; rated conservative, politically. The campus rests on a plain, shaded by a canopy of oaks, crepe myrtles, and magnolias; designated a "Tree Campus" by the Arbor Day Foundation. Buildings are predominantly Georgian, made of red brick with white detailing; a few buildings are antebellum. The campus is a "pedestrian" campus, on which there are no roads for vehicles. Students dress in athletic casual, mostly; however, Wednesdays are known as collar and dress days, since Greek life organizations meet in the evenings and expect members to wear "preppy" attire.

Benjamin's office is in the tallest building on campus, and in the county: Alistair Hall; it is ten-story brutally minimal structure that is allegedly causing ocular cancer due to its hazardous material construction. His office contains one iMac computer and a series of small stacks of books spread across a gray desk. It is the room in which Benjamin first meets Fox.)

LONGITUDE

(singing)

See me

Feel me

Touch me

Heal me

Right behind you, I see the millions

On you, I see the glory

From you, I get opinion

From you, I get the story

See me

Feel me

Touch me

⁶² Persimmon University is a pseudonym for the institution upon which this dissertation is based. Persimmon University is within the city limits of a city I call Persimmon and its neighboring city I call Antioch. Persimmon University is a major research institution, ranked in the Top 100 Public Universities by *U.S. News & World Report* with enrollment at approximately 27,000 students at the time this text is written. Persimmon is a land-grant institution, and is the second largest institution within its state. The University has long been known for its agricultural and engineering programs as well as for its agricultural outreach programs. The current governor of the state in which Persimmon exists is an alum and the university boasts of the achievements of alumni, which include the current CEO of Apple and an Oscar winning actress.

*Heal me*⁶³

BENJAMIN

(Spinning round in his swivel chair; holding a coffee; reading from a printed document)

Just listen to this: The New York Times, March 22, 1992. Quote, A measure on the current calendar of the Alabama House, Bill 454, seeks to limit gay groups on the campuses of the state's colleges and universities. It would prohibit any college or university from spending public funds to sanction any group that promotes a life style prohibited by the sodomy and sexual conduct laws that the state enacted in 1977.

LONGITUDE

(accompanying Benjamin)

See me

Feel me

Touch me

Heal me

BENJAMIN

Supporters of the bill said it would prevent universities from recognizing groups like the Persimmon Gay and Lesbian Association, whose charter was recently approved by administrators of Persimmon University. If the charter of this group is allowed to stand, said Representative Mark Gaines, a Homewood Republican who is a co-sponsor of the bill, you've opened the

⁶³ These lyrics are from the song "See Me, Feel Me" from The Who's *Tommy*. The song is not listed as a separate song on the original 1969 album, but it can be heard there as well as in the 1975 film: The Who, "See Me, Feel Me," recorded 1969, *Tommy*, Decca.

door for organizations
that promote bestiality
and wife-swapping.

LONGITUDE

Listening to you, I get the music
Gazing at you, I get the heat
Following you, I climb the mountain
I get excitement at your feet⁶⁴

BENJAMIN

The Gay and Lesbian Association was granted a probationary charter from the university's Student Government Association in 1990...But when the time came for a vote on the group's permanent charter last November, sentiment within the student government had changed. The vote was 23 to 7 against granting the charter. The student government president, Helios, 21, attributed the change to advice given by the Rutherford Institute, a Christian legal defense organization, end quote just a minute. Christian legal? Isn't that an oxymoron? Since when do Christians do legal shit?

LONGITUDE

See me
Feel Me
Touch Me
Heal Me⁶⁵

⁶⁴ *Tommy*, 1969.

⁶⁵ *Tommy*, 1969.

BENJAMIN

Let me continue with the less partisan New York Times. Quote, We found, because we were dealing with state laws, that we had legal grounds to deny the charter, Helios said. In January, however, the vice president of student affairs at Persimmon, overruled the student government and granted the charter...reaction was swift and virulent. Students opposed to the group collected 21,000 signatures, 4,000 of them from students, on a petition asking the Persimmon board of trustees to rescind approval of the charter.

Demonstrations by these students and by supporters of the gay group have led to heated words and at least one incident in which a pellet gun. End quote, goddammit. A pellet gun? Really? Quote, a pellet gun was fired near the gay demonstrators. The debate has continued to widen, with the national Persimmon Alumni Association endorsing the students' petition. The trustees will meet on Monday

to consider the matter.

66

LONGITUDE

They said that they didn't want to encourage students to do something that was outlawed by the state.

BENJAMIN

Lawrence saw to it we didn't have to worry about what the state had to say about sodomy. Although Sandra claimed that if sodomy was banned, then men couldn't stick it to women either, so she voted to approve all anal sex.⁶⁷

LONGITUDE

How egalitarian of her.

BENJAMIN

Was she looking out for herself on that one?

LONGITUDE

Steady, now.

BENJAMIN

If the student government was concerned about preventing students from doing anything outlawed by the state, then they should have been revoking the charters of fraternities, many of which were known rape dens.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ "Leaping Into the Fray Over Gay Group at [Persimmon]," *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 22, 1992.

⁶⁷ Here, I am referring to the plaintiff John Geddes Lawrence. In *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003), the Supreme Court overturned the Texas ban on consensual same-sex sexual activity. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote a concurring opinion with the majority in the case; however, her opinion did not specifically endorse same-sex sexual activity so much as it indicated that if sodomy was to be outlawed, then straight couples could not practice sodomy, either. #equalprotection.

⁶⁸ I refer to fraternities as "rape dens" based on three years' experience as a student conduct investigator. During that time, several cases emerged that entailed a component of sexual misconduct. To protect the privacy of victims, I will not reveal details here; however, I can report that one fraternity's charter was revoked for sexual misconduct violations during my time as an investigator. Regarding the time period of 1992, I can only speculate that similar misconduct occurred.

LONGITUDE

This isn't a play about rape. Nor is it a play about history. It is a play about now. There is a gay and lesbian association now.

BENJAMIN

Ah, and how welcome is it? The multicultural affairs office still hasn't developed LGBT resources nor did human resources include sexual orientation as a protected class in Persimmon's anti-discrimination policy until twenty sixteen. Twenty sixteen. Anyway, back to this business of charters and pellet guns and anti-sodomy laws. Listen to this fine press release here, from July, 2013.

(Reading from a file)

I quote: Vice President for Student Affairs Minos will leave Persimmon July 26 to take a job with the University of Southern California. The university announced today that Helios, an attorney in Persimmon's legal office, will serve in his interim.⁶⁹

LONGITUDE

And?

BENJAMIN

Helios, a lawyer in Persimmon's office, promoted to interim Vice President for Student Affairs...

LONGITUDE

He's apologized for his actions in the nineties. Publicly.

BENJAMIN

I tremble at his contrition. But that's not my point. Had we no other candidates for this job? Could we not have found a candidate with, I don't know, a degree in education?

⁶⁹ Evan Belanger, "[Persimmon] University appoints former SGA president as interim vice president," *al.com*, July 16, 2013, http://blog.al.com/wire/2013/07/auburn_university_seeks_new_de.html

LONGITUDE

One might find your attitude elitist. Expecting everyone to have doctorates to be qualified. Check your privilege.

BENJAMIN

And you check Betsy DeVos.⁷⁰

LONGITUDE

Point made.

BENJAMIN

Partially. Helios's promotion troubles me beyond his personal flaws. We work on a campus that is totally fine hiring a former crusader for bigotry to head the division that is designed to provide psychosocial support for the student body. The goddamn counseling center reports to this po-dunk Falwell, for Christ's sake. And the guy has no qualifications for the job. Persimmon doesn't mind a charlatan so long as he shakes and jives to the anti-queer tune.

LONGITUDE

Well, he has one qualification.

BENJAMIN

Et tu, ghost?

LONGITUDE

He is the advisor of Persimmon Girls and Fieldsmen.⁷¹ Those campus ambassadors...

⁷⁰ For more on why this joke has bite, see these articles outlining the pitfalls of hiring a U.S. Secretary of Education who has no background in public education #grizzlybears: Kate Zernike, "Nominee Betsy DeVos's Knowledge of Education Basics Is Open to Criticism," *New York Times*, January 18, 2017, and Emily Deruy, "What Makes Betsy DeVos Such an Unusual Nominee for Education Secretary," *The Atlantic*, January 19, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/01/what-makes-betsy-devos-such-an-unusual-nominee-for-education-secretary/513581/>

⁷¹ The Persimmon Girls and Fieldsmen are the official host/hostess organization of Persimmon University, serving under the direction of the Office of the President. The organization is notoriously competitive, and has been de facto

BENJAMIN

Yes...

LONGITUDE

I know they refer to the women as girls. But, you know.

BENJAMIN

Longitude: for a gender fluid spirit, you are shockingly reactionary.

LONGITUDE

I simply court the opposing viewpoint. I court the possibility of redemption. A true egalitarian always seeks the disconfirming evidence to his instinctual hypotheses.⁷²

segregated for much of its history. Of the approximately 20 members each year, usually (though not always) no more than two are people of color, nor have there been any students selected who were openly gay at the time of their selection. Fox was a Fieldsman, but remained closeted during his time in undergrad to have the chance to be selected. Helios, famous for revoking the Gay and Lesbian Association charter, was an adviser of the organization at the time Fox was a member, and Helios, as of November 20, 2018, is still an adviser.

⁷² Longitude's claim is not rooted in any philosophical literature regarding egalitarianism. When I was closeted, I would delude myself into thinking that I was egalitarian by playing devil's advocate to positions that were otherwise unsavory. Within the world of social sciences literature, seeking disconfirming evidence is a form of validation that serves the ethos of the researcher. While disconfirming evidence is useful in certain research contexts, I will not be searching for it within this project because I find the impulse to "disconfirm" the narratives of oppressed queer people to be an impulse that recapitulates oppression. Anyone seeking to "disconfirm" the evidence I present can, really, fuck off. The impulse to "disconfirm" queer experience is a dominant form of microinvalidation within campus climate studies and politics. For more information on microinvalidation and microaggression, see Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M. Bucceri, Aisha M.B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal, and Marta Esquilin, "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," *American Psychologist*, 62, no. 4 (2007): 271-286. Derald Wing Sue is considered the father of microaggression studies; however, his work rarely focuses exclusively on queer student experiences of microaggression. For information specific to queer microaggression, see: Michael R. Woodford, Jill M. Chonody, Alex Kulick, David J. Brennan, and Kristen Renn, "The LGBTQ Microaggressions on Campus Scale: A Scale Development and Validation Study," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62, no. 12: 1660-1687. This study identified the

BENJAMIN

That's how people justified the presence of a White Supremacist speaker staging a rally on campus this spring. The leadership feigned repugnance, and spoke about the true test of freedom of speech was the tolerance of speech that offends.⁷³

LONGITUDE

Like how I tolerate your pervasive use of the eff word.

BENJAMIN

We're all adults here. Speak fuck like an adult.

LONGITUDE

Speak elegantly like a man with a Master's in English.

following microinvalidations (my list is not exhaustive): "People said or implied that I was being overly sensitive for thinking I was treated poorly or unfairly because I am LGBTQ" and "Someone said or implied that my sexual orientation is a result of something that went 'wrong' in my past." The work of Nadal et al. is additionally useful for reference, Kevin L. Nadal, Arie-Anne Issa, Jayleen Leon, Vanessa Meterko, Michelle Wideman, and Yinglee Wong, "Sexual Orientation Microaggressions: 'Death by a Thousand Cuts' for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth," *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 8, no. 3 (2011): 234-259.

⁷³ During 2017 and 2018, Richard Spencer, founder of the National Policy Institute and organizer of the Unite the Right movement, began touring American universities to deliver a message of white supremacy. His appearances largely provoked protests from student bodies, which he used to demonstrate that universities were hostile to free speech. Many universities attempted to block his appearances; however, public institutions were not legally able to censor him or prevent his use of campus space. Persimmon, for example, attempted to rescind his reservation approval in the student center auditorium, but a judge ordered the university to allow Spencer to appear as scheduled. I participated in a research project that documented the varying ways this tour was covered by major public institutions; for more information, see Crystal E. Garcia, Jessica Weise, Benjamin Arnberg, and Marit Winborn, "Institutional Responses to Events Affecting Campus Climates: Examining the Power in Language" (Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Tampa, FL, 2018). For example, one can evaluate the extent to which a campus is committed to fostering an inclusive climate by seeing whether they referred to Richard Spencer as a "white nationalist" specifically or as something more vague like "controversial speaker."

BENJAMIN

Mother? Mother, is that you? And what do we make of the work Helios's done since his appointment? What opposing viewpoint can you conjure for Acontius?

LONGITUDE

What about Acontius?

BENJAMIN

That he was caught in flagrante dilecto with a female student at his former fraternity house.

LONGITUDE

I'd not heard.

BENJAMIN

You spend too much time haunting this monument to carcinogens.

LONGITUDE

But surely it is rumor? He was just promoted.

BENJAMIN

After a two-week mandated leave of absence. The girl had to resign from her position under his supervision.

LONGITUDE

He's had a rough time of it, though, romantically.

BENJAMIN

I am sympathetic to his previous tragedies. However, how am I to ignore a department that promotes a man guilty of sexual harassment?

LONGITUDE

Is it harassment if it is consensual?⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Consensual relationships in the workplace have long been debated as to whether those can be considered harassment. I base my understanding of sexual harassment in the workplace on Catharine MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), in which she identifies three major strands of harassment: severity, objective offensiveness, and pervasiveness. Consensual

relationships may not necessarily constitute a severe offense; however, they can be symptomatic of pervasive sexual harassment in which the woman (usually) acquiesces to advances after a period. In other words, what may have started as sexual harassment eventually became comfortable and welcome. In addition, the presence of a consensual workplace relationship between a supervisor and his subordinate may generate a hostile working environment in the sense that other subordinates may feel less privileged. Regardless of whether consensual relationships constitute sexual harassment, at Persimmon, the practice is explicitly prohibited and is almost universally punished across departments, except within the Division of Student Affairs. There is good reason for universities to be on high alert regarding sexual misconduct. MacKinnon, in subsequent work, notes a survey by the American Association of Universities (2015) in which 26.1 % of women reported “experiencing non-consensual sexual contact *through completed penetration* or sexual touching by *physical force or incapacitation*” (2046). She notes that the age range of eighteen to twenty-four years is when women (mostly) and men are most vulnerable to sexual assault. Women in male-dominated disciplines are at greater chances of experiencing sexual misconduct, with over 60% of women in law schools (for example) reporting unwanted sexual advances. Also noteworthy for university contexts is the robust body of evidence demonstrating that fraternity culture is the strongest predictor of on-campus sexual violence. According to MacKinnon, “fraternity men score higher on attitude scales that are supportive of rape, as well as higher in use of verbal coercion, drugs, and alcohol to obtain sex...Rape myth acceptance, which tends to flourish in [fraternity environments], has also been found associated with greater racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and religious intolerance...Studies suggest that rape cultures are fostered on college campuses when rape by acquaintances or dates—most frequently but not exclusively of women students by men students—is an encouraged and accepted, even integral, part of campus life” (2055-2056). MacKinnon’s work may seem tangential to the overall point of this chapter; however, Acontius was initially caught having an affair with an undergraduate student at his fraternity house, at which he was “house dad.” The overall circumstance (his retained employment status and promotion) sends a clear message that the department (if not the campus) is tolerant of sexual misconduct, to a degree. His circumstance demonstrated one of MacKinnon’s hallmark points: the more powerful (or well-connected) the less likely the perpetrator will be held accountable. MacKinnon also makes clear the connection between rape culture on campus and the extent to which that campus is also homophobic, racist, sexist, classist, ageist, and religiously intolerant. Hamp, about whom you will read in Chapter 2, reported being sexually assaulted by a group of fraternity men while en route to a bar. According to Hamp, the men “grabbed my ass” and started asking “You like it up the ass, huh?” Jason, about whom you’ll read in Chapter 6, reported having to dress “straight” to avoid verbal harassment at fraternity parties. What is interesting in this discussion is MacKinnon’s indication that universities are almost incentivized

BENJAMIN

It is at least forbidden. It is literally the only act punishable by termination, according to the faculty and staff manual.

LONGITUDE

Perhaps he merited mercy. Perhaps he was contrite.

BENJAMIN

He dates her still. She had to sacrifice her ambitions to prevent his further detriment. That's why his behavior is prohibited. And take note, too, my friend, that a gay man was fired last summer for having an affair with an intern.

LONGITUDE

Was it consensual?

BENJAMIN

Would it matter? One man is fired. One man is promoted. The only distinguishing feature between cases is the former involved two men.

SCENE:

(A conference room in the campus library. Benjamin sits with his back to a wall of windows. A laptop rests before him on the wooden table. Acontius appears on the screen; he sits with his back to a wall covered in mid-grade wallpaper and artistic reproductions; clearly a hotel room.)

ACONTIUS

I'm sorry we must conduct the interview on Skype. I've been in New York this week, and my flight was cancelled due to a snow storm.

to do nothing to address pervasive harassment or bias. "Deliberate indifference" is the standard by which universities are held liable; a campus may escape liability by simply holding a hearing or developing a reporting protocol that ensures an "appropriate authority" becomes aware of the complaint. The campus is not required to resolve the source of the complaint. For additional information on Title IX and sexual assault, see Catharine MacKinnon, "In Their Hands: Restoring Institutional Liability for Sexual Harassment in Education," *Yale Law Journal*, 125, no. 7 (2016): 2038-2105.

BENJAMIN

I lived through the polar vortex while working in Washington, DC. My MINI Cooper slid all the way into the inner ring of DuPont Circle. I had to tell the pedestrian I bumped: Sorry, I'm a Southerner; the only ice I'm used to is in my tea.

ACONTIUS

Well, I'll jump right into my questions, since we've already begun late.

BENJAMIN

Sure. I never pass an opportunity to escape small talk.

ACONTIUS

How do you plan to maintain professional boundaries with your students?⁷⁵

LONGITUDE

(from the corner of the room, hovering like Ellyn Burstyn in all the exorcism scenes from The Exorcist)
Can you believe?

BENJAMIN

I am not sure how to answer that. I prioritize boundaries, particularly since I am young. I guess there is concern because I have a brother who is still a student, so I am friendly with his peers. But also, I am aware that I have a controversial approach to advising. I live authentically so that others may feel comfortable living authentically around me.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ While this Skype interview took place, I typed each question in real time to email to myself as evidence of what was asked. If you would like further insight into the interview, I am happy to provide a copy of the question list as well as an Instagram screenshot in which Acontius frolicked in the snow with his undergraduate girlfriend, taken the same day as the interview.

⁷⁶ My advising style is built upon multiple strands of research within queer campus experiences. Much extant national research documents the lack of queer role models within campus contexts; in addition, many students report the classroom to be a site of hostility, which is usually only mitigated by an actively affirming teacher. Within my data set, none of the participants could identify a professor or administrator whom they would

But living authentically does not imply living inappropriately.

SCENE:

(Benjamin's office)

BENJAMIN

(Trembling, typing rigorously on his computer)

I am typing each question he asked me as well as my responses so that I have a record of what just happened in there.

EMILIA

And you say the girl was in the background?

BENJAMIN

I can't confirm that she was in the background, but she posted a picture to her Instagram of them together in New York that day.

consider a role model or affirming presence within the classroom (most referred to friends or community members as role models; Rex identified a former department chair, who was retired at the time of our interview), thus I attempt to be that as an adviser. For more information regarding queer reports of affirming environments on campus see, Susan Rankin, Genevieve Weber, Warren Blumenfeld, and Somjen Frazer, *2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People* (Charlotte, NC: Campus Pride, 2010). For the impact of affirming instructors and/or role models on campus, see Jason C. Garvey and Susan R. Rankin, "The Influence of Campus Experiences on the Level of Outness Among Trans-Spectrum and Queer Spectrum Students," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62, no. 3: 374-393, 2015, in which they found (out of a data set of 5,000 respondents) that "out" students were more likely to know or have had "affirming instructors" than students who remained closeted. Additionally, Kristen A. Renn found that 10.5 percent of respondents heard anti-LGBT language from faculty (p. 130) and that only approximately 51 percent of faculty reported feeling knowledgeable about LGBT issues (p. 130). Renn noted that "Campuses that support openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual faculty members and staff create an environment of acceptance where faculty can serve as role models for all students" (p. 131). My position of living authentically attempts to make up for the fact that the department in which I worked was openly hostile. See Renn, "Including All Voices in the Classroom: Teaching Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students," *College Teaching*, 48, no. 4 (2000): 129-135. See also Guy A. Boysen, "Teacher and Student Perceptions of Microaggressions in College Classrooms," *College Teaching*, 60 (2012): 122-129.

EMILIA

That's fucked.

LONGITUDE

Another quarter for the cuss jar.

EMILIA

As if gay men are the more likely group to be promiscuous with students.⁷⁷

BENJAMIN

These people upstairs in the Red Keep⁷⁸ all comment on my professional demeanor. Including my clothes. They say: (*miming scandal in expression and tone*) Benjamin drinks. He is known to drink at bars with students present. There are pictures of Benjamin drinking in public on Instagram. There is a picture of him kissing a drag queen. He was also seen outside a strip club.

EMILIA

To be fair, you were protesting the Westboro Baptist Church who were screaming God Hates Fags because it was gay pride.⁷⁹

BENJAMIN

See, I'm noble.

EMILIA

I wish I was on the search committee so I could see who else interviewed.

BENJAMIN

⁷⁷ Emilia refers to the common microaggression of assumption of sexual pathology (a microinsult). See Woodford et al., 2015.

⁷⁸ Emilia and I refer to the Persimmon Student Center colloquially as "The Red Keep," a reference to the king's fortress from *Game of Thrones*.

⁷⁹ Members of Westboro Baptist Church and numerous other opponents of queer rights gathered outside Swinging Richard's club in midtown Atlanta to protest Atlanta Pride in 2017. I was present, with Fox. The same protesters also attend the annual Atlanta Pride Parade, standing at the intersection of Peachtree and 10th, where the parade route turns to approach Piedmont Park, where the Pride Festival is held.

Oh, I have an idea who will land it. This guy named Glaucus. Acontius's boss, Circe, posted a picture of herself on Instagram with her arm about Glaucus's shoulder. She proclaimed herself overjoyed by the prospect of his future career in student affairs.⁸⁰

EMILIA

What're his qualifications?

BENJAMIN

He's ten years younger than I. No graduate school, despite the minimum education requirement being a Master's degree. But most important, he's a straight, white, Christian male. Brunette. Medium height. Medium build.⁸¹

EMILIA

What's that got to do with anything?

BENJAMIN

That's Circe's type.

SCENE:

(A conference room in the student center, which houses the Department of Student Affairs. Some members of Benjamin's circle refer to the student center as 'The Red Keep,' since it is a red brick fortress of a building with a circular conference room at the top with windows around its circumference providing 360-degree angle views of the main pedestrian concourse. The Red Keep is a reference to Game of Thrones since the Department's inner workings resemble the intrigue of Game of Thrones, but without the nudity. Mostly. Circe and her assistant enter the conference room where Benjamin and three other students await.)

⁸⁰ I have a screenshot of this Instagram post, but I will not include it.

⁸¹ I mention Glaucus's physical characteristics to indicate employee suspicion that Circe has "a type." Over the three years I worked in Circe's department, she systematically removed women and minorities while promoting and/or hiring brunette men with little to no qualifications. Since two of her subordinates were found guilty of violating sexual misconduct policy (without being punished), I underscore "this type" as further circumstantial evidence supporting my view that the department consists not only of homophobic hostility but sexual hostility.

CIRCE

Hess ordered everyone boxed lunches from Taziki's, since this meeting will be a long one.

(pausing while the students open their Greek salads and baked pita bread)

Today, we are having rumor control. It's a method my mentor used in Mississippi to contain insidious rumors swirling about the department. These rumors often adversely impacted morale; thus, addressing them boosted morale. Since many here lament the hostile climate, I want to intervene. I will correct rumors first; then you will each share a rumor you have heard, which I can confirm or deny.

BENJAMIN

(mouthing to his neighbor)

Isn't this how the Nazis figured out where the Jews hid?

LONGITUDE

(eavesdropping from under the table and making judgments about shoes)

Isn't this how the military figured out which fags to kick out?⁸²

CIRCE

(unwavering)

There is a rumor that the reason Odysseus was hired was because I am in love with him. Well, I am not. And to suggest that he was hired for romance does a disservice to his immense qualifications and talents.

LONGITUDE

(tugging at the hem of Benjamin's Gucci trousers)

Who is Odysseus? And what are his qualifications she accuses you of disserving?

⁸² See Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015). Although not an authoritative work on the history of the gay rights movement, Faderman's survey provides an adequate introduction to queer discrimination and oppression, including the military's campaign to systematically eradicate gay and lesbian military personnel, which led to the development of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

BENJAMIN

(showing Longitude a headshot of Odysseus, under the table)

Does that answer your question?

LONGITUDE

(smirking)

I see what you mean about her having a type.

BENJAMIN

(whispering to his lap, where Longitude rests a chin)

Emilia and I now have an acronym for it. S. W. C. M. Straight white Christian male. Brunette. Medium height. Medium build. No Master's degree at hire. No experience in education.

LONGITUDE

She like 'em dumb, eh?

BENJAMIN

I suppose she hasn't much choice, has she? Since the only smart one in the office is a fag.

CIRCE

(continuing, unperturbed)

I mean, he speaks Mandarin, for Christ's sake.

BENJAMIN

(continuing to whisper to Longitude)

I speak French. Pourquoi suis-je ici? Je cherchais le maison de Givenchy. Donne-moi un verre de vin rouge pour la peine. Sil vous plait. Where is my promotion?⁸³

CIRCE

(narrowing eyes, slowly turning her glare toward Benjamin)

What rumor might you want to address today, Benjamin? I hear you know everything that goes on.

BENJAMIN

⁸³ Translated: Why am I here? I am looking for the House of Givenchy. Give me a glass of red wine for the trouble (of being here). Please.

Thank you, I do.

(smirking, slightly; raising his hand to rest his chin upon it so that the room might see the gargantuan Alexander McQueen skull ring that Benjamin wears on days he must point and intimidate)

I hear that an Einstein's Bagels is coming to campus. Is that true?

CIRCE

That's not really a morale correcting rumor...

BENJAMIN

(interrupting)

Is it not? Whipped veggie cream cheese would boost my morale.

CIRCE

(unceasing)

...but yes, potentially, we are going to have an Einstein's bagels...⁸⁴

BENJAMIN

(interrupting)

Did you want us to read this article that you've placed at each spot about the University of Missouri?

CIRCE

(pursing lips)

Yes, Benjamin. Per request, I'm hosting these meetings as professional development for the graduate students who work in the department. That's another rumor going on: that we do not prepare graduate students with scholarship or professional development.

BENJAMIN

But this is from the Chronicle of Higher Education.

CIRCE

Yes?

BENJAMIN

⁸⁴ Einstein Bagels opened in Alistair Hall in August of 2017.

That makes it journalism; not scholarship. I have to go to my statistics class, soon. So let us go ahead and discuss the campus climate at the University of Missouri.⁸⁵ Maybe their example can help us determine how to reverse our own African American enrollment collapse over the decade, you know, before the New York Times takes notice. You know it has gone down two percent since I was an undergraduate here ten years ago?

LONGITUDE

What's that bring the total to?

BENJAMIN

We're now at seven percent. And the alumni association has miscoded many of my peers of color as white. Who knows what they code the queer people as? Sherbet? At any rate, my friend Emilia informs me that Alumni Affairs prefers not to do outreach to queer people anyway, so they may not be listed as alumni as all.

SCENE:

(A local fine dining establishment. The décor is rustic-chic, meant to accent the farm-to-table menu pioneered by an award-winning chef whose efforts landed the restaurant in Southern Living's top one hundred restaurants of the South list. Benjamin and Emilia sit, sipping Sauvignon Blanc and eating salmon cakes)

EMILIA

⁸⁵ I cannot recall exactly what the article was, but I am pretty sure it was a special report titled, "Turmoil at Mizzou," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 18, 2016. The resignation of the University of Missouri's Tim Wolfe the past autumn was among the most widely covered events in higher education that year. I presume Circe wanted us to discuss the incident, since Persimmon was preparing to release its inaugural Campus Climate Survey in April 2016. Circe was a member of the 2015 Strategic Diversity Initiative Committee, and often postured toward being an advocate of diversity and inclusion, despite having a dismal track record (such as not replacing the adviser for the International Student Organization nor the Black Student Union when the previous adviser resigned, despite expanding the advising team for student governance to three full-time staffers) and little to know scholarly achievement within the field of campus climate studies.

You know they promoted Commodus, right?

BENJAMIN

Didn't you say you were on the search committee for that job? And the search committee unanimously picked the other candidate?

EMILIA

We did. But Circe insisted on promoting Commodus instead. What has he even done? Launched one app and planned two events per year for the past five?

BENJAMIN

I guess it makes sense, his promotion.

EMILIA

Why?

BENJAMIN

S.W.C.M. *And* this year, he married a woman whom he began dating while she was his student.⁸⁶

EMILIA

Isn't Circe a Title IX coordinator?⁸⁷

BENJAMIN

Yep.

EMILIA

And she got all these men running around chasing ass in her department?

BENJAMIN

⁸⁶ Commodus, indeed, developed a relationship with an undergraduate student while he was serving as her graduate adviser. The couple were married in 2015, the following year, he was promoted to an assistant director position within the department. The position was created for him; no individual previously held it. The following year, Acontius was promoted to a second, newly-created assistant director position. In sum, two men who violated the university's policy on sexual misconduct were promoted *after the fact* by Circe, despite search committees unanimously recommending other candidates.

⁸⁷ As of November 20, 2018, Circe remained a deputy Title IX Coordinator for Persimmon University.

Yep.

EMILIA

And she's concerned about your influence on students?

BENJAMIN

You know gay men. We're whores, drunks, and drug addicts.

EMILIA

And black women are sassy and sing with their hands waving in the air.⁸⁸

BENJAMIN

Oh, Tonya's back in the office?

EMILIA

Yeah. She asked me today whether I liked white men.

BENJAMIN

Neither of us do, at the moment.

EMILIA

I said, I like all men, Tonya. All men.

BENJAMIN

Don't let Circe know, she'll think you're trying to steal her men.

EMILIA

Clair called me in her office today talking about how the invitation I designed for the alumni event quote: Gave her feelings of Kwanza.⁸⁹

BENJAMIN

Gasp.

EMILIA

Why are we here?

⁸⁸ I refer here to a scene I witnessed at Persimmon's Alumni Affairs office in which a colleague of Emilia's stated that all black women sing while waving their hands in the air.

⁸⁹ Tonya made this statement after seeing a draft of the invitation to Black Alumni Weekend.

SCENE:

(Yet another goddamn conference room. Persimmon can't manage to build a gender-neutral bathroom,⁹⁰ but we've got enough conference rooms to host the United Nations. Within, six undergraduate students convene for the Student Government Association Senate Executive Committee meeting. They discuss board appointments.)

ACONTIUS

(condescending)

You know, Benjamin, the reason we removed the Black Student Union President from the position on the board was because they were unreliable. So, we replaced them with the Honors President to provide academic diversity. I don't really appreciate your trying to undo our work toward academic diversity by attempting to create a permanent appointment for the Black Student Union President. Diversity is not about counting racial heads, you know?⁹¹

⁹⁰ I will give credit where credit is due: the Student Senate, in 2014, approved a resolution to include gender-neutral (labeled “unisex” or “family”) restrooms in all future construction on campus. The Senate, though, did have to table the resolution for one week, due to opposition. At the time, 178 “unisex” restrooms were available on campus for public use. See also John Sharp, “Alabama universities move forward on transgender bathroom policies—while state fights feds in court,” *al.com*, August 24, 2016, https://www.al.com/news/mobile/index.ssf/2016/08/alabama_universities_move_forw.html

⁹¹ The appointments in question were to the Board of Student Communications, which oversaw the operations of the weekly campus newspaper, the 24/7 radio station, the campus television network, the literary magazine, and the yearbook. Student appointees composed approximately 8 seats on the Board, with the presidents of Student Government, the Black Student Union, the Graduate Student Council, Omicron Delta Kappa, Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Council, and the International Student Organization being permanent appointees. However, over the course of 2014-2015, the Director of Student Involvement, Circe, and the Student Governance Adviser restructured the Board's makeup, removing the Black Student Union President and the International Student Organization President as permanent appointees. They replaced those students with the President of the Honors Congress, which is almost always (if not exclusively) held by a white student. The restructure guaranteed that the student board members would almost always be white (since there had been only one person of

BENJAMIN

I am literally wearing OPI Steel Waters Run Deep nail polish and a diamond ring right now. And you're lecturing me about diversity? You advise the whitest organization on campus⁹²; an organization that became *whiter* and *straighter* after you became advisor.⁹³ Students literally call it, quote: the Southern Gentlemen's Association. At our retreat last fall, you literally facilitated a discussion on whether there should be a white student union. I am simply trying to provide us some path to inclusion, in whichever way I can, given the circumstances. By the way, the Honors College is the most disproportionately white college on campus; their director was on the Common Book Committee and said that after Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, quote: We don't need another race book. So, way to go with your plan for diversity.

LONGITUDE

(tugging at Benjamin's hem under the table, yet again)
One, your nail lacquer suits you. Two, isn't that girl over there the President of the Black Student Union? And he just called her unreliable to her face?

FELICIA ELLERY

(speaking in Benjamin's ear)

color to be Student Government President and Greek Life would now only nominate a person of color every third year).

⁹² When this meeting took place, the previous two years of Student Governance saw no people of color appointed to executive-level positions within the organization, and it wasn't until 2017 that an openly gay man was appointed to an executive officer position. As of 2018, no openly queer person had ever been elected to an officer position, and fewer than twenty people of color had ever been elected to an officer position. It is also worth knowing that when a female candidate ran for Student Government President in 2017, her opponents campaign staffers chanted "She sits when she pees" on the campus green.

⁹³ Acontius became adviser in 2013, following the resignation of the previous adviser, who was African American. The previous adviser is the husband of my best friend from high school; he confirmed that the organization was hostile to his leadership, which he suspects in large part had to do with his race.

You have to report him to Circe. If you don't, who will? We're just undergraduates.

SCENE:

(The Red Keep. Benjamin and Circe sit across the table, alone. Benjamin drinks a matcha latte. Circe twiddles her thumbs on crossed legs.)

BENJAMIN

I feel rather awkward even bringing this up, because I have never formally tattled on a colleague; however, Felicia Ellery requested that I speak on her behalf after what happened last night at the Senate meeting. Acontius made comments regarding race and diversity that were, at best, ill-advised. The person he made the comments about happened to be sitting in the room. He claimed the Black Student Union was unreliable and that I was undermining his efforts to promote academic diversity, which, by the way, is not a thing.⁹⁴

CIRCE

It can...

BENJAMIN

My dissertation is literally on diversity and inclusion, so I assure you: academic diversity is not a thing.⁹⁵

CIRCE

You know, I wonder whether you're just blowing this out of proportion. Or exaggerating.⁹⁶ Your type tend to be melodramatic...

⁹⁴ Felicia Ellery did a search on Google and within the library's databases to discover that "academic diversity" did not exist within the scholarly discourse on higher education, with the exception of 1-2 disreputable articles. She emailed her findings to the entire Senate leadership the following morning, and copied Acontius. A copy of the email is available upon request.

⁹⁵ The only people who think it's a thing work for *Fox News*, see almost any episode of Tucker Carlson's show aired during 2018.

⁹⁶ I was not blowing it out of proportion, since Circe's peer (who held the same rank within the division), to whom I first reported the incident on September 1, 2016, suggested I file a Bias Response Protocol complaint and meet directly with the Vice President and Associate Provost rather than report to Circe, who

LONGITUDE

(sitting atop a filing cabinet)

Melodramatic? Girl, can you believe?

CIRCE

...and your supervisor tells me you thrive on stirring things up.⁹⁷

BENJAMIN

I do not stir things up. But I do address problems that arise. And I have been here longer than all of you, so I have seen a longitudinal pattern of exclusion among these people I'm talking to you about. I was one of those people who was systematically excluded by people like Acontius when I was an undergrad. You know, I rushed for his fraternity, but a friend told me the reason I didn't get a bid was because I seemed too gay.⁹⁸

CIRCE

That's not my domain. What is my domain is this office, and I think Acontius has an excellent track record for inclusion.

was well-known for not following up on bias incidents within her staff.

⁹⁷ My S.W.C.M. supervisor was overheard telling the IFC Adviser that I liked to "stir shit up." He referenced my "performance" during a meeting of the Board of Student Communications in which I advocated for an Ethiopian-American woman who was applying to be the television network Station Manager. The television network adviser (another S.W.C.M., brunette, who took Circe as his date to an awards banquet) was advocating for a less qualified male student with whom he routinely met at a local dive bar to provide advice. The Ethiopian-American woman had created the most widely-viewed program in the station's history, and yet her qualifications were being challenged. I spoke up on her behalf, having been an adviser for longer than anyone on the Board. My friend, the Panhellenic Graduate Adviser overheard the S.W.C.M.'s gabbing about me and immediately phoned to tell me. The following week, Circe barred me from ever attending a Board of Student Communications meeting again. I'd been a member (in one form or another) for a decade. She'd been a member for a month.

⁹⁸ Fox was a member of the fraternity at the same time as Acontius, and he confirmed that I was not given a bid because of suspicion that I was gay.

BENJAMIN

Oh, really? Like when he sent all the fraternities priority seating forms, but, oopsie boopsie, forgot to send the same forms to sororities? And when the Panhellenic President went to request some, he scolded her. He also struck down a bill of mine in the Senate that would have enabled a transgender student to be appointed to fill a Senate vacancy. He also asked a female job candidate how she planned to raise a child and fulfill her job duties. He presided over the removal of two African American students from his organization for grade violations, but hasn't removed a single white person for the same offense.

CIRCE

I'll look into the transgender student issue, since I was not aware of that.⁹⁹

BENJAMIN

Okay.

CIRCE

While we're on the topic, candidly, I don't love that you're still on the Senate. You wield too much influence over students. I don't like that. They respect you too much, and are intimidated by you. Your presence prevents them from expressing themselves as they wish...

LONGITUDE

Like saying homophobic shit without retribution?

CIRCE

...I'd prefer you not run again.

SCENE:

⁹⁹ I had literally been threatened by her student receptionist, who warned me that my bill was making "very important people" angry and that it would ruin my political cache. Despite her warning, I ran for a second term unopposed and was appointed head of Academic Affairs.

(A local bar. Benjamin and Fox meet to watch coverage of the Pulse nightclub shooting. Persimmon's President, by that point, had issued a two-sentence statement on the event. The statement was removed from the University website the following day.)

DIDO AND THE GAY MEN OF ORLANDO

(singing)

When I am laid, am laid in earth

May my wrongs create

No trouble, no trouble in, in thy breast

When I am laid, am laid in earth

May my wrongs create

No trouble, no trouble in, in thy breast

Remember me

Remember me

But ah, forget my fate

Remember me

*But ah, forget my fate*¹⁰⁰

SCENE:

*(Many months pass. Milo Yiannopoulos visits Persimmon's campus as part of his "Dangerous Faggots" tour.)*¹⁰¹

CIRCE

(reflecting to her students)

He made some good points.¹⁰²

(singing to Benjamin)

If your child ain't all he should be

This girl could put him right

I'll show him what he could be now

Just give me one night

¹⁰⁰ Henry Purcell, "Dido's Lament," *Dido and Aeneas*, libretto by Nahum Tate, ed. Curtis Alexander Price, *Dido and Aeneas: An Opera* (New York, NY: Norton, 1986). I suggest, as aforementioned, listening to Jessye Norman's interpretation of "Dido's Lament" accompanied by the English Chamber Orchestra.

¹⁰¹ Yiannopoulos spoke on October 7, 2016. The chair-elect of the faculty senate took the microphone at the close of the event to claim that all the faculty in electrical engineering were "behind" Milo and his message; he asked for an autograph. See Milo Yiannopoulos, "MILO at [Persimmon] University: 'Feminism is Cancer for Men...and Women!'" October 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKFA6RKIHSc>

¹⁰² Circe made this comment at the second "rumor control" meeting of the semester on October 25, 2016.

*I'm the Gypsy
The Acid Queen
Pay me before I start
The Gypsy
I'm guaranteed
To tear your soul apart
Gather your wits and hold on fast
Your mind must learn to roam
Just as the Gypsy Queen must do
You're gonna hit the road¹⁰³*

SCENE:

(Benjamin's office. Fox sits adjacent to Benjamin at his desk. Benjamin explains his dissertation research, which is what brought the two men into contact).

BENJAMIN

You were in Barn Yard Fraternity,¹⁰⁴ right?

FOX

Yes, honey. With your best friend, Acontius.

BENJAMIN

And you were part of that damn Persimmon Girls and Fieldsmen?

FOX

With Helios? Yes. Is that why you're asking? His special track record? For which he oh so sincerely apologized? I mean, he was always nice to me. I was not high class, like most members. Solid, middle-class, rural guy came up here and became a Fieldsmen. That was a cool gesture. But also, I wasn't out at that time, so who knows whether that would have made a difference.

BENJAMIN

You know, when Persimmon convened its initial Strategic Diversity Committee in 2005,

¹⁰³ Circe, of course, did not actually sing "The Acid Queen" to me, but she is guaranteed to tear your soul apart if you're not a S.W.C.M. See *Tommy*, 1969.

¹⁰⁴ I use the pseudonym "Barn Yard" rather than the fraternity's official name to protect the members within the fraternity who were complicit in its homophobia, but who may not have explicitly endorsed or perpetuated the homophobic climate.

the two undergraduate representatives were the Southern Gentlemen's Association¹⁰⁵ President, a white man, and the president of your fraternity. A Christian fraternity.

FOX

A dry fraternity, too. Well, not so dry when I hooked up with the following year's president.

BENJAMIN

I always felt pretty okay with myself for being denied a bid for a dry fraternity. I mean, to me, the whole point of being in a fraternity is to drink.

FOX

She's a lush?

BENJAMIN

(waving a hand, indicating the suite of offices holding people who believe he is a melodramatic shit-stirrer)
Wouldn't you be? If you worked here?

(pausing)

Anyway, the second Strategic Diversity Committee was convened last year,¹⁰⁶ and I just looked at their report. Guess who was on the committee?

FOX

Acontius?

BENJAMIN

His enabler. Circe.

¹⁰⁵ A colloquialism used by many in the student body to refer to Student Governance.

¹⁰⁶ It was convened in 2015. In the Strategic Goals Summary, their second goal was "Increase the recruitment, retention, and representation of people of color, ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented students, faculty, administrators, and staff..." Noticeably absent in the report are references to LGBT and/or queer people. The university claimed to desire inclusion of all community members, but does not ever explicitly use the terms "sexual orientation," "gender," "LGBT," "queer," or other terms that would denote goals aimed at including underrepresented sexual and gender identities.

SCENE:

(You guessed it: a fucking conference room. The President's Conference Room. The bell tower chimes. The Strategic Diversity Committee convenes and congratulates itself on yet another successful hoodwink. The Campus Climate Report has just been issued, revealing a much higher rating than had previously been given. A single trustee took the survey, and ranked the climate positively: a four out of five in most categories. The wife of the Persimmon Development Foundation conducted the focus groups that generated the survey. The survey contained only one question about the experiences of queer people.)

**CIRCE AND THE MOSTLY WHITE
STRATEGIC DIVERSITY COMMITTEE**

(singing)

CIRCE

It's astounding

Time is fleeting

Madness takes its toll

But listen closely

WHITE GUYS

Not for very much longer

CIRCE

I've got to keep control

I remember doing the Time Warp

Drinking those moments when

The blackness would hit me

WHITE GUYS

*And the void would be
calling*

ALL

Let's do the Time Warp again

Let's do the Time Warp again

**IMAGINARY CHIEF DIVERSITY
OFFICER¹⁰⁷**

It's just a jump to the left

¹⁰⁷ At the time the Campus Climate Report was issued, Persimmon had yet to hire a Chief Diversity Officer. Previously, the University had a "Director of Multicultural Affairs." A CDO was hired and commenced work in January 2017, although a coordinator of LGBTQ student services was not hired until summer 2018.

ALL

*And then a step to the
right*

IMAGINARY C.D.O.

Put your hands on your hips

ALL

*And bring your knees in tight
But it's the pelvic thrust
That really drives you insane*

CIRCE

Let's do the Time Warp again

LONGITUDE

*It's so dreamy
Oh, fantasy free me*

FELICIA ELLERY

*So, you can't see me
No, not at all*

BENJAMIN AND FOX

*In another dimension
With voyeuristic intention
Well secluded, we see all*

CIRCE

With a bit of the mind flip

BENJAMIN

You're into the time slip

CIRCE

And nothing can ever be the same

FOX

You're spaced out on sensation

BENJAMIN

I wish I was under sedation

ALL

*Let's do the Time Warp again
Let's do the Time Warp again*

IMAGINARY
OFFICER

CHIEF

DIVERSITY

It's just a jump to the left

ALL

And then a step to the right

IMAGINARY C.D.O.

Put your hands on your hips

ALL

And bring your knees in tight

But it's the pelvic thrust

That really drives you insane

CIRCE

Let's do the Time Warp again¹⁰⁸

SCENE:

(A lake forty miles northeast of the city of Persimmon. Benjamin sits in his living room before a gargantuan window overlooking the water. He prepares a collective story under the guidance of Laurel Richardson, Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams, and Phil Langer, sage advisers).

LAUREL

A collective story tells the experience of a sociologically constructed category of people in the context of larger socio-cultural and historical forces. The sociological protagonist is a collective.¹⁰⁹

BENJAMIN

I should conceive of the gay men at my institution as a sociological protagonist?

LAUREL

¹⁰⁸ For the straight people reading this dissertation, this song is “The Time Warp.” The committee is imagined having sung it, since the rose-tinted Campus Climate Report clearly was a warped view of what the climate was for underrepresented students. For example, white students were offered the chance to take the survey. Of over 500 responses, only 44 international students responded. Fewer than 100 responses were from African Americans, according to the Director of Academic Assessment, who gave an oral summary to the International Student Committee (on which I served) in 2016. See *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, directed by Jim Sharman (Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1975).

¹⁰⁹ See Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997), 14.

The men are individuals, yes. Together, they illustrate the socio-political marginalization experienced by many gay men on Persimmon's campus. Their collective occurs in contrast and opposition to the collective you've been telling me about. This Circe and Helios and Acontius and their ilk and their enablers.

BENJAMIN

I am concerned that I will be perceived as vindictive for identifying individual targets...

LAUREL

(raising a hand)

That is the beauty of a collective protagonist and antagonist. You may mention individuals, but you scrutinize the system. Nor do you valorize individuals, specifically yourself. You merely render collectives visible and depict them as authentically as possible, to the extent that authenticity exists...

BENJAMIN

Scrutinize the collective? You're saying that a collective enables individuals to absolve themselves of blame and responsibility by insinuating themselves within a larger institutional culture that normalizes their behavior.

LAUREL

A collective enables explicit discrimination, untenable to the contemporary consciousness, to disguise itself in subtler forms, such as marginalizing the opinions of a gay man as melodramatic...

BENJAMIN

When the term most accurate is justifiably dissenting.

LAUREL

A collective of oppressors balances the fugue of outrage exhibited in its opposition, the oppressed in this configuration. They create their own fugue of collegiality, morality, professional boundaries, evidence-based

outcomes, critical mass, the common good, and the recruitment of Foucault-style docile bodies.

BENJAMIN

I recall reading a study on suicide narratives of queer people in which one teacher explained why she failed to intervene when the child suffered from other children's attacks. She said, quote: We have a community that has widely varying opinions on LGBTQ issues, and so to respect all families, as the policy says, we ask teachers to remain neutral.

LAUREL

That's a sociological antagonist, for sure. To balance that condition, a sociological protagonist of marginalized people provides avenues for solace, safety, compassion, and triumph.¹¹⁰

BENJAMIN

Compassion and triumph are my objectives. I want this text to be compassionate and triumphant. Not prescriptive, per se, but receptive and resonant.

PHIL

(rising from across the room to join the conversation)
You depict the collective through a series of vignettes.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Laurel's dialogue is speculative based on *Fields of Play*, 1997, 30-35, where she discusses cultural stories, marginalizing narratives, and sociological protagonists. Aside from her first speech, the rest of her dialogue is not direct quotes; rather, they are speeches inspired by her work on collective and cultural stories.

¹¹¹ See Phil C. Langer, "The Research Vignette: Reflexive Writing as Interpretive Representation of Qualitative Inquiry—A Methodological Proposition," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22, no. 9: 735-744. In many ways, this opera comique is a giant research vignette composed of smaller vignettes. I practice vignettes according to Langer's vision as well as the "queering" of research vignettes by Stacy Holman Jones and Tony Adams who ask autoethnographers to "hinge." "We hinge experience and analysis, distance and closeness, equality and prioritizing oppression, conversation/dialogue and irony/rebellious debate, accessibility and academic activism, subjugated knowledges with canonical doctrine" (198). Vignettes are created from hinging researcher experience with that presented by the researched.

STACY

(pouring a cup of coffee from another part of the room)
Build vignettes around hinges between your experience and the experiences of those you encounter.¹¹²

TONY

(rocking himself on an antique rocker on the front porch, speaking into the window)
Hinging the personal with the studied is evocative and resonant, a goal of yours.¹¹³

STACY

Evocative autoethnography, which you attempt, includes good stories, stories that report recognizable experiences.¹¹⁴

PHIL

Together, these experiences (or “countertransference”) make “histories go” and determine experiences “collide” to remake histories (200). The goal of such autoethnographic vignettes is to “create good stories: stories that report on recognizable experiences, that translate simply and specifically to an actionable result” (211). See Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams, “Autoethnography is a Queer Method,” in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 195-214. Candidly, I use Holman Jones and Adams’s imperative to “create good stories” because, as Rex pointed out, surveys are “boring” (Rex’s narrative is the penultimate chapter of this dissertation). I aim to create immersive, resonant, broadly-scoped (though nuanced) research that is informative *and* interesting. Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre asks of the post-qualitative researcher that he or she generate research that is “remarkable.” Hopefully, an opera comique on queer campus experience fits the bill. For more on how to achieve St. Pierre’s notion of “remarkable” research, see Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, “The Appearance of Data,” *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies*, 13, no. 4, 2013: 223-227.

¹¹² See Holman Jones and Adams, 2010.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* Also, I want to direct you to Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis, *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016). I believe that evocative autoethnography, with its emotional dimension and allowance of intimacy with the researcher, best achieves “remarkable” in the sense that St. Pierre means. Bochner and Ellis emphasize the need to blur the line between research and literature; this endorsement, specifically, inspired my decision to adapt my data into opera format for this chapter.

These stories capture countertransference. No individual is the subject of study; rather, the relationship is scrutinized and captured. Knowledge of the climate comes from engaging with others.

TONY

You take fragments of lived experience and make them collide; breaking and remaking histories.

SCENE:

(A campus recreation center in Autumn. One year passed since Benjamin and Circe last saw each other. Benjamin walks the track that snakes through multiple weight-lifting machines, group fitness rooms, and lounge areas. At one lounge area, he is stopped by Scott, a former colleague.)

SCOTT

How's the dissertation going?

BENJAMIN

As well as to be expected, considering I'd rather be sipping champagne and reading Vogue on a beach in Tahiti.

SCOTT

Well, my dissertation work essentially got me fired.

BENJAMIN

From the Black Student Union? How do you mean?

SCOTT

Well, Circe said that graduate assistants only serve twenty hours per week, and doctoral students have such large academic loads that they are likely to cut into an already short schedule and shortchange the students.

BENJAMIN

Had your dissertation research and coursework been getting in the way?

SCOTT

Nope. I don't really know what I did to give her the impression that I couldn't handle the

load. I've been the adviser for over a year with no problems.

BENJAMIN

Did she already have a replacement lined up?

SCOTT

Nope.

BENJAMIN

So, the Black Student Union has no adviser right now, but the Southern Gentlemen's Association has three?

SCOTT

Yep.

BENJAMIN

Well, she finally achieved her goal, then.

SCOTT

What was that?

BENJAMIN

She got rid of all the people of color and all the gays that worked in that department when she arrived.

SCOTT

You know, you're right. All of the graduate assistants are white women in the Master's program, and all of the advisers are now white men and women.

BENJAMIN

None of whom are doing doctoral work. I knew she liked people dumb.

SCOTT

Wait, you said she got rid of the gays. She got rid of you? I thought you resigned.

BENJAMIN

A little of both. I resigned before the year ended to take an academic assistantship, but she'd already planned to fire me for budget reasons. Funny, that excuse, since I singlehandedly generated a quarter-of-a-

million dollars in revenue, a.k.a. half our office's budget, last year.

SCOTT

They can make up any shit they want, and no one's going to stop them. She must have some shit on the Vice President, otherwise how is he letting her get away. I mean, the Black Student Union now has no adult guidance. At. All. How do you think that makes them feel?

BENJAMIN

The Gay and Lesbian Association doesn't even receive funds or a full-time advisor. And the guy that hired Circe is the same guy that revoked the Gay and Lesbian Association charter back in the nineties.

SCOTT

Shit, really?

BENJAMIN

Yep. It was in the New York Times. Listen at me, though, standing here in the middle of the recreation center stirring shit up. I guess I am melodramatic. You know Circe called me melodramatic, right?

SCENE:

*(The tube. A Samsung with an AppleTV. Benjamin appears on screen. He enters a mad tea party as if he stepped through the looking glass.)*¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ This scene is meant to appear to the audience as if they are watching it on television, probably around two a.m. when they are delirious or groggy. Imagine, really that you're hallucinating. I structure this scene as a "choreography of becoming," as described by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (10). Coole and Frost reconfigure the commitments of qualitative inquiry using a new materialist paradigm, in which matter is unstable and human identity is forever in flux. They write, "the human species is being relocated within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain agentic capacities and in which the domain of unintended or unanticipated effects is considerably broadened. Matter is no longer imagined here as a massive, opaque plenitude but is recognized instead as indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways. One could conclude, accordingly, that 'matter becomes' rather than that 'matter is.' It is in these choreographies of

becoming that we find cosmic forces assembling and disintegrating to forge more or less enduring patterns that may provisionally exhibit internally coherent, efficacious organization: objects forming and emerging within relational fields, bodies composing their natural environment in ways that are corporeally meaningful for them, and subjectivities being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes” (10). What Coole and Frost mean for this project? They echo a trope of queer theory and Deleuzian thought in which we view identities as constantly becoming, largely influenced by social circumstance rather than individual agency. This scene is a choreography of becoming “melodramatic.” It demonstrates how I, as well as other gay men, are constituted as that which we are not, inherently. I am not melodramatic, for example, in my own view; however, a cosmic body of matter and material (namely American television) conspires to consistently constitute me as “melodramatic” in the eyes of others, to the extent that their perception is reflexive. This scene should demonstrate how I became the stereotype through no choices of my own. Richardson, 1997, becomes useful here, too. Recall her discussion of “the cultural story.” On that subject, she writes, “The cultural story is told from the point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order and bears a narrative kinship to functionalism. Since, for example, the central character in a patriarchal system is the male, a cultural story of ‘adultery’ is about the normative status of ‘marriage’ and how an ‘other woman’ tries to ‘ruin a family’ by ‘stealing a man’ from his wife. The central character in this story is the husband, and the story line ‘blames’ the minor characters, the women: the wife for her deficiencies in sex, love, and understanding; the other women for her deficient morality” (32). These types of “cultural stories” serve as “marginalizing narratives” to absolve dominant groups of their moral deficiencies and exclusionary practices. In my case, dismissing me as “melodramatic” rather than as “justifiably dissenting” allowed Circe to keep patriarchal dominance intact due to the dissenter being, in some way, deficient or untrustworthy. While on the subject of choreography, I must mention Valerie J. Janesick, whose work on choreography and qualitative research also inspired the structure of this scene. She notes that, “the qualitative researcher may learn from the choreographic forms of both minuet and improvisation. The design of the study begins with some fixed movements: precise interviews are planned, observations are scheduled, documents are reviewed and analyzed. In this way the researcher is like the choreographer/dancer of the minuet. At the same time, within the parameters of the interviews, information is disclosed that allows the researcher to improvise, to find out more about some critical event or moment in the lives of the participants. So the researcher beings to use the techniques of the improvisational choreographer/dancer” (50). See, Valerie J. Janesick, “The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design: Minuets, Improvisations, and Crystallization,” in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, 2nd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 46-79.

BENJAMIN

(Eating a flapjack cupcake from Baked and Wired, a bakery in Georgetown, DC.)¹¹⁶

I became notorious like my girl Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I'll take it, I guess. Notorious for melodrama. Typecast in the role. But how did melodrama become our type?

LUCILLE BLUTH

(Yelling from her yacht nearby)

Everything homosexuals do is so dramatic and flamboyant. It makes me want to set myself on fire.¹¹⁷

LAUREL RICHARDSON

(Sipping a tea)

The cultural story is told from the point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order and bears a narrative kinship to functionalism. Since, for example, the central character is a patriarchal system is the male, a cultural story of adultery is about the normative status of marriage and how an other woman tries to ruin a family by stealing a man from his wife. The central character in this story is the husband, and the story line blames the minor characters, the women: the wife for her deficiencies in sex, love, and understanding; the other woman for her deficient morality. This particular cultural story, in the United States, transcends race and class lines, making it seem true and giving it a hold on the imaginations of men and women. Cultural stories, thus, help maintain the status quo.¹¹⁸

STANFORD BLATCH

(Stopping at the other end of the table, where Carrie Bradshaw sits with Oliver Spencer)

¹¹⁶ Baked and Wired is on Thomas Jefferson Street, Northwest in Washington, DC. It has the best dirty chai in the district.

Once, a barista and I had a dirty conversation about dirty chais. "I'll have a dirty chai," I said. He, "How dirty do you want it?" I, "As dirty as you can make it." He, "You like it dirty?" I, "And hot." He made my foam in the shape of a heart.

¹¹⁷ *Arrested Development*, "Pilot," directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, written by Mitchell Hurwitz, starring Jason Bateman, Jeffrey Tambor, Portia de Rossi, and Jessica Walter, aired November 2, 2003.

¹¹⁸ Richardson, 1997, 32. See note 61 for further explanation of this speech.

If it isn't Mr. and Mrs. Down Under.

CARRIE BRADSHAW

(in an aside to the audience)

I was so preoccupied with my gay boyfriend, I kept forgetting about my gay husband.

(to Stanford and Oliver)

You remember Stanford? From brunch?

STANFORD

Apparently, it was more than just brunch. Don't fall for him; he's just another pretty face. He doesn't love you like I do. I knew this woman when she took the subway and wore Candies.

OLIVER

(laughing)

Candies?

CARRIE

I assure you, I never wore Candies.

STANFORD

You wore pink suede Candies, and I adored you anyway.

(to Oliver)

And how dare you try to steal her away with your dreamy eyes and your probably fake accent?¹¹⁹

ZANDRA

Oh look, the crying fag!¹²⁰

BENJAMIN

(Discussing methodology with a disinterested Lily Tomlin, who's busy speaking into a microphone narrating 'The Celluloid Closet for the table's entertainment')

¹¹⁹ *Sex and the City*, "All that Glitters," directed by Charles McDougall, written by Cindy Chupack, starring Sarah Jessica Parker, Kim Cattrall, Kristen Davis, and Cynthia Nixon, aired January 13, 2002.

¹²⁰ *Will & Grace*, "Flip Flop: Part I," directed by James Burrows, written by Adam Barr, starring Eric McCormack, Debra Messing, Sean Hayes, and Megan Mulally, aired February 6, 2004.

I once interviewed a drag queen. I asked what he'd have me do if I wanted to get a taste of what it was like living as a drag queen and genderfucker on our campus. He told me to wear makeup and get nails done and walk around campus for a day. I wore Steel Waters Run Deep by OPI, Clinique Matte Bisque powder, and YSL Shade 10 lipstick to Circe's office the day I reported Acontius. She stared at my nails the whole time. If my hand moved up, so too did her attention. Each time she challenged my report, she looked at my nails.

JACK MCFARLAND

(wrapping his arms around Karen Walker)

Before language, people communicated through intricate choreography, costume changes, and lighting. Language was only invented when unattractive people were born and needed to be commented on. My grandfather was one of the first ballerinas to land on the beach at Normandy. Fact: D-Day stands for Dance Day! Now, let's start with a simple box step. It is called that because we lead with our box.¹²¹

BERNADETTE

(chastising a woman who mocked her hair)

Now listen here, you mullet. Why don't you just light your tampon and blow your box apart? Because it's the only bang you're ever gonna get, sweetheart.¹²²

ALBERT

(standing from the table with such force that Benjamin's mimosa topples)

Don't give me that tone! That sarcastic contemptuous tone that means you know everything because you're a man, and I know nothing because I'm a woman.

ARMAND

(placing a palm over his face)

You're not a woman.

¹²¹ *Will & Grace*, "Fred Astaire and Ginger Chicken," directed by James Burrows, written by Ain Gordon, starring Eric McCormack, Debra Messing, Sean Hayes, and Megan Mulally, aired April 1, 2004.

¹²² *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, directed by Stephen Elliott (Los Angeles, CA: Gramercy Pictures, 1994).

ALBERT

You bastard!¹²³

BLAZING SADDLES DANCERS

(singing behind Lily Tomlin)

Throw out your hands

Stick out your tush

Hands on your hips

Give 'em a push

You'll be surprised

You're doing the French Mistake

(stopping due to a burst from stage left and the entry of a horde of rowdy cowboys who begin rumbling with the dancers)

CHOREOGRAPHER

Not on the face!

COWBOY

(punches him)

DANCER ONE

(squeals)

Come on, girls!

DANCER TWO

(squealing)

You brute, you brute, you brute, you vicious

brute!

*(collapses)*¹²⁴

BENJAMIN

(facing outward as if talking to the TV viewing audience at home)

I worked for three years in Persimmon's Department of Student Affairs. In that time, I was called: petty, catty, sassy, queen, melodramatic, storyteller, trifler, shit stirrer, sarcastic, cynical, a bad influence, alcoholic, crazy, paranoid, foul-mouthed, tactless, blunt rude, critical. Twice, I was granted interviews for promotions. In one, I was asked, quote, Will you be able to develop tact and diplomacy so you can better represent our office to external stakeholders?

¹²³ *The Birdcage*, directed by Mike Nichols (Los Angeles, CA: United Artists, 1996).

¹²⁴ *Blazing Saddles*, directed by Mel Brooks (Los Angeles: CA: Warner Bros., 1974).

end quote. In another, as you know, I was asked, quote, How will you maintain professional boundaries with your students? end quote. In both interviews, I was asked, quote, How do you inspire trust in others and build relationships with people who are different from you?

FOX

(entering Benjamin's office, finding Benjamin slumped over his computer's keyboard, dozing, while Absolutely Fabulous plays on the screen)

What are you watching over there, girl?

LONGITUDE

(painting her nails Steel Waters Run Deep, based on a recommendation she recently heard about it)

Girl, she's over there trying to demonstrate how media portrayals of gay men caused him to be fired.

FOX

That's a stretch.

BENJAMIN

Shut the fuck up, both of you. Haven't you ever seen The Celluloid Closet.

FOX

I mean, those questions you were saying you were asked, I can add to those. And I can add feedback I received. We're looking for a service leader. Or, We're not the multicultural affairs office. Or, We're looking for someone who will fit in with our team. According to my friend in human resources, the line, We're looking for someone who will fit in with our team, is a maneuver to dance around discrimination by claiming that the gay candidate's personality does not jibe with the office.

BENJAMIN

The way they perceive of my personality is largely influenced by the gay personalities these people see in the media.

FOX

Didn't I see you take a day off work to drive to Saks in Atlanta to exchange a pair of Gucci loafers that were shipped in the wrong color?

BENJAMIN

I needed them for a wedding reception the next day,
and I was going to be photographed.

LONGITUDE

Yep. It's all the media's fault.

BENJAMIN

Fox, while you're here. I want you to tell me five
words describing yourself. It's for my campus climate
study on gay men's experiences on this campus. I'm
trying to describe you in my opera on the dramatis
personae page.

FOX

Opera's aren't melodramatic?

BENJAMIN

Word one: Bitch.

FOX

I'll tell you this. That's always been my hang up. Like,
who am I? And who do I perceive myself to be? And
what do I prefer others to see myself as? Right?
Those three people have always been present and
they always look and feel different. Who am I?

PAUL

(singing)
Who am I anyway
Am I my resume
That is a picture
Of a person I don't know
What does he want from me
What should I try to be
So many faces all around
And here we go
I need this job
Oh, God
*I need this show!*¹²⁵

LONGITUDE

Does anyone else hear that singing? Or is it just me
hearing shit in purgatory that you live ones can't?

¹²⁵ Sammy Williams, vocalist, "I Hope I Get It," by Marvin
Hamlisch and Edward Kleban, recorded 1975, track 1 on *A
Chorus Line: Original Cast Album*, Columbia, record.

BENJAMIN

What is most important to you in the moment? One of Nora Ephron's, whom I stole this exercise from, in the middle of her life was divorced. And then later it was mother. Independent of what you think anyone else thinks of you, what is you?

FOX

Witty. Anxious. Friendly. Loving. And deceptively sad.

BENJAMIN

Tell me about that last one.

TOSCA

FOX

(singing)

(singing)

Vissi d'arte

I accomplished things

Vissi d'amore

That were exciting

Non feci mai male

But, I turned from

Ad anima viva!

Growing opportunities

Con man furtive

I feared who

Quante miserie

I always wanted to be

Conobbi aintai

That euphoria

Sempre con fe sincera

Could not be sustained

La mia preghiera

I worked so hard

Ai santi tabernacoli sali

But, I was just tired

Diedi fiori aglaltar

*The recession prevented me
Nellora del dolore*

*From prestige, self worth
Perche, perche, Signore*

*Choosing to live
Perche me ne rimuneri cosi*

*In a liberal city
Diedi gioielli della Madoann*

*Found my first relationship
Al manto, e diedi il canto*

*When it failed
Agli astir, al ciel*

*That exposed old wounds
Che ne ridean piu belli*

We use people in romance

To love parts of us that

We don't truly

Love ourselves

Sempre con fe sincera

I was unhealthy

La mia preghiera

I've never been able

Ai sanit tabernacoli sali

To pull myself out

Sempre con fe sincera

Of that depressing space

Diedi fiori aglaltar

I look back on my life

Nellora del dolore

With a mixed bag

Perche, perche, Signore

Of emotions

Perche me ne rimuneri cosi¹²⁶

¹²⁶ For best results, listen to Leontyne Price, vocalist, "Vissi d'arte," by Giacomo Puccini, conducted by Kurt Adler, accompanied by The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, recorded

*I feel like I was tricked
I think we allow
Ourselves to use
Accomplishments to
Plug holes in ourselves*

FOX

And you?

BENJAMIN

Psychotic. Storyteller. Manipulator. Bon
Vivant. Addict.

ISOLDE

*(singing)
Mild und leise*

Wie er lachelt

Wie das auge

Hold er offnet

Seht ihr's, freunde

Seht ihr's nicht

Immer lichter

Wie er leuchtet

Stern-umstrahlet

Hoch sich hebt

Seht ihr's nicht

Wie das herz ihm

Mutig schwillt

Voll und behr

Im busen ihm quillt

BENJAMIN

(singing)

Everyone is an addict

Just like everyone is

A prostitute

We all use

Our bodies somehow

To make money

Marriage is sacramental

Prostitution

Don't believe me?

Define consummation

And trace its conceptual

History through time

I am a prostitute

And an addict

The project I write is

1962 and reissued on January 25, 2011, on *Tosca*, Sony
Masterworks, record.

<i>Wie den lippen</i>	<i>Prostitution</i>
<i>Wonnig mild</i>	<i>And the feeling it provides</i>
<i>Suber atem</i>	<i>The catharsis</i>
<i>Sanft entweht--</i>	<i>The exorcism</i>
<i>Freunde! Seht!</i>	<i>The vengeance</i>
<i>Fuhlt und seht ibr's nicht</i>	<i>The activism</i>
<i>Ho rich nur diese weise</i>	<i>Yields addiction</i>
<i>Die so wundervoll und leise</i>	<i>I am addicted to feeling</i>
<i>Wonne klagend</i>	<i>Vindicated</i>
<i>Allex sagend</i>	<i>To feeling avenged</i>
<i>Mild versohnend</i>	<i>Hearing this man talk is</i>
<i>Aus ihm tonend</i>	<i>Vindication</i>
<i>In mich dragnet</i>	<i>What I experienced</i>
<i>Auf sich schwinget</i>	<i>Happened to others</i>
<i>Hold erhallend</i>	<i>I did not hallucinate</i>
<i>Um mich klinget</i>	<i>I am not crazy</i>
<i>Heller schallend</i>	<i>Writing it and sharing it</i>
<i>Mich unvallend---</i>	<i>Will expose the collective</i>
<i>Sind es wellen</i>	<i>That brought me to illness</i>
<i>Sanfter lufte</i>	<i>Who forced me into</i>
<i>Sind es wogen</i>	<i>A life of manipulation</i>
<i>Wonniger dufte</i>	<i>Who made me tell stories</i>
<i>Wie sie schwellen</i>	<i>And for whom I became</i>
<i>Mich umrauschen</i>	<i>A bon vivant</i>

<i>Soll ich atmen</i>	<i>The last seems positive</i>
<i>Soll ich lauschen</i>	<i>To be stylish, luxurious</i>
<i>Soll ich schlurfen</i>	<i>Rest assured</i>
<i>Untertauchen</i>	<i>I assume the mantle</i>
<i>Sub in duften</i>	<i>To manipulate</i>
<i>Mich verhauchen</i>	<i>I garner respect by being</i>
<i>In dem wogenden schwall</i>	<i>More stylish</i>
<i>In dem toneden schall</i>	<i>More articulate</i>
<i>In des welt-atems</i>	<i>More well-read.</i>
<i>Webendem, all---</i>	<i>More respected and hated</i>
<i>Ertrinken</i>	<i>Even among gay men</i>
<i>Wersinken</i>	<i>Who saw this man as</i>
<i>Unbewebt</i>	<i>Arrogant, aloof</i>
<i>Hochste lust!</i> ¹²⁷	<i>Shallow, condescending</i> <i>A traitor</i> <i>for staying straight</i> <i>so long.</i>

SCENE:

(An on-campus coffee shop. Benjamin stands in line awaiting a Venti Caramel Macchiato, hot, since people who drink cold coffee are freaks. Fox approaches from behind)

FOX

There's a glory hole on campus.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ For best results, listen to Waltraud Meier, vocalist, "Mild und lesie wie er lachelt," by Richard Wagner, accompanied by Berliner Philharmoniker, recorded January 1, 1996, reissued March 26, 2013, on *Tristan und Isolde*, Warner Classics International, record.

¹²⁸ For photographs, contact me directly.

BENJAMIN
New?

FOX
I guess?

BENJAMIN
Found it mincing about, did you?

FOX
Heard about it on Grindr. Want to go see if we can find it?

BENJAMIN
Don't you have work?

FOX
I'm taking a minute. Came out to my boss. He said he and his wife would pray for me.

BENJAMIN
It'll take the prayers of millions.

FOX
This is sort of work; the glory hole needs to be documented for your dissertation.

BENJAMIN
I could hear you before I could see you, by the way. Your tenor floated down the hallway. I tried to hide.

FOX
(pointing at Benjamin's shoes)
Look at you, honey. She splurged. She's high trash, today.

BENJAMIN
Thanks. Gucci. Alessandro's first collection. And what is that on your tee?

FOX
Two bears humping.

BENJAMIN
You wear that to work?

FOX

I told you: I'm taking the afternoon off.

BENJAMIN

Where is this glory hole?

FOX

Grove Hall.

BENJAMIN

Let's move.

LONGITUDE

(mimicking the one drag queen she ever saw as Benjamin and Fox exit an exterior doorway onto the campus green)

Enema? Party of two. Enema? Party of two.

BENJAMIN

(to Longitude)

Pardon?

LONGITUDE

Once heard a drag queen restaurant hostess yell Enema, party of two, to a crowd before correcting herself. Emily, party of two. With you two heading to a glory hole, it's for sure Enema, party of two.

SCENE:

(A gritty, emerald-green mosaic tiled men's bathroom. Large: four urinals in a row precede a string of four stalls. Across the walkway is a series of sinks and a large mirror. The bathroom's tiles echo sounds of leaks and drips in perpetuity, despite Grove Hall being the home of many engineering courses)

BENJAMIN

Which stall?

FOX

Third. Take a look at the poetry etched above it.

BENJAMIN

(reading from within)

I got a blumpkin right where you're sitting.

FOX

She took elocution lessons.

BENJAMIN

Well, I do try to read poetry clearly and elegantly.

(photographing the hole)

Of course a glory hole survives in Grove Hall; the building is slated for demolition.

FOX

(sitting on a sink)

Well, shit. Then Persimmon will destroy its only resource for gay students!¹²⁹

BENJAMIN

I'm kind of surprised it's here. Were it not for impending doom, the glory hole would probably go the way of the sodomy drawings, racist commentary, and pro-Trump Nazi propaganda that usually gets plastered and painted over.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Persimmon provided Safe Zone training to faculty and staff; however, there were no other resources devoted to queer inclusion. No safe space or center, no queer services staff member, no devoted counseling services or advisers. The university contributed some funds to bringing former NFL player Michael Sam to speak during 2016's LGBTQ History Month. Otherwise, the central administration made little commitment to queer inclusion. Thus, Fox's claim that the "Glory Hole" was the only physical resource allocated to gay men is not inaccurate.

¹³⁰ In the busiest buildings, it was not uncommon to see homophobic commentary or even targeted verbal harassment. On a number of occasions, I saw individual students' names and phone numbers appear on the bathroom stalls of Alistair Hall. Usually, these were along the lines of "For good head, call..." and included the name and phone number, or the Grindr handle. After the 2016 Presidential election, a professor hung a poster that read "Muslims Welcome, Immigrants Welcome, Refugees Welcome, International Students, Staff, and Faculty Welcome" on his office door in Alistair Hall. People began writing on the poster; comments included "Why is this still here?" and "My tax dollars pay your salary! This sign accomplishes nothing. And pay for this door! It is NOT yours!" and "Of course the leftist professor thinks he's making a difference by putting this here. All you're doing is dividing people more and more just like your hero Obama did to our country for 8 years. Just because you see yourself as an 'academic elite,' that does not mean you get to tell us how to think. Just teach your subject and go home like the rest of us." The poster was eventually ripped in half and thrown on the floor. For photographs, contact me directly.

FOX

Watch out for that black mold growing behind the toilet.

BENJAMIN

I can't believe I'm wearing Gucci where someone got a blumpkin.

FOX

It's kind of fitting it's in Grove Hall. It was built in the seventies...

BENJAMIN

(interrupting)

Your era?

FOX

Yeah, right after your swinging sixties. Anyway, this building was built during the gay liberation. Just prior to the trauma and re-closeting of the AIDS epidemic of the eighties.¹³¹

BENJAMIN

Have you used it?

FOX

No. But not because I'm shy. I'm into well-endowed daddies. Not college twinks.

BENJAMIN

A man of taste.

¹³¹ For more on the re-closeting that occurred during the AIDS crisis (or for more general information on the AIDS crisis), I suggest David France, *How to Survive a Plague: The Inside Story of How Citizens and Science Tamed AIDS* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2016). If you need greater insight into the psychosocial ramifications of AIDS and the legacy of risk, see Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Dean discusses the emergence of "bug chasing" as a means of queer empowerment, in which one overcomes internalized homophobia by contracting HIV/AIDS so that one no longer has to live in fear. Bug chasers have formed communities of support and kinship, according to Dean's research, the reappropriate the sexual pathology ascribed to them, much in the way that women embraced the label "nasty." I will refer to Dean's work much more extensively in Chapter 3.

FOX

Anyway, I'm not trying to violate human resources policy by sleeping with students. Lance was fired for his tryst with an intern. Fired the same day he was outed.¹³²

BENJAMIN

Meanwhile, Acontius lives large.

(exiting the stall)

Is this a meeting spot? Had anyone invited you here as a rendezvous point? Is that how you heard?

FOX

I haven't been here for a clandestine sword-sheathing. Maybe you should linger here a few hours a day over the coming week to determine just how widely known the hole is.¹³³

¹³² Lance was initially hired by the University in 2017 for a post-graduate internship. He was then promoted to a paid position. Soon after, Lance was discovered having engaged in a relationship with a male intern who reported to Lance within the office hierarchy. Lance was immediately removed from employment. I do not assert that Lance should have remained employed; rather, I do mention Lance's circumstance to demonstrate the lack of consistent enforcement of campus sexual misconduct policy. A gay employee was fired without questions while numerous straight men retained employment within the same calendar year for comparable offenses.

¹³³ I considered for a moment the possibilities of conducting such research and the abundant opportunity to use "thick description" as double entendre. But I am no Laud Humphries. And besides, as Paul Shankman made clear, "Geertz has proposed that social scientists study meaning rather than behavior, seek understanding rather than causal laws, and reject mechanistic explanations of the natural-science variety in favor of interpretive explanations" (261). Shankman (citing Clifford Geertz) sought a "refinement of debate" (do glory holes count as refined?) and directs us to theory rather than strict empiricism, "Geertz, in contrast, views interpretive theory not merely as a legitimate alternative to conventional social science, seeking parity with it, but rather as a theoretical framework that will 'challenge' and ultimately replace the tired mechanistic, reductionist approach of positivism with a 'refiguration of social thought.' That is, he suggests that interpretive theory is *superior* to conventional social science, arguing that the road to discovering the causes and effects of social phenomena lies 'less through

BENJAMIN

I'm not doing a mixed methods study.¹³⁴

FOX

Come again?

BENJAMIN

You're suggesting I count the number of times used. That's quantitative. I'm strictly qualitative. Although, at this point, an opera comique with a scene in a glory-holed bathroom stall, I'm not so sure I still can call myself a researcher...

FOX

This is research. You're examining the one safe zone that we have on this campus.

BENJAMIN

My foot is stuck to the floor.

SCENE:

postulating forces and measuring them than through noting expressions and inspecting them” (264-265). See Paul Shankman, Attila Agh, Erika Bourguignon, Douglas E. Brintall, John R. Cole, Linda Connor, Regna Darnell, Arie De Ruijter, Denis Dutton, Johannes Fabian, Claire R. Farrer, A.D. Fisher, L.E.A. Howe, Miles Richardson, Robin Ridington, and Stan Wilk, “The Thick and the Thin: On the Interpretive Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz [ad Comments and Reply],” *Current Anthropology*, 25, no. 3: 261-280, 1984. I use this extensive footnote to add refinement to a discussion of glory holes and to underscore why I will not devote further attention and analysis to the glory hole itself. A positivist researcher, according to Shankman et al., might approach the glory hole (as anthropological text) as an opportunity to measure frequency of use or to categorize the type of subjects who meet there. Such exercises might attempt to speculate the scope of need for queer sexual resources on campus. Would twenty meetings per week of forty different men justify the need for additional resources? What if it were only five meetings per week involving the same pair? Would number really matter? Would high frequency of use prompt further oppression?

¹³⁴ Although, if I did, I would use transformative mixed methods. See Carey E. Andrzejewski, Benjamin Arnberg, and Hannah C. Baggett, “Transformative Mixed Methods: A Missed Opportunity,” in *Research Methods for Social Justice and Equity*, ed. Kamden K. Strunk and L.A. Locke (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2019). At the time of writing, this work is in press, so I cannot provide page numbers.

(Benjamin sits on the patio of a local deli, well bar, situated in a shack-like building just across from campus. The patio contains dozens of iron outdoor furniture, a few television sets play ESPN. Multi-colored lights hover above the setting)

LONGITUDE

Fox likes to talk sex, doesn't he?

BENJAMIN

I think he views himself as my sex mentor.

LONGITUDE

You need one.

BENJAMIN

I'm celibate by everyone else's choice. Not my own.

LONGITUDE

When you had insomnia and visited the doctor, he told you, quote: The bed is for sleeping and sex. And how did you respond?

BENJAMIN

Could you prescribe the sex so I can go to Walgreen's and get some?

LONGITUDE

Pathetic. I've had more sex than you.

BENJAMIN

With women.

LONGITUDE

Nevertheless.

BENJAMIN

I'm a lady. I don't care for people touching my handbag, much less my body.

FOX

(approaching from behind, his favorite direction, and sitting; pouring Benjamin a cup of beer from his pitcher)

It's internalized homophobia, I think. Drilled into you through years of hell fire dogma that painted sodomy as the reason the world ended.

BENJAMIN

I mean, sodomy is just unappealing anyway.

FOX

I don't get you guys who get prissy about anal. Like, given the circumstance, not to mention the sexual preference, sometimes there's going to be a little shit.

BENJAMIN

I suppose we could say the same about life.

DAVID

(from behind a nearby azalea; almost a serenade)

Sodomy, that utterly confused category, was applied historically to masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, and same-sex sexual relations, among other things. I use the term active sodomy specifically to denominate a certain model or structure of male homosexual relations for which there is no single proper name.¹³⁵

FOX

When was the last time for you?

BENJAMIN

The last time? Well, this one guy on Grindr asked me a few weeks ago what kind of freaky shit I'm into. I responded, quote: I have an abandonment complex fueled by masochism and low sense of self-worth, so if you could leave your Rolex and wallet on the coffee table and leave me here by myself, that would really turn me on.

FOX

What?

BENJAMIN

One guy was trying to explain how to get to his house over the phone. He asked, "Masc?" I thought he meant masking tape. I looked in my drawer. Found none. Replied: No, but I

¹³⁵ See David M. Halperin, "How to do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ* 6, no. 1: 87-124, 2000. Quote from page 92.

could stop by the Home Depot on the way over and pick some up.

FOX

Why don't you come with me to Atlanta tomorrow? I have to give a fundraiser. After, I'll take you to Swinging Richard's.

BENJAMIN

What in God's name?

FOX

What's short for Richard?

BENJAMIN

Rich.

FOX

Get your mind off Givenchy for a minute, sister. Richard. Dick. Swinging Richard's...

BENJAMIN

Swinging Dicks? Sounds classy.

FOX

All nude. All male.¹³⁶ We'll go to Blake's, then Swinging Richard's, then Fort Troff...

BENJAMIN

I don't go anywhere with a trough...

FOX

Troff. T. R. O. F. F. It's like a bath, kind of.¹³⁷

BENJAMIN

Absolutely not.

¹³⁶ This is the name of a documentary made about Swinging Richard's. See, *All Male, All Nude*, directed by Gerald McCullough (Philadelphia, PA: Breaking Glass Pictures, no date).

¹³⁷ Fort Troff is now predominantly an online, gay-oriented sex shop. The company name "Fort Troff" also refers to a bondage party, that usually coincided with leather pride, in Atlanta that was temporarily shut down in 2009 when Peter LaBarbera (of the group Americans for Truth About Homosexuality) raised a stink. The event resurfaced in 2016, and now occurs periodically at varying Atlanta venues. The most recent event (as of writing this footnote) was "Fort Troff-Maneuvers" at Manifest 4U in Atlanta on September 15, 2018.

FOX

On second thought, I'm not prepared for you to see me in that environment...

BENJAMIN

I don't even walk around my bedroom nude.

FOX

The Heretic, then. It's got a leather shop and blacked-out sex room.

BENJAMIN

Someone might try to steal my jewelry.

FOX

Those people don't know the difference between Claire's and Tiffany.

BENJAMIN

How dare you? This is Cartier.

FOX

Not the point.

SCENE:

(Benjamin sits outside Joe's on Juniper in midtown Atlanta watching Kamala Harris give her first nationally televised interview since becoming a Senator. Benjamin's table is dotted by the five or six Sophia Petrillo cocktails he's drunk. Fox enters and sits beside him, orders a Red Bull and Vodka)

FOX

Why are you in a nude tank? Are you dancing in a ballet later?

BENJAMIN

I spilled a latte on my Rag & Bone henley. This was underneath. New topic. How is your relationship with Todd?

FOX

Complicated.

BENJAMIN

Why?

FOX

My prolonged period of closetedness and coming out in my mid twenties, it, well, caused a type of a relationship disorder. I mean, I didn't have my first full sexual encounter with a man until my mid twenties. Hadn't had a real relationship until then either. I spent so much time denying sexual impulses that when I came out, I started having sex so frequently and with so many different partners that I started to strip away emotional reactions to sex partners.

MARY MAGDALENE

(singing from a karaoke machine on the patio of Joe's)

I don't know how to love him

What to do, how to move him

I've been changed, yes really changed

In these past few days, when I've seen myself

I seem like someone else

FOX

(joining)

I don't know how to take this

BENJAMIN

Don't you take poppers?

FOX

I don't see why he moves me

He's a man. He's just a man

And I've had so many men before

In very many ways

BENJAMIN

You're just a whore.

MARY MAGDALENE

Should I bring him down?

Should I scream and shout?

Should I speak of love?

Let my feelings out?

FOX

I never thought I'd come to this

What's it all about?

Yet, if he said he loved me

I'd be lost

I'd be frightened

I couldn't cope, just couldn't cope

MARY MAGDALENE

I'd turn my head

I'd back away

I wouldn't want to know

FOX

He scares me so

I want him so

*I love him so*¹³⁸

FOX

(to Benjamin)

Do you have that problem?

BENJAMIN

Yes. My emotional reaction is: Get away from me and don't touch my jewelry.

FOX

I find it difficult to sustain long-term relationships with men with whom I slept. I'm accustomed to using men as sexual partners only. Not as potential life partners.

MADAME ARMFELDT

(singing from her Mercedes, which is stopped at a traffic light on Juniper Street)

Too many people muddle sex with mere desire

And when emotion intervenes, the nets descend

It should on no account perplex, or worse, inspire

It's but a pleasurable means to a measurable end

*Why does no one comprehend?*¹³⁹

FOX

I identify as gay. But I can envision myself marrying a woman.

BENJAMIN

Because female companionship seems more plausible than male companionship?

FOX

I could be married to a woman, start a family with a woman, and use men only to extinguish same-sex urges.

¹³⁸ Yvonne Elliman, vocalist, "I Don't Know How to Love Him," by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, released as a single May 13, 1971, on *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Decca, 1970, record.

¹³⁹ Hermione Ginggold, vocalist, "Liaisons," by Stephen Sondheim, recorded 1973, reissued November 10, 1998, on *A Little Night Music*, Masterworks Broadway, record.

SCENE:

(Benjamin reapplies his YSL Shade 10 lipstick in the mirror of Swinging Richard's bathroom. The walls are a gold color with a faux marble finish. The fixtures are brass. The light overhead, combined with Benjamin's nude tank, makes Benjamin appear as much an apparition as Longitude)

BENJAMIN

(reflecting on Fox's earlier comments)

Isn't that a more evolved form of being closeted?

LONGITUDE

Maybe? Does it matter? You're no further along.

BENJAMIN

I am at the opposite end of the same spectrum.

LONGITUDE

Are you though? You don't sustain relationships with men.

BENJAMIN

I do not try to establish them either.

LONGITUDE

Proving my point.

BENJAMIN

My mind is poisoned against men.

LONGITUDE

I was indoctrinated to believe gay men were promiscuous, diseased, sexual deviants.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ See Dean, 2009. "Even before AIDS, homosexuality tended to be understood as a doomed identity, a 'protodisease state' that would lead inevitably to misery and death, despite any particular queer person's seeming perfectly well. AIDS has reinforced this prejudice about homosexuality, since as members of a 'risk group' gay men are considered susceptible to HIV infection and therefore tend to be regarded generically as a class of 'the future ill'" (68). Dean further describes gay men's lifestyles as "living riskily; he writes, "To live riskily is to *be diseased*, even in the absence of pathological symptoms. In other words, this new medical perspective regards risk itself as a symptom" (67).

BENJAMIN

I internalized that homophobia. Believed that any partner would be interested in me only as a sex object.¹⁴¹

LONGITUDE

Dean's commentary explains how I was brought up, and how I developed internalized homophobia. I was brought up during the denouement of the AIDS crisis (born in 1987; AIDS entered my consciousness in 1993, when I started first grade, where it was taught as a most fearful contemporary epidemic). During adolescence, I often assumed that acting upon homosexual urges would ensure contraction of AIDS.

¹⁴¹ This is a self-inflicted microassault common among gay men, who buy into the cultural story of queer sexual pathology. The pathology is rooted in the cultural story that gay men engage in sex more frequently and more indiscriminately. The AIDS crisis expanded upon that message and linked that alleged promiscuity to risk and disease (as described by Dean, 2009). In many studies on microaggressions against LGBT youth, the topic of sexual pathology and AIDS arises. One focus group member wrote, "One of the kids that I knew in high school, he just came out of nowhere and just said that all gay people have AIDS" (28). Quoted in Kevin L. Nadal, Yinglee Wong, Marie-Anne Issa, Vanessa Meterkio, Jayleen Leon, and Michelle Wideman, "Sexual Orientation Microaggressions: Processes and Coping Mechanisms for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals," *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 5, no. 1: 21-46, 2011. Ragan Cooper Fox notes that this form of internalized homophobia (fear of gay disease) is generation-specific and exposes a chasm between the experiences of gay men who lived through the AIDS crisis and men born after the climax. Cooper writes, "The politics of homosexual visibility that resulted from AIDS activism in the 1980s can partially account for the generational differences between Jacques' 'coming out' experience and the ways in which his son revealed both his own homosexuality and HIV+ status. Growing up with a generation of gay men who wore 'SILENCE=DEATH' t-shirts and buttons that spoke of the dangers of ignoring HIV and the cultural silencing and marginalization of gay men and lesbians, it makes sense that Jacques' son would feel more comfortable than his father when negotiating the practicality of 'coming out' of the closet. For younger generations of gay men, passing is tantamount to complicity in marginalizing strategies. The concept of *survival*, then, has radically different meanings for older and younger generations of gay men" (51). Within my data set of ten gay men, I saw this generational chasm. Fox and I were both born before 1995, when the AIDS crisis had cooled from its late 1980s peak; Fox and I were also the only men in this study not to come out until after college and to not have same-sex romantic or sexual experiences until our mid twenties. For more on this generational distinction, see Ragan Cooper Fox, "Gay Grows Up," *Journal of Homosexuality* 52, no. 3-4: 33-61, 2007.

I never sought companionship among gay men; I assumed such a thing was impossible.

BENJAMIN

My only prior attempt includes a two-month period with a peer in my Master's program.

LONGITUDE

The one who's life story is now a major motion picture starring Nicole Kidman.

BENJAMIN

You were watching?

LONGITUDE

It was me.

BENJAMIN

Oh, yeah. That's right.

LONGITUDE

He was older.

BENJAMIN

But a year behind me in the degree program.

LONGITUDE

He grabbed me by the rib cage and asked...

BENJAMIN

Who do you think you're kidding with this straight boy act?

LONGITUDE

I eventually acquiesced to his advances.

BENJAMIN

We'd spend time making out in my living room with the door dead-bolted to prevent my roommate from a surprise entry.

LONGITUDE

Then he'd disappear for days to work on his memoir.

BENJAMIN

I still haven't read it.

LONGITUDE

Our relationship ended at an impasse. I
wouldn't come out.

BENJAMIN

He wouldn't be in a closeted relationship.

LONGITUDE

We kissed goodbye in the parking lot.

BENJAMIN

Right after I touched his penis.

LONGITUDE

Way to turn this moment into something
crude.

BENJAMIN

You died that night.

LONGITUDE

But you were born.

DESIREE ARMFELDT

(singing from a bathroom stall)

Isn't it rich?

Are we a pair?

Me here at last on the ground

You in midair

Send in the clowns

BENJAMIN

*(singing from an adjacent
bathroom stall)*

Isn't it bliss?

Don't you approve?

One who keeps tearing around

LONGITUDE

*(singing from atop the paper towel
dispenser)*

One who can't move

DESIREE ARMFELDT

Send in the clowns?

There ought to be clowns

BENJAMIN

Don't bother

*They're here*¹⁴²

BENJAMIN

While Fox feasts grandly on sexual experience, I abstain out of a desire not to be outed or cast aside.

LONGITUDE

See? You are also in an evolved closet.

BENJAMIN

I can say: I am gay. But only to one person at a time, and I can never imagine possessing a companionable partner of the same sex.¹⁴³

FOX

¹⁴² Glynis Johns, vocalist, "Send in the Clowns," by Stephen Sondheim, recorded 1973, reissued November 10, 1998, on *A Little Night Music*, Masterworks Broadway, record.

¹⁴³ Telling one person at a time is akin to the concept of "the glass closet," which originated in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990). I prefer defining the glass closet through Shaka McGlotten's work on "the down low," since I think her treatment is more clear and expansive than Sedgwick's. McGlotten writes, "it is important to note the degree to which the down low converges with Sedgwick's arguments about the closet: the cultural fascination attached to the down low evidences how sexuality is surveilled and managed through the policing of the 'relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and inexplicit.' The down low is a frustratingly opaque (especially to whites) sexual assemblage that is simultaneously known and unknown, explicit and inexplicit, insofar as it takes shape through practices of sexual discretion that resist the demand to publicly articulate a sexual identity that fits neatly within available categories. The down low resonates especially with Sedgwick's discussion of the 'glass closet' in the ways it is an enclosure constituted by the tensions between speech and silence. Indeed, perhaps the most enduring legacy of Sedgwick's ideas about the closet has to do with this last point: the homo/hetero binary emerges as an effect of discourse" (591). I want to make clear, though, that I would not refer to myself as "down low," since to do so would co-opt discourse originated, as McGlotten notes, within the community of African American "not-gay" gay men. Within "white" discourse, down low would be translated to "discreet?" Indeed, it is a common denotation on Grindr; white men, without posting their faces, identifying themselves as "discreet looking for discreet." That semantics here could be connected to the accusation that Grindr facilitates racism within the gay community, since discreet is linked to "white" discourse. See, "On Glass Closets and Not-Gay Gay Sex," *GLQ* 23, no. 4: 589-598, 2017.

*(entering the bathroom with his hands full of cocktails,
which he places on the counter)*

Enter Xanax. Enter a bottle of Ketel One.
Enter Quincy.

BENJAMIN

Quincy?

FOX

The name of the BBC¹⁴⁴ that you just
purchased a private dance from.

BENJAMIN

Jeezuss.

FOX

I think it was therapeutic for you. In a way.
Quincy came on stage, singled you out, flirted.
Well, by flirt, I mean he took off your
Ferragamo sandal, slid it between his thong
and thigh. You freaked and climbed on stage
to fetch it. You crawled a few yards with your
Givenchy sunglasses on. The more you
crawled, the more Quincy receded into the
heart of the room.

BENJAMIN

There was no room for skittishness when
four-hundred dollars of Italian leather hung in
the balance.

FOX

Oh, it was hung in the balance. For sure. You
stood, walked, stuck your hand in his package,
plucked out the shoe, and returned to your
seat.

BENJAMIN

¹⁴⁴ BBC is slang for “big black cock” and is common parlance in
gay discourse. However, the acronym is culturally problematic,
since it simultaneously stereotypes and fetishizes black men’s
bodies. I was first made aware of the problems of fetishizing
black gay men when reading Donovan Trott, “An Open Letter
to Gay, White Men: No, You’re Not Allowed to Have a Racial
Preference,” *Huffington Post*, June 19, 2017,
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/an-open-letter-to-gay-
white-men-no-youre-not-
allowed_us_5947f0ffe4b0f7875b83e459](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/an-open-letter-to-gay-white-men-no-youre-not-allowed_us_5947f0ffe4b0f7875b83e459)

I recall you vibrating with glee. Didn't you give me a tip when I hopped off stage?

FOX

Well, it was money you gave me as my allowance. I slid it back into your nude tank and said: She works hard for her money.

(The scene shifts back in time by thirty minutes, as Fox narrates Benjamin's encounter with Quincy. Benjamin and Fox sit at a two-person cocktail table adjacent to the catwalk. A tall, muscular man does a handstand in front of Benjamin. Benjamin delicately offers a dollar. The man, Quincy, accepts, does a back handspring, walks back to Benjamin, squats and says)

QUINCY

You've got style.

BENJAMIN

I know.

FOX

(narrating as Benjamin and Quincy reenact next to him)

You threw money at him. He followed you back to the table. He prodded. Rubbed. Poked. Pinched. He liked tugging your chest hair.

QUINCY

I'm forced to shave mine.

FOX

You were intrigued by his hustle. You bought a half hour with him in a VIP suite at the back of the bar.

(Benjamin and Quincy leave the table, walk a few yards, pass the catwalk, enter a private room complete with red leather sofa and a coffee table complete with a pole)

LONGITUDE

(narrating the action from the VIP suite, since Fox could not see it)

You talked. You sat. You fidgeted with your jewelry. Looked any which way but straight.

FOX

Not the first time she looked anything but straight.

QUINCY

Why are you so nervous?

BENJAMIN

I need a Ketel One and Cranberry.

QUINCY

What is that?

(nodding his head toward Benjamin's hands)

BENJAMIN

Xanax.

(taking the pill and chugging his cocktail, to wash it down)

LONGITUDE

You took the whole glass in one gulp.

QUINCY

Give me your hands.

LONGITUDE

He pinned you to the wall. Gave compliments. Kissed. Stroked. Hugged you to him.

FOX

He said it was his last night on the pole.

BENJAMIN

Me too.

QUINCY

I start a job as a fork lift operator next week.

BENJAMIN

Good for you.

FOX

You came back without your sunglasses.

BENJAMIN

I think he dick-slapped them off.

FOX

You got carried away by Quincy.

BENJAMIN

(returning to the table with Fox)

I think I settled into it because he was a stranger. He wasn't in my social network. There were no witnesses. It was a mutual hustle. He was into me because I paid him.

FOX

You were also the only man in there, besides me, under the age of sixty.

LONGITUDE

Hot by default.

BENJAMIN

I was into him because I knew that I could have the moment and move on. No need to worry about being cast off, unloved, deviant, unattractive, found out, unworthy of something more than...

FOX

Whack, bang, wiggle wiggle.

DAVID

(speaking from an adjacent table to Troye Sivan, who is in town for a concert)

The male sexual penetration of a subordinate male certainly represented a perverse act, but it might not in every case signify a perversion of the sexual instinct, a mental illness affecting the whole personality: it might indicate a morally vicious character rather than a pathological condition. Implicit in this doctrine was the premise that there was not necessarily anything sexually or psychologically abnormal in itself about the male sexual penetration of a subordinate male. If the man who played an active sexual role in sexual intercourse with other males was conventionally masculine in both his appearance and his manner of feeling and

acting, if he did not seek to be penetrated by other men, and/or if he also had sexual relations with women, he might not be sick but immoral, not perverted but merely perverse. His penetration of a subordinate male, reprehensible and abominable though it might be, could be reckoned a manifestation of his excessive but otherwise normal male sexual appetite. Like the somewhat earlier, aristocratic figure of the libertine or rake or roué, such a man perversely refused to limit his sexual options to pleasures supposedly prescribed by nature and instead sought out more unusual, unlawful, sophisticated, or elaborate sexual experiences to gratify his jaded sexual tastes. In the case of such men, pederasty or sodomy was a sign of an immoral character but not of a personality disorder, moral insanity, or psychological abnormality.¹⁴⁵

SCENE:

(Benjamin's office. Benjamin drinks a giant latte and takes Ippoprofen by the handful)

FOX

(phoning)

I was denied my raise, today. Also denied my bonus. Also denied a promotion.

BENJAMIN

(incredulous)

But you told me you met your fundraising goals for the year.

FOX

Met all my quotas for donor engagement. Met all expectations for planning and executing donor events. Met goals for bringing disengaged alum into the donor pipeline...

BENJAMIN

(interrupting)

But I saw the women in your office today at the nail salon having pedicures and

¹⁴⁵ See Halperin, 2000, 95-96.

champagne on the Associate Vice President's dime to celebrate their contributions to the billion-dollar campaign.

FOX

Yep. Wasn't invited. Way to answer a prayer, God. I want to revisit that question you asked me about research outcomes.

BENJAMIN

You're about to tell me what to do with all you've told me?

FOX

'Bout to lay it down.

TURANDOT

(singing)

In questa reggia, or son mill'anni e mille

Un grido disperato risono

FOX

(singing)

Attending a Southern institution

Where attitudes toward LGBTQ people

Are not embraced nor supported

Shows there's a lot of work to be done

Inside and out.

TURANDOT

E quell grido, traverso stirpe e stirpe

Qui nell'anima mia si rifugio!

Pincipessa Lo-u-Ling

Ava dolce e serena che regnavi

Nel tuo cupo silenzio in gioia pura

E sfidasti inflessibile e sicura

L'aspro dominio

Oggi rivivi in me!

FOX

If work isn't done to educate

People who work for Persimmon

To create an environment

For people to explore

Orientations and Individualities

And their senses of self...

Then it's going to have to

be

within communities of

peers

TURANDOT

*Pure nel tempo che ciascun ricorda
Fu sgomento e terrore e rombo d'armi
Il regno vinto! Il regno vinto!
E Lo-u-Ling, la mia ava, trascinata
Da un uom come te, come te
Straniero, la nella note atroce
Dove si spense la sua fresca voce!*

FOX

*Your study can shed light
On what is being done
On what isn't being done
What needs to be done
What hasn't been done well
This type of work may exist
On other college campuses
But that's not going to yield
How to deal with this topic here*

TURANDOT

*Da secoli ella dorme
Nella sua tomba enorme*

FOX

*What I hope to see here?
Hope it moves the needle*

TURANDOT

*O Principi, che a lunghe carovane
D'ogni parte del mondo
Qui venite a gettar la vostra sorte
Io vendico su voi, su voi
Quella purezza, quell grido e qualle morte!*

FOX

*I have tried fair expectations
Why am I sad?
I did not set fair expectations
For myself.
I denied emotional goals
Career goals mean nothing
Unless I'm emotionally sound
In college, I pursued falseness
I hope this study can help
Younger people like me.*

TURANDOT

*Mai nessun m'avra!
L'orror di chi l'uccise
Vivo nel cuor mi sta.
No, no! Mai nessun m'avra!
Ah, rinasce in me l'orgoglio
Di tanta purita!
Straniero! Non tentar la fortuna!*

*Gli enigma sono tre, la morte una!*¹⁴⁶

FOX

*Persimmon is rarely at the forefront
When it comes to
Social needs of minorities
It is slow to acknowledge
That they exist.
It's always been reactive
The culture is a good ol' boy mentality.
They give a nod to tradition
But some areas are non-negotiable.
If Persimmon made an environment
Where an individual was celebrated
Negative statistics like
Depression, suicide, drug abuse
Would cease.
But Persimmon promotes those who are alike
That prevents self-actualization
It takes leaving the South
To then arrive at that place.*

SCENE:

(Many months pass. Benjamin sits at home, since his office in the Red Keep is no longer his. Fox phones)

FOX

I'm in Nashville now. That makes you the sole-surviving gay alum from our era still working on campus. How does that make you feel?

BENJAMIN

Ecstatic.

FOX

I finally feel like I have a chance to be, again. Like when I lived in Washington, DC. I never really had an individual mentor or role model anywhere. But, in DC, I had an organization for a role model. The Gay Men's Chorus. There had always been a lot of fears associated with coming out.

¹⁴⁶ For best results, listen to Joan Sutherland, vocalist, "In questa reggia," by Giacomo Puccini, conducted by Zubin Mehta, accompanied by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, recorded 1972, Decca, record.

BENJAMIN

Can't imagine why?

FOX

They are a large group of people who share the same love of music and performing. They can come together and create something beautiful. They also create a community of like-minded people. It's a pretty awesome thing. The resource that it creates is tremendous. I look up to that. Can I have children as a gay man?

BENJAMIN

Who in hell wants that?

FOX

Can I find a professional path that would let me be openly gay?

BENJAMIN

Work for the Bravo network.

FOX

Can I find wealth as a gay man?

BENJAMIN

So far, I haven't been able to. Even though my Grindr profile reads: If you're a physician, I'm on my back.

FOX

I know that's silly, but to look within that organization and see people who demonstrate that they can find all of that, well, I look up to them and aspire toward that.

BENJAMIN

I'm shocked you couldn't find that here. I mean, Persimmon is so supportive. Listen at this article I just pulled from the archive. It's from October twenty-sixteen. Quote, To Avery Cotton, senior in psychology, rules are more than just words written on paper and policies are more than just formalities filed away in a code book. They mean something. During her sophomore year at Persimmon, she transitioned from being a man to being a woman. It was a difficult time for her, she said. Friends were supportive and professors were mostly accepting, but not everyone was. At the time, she was in chemical engineering, a tight-knit major where everyone knows everyone.

Students spend most of their time working on semester-long group projects.

AVERY COTTON

(reading her narrative to Fox over the phone)

I came out as transgender in two-thousand-eleven, and I decided to transition in the middle of the semester. Everybody knew I was the transgender student in the class. Chemical engineering is a conservative major like any engineering major. I was alienated. Most people didn't want to talk to me. I didn't really get along with anybody after I came out. I very quickly became to black sheep.

BENJAMIN

(picking back up the report)

Students in her project group would get into screaming matches over which pronoun to use for her, despite her obvious preferences, and staff would intentionally misgender her as well. She said she has a friend who transitioned from female to male and experienced a more violent, physical backlash. He even had a professor who tried to fail him.¹⁴⁷

FOX

Fuck.

BENJAMIN

Indeed. Although, I'm surprised by the female to male violence. I've only ever heard of violence against trans women. Way to show me my ignorance, Persimmon.

FOX

Get it together, transphobe.

BENJAMIN

So that professor in the report...

FOX

Yeah?

BENJAMIN

¹⁴⁷ Avery Cotton is a pseudonym for a trans woman who was a student at Persimmon University during the period of my study. Avery's story is taken from a report by the campus newspaper. To protect the privacy and identity of Avery, I do not provide citation details for that report.

Pretty sure I figured out who it is. He was interviewed by the Yellowhammer News earlier in the year.

YELLOWHAMMER

(in a bear ye, bear ye, newsboys voice)

Trigger warnings! Trigger warnings. Read all about it. Unless you're triggered. Then go be sensitive some other place.

BENJAMIN

Fuck off, dildo.

YELLOWHAMMER

A Persimmon University professor used his fall semester syllabus to poke fun at trigger warnings. Such warnings have become standard fare on many college campuses—so much so, in fact, that Persimmon engineering professor Philip Stevens saw it as an opportunity to make a joke to his incoming students.

PROFESSOR STEVENS

Trigger warning. I wrote in bold letters atop my fall semester syllabus before alerting my students that they should expect my class to include physics, trigonometry, sine, cosine, tangent, vector, force, work, energy, stress, quiz, grade. During the summer, I was reading yet another tedious article about some place, I don't remember where, instituting trigger warnings and their geographical equivalent, safe spaces, and on a lark, I decided to see what one might look like for my engineering mechanics course. It was sufficiently ludicrous that I decided to keep it on the syllabus as a tongue-in-cheek statement. I didn't think anyone but Persimmon engineering students in my class would see it and, being engineers, would shrug it off for the joke it was. Who knew?

LONGITUDE

The spirit world, bitch.

YELLOWHAMMER

Are you concerned about the culture of political correctness growing on college campuses?

PROFESSOR STEVENS

Yes. I think this PC business is making American universities, and their faculties and administrators, the laughingstocks of Western Civilization. But since the

proponents of this stuff think Western Civ is corrupt anyhow, they don't seem to notice that the rest of the world thinks they're fools.¹⁴⁸

LONGITUDE

An enabling engineering department does not constitute the rest of the world laughing.

BENJAMIN

I mean, not to be a dick, but engineering departments were trade schools up until a few decades ago. So, step the fuck off. Leave philosophy to those who've received a classical education.

FOX

I assume if the article was tedious, it's because Professor Stevens is under-read.

BENJAMIN

He actually said, quote, my class would see it and, being engineers, would shrug it off for the joke it was.

FOX

Are all engineers assholes?

BENJAMIN

Ask Avery, I guess. I know quite a few engineering students who aren't. They're mostly women, though.

LONGITUDE

Tell Fox about his new home state's track record.

BENJAMIN

Oh yes, Fox. In case you weren't aware...

INSIDE HIGHER ED'S NEWSBOY

(interrupting, addressing Benjamin)

Let me do my job, boss.

(addressing Fox)

April twenty-second, two-thousand sixteen.

¹⁴⁸ "Professor Stevens" is a pseudonym for the professor featured in the interview. The interview regarding trigger warnings appears in Cliff Sims, "Political correctness making colleges 'laughingstock of Western Civilization,'" *YellowhammerNews.com*, 2016, <https://yellowhammernews.com/auburn-prof-takes-political-correctness-college-mocks-trigger-warnings/>

BENJAMIN

My birthday! How sweet.

NEWSBOY

(to Benjamin)

Shut the hell up, lady.

(to Fax)

On Thursday, both the Tennessee House of Representatives and Senate passed a bill to cut the entire four-hundred-thirty-six thousand dollar state appropriation for an office at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville that promotes diversity at the state's flagship university. Republican legislators...

LONGITUDE

That's a contradiction in terms...

NEWSBOY

...in both houses have for months been criticizing the diversity office, which students have been rallying to support. On Tuesday, hundreds of students walked out of class to protest the bill, and many of the students sat on university walkways to block movement. Many students who marched in the protest said that a Confederate flag hanging outside a dormitory window they passed offered a perfect illustration of why the university needs a diversity office. In September, legislators attacked the diversity office for issuing a guide on the language that many transgender and gender nonconforming people prefer to use to refer to themselves, such as they or ze instead of he or she. Amid outrage in the Legislature, the university removed the guide. Even though the guide was removed, it was cited by many legislators as a reason to kill the diversity office. Many legislators also said the legislation was to stop Sex Week at the university.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ See Scott Jaschik, "Defunding Diversity," *Inside Higher Ed*, April 22, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/04/22/both-houses-tennessee-legislature-vote-bar-use-state-funds-university-diversity>

KNOX NEWSBOY

(tugging at the hem of Benjamin's velvet Acne Studios jacket)

He ain't told you the whole story.

BENJAMIN

On with the show, then.

KNOX NEWSBOY

(addressing Fox)

May twentieth, two-thousand sixteen. The University of Tennessee has disbanded its Office of Diversity, including eliminating four staff positions and a one-hundred thirty thousand three hundred fifty-six dollar operating budget. Meanwhile, Donna Braquet, director of the UT Pride Center, will resume her full-time position as an associate professor in the University Libraries. On Friday, she wrote on the center's Facebook page that she would no longer head up the Pride Center.¹⁵⁰

DONNA BRAQUET

We provided a brave space for students who are the most marginalized on campus to be their true, authentic selves with our space, our programs, our resources, and our events.¹⁵¹

PROFESSOR STEVENS

Trigger warning!

LONGITUDE

Don't you have a Ph.D. you should be working on? Oh, right. Your field doesn't require them to teach at the university level.

¹⁵⁰ See Megan Boehnke, "UT disbands diversity office, eliminates four positions," *Knoxville News Sentinel*, May 20, 2016, <http://archive.knoxnews.com/news/local/ut-disbands-diversity-office-eliminates-four-positions-334868cd-f50c-120d-e053-0100007fa864-380288111.html>

¹⁵¹ Quote taken from Braquet's Facebook post, as reported by Boehnke, 2016.

FOX

That happened two years ago. What's the point of digging it out of the archive now?

BENJAMIN

To show you that inclusion is not a linear achievement. It is cyclical. And fragile.

11:00 A.M. Spent hundreds on Lululemon today. Whoops.

[Beep]

[Beep]

3:00 P.M. Just worked out. Should I treat myself to a Frosty?

-

-

-

4:00 P.M. Ground Control to Major Tom.¹⁵⁴

[Beep]

5:00 P.M. Literally: I have shampoo in my hair, and I'm half naked in the parking lot.

[Beep]

11:58 P.M. Don't park here. They'll put a boot on your car even if you fucking paid.

[Beep]

[Beep]

1:00 A.M. Should I buy a unicorn tiara?

-

-

-

3:00 A.M. Ground Control to Major Tom.

Take your protein pills and put your helmet on.

Commencing countdown, engines on.

Check ignition and may God's love be with you.¹⁵⁵

[Beep]

¹⁵⁴ "Space Oddity."

¹⁵⁵ "Space Oddity."

8:00 A.M. I am not well.

[Beep]

9:00 P.M. 24 hours later of straight Netflix, and I'm finally leaving my bed.

[Beep]

[Beep]

12:00 A.M. Going to bed in my stolen fur.

-

-

-

12:01 A.M. This is Ground Control to Major Tom.

You've really made the grade.

And the papers want to know whose shirts you wear.

Now it's time to leave the capsule if you dare.¹⁵⁶

[Beep]

9:00 P.M. Was an otter, now a twink.

[Beep]

9:30 P.M. I'm going to leave. I'm workshopping a series that will make me a star.

[Beep]

[Beep]

10:00 P.M. Call me Miss Congeniality.

-

-

-

¹⁵⁶ "Space Oddity."

8:08 A.M. Grips the phone with his left hand.

He bites into the skin along his nails on the right hand.

Speaks through the bites.

Tills his hair with his right hand.

Like a plow through a cornfield.

-

-

-

8:15 A.M. Go get me a Matcha Latte.

Tomorrow, I'm going platinum.

-

-

-

8:17 A.M. *Your circuit's dead, there's something wrong.*

-

8:20 A.M. *Can you hear me, Major Tom?*

Can you hear me, Major Tom?

Can you hear me, Major Tom?¹⁵⁸

-

8:22 A.M. We only got a drink.

I would have if he wanted to, though.

I met Gretchen Carlson, though.

-

¹⁵⁸ "Space Oddity."

8:25 A.M. He resists stasis.

He is sensual.

He wants to press himself against surfaces.

His bare feet explore the edges of filing cabinets, drawers, stacks of books, and pieces of
upholstered furniture.

I inspired him to come out, he says.

-

-

-

8:27 A.M. Last night they loved you.

Opening doors.

And pulling some strings, angel.

Come get up my baby.

In walked luck and you looked in time.

Never look back, walk tall, act fine.

Come get up my baby.¹⁵⁹

-

8:30 A.M. You'd be my role model.

Last year, I was so secretive about being gay.

You just straight up started talking about me and guys.

You allowed me to be open.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ David Bowie, "Golden Years," recorded September 1975, track 1 on *Station to Station*, RCA, record.

¹⁶⁰ Discussions of role models were frequent within my data set to the extent that I added a "role model" question to my interview protocol. I recalled reading Daryl Smith's *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making it Work* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Smith discusses the key weakness of most institutional efforts toward inclusion being: critical mass (and critical capacity). In Chapter 4, Smith debunks several myths about the pipeline for "diverse"

8:32 A.M. *I'll stick with you baby for a thousand years.*

*Nothing's gonna touch you in these golden years.*¹⁶¹

8:35 A.M. He nor I sit in the same spots as when we first sat two hours prior to the interview.

I feel the need to bathe.

faculty, particularly women. Within that discussion, she indicates that retaining women in STEM fields has often failed due to lack of women faculty and staff who serve as mentors and role models. The impact of mentoring spills over into numerous fields of education, from diversity and multicultural affairs to graduate student engagement preparation. For queer students, the opportunity to locate mentors is slim. According to Rankin et al. (2010), in 2003, only 99 U.S. institutions (2%) provided dedicated offices or centers catering to LGBT students. By 2010, that number grew, but only to 160, or 4% of institutions (22). Their study noted that LGBT-identifying faculty and staff were largely responsible for building an inclusive environment (30) and that the absence of those faculty and staff correlates to lower inclusivity scores from LGBT students. Jodi L. Linley, David Nguyen, G. Blue Brazelton, Brianna Becker, Kristen Renn, and Michael Woodford found that “LGBTQ students sought mentorship and support from ‘someone like me’ or at a minimum, someone who understood issues facing the LGBTQ community” (58). They also reported that informal faculty interactions (such as mentoring and other out of the class interaction) positively impacted LGBTQ student retention and sense of inclusion (57). See Linley et al., “Faculty as Sources of Support for LGBTQ College Students,” *College Teaching* 64, no. 2 (2016): 55-63. Guy A. Boysen reported that, in 2012, 50% of students reported experiencing bias within classrooms and that “diversity teachers” were most trusted (and likely) to effectively respond to bias, namely microaggressions. See Boysen, “Teacher and Student Perceptions of Microaggressions in College Classrooms,” *College Teaching* 60 (2012): 122-129. Susan D. Longerbeam, Karen Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Dawn R. Johnson, and Zakiya S. Lee found that LGB students were more likely to come out when they were exposed to LGB role models in residence halls and classrooms. See, Longerbeam et al., “Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Experiences: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of College Student Development* 48, no. 2 (2007): 215-230. Jason C. Garvey and Susan R. Rankin found that “out” students usually had a “network of students to help navigate the campus culture, particularly with identifying affirming instructors,” whereas “closeted” students usually lacked such “networks” or “models” (379). See, Garvey and Rankin, “The Influence of Campus Experiences on the Level of Outness Among Trans-Spectrum and Queer-Spectrum Students,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, no. 3 (2015): 374-393. More studies replicate similar findings generating the conclusion that role models (whether older students and/or faculty/staff) contribute significantly to the positive perception of campus climate as well as positive sense of self-worth (exhibited by generating comfort with being “out”). Hamp’s labeling me a “role model” is a significant finding for the climate at Persimmon, since I met Hamp his senior year, haphazardly and came to know him through my study. Had we not met, Hamp likely would not have found a “role model” who was “someone like him,” and he would have stayed closeted and maybe delayed significant psychosocial development, much like Fox and I suffered. I am reminded in mine and Hamp’s discussion of role models about David Halperin’s *How to Be Gay*. He notes the paradox of being gay: it is something one is and something one learns to be, “the basic point is the same: gay culture doesn’t just happen. It has to be made to happen. It requires material support, organization, and a queer public sphere” (26). In addition, “Gay initiation clearly requires a critical mass of knowledgeable folk in a single location” (25), which brings us back full circle to Daryl Smith. Clearly, role models are essential to building a climate of queer inclusion. If you need to learn more about how to be gay, see Halperin, *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012).

¹⁶¹ “Golden Years.”

He feels the need to drink the remainder of my latte.

He leaves.

I wash my neck twice with soap and tinglingly-warm water.

Hamp spit on me by accident when he hovered over my shoulder.

Spoke into my left ear.

Grasped at my phone as I attempted to return a message to a

mutual friend with whom Hamp was infatuated.

Hamp requests that I inform Duck, the object of affection, that he would be glad to date him.

-

-

-

8:35 A.M. The first guy that I ever really liked was my sophomore year.

He kind of brought me to a place that made me comfortable enough.

I started telling people and not hide it as much.

-

8:37 A.M. Some of these days, and it won't be long.

Gonna drive back down where you once belonged.

In the back of a dream car.

Twenty foot long.

Don't cry my sweet.

Don't break my heart.

Doing all right.

But you gotta get smart.

Wish upon, wish upon, day upon day.

Held video equipment and microphones.

Who in God's name was this?

What in God's name was he doing?

He sat next to me at the conference table where I ate a Caesar salad.

-

11:05 A.M. You ain't a pimp and you ain't a hustler.

A pimp's got a Cadi and a lady got a Chrysler.

Black's got respect, and white's got his soul train.

Mama's got cramps, and look at your hands ache.

(I heard the news today, oh boy).¹⁶³

-

11:08 A.M. I hear you're funny on social media.

Write me a tweet to tweet to my three thousand followers.

-

11:11 A.M. I got a suite and you got defeat.

Ain't there a man who can say no more?

And, ain't there a woman I can sock on the jaw?

And, ain't there a child I can hold without judging?

Ain't there a pen that will write before they die?¹⁶⁴

-

11:15 A.M. I wrote.

MATCHMAKER: What do you look for in a man? ME: A bank account as big as my ass.

¹⁶³ David Bowie, "Young Americans," recorded on August 1974, track 1 on *Young Americans*, RCA, record.

¹⁶⁴ "Young Americans."

-
-
11:16 A.M. My nickname is Assphat. This works.
-

11:17 A.M. Ain't you proud that you've still got faces?

Ain't there one damn song that can make me break down and cry?¹⁶⁵

-
9:30 P.M. Hamp sees me at The Lyric, an upscale lounge-style bar.

He orders a liqueur-heavy cocktail.

He sits between my friend and myself.

He notices my iPhone 8.

He remarks the camera is supposedly amazing.

He slouches and spreads his legs.

Lets his button-down shirt hang open, slightly.

Puts on a face of seduction.

(Looks more like the aftershock of an aneurism).

He asks that I take a picture and send it to Duck.

I lift the phone.

Hamp's left ball slips out of his shorts.

I take the picture.
-

9:15 P.M. You've got your mother in a whirl.

She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl.

¹⁶⁵ "Young Americans."

Hey babe, your hair's alright.

Hey babe, let's go out tonight.¹⁶⁶

-
9:30 P.M. Am I the most interesting guy you've interviewed?

-
9:31 P.M. You like me, and I like it all.

We like dancing, and we look divine.

You love bands when they're playing hard.

You want more, and you want it fast.¹⁶⁷

-
9:35 P.M. He wears a tee shirt and eats bits of fried cauliflower.

He messages his pending one-night stand.

I ask why it's important that he be the most interesting.

-
9:37 P.M. You've torn your dress, your face is a mess.

You can't get enough, but enough ain't the test.

You've got your transmission and your live wire.

You got your cue line and a handful of ludes.

You wanna be there when they count up the dudes.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ David Bowie, "Rebel Rebel," recorded January 1974, track 6 on *Diamond Dogs*, RCA, record.

¹⁶⁷ "Rebel Rebel."

¹⁶⁸ "Rebel Rebel."

-

-

4:54 P.M. If I had sex, I'd tell you.

Blake had a weird penis.

Derek had balls so small I thought he might still be in puberty.

His dick is not impressive at all.

Am I a ho?

-

-

-

4:55 P.M. Why would that matter to you?

-

-

5:00 P.M. Because I think I'm ready to settle down.

I'm twenty-three.

It's time to be an adult.

Am I a ho?

-

-

5:01 P.M. *Ground Control to Major Tom.*¹⁷¹

-

¹⁷¹ "Space Oddity."

5:02 P.M. Who cares?

-

5:05 P.M. *This is Ground Control to Major Tom.*¹⁷²

-

-

-

5:15 P.M. *This is Ground Control to Major Tom.*¹⁷³

-

-

-

5:30 P.M. *Though I'm past one hundred thousand miles.*

I'm feeling very still.

*And I think my spaceship knows which way to go.*¹⁷⁴

-

-

-

-

-

6:00 P.M. *Can you hear me, Major Tom?*

Can you hear me, Major Tom?

*Can you hear me, Major Tom?*¹⁷⁵

-

¹⁷² "Space Oddity."

¹⁷³ "Space Oddity."

¹⁷⁴ "Space Oddity."

¹⁷⁵ "Space Oddity."

7:00 P.M. The gay community is so in each other's business.

You can move from Florida to Seattle.

And still people know where you're from.

If I meet you, then I'm going to try to sleep with you.

Then I'm going to meet the next person.

And sleep with them.

There's a circle, and it's gross.

-
-
-
-
-

7:10 P.M. Planet Earth is blue.

And there's nothing I can do.¹⁷⁶

-
-
-
-
-

7:15 P.M. I ask whether it's important to stay in such a community.

A gross community.

-

-

¹⁷⁶ "Space Oddity."

*We can love.*¹⁷⁷

-
8:10 A.M. Hamp calls me a lot.

The only person his age I know who prefers to hear a voice.

He's always on the road.
-

-
8:15 A.M. I want friends so bad.

They invited me to a party.

One person hooked up with three different people.

While at that party.

When I didn't.

They got pissed.

I didn't get invited to another party.
-

9:00 P.M. Well, I drunk a lot of wine.

And I'm feeling fine.

Gonna race some cat to bed.

Is this concrete all around.

Or is it in my head?

Oh, brother, you guessed.

*I'm a dude.*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ David Bowie, "All the Young Dudes," recorded July 8, 1974, track 8 on *David Live*, RCA, record.

9:30 P.M. I invite Hamp to a gay bar.

In Atlanta.

His first time.

He needs to go to H&M first.

To buy a cute debut outfit.

He settles on a sage tank and short, tan shorts.

Requests my David Yurman sterling chain to add some glitz.

We stop on the way out at a liquor store, downtown.

Hamp buys Sprite and Vodka. He drinks from a Styrofoam cup in the back of an Uber.

We exit the Uber on 10th Street.

Hamp knocks over a police fence.

Fox shows up. Fox met Hamp at an audition.

I think Hamp thinks of us as parents. Maybe.

We buy him chicken fingers. Like he was our child.

Hamp has too much vodka before we go out.

He needs chicken fingers.

Hamp disappears.

I locate him on a patio behind Blake's on the Park.

He's got one leg propped against a tree.

A cigarette in his mouth.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ "All the Young Dudes."

¹⁷⁹ I want to address the ethics of inviting Hamp into a social interaction. First, Hamp was of legal drinking age at the time we made this trip. Second, Hamp still struggled with coming out, and hesitated to visit a gay bar with people he did not trust; since Hamp looked up to me, and knew I was a responsible person, he requested that I accompany him. Specifically, he wanted me to make sure he arrived at his hotel safely, in case he had too much to drink. I think he also

feared being taken advantage of, sexually, by a stranger. Before consenting to this outing, I referred to Tony E. Adams's autoethnography on coming out. Tony E. Adams, *Narrating the Closet: An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011). Adams discusses spontaneous moments of discovery; he writes, "In classrooms and my office, in restaurants and bars, in online environments and at festivals and churches, I never know when someone will ask or tell me about struggles with the closet, coming out, and same-sex attraction. Furthermore, such conversations continue as my gay identity—particularly my public embrace of this identity—encourages others to share their dilemmas and secrets with me, trusting that I would not ridicule them or out them to others. They not only consider me an insider—someone who may have experiences similar to theirs—but also someone they trust and consider safe. I am not just 'one of them,' I am one of them who will not say a word about who they claim or feel to be; these persons believe they have much to lose, if their same-sex attraction is revealed. Such informal and unsolicited conversations are important ethnographic material: Even though they happened unsystematically and serendipitously, they illustrate how fieldwork can happen in relation to LGBTQ cultures, particularly because such 'natural' discourse offers glimpses of the closet and coming out that more organized and intentional efforts to gather information about these phenomena do not. They offer an 'accidental,' 'surprising,' and 'unplanned' glimpse into LGBTQ experience, one that allows me to attend to 'life itself'" (161-162). Ethics for researchers studying queer cultural settings is rather dicey. I hope more work will emerge on ethics and queer autoethnography in the future, since little currently exists. The most robust work on queer ethics is perhaps: Mathias Detamore, "Queer(ying) the Ethics of Research Methods: Toward a Politics of Intimacy in Researcher/Researched Relations," in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 167-182. Detamore first critiques rigid, formalized research protocols as "hiding" or rendering "incomplete" knowledge of queer experience. Regarding the risks inherent in intimacy (autoethnography is an intimate method), Detamore writes, "Intimacy is risk, and if the argument for an entangled, co-production of knowledge can be valued as a legitimate means to understand the multiple and nuanced circumstances that constitute human socialisation and experience, then the relationships that are established between the researcher and the researched are inherently intimate" (171). Detamore suggests intimacy is inevitable, and thus my quandary over social relations with Hamp is an overreaction. Detamore refers to Norman Denzin's (2003) concept of "indigenous research ethics" and "performative ethics" in which "The negotiation, or 'performance', of co-producing knowledge is traced horizontally between and through the researcher and researched. Liberal fantasies of 'emancipating' or 'redeeming' 'subjugated voices' evaporate and are replaced with a more nuanced assemblage of voices working from their own authority" (178). Detamore implies that autoethnography (in which the researcher is indigenous and knowledge is co-produced) elevates the "researched" to the level of researcher and that in co-producing knowledge, ethical constraints are relaxed because the researched has a say in what knowledge is generated. Also implied is the notion that the researcher is unethical only if he/she refuses to place him/herself into as much risk as the researched. Keith Berry conducted what is essentially an autoethnography of his experiences in a bathhouse. His article does not mention ethical boundaries or dilemmas (though no single participants exist or are named, besides himself); he writes, "I use personal narratives in this investigation to more intimately and vulnerably seek an understanding of gender constitution. This will make available discoveries that are grounded in my emotional and thoughtful traversing through the halls and floors of Steamworks. In doing so, I provide a more evocative account, an accessible and diverse entry point to better understand a slice of gay male culture, and even more, a motivation for readers to consider their own relationship [to] my ideas" (262). Berry's statement suggests that proximity and intimacy with subjects is acceptable so long as it is "evocative" and able to provide "better understanding" of subcultures. See Keith Berry, "Embracing the Catastrophe: Gay Body Seeks Acceptance," *Qualitative Inquiry* 33, no. 2 (2007): 259-281. Dean (2009) established his ethical boundaries, while writing an ethnographic account of barebacking subculture, as rooted in Gayle Rubin's "benign sexual variation" model. In that model, "different cultural organizations of sexuality should be understood nonhierarchically...no single consensual erotic practice is a priori preferable over any other. There is no best way of having sex" (x-xi). Dean's model suggests that the researcher is ethical if the research withholds judgment from his/her encounters and analysis. I establish myself within a more conservative ethical position. I subscribe to Adams's idea that spontaneous conversations and "informal" encounters are essential to the ethnographic project; however, I believe that the subject should be the instigator of spontaneity, review the results of your observation and analysis, and that the researcher shares nothing about the participant's life that the researcher would not share about his/her own. Hamp's narrative is a reflection of this practice, as are narratives that follow this chapter. Hamp was granted the opportunity to review my narrative representation with liberty to excise any component he wished. I withheld components of his narrative that I would not feel comfortable sharing had they happened to me.

11:00 P.M. *Ground Control to Major Tom.*¹⁸⁰

11:05 P.M. I wore shorts like this one night in Persimmon.

I was walking on the sidewalk.

Passed a fraternity house.

There was a group of guys.

One of them grabbed me by the belt.

“You like it in the ass?” he said.

I wore a tank one time at a bar in Persimmon.

I got a drink at the bar.

This guy next to me said, “Fag.”

Throughout high school, people told me that I was gay.

Now it’s like a running joke with myself.

I’m not gay by choice.

I’m gay because people told me all my life that I am.

My sexuality is not central to myself.

I have a lot more to offer.

11:55 P.M. *All the young dudes.*

Carry the news.

Boogaloo dudes.

*Carry the news.*¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ “Space Oddity.”

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>> Midnight >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

¹⁸¹ “All the Young Dudes.”

GRAY: AN EXORCISM¹⁸²

NEIL TENNANT AND CHRIS LOWE (PET SHOP BOYS OF THE PARISH OF WEST END GIRLS), DELEGATED BY THE ORDINARY TO PERFORM THE RITE OF EXORCISM ON GRAY, BENJAMIN, JASON, HAMILTON, AND BUSTER; MEN POSSESSED BY INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA.

Pet Shop Boys

Having before us the body of the possessed, we shall place a Christian Lacroix cross over him and over the bystanders. All shall be sprinkled with holy water, also La Croix, Passionfruit flavor. What

else would gay holy water be? All present: kneel.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Donatella, have mercy.

Goddess, the Mother in Heaven.

Have mercy on us.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Holy Mother of Gender Non-Conforming

Breaker of Glass Ceilings

Advocate of Cakes for Gay Marriages¹⁸³

St. Sappho

St. Sebastian

¹⁸² Gray's chapter is based on the exorcism rites of the Catholic church; furthermore, the chapter contains a series of "confessions" within the exorcism, which serve as a portrait of the demon of internalized homophobia whom the Pet Shop Boys endeavor to exorcise. Goddess be with us.

¹⁸³ Ginsburg wrote a stirring dissent in the case *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 138 S. Ct. 1719 (U.S. S. Ct., 2018). According to Ginsburg, "Phillips would *not* sell to Craig and Mullins, for no reason other than their sexual orientation, a cake of the kind he regularly sold to others. When a couple contacts a bakery for a wedding cake, the product they are seeking is a cake celebrating *their* wedding—not a cake celebrating heterosexual weddings or same-sex weddings—and that is the service Craig and Mullins were denied." Ginsburg also voted with the majority in *Lawrence v. Texas*, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, and *United States v. Windsor*. She is, arguably, the best defender of queer rights in United States history. Long may she reign.

St. Oscar Wilde
St. Tennessee Williams
St. Marsha P. Johnson
St. Peter Staley
St. Marlene Dietrich
St. Judy Garland
St. Harvey Milk
St. Joan Armatrading
St. Cher
St. Ryan Keith Skipper
St. Chrissy Lee Polis
St. Sal Mineo
St. Bette Davis
St. Edward Albee
St. Leelah Alcorn
St. John Geddes Lawrence
St. Joan Rivers
St. Donna Summer
St. Divine
St. Freddie Mercury
St. E.M. Forster
St. Diana
St. Coretta Scott King
St. Bella Abzug

St. Eve Sedgwick
St. Alan Turing
St. Barbara Gittings
St. James Baldwin
St. Troy Perry
St. Gilbert Baker
St. Charlie Howard
St. Walt Whitman
St. Gertrude Stein
St. Alexander the Great
St. Harry Hay
St. Rebecca Wight
St. Marcel Proust
St. Michel Foucault
St. Andy Warhol
St. Robert Mapplethorpe
St. Nan Golden
St. Adrienne Rich
St. Audre Lorde
St. Liberace
St. Derek Jarman
St. Rudolf Nureyev
St. Jerome Robbins
St. Stephen Sondheim

St. Edith Windsor
St. Beatrice Arthur
St. Candy Darling
St. Bill Cunningham
St. Alexander McQueen
St. Jane Fonda
St. John Gielgud
St. Ian Charleson
St. Eartha Kitt
St. Lily Tomlin
St. Brandon Teena
St. Ruth Simpson
St. Matthew Shepard
St. Scott Smith
St. Tony Kushner
St. Larry Kramer
St. Gloria Steinem
St. Gwen Araujo
St. Elizabeth Taylor
St. Christine Jorgensen
St. Gwendolyn Ann Smith
St. The Lady Chablis
St. Steven Charles
All holy saints,

Intercede for us.

From all, deliver us, O Lord.

We beg you to hear us.

Shall we hear the testimony of the victim?

Speak, with contrition, and we shall cast out this demon of self-loathing.

Banish it to the abyss.

Gray

I do not get on Grindr. As a pastime. When I'm home in Dale, the situation is bleak. At least in Persimmon, guys are my age. I never put a face on Grindr because I am so afraid that I will be harassed. I for sure would not have a one-night stand with someone from Grindr. Never. I must know someone first. Know that they won't give me an STD. Or rape me.

Benjamin

I met guys Grindr only once. Two stops, one night. Felt adventurous after leaving Bumpers. I think it was because a queen came off the stage to stop her boyfriend from talking to me. Was I a threat?

Maybe I was more alluring than I thought.

Gray

I remember that night, because you kept saying, "It's my time to be a ho. It's my time to be a ho."

Benjamin

You also kept saying, "Don't get raped or killed. You don't know what's out there." The first stop was at a trailer. The guy messaged to come into the door where the light was on. Inside, his voice beckoned me to the back; straight down a hall. Last door. The only light in the house flickered from within that room. Candles everywhere. I think maybe lavender? Candles on the nightstand. Candles on the shelves. Candles on the trunk at the foot of the bed. Candles. Candles. Candles. Enough candles to illuminate two men lying next to each other on the bed. This was an unexpected part of

the deal. “Um, hello to you both,” I said. The first stood to offer me a glass of red wine already prepared on the nightstand. “Drink,” he said. “It’ll be better for you,” the other said. “Stranger danger,” my brain said. “I need to go to the bathroom,” I said. I went to the bathroom and turned on the faucet to let the sound of water cover me as I snuck out the sliding glass door in the living room. I decided to play it safer by selecting a man advertised as “45 dad type” who’d been complimenting me throughout the evening on my fashion choices. Said dad type lived in a historic district; the house was small for the area, but well-maintained. All the lights were off, save one light overlooking a side entrance. There, Dad Type stood behind a screen door waiting. He gestured me into a room that he used as a closet. In this closet, at least one thousand pieces of clothing lived on re-appropriated bookshelves and industrial rolling racks. Clothes even hung from exposed rafters. “Come, let me show you some Versace jackets,” he said. “Gianni-era.” He showed me the jackets. Tried on the jackets. Pranced in the jackets. They were fine jackets. I was not there for jackets. After a while, I made that point clear. “Are we doing anything or what?” He replied, “I need to tell you something. I am dying. I have terminal pancreatic cancer. Earlier tonight I was in the mood for something. But now I’m a little dizzy and nauseated and tired. Would rather just rest.” He pulled off his baseball cap to reveal a head made bald by chemotherapy. He showed me pictures of himself the year prior; muscular, tanned, vital. He was still attractive, but far frailer. His skin translucent. His hair, as I mentioned, gone. We laid on his bed (clothed), and he told me of his demise. Health declined first. Followed by finances. All his money went to medical bills. His fortunes declined to the extent that he’d moved from a six-bedroom house in Atlanta to this two bedroom house in Persimmon, which he’d inherited. If he didn’t die soon, he might not be able to live there much longer either. I didn’t know what to say. I didn’t feel like being a ho no mo.

Gray

I am always so scared I'll show up to a Grindr hookup and it will be some guy or guys who are just catfishing me so they can bash my skull in with a baseball bat to teach me a lesson about my lifestyle.

Pet Shop Boys

Lord, we beg you to hear us!

When I look back upon my life

It's always with a sense of shame

I've always been the one to blame

For everything I long to do

No matter when or where or who

Has one thing in common, too

It's a sin.

Everything I've ever done

Everything I ever do

Every place I've ever been

Everywhere I'm going to

*It's a sin.*¹⁸⁴

Gray

My boyfriend wanted a threesome. I said, "Absolutely not." First of all, he never spoke. Ever. When I introduced him to you at Bumpers, he said maybe two words; he didn't even comment when we pointed out the Great Value edition of Lorde. Not a word. So, how is someone so shy and mute supposed to get it on with an extra guy in the mix? I already struggle just making it happen between

¹⁸⁴ Pet Shop Boys, "It's a Sin," recorded 1987, track 2 on the B side of *Actually*, Parlophone, record.

the two of us. Have to psych myself up to take my clothes off. I. Can. Not. Bring myself to more.

Plus, gross. Who knows what the third guy's carrying.

Pet Shop Boys

At school they taught me how to be

So pure in thought and word and deed

They didn't quite succeed

For everything I long to do

No matter when or where or who

Has one thing in common, too

*It's a sin.*¹⁸⁵

Benjamin

I often think herpes is the worse sentence. I mean, AIDS is awful and sad and dangerous. But it is more manageable, now. And at least there's some compassion for contracting AIDS. But, you get herpes, and you're trash. You have blisters that erupt in perpetuity. No one will feel sorry for you.

No one will write a Pulitzer-Prize-winning play about your experience. There is no *Angels in*

*America*¹⁸⁶ for herpes.

Pet Shop Boys

Father: forgive me

I tried not to do it

Turned over a new leaf

Then tore right through it

Whatever you taught me

¹⁸⁵ "It's a Sin."

¹⁸⁶ I refer here to Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2013). The title of my study is an homage to Kushner's landmark play.

I didn't believe it

Father: you fought me

'Cause I still didn't care

*And I still don't understand.*¹⁸⁷

Gray

Was I not enough? Why did he need a threesome if he was happy with me? I found the answer. He was not happy with me. Well, not enough to be with just me. I found out he was cruising Grindr for couples. And that was that.

Pet Shop Boys

*It's a sin.*¹⁸⁸

Benjamin

I recall the last time I had sexual contact with a woman. Her name was Candy. She was my boss. She managed a locally-owned retail store, which specialized in collegiate casual apparel. She drove a Ford Focus. One night, she drove me in that Ford Focus to a town called Beulah. In Beulah, a lady in a trailer with two toddlers sold Candy a few grams of weed while *Maury* played in the background. She offered us Mountain Dew Code Red. I declined. She called me a narc. Candy cleared me of the charge and shuttled me to the home of the middle son of the retail store's owner. She smoked. I drank from the case of Guinness I purchased on the way back from Beulah. I hate Guinness, but Beulah's "Kwik Shop" sold but one import. Candy smoked some more. I drank some more. She winked. I stretched out on the ground. She began a purr/giggle. I ate from a jar of cashews I found in a low-lying cabinet. She poured a shot from a bottle of Beefeater she pulled from her purse. I drank the second shot. She climbed atop me, scissor style. "Let's have sex," she said. "Whatever," I replied.

¹⁸⁷ "It's a Sin."

¹⁸⁸ "It's a Sin."

Did you say I've got a lot to learn?

Well, baby, don't think I'm trying not to learn.

Since this is the perfect spot to learn.

Go on. Teach me tonight.¹⁸⁹

I was twenty. Had sex twice before. Both with women. Both for proof that I wanted to have sex with women. Encounter one: in a shrubbery. Indian hawthorn, maybe. I got a rash. Non-STD rash. I checked. I wasn't pregnant, either. Encounter two: on a staircase. Encounter three: nigh. Candy asked, "You got a condom?" I replied, "No." Candy calmed, "I've got a few in my purse."

Starting with the A. B. C. of it.

Roll right down to the X. Y. Z. of it.

Help me solve the mystery of it.

Go on. Teach me tonight.¹⁹⁰

Of course, I had no condoms. The last time I had need was two years prior. There hadn't been any handy condoms on the staircase. I risked the herpes (and potential child) anyway. Such was the need to prove something so substantial as straightness. "I like your boobs." In retrospect, I liked that I could have my face in her boobs and not have to look at anything else that was going on. Like the fact there was a vagina in my lap. Candy had big boobs. Tan boobs. Boobs that kept me from putting anymore cashews in my mouth. She'd leaned forward to whisper, "I'll be right back. My purse is in my car. Then we'll Get. It. On." Then she kissed me.

The sky's a blackboard.

High above you.

If a shooting star goes by.

¹⁸⁹ Lyrics from the song "Teach Me Tonight," written by Gene De Paul and Sammy Cahn, 1953. I base my work around the live performance by Amy Winehouse on *Jool's Annual Hootenanny*, 12.0, hosted by Jools Holland, aired 2004, BBC.

¹⁹⁰ "Teach Me Tonight."

I'll use that song to write, 'I love you.'

A thousand times across the sky.¹⁹¹

I don't ever want gin again. Candy took another swig. Kissed me again. Tasted like Christmas. Then she started shimmying forward. She was crawling forward over my face but trying to stand simultaneously. A crab trying to be a giraffe. I did not work out, this crawl/stand. She slipped and landed spread eagle on my nose. Broke it.

One thing isn't very clear, my love.

Should the teacher stand so near, my love?

Graduation's almost here, my love.

Go on. Teach me tonight.¹⁹²

Her moist inner thighs squeezed the cashew right out of my mouth. Warm blood seeped through and trickled down my cheeks. I assumed she was on her period.

“GET THE FUCK OFF ME!”

I ran out screaming. Never touched a woman again. To this day, I have a deviated septum that prevents me from blowing my nose out the left nostril.

Pet Shop Boys

I came across a cache of photos

And invitations to teenage parties

“Dress in white” one said, with quotations

From someone's wife, a famous writer

In the nineteen-twenties

When you're young, you find inspiration

In anyone who's ever gone

¹⁹¹ “Teach Me Tonight.”

¹⁹² “Teach Me Tonight.”

And opened up a closing door
She said: "We were never feeling bored."
'Cause we were never being boring
We had too much time to find for ourselves
And we were never being boring
We dressed up and fought, then thought: "Make amends"
And we were never holding back or worried that
*Time would come to an end.*¹⁹³

Gray

I must be monogamous because I am so petrified of HIV. The frustrating thing about being gay in this city is that everyone just wants to hook up. I can't even have gay friends because eventually they tell me they just want to fuck me. Like Logan. He kept texting me talking about how he had my back after my relationship ended. Then when my ex drove all the way from Georgia to show up at Bumpers, Logan confronted him about his manipulation. Then Logan hit on me the same night. Are you my friend? Or am I just a potential conquest? Everyone wants to fuck me.

Plus, guys around here are so aloof. This one guy I was with. Things were going so well. Then he decided to move to New Mexico. And disappeared. Now, I don't see any reason to bother. That's probably the most frustrating thing about being gay, to me. The culture is not built on monogamy.

And I think I am the only remaining man who could only be monogamous.

Benjamin

I'm too much of a mess to have to consider someone else's feelings. And the anti-depressants made me gain so much weight that I will probably never have sex again. I told you 2016 was my time to be a ho. Look at me now.

¹⁹³ Pet Shop Boys, "Being Boring," recorded 1990, track 1 on *Behaviour*, Parlophone, record.

Gray

I cannot just hook up. I don't want to catch something from you.

Benjamin

You should come to Atlanta Pride with me so we can find you a resident physician at Emory Medical. That way you can date someone who can treat you for whatever you might get.

Gray

Or since he's a medical professional, he'd have treated himself before he ever touched me.

Pet Shop Boys

When I went, I left from the station

With a haversack and some trepidation

Someone said: "If you're not careful

You'll have nothing left and nothing to care for

In the nineteen-seventies"

But I sat back and looking forward

My shoes were high, and I had scored

I'd bolted through a closing door

I would never find myself feeling bored¹⁹⁴

Jason

I am polarized by the gay community here. I find it to be lacking morals, which is hard for me because I did want to be part of a community. I find them to not be trustworthy people. I think that they're sexually fluid. As a freshman, I wasn't yet. And still am not. I'm very much rooted in a traditional aspect of that.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ "Being Boring."

¹⁹⁵ Jason is the subject of Chapter 6; however, a component of his formal interview exhibited some internalized homophobia, so I included his narrative in that vein here.

Gray

The gay-straight alliance has a niche audience. It's a weird environment. Someone like me who's more conservative in their sexuality and conservative in their personality...I don't really feel comfortable there. I just don't feel like I fit. Very eccentric members of the LGBT community dominate. I don't think it's diverse enough for the gay community. I'm able to sort of be comfortable in the way that I am because I am more conservative in my lifestyle. I'm not your archetypal gay person.

Pet Shop Boys

Now I sit with different faces

In rented rooms and foreign places

All the people I was kissing

Some are here and some are missing

In the nineteen-nineties

I never dreamt that I would get to be

The creature that I always meant to be

But I thought in spite of dreams

You'd be sitting somewhere here with me¹⁹⁶

Brooks Brothers Customer

You're a stylish young man.¹⁹⁷

Benjamin

I suppose that's true. Care to zip up your pants there? Or do you need a different size?

Brooks Brothers Customer

¹⁹⁶ "Being Boring."

¹⁹⁷ I worked at the Brooks Brothers location in Georgetown, Washington, DC from 2012-2014. This scene is based on an encounter I had in the fitting room in 2013.

You want to come to my suite at the Four Seasons¹⁹⁸ and talk style? I'll buy a bottle of champagne.

Benjamin

What kind of champagne?

Pet Shop Boys

I don't know why

I don't know how

I thought I loved you

But I'm not sure now

I've seen you look at strangers

Too many times

The love you want is of a different kind¹⁹⁹

Hamilton

You certainly manage yourself well for your age.

Benjamin

I bought a young man a drink last week and he said, "Thanks daddy." Daddy? Is the Chanel moisturizer not working?

Benjamin's Memory²⁰⁰

I bumped into Hamilton at a liquor store. We rendezvoused for a tryst at the nearest hotel. We undressed. Got in bed. Recaptured familiarity with each other. Before the full heave ho...

Hamilton

I'm positive.

¹⁹⁸ The Four Seasons Hotel was located approximately two blocks away at M Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. It was not uncommon for guests of the hotel to come into our store and request services (from something as benign as delivering a shirt to the concierge on a guest's behalf to something akin to prostitution).

¹⁹⁹ Pet Shop Boys, "Domino Dancing," recorded 1987, track 3 on *Introspective*, Parlophone, record.

²⁰⁰ You might be confused at the difference between "Benjamin" and "Benjamin's Memory." In this scene, "Benjamin" denotes the Benjamin that was present with Hamilton. "Benjamin's Memory" is an after-the-fact reflection on what happened during the encounter with Hamilton.

Benjamin

[Gasped. Sat upright. Turned on the lamp. Froze.]

Hamilton

[Wrapped the comforter around himself. Faced the wall.]

Benjamin's Memory

Hamilton had been at ease with his body. Exposed it without shame. Why not? He was toned, but soft. Olive-skinned. Deep-set eyes, slightly shadowed. Magenta lips produced a natural pouty pucker. My gasp made him rescind his confidence. He repackaged himself as if the disclosure rendered his beauty vanished.

Pet Shop Boys

Remember when we felt the sun

A love like paradise

How hot it burned

A threat of distant thunder

The sky was red

And where you walked you always

*Turned every head.*²⁰¹

Benjamin's Memory

Should I stop intimacy? What message would that send? Would that make me small-minded? Or pragmatic? Would I seem callous? Or justified? Hamilton felt guilt. Hamilton could not buy his way out of this predicament. He could not buy me out of infection, either. He liked me enough to keep me safe. He switched off the news playing on the television. He preferred muffled sound in the background. Sex noise was inelegant. But that did not matter anymore.

²⁰¹ "Domino Dancing."

Benjamin

Well. You look splendid.

Benjamin's Memory

Wrong thing to say.

Benjamin

[Leaned over and kissed Hamilton on the cheek.] Are you scared?

Hamilton

Only that people will say, 'He had it coming.'

Pet Shop Boys

All day

All day

Watch them all fall down

All day

All day

*Domino dancing.*²⁰²

Shaun Edmonds

What have we lost in our desire not to be hurt? Where did all this sacrifice of self, begging at the altar of normalcy, get us?²⁰³

Benjamin's Memory

The next week, I spoke with Jason. Jason was in a muddled state after a break up with a man who cheated on him. Frequently. Often with mutual friends. Infidelities were less a problem than the

²⁰² "Domino Dancing."

²⁰³ See Shaun E. Edmonds, "Connected to Orlando: An Autoethnography in Three(ish) Acts," *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 7 (2017): 519-526. Quote from page 523.

sexual health risks that accompanied frequent encounters. Because of risk and betrayal, Jason disengaged from the gay community.

Jason

They're very sexually fluid. I am not. That just kind of turned me off that crowd.

Gray

Gay men are a population perpetually 'at risk.'²⁰⁴

Benjamin

I remember learning about gay culture as a child during the height of the AIDS crisis. I also remember a friend who coached me through the coming out process...

Buster

You're about to sacrifice your social standing and forever be viewed as sexually exotic, at best, and sexually pathological, by most.²⁰⁵

Gray

It's like gay men think, 'If society expects me to be a ho, I may as well just be a ho.' But I don't want to be a ho. And I can't trust a ho.

Benjamin

Shush, girl. Shut your lips. Do the Helen Keller, and talk with your hips.

Gray

What?

Benjamin

From that 3OH!3 song where they say not to trust a ho.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ See Dean, 2009.

²⁰⁵ Buster is a pseudonym for a friend of mine from Washington, DC who coached me through going to a gay bar for the first time.

²⁰⁶ I'm not sure why I thought of this song, because it is terrible. To see how terrible, find 3OH!3, "Don't Trust Me," recorded 2008, track three on *Want*, Atlantic, record.

Dr. James Dobson

One is trustworthy if one is sexually moral. Masturbation and sodomy are sinful. Homosexuality is a choice. It is a psychiatric disorder that must be eradicated if a man is to walk with God.²⁰⁷

Hamilton

Did I have it coming?

Gray

Will I have it coming?

Dr. James Dobson

Yes.

Benjamin

No.

Pet Shop Boys

No.

No.

No.

I command you, unclean spirit, and Dr. James Dobson, along with all your minions now attacking these servants of Goddess, that you tell me the day and time of your departure. They shall lay their hands upon the sick and all will be well with them.

Let us pray.

²⁰⁷ I do not refer to any specific quote or publication from Dr. James Dobson. However, my mother and father had a copy of James C. Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2001). One chapter focused on “homosexuality” and how to eradicate it from your sons. Dr. Dobson’s methods didn’t work on me.

ABSENCE: AN ELEGIAC MASHUP²⁰⁸

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²⁰⁸ In Jennifer Egan, *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2010), a family narrative exists via Power Point under the title “Great Rock and Roll Pauses.” A young boy, Lincoln, struggles to tell his father “I love you.” Lincoln attempts to connect through a mutual love of music; hence, Lincoln’s repeated proselytizing about the power of rock and roll pauses. One night, Lincoln plays music to his father; his father stops him, “Lincoln, before you play another song. I—I’d love to know why the pauses matter so much to you.” Later, we receive the answer, “The pause makes you think the song will end. And then the song isn’t really over, so you’re relieved.” This chapter is about pauses: the moments of silence in individual narratives in which much more is communicated than generally recognized. In conventional humanist qualitative inquiry, silence is overlooked in favor of “brute data” (See St. Pierre, 2013). I focus on the silence within suicide narratives. I also focus on the sounds that precede the suicide act and the sounds accompanying the mourning period following the suicide act. Suicide victims exhibit multiple silences: remaining silent through suffering, being silenced when suffering is invalidated, and locating permanent silence in death. If we do not learn to read silence, we cannot learn the conditions that prompt youth suicide, specifically queer youth suicide. Nor can we locate a means to render un-silent those who suffer in silence. We cannot make them affirmed, validated, or feel vital. I employ evocative autoethnographic methods, in which I document my major depression, to provide insight into what is experienced by a queer youth who is silent/silenced. My definition of evocative autoethnography comes from Bochner and Ellis, 2016, and Jones and Adams, 2010. I employ a curation-as-analysis approach to guide data inclusion; curation (without interpretation or explanation) prevents, as much as possible, further silencing of individuals by pervasive researcher/theoretical voice. Since silence and sound are my primary data sources, I felt compelled to consider Stephanie Daza and Walter S. Gershon, “Beyond Ocular Inquiry: Sound, Silence, and Sonification,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 21, no. 7 (2015): 639-644. Daza and Gershon call us to move beyond “ocular inquiry” through “sonic cartography.” Silence is poetic; “bodies are sounded—there is not actual silence for hearing humans;” silence/sound is resonant, “Resonance is in many ways the inversion of relevance. Relevance is but a consensus perspective, a majority consensus about what matters...a means to silence minority voices for the expression of the majority” (641). Gershon expands on sonification and resonance in Walter S. Gershon, “Vibrational Affect: Sound Theory and Practice in Qualitative Research,” *Cultural Studies->Critical Methodologies* 13, no. 4 (2013): 257-262. Gershon uses the phrase “sonic ethnography” to describe his use of sound to “[consider] processes, experiences, ideas, ideals, and ecologies in, as, or through sound to interrupt ocular metaphors in important ways” in documenting holistic, every day human experience (258). Sonic ethnography can be used as a “tool for reflexivity as well as for qualitative inquiry” since “sounds...sit at the paradox of human experience—utterly individualistic and inescapably socio-cultural in their interpretation” (259). Gershon’s work on sound emphasizes sound data’s potential for studying, capturing, and creating resonance; he writes, “Resonance is theoretically and materially consequential. Theoretically, if everything vibrates, then everything—literally every object (animate and inanimate), ecology (‘natural’ or ‘constructed’), feeling, idea, ideal, process, experience, event—has the potential to affect and be affected by another aspect of everything” (258). I use Gershon’s work on resonance to demonstrate that proliferating the types of data in this chapter is a call to allow yourself to be affected on a multi-sensory level not entirely possible if I focused exclusively on text-based research. I attempt to map sound through text, a methodological paradox. I depict silence/pause visually and employ words that connote sound to depict what one hears and senses, bodily, when being silenced as an LGBTQ youth. I also suggest a soundtrack to accompany your experience of my sonic cartography; these songs are selected because they are resonant to me; one even stopped me from following through on a suicide attempt. Hopefully, they will resonate with you.

Jeers

Taunts

Insults

Rejections

Sniggers

Laughs

Cackles

Guffaws

Yells

Sobs

Castigations

Excommunications

Weeps

Whispers

Boos

Hisses

Slurs

Invectives

Hoots

Slanders

Betrayals

Gibes

Snorts

Honks

Whistles

Locker door rattles

Slams

Rumbles

Stomps

Shatters

Bells

Sirens

Yells

Cracks

Smacks

Trickles

Exhales

Heaves

Splatters

Whimpers

Steps

Cranks

Screeches

Rustlings

Muffles

Doubts²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ For an estimate on the scope of queer suicidality, see Michael P. Marshal, Laura J. Dietz, Mark S. Friedman, Ron Stall, Helen A. Smith, James McGinley, Brian V. Thomas, Pamela J. Murray, Anthony R. D’Augelli, and David A. Brent, “Suicidality and Depression Disparities Between Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Youth: A Meta-Analytic Review,”

Knocks on the stall doors
Underwear elastic tugged and released to a smack on the bare waist
Bare bottom exposed and slapped
Calls through changing rooms “Oh, aren’t you *fancy*”
Inquiries in the gym shower, “You looking for this dick?”
Punches in the parking lot
Beatings on the bedroom door, “What were you doing staying the night with a gay boy?”
Whirring condoms, soaring at you across an auditorium
Whispers of AIDS directed at you during an abstinence-only education seminar
Phone rings, “You know your son’s gay, right?”
Drunken slurs, “Come on, Jessica, you know your boyfriend doesn’t like girls. He’s a fag”
Condescending whispers, “Boys will be boys”
Yells of “Sodom. Sodom. Sodom. God brought down Sodom”
Readings of “If a man lay with a man as he might lay with a woman...”
Stern warnings in deadpan tones, “He shall be consumed by fire”
“AIDS is the fire God promised”

Journal of Adolescent Health 49 (2011): 115-123. The research team analyzed 19 major study findings regarding disparities in “sexual minority youth” and heterosexual suicide rates. Their analysis yielded the cross-study average finding: a 28% rate of suicidality within sexual minority youth compared to a 12% rate for heterosexual youth. To explain the high rates for sexual minority youth suicidality, Marshal et al. write, “Minority stress theory suggests that disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual youth can be attributed in part to stigma, discrimination, and victimization experiences that are a result of a homophobic and violent culture. Among the factors that researchers have found to be associated with psychosocial risks in SMUY are the negative responses of other people to gender atypical behavior, high-risk sexual behavior, conflicts related to disclosure of sexual orientation to family and its consequences, and mistreatment in community settings, *especially schools*” (emphasis mine, 116). The sound-connoting vocabulary used is curated based on sounds associated with violence within school buildings, as experienced by myself, participants in my study, as well as others in my social network who have narrated their experiences of bullying to me throughout my life. Jeers and guffaws. Lockers slamming. Poundings on stall doors. Honks in the school parking lot. These are common sounds associated with being bullied in schools.

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Pop

Bang

Crack

Gasp

Thump

Smack

Click Click Click

*All I wanna do is *bang *bang *bang *bang*

Thrash

Whip

Scream

Exhale

Sigh

Hack

Whimper

Thud

Whack

Crackle Crackle Crackle

Spark

Sizzle

Sizzle

And take your money²¹⁰

²¹⁰ The lines “All I wanna do is [bang, bang, bang]” and “take yo money” are lyrics from M.I.A., “Paper Planes,” recorded 2007, track 11 on *Kala*, Interscope, record.

Cue Playlist: “Creature Comfort” by Arcade Fire²¹¹

“Jamel, a fourth grader at Joe Shoemaker Elementary School in Denver, hanged himself in his bedroom last Thursday...Over the summer he had told his mother he was gay...Jamel, who was obsessed with cartoons and computers, woke each morning to style his own curly hair, just like his older sisters.”²¹²

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“‘Judge Roy Moore called my daughter Patti Sue Mathis a pervert because she was gay. A 32-year old Roy Moore dated teenage girls ages 14 to 17. So that makes him a pervert of the worst kind.’ ... Mr. Mathis described finding his daughter with a self-inflicted pistol shot wound to her neck on the floor of the mobile home where she lived on the family farm in Wicksburg. Music was playing softly in the background, he recalled, the details of the moment still sharp in his mind decades later.”²¹³

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“Classmates yanked his long hair and tried to drag him around by his ponytail. They tripped him in the halls and stole from his backpack. They called him names and told a new girl he was gay, which he denies, so she would not befriend him. Every day in the cafeteria, he sat at a long table with a group of boys crowded at one end, a group of girls at the other, and him alone in the middle,

²¹¹ Released on June 16, 2017, track 4 on *Everything Now*, Columbia, record.

²¹² Jamel Myles hanged himself in his home in 2018. His story was reported by Julie Turkewitz, “9-Year-Old Boy Killed Himself After Being Bullied, His Mom Says,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2018: A14.

²¹³ Roy Moore was the Republican candidate for the United States Senate special election in Alabama in 2017. The quote used was originally part of the report by Christine Hauser, “At An Alabama Rally, A Father’s Grief Over His Gay Daughter,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/12/us/nathan-mathis-roy-moore.html>

surrounded by empty space...By February, he had enough of the bullying, he said. He used his sweater to try to hang himself in a school stairwell.”²¹⁴

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“He had a rock on his chest, and wanted to take it off so he could breathe.”²¹⁵

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“While Eric lived life to the fullest, he had his own personal struggle. He was in the process of transitioning to his identity as a girl. It simply became too much for him and he sought relief from

²¹⁴ This narrative comes from a report by Elizabeth A. Harris, “At School Where Student Died, Bullying Led to a Suicide Attempt,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2017: A17. Harris’s report noted that the boy’s grandmother reached out to multiple school personnel regarding the bullying faced by her grandson. However, according to the boy, “all that did was make the bullying worse.” This story is reflective of common ambivalence held by school administrators toward bullying of gender non-conforming students, especially effeminate boys, as documented by Joshua R. Wolff, Kenneth D. Allen, Heather L. Himes, Ashley E. Fish, and Jennifer R. Losardo, “A Retrospective Examination of Complete Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Suicides in the United States: What Can Be Learned from Written Online Media,” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 18, no. 1 (2014): 3-30. Their study noted “Denial of the Problem” as a significant domain within their analysis of online reports of sexual and gender minority suicides. The comments from administrators are shocking. For example, one school, “released press statements that indicated that bullying is a rite-of-passage among adolescents or an accepted social norm, and hence schools were not responsible for doing more to protect vulnerable youth.” Another administrator said, “Is there bullying that’s going on? Absolutely. But I don’t buy into the idea for one minute that [our] county schools are less tolerant than another rural school system in the region or the state.” A school spokeswoman at a separate district said, “We have a community that has widely varying opinions [on LGBTQ issues], and so to respect all families, as the policy says, we ask teachers to remain neutral” (16). Wolff et al. also noted that parents echoed and/or endorsed these sentiments: “One youth...attended an open city council meeting where members were debating whether the town should recognize a gay pride event being held in the city. Shortly after attending the meeting, the young man committed suicide. The youth’s father described the city council meeting as ‘a place where the same sentiments that quietly tormented [his son] in high school were being shouted out and applauded by adults;” another reported spoke of, “one youth in Tennessee who completed suicide just before the state legislature was scheduled to vote on a bill that would make it illegal for public school teachers to talk about LGBTQ topics in any way during classes” (17). Alabama, where Persimmon University is located, is one state that instituted what GLSEN calls “No Promo Homo” laws. Alabama State Code 16-40A-2 (Title 16. Education) reads, “Any program or curriculum in the public schools in Alabama that includes sex education or the human reproductive process shall, as a minimum, include and emphasize the following: [...] (8) An emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.”

²¹⁵ This quote was from a grandmother’s account of her grandson’s suicide published in, “Phillip Parker, Gay Tennessee Teen, Commits Suicide After Enduring Bullying,” *Huffington Post Gay Voices*, January 23, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/23/phillip-parker-gay-tennessee-teen-suicide_n_1223688.html

his suffering. He left a beautiful letter letting his parents know that he knew he had been loved unconditionally, but he needed to move on... ‘I would like to be remembered as a transgender pansexual teenage girl named Hope. Being transgender is my gender identity. My sexual orientation, or sexual identity, is being pansexual, meaning that I do not care about what the person is; I care about who they are. Sexual orientation is who you go to bed with and gender identity is who you go to bed as.’²¹⁶

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“When Tyler Clementi told his parents he was gay, two days before he left for Rutgers University in the fall of 2010, he said he had known since middle school. ‘So he did have a side that he didn’t open up to us, obviously,’ his mother, Jane Clementi, said...Tyler told a friend that the conversation had not gone well...Three weeks later, he jumped off the George Washington Bridge after discovering that his roommate had used a webcam to spy on him having sex and that he had sent out Twitter messages encouraging others to watch.”²¹⁷

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²¹⁶ Excerpted from Eric (Hope) Verbeeck’s obituary Trudy Ring, “After Trans Teen Takes Her Life, Her Mother Shares Story to Help Others,” *Advocate*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.advocate.com/transgender/2018/3/15/after-trans-teen-takes-her-life-her-mother-shares-story-help-others>

²¹⁷ Excerpted from Kate Zernike, “After Gay Son’s Suicide, Mother Finds Blame in Herself and in Her Church,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2012: A14.

“I should have known something was wrong, but he seemed happy. After he did what he did, we found out a lot that we didn’t know and there is a lot of bullying that goes on at the school.”²¹⁸

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“Former England International John Fashanu has admitted that he paid his late brother Justin [75,000 pounds] not to reveal he was gay before his death in 1998. Justin Fashanu, who played for Norwich and Nottingham Forest in the 1980s, came out as gay before he committed suicide in May 1998 at the age of 37.”²¹⁹

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“Summer Rae Dolman told her family she was going out back to draw...Her great-grandfather found her in the woods. She’d hanged herself. She was 13...After Summer’s death, Stevenson found a folded note in Summer’s dresser that she believes had at some point been slipped into the teen’s locker. Cruel messages are scribbled on it. Among them: ‘You, jump off the school roof’ and ‘Die you lgbt.’”²²⁰

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²¹⁸ *Huffington Post*, 2012.

²¹⁹ Excerpted from, “John Fashanu Paid Late Brother Justin 75,000 Not to Reveal He Was Gay,” *Telegraph Sports*, April 18, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2018/04/18/john-fashanu-paid-late-brother-justin-75000-not-reveal-gay/>

²²⁰ Excerpted from Kari Bray, “After suicide of 13-year-old, family calls for kindness, courage,” *HeraldNet*, August 13, 2018, <https://www.heraldnet.com/news/after-suicide-of-13-year-old-family-calls-for-kindness-courage/>

“I love you. Thank you for having me. It’s been a pleasure. I know this will bring much pain. But I will hopefully be in a better place than this shithole. Please, put my body in burial and visit my used body. And make sure to make the school feel like shit for bringing you this sorrow. This life was a pleasure, mostly having you guys to bring me through the pain. Hopefully, I become the universe.”²²¹

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Assisted suicide

She dreams about dying all the time

She told me she came so close

Filled up the bathtub and put on our first record

Saying

God, make me famous

*If you can’t just make it painless*²²²

Autumn; several years ago. I called Persimmon’s Student Counseling Services to schedule an appointment. It was the first day of class, and there were over three hundred students on an appointment wait list. “The next available appointment is in October.” Students on Persimmon’s insurance plan are required to use Student Counseling Services first, otherwise psychiatric appointments or psychiatric medications are not covered.

I needed in. That morning, I collapsed in my office from a panic attack *Gasp Smack Moan*. I’d learned that others in my office speculated that I was too close to my male students. They gossiped

²²¹ This quote is from Seth Walsh’s suicide note, as reported on an ABC broadcast in 2011. See, American Broadcasting Company, “Seth Walsh’s Mother Files Lawsuit Against School District,” *ABC News*, July 5, 2011, <http://www.turnto23.com/news/seth-walsh-s-mother-files-lawsuit-against-school-district>

²²² “Creature Comfort.”

about it *Whisper Giggle Gag*. Thought me guilty because I'd helped on a student government campaign of a student presumed to be gay himself (he's not). Relationships with students were fire-able offenses.

"If this is an emergency," offered the receptionist, "we have ten-minute appointments available."

"Fine. I'm suicidal," I said.

"Come in at 3:00."

Some boys hate themselves

Spend their lives resenting their fathers

Some girls hate their bodies

*Stand in the mirror and wait for the feedback*²²³

Persimmon's Student Counseling Services team included no full-time psychiatrists nor physicians. Their team of psychologists was small; the smallest among Persimmon's peer institutions. Eight licensed psychologists and a handful of psychology graduate students. If you needed immediate help (drugs), you were fucked. I was already Obsessive Compulsive. Now I was panicky; guilty of living while gay. Counseling works. But when you've just picked yourself up off the office floor after a sweat, tremor, vibration, and collapse

...

thump

thump

thud

whack

exhale

²²³ "Creature Comfort."

gasp

throttle

... cognitive behavior therapy is not swift enough.

Some girls hate themselves

Hide under the covers with sleeping pills

Some girls cut themselves

Stand in the mirror and wait for the feedback

Some boys get too much, too much love, too much touch

Some boys starve themselves

Stand in the mirror and wait for the feedback²²⁴

Later. I talked for ten minutes to another graduate student; she nodded and said things like, “These anxieties and compulsions seem uncomfortable.” No shit, Diane. “The skin is peeling off my hands and I have a bruise on my forehead where I smacked it *POW* on the desk.” After ten minutes, she dispensed me to a check-out desk where I was offered a follow-up appointment...in October. No referral to a psychiatrist. No drugs. *Silence.*

Creature comfort makes it painless

Bury me penniless and nameless

Born in a diamond mine

It's all around you, but you can't see it

Born in a diamond mine

It's all around you but you can't touch it²²⁵

I went to the local Urgent Care. There, I exhibited further anxiety and collapsed *Gasp Smack*

Moan.

²²⁴ “Creature Comfort.”

²²⁵ “Creature Comfort.”

...
thump
thump
thud
whack
exhale
gasp
throttle

... cognitive behavior therapy is not swift enough.

The physician's assistant gave me a prescription for fifteen Klonopin. Those lasted two days
Crunch Crunch Gulp Gulp.

We're the bones under your feet

The white lie of American prosperity

We wanna dance, but we can't feel the beat. I'm a liar

*Don't doubt my sincerity.*²²⁶

A week after that: I collapsed again *Gasp Smack Moan.*

...
thump
thump
thud
whack
exhale
gasp

²²⁶ "Creature Comfort."

throttle

... cognitive behavior therapy is not swift enough.

I'd now missed two weeks of class. My obsessive behaviors, triggered by anxiety, stripped my skin (from over washing) to the extent that my hands openly bled in the sink. My eyelids stung from too many applications of astringent. My ears were cracked, my lips peeled raw, my nails split in half, and my hair fell out in tufts. I could not function. I slurred speech. My memory evaporated; I'd stand in the middle of stairwells wondering whether I was going up or down. I sat in my car wondering whether I was going to work or whether I just got home. I could not remember people's names. Couldn't remember dates, meeting times, dinner plans, where the restaurant was at which the dinner plans were to happen. I'd begin a sentence and forget its trajectory four words in.

It goes on and on

I don't know what I want

On and on

I don't know if I want it²²⁷

The third week of the semester, I went with my 250 students to active shooter training in our student center's ballroom. The Director of Campus Security asked us, "What is the first thing you do when an active shooter enters the room?"

I whispered to my friend, who held the same assistantship as I, "Aim at me first." The Director began throwing tennis balls at us; they were meant to simulate bullets *Thwack Thwack Stomp Stomp Thwack Thwack Screech.*

At 4:00 p.m. that day, Dr. Hughes put me on Prozac. Two weeks later, we upped the dosage. Two weeks later we hit the maximum dosage. Two weeks later we switched to another SSRI, starting at the maximum dosage. Six months later, we switched to an SSNRI, at the maximum dosage. Six

²²⁷ "Creature Comfort."

months after that, with no improvement in sight, I began self-medicating. I accumulated Tramadol and Lortab and Percocet from the following sources: my past prescriptions from surgical procedures (90 pills), my grandfather's medicine cabinet (which hadn't been cleaned out since his death) (350 pills), my parents' medicine cabinets (my mother had two cosmetic surgeries within the previous two years) (120 pills), and my brother's prescriptions left over from a series of surgeries removing cysts on his back (60 pills). From there, I developed a hodge podge collection from various friends and acquaintances, to whom I paid, on average, \$3 per pill. Knowing that I had "two kidney stones in the pipeline" from my previous kidney stone crisis a year prior, I went to the emergency room. Twice. Both times feigning pain to get an additional sixty pills. By Christmas, my stockpile was 2,000 pills strong *Rattle Rattle, Fuckers*.

Guzzle.

Gulp.

Guzzle.

Gulp.

Hack.

Hack.

Exhale.

...cognitive behavior therapy is not swift enough.

God, make me famous

If you can't, just make it painless

*Just make it painless*²²⁸

Cue playlist: "Unravel" by Bjork²²⁹

²²⁸ "Creature Comfort."

²²⁹ Bjork, "Unravel," recorded August 1997, track 3 on *Homogenic*, Elektra, record.

September 2015. Midnight. A Persimmon student, aged 22, drives to a prominent downtown intersection. He parks his car in front of a popular bar. He pulls out a gun. He blasts *Click Click Bang Bang* pink matter onto the patio.²³⁰

While you are away

My heart comes undone

Slowly unravels in a ball of yarn

The devil collects it

With a grin

Our love

*In a ball of yarn*²³¹

January 2016. Seven p.m. The student Senate (on which I serve) urges all students to become aware of signs of mental illness and suicidal ideation so that they can reach out and support their struggling peers. The Senate makes QPR suicide prevention training available to all organizations.

He'll never return it

When you come back

We'll have to make new love

He'll never return it

*When you come back, we'll have to make new love*²³²

March 2016. The Persimmon Mental Health Task Force releases a report suggesting the university hire twelve additional mental wellness staff members and three full-time psychiatrists.

Later that month, Persimmon students organize Mental Wellness Week. The culminating event

²³⁰ This account was provided by the Persimmon campus newspaper, which I refrain from referencing to protect the identities of the student and his family. I must point out that the report makes no mention of the student's sexual orientation or gender identity, thus I do not assume his queer status. I mention this report only to indicate a specific incident on Persimmon's campus that prompted a holistic investigation into the efficacy of Persimmon's impact on student mental wellness.

²³¹ "Unravel."

²³² "Unravel."

features the placement of over 100 backpacks representing students who committed suicide in recent years. Five backpacks belonged to the students who had commit suicide to that point in the academic year.

While you are away

My heart comes undone

Slowly unravels, in a ball of yarn

The devil collects it with a grin

Our love, our love

*In a ball of yarn*²³³

...

...

...

“On May 11, 2013, Darcy was born at 21 years of age. The Persimmon senior no longer wanted to go by her birth name. She wanted to start again as Darcy. Darcy struggled with such feelings throughout her childhood and said despite being born biologically male, she never felt like a man. Darcy said she credits Persimmon’s Gay-Straight Alliance, with helping her come to understand her identity. ‘If I didn’t have the [GSA], I don’t know what I would have done,’ Darcy said. ‘I’d have probably killed myself.’ When she still used the name [given at birth], Darcy said she came within seconds of committing suicide after being outed as someone attracted to men. ‘The only thing stopping me was I couldn’t break the razor blade out of my razor.’”²³⁴

...

²³³ “Unravel.”

²³⁴ Darcy’s story was originally reported in the Persimmon campus newspaper. Ordinarily, I would refrain from referencing her by name, to protect her identity. However, Darcy has since established a foundation supporting LGBTQ mental wellness services, and she is the plaintiff in a lawsuit against the state, which has been widely covered by state media. See, Jeremy Gray, “I’ve always been Darcy’: Transgender [Persimmon] University student to be honored at Montgomery LGBT vigil,” *al.com*, February 7, 2014, http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2014/02/ive_always_been_darcy_transgen.html

...

...

Gasp.

Slice.

Wince.

Whimper.

Cue playlist: "Hyperballad" by Bjork²³⁵

We live on a mountain

Right at the top

There's a beautiful view from the top of the mountain

Every morning, I walk towards the edge and throw little things off

Like car parts, bottles, and cutlery

Or whatever I find lying around

It's become a habit

*A way to start the day*²³⁶

Suicide attempts were like Christmas. They came annually. Until I got help.

I go through all this, before you wake up

*So I can feel happier to be safe up here with you*²³⁷

I got asked in a job interview, "How do you plan to maintain professional boundaries with your students?" by a straight man with social power. He'd been caught having an affair with a student, ten years his junior, in his old fraternity house, where he was house dad. He got promoted. And then he asked me how I'd maintain professional boundaries with my students. Since, after all,

²³⁵ Bjork, "Hyperballad," recorded 1995, track 2 on *Post*, Elektra, record.

²³⁶ "Hyperballad."

²³⁷ "Hyperballad."

gay men can't be trusted to keep from fiddly diddling if another gay man is in range. I did not get the job. A straight guy ten years younger than I, with no job experience or degree in the field, did. On the way home that evening, I remembered Christopher Walken's character in *Annie Hall*, who fantasized about driving head first into oncoming traffic. I wondered how fast I'd need to drive into a pine tree on the side of the road to ensure swift death.

Crack

Whack

Sizzle

Sizzle

Sizzle

...cognitive behavior therapy is not swift enough.

It's early morning

No one is awake

I'm back at my cliff

Still throwing things off

I listen to the sounds they make on their way down

I follow with my eyes 'til they crash

I imagine what my body would sound like slamming against those rocks

When it lands will my eyes be closed or open?

I go through all this before you wake up

So I can be happier to be safe up here with you²³⁸

The Christmas after my breakdown, I received a Hermes scarf as a gift. It was tangerine on one side, with blue and gray horses on the other side. Silk, obviously. It was eight inches wide. Six

²³⁸ "Hyperballad."

feet long. I did not often wear scarves. Too hot in Persimmon, even in winter. But, it was Hermes. “Thank you. Thank you. I love it.” But what in God’s name would I do with it? A week later, I was alone with the scarf in a room at the Four Seasons Hotel in Atlanta. All my friends were out of town, and my plans for the evening were cancelled when a friend ditched me for a Grindr hook up. I attempted my own Grindr hook up, but failed when three separate men claimed I wasn’t hot enough. I had a terrace room overlooking 14th. Outside my sliding glass door were sturdy sconces hung high enough for me to wrap the scarf around my neck and suspend myself from the sconce with twelve or so inches between my feet and the ground. I could easily kick the chaise lounge out from under me. And Hermes silk was the best, right? It would hold me. And what a sensational way to go: death by French silk at the Four Seasons Hotel.

Cue playlist: “Joga” by Bjork²³⁹

All these accidents that happen

Follow the dot

Coincidence

Makes sense

Only with you

You don’t have to speak

I feel

Emotional landscapes

They puzzle me

Then the riddle gets solved

And you push me up to this state of emergency

How beautiful to be state of emergency

²³⁹ Bjork, “Joga,” recorded August 1997, track 2 on *Homogenic*, Elektra, record.

Is where I want to be²⁴⁰

After my Master's, I lived in Washington, DC. On my birthday the second year, I was turned down for another in a series of high-profile job interviews. The series started the previous year. A senator from my home state turned me down in September. PEW Charitable Trust turned me down in October. Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus didn't even interview me in November. Bloomingdale's offered a sales job, but I already worked at Brooks Brothers in Georgetown, so why move if not into management or corporate? Magazines. No. Newspapers. No. Congressional offices. No. Georgetown U. No. George Washington U. No. Johns Hopkins U. No. The State Department. No. A few weeks after my birthday (April), I was invited to a party at the Billy Reid store down the street. They were celebrating the one-year anniversary of the store's opening as well as the designer's recent appearance on a CBS morning show, which was filmed in the DC store. I was friendly with the staff, since my friend Madeline left her job with me at Brooks Brothers to take a job there. I went. Lifted a few cocktails, nibbled a few apps made by the chef of DC's newest hot spot: Rose's Luxury. The party ended around eleven p.m. But I was buzzed and did not want to go immediately home. Called around to my friends who lived in the area. None answered. I got in my car and drove up 31st to Q, which crossed the "Buffalo Bridge" and led past the Cosmos Club. I went east a few blocks, took a left, went north one block, took a left on R and parked at Cobalt, the neighborhood's largest gay bar. There was a restaurant on the first floor, a lounge-style bar on the second, a dance floor on the third. The line was long; it was, after all, midnight on a Friday. I wore head-to-toe Billy Reid from the most recent runway show; as a result, I became the center of attention for being dressed in a far more sophisticated manner than tank tops and booty shorts. Two separate men bought me my requested cocktail: whiskey sour. Twenty minutes later, two different, separate men bought me two more whiskey sours. I entered the dance floor. The DJ played "New York City Boy"

²⁴⁰ "Joga."

by the Pet Shop Boys. *Bump Pulse Bump Pulse* I was bent and twisted and thrust against and smacked and pounded and turned and tossed. People tugged at my custom blazer, caressed my linen shirt, pulled on my bow tie, and slid their fingers between my ostrich belt and sage twill trousers. While one man kissed me *Smack*, another felt me up from behind. Another took me by the hand. Led me to the bathroom. Pushed me into the stall. *Whack*. Stuck his tongue in my mouth. *Slosh*. Put my hand down his pants. More followed, and I cannot now say what because I cannot remember. *Moan*. By this point, I'd had four chardonnays at Billy Reid and eight whiskey sours at Cobalt. What I do remember is getting in my car at 3:00 a.m. *Exhale*. My shirt was not tucked, my bow tie was missing, my hair was a disaster, and my custom blazer was bruised by red wine. I took out my phone to call an Uber to take me home. My phone was dead. I threw it through the windshield. *Pow. Crack. Shatter. Thud*. I felt disgusting and shameful and angry with myself for whatever may or may not have happened inside. *Sob*. I felt shameful for going at all *AIDS is the fire God promised*; I'd never been to a gay bar. I'd never had any sexual encounter with a man beyond kissing. I recalled having a bottle of Stolli and two bottles of Lortab in my bedroom. "I'll take them all and let myself die." *Gulp. Guzzle. Gulp. Guzzle*. I even had anti-emetics to keep from vomiting up my poison. I didn't want to recall anything in the morning, and I didn't want to face another day at my retail job. I put my MINI on D and drove down R, wound my way through DuPont Circle, headed Southeast on Massachusetts Avenue, missed my left turn in Mt. Vernon square (where I should have maneuvered myself onto New York Avenue NW). Kept going and going in a section of city completely foreign to me. My phone (which I'd retrieved from the sidewalk) was still dead *Silence*, and I needed the GPS to take me home where I could kill myself and be done with all this muck and fuss. I hit myself in the face as punishment for my stupidity. *Smack Smack Smack Thud*. I hit sixty miles an hour heading onto the Anacostia Bridge. *Vroom. Vroom. Vroom*. Near the other end, I dropped my phone while trying to plug it into the charger, *Thud*, jumped the curb, *Screech*, hit the side of the bridge, *Whack*, and skidded

off the other side into a construction zone. *FUCKKKKKKKK*. My face hit the steering wheel in the process, *Thump*, and I was knocked unconscious. *Silence*. At 5:00 a.m., I was awakened by the driver *Knock Knock Knock* of a tow truck sent by MINI Roadside Assistance. A worker at the construction site had called them, since the number was on my keychain.

The next morning, I threw out my pills and liquor. I went to counseling.

On and on

I don't know what I want

On and on

I don't know if I want it²⁴¹

...

...

...

...

...

...

"I'm still pissed at him.

I'm still mad at him.

He put on a good act.

He shut us out.

Nobody saw it coming.

There were no signs.

Yesterday, he was fine."²⁴²

...

²⁴¹ "Creature Comfort."

²⁴² Excerpted from, Eric D. Teman, "Now, He's Not Alive," *Qualitative Inquiry* 16, no. 8 (2010): 611.

...

...

...

Reviewing the suicide reports of others in the queer community made me realize that the victims have one thing in common: an auditory mixture of silence and cacophony. The sound data that exist, usually, are the voices of those closest to the victim who speak up after the act. Most are aghast *gasp sigh sob wail* that the beloved *bang smack hack slice sizzle sizzle sizzle* ended their lives. Often, the aghast were unaware of the pressures faced by their beloved for being queer. That adds further silence. Silent suffering as an in-the-closet queer. We then come to know of the cacophony experienced by the queer individual *laugh guffaw jeer snicker taunt slur punch slap bash* by piecing together the evidence of what they lived through in their final days, and we finally understand the extent of their suffering. We finally validate the severity of the context that led to suicide. My work attempts to bring sound data into the conversation to provide auditory signals to those who are too frequently deaf to the pain suffered by the queer community. I draw my sound data from the instances in my life in which I was on the precipice of suicide myself, a condition created by a cacophony of sound that convinced me that I was better off dead. These sounds come from sense memory. I designed this study as a mashup of percussive sounds that accompany self-destruction and music that resonated bodily within me each time I contemplated bringing myself into permanent silence. The songs used, from Arcade Fire and Bjork, remind me of the cost that would come with my absence. In “Creature Comfort,” a lyric, previously unmentioned, notes, “It’s not painless, she was a friend of mine.” In “Unravel,” Bjork describes her heart coming undone after the absence of a lover. I recall being awoken on the front seat of the tow truck in Annapolis, MD after crashing my car. My aunt, whom I treated as a mother, came to fetch me and take me to her house to recover. My suicide would not have been painless to her. So, I didn’t do it. Haven’t thought about it again.

For whom will it be painful? Many. The imagined sounds of their sobs stopped me.

Perhaps the most insidious component of depression, especially depression built upon feelings of queer shame, was its ability to convince me that death was a better option than life. Depression whispered: “Dead people have no shame.” Depression prodded: “Dead people have no financial burdens.” Depression cooed: “Dead people do not have to worry about their looks.” Depression lilted: “Dead people do not feel guilt. Do not cry. Do not have withdrawals. Do not dwell on rejection. Do not get yelled at. Do not fear for personal safety. The dead don’t care.” Depression was a chorus; it marketed silence. It was a daily, swelling vocal tide that drowned out all sound. death. Death. DEATH. Fortissimo. In comparison, life was an onslaught of caring (read worrying). A cacophony of taunts, shouts, threats, insults, moans, sighs, cracks, pops, bangs, sirens, jeers, sniggers, cackles. Depression’s chorus was Wagnerian in comparison. Wipe out the auditory chaos, urged the depression chorus. Who could convince me to think otherwise? There was usually no dueling chorus telling me life was the better option. Why stay? Why put off the inevitable? The further I descended into depression (before seeking assistance, which is now turning down the volume), the less frightful death became. It’s life that was frightful. Life’s frightfulness grew by day. Self-destruction became passé, pedestrian, not worth fearing.

This study is an attempt to disrupt the cacophony; it is an attempt to draw attention to the silence of the suffering and to illuminate the necessity of support being higher in volume than the cacophony that plagues the suffering. The excerpted suicide reports demonstrate how each victim lived silently amid dissonance, their loved ones unaware of their experiences *prior to death* and unable to find out “Why?” *after* death. In many cases of suicide that I have heard narrated, those close the victim spoke: “He was so selfish to leave us.” Or: “He was just overreacting.” Or: “He made a permanent solution to a temporary problem.” None could imagine how the dead could justify their

actions. I assure you, when queer shame collides with depression and the world becomes too loudly ridiculing, it is easy to justify finding the nearest exit.

Writing on silence and sound and suicide led to an inevitable paradox: I must address silence and sound through visual text. Suicide victims often espouse feelings of loneliness (consciously or unconsciously) as contributing to suicidal ideation; I feel strange providing a sonic cartography and empathetic ear after the fact. We should have been listening *before*. The victim finds friends, always, after, when the silence is absolute.

“I tried calling him.

The call wouldn’t go through.

I became...a little worried.

It’s been confirmed!

You know this is what’s happened...

This isn’t real.

I’m only dreaming...”²⁴³

I would decline presenting the victim’s silence had I not almost been a victim myself. On frequent occasions. Being part of the community of queer people and a former part of the community of major depressives, I feel it my epistemic duty to make others aware of how to read our silence, our sounds, our distance, and our despondency so that we can finally be heard.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Teman, 2010.

²⁴⁴ I want to point out an additional need to conduct intersectional studies of suicidality among the queer population in the vein of Olivier Ferlatte, Travis Salway, Olena Hankivsky, Terry Trussler, John L. Oliffe, and Rick Marchand, “Recent Suicide Attempts Across Multiple Social Identities Among Gay and Bisexual Men: An Intersectionality Analysis,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 65, no. 11 (2018): 1507-1526. Ferlatte et al. critiqued the bulk of existing suicidality studies as assuming “monolithic” experience among all gay men. The research team analyzed data from the national *Sex Now* study in Canada, in which over 8,000 gay and bisexual men were surveyed; their analysis of 145 specific cases, representing men who attempted suicide within the previous 12 months, found that low-income and non-degree holding men were significantly more likely to attempt suicide, as are black and Latino men. In addition, bisexual men were less likely to attempt suicide when partnered with a woman. They also point out that common “risks” associated with queer suicidality, such as substance abuse and depression, are common risks among all men, thus analyses using those “risks” as the primary correlates are not as illuminating as more holistic, intersectional approaches. In the case of Persimmon, it is worth applying their findings (albeit in a speculative fashion, at this point); the men in this study (except one) are all

from rural Alabama. Rural upbringing is associated with increased suicidality, especially considering the increased visibility of “out” people in small-population contexts. Increased visibility is connected to higher rates of harassment. Within my data set, I can see elements of Ferlatte’s et al.’s findings: the two men whom I interviewed and observed who were from the most rural and socioeconomically challenged areas of the state (Fox and Gray, both of whom are from rural Southeast Alabama) were both being treated for depression and anxiety disorders at the time of our interview, and both had a history of psychiatric treatment. They both also experienced delayed “coming out” processes and greater challenges from family members. The commonalities of experience, though, should not be the focus of suicidality research among GLB populations, according to Travis Salway and Dionne Gesink, “Constructing and Expanding Suicide Narratives from Gay Men,” *Qualitative Health Research* 28, no. 11 (2018): 1788-1801. Salway and Gesink critique the overreliance on adolescent bullying narratives among suicidality studies, noting, “Such interventions are undeniably important for future generations of sexual minorities; however, stopping anti-gay bullying may be too little and too late for GLB adults who have accumulated a lifetime of social stress related to sexual stigma” (1789). They endorse a turn toward qualitative analysis of individual GLB narratives, “Qualitative research that exhibits the stories of sexual minorities who have experienced suicidal thoughts or actions offers a remedy to these limitations. In particular, unstructured narrative approaches complement quantitative studies by telling us how gay people themselves make sense of their histories of suicide attempts and how they convey these sensibilities to others. Survivors of suicide attempts can share previously unrealized ways of living and coping, and new strategies for preventing suicide. These strategies may be distinct from biomedical or psychological interventions and contextualized in ways that will ensure they are relevant and effective for gay people” (1789). They highlight effective narrative types, of which “memorial” (to me) yielded fruitful results by prompting “retrospective memorial accounts” characterized “by a sense of having *always known* one was gay” (1794). What precedes this footnote, and indeed this chapter, is ultimately a memorial narrative. The tales provided indirectly provide holistic, adult accounts for why gay men in my study context might experience suicidality at some point in their lives. Within this chapter, I direct your attention to moments in my life that contributed to suicidality that are not exclusively connected to anti-gay bullying in my youth (which I was mostly free from experiencing). Instead, I note my lifelong struggle with obsessive compulsive disorder, feelings of physical inadequacy compared to unrealistic body/beauty expectations within the gay community, substance abuse, isolation from support networks after college graduation and moving to Washington, DC, workplace discrimination, economic hardship, and sexual assault. My account documents *adult* problems that cannot be addressed by the body of literature that is preoccupied with adolescent GLB youth. Certainly, adolescent experiences shaped how well I handled *adult* problems, but it is too late to address adolescence for me. For example, I no longer experience threats of violence from peers or colleagues, nor am I harassed in office restrooms or locker rooms. Solutions for me must be much more complex. And narratives like mine must become more centralized in the discipline to better construct said solutions. For a breadth of additional resources on queer suicide (that influenced this chapter), see the following: (a) John Fenaughty and Niki Harre, “Life on the Seesaw,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, no. 1 (2003), 1-22, (b) Raechel Tiffe, “Grieving Toward the Horizon: A Reflection on Orlando, Queerworlds, and Latinx Angels” *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 7 (2017): 533-537 (Tiffe notes that queer people “live with ubiquitous grief, with the trauma of probable death” (533); this sentiment is echoed in my chapter when I note that death speaks and becomes so commonplace as to no longer be scary), (c) Sara Ahmed, “Queer Feelings,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013): 422-441 (Ahmed discusses “repetitive strain injuries” that result from “compulsory heterosexuality” which leaves bodies “contorted” and “twisted,” which is bodily violence impressed upon queer people and that has psychological ramifications. Also important, Ahmed revisits Judith Butler’s theory of queer melancholy, in which “heterosexual culture, having given up its capacity to grieve its own lost queerness, cannot grieve the loss of queer lives; it cannot admit that queer lives are lives that could be lost” (430). Sentiments like these help underscore a sense of “death is a better option” because a queer life is not valuable enough to remain alive), and (d) Jose Esteban Munoz, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, The Performativity of Race, and The Depressive Position,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013): 412-421.

JASPER: AN INTERLUDE

I came to Persimmon 'cause it was cheap²⁴⁵

That was my main motivating factor

I'd an eye toward government or law

Would be cool to be international

I am trilingual now. Spanish.²⁴⁶ English.

Catalan. Not useful, that third one, but:

Whatever.

Ev'ry time, we say goodbye

*I die a little.*²⁴⁷

Personality? I would say strong-willed

Funny? Hopefully. Sarcastic. Same thing.

Optimistic. That goes with well with strong-willed

“This is my goal; I’m going to get there”

Not optimistic. I change it to grit

When in a good mood: I’m pretty playful

Ev'ry time, we say goodbye

*I wonder why, a little*²⁴⁸

[You ever in a bad mood?]²⁴⁹

[What does that mood look like?]

²⁴⁵ Jasper was from Alabama, and thus, he received in-state tuition, though he would rather have gone to a private university out-of-state.

²⁴⁶ Jasper’s father is from Spain, so Jasper identifies predominately as white, but with Hispanic heritage. He is fluent in Spanish based on his upbringing in a Spanish-speaking household.

²⁴⁷ Cole Porter, “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye,” written 1944, Chappell & Company, song. I prefer the Carmen McRae version recorded in 1959 on the album *When You’re Away*.

²⁴⁸ “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye.”

²⁴⁹ Bracketed text indicates the questions that I asked Jasper during his narrative.

It's when I know that I've been truly wronged
I don't scream. I don't yell. I don't blow up.
I say hurtful things because I'm pissed off.
I was part of Barn Yard Fraternity
To be candid: it has closeted gays
Like really toxically closeted
Because of that, they discriminated
For anyone who seemed they might be gay
There was this guy; was the star pledge, you know
They loved him. They loved him. And then he quit
He had personal family matters
They thought that he thought that he was better
Told girls, "He's more interested in boys."
I thought, "Wow. They used that as a weapon"
That was the worst thing that you could label him
Not, "He's a thief" or "He's a drug addict"
It was "He's gay." Was the reason I dropped
It's weird living in this generation
No one cares. No one cares.²⁵⁰ Tellingly, at
Persimmon, it is rather different

²⁵⁰ Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Hilary B. Zimmerman, Melissa C. Aragon, Hannah Whang Sayston, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar found that 81% of college freshman in 2014 supported same-sex couples' right to marriage. Jasper's claim that in his generation "No one cares" if one is straight or not is substantiated by Eagan et al.'s findings. See, *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2014* (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, 2014). *The PEW Survey of LGBT Americans* also found that LGBT felt that the majority of the nation now seemed generally supportive of LGBT people. These data suggest that if LGBT students face discrimination and harassment on campus, at this point, it may largely be due to outdated policies or faculty, staff, and administrators of an older generation who operate under the cultural norms of their upbringings.

Why the Gods above me

Who must be in the know

Think so little of me

They allow you to go²⁵¹

In different schools

Someone would just ask

“Are you gay or not”

And he would say “No”

And that would be fine

There are so many

Boys on this campus

That built up pressure

Some part religious

Part reputation

Can't say anything

If somebody slurred

They would not cause fuss

They don't want to seem

Gay or blah, blah, blah

It's don't ask, don't tell

Self-imposed, you know?

When you're near

There's such an air

²⁵¹ “Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye.”

*Of spring about it*²⁵²

She called me, she knew

I dated a man

Called me a “faggot”

A simple guilty

Not guilty action

In Student Affairs

I don’t think the girl

Would have been punished²⁵³

I can hear a lark somewhere

*Begin to sing about it*²⁵⁴

There’s this whole supposition with gay men

If two of them are in proximity

Then they must be twiddling diddling

Rumors started at orientation

For that very same thing; if they’d asked me

They’d know; I’d been dating someone for years²⁵⁵

²⁵² “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye.”

²⁵³ Georgianna Martin, Christopher Broadhurst, Michael Hoffshire, and William Takewell conducted an exploratory qualitative study of “tempered radicals” within student affairs administrations at universities in the South. They found that LGBT-inclusive grassroots activism is always most effective when student affairs administrators are clear activists and intentional role models for LGBT students. One Dean of Students stated in an interview, “The most important thing we do is role model inclusion. Ten years from now, our students will not remember the first thing about what...I did technically. They could remember everything about how we conducted ourselves in public when it comes to matters of addressing [LGBTQ] identities” (8). When Jasper claims that student affairs at Persimmon probably would not have punished the student employee for calling him a “fag,” he indicates a personal belief that student affairs lacks visible role models or clear, intentional activists. His belief is colored by prior experiences with a conduct process involving close friend who was sexually assaulted at a fraternity house in addition to reporting a student government campaign for a male candidate that chanted, “[The opposing candidate] sits down when she pees.” The campaign went unpunished for its misogyny. See, “Students at the Margins’: Student Affairs Administrators Creating Inclusive Campuses for LGBTQ Students in the South,” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 55, no. 1 (2018): 1-13.

²⁵⁴ “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye.”

There's no love song finer

But how strange, the change

From major to minor

In Spain, there is one teacher per whole grade

The first-grade teacher was an out gay man

Nobody cared. I mean the children knew

He would walk in and say, "Hola" and the

Children would run up and give him a hug

None of the principals would be worried

It just doesn't matter. Know what I mean?

*Ev'ry time, we say goodbye*²⁵⁶

I was half closeted at Persimmon

I wanted to get somewhere, to achieve

There are people who won't let you get there

Just from the way you speak, the way you dress

Not want you to get to the top at all

A lot of them were closeted gay men

Somewhere there's music

How faint the tune

Somewhere there's Heaven

²⁵⁵ Jasper echoes Anthony D'Augelli's finding, regarding identity development of college-aged queer students, that there is a common "view that gay men are solitary and cannot form relationships of any duration because of sexual excesses" and the lack of "social and cultural apparatuses for heterosexual bonding" (327). Jasper indicates that he does not have the luxury of "bonding" apparatuses, and even if he did, he'd be presumed to be engaging in sexual activity with the other gay man in the social, professional, or academic context. That condition plagues gay men specifically, who, like Jasper, are consistently treated as potential sexual harassment violators. See, "Identity Development and Sexual Orientation: Toward a Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Development," in *Human Diversity: Perspectives on People in Context*, ed. E.J. Tackett, R.J. Watts, and D. Birman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994): 312-333.

²⁵⁶ "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye."

*How high the moon*²⁵⁷

[I can't have it, you can't have it, either]²⁵⁸

There is no moon above

When love is far away, too

Til it comes true

*That you love me as I love you*²⁵⁹

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah²⁶⁰

Somewhere there's music

It's where you are

Somewhere there's Heaven

*How near, how far*²⁶¹

The goal isn't really that every

Single Persimmon administrator

Is an ally and is great. Like whatever

The important thing: the student body

²⁵⁷ Nancy Hamilton and Morgan Lewis, "How High the Moon," introduced 1940, in *Two for the Show*, Broadway revue. I prefer the Sarah Vaughan live recording from 1957 at Mr. Kelly's in Chicago.

²⁵⁸ Kristen A. Renn and Brent Bilodeau suggest that involvement in identity-specific organizations and leadership opportunities is one of the most effective means for students to develop a positive identity (sense of self worth). They also point out that general leadership and involvement may not necessarily holistic, positive LGBT identity development; thus, LGBT identity development opportunities must be a "central purpose" (68). One participant in the study said, "I don't think I would be as out as I am if it wasn't for [LGBT] activism. Because when you're an activist, you're forced out of the closet by the fact that your face is on the front page of a newspaper" (58). Another said, "After the [LGBT] conference, I think, I really felt like carrying on after the conference ended into how I acted...I kept those kinds of things in mind and it just kind of sat there through the summer. I'm out. I've got this [rainbow flag] on my bag and I'm just out fully. Everybody knows. It's a great feeling, and I believe the conference was doing that" (58). Jasper's narrative here indicates a condition in which gay men, lacking opportunity for healthy LGBT identity development through student affairs, perform a toxic masculinity and also punish their peers who are out, largely in order to protect their own closeted identities. For more information about LGBT student involvement, see, "Queer Student Leaders: An Exploratory Case Study of Identity Development and LGBT Student Involvement at a Midwestern Research University," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* 2, no. 4 (2005): 49-71.

²⁵⁹ "How High the Moon."

²⁶⁰ Jasper's repeated use of "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah" reminded me of the scat sections of Sarah Vaughan's interpretation of "How High the Moon," hence why I prefer readers listen to that recording, if possible.

²⁶¹ "How High the Moon."

Becomes that way. Students come here. Feel at home

Not tolerated. But they're accepted

Reality is: it's twenty eighteen

Part of campus is in twenty eighteen

Part of campus is in the AIDS crisis

The darkest night would shine

If you would come to me soon

Until you will how still my heart

*How high the moon*²⁶²

[How do you find a boyfriend on campus?]

Look at me

I'm as helpless as

A kitten up a tree

And I feel like

I'm clinging to a cloud

I can't understand

I get misty

*Just holding your hand*²⁶³

Being a fucking KGB agent

You had to sniff them out in secret

It is very hard to find a boyfriend

Many times, you find a partner through friends

²⁶² "How High the Moon."

²⁶³ Erroll Garner, "Misty," written in 1954, on *Contrasts*, EmArcy, record. Originally charted by Johnny Mathis in 1959; however, I prefer Billy Eckstine's interpretation performed live in 1960 and recorded on the album *No Cover, No Minimum*, Roulette, record.

With Collier, I thought maybe he was gay
He thought maybe I was. We took the plunge
If either one of us would have been wrong
That would have been a giant disaster
I went in for a kiss before knowing
[Bold! And you don't drink. You did it sober!]
Completely sober. Thank God it worked out
I don't get why people just are not out
But I guess that is hypocritical
Because technically I was not out
I'd a really full social calendar
I felt really fulfilled. Once in a while
I felt it, "I have no romantic life"
Walk my way
And a thousand violins
Begin to play
Or it might be the sound
Of your "Hello!"
That music I hear
I get misty
*The moment you're near*²⁶⁴
So many vanilla gays are hidden
It's the rainbow surprises that are not

²⁶⁴ "Misty."

Because they can't be hidden on campus

You can say that

You're leading me on

But it's just what

I want you to do

Don't you notice

How hopelessly I'm lost

That's why I'm

*Following you*²⁶⁵

I was standing in Iceland on a hike

With my fucking Australian boy friend

We were at the point where the Eurasian

And North American tectonic plates

Meet. And the tour guide said, "The plates converge"

"The two worlds are pulling apart," he said

I thought, "I have a choice: Do I want to

"Converge? Do I want this part of my life

"Where I've been really myself in Europe?

"Or do I want to be in America?"

All it took was moving across the world²⁶⁶

On my own

²⁶⁵ "Misty."

²⁶⁶ This segment of Jasper's narrative inspired the song selection for his chapter. Being on the line between North American and Eurasia with an Australian boyfriend whom Jasper met in Spain seemed so absurdly and classically romantic that I decided jazz standards best exemplified the musical mood of his story. The fact that Jasper left his boyfriend behind to return to America influenced the selection of the melancholic, though hopeful, selection of "Misty" as the closing number to bring the musical selections full circle back to "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye."

*Would I wander through
This wonderland alone
Never knowing my
Right foot from my left
My hat from my glove
I'm too misty
And too much in love²⁶⁷*

I decided to
Come back after all
In Ibiza, met
a gender fluid
Man with long hair and
Full face of makeup
He's from Mexico
I said that I felt
“Didn't owe a story”
But he stopped me short
“If not for people
Privileged like you
To make friends with the
Straight people out there
People like me would
Be dead and buried.”

²⁶⁷ “Misty.”

I like being someone's
First ever gay friend
To make somebody
Friendly to gay men
You must be one who
Is gay and friendly
*I'm just too misty*²⁶⁸
[What is a selling point for coming out?]
You are happier.
Physically like
A release. Do you know?
I am happy in
A way I did not
Realize that I
Was not happy
I thought that I was
But then I came out
And I knew myself
The very first time
*And too much in love*²⁶⁹
All it took was moving across the world.
Just do it. Bite the bullet. Don't be scared.

²⁶⁸ "Misty."

²⁶⁹ "Misty."

ADOLFO AND TEDDY: A QUEEN OUT²⁷⁰

*You're going to dance. And have some fun.*²⁷¹

Teddy

I'm a new gay.

<<<Club look

Black cap, worn backward

Black denim

Spiderman top

Black suede heels

Louboutin style²⁷²>>>

Benjamin

When you first got here, what did you learn?

<<<Club look

Black tee with rainbow lip graphic

Black mesh shorts

Black tights

Silver Ferragamo sandals>>>

Teddy

I was never exposed to gay music.

Q-Tip

*Dig!*²⁷³

<<<Club look

Some pseudo

psychedelic jumpsuit²⁷⁴>>>

Benjamin

Like disco?

²⁷⁰ I first met Adolfo and Teddy at Bumpers, where they performed as part of an amateur drag exhibition. As you will read, Teddy won the exhibition "Drag Boot Camp." Subsequently, each became bar tenders at Bumpers, and each routinely performed at Friday (and the occasional Saturday) evening drag shows. Since the bulk of my interactions were at Bumpers for drag shows, in addition to periodic contact through the local Pride organization, I structured this chapter around what Adolfo labeled "A Queen Out." A Queen Out occurs when a queer person (Adolfo uses "gay," but it really could apply to anyone along the spectrum) is in a safe space and hears a beloved song; the combination prompts musical abandon, and the individual dances with freedom and joy. Adolfo "queens out" to nineties pop music, which informed the musical selection for the chapter. The visual structure mimics an interaction on a dance floor, with each of us positioned in separate spots, holding court on an imagined barroom dance floor. The text within arrowed brackets indicates what we each typically wear to the bar and exemplifies dance moves I observed Teddy and Adolfo incorporating into their own drag performances.

²⁷¹ "Groove is in the Heart," by Deee-Lite, recorded 1990, track 9 on *World Clique*, Elektra.

²⁷² Louboutin style usually implies a three- to four-inch heel with the toes resting on a one-inch platform, giving the wearer approximately 5 inches of raised height.

²⁷³ "Groove is in the Heart."

²⁷⁴ I make this assumption based on the music video for "Groove is in the Heart."

Adolfo
And even like the kiki²⁷⁵ stuff, music that only
A select group of people would know like...
<<<Club look
Technicolor tank, printed
Cut-off denim shorts
High top black leather sneakers>>>

Teddy
Werqin' Girl by Shangela.²⁷⁶

Benjamin
Can you spell that?

Teddy
I thought she was the coolest thing.
I didn't know it was a man.
I didn't know anything about it.
<<<Dances in series of struts
Pouty mouthed
Dazzles via periodic back handsprings>>>

Benjamin
I once got into a fight
with a guy at a fraternity party
over whether Natasha Richardson's
or Liza Minnelli's Sally Bowles was better.²⁷⁷
Then we each had the nerve to
say we were straight.
It was a purely musical discussion.
<<<Dips low to remove himself
from the line of vision of most
on the dancefloor
Pops up and down in a semi-squat>>>

Lady Miss Kier²⁷⁸
The chills that you spill
Up my back keep me filled
With satisfaction when we're done
*Satisfaction of what's to come*²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ In queer subculture, "kiki" refers to social gatherings, largely for queer people of color, to dance and socialize (and, presumably share gossip). Adolfo seems to use it to underscore the insular nature of kikis, in which participants develop inside jokes and tastes.

²⁷⁶ Shangela was a drag performer made famous as the first contestant eliminated on season two of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. She released the single "Werqin' Girl" in 2012.

²⁷⁷ Refers to the 1990s Broadway revival of *Cabaret* and the 1972 film version, respectively. Liza Minnelli's is better.

²⁷⁸ Lead vocalist of Deee-Lite.

²⁷⁹ "Groove is in the Heart."

Teddy

I wasn't into Britney Spears or Christina.
Shania Twain was like the gayest thing I was into.
Without even knowing that she was a gay idol.

Benjamin
I wouldn't call her that.

Adolfo

If a certain song from comes on,
Most gays I've met will start queening out.
<<<Spins, dervish-like
Arms raised, bent at the elbows>>>

Benjamin
But Shania is not one of them.

Adolfo

I queen out to nineties pop.
<<<Flips hair
Drags hand up left thigh>>>

Lady Miss Kier
Your groove I do deeply dig
No walls only the bridge
My supper dish
*My succotash wish*²⁸⁰

Teddy

I learned to love it.
<<<Sashays and winks>>>

Benjamin
One component of being a new gay
is relearning how to be in relationships with people.²⁸¹
<<<Awkwardly holds drink in the air
To prevent neighboring dancers from knocking it>>>

Teddy

Right. So, like in high school,
I dated girls and stuff.
When I was dating girls,
I saw them, and I would think,
Oh, I would date her, or whatever.

²⁸⁰ "Groove is in the Heart."

²⁸¹ Refer to previous discussions about glass closets and coming out. I refer to the condition in which queer people must rebuild friendships/relationships around a newly revealed queer identity.

Benjamin
Adolfo, were you closeted like that?
Like, scoring girls and such?

Adolfo
My dad still doesn't know I'm gay.
My great-grandmother's health has not been great.
My dad is very, I'm going to take care of you.
For some reason, my being gay and coming have just
seemed like something that would hurt him.
Or just add another stress.
My dad's girlfriend, they just got married,
her son is gay.
Do I think my family is usually tolerant?
Yes. I don't really know why it's an issue to come out.
It's just something that I kind of put off.
<<<Saunters amongst other men
Extending right hand
to caress shoulders and chests>>>

Lady Miss Kier
DJ Soul was on a roll
I been told he can't be sold
Not vicious or malicious
Just de-lovely and delicious²⁸²

Teddy
Girls don't have crushes on me anymore,
now that I don't hold it back or act straight.
People can tell I guess.
The change in mannerisms happened,
because I was like, I'm going to do what
I'm going to do.
I dated one guy back home.
Not a single person knew.
We couldn't risk someone finding out.
Then I came here and saw guys as datable.
It was a learning experience.
<<<Hands on knees
Back arched
A slight twerk
As much as a twink can manage>>>

Benjamin
Did you have any ambition
for being involved on campus?

²⁸² "Groove is in the Heart."

<<<Vogue-ing
The lazy gay's ideal dance
Showcases a new manicure
And new jewelry>>>

Q-Tip
Feelin' kinda high
Like a Hendrix haze
Music makes motion
Moves like a maze
All inside of me
Heart especially
Help of the rhythm
*Where I wanna be*²⁸³

Adolfo
I was in a fraternity.
A historically mainstream fraternity.
I was Vice President, then I ran for President.
All of a sudden, gay became an issue.
People stood up.
We had votes.
It was like, Do you see him being the face
of the fraternity?
It was hurtful to hear that my image
was more important than the work I'd done.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ "Groove is in the Heart."

²⁸⁴ Robert A. Rhoads wrote an oft-cited ethnography on fraternity life, in which he found that fraternities are traditionally hostile to homosexuality (see "Whales tales, Dog Piles, and Beer Goggles: An Ethnographic Case Study of Fraternity Life," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1995): 306-324.). Leo Reisberg, in 1998, reported that approximately 70% of fraternity men reported homophobic attitudes within their chapters (see, "Seeking Acceptance on Fraternity Row," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 45, no. 6 (1998): A45.). Jeffrey A. Hall and Betty H. La France, nearly ten years later, in a study analyzing group cohesion on hetero-identity concern, found that 53% of respondents still believed having gay members would be "bad." They elaborate, "homophobic communication is likely to be prevalent in fraternities because a heterosexual man does not want to appear to be homosexual, believing that his relationships with other heterosexual men may be challenged by that appearance. Men's relationships with one another within the fraternity are crucial to the cohesion of the group, and maintaining friendships is the central concern of every member of the group" (45). They also note that if "participants perceived that the presence of gay fraternity members would reduce trust and cohesiveness within the fraternity, hamper member recruitment, and damage relationships with sororities, participants held more negative attitudes about gay fraternity members" (52) (see, "Attitudes and Communication of Homophobia in Fraternities: Separating the Impact of Social Adjustment Function from Hetero-Identity Concern," *Communication Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2007): 39-60.) Frank Harris III and Shaun R. Harper, in an otherwise rather rosy and delusional piece on "productive masculinities," included a participant who stated that the key factor in reducing his fraternity's homophobia was electing a gay president; he says, "Our president last year was gay, so you're not going to call your president a fag. So that kind of ended that" (714). I write that this is delusional, considering that the gay man must first be elected to the chapter presidency in order to end a culture that is homophobic, which implies that he may never get the opportunity. Indeed, Grahaeme A. Hesp and Jeffrey S. Brooks site the work of Douglas N. Case, in which a national survey revealed that 80% of gay fraternity men held up to 1 leadership position and approximately 20% were chapter presidents. Hesp's and Brooks's study included interviews with gay fraternity men, most of whom acknowledged the importance of face-to-face interaction to reduce homophobia. One participant notes, "My brothers learned just from being around me. Just interacting with me, they have a new sense of respect and understanding about homosexuality. A [safe zone] program would almost be futile because it would kinda undermine the gay member himself, saying that his

<<<Performs something vaguely psychedelic
Kind of wobbly and wavy
Like a cast member of Hair>>>

Benjamin
I remember a friend telling me
that her sorority's code for black-balling
a girl was to yell out during rush,
She's a lesbian.²⁸⁵

Q-Tip
Flowin' glowin'
With electric eyes
You dip to the dive
Baby you'll realize
Baby you'll see
The funky side of me
Baby you'll see
*That rhythm is the key*²⁸⁶

Teddy
With band, I did strive to be section leader.
I found out that my band director would
talk about me in meetings with the band staff.
We would talk about me and my friend Jed,
who is gay. And so he would ask,
What's up with Teddy and Jed?
Year after year, I wouldn't get section leader.
By my fourth year, I was like, I'm done.
Not feeling appreciated sucked.
<<<Stepping toward Benjamin
Like a member of En Vogue in the
"Never Gonna Get It" Video>>>

Q-Tip
Get get ready with it

presence wasn't education enough" (403). Again, as Adolfo's narrative exhibits, expecting the gay member to successfully combat a heteronormative (at best) or homophobic fraternity culture independently is a bit of a pipe dream. For additional participant responses from these studies, see: Frank Harris III and Shaun R. Harper, "Beyond Bad Behaving Brothers: Productive Performances of Masculinities Among College Fraternity Men," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 27, no. 6 (2014): 703-723; Douglas N. Case, "A Glimpse of the Invisible Membership: A National Survey of Lesbian Greek Members," *Perspectives* 23, no. 3 (1996): 5-8; and Grahaeme A. Hesp and Jeffrey S. Brooks, "Heterosexism and Homophobia on Fraternity Row: A Case Study of a College Fraternity Community," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 6, no. 4 (2009): 395-415.

²⁸⁵ The Greek Life Director at the time had to remind sororities that they could not actively discriminate against lesbians, although little to no formal oversight existed to combat such practices within chapters.

²⁸⁶ "Groove is in the Heart."

*Can't can't quit it
Stomp on the street
When I hear a funk beat
Playing pied piper
Follow what's true
Baby just sing about the groove²⁸⁷*

Adolfo
I think that Persimmon is a pretty positive place.
I'm sure that people have had, um,
not so tolerant experiences.
But my perspective is that there's tolerance.

Benjamin
But what about acceptance?
If you wanted Persimmon to improve,
what would be your top three things that
you would want them to change?
<<<Slowly swaying as if Sade
Is playing rather than Deee-Lite>>>

'N Sync
*It's tearin' up my heart
When I'm with you
And when we are apart
I feel it too²⁸⁸*

Adolfo
I'll queen out to this.
<<<Hops into a formation
That resembles an upright
Snow angel>>>

Benjamin
This reminds me of kissing girls
at middle school dances.
Ew.

'N Sync
*Baby, I don't understand
Why we can't be lovers²⁸⁹*

Benjamin
That's what they said.

²⁸⁷ "Groove is in the Heart."

²⁸⁸ "Tearin' Up My Heart," by 'N Sync, recorded 1997, track 1 on *'N Sync*, RCA.

²⁸⁹ "Tearin' Up My Heart."

Teddy
Ha.

<<<Arms raised and waving like a
Baptist choir member who caught
The spirit during MaryMary's "Shackles">>>

Benjamin
Back to the question.
<<<Head bobbing
Puckers lips
Like it's a dance move>>>

Adolfo
I recently came back from Vancouver.
There was a police badge
right where you walk out of Starbucks
with a rainbow painted over it.
I felt it said: This is a safe space; feel free.
It was openly advertised that
crimes against the LGBT community
would not be tolerated.
I'd love to see something like that here.
I know that we don't have a community center,
or office, or program...
<<<Hugs himself like a topless dancer
Who's still trying to cover herself
Leans forward and blows a kiss>>>

Benjamin
We don't.
I doubt one will happen.²⁹⁰

'N Sync
*Baby don't misunderstand
What I'm tryin' to tell ya
In the corner of my mind*²⁹¹

Adolfo
Corner of my mind

²⁹⁰ A reminder that Persimmon hired its first LGBT Coordinator in 2018. The city did not provide LGBT-inclusive resources, either; however, Persimmon allowed the local Pride organization to present a float in the city Christmas parade. They denied the Pride organization a permit to have a Pride parade during the June Pride Festival. The adjacent town allowed a Pride parade, to backlash from the public. To avoid appearing discriminatory, the town eliminated all parades from the schedule (including the Christmas parade) to eradicate future Pride parades. The city reversed this policy within months to accommodate a Christmas Parade and Pride Parade. Local media reported on the controversy; however, I refrain from citing those media to preserve the anonymity of participants within this study.

²⁹¹ "Tearin' Up My Heart."

<<<Mimicking the marionette
Dance from a different 'N Sync video>>>

'N Sync
*Baby it feels like we're
Running out of time*²⁹²

Teddy
When I came to Persimmon,
I had no idea that there was an LGBT group.
Maybe a class or something?
Or maybe LGBT history?
<<<Hands on hips
Bent slightly at the waist
Sways toward Benjamin and Adolfo>>>

Benjamin
But as a freshman, would you have taken a class like that?²⁹³
<<<Slightly gyrates hips
Knee pops
Places drink on the floor to massage patella>>>

Teddy
Maybe not my first semester.
But once I did let people know I was gay,
and wasn't hiding it, I think it would have been
cool to learn about gays and our history.

'N Sync
*Let it go
If you want me girl
Let me know
I am down
On my knees
I can't take it anymore*²⁹⁴

Benjamin
When did you first come out, Adolfo?

Adolfo

²⁹² "Tearin' Up My Heart."

²⁹³ Hesp's and Brooks's participants, all of whom are gay, suggest that no one would go to an LGBT history course willingly. At Persimmon's campus, that logic may hold, considering Women's Studies courses are largely under-enrolled and Safe Zone Training is treated as a punishment rather than a proactive learning opportunity (i.e. individuals are sent to Safe Zone Training after being reported for homophobic discrimination or the use of slurs).

²⁹⁴ "Tearin' Up My Heart."

*It's tearin' up my heart
When I'm with you
When we are apart
I feel it too*²⁹⁵

Benjamin
Adolfo?

Adolfo
Huh? Oh. College.
Probably my freshman year.²⁹⁶
<<<Shaking head and turning it to face Benjamin
Cha-cha slides
Then turns around, pivoting on left foot>>>

Benjamin
When did you first realize
that you were gay?

Adolfo
Mid high school?
I dated girls.
Had sexual experiences with girls.
I had thoughts like, If I were gay,
I shouldn't be able to do this with girls.

Christina Aguilera
*Come on over
Come on over, baby
Hey boy, don't you know
I've got something going on
I've got an invitation
Don't keep me waiting
All night long
I know, you know
So baby don't pretend
You won't give me...*²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ "Tearin' Up My Heart."

²⁹⁶ I must indicate some descriptive statistical findings here: of the ten men in this study (including myself), six came out in college, two came out in high school, and two came out after college. Of the six men who came out during college, five of them came out during the freshman year, once they became involved in coursework or organizations that were affirming of LGBT people. Jason, for example, came out after taking his first design class, which was populated by other gay men. Teddy came out after meeting gay friends in band. The freshman year, I conclude, is a site for major homosexual identity development shifts, and should be a focal point of administrative intervention and future academic study.

²⁹⁷ "Come On Over Baby (All I Want is You)," by Christina Aguilera, recorded 1998-1999, track 5 on *Christina Aguilera*, RCA.

Benjamin
I guess all three gave...

Adolfo
I thought, Well I've never done
anything with a girl, and I have these
thoughts in the back of my mind,
so therefore...

Teddy
I would think like, Oh, I would date her.
<<<And it's the pelvic thrust
That really drives you insane>>>

Benjamin
I remember touching my first boob.
She had to prod me into using both hands.
<<<Does that thing with his hands
Where he circles them around each other
Like in a conga line
What the fuck?>>>

Christina Aguilera
I'm not just talkin'
*About your sexuality*²⁹⁸

Benjamin
Aren't we, though?

Christina Aguilera
But I can't help myself
*When you put your hands on me*²⁹⁹

Benjamin
Poor thing.
<<<Dances the
French Mistake>>>

Teddy
Persimmon was kind of a clean slate
for me to come out.
Where I'm from, I knew maybe three gay people.
<<<Strikes the "Liza With a Z" pose>>>

Benjamin

²⁹⁸ "Come On Over Baby."

²⁹⁹ "Come On Over Baby."

There was one out guy in my grade.
When we got our STD talk in the auditorium,
and the presenter mentioned AIDS,
everyone in the auditorium looked at that guy.
He responded, What the fuck are you bitches
looking at?

Teddy

When I came to marching band, there were the band gays.

Adolfo

When I came to Persimmon,
I met people at Bumpers.
I think I heard about it through people in my
department who were also gay.
<<<Leans back
Kicks right leg up onto bar>>>

Teddy

I got closer to people.
I knew that they were, and they knew that I was.
Usually the other person would ask,
Oh, are you dating anyone?
And usually I'd be like, Oh, no I'm not.
<<<Runs his fingers up Adolfo's leg
Then spins and squats
Drags his rump across Adolfo's groin>>>

Adolfo

I was introduced to a group of people.
And then there was like five or six people.
But then they would tell me about this other group.
That they didn't hang out with.
Like, it's such a small gay community.
How can you have circles within a circle that's
not even that big?

Teddy

Jed, he's been my best friend since freshman year,
had one of his friends ask me if I was gay.
Then he found out through his friend.
That was the basis for my friend group forming.
We were in band, but beyond that we were gay in band.

Adolfo

Coming from Miami, I get it.
I can't be friends with every single person.
But making sure that people in this community

understand that there aren't enough
of us to be cliquey...Don't get me wrong
I talk crap about those same people.³⁰⁰
I don't particularly love every single choice.
But if I'm having a party at my house,
I invite them.
Because I want the entire community there.
<<<Leans chest forward
Extends arms and makes a beckoning gesture
Sashays across the dance floor
Like Liza Minnelli singing "Cabaret.">>>

Benjamin
That's something that struck me
when I came back.
The cliques had names.
<<<Sits on a bar stool
Criss-crosses legs
At the knees
Then the ankles>>>

Teddy
The Matildas.³⁰¹

Benjamin
Yes.

Adolfo
*All I want is you*³⁰²
<<<Spins rapidly
With abandon
Arms akimbo
Hair, Beyonce-esque, flowing>>>

Christina Aguilera
Come over here baby

Adolfo
All I want is you

Christina Aguilera
You know you make me

³⁰⁰ Presumably at a kiki.

³⁰¹ The Matildas were a local kiki. They dated amongst each other, from what I could tell, had parties at each others' homes, and travelled together. The Matildas' main excursion was to Panama City Beach Pride each summer. I was and am not a Matilda, though three Matildas participated in this study.

³⁰² "Come On Over Baby."

*Go crazy*³⁰³

Adolfo
*All I want is you*³⁰⁴

Christina Aguilera
Now baby don't be shy
*You better cross the line*³⁰⁵

Benjamin
While she's over there losing herself,
when you were in undergrad,
who would you consider a role model?

Teddy
Adolfo's probably going to laugh at me for this.
My freshman year, I rushed a band fraternity.
<<<Performs a march>>>

Benjamin
Oh, jeez.

Adolfo
I'm gonna love you right
*'Cause all I want is you*³⁰⁶

Benjamin
Adolfo might not have wanted you if you'd
been in a band fraternity.

Teddy
It was just because one of my
straight friends was doing it.
<<<Continues to march
Mimes a trumpet
Bends at the waist
And mimes the trumpet
Being played through his spread legs>>>

Benjamin
Um, hum.

Destiny's Child

³⁰³ "Come On Over Baby."

³⁰⁴ "Come On Over Baby."

³⁰⁵ "Come On Over Baby."

³⁰⁶ "Come On Over Baby."

*Say my name, say my name
If no one is around you
Say baby I love you
If you ain't runnin' games*

Teddy

Actually, no?
One of my gay friends did it, as well.

Benjamin

Not this one; they tried to get me.
I wasn't even in band.
<<<Makes jazz hands
Continue to not be a thing
That sophisticated dancers do>>>

Teddy

After I dropped, one of the leaders
was like super gay, super flamboyant.
It was Sebastian...
<<<Runs across the dance floor
Does a split leap
Directly under a strobe light>>>

Destiny's Child
*Say my name, say my name
You actin' kind of shady
Ain't callin' me baby
Betta say my name³⁰⁷*

Teddy

He was, you know, third or fourth year
at this point.
So seeing this older gay...

Benjamin

Older gay? In 2013?
I really am a Persimmon antique.
Like the Panhellenic President said.
<<<Gets down to a jazz square>>>

Teddy

...who was out, he showed me that
you can be out and you can be in band
and do fraternity stuff.
He called me his gayby.

³⁰⁷ "Say My Name," by Destiny's Child, recorded 1998-1999, track 12 on *The Writing's on the Wall*, Columbia.

That's like the one older gay person that I knew
who had experienced a few years of college.

I learned from him.

I was exposed to a lot more gay people
outside band through him, and I saw that
there were more than just the band gays.

<<<Takes Benjamin's arms
Leads him in a hip-hop-infused waltz>>>

Destiny's Child

*I know you say
That I am assuming things
Something's goin' down
That's the way it seems
Shouldn't be the reason
Why you're actin' strange
If nobody's holdin'
You back from me³⁰⁸*

Adolfo

What's the question?
<<<Bobbing head>>>

Benjamin
Role model?
In the culture at large?

Teddy
RuPaul.
A lot of people would say it.

Benjamin
That's a prescient answer.
My next question is regarding drag.

Teddy
It's a gay person that is so transparent
and mainstream and isn't holding back
for anybody and is actually famous
for being gay...

Adolfo
Not to interrupt, but I think the gay
role model thing is interesting.
Am I going to pick somebody who's gay?
And they're gay first and foremost?

³⁰⁸ "Say My Name."

Those people are attacked because they're
leading with that; that's the foot they put forward.
On the other side of it, you have people who
I wouldn't say that they hide it, but it's not...
 <<<Spinning
But like a figure skater
One arm up, one extended
Making an L>>>

Benjamin
Foregrounded...

Adolfo
 It's like Adam Rippon.³⁰⁹
You're starting to see people who make it
 a big part of who they are.
 Then there's Gus Kenworthy.
 He's done ads with another man.³¹⁰
They're both naked, and they're very clearly gay.
 But that's not what he talks about all the time.
 It's a limiting question.
 You ask yourself, "What kind of gay role model
 are you talking about?"
<<<Ends in a pose and exhales rapidly>>>

Benjamin
What does it say about me?
 That they're my role model?

Adolfo
Right.

Benjamin
 I don't even have one.
My role model is Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Destiny's Child
What is up with this
 Tell the truth
 Who you with
How would you like it if

³⁰⁹ A professional figure skater who made headlines for refusing to meet with Vice President Mike Pence prior to the 2017 Winter Olympics on the basis of Pence's support of conversion therapy.

³¹⁰ Kenworthy is a professional skier who also made headlines for indicating that he would refuse an invitation to the Trump White House, if he won an Olympic medal. Adolfo did not indicate which advertisement he refers to; however, Kenworthy was featured in a major, national campaign for Head & Shoulders shampoo titled "Shoulders are for Greatness." The commercial featured Kenworthy waving a Rainbow flag.

*I came over with my clique
Don't try to change it now
See you gotta bounce
When two seconds ago
You said you just got in the house³¹¹*

Teddy

The opposite would be Ellen.³¹²
She's obviously a lesbian.
But she's not always like,
Hey, I'm a lesbian.
She just does her thing
and happens to be a lesbian.
She's the sweetest person in the world.
Having her as a very visible gay person
can help with overall image of gays.

Gloria Estefan
*De mi tierra bella
De mi tierra santa
Oigo ese grito de los tambores
Y los timbales al cumbanchar³¹³*

Benjamin

Adolfo, it's your roots.
This goes back to what you were
saying about what you choose to
foreground regarding your identity.
<<<Takes Adolfo by the hand
Leads him in the whitest Samba
Anyone ever attempted>>>

Adolfo

Right?
Being Cuban and Puerto Rican,
and having grown up in Miami, cooking
is something that is super important to me.
<<<Forces Benjamin's hips closer to his
And leads him in a more competent samba>>>

Gloria Estefan
*Y ese pregon que canta hermano
Que de su tierra vive lejano*

³¹¹ "Say My Name."

³¹² Ellen DeGeneres. According to the *PEW Survey of LGBT Americans* in 2013, Ellen DeGeneres is the most admired celebrity among the LGBT community.

³¹³ "Mi Tierra," by Gloria Estefan, recorded 1992-1993, track 2 on *Mi Tierra*, Epic.

*Y gue el recuerdo le hace llorar*³¹⁴

Benjamin
I once made a salad with what
I thought was lettuce.
Turned out to be a cabbage.

Adolfo
Every family event that I've ever had
was centered around food.
<<<Releases Benjamin
Steps apart
Takes his dress to one side
Waves it like a flag as he spins>>>

Benjamin
Mine were centered around red wine
and regret.

Adolfo
Food makes most people happy.

Benjamin
I think I might need cool sculpting.
<<<Flailing to make himself jiggle>>>

Gloria Estefan
*Una cancion que vive entonando
De su dolor de su propio llanto
Y se le escucha penar*³¹⁵

Adolfo
I cook.
I always tell people,
It's how you communicate.
<<<Doing a cha-cha that ends in a squat
Hands raised in a V>>>

Gloria Estefan
*La tierra te duele
La tierra te da
En medio del alma
Cuando tu no estas*

Adolfo

³¹⁴ "Mi Tierra."

³¹⁵ "Mi Tierra."

I collect a lot of time and energy
into something I've prepared.
People come over, and they'll appreciate it.
That's an attraction.
That's inclusion.

Gloria Estefan
La tierra te empuja
De raíz y cal
La tierra suspira
*Si no te ve mas*³¹⁶

Benjamin
Is there anything about
your cultural heritage that you feel
creates additional burdens for coming out?

Teddy
Or being more accepted?
<<<Joining Adolfo in a
Revival of the Samba>>>

Adolfo
I've struggled with that question.
I think there is a cultural element to coming out.³¹⁷
In some minority groups, it's harder to come out.
Black culture can be different from Hispanic culture
can be different from Asian culture.
With Latin culture, and definitely in Miami,
I think it's harder to come out.

³¹⁶ "Mi Tierra."

³¹⁷ Much has been written about the coming out experiences of queer people of color; however, the body of literature is dwarfed by the amount of literature surrounding White queer people. Juan Battle writes prolifically on black sexuality, and in conjunction with Sandra L. Barnes, edited a useful volume on the subject: *Black Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010). Jose Esteban Munoz helps bring Kimberle Crenshaw's "intersectionality" paradigm into queer theory through his work on "disidentification" which is meant to be "descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). In addition, "Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (11). In Adolfo's case, his reluctance to come out, specifically to his father, exhibits the dual-pronged challenge of fitting into society as a Latino man *and* as a gay man. Even within his own ethnic minority group, he must negotiate a gay identity that is culturally contested, just like he must negotiate a Latino identity in a queer culture dominated by White normativity. When Adolfo mentions that his uncle is gay and that his father may not necessarily be opposed to his son being gay, his reluctance indicates that perhaps adding "gay" to the conversation of his identity is more negotiation than he's willing to take on. Adolfo's narrative is useful in depicting how White privilege may still operate within the minority group that is the queer community; it seems counterintuitive to claim privilege as a gay person, but I only have to fight marginalization on one front, whereas queer people of color (specifically queer women and transgender people of color) must fight marginalization on multiple fronts. Who wouldn't want to avoid coming out, since being an ethnic minority is challenge enough? See *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

In my family, I don't think it's harder.
My uncle is gay and out and open.

Gloria Estefan
*La tierra donde naciste no
La puedes olvidar
Porque tiene tus raíces
Y lo que dejas atrás*³¹⁸

Adolfo
Now he was the butt of some jokes.
But my uncle who's fat,
he's the butt of jokes there.
Being gay was definitely something
that was talked about.
But I think it's hard in Hispanic culture.
But do I think my family is unusually tolerant?
Yes.

Benjamin
For me, people with my background
seem okay with being gay, but they
are not okay with giving up social class.
<<<Doing a singular tango back to his bar stool >>>

Adolfo
Yeah.

Benjamin
Going from privileged to not privileged.
Like, be gay, but just don't come out.
What's that called? The glass closet?
The gays I knew in undergrad never
hung out together because they didn't
want to draw too much attention to
themselves.³¹⁹

Gloria Estefan
*Siguen los pregones, la melancolia
Y cada noche junto a la luna
Sigue el guajiro entonando el son*

³¹⁸ "Mi Tierra."

³¹⁹ Don Johnson wrote of the tendency of gay adolescents to become "the best little boy on the face of the earth" (38) to avoid speculation into their sexual orientation tendencies. He writes that the "best little boy" tendency translates into highly performative assimilation to blend into heterosexual peer groups as much as possible. One may infer that assimilation is performed to preserve the privileges of the heterosexual peer group. White gay men, in particular, have incentive to assimilate, since straight White men hold the most cultural privilege in the global cultural context. See, "The Developmental Experience of Gay/Lesbian Youth," *Journal of College Admissions* 152-153 (1996): 38-41.

*Y cada calle que va a mi pueblo
Tiene un quejido, tiene un lamento
Tiene nostalgia como su voz³²⁰*

Adolfo

So, my friends in Miami were
very much like me.
We were just going out,
drinking, talking to people,
and going home.
Dressing really cute
and that kind of thing.
Then I came to Persimmon,
and it's much smaller.
If there are ten gay people
in Persimmon, chances are,
they're all going to be very different.
I can either befriend one of them
because they're like me.
Or I can befriend all of them.
And sort of learn from all of them.
<<<Shimmies
Swipes hands down sides
Accentuates hourglass shape>>>

George Michael
*I won't let you down
I will not give you up
Gotta have some faith in the sound
It's the one good thing that I've
Got...³²¹*

Adolfo

I ended up befriending all of them
from performing drag.
I dress up as woman and
perform as women and participate
in drag culture.

Benjamin

I think the best compliment
I ever got was a girl at one of your
performances asking which queen I was.
<<<Puts head in pullover
Sings the lyrics from inside>>>

³²⁰ "Mi Tierra."

³²¹ "Freedom '90," by George Michael, recorded 1990, track 2 on *Listen Without Prejudice Vol. 1*, Columbia.

Adolfo

But you don't perform, do you?
You should.

<<<Hugs chest and saunters about
Like Naomi Campbell>>>

Benjamin

No.

But she thought I did because my
makeup, according to her, was so
well-applied.

Teddy

Paint up.³²²

<<<Pulls Benjamin's head back out

Kisses both cheeks

Paints on some lip gloss>>>

George Michael

Heaven knows

*I was just a young boy*³²³

Teddy

*Didn't know what I wanted to be*³²⁴

Benjamin

Teddy, what led you to drag?

What does that give you?

<<<Puckers>>>

George Michael

I was every little

Hungry schoolgirl's

Pride and joy

*And I guess it was enough for me*³²⁵

Adolfo

*Said I guess it was enough for me*³²⁶

Teddy

³²² A phrase used by both Teddy and Dusty to indicate "get into drag." Paint up, presumably, refers to putting on makeup.

³²³ "Freedom '90."

³²⁴ "Freedom '90."

³²⁵ "Freedom '90."

³²⁶ "Freedom '90."

When I was a new gay,
I thought that drag was the worst thing ever.
Like: Oh my gosh, that does not represent us!³²⁷
It makes us look bad!

George Michael
To win the race?
*A prettier face!*³²⁸

Adolfo
Brand new clothes
*And a big fat place*³²⁹

Benjamin
On your rock and roll T.V.³³⁰
Yeah, yeah, yeah. I want to hear this.

Teddy
I was thinking back to the gay witch
in high school, and like that doesn't
represent everyone.
Then I ended up going to my first drag show.
I thought, This is actually like really cool.
This is funny.
I thought drag was just cross-dressers.
I didn't understand the art behind it.
<<<Swirls around Benjamin
Stands behind
Grabs his shoulders
Whispers into his ears>>>

George Michael
I think there's something
You should know
I think it's time
I told you so

³²⁷ Teddy reflects the misogyny that still exists within the gay population, in which femininity is still derided or downplayed. "Femme," for example, is often singled out as undesirable on gay networking apps, and many transgender individuals criticize gay men (in particular) for limiting queer activism solely to cis-gendered queer people. Much recent scholarship has focused on gay misogyny and derision of femininity. See: Sadie E. Hale and Tomas Ojeda, "Acceptable Femininity? Gay Male Misogyny and the Policing of Queer Femininities," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 3 (2018): 310-324; Han Chong-Suk, "No Fats, Femmes, or Asians: The Utility of Critical Race Theory in Examining the Role of Gay Stock Stories in the Marginalization of Gay Asian Men," *Contemporary Justice Review* 11, no. 1 (2008): 11-22; Richard G. Jones, "Queering the Body Politic: Intersectional Reflexivity in the Body Narratives of Queer Men," *Qualitative Inquiry* 21, no. 9 (2015): 766-775; and Karen L. Blair and Rhea Ashley Hoskin, "Experiences of Femme Identity: Coming Out, Invisibility, and Femmephobia," *Psychology & Sexuality* 6, no. 3 (2015): 229-244.

³²⁸ "Freedom '90."

³²⁹ "Freedom '90."

³³⁰ "Freedom '90."

*There's something deep
Inside of me
There's someone else
I've got to be³³¹*

Adolfo

So, I choreograph.
If I don't feel like I've choreographed
and run through it a few times,
I don't feel comfortable with it.
I get very nervous and very anxious.

Teddy

*Take back your picture in a frame
Take back your singing in the rain
I just hope you understand
Sometimes the clothes do not make the man³³²*

Adolfo

I think practice makes perfect.
I'll go over it a million times.
I can be very shy sometimes,
but I'm not reserved.
If I'm lecturing, for example, in
an auditorium full of undergraduates,
I can be very loud and very animated.³³³
Try to be funny, if I can.
That translates over to when I'm
performing in drag.
I like big over the top diva kind of songs.
<<<Lays on ground
Kicks legs up, right leg on left knee
Mimes washing himself with a sponge
Like Christy Turlington>>>

George Michael

*All we have to do now
Is take these lies
And make them true, somehow³³⁴*

Adolfo

All we have to see

³³¹ "Freedom '90."

³³² "Freedom '90."

³³³ Adolfo was a graduate teaching assistant in a social sciences field at the time of our formal interview. He did not attend undergraduate at Persimmon.

³³⁴ "Freedom '90."

*Is that I don't belong to you
And you don't belong to me*³³⁵

George Michael
*Yeab yeab*³³⁶

Teddy

Two years ago now,
 some of my friends are drag queens,
 and they decided to do a competition,
 so me and like ten of our friends signed up.
They taught us how to walk in heels.
 We picked our names.
 We developed like these characters.

Adolfo
You beat me.

Teddy

We had to do this competition, and I won.
It ended up being something I really enjoy.

George Michael
*Freedom!*³³⁷

Adolfo
*I won't let you down*³³⁸

George Michael
*Freedom!*³³⁹

Adolfo
*I will not give you up*³⁴⁰

George Michael
*Freedom!*³⁴¹

Adolfo
*Have some faith in the sound*³⁴²

³³⁵ "Freedom '90."

³³⁶ "Freedom '90."

³³⁷ "Freedom '90."

³³⁸ "Freedom '90."

³³⁹ "Freedom '90."

³⁴⁰ "Freedom '90."

³⁴¹ "Freedom '90."

³⁴² "Freedom '90."

George Michael
You've gotta give
*For what you take*³⁴³

Teddy

I wasn't in band anymore.
So, it was kind of a new artistic,
creative outlet for me.
It is fun putting together a story
through a mix that you make,
based on an outfit you wear,
matching that to a song,
there's an artsy aspect to it.
<<<Raises arms
Face points to sky
Like a Gospel Choir at a revival
Sways from side to side>>>

George Michael
We won the race
Got a brand new face
*For the boys on MTV*³⁴⁴

Adolfo
But today the way I play the game
*Has got to change*³⁴⁵

George Michael
*Oh yeah*³⁴⁶

Adolfo
*Now I'm gonna get myself happy*³⁴⁷

Teddy

I like the aspect of drag
that brings people all together.
Being the one who's bringing people
together is a cool and rewarding experience.
It's like giving back to the community.
In some way.

Adolfo

³⁴³ "Freedom '90."

³⁴⁴ "Freedom '90."

³⁴⁵ "Freedom '90."

³⁴⁶ "Freedom '90."

³⁴⁷ "Freedom '90."

You do cute little dance moves.
You go for minutes of interacting
with people and walking around
and flipping hair and all that kind of stuff.
It's freeing in that it lets you sort of live out
an experience that a lot of gay men enjoy.
It also pushes you to step outside
your comfort zone, for sure.
Anything that pushes you out of your
comfort zone is probably good for you.

Benjamin
Why did you compose your
character the way that you did?
<<<Two steps>>>

Teddy
It's never something that I sat down
and thought: This is how I'm going
to act.

Adolfo
One thing that is definitely common
across both me and Delia is
wanting to do things right.

Teddy
It's something that happens
when I get in those clothes
and dress up like that.
Like, I'm dressed up as a woman.
Dancing.
How can you not let loose
and be happy when you're like that?
They're seeing Candi.
So, I don't really care what I do,
because the impression they're getting
is of Candi, not Teddy.
<<<Stands on the bar
Uses a support beam as a pole
Swings from it
Wraps left leg around beam>>>

Adolfo
I don't really create a character.
As soon as you put on the makeup
and the wig and the outfit,
the character just sort of comes out.

I don't really have a character.
It's just me, but more anxious me.
<<<Bends down
Flips it
Reverses it>>>

CeCe Peniston
Finally, it's happened to me
Right in front of my face
*And I just can't describe it*³⁴⁸

Benjamin
Oh, my god.
CeCe performed at Atlanta Pride.

Adolfo
Yeah, I saw your friend there.
Your friend with the butt.

Benjamin
Hamp?

Adolfo
No. I think his name's Jason.

Benjamin
Oh yeah.
I knew she was there,
but I didn't see her.
How was she?
<<<Lets them see him one, two step>>>

Adolfo
Oh, I didn't talk to her.
She was just at the next tent.

CeCe Peniston
Meeting Mr. Right
The man of my dreams
The one who showed me true love
*Or at least it seems*³⁴⁹

Benjamin
Speaking of Pride,
I wonder what you're proud of.

³⁴⁸ "Finally," by CeCe Peniston, recorded 1991, track 2 on *Finally*, A&M.

³⁴⁹ "Finally."

Like, what is the selling point
of being gay?

CeCe Peniston
*With brown cocoa skin
And curly black hair
Just the way he looks at me
That gentle lovin' stare³⁵⁰*

Adolfo
You know I've never seen
The Adventures of Priscilla,
Queen of the Desert.

Benjamin
Are you even gay?
I mean, you have had sex with women.

Teddy
Something straight people can't
experience is the sense of community.
Like, there's not a straight community.
Straight people don't go:
Oh, you're straight, let's be friends.
That don't have that connection
or that history or that struggle.

Adolfo
As gay people, I think we're
uniquely able to not care as much
about individual differences in people.
Within our own group, there's
so much heterogeneity in how
someone can self-identify and how
they got to that point.
I think being gay gives us an appreciation
for just letting everybody be who they are.
Sort of a sense of mutual understanding.
<<<Dips it low
Picks it up slow>>>

Teddy
Some of our history is very bad.
But the fact that we are able to come
together over that is a very positive thing.
They don't have a basis for

³⁵⁰ "Finally."

immediate friendship.
<<<Smacks Adolfo's ass
Winks at Benjamin>>>

Cece Peniston

Finally!
You come along
The way I feel about you
*It just can't be wrong*³⁵¹

Teddy

Racial groups can experience that,
but the white, straight population doesn't
have anything like that.³⁵²
<<<Dips it low
Picks it up slow>>>

Adolfo

LGBT people make impacts.
Measurable impacts.
What does the LGBT community
do for adoption rates, for example?³⁵³
What kind of dent are they making
in that system?
I don't want to see talk that just highlights
the struggle that it is to be LGBT.
You know, some things are good.³⁵⁴
And talking about those things
are really important for some people.
<<<Smacks Teddy's ass
Winks at Benjamin>>>

Cece Peniston

Finally!
It has happened to me
Right in front of my face

³⁵¹ "Finally."

³⁵² One could argue that Christianity, specifically the Southern Baptist Convention, is such a group. But that's a subject of another study. And I'm sure they won't consent. One should take a glance at "The Nashville Statement" released by a collective of Southern Baptist ministers, speakers, writers, and other leaders within said "community." The statement condemned homosexuality, among other things, and was released during the period of this study.

³⁵³ Adolfo implies that queer people improve adoption rates; however, I do not provide evidence to support that claim, and thus I do not endorse it. However, it is a subject worth further study: Do queer people make measurable impacts on adoption rates?

³⁵⁴ One good thing in my life is how when I make a judgment in something artistic, people automatically agree, since gay men are taste makers. People candidly take photographs of my outfits and post them online. That happened frequently when I lived in Washington, DC. I was once stopped by a woman in a Human Rights Campaign t-shirt who asked, "Do you have a moment for gay rights?" A passerby looked at my decadent Thom Browne blue, red, and white plaid suit and said, "Honey, his whole outfit is a moment for gay rights."

*My feelings can't describe it*³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ "Finally."

JASON: SOPHISTI-POP AND SAUVIGNON BLANCS

*I just got your message baby. So sad to see you fade away. What in the world is this feeling? To catch a breath and leave me reeling. It'll get you in the end. It's God's revenge.*³⁵⁶ I sat on a bar stool on the roof drinking a cocktail with a strange girl named Lexie drinking a frozen drink called an “Octane.” I looked through the opening of the roof onto the dance floor below. Two men.³⁵⁷ Dead center. Lips locked. Hands on bums. “They’ll be dead soon,” I thought.³⁵⁸ *Oh, I know I should come clean. But I prefer to deceive. Every day, I walk alone. And pray that God won't see me. I know it's wrong, I know it's wrong.*³⁵⁹ “I see you’re into fashion,” Jason said. “What?” I replied. “Your bag is Rag & Bone,” he pointed at my green leather tote on the desk. “And what’s in that box? Are those the Gucci shoes you told me about?” he asked. He ate a berry parfait, made for him by his boyfriend. *Tell me why is it I'm digging your scene? I know I'll die. Baby.*³⁶⁰ Jason seemed perfect. He was president of a prominent organization. He’d been flown to New York for a stay at the Waldorf to represent said organization at a fundraiser. He wore a velvet tux jacket. Bought Gucci slippers to complement. He would graduate in the summer of 2017 with a job offer, in Nashville, he told me. His clothes appeared as foliage on the limbs of his body. So at home in fashion. Had even been featured on Billy Reid’s³⁶¹ Instagram in a post designed to teach viewers how to wear a coat. He was attractive: slender, plump pink lips, perpetual smile framing copy paper white teeth (a friend once told me she’d have slept with him just because of his teeth),³⁶² dusty blonde hair with a slight curl. He was extravagantly wealthy (inherited

³⁵⁶ “Digging Your Scene,” by The Blow Monkeys, recorded 1985-1986, track 1 on *Animal Magic*, RCA.

³⁵⁷ One of whom is Jason, to whom I’d be introduced almost two years later by Hamp who suggested I interview him for this study.

³⁵⁸ Indeed, Fox was assaulted outside the same bar in 2017.

³⁵⁹ “Digging Your Scene.”

³⁶⁰ “Digging Your Scene.”

³⁶¹ Fashion designer headquartered in Florence, Alabama who showed two collections per year at New York Fashion week and sold in department stores like Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus. Known for neutral, Earthy color palettes.

³⁶² This was the same friend who called me a Persimmon Antique.

a trust fund). He'd invested substantially³⁶³ in a former boyfriend's business. Jason came to my attention because Hamp had a crush on him. Indeed, Hamp spent part of our initial interview texting Jason about his evening's plans. I knew who Jason was, though, despite Hamp's infatuation. Jason was the first man I ever saw perform gay sexuality in public in Persimmon. Kissed his boyfriend in the biggest bar in the city. They didn't die, after all.³⁶⁴ *I just got your message baby. So sad to see you fade away. I'm like a boy among men. I'd like a permanent friend. I'd like to think that I was just myself again.*³⁶⁵ "I always knew I wanted to do something in a creative industry. Whether that was architecture, or interior design, or graphic design...I toured different schools with ranked design programs.³⁶⁶ Persimmon being one of them. Ended up here, and the rest was history," Jason told me over sprout salads. He and I bumped into each other a campaign meeting for a female candidate for the Southern Gentleman's Association³⁶⁷ Presidential election, Amelia Peck. I was Amelia's communications director; Jason was roommates with one of Amelia's sorority sisters. After the meeting, he suggested we dine at Hearth, a local farm-to-table restaurant. *Diamond life. Lover boy. He moves in space with minimum waste and maximum joy. City lights and business nights. When you require streetcar desire for higher heights. No place for beginners or sensitive hearts. When sentiment is left to chance. No place to be*

³⁶³ A five-figure sum.

³⁶⁴ Despite that Alabama, as of 2018, still does not have a hate crime law that extends protection based on sexual orientation. The FBI Hate Crime Report of 2017 noted that approximately 1,300 individuals were targeted for assault based on sexual orientation, of which half were gay men. Alabama, in that period, contained 334 reporting agencies meant to report "hate crimes" to the FBI. Only 3 agencies reported a total of 9 hate crimes in a state labeled by the *Washington Post* as the "least friendly state" for LGBT people in the United States. See, FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division, "2017 Hate Crime Statistics," <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/hate-crime>. See also, Jacob Bogage, "Why Alabama is the least friendly state to gays in the nation," *Washington Post* (June 26, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/26/why-alabama-is-the-least-friendly-state-to-gays-in-the-nation/?utm_term=.e137e56bae0f.

³⁶⁵ "Digging Your Scene."

³⁶⁶ Persimmon's college for design was consistently ranked among the top 25, nationally. This achievement is important, considering queer students in design programs frequently told me that they felt safest among their design peers and faculty members. Thus, the design programs were at least recruiting top talent and psychosocially supporting that talent, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

³⁶⁷ A colloquial reference to the student government; when Amelia Peck eventually won in 2017, she became only the third woman in over a century to win the presidency. Also of note, only one student of color ever held the presidency in the university's 162-year history.

*ending, but somewhere to start.*³⁶⁸ The night I saw Jason being publicly gay, I saw but a note in the symphony. The lovers' night ended in a fist fight, with Jason leaving his boyfriend sufficiently bloody and pushed into a ditch. He mentioned it casually, after we ordered a first round of Sauvignon Blancs. The romance was torrid. Jason felt violent upon learning that Todd, his boyfriend, may have cheated. *No need to ask, he's a smooth operator. Smooth operator.*³⁶⁹ "In ten years?" Jason pondered, speared sprout at his lips. "If I could do anything, I would love to be in Austin, Texas. It's such a creative hub; there's a lot going on. It's funny because Austin is still up and coming. It's outsourcing so many of its projects to New York or Los Angeles, and I think that there's a void I could fill. The energy is very young; I think it's just so inspired." *Coast to coast. LA to Chicago, western male. Across the north and south, to Key Largo. Love for sale. Face to face, each classic case. We shadow box and double cross. Yet need the chase.*³⁷⁰ Jason wanted to talk more about fashion. Especially whether I kept my style choices consistent no matter where I went or who I was with. I explained, "When someone criticizes my style at Persimmon, I reply, 'My outfit cost more than yours. So there.' Meanwhile, I turned down a corporate gig in New York because I could not afford to live there. I invested in accessories; not in my future. Patsy Stone, on *Absolutely Fabulous*, said, 'You can never have too many hats, gloves, or shoes.' I lived those words as if they were Jesus's last from the cross." *A license to love, insurance to hold. Melts all your memories and change into gold. His eyes are like angels, but his heart is cold.*³⁷¹ "I never wear my skinny black jeans or short shorts out," Jason told me. He happened to be wearing a pair of five-inch inseam shorts, expertly fitted. "Wearing these things is an announcement that I'm gay." And what about his very public relationship with Todd? He explained, "I was walking home from a bar, once, with Todd, and someone called me a faggot, so Todd punched him." *I could be discontent. And chase the rainbow's end. I might win much more, but lose all that is*

³⁶⁸ "Smooth Operator," by Sade, recorded 1983, track 1 on *Diamond Life*, Portrait.

³⁶⁹ "Smooth Operator."

³⁷⁰ "Smooth Operator."

³⁷¹ "Smooth Operator."

*mine. I could be a lot. But I know I'm not. I'm content just with the riches that you bring.*³⁷² Jason sunk into his buzz from the Sauvignon Blanc. He listened to me, as I narrated how I saw him at Moon Bar the night he was called a faggot and Todd punched the prick out. “I was the best-dressed person in technical poverty in Alabama” I began. “My fall from glamour peaked that night at Moon Bar. On an upstairs deck, my first Persimmon boy date, Liam, dropped his last cigarette into the gutter. ‘I’ll buy you a beer if you save that cig,’ he proposed.” “Tragic,” said Jason. I continued. “I knelt, in my Billy Reid runway outfit, reached through the railing, fumbled through the debris, and retrieved the now moist cigarette. Liam fetched my reward. He left me kneeling in the gutter clutching a dripping cigarette in the sconce’s beam. A table of undergraduate girls giggled.” Jason said, “They were probably Phi Phis. They were all there that night with Todd.” Continuing my story, I said, “I sniped, ‘What are you looking at? Life gets pretty bleak when you come of daddy’s payroll.’ Liam returned with a Keystone Light. That boosted my hobo mystique. We stood, he and I, shoulder to shoulder against the balcony rail. To block the wind, so I could light the cigarette Liam held in his lips. The process was fitful, thwarted by wind and the fear that my hair (laden with Paul Mitchell spray) would go up in flames if I mismanaged the lighter.” Jason stopped me: “You use hairspray?” I replied, “Now I use Redken working paste.” Jason, appeased, said, “That’s better. Hairspray is so eighties.” I continued, “‘You’re such a delicate flower,’ Liam said after my fifth flinch-induced failure to create a spark. ‘I’ll do it myself.’ Amid the hubbub, a pair of bear-like arms injected themselves between us. They belonged to a man in an incandescent orange security tee. He displaced us by a foot, each. Left a two-foot gap between us. ‘You guys can’t be leaning over the rail like that,’ he cautioned. ‘We were not leaning. Besides, you didn’t say anything a minute ago when half my upper body was extended through the bars.’ He rebutted, ‘Just don’t get too close.’” Jason asked, “Too close?” I nodded, “The only thing I was close to was Liam. Then I remembered: I forgot not to be publicly gay. Had to act

³⁷² “You’re the Best Thing,” by The Style Council, recorded 1983-1984, track 10 on *Café Bleu*, Polydor.

right. Had to stand two feet apart from your man.” Jason rolled his, “To think that two feet is all it takes to make you go from gay to straight.” *I might shoot to win, and commit the sin. Wanting more than I’ve already got. I could run away, but I’d rather stay. In the warmth of your smile, lighting up my day. The one that makes me say: ‘Cause you’re the best thing that ever happened to me or my world.*³⁷³ Jason ordered more wine and thought a minute about my story. A moment later, he started speaking like Catherine Trammel in *Basic Instinct*, “Am I transgressive because I’m gay? I could be at Moon Bar and get called ‘faggot.’ It’s happened multiple times. I see the dress codes they have at the bars that specifically target gay men. If I were to walk from Silvestri Hall to Corcoran Center³⁷⁴ in what I’m wearing now,³⁷⁵ I would feel out of place because of the culture. Sometimes I wear hats on campus to keep my identity somewhat hidden. I scroll through my Facebook, and I see everyone sharing the fact that Persimmon was named the ‘Most Conservative Campus.’ Why are we proud of that?” he trailed off. *So much for your promises. They died the day you let me go. Caught up in a web of lies. But was just too late to know. I thought it was you. Who would stand by my side. And now you’ve given me, given me. Nothing but shattered dreams, shattered dreams.*³⁷⁶ I filled Jason’s pause, “I am not so keen on brushing aside fashion dictates or celebrated conservatism. I believe people should take fashion cues from me, not the other way around. I use fashion to assert myself. Wearing Margiela³⁷⁷ and Givenchy³⁷⁸ has as much to do with making a powerful impression as it does with exhibiting my personal tastes. I like to think I beat the

³⁷³ “You’re the Best Thing.”

³⁷⁴ Silvestri Hall housed various design studios and Corcoran Center was the main classroom building for the College of Engineering, which you’ve already read about. It’s approximately a quarter of a mile to walk between the two, through a campus green, a student union, and several engineering buildings.

³⁷⁵ Five-inch-inseam fitted shorts and a tank top.

³⁷⁶ “Shattered Dreams,” by Johnny Hates Jazz, recorded 1986-1987, track 1 on *Turn Back the Clock*, Virgin.

³⁷⁷ Maison Margiela was having a resurgence, at this time, since the appointment of previously toxic John Galliano as Creative Director. I owned but few pieces, since collections were difficult to find in the U.S.; however, my go to fragrance was Jazz Club, a Margiela eau de parfum.

³⁷⁸ Specifically, the FW 2014 collection, which was and is my favorite menswear collection ever staged. Speaking of Givenchy, I was once prevented from entering Moon Bar because I wore a pair of Givenchy hunter-green sunglasses and a Persian-print top. Jason previously mentioned dress codes targeted toward gay men...well, claiming that sunglasses were a safety hazard was code for “your shirt is too gay for this bar.” Instances of discrimination based on dress were common; for example, Liam was prevented from meeting me at a separate bar because he had on jewelry. Another friend was denied entry at yet another bar for wearing a deep V-neck t-shirt and his trousers rolled at the bottom. And yet another friend was denied entry for wearing too-short shorts.

patriarchal snobs at their own games: wear labels they can't properly pronounce, nor afford, and do it better than they, even if they could." *Woke up to reality and found the future not so bright. I dreamt the impossible: that maybe things could work out right. I thought it was you who would do me no wrong. But now you've given me, given me. Nothing but shattered dreams, shattered dreams.*³⁷⁹ "Sometimes," Jason resumed, "if I go to the fraternity house, or wherever, I'm not going to wear my usual clothes. I have that innate feeling that I don't want to stick out like a sore thumb. I don't want to be the target at the end of the room."³⁸⁰ *The picture you see is no portrait of me. It's too new to be shown to someone I don't know. And it's driving me wild. Makes me act like a child.*³⁸¹ Jason continued, "People have taken a particular interest in me because I am gay. Like a token. I am gay. I must be fashionable and exciting. I'm something new that people didn't have before coming to Persimmon. They think I'm a thing. GBF." *You think I am crazy, but what can I do? You waste your time, like my money. It ain't so funny, but it's true. Now you can't tell me what's going on. And that I am weak, while you are strong. What is it you need, that makes your heart bleed? Do you really know? 'Cause it doesn't show.*³⁸² I replied, "Your position is devious. Being a chameleon is a powerful thing. You can camouflage yourself. You can mold yourself to suit. If done right, social fluidity is as easy as Liam and me moving apart or coming together by two feet. Two feet is the distance between normal and abnormal. We can be both sides of the equation. We can be all men at

³⁷⁹ "Shattered Dreams."

³⁸⁰ Sasha N. Canan, Kristen N. Jozkowski, and Brandon L. Crawford found that fraternities are the most rape-prone and sexual assault encouraging spaces on college campuses (and, indeed, in the U.S.). Canan, Jozkowski, and Crawford speculate that this tendency stems from rigidly enforced "traditional" gender roles enacted within single-gender cultures, bred by fraternities. They even note that men may be subjected to sexual violence within fraternity spaces, since to breach "traditional" masculinity (by refusing sex with a woman) would violate the norms of the fraternity culture. Now, Jason refers to his feeling that if he dressed "too gay" at a fraternity party, he would be a target of hate-biased violence. That fear is not necessarily fear of sexual assault (although Hamp narrated being sexually assaulted by fraternity men when he passed by their house on the sidewalk); however, it is not farfetched to assume that a culture that enables rape might also enable gay bashing, since both crimes are predicated on gender difference. See, "Sexual Assault Supportive Attitudes: Rape Myth Acceptance and Token Resistance in Greek and Non-Greek College Students From Two University Samples in the United States," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 33, no. 22 (2018): 3502-3530.

³⁸¹ "Round & Round," by New Order, recorded 1988, track 4 on *Technique*, Factory.

³⁸² "Round & Round."

once.” *The picture you see is no portrait of me. It’s too real to be shown to someone I don’t know. And it’s driving me wild. Makes me act like a child.*³⁸³ Jason answered, “But we shouldn’t have to be.”

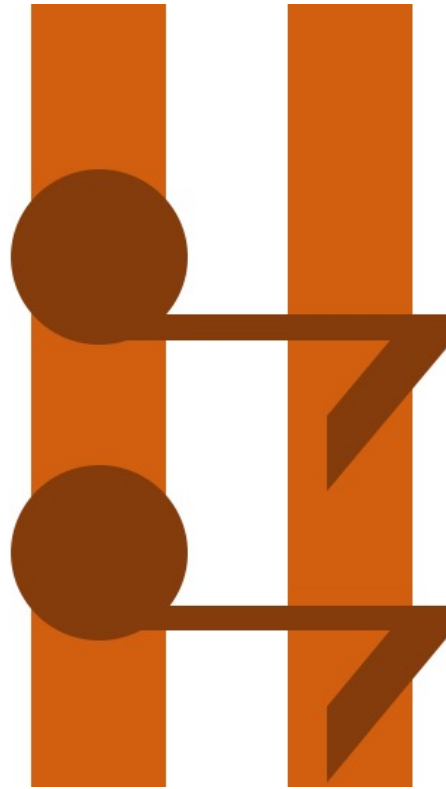
³⁸³ “Round & Round.”



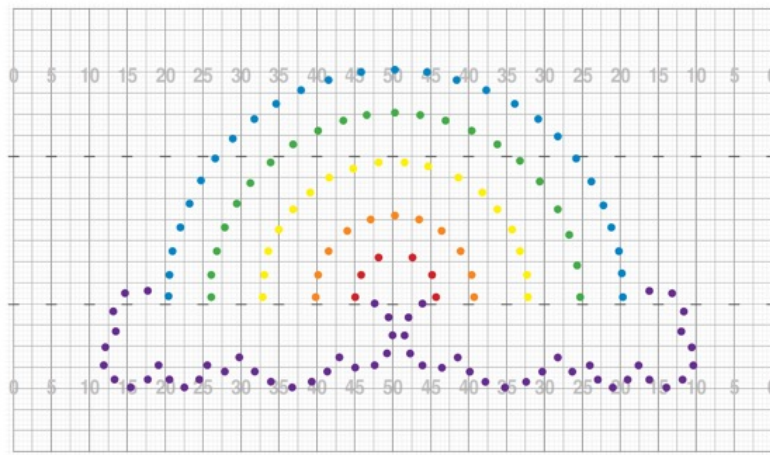
³⁸⁴ Rex held a leadership position within the Persimmon Marching Band and within the Department of Music at the time I met him. His formal interview focused largely on his experiences as an ambassador for the department as well as his enthusiasm for educating future generations of students about music and performance. Thus, we decided to structure his chapter as an orientation presentation for prospective band members who are queer. Since Teddy also indicated that the band was a gay (queer) friendly space (at least among the students), we wanted to emphasize that fact through his “presentation.” Rex’s chapter is meant to exhibit the call to emphasize “good experiences,” which Adolfo requested during his interview. I observed Rex deliver an orientation to prospective band members at Persimmon’s summer freshman orientation, so the text mimics his organic manner of speaking.

band gays have:

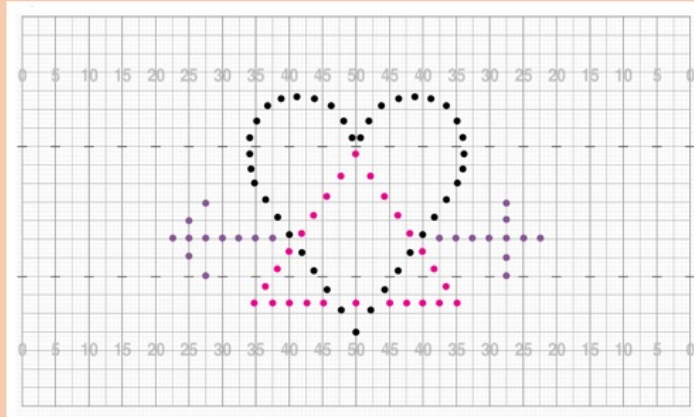
1. A real passion for creating musical experiences with other people.
2. The need to pursue something bigger.
3. An interest in studying how relationships within the notes formulate music...the way melodies are formed and structured, how they convey certain emotions to integrate music and psychology.



drill chart #1



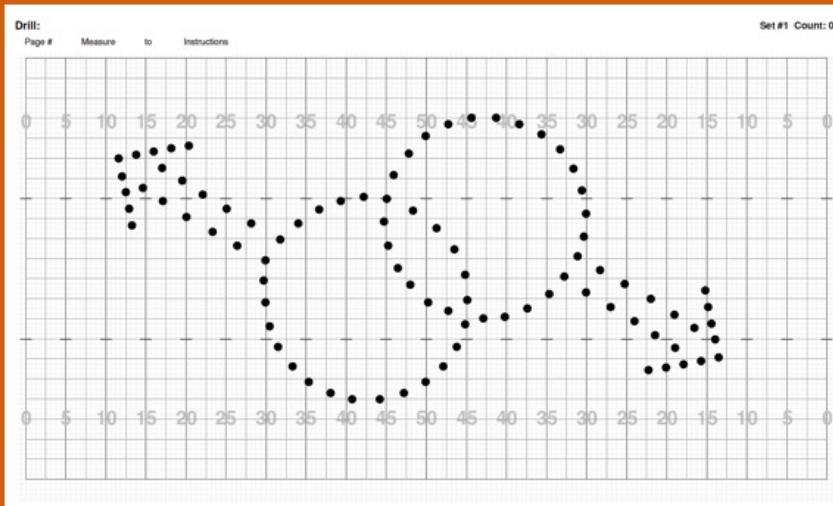
drill chart #2



why I'm here: I just want to teach
people who want to teach music.

will I be able to live while gay in band?

1. I came to their summer programs when I was in high school, and just fell in love with the school, the place, the people.
2. Being in the band really kind of helped me find myself.
3. I've felt like I've learned how to be successful, not necessarily music, but as a human being.
4. The previous department chair was a lesbian; her partner was an accompanist at the university.
5. Representation is incredibly important; we need successful people in the field to remind others that we can be good at what we do.
6. Join us!!!



will I be
able to
lead?

YES!

I am:

1. Vice President of Membership for my Band Fraternity.
2. President of the Department of Music Student Ambassadors.
3. Officer of National Band Association (Campus Chapter).
4. Drum Major.

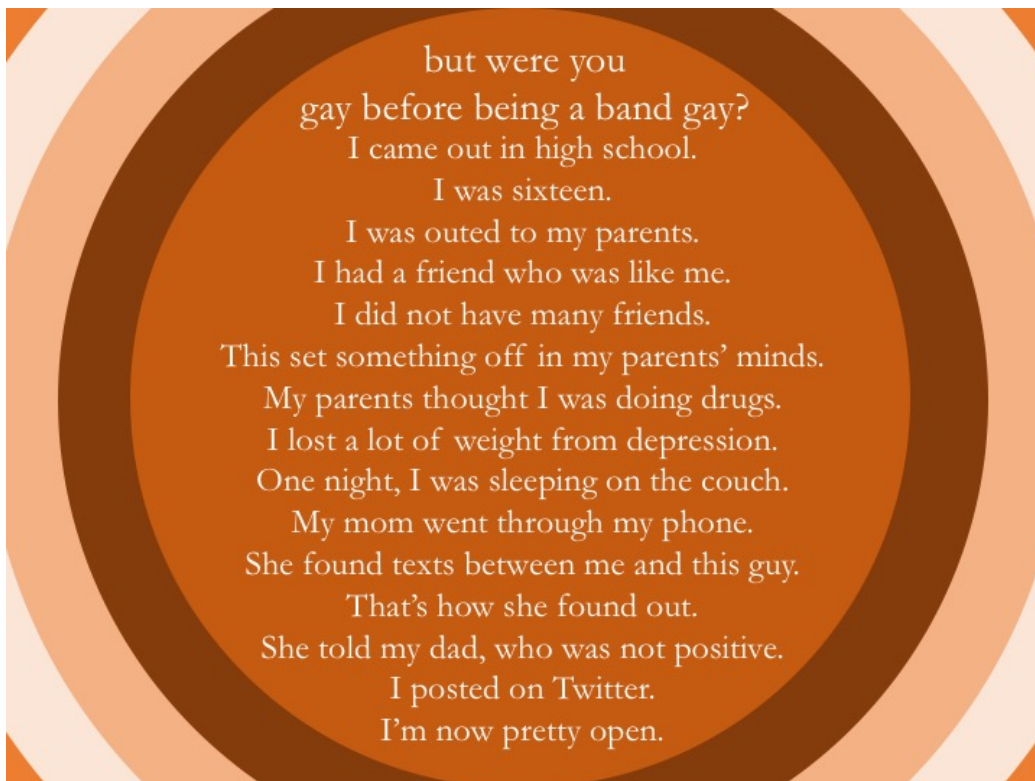
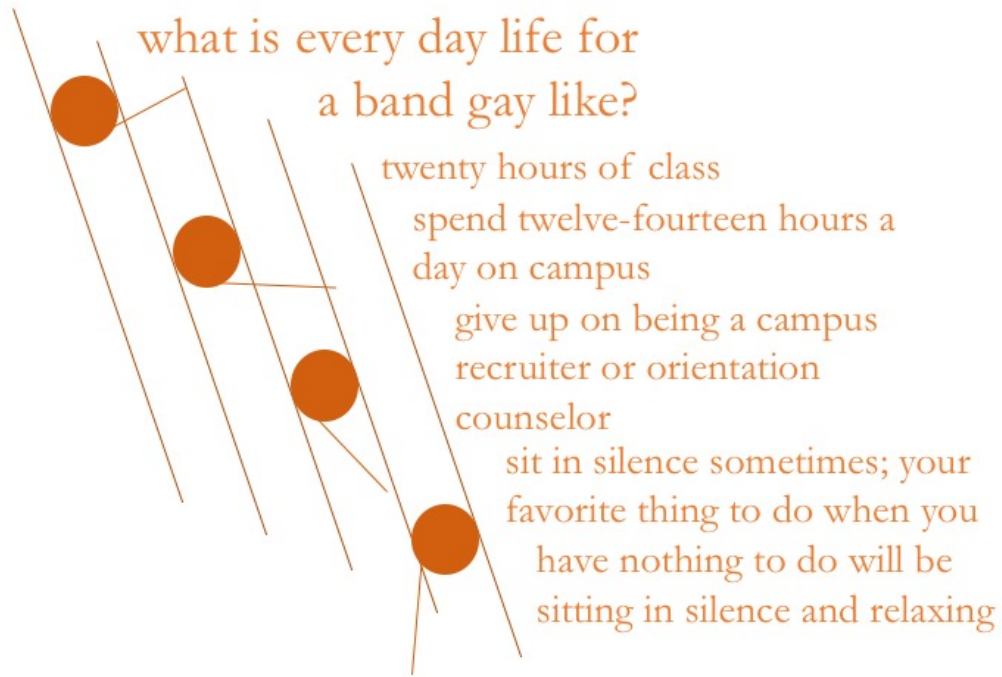
how can I lead
while gay?


be your
authentic self

you have your best presence when
you're not worrying about mannerisms
or the pitch of your voice

be confident. be secure in the things that you're
saying. you will be more successful being who you
are in front of people


be passionate about how wonderful your time at Persimmon
has been and how this organization or studying is extremely
fulfilling. enjoy talking to people about the things you love





what
are my
goals
as your
band
gay
leader?

1. show students who are part of the LGBT community who are thriving
2. show how those LGBT students are contributing to campus
3. show how those students overcome being on the most conservative campus in the South
4. show LGBT students encouragement
5. show LGBT students how to expand into or reach out into the LGBT community
6. show LGBT students how to make time for drag shows and other extracurricular activities



what does my inclusion
philosophy look like?

1. give good advice and talk about being a young band gay a lot and be very encouraging to young band gays
2. celebrate and love for who you are
3. enable everyone to be part of something regardless of personal characteristics
4. any part of humanness should not exclude somebody from being a part of whatever they want to be part of
5. be active in getting people who are different from the majority to be involved
6. eliminate polarization and silos

DUSTY: DON'T MEAN SHIT IF IT AIN'T DONE WITH TITS³⁸⁵

It's got lots of gaysSSSSSSSSSS.

I mean, you'll feel

...stuff...

One *love*.

Fuuuun.

Majorrrrrrr.

All went well...

It's a *mess*.

A mess.

Mess.

Mess.

MESS.

MESSSSSSSSSS.

Paint up, bitch.

Genderfuck.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ Dusty has a rambling way of making a point, often pursuing tangents to extreme ends before circling back to his prior message. He switched subjects mid-sentence during most sentences. He spoke in highly rhythmic patterns, and his tone, pitch, and volume fluctuated throughout his moments of narration. When reading his transcript, I could not help but conjure Ella Fitzgerald scatting while accompanied by Louis Armstrong. To provide a sense of Dusty's speaking style, I incorporated the improvisational nature of scat-singing into the textual formatting of Dusty's chapter. To do so, I put Dusty's interview transcript into a word cloud to determine the 250 words he used most often; the results led to the scat flourishes that you see interspersed throughout the chapter. Italicized words indicate that he semi-sung the word. Capitalized words indicated increased volume (or frequency of use). Underlined words indicate emotional emphases such as sarcasm, joy, derision, etc. Obviously, the title is a play on "Don't Mean a Thing (If it Ain't Got That Swing)" which features an extended scat improvisation by Ella Fitzgerald.

³⁸⁶ Sarah Hankins produced an ethnography of gender performance in Boston that included fieldwork within a space that provided "genderfuck" experiences. Hankins's ethnography illuminated many points; however, most pertinent, she notes that, "much US gender performance is organized around the payment of money for erotic behavior" (442) and that "tipping is, in many respects, gender performance's material core...a direct and literal monetization of erotic, sexual(ized) interactions and, in this respect, may look more like a logical extension of prostitution or other forms of sex work than of normative, hegemonic commerce" (444). Hankins reflects on personal experience: "I came to experience my own tipping as a site of convergence and collapse, the nucleus of a microeconomy that manifested sex, gender,

I said dude, get a *JOB*.

DrunkKkK.

Sangria.

It's one FUN art.

Bar. *Bar.* Bar.

Paint up...

Get FUCKKKKED(uh)!³⁸⁷

Dusty's chest is always on display. His drag ensemble, regardless of theme includes a sheer top (or no top) revealing his "boy body" from navel to neck. He does not reveal a faux bosom.

money, and social power as intersectional categories and that implicated its participants not only in market relations but also in social relationships. I was, perhaps, a john in that I paid for things that felt like sex, yet I was a queer john, facilitating the circulation of money among queer people, in payment for queer arousals. My tip was also a kind of buy in to my associates' performative reconfigurations of gender, sex, and social power. Then, too, many of these associates were my friends, and tipping them gave me the sense that, john and ethnographer though I was, my money strengthened affective ties and contributed to the resource strength and viability of my queer community" (445). Hankins's work identifies a paradox: a drag economy flourishes through sexualized femininity (in which men construct hyperreal femininity and exchange sexualized performance for money, as if they were women; by extension, perpetuating associations between women and sex work), and drag economies enable a queer support economy to further the efforts of genderfucking and other transgressive performances. Dusty, as you will read, embodies this paradox to an extent; however, he seems to be more intentional in disrupting gender binaries through his drag performances; though highly sexualized, he also builds markers of maleness within each performance so that sex work is not as clearly linked to femininity. Hankins also writes at length about drag performance and queer arousal, indicating that genderfucking is a "sign of desire" and that tipping is a reciprocal "sign of desire" available to queer people who are unloved elsewhere in society. That is a complicated topic that I am not sure I am prepared to address within the scope of a footnote. I hesitate primarily because my self-reflection found a personal ambivalence about drag performance, in general, and I by no means find drag performance "arousing" in a sexual sense. Is it perhaps rooted in a fundamental need for gender performance to be more clearly defined and traditional? Is it because I have an implicit dislike of the female body? Probably. I mean, I am gay, so women are not sexually alluring. But beyond that, I generally have little romantic interest in the man behind the drag, even when he's out of costume. Tipping, for me, is a means to support queer culture financially, but it is not a means to generate sexual pleasure. See, "I'm a Cross between a Clown, a Stripper, and a Streetwalker": Drag Tipping, Sex Work, and a Queer Sociosexual Economy," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 40, no. 2 (2015): 441-466.

³⁸⁷ Durell M. Callier writes: "C major or Key of C is one of the most common key signatures in Western music, most noted for it's [sic] lack of sharp or flat notes within it's [sic] scale. C minor, on the other hand, is noted for its usage of pitches that utilize sharps instead. The minor chords are the black keys on the piano, the keys which often give melodies and harmonies darker, smoother, more soulful sounds. I like to think of my life as living and rifting off of these keys, the pitches that sound like the most common key signatures with just enough of a change that you hear and see the subtle difference...The metaphor of living a life in a minor key is particularly apt to describing my life as a Blackqueer male" (790). See, "Living in C Minor: Reflections on the Melodies of Blackness, Queerness, and Masculinity," *Qualitative Inquiry* 22, no. 10 (2016): 790-794. I must point out: Dusty is not Black; he identifies as mixed race with Hispanic and Native American ancestry, with the phenotype of a Hispanic man. However, Dusty's narration of his story mimics Callier's emphasis on C minor being an apt metaphor to the improvisations inherent in negotiating identity across race, gender, and sexuality dimensions.

Instead he reminds us that his femininity is an illusion. A “genderfuck.” With each twirl we see the flat chest of a nineteen-year-old boy. My first time seeing Dusty perform, his genderfucking encompassed: climbing onto the bar to perform Florence and the Machine’s “Dog Days Are Over;” during a dramatic flourish, his ginger wig caught the flap of a ceiling fan, flew off his head, and landed ten feet away in a pitcher of daiquiris. He climbed down, took the microphone, and concluded, “That’s why I named my alter-ego ‘Mess.’” Closed with a back handspring and disappeared behind a black, bedazzled curtain that separated a makeshift dressing room (in which shipping crates served as a vanity) from the bar at-large.

Friend, dream.

Hang with me a little.

It’s me.

ME ME.

Mom can tell I’m nice.

BUT I’M A MESS, *YES*.

How to RSVP? The litmus test for an “affirmative” response, for me: “Is alcohol present? Yes? I will be there.” I came to campus in 2014. Prior to coursework, I went to a famous local bar. People went there to graze for sexual encounters, demonstrate wealth and status, fraternize with up-and-comers, and maybe see famous alum like NBA and NFL players. I once took Cinco-de-Mayo shots there with a football star and dropped it like it’s hot with Miss Alabama. There was an endless parade of extravagance and idiocy; tabs went as high as \$500; the average drink price was \$4. As an undergraduate patron, I saw, felt, or experienced: what it felt like to intercept a date rape drug in a shot glass, how efficiently broken bottles could pierce the skin, what haggling over the price of cocaine sounded like, what calisthenics were involved for two men to have sex in a stall (I was not a participant; just a witness), and how easy it was for a pair of bouncers to hoist me overhead and toss

me over a fence due to the sin of wearing sunglasses inside.³⁸⁸ Once saw a girl get “finger fucked” on the stage; she was not part of the band, and she did not know her impromptu lover. Saw a faculty member sell gallons of date rape drugs to a bar manager in the beer freezer.³⁸⁹ People used to make out with strangers for cigarettes, have sex in bathrooms, do lines of coke off the handrails, actually swing from chandeliers (before Sia³⁹⁰ did), and get in fights twenty men deep. I was once told by the bar manager, “We’re the largest beer vendor in the state of Alabama.” I replied, “That makes me the largest beer consumer in the state of Alabama.” I went every night.

When I returned as a Ph.D. student, nothing had changed. Well, the faculty member who concocted and sold date-rape drugs had been arrested. Otherwise, the space remained debauched, with the capacity to accommodate 2,000 patrons at a time.

I sat at the end of the rooftop bar sucking down whiskey sours, waited for the wave of alcoholic warmth that would convince me that I was, in fact, home. That is how addiction operates: the body feels more itself when inundated with the drug of choice than when dry. I’d been back in Alabama for a month, but had not felt “home” until I put a glass of Maker’s Mark to my mouth. Two sips in, I felt at myself again, like Sweeney Todd when he grips his razors. “These are my friends; see how they glisten.”³⁹¹ Sub glistening liquor bottle for blade. At ease, I stared through the opening that exposed the dancefloor below. Two men made out at the center while a country-

³⁸⁸ See footnote 378.

³⁸⁹ The guilty party was a lab instructor, related to a Trustee member, who made date rape drugs on-campus in his lab then sold them to the staff at said bar. The arrest was heavily covered by state and national media; however, I refrain from citing the reports to preserve the anonymity of parties involved.

³⁹⁰ I refer to the 2014 song “Chandelier” by Sia, which includes the lyric, “I’m going to swing from the Chandelier.”

³⁹¹ See, “My Friends,” from Act I of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* by Stephen Sondheim.

western crooner wailed “You Never Even Called Me By My Name.”³⁹² I thought, “They’ll be dead soon.”³⁹³

A brunette sat on the stool to my right. She asked if I smoked. “No.” She pulled out a Marlboro light and lit it with a lighter made of what appeared to be pewter, in the shape of a ridged tube of lipstick. “Ever had the Octane?” she asked after the first puff.

“Is that something from here?”

She pointed to her cocktail.

“Basically a frozen daiquiri, but they dump in a topper of moonshine.”

“Isn’t that the third one of those you’ve ordered? You’ll be dead soon.”

“I’ve trained my liver like an Olympian.”

I ordered an octane to remain in league with Lexie, which is how she introduced herself an hour later. Actually, I asked for her name an hour later. I figured if I hopped into her 3-series BMW with some guy named Dalton and rode with them to a house by the train tracks, then I should know the name of the woman with whom I’d likely share the police and/or Coroner’s report.

Lexie lured me with the offer of a “robust pile of pot.” I figured I’d have to give up illicit substances as a bona fide academic (“LOLZ, girl please,” Benjamin said to himself in 2018. If straight boy administrators can boink their eighteen-year-old desk workers without reproach, then so help me I’m going to blaze every now and then).³⁹⁴

She also had Sauvignon Blanc by the box sitting in the rear. And like I said, when there’s alcohol, I show up.

Lexie kicked in the door of the tiny, pale blue cottage.

³⁹² David Allen Coe, “You Never Even Called Me By My Name,” recorded 1975, single, Columbia Nashville. Coe’s song was a popular staple at Moon Bar on karaoke nights, and the crowd could generally be counted upon to know the lyrics and sing along, especially the line, “But before I could get to the station in my pick up truck, she got runned over by a damned ol’ train.”

³⁹³ I refer to first seeing Jason and Todd, which I outlined in “Jason: Sophisti-pop and Sauvignon Blancs.”

³⁹⁴ See my discussion of Acontius in “Fox: An Opera Comique.”

“Don’t you have a key?”

“Oh, this isn’t my house; it’s Joseph’s. We used to work together at The Spaniel. I keep my stuff here so my boyfriend won’t find it and turn me in to my narc parents...”

“So, wait,” I interrupted, “Who is Dalton?”

“Joseph’s former boyfriend. He has the pipe we’ll use.”

Made sense?

I took a few puffs (my first in at least three years). Then I pet a slick, slender flamingo in the corner. Turned out to be a poster of a flamingo that could not consume the blueberries I tried to feed it. Sang along to Evelyn “Champagne” King’s “I Don’t Know If It’s Right.” Decided to change my Facebook profile to read “Benjamin Champagne Arnberg.” Lights flashed through the window; I hit the deck. “Cops?” Where were Dalton and Lexie? Probably boning in the backroom somewhere. But Dalton was gay, and Lexie’s car was gone. I peeked back out the window. No cops. But Dalton was face down in a bush. His back rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell. “Breathing. Not dead. Thank Jeezuss.” Famished, I decided to walk down the block in search of food (I thought it would be rude to eat the cheese poofs of some guy named Joseph whom I’d never met who was currently working at a restaurant named after a dog serving things like “Sprout Salad” to rich white ladies and their husbands, who could be lamenting that their roofie dealer was put behind bars).

Arrived at Krystal’s. Of course. The door was locked, so I went around back. I stood in front of the drive-through speaker for a solid ten minutes, picking at the blooming blisters caused by my new cordovan Crockett & Jones buckle shoes. Eventually, a voice and a spotlight evaporated the dark silence. “Sir. Sir? Sir! We are closed.”

I bellowed, “Give me the Krystal Chicks. I want a sack full of Krystal Chicks!”

Surprisingly, the voice obliged, to an extent, “You can have what was left over, but I ain’t turning back on the grease.”

A few minutes later, the window popped open and a sack full of Krystal Chicks flew onto the pavement. I picked them up and sat under a nearby Crepe Myrtle. There was no ketchup. Fuck. Veronica, of the speaker, sat in her car. Her arm was out to the elbow. Kept the smoke away from her hair? She was yelling through her phone at her boyfriend. She probably wouldn't get me any ketchup. I suffered through condiment-less Krystal chicks. Then fell asleep.

I awoke to the dawn.

“Fuck.”

My phone was dead. I had no idea of the time. I knew, though, that I was due to escort some students to a conference in Nashville. We had an early departure. Where was I? Krystal. Why in God's name? I scurried around the parking lot for a minute as I attempted to determine which direction might lead to my car. This was new Krystal, so I could not place myself. I took a gamble on “Right.” Went right at as brisk a pace as Crockett & Jones loafers and Billy Reid linen trousers would allow. An hour later, I made it to my car. Within, there was a Rubbermaid hamper containing all the clean laundry I'd planned to pack for Nashville that morning. No time for that. I drove to the rendezvous point to meet my students for the first time as their adviser. Arrived wearing the same outfit as the night before, and welcomed them into my car. In Nashville, I checked into the hotel on our behalf; rather than rolling luggage, I lugged a wad of clothes in a Rubbermaid hamper. A mess.

Yeah.

I got it.

Stuck, bad art.

But fashion is FASHION.

Get over it, *bitch*. (And tryin'a put on her make up in the mirror and Crash, CRASH,

CRAAAASSSH

Into a ditch).

*Not playin'.*³⁹⁵

What I said.

Came.

Came.

Came.

Back.

Who knew?

I like your sauce.

Sauce.

Saucy.

Saucy Lady.

Like *foxy*.

Cleopatra.

*She's workin' at the Pyramid tonight.*³⁹⁶

You know his insta is public now?

Who the fuck is you?

Go on.

Go'n.

Gone.

I play precisely because I am uncertain of what will happen, of what will be produced in any particular moment. I had gathered dead leaves, fallen flower blossoms, and other cuttings from the indoor plants to make them appear more aesthetic. When I paused to examine what I had collected (and to reconsider why), I realized that I was holding onto something that was not

³⁹⁵ A play on Outkast, "Roses," recorded 2002-2003, track 10 on *The Love Below*, Arista.

³⁹⁶ A play on Frank Ocean, "Pyramids," recorded 2011-2012, track 10 on *Channel Orange*, Def Jam.

unaesthetic, but was differently aesthetic. I then placed the plant matter on a piece of blank paper and proceeded to take several pictures. This was an unexpected moment that may be methodological, or may one day become methodological or may become nothing at all.³⁹⁷

Gone.

Coming back to Persimmon makes me a mass of dead leaves and fallen blossoms strewn about the campus green, sometimes dressed up with Alexander McQueen.³⁹⁸

Cuz. CUZ.

Doin' calisthenics.

Tryin' well.

Went big.

In this wig.

Legs? *They good.*

Givin' *him* this *wood*.

Dusty liked talking. Ask a yes or no question, get a dissertation.

“I already have a brand started. It’s not actually like ‘*The Brand*’ I want to be mine. It’s just like the brand I started. It’s called ‘*Mess*.’ The name mostly came from my drag persona Smirnoff Manolo because she is definitely crazy and gets drunk; if you saw her, you’d say ‘*What a mess*.’”

I recalled a wig soaring across a crowded bar and landing in some daiquiris.

³⁹⁷ Quote from Jasmine Brooke Ulmer, “Composing Techniques: Choreographing a Postqualitative Writing Practice,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 00, no. 0 (2017): 1-9. Quote from page 3. Ulmer’s insistence that researchers “make visible what normally remains behind-the-scenes in case it is helpful or sparks something generative for others” (2) drove much of the compositional style and thrust of this chapter, not to mention the whole study. One might say that the improvisational, impressionistic renderings of Dusty’s narrative, hinged with my own “mess” narrative, are direct applications of Ulmer’s composition-through-play techniques outlined in the article.

³⁹⁸ McQueen’s early shows, such as FW 1995’s “Highland Rape” and the SS 2001 Ready-to-Wear collection, set in an asylum-like space, were specifically chosen visual metaphors for this chapter, since these shows exhibit messiness, deconstruction, and madness (among other visual symbols). My protective wear for the duration of the Ph.D. program was a pair of black metal Alexander McQueen sunglasses (worn whenever I walked anywhere on campus) and a large, black Alexander McQueen skull ring from the 2014 jewelry collection. I’d wear it to meetings to point at the people expressing troubling worldviews regarding diversity and inclusion.

I concurred.

“She is a *beautiful mess*. And a fun *mess*. I just started designing and making clothes and someone zipped me into a dress and the zipper was broken and they were like, ‘*What a mess.*’ And I thought, ‘You know what? It is a hot mess.’”

I recalled waking under an ornamental tree at Krystal’s with fried bits of chicken on my blouse. We were kindred. We embraced the mess.

Dusty kept talking.

“I created my drag persona knowing I want to have Smirnoff’s fun energy and Dusty’s drunk energy. They’re basically *the same*. It never really had negative meaning. But I think it’s more of a character. When I get in drag, I never feel like I’m *escaping*. I feel like I’m going to work.³⁹⁹ I created Smirnoff as an underage queen to get into bars and drink underage. I think of myself as a geisha. *Do you know what a geisha is?* They’re like the party host. And they do fun things; that’s the job. We get paid for it.”

Major.

Can you hear me? Major Tom?

Major.

Snapshot. Take my Picture.

Major.

You’re black, white, beige, chola descent.

You’re Lebanese. You’re Orient.⁴⁰⁰

I followed up with Smirnoff at the end of the week. She requested it. Her haven was a dive bar named “Bumpers.” Backed up against train tracks. Step too far off the deck while smoking and:

“Splat!”

³⁹⁹ Dusty echoes Hankins’s work on tipping and gender performance here.

⁴⁰⁰ A play on Lady Gaga, “Born This Way,” recorded 2010-2011, track 2 on *Born This Way*, Interscope.

I parked behind to keep my car from being side swiped by traffic that zoomed by on the four-lane thoroughfare that connected the two adjacent cities of Persimmon and Antioch. The highway was essentially a warehouse district. One could place oneself geographically along the corridor by business type.

If a friend asked:

“How long will you be?”

You could say:

“Auto shops,” and mean five minutes to campus.

“Climate-controlled storage,” ten minutes to campus.

“Discount merchandise and Korean Karaoke,” fifteen minutes.

I drove all night-ight to get to you. Is that all right?⁴⁰¹

Bumpers was the fifteenth business in fifteen years to occupy the end suite of a brown brick strip mall across from a bowling alley.

To the left: fake diamonds in “silver” settings, come one come all.

To the left: a Mexican restaurant staying in business for the sole reason that they did not card college students.

Presently, Bumpers’s door was blocked by an impromptu photo shoot. When the cloud of chain smoke drifted past, I made out a topless Smirnoff Manolo wearing green-sequined hot pants and silver-sequined ram horns (attached to a head band) surrounded by twinks of varying shades and sizes.

You’re black, white, beige, chola descent.

⁴⁰¹ Do not assume I mean godawful Celine Dion’s version. See instead, Cyndi Lauper, “I Drove All Night,” written by Billy Steinberg and Tom Kelly, recorded 1988-1989, track 2 on *A Night to Remember*, Epic.

A twink on either side placed a palm over Smirnoff's "boy breasts." All wore sequined devil horns. All held Marlboro 100s dangling between their lips. Smirnoff saw me, fled the shoot, exposed his "boy breasts," and came over to bellow, "let's take shots, whore!"

Whore, whore, WHORE.

How do you like it?

How do you like it?⁴⁰²

We took shots.

My girlfriend, who chaperoned, overshot the runway: took a double of shot of tequila with no chaser. Within the arch of the lurch back, gurgle, and slammed shot glass, she kept the circle going by leaning over into a five-gallon bucket turned garbage can and upchucked the duck breast she had for dinner.

Smirnoff "Sashay Shantayed"⁴⁰³ away to be photographed and felt up by a leather daddy sitting spread-legged on a pool table. Two goldfish watched from an adjacent fish tank while I snapped the photo. Smirnoff disappeared into the crowd. Moments later, she appeared in a black leather embellished outfit reminiscent of styles worn by En Vogue in the "Free Your Mind" video back in the 90s. Smirnoff's beat dropped and she directed:

All you ladies pop your pussy like this. Shake your body don't stop don't miss.⁴⁰⁴

The solo performance turned fugue as three dozen pussy-less gay men and three straight women sang out:

My neck, my back...

During the lyric:

A bitch like me moans and screams

⁴⁰² A play on Andrea True Connection, "More, More, More," recorded 1976, track 3 on *More, More, More*, Buddah Records.

⁴⁰³ A reference to the refrain from RuPaul's "Supermodel."

⁴⁰⁴ The opening lyric to Khia, "My Neck, My Back," recorded 2001, track 1 on *Thug Misses*, Epic.

Smirnoff did a back handspring.

His wig caught the corner of the DJs MacBook pro and snatched it off its podium.

Chants continued.

Like my pussy and my crack.

Sans bass line.

Almost poetic.

Like a perverse genderfuck of:

*Hey Jude.*⁴⁰⁵

Smirnoff daintily placed the computer in its place and Sashay Shantayed behind the bar.

My girlfriend and I went outside while the AV system was restored. I informed her it was time to commence my *whore* phase. It was time, in my line of reasoning, to be a *whore* because the following year, I'd be thirty. Then I'd be celibate by everyone else's choice.

"It's my final year of being *boy-toy* material."

"Who have you been a *boy toy* for?" she asked.

"No one. That's why I haven't gotten the Louis Vuitton bag I want yet."

"Which bag is that?"

"The men's overnight duffle in Damier Graphite."

"How much is that?"

"Enough to mean that I have to be a *prostitute* to get it in my lifetime."

"Then get out *Grindr*," she suggested.

We perused.

Messed a few acceptable options.

Made an itinerary.

⁴⁰⁵ You know I mean The Beatles here, right?

I departed to my first option.⁴⁰⁶

“I went out before I had even graduated and I had a lot of girlfriends because I was a cheerleader so they helped me get everything together I went and bought wigs secretly like they gave me jewelry and I went out to my first club and I barely got in there I knew a guy who knew the owner and like he said if I came in drag then I would be fine. *Ooh, baby baby baby, I see us on our first date. Doing everything that makes me smile. When we had our first kiss. It happened on a Thursday. Ooh, it set my soul on fire. Ooh, baby baby baby, I can't wait for the first time. My imagination's running wild. And it feels like*⁴⁰⁷ My first night I made like a hundred and twenty dollars which is like it's pretty good for a first night like you barely make that when you're like pretty established so I was like *I can do this* so then I just kept practicing makeup and then summer rolled around and I started going to Splash Bar down in PCB *And you'll never know how good it feels to have all of my affection. And you'll never get a chance to experience my lovin'. 'Cause my loving feels like*⁴⁰⁸ I was doing amateur nights at Splash Bar and I was only making like forty dollars just enough to fill up my gas tank and make it back home because it was an hour and a half drive to PCB and when I moved here I didn't do drag because I didn't really know anybody but before I moved here I found all of the Persimmon people on social media and followed them beforehand and so when I got here I got on Grindr and I met a guy on there who knew the owner to Terrace because Twist⁴⁰⁹ had already closed so I went there and one of the queens there Envy used to perform at Splash Bar so I knew her and the owner of Splash Bar was like *Talk to this Queen* so I talked to Envy and she was like *Yeah this is Imani you can't paint with her and we'll hot spot you here* Then I hot spotted there on uh the second month of fall freshman year *Oh baby baby baby, from the day I saw you. Really, really wanted to catch your eye. Somethin' special 'bout you. I must really like you. 'Cause*

⁴⁰⁶ I briefly mention said option in “Gray: An Exorcism.”

⁴⁰⁷ Alicia Keys, “You Don’t Know My Name,” recorded 2003, track 5 on *The Diary of Alicia Keys*, J.

⁴⁰⁸ “You Don’t Know My Name.”

⁴⁰⁹ Terrace and Twist were two Persimmon bars that featured drag nights once per week. By 2016, both had closed.

*not a lot of guys are worth my time. Oh baby baby baby, it's getting' kind of crazy. 'Cause you are takin' over my mind. And it feels like*⁴¹⁰ And then a few months passed and I like wasn't performing and it was like a one time thing and then another month passed and I heard about Bumpers and I hadn't heard about Bumpers and I met Darwin and then I went with Imani to Bumpers and Imani did a jump off the stage and split broke her ankle and I was like *You don't know my name* I can perform because I was in drag that's how I got in and so I performed and they put me on cast and that kind of started me here in Persimmon and we built Bumpers from a crowd of like thirteen to having a crowd of ninety so we built that place pretty much from the ground up and like that really helped my drag cred more of the performance side like I was always like *I'm a college student, so I don't have money to be going out and buying new wigs and new makeup* And like I do like luxury items but like Bumpers was a little ratchet and I remember we thought we the shit...It was so hot and we tried everything we had fans it was a mess but it was honestly such a great experience and I feel so bad that we had to shut it down but I thought it was the coolest because it was so underground honestly you walk straight into this pool bar and you go back to these big black doors and you go into this huge room with no air conditioning there's dudes dressed like women and it just looked cool to me even though the bar owners did not like do anything for us everything came out of our pockets so I'm going almost on two and a half years and I'm only twenty and so I started very young and I have a long drag history which is not a lot for a lot of queens who start out so like Smirnoff before she got to Persimmon had already been created basically and then she just grew here."

I used to be

Relax Max

Smirnoff Manolo

Your nerves are just like jumpin' jacks, Max

⁴¹⁰ "You Don't Know My Name."

Now it's Smirnoff

Bumpin'

Bumpin'

BUMPIN'⁴¹¹

POPPIN' A PUSSY LIKE THIS.

The whore phase commenced the following week at Atlanta Pride. At 10th and Piedmont, I sat at the bar and displayed an array of statement rings I wore specifically to capture attention.⁴¹² I bathed in pink light emanating from a makeshift dancefloor (dining tables pushed aside). At first, the dancefloor held a karaoke competition; the crowd was predominantly black gay men. However, one white man, sexuality indeterminate, since he wore camouflage and a John Deere hat, stood and sang “Chicken Fried” by the Zack Brown Band. I immediately felt obliged to point out that I did not know the man. I scooted a few seats down on the bar to put literal distance between us, since we were the only white men there, aside from Fox who was busy essentially scraping ass on the dancefloor with a man Fox presumed had a “fat dick” based on his build and beard. I scooted as far as I could and ended next to a too cute to be fair black man named Cal.

“Your jewelry is so interesting. This large skull, here,” he traced up my right index finger, “Why wear it on a night like this?”

“It’s McQueen. I’m shamelessly wearing it to turn heads. Snag a few, I mean. Someone already asked if it was voodoo. Another began ministering to me about the way that faith in Jesus can heal depression.”

“Someone ministered to you at a gay bar?”

“Of all places.”

⁴¹¹ Dinah Washington, “Relax Max,” track 15 on 1998 reissue of *The Swingin’ Miss D*, EmArcy.

⁴¹² Including the Alexander McQueen skull ring.

“Why are your hands over your eyes?” he asked when our giggling desisted. “The blue is mesmerizing.”

The lipstick lesbian, with whom I was staying and who now showed herself outside the window pointed to my phone, indicating that I should look at it. She’d messaged: *Do not bring a stranger home to fuck in my guest room. I’m going home. I’ll text you the address to give to the Uber driver.*

“Mesmerizing?”

“What color would you call that?”

“Um, they’re gray-blue. I guess. If I wear turquoise, they look like the shade of the gulf, right outside Destin.”

“I can’t place that color. Never been to Destin.”

“My name is Benjamin Tyler.”

“How bougie.”

“Bougie?”

“A rich white boy’s name.”

“Excuse me,” I protested, “You’re in a midtown bar wearing Gucci. You’re not exactly poor.”

“Fair,” he smiled, “I’m Cal.”

“Cal? Born name?”

“Are you implying I should be called something else? Like Tyrone?”

“No, I meant like ‘Cal, short for Calvin.’ Which reminds me of Calvinism, and I just got ministered to, so got to be careful not to get triggered.”

“I’m just teasing.” He picked up my left hand with his right. “Your ring there, on your wedding finger. Real?”

“Yes. Sterling. From Tiffany.”

“No. I meant: Are you married?”

“It’s decoration. And an excuse to turn down unwanted proposals.”

“I take it by your not sending me away that I’m a wanted proposal?”

“So far.”

“Let me try it.” Cal slid the silver band from my finger. He held it above his own wedding finger. Before putting it on, he looked at me and asked: “You’re going to make me do all the work?”

I took the ring and pushed it fully onto Cal’s finger.

“Perfect fit,” he said.

“My mother would die. I should really drive you down to her house right now.”

“Are you one of those rich white boys who likes to taunt their society mothers by bringing home a dark boy?”

Shit. “No. No. I meant she’d die because you’re a man.”

“But my being black is just icing on the shock-value cake?”

Cal suggested we give up talking for a minute, since our impasse made me nervous. “I’m just teasing,” he kept insisting. He pulled me to the bathroom and kissed me, as if to reassure me. Then he pulled me to the dancefloor and asked me to prove myself as a dancer. Prove I belonged in the black gay club. “I didn’t know this was a black gay club,” I protested. “Yeah, all the white people here really make it confusing,” he laughed. He kissed me again, then stepped back and made a gesture like, “Let’s see what you got.” What I got was a cramp in my thigh. I fell over and spilled my drink. He walked out.

Someone put *boys* in bed.

Party *boys*.

Put *out*.

Boys.

Mean love.

Dad.

Dada.

Dadadadad.

DADDY.

Wear four boys.

Be cool.

Better than *ever*.

Check these LEGS, fool.

Service the costume.

Boys in bars.

Ba. Ba. Ba. BARS. Ba. Ba. Bars. Da. *Day*. Doo. Da *Day*. Daaddddayyyy.

Madison slapped me. Not enough to bruise. Or really sting. But abruptly, without warning, just as I settled my head into the pillow.

I was still a timid whore. Fidgeted while undressing, as if an excuse to remain clothed would emerge as Madison was taking his off. I applied hand cream and rubbed it into my skin so efficiently that it probably evaporated. I checked my phone. Thrice. Without prompt. No beeping or buzzing. I checked the door. Played with the lighting. Tried to make the environment just perfect. Relief arrived when Madison offered to do it under the comforter. I could keep on my black boxer briefs.

Then he slapped me.

“What did I do?”

“Nothing. Just a little play.”

“What playground did you grow up on?”

“Huh?”

“We never slapped each other at my recess. So, it’s not play.”

“Sure it is. You’re just too conservative. You’re not used to it.”

“Being conservative has nothing to do with it; I don’t want to be slapped.”

“It’s just a little pat with my hand.”

“And it’s just my face. So, if I ask it to be left alone. I expect it to be.”

“A little rough-housing might liven you up a little. I just want you to be loosened.”

“I’ve had quite enough loosening. The pain has been applied, thank you. I do not need more.”

“You need a bit of pushing and shoving to get out the livewire. A touch of exquisite pain makes the sex all that more orgasmic.”

“Please. If pain was exquisite, Oxycontin would not be addictive.”

Madison pinned my arms on either side. Making me shaped like a crucifix. He kissed me. Not on the face. He bit my collar bone. He dragged his hands up my arms and applied them to my shoulders and pushed down, hard. He lifted himself to place his knees between my thighs.

“Maybe we should go at a calmer pace?”

“Calm will never get us there.”

“Maybe tonight isn’t the best time for us to go to that level?”

“If not tonight, when?”

“We only just met.”

“You wanted a new experience. You won’t find it for yourself. I’m helping you get there.”

I slapped his hand off my waistband. He slapped my hand back. I slapped his. Felt like a Marx Brother.

“Fine. You’re not ready tonight. I’ll give up. But for fuck’s sake, Benjamin, you better get ready soon, or just get ready to live life alone. No one’s going to wait for you forever.”

I sat up, applied tangerine lip balm to my bitten lower lip, and in my best Audrey Hepburn:
“It should take you approximately four seconds to get to that door. I’ll give you two.”⁴¹³

I *love* having a woman’s face.

A *sexy* woman’s face.

And then like just my *boy bod*.

My boy, **boy bod**.

There’s just *something* about it.

I think it looks cool.

I like to think my *legs* look nice.

⁴¹³ Leo Bersani reflects on the cultural trope, “Women and gay men spread their legs with an unquenchable appetite for destruction. This is an image of extraordinary power...the infinitely more seductive and intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman...A general ethical polarity in Greek thought of self-domination and a helpless indulgence of appetites has, as one of its results, a structuring of sexual behavior in terms of activity and passivity, with a correlative rejection of the so-called passive role in sex...the moral taboo on ‘passive’ anal sex in ancient Athens is primarily formulated as a kind of hygienics of social power. *To be penetrated is to abdicate power*” (18-19). I ask myself, is my reluctance to being a “whore” (which is both culturally expected of me and a cultural expectation that leads to social marginalization via sexual pathologizing) rooted in a reluctance to “abdicate power”? A few participant narratives, particularly Gray’s, indicate an implicit fear of being the victim of sexual violence, or sexual domination (at least). Bersani roots some of the contemporary fear of gay sex in the residue of the AIDS epidemic. However, my data and my narrative seem to also indicate a more powerful resistance to assuming submissive sexual role, since so much of queer existence involves social submission. Why add more? Perhaps, too, there is a bit of inherent misogyny in not wanting to assume the “femme” position? At the very least, my encounter with Madison exhibits interesting dynamics of gender performativity. Madison (of the afore-mentioned request for “masc”) performs the “masculine” aggressive role and assumes that I will perform the powerless “feminine” role. I include this narrative in conversation with Leo Bersani since Dusty’s private life is sex-rich, despite his genderfucking tendencies, and his sex-life disrupts some of the conventions seen in men of my age. Perhaps Dusty’s peer group (ten years younger than my own) are better situated to dismantle more rigid gender norms? Julie L. Nagoshi, Craig T. Nagoshi, Heather K. Terrell, and Stephanie Brzuzy produced some findings that suggest the post-millennial generation is more inclined to embrace “fluid embodiment,” at least transgender people are. They note that approximately a third of their self-identifying gay/lesbian participants still conflated gender identity with biological sex. Dusty, and his genderfucking, may indicate that “fluid embodiment” of gender is a path toward eliminating sexual relationships built upon power dynamics and rigid gender norms. Nagoshi et al. help explain, to an extent, Madison’s insistence on “exquisite pain” and my implicit resistance to sexual expression; they write, “Stevens (2004) interviewed self-identified gay college men and found a developmental gay identity formation process involving a back-and-forth between social contexts that fostered identity exploration but repressed open expression of one’s gay identity and the individual’s developing internal sense of self and self-empowerment” (207). In addition, their work with female-to-male transgender individuals revealed a perception that “FTMs were more conscious of the ways in which masculinity is interpreted as power, conveys privilege” (208) with one participant saying, “Moving from male-to-female is almost a slap at masculinity. However, moving from female-to-male is an atonement for that, and saying, ‘Well, this girl wants to be a guy, obviously she knows what she’s doing, because she’s moving from the weaker sex to the power sex’” (213). See, Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010). See also, Nagoshi et al., “The Complex Negotiations of Gender Roles, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Among Heterosexual, Gay/Lesbian, and Transgender Individuals,” *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research* 8 (2014): 205-221.

And my *butt* looks nice, too.

So that's why I don't pad.

I don't wear a lot of tights.

I don't absolutely need them.

It just doesn't feel right.

If you wanna be a drag queen.

Be a drag queen for **yourself**.

If you don't have the personality.

Then maybe do *something else*.

I don't want to fit that mold.

I wanna be my own style.

I like my voice.

My nipples.

My jewelry choice.

My triples.

If you wanna be a drag queen.

Be a drag queen for **yourself**.

If you don't have the *tricks*.

A mode that *fits*.

Then maybe do *something else*.

Every time I wear a necklace, it slaps me in the face.

Bangles get in the way.

I flail my arms, and they get caught in my wig.

I like having my natural body out.

There's not that much separation between me and a stripper.

But I'm a dude dressed like a female.

Pause. That's the thing, too. Drag queens take themselves so seriously and it might just be because I'm young some queens take themselves so seriously and I don't agree that there's...there's a fine line between like professionalism and like having your own head so far up your own ass. Like, yes, you should remain professional in the way of, like, you respect other queens, you respect the bar, you show up on time, you have stuff ready, you have outfits and stuff. But like, queens are so caught up, on all the politics,⁴¹⁴ like, 'Oh, I have this name and this name and this name,' and, 'Oh, you shouldn't do this. Oh, you shouldn't do that.' Like, why do you care? The whole, like, drag is whatever you want to make it, so like. I remember the first time I decided to wear my legs and my boy chest out. I put on a black tutu and walked out, and there was a padded queen there. She came up to me and she was like, 'What the fuck do you think you're doing? You get your ass upstairs, and you change right now.'⁴¹⁵ And I'm like, 'You're not the boss of Me. I don't know who you're talking to.' And I don't understand queens who are like so like cookie cutter and like, like, take drag. Like. Take themselves so seriously. You're a dude dressed as a woman. Have fun. That's the whole point of drag. I wouldn't do drag if I wasn't having fun. Like, they tip me because I look like I'm having fun. I am having fun. I think performing is like...I wouldn't be doing...It takes two hours. Two

⁴¹⁴ The impulse toward making drag political is discussed by Bersani, in which he describes homosexuality as a sexual choice, but gayness as a political lifestyle, especially in response to the AIDS crisis. That distinction is often strictly delineated in the lives of men-of-color who resist assuming the identity of "gay" or "queer" and instead refer to themselves as MSM (men who have sex with men). Patrick A. Wilson, Pamela Valera, Alexander J. Martos, Natalie M. Wittlin, Miguel A. Munoz-Laboy, and Richard G. Parker draw attention to the disproportionate overrepresentation of BMSM (black men who have sex with men) in seropositive status. Wilson et al. performed a meta-analysis of 70 studies on the BMSM population and note that intersectional stigma regarding race, sexuality, masculinity, and social class led to within group reluctance to seek comprehensive care. It's interesting to note, then, that much queer activism is ethnocentric to white population concerns. I wonder whether Dusty's dismissal of the "political" aspects of drag is futile. Is all drag political? If not, should it be? Is drag a way for queer men of color to subvert not just gender norms, but gender and racial norms as well? See, "Contributions of Qualitative Research in Informing HIV/AIDS Interventions Targeting Black MSM in the United States." *Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 6, 2016: 642-654.

⁴¹⁵ The "padded queen" exemplifies an anti-fluid-embodiment stance here.

hours. To get into drag. And your penis is between your legs for like six hours. No one would do it if they didn't absolutely love it. I like love the performance. I love the art. I like everything, and like the whole point is to have fun. Like, yes, it's nice to make money. But like, I'm having fun. And a lot of queens do it for the money, and that's not what you should be doing it for. It's very apparent a queen that performs for money and a queen that performs because she loves the art of drag.⁴¹⁶

If you want to be a drag queen, you best be having fun.

Tonight we are young, and your dick is stuck.

Have some fun, or shut the fuck up.

Ordered a pale pink pair of leather sneakers. Pale enough to be flesh. They were Italian. They were perfect. Ivory laces, which gave the look of an XXX icing pattern across the top of my foot. I kind of liked my foot reading, "XXX." After all, they were club shoes for the whore phase.

I put them on with a pair of sage-green linen trousers with a drawstring waist. Marigold top fresh out of the box from Supreme. My first time making the elusive Supreme drop before sell out.⁴¹⁷ I'm not a skater, but I like looking urban in the club. Otherwise my pale skin and rigid posture make me look like a closeted Piedmont driving supper clubber who got lost on his way back home to West Paces Ferry.⁴¹⁸

Bumped into my mother.

Flapping down the corner of the *Wall Street Journal* she read over lunch, she scanned me. Lady Xerox asked, "What are you doing in pink shoes? That's what a gay boy would wear."

⁴¹⁶ Dusty strikes me here by implying that "fluid embodiment" of gender is a liberating social position. His/Her narrative here indicates a strange queer triumph: when one dispenses with the need to exist within a binary category, then one finally achieves "fun" because other aspects of living take center stage, rather than gender.

⁴¹⁷ Supreme is a New York based, skater-culture-influenced, fashion brand notorious for being difficult to get, since limited-edition capsule collections are dropped once per week. These collections usually sell out within a day or two; patrons must remain vigilant in checking "drop" updates. Supreme is relatively inexpensive, but built cultural cache through partnerships with fashion houses such as Louis Vuitton.

⁴¹⁸ West Paces Ferry is primarily residential street stretching through the ritzy Buckhead area of Atlanta. The Georgia Governor's Mansion is on West Paces Ferry, for example. Saying that address in Atlanta connotes financial and social prestige like almost no other address in the South.

“They’re not pink; they’re flesh toned.”

Lady Xerox hurrumphed. Sipped her tea. Exhaled. “How could you come by flesh-toned shoes when last month I had to give you three-thousand dollars to pay bills while you found a job, after you resigned from your job at the Student Center?”

“Had these since Georgetown.”⁴¹⁹

I stepped outside to drop my bag in the car. Walked back around the patio, from which Lady Xerox could clearly see me from the window. I lit up a Marlboro 100.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Rattatatat.

“Ben. What are you doing smoking? You’re asthmatic!”

“I know, mother. This is a suicide attempt.”

Like smoke I hang around in the unbalanced. Ooo, ooo, oouuh.

It’s not a movie, this is not a script to proofread.

I’ll spit some untruths to dumb fools and groupies.

Fun to punctuate, pronounce the funds I make.

The miles I take put in your face.

Oh, my mistake, you’re not a floozy.

*Then excuse me.*⁴²⁰

We don’t really have much Hispanic heritage. I do look Mexican. My dad is ninety percent Native American, and then my mom is Caucasian. My family is military, so we’ve moved around a lot. We’ve always been separated, like, from a pretty great distance from all our other family that we would maybe get some of that culture from, but we’re very like, Americanized. So, I came out sophomore year in high school, which is pretty young. But I’ve known since I was four. I figured it

⁴¹⁹ Reminder: I worked at the Brooks Brothers in Georgetown, which gave me a robust wardrobe. The extent of said wardrobe enabled me to disguise recent purchases as older pieces being trotted out for the first time in ages.

⁴²⁰ Amy Winehouse, “Like Smoke,” featuring Nas, released as a posthumous album December 2011, track 5 on *Lioness: Hidden Treasures*, Island.

out very early. So, my dad still is military; he's been in for like twenty something years. Grew up in Colorado. That's where my grandparents lived. Really small, small town. They just got a Family Dollar. So, it's not redneck, but it's hella country. They hunt to eat for the winter. Like, that's the kind of town my dad grew up in. He went into the military; so, like, super butch military man. Loves to shoot guns. Loves to hunt. And then my mom grew up Catholic. Seven sisters. No one in her family is gay. No one in my dad's family is gay. I would hear like, sometimes my dad would make homophobic remarks toward the TV. Not like super homophobic, but like, "What a fag." But like, that's it. Like common military term. Was terrified coming out. But this is not going to end well. But I had an uncle who is super accepting, and like very Democratic. And so, something happened, and my dad pissed me off really bad. And I wanted to get back at him. Like, I'm going to get back at him. So, he came in my room, and I sat him down and told him I was gay.⁴²¹ Like, I wanted to get at him, which was like super wrong of me to do. He just sat there, and he didn't blow up like, like I thought he would. And my uncle was on speed dial because I was like ready to go to his house. And then he brought my mom in, and I told her. Then they just kind of stared at each other really awkwardly. And then, like my mom looked me and said, "Alright. Cool. We still love you."⁴²² And then that was like the end of it. I like honestly think my parents are really good people. And they're smart people. And they know what is authentic and what isn't authentic. And for me to tell them I'm gay, I think they were able to rationale, this is obviously not a choice. He wouldn't be telling us like...So, the summer I started drag, it was just me and my mom in the house because my dad was

⁴²¹ Let's take a moment to pause over Dusty weaponizing his own identity to serve as aggression towards his father. This act complicates conventional Homosexual Identity Formation models (rooted in Vivienne Cass's, "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model," *Journal of Homosexuality* 4, no. 3 (1979): 219-235). Dusty achieves a form of identity synthesis through coming out and acknowledging that his being "gay" is a central (though perhaps not defining) characteristic of who he is. He also treats his coming out as a moment to wield power, to manipulate, to avenge. However, he simultaneously capitalizes on "gayness" being an undesirable identity marker as the crux of his power. What a paradox? He's proud to exploit his marginalized status as a tool with which to bludgeon others. Is that power? Is that "queer-as-achievement"? Here, Dusty echoes Dean's discussion of "bug chasing" in which gay men take the fear (and thereby, the power) out of HIV by seeking to contract it and master it.

⁴²² And does their affirmation give him power or take away his power? If his intent was to use his sexual orientation as a punishment, then does refusal to be punished (via affirmation) take away his power? I'm so confused by this dynamic.

deployed in Korea. My brother was in basic training, and like my little brother sent to Colorado for the summer. So, it was just me and my mom. And me and my mom have like a really strong connection. We talk about sex. We talk about boys. Like she knows. Like she's my best friend. So, um, I still had a secret from her, and I was still like doing it in my room. But like I was, it was, the week I was about to go to PCB.⁴²³ I tell my mom everything for like safety reasons, too. Like in high school, I never had a curfew as long as I texted her, "I'm here." So, I didn't want to go without her knowing, and I hate lying. That's another reason why I'm so open and truthful. It's cuz I don't like keeping secrets, and I don't like lying. So, I ended up telling her and she was really weirded out, because when you come out as a drag queen, people automatically think you're trans. And you want to be a woman.⁴²⁴ So, I had to basically teach her about the art form, and I showed her videos on Facebook of drag queens. And I showed her me in drag, and she was like, "Okay, you're pretty good." And like, she used to do hair for *Vogue*, and like so, actually the night I went out, she set out one of my wigs. So, like super chill, super smart. No matter what I do, somehow, I just can't piss them off. I dyed my hair blue, and they still liked it.⁴²⁵ So, then she knew I was performing up here my freshman year. She knew all along, but she kept it from my dad because we didn't think he would be fine with that at all. And then Spring my freshman year, I actually woke up at a friend's house because we had like partied hard, and like I was so hungover, and I called my mom because they were coming and she was like, "I told your dad you do drag. He thinks you're a stripper. Don't piss him off. We're coming to get you."⁴²⁶ Because they were still on their way. So, I drove to the Waffle House, and it was really awkward because everyone knew that there was a subject we needed

⁴²³ Panama City Beach, FL. Approximately 1.5 hours from Dusty's hometown.

⁴²⁴ And that would be a slap to masculinity, right?

⁴²⁵ Again: Are they taking away his power through affirmation? What a mind fuck.

⁴²⁶ Hankins linkage between gender performance, tipping, and sex work makes sense here, now, right? One wonders whether Dusty's parents were more concerned about the sex work connotations than the gender performance. Perhaps they conflated the femininity inherent in drag with increased risk for sexual encounters, sexual exploitation, and sexual passivity, which would be an "abdication of power." That's not to say that these concerns aren't worth considering; however, they were okay with Dusty being gay, but draw the line at drag.

to talk about, but like no one would talk about it. Until the very end, and my dad was like, “Yeah, you know, your little drag thing? You can’t do that no more.” And then, I was like, “I don’t think you can tell me what I can do.” And then, I was like, let me explain to you what it is. What I do. See the art form. He felt really uncomfortable, like seeing a picture. I showed him a picture. And like, he recognized like I’m kind of good at this. I enjoy it. And like it’s a passion of mine. So then, he was like, “if you really like it, and you’re making money, I don’t really care.”

*These bitches want Nikes.*⁴²⁷

*I’ve been tryin’ to get down, to the heart of the matter, but flesh is weak, and my heart is so shatter, but I think it’s about.*⁴²⁸

Do I got a story?

From the whore phase?

Coming out story?

I come out to every person I meet.

Some folks are real dumb, too. Like how can you not tell? It’s the twenty-first century.

You’ve seen fags before, right? Not that I encourage people to stereotype, but when a man rolls into work wearing Stila shimmer highlighter and YSL 10 lipstick and Black to Reality OPI Nail Polish...the odds are in your favor if you suspect he’s sweet.

A couple of weeks ago, I was at a gay club in Midtown. Rainbows literally on the crosswalk. Neon damn everywhere. Freaking Grace Jones was playing on the box.

This dude comes up to me on the patio and tells me that Jesus loves me.

“How could he not?” I asked.

The guy puts both hands on my face and talks about how I need to be contrite.

⁴²⁷ Frank Ocean, “Nikes,” recorded 2013-2016, track 1 on *Blonde*, Boys Don’t Cry.

⁴²⁸ “The Heart of the Matter” was written and originally recorded by Don Henley; however, I prefer India Arie’s cover recorded 2005-2006, track 5 on *Testimony: Vol. 1, Life & Relationship*, Motown.

“I’m drinking bourbon Sprite,” I said. Hoped he’d take the hint and order me another. Felt I deserved something for hearing his sermon.

“No. Contrite.”

“Don’t follow.”

“Son: Your body is a temple for the living God.”

“Say what?”

“Why are you destroying what God gave you? Body and soul?”

“Not sure you know where you are.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just so we’re clear: I suck dick. See that guy over there in that flashy purple top? Look like tinfoil? Think it’s Burberry from 2014.”

“Yes.”

“Might suck his dick.” (I didn’t; the whore phase didn’t work for me).

He said he’d pray for me. As if I needed praying over. Did I look like I felt guilty? Pray for the starving. Pray for the homeless. Pray for the refugees. But me? I’m okay.

I pray you’ll be our eyes

And watch us where we ho

And help us to be wise

In times when we are hos

Let this be our prayer

As we ho our way

Lead us to a place

Guide us with your grace

*Give us faith so we'll feel safe*⁴²⁹

I mean, I can't be the only one who feels this way or sees what's going on? I think what you're going to get from this research project, or what you might get out of it is like making people more aware that there even are gay people on Persimmon's campus.⁴³⁰ And then letting the gay people know that there are other gay people on Persimmon's campus. And like, you could get together or whatever. I don't know how you'd go about getting together. You can definitely do a good job of letting them know. Because when I first got to campus, my suitemate was like, "I didn't know there were gay people here." And then when I went to Orientation, I got on the bus, and right behind me was, "You're from Pensacola? I heard there's a lot of gays down there." And they were like, "Yeah, it's terrible." They like bonded over homophobia in the first two minutes of meeting each other. Like, I think awareness is going to be a huge step on this campus. I mean, there are people who know, but like there's not really like a place for them to hang out. Like, I had no friends freshman year.⁴³¹ And it was rough. And my GPA was not good. Like my weekend life was picking up and that was always something to look forward to. But on campus, not fun. I didn't really have any friends. Going into my sophomore year, I was on academic probation. But freshman year, yeah, it sucked. And then I started making friends in the gay community outside of school, which led to some connections in school. Most of my friends are older. Like, twenty-seven. Freshman year kind of made me hate most freshmen. I kind of just stick to like the gays. The gays. The gays.

⁴²⁹ Josh Groban and Charlotte Church, vocalists, "The Prayer," written by David Foster, Carole Bayer Sager, Alberto Testa, and Tony Renis, recorded 1999-2001, track 13 on *Josh Groban*, Reprise. I know Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli originally recorded the duet; however, I dislike both. So I refer to a less egregious, though still troublesome, pairing of singers.

⁴³⁰ OMG! This addresses one of Renn's strands of queer experience: visibility. #validity

⁴³¹ Lack of social network, especially among other queer people, was the most common theme among the formal data set. Thus, future administrators and scholars would be wise to zero in on the freshman year as a site of study for queer becoming, in flux.

POSTLUDE

I hope you are and are not appalled. I hope you are educated and transformed. I hope you are bewildered, scandalized, scorned, energized, contemplative, unsettled, titillated, ebullient, and activated. Many readers suggested I tone down my rhetoric, curb the more salacious details, consider my future scholarly career and whether I wanted to be known as a researcher who strikes a match and lights a flame at every turn. I considered this feedback carefully. Then I reminded myself that I sought to depict life as is (to the extent that any life may be perceived in such simple terms as “as is”), intellectual development as was (and continues to be), and a vision of life for us that I want to achieve, negotiation and assimilation free. I recalled Jose Esteban Munoz’s use of the phrase “unpack the ruses.”⁴³² Unpacking ruses was the purpose of the study, I determined in retrospect. Unpack ruses, especially those that seek to tell queer people that things are not as bad as they seem. And, “Oh you should be thankful for not living back when...” Unpack the ruses of assimilation, which is highly encouraged in collegiate culture and beyond (for the keys to the upper echelon of society are allegedly found in a college education). And, also, unpack the ruses we tell ourselves to make us feel as if we are not as fallible as we are, queer people included, especially the white gay men who consider themselves magnanimous, inclusive activists when they really only rise to magnanimity for themselves. I also recalled Margaret Atwood’s insistence that no detail enters her speculative fiction that did not already exist elsewhere, in isolated form (perhaps), in human history. The extremes presented here, on either end of the experience spectrum, may seem fanciful or farcical or fallacious or fellatio-us or furious or fecund with dishonesty. However, each element of this text was perceived by someone, felt for even longer, and sometimes transcended individual consciousness.

To make use of this study: I suggest you treat it as an opportunity to immerse yourself in someone else’s consciousness. Take a moment and consider how you might react to a circumstance

⁴³² *Disidentifications*.

described in the preceding pages, then take another moment and imagine how it felt to be another, less privileged, less “normal” person encountering that circumstance. Then take yet another moment and evaluate the justice or injustice inherent in each moment. If you feel indignant, let that inspire you. If you feel inspired, let that activate said inspiration. Last, take a moment, as Glenn Close (in a 2018 *Times Talks*)⁴³³ suggested, and learn to love the characters, even the ones who seem evil on the surface. Treat each man here as a character, and, despite initial impulse, find some way to love them for simply sharing the commonplace situation of humanness. The ability to love above the impulse to reject or despise was the biggest challenge I faced when writing this study. Many people crossed my path during the duration of the search who inspired disdain and scorn. Dr. Hannah Baggett, in an initial review of the text, reminded me that people are people; I must learn to allow fallibility and search for flickers of humanity even in the most seemingly unworthy people. She also suggested I learn to look less on tragedy and find instead triumph. Not everything is bad; not everyone views themselves as victims; and not everyone wants to feel browbeaten (nor condescended to, which is a habit of being that I must swiftly correct). I must also allow space for people to improve, since most faculty, staff, administrators, counselors, advisers, and students living and working in the realm of higher education are attempting to do the best work possible and attempting to serve all students well.

I indicated in the “Prologue” that I would resist making conclusions, interpretations, or suggestions for further action. I stick to that commitment. However, I feel the need to draw your attention to some key moments illuminated by the text. Well-intentioned people may cause more detriment than they realize; in fact, the well-intentioned often absolve themselves of self-made

⁴³³ Parul Sehgal interviewed Glenn Close and Meg Wolitzer about the 2018 film *The Wife* as part of the *Times Talks* series of the *New York Times*. Streamed live on July 31, 2018. The sentiment of experiencing the perspective of others and learning to love characters was echoed in Meryl Streep’s highly publicized Cecil B. DeMille Award speech at the 2017 Golden Globes. Streep advocated the imperative for empathy in the era of President Donald Trump. I share her sentiments.

detriment under the defense of “I meant well.” Safe Zone stickers exhibit that “well-intentioned” fallacy. Well-intentioned does not equate to inclusion. And symbols do not equate to change. Inclusion is not something that need be achieved once; it is something that must be achieved day-by-day, minute-by-minute. Inclusion starts with the most broad parameters; if any marginalized group is left out of the equation, inclusion has failed for all. The freshman year is a site of identity-in-flux, a flux exacerbated by negotiating an emergent gender and sexual identity, which is opposed to their previous sense of self, that was held at bay during adolescence. Gay men may achieve a self-identified sense of self-worth and identity synthesis while still exhibiting signs of internalized homophobia well into adulthood. One wonders whether identity synthesis is even a possibility (I refer here to Cass’s model of “Homosexual Identity Formation” long referred to as the foundational developmental model, primarily for gay men). Synthesis is the final stage of development for gay men; it entails integrating homosexuality into the identity to the extent that it is no longer central nor something that needs to be proven, challenged, or explored further. As Hamp said, his sexuality is not central to himself; that is a production of identity synthesis. Yet, do we live in a society that enables synthesis? If queer people must continually highlight their sexual and gender nonconformity in order to acquire and assert their rights as “full” human citizens, then can a queer identity ever be non-central? Many moments of the text draw into contention the proportion of responsibilities among stakeholders on college campuses. I clearly indicted the student affairs personnel on the campus; however, that does not mean that the rest of the campus may consider themselves absolved. The global cultural imagination perceives higher education as, perhaps, the last bastion of progressive, inclusive ideals and humanism. Yet, the ivory tower is far more regressive than progressive, as this study demonstrates (to varying effects). When and how will we make valid the, for the time being, fallacious cultural imagination?

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