LONELY AFFECTS AND QUEER SEXUALITIES: A POLITICS OF LONELINESS

IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN CULTURE

By

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the manner in which loneliness has been presented culturally, scientifically, politically, and academically as the asocial antithesis of happiness. I suggest lonely people are presented throughout these discourses as misfits, trapped by their lonely feelings and in danger of entrapping others. I further put forth that the impetus to understand and promote a conception of loneliness as depressive and alienating is politically inflected, strengthening neoliberal models of sociality that rely upon particular notions of good citizenship. As a consequence, Western scientific, academic, and cultural discourses continue to reinforce particular brands of "productive" intimacy (heterosexual, middle/upper class, able-bodied, white, monogamous partnerships), while strategically policing the lonely person's presumed immaturity, negativity, and illegibility.

The thesis begins by considering how recent scientific studies are lodged in evolutionary models, with the implication that they position loneliness as an abnormal and dangerous setback to Western sociability and its progress. As a corollary, I demonstrate that contemporary cultural narratives such as Dan Savage's "It Gets Better Project" that have surfaced in order to address queer, teen suicide, bullying, and violence tend to frame loneliness as a degenerate feeling that warrants survivalist tactics and adaptations away from queerness. In scientific and cultural discourses alike, then, loneliness has become stuck onto queer subjects and can only be understood as a condition that infects a sub-set of weak and vulnerable subjects. Judged for their seeming narcissistic and unhappy tendencies, queer sexualities come to be considered dangerous and contagious, and lonely queer bodies are being represented in scientific, cultural, and social media narrativizations as the reason for a larger, Western failed happiness.

The body of the thesis deepens and extends these concerns by analyzing the marked tension between the figurative language that speaks of loneliness as a pathology and an (a)political desire for selfish individualism. I suggest that in light of the current failures of Western sociality what is needed is a space for an understanding of the everydayness of loneliness and its potential to be political. Drawing on critical work on affective politics, this thesis makes a space for the lonely queers among us. Focusing attention on four key areas— the science of loneliness, lesbian narcissism, childhood sexuality, and queer disability—I argue that loneliness is neither an exceptional trauma, nor is it extraordinary: rather, it is every subject's inheritance. By envisioning loneliness as possibly pleasurable as much as it is traumatic, and by seeing the act of declaring oneself lonely as a political strategy, I argue that we may be encouraged to re-evaluate the ways in which we experience relationality, human empathy, and sociality. Moreover, our shared loneliness as Western subjects may actually have the potential to rupture the rigidity of societal paradigms (sexism, ableism, classism, racism, and homophobia) that are based upon exclusion, upward mobility, and capital gain.

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Dear Teiya Kasahara. I cannot forget about you or the love that you have brought into my life. You found me in a moment of stubborn resolve, where I was determined not to let romantic love in. And yet, here we are. You are the most precious gift, and I am the luckiest of all lucky. I will work hard to remind you of that everyday as we build our lonely lesbian lives together.

And finally, thank you to the thousands of teens and their parents who have spoken with me about their loneliness. Your bravery and refusal to accept a world where happiness is bought and on offer only to a select few people into its fold, has inspired me to continue to work for the voices that are so often misheard, and the people who are so violently mislead.

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It's so effortless to let my loneliness defeat me, make me mold myself to whatever would (in some way - but not wholly) relieve it. I must never forget it... I want sensuality and sensitivity, both... Let me never deny that...I want to err on the side of violence and excess, rather than to underfill my moments. (Sontag, *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks: 1947-1963* 37)

You can do a lot of things and be lonely. You can do exciting things and be lonely. You can fall in love and be lonely. You can marry and have children and be lonely. You can be content and be lonely. ... You can even be lonely and be lonely. (Onlin-Unferth, *Revolution* 185)

Our individuality was very precious to each one of us, but so was the group, and the other outsiders whom we had found to share some more social aspects of our loneliness. (Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* 205)

Lonely Gays and the Ways We Play

In 2005, I came across Denise Riley's *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect*

and a nine-page essay within entitled, "The Right To Be Lonely," an essay that,

unbeknownst to me at the time, would become the basis of my academic career.[1] In it,

Riley parodies Western human rights discourses' promises to excluded subjects that once

they are recognized as possessing an identity they will magically be loved and respected

by the "normative" majority. What follows in Riley's essay is an animated discussion

about the pitfalls of contemporary Western society's modes of identification, our

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[1] See Denise Riley's *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (49-58).

structures of relationality, together with a critique of our culture's interdependent investment in the idea of a "fantasized regularity" of selves—selves driven by a need to be sociably accounted and accountable as insiders (52). The result of our tenacious scramble to "incorporate more and more contenders into the realm" of the socially acceptable, is, as Riley names it, loneliness (52).

In response, Riley offers what she terms "the willful principle of the right to be lonely," a phrase that I read as a paradoxical play on the declarative process of identification and recognition (49). Loneliness, as she explains, is "everyone's common fate" anyway, even if only "episodically," and since loneliness is neither inclusive nor exclusive—seeing no such divisions—it should be *the* identity we aspire to (49). To be sure, Riley is joking. For her, claiming a right to be lonely is a satirical stance that enacts "the vacancy of claims to rights," in the process calling attention to the performative nature of the language of entitlement, sovereignty, and privilege (49). Riley wants to highlight what she sees as a need for Westerners to explore the "volatile meanings of the social" (51). It is her hope that in doing so we might find a nuanced possibility: that one can be as "social within one's solitariness" as one might be when surrounded by communities of neoliberally recognized people (58).

I linger throughout this thesis on the idea that loneliness is a politics in and of itself. Currently, any public declaration that "I am lonely" presumes that we are registering this feeling based on what we have been led to believe that loneliness, as a term, means: sad, alone, lacking, in need or want of friends, odd, bizarre, queer, and unhappy. Conforming to the idea that loneliness is definable and that this definition is

always negative is socially expected. If loneliness is understood to be unsocial, depressive, and alienating, then one who is lonely can only be embraced by the social sphere if they agree to "give up" their loneliness. Lonely people, then, are social misfits trapped by their loneliness and in danger of entrapping others. In this way loneliness can only ever be understood as a dangerous setback to sociability. But, is this actually what loneliness is? Perhaps, by envisioning loneliness as possibly pleasurable as much as it is traumatic, and by politicizing loneliness, by seeing the act of declaring oneself lonely as a political strategy, we may be encouraged to reevaluate the very categories through which relationality, human empathy, and sociality are most often studied.

This thesis begins by way of recognizing the everyday, ordinary life of loneliness and lonely people. By necessity, I introduce my topic by outing my own loneliness. I am my own lonely archive. I am the material I have accumulated. I am also queer—a lonely gay woman in loving connection with many others, and I do not see myself as exceptional. My loneliness is both a socially constituted and constituting condition—both independent from my self, and an indication that I am a self in the first place. I can be lonely for a moment and not the next; I can be lonely for a lifetime and still recognize my intense desire for affiliation.

While many might say that loneliness cannot be considered political because it is merely an emotional response (pure affect) and, thus, it cannot act as a form of cultural critique, I contend that to identify one's self as "lonely" is, today, a risky political act that should not be mistaken for a declaration of an "inability" to connect in meaningful and sustaining ways with others. Rather, loneliness is what brings us together in

communication, enabling us to begin to negotiate the difficult terrains raised by neoliberal social structures that take happiness and unloneliness as their beginning point. In other words, the act of proclaiming one's loneliness becomes an ethical affirmation of one's connection to all others, while loneliness itself becomes a trope that enacts its own mobility. In doing so, our shared loneliness has the potential to rupture the rigidity of societal paradigms that are based upon exclusion (sexism, ableism, classism, racism, genderphobia, transphobia and homophobia). There is a marked tension between the figurative language that speaks of loneliness as either the pathological paralysis of solitude and asociability, on the one hand, or the (a)political desire for selfish (and seemingly unethical, irresponsible) individualism, on the other. What seems to be missing, however, is a space for an understanding of the everydayness of loneliness and its potential to be political. I seek to complicate our predilection towards romanticizing and demonizing particular understandings of loneliness, namely its misinterpreted associations with pathology, disability, and selfishness in order to suggest, instead, loneliness's political and even altruistic potential.

Many contemporary scholars have argued that loneliness is a sociological condition that results from impulses toward and feelings of "aloneness."[2] Symptomatic of the social forces at play within modernity's movement towards technological advancement, privatization, and capitalist discourses, what has problematically emerged out of these understandings is the impulse to monsterize loneliness—that is, to out it as an

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[2] See Thomas Dumm's *Loneliness as a Way of Life*; Michael Cobb's "Lonely"; Denise Riley's *Impersonal Passions: Language as Affect*.

extraordinary condition that infects a few debilitated people and yet has the potential to devastate society. In conversation with this fear, Hannah Arendt once wrote: "loneliness and the logical-ideological deducing the worst that comes from it represent an anti-social situation [that] harbor[s] a principle destructive for all human living-together" (478). As scholars, we have been attempting to understand lonely feelings and lonely people for a long time. From the Romantic period onwards, loneliness has been a topic of study for artists (i.e. Keats, Wollstonecraft, Loy, Dickinson, Plath), philosophers (i.e. Shelley, Adorno, Levinas) and psychologists (i.e. Freud, Kinsey, Ellis). And yet a belief in loneliness's inevitable ugliness seems sacrosanct, making lonely people objects of pity and fear. Complicating matters is the fact that loneliness is considered a condition that attracts or "sticks to" a select, strange few (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 91). It is amid and against these judgments that my thesis takes shape.

I see my work on loneliness as being in conversation with an "affective turn" that has taken place in the humanities and social sciences—a moment that has seen an orientation towards both critical and scientific theories on emotions (Clough ix). Engaged in this turn, scholars such as the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as well as Sianne Ngai have been trying to negotiate affect's political potential by asking how subjects affect and are affected by the world around them. I argue that loneliness has not only been singled out as a pathological feeling that unravels what Westerners consider a healthy social—a model of civility, freedom, and diversity—but also that loneliness has become stuck on to queer subjects. In consequence, queer bodies are the scapegoat for a failed happiness and judged for their seeming narcissistic and unhappy tendencies. Drawing on critical work

on affective politics, I seek to make a space here for the lonely gays among us. I suggest

that loneliness and the unhappy baggage that accompanies it can challenge the happy

discourses of the neoliberal West by calling into question the ways in which this Western

sociality actually triggers an everyday loneliness in its subjects by alienating and

excluding so many of us. In a hard-won effort to strengthen ideals such as freedom,

progress, and mobility we have forgotten what these desires require of us—namely

hierarchies of belonging, policed emotions, and exclusionary politics. We have also

forgotten what these desires leave behind.

   Sara Ahmed suggests that certain people and their bodies are susceptible to a kind

of "stickiness" where signs and stigmas (words, feelings, or presumptions) become

"sticky through repetition" until the use of the sign seems "intrinsic" (*The Cultural

Politics of Emotion* 91). In many ways, loneliness has become stuck to queer identities,

and, I argue, to lesbianism specifically. Indeed loneliness does have a long, torrid history

of being intertwined with lesbianism that has "accumulat[ed] in affected value" over time

(92). In its earliest incarnations, lesbianism was associated with an unhappy loneliness

that began surfacing, most prominently perhaps, in the early 1900s when sexology was

beginning to become the mainstay of sexuality studies.[3] In 1928, eight years after Freud

unveiled what he called "the female homosexual,"[4] Radclyffe Hall penned *The Well of*

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[3] For more information see Laura Doan's and Lucy Bland's *Sexology
Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* and *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies
and Desires*.
   [4] From "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," by
Sigmund Freud. This essay can be read in full in *SE* 18, 145-172.
   [5] For some enigmatic information on the novel's fallout and its repercussions for

Loneliness, her novel about lesbian love and death. Plagued by depressed cultural representations, Hall created Stephen Gordon as a confused and miserable person who failed to thrive in her contemporary moment, and who represented a viable threat to the happiness of those around her (Love 101). This narrative would not only land Hall on trial for obscenity, but would also paint lesbianism as an inevitably mournful sexuality, forever forging connections amongst failed masculinity, loneliness, and same-sex love.[5] Noting how readers delighted in making fun of what became known as the "downtrodden [. . .] pathetic, post-war lesbia[n]," Heather Love suggests that readers "balked" at *The Well of Loneliness's* "melodramatic account" of what was known then as "sexual inversion," and yet the book's resonances with the hetero-readership enabled an easy equation between the "depressing spectacle" of the lesbian subject in the book and the lesbian subject of the everyday (100). Lesbians are still "suffering as the lonely outcasts" because of *The Well* and the ways in which it was read (100).[6]

While important contemporary thinkers such as Heather Love, Thomas Dumm, Emily White and Michael Cobb take up the topic of loneliness, the dominant discourse of

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contemporary lesbians see Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards*: *Loss and the Politics of Queer History* and Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian.* See also Christopher Nealon's *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* for a clearer understanding of the emotional politics of unhappiness and homosexuality, and Ann Bannon's *The Beebo Brinker Chronicles* lesbian pulp novels, which highlight the passage of the lonely lesbian throughout the twentieth century.

[6] Heather Love explains: "*The Well*, still known as the most famous and most widely read lesbian novel, is also the novel most hated by lesbians themselves … many readers understand the novel's dark portrait of lesbian life as not only an effect but also a cause of our difficult history" *Feeling Backwards*: *Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (101).

lonely feelings that surges throughout 20th and 21st-century Western political philosophy and the social sciences understands loneliness as pathological, disparaging, suspicious, and apolitical.[7] Often conflating loneliness with solitude, alienation, and singleness, scholars have even suggested that loneliness "necessarily signals misery" (Christenson 589), that it is a sign of a "damaged self," a "spoiled" (Goffman 107-108) or "disqualified identity" (Love 4),[8] and that it has the potential to turn the world into a dangerously "lonely crowd" (Cobb, *Single* 19). As Michael Cobb argues, the new science of loneliness "make[s] you want to run to the nearest available partner and pop the question" (15).

Heather Love makes valuable connections between the queer identity and loneliness. Yet, by seeking to retrieve those lost lonely subjects which modernism has forgotten—those bodies that have been accused of "backwardness" and "lagging behind" (5)—Love's project in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* idealizes loneliness as "a condition of singularity" that leaves the lonely subject unique or special in some way (108). Although I am in conversation with Love, I am arguing here that we, scholars and queers, need to move away from notions of extraordinariness and uniqueness. As neoliberal subjects, to some extent inevitably invested in normative models of acceptance, happiness, and success, we are each guilty of the implications of

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[7] See recent books that discuss loneliness such as Emily White's *Loneliness*; Michael Cobb's *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled*; Thomas Dumm's *Loneliness as a Way of Life*.
[8] Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* makes a positive space for lesbian loneliness. However, she argues that loneliness, and the sadness that accompanies it are unique to queers and this is important to recognize because it enables us to remember and learn from past queer histories that have been denied us.

our presumed superiority over others, and no one is too "normal" or "happy" to escape the detriment these presumptions of our own entitlement have on other people. Reclaiming a special loneliness as our own (a queer feeling) is not my purpose. Rather, I argue that loneliness is not the condition of the few and, although cultural, social, and scientific narratives seek to stigmatize the lonely subject, labeling her abnormal in her loneliness, loneliness does not mark certain bodies as different, remarkable, or queer. It is every subject's inheritance at some point in her life. It is in fact because of loneliness's sheer indifference to bodies, boundaries, and borders that being lonely is potentially the most ethical way to relate to one another. By theorizing an uncomfortable, "peculiar," or *queer* loneliness (different but not extraordinary), this thesis explores how sociality can be reshaped through a politics of loneliness that takes as its focal point the ways in which loneliness brings us together rather than tearing us apart (Arendt 21).

In this political moment, a slippery affective shift is afoot which sees certain "happy" feelings being revered in opposition to unhappy feelings. However, I am suggesting that something queer remains after neoliberal imperatives to ensure that reified ideas of neighbourliness, kinship relations, and positive feelings like happiness are enforced. And it is this queer remainder—affective and mobile, lonely and leaky—that I argue here carries within it a potential for relational changes that remove notions of superiority from the center.

I want to explore the manner in which loneliness has been conveyed culturally, scientifically, politically, and academically as not only asocial, but as the antithesis of happiness. What strikes me about this formula, where loneliness = unhappiness, and

happiness exists in opposition to loneliness—reminiscent of other "axiomatic pairings" such as masculine/feminine; straight/queer (Cobb, *Single* 24)—is the fact that one assumes the opposite of loneliness to be unloneliness—the condition of not being lonely. However, as this thesis will explore, loneliness has instead been pitted against happiness, relegated to a position as the ugly Leviathan that threatens to swallow a happy society whole. I explore here how critical socio-political discourses surrounding positive affects such as happiness have conditioned this equation in an attempt to make happiness intelligible as *the* valorized emotion. The anti-hero (loneliness) becomes unhappiness, and must be defeated by the superhero (happiness) lest we all fall victim to loneliness's power. As a result, lonely subjects are turned into the nefarious characters in our cultural narratives, thought to embody an inherently dangerous potential that will leave us all miserable.

So how did loneliness become happiness's nemesis? How does this binary dualism get enacted in our everyday lives? Why all of the suspicion surrounding the lonely person? And, more importantly, how can loneliness's position as the antihero (one who is unpatriotic, unnationalistic, and a bad citizen) help create a space for a new sociality that refuses to take happiness as its beginning, middle, and end point?

Lonely and Delirious: Killing the Trench Coat

What has become clear now, in 2013, is that the lonely queer subject's vulnerability is represented and perceived as threatening to Western modernity's investment in neoliberal socialities. The West recognizes particular notions of traditional

family and communities, and the happy feelings that surround these, as essential to

maintaining national strength and the ideals of progress. Relational frameworks and

sentiments that stand outside of these traditions get ostracized. As a consequence,

Western scientific, academic, and cultural discourses continue to reinforce particular

brands of "productive" intimacy (heterosexual, middle/upper class, able-bodied, white,

monogamous partnerships) while strategically policing both loneliness's illegibility and

the lonely person's presumed immature, negative effect on society. Furthermore, an

impetus to make loneliness a specifically queer problem, distancing loneliness from

"happy" populations is conditioned by both heterosexual and homosexual discourses

alike. By way of introduction to the tension that I see coursing throughout our cultural

desire to collectively mourn and make lonely the image of the queer subject, and our need

to aggrandize and legitimate binaries between normal and abnormal affects, I explore

what I see as a cultural obsession with queer death.

"Queerness" both denotes strangeness and is intimately acquainted with

loneliness. The lonely queer subject has become the celebrity of the moment, her life

judged worthy or non-worthy through cultural, scientific, and academic discourses that

represent her publicly.[9] Whether through the memorialized suicides of gay teens

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[9] As is discussed at length in this thesis, in a moment rife with fears about queer
teen suicide and bullying, the presumed alienating impact of social media, and the
cultural violence the West has witnessed by the child "gunman" in schools, loneliness has
become a popular topic when researching mental illnesses such as rage, depression, and
anxiety. For more information on this recent turn to understanding the complexities of
violence and suicidation through a loneliness lens see references throughout this thesis,
specifically Kate Bornstein's *Hello Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens,
Freaks, and Other Outlaws*; John T. Cacioppo's *Loneliness*; Wendy Millstone and Jeffrey

throughout North America, popularized through online sites, films, and books about

sexuality, or realized through scientific checklists that quantify and qualify emotions for

statistical analysis and profit, queerness and loneliness have been strategically put into

bed together. For instance, I recall the first moment when I was told that lonely gays can

and most likely will become killers. On April 20th, 1999, 18 year-old Eric Harris and his

friend 17 year-old Dylan Klebold took guns to their high school in Columbine, Colorado,

killing 13 people and injuring 24 others before taking their own lives. Media sources

raged and mourned the lost lives in what I, as a 22 year-old woman at the time,

experienced as the first instance of live, minute-by-minute news coverage of systemic

violence. Casting Klebold and Harris as "sad, lonely, [and] depress[ed]," media sources

painted the boys as members of an elite "homosexual" squad called the "Trench Coat

Mafia" (Kass 179). Portrayed by the media as "frustrated gays" trying to "hide or repress"

their homosexuality, the two boys were thought to have taken their loneliness and

bitterness out on a hapless, otherwise happy heterosexual community (Cullen, "The

Rumour That Won't Go Away" n. pag.; Cullen, "Inside the Columbine Investigation" n.

pag.). Students corroborated the rumours about Klebold and Harris' homosexuality,

offering in interviews that "th[e] [boys] were part of an all boy mafia and homosexual

Brantley's *True Belonging: Mindful Practice to Help You Overcome Loneliness, Connect with Others and Cultivate Happiness*; Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*; Daniel Bitonte's "Alleged Gunman Smart But Lonely; Slain Mother Fond of Guns: Media Reports"; Robert Kolker's *A Cinema of Loneliness*; Katherine Kelly and Mark Totten's *When Children Kill: A Social Psychological Study of Youth Homicide*; *Loneliness Book: Thoughts and Advice for those Feeling Lonely*; Fabiola Carletti's "Are Quiet Loners Unfairly Linked With Violence?"; Sean Seepersad's *The Lonely Screams: Understanding the Complex World of the Lonely*.

group," as one student admitted, that "took showers together" and "held hands" (Cullen, "The Real Columbine" n. pag.). Journalist Dave Cullen suggests that for the two boys who were plagued by ugly emotions, "loneliness was the crux of the problem" (*Columbine* "The Seeker," n. pag.). Analysts presumed that the kids who picked on "depressive Dylan" at school and the girls who ignored him made Dylan feel as though his "distinction [was] a lonely curse" (Kass 80).[10] For Dylan, being "unique" meant being "lonely" all the time (Cullen, "The Seeker," n. pag.) and professionals were quick to make the leap that Dylan's alienation was loneliness, and that this loneliness caused a dangerous desire in him to make "others pay" for his pain (Relative, n. pag.; Altheide 1357). For Harris, a queer "narcissism" was presumed to stem from the boy's fantasy of finding complete solitude, and it was his feelings of exceptional superiority that many argued left him violent and murderous (Kass 179).

Whether or not the boys' homosexuality was more than a rumour, and whether or not homophobic bullying played a significant part in their violent act, cannot be determined. Yet, the fact that the boys' loneliness was deemed inextricably linked to gayness, and then, in turn, to their violence against a presumed heterosexual populace is what interests me here. Being loners was bad enough, but the media assured us that the boys could only have reacted so horrifically if they were lonely gays. As Cullen argues,

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[10] There have been many books written about the Columbine shootings, and each discusses the pathological loneliness the boys suffered—one's loneliness leading to his narcissistic tendencies; the other's leading to their lack of empathy for themselves or anyone else. For more information see Dave Cullen's *Columbine* (2010) and Jeff Kass' *Columbine: A True Crime Story* (2009). Also see the youtube video linking the "lonely boy" to the Columbine Shootings: "Chris Morris Friend of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold."

"whatever the truth about Harris and Klebold's sexual orientation, it's clear that 'gay' is one of the worst epithets to use against a high school student in Littleton" ("The Rumour," n. pag.).

The charge made clear after Columbine is that the lonely are often self-absorbed queers who eventually suffer a violent rupture of the boundary between their internal emotion and their rage against others. This presumed connection between loneliness and being gay has since reemerged in media reports surrounding the Colorado movie theatre shooter, James Holmes,[11] the Dawson College shooter, Kimveer Gill,[12] and most recently, with the Newton School shooting involving Adam Lanza.[13] The warning that loneliness will eventually transform from an internal, personally felt solitary and predominantly queer affect into an external threat presents a conundrum for someone like me who experiences loneliness as a means to altruism and not as a precursor to violence and death. And to complicate matters further, warnings against queer loneliness are everywhere as we attempt to negotiate a cultural moment where our lonely queer teens are choosing suicide over loneliness. It is in this confusing way that queer loneliness is being understood culturally as both a self-annihilating threat to the gay subject rendering

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[11] For more information on the linkages between Holmes, loneliness, and queerness see: "Colorado Shooting Blamed on Gays, Liberals"; "Holmes' Gay Lover Implicated."

[12] For more information on the linkages between Kimveer Gill, being a loner Goth, and homosexuality see Sharon Heleva-Amir and Rachel Cohen-Almagor's "Bloody Wednesday on Dawson College."

[13] On the linkages between Adam Lanza, queerness and loneliness see Fabiola Carletti's "Are Quiet Loners Unfairly Linked to Violence?" and Daniel Bitonte's "Alleged Gunman Smart But Lonely."

her suicidal—and a threat to the heterosexual public at large, simultaneously.

It Gets Happier

The "It Gets Better Project" emerged online in response to the many gay teen suicides that have happened throughout North America in the past three years. Dan Savage's incredibly successful online campaign aims to help queer youth survive feelings of alienation, bullying, and suicidal ideation. Although I discuss Savage's campaign at length in this thesis, I wish to draw attention here to the structural elements of the "It Gets Better Project" (IGBP) and the ways in which gayness and loneliness are being represented in the project's online videos in order to suggest that Savage's campaign uses neoliberal notions of progress and American superiority to endorse capitalist agendas through queerness. Although Savage's campaign has undeniably helped many young gay teens feel a connection to gay communities, there is a problematic trope in these videos that presupposes and promotes an easy relationship between capitalism and happiness. As my analysis will show, the argument that subtends this project is that homosexuality will only be "successful" as an identity when queers figure out ways to overcome their own weaknesses, such as loneliness, and work to become acceptable within the socio-economic frameworks that are accommodated and tolerated by the heterosexual community.

While there are thousands of videos on the site itself, there is a particular structure common to each one that needs critical exploration. Videos made by "couples" in particular emulate a pattern of storytelling that parrots neoliberal discourses, such as the

narrative pattern found in the original video that sparked the entire "It Gets Better Project," "Dan and Terry" ("Dan and Terry," n. pag.). Introducing themselves, Dan and Terry separately take time to tell the camera they are a "healthy," monogamous couple who have been together for "16 years." They have worked hard and have since earned the right for people to "love [them], respect [them], include [them]." Each man then tells his personal story of the bullying he experienced in high school. Dan Savage confesses that as a "musical theatre queen" he was bullied for being what other guys thought of as effeminate—"I liked musicals and I was obviously gay, and some kids didn't like that." Similarly, Terry admits he was bullied because he was considered flamboyant: "look[ing] that way, talk[ing] that way." Focusing on how their outward aesthetic and physical characteristics—the clothes they wore, the way they spoke, the interests they pursued— made them targets of homophobia, both Dan and Terry argue that for them high school occurred in a vacuum, in another time and in another place. Pretending high school away enabled them to survive the hallways and locker rooms; however, the abstract denials of their everyday life also left them believing their loneliness was childish and necessitated imagining away. Loneliness became their own shameful problem rather than an indication that the social structures around them were problematically homophobic. Consequently, as adults advising their young audience that high school is simply a blip in life that needs to be suffered through, both men continue to perpetuate the same abstraction they suffered through—that as queers our loneliness is our problem, and we must wait for people to "get over it" and tolerate differences—"it" being homosexuality. "Sticking out the bullying, the pain and despair of high school" is one necessary hurdle all queer kids

must learn how to jump over. If we are strong enough to survive "the worst time of life," promise Dan and Terry, then, like in "Westside story, there really is a place for us" all ("Dan and Terry," n. pag.). The projection of a world where young, attractive, theatrical heroes must suffer plights of "despair" and homophobic violence on their quest to find happy lives where all "gets better" through adaptation and survival is continued throughout the entire campaign; act happy and you will eventually know happiness.

While the videos vary in length, a step-by-step narrative structure predictably shapes each of the thousands of videos. A typical video can be broken down into these steps:

- Both lovers introduce themselves
- Both lovers out the amount of time they have been together
- Both lovers tell their individual stories of experiences with bullies in high school
- Both lovers explain how they have found, through raw survival, that life gets better when you grow older and out of loneliness
- The clips end with the couples professing their undying love to one another

A comparative look across these videos reveals beautiful people (the majority being handsome, young, able-bodied, white men) promising over and over again that endurance and persistence in the face of verbal and physical violence leads to a prosperous and productive future.

The setting for these videos is most often a living room, where a couple sits snuggly next to one another while calm lights, candles, and soft colors create a happy and

domestic atmosphere. The viewer is granted an extraordinary glimpse inside the window

of a real-life gay home: a private moment where intimacies are made public and secrets

are told.[14] After a happy home life (a homo-life even) is aptly established, each lover

speaks to the camera, offering himself up as an example of what life will look like when

you survive high school and everything "gets better." Each video promises that a happy

life can be achieved through a successful job, a dedicated relationship, a family (whether

that be children or pets), travel, and financial stability. The clips suggest that Dan and

Terry's idealistic life, and the space they have carved out for one another, is available to

everyone. All that needs happen is for young queers to turn towards happiness and away

from bullies.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed argues that

critical theorists need to embrace a queer phenomenology in order to "offer a different

'slant' to the concept of orientation itself" (3). Interested in not only "how we [as people]

'find our way'" but also how we come to "feel at home" in the directions we inhabit (left,

right, backward, forward), Ahmed offers that this feeling-at-home drives our

unquestioned national investment in public/private distinctions, binaries, and stereotypes,

including those which delineate "straightness" (7). In her argument that "becoming

straight" takes work (79), Ahmed surmises that heterosexuality is not "simply an

orientation toward others" but is also something "we are orientated around" and taught to

inhabit (90-91). Consequently, "compulsory heterosexuality" and even homonormativity

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[14] For more on the "intimate public sphere" see Lauren Berlant's *The Queen Of America Goes To Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship.*

not only limit a subject's ability to steer off course, or to "reach what is off the straight line," but force queerness, queers, and activists ourselves into expected and manipulable positions (91). I see this happening throughout Savage's IGBP, where the videos promise acceptance for queerness and yet condition that acceptance by presenting an acceptable image of queer happiness. While Savage and his partner go to great lengths to invite viewers into their happiness, the fact that this lifestyle—one dependent upon wealth, masculinity, whiteness, privilege, and power—is not accessible or even desirable to many queer people suggests that happiness is the cost of getting better, while loneliness is the price one pays for not being able to be happy.

"Fuck 'em All!"

Another IGBP video entitled "Kimberly and Stacey," a "real life" lesbian couple, is particularly salient for the focus of my thesis on lesbian loneliness. In their 11:16-minute long video, Kimberly and her partner Stacey reinforce the happiness professed by Dan and Terry, from the leather couch in their living room. A "successful" monogamous pair, they are celebrating their "four-year anniversary today" lending a sense of happy pride and urgency to the picture ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.). Adhering to the strategic format of the IGBP, Kimberly makes two promises: to tell "[their]" story, and that "it does get better." After having provided us with a temporal marker—the day of their anniversary—that legitimizes their relationship by emphasizing its durability, Kimberly begins with her self-confessions. She explains that "misery" and "isolation" and feeling "alone" left her "pretty suicidal for most of junior high and a lot of high school."

"I was just not getting what the point was…why continue with it," she says. Yet, she wavers, "somehow [I] did make it through, day by day." Harkening to an everydayness inherent in high school, Kimberly blames the bullying she endured on her androgynous appearance as a teen, and on the fact she was too immature in her loneliness to get over the bullies' imprint and move on. As Kimberly becomes ever more fidgety and uncomfortable in the retelling of her history, her girlfriend Stacey stares expressionless at the screen. It is as though Kimberly's storytelling necessitates stoicism. When Stacey does reveal her own story she says she was bullied at school because she was the new girl in town. Revealing a heartfelt story about her alcoholic father and the mean girls in her class, Stacey credits the church with saving her life in the ninth grade. It is important to note that neither Stacey nor Kimberly were out as lesbians in high school. However, for Stacey the church community she found "loved" her and "accepted" her, and it was with their support that she could finally "move to a big city" and become a "big city girl." For Kimberly, however, life only began when she grew up.

Several presumptions are advanced throughout these and other videos in the IGBP. There is the assumption that youth today can be understood by adults who experienced bullying in their own past—that the everyday lives of youth can be made coherent only through adult lenses. Kathryn Bond Stockton questions the ethics surrounding "adults looking back" on their childhoods in order to inform understandings of children today (5). Arguing that the "child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were," she questions whether looking back is not simply the process by which we create potentially harmful "nostalgi[as]" and "fantas[ies]" about the experiences of

present-day children (5). We do not know the "contours of children," she argues, or "who they are to themselves," so perhaps we should "stop talking" for children "altogether" (5). As in many other IGBP videos, Kimberly and Stacey tell youth how they should feel now, and how they will feel in the future, with little ability to understand the lived experiences actual youth are feeling in this moment: a moment rife with technological advances, digitization, and different social expectations because of these innovations. Moreover, the promise that it gets better is not supported by helpful strategies for understanding bullying, nor by tools for understanding queer feelings. In fact, the articulations of this promise of "better" offer no suggestions as to how society might make material changes to the ways we perpetuate and create spaces of oppression and marginalization that leave youth feeling alone in the first place. Instead, youth are left with the empty promise that "somehow" they will make it through "day by day" ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.). It is as though queer loneliness is a condition that they personally need to get over, like alcoholism, leaving the culture that fosters homophobia entitled, ongoing, and intact.

Stacey and Kimberly also dramatize what it was like for them as bullied teens, and yet, oddly, there is absolutely nothing about young sexual identity in their narratives. Kimberly was bullied for being shy and different looking; Stacey was bullied because she was the new girl in town. Instead of speaking to their queer narratives, the two women spend much of their airtime attempting to convince themselves that surviving the horrors of their respective high schools was good for their moral characters. The hardships of homophobia, loneliness, and heartbreak are each revealed to be inevitable in high

school—in other words, normal. In turn, each woman promises her audience that idyllic lives await *all* queer teens when they work hard to overcome their loneliness. Capitalist ideologies such as these suggest suffering hardships affords subjects with "some continuity in the world." Hardships become learning mechanisms in these videos, as though being bullied and overcoming loneliness were part of being a "citizen in training" ("079: Interview with Lauren Berlant," n. pag.). For instance, Kimberly often reiterates the necessity of suffering for a better future, telling teens that the bullying they endure and the feeling of loneliness that results is "building character." She even suggests that bullied gay kids can "build on this pain and be all the stronger for it" ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.).

The promise that suffering today yields a successful tomorrow is reiterated often throughout the IGBP, echoing a "what it will mean to endure" capitalistic value structure ("079: Interview with Lauren Berlant," n. pag.). Thriving, surviving, and living through lonely feelings and outward homophobia are the mantras of the day. Kimberly's promise of happiness, or what Lauren Berlant has called the "fantasies of the good life," coupled with Stacey's unfaltering optimism that you can "do anything you want" once you get out of high school and get over your loneliness, reveal that the "structures of attachment" promoted here are material and reside within the safety net of a capitalist, heteronormative framework ("079: Interview with Lauren Berlant," n. pag.). "Go to college," Kimberly tells the viewer, and then "make your life extraordinary … you can do absolutely anything you want" ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.). Echoing popular American patriotic military logos such as the "be all you can be" slogan in the mid-90s,

Kimberly's pep talk seems like a call to arms where the lonely outcasts of high school all grow up to form an "army of the lonely" who are redeemed by becoming part of the crowd (Cobb, *Single* 21).[15] Kimberly then aggrandizes her privilege: "I'm in love, I have a partner … we've got our own home … we've got the means, the ability to do it," while Stacey adds "we've got great jobs" ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.). The happy life that Kimberly and Stacey, as well as Dan Savage and his partner Terry, advertise represents a "cruel optimism." This optimism suggests that an idyllic fairytale life awaits every queer teen who watches the IGBP videos, and yet does so without also critiquing the cultural and social privileges that make this life impossible for many of their viewers ("079: Interview with Lauren Berlant," n. pag.).

For many teens watching the IGBP, the promises therein (such as Savage's lavish trips to "Paris," or Stacey's going to "college," Terry's book deal, or Kimberly's freedom to do and be "anything [she] want[s]") are not available. The fact that the same capitalist, ableist structures that these queers support are the very same structures of oppression that ensure other queers remain oppressed is not only ignored by Savage, but also celebrated as these structures become *the* way to achieve happiness as a homosexual. The lack of consideration for those who might not have the privileged ability to become unlonely, survive bullying, and then go off to college is overwhelmed by the capitalist rhetoric that this project endorses. Financial stability, happiness, monogamy, and traditional notions of "home" are celebrated at the expense and exclusion of other types of family or

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[15] See the actual US ARMY recruitment video from 1994 here: "Army Be All You Can Be," (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDbNtFL2TUI).

complicated affects like loneliness. For instance, according to Kimberly, to feel lonely, "miserable," or "isolated" is to be feeling in the wrong way. By equating homophobia with inevitability and normalcy, and getting better with wealth, monogamy, and being able to have "anything you want," Kimberly unwittingly undermines the plight of the bullied queer teen ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.).

Yet, in a strange turn of emotional tenacity Kimberly tells teens that rage—getting angry and even—is an acceptable feeling. However, rage is permitted and afforded you *only* once you grow up and "get better." Only adults have the right to say, "fuck 'em all" and Kimberley assures teens "you can tell them that, fuck you" once you are through with high school. Until then, you have to bide your time ("Kimberly and Stacey," n. pag.). What I find intriguing here is that her final words contradict her earlier message of martyrdom. Bullied teens are primarily instructed by Kimberly to passively work through their loneliness and survive to stay alive rather than critique the system of oppression they are stuck growing up in. Kimberly and Stacey's step-by-step advice to making it through high school involves repressing anger and sublimating it into capitalist desires, stumbling through a loneliness you are not supposed to talk about, fleeing your home, moving elsewhere to become a middle-class, homonormative subject who, by way of growing up, is now able to vengefully stand in judgment of others—undermining any anti-bullying rhetoric by essentially telling teens that when they grow up they too can become a kind of bully. It is the long awaited "fuck you" that Kimberly suffered for. Kimberly's obvious uncertainty about the way she feels now that she has "survived" the bullies who made her life tough comes across as cruel optimism once more, where the acceptance Kimberly so

desired from her schoolmates has become that "obstacle" that continues to impede her own "flourishing" now that she is an adult and has become older and angrier (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 11). Perhaps Kimberly has simply better learned how to modulate her emotions.

Brian Massumi argues that in the West we have proven that we are actually willing to make all of our political, economic, and cultural and social decisions based on how we are "feeling" at any given moment (x). The "greater our power to be affected [. . .] the greater our power to act" (x). The power, of course, then lies in the hands of she who can manipulate her feelings, changing her own affective "mindset" and sometimes the feelings of others (x).[16] The IGBP struggles to smooth out the affective shifts and ruptures that complicate its project of affirmation. While the kids the videos seek to help are experiencing a plethora of raw emotions that are not pretty—sadness, loneliness, anger, suicidal ideation, helplessness—Savage's constant promise that happiness is the emotion to achieve, and that this emotion is only rewarded after queer kids suffer through years of torment, is worrying. What happens to a child's loneliness, though, if it is ignored for so long? And, is this what we want our queer kids to do, to grow up and say, "fuck you" to everyone who does something wrong?

Tumbling Down the Slope of Loneliness

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[16] We who consider ourselves Leftist, as Massumi warns, are coming a bit late to the party as "in North America at least, the far Right [has been] far more attuned to the imagistic potential of the postmodern [affective] body than the established left and has exploited that advantage for at least the last two decades" (*Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect and Sensation* 44).

In contrast to the IGBP, *The Slope: Superficial, Homophobic Lesbians* is an independent web series written, produced by, and starring the lesbian couple Desiree Akhavan and Ingrid Jungerman (www.theslopeshow.com). These women satirize the ways in which stereotypes of lesbianism have been popularized by social media. Particularly important to my thesis are the couple's discussions and performances of loneliness and narcissism. I suggest that each woman queers the stereotypes surrounding lesbianism that being a lonely queer is extraordinary in some way, or that loneliness inevitably causes death and ruin. Providing audiences with a very mundane, ordinary couple who do boring, everyday activities—shopping, dating, sleeping, drinking— Desiree and Ingrid comically present the tensions between cultural perceptions of lesbianism and their perceived loneliness alongside the everydayness of their actual lived experiences. In making lesbianism into an everyday identity, the couple challenges the ways queerness is perceived as a threat to heteronormativity by parodying lesbian narcissism, making lesbianism so shallow it actually reveals itself as a caricature of both hetero and homonormativity. In doing so, *The Slope* uses the notion of lesbianism as spectacle in order to enact and parody the individualistic, self-centered impulses of hetero and homo neoliberalism—identities that serve to reify capitalist prerogatives and goals.

Ingrid and Desiree critique the neoliberal underpinnings of the IGBP by making an "It Gets Better Project" video themselves. *The Slope*'s IGBP video enters into this teen-suicide dialogue as the lone antagonist to Dan and Terry's or Kimberly and Stacey's messages. As we meet Ingrid and Desiree they are perched on their couch, at home, speaking to the ominous camera in front of them (*The Slope* Episode 5: "It Gets Better?"

n. pag.). Introducing themselves as "a real life couple" Ingrid smiles lovingly as her

paramour Desiree adds, "even though I don't look gay" ("It Gets Better?" n. pag.).

Calling attention to the stereotypical appearance of queers, especially the gay male

visibility and the butch/femme power dynamic represented throughout the IGBP, Ingrid

and Desiree choose to begin their video by being honest about their adherence to such

expectations: these two women profess to fit the bill even if they do not. Desiree's long

hair, what she would call her fashionable flowery dress, curvy body, and Iranian heritage

make her an outsider in pop-cultural gay communities' presumed white, femme, body-

conscious, waify aesthetic. Ingrid, on the other hand, is left to be the one who "looks" gay

in her striped shirt and jeans, tomboy body, shorter hair, and lack of makeup. Together,

the couple looks ordinary—a stand in for any two bodies they might encounter on the

street. Further parodying the absence of diversity throughout IGBP, Ingrid and Desiree

next have fun with their lesbian presence by embodying many stereotypes we have

culturally presumed about lesbianism. In doing so, they perform narcissism, butch/femme

subjectivity, and queer vanity through humourous and often politically offensive

pronouncements.

Following the IGBP narrative structure, Ingrid gives a shout out to all "LGBTQQ"

teens while Desiree, confused, queries: "what does QQ mean?" Ingrid tells her, "Queer

and Questioning," and Desiree happily responds, "Oh, I don't care about the ones that are

questioning … [they're] just having a bi-curious Katy Perry moment" ("It Gets Better?"

n. pag.). Shocked, Ingrid says that Desiree cannot simply exclude people because she

doesn't think their identities count, inadvertently calling attention to the ways the queer

community splinters and separates over issues of trans*[17] and bisexual exclusion, but

Desiree assures her she certainly can do just that. Desiree is positive she is right what

sexual identity is and what it is not. Unlike the IGBP which professes to be inclusive of

the queer community and yet concentrates on white, gay male experience, she doesn't

pretend otherwise. [18] She is arrogant, narcissistic, and egocentric in her declarations.

Smiling a lot as though her happiness makes her entitled to ridicule others, she is

permitted these indulgences. Desiree arrogantly refuses to understand that her humour

might actually reify the stereotypes being waged against her own queer community by a

heteronormative public. Her performance of optimistic elitism serves to critique Dan

Savage's public persona as a man who satirizes and makes fun of others while

simultaneously celebrating his own success as a gay celebrity. After all, excluding and

ridiculing others is exactly what Savage does in his columns: he laughs at people he

doesn't understand or agree with, even as he is criticized over and over again for ableism,

misogyny, biphobia and transphobia.[19]

Moving on to tackle the next element in the typical IGBP video, the personal

confession, Ingrid and Desiree ask one another if they were bullied when they were teens.

However, rather than exclaim, "yes," as expected, Ingrid replies: "No. I wasn't out in

high school. I mostly dated athletic Black men." Referencing the stereotype that

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[17] * refers to transgendered, transsexual, and undeclared gender-queer individuals
[18] See: *thestranger.com*
[19] For more information on the critique against Dan Savage see the following: Chris O'Guinn's "Snails and Oysters: Dan Savage is Biphobic"; Dan Savage's "Bisexuals"; Renee Martin's "Womanist Musings: Dan Savage's Bi-Phobic Rant"; "Dan Savage Gets Glitterbombed."

surrounds the queer kid in high school who must be miserable, sullen, and ostracized, Ingrid also uses the stereotypical figure of the strong, athletic Black man and creates a hero out of him. Gently critiquing notions that Black subjects are more homophobic than Caucasian ones, Ingrid presents us instead with a narrative where the little lesbian girl is protected by an iconic Black athlete. Risking further offense, Ingrid turns the narrative of Caucasian supremacy on its ear. For her part, Desiree enters the narrative with a traumatic tale of being "most definitely" bullied in high school. Ingrid, almost relieved and excited about this confession, declares, "because of your sexuality?" But Desiree immediately disagrees: "No, ah, because I was very ugly and a little bit fat. Yeah, nobody really gave a shit about my sexuality" ("It Gets Better?" n. pag.). Interrupting what is supposed to be a video made for teens who are being bullied *because* of their homosexuality, Ingrid and Desiree parody videos like Kimberly and Stacey's which work to efface queerness even while notionally foregrounding it. Significantly, many of the appeals throughout IGBP are stories of outsiders, as though being ostracized because of your weight, religion, or parents necessarily conjures the same emotions as being queer and bullied because of your sexuality. Sexuality is neither the focus nor the point of a lot of these videos even though the IGBP was created for the teens who died by suicide and were bullied specifically for looking or being queer. Ingrid and Desiree are using humour to point out that while the videos profess to give support and sound advice to queer teens who are struggling with homophobia and suicidal ideation, the videos themselves do the opposite. Their point is that the IGBP videos are losing their own plot.

Providing us with a recap of what the couple has derived from their superficial musings on the subject of homophobia and bullying, Desiree gives the following summary: "So I guess what we can glean from this conversation is that one can protect themselves from bullies by dating athletic black guys and not being fat." By "gleaning" that the only way to survive high school is to date "black guys" and not "be fat," Desiree and Ingrid are poking fun at the sort of advice the IGBP videos offer—advice that is often heterosexist, classist, repressive, and judgmental ("It Gets Better?" n. pag.). More importantly, though, the lack of coherency in Ingrid and Desiree's message, and the ridiculous "uninevitableness" of their advice serves as a counter-response to the neoliberal messages throughout IGBP. Going over their list of ways to avoid being bullied in high school Ingrid and Desiree, in a moment of quasi-seriousness, argue that "it gets better is a big piece of advice to give someone." The emptiness of the promise that "it will get better" does not sit well for either woman, as each wonders "how?" Desiree provides us with the following advice: "It's kinda like saying you'll grow into that nose one day. I say 'fuck that. Go get a nose job.'" Seeking a more "take charge approach," and critiquing the message of IGBP that you must wait until high school is over before expecting to feel better, Ingrid tells us: "we made a check list, together as a couple, for kids who want to *make* things better":

> Desiree: "Number 1. Don't be fat."
> Ingrid: "2. If you're ugly, be really funny."
> Desiree: "Number 3. Don't demand too much attention."
> Ingrid: "4. Don't be loud."
> Desiree: "Not everyone needs to have an opinion."
> Ingrid: "Number 5. Know a lot about music. That's a good one [...] and finally number 6. Oh, don't do theatre."
> Desiree: "I would have to say that there is a way to be out, gay, and

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> happy in high school. And it's if you are a hot girl."
> Ingrid: "Yeah, or a colorful gay guy who has like a boa and a catch
> phrase." ("It Gets Better?" n. pag.)

A lot of their advice is sadly true in a capitalist society that values appearances, material

wealth, and cultural capital over all else. Further, through Ingrid and Desiree's satirical

list one can see that the IGBP's advice to queer teens is just as ridiculous. Ingrid and

Desiree's advice that teens should stay silent and not be too "loud" poignantly echoes the

advice the IGBP offers: survival requires silence and bucking up. "Not everyone needs to

have an opinion," Desiree suggests, and this declaration is exactly what the IGBP videos

tell teens. Do not criticize the structures that enable oppression, simply learn how to adapt

to them. Be evolutionary, not revolutionary.

Darwin's Lonely DNA

Normalizing the social structures that enable oppressive ideologies and leaving

them largely intact, IGBP advocates a happiness that depends upon upward mobility at

the expense of lonely feelings. Troublingly, however, the capitalist ideologies used

throughout IGBP also evidence a passive return to Darwinian, evolutionary theory. I want

to point out that both the "Dan and Terry" and "Kimberly and Stacey" clips liken

sexuality to a struggle for survival that pits the fit against the weak. As a larger theme of

my thesis, I explore how the adaptation of the Darwinian model of emotional containment

runs throughout the perspectives surrounding models of affect that I discuss at length in

the coming chapters. Perhaps indicative of the turn that popular culture as well as facets

of neuroscience have taken towards evolutionary psychology, much is being made of

survivalist discourses, especially when considering affect and fears of its contagion. This relationship between science and affect has easily bled into cultural understandings of both queerness and loneliness. For example, important to this thesis, and discussed in more depth in Chapter One, is neuropsychologist Dr. John T. Cacioppo's use of Darwinian models of evolution in his contemporary research on loneliness. In fact, Cacioppo has begun an entire scientific discipline dedicated to studying loneliness through an evolutionary, biological perspective.

By way of brief introduction to this essentialist discourse, it is worth noting that Cacioppo conceptualizes "human nature" as having evolved in ways that enable "specialized devices" in our brain that "allow you to connect" socially ("John Cacioppo: Loneliness," n. pag). When this "connection" is at risk loneliness is the result. Citing the "decimation of the extended family" as well as rising "divorce rates" and "empty nest problem[s]," Cacioppo argues that loneliness is on the rise in certain people because their bodily make-up is "signal[ing]" and feeling the pain of "becoming disconnected" ("John Cacioppo: Loneliness," n. pag.). Their loneliness singles them out. Living against the grain of their evolutionary make-up, lonely people are not living in ways that "fit our human nature." Loneliness, then, is a "mutation like physical pain" that signals a person's "need for others"—a pain the lonely person must quell in order to be "happy." Since "evolution" has not "had the chance to repair" the pain "mechanism" of loneliness, Cacioppo argues, it is up to scientists to figure out ways to "make happier more productive individuals," ridding people of their loneliness and unburdening the non-lonely of the lonely. Believing vehemently that there are non-lonely and lonely people—

two separate groups marked by genetic predispositions and neurological differences—

Cacioppo argues, "most people don't feel lonely" ("John Cacioppo: Loneliness," n. pag.).

The ones who do are "special," and their loneliness "is a danger signal." The lonely might

even be called queer, as I suggest (Aamodt; Vaszily). These "scientific" findings paint the

lonely person as one who will be driven to "an early grave," and who always has the

potential to become that queer "lonely terror" who can take us with them (Cobb, *Single*

17, 39).

 Taking a page from this evolutionary understanding of emotions, Savage's IGBP,

too, advocates for survivalist thinking when addressing the needs of queer teens.

Dovetailing with Cacioppo's homogenous view of feelings (those emotional triggers that

signal we are not acting in accordance with our biological make-up and human nature)

both Kimberly and Stacey's and Dan and Terry's videos presume there must be a

universal feeling for queer teens, and, furthermore, that homophobia is experienced in the

same ways by all bullied youth. As Cacioppo suggests, pain is paramount to our

evolutionary survival—"if you didn't have physical pain in your system you likely would

not survive." However, while Cacioppo argues that "we are the architects of our social

reality" and that "betrayal is normal," these suppositions suggest that one's feeling of

loneliness in high school (and beyond) is one's fault, and it is, therefore, one's social duty

to grow stronger because of the experience ("John Cacioppo: Loneliness," n. pag.).

Loneliness is a burden to overcome as an individual, alone. The cruelest of optimisms

here, however, is that if one is considered neurologically hard-wired to feel lonely, then

while it might be a Western duty to be happy as a citizen, one's genetic make-up

undermines this possibility, making the lonely person a failed subject from the beginning. As Ahmed might say, failure gets "stuck" on your body without you even knowing it (*Queer Phenomenology* 91).

Unhappy Being Happy

Critiquing the IGBP for its utopian promises and its refusal to speak to the structures that oppress queer teens, *The Slope*'s video serves to highlight what high school has actually become under neoliberal structures. Ingrid and Desiree show audiences an example of two adults who are so shallow and enmeshed in identity politics that they cannot understand what it feels like to be a lonely, bullied teen. Moreover, Ingrid and Desiree perfectly model the fact that capitalist teens may well not grow up into nice, compassionate adults by virtue of having survived bullying as youth. Instead they remain caricatures of the bullies one might see in high school, re-created in a queer neoliberal image. One could easily imagine adult Ingrid and Desiree telling their peers to "fuck" themselves, as Kimberly does. In these ways, this video makes evident the betrayal inherent in the promise of upward mobility, presenting audiences, instead, with a glimpse of what repressing feelings of loneliness and wearing a happiness mask will actually do to you and your identity. Their video, although deliberately outrageous, speaks to the actuality of the Western high school setting that has been permitted to become a nexus of homophobia and oppression because of our investments in middle-class "normalcy" and purity. Homophobia is expected; we create the spaces for it. The excessiveness of arrogance, shallowness, and striving for bodily and aesthetic perfection these women

parody mirrors the actual requirements of acceptance and recognition in a society that values money, power, and uniformity. *The Slope's* humour relies upon our present everyday lives as neoliberal subjects who continue to privilege homophobia as part of a narrative of overcoming, self-improvement, and positive evolutionary adjustment.

The end of the video is similar to Kimberly and Stacey's. Desiree, much like Kimberly, continues to ramble incoherently, and Ingrid, like Stacey, tries to suffer through it while remaining stoic. Instead of ending with the advice that Kimberly provides—that when you become an adult you can say "fuck you" to people who once treated you poorly—Desiree unabashedly undermines the supposed point of her and Ingrid's pro-queer teen video in much the same way the IGBP inadvertently undermines queer teens with its advice. Desiree pleads: "Don't, don't kill yourself. Because suicide is super gay" ("It Gets Better?" n. pag.). By equating suicide with being gay, and being gay with something stupid, Desiree's quip points to the paradoxical messages in the IGBP videos, a campaign that professes inclusion and yet excludes, advocates for the expulsion of loneliness in favour of survival, validates structures that force queer teens to suffer as teaching tools, and legitimates capitalist, heteronormative, classist, ableist, male-dominated, self-centered ways of life as the way to happiness.

What I am suggesting overall is that the "It Gets Better Project" legitimates homophobia as a necessary part of queer experience. By rewarding melodrama and valorizing bullying—effectively providing bullies with an entire online site dedicated to their ignorance and violence while also suggesting that experiencing hate is a necessary step in growing up—Savage's project also validates the stereotype that queers are

"special" people with extraordinary feelings, a suggestion that undermines the notion that queers feel ordinary affects, and live everyday lives. However, unlike the videos in the IGBP, Ingrid and Desiree are not there to thank Savage or deify his efforts. They are there to give "real advice" to kids who need it in an everyday moment that requires it. Not concerned about the future financial success of teens, these two women's performance video politicizes the present, and the stereotypes of present-day, ordinary lesbians, by making sarcastic and ironic statements that emphasize the loneliness that remains unrecognized for queers after the promise of happiness—future wealth and acceptance— fails them. The joke is actually on all of us as we blindly aspire to these happy ideals, turning away from the fact that our investment in happiness necessitates the oppression of others.

The Lonely Turn

Trying to free the condition of "singleness" from its associations with loneliness, cultural theorist Michael Cobb suggests that being single and being lonely are two different circumstances: to be single is to be free from the confines of the "couple"; to be lonely is to suffer a devastating blow to chances for a "happy, thriving, lifestyle" (*Single* 8, 4). In reaction to what he sees as the singlemindedness of a heteronormative society that revels in coupledom and monogamy and fears loneliness at all costs, Cobb dismisses recent studies of loneliness, calling them "ubiquitous" indications that loneliness is, has been, and will always be a depressive attribute (13). As he argues, "loneliness, as we're frequently reminded, has terrible consequences" (15). However, returning briefly to

Hannah Arendt, it is important to point out that although she argues loneliness is the condition that can reduce the human to non-human—its "terrible consequences" as Cobb observes—she also sees the positive potential in its ordinary, everydayness as well. She argues that although "loneliness is … contrary to the basic requirements of the human," it is also "one of the fundamental experiences of every human life" (Arendt 475). I offer loneliness here as a social, everyday feeling that brings people together in space, conversation, and love. I register Cobb's and Arendt's fears that loneliness is one of those emotions that is considered undeniably awful— the condition of the alienated and alienating— and I am sensitive to the fact that as scholars we "have been taught to be wary" of theories that might celebrate selfishness and "inflated individualisms" just for the sake of argument (Cobb, *Single* 25). Bearing this in mind, however, I suggest that we have overlooked the potential within loneliness to turn us around politically.

As a small side note in *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed suggests that instead of constantly negotiating with, responding to, and resisting hegemonic structures that seek heteronormativity and queer conformity, queers might consider refusing to answer the calls of mainstream politics (no matter how defamatory or offensive), thereby refusing to be set on the right and straight path—to be turned around. She claims:

> Yes, we are hailed; we are straightened as we direct our desires as women toward women ... the hope is to reinhabit the moment after such hailing: such a politics would not overcome the force of the vertical, or ask us to live our lives as if such lines do not open and close spaces for action. Instead, we hear the hail, and even feel its force on the surface of the skin, but we do not turn around, even when those words are directed towards us. Having not turned around, who knows where we might turn. Not turning also affects what we can do. (107)

Although Ahmed does not examine this injunction to turn away any further, I suggest that

queer thinkers, especially lesbians, can create a space for a politics that engages the ugly feelings surrounding our loneliness.[20] Turning toward loneliness allows me to manifest Ahmed's claim that in order to shift the attention and direction of relational politics, theorists, thinkers, and activists may need to move in baffling ways and into unusual places. Because it is intersubjective and offers a way of being-in-the-world-with-others through its ordinary, everyday disarming resistance to sociability as it is currently organized (if not always lived) in Western society, loneliness fuels and enacts a refusal to answer the heteronormative hail, the "we want you but not you" call of Western society. In the face of such hailing, lesbian loneliness emerges as a refusal to be turned around to that demand.

My key questions in this thesis are: If the lonely are thought strange—not the norm, and the exception to the rule as Cacioppo's empirical results argue—and if queer identities are also not the norm (the exception to the heterosexual rule), what connections between queerness and loneliness are being presumed and supported by scientific discourses, and at what cost? If queerness and loneliness are considered interconnected as has been rapaciously argued by the social media, psychologists, scientists, and academics, and if ultimately the suggestion is that lonely people are threatening to society, disabling, and monstrous, why in recent years has loneliness become considered a crisis state, an emotion that warrants its own medical warnings? Is the science that speaks of loneliness

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[20] The concept of "turning" as a repressive gesture and as a mode of policing identities is theorized in Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power.* Butler states: "self restriction" and "reflexivity is [determined] through ... this turning back upon oneself which is simultaneous to turning toward the law" (115).

arguing that queers are less evolved than heterosexuals? Are queers hopeless and helpless social contagions to be done away with? Are queer dispositions, habits, and/or practices such as narcissism, or sexual intimacies like kissing or cunnilingus, or emotions such as loneliness, extraordinary? Do they threaten the ordinary, everyday survival of our species? How do cultural narratives such as the IGBP collapse under the weight of such assumptions, even unwittingly legitimating them? If we are instructed to turn away from loneliness, and in doing so turn towards a social that creates monsters and enemies in order to feel safe as a false "collective," does that mean lonely people are, in effect, the new "terrorists" and that they are lurking 'within' the nation? What does their lonely presence suggest for relational politics? Speaking to these questions, I seek here to politicize loneliness, arguing that its "noncoherent singularit[y]," its combination of intimate narcissism and altruistic desires, makes the affective resonances that it enables a key to social change (Riley 4).

In Chapter One, I explore current cultural, academic, and scientific perceptions of loneliness. According to the early twenty-first-century science of well-being, loneliness takes on the disposition of a trauma—not entirely spectacular, but messy enough to disrupt and unsettle anyone it is unfortunate enough to touch. This comparison is important because in much the same way that the term "trauma" conjures images of extraordinary, horrible experiences that lead to a host of illnesses (Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, nightmares, sleep deprivation) loneliness too is being understood as

traumatic.[21] I suggest in this chapter that in consequence of loneliness's newfound celebrity, scientific, academic, and cultural discourses have become dependent on their negative suppositions about loneliness. Westerners are conditioned to handle lonely feelings as though they were traumatic, stopping them—by fighting their effects, as though stopping loneliness will stop some form of metaphorical bleeding and social enervation and collapse. When one is lonely (and feeling vulnerable, empty or lost), the science and cultural perception of loneliness forcefully encourage the lonely to get over themselves—to return to a natural, evolutionarily "fit" state of unloneliness.

I further suggest throughout this chapter that the desire to diagnose, cure, and arrest loneliness while instilling a sense of "natural" happiness back into lonely persons indicates Western modernity's desire to also eradicate queerness (Sedgwick 2). In these cases, to stop feeling uncomfortably lonely becomes synonymous with "normalcy" and "purity," while the extraordinary lonely gay subject must learn from the ordinary, happy hetero-social citizen how to adapt. However, while happiness is considered to be the emotion that "promises to relieve loneliness," and happiness is thought to be achieved through heterosexual love, this chapter asserts that Western culture's heteronormative, phallocentric notion of love and happiness has become vulnerable to a lonely rupture, where loneliness serves to trigger unhappy feelings that are calling Western socialities into question (Cobb, "Lonely" 450). The result has been a sharp return to Darwinian,

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[21] For more information on trauma studies and queerness see Ann Cvetkovich's *Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*; Melissa Gregg's *The Affect Theory Reader*; Eve Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity*; Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*.

evolutionary discourses that seek homogeneity through the legitimization of heterosexual exceptionalism. I explore here how the science of loneliness is leading this turn, advocating for the control over affects that challenge happiness and the capitalist agenda behind it.

Chapter Two explores the potentialities of dwelling with queer loneliness through a focus on lesbian narcissism. Arguing that narcissism has always had a close relationship to loneliness I suggest that rather than being an extraordinary condition of antisociality and selfishness, lesbian narcissism creates a space for ordinary, everyday loneliness and altruism. Exploring Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch* and Kelly Connell's *Double Life*, I examine the ways in which these two narratives weave a socially conscious and critical lesbian narcissism throughout, prompting their audiences to question the connective potential of a gay narcissism. These artistic inquiries critique the promises of neoliberal happiness by embracing everyday, unpretty feelings, particularly loneliness's traumatic rupturing of the ego.[22] Waters' and Connell's texts demands a self-reflexivity where the subject takes herself and her selfishness into account, precipitating the questions: what am I attempting to secure for myself? Is this even possible?

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[22] Lauren Berlant argues trauma has become "synonymous" with any "disturbance" that makes a subject feel as though they are not able to "trust" their life any longer ("079: Interview with Lauren Berlant," n. pag.). As such, trauma becomes "modeled on a notion of the exceptional," as that which both "interferes" and "shatters" lives. In a contemporary moment where living as though constantly in crisis—"an ongoing, heightened state of experiencing a threat to life" ("079: Interview with Lauren Berlant," n. pag.)— has become ordinary, loneliness curiously remains exceptional to those who seek to understand it. In the same way Berlant seeks to "stop exceptionalizing trauma" and those who feel traumatized, I argue loneliness is an everyday way of life, ordinary and socially connective not because it brings rare, miserable subjects together, rather, because loneliness is a shared affect we all have and always had in common.

Chapter Three returns us to childhood kisses. In this analysis of childhood sexuality and the ways in which queerness gets monsterized as an extraordinary and pathological sexuality for children, I argue that encounters with loneliness can lead queer children to love and compassion. Here, I explore the panic that has surfaced surrounding early-twenty-first-century queer youth suicide. Examining the fictitious narratives found in the films *Hanna* and *The Nature of Nicholas* alongside Phoebe Gloeckner's graphic memoir *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl* I analyze our Western preoccupation with blaming our "monstrous" behaviour—our homophobia, classism, racism, ableism—on queerness. I also explore how that reaction affects our queer children. Using the act of "kissing" as a metaphor for the rupture that occurs when loneliness serves to critique neoliberal discourses that enforce compulsory hetero-intimacies on our children, I suggest that we are treating queer children as though they are a filthy residue of our failed happiness, punishing them with loneliness for their chosen intimacies. I argue in this chapter that the kiss is what brings lonely kids together and unravels the cruelty behind the policing of conditioned affects such as happiness. In this way, childhood loneliness is not catastrophic; it can be conceptualized differently, as a political act of turning us around and around until we finally see the need for social change, even if dizzied.

Chapter Four engages with contemporary disability theory and the lies Western society tells itself about tolerance. Exploring Dan Savage's *Miracle!*—a parody of the life of Helen Keller—alongside Terry Galloway's short film *Annie Dearest* and memoir *Mean Little deaf Queer,* I explore how loneliness serves to speak to the cultural appropriation of queerness by able-bodied, hetero and homonormative public. So invested

are we in a Western promise that we can all be happy, successful, and included that we cleave to unhappy discourses of exclusion and rejection, intolerance and hatred. Specifically, the act of lying serves here as a mode of performance that can reveal the extraordinary hypocrisy found within a contemporary ableist and heteronormative society that rewards itself for its diversity and yet cannot tolerate actual tolerance.

Happy Intolerance

Important to the entirety of this thesis is the point that loneliness is not an exceptional trauma as scientists such as Cacioppo would have it. Nor is it extraordinary. Everyone is lonely to some extent, at some point in our lives. This insight leads me to believe that contemporarily we are not fearful of what we understand to be lonely individualism—even though we continue to voice this fear. We are, in actuality, fearful of a social loneliness, where groups of lonely people find one another and socialize in new ways that challenge mainstream Western discourses of sociality. Loneliness, I suggest throughout this thesis, carries within it a potential politics of alterity; it not only puts the current heterosocial structure at risk, the lonely subject challenges the aspirations and desires of that structure—that is, Western investments in capital, progress, futurity, superiority, patriotism, and universalism. Our unease with loneliness, then, speaks to the fact that we know the way we (as Westerners) are relating to each other's otherness and otherness in general is wrong, but that we are not sure what to do about it. We feel wrong; we feel absence; the social feels wrong. Perhaps, then, it is not lonely people who need to be rehabilitated, but rather the social itself.

CHAPTER ONE

Critical and Cultural Engagements with Loneliness

When we are lonely we not only react more intensely to the negatives; we also experience less of a soothing uplift from the positives. (Cacioppo, *Loneliness* 31)

Loneliness can be a vacuum or an iceberg. Lonely people need to deal with the vacuum inside by sucking up everyone around in order to fill their void. Or they need to deal with the iceberg inside by trying to gain warmth from everyone around. (Fisher, *Rebuilding* 37)

Science's Stake in Mistaking Loneliness

I begin this chapter with the story of my thesis' beginnings. In writing this dissertation, I have had many friends offer their suggestions on reading materials and experiences of loneliness which have proven invaluable to the process through which I have been trying to understand what loneliness is culturally, politically, and socially, and how and why I see a necessity for a change in how we understand the lonely. "Isn't loneliness just a form of masked depression?," people have asked. "Doesn't such a

project make me lonely?," some have queried. "Do I need a test case?," many have offered. This chapter stems from my desire to contextualize loneliness's critical engagements with pop-cultural, academic, and scientific discourses in the recent present. I argue that these dialogues with loneliness are interconnected and speak to a larger cultural trend that sees the sciences, academia, and cultural politics negotiating one another in ways not understood before from these typically insular modes of inquiry. In some odd way, loneliness's supposed disconnect has brought these discourses together and I explore why this might be the case.

To be sure, people have been talking about loneliness over the last decade. As discussed in my introduction, since the turn of the millennium there has been a surge in attention towards loneliness. As evidenced by memoirs such as Emily White's *Lonely* (2010), Thomas Dumm's book of mourning: *Loneliness as a Way of Life* (2008), films such as 2012's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*, 2011's *A Lonely Place to Die,* and countless online sites for those who consider themselves to be lonely such as the Experience Project (www.experienceproject.com) and Web of Loneliness (www.webofloneliness.com), people today are very much interested in uncovering what loneliness means to them. A desire for happiness and a fear that loneliness forecloses this possibility has kept isolation, solitude, and unhappiness (and the belief these are all synonyms for loneliness), at the forefront of discussions about what stands in the way to people being happy.

I begin this chapter by introducing you to Jeff, one lonely guy (see Appendix 1). Jeff Ragsdale (a budding comedian and actor) made headlines when, after suffering a break up with his girlfriend, he posted flyers around New York City asking people to do

one simple task: call him. Posted on telephone poles throughout the Upper West Side,

Chelsea, and the East Village throughout October 2011 his posters read:

> "If anyone wants to talk about anything, call me (347) 469-3173.
>
> Jeff, one lonely guy" (Cahalan)

This act solicited over 65,000 calls from people all over the world who began checking in

with Ragsdale. The politics surrounding Ragsdale's outreach were starting to get people's

attention so much so that to date he has published a book, and has made a living as a

motivational speaker against the perils of loneliness.[23] It seems the space Ragsdale

created by posting the poster, and then later publishing his intimate conversations with the

people who connected with him by phone—people he did not know prior— resonated and

continues to resonate with people, intertwining the public performance of social

networking with the intimacy of private disclosure.[24]

The posters that Ragsdale stapled to telephone poles circulated a narrative that

was publicly accessible and open to personal interpretation. "Talk to me about anything

because I am so lonely," the posters invite. "Make someone happy," they seem to beg.

This public appeal for someone, anyone, to tell us where our collective lonely "narrative

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[23] The fliers advertising his loneliness became so popular on social media sites such as Reddit, twitter, tumblr, and Facebook that Amazon.com solicited a book from Ragsdale. The resulting publication *Jeff, One Lonely Guy*, gathered together texts and messages he received and conversations he had with other people about, among other things, loneliness. Amazon even created posters to advertise this book with the catch-phrase "Occupy Loneliness" across the top, harkening to the grassroots political movement Occupy Wall Street. See also "Occupy Loneliness: A Talk With David Shields About One Lonely Guy" (*UW Today*).

[24] For more information on other interventions that combine private confessions with public spaces see *postsecret.com*, a site that posts postcard confessionals.

is headed" has certainly struck a chord with listeners, readers, and buyers. David Shields, author of the widely popular *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* and who also wrote the introduction to Ragsdale's book, describes Ragsdale's prose "as Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* told for and in the digital age." "*This* is Occupy Loneliness," he asserts, and it must be paid attention to (qtd. by Jones "Jeff, One Lonely Guy on Seeking," n. pag.; emphasis in original). This *this* is not stipulated, but Shields' words suggest the "this" refers to Ragsdale's act of merging his private loneliness with a public desire to talk about it, a declaration that also suggests a willingness to protest against anything or anyone who would attempt to dissuade a movement against loneliness.

And Ragsdale found supporters for his movement in the thousands.

Those who have found comfort in this space created by Ragsdale between the private and public sphere continue to post messages to Jeff's twitter and tumblr accounts, revealing their intimate experiences. Some of his followers have talked of the chance Ragsdale has given them "to anonymously vent" in a way that is personal and impersonal at once (Levy). Their messages to Ragsdale vary, oscillating between confessions of depression, to advice for Jeff to hang in there, to everyday chatter about weather or food. On April 3, 2012 a self-professed "failed actor" reveals: "I'm pretty lonely myself, which is pretty weird considering I'm married." April 2nd's post reveals: "I need a job," and March 28th's message is: "I was hospitalized twice in the past two years for suicide attempts." So "maybe I'll drive away and never come back" someone on March 29th, 2012 writes. There are posts about financial stress,— "I'm a single mom and make too much money to get help and not enough to live off" (March 28th, 2012)—posts about

failed relationships, ("I lost my best friend to da worst enemy" [March 26, 2012]) and lost intimacies: "need 2b held" (March 28th, 2012).

What is interesting here for the purpose of my thesis is that Jeff's outreach has revealed that although loneliness is a term people use often, loneliness's meaning to peoples' lives differs greatly: financial loss, illness, job security, lost and invalidated love, or a bad day at the office are all being used to describe loneliness. Loneliness becomes an umbrella term for despair and desperations of all kinds. Appearing on the CTV News Channel on March 21, 2012, Ragsdale was asked about the "common loneliness people have" and how he understands loneliness himself. Ragsdale discusses how he understands loneliness to be a passing affliction, one that keeps him from romantic love, and one that can come back at any time even after it leaves: "we've all been lonely in our lives" and people need help to "get through this; it's going to get better" ("Jeff, One Lonely Guy is Lonely no More," n. pag.). Jeff's promise to the public that "it's going to get better" assumes that when one is lonely, it is their problem to deal with, and that one simply needs to get better, revealing loneliness to be a continuous assault, always lurking in doorways even after you've asked it to leave. Vampiric in its resonances and queer in its movement, loneliness as Ragsdale conceptualizes it speaks to the ways in which being lonely is commonly understood culturally, politically, and professionally as a dangerous, menacing, and unwanted condition that sucks happiness dry.

I will argue that loneliness, depicted as a threat to the self and others that is calculated in its mobility and manipulative in its desire to dissuade healthy growth and happy development, has become personified in the figure of the queer, threatening

stranger. Further, after extensive exploration into the contemporary cultural understandings of loneliness, its definitions and (mis)uses socially, politically, and economically, I have come to realize that this current narrativization of loneliness is embedded in discourses that require a particularly traditional sociality of their citizens—a strategic connectivity that celebrates heterosexual normalcy and happiness. If Jeff, one lonely guy, gets unlonely by going on a few dates with women, then his return to happiness is also a marked return to traditional ideas around heterosexuality, reproductivity, and futurity, all of which reward him as a success story. In consequence, the lonely subject, the figure that remains "still lonely," becomes a constant target of pathologization for both her strangeness and her sheer lack of happy compliance. In other words, alongside the new social, scientific, and scholarly investments in the study of loneliness discussed here, what has emerged is a narrativization of loneliness that sees loneliness as an antagonist pitted against a straightened ethos of heterosexual happiness.

These characterizations of loneliness as queer echo the ways in which the queer subject has been represented historically as the pathological, sickly, failed identity—and as threatening to infect with and recruit normal, healthy heterosexual people to moral degradation. On the heels of a post-911 Western preoccupation with the notion of "terror" and the narratives that have been built around who a "terrorist" is, in 2012 a version of the "introvert" from 20th century sexology has returned, where the pathologization of loneliness and the queer subject's presumed vulnerability to being lonely have turned some lonely subjects into the new queer monsters that a neoliberal West must defend

itself against.[25] Government funded, politically sanctioned and commissioned scientific studies on loneliness are being used to legitimate homophobia by arguing that loneliness and queer sexualities are, and perhaps have always been, interconnected. Publicly outing the lonely subject as stalwartly queer, these scripts work hard to ensure being lonely is indistinguishable from being queer, and that loneliness is considered a queer disorder. Pathological, bizarre in her intimacy, harbouring desires that pose infectious and dangerous threats to healthy heteropublics, the lonely subject is presented to the general public as so abnormally queer she hurts.

This chapter starts with the premise that there is an ethical urgency in the contemporary moment to re-imagine the lonely queer subject as she who has the potential to demand compassionate changes to the relational structures we have each been capitalizing on in the West. Through an exploration of pop-cultural, academic, and scientific narratives on loneliness, I suggest throughout this chapter that loneliness refuses these scripts, interrupts neoliberal social networks, disrupts characterizations of normalcy, and demands spaces for our queer "ugly" affects (Ngai 7).

The Lonely Celebrity

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[25] Not only based on the racial and cultural profiling we witnessed post 9/11, the new lonely queer monster is also discriminated against because of her sexual and gender identity. Not surprisingly, the most affected queer persons who are made to bare the weight of such oppression are still non-white, non-heterosexual, culturally diverse people such as Aboriginals (2-spirited peoples of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit), women, trans people, and youth.

Today, everyone is talking about loneliness. It's the Voldemort of our time, the Branjelina of unpretty emotions. However, loneliness's newfound celebrity has been greatly misunderstood and misused by academics, scientific and healthcare professionals, politicians, and social media-driven popular culture. Characterized as an emotional state that is always depressed, sad, and pathetic, loneliness is surrounded by an anxious idea that lonely people need to be policed and cured. A presumptive paranoid ideology surrounds it, and this ideology requires and polices loneliness's temporality, comprehensibility, and map-ability. The vast amount of literature (medical, memoir, self-help, and academic) available that is supposed to assist lonely people in reassembling their dismembered selves reveals the fear of loneliness as an entity that must be discovered, followed, expelled, and fixed. In recent years, a host of narratives have posited that by studying loneliness through its degrees of severity, chronological history, and population patterns, researchers have now determined what loneliness is. What is evident throughout these presumptions is that not only has loneliness amassed an assortment of anti-social and threatening connotations, but that queer minorities are being profiled and targeted as the bringers of loneliness, misery, and shame.

To declare that science now understands and, moreover, that researchers know which kinds of people are most likely to be lonely is troubling for me. Their definitions of loneliness tend towards a single paradigm that is enmeshed in models of cause and effect, while loneliness lends itself to medicalized models that work to pathologize, shame, and/or pity the lonely. Seen as a weakness, leading—if not treated—to dangerous isolation, disability, narcissism, and serious mental degradation, loneliness is tainted as

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queerly abnormal. For instance, loneliness is commonly understood by popular social media sites that publicize scientific discoveries as the condition of the strange, solitary wanderer, the shadow cast in a crowded room, the alienated and alienating child at the party who prefers to sit alone, the introverted teenager who writes sensitive poetry, the older woman who stares off too much, the immigrant who is too quiet for comfort, the lesbian couple who keep only to themselves and their cats. These untrusting notions surrounding the lonely person are everywhere in a contemporary culture that rewards publicly demonstrative affects that seem happy and considers loneliness an extraordinary impairment rather than an everyday feeling.

In the past two years, examples of the sensationalisation of loneliness have been widespread, as media outlets published thread upon thread highlighting the most attention-grabbing stories while using the term "lonely" to secure these features' quirky popularity: "Lonely Wife Threatens to Blow up 10 Airplanes," *ABC News* claimed (Newcomb; November 8, 2011); "Ralph Fiennes Says Harry Potter's Evil Lord Voldemort Just Lonely," *The Guardian* claimed (Child; July 14, 2011); "Loneliness Linked to Premature Death," ran a headline for *CBC News* ("Loneliness Linked"; June 18, 2012); "Seen at 11: Loneliness and Death," argued *CBS* soon afterward "Loneliness and Death" (July 22, 2012); *BBC News* published "Young More Lonely Than the Old, UK Survey Suggests," (C. Murphy; May 2010), while *Pink News* ran the opposite headline: "Stonewall Report: Older Gay People at Risk For Loneliness" ("Stonewall Report"; September 2011). Yet, another source rallied that "Loneliness Can be Contagious" (Mapes), while, following suit, livescience.com published their article:

"Why Loneliness Can be Deadly" (Gammon). In perhaps one of the strangest stories, ABC News warned they had uncovered a fraudulent adult who masqueraded as a Harvard student for years, attending classes and taking exams, all in order to feel less lonely (Krieg's "Harvard's 'Lonely' Man Ignites Campus Media Feud"; March, 2012). Each of these news stories uses words meant to spark the feeling of danger they claim is inherent in loneliness; coupled with words such as "contagious," "blow up," "risk," "evil," "ignites," and "deadly," loneliness becomes easily associated with explosive harm, disease, and fear.

Even more detrimentally, in their reports on scientific studies of loneliness the social media has linked loneliness to murderous tendencies, mass suicide, and social pathology, making claims that it is an attribute that is capable of both unraveling happily social people and pushing particularly vulnerable people (such as the alienated, isolated, or marginalized) into becoming dangerously anti-social to the point of violence. Sadly, in recent years numerous children and young adults have gone on killing sprees at their schools. Reported as retaliators against a social sphere that abandoned or refused them, these lonely gunmen have become media spectacles and exemplars of loneliness gone awry. Bullied by the social groups they could not fit into because of their shyness, sexuality, race, class, or general sensitive eccentricities, these young people have been presented to the public as lonely reactionaries who snapped in pathological defiance *against* the social that dismissed them. Seen as exclusively constituted by misery and rage, loneliness is used throughout these news stories to explain what happened to make these people violent. Dylan Klebold, one of the teenage Columbine shooters in 1999

whom David Cullen describes as "the quivering depressive" who created poems about "love" and attended his prom only days before the shootings, wrote in his journal hours before the killings simply: "the lonely man strikes with absolute rage" ("Columbine, the Book," n. pag.).

And it continues: Isaac Grimes, the 15-year-old boy from Colorado who in 2009 murdered his best friend, Tony Dutcher, and his friend's parents because of a desire to "fit in" with his popular peers was dubbed the "lonely sophomore" by *ABC News* (Krieg). Jared Loughner, the young man who in January 2011 shot 20 people at a Safeway in Tucson—including U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords— has been described as "a portrait of isolation, a nobody" whose "lonely world" preconditioned his actions (Holestege). Of James Holmes, the recent gunman who opened fire at a movie theatre in Colorado, Diggity Dave, a reality star who talked to Holmes a month before the shooting, said: "I knew the kid was lonely" (Rogers). Stanton Peele, a psychologist, argued: "if James [Holmes] had someone to go to the movies with, he wouldn't have faced a crowded theatre with guns blazing" ("A Lonely Killer," n. pag.). But perhaps one of the most poignant considerations of loneliness's presumed reactionary, antisocial underpinnings came in 2007 as media sources struggled to understand how 23- year-old Virginia Tech gunman Seung-Hui Cho could suddenly open fire and kill 32 classmates before shooting himself in the head. *The Guardian's* Blake Morrison called Cho a boy who suffered from "loner behavior" and "personality disorders" (Morrison) while Lucinda Roy, Cho's poetry professor, described Cho as "extraordinarily lonely—the loneliest person I have ever met in my life" (Potter, et al.). In an online forum meant to open dialogues

surrounding the 2007 shootings, Username XTHC revealed what he sees as a social

responsibility for us all in violence. He describes the young shooter (who reportedly

referred to himself as "the question mark") as someone whose loneliness positioned him

against a society that courts violence through alienation and yet refuses to see beyond its

judgmental, unhappy-making ways:

> We never listen to those that are different from us—the outcasts, the lonely, the homeless, the ones that are unspoken for. We don't try to understand. We shun them and put them out of our minds because of our fear that we will become like them. And these people become more and more lonely and alienated in their isolation ... There are more "Question Marks" out there. There are millions of them. And if we don't listen to them, they will follow the same path again and again, because people are not connecting. We are becoming more and more disconnected from each other, creating more and more "Question Marks" every day. ("Question Marks," n. pag.)

This quote does much to explicate a presumed binary division between the normal social

and the special lonely, where the lonely "them" must be treated differently from the

normal "us." Moreover, XTHC's words speak to a paranoia that highlights this nefarious

and unknown "they," the people among us who are always ready to attack a very

vulnerable Western sociality and cannot be trusted. These "different" and strange

"outcasts"— "the ones that are unspoken for" who we cannot "understand" but who stand

amongst us as social outsiders—provide fodder for the idea that a new nemesis has

surfaced throughout Western nations, one which is visibly invisible—no longer hiding

away in the shadows. And as XTHC warns here, the everydayness of these Question

Marks' arrivals demands that we strengthen our social strongholds and avoid becoming

"disconnected" so that everyone is accounted for and no one remains a "question

mark"—so we don't "become like them" ("Question Marks," n. pag.). This type of

reasoning, echoed also by Stanton Peele who argued above that James Holmes simply needed a "real" friend to attend the movies with, reifies a leftist ideology that suggests commerce capitalism and globalization have turned what used to be communal relations into nothing other than products and objects, necessary tools with necessary functions that leave us all lonely.[26]

What each of these above examples seems to suggest is that a fear of loneliness is rampant in Western society in all corners of life, and its incoherence (its "question mark" status) is terrifying: to not know an identity or a problem is also to not know what to do about it. While the effects of loneliness have been long thought to include "feelings of anger, sadness, depression, worthlessness, resentment, emptiness, vulnerability, and pessimism" (Donner) what has recently emerged is a widely held assumption by medical experts and scientists, discussed in detail below, that the lonely person creates for herself a particular subjectivity that she then uses against the social: she is paranoid, thinks she is "disliked" or "worthless" and, because of this, she knowingly decides to become highly "self-involved... lack[ing] empathy with [and for] others" (Griffen 15). Further, these narratives suggest that the lonely is a predetermined figure, a susceptible receptacle for loneliness, one who cannot control loneliness's emergence in her body, or its consequences. In this way, she is internally powerless and externally contagious, requiring her self-containment to survive. What strikes me as intriguing here is the recent obsession not with needing to dissect loneliness and interrogate the lonely, but with

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[26] For more on this see "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?" (*The Atlantic*) and "Social Networking: Failure to Connect" (*The Guardian*).

turning the lonely subject into a subject of scientific and medical study.

Alongside loneliness's newfound online celebrity (as a feeling, act, cause for a preventative campaign, and trigger for violence) this chapter negotiates scientific theory's current turn towards loneliness as a biological inheritance that hinders. I turn to a group of scientific articles that began to surface in 2010 theorizing the genetic essence of loneliness. Given the fact that the social network is what the science industry is concerned is most at risk of being undone because of loneliness, and the irony that it is through social networking sites such as Facebook that I have been made aware of a lot of these scientific studies (through friends and their desire to help me with my lonely project and my loneliness itself) it seems fitting to converse with these articles as sites that interrogate loneliness.

The scientific concentration on loneliness—and in particular its insistence upon seeing loneliness as a social debilitation— is symptomatic, I argue, of a larger cultural paranoia surrounding sociality and its potential vulnerabilities. Although these narratives are attempting to chart affects and behaviours that science claims can lead to social disease, these studies are also troubled by both loneliness's shiftiness and its ordinariness. In their attempt to render loneliness extraordinary, scientists have used fear to warn people of loneliness's presumed pathological aspects. In doing so, the scientists explored here have created a profile of loneliness and the lonely subject that relies on essentialist understandings of genetic defect to explain what is scientifically considered the "condition" of loneliness. Capitalizing on a notion that loneliness is a monstrous rarity, these scientific models make us afraid, and then deploy militant metaphors in order to

legitimate violence against the lonely. Consequently, these scientific discourses have done much to render loneliness a new, queer terror.

The Science of Loneliness

According to recent scientific studies conducted in the US and UK, loneliness is on the rise, quickly becoming a serious social, economic, and public health concern (Hawkley 99). Recently, U.S. researchers ascertained that "millions of people suffer daily from loneliness," defining loneliness as "a debilitating psychological condition characterized by a deep sense of emptiness, worthlessness, lack of control, and personal threat" (Thisted et al. 453). In March 2010, the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) commissioned Opinium Research LLP to carry out a survey of adults throughout the UK in order to determine the perception and prevalence of loneliness on a national scale. Their Lonely Society Report (LSR) defines loneliness as "not being alone but a subjective experience of isolation" that, if it persists, becomes dangerously "chronic" (Griffen 4). Arguing that one reason for loneliness's surge is directly related to our increasing experience of and belief in Western solitude, the report concludes that as many as 48% of British citizens "strongly" believe that we are getting lonelier all of the time, and that 1 in 10 persons professes to feeling utterly lonely most of the time (12, 21). Similarly, in North America, the fear remains that, because we are "in the midst of a major social change" where "more people are living alone than at any point in U.S. [and perhaps Western] history," unknown aftereffects of this newfound "aloneness" are a cause for concern (Olds and Schwartz 2). The LSR warns UK citizens that if the lonely don't get

better, the entire nation will suffer economic strain: "From an economic perspective alone, the physical, mental and societal consequences of emotional and social isolation place a huge burden on public service" (23-24). The cost of loneliness, then, is feared to be too great, and strategic interventions are therefore deemed necessary in order to brace us for loneliness's impact and to monitor its repercussions.

Moreover, this statistical analysis purports that the lonely person herself is dangerous to the well-being of other people; some sort of "distorted thinking" in the lonely person directly leads to the development of "vulnerable groups" of disoriented, lonely people, each intoxicatingly spreading their loneliness around, infecting the overall happiness of the socially normal collective (for example, "Loneliness Help Sheet," n.pag.; Griffen 4). In short, the reports analyzed in this thesis each conclude that the lonely person is a contagious toxin, a dangerous threat to the well-being of unlonely people. I will next examine these scientific findings in more detail, discussing their influence on the public perception of loneliness, and exploring neuroscience's attempt to provide an answer as to why loneliness is becoming more visible as a problem as we enter into the second decade of the millennium.

In recent years, many neuroscientists have become interested in "the anatomy of emotions" and how the brain's emotional areas impact human behaviour (Knutson). This new branch of study investigates how "emotional feelings are generated," how these feelings "govern our behavior," and how they affect social connectivity (Panksepp 4, 11). These subjects are typically studied in the "humanities" and "social sciences" ("Does Neuroscience Refute Ethics?" n. pag.). This new branch of scientific research, "affective

neuroscience," is deeply rooted in theories of "evolutionary" psychological development. Heralding Charles Darwin as the most "influential psychologist," much of this discourse argues that there are "complex adaptive strategies" beyond our consciousness that have been "built into the human brain" and which can override our learned behaviours (Panksepp 10, 11, 10). This evolutionary baggage predisposes some people to certain behaviours. In other words, our behaviours are heavily impacted by both our "genetically engrained emotional circuits" and our inherited "raw feels" (a.k.a. emotional states) (11, 12). For affective neuroscientists, the possibility of loneliness's genetic component and its possible correlation to evolutionary survival brings loneliness into these dialogues about loneliness's purported degenerative effects on the body, and mind and on the social body as a whole.

Dr. John T. Cacioppo, Director of the Centre for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience at the University of Chicago, is considered the founder of the science of loneliness. His name is attached to virtually hundreds of loneliness studies on topics as varied as the effects of loneliness on muscle pain, the different brain development of lonely people (Gammon), and the overall "anatomy" of loneliness (Cacioppo, *Loneliness*, 71). Cacioppo has become perhaps *the* single most trusted authority on the medical effects of loneliness throughout the world. He has co-authored a book on the topic, has overseen numerous reports on loneliness that have appeared in academic journals internationally (some of which are discussed in this chapter), has conducted a plethora of interviews, has made You Tube videos, and has developed an informational website—scienceofloneliness.com—that enables online readers to gain access to and reflect on the

current online news-stories that have surfaced surrounding loneliness and its effects.

Cacioppo even has a blog where a variety of readers can get helpful advice from him

about how one can combat the dangers he believes are inherent to loneliness. I am

structuring a portion of this chapter around Cacioppo and his influence on the public

perception of loneliness because of his interdisciplinary scope and popularity.

Furthermore, it is important to explore how Cacioppo understands loneliness in order to

fully comprehend the implications of his work and ultimately its effect on Western

understandings of the lonely subject.

In his co-authored book, *Loneliness,* Cacioppo begins to unravel the "story" of

loneliness by introducing us, in his acknowledgments, to figures in literature and culture

who have "proven" that loneliness is unhealthy and unpleasurable. He writes:

> The fact that loneliness is unpleasant is obvious. In Genesis, Adam and
> Eve's punishment for disobeying God was their exile from Eden. In Ovid's
> *Metamorphosis ...* Deucalion realized that however difficult or impossible
> it is to live with others, even more difficult and more impossible is it to
> live without them, in complete loneliness. (x-xi)

Conflated with aloneness, loneliness is seamlessly linked to Christianity's original sin; the

Bible and *Metamorphosis*, non-scientific texts, are used to build an argument that the

lonely subject perpetuates and intensifies her miserable state by making the wrong life

choices (i.e. eating an apply from a forbidden tree).

Cacioppo's book continues to argue against loneliness by referring his readers to

case studies of patients, such as Katie Bishop. Bishop, he describes in his early chapters,

was born into a "community that was nothing if not closely knit." She, however, decided

she wanted the freedom of being on her own. She took a job in the "software industry"

and found herself spending "a great deal of time in front of the TV, eating ice cream straight from the carton." Not long after her choice to live an "independent life" came to fruition, Katie Bishop was, according to Cacioppo's description, "fifteen pounds heavier and truly miserable" (3-4). Becoming, in his estimation, a social pariah, a "socially [un]acceptable" woman who was constantly "spat[ting] with her neighbour" and suffering "unpleasant run-in[s] at her home office," Katie was repelled by others because of her serious "lonel[iness]," according to Cacioppo (4). Cacioppo further surmises that Katie's lonely condition is not the same emotional state that "fuels pop songs" and "MissLonelyhearts columns"; rather, her loneliness is unordinarily extraordinary, "a serious problem that has deep roots in her biology" (4). Although Katie was born into a good home, she was also predisposed "genetically" to a feeling of "isolation" that was most likely passed down to her through her mother (4); her genetic make-up left Kate vulnerable not only to loneliness, but also to the kinds of bad decision-making that affected all of the people in her life negatively. Bishop's decision to try and be "independent," like Eve's in the story of Christianity, causes her own downfall, but it also conditions the loneliness of others such as her Adam-like co-workers and neighbours. Loneliness in Cacioppo's universe is unique, selfish, difficult to control, and abnormal.

Cacioppo next introduces his readers to the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a twenty-question survey that was developed in 1978 as an "assessment instrument" to help researchers understand what they perceived as the growing prevalence of loneliness (Sarason 270). The scale was revised in 1980 and then again in 1996 and is considered the only assessment tool of its kind for interpreting and understanding the psychosocial

effects of loneliness, which Cacioppo argues lead to physiological and emotional symptoms.[27] It should be mentioned that the term "lonely" appears nowhere in any of the questions, and yet, this questionnaire, and the results produced from it, form the basis for the entirety of Cacioppo's research findings on loneliness. It is also important to note that each question asks the participants to rate their feelings about themselves in relation to their personal social connections on a scale from 1-4: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always. The subjective self-referentiality of the questions asks a lot of the subject and does not take into account the temporal fluidity of emotions—such as the particular moment the participant might be in and how their immediate feelings of sadness, headache, fatigue, hunger, happiness, anger, constipation, stress, and allergies might affect their answers. Neither does the survey consider the fact that the participant might not answer the questions honestly due to the feelings of shame and humiliation that admitting one's loneliness evokes. Finally, the survey presumes that we all know what loneliness is and how it feels.

To be sure, many scientific discourses that rely upon cognitive and social neuroscience use reputable and valuable quantifiable data when conducting research. This chapter is certainly not suggesting that studying affect through scientific lenses is always a problematic or nefarious practice. As Ralph Adolphs argues, "neuroscience might offer a reconciliation between biological and psychological approaches to social behavior" and, thus, exploring affect across methodologies and rhetorics is crucial (165). There are also

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[27] The questions on the survey can be accessed here after typing in "UCLA Loneliness Scale Questions": www.tactileint.com

strict guidelines and ethics boards in place in the sciences for both quantitative and qualitative studies that work hard to ensure ethical practices are maintained. Still, Cacioppo's methodology uses a variety of subjective questions; his use of the UCLA Loneliness Scale for his studies requires of his participants open-ended, personal self-reflections about solitude, isolation, sadness, depression, alienation, and frustration under the presumption that these are each equated with loneliness. However, at no point is loneliness addressed or defined in a fuller social context. Many of the questions on the scale he uses are difficult if not impossible to assess for accuracy or quantifiable reliability. Questions such as "I feel left out," or "I feel in tune with people around me," solicit responses from people without taking into consideration specific contexts such as the person's understanding of loneliness or their historical, economic, cultural, and sociological beliefs surrounding altruism, family, and sociality.

Also troublingly, the UCLA scale used by neuroscientists has now been adopted and "truncated" by popular social media conglomerates that overly simplify the questions even further; in less than 10 seconds, an online user can take the Loneliness Quiz and walk away with a "loneliness rating" out of 29. I took the quiz myself; my score was 21. I was told I have "a high level of loneliness" based on 10 questions that included: "How often do you feel as though no one understands you?" and "How often do you feel unhappy doing so many things alone?" (Russell). I later took the same test on another site which also asked me my gender and the number of Facebook friends I had. I received a second score of 26 and was told I have "moderate loneliness" ("Psyche Central: The Loneliness Quiz," n. pag.). Curiously, the questions on the scale neither asked me about a

family history of loneliness, nor about biological specifics that might lead scientists to argue that there are inborn contributing factors to my feelings of anxiety, isolation, or alienation. Yet, Cacioppo sees underlying biological underpinnings and pathology in loneliness. Defining loneliness as a form of "social pain" (*Loneliness* 7) that has its roots in our evolutionary history, Cacioppo understands loneliness to be a "stimulus" that triggers the subject into realizing they are not engaging in proper "social connections" that have been "deeply woven" into humans since the beginning of time, literally (11). He explains that "for as long as our species has left traces, the evidence suggests that the most emotionally evocative experiences in life have been weddings, births and deaths—events associated with the beginnings and endings of social bonds. These bonds are the centripetal force that holds life together" (10).

According to Cacioppo, then, loneliness acts as a policing mechanism that serves to vet our relationship choices, indicating sharply which ones are healthy and which ones are improper for us, even if against our will. As he explains, "our forebears depended on social bonds for safety" and for reproduction; therefore, feelings of loneliness were utilitarian, coming about only "when those protective bonds were in danger or deficient" (7). Certain bonds are privileged over others throughout Cacioppo's work. Evolutionary essentialism, including essentialist theories surrounding heterosexuality, rears its head often throughout Cacioppo's research findings. The implications around what he sees as a proper non-loneliness inducing relationship are left wide open but the heteronormative underpinnings are clear. By returning often to metaphors that suggest "roots," "deepness," and historical and evolutionary evidence, Cacioppo manages to imply that heterosexuality

is the only physiologically valid history of sexuality and that any other "social connection" is infantile, shallow, false, fleeting and most important to me, queer. For instance, in a joint study on sleep dysfunction and loneliness Cacioppo, Preacher and Hawkley suggest that our "evolutionary history is still within us" and although we might not require marriage or long term partnerships for our physical safety and security, as we might have once done historically in "hostile environments," our bodies and minds are programmed genetically to require such connections and to perceive them as invaluable (Hawkley et. al 136). In another study, Cacioppo and his colleagues argue that "delayed marriage ... increased dual career families ... increased single-residence households ... and reduced fertility rates ... have contributed to an increased prevalence of loneliness (Masi et. al 220). In a global context where gay marriage and queer rights are anything but universal, and heterosexuality is celebrated for its happy normalcy, Cacioppo's suppositions on what types of relationships are secure and "invaluable" are not a mystery. Consequently, the lonely queer is at best problematically wasting her potential by seeking out same-sex intimacies. At worst she is wired from the get go to be at odds with *normal* social connectedness and social well-being.

Cacioppo is not alone in his theories surrounding queerness' implicit connection with loneliness. There is such a stigma surrounding loneliness that scientists have gone so far as to say that loneliness is actually preconditioned by sexuality, influencing rape, sexual aggression, and abuse. In a study carried out in 1996, heterosexual pedophiles were determined to be most conflicted by and apt to carry out deviant sexual acts when they felt humiliated about their desires. Their humiliation influenced their motivations for

abuse. However, homosexual pedophiles were found to be most dangerously deviant when their desires left them feeling loneliness (Proulx 285-86). Suggesting that there is something inherent in homosexuality that is lonely, and further suggesting that this loneliness leads to sexual molestation and abuse, makes dangerous leaps that have lasting effects on queer communities. Moreover, this scientific connection between loneliness and non-traditional sexualities deemed sexual deviancies speaks volumes to the underlying motivations behind the science of loneliness. I want to pay close attention to the ways in which Cacioppo outlines the dangers he sees running rampant in the "chronically" lonely—his fears for their "physiological" safety and the safety of those around them (*Loneliness* 5).

Cacioppo and his colleagues use multifaceted publication sources (including books, blogs, websites, online videos, and academic journals) alongside a strong social media presence to convey his arguments surrounding loneliness and its effects on society. Using medical and scientific terminology surrounding loneliness, while adopting militant metaphors to describe the terrifying situation loneliness presents for us all, Cacioppo delivers to his audience an understanding of loneliness as dangerous. For instance, in Cacioppo's blog he and William Patrick outline a particular trajectory for the science of loneliness as a SWAT Team intent on wrangling the body with tough love and suffering until the subject *decides* to make better, culturally acceptable, choices:

> Science tended previously to see loneliness as an aversive state with no redeeming features, and as a state barely different from general negativity or depressed mood. More recent research suggests a very different depiction of loneliness. We have adopted the perspective of loneliness as a biological construct, a state that has evolved as a signal to change behavior—very much like hunger, thirst, or physical pain—that serves to

> help one avoid damage and promote the transmission of genes to the gene pool. In the case of loneliness, the signal is a prompt to renew the connections we need to survive and prosper. ("Book Blog," n. pag.)

Cacioppo's use of phrases such as "the transmission of genes," "biological construct," "evolved," "avoid damage," "renew the connections," and "survive" spark a return to a Darwinian model of biological essentialism, where survival and reproduction are the key goals. Laced with terms that suggest a particular construct of Western progress—material and physical reproductions, economic growth, and a universal "we"—Cacioppo's message seems to be one that fosters capitalist "prosper[ity]," where survival is wedded to economic wealth and progress. If loneliness threatens our survival, this is also taken to mean the economic prosperity of the "we." For example, Edward L. Glaesar, a colleague and loneliness research contributor of Cacioppo's, states that the "societal cost" of sustained loneliness will be felt by the loss of productive, compassionate citizens because "[lonely people] are always revving their engines in the red zone," and therefore are never quite useful enough, always trying to bring others down with them (Glaeser). Lonely people, then, are understood to be drains on fiscal success and societal fortitude. Loneliness's only "redeeming features" are that it is helpful to Cacioppo and his fellow researchers—as well as to science, to the body, and to the social—as a "signal" as Cacioppo argues, to the lonely subject that she is pursuing "bad" relationships that are not prosperous or good for the "we" ("Book Blog" n. pag.)

The lonely queer subject becomes a danger to individual non-lonely subjects and sociality as a whole. Because the threat that we call loneliness comes from within the queer subject and has mutated her ability to find healthy, prosperous social bonds,

suggests Cacioppo, the socially isolated person is the one to blame for her feelings of

insecurity and social stigma. Following this line of argument, it is not the people around

her that shame the lonely for being lonely, it is her own paranoia that is at fault—

humiliation and shame stem both from an inherent deficiency that leads her to

continuously form unhealthy attachments that make her feel she is constantly "fend[ing]

off blows" (*Loneliness* 16), as well as her guilt for not being a successful citizen. This

rhetoric traps the queerly lonely subject in a cycle of perpetual distress because she

genetically seeks out "unhealthy" relationships yet has nothing but "negative

expectations" of even these attachments, leaving her lonely, outcast, and a failed subject

(17). [28]

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[28] Discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation the social media has long associated queer intimacies with loneliness. Throughout the 1980s, magazines and journals such as *TIME*, *Life*, and *LOOK* ran stories that depicted homosexuals as backward misfits who were "lonely, isolated, and merely interested in seducing innocent others into 'their lifestyle'" (Swigonski, Mary E. et al. 155). During the 1990s, queers were considered a "disposable population" filled with narcissism, antisocial tendencies, and promiscuities that presumably lead to diseases such as AIDS. Images of "lonely bedsits" and "hospital isolation" colored many people's idea of the deadly and terrifying outcomes of a homosexual identity (Watney 133, 123). Being homosexual was like wearing a rope around your neck. Queerness in the 2000s too is often accused of anti-relational proclivities and vast amounts of loneliness. Suicide rates among queer subjects including elderly, adult and, most poignantly documented by the media, queer youth follow this lonely narrative.

And to be sure rates of suicide, depression, substance abuse, isolation, homelessness, and harassment are exponentially higher for queer persons of any age. A 2002 study found that as many as 21% of adult gay and bisexual men had "made plans to attempt suicide" in their lifetime; 12% had tried once, and half of those had made "multiple attempts," most before the age of "25" (see: Youthpride.org). A 2010 survey commissioned by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found that a staggering 41% of transgendered persons in the U.S. have tried to die by suicide. See: Thetaskforce.org). A YouGov survey recently commissioned by the "campaign group Stonewall" has found that older queers are more

If loneliness is thought to be innate then the suggestion is clear that there are

certain "natural" bodies that are innately able, superior, and more naturally functional

than others. The vulnerable, then, are those predisposed genetically to more loneliness

than others—the chronically lonely. However, if each person requires a different type and

measure of interaction and connectivity, and if "our individual sensitivity to loneliness

decides who feels lonely in what situation" (*Loneliness* 5), then against what norm is

one's level of competency and social comfort being implicitly measured? And how does

the language of biological essentialism work throughout these scientific narratives and for

what purpose? According to Cacioppo's theory, the lonely queer is predisposed

genetically to her loneliness—"born that way," to quote Lady Gaga. Loneliness also

serves as a signal that tells the lonely subject she is entering into abnormal relationships,

antithetical to her own survival and that of others, queer ones perhaps. Yet she cannot

help it because of her inherent loneliness. Then, what is to be done with her? Here,

loneliness is the only feeling (because of her inheritance) she and all queers can ever feel.

They are damned and damning.

Cacioppo is not alone in arguing that loneliness is a dysfunctional evolutionary

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likely to feel alone and experience isolation than elderly heterosexuals (40% of gay and
bisexual men versus 15% of heterosexual men). These elderly queers are going to require
GPs, and health and social services that are neither ready for nor willing to accommodate
their needs (Doward). As for young queers, statistics evidence that "as many as 1 in 3"
queer youth have attempted suicide, and that they are "2-3 times more likely to attempt
suicide than heterosexual young people" (Youthpride.org). According to CAMH in
Toronto, Ontario as many as 32% of young LTBTQ youth have attempted suicide as
compared to 7% of their heterosexual peers. See: ("Suicide Assessment and Prevention
Handbook").

trait we have inherited. This return to evolutionary theory in the wider breadth of scientific research points to a theorization that the lonely are stepping backwards, suffering from a regression, or, worse, that they enter the world backwards to begin with. Psychiatrist and author Jacqueline Olds argues in an interview that "when people feel lonely, a 'stepping back' occurs. They start to send out signals, often non-verbal ones, telling other people to 'leave me by myself, I don't need you, go away.' They feel shame that they are different from everyone else and they get stuck in this 'stepped back' position" ("The Lonely Society Report" 18). All of this research suggests that interventions are necessary when loneliness is thought "chronic" enough. In other words, when loneliness starts becoming too unnatural and backward—a condition antithetical to our "human nature" that threatens to "fragment" society and societal successes— something must be done to help everyone "get better" (33). In a Western political climate that fears recession and sees such backwards motion as a weakness (financial, physical, emotional, and national), loneliness is considered a step in the wrong direction for the social subject. Unable to listen to her lonely triggers she is left "stepping back"—not stepping into future progress but de-evolving and degenerating instead. By equating loneliness with a "stepping back" Olds implicitly suggests the queer, lonely subject is backwards and in need of being turned around.

Before continuing with my inquiry into the science of loneliness it is important to note how alongside non-Western bodies who have been deemed pre-modern, Western-queerness has also "been branded as non-modern or as a drag on the progress of civilization" by cultural, political, and scientific narratives (Love 7). In *Feeling*

Backward, Heather Love argues that "whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up, queers have been seen across the twentieth-century as a backward race" (6). As "both abject and exalted, a 'mixture of delicious and freak'," queerness has suffered from divisions and schisms that seek to either romanticize homosexuality as "exceptiona[l]" or demonize it through "a stigmatizing mark" (3). Both contradictory approaches render the queer extraordinary, leaving the queer subject feeling as though she is strange, and nothing other than a failed identity (3). For this reason, "the desire to be recognized as part of the modern social order is strong" amongst queers who seem poised to fight that our feelings are as ordinary as anyone else's (7). Scientific models that suggest loneliness is inherent to those queer and strange subjects who form relational bonds that run counter to heterosexual relationships serve to further demonize queers as bizarre anomalies or "throwbacks" (6). Good subjects are considered by science to be neither exceptionally bizarre nor backwards; good feelings are understood to be happy ones felt by unlonely people who are future oriented, progressive, everyday, and normal. It is through this process of deduction that happiness becomes understood as antithetical to loneliness, and unloneliness—loneliness's actual antithesis—is relegated simply to the position as happiness' stepping stone.

It is not coincidental, then, that, turning to the "News" section of Cacioppo's website one finds archived articles concerning loneliness that speak to the notion of the

unhappy versus the happy citizen.[29] These pieces have been published by various media sources throughout the US and internationally and when one clicks onto this section of the website, one is immediately met with the "top" stories on loneliness of the moment, complete with helpful titles that are underlined and bolded to catch one's attention. For instance, logging onto the site on January 23, 2011, I was met with the following four top-stories:

1) "**Loneliness Can Lead To Serious Weight Gain,**" published by *Newswise*, an online news source page where anyone can publish their news. In this article, loneliness is considered a form of "emotional distress" that leads people to overeat and fall into a "deeper depression" (n. pag.). The expert for this particular study is Mary Jo Rapini, a psychotherapist who works at the Methodist Hospital in Houston Texas.[30]

2) "**Loneliness Can Cause High BP**" was written on the online news site *Health Care n' Diet*. This article's quoted expert, Louise Hawkley, a colleague of Cacioppo, argues that loneliness is directly linked to hypertension in older adults and that unlike depression (which is often a symptom of a larger issue) "loneliness behaves as though it is a unique health-risk factor in its own right" (n. pag.).

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[29] Cacioppo's website, www.scienceofloneliness.com, was moved to a new domain in 2012 when he was offered his own webpage on *Psychology Today*'s website entitled "Connections: Reach Out and Touch" (www.psychologytoday.com/blog/loneliness). The format of the webpages is exactly the same as is the content therein. You can also find archived articles from Cacioppo's original page here: http://vknfal.wordpress.com/.

[30] Speaker, author and sex/relationship psychotherapist Mary Jo Rapini LPC runs the relationship expert and advice webpage, "Empowering Women and the Men Who Love Them" (www.maryjorapini.com). She also has a call-in show on Fox called "Mind, Body and Soul with Mary Jo" (www.myfoxhouston.com).

3) **"You've Got To Have Friends, But How Many?"** was written by Sophie Dembling and published by *Psychology Today*, an online news source. The article suggests: "loneliness has nothing to do with the number of friends a person has"; rather, "it's how we feel about being alone" that counts (n. pag.). In this article socialization is presented as the key precursor to being comfortable with being alone every once in a while; the article works under the presumption that loneliness is the feeling that must be avoided at all costs whether it be by developing relationships with one great intimate or with hundreds of friends. The information in this article comes from findings from the UCLA loneliness scale and a study based on these findings carried out at the University of Chicago by Cacioppo and his affiliates.

4) **"Lonely Children Disclose Intimate Information Online"** comes from *International Business Times,* an online news source. The article suggests that children who are "lonely" are more likely to chat to "adults" online because "lonely students compensat[e] for their weaker social skills by using the internet to meet people" (n. pag.). Presuming that lonely students are "weaker" than other students (or that there are unlonely students!) this source suggests that abuses online occur in part *because* of loneliness. No author of the article is given, and the source for the information therein is accredited to Master's student Luigi Bonetti, Dr. Marilyn Campbell, and Dr. Linda Gilmore from the Queensland University of Technology. This was a survey study.

In the multitude of articles available on the site, the page's fiscally and socially conservative undertones are apparent. With sources cited here such as *Forbes Magazine, The Christian Century, International Business Times*, *Newsweek, MacLeans*, and

Business Week, one cannot overlook the push for readers to conflate church and state, and clearly understand loneliness's threat to national security, economic stability, and loneliness's abhorrent moral implications. In total there are 32 complete pages of article links about loneliness and each is filled with similar accreditations including economic, Christian, and right-wing source links. Each article therein highlights the conservative, heterosexual, medicalized, Christian, masculine, and middle-class underpinnings of Cacioppo's science of loneliness. Fear, dislocation, illness, suicide, pedophilia, moral degradation, death, invasion, pathology, and financial ruin are each attributed to loneliness in one way or another throughout and each article circles around the general thesis that loneliness is an expensive, dangerous pathology, and that it should be included in the DSM.[31] For example, Emily White argues that in order for loneliness research to receive appropriate medical attention loneliness must be considered a "serious clinical disorder" (205, 300). Furthermore, Richard Booth argues in "Loneliness as a Component of Psychiatric Disorders," that as a "relational deficiency" and a condition that is "clearly dysfunctional" and "maladaptive" (often times causing "cognitive disorganization" and conditioning "narcissism") loneliness should be considered a pathology that is listed in all medical and psychiatric diagnostic and treatment manuals including the "DSM-5" (4, 7, 7, 9, 10).

Using words such as "weakness" and "unique," along with generalizations about "communities" that equate loneliness with place (making statements about loneliness's

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[31] Although not currently listed in the DSM, loneliness is listed in the North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA) "listing of nursing diagnoses" (Booth 1).

lack of prevalence in particular socioeconomic communities that host more "block parties," have less "crime," ensure "well-kept homes" and "clean streets" [Gibson]), Cacioppo paints a picture of loneliness, and the lonely themselves, that is implicitly critical of non-white, non-middle class, non-heterosexual persons. And, although when viewed scientifically loneliness is a condition that must be overcome and cured, these same discourses conflictingly suggest loneliness's dangerous lasting potential and resilience. In other words, while the lonely subject is thought knowable and containable, stoppable somehow, loneliness itself is relegated, in these narratives, to a position of the unknown monster—a negative feeling, condition, and threat that is always looming and spreading. This type of reasoning places loneliness, in all its complexity, in the middle of a war between an imagined outer and inner terror, and between notions of healthy and unhealthy bodies, productive and nonproductive citizens, and useful and expendable lives.

I explore next some of these articles to suggest that they consistently present loneliness as a physical, mental, and psychosocial health risk that infects the "weak" and is contagious to the "normal." The underlying suggestion here seems to be that the lonely tend to not only form relationships with others that further their social isolation, but also that rather than desiring to get better and back into the realm of the acceptable and happy social their loneliness is so deafening that they actually seek loneliness as a comfort. As such, the lonely person is thought to be she who recruits other people to her loneliness. Converting, distorting, and mutating the social sphere into a lonely space, a "trend," as Jacqueline Olds surmises in *The Lonely American: Drifting Apart in the Twenty-first*

Century, lonely people "seem to be creating a lemming-like walk into loneliness" (7).[32] So convinced of loneliness's inherent power, Olds, often linked to Cacioppo, suggests loneliness is a problem that has the potential to threaten a country's (in this case the U.S.'s) well-being. She states: "We wrote this book in order to bring our country's hidden cultural values and unwitting choices out of the closet, so people won't somnambulate their way to lonely despair without even recognizing how or why they are doing it. The truth is that if one can bring oneself to acknowledge loneliness, half the battle is won" (176). Here, Olds and her co-author, Schwartz, configure loneliness as a temptress that manipulates the subject into thinking they are "happy" when in actual fact they, and the "country," are not (177).

Clearly, there are queer underpinnings in all of these arguments. Linking crime, substance abuse, unhappiness, and disease to loneliness, these researchers suggest that loneliness's queerness—its desire to keep the subject tied to the secrets of the "closet"— makes a war against loneliness, queerness, and the lonely, necessary and legitimate. And this is where the science of loneliness takes an even more ominous turn, suggesting the lonely are not only unhealthy and failed citizens—in contradiction, through both no fault and every fault of their own—but that they are a national threat to the happiness and well-being of the entire social sphere. It is in this way that queers are made privately and publicly dangerous, their presumed contagious sexualities harkening back to a rich history of heterosexual fears of queers and their supposed powers of recruitment.

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[32] "Relationships which research has shown to be so vital to our health and well-being are under threat by trends in our society" (Olds as qtd. in "The Lonely Society Report" 9).

Darwin's Lonely Monkey

As has been argued, cultural and scientific narratives have often rendered the queer as predisposed to loneliness. Furthermore, in much the same ways that gays and lesbians have been accused of soliciting and recruiting homosexuals—turning heterosexuals gay—the same rhetorical strategies are being deployed concerning loneliness. Following the stereotypical ideologies surrounding homosexuality and its militant recruitment techniques—namely that homosexuals gather in groups and strategically manipulate heterosexual people into becoming gay—Cacioppo and his colleagues trace queer lines between what they configure as lonely subjects, their lonely friends, and their un-lonely targets. They argue: "people who are lonely tend to be linked to others who are lonely," in fact attracting them (Cacioppo et al., 985). Oddly, however, these lonely persons' combined loneliness does not satiate the lonely—rather, it breeds more loneliness and spreads it further until the loneliness infects the non-lonely as well.[33]

Next I turn to a study that I find particularly troubling for the way it shows the

[33] The notion that the lonely are predisposed to seek out their own kind, the lonely, the queer, the outcast, is uncannily similar to paranoid fears of recruitment that have been historically waged against the gay and lesbian community. So profoundly influential was the fear that gay and lesbian subjects were recruiting heterosexuals to their fold that the idea began to become satirized by social media outlets such as *The Onion* who proclaimed in 1998 that "the activist homosexual lobby [was] winning," citing homosexual sources who were celebrating the successful "ensnar[ing]" of over "300,000 heterosexuals" into the "Pink Triangle." Using mock interviews *The Onion* even went to far as to quote a fake homosexual male source who proudly revealed it was "crucial that [they] reach these children while they're still young [. . .] when they're most vulnerable to [the homosexual] message of sexual promiscuity and deviance." One mock interviewee (an 8 year-old boy!) actually claimed: "when I grow up I want to be gay" (theonion.com).

neoliberal and military discourses surging throughout the science of loneliness and, in particular, their investment in theories of recruitment and contagion. In December 2009, researchers from the Universities of Chicago (Dr. John T. Cacioppo), California (Dr. James H. Fowler), and Harvard (Dr. Nicholas A. Christakis) published a collaborative study" that "tracks" loneliness in the U.S, entitled "Alone in the Crowd: The Structure and Spread of Loneliness in a Large Social Network." This study garnered much attention publicly and its popularity began an entire movement surrounding the idea that loneliness is a cataclysmic socially isolating contagion that "spreads" (977). The language used to make such claims within this study includes terms such as "typography" (977), "path" (977), "extends" (977), and "clusters" (980), creating a sense that loneliness is a growth that can become overpoweringly large, uncontrollable, and threatening; other phrases pervasive within the study argue that loneliness is a virus that "spreads through these [social] networks" (977) by circumnavigating "the periphery" (977) and "spread[ing] through a contagious process" (977). The lingo used to describe loneliness's powerful cadence in this article suggest its strength and resilience, but also evidence its underlying anxiety-inducing effects. Loneliness is presented here as an entropic underachiever, a deteriorating force that has the power to "drive" (977) the social network into complete oblivion (977).

The findings of this study went viral throughout the popular media. *USA Today* cited the study as evidence that "feeling lonely can make others lonely, too" (Jayson). *The Globe and Mail* called loneliness "a social disease" where lonely people "infected remaining friends with their loneliness before the relationship crumbled" (Bielski).

MSNBC posted that loneliness makes "the brain more defensive" because it signals a "biological reaction" that triggers impoverished social connection; "instead of a germ," people on the "edge" of the social network seep loneliness from themselves, "transmitted through [their] behaviors" (Mapes). In his article entitled "You're Lonely, I'm Lonely" published by *The Christian Century,* L. Gregory Jones even went so far as to suggest that loneliness is a "major health concern" that might be "as contagious as the H1N1 virus," while *USNews* chimed in that "staying socially connected might be just as important to public health as washing your hands and covering your cough" (Grossman). Heard collectively, these voices warn us that the lonely person is, and her strange affects are, out to get us all.

According to these reports, loneliness kills: Cacioppo, Fowler, and Christakis link loneliness to a host of illnesses and catastrophic outcomes including Alzheimer's disease, obesity, "increased vascular resistance," "elevated blood pressure," insomnia, a "diminished immunity," depression, alcoholism, "suicidal ideation and behavior," and "morbidity and mortality" (976-977). These scientists have turned loneliness into its own "outbreak narrative." Patricia Wald argues that "outbreak narratives" are those stories told about the emergence of diseases that attempt to provide the disease, virus, or epidemic with an origin story (2).[34] Oftentimes outbreak narratives get taken up by the social media and scientific communities as a means to point the finger at particular groups, identities,

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[34] Feminist science studies scholars such as Donna Haraway and Emily Martin each offer early critiques that immunity is a gendered, politicized figuration. See Haraway's "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate Others," 295-337, and Martin's *Flexible Bodies: The Role of Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS.*

or geographies, blaming them for causing the health risk. What is brought forth in these outbreak narratives is often "a contradictory but compelling story about the perils of human interdependence and the triumph of human connection and cooperation [and] scientific authority" that seeks always to reaffirm the dominate ideologies of normalcy, no matter how infectious, detrimental, and sickly those ideals may be (2). It is in this way that the outbreak narrative also serves to remind us that these tales are also fantasies about supremacy that can lead to violent containment and sanitization.

The lonely individual is described in Cacioppo, Fowler, and Christaskis' study in terms of her constant dangerous potential. Forever cruising the social's periphery until she unwittingly unleashes her malaise into the public sphere, she is out to make everyone unhappy. These presumptions about loneliness are all very apocalyptic. In response to the contagion that loneliness threatens, Cacioppo and his colleagues outline a militant strategy that is meant to overcome the perceived threat of loneliness and, in a larger sense, the threat of the lonely person herself. The lonely person is not to be taken lightly, and her loneliness will attack us, reach out and suck us in, when we least expect it; we must be constantly aware of a lonely person's dangerous potential and anticipate her movement. In an attempt to figure out how the lonely subject infects and affects the non-lonely crowd, the study turns to an analysis of monkeys. During an experiment that tracked solitary "rhesus monkeys" over time, the trio's lab analysis showed that the loneliest monkeys were the ones that were thought to be expendable by the social monkeys: "most of these isolate animals were driven off or eliminated" by other members of the rhesus group (986). Concluding that "humans may similarly drive away lonely

members of their species" because the lonely "threatens the cohesiveness of the network" (986), the study suggests that "collectiv[ely] reject[ing]" the lonely person may "serve to protect the social integrity of social networks" by keeping the contagion "in check" (986-87). The sacrifice of the lonely subject is presumed here to be necessary for the well-being of the entire society—a kind collateral damage. Her "rejection" by the unlonely gestures to an aggressive end for the lonely subject who must be kept out of the social, even if forcibly, for fear that her "emotional contagion" will infect it completely (978).

Wald cautions against the public and private panic that can ensue when outbreak narratives suggest that a particular "type" of person is infectious and that this contagion happens through interpersonal contact. Citing the example of Patient Zero, the Canadian flight attendant who was blamed for bringing the AIDS virus to Western countries, Wald argues that "communicable disease[s]" such as the AIDS virus tempt narratives that will pinpoint and contain an enemy, warn the vulnerable, and exalt scientific heroes who are celebrated for figuring out vaccinations, cures, or ways to isolate the contagious (14). When outbreak narratives go viral and become popularized by the media, the desire to find a responsible group upon which to lay blame, and then to isolate that group becomes paramount. As Wald states: "disease emergence dramatizes the dilemma that inspires the most basic of human narratives: the necessity and danger of human contact" (2). Trailing such claims of loneliness's contagion is a marked paranoia that affective identities and states can no longer be understood to be individual and self-serving choices one makes, or symptoms of circumstances one finds oneself in, but rather must now be understood to be functions of our physiological dispositions.

I turn here briefly to the late queer theorist Eve Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* where she speaks to a raging paranoia or "a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Racoeur qtd. in Sedgwick 138) she sees proliferating throughout Western consciousness around issues of national security, citizenship, and terrorism. Sedgwick argues that our thinking, interpretation, and understanding of our positions as subjects-in-the-world-with-others have become increasingly paranoid. And importantly, paranoid thinking practices are not limited to conservative discourses; even the most progressive politics is shaped by this paranoia. Often afraid of something we cannot name but are certain is coming to get us, we are forever on the defensive, feeling anxious, and ready for battle. Sedgwick argues that this paranoid knowing we have adopted is "inescapably narrative" (138), a story that keeps passing from one person to the other easily making the tellings of these stories fear-provoking and chaotic, — paradoxically "burrow[ing] back and forward at once" in order to stave off "'surprises'— future-oriented, and vigilant" (130). This paranoid thinking maintains its power by convincing the thinker that the answer to any problem is always a "hop, skip and a jump away" (138) from getting solved—all they must do is look and find the "right direction" to head in (139). It is in this trajectory that I see a paranoid thinking at work in the science of loneliness.

Paranoia surrounding lonely subjectivities and the science that seeks to fight what is seen as an inherent entropic potential within loneliness are fuelled by paranoias surrounding the vulnerability of Western social structures. Thus heterosexism, gender biases, classism, ableist thinking, and racism might be better understood by

"understanding [the] paranoia" around unpretty affects such as loneliness whose "tropism" tends to be considered "contagious" and whose main objective is thought to be to redirect, displace, and overcome the normal (126, 131). If affects are no longer thought to be controllable, then unleashing these emotive conditions and ways-of-being-in-the-world seems fraught with risk. The lonely person and her rapacious contagious loneliness become figures that signal the death of happiness and the death of the social. If loneliness threatens the future of the social, then the entirety of the social order depends on her, and her loneliness's, arrested development. In support of this notion a figurative duality begins to surface throughout this study's discourse: in order to continue "helping [the lonely]" the study suggests—already pitting the lonely against the non-lonely in a scenario reminiscent of war— that "we might create a protective barrier against loneliness that can keep the whole network from unraveling" (Cacioppo et. al 977).

Carroll E. Izard's *Human Emotions* (1977) outlines what she describes as the "principle of emotion contagion" which suggests that "emotion is transmitted from one person to another" or, that "emotion is catching" (128, 106). This phenomenon, what Teresa Brennan identifies as "entrainment" where "one person's affects can be linked to another" (49), becomes known as one's ability to "catch" an emotion from another person or persons, depending on their "characteristics and their momentary emotion thresholds" (Izard 106). This mode of transmission suggests that most persons have "emotion control" (129) and can regulate their reactions to others' emotions. The danger, however, lies in those persons who cannot control their feelings. Even critical humanities and feminist scholars have been drawn to theories of affect contagion. Teresa Brennan

explores how people in "proximity" with one another can "transmit" affects, whereby one person's "energetic attention"—their nervousness or aggression for instance—can become another's through a process she calls "simple affective transfer" (49). Although the types of people vulnerable to this "passing" are not specified in these two books, the suggestion remains that while each of us is vulnerable to catching emotional contagion, some people are more likely to be contagious. Through this idea of affective transfers it is easy to see how the effectual gnawing paranoia that results from a fear of an emotive transmission of loneliness could take hold, legitimating defensive stances against those lonely queers who might be suspected of emitting such unhappy transmissions.

Turning briefly to J.K. Fowler et. al's 2011 study "Correlated Genotypes in Friendship Networks," we see that while scientific research has been concentrating on the contagion of emotion, it also discusses the possibility that relationships are genetically predisposed. Concentrating heavily on theories of evolution, this study argues that not unlike the "physical" and "biological environment" the "social environment" is subject to "evolutionary force[s]" (3). The authors suggest: "there may even be genetic niches within social networks that promote *or inhibit the evolution of certain kinds of social behavior*" (3, my emphasis). In other words, we are born to love in particular ways and have little control over our genetic dispositions, but our "social fitness" requires a modification of these innate propensities, whereby we must *choose* to learn how to love appropriately and acceptably (1). In order to explain their assertions these scientists interpret the difference, biologically, between the dangers of relational sexual and gender sameness and the benefits of relational heterosexual homogeneity: "one of the most

replicated findings in the social sciences is that people tend to associate with other people that they resemble, a process known as 'homophily' ('birds of a feather flock together')" (1). However, choosing friends who have different genotypes is crucial when the chooser is inherently vulnerable to negative "tendencies" such as alcoholism, depression, or loneliness. For instance, if an alcoholic homophilic subject "chooses friends with a different genotype (heterophilic), they may be less likely to give alcohol to her," making her connection with the heterophilic friends healthier (3). Opposites in this instance do not only attract, they correct. Similarly, if a lonely homophilic/homosexual subject hangs around other lonely, homophilic/homosexual friends, then her lonely sexual desires are reinforced, and she will remain a lonely gay. However, by seeking out "healthier" relationships with subjects of different genotypes, heterophilic/heterosexual relationships, she is more apt to overcome her loneliness with this better relational fit and, perhaps, even overcome her homophilic tendencies altogether by "facilitat[ing] or modify[ing] the expression of [her] own genes" (3). That is, of course, unless she contaminates her heterophilic friends with her homophilic, genetic loneliness.

This reasoning harkens to the notion of biologically predetermined sexualities and the "gay gene," theories that surfaced in the 1980s during the height of the AIDS crisis that suggested homosexuality was a predetermined genetic condition. Simon Levay, a gay researcher, was made famous by his argument that you are born genetically sexually oriented towards a particular sex and that heterosexual intimacy is the normal sexuality. He states: "homosexual people are sex-atypical [. . .] [and] male homosexuality might result from the simultaneous presence in one man of several 'feminizing genes,'"

concluding that "biological processes, especially the prenatal, hormonally controlled sexual differentiation of the brain, are likely to influence a person's ultimate sexual orientation." Returning to Fowler et al.'s study above, the warning that one had best choose friends wisely if one hopes to survive speaks to how biological determinism and science continue negatively to affect the perception of same-sex intimacies.

This line of heterosexist, masculine reasoning is everywhere in these studies and is especially substantiated throughout queries by Cacioppo and his colleagues' into the gendered and queer nature of loneliness. They surmise: "the association between the loneliness of individuals connected to each other, and their clustering within the network could be attributed to [. . .] social psychological processes" which include "the homophile hypothesis" which suggests that lonely individuals seek one another through "the tendency of like to attract like" ("Alone in a Crowd" 978). Accordingly, if the "law of attraction specifies that there is a direct linear relationship between interpersonal attraction and the proportion of similar attitudes" (978), loneliness, then, is clearly queerly inflected in both body and lifestyle choice because "lower levels of loneliness are associated with marriage" (978). Therefore, the bulk of loneliness is a queer problem. Furthermore, this study argues that "loneliness spreads more easily among women than among men . . . [as] women . . . reported higher levels of loneliness than did men" (984). Plainly, when studies such as these ones argue that "some individuals might be 'immune' to whatever pathogen is spreading in a population not because of their own constitution, but rather because they have come to surround themselves with others with particular genotypes" one cannot help but see homophobia. What we take away from these

scientific treatises is this: if there were a gender for loneliness it would be feminine, its sex female, its sexuality queer.

Scientists such as Levay and Cacioppo advocate family-oriented domesticity, heterosexuality, and masculinity. Let us take a look at one final scientific study. In Hawkley et al's article "Loneliness Predicts Increased Blood Pressure: 5 Year Cross-Lagged Analysis in Middle-Aged and Older Adults," one finds chilling clues that suggest the lonely queer is too threatening to the security of traditional domesticity and private life to be left alone. Speaking generally to changes in the family structure in "the late modern United States," the study narrows in on "loneliness and its role in health and well-being" (140). These researchers argue that the rise of loneliness correlates directly to these familial transformations: "dramatic changes in the family have been noted in higher divorce rates and a higher proportion of adults living alone [. . .] and a more diverse population may be eroding the basis for feeling connected with others" (140). This paranoia that the erosion of pure "connect[ion]" is a significant threat to the "family" quickly turns into an argument against loneliness and the diverse lonely people that Hawkley et al. believe are conditioning the loss of "feeling connected" (139).

Implicitly throughout these research findings we find the belief that this "dramatic" lost feeling is related to a marked erosion of heterosexual values, an increase in immigrant and sexually "diverse populations," and a decrease in employment—symptomatic of this increase in diversity. Furthermore, a suggestion surfaces whereby the lonely person—the queer, diverse, unemployed, immigrant—is thought hyper-paranoid about threats to her own safety and, therefore, dangerous because of this self-

preservation. As these doctors confirm, "we hypothesize that threats to one's sense of safety and security with others are the toxic component of loneliness, and that hypervigilance for social threat (conscious or unconscious) may contribute to alterations in physiological functioning" (139). What seems peculiar to me is that this study is actually paranoid about otherness and diversity, yet rather than speaking to that paranoia this study deflects this anxiety onto the lonely queer subject, turning her into something extraordinary rather than an ordinary person who feels everyday loneliness.[35] The inevitability of this cyclical paradigm makes loneliness and the threatening periphery it occupies seem as though it is even the more terrifying because of its cunning invisibility.

It seems astonishingly violent to police the social hierarchy by suggesting that "efforts to reduce loneliness in society may benefit by aggressively targeting people in the periphery to help [them] repair their social networks" (Cacioppo et al., "Alone in the

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[35] Although discussed in depth in Chapter Two, it bears repeating that the association of loneliness with queer individuality carries with it the baggage of existential romanticism, baggage that has spilled into today where any attempts to talk about the individual are met with charges of selfishness and narcissism. To this end, queers and gay men particularly have been doubly judged and marginalized, accused of being too single—promiscuous but non-committal— stalwartly non-reproductive, contagious with AIDS, and vainly in love with exact copies of themselves. For queer women, loneliness has often been associated with repeated lesbian histories of failed love, selfishness, suicidal remises, murderous pathology, and lonely, lost desires. From Radcliffe Hall's Stephen Gordon, the original lonely lesbian butch in *The Well of Loneliness*, to Hedy's lonely attempts to find love in the film *Single White Female*, to Kat's lonely wanderings in search of lost love from Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*, to Chloe's lonely and contagious lust for an unattainable woman from the film *Chloe* there is a long list of reasons why queers want to be disassociated with the charge of loneliness, and especially with its presumed contagion. Each of the above examples takes queerness as an identity and uses loneliness to make that identity seem pathological—Stephen Gordon commits suicide; Hedy tries to murder Allie and is, instead, stabbed to death in self defense; Kat fades away to bare-life in the streets of London; Chloe, too, commits suicide after recruiting a lesbian lover and losing her to a man.

Crowd," 977). This rhetoric implies that the "whole" social body, valued above and beyond the fragmented bits of the lonely self, will only be safe when and if loneliness is defended against and eradicated. Loneliness must be "trimmed" (987)—literally cut away—in order to "protect the integrity of social networks," and if this fails to happen, the outcome will be dire. This act of regulating lonely bodies joins a broad forum of bodily policing that has occurred throughout history around individual, racialized, classed, and sexualized bodies and communities; today, loneliness too has become subjected to what Christopher Murphy calls "securitizing"— where the "process of making societies safe" starts to legitimate racial, class, gender, and sexual discrimination (1). [36] This development elucidates the fact that, rather than working to find "effective interventions for loneliness," these scientists are actually adhering to their own Western paranoia about change (Hawkley et Al, 139).

What is interesting to me here are the ways in which the social network becomes personified, where "integrity" (Cacioppo et al., "Alone in the Crowd" 986) can be

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[36] Lonely subjectivities add themselves to an extensive list of identities that have been subjected to political and scientific control. Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* discusses the long policed intersexed body; in *Curiousor: On the Queerness of Children* Steven Bruhm introduces readers to the regulated bodies of queer children; Mitt Romney's call to police the bodies of women made headlines as he demanded strict anti-abortion guidelines and eugenics for what he calls "welfare moms" (Walsh); Immigration laws in Canada have recently come under attack for their obvious selective discrimination of who has the right to asylum in Canada where noted criminal Conrad Black is granted temporary asylum, while Veronica Castro, a Mexican woman who pleaded with the Canadian government to love safely in Canada, is deported and "murdered" soon after ("Conrad Back on the Road to Canadian Citizenship"). Alongside homophobia, genderphobia, and classist rhetoric, blatant racism has proven to be another mainstay in the policing of bodies; Kam Louie and Tseen Ling-Khoo suggest in *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English* that diasporas are "by definition collectivities" held together by the experience of displacement and upheaval (81).

associated with an abstraction. Queer theorist Michael Warner argues that contemporary cultures need to stop conceptualizing the "social body" as "a one" (188); in his estimation social bodies "only exist" in constant "historical transformation" and, therefore, it is "futile" to continue to argue for a single "essentialism," a moment when all normal bodies sprang forth universally, cut from the same normal, healthy cloth (189). No body, then, is universal. Essentialist understandings also presume that some opaque authority has the right to choose whose bodies are considered normal.[37] As such, scientists of loneliness are not only presuming that there is an essential social body into which all bodies must fit, but that there is also a predetermined socializing body whose job it is to fit bodies inside itself. The lonely queer body, or misfitted body, troubles essentialist understandings of sociality that legitimate notions of unhealthy and healthy, abnormal and normal: the lonely subject becomes she who is does not fit into all bodies, is not socializable, and is, therefore, a dangerously queer anomaly.

Not unlike the spectre of Communism haunting Europe that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels made famous in their 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, loneliness is thought to be haunting the periphery of the social sphere with threats of mass political upheaval and change; this ghostly shadow of what might become has been stapled onto loneliness like an albatross making the lonely subject powerfully horrible for scientists. In this way, loneliness becomes the disingenuous invader we all must fear while the lonely person is its disgusting vessel, she whom we must protect ourselves against. Yet, loneliness's

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[37] For more discussion on the notion of the social body see Mary Poovey's groundbreaking *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864,* as well as Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo.*

ability to move throughout the social like this haunting spectre unmasks the social's

undeniable vulnerability, thereby revealing that the social is neither impermeable nor

impenetrable.

In *Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* Ann

Cvetkovich argues for a "depathologizing" of the "traumatic nature of penetration" and

accessibility (56). While Cvetkovich is focusing her arguments on working through the

both intimate and abusive acts of sexual penetration many butch queer women have

endured, her desire to make "penetration meaningful" as a "vehicle for working through

traumatic histories" bears exploration in accordance with my arguments about loneliness.

Cvetkovich describes the cultural understanding of trauma as an unwanted "excitation"

from the "outside" that is "powerful enough to break through the protective shield" we

presume exists between us—individually and collectively—and them—the outsider who

we believe seeks to harm us (53). In Western political discourses that speak of terrorism,

a group of various "thems" seeks to infiltrate and destroy "us"; as far as the science of

loneliness is concerned the lonely subject is the outside force that is seeping into the

social sphere, marking it with contagious affects, through unmediated gaps scientists are

trying to fill. Cvetkovich, however, points to the moments after such penetrations have

happened, where the penetrated body (and I am arguing here that this can be various

traumatized social bodies as well as an individual body) reacts in the "aftermath" of this

clash of emotions, "creat[ing] a defensive crust [that forms only after] the death of its

outer layers" (53). In a post-9/11 society, where the Twin Towers and Pentagon were

literally penetrated by crashing airplanes, the paranoia surrounding infiltration, by

technology, diseases, persons, or affects, heightens fears about the vulnerability of the social fortress.

I am arguing that loneliness, though, is a necessary penetrator that connects rather than undoes or shatters. The notion that the social has "skin" that acts "as a border that feels and that is shaped by the 'impressions' left by others," and that "the skin of the social might be affected by the comings and goings of different bodies, creating new lines and textures in the ways in which things are arranged," is invaluable when trying to understand the paranoia of a breech in this social "skin" (Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* 9). For instance, after the attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001, profiles of the U.S.'s "penetrator" became markedly racist—the Muslim subject who has become a synonym for "terrorist"; the U.S. is today hyper-anxious about its borders being permeated, operating under its own "ethical-political rubric of good and evil" (Brown, "Injury, Identity and Politics" 151). Wendy Brown's understanding of *ressentiment* proves fortuitous here in an attempt to understand this hard-won paranoia that the U.S. in particular, and the West more generally, reproduces. Brown defines *ressentiment* as a feeling that "produces an affect (rage, righteousness) that overwhelms hurt feelings; it produces a culprit responsible for the hurt while producing a site of revenge to displace the hurt" (158). In no way does Brown suggest that this "rage" is acceptable or legitimate; rather, she states that *ressentiment* leaves one "starkly accountable yet dramatically impotent" where all action is nothing but a reaction, "a substitute for action" (158, 159). I argue alongside Ahmed and Brown that this "fiction" of a "universal community" that the West holds fast to, where the West's social body is superior to all other bodies,

contributes to the paranoia of strangers that has become commonplace in the science of loneliness (155). While in the case of a contagious loneliness both the victims of this unlawful "penetration" and the perpetrators are internally located as citizens of the West, these loneliness "spreaders" are also very much considered inherent outsiders—brought into the borders of the Western nation state because of (what is considered by these scientific studies) an invasion of racial, class, and sexual diversity. The lonely subject's dual position as both insider and outsider marks her as a failed citizen *and* a dangerous betrayer. Her loneliness, the anti-happiness, is the proof of this betrayal.

Throughout these studies published in pursuit of a science of loneliness one finds a complicated fear of the strange and stranger; the implications of terrorism seep through the entirety of these narratives. What troubles me most are the ways in which these researchers understand loneliness as a terrorist, a "foreign" trigger that signals an inherent weakness or queerness in the subject's genetic make-up that needs to be cured through "cognitive-behavioral training," and if this is not possible through expulsion or even death (Hawkley et al. 139). These "treatments" are reminiscent of the militant deprogramming and torture techniques used for supposed terrorist cells, as well as the militant Christian fundamentalist tactic which suggests that homosexuals need to "pray away the gay" to be saved. [38] Throughout these scientific studies on loneliness, the cognitive treatments to help the lonely assimilate are listed as: (a) learning how to "exten[d] oneself socially, (b) to increase[e] one's awareness of qualities of good

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[38] See Sarah Boesveld's "Pray Away the Gay: Conversion Therapy Groups Face Heat Over Charity Status" (*National Post*).

relationships, (c) to selec[t] relationship partners carefully to optimize synergies, (d) to be more optimistic and expect the best from relationship partners, (e) and to "synchroniz[e] affect and behavior with a relationship partner" (Hawkley et al. 139). Phrases such as "good relationships," "optimize synergies," and "select relationship partners carefully" speak to the suggestion that there are "good" intimacies and strange, queer intimacies, and that responsible citizens must thwart all urges towards the queer ones. Further, remembering the rhesus monkeys that served as the scientific bases for the bulk of these studies, when the lonely monkeys could not resocialize and happily return to the group, they were either "driven off or eliminated" before they could recruit more lonely monkeys to their cause (Cacioppo et al. "Alone in the Crowd," 986); for the researchers, it was unquestionably the social monkeys' right to kill them. Glaringly, what is not being addressed in these studies is the extreme paranoia of these scientists and the ways their fear of queer affects proposes and legitimates violence.

Science's Lonely Turn

I have suggested in this chapter that the science of loneliness is fraught with heterosexist and sexist research and conclusions whereby science surmises useful citizens are, by definition, not lonely. For them there is no future in loneliness. Loneliness is considered here to exist in contradictions: it is excessive (clustering around, gathering, and even hoarding otherwise social people) and depleting, stagnating, immobilizing, numbing, alienating and social. Too much and too little, emptying and already devoid of emotional sustenance, loneliness is characterized by forms of "under-expression" that

lead to overtly over-the-top consequences that make loneliness extraordinary (Cacioppo et al., "Alone in the Crowd" 978). Thought to be both "quintessential[ly] individualistic" and yet at the same time "also a property of groups of people," loneliness is linked to larger frameworks here that suggest its threat to sociality (985). Yet, because loneliness upsets the ebb and flow of temporal progression, and because its direction is askew, science's attempt to lay blame for its presence in our social sphere might be moot. Loneliness continues to twist and turn, and make itself heard.

The science of loneliness understands loneliness wrongly. Loneliness is not generated by an individual desire to gravitate towards solitude but by the opposite—that is, a desire to connect people. The irony in loneliness's outbreak narrative is that it is considered a threatening contagion that attacks others (the non-lonely) by seeking the non-lonely out, turning them lonely, and bringing them into the lonely group—forming lonely connections. By these researchers' own admission the lonely are not isolated at all. They might *feel* solitary and isolated, but based on proximity and human-to-human contact they are not alone (they are not sitting at home in a room by themselves staring at walls and cats). Instead, they are constantly within the social, surrounded by people. If thought to exist on the periphery, then, they still have access to other people. Lonely persons collect bodies, forming lonely collectives, luring others to loneliness and then turning them lonely. In this sense, ironically, loneliness proves both altruistic and social—a reassertion of the commonalities amongst us. Indeed, as Brown suggests "there is an etymological sense in which the making of compound subjects *is* politics" (qtd. in Ngai 167).

Since it appears that the loneliness science speaks about is actually quite social, new questions arise: is it a fear of another presumed queer contagion like AIDS that fuels a paranoia about loneliness, where homophobia becomes both a symptom of this narrative and the reason such narratives spread, or is it the fear that queerness itself is the everyday, the ordinary, that propels these scientific studies' insistence that loneliness is attracted to and becomes the queer? As Wald suggests, the problem with any disease is "less in its novelty than in its familiarity" (6). Does loneliness become the more troublesome because of its ordinariness? I explore these questions throughout the subsequent chapters where I argue that the very social structures that support relationality are revealed to be vulnerable through loneliness. What I find promising about loneliness are the very traits that these researchers abhor and wish to rehabilitate, namely the feelings of discomfort, misfittedness, and lostness, and seeking. If loneliness's "reinforcing effects mean that our social fabric can fray at the edges like a yarn that comes loose at the end of a crocheted sweater" as Cacioppo fears then I believe loneliness is an important force to be reckoned with ("Alone in the Crowd" 977). To be sure, these scientists have proved their own point; loneliness is working very well, and is triggering for us the awareness that there is something horrific about the ways we relate to others socially. What loneliness threatens to reveal, however, is that the fabric of society holds tenuously together by self-serving, Western social structures and that these can be ripped away, knotted, and perhaps most frightening for Western powers, re-knit into something different. I do hope they can be.

Here, I want to ask: what is it about the queer narrative the science of loneliness weaves that makes us listen and judge the lonely subject? Why has loneliness become an

antithesis to happiness and who does this benefit? And, importantly, what is at stake in seeing loneliness in positive, pleasurable ways? A possible answer to the latter question might be found in the humiliation associated with both loneliness and queer sexuality. Oddly, the act of declaring one's loneliness publicly, which one might assume would be considered a good thing given our Western fear of the unknown lonely stranger who lurks amongst us in silence, has been negatively inflected with embarrassment and shame: a desperate action in anticipation of a reaction and an act that prompts a social and socializing response. As Denise Riley explains, "as households of single people grow, the admission of even occasional loneliness remains taboo, while to be without visible social ties is inexcusable" (58). The pressure to be visibly and happily social and heteronormative precludes questions that might critique the mandatory nature of such visibility. To be lonely is to be an anxiety-inducing body—worrying to us because of the lonely person's seeming refusal of happiness and, as Michael Cobb argues, for abandoning what is taken to be our common goal: developing a self through our "relationship[s] with others" (*Single* 11).

I do not see the lonely subject as a rebellious identity, or as an exceptional leftover of a happy social. I understand the lonely amongst us, myself included, as ordinary, everyday reminders of the shared loneliness we all have, queer or otherwise. The surfacing of loneliness, then, is not in any way exceptional. Yet, the way loneliness is "cas[t]" as another intriguing enemy with queer attributes and affects, in what Jasbir K. Puar calls the "miasma of oppositionality,"—or the state of murky confusion—is what creates a sense of exceptionalism and homophobia around loneliness ("Q&A With Jasbir

Puar"). That loneliness could be its own powerful contagion, uncontrollable and dangerous to others, and that its effects could potentially destroy Western understandings of sociality, makes loneliness a valuable political emotion to heterosexist culture, easily put into closets with queerness, another presumed miasma of its own.

Why then would I be advocating for a politics of queer loneliness? Such a politics might enable a relational structure that disorients neoliberal sociality in ways we have never seen, ways that are necessary if we are to work towards ethical, democratic practices of altruism and relationality. Neoliberalism relies upon conditions of exceptionality as though creating and sustaining a national identity was a completely normal and ordinary goal.[39] Revelling in the creation of national borders and fostering exclusive citizenry, American exceptionalism, for instance, legitimates its own enforced security. In so doing, privileged, conforming neoliberal subjects are considered originary, while other subjects, spaces, and beliefs become cast as dangerous misfits, and oftentimes as models of terror seeking to overthrow or infect these borders. Even in this moment where a "transnational trend" seems to be offering a space to interrupt exceptionalism, neoliberal policies remain strengthened if not reinvigorated. While transnationalism appears to provide a reprieve or even an ethical alternative to theories of exceptionalism—as borders are opened, and cultural diversity is encouraged—the promise of "post-exceptionalist" inclusivity (Pease 19) simply reifies Western

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[39] American exceptionalism refers to what Amy Kaplan has called the "tenacious grasp" neoliberals have on the notion that the West is superior to all other cultures. This superiority legitimates rigid borders and exclusions, explained on "narrow national grounds," as well as the militant practices that are deployed to secure these borders (as qtd. in Fluck 369).

supremacies once more (Fluck 377). As Winfried Fluck argues, "transnationalism" is merely "a code word for an America reinvigorated by an aesthetic plentitude made possible by cultural flow and exchange" (369) where "America becomes a world leader again" and again on the backs of otherness (369, 370). In other words, under the guise of opening up its borders to all, the neoliberal West acquires shiny new pieces for its collection—"fascinating new aesthetic objects"—while remaining militant about its own "normal" superiority (370).

However, the everydayness of loneliness, its sheer ordinariness, makes the lonely a powerful political voice. Cast out for being seemingly peculiar, the very potential to reimagine a social sphere based on loneliness exists precisely because the lonely, each of us, are neither interested in sticking to a projected trajectory of neoliberal sociality nor in destroying and/or maintaining the social network. Instead, the impossibility of navigating throughout loneliness without a particular destination in mind enables a moment of directionless direction—a getting lost—that keeps this loneliness moving while its connection to each of us allows loneliness and this lonely time to pause, think and reevaluate, refusing to be turned any which way in particular. Loneliness then is the exception to neoliberal exceptionalism's rules. In this way, queer loneliness is not running from neoliberal discourses that require social complacency; it is facing these imperatives with its back turned. So instead of asking what we can do about our queer loneliness, I ask what we can do *with* it.

CHAPTER TWO

Narcissistically Attached: Waters' and Connell's Lesbian Sociality

I was looking for someone who looked like me. I think this is probably what everyone does, maybe subconsciously, when choosing a mate. Lesbians definitely do it, even if choosing a mate has nothing to do with breeding. I call it Lesbian Narcissism. It goes like this: A lesbian spots another lesbian. She thinks, Oh, she's cute. She notices her clothes. She thinks, cool outfit. Slowly it dawns on her that she has that same outfit. And the same haircut.
>   (Askowitz, *My Miserable, Lonely, Lesbian Pregnancy* 71).

The New L-Word

An unapologetic self-preoccupation defines contemporary sociality. As more and more people are concerned with their single life histories, many of us are embroiled, as Denise Riley has astutely pointed out, in a paradoxical moment full of individuated selves scrambling to "know themselves," and seeking to find themselves through "happy," intersubjective attachments (4). Our social, political, economic, and cultural lives are navigated around this quest for self-fulfillment and yet we remain anxious about the threat of a noxious individualism. Valued as progressive, the notion that we are *for* community inclusion and *against* individualistic exclusionary practices works to foster a "fantasy of national-unity," "wholeness," and legitimacy (Fortier 101, 105). It is through national fantasies of cohesion and universality that we have convinced ourselves that our socialities are, at their core, altruistic. Most of us might even agree that we, individually, are dependent upon the social even if we would like to consider ourselves otherwise. As Judith Butler submits, "The 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation" (8). Sociality, however, is not inevitably ethical. As I will argue throughout the

remaining chapters of this thesis, Western sociality has become based upon capitalist ideals such as mutuality, commonality, and mimesis. As Richard Sennett states, "treating someone else as a 'real person' … [is] like a market exchange of likenesses; they show you a card, you show them one" (10). The result is a widening of the scope of identity so that ambiguous terms such as "family" and "community" attempt to implicate every one, and yet actively differentiate between who belongs and who does not belong. In a neoliberal Western culture that delights in and is "greatly energized by the entire diction of public and private boundaries," this binary relationship between belonging and exclusion has become untouchable and seemingly beyond reproach (Riley 56).

Although neoliberal ideals are stalwartly self-serving and often times ableist, classist, gender phobic, racist, and heterosexist, charges that our contemporary relational structures might be negatively narcissistic, or hyper-individualistic are vehemently refused by Western political discourses that fend off such critiques through professions of tolerance, sexual and gender diversity, and multiculturalism. A self-celebrated neighbourliness circulates throughout these narratives of national belonging, masking and legitimating the many inequities still very much prevalent in Western sociality under a false guise of universal amicability. As Anne-Marie Fortier argues, the political aims of "feel good multiculturalism" and community building do much more to oppress otherness than they do to bring citizens happily together through their differences (104). Still, we believe in optimistic states of being where the personal, the public, and the national all aspire to happiness. Arguing that the neoliberal West's notions of tolerance and diversity are merely political strategies that maintain exclusive structures of national citizenship

with a smile, Wendy Brown reminds us, however, that "the language of recognition" very easily "becomes the language of unfreedom." ("Identity" 156). Brown asks us to think more carefully about "liberal" programs that profess their happy progressiveness and recognition of otherness, while collapsing into "disciplinary discourse[s]" that quickly become racist "vehicle[s] of subordination," sexual assimilation, and gender "normalization" (156).

A Western belief in our friendliness, neighbourliness, and stalwart tolerance for diversity enables citizens to feel good about themselves, a happy feeling that is understood by Fortier to be an "integral element of neoliberal governing strategies" (104). This false optimism, one that Lauren Berlant calls "cruel," gestures to both an unachievable fantasy of "the good life" that Westerners hold fast to and our desire to believe we are good people, building kind communities, living in a happy nation. While the promise that this life "will add up to something" incredible has begun to crumble in a post 9/11, war-torn moment, where economic recession and environmental crises have left people questioning the stability of "liberal-capitalist" governments, this moment of chaos makes our happiness seem both more tenuous and more necessary than ever (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* 15). In this vein, any "emotionally illegible" (Ngai 26) feelings that might challenge this happiness, or any "strange" relation that might make us question our connections, becomes inevitably configured as dangerous to the "homogeneity" and national unity of the happy home we are now realizing might not be so happy (Fortier 78). Sara Ahmed's analysis of what she sees as an almost state-sanctioned happiness explores the "happiness industry" of self-help and self-gratification that she argues has

surfaced in response to the feelings of upheaval Westerners are experiencing (*The Promise of Happiness* 3). Ahmed cautions that such an idyllic happiness only works through willful ignorance, without our knowing what it is "we wish for in wishing for happiness," and at whose expense this wishful thinking comes (1). In the process, the unhappy become configured as the deservedly lonely unwanteds (the "unhappy queer, and melancholic migrant" (*Promise* 17) who threaten what Fortier calls the "national structure of feeling" (Fortier 88).

It is this "feel good" politics and its selfishness that I trouble here through an exploration of loneliness's and lesbianism's fraught relationship to narcissism. In contradistinction to a Western nationalism that aspires to its own happiness and values its unity above all else, loneliness produces an "ironic distance" in a person and in the social, a disconnection that makes fragile notions of universality and ideations of "wholeness" untenable (Ngai 10). It is in this sense that unpretty feelings like loneliness, queerness, and narcissism induce a compounded confusion, or what Ngai calls a "highly specific feeling of feeling uncertain about what one is feeling" (17, 14). My argument is that uncertainty can force a political slippage in neoliberal socialities, while guiding subjects into questioning why they are feeling such dis-ease when living in a social sphere that portends happiness.

As discussed in Chapter One, the science of loneliness has worked to create genetic, sexual, and gendered connections between loneliness and women. Scientists such as Cacioppo have concluded that loneliness a) passes through women genetically, b) is attracted to women more than it is men, c) spreads more rapidly amongst queer and

female groups, d) adheres to a hemophilic structure where like attracts like, and e) is more contagious for women than it is for men. Based on these scientific findings, gay men might be a danger as carriers of loneliness; however, since women are more likely to "catch" and spread loneliness, lesbians, especially lesbians intimate with other lesbians, are of the highest risk as carriers of loneliness. Through an exploration of lesbian narcissism and loneliness I argue that there is an interruptive potential in loneliness—an unhappy, narcissistic, and "ugly feeling"—that makes lesbian loneliness in particular both politically threatening and socially necessary (Ngai 10).

Important to this chapter on lesbian narcissism are the points of departure and connection between loneliness and queerness. I suggest there are cultural presumptions and predilections that shape the ways in which we think about loneliness and understand queerness. The first presumption is that lonely and queer subjects are narcissists, and therefore threats to the social networks the West invests in. Overly self-indulgent and preoccupied with finding herself in a condition of unloneliness, the lonely subject is often criticized for being malignantly unsocial and selfishly strange. The lesbian subject, alongside her gay male counterparts, is criticized for her desire for sexual similitude, as though her attraction to the same sex effaces all chances for other social relations. Thus, while human sociality is presumed inherent, and our need to be with other people is thought to be present from the moment we are born, the stereotypical labels that stigmatize queers (such as being narcissistic and lonely) suggest that there is something inherent in queerness that delimits our social potential. In other words, for queers, our sociality is not thought to make us socially conscious people, or socially connected, and

our being a part of the social does not guarantee us a spot within the socially accepted

spaces— or as Sara Ahmed would say, we are not guaranteed a seat at the table (*Queer*

Phenomenology 59).

This chapter explores the stigma of queer narcissism by turning it inside out and

rereading it through a queer lesbianism that endeavours to be self-critical, self-reflexive,

and politically altruistic. If, as Ahmed argues, happiness favours the "privileged," then I

wish to suggest here that loneliness favours the misfitted queers amongst us—those who

live in the world as outed "aliens" (*Promise* 11). This proposition is a difficult one

because both loneliness and queerness have already been far too often associated with

self-absorption and individualism. Currently queerness, at best, stands in semi-opposition

to established neoliberal relational discourses that effectively either turn queerness into a

prized, public spectacle that enhances an already valorized heterosexuality, or into an

enemy of the hetero-state.[40] Whether queerness is seen as a welcome addition to the

traditional notion of the Western family, or as a serious threat to this hetero-patriarchy,

queerness is conceptualized as *something* that needs help being reconciled into a

neoliberal sphere. At worst, queers' desires to be included somewhere leave many

scholars, feminists, and activists invested in progressing queerness's political imprint.

The result is that oftentimes these discussions spend their time backtracking in order to

analyze homosexual politics' past accomplishments and failures, with a queer eye always

on projecting queerness forward, into a future that remains unabashedly neoliberal. This

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[40] See Shane Phelan's *Sexual Strangers: Gays, Lesbians and the Dilemmas of Citizenship*; Michael Warner's *The Trouble With Normal*; and William Harris' *Queer Externalities: Hazardous Encounters With American Culture*.

trajectory both mimics and re-endorses the conservative right's political claims to progress, growth, and cultural advancement. Queer women are caught in this paradox where becoming visible means becoming acceptable under neoliberal social standards, often at the expense of a queerer politics. The anxiety surrounding this awkward conundrum where being socially accepted means becoming socially acceptable has conditioned gay and lesbian sexualities and their feelings, especially at historical junctures when paranoia surrounding social change has proliferated throughout hetero-public spheres.

A case in point would be the beginning of the twentieth century when a collective feeling of anxiety was thought to be permeating Western culture causing in many subjects varying physical and psychosomatic symptoms of restlessness including "insomnia, lethargy, depression, hypochondria, hysteria," and general malaise (Stewart 44). These mixed, "unsteady" and "fraught structures of feeling" were presumed to stem from the societal changes of the 1900s where the "excitable subject" and her virtuous, morally astute Victorian "sensibility" was being cast "adrift" in fast-moving, "large-scale modernist social transformations" (44). Sexuality and sexual identity were each being researched and monitored by science and medical analysts, as Sexology and Psychology became burgeoning professional fields (Bland and Doan 199). The idea that one had to either "modernize," which even then carried within it the sign of normalization, or risk "perishing" was everywhere (Bauman 132). A promise of social change—from Victorian morality to modernization—also ushered in a blind devotion to a pre-neoliberal capitalism where a presumption was born: that material consumption actually begot

happiness and happiness begot healthy social connectivity. At the same time, a paranoia that there was an unnameable threat lurking on the periphery of this social change began to blossom within the public and private imaginary; "a gothic" pessimism that "hidden threats and unseen forces" were constantly afoot collided with the utopic optimism that came from this "new consumerist-therapeutic ethos" (Stewart 44). The notion that happiness is interdependent with fiscal wealth and that this happy-success is under constant threat by outside forces is still supported by neoliberal political rhetoric today. And any queer subject who is unhappy with this heteronormative ethos faces the charge of strangeness, being outcast and thought threatening to happy states of being.

Although consumerist rhetoric promises to fashion unique subjectivities, the desire for similitude found at the heart of consumerist discourses has created an anxious need for a belief in the autonomous consumer. In other words, the autonomous consumer is antithetical to the universally acceptable subject, and yet the two are expected to become one in the same. Pessimistically speaking, it might be, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkeimer warned in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* that the "promise" of a "true universal" and the superiority that our contemporary culture continues to aspire to is one of the greatest tragedies the West has yet to claim as its biggest failure. And this "failure," our vanity and delusions of uniqueness and superiority, has created a "culture" that is "industrialized, rigorously subsumed" and a mere "imprint" of agency, creating "surrogate[s] to identity"—piles of identities that have been marketed and heralded as progressive, but marked with a sense of lonely individualism and emptiness (103). Perhaps in reaction to this blind denial of the obvious lack of difference offered and

celebrated by capitalist discourses, sameness, and our fears of it, have been projected onto those people who *are* actually diverse.

Put otherwise, a desire for similitude has become understood by cultural, social, and political discourses as the selfish preoccupation and defect of the queer desiring body. The belief that queerness involves a calamity of extraordinary hedonistic impulses continues to circulate, suggesting that queerness exists in contention with unified, acceptable social parameters and social cohesion. "Normal" heterosexual subjects are now understood as savvy, social agents, and queer subjects are painted as bizarre lonely narcissists pathologically seeking images of themselves in everyone they meet. What Tim Dean calls a "primary narcissism," where "same-sex love tends to be understood as love of the same, and hence as a refusal or exclusion of otherness," has become synonymous with homosexuality (127). Queers are understood as selfish, individual players—rule-breakers who are dangerous to the team, and oftentimes not even willing to play the game.

While loneliness and narcissism are not the same, and are not interchangeable terms, both have been attributed to lesbians, and both suggest a propensity towards selfishness and individualism. Given queerness's already fraught presumed connection to narcissism and loneliness, if loneliness alerts us to the fact that "something is happening—something that needs attending to" (Stewart 5)—an affective leakage that tells us we need to make social changes now, today— how do we find ways to politically understand it without missing the moment or further stigmatizing queers? What is at stake for queers and our own sense of social connectivity, our desires to belong or transgress

such belongings, in attempting to give an account of a queer loneliness that makes

queerness itself ordinary? And, finally, what type of citizen might a misfitted lonely,

queer narcissist make?

I will be turning to two narratives to help me think through these questions: Sarah

Waters' *The Night Watch* and Kelli Connell's *Double Life.* In doing so, I wish to

highlight the tricky and misfitted positions of both lesbian narcissism and loneliness in

contemporary Western culture. Each of these narratives relates lesbian narcissism directly

to a political, everyday loneliness that acts as an emotion with "rogue intensities"

(Stewart 4), enacting the ordinariness of social connection by refusing to differentiate

between self and others. Zygmunt Bauman argues that, historically, in the pre-modern

moment, Western nationals believed a particularized script was needed to celebrate the

"humanity of humans" (Bauman 127). However, what transpired in late modernity was an

endorsement of a relational ethics that professed altruism and inclusivity and yet modeled

exclusive, discriminating practices. As aforementioned, this highly interdependent,

consumer-driven sociality legitimated a social practice of creating a "boundary between

citizens and foreigners," between an us and a them, between the normal and the

abnormal, and between the heterosexual and the homosexual (Bauman 127). Creating

such a social exclusivity towards the "other" was not only legitimated, but was

encouraged as a means by which to secure one's happiness and sovereignty. Thus, it has

become our "right" to set impossible "conditions" on other subjects and "exclude any

human being who has been cast beyond the limits of the human and divine laws, and to

make them into a being to whom no laws apply and whose destruction brings no

punishment" (133,126). The lesbian loneliness working throughout the aesthetics that Waters and Connell practice, I suggest, dissolves the selfish sociality Bauman warns us of—this sense of the importance of the boundary between me and you.

In *The Night Watch*, Waters negotiates the everyday life of lonely lesbians amidst the extraordinariness of World War II. The war has brought lovers together, remade intimacies into playful explorations, and severed bonds leaving each lesbian subject to cope differently with the lure of selfishness. Waters' lesbian characters seek solace in sexual pleasure and ordinary routines while attempting to figure out what individuality and sociality mean in times of complete cultural disorientation. I argue that Waters attempts to create new social outcomes for lesbian intimacy where relationality pushes lesbianism's narcissistic identity and lonely sociality beyond the constraints of nostalgic pasts or neoliberal futures. Elizabeth Freeman states that there is an "erotics of apprehending history," and Waters plays with ideas of sameness and narcissism through the fluidity of bodies, touches, spaces, and time in order to disconnect subjectivity from a loneliness that leaves her lesbian characters stuck in the past, unable to connect with one another (111). In the process, Waters reveals a political loneliness that seeks to connect these women through their intimacies, vulnerabilities, and desires not in order to make them extraordinarily happy, but rather to explore how feelings of misfittedness and aloneness can trigger necessary social and political change. Lesbian narcissism thus becomes a relational means to question self-preoccupation and recognize our personal complacency about and responsibility toward the people we share our spaces with.

In her exploration of lesbian intimacy and the self, Connell's photos in *Double*

Life appeal to the everydayness of societal isolation, while Connell's muse is depicted in simple, ordinary social moments with her female lover—both the same woman in these photos. I argue that the doubleness of the muse's image, that is, the self-extension and the juxtaposition of her lesbian self, both challenges the masculine readings of gay male narcissism that thinkers such as Leo Bersani have focused upon and opens a space for a lesbian loneliness that is self-reflexive and altruistic. While Bersani, discussed throughout this chapter, sees narcissism as a necessary violent disavowal of all selves in an extraordinary, sexual annihilation of worlds, pushing subjects to the precipice and then watching them fall off into depths, Connell's figure creates a space for a relational narcissistic intimacy that brings lonely bodies together, pleasurably towards change, in ordinary ways. By presenting her audience with a single figure who becomes two figures participating in everyday acts such as bathing, eating, and driving together in a truck, Connell's photos rupture heteronormative and gay male narcissistic social structures that see loneliness, queerness, and narcissism as disconnected, unique or individualistic. Connell's photos refuse happy assimilation into heteronormative social conformity; her conceptual loneliness turns away from happiness and brings these images to the brink of a new sociality that is dangerously close to the precipice of annihilation yet remains upright and together through care and a recognition that our shared, same loneliness is what connects us. In these ways, Connell's loneliness represents the ethical possibilities within the intimate, queer narcissism of everyday loneliness.

I suggest throughout this thesis that queer loneliness is an affect, a potential identity, and a politics that must be engaged, without collapsing the notion of the lonely

queer-subject back into the historical realm of individualism, nihilism, and "imaginary" narcissism (Chiesa 23). Through a reading of Waters' novel and Connell's images, and building on Bersani's notion of "impersonal narcissism," I work in the rest of this chapter to argue that lesbian loneliness offers contemporary Western culture an ordinary, intimate, and socially conscious narcissism that challenges Western structures that advocate for our happy exceptionality (Bersani, *Intimacies* 112). I contend that just as Waters' protagonists and Connell's lonely queer couple find they cannot abandon their loneliness by being indoctrinated into the happy social, their self-critical lesbian loneliness shows us how to embrace the infinite burden of a lonely sociality, one that pushes current consumerist dependencies beyond themselves. Consequently, lesbian loneliness's ordinariness, its "mutually assured vulnerability" and indifference to differences— indifference to "'undecidables' made flesh" as Derrida states (qtd. in Bauman 141)— seeks in others not their reciprocal care and recognition, but their ordinary compassion, making everyday loneliness the link to the "common humanity" we seek (in Bauman 156).

Who's Fairest in the Land?

Before embarking on my textual analyses I want to introduce how narcissism and queerness have been presumed to be intimately associated with one another, and, alongside these associations, how loneliness and lesbianism have been linked through this understanding of narcissism. In 1928, sexologist Havelock Ellis' "The Conception of Narcissism" married narcissism to homosexuality with his theory on the inner workings

of homosexual desire. Arguing that the sexual "invert," the homosexual, actually "misdirects" her/his sexual desire, moving away from the direction of heterosexuality, Ellis suggested that the homosexual's "libidinal energy" was constantly "turning on him/herself" creating a "narcissus-like tendency" (Ellis, qtd. in Bruhm 4). Describing narcissism as a "pathological attraction to the self" Ellis weighted the homosexual down with these "unnatural" attributes of excessive "self-admiration" (Campbell et al. 351). The link between narcissism and homosexuality was born and began to gain mobility. After Ellis' work was translated into German by Paul Nacke, both Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud used the term "narcissism" to describe homosexuals; however, they concentrated solely on males whom they believed seemed unable and uninterested in taking women as love objects (Freud 4).

In his essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" Freud emphasizes narcissism's role in male homosexual desire, arguing that "perverts and homosexuals," instead of using their mothers as their initial love objects, "take as a model not their mother but their own selves" (88). While he does argue homosexuals are excessively "narcissistic," he is quick to suggest that a certain degree of narcissism is "necessary" in all sexual development. In other words, instead of negating narcissistic tendencies as detrimental to the development of social and sexual subjectivity, differentiating between healthy and unhealthy narcissism, Freud suggests that a "primary narcissism exists in *everyone*" making narcissism quite ordinary (88). However, Freud creates a binary dualism between healthy and what he sees as abnormal narcissism, a self-obsession that marks those subjects who fail to mobilize their libidinal desires for others, taking on lovers who reflect their own

image instead (88). Homosexual narcissism, for both Freud and Ellis, signaled an interruption in normative psychosexual development.

Contemporary theorists too have studied narcissism alongside homosexuality, especially in the realm of a continued interest in psychoanalysis. Steven Bruhm's *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic* engages with the presupposition that there is a "psychological link" between homosexual desire and narcissism (1). Reflecting on psychoanalysis' influence on conceptualizations of the gay, male narcissist, Bruhm takes issue with the notion that narcissism delineates a negative quality, arguing that gays have been too easily misunderstood as "antisexual" and "antisocial" narcissists who only care about their own pleasure (2). Pointing to a laziness in the cultural analysis of homosexual narcissism, Bruhm suggests that connecting same-sex love to mere self-obsession and vanity makes it easy for "conservative critics and journalists," as well as medical practitioners and therapists, to dismiss homosexuality as a sexual identity infected with "egoism and selfishness" (2). Still, this negative association between narcissism and homosexuality has historically and contemporarily been used to create a demonized conceptualization of homosexuality, and to create a "taxonomic category" that has been and is still being used as an argument against rights allocation for homosexuals while maintaining a heteropatriarchy (3). For example, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and the religious zealots who used the equation of narcissism and gayness to further homophobic propaganda evidence such a misappropriation of gay narcissism (3).[41] In this case, the

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[41] Many political leaders used tactics such as the "fire and brimstone rhetoric" (Murphy et al. 275) of Senator Jesse Helms, to blame gay males who had contracted HIV,

meanings of gay narcissism are twofold: it creates a narrative that blames the selfish queer man for contracting and then spreading AIDS, and it creates an ideology that homosexual intimacy is flimsy, self-endorsed, and "illusory," thereby turning heterosexual sociality into the model of ethical realism and altruism.

Michael Warner's "Homo-Narcissism" has also argued that sloppy thinkers have too easily used psychoanalysis as an "arm of power." Warner chastises understandings of narcissism that ignorantly condemn homosexuality as "regressive" and "self-fixated," a contagion or disease (qtd. in Greven 23). Despite narcissism being removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders in 2010, the focus on queer pathology and its link to selfish narcisissism has not lessened (Zanor). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that for the politics of heteronormativity to work, the heterosexual must remain unabashedly understood as socially altruistic and the homosexual must be outed by, as Peter Baldwin argues, a "foreignness" that has to be "narcissistically elaborated in lavish detail" (10). These heteronormative ideologies, furthermore, work to effectively mask heterosexual narcissism (Greven 23).

In this next section I seek first to unfetter narcissism from Ellis' and Freud's shackles, and then turn briefly to the ways in which homosexual, white, middle-class men have both been used and, in turn, have used narcissism to create and sustain acceptable

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claiming their perverted, "reckless," deadly immoral lifestyles and sexual selfishness left the infected deserved of their plight (LeJacq 122). Moreover, narcissism was used to accuse certain gay men of purposefully spreading AIDS throughout the general population. Randy Shiltz's *And the Band Played On* semi-fictionalizes the life of patient zero's Gaetan Dugas, who was accused of using his "gay cancer" to make others sick on purpose (113). Dugas will be forever associated with a selfish narcissism that has become synonymous with the homosexual identity itself.

capitalist subjectivities. I will then be moving away from a concentration on gay, white, middle-class male subjectivities, putting forth an appeal for an understanding of a lonely lesbian narcissism, an intimate self-love that is at the forefront relational and social. This lonely lesbian narcissism, I argue, calls neoliberal networks into account for their proliferation of selfish individualism and exceptionality. I explore what relational possibilities are made possible through a lonely lesbian narcissism that is otherwise unavailable in the contemporary moment. I focus on the dynamics of intimate relationality and lesbianism, asking what conditions of social possibility open up when women encounter one another erotically, sexually, and politically without assuming that what psychoanalysis has called a repressed self-love dictates their actions.

The idea that homosexuals selfishly demand to be treated as special—to be given special rights to marry, to be afforded a special tolerance in the military (which might endanger the safety of the nation at war), to be granted special permission to raise a child—is reflected in discourses of sexuality throughout Western culture. The notion that homosexuals are exceptionally narcissistic, and that homosexual intimacies are extraordinarily nihilistic, stigmatizes gayness with an inherent and dysfunctional social shortcoming that seems to demand heterosexual attention. This supposed marked remarkability has become more evident in 2013 as we see a vibrant visibility of male homosexuality in the social and cultural media. It is here that being a gay narcissist is not only seen to be financially profitable but celebrated as spectacle and entertainment. Indeed, the gay narcissistic man has taken on a life of his own in the public eye, one that both substantiates stereotypical assumptions about gay narcissism and uses these

presumptions for capitalistic gain and assimilation.[42] Less interested in making spaces for

multifarious forms of sexuality and more interested in proving their neoliberal

effectiveness, many contemporary, bourgeois gay men have embraced a capitalist

selfishness that keeps social hierarchies in place.

Jack Halberstam effectively criticizes cultural and queer studies' preoccupation

with a particularly capitalistic version of gay narcissism. In her[43] joint introduction to

"What's Queer About Queer Studies' Now?" she particularizes her criticism of white,

male, gay narcissistic subjectivities stating: "queer theory collapses too easily into 'gay

and lesbian' and a 'possessive individualism' that presumes a gay, white, male

subjectivity" (Halberstam, qtd. in Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 12). Suggesting that the

"future of queer studies" will involve moving completely away from "white, gay, male

identity politics" (and its focus on gay male shame, sex, and pride), Halberstam calls for a

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[42] Embodying the image of the corporate, white, snobby, self-righteous, wealthy, obsessed-with-their-appearance-and-self-image, upper class professional, the gay narcissist has handily found his way into popular culture. The snooty, out-of-touch poetry aficionado in *The Best and the Brightest*, the sexy, sex-hungry Ad-exec Brian from *Queer as Folk*, the self-obsessed Jay Manuel from *Canada's Top Model*, the consumerist ideal, Jack, and corporate lawyer Will from *Will and Grace,* corporate lawyer Kevin Walker from *Brothers and Sisters*, Defense attorney Ray Fiske from *Damages*, the manipulative, mother-hating but dashing Andrew from *Desperate Housewives* each resonate with a public eager to tolerate homosexuality as long as it is keeping up the with neoliberal imperative to spend money and make money. Whether the butt of jokes a hetero-audience is in on, or a licentious other the audience loves but knows they will never be, the gay male narcissist is romanticized and demonized as he who is so concerned with himself he cannot be expected to be altruistic. It's not all his fault; however. He is gay after all. A "refuge of male privilege" (Greven 20) these versions of narcissism delimit the potential for altruism, and lend credit to queer theorists' contentions with gay male privilege, suggesting narcissism is the gay male's badge of honor.
[43] After much deliberation and play, Jack Halberstam now considers herself "loosey-goosey" on pronouns and so goes by she, he, or they. For more information on her current stance see *jackhalberstam.com*.

change in direction, demanding instead a queer studies that concentrates on radical understandings of "feminism" and "ethnic studies" that seek to "take apart" the troubling neoliberal "social processes" that oppress queer subjects (12). Halberstam's charge is clear: some gay men have been "bought off by gay pride" (Traub and Halperin 7). Allowing themselves to be pinkwashed, some gay men have become fettered to companies who wish to *appear* sexually tolerant and progressive and so endorse selective gay icons who can advance their public relations successes, all the while remaining tied to heterosexist practices. Therefore, while contemporary "gay visibility" seems to be attempting to move "upwards," Sara Ahmed reminds us you cannot remain "lin[ed] up" with normative pathways and directives unless you also "follow" the directions and regulated orientations that are deemed normative in the first place (*Queer Phenomenology* 137). If homosexual men are passing as almost normal, they are "follow[ing] the line" of heterosexuality, whiteness, masculinity, class, and progress: to pass is to be recognizably acceptable by the states of regulation we inhabit (137).

Queer studies itself has taken gay men as its center; lesbianism is oftentimes considered moot by queer scholars who concentrate so heavily on gay male gender identities and their associated shame and pride. With such a blatant focus on itself, gay male sexuality has, once again, been accused of being a narcissistic "brand" that has usurped the field of queer studies. As Frances Negron-Muntaner argues, gay maleness and "its [brand of] narcissism" is always dangerously bleeding into all conceptualizations of queerness (qtd. in Traub 95). A celebration of gay male narcissism, then, works to "demonstrate [gay men's] fundamental normality," except for their minor differences, by

creating new binaries and exclusions (Phelan 84-85). Ironically, what this means for the study of narcissism is that it only gets researched through the lens of gay maleness and the pride and shame associated with being gay—selfish vanity, social and corporate assimilation, or a stalwart, separatist individualism. Yet, if constantly professing the importance of gay male shame evidences what Sally Munt has called a "contagious dynami[c]" (34), or if it is simply masking "anger in middle-class clothing" (34), as Esther Newton suggests, or if it is just another part of the "civilizing process" as George Chauncey argues (37), or if it is only ever a gay male thing as Jack Halberstam has argued (220), then is it possible that loneliness is lesbianism's affect? Can loneliness bring us beyond "self-affirming forms of sociality" and closer to a nuanced understanding of narcissism? (Halperin and Traub 34).

The possibility that queer narcissism offers the potential for an alternative understanding of sociality is not new, and yet most of the provocative theories are male-focused and collapse into a debate about whether to position queerness within or outside dominant social matrices. For instance, Michael Warner asks critical thinkers to reassess our queer relationship to narcissism and its presumed relinquishment of sociality: "why is gender assumed to be our only access to alterity?" he asks, questioning the notion that homosexuals have an inherent inability to distinguish between "self and not-self" (200). Focusing further on unpacking how narcissism has created schisms in queer communities and how understandings of narcissism have been mandated by psychologists and scientists, Tim Dean argues that both heterosexuals and homosexuals must challenge our understandings of erotic relationships that keep the "margin between otherness and

difference" closed and oppressive (17). However, Dean does see some potential in what he calls a "nonimaginary narcissim" (17), one that challenges the traditionally conceived Lacanian narcissism which argues that the formation of the ego rests solely on an "imaginary identification" that requires the "techniques of trickery" (17) and mirrors to lure and then alienate "the specular other" (17). Dean suggests that because this "specular other" is not the same "Other" through which the self is constituted, narcissism has to be rethought. In other words, reemphasizing Lacan's notion that recognition is always a misrecognition, Dean argues that what the person actually sees in this "mirror" is a fantastical "fixation" of what they want to see, not necessarily an accurate portrayal of what, or who, is actually there (17). Therefore, he suggests that subjectivity cannot be understood by this imaginary narcissism (17) because it is based on fantasy—"the imaginary dimension of the subject is the ego" (17).

Importantly, Dean does not want to abandon the potential he sees in queer (especially gay-male) narcissism. Rather, he wants to conceptualize a queer narcissism that is understood as more than a desire to "maintain the ego," one that goes beyond "imaginary" narcissism and embraces something quite different (29). As to what that something is, he remains unsure. The key question for my purposes is to tease out what this usefulness might be. How do we differentiate between the narcissism associated with gay men and other queers such as lesbians, on the one hand, and the profoundly narcissistic tendencies of capitalist discourses and practices, on the other? How do we effectively take a term that carries so much affective weight as "narcissist" and both disorient its connotations and distance it from neoliberal uses? I contend that what these

theories are missing is an understanding of lesbian loneliness, an affect that I suggest is political precisely because it acknowledges the queer political valences within narcissistic tendencies and pushes to hold relational systems that exclude into account, bringing them to the precipice of an urgent renewal. It is in this way that social networks that are predicated on exclusion and inclusion and that recognize progressive able-bodiedness, whiteness, and hetero-success as the only palpable paths towards belonging are brought into question through loneliness.

I argue throughout the rest of this chapter that lesbian narcissism works in lonely opposition to stereotypical presumptions of a self-absorbed, gay narcissism. Thus, while gay male subjectivities are historically inflected by, and contemporarily celebrated through, shame and pride, two attributes that see the self as central, lesbian narcissism is historically and contemporarily embedded in loneliness rather than being associated with shame or pride. Antithetical to individualist ideologies, moreover, this lonely affect is social, and seeks connected engagement with others. Put otherwise, while lesbianism is conditioned by a desire for sexual sameness, and loneliness is often thought to be a solitary affect that dwells in selves, lesbian loneliness makes space for a narcissism that externalizes self-reflexivity, thrives through critical engagements with others, and connects rather than separates. However, lesbian loneliness does not then become unlonely—thereby creating a happy lesbian identity. Rather, loneliness serves as an emotion and way of being in the world that is constantly working to be altruistic through a feeling of longing. This lonely feeling reminds us being ethically social requires work, and that neoliberal happiness is not an entitlement.

Coming for Bersani

Contemporary theorist Leo Bersani has grappled with what he sees as the queer usefulness of gay male narcissism over the course of his career and he has done much to reimagine Freud's influential understanding of self-love. Before turning to lesbian narcissism in Waters and Connell, I first explore how Bersani's theories surrounding narcissism work politically and culturally in order to gesture to how his theories' contributions to queer scholarship and, most importantly the gaps in these conversations, make room for a social lesbian narcissism that lingers in loneliness. In "The Will to Know," Bersani explains how Freud, like Lacan, speaks of a "specular," "blind" narcissism where a "displaced self-love" leads the subject to constantly seek out the perfect mirror image of themselves—an image that they have no memory of, but believe exists (160). This lost memory, or the absence of its ever existing, keeps the narcissist invested in their narcissism. They cannot think beyond that personal absence. For Freud, this mirroring is not necessarily negative. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* Freud writes that in any relationship our lovers often "serv[e] as a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own" (112). Our motivation to love the other is dependent on our desire to "satisf[y] our narcissism" (112-13). Freud implies here that the other is needed and used to help us reaffirm ourselves; our desires for personal fulfillment guide all of our altruistic attachments. In reworking Freud's delivery of this "blind" narcissism, Bersani introduces us to a narcissism in new clothes: his "impersonal narcissism" (*Homos* 118), or what he later calls a "spatial, anonymous narcissism" ("A Conversation with Leo

Bersani" 175). According to Bersani, Freud's understanding of narcissism conceptualizes people as continuously "impoverished," thereby legitimating their constant need for ego-nourishment ("Against Monogamy" 92); their quest for love is a quest for a lost personal "memory" of themselves ("The Will to Know" 162). Bersani criticizes this "limited" understanding of desire, warning that society needs "a new way of coming together" that re-imagines sociality as something other than a process of impoverished mimesis and "interdependent power relations" (*Homos* 10,4).[44]

For Bersani, if people are indeed driven to connect with others only because they feel they are incomplete without that reaffirmation, relations with others are only based on self-indulgence and narcissistic wish-fulfillment. He explains that if, "in order to love ourselves," we need "to have the illusorily objectified self-confirmation of a mirror" ("Sociality and Sexuality" 105), then our love of others is a selfish love. Countering this theory, Bersani introduces the idea of gay male narcissistic attachment, arguing that the only ethical intimate relationship one can have with others is a relation without personal attachment. Ethical intimacies should never be personalized, meaning that relationality can never be predicated on a self-desire that is based on a sense of lack because this type of sociality will only ever be selfish, based on the self's impoverishment and neediness and not on the other with whom the self is in relation. Where Bersani sees potential for a

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[44] Bersani has argued that Western intimacy is entirely based on notions of self-possession, self-validation and self-recognition, where "the self and its personal valances is always central to any story about intimacy, relation and compassion" (*Intimacies* viii). Belonging, then, the supposed antithesis to loneliness cannot help but be narcissistically self-serving—at the expense of others—because belonging promises to make the self whole at the other's expense.

different type of intersubjective connection is in gay relationships because, in his estimation, gays already exhibit the type of impersonal intimacy heterosexual relationships lack. He provides the example of two gay men who have cruised one another anonymously and are now engaging in anal sex on a rooftop. For Bersani, these lovers' blatant refusal to know one another, to see one another as complements to their personal deficits, and yet their willingness to cum and come together for the world, make this impersonal narcissism socially conscientious (*Homos* 165). These lovers' sexual union is based on their bodily extension into the world, rather than a sociality that requires internalized wish-fulfillment and the possession of the other. He argues: "at his or her best, the homosexual is a failed subject, one that needs its identity to be cloned, or inaccurately replicated, outside of it. This is the strength, not the weakness, of homosexuality" ("A Conversation" 183). Bersani's "impersonal narcissism" works, then, through a selfless self-preoccupation that is altruistic. If a person believes that the "self out there" might *seem* like "'mine,'" but that she is so "without [ever] belonging to me" (118), then this recognition that she cannot be possessed by me changes the ways in which neoliberal relationships are conditioned. No longer is the self "out there" mine to own. It does not complete me. It is its own autonomous self, and is not there in order that I can become whole.

I understand his theory in this way: if I am impersonally narcissistic, I know that she who I desire did not originally come from me or me from her, and that I did not give her up unconsciously through the course of my development. Therefore, my narcissistic desire for her cannot be seen as specular or personal. My desire for others, then, is not

fuelled by a traumatic, metaphorical castration, or Freudian penis envy—where I seek a

reattachment of a lost part of myself to make myself whole—a lost memory of a self I can

barely even recall. Instead, through "impersonal narcissism," the opposite is true: the self

finds pleasurable desire in "find[ing] ourselves" in a position *as* the selves we have lost

"*already* in the world," selves that are "there not as a result of our projections but as a

sign of the natural extensibility of all beings" ("Against Monogamy" 100). This

"solidarity in the universe" is what Bersani sees as a necessarily "expansive" narcissism

("The Will to Know" 162) that comes from "reaching for our own 'form' elsewhere"

("Against Monogamy" 100), not in order to reduce the world to a sameness that sees no

difference; rather, to enjoy the joyous affirmation that we are "inaccurately replicated"

everywhere we go (100). This realization allows for a connection to others that is not

based on a desire to "overcome differences" (100) or a need to suppress and possess the

other in order to reproduce other others in our likeness. Differences become necessary

"supplements" to "sameness" (100); they enhance rather than detract from social systems.

If the person is impersonally narcissistic, differences are not merely tolerated for the

betterment of the few. They are endemic to social survival.[45]

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[45] Moving away from a psychological desire based on incorporating differences, to formulating a notion of desire that is based on a "seductive sameness" (*Homos* 150), Bersani's narcissism stresses that no body is actually differentiated or hierarchically dominant. This is not the same as arguing for a collective universalism (where we all get along because differences are inconsequential) because universalism suggests that there is both a universal standard, as well as a beginning point—such as the national-identity model, which, arguably, has fought for a heterosexual origin story all along. Bersani asks that we turn away from *all* others, including ourselves, as other to ourselves, in order to take apart a social system that regulates bodies based on their position as othered.

Many queer scholars have understood Bersani's theories of the emptied self to be an "antisocial" position (Rodriquez 332), and much too "non-relational" for contemporary politics (Huffer 519). Chastising Bersani for taking the "emotional meanings of sexuality" out of sex, David Greven, for instance, argues that Bersani's work to rescue narcissism from the charges of asocial selfishness has led him to embrace a masochism that "lends itself to appropriation by the very same structures of masculine power to which radical queer manhood claims to be resistant" (20). He further argues that Bersani's endorsement of anonymous cruising and pain-inflicting intimacy in this "culture of torture" that characterizes the contemporary moment is irresponsible (43-4). Taking Greven's point, I have to wonder, however, if it is the emotional connection we are missing in Bersani's theories, or whether we are longing for Bersani to recognize what we think is invaluable in the personal: the connection we have, and want, to ourselves? Perhaps Greven has missed the point of the self-extension and narcissism Bersani advocates and is grieving the loss of the self as centre more than he is upset about Bersani's exploration of kinky sex.

Bersani's strength lies in his risky desire to burst the bubble of our reified views of intimacy. I find encouraging his attempts to disconnect narcissism from selfishness and, instead, to reconsider narcissism as an altruistic negation of the self-at-centre, one that renounces the hold the self has over the other. Indeed, what I find valuable about Bersani's argument is that he makes explicit that we in the West need to break from

personal desire-driven relationships that are inherently selfish.[46] Still, while Bersani's narcissism is wonderfully disorienting, and necessarily important in its critique of self-centered altruism, it is also dependent upon privilege.[47]

What I find especially intriguing about Bersani's theory of narcissism is that embedded in his declaration that the self must learn that it cannot seek others for its own fulfillment is a loneliness that is triggered. The loneliness is revealed both because of this realization—that others do not exist for my needs alone—and in spite of it, as we attempt to reconceptualize what sociality might look like without this capitalist imperative to possess and be possessed by our loved ones. Bersani fails to mention the affects that linger or that are triggered when two people, intimately entangled, reach an impasse after they come to this realization that in this political moment they can no longer sustain relationships that are built on models of wish fulfillment and consumption. I put forth, however, that loneliness remains and becomes the platform from which new socialities

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[46] It is true I am not convinced by his argument that relationships must be impersonal; I do not believe that homosexual gay men's "cruising" is an inherently impersonal act—wondering myself how it is even possible to be in relation with an other without a politics of intimacy being there, even if beyond our will.

[47] Bersani overlooks the masculine, white privileges inherent in his ideation of impersonal narcissism. His theory refuses to address lesbianism (which I will discuss), but he also fails to acknowledge the privileges of race and masculinity that certain bodies "arrive," as Ahmed might say, at the table with (*Queer Phenomenology* 38, 84). While Bersani argues, or even hopes, homosexuality promotes a sharing of space, making it so that every body is "potentially everywhere, attuned to multiple correspondences between [itself] and the world" (*Homos* 125), the reality is that globally there are many homosexual politicians, teachers, doctors, lawyers, fathers, and sons who are not interested in sharing spaces or extending their chairs to any others. Being homosexual does not rescue subjects from becoming racist, sexist, classist, or ignorant people. These "condition[s] of arrival" are paramount to understanding how subjectivities are created, celebrated, and denied (*Queer Phenomenology* 41).

emerge. Therefore, while current socialities attempt but fail to assuage loneliness—a feeling that can neither be subsumed by nor put onto the other—this lonely remainder is the key to all ethical relationalities. What Bersani offers with his theory of impersonal narcissism is the recognition that there are dangerous effects of capitalist-driven desire for self-fulfillment that require that we start seeking out "some other kind of sociality" ("A Conversation with Leo Bersani" 178). Taking Bersani's lead I now ask: how do ideologies surrounding "tolerance," "recognition," "inclusion," and "national belonging" somehow elude the label narcissistic, while conditioning political, cultural and socio-economic practices that are self-serving, exceptionally idyllic, and exclusionary? And how might a lesbian sociality, a lonely one, evince possibilities that Bersani wants without necessitating a turn away from the other?

I Saw Her From Inside of My Mirror

Female narcissism is often explored through the lens of sexological discourses where women were thought to possess an inherent feminine vanity. Both Ellis and Freud can be implicated in this charge. Ellis argued all women were "auto-erotic" vain creatures "capable of completely losing themselves in self-admiration" (Grosz and Probyn 99). For Ellis, femininity and narcissism were as analogous as he believed women were to the "self-replicating frames of a mirror" (Latimer 87). How exactly the "originally male Narcissus" became, for Ellis, a self-obsessed woman "before her mirror" who then "evolve[d] into an effeminate man" is a mystery (90). Between Ellis's time and our own,

the "narcissistic myth" that "no other exists, only me" is a narrative that has been legitimated through theories of female sexuality, psychoanalysis, and cultural aesthetics that continue to portray heterosexual women and gay men as "entranced" with their own mirror-reflections (87). The mirror has become the "emblem" of female and effeminate-male narcissism (90).

The lesbian figure represented more confusion for Ellis. While he believed women to be naturally vain, the idea that two women could fall in love posed a challenge to this notion of vanity. Why would a woman who is self-obsessed wish to love another woman who would refuse to reaffirm her beauty? Would another woman not threaten this vanity? In his attempt to understand female narcissism alongside lesbianism, Ellis then argued female narcissism was indicative of nothing other than an "internally provoked excitation" that had zero to do with a relation with others (Gaitanidis et al. 35). In this way, Ellis believed a true invert's (lesbian's) love of other women merely evidenced her preoccupied "sexual attraction" to herself (Jacoby 16). In other words, she saw herself in the women she desired. Along with his colleague, famed sexologist Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, Ellis argued that female inverts were born with an innate reversal of gender traits making women actually lonely female vessels with "male souls."[48] Reducing female intimacy to gender confusion Ellis was able to explain lesbianism away as another instance where the male "soul" seeks out in women what itself needs in order to become complete. In *Sexual Inversion,* Ellis argues that lesbian relationality maintains gender

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[48] For more historical context on female sexual inversion see Laura Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture.*

divisions (and stereotypes) through same-sex couplings whereby an "active inverted (mannish) woman" couples with a "passive inverted woman" in order to complete a failed masculine and feminine dyad (qtd. in Latimer 91). However, Ellis really struggled to explain the desire of the passive, feminine woman for the mannish lesbian—our contemporary understanding of the femme/butch dynamic—and of the feminine woman who desired other feminine women. He only offered that these passive women might be "not well adapted for child bearing" and "not usually attractive to the average man" (Ellis 133). The feminine lesbian partner was an enigmatic figure for Ellis that caused him much angst, and his dismissal of her potential led narcissism to become an "enabling fiction of patriarchal authority" (Latimer 93).

Freud, by contrast, focused his attention on male, homosexual narcissism, suggesting that while there was indeed a predetermined vanity in women, one that he believed stemmed from women's "genital lack," narcissism was predominantly male. Women's desire to love themselves, then, served for Freud as a "late compensation for their original sexual inferiority" and acted as a symbol of their extreme vanity or a milder, unimportant feminine narcissism ("Femininity" 10). In some cases, Freud surmised, certain women whose "narcissism" had become "wound[ed]" might begin to "behave as though [they] were a man" ("Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" 80, 160); the female homosexual, then, was she who had gotten stuck in a "Pre-Oedipal phase" (195) who had either returned to her "masculinity" and "Oedipus-complex" or had never gotten over it (191, 156). In both Freud and Ellis, the hyper-vanity of women was thought more worrisome than narcissism. Later, however,

female narcissism became endemic to Freud's theories of healthy psychosexual development where the heterosexual man takes possession of the woman's desire for herself, reclaiming her self-adoration for his own fulfillment.[49] This "healthy" heterosexual process whereby a man corrects the woman he desires of her personal desire for herself is considered by Freud the only means by which a man can suppress his own narcissism. All heterosexual love, then, becomes an attempt at "repossession," or a way to make up for the "lack" of "oneself," where "what the lover lacks is identical to what he is" (Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality" 118). Narcissistic attachment becomes the basis of heterosexual sociality, our "ontological reality," where one seeks to possess in the other what they themselves gave up ("Sociality and Sexuality" 118). In the process, lesbian narcissism gets completely lost.

Freud seemed especially unsure about how to understand female-to-female intimacy other than to see such relationships as evidence of narcissism gone wild. Freud argued that the "female invert" either suffered extensively from "autoerotic drives" or suffered from a messy "cross-gendered identification" where she, in consequence, took

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[49] Associating vanity and narcissism specifically with women and homosexual men, Freud suggested that those who could not let go of an excessive love of themselves remained in a self-obsessed state (left as lesbians or homosexual men), whereas heterosexual men developed healthily *because* of their ability to overcome their narcissistic tendencies. Thus, for the heterosexual man, his turn away from himself—his desire to replicate his own likeness in other men—could only be mastered if he could constantly seek out what he had lost and was lacking because of that turn away. Yet, this heterosexual man must *also* combat the vain narcissism inherent in women and so he "appropriates" the rejection women have for him (women who are so narcissistic that they are seeking replicas of themselves) and then "narcissistically suppresses" the woman he longs for by taking possession of the desire she has for herself and her own image, and keeping it for himself.

on "masculine characteristics" and then sought out love objects with high levels of "femininity," reducing lesbian desire to a failed, stunted "masculine identification" with the "masculine libido" (Latimer 90). It would seem that the lesbian and the female heterosexual share the same tendencies and are undifferentiated except by narcissistic degree; in seeking out a feminine other, the lesbian seeks what she refuses to see in her own self and becomes "not narcissistic enough" (Bruhm 19). In Freud's estimation the mannish lesbian is depleted in her narcissistic tendencies while the female heterosexual is excessive in her self-love. Of course, not unlike Ellis' theories, this Freudian theory does nothing to explain the many lesbian relationships that do not follow the "butch-femme" stereotype (Latimer 95). Nor does this paradigm of inverted gender and desire work to answer questions surrounding the ways in which contemporary commodity culture uses particular forms of queerness differently to perpetuate the West's own narcissistic tendencies.

By reiterating the notion that women who love other women sexually are seeking mirror reflections of themselves, Freud also precludes possible socialities and the affects associated with these intimacies that might be derivatives of female same-sex love. For instance, Freud offers little by way of explanation as to how psycho-sexual development differs for two women in love even though the stigma of narcissism—and the self-obsessed over-introspection and hysterical emotional paralysis that accompanies it—are so often associated with lesbians. As Jean Gallagher argues, a conflation between "lesbian erotics" and narcissism tends "to gather around the lesbian body" (418). Indeed, as Carolyn Allen has also observed, the discourses of modern sexology have "pathologize[d]

the same-sex erotic dynamic" between two women as a moment of "extreme self-enclosure under the rubric of narcissism" (189).

How does lesbian narcissism differ from stereotypical, excessive, heterosexual female narcissism, in ways that speak to the socially mobilizing loneliness triggered by same-sex female desire and the residual narcissism that lingers? Critics such as Carolyn Allen, Teresa DeLauretis, Tim Dean, Ellis Hanson, and Steven Bruhm have attempted to rethink "narcissism" as opening up a positive and political possibility for queers, yet they have directed their interventions towards rescuing and elaborating male queerness. For instance, Tim Dean's entire query in *Beyond Sexuality* ponders lesbianism in relation to narcissism in a fleeting moment, hypothesizing that "if lesbianism has anything to do with female narcissism, it may do so differently from narcissism in men" (121). He quickly turns away from such musings. Steven Bruhm's *Reflecting Narcissus* mentions lesbianism only as a linguistic pairing alongside the term "gay" (6) and in a footnote (180).[50] Bersani does not speak about lesbianism at all. The fact that Freud and Ellis dismiss lesbian narcissism as further evidence of the ineptitude and immaturity of lesbian sexualities works against the possibility that a revisiting of psychoanalysis would yield a popular focus on such an ignored subject. And it certainly seems, in the academic and activist worlds, that we are "preoccupied with masculinity and men" and that "gay men are more interesting, both to themselves and to others, than lesbians" (Halperin and Traub

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[50] Bruhm freely admits to not reading Narcissus in "lesbian representation" (6). For a full explanation, see his *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic*.

36).[51]

Lesbianism as a topic for critical study generally has suffered a recent re-closeting; certain scholars even state that lesbian politics are no longer necessary or important enough to be explored in this contemporary moment. Juana Maria Rodriguez argues that lesbian sexuality and its political valences and potentials are studied much less because lesbianism is seen as passé, while lesbians are a "less valued academic commodity," and "less transgressive, or sexy" than other sexualities—"too frivolous [to] merit critical engagement" in a contemporary moment when war, violence, and human rights discourses are being complicated and challenged (335, 331). Elizabeth Freeman points out that lesbian feminists are often cast as the "big drag" in queer theory (62), or, as Sara Ahmed muses, as the "feminist killjoy" (*The Promise of Happiness* 50). Accused of "harkening" back to "single-issue identity politics" that excluded many, or to "normative visions of women's sexuality," lesbians who want to talk about lesbianism seem out-of-the-loop politically (Freeman 62). As Janet Halley asserts, "There seems to be no urgent need in [this redemptive cultural] feminism to understand women's version of what Leo Bersani has called [gay male] love of the cock'" (65). Similarly, feminisms

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[51] For a discussion about why lesbians are not as studied as gay men in queer studies, see Ann Pelligrini's argument that there is an interdependency between "commodity capitalism" (141) and queerness, where capitalist discourses sell citizens notions of "alternative lifestyle[s]" in order to advance neoliberal progress. Neoliberal "demands of wage labor" as well as the social media's misrepresentation of these demands "interpellate[s]" gay men and lesbians differently "as different sorts of bodily commodities" reaping the benefits from these interpretations (346, 143). While Bruhm argues that "to a remarkable degree gay and lesbian cultural theory has embodied wholesale the pathologizing narrative of narcissism" (3), it seems more accurate to argue that lesbians and gays are "wholesaled" differently.

that adhere to a typography of generational inheritance and waves—first, second, third wave histories and progressions—risk the inevitable "drag back" (Freeman 65) that waves provide, leading perhaps to the criticism of the "humourless radical feminist" (68). This sense of losing ground, or being sent tumbling backwards, a predicament that Freud and Ellis originally associated with lesbianism, can especially accompany lesbian feminisms which are attempting to negotiate a "problematic" relationship with a queer theory that is dominantly male centered, especially when these feminists are anxious to secure and often times create lesbian histories (68).[52] Consequently, any possible positive potential that might be found within an exploration of lesbian narcissism has been ignored.

As far as queer scholarship is concerned, the fear that the study of lesbian desire is being ignored has triggered a handful of critics to reconsider the role of psychoanalysis and its influence on understandings of lesbian subjectivities. For instance, Valerie Traub asks us to move beyond the metaphor of the mirror and lesbian desire, arguing that "we need not buy into Freud's pathology of lesbian desire" as a desire based only on the lack of a phallus (351). The persistence of the mirror-image lesbian narcissist, then, is for Traub a reminder of the fact that lesbian histories have been so denied and refused that we find ourselves today seeking some sense of similitude, creating lesbian apparitions that

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[52] For a detailed analysis on lesbian historical fiction and the development of empathy as a strategy to combat gay male shame see Mandy Koolan's dissertation *Twilight Tales: Ann Bannon's Lesbian Pulp Series 'The Beebo Brinker Chronicles.'*

might promise our origins (350).[53] Instead, Traub argues lesbians need to stop

recapitulating the mechanisms that have kept them hidden from their histories and

shackled to notions of self-absorbedness and gender confusion. Alongside Traub, I argue

that mirroring, this tendency to return to a lost past and attempt to overturn narcissism's

negative effect on lesbianism, reflects a dangerous domino effect. Let me add that, while

it is true that lesbians need a space to create ways in which we can "materially produce"

an "affirmative lesbian culture" for the future, and one that benefits from the knowledge

productions of our past, we also need to embrace the everyday moments that are deeply

embedded in what is called lesbian narcissism. What seems lacking in our current

scholarship surrounding lesbianism is an understanding of lesbian intimacy as something

other than a "self-enclosed" and "deficient" relationship based on an obsession with our

past selves (Latimer 90). Put otherwise, while reaching backwards to lesbian histories

enables valuable recognitions of the ways in which lesbianism has been misused and has

fought to survive—shameful and proud moments worth realizing—in order to move past

the insular confinements of both shame and pride (those self-centered affects that have

become attributed to gay male sexualities) the lesbian narcissism that arises from a lonely,

social present offers the potential for social changes beyond the individual self.

The possibility of a social lesbian loneliness works counter to many theories of

both lesbianism and loneliness offered by scientific, psychological, academic, and

political discourses. For instance, as discussed in my first chapter, I see the homophobic

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[53] For a detailed exploration of the idea of the ghostly lesbian who is always on the periphery, see Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture.*

profile of a backwards, lonely queer subject created throughout the science of loneliness. Loneliness is inappropriately attributed to minorities and women, while queerness is being studied as a lonely identity. As such, a discernable paranoia runs throughout each of these scientific narratives that points to a fear that the social structures Western society is so invested in are in danger because of lonely people and their loneliness. Similarly, academic studies of contemporary loneliness suggest that loneliness stems from "demographic changes and lifestyle choices," gesturing to unspoken implications behind such terms (Griffen 9). Gendering loneliness feminine and odd or "foreign," these studies also harken back to psychoanalytic presumptions about strangely queer and lonely subjects that serve to scapegoat marginalized communities and further stereotypical notions of homosexuality. What current studies make evident is our absolute fear of troubling neoliberal hetero-structures; this is where queerness really creeps in, making the lonely queer, especially the lonely lesbian, the most threatening person of all.

Moving away from conditions that require capitalist reproductions of various kinds—mass reproduction of commercial materials, values, personas, subjectivities—lesbian loneliness offers a critique of replication and neoliberal progress, of social spheres that condition subjects alongside regulatory affects, desires, and directions. Progressive citizenship rests on traditional understandings of family, marriage, national security, and sociality making it imperative for queers, if they want to be accepted as citizens, to be subjected to "straightening" (Phelan 75). However, if as Halperin and Traub suggest, "the time has come to consider some alternate strategies for the promotion of queer sociality," I ask that we explore socialities that do not inform or sustain such straightenings, and,

therefore, are not constricted by neoliberal investments in timelines that concentrate on extraordinary pasts and unforeseeable futures while overlooking the day to day (4). I argue here for a lonely lesbian politics that relies not on a break with reality and/or sociality, but rather, a lesbian loneliness that happens in the everyday, ordinary moments of the now. Ironically, I suggest, it is ordinary loneliness that can lead us to new modes of compassion and desire where, as Judith Butler offers, "losing the self expands the capacity for love," and where a loss of the self comes about through the everyday love for the other (*Intimacies,* jacket quote).

In *Ordinary Affects,* Kathleen Stewart argues that ordinary affects are those not-so-peculiar feelings that force us to realize we are experiencing a particular moment, a now. Jolting us awake to our everyday experiences, these feelings, Stewart offers, "are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences" (2). As active emotions, ordinary affects "catch people up in something that feels like something," creating a "vague but compelling sense that something is happening" (2, 4). Political in their propensity to make social change possible, ordinary affects such as loneliness, act as "almost returns" that can conjure a sense of déjà vu. Their resonances are powerful: "Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible" (3). This understanding of the political effectiveness of our everyday affects recognizes that we are constantly feeling; however, we often skip over our affect's resonances, busying ourselves with day-to-day demands and future aspirations, concentrating only on those affective experiences that make us stop. Yet if we

can acknowledge that all affects can serve as "social experiences in solution," providing

the potential for social change, we might connect through our everyday feelings of

discomfort: alone, collectively, and at times connectively (3).

Ordinary affects "are a kind of contact zone" and are indeed relational and social

(3). They represent "lines of potential that a something coming together calls to mind and

sets in motion" (2). For example, these affects trigger a memory of the "before–life" of

certain lines that seek to "straight[en]" us, oppress us, keeping us on some notion of the

right, normal path, while allowing us a glimpse at the afterlife of the consequences of

these lines (*Queer Phenomenology* 79). It is in this way that ordinary affects are

reminders that let us know what we are doing and how we are doing it. Yet these affects

do not deliver particular outcomes. In many ways, they are beginning and endpoints that

lead to more beginning points. I argue here that the challenge of knowing that we are a

part of these social systems that oppress is our responsibility, even if we claim to feel

loosely assembled by these systems and that loneliness, like all ordinary affects, "exerts a

pull on us," refusing to let us ignore it (Stewart 4). This "pull on us" can be witnessed in

the photographs Connell constructs, where the loneliness of and between her subjects acts

as a thread that enacts connection and demands social action.

Aspiring to a lesbian lonely sociality requires troubling how intimacy and

loneliness have been paradoxically coupled in the West, strategically represented as two

attributes that work in opposition. While a desire for a particular brand of intimacy has

been configured by and through Western politics and other regimes in order to keep

people on the right path and in line (Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* 16), loneliness has

been represented not only as decidedly against intimacy but also as antithetical to happiness. As discussed in my introduction, it is not unloneliness that is considered to be loneliness's better half, but happiness. I suggest that by taking the happy out of notions of lesbian pleasure, and along with it happiness' neoliberal underpinnings and desires, the lonely lesbian narcissist challenges cultural conditions of sociality and belonging, creating spaces for lonely socialities through her narcissistic love of other women. Her lesbian loneliness is neither exceptional nor extraordinary and by embracing a humiliation that stems from being understood in this neoliberal moment as lonely, and outing her loneliness every day for others to see, hear, and feel discomfited by, lesbian loneliness becomes a humble revelatory relational gesture/emotion/offering/posture/condition that surrounds the I/you. While loneliness certainly cruises the tenets of individualism, it itself is a relational intimacy that troubles all desires to possess (self, and other). I work here to argue that what is lonely about loneliness isn't aloneness, it is its refusal to possess others, and instead, to choose a social that is dizzying, shedding all sense of social ownership based upon directives, success, and neoliberal progress. The lonely lesbian refuses to be led into a direction and instead chooses when and how and where to walk. In doing so, the lonely lesbian pushes the cultural imaginary beyond itself, past vanity and mimesis towards playful, multifarious, queer relations.

To further explicate what I see to be the sociality that lesbian loneliness offers, I turn to Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*, a narrative that creates a space for an everyday lesbianism that plays in and out of time, while pushing lesbian love and sexual intimacy towards lonely socialities. Waters' conceptualization of the ordinary tensions that arise

between women in an extraordinary moment—World War II—provides a model for a

new understanding of lesbian narcissism where the self is necessarily taken out of the

centre in order that the social can continue. Waters evidences how cultural feelings of

social and personal unease, rather than closing down possibilities for change and

movement, permeate borders and boundaries, helping people start to renegotiate how

their bodies "feel" and are "affected" by neoliberal politics. Further, while *The Night

Watch* negotiates the triangular relationship between Kat, Helen, and Julia as they get lost

in the everydayness of their intimacy against the backdrop of war, Waters concentrates on

the everyday life of intimacy, with its "bad" as well as "good" feelings. In doing so, she

challenges political discourses on affect that suggest happiness is the only emotion worth

attending to, while disrupting the notion that "ugly" affects, such as loneliness, are

enemies to both the nation and sociality in general.

At Night I'm Watching Julia

　　The Night Watch explores affective experiences during moments of World War II.

Each character lives with the upheaval of war, negotiating her ordinary life alongside a

phenomenon that becomes the everyday. The novel asks, for instance, how love, gender

constructs, and sexuality each function during a war-torn moment when fear and

insecurity are intensely lived. And what happens to these re-conceptualizations when the

war ends?[54] Keeping the reader tumbling along as the rubble from buildings falls and the

sky rains bullets and bombs, Waters' exploration of lesbian intimacy forces her characters

to question their social allegiances, their personal investments in love, and, perhaps most

importantly, their roles as intersubjective beings living their everyday lives. In doing so,

The Night Watch gestures to a disoriented and dislocated lesbian politics that sees

loneliness as connective, and narcissism as relational.

When we first encounter Kay, a handsome woman in her late-thirties, the war has

ended and she is left wandering around London, alone and dispossessed of a sense of

connection to others. Lost in the memories of her ex-lover Helen whom she met, loved,

and broke up with during the war, withdrawn Kay "watch[es]" everyday life continue

around her and in spite of her with little understanding of its relevance (Waters 3). Now

that the everydayness of the war has ended, Kay's ability to negotiate societal

expectations of ordinary life has been arrested; the ordinariness of life without the

extraordinariness of war has left her shaken and confused, becoming "the sort of person

whose clocks and wrist-watches have stopped, and who tells the time, instead, by the

particular kind of cripple arriving at her landlord's door" (3). Her inability to exist in the

ordinary moment unravels her, leaving her to cope with disjointed memories of gender

queerness and love lost and reliant upon a stalwart expectation of fantastical events to

guide her through her days. It is in this way that Kay remains trapped by both her past and

her hope that she might return to those moments in the future.

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[54] Important scholarship has been done on how World War II disrupted, reorganized, and constrained the everyday life of British citizens. For more information on this see Marina McKay's "Is Your Journey Really Necessary?"

In an attempt to point to this internal struggle Waters uses flashbacks to both orient and disorient the reader. The flashbacks provide readers with the sense that ordinary people continue to do ordinary things throughout the chaos of disorienting violence. By jumping between present and past, Waters also troubles ideologies surrounding extraordinary and ordinary lesbian histories and subjectivities. In stories of Kay, and Kay's ex-lovers, Julia and Helen, Waters shows that intimacies cannot survive in the context of extraordinary individual experiences alone. Rather, it is the importance of the everyday moments of shared loneliness that make palpable their sociality.

Having manned the "male" job as an ambulance driver while London was under nightly aerial bombardment, Kay recalls delicious moments when she was able to "flirt safely with masculinity" while all of the men were fighting (Doan xix). And although gender roles have been returned to post-war "normal," Kay still spends every morning putting on her "men's shoes" and putting "silver links in her cuffs," refusing to return to a past compliance with particularized femininity (Waters 6). Perpetually stuck reliving those war moments, Kay waits for something that is past, "stealthily" (6) negotiating the underbellies of London as a lonely spectator "who ha[s] nothing to do, and no one to visit, no one to see" (6). Her rebellion against gender conformity sees her spending her days reliving the steps taken, the air breathed, and the roads traveled when Kay was Helen's lover.

To be sure, Kay's romantic relationship with Helen is anything but ordinary. From its inception, her affair with Helen is based on idyllic chivalry and heroism; Kay is the masculine hero who treats Helen, her feminine muse, like a princess. Having saved Helen

from a building collapse during the war, Kay continues this chivalric dynamic in the romance that ensues. From Kay's lavish gifts of "satin pyjamas, the color of pearls" (148), to "real coffee" (289), to the "orange" that Kay had "worked on … for half an hour with the point of a vegetable knife, carving HAPPY BIRTHDAY into the peel" (289), the text is filled with moments of what I call narcissistic chivalry. This kind of chivalry is a heroism based not primarily on the needs of the other, but on the neediness of the self. An early example of this narcissism is found during one of the flashback scenes as we hear Helen, who has dropped into the ambulance quarters to see her lover, ask Kay about her day: "What have you been doing?" (243). A simple question indeed; however, Kay, who has endured an extraordinary day, bearing witness to many deaths, cannot answer Helen truthfully. She sugarcoats her words with poetic cliché: "Thinking of you," she says, suggesting that she sat around all day, dreaming only of Helen (243). Suspecting an emptiness in Kay's romanticized statement as well as an air of façade or performance Helen replies, "You always say that" (243). The everydayness of Helen's question— "how was your day?"— directly conflicts with Kay's desire to live extraordinarily, to live in fantasy. For Kay, "thinking of you" is a lie, of course, but one that makes Kay feel complete. A good hero does not burden her lover with everyday stories of heartache or pain. Having found the role of hero—the masculine woman who saves damsels in distress from danger during the war—Kay sacrifices the ordinariness of her relationship to live in special ways. In doing so, she sees her own heroic image constantly in the reflection of Helen's doe-eyed love for her.

Kay's narcissism appears also in a later flashback, on Helen's birthday, when Helen

dresses in the satin pyjamas Kay has given to her. Helen stands "shyly" before the mirror so Kay "can look her over" (291). Here we see glimpses of the stereotypical narcissism which Freud, Ellis, and contemporary culture associate with femininity and gay masculinity. The mirror, as aforementioned, is a long-standing symbol of narcissism and figures prominently in this scene as Kay admires herself through the image of Helen in satin—the woman who completes her. Of the encounter with Helen in front of the mirror Kay explains:

> She felt her love, at moments like this, as a thing of wonder—it was wonderful to her, that Helen, who was so lovely, so fair and unmarked should be here at all, to be looked at and touched . . . Then again, it was impossible to imagine her in any other place, with any other lover. No other lover, Kay knew, would feel about her quite as Kay did. She might have been born, been a child, grown up—done all the particular, serious and inconsequential things she'd done—just so she could arrive at this point, now; just so she could stand, barefoot, in a satin-pyjama suit, and Kay could watch her. (291)

In this moment Kay understands Helen to be an object, "like a pearl" (292), sent to Kay to fulfill her own need to feel whole. Helen is presented to Kay as an innocent body to be admired, touched; Kay goes so far as to suggest that Helen was always destined to meet Kay and be loved by her and that, somehow, Helen could exist in no other way. During this bedroom scene Helen's agency also seems "inconsequential"; Kay sees her own happier self, created and maintained through Helen's reflection regardless of what Helen feels. Helen, admitting her "self-conscious[ness]" (290) before Kay's consuming gaze, rebukes Kay when she is told to get dressed for her birthday outing, telling her: "I feel like a child being offered a day out by its aunt" (294). But Kay dismisses this confession of feeling and returns her attention to Helen's body, now telling Helen how to dress: "Wear the Cedric Allen [dress]. I like that one more" (294). It is as though Helen were

only wearing clothes for Kay's pleasure.

Kay herself is a figure who embodies both the ordinary and the extraordinary and the tensions between the two. During the war she is, at once, an ordinary woman doing extraordinary things—a woman risking her life to save others; a race-car ambulance driver, weaving in and out amongst the dangers of war-torn streets to help the injured— and an extraordinary woman doing ordinary things—a war-hero trying to love Helen; a gender-queer lesbian negotiating the everyday. It is the tension between these dueling roles that leaves Helen feeling alienated and alone. Her Kay has become too spectacular to live within everyday life. Helen begins to question Kay's idyllic role as masculine-savior-without-needs, wondering why Kay "ma[kes] an absurd kind of heroine out of [her]" as though Helen were not an independent woman in her own right. Questioning, too, Kay's "passion" for her role as Helen's lover, Helen claims: "there was something unreal about it" (256).[55]

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[55] At this point, some might be tempted to understand Kay as a trans character, and Helen's refusal of her as indicative of a failure to understand Kay's gender queerness. While such a reading is certainly possible, I hesitate to accept it, cautious of either succumbing to the temptation to rewrite or create trans histories at the expense of butch subjectivities, or imposing a feminist politics that undermines trans-identities.

[47] From "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" by Sigmund Freud. Further historical references to female hyper-emotionality, irrationality, manipulation and stupidity are widespread. However, key feminist texts to consider are Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Right's of Women* written in 1792, which argues that educating women, whether they are "too sensitive" or not, was necessary for national security; Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* written in 1929 which argues that women loving women is normal and that it is the male politician who fears this combination of feminine intellect and power; and Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* written in 2004, that argues emotions are sticky and political, and once an emotion like unhappiness gets written on the bodies of lesbian women, it is both difficult to wash it away, and not desirable for a Western politics that needs to create unhappy

Kay certainly straddles masculinities and femininities throughout this novel, and not unlike Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, Kay's gender identity risks collapsing debates about her fate in *The Night Watch* into contemporary tensions surrounding butch and trans subjectivities that were also very prominent during Hall's famous obscenity trial. In 1928, eight years after Freud unveiled what he called "the female homosexual,"[56] *The Well of Loneliness* painted lesbianism as an inevitably mournful sexuality, forever forging connections amongst failed masculinity, loneliness and lesbianism, and lesbianism and unhappiness.[57] Hall's obscenity trial also presented audiences with a threatening, mannish lesbian menace who caused a "mythic moral panic" regarding gender norms (Doan xxi). This masculine lesbian was considered visibly unsettling in her desire both to love women (sexually, emotionally) and to challenge gender complacency—not simply through fashion, but through posture and performance. After this trial, a historical, chivalric figure that re-imagined the gentry of yesteryear

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enemies.

[48] There has been much scholarship done on *The Well of Loneliness*; however, for some enigmatic information on the novel's fallout and its repercussions for contemporary lesbians see Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards*: *Loss and the Politics of Queer History* and Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian*. Also see Laura Doan's edited collection *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on the Well of Loneliness* and Deborah Cohler's *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth Century Britain*.

emerged: a heroic, solitary, rootless lesbian-chap ("the model of lesbian heroism" Doan 19) who was the "perfect" companion— romantically idyllic and helplessly devoted to an equally "perfect" feminine heroine. Contemporary scholars were left with two ghostly figures who seemed extraordinarily "staged" (Doan 19): the chivalric hero and the intimate friend who could never reveal her lesbian sexual longing. Narratives that emerged after *The Well of Loneliness* maintained these figures (hero and heroine) and storylines separated into two distinct but equally problematic trajectories that gave way to predictable plotlines for lesbian characters and histories. Both narrative directions led to sadness and loss, a well, if you will, of loneliness.

The first figure presents audiences with a mannish-woman who falls for an unattainable feminine woman (either married, dying, or only willing to experiment sexually with a woman for a short while before returning to her hetero-life). The second figure reveals a coupling where two intimate female friends live together for the duration of their lives, in secret, perfectly content, until one passes away, or gets married to a man. An entire industry of lesbian pulp fiction novels emerged post-World War II that supported and upheld the value of these asexual figures whose intimate lesbian desires remained internalized. In both cases, sex (the acts and the intimacies) becomes awkward, monstrous, or nonexistent. And each of these women is extremely lonely. Of interest to me is the first version of lesbianism mentioned: the chivalric lonely hero that can be found in lesbian pulp novels such as Ann Bannon's famous 1957-1962 books, *The Beebo Brinker Chronicles* or Ann Aldrich's 1955 novel *We Walk Alone.* The mannish lesbian protagonists in these novels are recognizable for their Freudian "penis envy," their self-

berating attitudes, and their suicidal tendencies stemming from feelings of inadequacy—

they feel not-good-enough-to-be-real-men.

In *The Night Watch*, like Hall's Stephen Gordon or Bannon's Beebo Brinker, Kay is

an easy target for lonely yearnings; her longing for romantic perfection results in the

failure of her relationships, and she lingers among spaces in London as a lonely outsider

at odds with her masculinity and femininity. She often "represen[ts] the melancholic

image of the butch lesbian that critics and activists have tried to overcome in recent

years" (Love, "Spoiled Identity" 505). Does Kay wish she were able to become a man? Is

she a "stone butch," destined to be miserable because of her misfittedness (Halberstam

111)? Is she more comfortable with her masculinity than with her femininity? Or is she

creating a "female masculinity" that suits her needs (Halberstam 1)? We cannot know;

Waters at no time tells her reader and it would be irresponsible for us to make leaps, or

interpret what we think Kay's struggle "existing between sexes" actually might be (Love

508). [58] As Heather Love warns: "the need to turn the difficulties of gay, lesbian, and

transgender history to good political use in the present has resulted in a lack of attention

to the specificity and density of the historical past" (491), and we want to avoid the

impetus to invent histories that did not exist in ways we might wish to narrate.[59] By

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[58] As Heather Love argues: "The stereotype of the melancholic butch—freak of
nature, failed woman or failed man, rejected lover—is so powerful and so affectively
charged that debates about cross-identification in queer and lesbian circles are often
drawn irresistibly to it" ("Spoiled Identity" 505).
[59] As Monique Wittig states: "make an effort to remember, and failing that, invent"
(qtd in Doan and Waters 16).

setting this relationship between Kay and Helen up in the context of the war, Waters uses the extraordinariness of the situational violence around the couple to evidence the ordinariness of Kay's gender queerness and to avoid the temptation to create fantastical histories. In this way, Waters offers a subtle critique of narratives that reserve ordinariness for heterosexual characters while attributing an extraordinariness to queer subjectivities.

Without assimilating Kay's story into a present tension, we do know two or three things for sure: Kay takes pleasure in stereotypical masculine dress and in an extreme impenetrable chivalry, and when this chivalry is at stake she recoils in loneliness. It is here where we begin to see loneliness being used as though it were an ordinary effect of lesbianism and also as the antithesis of happiness. At the beginning of their romance, Helen loves Kay's need to love her, and sees nothing other than "the sufficiency of [Kay's] female body to bear desire in a masculine mode" (Love 507). To be sure, for women the excitement of the war included being afforded the opportunity to take on traditionally male-oriented tasks; however, this transformation was deemed an extraordinary situation precisely because of everyday sexism. Usually socially disapproving of masculine women, World War II Britain had no choice but to ask its women to "man-up" and take ownership of the everyday tasks of maintaining the cities whilst the men were fighting the war elsewhere.[60] So, even though Kay is "neither fully masculine nor fully feminine," Helen does not question her gender "transgression[s]"

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[60] For more on this situation, see Deborah Cohler's *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain*.

(Love 500). As the story unfolds, it is not Kay's gender queerness that renders her strange or unacceptable to Helen, it is her refusal to live and feel in the everyday with the woman she loves. Kay's outward refusal of everyday affects such as fear, loneliness, sadness, and anxiety troubles Helen, not Kay's "failure to be real," or, a man (506). It is as though Kay were without affect, or, like the stereotypical "stone butch" she is "blocked, more lacking, and more rigid" (Halberstam 112), revealing only those affects that trace a line from ordinariness to exalted hero (Love 507). Helen's everyday desire for Kay is thus overshadowed by Kay's desire to perform extraordinariness and have that uniqueness confirmed by Helen; Kay's desire to live in the world as a superhero—not simply as butch woman, man, or gender queer—points to this tension Waters creates in the context of lesbian sociality rather than to a predictable critique of heteronormativity.

For me, portraits of the tragically lonely lesbian speak less to what loneliness is for a lesbian, than to the unsustainability of aspiring to a model of sexuality that tends towards idyllic perfection and nostalgia. Waters seems to agree, presenting readers with a complicated Kay who, in her present-day 1947 context, remains on a quest to rid herself of the personal loneliness she lives with every day, and who is struggling to overcome her need for the extraordinary. Kay sees Helen as the only person who can take loneliness away from her. Unable to see beyond her languishing self—a self that longs to be fulfilled by Helen, her lost love—Kay's desire that Helen save her, fill that gaping hole Kay has within her heart, leaves Kay obsessed with possessing Helen once more. It is not that Kay wants to love Helen so much as she needs Helen to love her. By the novel's end she is a ghostly figure, an "apparitional lesbian" as Terry Castle would have it, who haunts the

periphery (20). And yet Kay remains hopeful. I wish to point out here that Kay is not presented throughout this work as miserable because of her desire for specialness or for being too special; rather, she reveals the fragile unsustainability of perfection and exceptionalism. Kay's hard realization that life is to be lived, day by day, and that she cannot create a persona who does not feel affected by the ordinary loss and love of others gestures to a critique of intersubjective relationships that our culture has become attached to.

To further Waters' suggestion that it is the everydayness of lesbian intimacy that can create spaces for nuances in sociality, I will now focus on the characterizations of Helen and Julia in *The Night Watch*. From their beginnings, this couple defies stereotypical standards of lesbian couples in lesbian historical fiction (secretive, femme and butch power dynamics that lead to extraordinary deaths, dramatic suicides, and losses) because they are revolutionarily ordinary. Helen and Julia are very egalitarian. They fight, sometimes hate one another, have wild and soft sex, break up other lesbian relationships, become violent, kiss and make up, are intelligent, witty, sarcastic, get jealous, can be sweet, dirty, and are not cast into specific lesbian gender roles (i.e. butch/femme). As a couple they seem incredibly realistic, but somehow in the context of what we are used to as an audience, unexpectedly so. Mercilessly, at times, Waters unpacks a day in the life of Helen and Julia, taking us through all the mundane details of their everyday life—their bath, their packing of their lunches, their walks to the park, their meetings with a friend at the park, their fight at the park, their make-up sex later, their refusal of sex, their miscommunications (43-57)—in order to provide a snapshot of

the ordinary, even extra-ordinary, life of these two women.

In her depiction of modernism and the temporality of its progression in the novel, Waters differs from novelists writing about queer moments, such as Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, by making everyday lived experiences the demarcations of everyday loneliness. For instance, in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway,* Clarissa fears the forward progression of time, and the modern moment becomes a terror to her with its brisk changes and fast-paced momentum. The entire novel takes place over the course of one day, as we see Clarissa obsess over a past moment, where she had a fleeting kiss with a woman who has since moved on. Woolf's lonely lesbian character fears the past, the future, and cannot enjoy the everyday moments presented to her. Instead, she is stuck in an extraordinary daydream. Bowen, on the other hand, works to disorient perceptions of reality, creating characters whose identities are constantly in question, stuck between "the living and the dead," and whose sense of time and space discombobulates any sense of the "realism" often attributed to "the twentieth-century novel" (Thowsen 42, 41). Her lesbian characters experience modern time as though they are dreaming, unable to separate fiction from reality. Both Woolf and Bowen's interpretations remain fixated on the extraordinary moments that make life feel special or deranged, whereas Waters provides readers with lesbian intimacies that are presented as ordinary, lived experiences. Even Kay, a character seemingly locked into a taciturn nostalgia for the past, must come to terms with the very everydayness of her present, and it is Helen and Julia's love for one another that becomes the backdrop through which Kay must embrace her loneliness and choose to live in the now.

In one scene in particular, Helen and Julia's casual domestic fight evidences a turning away from expectations of extraordinariness and towards an ordinary narcissistic loneliness that I see here as crucial to the politics of the narrative itself. Helen and Julia have just shared a wonderfully pleasurable sexual moment that "wasn't like their usual leisurely love-making" (Waters 394). Intensely emotional, Helen is left feeling naked, "shaken, chastened, as if from an argument" (394). Her mind wanders and she begins to think of Kay, her girlfriend, feeling guilty that she has betrayed Kay's trust. Looking down at her post-lovemaking body she yells out to Julia: "Look at the state of me! … How the hell will I hide this from Kay?" (395). Covered in scratches and bruises, Helen is afraid her body will become material evidence of her indiscretions. More than this, however, Julia's intimate moments with Helen trouble Helen because sex is chaotic, wildly visible, and too pleasurable, bordering on aggression, penetration, sheer desire, gender bending, and dislocation. While with Kay, intimacy had been gentle, idyllically romantic, and lackluster, there is an everyday rawness to sex with Julia, an ugly messiness that reflects a reality that leaves Helen undone. With Julia, sexually, Helen is unsure of her role.

Turning towards "the mirror" to see herself therein as she once did with Kay (395), Helen becomes exasperated that, unlike Kay who gazed at and consumed Helen's image, Julia ignores Helen's reflection and instead washes "her hands and mouth" free of the sexual remnants they have exchanged. Julia's actions are not organized around such a need to behold herself in Helen, or on Helen's body. Confused, Helen yells again: "what have you done to me, Julia? … I don't know myself" (365). I want to pause here to point

out that narcissism, in this moment, is relational, and not the internal, individual self-preoccupied narcissism Ellis theorized and which Kay, upon giving Helen her satin pyjamas, evidenced. Julia's refusal to be Kay in the bedroom—"I won't be like Kay about it … laying down my cloak, like Walter Raleigh (253)—troubles Helen, who is disoriented. Their sexual intimacy instead speaks to an eroticism where bodies move rhythmically. This movement contrasts with sexual moments between Helen and Kay, where Helen occupies stasis as an object to be held and admired for Kay's personal fulfillment.

When making love, neither Helen nor Julia is individuated. There is still an emphasis on merging subjectivities but not for the sake of ownership or, as Kay attempted to do with Helen, self-sacrifice to the point of martyrdom. Instead, Helen and Julia blend into one another, disorienting any spaces and borders that might have existed between them. A poignant example of this can be seen as Helen is caught gazing at Julia dreamily during one of their flirtations: "don't you ever get tired of looking at me?" Julia asks, and Helen responds that she "wants to know every part of [her]" with no "mystery" attached (392). As the two women start having sex, Julia pushes her fingers up deep inside Helen's vagina; here, all bodily distinctions are erased and one is left unsure where Helen ends and Julia begins. With her fingers inside of Helen's body, Julia says, "I can't—I can't feel you" (393) and we witness the moment when the individual is erased. In this sexual scene these two women are "constituting a relationality not based on identity" ("A Conversation with Leo Bersani" 13) but rather on a "renunciation of the couple's oval-like intimacy"— where one lover sees another as she who is in her possession but is "willfully

withholding" from her the key to "the secret of [her] being" ("Against Monogamy" 92). However, instead of Leo Bersani's two male lovers coming for each other while staring out into the world, annihilating their subjectivities as the world comes undone, Helen and Julia's gazes are transfixed on one another, disorienting their subjectivities through a narcissistic intimacy, where Julia and Helen are at once themselves and the other at the same time. Waters describes the scene: "they held each other's gaze, in silence … they moved together and kissed … Helen lifted her hips, to meet the movement with a movement of her own" (393); Helen's self-disavowal happens *in tandem with* and in relation *to* Julia's, a disavowal that only can occur through Julia's embrace of Helen's loneliness and Helen's embrace of Julia's. Their loneliness brings them together, and they do not and cannot turn away from one another. Their intense dwelling with the other person and her loneliness creates their everyday bond.

Julia and Helen experience "a kind of sameness that's not identity," a coming together through an ordinary loneliness that sees no Helen or Julia, but an "inaccurate replication" of two intimate, undifferentiated bodies working together ("A Conversation with Leo Bersani" 13). This is not to say that Julia strips Helen's loneliness away, or that Helen attempts to possess Julia's loneliness. Rather, each takes pleasure in laying the other's loneliness bare, relating to their loneliness together: "[Helen] wanted to give herself up to Julia" (Waters 394), and Julia wanted to lose herself in the moment with Helen, to "feel [Helen] gripping [her] (394). This letting go through pleasure that Helen experiences with Julia makes room for the potential for a new sociality, one where relationships are based on a respect for each of our connected lonely samenesses rather

than on an "antagonistic" and "hierarchical" battle for individuation and uniqueness (Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?* 33). Letting go of this "narcissistic and paranoid fascination" ("Against Monogamy" 92) that your lover can provide you with what you have always been lacking enables an obsession with the extraordinary to become a love of ordinariness—a love of today's moments.

Still, after the sexual ecstasy ends, Helen is troubled by the sociality of her loneliness and her lack of trust in Julia's love for her. Without the sense of ownership she is used to—a sense of possession that she and Kay had counted on—Helen is left with uncertainties about Julia's feelings for her. Helen is a subject in transition and her loneliness and jealousy confuse her. No longer an attribute she can keep to herself, forgo, wish away, or get someone else to cure for her, Helen's loneliness becomes an inseparable part of her love for Julia. On the one hand Kay never wanted Helen to be lonely and so worked, as the chivalric hero, to assuage Helen's feelings by filling Helen's void's with Kay's own image. Yet, Kay could not accomplish this, and Helen spent much of their relationship feeling empty, in need of something more. This longing for something more keeps Helen on the brink of needy adoration of Kay, whom she simultaneously regards with contempt. Having someone promising to give you everything, always, is intoxicating but, not unlike capitalism's promise to provide happiness through purchases, this happiness is a failed promise that leads to feelings of betrayal. After Julia and Helen make love Helen exclaims: "This is what Kay wanted, isn't it? I know why she did, Julia! God! I feel like—I feel like I'm her! I want to touch you, Julia. I want to touch you, like she would" (Waters 350). But Helen's desire to

become Kay in order to "touch" Julia like "she would" begins to unravel Helen's notion of her own self. At once, she wants to be Kay, to be Helen, and to be with Julia and undo Kay.

When Helen replaces Kay with another love object, one who can reaffirm Helen's self and save her from loneliness, she is disgruntled to find that Julia is not as chivalric as Kay. Julia also has no desire to save Helen from her loneliness. Telling Helen that "[Kay's] more of a gentleman than any real man she ever knew," Julia gestures to the impossibility of Kay sustaining her narcissism as well as to Julia's refusal to be what Helen believes she is lacking in herself. Terrified to face her everyday loneliness, Helen becomes "frightened" and "for one terrible moment she [sees] herself completely alone—abandoned by Julia, as well as by Kay" (397). And with Helen desperate for Julia to take her guilt away, to assuage her ordinary feelings of uncertainty about her love, trying to hail Julia as her chivalric savior (395) Julia refuses the call. Julia does not, however, refuse Helen. This scene marks a turning point for Helen whereby the narcissistic care she received from Kay, and returned to Kay, is being underwritten by Julia's refusal to be extraordinary. Julia's marked ordinariness, as noticed by Helen throughout—her "ordinary way of gladness," her "unmade-up" face, her "bare, and colored" walls, the "furniture [that] was very ordinary" (324)—forces Helen to abandon her expectations of narcissistic grandeur. Julia, for Helen, is "the most unpeculiar person [she has] ever met" (342) and this scares her into loneliness.

Waters' portrayal of Helen shows her as wrestling with feelings of self-consciousness and envy; determined to possess Julia but facing Julia's refusal to be

consumed in that way, her narcissistic identity is further disrupted and led elsewhere to dizzying effect. Helen is jealous of Julia's beauty, for instance, claiming "[I] was jealous of Julia's reflection … of Julia's clothes … with the powder on Julia's face" (392). Wanting to "be" Julia—to become or perhaps possess Julia's mirror image—involves wanting to see herself in Julia, while also wanting to be with Julia (to touch her "like" Kay, to be Kay and touch Julia's body with Kay's fingers and tongue) the shattering of Helen's self is continuing to take an odd, narcissistic turn. Before, when Helen was with Kay, she could stare at Kay and see herself reflected in Kay's eyes, always self-affirming. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, Kay used Helen in much the same way. With Julia, however, much is different; Helen can stare into Julia's eyes all she wishes, but she will not see herself there. Instead, when she looks at Julia she sees "[Julia's face]," a woman who can be "watching [Helen], through the mirror" and still see Helen and not herself reflected back at her (393,392).

While Freud understood narcissism to be based on a desire to seek out in others what one desires in the self, their lack, Helen and Julia's lesbian narcissism interrogates this way of seeing only for the self. Helen cannot see herself in Julia and must work to establish a sense of connectedness that is based on her own selfless letting go of that need to be constantly reaffirmed, rather than based on a desire to be fulfilled by the other. Recalling Freud's explanation of narcissism, I suggest that Kay evidences her self-obsession through the performance of her chivalric love for Helen, where the masculine lover quells her narcissism by gazing into a woman's face. However, by refusing to appropriate Helen's love for herself as her own, Julia's lesbian narcissism suggests a new

sociality where a subject cannot see herself in the other; their coming together manifests itself anew precisely because the subject, Julia, sees herself only in relation to someone else, Helen. Julia can only see the other, who in turn only sees her. Julia does not seek a confirmation of her self in Helen's image. In fact, when she looks at Helen she sees someone separate from herself and for her this is an everyday feeling. And finally, Helen too is changing, slowly, through their relationship, finding that she cannot stop thinking about others in lieu of herself when she is with Julia: "She would never again, she thought, cross a floor, never switch on a wireless, never put a poker to the fire—never do anything at all—without thinking of the lovers who might be embracing in rooms close by" (390). Her everyday life is now relationally inflected.

Let me suggest that loneliness maintains and sustains this social contact. Julia refuses to steal away Helen's loneliness, to quell it, to fill Helen up with empty promises, or to allow Helen to remain self-centered. Although Helen needs Julia to reaffirm for her what Kay has been promising all along—that Helen is the heroine, infallible and perfectly, tragically rescue-able and hence what makes her lover's subjectivity possible—Julia refuses. Before Helen met Julia loneliness was an extraordinary sentiment and one to be avoided. Now, she cannot understand why Julia will not take her loneliness away from her, or, perhaps most troubling to her, how Julia can be so comfortable being alone and lonely: "What is it about Julia? Why is she always so alone" (327)? But for Julia the loneliness that Helen is feeling is ordinary, and something Helen must face. Julia's actions, therefore, work to guide Helen through the loneliness without taking the experience from her. Waters narrates: "Julia had moved across the room to shovel ash on

to the coke in the grate; but she had risen, and was standing at the mantlepiece, without turning around. She didn't come to Helen's side, as she had before. She stood as if gazing at the fire, brooding over the smothered coals" (395-6). By stepping away from Helen's proximity, but not leaving her alone, Julia provides a safe, social space for Helen to feel loneliness as an ordinary affect. The everyday act of stoking a fire while Helen's loneliness surfaces behind her serves two functions: at once an ordinary domestic labour, the act shows that for Julia, loneliness is as ordinary an event as taking care of her home—a part of everyday life and of ordinary relationships. However, the act also may be understood as a metaphor for Helen's dangerous incendiary force as her need for Julia to assuage her loneliness grows with every stoke. Through forcing Helen to acknowledge her part in Kay's sadness, calling her into account instead of saving her from negative feelings, Julia shows Helen how the loneliness she feels is real, and necessarily connected to the responsibility she has for Kay's feelings. Helen is hurting Kay, and no one can take that guilt away from Helen. Her decision to be with Julia is her own, and the loneliness triggered by Julia's refusal to absolve Helen's loneliness works to evidence what a politics of social responsibility is. The everyday choices Waters has Helen make are political, hard, and sometimes uncomfortable; however, Helen's agency is paramount to those decisions. It is her loneliness that triggers realizations that she alone makes choices and she must negotiate the feelings of those around her. Loneliness here is relational; it forces a realization of relational responsibility.

Julia further complicates their relationship by admitting her own loneliness to Helen— an act she sees as neither humiliating nor a call for Helen to take Julia's

loneliness away from her. Helen, presuming that the reason Kay and Julia's relationship didn't continue was that Julia had a "misaffection" for Kay, finds out that it was actually Kay who did not love Julia (343). Angry that Julia didn't tell Helen the origin story of Kay and Julia's end, a story that Helen saw as pinnacle for her own understanding of Julia's and her own love story, Helen demands that Julia give her an account of herself. Julia responds simply: "I was proud; and I was lonely. I was fucking lonely, if you want to know the truth" (397). Julia sees her loneliness as something that is ordinary and its revelation to Helen "doesn't make any difference" to her (397). Her loneliness is one part of her that she refuses to apologize for; it is the reason she was able to find Helen, and so loving Julia will require that Helen embrace her ordinary feelings of loneliness and not try to sugarcoat or cure them. Helen is confused; Kay never wanted Helen to feel anything ugly, and in turn, never showed Helen her own unpretty feelings. Waters suggests here that Kay's idea that Helen should feel perpetual happiness is both unethical and impossible. And even though Helen feels now more than ever that she is "completely alone—abandoned by Julia, as well as by Kay" (397) when she experiences the shattering of her desire to possess Julia, Helen's loneliness may help her (and the reader) to understand love. It is in this way that Helen can also begin to understand that Kay's unhappy loneliness (her longing for Helen's return) is also ordinary and relational.

Ordinarily Queer Duplicates

In *The Promise of Happiness* Sara Ahmed argues that Westerners hold a sense of entitlement to "happy" that presumes it is always "out there" for us to take. Our job as

citizens is to turn towards the happy and to turn away from that which threatens this turn (5). The presumed measurability of affect suggests that "feelings" are weighable, profitable, and interpretable (5). Consequently, "an affective geography of happiness takes place" where happy people are thought to be those creating new, productive paths towards collective futures and unhappy people are thought to be the jagged barriers that hold us back (97). In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai concentrates on "unattractive feelings," or unhappy affects that are considered passive or wasteful. Thought to do nothing other than distract the vehement, active emotions (such as happiness) from getting things done (5), to be unhappy is to be lazy and needy. If happiness is the condition of always forging ahead (*The Promise of Happiness* 91), then unhappiness tends to be conceptualized as that which hinders stability and progress. The contemporary cultural valorization of happiness means that loneliness can only be understood as a burden on both the "depressed" person who can't seem to snap out of their funk and the happy political system around them. It is in this sense that unhappiness has become a repulsive affect, while those people who feel unhappy have become the repulsive, lonely others.

I see Ngai's and Ahmed's current work as continuing conversations started by lesbian theorist Shane Phelan's writings of the 1990s. Phelan argues that nation states such as the US are so invested in their happiness that they will fight wars in order to protect happy heterosexual masculine bonds, or, as Phelan states: their right to happy "republican" and conservative love (47). This love "for one's country, for its laws, and for one's fellow citizens" and, especially, for one's fellow "man" is dependent on the idea that the state's emotional happiness and well-being is perfect (46). This war on feelings

has, perhaps not so surprisingly, been waged against individuals who are believed to harbor dangerous sexualities, such as lesbians. Queer in her sexuality and her emotionality, the lesbian has become recognizable through negative affects (such as melancholia, sadness, and loneliness) ostensibly relinquishing her potential for optimism. Targeted for her presumed lonely ways of feeling, thinking, and being, any lesbian who has miserable feelings is today judged as a source of fear, becoming a repository for national and often conservative angst. This final section of my chapter seeks to make a political space for the unhappy lesbian misfit by exploring what is at stake politically and culturally in the ordinary lonely sentiments that get "stuck" to lesbians (*Queer Phenomenology* 140).

Expectations that lesbian subjectivities are extraordinary, coupled with the scientific and cultural narrativized histories we have retained that suggest our inherent miserable, alienating loneliness, make arguing for an ordinary, relational lesbian loneliness difficult. And while Love chooses to "dwell at length on the 'dark side' of modern queer representation" (4), re-exploring characters and personages whose negative affects and hurtful feelings carry within them the potential to mobilize a positive queer movement, Love's project still understands loneliness as "a condition of singularity" that leaves the lonely subject unique or special in some way (108). Being extraordinary is part of Love's recuperation of lesbian history. However, what I see within cultural scripts that interrogate queerness as a lesser, subordinate, or miserable identity, is the continued feminization of unhappiness. The dismissive reactions—or lackluster non-reactions—to lesbian loneliness in particular demonstrate the ways in which lesbian desire is rendered

both invisible and affectively unpretty; lesbian intimacy thus becomes reconfigured as an internal threat poised to infect our social sphere, while lesbian feelings are understood as ugly feelings—sentiments that are not becoming of a good girl. Instead, I argue that our unhappiness and loneliness have the potential to be strategically defiant and elusive, politically misfitted emotions. If understood differently, lesbian unhappiness is neither a despair-ridden emptiness that comes from a lack of community, sociality, or connection—a *Well of Loneliness* loneliness—nor is it a passive trope or metaphor for a unique way-of-life. Rather, there is something lovely about this misfitted feeling that becomes an outward refusal to answer a pressured call to be extraordinarily happy. To elucidate this possibility, I turn to Kelli Connell's *Double Life*. Connell's work, I contend, explores how loneliness interrupts imperatives that subscribe to a miserable lesbian loneliness by making visible those lonely lesbians who risk dwelling in moments of vulnerability and confusion in order to create everyday spaces for multiple futures for the lonely in us all. If loneliness's potential lies in its ordinariness, as I argue it does, and if it thrives through the personal connection to the everyday lives it influences, and through the resonances it leaves, the question remains: how do we find "the potential that animates the ordinary" in order to mobilize political changes without seeking out some magical, spectacular event to force that change to occur? (Stewart 1). In other words, can an ordinary loneliness work to renew the social?

I read Connell's photography as an exploration of how a lesbian loneliness in its incoherence may recast sociality and sexuality, suggesting that the loneliness of narcissism is what holds intimacies accountable. In other words, the ordinariness of

loneliness and its relationship to narcissism does not simply animate selfhood, but also ethical relations of beholding. As a body of work, *Double Life*[61] narrates an everyday relationship between two women, Kiba Jacobson and Kiba Jacobson, one woman playing the part of two lesbian lovers. Connell's women appear in shots that represent the everyday life of two lesbians in an intimate, loving, imperfect, sexual relationship. Pictured at times as wooed ladies or jealous, aggressive lovers, and at other times candidly bathing, talking on the phone, making love on a couch on a sunny afternoon, unwinding after a dinner party, driving to and from weekend trips, the subjects in these photos disorient our desire to pin down each woman's position, class, or desire, making their various possible positionings somehow visibly suspended. Similarly, there are no clear gender regulations. One cannot tell, from one image to the next, who is gendered masculine Kiba and who is gendered feminine Kiba; these two women are one and the same, one sometimes dressed in a more stereotypically masculine way, the other often dressed in a stereotypically feminine way, and often times their clothes are reversed, flip-flopped, and meant to confuse. The twinning effect of Jacobson taking herself as her muse (and the fact that both Kibas stand in for the artist, Connell) also makes it impossible to decipher lover from loved, bottom from top, body from body, and self from other. Both women are lovers. Both women are present. Both women's emotions are pressingly and ordinarily intense; however, a sense of the distinction between the two bodies ends there.

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[61] To see Connell's full portfolio of *Double Life,* visit "Images" at kelliconnell.com.

In her 2008 image entitled "Reflection," Kiba is shown leaning in her doorway looking towards her lover, Kiba again, who stands out of view but whose reflection is mirrored in the door's glass pane (see Appendix 2). The photo seems divided in half with one lover on one side and the other transfixed in front. Dressed in a floral skirt and in bare feet Kiba appears feminine and solemn, the look on her face distant and lonely. The brightness of the spring day is in direct contrast to the darkness of the interior of Kiba's sunless home; it is industrial with its greys and dirty blacks, and it is not an obviously happy place, but rather an ugly one. Stuck between the doorway and the outside world, Kiba remains calcified, lost in the gaze of her lover. It is as though her loneliness is attempting to draw her lover into her—into her home, her body, herself. However, like Julia in *The Night Watch* who stays in proximity to Helen but out of her reach, Kiba, the lover who is outside of the intensity of the shadowed remains of the domestic sphere, seems resolved to stay outside of her lover's loneliness. Leaning nonchalantly on a fence post, she is caring, inviting, and not turning away from her lover's unpretty feelings (remaining there spatially), but she is also refusing to barge her way inside of her lover's affects, rewriting them, curing them, taking them away. She is also not about to be consumed by her lover's need for reassurance or self-affirmation, or give up her own loneliness to appease. Her loneliness is connective, and although it is oppressive, tense and compromised it is still relational.

The reflection of Kiba's image as seen in the closed glass pane of the doorway suggests warmth and nature in contrast to the open doorway that screams suffocation and uncertainty. Returning to the mirror as a symbol of lesbian narcissism, I follow Elizabeth

Grosz and Elsbeth Probyn's observation that artists often depict "women kissing themselves in mirrors," showing them as so fascinated by their own self-images that they cannot bear to look away (99). The images themselves often present hyper-feminine women staring longingly into a mirror, away from the camera's lens. The effect is the simultaneous pushing aside of the idea that the lesbian is simply a "thwarted man" (99), and that the "lesbian double" is meant to entice the male gaze (100). Still, even when images depict two women kissing each other, these portraits are often dismissed as metaphorical representations of sameness. In these cases, the lesbian body is nothing other than a "reflection" or "an echo" (99). Connell's own use of mirroring in "Reflection" can be read as undoing the notion of the "lesbian double" who merely seeks her echo in loving another. When the two women are examined closely (Kiba and Kiba), they are perfectly inverted images of one another, both leaning, both staring ahead, both noncommittal in their direction. Each seems to be waiting for the other to make a move, to direct the moment, and yet each is unwilling and perhaps unable to force the other to take away her discomfort. Yet while Kiba, the woman wearing the skirt, might just as easily become Kiba, the woman wearing the T-shirt, their bodily placement in the scene keeps each of them on a diagonal to the other, not in front or behind. They cannot be replicas. Unlike mirror images, their inverted images do not match; they are not one and the same. The calm expression on Kiba, the outsider's, face speaks to the everyday unsaids that conversations and moments in relationships work through, where being outside does not necessarily mean leaving, nor does it mark the end of a relationship. Rather than copying the trajectory of extraordinary tragic loneliness that, as I explored

earlier, has haunted lesbian origin stories, there is no pre-determined fate for Connell's muses' relationship and no script to follow. No one is the enemy; no one is the villain; no one has to die; and no man has to intervene to right the romantic plot gone astray. They will stay where they are and work it out in their own time.

Connell's loneliness at once unworks the queer lesbian subject and then becomes the means by which these characters, both versions of her same self, a self in love with her self, revise their world. In a sense, Connell is creating a "reorienting mirror of our age," allowing us to imagine the places that we are in, and the places that we are not in (Huffer 521). Looking at this photo, one can easily imagine taking the lonely woman's hand and going inside of the house. I might make her tea, or take her to bed. I might try and make her laugh, and force her back into my version of happiness. I can imagine the inside of the house that is holding her loneliness: is there a kitchen table filled with unpaid bills? A dirty bathroom? A crying child? Reasons for the woman's loneliness are anyone's guess and require that our own self-inflected narratives be created. The desire to possess and own the woman still swirls around here in and through the everyday. However, the impetus to cure her, or to assuage her unpretty feelings, remains strong. In the same vein, one can also imagine staying outside and turning away from the lonely woman standing in the doorway. I could get in my truck and drive away to a happier space, where someone's pain was not affecting my own feelings. I could refuse to notice. Yet, this picture offers us a moment to live in. It is through Connell's figures' lonely awakenings that they and we see ourselves in relation to other lonely selves, relatable to them not because of their close proximity or likeness, and not because of their

uniqueness, but by their complete, undeniable vulnerability to loneliness. In this way, Connell's loneliness is not queer or strange at all, but ordinary, and captures what our own and others' ugly feelings require of us all: care, patience, and selflessness.

When I asked Connell about the "nature of narcissism" in her work, she responded that her photographic images are supposed to be about "a relationship between two people" as well as an image depicting "the multiple sides of the self" (Connell, personal interview). Coupling the self's selves and the dynamics of a couple in a single shot enables each image to unravel the boundaries between the lesbian subject and her lover and the various versions of subjectivity each brings to the scenes. Complicating things further, Connell also argues that she is always "inviting viewers to project themselves into the roles portrayed versus imagining their own relationship relative to the figures" ("Kelli Connell's Double Life"). The gaze from the onlooker, the you and the I who interpret her images, is pulled into the work and we are asked to find ourselves not within these particular bodies but within the worlds created by their affects and their relationship. In this way, the mobility of shared affect traverses boundaries between selves. Connell's presence as photographer and model, serving as she does as Kiba Jacobson's "stand-in" for every shot, disorients subjective divisions all the more. Connell explains:

> I photograph Kiba and a stand-in, someone who is available to play the other character in the scene. The majority of the time, this stand-in is me. I have used a self timer in almost all of the pictures in this series, where we're both acting out the characters. She will be the one on the left and I'll be the one on the right for one or two rolls of film and then we'll go change clothes. I'll put on the clothes she had on and she'll put on mine. Then we'll act out the other scenario. So in Photoshop I'm just removing myself and putting her in, but what is really recorded on the film is our interaction together. ("Kelli Connell's Double Life")

In creating an intimate moment with a couple and then taking herself out of that intimate space by replacing herself with Kiba, another woman who then becomes her own image's lover, Connell's play on lesbian narcissism creates questions about the self and our relationships to others. Literally removing herself from the scene, in Bersanian ways, Connell is constantly initiating a self-dislocation and a self-extension throughout her work. However, by canceling herself out she refuses a specular Freudian narcissism by taking herself out of every frame, replacing her image not with another image of herself but with Kiba's image. What is important to point out here is that Kiba, although not a replica of Connell, speaks to Connell's perception of herself more than Connell's own likeness could. She explains: "I do very much think of her as a stand-in for myself." This notion of "stand-in" does not point, however, to a narcissism whereby Connell sees herself reflected in Kiba, or one that presumes Kiba as an interchangeable object that simply reinforces Connell. Rather, Kiba's willingness to share her affect with Connell creates an ordinary space, body, moment, and politics of care where she and Connell are neither individuated nor annihilated. Instead, they exist in dynamic relation to one another

While the two women are represented as "good friends" living their everyday lives apart and together, most people "when they see the work" assume that Connell is rendering the coming together of Kiba and Connell, in the intimacy of these snapshot moments, timeless and boundless. Connell states: "I also try to erase any idea of these characters as specific people. I'm continually trying to make that definition disappear or change or shift based on interpretation and context." Connell is not interested in Kiba or Kelly Connell as people in her work; rather, she creates a space whereby lonely bodies—

singular and yet not always single—come together through their shifting affects in the everyday.

In the 2002 image entitled "Kitchen Tension," Connell presents us with the snapshot of a moment where two women are experiencing ugly feelings (see Appendix 3). Once again, we are presented with a domestic sphere; however, this time both women (both Kiba) are inside of that space together, sharing the tension of their shared affects. Unhappy loneliness is the focal point of this image where affects are not packaged to look pretty. The image of the lover by the sink—a double-edged symbol that speaks to the negotiation between a patriarchal oppression that keeps women secluded in the private space of the home, and the cleansing potential of the sink itself—is not a happy one. Harkening back to the image of Waters' Julia stoking the fire, whatever it is these two figures are feeling, they are doing so in their own corners of the room, unaware that their affects are intermingling even if they refuse to see one another, and are remaining silent.

Wearing a bright red, floral blouse, Kiba sets her hand tensely on the tap. She has either just finished the dishes, begun to clean them, or her muscle memory is grasping at the tap. We cannot know for sure; however, she seems ready for a confrontation, and in one way or another (be it bodily or verbal) committed to being heard. Her lover, captured as a headshot, seems uncomfortable in the space, sitting away, her back turned, staring off out of frame. She is not turning around to the call of her lover's stare. Her brow is furrowed, and her lips are pursed as though she is thinking about how best to proceed. Affect is gathering around these women and you can almost taste the conflict, making the kitchen a perfect place to house such a moment. A place for eating, cooking, drinking,

chatting, the kitchen is a shared symbol of home and also of conflict. As Ahmed argues, the kitchen and all of its familiar "smells" has the power to "retur[n] [us] somewhere" even though we are not always certain where that "somewhere is" or whether the return is "welcome" or not (*Queer Phenomenology* 10). Still, we all can conjure up memories of kitchens past and what conversations, arguments, and intimate moments we experienced in such spaces, and in many ways one kitchen becomes any kitchen. The everydayness of Connell's kitchen space is evidenced by a few key features: the light coming through the window, the Gumby toys aligned on the sill, the bruising bananas in the baskets hanging from the ceiling; one gets the sense that this home is lived in, and that this kitchen has been the scene of many a complicated discussion making this particular event unextraordinary. In this way, it is the tension between the women within the space that draws the viewer into this image. Their direct challenge to happiness speaks to how affect comes with set lines of acceptability, and that these women's straying emotions are competing with societal expectations of happiness.

Happiness is considered the affect that keeps one in alignment with the regulated pathways that condition neoliberal love. The optimism of happiness keeps people in line, orderly and properly advancing forward without getting stuck backtracking or lagging behind. The women in this image are lagging, dragging their feet in silence and refusing to advance forward. If happiness is the glue that keeps the lines of normativity in order, and the imperative to be heterosexual is strengthened by its association with and connection to happiness, then this couple implicitly rejects it all. Instead, Connell presents us with a couple who feels differently at different moments, and whose vulnerability to

feeling "bad" is not something to be hidden. She captures the ordinariness of unhappy tension and lays it out for the world to see, presenting a sociality that embraces "the highs and lows of relationships," including "moments of darkness, boredom, despair, or frustration" ("Kelli Connell's Double Life").

I next present a particular reading of "Kitchen Tension," arguing that one affect that circulates throughout the photo is envy. However, the discussion of envy that follows can be used for any affect that is considered unhappy. I have chosen envy because as a viewer coming to this scene, envy of the intimacy is what I immediately experience. I have gone back and forth on why that might be, and in conversation with others who have also seen and have been affected by this image, I have tried to rewrite that first feeling of envy, questioning its authenticity and trying to pretend it away. What about this image calls forth envy? I've asked myself. Isn't it more appropriate to read other emotions into the shot? Yet, in line with Connell's wishes, that her viewers "project themselves into the roles portrayed versus imagining their own relationship relative to the figures," I cannot refuse the feelings of envy that I feel are being portrayed in this photo. I recognize that I cannot enter into a relation with these women and this image without bringing my affective memories with me. Pretending envy away would be comparable to *The Night Watch*'s Helen begging Julia to absolve her guilt over hurting Kay. While I do not see myself reflected in these women's faces, I feel the tension created in this kitchen (fabricated but still there) and I feel it as envy, speaking, hopefully, to how one's personal affects and the ways in which they are manifested and circulated are interrelational and that the envy on my mind can coexist with any affects in the room. I also contend that

with all negative affects comes loneliness. The idea that one's feeling is one's alone, and that it can and will be judged according to a spectrum of culturally accepted feelings, ensures that loneliness and unpretty sentiments share a sleeping bag. Therefore, loneliness, envy, and narcissism are inextricably connected throughout Connell's images.

Of course, Freud linked femininity not only to narcissism, but to envy, "exemplarity," and imitation. According to Freud, "exemplarity" is always feminized, and he saw heterosexual women as more susceptible to becoming objects of mimesis for one another. This "female-associated copying" was thought by Freud to be "reinforced through a shared principle of transmissibility," which Freud understood as a "contagious 'infection'" (Ngai 144,149). In Freud's estimation, a woman rightfully envies the women with whom she comes into contact and is only able to overcome her envy, and become a collective member of society with acceptable "group feelings," when she realizes that her envy is humiliating and not culturally appropriate, forcing her to "identify [herself] with others" through a shared desire for men, keeping her envy—and thereby her loneliness— hidden (qtd. in Ngai 164). Envy, and the humiliation and shame that accompanies it for women, stands in direct contrast to Freud's idea of heterosexual male narcissism, where, in order to overcome his narcissism, the heterosexual man consumes his female love-object's love of herself and makes it his own. In other words, the envious woman is expected to repress her envy while the heterosexual male narcissist is permitted to absorb his woman's love of herself, taking that away from her. For Freud, female singularity can only be mimicked and cloned within a group of women, and never actually realized. Connell's subjects, and their lonely envy, work in opposition to Freud's presumption of

the impossibility of female autonomy. Their envy is relational, something felt with and against one another, motivated by the tensions of loneliness colliding. Looking at the image again, I suggest that Kiba's refusal to turn around and look into the face of her lover's envy is reminiscent of the scene between Julia and Helen in *The Night Watch* in that the affect in the room is shared. Kiba's red-bloused lover demands a confrontation, or an explanation for her feelings. Perhaps what she is seeking is the recognition that she is feeling correctly, or, more possible, a promise that what she is feeling is not unwarranted and paranoid in some way. The domestic scene tempts the creation of a narrative where we fill in the blanks for the version of Kiba who stands at the tap: "Why am I stuck at home while you gallivant around? Where were you last night? You were talking to her again, weren't you? You assured me that this time I'd get to go back to school and you'd put your life on hold for once. Why is it that while you're out living your dream, I'm home with the baby?" Conversely, the envy could just as easily be coming from Kiba in denim: "I know you think he's handsome; I never see you smile like that when I'm in the room; You told me that if you carried our baby, she'd love me the same way; You said when we got into this that you would never love someone more than me." Their envy is shared and intermingling with all other affects in the room, making potential conversations, explanations, and expectations endless. At the same time their envy is individual, and not mimetic, in that Kiba's sink-stayed lover cannot expect her silent, withdrawn partner to take her envy away from her, or vice versa. Rather, their feelings connect, combine, and become a relational engagement between them—one that awaits their discussion. Yet, this is an everyday discussion that one can imagine happening in

any kitchen at any time or place. There is nothing extraordinary about these women's feelings or their insecurities, needs, desires, or anxieties. The only extraordinary aspect of this relationship is the understanding we, as Western subjects, have of these women: namely, the expectation we have been culturally conditioned to bring into the room is that their loneliness is dangerous, their relationship is unhealthy and doomed, and their unhappiness is infectious and must remain boxed.

What is important to me about Connell's work as a series is that the women here are so similar to the women in later photos (such as in the 2008 piece discussed above) that a sense of timelessness mingles with the everyday. It is not simply that the models used are Kiba in all instances; rather, that the frames, the colors, the textures, and most importantly the affects projected are claimed as ordinary and familiar. We have all been where these two women are right now, in the kitchen, feeling as though we were going to become undone by the tension of the moment. And yet, we see in photo after photo that these women have survived this moment, the next, and the next, and that this is what relationality is: everyday feelings, some ugly, some pretty, experiences in the rawness of the now to be lived through uncomfortably and together. A lonely envy, here, brings these two women together, rather than (as Western culture has been conditioned to interpret envy) driving them apart.

Ngai discusses envy as a negative affect that "has been reduced to signifying [. . .] the 'lack' or 'deficiency' of the person who envies" (21). Popular and critical culture understands envy as this selfish, "static sign of deficiency rather than a motivated affective stance" that connects women, bringing them together (127). Troubled by this

dismissive understanding of envy, Ngai asks: "Why is a subject's enviousness automatically assumed to be … a reflection of the ego's inner workings rather than a polemical mode of engagement with the world?" (128). In rebuttal, Ngai suggests that mimesis has nothing to do with exemplarity at all; rather, envy is quite ordinary. Moreover, envy demonstrates not the fantasy of becoming the other but "the capacity for female subjects to form coalitions based on something other than" heterosexual desire towards men (168). In this way, envy is both social and invested in a politics of change. Thus, while heterosexual women may attempt to strengthen their relationships to men by becoming socially acceptable, the lesbian narcissist's "aggressive acts of emulation" aim to dissolve these socially contractual relationships, making women not "exemplary" spectacles awaiting a male awakening but rather "stripping this 'example' of its exemplarity," making lesbianism ordinary (163).

Returning to the image one last time, I argue that taken together the two Kibas in this photograph "emulate attributes without identifying with them," creating a space for a different understanding of narcissism that does not revolve around a desire for oneness or becoming the same, but one that also does not seek individualism (Ngai 168). As such, Connell's figures are caught in a bind, but their vexation does not signal an end. The lover by the sink clearly appears to feel wronged by her lover in the chair. She might want answers, or an apology, but she certainly wants to relieve herself of her feelings of unhappiness. If she is jealous that her lover has given someone else her time or her flattery, or if she is envious that her lover seems better at keeping her emotions locked inside of her, we cannot know. Yet, the fact that her lover seems unwilling to be

complacent to her demands of confession or reciprocated affect is evident. However, the same can also be said of Kiba in the chair. The two lovers are mimicking one another's affect and silence—though not in order to become the other, rather to open up lines of communication that exist outside of socialities based on consumption and possession. The political potential of narcissism within this space might be easily forgotten because of this conflict; we want the situation to be resolved and pure, consistent happiness to be returned, presuming it was ever there in the first place. Still, the lover in the chair refuses this turn even though you can feel her loneliness, and you can see it on her face. Her "unhappy possession" of her lover's lonely gaze creates a silent space, a patience where these two women can engage in their angst and intimate uncertainties. It is here, in a space such as this, where communication happens. The scene offers no comfort and no promise of reprieve. Instead, we are as stuck in this discomforting moment as these two figures are. Their loneliness brings them as close to one another as they can be in a moment rife with uncertainly and tension, creating with it the potential for a connection that comes face to face with discomfort, and does not succumb to the urge to create an extraordinary melodrama out of an ordinary unpretty feeling.

CHAPTER THREE

Homophobic Zombification: Queer Pustules of Resistance

I would stab my son for acting gay. (Tracy Morgan, Comedian)

This Kiss is Gonna Hurt

Recently, there has been much emphasis placed on queer youth suicide precipitated by media reaction to the death of 18-year-old Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University student who jumped off of the George Washington Bridge on September 22, 2010. His death marked the eighth young gay-male suicide in North America that year. The reasons for the tragic decision to end his life were said to stem from Clementi's shame and humiliation; Clementi thought that a private sexual encounter with an older man had been filmed and streamed across the Internet by his roommate, Dahrun Ravi, who had earlier in the evening tweeted the entire school: "I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes it's happening again" (Biemiller). Although Ravi did not end up recording the sexual encounter, after reading the social media feeds online discussing his sex life and queer identity, Clementi had no reason to believe he had not. Hours later Clementi took his own life.

This ambiguous "it" that Ravi eludes to in his tweets, and the the shame Ravi felt Clementi should feel as a young gay man have prompted media sources such as *The Huffington Post*, *Fox News*, *The Daily Mail*, and *NewsWeek* to profess their fear that gay-teen suicide and suicidal ideation are becoming "epidemic[s]" that are plaguing the

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West.[62] Clementi's death specifically sparked a media frenzy of responses, each working

to create a particular narrative surrounding his death, including a surge of online outreach

initiatives by famous celebrities. These supportive endorsements came from people as

diverse as Lady Gaga who launched the Born This Way Foundation,[63] Daniel Radcliffe

who endorses The Trevor Project,[64] Cindy Lauper who organized the Give a Damn

Campaign, [65] and, most popularly, Dan Savage who began the "It Gets Better Project."[66]

Moral panic looms large in the scripts we use to conceptualize child sexuality,

affecting the ways in which narratives about queer children and their intimacies circulate.

A host of critical scholarly work on child sexuality has also surfaced in the wake of these

tragedies, not limited to popular media exposure. The emerging scholarship surrounding

children and queer sexuality identifies both a paradoxical presumption and a sustained

ignorance surrounding queer children's sexual desire. On the one hand, purist cultural

narratives argue that children begin their lives as asexual and gradually become

heterosexual, irrefutably. As Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley suggest, this "utopianism

follows the child around like a family pet" (xiii). On the other hand, the paranoid fear that

the innocent child can be written upon, turned homosexual, or recruited speaks to cultural

fears surrounding our own national and personal vulnerabilities. Undeniably, when the

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[62] See Emily Chara's "Bullied to Death?"; Richard James's "US Gay Community Reeling"; Sharon Stapel's "Teen Suicide"; David Badash's "Gay Teen Suicide Epidemic-Missing in Action: The Surgeon General and the DC"; "Margaret Hoover Discusses."
 [63] See: (bornthiswayfoundation.org).
 [64] See: (thetrevorproject.org).
 [65] See: (wegiveadamn.org).
 [66] See: (itgetsbetter.org).

child herself threatens the configured heterosexual child of our cultural fantasies, Western culture can be very unkind (Levine 10). As Bruhm and Hurley explain, "People panic when sexuality takes on a life outside the sanctioned scripts of child's play. And nowhere is this panic more explosive than in the field of the queer child, the child whose [narrativized] play confirms neither the comfortable stories of child (a)sexuality nor the supposedly blissful promises of adult heteronormativity" (ix).

In this chapter, I look at the image of the queer child as a lonely subject and explore the ways in which she becomes the repository for societal notions of innocence, asexuality, and victimization. I explore how these presumptions are enforced in ways that rob queer children of sexual and emotional agency. I suggest that the queer child who resists these norms threatens accepted models of sociability because of her inability and refusal to fit into a particular narrative of growth and dependency—a narrative that also serves national strategies for citizen control. The queer child is socially, culturally, and politically punished for being misfitted and lonely. However, rather than being rendered simply invisible, the queer child's loneliness as it unravels lays bare the fact that she inhabits a disoriented social space while in her process of becoming—fitting comfortably within neither homosexual nor heterosexual spheres. In order to explore configurations of the lonely queer child who resists compulsory heterosexuality, I turn towards children's sexual stories that challenge the societal propensity to insist that queerness in a child is a temporary monster, merely a playful curiosity that takes place before she "grows up." Her loneliness is triggered through a ubiquitous and tenuous positioning between infant and adult and, in turn, fosters a demand for a reconfigured ethics of child intimacies that are

not judged in advance by heteronormative, gendered spectrums.

I address three specific narratives in this chapter: the films *Hanna* (2011) and *The Nature of Nicholas* (2002), and the graphic novel *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl* (2002). Each piece presents us with moments where children are expected to negotiate societal expectations of their sexual and temporal development, evidencing that queer children are caught in a double bind simply for being, as Michael Warner argues, "consistently inconsistent in their identification" (*The Trouble* 39). Challenging the romantic notion of the wistful child discovering, for the first time, their queerness, as well as the sanitized narrative that children have no sexuality at all, I cite the examples of Hanna, Nicholas, and Minnie, the protagonists of each narrative. Hanna presents for us the image of a queer, lonely girl running both towards and away from adult expectations that have literally been coursing inside of her body from birth. Nicholas represents the introverted child whose sexual desire for another boy betrays our idealizations of innocence and masculinity. The homophobic bullying he endures from his own father reinforces a notion that gay boys are too weak to survive masculine discourses. Minnie represents a precocious, voraciously sexual child whose outright eroticism, experimentation, and adultification make her easily dismissable as disgusting or pathological. As a young female queer, her emotional outbursts and suicidal ideations are considered internal, her own fault—the inevitable problem of a hyper-affective queerly female body.

In addressing these concerns I focus on the act of kissing in order to elucidate the tension between sexual exploration and loneliness in these (un)expected narratives—narratives that are both required and unwanted. Claudia Castaňeda surmises that queer

children are haunted because they are "repeatedly figured as an entity in the making" (1). That children "physiologically" develop and change over time, growing up and into their predestined adult selves, becomes a presumed function of childhood itself; the child is therefore quickly reduced to a body who, above all else, must "develop into an adult" in a chronological and "proper" manner (4). In order to ensure smooth, predictable (and normative) development, a "child's socialization and enculturation must be secured" and policed (4). In this way, the child is essential to adult subject formation. With this expectation of children in mind, I suggest here that the intimate kisses between same-sex children attempt to make room for playful directional changes, changes that could well steer them off this progressive development track. The kiss is relayed through these texts as a "present" (Haffey 146): both a gift and a moment that enables these children to be intimate. Their desire, however, is not used in order to "dissolve the difference" between children and their adult counterparts, as David Clark and Stephen Barber suggest in their elaboration of Sedgwick's conceptualization of the queer child (5). Further, I suggest that child intimacy refuses to ensure heterosexual advancement and growth, undoing these presumptive spaces, while muddying cultural, social, and political cues that attempt to keep children and their (a)sexuality in line with heteronormative expectation. In this way, the kiss pushes beyond the past and future directory, enabling the everyday moment where the child can be queer in, on, and because of her own time.

Kisses between two queer children terrify a culture that associates children with either asexuality or hypersexual deviancy because the act of the "kiss" is neither stalwartly sexual nor innocent. For example, while Hanna's, Minnie's, and Nicholas's

separate kisses are simply ordinary experiences in their processes of becoming, each child

is made to feel guilt and shame about their kisses in different ways. A queer loneliness

ensues. Increasingly sexually experienced as well as afraid, these characters realize that

they have nowhere to turn but to loneliness; however, instead of debilitating these

children, loneliness works to challenge the adult-centered directives put upon them. In

effect, loneliness pushes these children past their own fears of being lonely monsters.

A Kiss with a Fist is Better Than None

In Camilla Gibb's *The Petty Details of So-and-So's Life*, the narrator muses about

the importance of the kiss as a trope: "like any archaeological find, a kiss is meaningless

in isolation" (14). The implication that the kiss is not a something that exists on its own,

alone, is of interest to me here as I explore the implications of loneliness and kissing in

queer children's narratives. That the kiss's underlying meaning cannot be known through

the kiss itself prompts this exploration into loneliness. I ask: what is it about the kiss that

holds within it expectation? What is invested in our Western notion that the kiss requires

a something to follow it? And what does a kiss deliver without that something? Or, in

other words, what political effects are created through its initiative? I next explore the

queerness of lonely kids kissing their same-sex friends, lovers, and strangers and the

ramifications and cultural implications their kisses have on contemporary ideas

surrounding child sexuality and queerness in general. I suggest in the narratives I explore

here that a kiss—the queer kiss between children specifically—promises nothing

definitive and is a lonely gesture. At the same time, though, the kiss' refusal to mean any

one thing consistently pushes kissing, and the loneliness that brings two mouths together,

beyond definition and speaks to what I see as a necessary ambiguity surfacing in

narratives surrounding queer child sexuality in contemporary Western discourses.

Same-sex kisses between young children and adolescents are often dismissed by

scholars as moments of temporary "fascination" (Showalter qtd. Haffey 138), naïve

innocence, or an "adolescent love" (Jagose qtd. in Haffey 138) that is at once "dangerous"

(138) and "normal," inevitable because of the unpredictability of affectations and phases

"such as all [boys and] girls go through" (Woolf 11). In other words, these intimate

smooches have been understood as predictable blips along the path to straightness.

However, queer kisses within fiction can also serve as "erotic pause[s]" in narrative

temporalities that "create pockets where time functions in a different manner" (Stockton

qtd. in Haffey 137). In these same structures, the figure of the child becomes she who

stops long enough to "revea[l] our most earnest attempts to grasp time and tame its

effects" (Stockton 283). For example, as Kate Haffey points out, the famous kiss between

Clarissa and her school friend Sally Seton in *Mrs. Dalloway* figures as an "exquisite

moment"—an isolated incident that haunts and pleasures Clarissa for the rest of her life.

Her memory of this kiss also upsets the temporal momentum of her heterosexual life –

birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, and death –

as Clarissa's thoughts about reproduction and domesticity are forever affected by this

"queer moment" (137). The kiss, then, becomes a relivable, "continuing moment,"

disrupting the diachronic stasis of presumed normative stages and progressions

(Sedgwick viii).

In this chapter, I suggest that instead of becoming a snap shot of a unique, extraordinary, fleeting moment in time—a time that then actually serves to segue back into a linear, heteronormative progression—the same-sex kisses within *Hanna, The Nature of Nicholas,* and *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl* are temporally misfitted, "recurrent and eddying" intimate acts that disorient sensibilities and create long-lasting affects and effects (Sedgwick xii). The recurrence of these kisses signifies not only that the kisses themselves will come again but also that the queer loneliness that stems from these intimacies will continue to proliferate. This proliferation is not, however, understood as a failure to be progressive enough, or as the beginning point of a domino effect where a kiss necessarily leads to queer sex. And these lonely kisses are not meant to cure these children of their loneliness, bringing the children together in happy sociality. Rather, the moment of the kiss between the same-sex children in these narratives works as an everyday experience where failing to be both heterosexual and unlonely is absolutely ordinary. Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* theorizes queerness' "affective potential" as one that builds on the fact that "queer" is a demarcation of failure – "a sign of failed being or non-being" (146). She understands the "feelings" of queerness (feeling queer) to be indicative of the problematics and potential within the category itself and within the risky act of taking it on as a "name" (146). More specifically, however, Ahmed argues that since queerness itself is "mediated" and "attached" to the "histories that render it a sign," more work has to be done on how queers have been used (reduced, recycled) as emblematic of negative, even primitive "feeling[s]" that make the heterosexual spaces' pure "sentimental feeling[s]" uncomfortable (147). In this context,

queer feelings of loneliness (stemming from abnormality, exclusion, and discomfort) are held up against heterosexual feelings of normalcy, belonging, and comfort. As has been discussed in previous chapters, loneliness is often pitted against an idealized and reified happiness. Like being queer, being lonely is considered a demarcation of failure—and loneliness is a failed feeling. The kiss between same-sex kids, therefore, is often used as another example of lonely queers gone wild; their intimate, bizarre act, an act propelled by queer loneliness, threatens normal, ordinary, and "legitimate ways of living" (149). Consequently, the queer kiss between lonely children is used in contemporary narratives in much the same ways loneliness has been used by the science that studies it; as a figure of contagion, the kiss is thought to spread queerness in ways that are seen by queer adults as peculiar and by heterosexual society as threatening.

So what is problematic about this kiss? To explore this question, I turn to the 2011 film *Hanna*, a story about a lost lonely girl whose strengths lie in her ability to remain unknowable, superfluous, and chaotic. Directed by Joe Wright, the film blends many different genres as though to further enhance the edifying, queer effect of the young protagonist, Hanna. The narrative draws on the fairy tale as much as it does on the spy-thriller, science fiction, and teen romance genres. This constant molding and remolding of genres has the effect of forcing the viewer to constantly unsettle her expectations; the refusal of *Hanna* to conform to any one genre enables Hanna, the protagonist, to remain in a state of everyday flux, as though her chaotic loneliness and the life that she inhabits is ordinary.

16-year-old Hanna was raised from infancy in the isolated wilderness in Finland

to be the ideal assassin. Her superpowers are the result of an experiment conducted on her mother's body while Hanna was in utero—a product of a Cold War politics now deemed dangerous and leaving Hanna vulnerable to being killed off. She is perfectly colorless: her red hair, blue eyes, and freckled face so starkly washed out through the cinematography that she appears ghostly. The effect is an affective stagnancy that conditions the opening scenes as we watch the tiny girl kill animals, fight her father in combat, and survey her stark, glacial surroundings without facial expression or emotive response. However, our sense as viewers that this young girl is in a constant state of loneliness is always there as she looks longingly to her father, her only human contact, to tell her how to feel and think. Her father, Erik, an ex-CIA operative, teaches her multiple languages and apocalyptic survival skills, reminding the child constantly that death is always a second away. Emotion, he tells her, is deadly. When her father must leave her alone, Hanna is left to negotiate the world outside of their lonely cottage in the Finnish wilderness. She is quite literally thrown into sociality, forced to interact with others as she tries to find her way back to her father once again. The effects of her everyday loneliness are difficult to watch. Completely disconnected from the world she knows, Hanna cannot understand social cues, has no knowledge of the ins and outs of humour, and exists in the relational space as a confused observer and outsider—until she meets Sophie.

Vacationing with her bohemian parents, young, British Sophie is a cliché of the quintessential Western teenager. She shops, loves make-up, celebrities, and pop culture, and is well aware of the economy of friendships. Her banter with others around her is not only hilarious but compassionate, as she befriends the quirky Hanna and adopts her into

her family who is traveling together by van across Spain.

Keeping their relationship in mind, I argue that two kisses in the film *Hanna* are worth discussing in order to illustrate that the queer kiss—its ambiguity, mystery, refusals, and the tensions surroundings its ramifications—enables a particular affective geography for queer children, one made possible through loneliness. The first kiss occurs when Hanna and Sophie go out on a double date that Sophie has arranged for them. After the foursome hang together, Sophie heads off with one boy leaving Hanna with Feliciano, a young Spaniard. She is utterly confused about what is meant to transpire now that the music has stopped playing and it is simply the two of them. He, shyly, keeps looking at her expectantly and she, awkwardly, returns his glances and then they both look away sheepishly as they sit under the stars. When he finally moves a tad closer, she abruptly asks him in a somber voice, staring straight ahead disconnectedly: "Are we going to kiss now?" Feliciano is hopeful: "Would you like to?" he says, to which Hanna disaffectedly replies: "Kissing requires a total of thirty-four facial muscles and one hundred and twelve postural muscles. The most important muscle involved is the orbicularis oris, because it is used to pucker the lips." Taking a chance that this rambling means he is permitted to kiss her, the boy leans into Hanna and gets ready to kiss her on the lips. But Hanna instinctively throws him to the ground and jumps on top of him in defense prompting Sophie to come running: "Hanna, you mentalist!" Feliciano, embarrassed, says, "Please, tell your friend I just wanted a kiss!"

Feliciano's heteronormative social and sexual expectation of "just wanting" a kiss holds a lot of weight for Hanna. Her inability to separate physical attack from intimacy

leaves others befuddled; yet, according to what Hanna has been taught by her father, intimacy is interchangeable with violence, care intermingled with strength, agility with one-upmanship. Still atop the boy, Hanna calmly asks Sophie: "Should I let him go?" never losing her composure, and Sophie, appalled but accepting of her friend's oddities replies, "As opposed to what? Yes, you should let him go!" Hanna complies, leaning in close to Feliciano as if to actually kiss him but instead saying, "It was nice." The boy remains on the ground, confused. Sophie's comment, "as opposed to what?" highlights my point nicely. For Sophie, the meaning behind the "what" she asks about is unfathomable, because she presumes there *is* a correct way to feel when you care for someone, just as there are inappropriate and impossible ways—the "opposed to what" that she can't even begin to think through. However, Hanna's queer understanding of affection does not align with this script of intimacy. Raised in the Darwinian manner of "adapt or die" she is misfitted; for Hanna, a kiss with a fist is not better than none, or even a stand-in for affection—it simply is.

For Hanna and other queer children, the kiss becomes, as Anne Carson suggests, a "modified blow"— a deliberate, tactile movement away from the directions that are imposed on children on their path to adulthood (*Men in the Off Hours* 1). Hanna experienced being next to Feliciano as social and "nice." She was not miserable at all with their interaction. However, Feliciano's expectation of the kiss was not the same as hers. He wanted connection and intimacy to assuage their respective lonelinesses and to begin a relationship that would continue along a set heterosexual path. For Feliciano, kissing is the first step to ending loneliness and securing a successful heterosexual

relationship, but for Hanna, the kiss does not mean the end of loneliness. In fact, her violent reaction to his needs relays the message clearly that her loneliness will not be assuaged by Feliciano's lips. Interestingly, throughout the film, Hanna is perfectly comfortable with her loneliness, and even uses it as a means to experience altruism. Indeed, it is Hanna's loneliness and her refusal to expel it that keeps her social, searching for her father and becoming intimate with Sophie. By contrast, what Hanna is supposed to, or ought to feel in the moment of the heterosexual kiss is inconsequential because she cannot recognize the familiarity of emotion, nor read the social cues that teach her how to feel. Her everyday script is a different one where loneliness serves to interrupt how socialities are presumed to work.

The second kiss sees Hanna in an intimate moment with Sophie as the girls are in a bed in their tent together, their bare feet sticking out from under their shared quilt, touching. While the camera angles that depicted the attempted kiss between Hanna and the boy kept the two at a distance (long shots, and background shots that did not reveal the proximity of their bodies) the camera changes its focus for the two girls, capturing extreme close-ups of body-parts and their physical intimacy. Sophie stirs Hanna awake, unable to sleep, though the camera remains fixed on the girls' feet: "Hanna?" she asks, "Yes," Hanna replies, their feet rubbing together gently: "Where do you really come from?" The shot then moves to the two girls' faces as they huddle together under their blanket. Sophie has expectations of Hanna and is demanding that she reveal herself in ways Sophie believes are normal in a friendship. Sophie dictates: "If we're going to be friends you have to be honest with me. Them's the rules." Hanna seems confused, "Are

we friends?" to which Sophie replies, smiling softly, "Yes, I like you … I mean you're a freak and everything but I like you." Hanna replies, "I like you too." Still, she tells Sophie she cannot tell her all about her life because Sophie's safety would be at risk. Now Sophie is confused, the camera focusing in on her full lips and blue eyes. The "rules" of sociality are being misfitted and Sophie is left to negotiate her feelings of "like" for Hanna, and her knowledge of the script that dictates how relationships must feel and progress. "Can we still be friends?" Hanna asks. "I don't know," Sophie whispers. "I mean, I don't really know who you are, do I?" "That's just it," Hanna responds, "Neither do I." The intensity of this moment can be juxtaposed with the comedic effect of the attempted kiss between Hanna and the boy. This exchange between Hanna and Sophie is much more serious and the loneliness between the two girls is interconnected and intersubjective.

When Hanna reaches down out of shot and reveals a piece of paper, she shows Sophie a DNA-scan, which she has stolen from CIA headquarters. The camera then concentrates on half-angles of each girl's lips, nose, cheeks, and eyes as the girls whisper to one another. When Sophie sees Hanna's DNA reports she says, "Are you sick?" and Hanna replies, "I don't feel sick." Sophie's immediate reaction to the information on the sheets speaks to a cultural propensity to see queerness, like disability and mental illness, in pathological terms. Hanna's loneliness (seen in this instance as her quiet, secretive introversion) and her refusal to give herself over to Sophie's prying expectations mark her as a bizarre kind of "friend," leaving Sophie uncertain which direction to follow. As Robert McRuer argues, the queer body becomes the "anti-body" (134) in narratives that encounter her, whereas the supposedly able-bodied subject, in this case Sophie, even

though she is empathetic to some degree, understands queerness and loneliness as indicative of lack: "What is wrong with you?" Sophie asks Hanna the "mentalist" who says defensively, "Nothing's wrong with me," as though convincing herself.

It is revealed later that Hanna's DNA has been altered by the CIA so that she is able to become stronger, possess the highest stamina for pain, have incredible reflexes and memory, and be able to suppress emotions. Hanna has been involuntarily infected with these special gifts. Holding the photocopy of her DNA report like a child's blanket, teenaged Hanna is about to set off to discover what is wrong with her—why she is so queerly made-up. Sadly, knowing Hanna is leaving her, Sophie gently ties a friendship bracelet around Hanna's wrist and the camera captures Sophie's red-painted nails, fingertips lingering atop of Hanna's arm and her finger feathery, rubbing Hanna's delicate forearm. "Thank you," Hanna says, staring at Sophie as the camera slowly pans up the side of her body to her face and rests on Hanna's eyes. Sophie looks at Hanna, widening her eyes, and smiles before Hanna shyly closes Sophie's mouth with her finger. Chatty Sophie is speechless. It is now that Hanna leans over the girl, closes her own eyes and kisses Sophie slowly on the lips. She then sits back and smiles gently at Sophie whose face is satiated, confused, and delighted. The two silently close their eyes and fall asleep.

In contrast to the earlier kissing scene, Hanna's queer feelings about Sophie, her reactions to her, and her own bodily impulse not to do violence to the girl—not to throw her to the ground as she did with the Spanish boy who tried to kiss her—speak to the extraordinariness of the presumption that heterosexuality simply *develops* in all children, the ordinariness of both Hanna's and Sophie's loneliness, and Hanna's care for Sophie. In

the first example, a touch, not even a kiss, collapses love and violence and a host of other affects and actions together in bizarre, simultaneous time. Hanna does not feel angered or threatened when the boy tries to kiss her, still she reacts affectively as though she does. Her feelings are thus unpredictable and impossible to categorize. Was she upset? No. Was she scared? Not particularly. What preempted her violent reaction to the kiss? Her understanding of intimacy, perhaps, but even this cannot explain the affective states she maneuvered through the kiss. The shifting quality of her feelings before, during, and after the kiss follows no logical order and her sentiments are not prescriptive. She pushes the boy away from her before the kiss can be carried out, and before her agency in the act becomes vulnerable to being overtaken by his own. The potential heterosexual plot of the kiss gets lost or queered, and Hanna retains her loneliness. By queering the kiss and turning away from the call to grow up and become an unlonely heterosexual, Hanna, the lonely queer child, deals a "modified blow" to Western progress and normalization (Carson 1). It is for this reason also that her affections and feelings are thought threatening to social networks that rely on such progressions—they are imagined as sickly contagions that must be quelled, cured, or erased.

What is significant about the alternative kiss between Hanna and Sophie is that it is gentle and filled with an affection that is supposed to elude Hanna. Genetically altered to not feel, Hanna, when kissing Sophie, reveals a moment that is incoherent for an adult outside-world that expects Hanna's adultification, stoicism, and genetic superiority. The kiss itself is not without desire either. In fact, given Hanna's propensity to analyze every situation, weighing the options of her survival over the threats of her demise, this kiss is

well thought through and performed with intent. It is another "modified blow" where

lonely Hanna chooses to embrace Sophie, and who closes her eyes in vulnerability,

feeling the sensation of the kiss rather than watching it occur. It is in this way that she

actually gives Sophie much more than the information Sophie demands—her

unconditional love without expectation. Moreover, the queer kiss is not an erotic

precursor to a larger conversation about the relationship developing between these girls,

nor is it Hanna's or Sophie's coming out moment. The kiss becomes a symbol of the

lonely feeling that has helped Hanna connect with Sophie, a lonely feeling Hanna had

never experienced like that, cannot name, and chooses instead to share with her female

friend.

While suggesting the potential for endless possibility, the kisses between queer

children are easier to discuss in terms of what they do not represent: for one, these kisses

do not seem innocent at all, even though critics such as Haffey are quick to suggest

innocence's "association" with childhood (156). Still, queer kisses cannot merely be

reduced to sexual precociousness either. The kisses between the queer children in the

narratives studied here spark neither "illicitness" nor the licentiousness often presumed by

adult kisses (156). And these kisses do not become signifiers for the development of

particular queerly adult subjectivities. These child kisses are not even meant to make

queerness more visible as part of a larger cultural landscape, or to act as coming out

stories, or to educate larger audiences about queer sexuality, as Vanessa Wayne Lee

suggests is the goal of adolescent and child queer fiction (154-155).

Indeed, these kisses are also not meant to trouble futures. Lee Edelman has argued

that intimacies between queer adults are a threatening spectacle for heteronormative

society because of a cultural obsession with the idea that children, generally presumed to

be heterosexual, are the only hope for the future. Edelman states: "The cradle bears

always the meaning of futurity and the futurity of meaning" (117), so much so that

queerness is configured as the antithesis to this futurity. The image of the predetermined

heterosexual Child—*Hanna*'s Feliciano and presumably every child— "regulates" these

political discourses, legitimizing homophobic resonances as a necessary defense of the

hapless child, her future, our future, and the natural order of things. Only the fittest can be

permitted survival. The possibility that the figure of the Child will become tainted with

queerness—what Edelman calls a "spoilation" or "pollution" (113)—marks any queer

intimacy as particularly dangerous for the young. Yet, the queer kisses between children

are not future driven, making them problematic to political structures based on

progression and upward mobility. Unlike adult kisses, heterosexual and queer, that carry

within them a plot filled with expectations of past and future repercussions and happy,

unlonely progressions, or what Edelman calls the irrational "logic of futurism," what

comes next is often inconsequential within the context of child kisses—living through,

moving on, getting over are not as relevant (11). The future of all sexual politics as we

know it is not so much unsettled by these kisses as the question of futurity is unimportant

to the ordinary moment in which these kisses occur. To argue that futurity is being

displaced is not to say the kisses between queer kids are not sexual. On the contrary, they

certainly are; however, there is no language to speak about sexual pleasure and children

that is not already tainted with moral panic, fear, or sensitivity. Therefore, I argue that

affect, desire, intimacy, relationality, and pleasure must be reimagined from a queer-child perspective and one way of doing so is to reconfigure them from the perspective of a singular intimate action, the lonely kiss.

Although Haffey suggests that the kiss has the power to momentarily collapse the distinction between child and adult, I wish to tread lightly here, enabling for the queer child her space alone, without creating a bridge or throughway to adult sexual desire or subjective identity formation. While I agree with the importance of adult recollections of their queer childhood experiences—including their first kisses, but also the societal outrage surrounding homosexual desires—I wish to focus on depictions that work to capture the affective slants that occur during the actual kissing moment as experienced by the child, not the adult looking backwards through memory (Stockton 24). Therefore, the kisses discussed here are not meant to "rewrite history" and are not a catalyst that queers time. They are not "delivered across staggered, folded—kinky—time," as Kate Thomas suggests when discussing historical representations of adult queer kisses (335). In other words, enacting a "different relation to the future" is not all these kisses do (Haffey 151). Loaded with ambiguity, these kisses elude utility or temporal progression in that they do not begin with an end point in mind and, in fact, offer no new beginnings from which to start. Instead of spectacularizing the position of the kiss and the meanings behind such acts, these kisses feel as ordinary and everyday in their chaos as the loneliness that initiates them. While Haffey suggests the kisses seem to enable "the pleasure of a pause in action" (157) and the bridges that "enact crossings across perceived divides" (159), I contend that the kiss itself is not a collective pause at all; rather, it is a turn away from the

ties that bind intimacy to the spectacle of heterosexual progression—a stepping forward

that, although understood to be normative, is forced and enforced. This turning away from

heternormativity is not a marked "sexual turn" (159) from "touching and kissing to

genital sex" (Wayne Lee 156), or a halting of time or even its reconfiguration, but a step

away from the affective path that adolescent intimacies are meant to inevitably follow. In

other words, the act of not turning around to answer the call to fulfill heterosexual scripts

opens up possible spaces for alternative directions and queer affects. As discussed in my

introduction, a turn away from the calls of mainstream politics opens up new directions

and pathways for altruism. For queers, the act of kissing serves as a turn away from

heterosexual expectations and a turn toward unknown relational potentials. As Sara

Ahmed states: "who knows where we [as queers] might turn?" (*Queer Phenomenology*

107).

This next section explores how lonely kisses might speak to the tectonic shifts of

affect that I argue are creating new geographies of feeling, new feelings that do not

register as passions we recognize in our limited taxonomy of emotions. These feelings,

because they are not knowable, are often thought of as "ugly feelings"—ugly for being

strange, unpretty, indefinable, and messy (Ngai 11). By rereading the kiss as a momentary

experience that speaks to the "power" (Haffey 149) of everyday feelings like loneliness, I

suggest that queer kisses make room for a social loneliness that is not accountable to

neoliberal socialities that depend on both financial success and consumerism, and idyllic

emotions such as extreme elation or hyper-happiness to exist. Instead, as representations

of the every day, these kisses offer these children a present moment that is all theirs.

If I Make You Happy, I Can't Be That Bad

Emma Donoghue, whose work on female friendship has shaped the ways in which passions between women are understood and contextualized, uses the kiss as a metaphor for female intimacies of varying kinds. For Donoghue, it is not the act of kissing itself that is of importance but what the kisses do for female connectivity. She explains that "image[s] of the kiss ... like acts of storytelling, mentorship, and love are figured as forms of mutual exchange, in which women use their mouths to connect passionately in a range of different ways, whether sexual or narrative" (Martin 8). This "narrative" connectivity is crucial for enabling women to interrupt the scripted plot of masculine patriarchy, including heteronormativity. For Donoghue, the kiss "embodies an invitation to experience, rather than an imposed norm and suggests an encounter that has the potential to continue in unscripted ways" (Martin 8). However, while Donoghue does much by way of creating spaces for various readings of female intimacy and relationality, the kisses between women that she constructs are meant to lead to "alternative visions of happiness" that disrupt the normativization of heterosexuality (Donoghue qtd. by Martin 11). I believe the kisses between queer children do much more than happily meddle with heterosexuality. They disrupt it, in fact.

As mentioned in previous chapters, Ahmed suggests that happiness gets used as a profiling tool, separating people into types— those who are able to be appropriately happy and those who are not (*The Promise of Happiness* 6). By putting trust in a social system that presumes to "know 'in advance' what will improve people's lives" the notion

that "to feel better" means getting happy surfaces, in spite of and perhaps because of the fact that this privileged feeling is not accessible to everyone (8). For the lonely queer child, an adult presumption that their queerness is a misstep, or illness, a worrying malformation of heteronormativity, coupled with a belief that we can foretell their future "in advance" of their reaching it, interrupts queer children's efforts to both seek alternate spaces for their loneliness and envision lonely horizons that do not see happiness as the limit. While *Hanna* stands out as an unusually nuanced mainstream feature film, the film, *The Nature of Nicholas,* and the graphic novel, *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl*, show how alternative cultural producers are attempting to address the topic of lonely queer children and their intimacies.[67] Like *Hanna*, these resistant texts enact innovative strategies to critique the fears of a homophobic Western culture that sees children's bodies and their feelings and desires as dangerous. For example, Hanna is called a "mentalist" by Sophie—a "lunatic"; her ableist mindset deems Hanna's DNA make-up and the ways in which she communicates with others strange. Still, taking the audience on queer journeys, *Hanna* and these other texts also dizzyingly present a seeming submission to homophobic abjection only to turn this trajectory slantwise. This turn reveals a resistant strategy where loneliness becomes these children's social strength and link to intimacy. All three of these texts pivot on a queer kiss that results in the characters' cultural and literal monsterization; at the same time, though, each text presents us with young queers whose loneliness helps them persevere, enabling them to risk happiness while revealing the

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[67] For other examples of queer narratives about children that blend the genres of horror, graphic novel, and romance see Mariko Tamaki's *Skim*, Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*: A Tragicomic, and the film's *Let The Right One In* and *Autumn Ball*.

beautiful ugliness and ethical landscape of uncertain moments, moments that exist in the every day. In the process, the kisses between these queer children and the monstrosity that results from these events become strategic critiques of cultural expectations of purity and innocence, of progressive development models that pre-inscribe universal heteronormativity, and of calls to be always happy. I begin first with *The Nature of Nicholas'* kissing contagion in order to draw attention to a cultural framework that reveres and yet abhors gay male shame and death, and then I move onto *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl*, where lesbian loneliness is set against queer masculinity and its supposed "riskier affects" in order to critically engage with the process of being rendered secondary, marginal, and shadowy.

 The Nature of Nicholas (2002) is a little-known Canadian film written and directed by Jeff Erbach that exposes Western culture's preoccupation with creating monsters as punitive responses to "unspeakable" deviations from traditional figurations of the heterosexual, masculine boy-child. The film focuses upon the friendship between ten-year-olds Nicholas and Bobby, and the kiss on the lips between them that leads to each boy's literal monsterization. It is this kiss and the eerie silence that surrounds its consequences that I wish to explore in detail. Ten-year-old Nicholas is the quintessential weird boy. He is frail, small, a social outcast at school, lonely, and ostracized by his peers, while at home on his Manitoba farm he is polite, introverted, quiet, and conscientious. His complacent acceptance of his mother's rules is eerily stoic. One afternoon he meets a new boy, Bobby, who is virtually Nicholas' opposite; handsome, muscular, confident, and athletic, Bobby introduces Nicholas to an unlonely world of pre-

pubescent parties and happy-go-lucky, flirty girls. Happily on his way to manhood, Bobby seems poised to drag Nicholas along this path with him.

Fascinated by his new friend, Nicholas begins to sexualize his and Bobby's relationship, fantasizing about loving and caring for Bobby as though he were a helpless baby. Attempting to get closer to Bobby, Nicholas attends a pre-teen party that involves a game of "spin the bottle"; however, when he is locked in the closet alone with a girl who stares at him expectantly, Nicholas freezes. He has no internalized hetero-script to read from. After the party, Nicholas gets up the nerve to kiss Bobby on the mouth. Although Bobby and Nicholas's relationship teeters ambiguously back-and-forth and sideways from the beginning—snaking in between homoeroticism, sexual curiosity, and male bonding—it is only after this tiny, gentle kiss, that Bobby begins his bodily and emotional transformation into a lonely quasi-zombie. Nicholas' lonely queerness, it would seem, is contagious. It is here that this seeming coming-of-age story crosses genres, collapsing its small-town-drama narrative into one of horror. Recalling Hanna's seeming affectlessness, and her body's "sickness," we see how loneliness was written inside Hanna's DNA from birth; she was created to be a solitary stoic whose queer feelings were untenable. Like Hanna, Nicholas—also lonely from birth and raised to remain emotionless—is placed directly in the path of heterosexual social expectation. Feliciano's desire to kiss Hanna and her refusal to do so enables her to connect further with Sophie, creating a queer bond through each girl's loneliness. For Nicholas, a literal closet—a symbol for homosexual repression—traps Nicholas inside with a young girl. Yet, the girl does not want to kiss Nicholas in the ways Feliciano wanted to kiss Hannah. Instead, she stays away from

Nicholas, sensing there is something different about him that she does not like. Bobby, however, is drawn to Nicholas' lonely queerness.

The stereotypical symptoms the science of loneliness warns us about are made tangible in Bobby's body as he begins to monsterize after the kiss. His skin begins decaying and turning green; his lips become chapped and bloody, and his motor skills begin to waver until he is barely audible and unrecognizable. It is as though Nicholas' queerness and loneliness have infected Bobby, turning the once happy boy into an effeminate, vulnerable icon of misery. In using the horror genre's zombie trope and then subverting it by creating a zombie-boy who is neither horrific nor monstrous, the film refits the genre itself in ways that shed light on the horrific pressure we place upon queer children. Hidden away in yet another closet—Nicholas's this time—Bobby is stripped of his confidence and masculinity, and he becomes the needy, shameful, weeping child begging for Nicholas's help. In a word, he is pathetic. His inability to cope with Nicholas's or his own loneliness, and the zombification that results, renders him powerless and completely dependent upon Nicholas for compassion. The monsterization he is enduring for one kiss punishes Bobby for being lonely, infantilizing his body, and returning him to, or turning him into, the hapless child without agency that society desires and requires.

Oddly, while it is Nicholas who initiates the queer kiss between the two boys, it is Bobby who first begins to suffer from the effects of queer monsterization. It is as though Nicholas is invisible, a failure from the start who bears no significance to this narrative because of his lack of masculinity and his outward loneliness. Therefore, he can neither

be held accountable nor mentioned in this queer experience. Bobby has been infected with Nicholas' queerness through the tiny kiss, but it is Bobby who is the focal point. Ahmed suggests that the queer child is often ostracized and misconstrued as a failure, a letdown, because "the queer child fails to inherit the family by reproducing its line" (*The Promise of Happiness* 95). Nicholas' lack, then, is an "affective" one, where he not only fails to feel in the proper, heterosexual ways, but he also becomes "an unhappiness-cause," making his friends unhappy too (*The Promise of Happiness* 95). Yet, although he is the cause of the unhappiness epidemic, Nicholas is still ignored. In this case, the *real* loss is the happy, masculine Bobby whose potential to make his family proud is robbed from him, led astray by an outside affective force. The story takes a more curious turn still as Nicholas attempts to help Bobby become normal once again. Terrified for Bobby, Nicholas calls Bobby's parents' home for help but is confused when Bobby himself answers the phone. Somehow, there are now two Bobbys: queer, lonely, sickly zombie-Bobby and happy, hetero-Bobby. Rushing to his friend's farmhouse, Nicholas finds the healthy version of Bobby playing baseball in the field, looking spry. When Bobby spots Nicholas, as though anticipating Nicholas' reaction, Bobby says right away, "You don't think I know anything about myself? It sure is gross". This "it" that is gross is unspoken, but Bobby knows it is there, and is trying to forget about it. The proclamation that the other Bobby "sure is gross" reveals an ugliness surrounding the kiss Bobby accepted and Nicholas delivered, and the lonely feelings that erupted as a result. Zombie-Bobby has caught Nicholas' disease. When Nicholas tells healthy-Bobby that the zombie-Bobby "needs help," Bobby tells Nicholas poignantly to "just take it out to a field and leave it

there," implying that Nicholas should let zombie-Bobby, a mere thing, an ugly feeling, die in isolation because the zombie-Bobby's queerness is that part of Bobby that is just plain "gross." Watching as Bobby dramatically wipes his mouth free of the kiss the two boys shared, a disheartened Nicholas asks, "You feel badly about it?" to which Bobby sadly replies: "Not any more."

What is important in the scene between the two young queer children is the possibility that surrounds this "it"; while unnamable, the "it" is hated by Bobby. I return for a moment to the "It Gets Better Project," which I discussed in my Introduction, and the ambiguousness of the term "it" (which for Nicholas and Bobby could mean the kiss, their feelings, queerness in general, love, desire, curiosity, and loneliness). The "it" that Dan Savage promises "gets better" is shown here to get better only when the "problem" is expelled—or in this case dead. The "it" becomes replaceable with another happier "it" and healthy-Bobby's notion that he can only truly get better through heterosexuality and happiness, pointing to the homonormative directionality of Savage's proclamations today. What gets better for Bobby? Life, once the unhappiness that is "it," this queer life of uncertainty and loneliness, is done away with. It gets better for Bobby when the queer part of himself dies off and he gets straighter. That is the cost.

Feeling terribly guilty that healthy-Bobby's disdain for the kiss Nicholas and he shared may have created a zombie, Nicholas crawls into bed with zombie-Bobby and maternally massages his back. Cooing to the sickly body, touching him calmly, Nicholas awakens to find that he too has "caught" the zombification syndrome. His queerness and loneliness have interconnected with Bobby's illness to create a super virus that spreads

rapidly between the two boys. [68] Harkening back to the science of loneliness and its Darwinian proclivities, social survival is, according to this film, up to society at large: society must combat Nicholas and his loneliness as though the boy were a rabid animal— a threat that has to be handled appropriately to ensure a common good in a battle where good triumphs over evil. In this case, the film turns to Nicholas' father in order to set Nicholas in the correct direction. In the second-to-last scene of this film, the boys take a turn towards death, and we see Nicholas' dead father—presumably a ghost—luring his sickly queer son to an old abandoned farmhouse. Here we find zombie-Bobby chained to a wall, crying and chanting "don't look at me." Bobby is enslaved and is left to die, and Bobby's chains conjure terrifying reminders of lost queer children such as Mathew Shepard, who was beaten and chained to a fence by homophobic teens. Even though we, the audience, see and fully understand that Bobby, like Shepard, is only a confused boy who has no idea why he is so hated, we are left to watch him being abandoned to die. He is made to feel ashamed of his zombification, and the chains serve as a reminder that queerness means imprisonment for so many in a culture that normalizes heterosexuality.

Despite Nicholas's fears and sadness, his hyper-masculine father seems happy to put zombie-Nicholas to bed, whispering "All['s] in the past; it's all just a part of growing up," softly into his ear. He then covers his son's face with a blanket. These familiar parenting gestures are being reworked here by Erbach to be sinister and suppressive rather than comforting. The fact that the father figure literally tells his child that his queer

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[68] Although not specifically stated by Erbach's characters, the allusion to the AIDS virus seems omnipresent.

kiss and loneliness must become the past and cannot exist in the present moment because the future will be impossible, is intriguing. The future becomes dependent upon a happiness-inflected hetero-narrative of growth, success, and mature development, where boys become men who take women as lovers. Any other path leads to shame and death. This shared knowledge makes the covering of the boy's face with a blanket almost seem like a relief to the audience. In some ways, we are meant to agree with the father, a figure for larger society, that these children are not "right," as we grapple with the deterioration of their faces, limbs, lips, and the tears in their eyes. Somehow, their suffering seems so dire that the blanket covering the face makes us look away, hopeful that the monstrous body will just disappear. After all, no one likes to watch children suffer. Or, rather, no one wants to know they are watching and perpetuating the suffering. Yet, this film forces the audience to identify with these two monstrous children and to not look away from their shaming.

The final scene of the film depicts a very healthy, hauntingly happy Nicholas deciding to approach a young girl who is skipping in their schoolyard, while his ghostly father trails in the distance carrying scissors behind his back as though poised to cut any queer, ugly feelings out of Nicholas' body at the first sign of deviation. The scissors serve also as a symbol of the looming threat of the father figure and can be read in many ways; if the father represents himself, paternity, the scissors might mean he will cut any parental ties between himself and the boy should Nicholas' enforced heterosexuality fail him again. This, sadly, is the plight of so many queer youth who find themselves without

family support once they come out queer.[69] The scissors might also represent the threat of

death that looms over queer subjects who are so at risk for societal violence, abuse, and

suicide.[70] The scissors in this case can be read as a warning that staying straight means

staying alive. Moreover, the scissors could represent an emasculating symbol, a reversal

of Freudian penis envy where Nicholas' father serves to remind the audience, and his son,

that he will castrate the boy—effeminizing him—should he return to his queer longings.

However, I argue, more specifically, that the scissors represent the societal impetus

towards happy, heterosexual affects. The father, a figure for the social, is legitimated in

his enforcement of happiness and heterosexuality because Nicholas's potential as a lonely

threat to social norms must be monitored closely in order to ensure he remains in line.

The father will enforce heteronormativity and make his child, all children, stay—or "get

better"—happy and productive, no matter the cost. The *snip snip* sound of the scissors

lingers as the foreboding soundtrack that ends the film.

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[69] The statistics are staggering around the issue of parental rejection, abandonment and the queer teen experience: in the US alone, 50% of queer youth admit to being rejected by their families after coming out; 40% of street youth are queer teens; 26% of queer teens are told to leave their homes. For more information on the studies used for these statistics, and links to further analysis, see: "Today's Gay Youth: The Ugly, Frightening Statistics."

[70] As many as 1in 3 queer youth have attempted to take their own lives, while 58% of all queer youth surveyed cited desires to do so; 84% of queer teens have admitted to being *often* verbally harassed for their queerness; out of all violent acts against males in 2005 in the US, 61.3% of the attacks were committed against males presumed to be "gay" as compared to the 1.9% who were assumed straight; 64.3% of US teens reported feeling physically unsafe at their school. In Canada, 37.8% of Canadian queer youth have reported being physically attacked by their peers. See: Youthprideri.org; Queer teens hear taunts such as "fag," or "lezzie" or "dyke" in derogatory ways 75 times per day. See: "Using Language to Support LGBT Youth," and Antonia Zerbisias's "Gay Teens Told it Gets Better: Stats Reveal Crisis in our Schools."

At first glance, this film suggests that the homophobia that is written on the bodies of these two misfitted boys—as evidenced by their zombification—is justifiable; that little queer boys don't deserve or are not equipped to survive their own lonely narratives. These two boys' deaths are configured as passive willing suicides where Nicholas refuses to fight his father, who covers his face with a blanket, and Bobby waits for his death to free him of his pain. However, gesturing towards a wider contextual trend in the way we "think" about the child, I suggest that this film indexes a shift in the way we might begin to rethink the queer, lonely child as a figure. Castaňeda establishes the relationship between the queer child, her sexuality, and the temporal expectations that surround her, arguing that, socially speaking, adults appropriate the child figure as evidence of their own human existence, reducing the child to the position of "the adult's other" (165). Castaňeda explains: "the child is both that which must be figured in order to make the claim on the human, and the body from which the 'facts' of human nature's makings must be ascertained" (81). This transformative progression, where the child grows up to become the adult they were meant to be, is considered necessary to the maintenance of adult subjectivity. Children, then, become figures that are used to help adults understand their own subjectivity, a "theoretical resource" that is meant to validate adult origin stories (167). If the child figure is a queer one, then the social implications for heterosexual society are vast as a troubling pressure is placed upon the heteronarrative that supposedly speaks normativity for Western adults. The queer child demands a new narrative.

What I suggest here is that the symbolic Child forces children into a difficult

position where they are split in two, oscillating between embodying our "hope" for futurity, and representing a potential "threat" to society. Since every child has the potential to be queer, in effect, this film evidences that we are enraged by the queer potential of children; we hate queer children so much that we have turned them into monsters, giving us license to be unethical towards them and to react violently to them. In *No Future,* Lee Edelman argues that there are two manifestations of the death drive at play culturally throughout engagements with identity politics, and that each requires a universal understanding of the child in order to function. The first version of the death drive is the one that is invested in a happy, innocent child figure, whose task is constantly to validate a stable, positive adult identity through "identification with the future of the social order" (25). This child keeps the binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality intact; this child is the symbol of the happy futurity. The second version of the death drive is "bound up" with the figure of a negative queer body. This queer monstrosity stands in opposition to the notion of reproductive futurism and the child (pre-heterosexual) as a political symbol (25). This second death drive becomes the one that can be blamed for the destruction of the social. Although Edelman goes to great lengths to reveal the differences between these two drives as they pertain to the figure of the heterosexual child and the queer adult, missing from Edelman's critique is the experiential and material figure of the queer child. He seems to overlook the fact that the queer child is in a precarious position: not yet an adult, not wanting to be a quasi-adult, and not necessarily adhering to the hetero-development expected of her.

In *The Nature of Nicholas*, it would seem that Bobby's and Nicholas' two sides

(lonely queer zombie-boys and the happy heteronormative children they are expected to be) encapsulate and reinforce Edelman's notion of dueling forms of the death drive. But what else could be suggested here? Is there an "alternative story" to be told (Castaneda 165)? If the zombie, as a cultural figure of monstrosity, is thought to be driven only by its impulses and, if, as Edelman suggests, society hinges upon its own need "to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child" (14), then I assert that this film attempts to deliver a child whose body is forced to be the harbinger of both forms of the death drive simultaneously. This film works to create and synthesize a child who is both the Child as symbol (a controlled system on its way to optimal growth who accrues much cultural capital) and the interruptive queer child (who is constantly becoming). It is as if this doubled-child figure is the aporia in this economy of drives established by Edelman—the point where the two drives converge in a way that can be managed neither by the regime of the social, nor by the queer theories of Edelman because these two methods of containment demand the child as symbol and collapse without it. This is one way of explaining why the zombie-boys must be locked away at the end of the film; they cannot be permitted to exist alongside the heterosexual child-symbol because they are seen as a permanent threat. This "shutting away" foregrounds the cost of confounding the normative relationship between the death drive, becoming, and survival. Their shutting away, though, can also importantly be understood as the two zombie-boys actively turning away from the demands of hetero and gender normativity.

Castañeda and Stockton argue for an understanding of children who "cannot be known in advance" (Castañeda 170), a space where children can "grow sideways"

(Stockton 52). *The Nature of Nicholas* gestures to a spatial agency beyond the precipice of adult ontological privilege, where "agency is active in and through the body, where the body may be realized as 'human,' 'child,' 'adult,' or perhaps even some other kind of body" (Castaňeda 168). As not-quite-human, or as a past human who never can be human again, the zombie articulates this child-figure well. In the absence of awareness of his queerness, Nicholas is the single embodiment of two death-drives coexisting in one body, unsplit, thereby collapsing both binary oppositions into a single boy. He is a consequence of a series of messy collisions, refused emotions, and expectations: the social meeting the antisocial meeting the seeming impossibility of a sociality for queer, lonely kids. And yet, the playful potentialities found within this "impossible being" (the zombie who is also a child), who seeps with a strange loneliness and elasticity, create hope that the queer child may "break open the seams of the overarching political narrative," forcing their own queer and social interruption into a cultural script that is trying to write them out (Edelman 124). The boys' zombie bodies act as sites for archiving culturally wasted everyday affects like loneliness; they also offer a bodily space for an agential, transformative queerness that pushes beyond narratives of violent containment.

Acting as their own cultural archives, Nicholas and Bobby are both a fleshy reflection upon childhoods that have collapsed under the enormous weight of an expectant heterosexist culture, and an expression of Western culture's fear of an apocalyptic queer disease that begins with children and ends with a lack of a future. The anxiety Westerners carry that the very children we consider as our future's "hope" will actually betray us points both to our fear of fear itself, and our desire to absolve our fears

in any way necessary. Still, even though they are abused, using the zombie trope, Nicholas and Bobby find imaginative ways to articulate the inarticulable through their zombification. By reimagining the zombie body as a thinking, feeling, vulnerable child who is subject to the shameful betrayal of a heterosexist culture, the zombie genre works to show how presumptions about heterosexual normalcy are created and controlled by a regime that is willing to sacrifice children for its own heteronormative existence. Using their bodily excesses and abjections to create monstrous doubles of themselves, the boys can occupy two very different spaces at once: on the one hand, Bobby and Nicholas represent the hope for a heterosexist futurity, a hope that is conveyed in this film as something that feels very eerily forced and wrong, while, on the other, their zombified bodies (and the kiss between them) disturbs the limits of the proper child who is readily sacrificed to "save" us all. Their loneliness makes the societal conceptualization of their queerness physical; the message written in their subversive pustules refuse to be silenced and their sickly, leaking bodies evidence their resistance to speaking child-queerness along coherent lines, in turn alluding to the subversive potential within the zombified body itself.

But this seems like an overly optimistic way of reading this oblique ending. One cannot simply ignore away the conclusion's suggestion that although queerness is allotted its own space through the doubled bodies—where the queer boys are permitted to exist only as separate, lonely entities—the fact remains that each child is literally kept in chains, away from his own heterosexual version, a pattern that bespeaks the incredible violence that society's paranoia about child queerness does to their identities. This

enforced separation can be linked to the final image of the scissors that Nicholas's father carries behind his back; he is prepared to perform a literal cutting away of the queer side of Nicholas should he resurface. I argue the "communicable disease" (Wald 2) that circulates in *The Nature of Nicholas* through the two boys' kiss is not homosexuality at all, but both homophobia and lonelyphobia. There seems to be an imperative to kill these queer children—to cut them in two. Nicholas' father makes invisible what he deems to be monstrous in the two boys in order to stave off the end of the world. In his attempt to silence the kiss that the two boys shared and the loneliness that is transmitted, and in his decision to lock the zombie children in a closeted shack far away from the "home," the father turns that kiss, the act itself, into a cataclysmic threat to the image of the family. It is important to keep in mind, however, that what is *not* being said here is that these children's queerness became an illness only when someone decided the child, as symbol, must become heterosexual: they are already experiencing themselves as queer and lonely before the adult world begins to work explicitly on reforming them.

Let me conclude this reading by suggesting that this film holds two narratives in tension. The first is the "outbreak narrative" in which a disease (lonely queerness) is contained and shut down by the father who staves off the apocalypse by saving and sacrificing his only son. New Nicholas—happy heterosexual Nicholas—is reconfigured as unlonely and socially acceptable. The social—and Nicholas's and his father's happiness—depends upon queer Nicholas' invisibility. The second narrative, however, is the queer critique in which the monstrous child-boy, Nicholas, speaks back to his father who represents not the hero, but the cleansing regime that renders queer children

monstrous in the first place. Thus, when Nicholas' ghost-father isolates and stops the boys' queerly curious disease at its root (before their queer loneliness can "infect" the rest of the world) he, as the father figure who loves his son, is also the outside world who bullies these two queer boys to death.[71] The father kills his own son and blames the child for killing himself. The father, then, is presented as both a doting defender of human existence and a hateful homophobe who is defending a violent symbolic order—an order that hates these queer children not because they are threatening, but because of society's fear of ugly queer feelings. Zombie-Nicholas is neither a hero nor a monster; he remains abandoned in the dark shack that must stand for both his home and his deathbed simultaneously. Yet, the film triumphs by making visible what our queer nemesis actually looks like—two tiny, crying, wheezing, barely-verbal zombie-children, bound and abandoned, cold and alone—and audiences are called to reflect on the possibility that our paranoia about queerness and queer contagion fosters violent strategies of physical, affective, and discursive containment.

Fear the Queer: Queer the Fear

The Diary of a Teenaged Girl (2002) is a more erotically explicit queer narrative than both *Hanna* and *The Nature of Nicholas* and captures, through graphics and punchy diary entries, the intimate kisses between Minnie and her friend, Tabatha. Western culture's preoccupation with creating monsters is explored through Gloeckner's little known graphic memoir that exposes punitive responses to childhood feelings and

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[71] For an extensive examination of these suicides see Chapter Four of this thesis.

sexualities that are considered "unspeakable." As a genre, graphic memoirs by women tend to examine childhood experiences "*in extremis*," where traumatic and at times "brutal" memories are made political through each panel (Chute 92). As Hillary Chute suggests, the reappearance of the "legible, drawn body on the page" works to "reconstruct" and "repeat" traumas in order to "counteract" them (93). In particular, this "graphic narrative" focuses its attention upon lonely Gloeckner's "inappropriate" childhood sexual experiences, her physical encounters with sexual "strangeness," and the eerie silence that surrounds the consequences of her choices. When Gloeckner's text is juxtaposed with Wright's and Erbach's films there comes into view striking differences between the ways in which Hanna and Sophie and the two boys, Nicholas and Bobby, are configured and the ways in which Minnie and Tabatha are represented. Hanna and Sophie's kiss furthers their intimate friendship, while enabling Hanna to develop alongside her loneliness, while the boys' kiss leads to a contagion of loneliness that exposes the ways in which society monsterizes queer children to death. Minnie's narrative, however, is harder to locate. What seems certain is that Minnie is a tragic character, left both suicidal and alive, her monstrous body physically decaying, leaving her ostracized from the social and judged as too melodramatic to care for. Accused by her mother of being temperamental, and by her mother's and her own male lover Monroe as too "emotionally involved," Minnie is presented to her readers as just another lonely teen girl who is spoiled and depressed (Gloekner 240). Furthermore, she is portrayed as a guilty participant in her own demise: guilty for surviving when she is deemed too weak to take her own life, and guilty for not figuring out how to be happy, wallowing, instead, in

her loneliness. So, while Hanna is permitted to wander as a lonely girl who is only strengthened by her kiss with Sophie, and zombie-Nicholas and Bobby are configured as vulnerable weaklings who reveal the monstrosity of the social, monstrous Minnie is seemingly a manipulative brat who is to blame for her own demonization, whose punishment is to suffer as an outcast pariah. Her unhappiness, therefore, seems warranted, as though happiness were something only available to the girls who stay on a straight path. However, Gloeckner's Minnie complicates the pathos of the other two narratives by offering a protagonist who, unlike Hanna and Bobby who are largely innocent victims of outside directives, is aware of her power to manipulate and be manipulated by adult others. For instance, while Hanna happens upon Sophie because of the path her father lays out for her, and Bobby and Nicholas are swept-under-the-rug together by the father in a plot to erase them, Minnie chooses her directions. She must learn how to work through her Western desire to possess and own those she loves. In doing so, Minnie represents the everyday person who sees loneliness as an ugly feeling and yet cannot escape it. She struggles to accept vexation and being unsettled as the means through which she can become connected to others. Like Waters' Helen or Connell's domestic figure, Minnie very much wants to blame her loneliness on other people, and, in doing so, seeks still others to relieve her loneliness. Still, Minnie, a child with mature ugly feelings, is a powerful character precisely because she is neither innocent nor happy, neither a superhero nor a supernatural figure—she is startlingly, familiar, and ordinary.

When we first encounter "little Minnie" she tells us how grown up she is; she is "mature looking" (4), "likes to be alone," "is not stupid" (3), and "need[s] sex" (26).

Minnie is fourteen years young, with unrecognized adult thoughts. She candidly talks about the boys she has had sex with as though she is an adult and they are children: "I went to Golden Gate Park, to the aquarium, and picked up this really cute little number only sixteen years old" (11). However, the actual layout of the book is interspersed with child-like drawings of homework assignments, funny-looking teachers, girl-musings about crushes, and random ramblings about life, love, and feelings. When juxtaposed with Minnie's very grown-up experiences (intergenerational sex, lesbian sex, drugs, and alcohol) these images seem as though they are evidence of her longing for a lost childhood and yet also they are also signs that she is trapped in it.

Throughout the narrative, "little Minnie" is revealed in a self-reflexive plot that leaves her literally and metaphorically monsterized for the loneliness she feels regarding all of her relationships, including the one with her female lover, Tabatha. By sharing "censored scenarios" between herself and Tabatha, Minnie's everyday loneliness is revealed as that which enables her to think through the ways in which the adult world writes its expectations upon her queer body (Chute 93). *The Diary* concentrates on the every day, literally dating each entry as it happens to occur in the moment of Minnie's life. Many entries act as poignant interruptions of action where Minnie will confess that she is writing in her diary while the person she is writing about is in the room, filling the reader in on the recent event as if we are with Minnie, living her everyday loneliness with her second by second. Minnie is impulsively experiencing the here and now of her feelings, and trying desperately to capture their semblance on the page. For example, Minnie's diary section entitled "My Junior Year" navigates Minnie's queer feelings

surrounding her same-sex desire. At first glance, queerness, kissing, and female intimacy are set up as Minnie's savior from her feared loneliness. Minnie writes, "I wallow in a state of despair, but by and by, I am befriended by a girl named Tabatha" (Gloeckner 193). Nevertheless, as she and Tabatha become closer, Minnie begins to contemplate how loving a girl leaves her feeling disconnected and sickly: "My head is swimming in a poison serum; something is attacking my brain. I feel horrible" (195). In fact, her comments that "I feel so lonely" are inseparable from her proximity to and intimacy with Tabatha and the monstrous reactions society has to their relationship (197). Minnie kisses-and-tells a total of three times in this memoir, and each of these incidents builds on the affective promise of the perfect, happy connection Minnie imagines will emerge after the first kiss she shares with Tabatha.

The first kiss occurs during a screening of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* when Minnie, upset with her male lover, attends the movies alone. Tabatha and Minnie meet at the dark theatre on Polk Street, the perfect setting for Minnie's monstrous romance with Tabatha because the "Frankenstein place" carries within it a carnivalesque feel, where children are eerie, sexual, flamboyant, and crass (202). The *Rocky Horror Picture Show* becomes the backdrop for Minnie's queer feelings—a film filled with monstrosity, satire, fantasy, where things are never what they seem. As they watch the pre-show to *Rocky Horror* together, smoking a "joint," Minnie is intrigued by Tabatha's "tough, feminine style" (216). She is also overwhelmed by her attraction to Tabatha's beauty, writing in her diary that "her beauty seems like an impossibility… When she sucks on a joint it looks like love" (216). Love, for Minnie, has transformed into something that comes from the

mouth of queerness, and she hopes it will kill her own loneliness.

Minnie admits she wants to both "consume" Tabatha and "be her" (216). Loneliness for Minnie is a plague, an emptiness that she wants to fill with promises of happiness. When Tabatha leans in and kisses Minnie "on the cheek" this marks the first physical contact between the two and Minnie is overwhelmed (217). Enchanted, she states "I could feel her warm breath in my ear when she said she really wanted to see me again" (217). Tabatha's promise of wanting to see more of Minnie provides the girl with a respite from her loneliness, and readers, too, are tempted to like Tabatha, to think of her as safe. Of note here is that, as in *The Nature of Nicholas* when Nicholas first meets Bobby, the cartoon depicting Minnie and Tabatha's first time hanging out together shows two healthy looking versions of the girls. Their pre-kissing bodily states, robust and smiling, suggest the rewards of following the rules of heteronormative, psychosocial development, where girls are happy, normal, and untouched (see Appendix 4). Unlike in *Hanna*, where Hanna's physical and emotional body is made stronger through her kiss with Sophie, Minnie is encouraged to stay far away from Tabatha's loneliness and queerness. Minnie's friend Richie warns: "believe me…don't mess with [Tabatha]" (Gloeckner 212); Minnie cannot heed the warning.

The unhappiness, violence, hatred, and lust that are seeping into Minnie's thoughts comes out as a queer sort of loneliness: "I think I'm going insane" she tells her diary; "everything is so loveless and mediocre … I feel like beating the shit out of someone" (213). Wanting to "beat" someone up and wanting to find someone to make her happy places Minnie in a conundrum that turns her attention again to Tabatha. Minnie's

own monstrous affects—loneliness, hatred, and queer love—are evidenced by her strong convictions of hate. Statements such as "I hate men. I hate their sexuality … I just hate them" (215); "I hate myself, I hate him" (217); "I hate Roger and John and lots of other people" (217) seem to be directly related to her connection with Tabatha, and Minnie's queer sexual attraction to her loneliness. It is as though the narrative were trying to tell us that Tabatha is infecting Minnie with a loneliness that displaces "healthy" happiness and a healthy home life. Minnie turns away from her family and home, and towards Tabatha—the "bad-news baby dyke" (203)—and to Tabatha's home which is "nowhere and everywhere," the setting for Minnie's monstrously queer discoveries (216).

The pressure to be happy, however, resonates within Minnie, and pondering her relationships with men, she begins to romanticize what having Tabatha as a girlfriend would feel like. Idealizing lesbian love, like a picture of happiness, Minnie fantasizes about Tabatha's love and hatred, juxtaposed and intermingled. She decides that kissing Tabatha would be "much purer and sweeter than kissing a man," creating the extraordinary out of Tabatha's ordinary kiss (223). On Tabatha's birthday Minnie says, "I feel like I love her" (237); however, this declaration seems ridiculous. Instead of saying, "I love her," the words "feel like" gesture to the queer affects at play here. She convinces herself the only affects available to her and Tabatha are those that provide extreme elation or hatred, while dismissing her loneliness as an unwanted infection. But her loneliness is not a feeling that can be glossed over.

Minnie's bodily reaction to Tabatha's kiss is palpably connected to her idealization of love and hatred, and her desire to end her loneliness. Minnie is certain an

external and unhappy loneliness has infected her *because* of her relationships with others and these relationships' failure to take care of her—to keep her unlonely. Yet, at the same time she romanticizes these intimacies (especially with Tabatha) in an attempt to control her own feelings and to turn Tabatha into what Minnie desires: a reliable, caring lover who can assuage her loneliness. When Tabatha finally takes Minnie to a secluded area, they kiss on the mouth: "We kissed and felt each other's bodies … I just wanted to look at her with my clear eyes she's so beautiful I almost can't look it's like my mind rejects the possibility of such perfection" (239). The lack of punctuation in this confession leaves the reader with the sense that Minnie is writing about the kiss as it is happening, in that very moment. Minnie's understanding here, that perfection is always too good to be true, cannot deter her from validating her ideal: "Everyone says she's so bad but it's stupid what the hell can she do to me?" (239). Tabatha's "dizzy[ing]" effect on her is infectious, all-consuming, and overwhelming; she's uncertain how to proceed and although she has no knowledge of how two girls could "fuck" she is intrigued and turned on; this feeling of discombobulation and disorientation makes Minnie see love as perfection, not an everyday feeling, and she begins to transform Tabatha into a figure of the child-ideal, only queerer. Tabatha will save her from all of the people Minnie has been hurt by and all of the negative feelings Minnie has accumulated throughout her young life because of these hurtful people (Minnie's mother, Minnie's stepfather, Minnie's father, and Minnie's sister). The kiss between Minnie and Tabatha differs from those between Nicholas and Bobby and Hanna and Sophie because while the others use their loneliness to bring their intimates closer, Minnie actually refuses both her own and Tabatha's loneliness and uses

her almost obsessive desire for happiness to possess Tabatha, attempting to change the girl into what she and society deem normal. In this way, the infectious affect is happiness and the false promises it portends.

The loneliness that Minnie tries to avoid leaves her to completely idealize happiness at the expense of the lonely reality of Tabatha's situation and needs. Tabatha needs more than a blanket of happiness to make her life better. The girl needs societal shifts, education reform, policy changes, financial aid, public advocacy, structural and emotional support, and material necessities such as a home, food, and clothing. Minnie, however, misreads Tabatha entirely. In the cartoon depicting Tabatha and Minnie's first sexual contact, Minnie draws Tabatha holding her from behind, groping her breast (238). The caption, however, reads: "Tabatha embraced me." The separation between the idyllic intimacy Minnie craves, on one hand, and the lust/sexual aggression Tabatha displays and wants, on the other, is highlighted here through the negotiation of words and pictures. If Tabatha is pretty, like a picture, the picture itself reveals more than Edelman's child-figure is permitted to do. Plainly, Tabatha is beautiful but she is also sexual, lonely, lost, and manipulative, captured through the graphic and yet somehow misinterpreted by Minnie's words. Minnie attempts to stranglehold the child-figure ideal, and misinterprets Tabatha because of the scripts she has been provided surrounding children and life trajectories. In this way, Tabatha presents a challenge to the child-figure. She steals, gets arrested, is a lesbian, has sex for money, does drugs, and is considered a "sleaze" (231).

Minnie's idealization of Tabatha only takes a terrible turn when Tabatha fails to live up to Minnie's expectations of the child-figure. Minnie's idealization of Tabatha is as

much a part of their dynamic as is Tabatha's refusal and inability to meet Minnie's expectations. Happiness fails its promise to Minnie when Tabatha gets Minnie on "meth" and "dumps" her at her male friends' house (Arthur and his brother) where she trades Minnie's drugged-out-body and sexual favours for drugs: "'Don't you know what they did? They gave me these [Quaaludes]'cause I let them fuck you'" (264). Tabatha has become the evil lesbian who preys on Minnie's body, exploiting her vulnerabilities. Yet, it is only after this incident—when Minnie rejects Tabatha, casting her free—that Minnie starts to reflect on her everyday feelings of loneliness and wonders why she has been so afraid to feel lonely. In a revealing moment dated Sunday, January 23, Minnie writes that Tabatha pushes Minnie somewhere ("she pushes she pushes me" n. pag.). The love Minnie feels for the girl becomes "like" the love Minnie feels for herself, every day, in the present, a love that is not always happy, but honest, mixed with angst, adoration, loneliness, and disdain—a love that is lonely and is constantly propelling Minnie beyond the expectations of a false happiness she cannot conjure up simply because it is expected.

After Tabatha leaves her, Minnie begins to deteriorate physically and mentally, as though strung out on love. Told by her friends that if she remains with Tabatha she will never be truly loved, Minnie's emotional upheaval comes as much from society's refusal to acknowledge the pleasure of her loneliness for Tabatha—much like Kay's longing for Helen—as it comes from Minnie's supposed depression. She states, "I long to be alone but I long to be loved. The pain I feel is leading me into darkness" (256). Blaming Minnie's association with the monstrous children on Polk Street for Minnie's physical and emotional duress, Monroe, Minnie's adult male lover, and Charlotte, Minnie's

mother, decide that Minnie needs to be recuperated back into the hetero social sphere: Their solution? Marriage: "Ok…your mother and me have been talking…and…maybe you and I should get married! I mean—heh—if you can stay away from Polk Street" (254). Monroe is attempting to save Minnie, and himself, from her loneliness by recreating a "traditional" family. But their attempt to work through Minnie on their way to solidifying a heteronormative narrative for her (and themselves) begins to hurt her, making her sickly. Minnie's bodily reaction against her anything-but-happy heterosexual home becomes extreme: "Then something in me snapped and I was overwhelmed by sickness" (256). Minnie's mother blames her physical deterioration on queerness and the loneliness for the impossible that queerness fosters: "Lesbians are really sick because they just want to be men" (266). Just as Nicholas and Bobby awaken after their kiss to find themselves turning into zombies, Minnie, covered in "bruises," "boils," "skin popping" pustules, and with a "green face" (see Appendix 5), is clearly suffering from something. However, the difference between Bobby and Nicholas and Minnie and Tabatha is that in *The Nature of Nicholas* the external world happens to Nicholas and Bobby, where Nicholas's father imprisons the boys in a shack, while Minnie and Tabatha are understood to be deciding their own fates. In *Diary*, Tabatha, like Bobby and Nicholas, is left alive in a deteriorating, decaying drug-infected body, a monstrous, visible reminder that when two girls kiss, their intimacy destroys happiness and social connectivity, thus legitimating punishment. Minnie is left with a choice: live or die.

Minnie provides the reader with a sketch of "the right side of [her] room," her affective geographical position, which complements an earlier drawing of the "left side of

[her] room" (n. pag.). Taken together, the two drawings provide a portrait of Minnie's

psychosomatic space where the Child figure is juxtaposed alongside the adult fantasy of

the Child figure, and these are juxtaposed, in turn, with Minnie's attempts to understand

her position within such a domestic space. Recalling the tent where Hanna and Sophie

share their kiss, and the shack that imprisons Nicholas and Bobby after their kiss,

Minnie's bedroom serves as a further reminder that for society, these lonely queer kids

are only permitted to exist elsewhere, safely monitored, controlled, and away from the

home.[72] In the everyday space of Minnie's bedroom, the real and the imagined—sleepy

cats, liquor bottles, *Crime and Punishment*, religious musings ("I wonder as I wander out

under the sky how Jesus our savior came to die"), prescription drugs, tampons, perfumes,

teddy bear stickers, dirty socks, wine glasses, and David Bowie records—litter the room,

archiving her confusion over being both a happy child figure and the queer antithesis to

this figure. In the drawing of the left side of Minnie's room, two photographs appear

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[72] Playing with shifting temporal moments, we meet Tabatha again in Gloeckner's *A Child's Life* when a grown-up, heterosexual Minnie runs into her, some sixteen years after they last kissed. Tabatha, a "grown homosexual" (Stockton 289), is stuck in a perpetual state of permanent, monstrous childhood— infantilized and "fastened … to the figureless figure of the queer child" (289). Minnie is shocked by her lack of growth and development, and can do little but wish the lonely woman well, telling Tabatha about Minnie's success as a social, heterosexual woman—how she has reared children and is happily married. Tabatha congratulates Minnie— who is healthy and seemingly 'normal' now that she is not surrounding herself with the abnormal child-sexualities she had been around on Polk Street in her youth. Tabatha, the queer child who was both "eerily mature" (291) and eerily monstrous—"quasi-pathological" (293) as a young girl reconfirms Minnie's normalcy, telling Minnie that she cannot take money from her because Minnie needs to keep all of her resources for her children, who are the future after all. Tabatha now represents nothing more than stunted growth, both wasted potential, and the abject queer child, sentenced to never grow up. As she who "fail[s] to possess or to realize [her] potential … she remains a flawed child and an incomplete adult" (Castaňeda 4).

within the cartoon drawing situated above Minnie's bed. In the first photo, the woman (presumably Gloeckner's mother) looks to her left, while the man (presumably Monroe) looks to the right. Both parental figures are looking away from the room as though not wanting to really see what is happening to Minnie. In the drawing depicting the right side of Minnie's room in the mirror we see a photograph of "Minnie" (one of author Phoebe Gloeckner herself) appearing, ghostlike, as though she were watching little Minnie's transformation—her own—from afar, unable to stop her from hurting, or being monsterized, turned into (and seeing herself as) "this wretched body," the "pulsating vessel" that "has a soul of its own" that can do little else but "suck in the muddy black poison" and watch as her "love [is] encased in bubbles that rush to the surface and burst" (187-88).

Minnie's constant, everyday self-hatred gestures towards what I see as a societal movement to reconfigure the notion of the sexual "monster" as the lonely queer child, or, in the case of Minnie, the queer child who kisses and tells rather than blotting herself out through suicide. In consequence, throughout these animated scripts, cultural fears of ugly affects like loneliness, and cultural homophobia—and perhaps most unsettling, Gloeckner's internalized queerphobia—is written on Minnie's body in the form of quasi-zombification where it appears as though Gloeckner is suggesting that Minnie needs to be constantly punished for surviving her own drawings and that this punishment is ordinary. Queer things continue to occur, where bodily excesses and emotional absences collapse into monstrous embodiments of loneliness: "I have so much energy. It's literally coming off my body as steam. I am always hot and my heart is always pounding faster than is

usual" (116). Her unusual sensations are indicative of both her slantwise projection (movement away from the child figure that she is expected to become) and a register of adult resistance to letting little Minnie be anything but a monstrous fantasy they've created to reconfirm their own subjectivities. I suggest here, though, that Minnie's loneliness is, at the same time, recuperative because it allows her to purge and to leak across the containing adult fantasies of children and childhood. She is the abject, a remnant of a failure to reconcile adult desires with her own everyday loneliness, and yet her loneliness enables her to feel rather than be blotted out; her monstrous body— monstrous only in its spectacular portrayal—speaks to her refusal to be anyone's ideal Child.

Thus, the "death drive" is re-imagined in this graphic memoir as a means for the queerly curious child to ensure that her own desires can continue without being forced into a semblance of cultural "acceptability." In this way, Gloeckner's autobio/graphic narrative uses Minnie to unsettle and interrogate "the unthought remainder" *behind* the words printed on the pages of these texts, allowing Minnie's mutating, deformed body to remain strategically uncontainable—outside of her bedroom, outside of the traditional home, outside of the pressures placed upon her to be "normal" (Gilmore 101). In consequence, Minnie's narrative may be understood as that which seeks to undo and redo Minnie herself over and over again, so that her monsterization becomes a means for her to refuse a false happiness and embrace an everyday loneliness that feels ordinary and self-reflexive. Thus, this queerly curious child becomes she who "extends the self in the writing, and puts her [self] in another place" still here, making the story told one that

troubles the "production of identity," gesturing to a space beyond the page and hetero-identities themselves (101). It is through her encounter with Tabatha's loneliness, intermingled with her own, that Minnie is able to challenge the rigidity of a cultural script that either demands her conformity to heterosexist ideologies, or her immediate erasure. However, this does not mean Minnie does not contemplate death.

Ahmed suggests that there is a link between unhappiness, loneliness, and queerness that perpetually "link[s] queer fates with 'fatality'" (*The Promise of Happiness* 103). Minnie's refusal to follow the cultural script of child development certainly leaves her feeling alone and thinking about suicide. There are several instances of Minnie's suicidal ideations in this memoir, instances ignored or dismissed by her mother, friends, and adult lover. The most intriguing instance, however, occurs late in the novel on Saturday, August 21. Minnie writes a poem about dying, and this is accompanied by a drawing of her drowning in a body of water, alone, as happy beach goers above her on sea level sit in boats under umbrellas, facing away. She states:

> AND from this wretched body I speak
> Saying it will be different when I die [. . .]
> when I die I would like to die by
> Drownation in the Ganges River [. . .]
> The hum and twitter of foreign voices/ unaware of my separation
> From them [. . .]
> I suck in the muddy black poison
> The last taste
> My brain is bathed in a black stench
> My heart fights and is freed in a muted scream
> All my love encased in bubbles that rush to the surface
> And burst.

Minnie confesses that she "feels like drowning in a sea of banality" because she "feel[s] so lonely" (195, 197).

Reaching out for help Minnie calls a suicide prevention hotline for teens but the person who answers her call is judgmental and rude to her, blaming Minnie for her lonely feelings. The woman on the other end tells her that her sexual experiences have "been sick" and that Minnie is a "sicko" (282). Quoting biblical passages from Leviticus, the woman calls Minnie a "nobody" (281) and tells her: "You could also kill yourself. You hear me nobody? Take a few too many pills or jump off the Golden Gate Bridge," to which Minnie replies, "fuck you" and hangs up (283). This scene is eerily reminiscent of many of the social reactions teens who have died by suicide have received on their social media sites posthumously.[73] Even so, the fact that this treatment ends this section of the book and begins the Epilogue suggests that Minnie has made a decision to continue living in spite of a society that has given her little room to live in. Minnie's queerness is seen by her mother and Monroe negatively—she is seen to be "'growing sideways'" (Stockton 279) or "slantwise" (*Queer Phenomenology* 107) rather than upwards, as is expected by the society that watches her fail. Nevertheless, while *Diary* traces the imperative to punish the queer child out of existence (writing her out), a double narrative enables Minnie to speak to the subversive sexual potentialities within the monstrous body.

Margrit Shildrick argues that encounters with "the strange" and "monstrous"

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[73] The most recent example of this type of posthumous treatment occurred in October 2012 when Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old teen from Vancouver, B.C. died by suicide only to have her memorial Facebook page bombarded with hateful comments. One person actually coined the term "Todding" to refer to the girl's death, posting a photo of Todd hanging herself, online. See: (Micah Luxen's "Amanda Todd: Bullied"). A Toronto man was fired for remarks he made on Todd's page after a woman in Toronto unveiled his identity. He had stated: "It's about time that bitch died" ("Negative Amanda Todd Post").

reflect not "a discrete event" but rather "the constant condition of becoming" that living requires (1). The dramatic bodily transformations that Minnie undergoes can be understood as a form of what Shildrick calls "embodying the monster" (2), and Minnie's relationships to these changes as she and others around her perceive them produce queer affects and effects that lend themselves to the playful, multifarious, and explorative tendencies of childhood sexuality. Minnie's yearning for a relationship that yields happy perfection brings her body to bear the brunt of the expectations society has of its children. Exemplifying a sort of "arrested development" (Stockton 289) in the sense that Minnie is neither moving forward nor backward, Minnie takes up the space of present, everyday experiences that allow her to remain in a continual state of multifarious becoming rather than to be settled into a particularized subjectivity. [74] Instead of reading Minnie's becoming as a mere example of the "erotic hysteria" (Rubin 6) that threatens the safety of children, or seeing Minnie as a collapsible figure who is symbolic of a belief in an annihilating homosexual "death-drive" (Edelman 12), I argue that her sickly, leaking body indicates a resistance to be turned toward conventional scripts of childhood development. The ending itself might be read as a means by which the narrative closes down such possibilities for multiple becoming, as Minnie is shown without Tabatha, and without any lover. She is single and alone. Yet, rather than attempting to fill a void with an impossible and cruel promise of happiness, Minnie has surrounded herself with the unknown potential the promise of everyday life brings. Minnie is content to be both alone

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[74] For a discussion on how the disabled body plays with "multiple" becomings see Margrit Shildrick's "Queering Performativity: Disability After Deleuze."

and pleasurably lonely. Her loneliness enables her to see her past lover, Monroe, as a man she can neither possess nor change into her happy husband. Tabatha is understood as a past love she cannot idealize or interpret according to her own desires. Minnie's lack of a romantic object and the feelings of loneliness that continue to proliferate are both comfortable and ordinary—a valuable part of the everyday life of being human.

Theorizations concerning the relationship between emotion and humanness are fraught with confusing contradiction. As Lily Cho explains, on the one hand, humanness seems to be demarcated by one's ability to feel: "the reliance upon emotion and feeling to humanize the figure of the citizen depends upon the idea that emotions are an indication of human subjectivity" (280). On the other hand, we have the "feeling dead subject," in this case, children (281). Let me build on Cho's insights to suggest that the monsterized, zombified child reveals the everydayness of ugly feelings and the potential for compassionate sociality to surface amidst these feelings. Furthermore, happy feelings— such as heterosexual love—are used through these children's stories as weapons, used in ugly, hurtful ways. These queer, lonely children are punished by a happy heteropublic for their queer intimacy, and relegated to the role of citizenship's constitutive outside, to "feeling dead." Whereas adults rely upon the child-figure to reconfirm their humanness and their ontological necessity, the child-figure is constantly burdened by the expectations of their development—they are expected to grow up, mature, even out, and become someone else. The beautiful aspect of the zombified queer child is that she exists in a liminal space; she has failed as human and child, and yet her complicated feelings live in the everyday. These zombie-children are certainly not evacuated of emotion; rather, their

loneliness is seen everywhere refusing to transform them into happier selves. As

Halberstam states, "failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood" (3),

and for Hanna, Nicholas, and Minnie their failures may serve as their successes; for the

zombie-child (the lonely, queer child) it is their existence in a state between human and

unhuman, alive and dead, and between two idyllic and yet impossible feeling states

(which precondition pure-innocence and evil-monstrosity), that enables these kids to play

in a loneliness littered with affective possibilities beyond heteronormative happiness. I

suggest here that the real threat the zombie-child poses to the human adult is indeed a

challenge to familiarity and recognition. Homophobia, therefore, becomes the fear of

inherent possibilities and incoherencies, not a fear of an outside attack or threat. The

potential for development that we impose on the child-figure gets reordered and regifted

as the potential and possibility that we adults, too, might be inconsolably lonely and

queer.

The notion that heterosexuality is a precondition rather than an option transforms

hetero-complacency onto a "truth" and, as Cho explains, "real subjectivity can be an

indication of monstrosity" (281). Adapting Cho's point about citizenship codes in the

context of migration, I suggest that it is this uncertainty (of our own sexuality) and

subjection to normative codes that is the source of horror. It is true that lonely, queer,

zombie children are dismissed, hidden, killed off, punished, and are appropriated in these

narratives. However, rather than this zombification materializing as a way of symbolizing

a re-socialization, where a misunderstood child needs simply to be better understood,

accepted into the social, cured of her loneliness, I argue that these children's loneliness

and willingness to experiment with singularity radically disorients affect and

development. The kisses these children share with one another do not advance loneliness

states, or further infect these children with queerness. Their loneliness does not seep out

of their bodies into the world to infect others, pulling happiness out of the social with its

monstrous grasp. Rather, the kisses shared throughout these narratives permit loneliness

to be lived as an ordinary, everyday feeling that brings young, queer children together,

socially, emotionally, and physically. It is in this way that the lonely kiss is an act of

altruism, care, and connectedness and not an act of alienation—not a feeling in service of

happy endings, but, rather, in accordance to lonely beginnings. Disruption and

disorientation occur not because these queer youth are reimagining queer times and

spaces where they too might be acceptable, but because these children are represented,

first and foremost, as experiencing the present everyday moment in which their loneliness

feels ordinarily queer. Misunderstood by a hetero-public that seeks their erasure and a

queer public who does not know what to do with them, underestimated as agents who can

perhaps one day pen their own resistance, these kids redefine what it means not only to be

a queer child, but a lonely human desiring a social that is not yet here.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tripping Over White Lies: The Lonely (Dis)abling of Neoliberalism

This play will be deeply offensive to the deaf/blind community, so please don't tell them. Keep your hands shut! (Savage, *Miracle!*)

'Kids. Don't use the R-word. It is Totally Gay.' (Colbert*, Colbert Report* March 2011)

Miserable Lesbians

On Friday, October 4, 2010, a mere two weeks after the high profile death of Tyler Clementi in the U.S., the lifeless bodies of 21 year-old Jeanine Blanchette and her 17 year-old girlfriend Chantal Dube were found in a wooded area behind a social services building in Orangeville, Ontario. Eventually deemed a double suicide by police, the lesbian couple's disappearance drew little attention from the local or national media and even sparser attention from the Orangeville Police Department. Given the warning signs the police received concerning the girls' disappearance this lackluster reaction seems confusing if not downright negligent. Even though friends received "goodbye phone calls" and "letters" from Blanchette on Tuesday, October 1; even though, upon her child's disappearance, Ellen Blanchette—Jeanine's mother—immediately went to her daughter's apartment to find it "a disaster," the computer completely "wiped of its memory"; even though Jeanine's friend contacted police telling them Jeanine had called her with an ominous message saying "it was the end"; and even though Ellen is a person living with a disability (a self-professed "amputee"), who clearly expressed her fear that she couldn't physically search certain areas without police help, the police still told the families of the missing girls not to worry themselves. These things "take time" they insisted (Halliday).

Perhaps more troubling is the fact that the authorities went further, assuring the families that the girls had simply run off together and that their disappearance was a predictable attempt at feminine manipulation, or, as one officer explained, "an attention grabber" (Dempsey). After all, girls just do this—they run away. A senior officer even bet "a week's salary they would be found," reducing Blanchette and Dube's vanishing to an example of girls playing a game of angsty rebellion, and their loneliness to a nuisance not worth exploring (Dempsey). By the time the police decided to begin the search—four days into the girls' absence—it was too late. Jeanine Blanchette's cousin, not the police, found the two girls lying together, dead already, nestled in a cover of trees.

What I find especially problematic here is that when the girls were eventually found their deaths (although understood to be undeniably tragic), when and if they were mentioned at all, were described by the media as losses that were inevitable, foreseeable even, because of the girls' presumed unhappiness. Coverage of their deaths was limited to a few newspaper articles and blogs, each weighing in on the lonely affective dispositions of Blanchette and Dube, effectively creating a narrative that focused on the girls' internal psyches rather than contextualizing the lives they'd lived together as a young couple in the everyday world. For example, in a disturbingly sanitized post entitled "Two Young Lesbians Commit Suicide in Canada," media mogul and Hollywood gossip maven Perez Hilton suggests that the reason Blanchette and Dube died was simple: they were mentally ill. With his website PerezHilton.com branded across the mug-shot-like photos of the two young women, Hilton asserts, "this is just too tragic" ("Two Young Lesbians"). By branding these young women's photos, Hilton proves he is concerned primarily with both

owning and then selling these girls' images in order to market his own website.[75]

Moreover, by choosing to render the girls' feelings extraordinary with these two

particular close-up photos—each depicting the young women in affective moments either

eerily solemn, in the case of Dube, or hyper-emotional, in the case of Blanchette—each

girl is, in effect, put on trial by the press, criminalized for both her emotions and her

suicide. Presenting the girls as unwell mentally, Perez's declarations separate himself

(and perhaps the gay male audience he so often discusses) from what he outs as an

instability within lesbian identity.

In his earlier posts concerning the suicides of young, gay male boys Hilton

presents their deaths as symptomatic of cultural bullying and homophobia. For instance,

of Jamey Rodemeyer's suicide, Hilton writes that the boy "took his own life due to

bullying" ("Jamey Rodemeyer's Mother"). Commenting on both Lance Lunston's death

in January 2011, and Jamie Hubley's "devastating" death in October 2011, Hilton

surmises that each boy took his own life only "after relentless" social torment, and after

"being … long-time victim[s] of anti-gay bullying" ("Another Gay Teen"; "Devastating:

Gay Teenager"). "Love is louder," he proclaims about the young boys' deaths, and we

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[75] Accusing Hilton of being "the world's most famous cyber-bully," Chez Pezienza argues that Hilton's "entire career is based on publicly humiliating anyone he personally feels deserves it," and that Hilton has made "himself rich by indiscriminately circulating images" of celebrities in private, homoerotic sexual circumstances. Hilton even goes so far as to draw "semen" across images, claiming they should be "drag[ed] … out of the closet" in order to talk about their "sexuality" in public. For instance, he outed Lance Bass publicly as gay before the man had a moment to do it himself and yet "comes to the defense" of Tyler Clementi, chastising Dahrun Ravi for going public with Clementi's sexuality (Pazienza).

must learn how to better "relate to others" ("Another Gay Teen"). And yet, the deaths of

Dube and Blanchette lead Hilton to surmise that the girls' choice to "commit" suicide

emblemizes mental "depression" and weakness—their own disabling affects. Hilton also

suggests that these girls were not able enough to "get better." Hilton explains: "It breaks

our heart that despite their best efforts, they couldn't find the strength within themselves

or each other to hold on" ("Two Young Lesbians"). Hilton's presumptions surrounding

the girls' deaths privilege male strength and tragic victimization, dismissing Dube and

Blanchette along with Blanchette's mother as hyper-feminine hysterics who are too weak

and too incapable to fight for survival ("Two Young Lesbians").[76]

The overall quietude surrounding Blanchette and Dube's deaths speaks to a

troubling and confusing gender bias that conditions social reactions to lesbian desire,

intimacy, and affect. Western society is, comparatively, far more eager to revere and

make heroes out of gay male youth who die by suicide, heralding them as brave victims

of homophobia. This eagerness is especially evidenced by gay male figures in the media

such as Perez Hilton who feel the need to outwardly stand up for these young, male

voices. In 2007, 13 year-old Shaquille Wisdom took his own life after being endlessly

bullied by kids at his school in Ajax, Ontario. The media coverage of Wisdom's death

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[76] Other news sources tended to agree with Hilton, concentrating on the girls' mental ineptitude rather than other possibilities surrounding their deaths. Reducing the young women's suicides to an inevitable symptom of Blanchette's independent depression, AutoStraddle.com (one of the more sympathetic online sites) states: "letting someone still in the throes of a depressive episode out of the mental hospital can be like letting someone out of the hospital still bleeding from half the places they'd entered bleeding from" ("Missing Lesbian Couple"). The fact that the two girls died together, and were an open, out lesbian couple seems inconsequential, as does Dube's personal agency in the suicide.

was remarkably different from public reactions to the Dube and Blanchette suicides. Described by the media as a murderous example of gay bashing, Wisdom's death initiated a strong social response throughout Canada as people rallied against what they saw as the growing pandemic of homophobia. The idea that a young man would be driven to take his own life was portrayed as leaving the Canadian public heart-broken. As one supporter exclaimed: "words did more than hurt [Wisdom]. They drove him to kill himself" (Kelly et al.). Wisdom's death prompted a public outcry for Canadian education reform against homophobia, and sparked amendments to sexual education across the country.[77] I cannot help but wonder: why, for Wisdom, did the media coverage speak tragedy and loss, attributing the death of the boy to the violent hatred of others, while Dube and Blanchette's deaths were construed as unhappy inevitabilities that had nothing to do with bullying?

The fact that Blanchette and Dube were taken seriously neither by the state (specifically, the police department) nor by the media after their deaths speaks to what I understand to be a Western fear of queer affects. I contend that, under the guise of empathy, tolerance for sexual diversity quickly collapses into a script for particularized gender control and misogyny, evidenced by what I see as a marked split between public sentiment towards lesbians, on the one hand, and particular gay male subjects, on the other. This reaction, or lackluster non-reaction, to the deaths of two lesbian girls

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[77] Including: Krishna Rau's "Gay Teen's Suicide"; "Shaquille Wisdom Tribute"; "Hour of Remembrance."

poignantly demonstrates the ways in which lesbian desire is considered debilitating and filled with unpretty or "ugly feelings" (Ngai 10)—affect's unmentionable "bad" feelings (Love 159). As victims of their own *internal* complexities, lesbians are always already not happy. As such, lesbian youth are ignored, their sadnesses undercut as if they are not quite serious enough, their fears treated as banal, "depressive episodes," and their anxieties refuted for being too emotionally inflected to be tolerated ("Missing Lesbian Couple Found").

Focusing on the promise of upward mobility inherent in neoliberal discourses that see heterosexuality as an inherent part of a healthy Western narrative, I suggest that a promise is circulating through a variety of neoliberal lies, each professing that Western liberal democracies accept, respect, and include queernesses of all kinds. However, a disquieting narrative moves within these discourses that promises an explicit tolerance for particularly privileged types of gay-male homosexuality and the dismissal of lesbian intimacies deemed unable to be tolerated. I explore how this notion of neoliberal tolerance secures an able-bodied normalcy in its privilege by configuring the lesbian body and mind as debilitated.[78] While there are important cultural debates currently underway concerning what it means to be considered, recognized, and often times judged disabled, as well as an at times fraught relationship between disability and madness studies (Wolframe as qtd. by Price 267), for the purposes of this chapter I explore notions of psychological, biological, sensory, and cognitive "disability" in tandem in order to

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[78] For an in depth discussion on the connections and tensions between the terms "mental/madness" and "physical" disability see Jim Read et al.'s *Speaking Our Minds*, Margaret Price's *Mad at School* and Kim Hall's *Feminist Disability Studies*.

articulate the ways in which Western discourses surrounding ableism manipulate the notion of "normalcy" to exclude lonely lesbians.

In *Mad at School,* Margaret Price argues that those with psychological disabilities—or "madness" as emerging "Mad" scholars and activists such as PhebeAnn Wolframe and Pat Capponi argue—actually "suffer from "an inability to be received as valid human subjects," marking the "mad" cultural and "rhetorically disabled," lacking all "basic human rights" and "freedoms" (26). Price explains, "if one can communicate and be received as a valid communicator, one can be included" (27). Blanchette and Dube's sadness—their label as "depressed" girls—served, for the media, as a means to dismiss them as failures, unable to overcome their flaws and destined to succumb to them. The loss of their lives becomes their problem, not ours, stemming from their impaired ability to "communicate" in a Western society that preaches tolerance for diversity. As such, Dube and Blanchette went unheard. More specifically, their lesbian loneliness alienated each becoming-lesbian girl to a status as not-quite-human, not acceptable, incapacitated and debilitating to others—in this way they were deemed less than human.

The industry of optimism as discussed in previous chapters is inextricably linked to a neoliberal fantasy of perfection. The neoliberal body is capable, able-bodied, and constantly considered upwardly mobile; its ability to thrive marks its persistent orientation towards future progress. Neoliberal affect is happy, optimistic, and always concentrated on future economic and social success (as per Berlant and Ahmed). However, whereas historically subjects who were not "able" to embody this impossible standard of remarkability were dismissed as monstrous discards, "unsalvageable" and

thus "stubbornly inhuman," today they are paramount to this neoliberal paradigm of health and wellness (Mitchell and Snyder 4). The seemingly "debilitated" both mark the capable as such—ever thriving—and aid and abet the proliferation of successful "finance capitalism" (Puar, "The Cost of Getting Better"). As Jasbir Puar argues: "debility pays, and it pays well" ("The Cost of Getting Better"). Still, these methodologies also suggest a marked division between the necessary and the valued, where, unless the subject has lived a long, sustained life of normative "ability," they, and their bodies, are thought to have failed to be human in some way. Their quality of life is thought to be suffering and their capacity to be independently productive is presumed lost.

Terry Galloway's *Mean Little deaf Queer*, which I will discuss at length in the latter part of this chapter, negotiates this paradox of Western culture where the not-quite-able-enough body is expected to become as "able" as possible in order to be afforded human rights. I turn to Galloway's memoir in order to explore the ways in which the lies she tells blur the lines between able and "unable," lines that are further troubled when Galloway's sexual and bodily desires and the deafness that has become part of her identity transcend normative paradigms of disability. Galloway's lies, her outright refusal to be "true" to her disability and the expectations that come from the various communities that attempt to define her—feminist, theatre, disabled, able-bodied, female, queer—enable an exploration of what it means to betray the identities you were once saved by. Galloway's dishonesty—and the loneliness that travels within each communicated lie—yields a politics of altruism that defies easy boundaries between deaf and hearing, straight and queer, heard and unheard privileges, while refusing to simply be better.

"Just Fly to Paris": Getting Better One False Promise at a Time

The paradox between promising that life gets better for you even though you are different, and showing you that the best way to happiness is through making necessary changes to yourself and your life so that you can become acceptable by the normal populace, is made clear through Dan Savage's "It Gets Better Project" (IGBP). Here queer suicide is understood as an expected symptom of a disabled population, while, simultaneously, choosing to live becomes glorified as a profitable decision that brings the queer subject closer to normalcy—recognition and ability. Furthermore, the queer subject who chooses to live, to continue to "thrive" in a neoliberal moment, is celebrated as an implicitly masculine subject, continuously working hard to someday be capable and normal (read heterosexual, white and male). As mentioned in Chapter Three, in recent months, Western public and social media attention has spotlighted gay male youth suicide sparking a media-frenzy of responses, including a surge of online outreach initiatives by bloggers, Tweeters, and a slew of famous celebrities like Cindy Lauper,[79] Daniel Radcliffe,[80] and Lady Gaga.[81] Although this outreach has done much to show public support for gay teens, I am concerned with what messages are being inscribed within these initiatives. I explore here gay male ability alongside lesbian debility, and how these labels are delineated and supported.

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[79] See: (truecolorsfund.org)
[80] See: (thetrevorproject.org)
[81] See: (bornthiswayfoundation.org)

As I explored in the introduction to this thesis, Dan Savage's "It Gets Better Project" (IGBP)[82] began as an online site where queer and LGBTQ youth and adults could post supportive video messages to other youth who might be struggling with bullying and homophobia. Savage's IGBP attempted to create a safe space in order to speak out against suicide. Each video, of which there are over 12,000, relays a personal message meant to provide proof that "it," life, truly "gets better" for homosexual kids after middle and high school. The overlaying message of the IGBP is that survival is the key to "getting better," and that surviving homophobia necessitates a "growing up." After all, you cannot get better if you are not alive. Savage himself states: "however bad it is now it gets better. And it can get great … but you have to tough this period of it out, and you have to live your life so that you're around for it to get amazing. And it can. And it will" ("Dan and Terry"). What quickly becomes clear, however, is that while this campaign professes to speak to all LGBTQ youth, what emerges is a set of videos that specifically speaks to white, middle-class gay boys and a romanticized notion of able-bodied gay freedom that leaves lesbians and other minorities on the brink of invisibility.

As I will be arguing, the IGBP celebrates an image of neoliberal capacity in the form of capitalist gay male visibility, while evidencing a widespread lack of political information, care, and sentiment for young female queers, especially those deemed lonely and incapacitated. For example, the original video that began the IGBP, posted by Savage and his partner, Terry, in September 2010 (just weeks before Blanchette and Dube would take their lives), paints a canvas that promises normativity and extraordinary privilege,

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[82] See: (itgetsbetter.org)

with little thought to the actual everyday lives of the teens they might be talking to. Revealing the entirety of his personal love story with "Terry," his partner of "sixteen years," Savage tells us that on her deathbed his mother told Dan to tell Terry that she loved him "like a daughter" and as "[Dan's] spouse." Savage reiterates often that the heterosexual families each man grew up within worked hard to "love [them], respect [them], [and] include [them]" as "members of the family," and should be celebrated for their openmindedness. Savage then narrates that the best day of his life was when he and Terry "adopted a son" named "DJ." His happy reflection reveals that he never thought he'd ever "be a dad," or that he would give his "mom and dad another grandchild." Recounting a "happy memory," Dan describes the time he, Terry, and DJ went "to Paris as a family" and "watched the sun come up with the Eiffel tower in the distance." Photos of the world travelers strolling the streets of Europe and snowboarding in the mountains flash while overtures of calming music accompany the happy slideshow ("Dan and Terry").

A neoliberal discourse of accommodation and tolerance is weighted heavily here as "Dan and Terry," and the message they send out, celebrates their newly found tolerance by their families and the heteronormative sphere's superior ability to create a "special" space for gay male recognition. Moreover, Savage's message reifies neoliberal ideologies surrounding punitive justice, patriotic freedom, and national superiority: "your life can be amazing," Savage promises, just as long as you "tough" your way through the present moment. Never, he argues, end your life because then "the bully's won" and "you've deprived yourself of so much potential happiness." This "us" versus "them"

rhetorical argument dehumanizes the figure of the bully to a monstrous other who is attempting to thwart the "potential happiness" and success of the able-bodied homosexual, when in actuality the "bully" is the heterosexual social sphere that Savage commends, celebrates, and strengthens.

Savage's judgmental presumptions that "miserable people like to make other people miserable" demarcates "happiness," synonymous with Paris, adoption, marriage, recognition by the state, and tolerant family members, as the only affect worth pursuing. Even though the pursuit of happiness, freedom, and the strength of a nation is what many homophobic institutions—the military, government, public services that enable adoption, marriage, health care, immigration—base their values upon, Savage continues to fight for national pride. As President Obama's own "It Gets Better Project" video states: "as a nation we are founded on the belief that all of us are equal and each of us deserves the freedom to pursue our own version of happiness … that's the freedom that enriches all of us. That's what America is all about. Every day it gets better" ("President Obama"). The fact that this promise is a blatant lie, that everything certainly does not get better for the vast majority of people who are considered queer, racial, class, bodily, sex, or gender *others* does not seem to matter. What matters is the message that by "sticking out the bullying and despair of high school" you'll live to "be the envy" of all those others who picked on you, who will see how "ecstatic [you are] to be alive" because "living well is the best revenge" ("Dan and Terry"). Messages in the IGBP also reinforce ideas of extraordinariness and entitlement—"sticking it out" in the present only to see your way through to the future. And this future promises that you can be "a son," "a brother," "an

employee," "a friend," and that this world will not even give "a thought that [you're] gay." As one video begs of youth: just please don't "give up before the miracle" that this promise offers can be made available to you ("It Gets Better: Visa Employees"). But what about those people who are not afforded the opportunity, privilege, or "miracle" of "living well"?

Some important critiques of the "It Gets Better Project" have noted the conspicuous absence of particular subjectivities, suggesting that "queer people of colour, trans*, genderqueer and gender nonconforming youth, and lesbians have not been inspirationally hailed by the IGBP in the same way as white, able bodied gay male liberals" have been (Puar, "In the Wake"). Pointing to the notion that "successful" gay maleness is inextricably linked to neoliberal discourses of success, ability, and progress, Jasbir Puar states:

> [Dan] Savage embodies the spirit of a coming-of-age success story. He is able bodied, monied, confident, well-traveled, suitably partnered and betrays no trace of abjection or shame. His message translates to: Come out, move to the city, travel to Paris, adopt a kid, pay your taxes, demand representation. ("In the Wake")

His is "a mandate" that demands one "fold" oneself "into urban, neo-liberal gay enclaves," harkening to a discourse of "liberal handholding" that advocates an upwardly mobile form of rising from the ashes (Puar, "Ecologies of Sex"). With this upward mobility has come the idea that queers need to be accommodated by heteronormative society, and can do so through the legalization of marriage, inclusion in the military, and thriving in the corporate sphere.

"It will get better" speaks to a call to upward mobility that "echoes" neoliberal understandings of progress, growth, and the ability to thrive. As Lisa Duggan and Richard Kim note, "these goals align too neatly with those of social and economic conservatives: seeking to join rather than critique and contest the inequalities and injustices of the privatized family, the imperial state, and the neoliberal market" ("A New Queer Agenda"). Indeed, the "It Gets Better Project" mimics the "pull yourself up from the bootstraps immigrant model" so widely used post World War II, without presenting a clear message that argues for the equality of racialized subjects and minorities (Puar, "The Cost"). Further, according to Puar, Savage's insinuation that "things are indeed supposed to be better" for white gay men reinstates a "white racial privilege" that was originally "lost by being gay," thereby making the rise of the neoliberal subject dependent upon the silencing of other queer voices ("The Cost").[83] Criticized also for his biphobic rants, his transphobia, sizeism, and ableism Savage and the IGBP particularize and celebrate the arrival of the neoliberal gay male subject and his ability.[84]

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[83] Much has been made of "the limited racial parameters" of the IGBP and of Savage himself. For example, Savage has been accused of spreading racist stereotypes and Islamophobia. In his 2008 congratulatory post about President Obama's win, Savage takes the opportunity to voice his sadness that Prop 8 was halted by those whom he believes to be black Americans, accusing African Americans of being "homophobic" without seeing the offensiveness of his "racially-charged" views. "Black" queers accepted by Savage or who post videos to his IGBP do so as though they are exceptions to what Savage sees as the rule of black homophobia. In this vein, Savage's project accommodates blackness as long as its colours are gay first and foremost. He has also been chastised for his Islamphobia, putting his support behind the U.S. military and arguing that the Middle East must be "invad[ed]" and "rebuil[t]" by the U.S. in order to "free the Iraqi people" from the "Islamo-fascism" they face from the "Saudis"(Grisham).

[84] For a discussion of Savage's biphobia, see "Womanist Musings"; For a discussion of Savage's transphobia see "Dan Savage Gets Glitterbombed"; For a

Savage's project also successfully denies the idea that homosexual boys and men are debilitated or queer in any way by re-branding them capable—"as capacity" itself (Puar, "The Cost"). While not his intention perhaps, Savage's project and the capitalist sponsorship support he has built around it still reify other bodies as "erroneous," while the gay male teen is indoctrinated into neoliberal acceptability (Puar, "The Cost"). Thus, his version of "queerness operates as a machine of capacity" putting a queer name behind multi-million dollar corporate industry and the discourses of neoliberal progress and success it seeks (Puar, "The Cost"). Savage successfully deploys a "politics of sympathy" that converts gay trauma and "injury" into productive "cultural capital" aided and abetted by philanthropic digital technologies such as Google, the IGBP's main sponsor, that promise altruism and social connectivity ("The Cost"). As has been evidenced historically, there are rich benefits for corporations looking to do philanthropic giving, and although Savage's project was begun to help struggling gay youth, his corporate sponsors, like Google, are not suffering from the popularity of the project.[85] Furthermore, corporate reputations actually get "cleansed" by being associated with such charitable projects as the IGBP, even if these businesses do nothing else to change their politics or practices. Not dissimilar to other projects that seek corporate sponsorship and support from anyone and everyone who will lend their names—such as the "Making It Our

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discussion of Savage's sizeism see "Dan Savage and Fat Phobia"; For a discussion of Savage's ableism see: "Dan Savage's Play 'Miracle!'" and Smith's "Dear Imprudence."

[85] For a discussion on corporate sponsorship for causes such as breast cancer see Gayle A. Sulik's *Pink Ribbon Blues;* for a historical understanding of the complexities of corporate giving see Kathleen Waters Sander's *The Business of Charity*; for an overview of corporate giving see Leo Gorarke's *The Ethics of the New Economy: Restructuring and Beyond*.

Business Campaign," an initiative launched in 2007 by Barbara Bush and the Dubai

Chamber of Commerce and Industry to "raise awareness" about breast cancer in the

"Middle East" ("Mrs. Bush's Remarks")— the "It Gets Better Project" often celebrates its

successes while not calling into account who is putting its name behind its initiatives.[86]

Ironically, many of the teens who have died by suicide in Canada and the U.S. in

the past five years cited their feelings of lonely incapacitation well beforehand,

identifying as reasons for their feelings of alienation factors such as their lack of access to

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[86] For example, Republicans, The Conservative Party of Canada, Target, Nokia, Visa, Telus, and Google have all put their "brand" behind the IGBP even though, ironically, their governing strategies and companies have done much to exclude the queer populace from their own anti-gay policies, business ads, and campaigns in the past. They also have done nothing to change their policies in the present. Visa recently was criticized for running what many thought was a homophobic ad around the Saints football team. See: "Homophobic Visa Commercial"; Target was recently severely criticized for contributing a large sum of money to Minnesota candidate Tom Emmer's political campaign. See: Alex Blaze's "Get Equally Screwed Over." A right-wing anti-gay politician, Emmer is known for donating funds to Christian Rock bands who promote a "kill the gays" rhetoric in their lyrics and messages to school children. See Michael Airhart's "Minnesota Republicans in Bed"; The Conservative Party of Canada, who has attempted to stop gay-marriage, continue to make it impossible for at risk gay-immigrants to seek asylum in Canada, have halted Bill-13 that would make it law to have Gay/Straight Alliances in every school that wants them, also posted an It Gets Better Project video (see "Tories Release It 'Gets Better' Video.") Google, the largest sponsor of the IGBP recently launched its new Google Pro software by using Dan Savage's name, and the Project videos to showcase Google's technology to competitors. Of this alliance between Google and Savage, one naysayer stated: "That's making blood money off of our teenagers so bullied that they can't think of any other way to make things better other than suicide" (See: "Google Ad Showcases It Gets Better Project: Blood Money?"); Outwardly anti-gay Republicans Leonard Lance, Frank Lobiondo, and Jon Runyan also made an "It Gets Better Project" video even though they still do not support gay rights, and have openly challenged the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" repeal, Gay-Marriage Act, and a host of rulings meant to get safe spaces in schools of LGBTQ youth. And yet, their video is posted. See Zack Ford's "First Elected Republicans."

social support, their continuous experiences of internet-bullying, their subjection to

cellphone (text-message) harassment, a multitude of government supported oppressive

gender, race, sexual, and class inequities, and an inability to be upwardly commercial or

"in" enough with the popular crowd. Yet cell phone companies, Internet search engines,

and credit card companies are IGBP's largest financial supporters. The IGBP

inadvertently suggests that those who die by suicide are not "able" enough to cope, while

the social media, financial companies, and political figures who are implicated in their

inability to "thrive," not to mention the plethora of books and videos that have surfaced in

conjunction with the IGBP, all become associated with saving lives. Savage's project

enables corporate empires like Visa, and authoritarian political bodies such as the

Republican Party, to pinkwash their politics by embracing this *cause celèbre*. Thus, while

the IGBP is a moving and emotionally powerful promotional tool the fantasy that it

speaks for *all* gay people does more to establish the normativity of neoliberal discourses

than it does to create spaces for open dialogues about the rogue affects these queer teens

experience in this newly digitized neoliberal present, or the physical effects these affects

have on the body. The point here is not to blame Savage for his message of hope. To be

sure, he has helped many teens by registering some of their anxieties and concerns.

However, by blatantly disregarding who is using his project to support their own

corporate interests, and what type of message this actually puts out to queer teens, Savage

does his own project a disservice.[87] What this digital moment insists on is more

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[87] For example, Clementi was a young, white gay male who turned to the internet
for friendships and to explore his sexual desires for other men. In the media, his death is

exploration into the possibility that our use of technologies has created affective tendencies we have yet to realize or understand.

The current digital age demands everyday "forms of attention, distraction, practice and repetition" get played out over and over again (Puar, "The Cost,"). For this reason we must pay attention to the as yet unforeseen impacts digitization will have and is having on our bodies, and how it influences neoliberal understandings of capacity and debility. In a moment where sociality is becoming conditioned by digital forays that promise connectivity, openness, access to unique identities, and an unbridled intimacy that professes to include anyone, the digitization of relationality also, for some, gives way to extreme alienation and creates new opportunities for oppressive behaviour, outward homophobia, ableism, racism, sexism, and the violence, stalking, and bullying that can accompany these. And in many cases, in fact, anonymity heightens the potential of these online sites. However, what seems most troubling for adults attempting to navigate our way through these digital terrains is the fact that for teens today, a type of digital sociality (with its simultaneous promises of connection and alienation, love and hatred, care and abuse) is now a part of their everyday, ordinary lives. And yet we have no idea how they, or we, are being affected.

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interpreted as that which marks his failure to thrive and our societal failure to save him—to reach him in time to recapacitate his vulnerable identity into a more acceptable, capable social realm. 'We could have accommodated Clementi,' Savage's message seems to say, because our newly "tolerant" social space allows for progressive opportunities for gay teens too.

Today, as Puar reminds us, "bodily habits and affective tendencies" are constantly linked to digital technologies—cell phones, the internet, video games—where contemporary teens are caught in a paradox: presumed to be completely competent in a digital technology we know little about, these teens are given a conditional agency to explore these advances and yet are also "socially subjugated" to the demands of these technological forms of relationality ("The Cost"). Put otherwise, teens today are expected to become apt neoliberal pupils who can navigate and negotiate the fast-changing world of technology—a world that promises financial and national progress—and yet are also expected neither to be affected by this access nor to take advantage of such terrains. As Puar argues, for today's teens something as terrifying as "cyber stalking" is confusing because inviting online attention is actually necessary if one is "to become a neoliberal sexual subject."[88] In other words, the violent and oppressive reactions that the digital age fosters through social connection sites are exactly those required to be a neoliberal subject, and are as much a part of the promise of neoliberal happiness as are acceptable affects such as love. The simultaneity of "exposure and alienation," coupled with promises of friendship, love, and financial success, make the oftentimes abusive affects that proliferate on the Internet ordinary and expected of good, neoliberal citizens. By focusing on futurity, Savage's project "lets the politics of the now off the hook" (Puar,

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[88] As Puar suggests recuperative initiatives like the IGBP are "not just about a drawing in around identity formation...[they are] about the technology, [they are] about the rapidity at which something becomes viral, [they are] about speed, and pace and duration...[they are] about the click, right, it's about that active bodily process" ("The Cost").

"The Cost"). The fact that these bullied teens are feeling lonely and fatalistic gets effaced, rewritten by a desire to push these teens towards a happy thriving future. Encouraged to ignore their affective presents, as well as any underlying critiques of neoliberalism, young people learn how to choose which bodies to capacitate and which to ignore (Puar, "The Cost").

The IGBP lays bare the fact that the cultural media is more than happy to suggest that gay male visibility and its imminent danger of erasure is far more serious a problem than injuries to other queers who seem doomed to lonely unhappiness. I see the IGBP as a well-meaning cog in the wheel of neoliberalism and an example of a cultural script that evidences how broader society negotiates and dismisses feelings such as loneliness that are presumed to be queer affects. At the centre of the "It Gets Better Project" are Google (a multinational capitalist corporation) and Dan Savage (a thriving, profitable, gay male), both of which promise young, queer, male teens that if they thrive, and continue to live, they will benefit from the gift of neoliberal recognition. However, so absent is the lesbian subject from cultural scripts such as the "It Gets Better Project" that she appears in videos as a token supplement, visible enough to be accounted for, invisible enough to be ignored: merely tolerated, barely tolerable.[89] Speaking to this conspicuous discrepancy, the rest of

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[89] For example, the video from TELUS, one of the major sponsors of IGBP, runs 7 minutes and 18 seconds long, and features twelve supportive messages from gay men, but only one 13 second long message from a black woman who does not even mention lesbianism ("TELUS: It Gets Better"). Typing in "gay men" into the IGBP video search space reveals six pages with those terms of reference, whereas typing "lesbian woman" reveals only one. Upon exploration, moreover, it becomes clear that "lesbian" is used in these videos alongside the acronym LGBTQ, not on its own. Typing in the term "lesbian" into the search engine reveals 396 results, many of which are, once again, using the term

this chapter explores ideas of incapacity, ultimately linking lesbian absence and loneliness to understandings of "able-bodiedness" stemming from Western culture's investment in notions of heteronormative capacity and lesbian debility.

The Miracle of W-A-T-E-R

With the rise of the medical industrial complex and the growing paranoia about national vulnerability, a neoliberal imperative to profit from what has become understood to be the disabled other has been normalized to the degree that there is a visibly "interdependent relationship between bodily capacity and bodily debility" (Puar, "The Cost"). Disabled bodies become understood as special—in need of special care, compassion, and accommodation from a tolerant, able-bodied public. In turn, as Robert McRuer argues, in order for contemporary neoliberal subjects to be considered ethically good, "they must demonstrate ... a dutiful (and flexible) tolerance toward the minority groups constituted through these movements" (18).

Although the idea of "specialness" or a "special needs community" permeates stereotypical understandings of disability, many in the field of disability studies have worked to argue for disability's inevitability and fundamental pervasiveness and ordinariness (Mitchell and Snyder 1). For scholars such as David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, and Robert McRuer, disability is being reconceptualized as inevitable—"the most common identity category" because as humans our ablebodiedness fails over time, day by

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lesbian only in conjunction with gay. Typing the term "gay" into the search engine reveals 1710 results ("It Gets Better Project," www.itgetsbetter.com).

day. As such, when it comes to our physical and mental capacities we are essentially "all inherently lacking" as time progresses (Mitchell and Synder 1). As McRuer argues: "we are [perpetually] haunted by the disability to come" (Puar, "The Cost").

Disability, then, as Shildrick argues, might just be the "common underpinning of all human becoming" because it "lays bare the psycho-social imaginary that sustains modernist understandings of what it is to be a subject," a subject so anxious about its own "physical and mental autonomy" and "interpersonal separation and distinction" that it can do nothing other than be wary of differences, especially ones that speak to a need for "interdependency and connectivity" and inter-autonomy (Shildrick 10, 2, 2). And as Mitchell argues, while the "disabled experience" offers its own "unique and valuable perspective" on life, disability itself is "not an exception, but the basis in which a decent and just social order is founded" ("The Cost"). This idea of "anticipatory disability" where the human is always progressing towards becoming a debilitated body has commonly become, as Puar argues, "the temporal frame of disability rights activism and disability studies" ("The Cost"). In this way, disability is not exceptional; it is ordinary, or, the identity of the everyday. One's lived experience—one's experience of being "disabled"—differs from one's relation to one's identity in the world, where the label "disability" and the condition of an "absence of ability" are positions we each will come to inhabit eventually. However, these notions of inevitability have also spurred the medical and scientific community's work "on behalf of" the disabled to develop ways of "correcting" the future—staving off an unwanted promise of disabilities to come—while finding methods to recuperate disabled bodies that have been born into their differences

in ability, or have "prematurely" suffered a physical or mental "regression" from the ideology of the normative healthy subject (Mitchell and Snyder 2).

There are many debilitating aspects of neoliberalism, all of which have produced an "economics of debility" which creates a figure of the "incapacitated subject" in order to reify neoliberal standardizations of normalcy, health, ability, and happy well-being (Puar, "The Cost,"). One must continuously actualize and maximize one's capacity; it's not enough to just have it ("The Cost"). In returning to the argument about how the gay male is recentralized by the "It Gets Better Project" as a capable, successful body, I turn now to the lesbian subject and what I see are the ways in which she is dismissed as a failed identity because of the crippling loneliness associated with her lesbianism. Dismissed as deficient, disavowed, and dismembered unless she remains "compliant" with heterosexual and able-bodied norms, this disabled queer body is expected either to be socialized, integrated, accommodated, or to get lost (McRuer 19).[90] Her inability to communicate her lonely feelings through acceptable neoliberal terms, or, put otherwise, through words that speak in ideological ways that are considered "understandable," renders her incomprehensible. Her feelings of loneliness, coupled with the affective

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[90] "The rhetoric of coming out that now permeates the disability movement has clear antecedents in the gay liberation movement" (McRuer *Gay Shame* 181) and while I am certainly not conflating queerness with disability, what I can say is that queerness, like disability, is suffering from similar categorization issues from a normative public that seeks its definition. And while disability, like queerness, is not a single category it is often universalized as one. Disability, like queerness, is unsettling. Perhaps this is so because of the possibility that all of us are "commonly" differently-abled, forcing us to always question what actually "constitutes 'non-disabled'" (Shildrick 4). If not disabled, we are all "temporality abled" bodies (4) and the "status of ablebodied is at best provisional rather than a fixed identity" (Shildrick 8).

responses that condition this loneliness, mark her as a "special" rather than ordinary—abnormal rather than normal—neoliberal subject. Therefore, she becomes marked as a failed subject and is punished for being intolerable. Presented as a problem to neoliberal understandings of accommodation and tolerance because of her lack of value as a neoliberal subject, this subject's lonely feelings call into question our stark obsession in the West with happiness, social connectivity, and the cultural avoidance of the non-happy. I argue here, it is her refusal of heterosexual, gender, and sex norms coupled with the ways in which she *feels* differently about her place in the world with others that refuses to be recuperated, to thrive, and to (re)produce neoliberal desires.

As I discuss in Chapter Two, while gay men are heralded as salvageable bodies, the lesbian has become a trope of failure: of hopeless narcissism. Dismissed for her inability to make sense of her confusing affective tendencies and accused of not moving on, not pushing past her single-identity focus, not thriving, it is as though in this contemporary moment "getting over" lesbianism is also a prerequisite to lesbians "getting better." Yet, I argue here that the cultural relinquishment of the lesbian body coupled with the act of embracing the gay male subject might masquerade as an "ethics of [flexible] accommodation" and a neoliberal form of "tolerance," as though socially, culturally, and politically we have lesbians' best interests at heart. However, the idea of "tolerance" that becomes celebrated through human rights discourses of equality leads to an understanding of the lesbian as not quite "capable" enough.

Queer and disability studies theorist Robert McRuer argues that while the West professes to "valu[e] [. . .] diversity" culturally, socially, and politically, a belief in our

own superior able-bodiedness (or, what he calls an "able-bodiedness" that still

"masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things" [*Crip Theory* 1]) creates the

disabled figure who, in turn, enables the supposed superior to "feel" ethical in her or his

tolerance for difference (18). As Wendy Brown argues, the people who must be tolerated,

or "handled," are then only permitted to "exist within a certain set of limits on behavior"

and are still seen as "abject" objects to be "subordinated" ("Wendy Brown on

Tolerance"). Tolerance, then, becomes the vehicle through which neoliberal inclusion

works, where the disabled other is rendered acceptable by a superior centre who feels

charitable in her or his acceptance.[91] Although the politics of queer sexuality—especially

seen through queer stereotypes such as narcissism and the presumptions surrounding

lesbian sexuality and its inability to be altruistic— have been pathologized as unable,

weak, and inept, queerness is not considered a disability. Particular tendencies and affects

that have been wrongfully associated with queerness (such as what Anna Mollow calls

"intrinsic murderousness" and "suicidality" (297), and the loneliness and preconceived

stereotypes about sexual over- and under-indulgence I explore), have become "highly

relevant" to those stereotypes surrounding the term "disabled." However, as Mollow goes

on to suggest, collapsing the two terms into one presents a host of problematics, not the

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[91] Wendy Brown discusses the ways in which tolerance, although revered as a
"benign virtue" that we all have to be "for" to be considered good people, actually needs
to be scrutinized. Defined as "the management of some undesirable element or foreign
body, invading or taking up residence within the host...[that] one would rather not have to
deal with" tolerance sets the host up as the "normal" one, while that which must be
tolerated is "in some ways problematic." When being used as a "political principle"
tolerance becomes a "substitute for discourses of justice...or even freedom" rather than
equality. See: "Philosophy Bites: Wendy Brown on Tolerance."

least of which is the assimilation and reduction of disability to another queer symptom of misfittedness (289).

Still, we live in a neoliberal moment, a time that rewards and celebrates fantasies of extraordinary capacity over and above the ordinary, everyday subjects who are so often treated as "abject" (291). Thus any discussion of sex, especially queer sex and its discontents, must include reference to capacities and debility in response to this "homophobic and ableist culture" (294). As Mollow states, in many ways "sex in a sense *is* disability," and the two terms carry within them the "same self-rupturing force" that is endemic to the anxiety around queer and disabled subjects (287). Entering into a discussion about Terry Galloway's *Mean Little deaf Queer,* a memoir that highlights the fusions and tensions that exist for a woman who is both disabled and queer, I concentrate on analyzing how moments of lesbian loneliness brought about through a desire to be exceptionally "normal" lead to social change without recuperation. Before turning to Galloway's memoir, though, I first put Dan Savage and Terry Galloway in conversation. I do this in order to explore the creative methods of two queer performers each of whom takes up disability differently, while unpacking the ways in which homosexual ableist discourses often seek heterosexual tolerance through the disabled subject, over and above the politics of disability. By exploring Dan Savage's controversial staging of *Miracle!*, a reimagining of the story of Helen Keller, alongside Galloway's own interpretation of Keller's life in *Annie Dearest,* I trace the everyday conflicts in queer spaces concerning stories told, sold, and retold that package both queerness and ability in tension-riddled tandem.

Galloway's short video *Annie Dearest* (a film produced by MickeeFaust,

Galloway's theatre company) can best be described as a parody of two key scenes from

1962's *The Miracle Worker*, a film starring Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke that chronicles

the real-life relationship between teacher Annie Sullivan and her deaf and mute student

Helen Keller. [92] In the 1962 film, Keller is unable to communicate with anyone; deaf and

mute, the girl lives in a world of silence until her parents, at their wits' end, hire a tough,

no nonsense teacher who is determined to prove to Keller and her family that she is

capable of conversing with people. For Sullivan, communication requires domestication

and what she considers civility: wrangling with everyday manners such as eating

properly, dressing accordingly, and participating in a world that might come to tolerate

you. The famous breakfast scene in *The Miracle Worker* has Sullivan and Keller locked

together in the family's dining room in a violent tango where Sullivan is attempting to

teach the wild-haired, feral child, who moans and grunts, punches and scratches, how to

eat a meal with utensils rather than using her hands. Relying upon Keller's sense of smell

and touch to develop proper "civilized" manners, Sullivan wrestles the girl into a proper

chair as Keller, ever defiant, throws her food and utensils around the room in a power

struggle that rivals a bullfight. Forcing food down her throat with a spoon and slapping

the girl in the face to get her attention and to prove she will not be deterred, Sullivan uses

violence (including splashing a glass full of water in the girl's face) alongside positive

reinforcements—spelling G-O-O-D G-I-R-L on the girl's fingers—to force compliance

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[92] *Annie Dearest* can be seen in full here:
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXNUN5OCZdY).

through a good-willed compassion (*The Miracle Worker* "Breakfast Scene"). Finally, after eight long minutes of throwing herself into walls, spitting in Sullivan's face, pounding the floor, slapping, kicking, being dragged, and thrashing, Keller's wildness seems to be conquered by Sullivan. The underlying message of this scene is that Keller, for her own good, needs to be forcibly tamed so that she can become understandable and acceptable to the able-bodied society around her.

The second scene of note is the equally famous water pump scene. Here, Keller proves her worth as a human subject by finally understanding how to bridge the gap between her own disability and the world's normative expectations for communication. Hauling the girl around the yard like a ragdoll, Sullivan attempts to explain to Keller that it is water that comes out of the pump: "W-A-T-E-R water; it has a name." The child feels the water with her hands and starts to sound out the word "water." Touching Sullivan's face to feel the muscles move as she speaks, Keller has a revelation that she can communicate by feeling the vibrations of the words as they come from Sullivan's mouth and throat. Elated, Sullivan reinforces Keller's attempt to communicate by using single finger spelling, celebrating the girl's comprehension of spoken words such as W-A-T-E-R and then G-R-O-U-N-D and then all other material items around her. The climax of the scene occurs when Keller is able to recognize her parents—M-A-M-A, P-A-P-A—and can sign T-E-A-C-H-E-R (*The Miracle Worker* "Water Scene"). Keller's return to civility facilitates her return to her traditional family, underscoring that she is now recognizable as human to the able-bodied community.

Of the film and the effect it had on her life as she grew up with a disability, Terry Galloway states:

> I never felt envy until I was almost ten and saw Patty Duke as deaf-blind Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*. That girl was a sight. Her hair a greasy, matted nest, filth smeared all over her scabby little body, her cotton jumper like the rag of an urchin. Patty as Helen was ill-willed and determined and narcissistic as I'd always dreamed of being, and bored into a spitting-mad whirlwind... Playing Patty Duke as Helen Keller became my private game...letting the inner me rip. ("Meaner," *Mean Little deaf Queer* 35)

Galloway sees Duke's Keller as a heroine and longs to abandon the decorum of the hearing world—and the hearing apparatus she was forced to wear—to embrace an extraordinary silence she sees as narcissistically magical. Galloway's desire for the rebellion that she senses in Duke's version of Keller speaks to her own confusions about what being deaf meant to her as she navigated an able-bodied world that expected little girls to be sweet and pretty, articulate and well-mannered, and above all good listeners.

In *The Story of My Life,* Helen Keller remembers the water scene as a beautiful dream. Like Galloway, Keller was not born deafblind and did not lose her sight and hearing until she was 19 months old after contracting an infection. She soon found herself feeling a lack of connection to the world around her. Of her early childhood, Keller states: "in the still dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment or tenderness" (12). Having spent five years without speech Keller was at age 7 put in the care of Sullivan, and "water" was the first word Keller uttered. Although the water scene was made famous by *The Miracle Worker*, Keller's own recollection of the moment she could understand the word water is beautifully simple. Wandering around the yard with Sullivan, she and her teacher came upon the water pump, an everyday apparatus that

provided water for the Keller family; the moment the girl felt the water running into her hands, Keller says she suddenly understood that objects had individual words attached to them. It was only then that the world of communication became accessible to her: "Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me" (12). However, not only was she able to communicate by recognizing words, Keller also recalls how language enabled her to feel, to become affectively engaged. Whereas before this moment Keller felt devoid of "tenderness," now, "for the first[,] time [she] felt repentance and sorrow" for the "feral" ways she had acted as a child without language (12). Sullivan had helped Keller develop a sense of guilt and a desire to atone and fit in while also helping the girl create a sense of connection with her.

In *Beyond the Miracle Worker: The Remarkable Life of Anne Sullivan and Her Extraordinary Friendship with Helen Keller*, Kim E. Neilson argues that Annie Sullivan was also transformed by the water moment. In her journals Sullivan wrote that after Keller learned to recognize water Keller became human: "the wild little creature ... transformed into a gentle child" (as qtd. by Neilson 85). The media depicted Sullivan as a saint—an outsider who came into the Keller home and transformed a monster into a princess. As Neilson argues, Sullivan became the "necessary accompaniment to Keller ... the able-bodied savior who had freed [Keller] from the chains of her disability" (233). Even though Sullivan herself suffered from "Trachoma" and near blindness, Sullivan is remembered as an able-bodied superhero who transformed a decrepit body into a human form—a miracle worker who performed the kind of rescue that Dan Savage promises in

Miracle! and also in the "It Gets Better Project"[93] (6), and that Galloway has fun with in her comedic performances.

Galloway's *Annie Dearest* parodies the breakfast and water scenes from *The Miracle Worker*. The short film begins with a series of instrumentals and the closed-captioned words "incredibly moving music" written below. As Helen Keller, played by Jessie Altomaro, wanders throughout the yard aimlessly and alone she gets entangled in a row of hanging white sheets, literally wrapped up and ensnared by domestic decorum. Right away we understand that *Annie Dearest* is meant to be a satirical critique of able-bodied, and to a degree heteronormative, expectations of a proper house and home. When the girl enters the dining room she and Annie Sullivan, played by Galloway's long term partner Donna Marie Nudd, begin fighting over Keller's desire to eat her meal with her hands. Not permitted to simply sit at the table—a symbol of white, middle-class, heteronormativity and of fitness to inherit the family line as Ahmed suggests (*Queer Phenomenology* 43-45)—she must learn first how to be "polite." Clearly frustrated, Sullivan snaps: "you're just a spoiled little deaf and blind brat you are, B-R-A-T brat. And I, Annie Sullivan, will not put up with it" (*Annie Dearest*). While Sullivan's endless patience with Keller is highlighted in *The Miracle Worker* (as she calls Keller G-O-O-D G-I-R-L), this version of a surly Sullivan critiques the original film's deification of Sullivan, a woman who actually resorted to physical abuse in order to "teach" Keller how to be a good little girl.

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[93] For a specific instance where miracles are promised in an "It Gets Better Project" video, see "It Gets Better: Visa Employees."

Parodying Sullivan's frustration with working with Keller, what would have been Sullivan's own physical exhaustion, and *The Miracle Worker*'s romanticization of Sullivan's role as the "able-bodied savior" (Neilson 233) who teaches a "little savage [. . .] obedience," (Sullivan as qtd. by Neilson 85), *Annie Dearest* is a critique of the ways in which *The Miracle Worker*—the first famous film about disability, *The Well of Loneliness* of disability if you will—portrayed Keller as less than human, barely tolerable, and certainly in need of the able-bodied world to help her survive. In *Annie Dearest,* Sullivan's motivation to help the girl occurs as Sullivan takes a sip of water and decides *water* is the word that Keller must learn. Water, a requirement for everyday existence and symbol of Christian rebirth (spiritual cleansing), enables Sullivan to legitimate its articulation through any means necessary. From here the video becomes absurd as Sullivan takes tough love to an entirely abusive level, deploying a variety of torture techniques to show the girl how to say and recognize W-A-T-E-R.

In Galloway's version of the story, Keller is hosed down with a power hose until she can't breathe; she is taken outside to a "contaminated," poisonous lake and thrown in head first; her head is repeatedly shoved into a toilet as though Sullivan were a bully in high school; Keller is tied to a chair and locked in a crawlspace underneath the house while drips of water fall on her head for days until she finally utters a groan that Sullivan decides is "water" ("Wah....Wah...Wah," more like a cry than a word). A rewriting of *The Miracle Worker*'s reunion scene, where the heteronormative, white, middle class family is brought together again as the mother, father, and child embrace, *Annie Dearest*'s final scene is the antithesis to domestic bliss and shows Sullivan holding Keller, alone, without

the father or mother present. The two females hold one another tightly as Sullivan looks into the camera and says, "Now W-I-R-E-H-A-N-G-E-R" as terrifying music sounds in the background and the words: "THE ONLY WAY THEY LEARN" flash overtop.

Alluding to the violent ways in which people with disabilities have been treated historically and contemporarily, *Annie Dearest's* final words leave a bad feeling in the stomachs of any of us who found ourselves laughing throughout the short film. While historically, Western society has understood disability in varying ways—as evil, angelic, an indication of unfitness, a stigma, a sign of luck, specialness, innocence, punishment and lack—the fact that the final words "the only way they learn" are meant to make us laugh, also speaks to the ways in which we, culturally, have overlooked the realism of the statement itself. [94] Galloway's parody highlights bullying and conveys overtones of the colonizing practices of U.S. imperialism: the ways in which the West uses violence to civilize, teach, and 'help' others fit in. As a child suffering from acute deafness and sight loss, Galloway recalls the brutish treatments that were implemented in order to help her hear again. Recounting her experience as a young tomboy who had just learned she was on her way to becoming deaf forever, Galloway explains what this care actually felt like for a girl her age, developing breasts, getting pudgier, and getting her period for the first time. Self conscious and hormonally chaotic, Galloway was made by doctors to wear a large button on her head, big box hearing aids around her neck, and thick, bottle neck glasses leaving her wandering around through her prepubescence feeling ugly, fat, and

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[94] For more on the historical understandings of disability see Chomba Wa Munyi's "Past and Present Perceptions." Also see Lennard Davis' *Enforcing Normal: Disability, Deafness and the Body*.

impeded by her lack of freedom. The "remedies" for her deafness and near blindness were such that every time she used to take a walk all she would hear was "bounce bounce, beep beep, bleed bleed. Bounce bounce, beep beep, bleed bleed" (Galloway, "You Are My Sunshine"). So disruptive were her apparatuses that all she craved was the "quiet" she'd once had ("You Are My Sunshine"). In much the same way that *Annie Dearest*'s Keller is locked underneath a porch and tied to a chair in order to save her from her disability, Galloway had become the "prisoner of the cure" (Galloway, "Terry Galloway on Why" n. pag.).

As an adult, Galloway continued to struggle with what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has called "stigma management" (as qtd. by Sandhal 40); her position as an outsider needing recognition from the able-bodied community in order to survive financially, emotionally, and physically left her constantly relying upon social services for access to hearing aids and care. Straddling the line between the "charity case" and the "overcomer"—the two "cultural representations" available for disabled people whose performances are meant to "appeal to a benefactor's sympathies" (Sandhal 41)—Galloway worked to perform in between, around, above, and below this binary. Helen Keller's depiction in *The Miracle Worker* served as the model for Galloway's enactment of what she knew had to come across as extraordinary disability if she were to be given help and attention. She states:

> I had to go to the Rehabilitation Services and act deaf so I could get two government issued hearing aids...How do I convince these government officials that I am really deaf, which I really am? ...the fate of my ears hinges on whatever performance of deafness I come up with... So I went into that office and ping! I...got all meek and uncertain and my speech got blurry and I sat there silent, unfunny and glum. I couldn't help myself.

> I only had *The Miracle Worker* and lousy deaf jokes as my performance references. And I was desperate for those hearing aids. (Galloway as qtd. by Sandhal 41)

Her lesbianism further complicated matters, forging an odd alliance between her disabled and queer identities (79). In many ways Galloway had to both come out of the closet as a lesbian and "com[e] out as crip" (Sandhal 42).

Galloway's "disability pride" (44) has spoken to her multiplicity of identities; however, she has often existed in the liminal spaces "outside [her] own subcultures" (35), subject to queer communities' "ableism" (36), the heterosexual communities' homophobia, and the homosexual communities' homonormativity or queer phobia. Still, her fluid identities as a deaf, lesbian woman have helped her navigate the "crip community's often divisive, painful hierarchy of disability identities" (50). Yet, Galloway has struggled within this Western moment where, while there is a "national" celebration of "diversity," it is one that strategically "entails acknowledging" the "gay" and the "handicapped" without actually seeing diversities as ordinary (McRuer and Wilkerson 2). For certain, there is a blurred line between "the critic and the cruel eye" of those of us who have the privilege of claiming able-bodied status (Faires).

Discussing Dan Savage's own version of the Helen Keller story, in his play *Miracle!,* will help me to think through the complexity found within issues of privileged storytelling and freedom of expression. *Miracle!* debuted in July 2012 at the Intiman theatre in Seattle. Touted as the play that promised to "offend," *Miracle!*'s gay male actors set the stage for a celebratory party by dressing in lavish drag and handing out Jello shooters before the performance began (Baltus). Savage's *Miracle!* rewrites the original

The Miracle Worker and its focus on the bond between Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan, and instead chronicles Hellen Stellar's young, gay male life, as he learns "communication and good behavior" through his relationships with other gay men (Baltus). Set in a "drag bar," the premise is this: Hellen's father, raising Hellen on his own, adopts the new name, Crystal, and fast becomes a parent who manages his own love of the drag stage alongside Hellen's disability through the use of "electric dog collars," lip syncing, and clownish makeup. With its drag-show burlesque flair—outlandish costumes such as Nerf ball breasts and Beanie Baby hairpieces, boas, sequins, and high boots—Hellen is portrayed as a failed drag-king "aping" musical performances better performed by his able-bodied peers. He is reduced to a grunting, barking body, stumbling along on stage as though his deafness and blindness made him incapable of mobility. In fact, Stellar (played by a young Johnathon Pyburn) has been insensitively described as looking like a "psychotic five-year old refugee" bumbling along unawares and lost in his own world (Baltus). Still, the critics of the show, who are mostly men, seem unaware of or do not care about the offensive impact of their words.

Savage's play is for the most part considered by critics to be a "ridiculous and hilarious" parody (Baltus). Celebrated as Savage's "bold and brash return to the stage" and a reiteration of Savage's political message of acceptance for homosexuality, most critics celebrate Savage's rising stardom and overlook the actual content of the play ("Dan Savage's *Miracle!* at the Intiman"). As Katherine Luck states, "In *Miracle!*, Savage is projecting his anti-bullying message for gay teenagers onto Hellen … Hellen's story comes to represent a call for acceptance, tolerance and communication between

people of all stripes" (Luck). However, there is something about Savage's Hellen—his constant stammering, his cat calls, his primate-like movement, his disheveled wild hair and clothing, his smudged make up–that seems "inherently tragic" to some critics (Faires). Savage's actual criticisms seem to spring from the online community, where comments have been posted all over various article pages that accuse Savage's supporters—for example, Tom Tangney from MyNorthWest.com—of propriety and undue worship. One reader, gb1118, writes: "Dan Savage was bullied growing up [?] … I love how he has no problem offending the deaf and blind community, but if we offend the pfag community, somehow we're homophobes. Double standard?" (Tangey). In an open letter posted on the AfterElton website, Zoe writes that they, an openly queer, disabled person, are "pissed the hell off" about *Miracle!*, accusing Savage, a "non-disabled guy," of both putting on "a show devoted to mocking disabled people" and of "selective engagement with the concept of human rights" ("Real Voices"). Zoe states: "You can claim to be in our corner, but we might not believe you if you're actually pointing and laughing from across the room" ("Real Voices"). Indeed, Savage's Hellen is a perfect caricature of what has come to be expected stereotyping in the portrayal of disabled characters. Yet, Savage apologizes for nothing here. Instead, he simply warns the audience: "The play you are about to see is deeply offensive to the Deaf-Blind community. Do not tell them about it. Keep your hands shut" (Luck).

Asked if he actually believes that the play is offensive to the disabled community, Savage disagrees, arguing that *Miracle!* is not meant to emulate Helen Keller's story at all; it is meant to be an "original script." He then points to the show's rave reviews as

evidence of his unmalicious intentions—"Miracle! is actually rather sweet," promises *The Examiner*; "improbably heartwarming," suggests *Crosscut*. Savage defends the show's "accessibility" to the deaf and deafblind community, arguing: "we have had maybe 8-10 complaint emails in total," and references the audience members he has invited who are disabled, as though their presence and acceptance of the play means it cannot be offensive.[95] Asked why he did a drag version of *The Miracle Worker* in the first place Savage says he was inspired by the water scene in the film and thought it would be funnier if, instead of trying to teach Helen the word for "water," Annie Sullivan was trying to convey to Helen the importance of "vodka" (Frizzelle). He wanted to "fuck up" that famous scene and "do [it] differently" (Frizzelle). And isn't it a funny play? What *is* offensive about *Miracle!*? Is *Annie Dearest*, Galloway's parody of the Keller's life which queers her story even further, more okay?

Perhaps the differences between the two performances derive from their modes of delivery and their reception. Galloway, a deaf and near-blind woman, produces a film about another deaf-blind woman that adheres to the original sex and gender dynamic of *The Miracle Worker*—Annie Sullivan and Helen Keller are both female identified females whose sexual preferences are unknown. *Annie Dearest* also seems authenticated because of Galloway's personal knowledge of disability. To be sure, *Annie Dearest* might be construed as offensive in many ways, but our offense is guarded by this notion of

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[95] Savage states: At Intiman theatre "there were ASL-interpreted performances of other shows in the festival and *twenty times* as many deaf people came to see *Miracle!*." He further argues that the reaction from those in the deaf and deafblind community were so positive that Zoe's mind should be "blown," as these disabled persons actually want to restage *Miracle!* themselves ("Dan Savage: An Open Response to Zoe").

Galloway's authentic experience. Questioning whether Savage (a gay, white, able-bodied man), should have written and directed *Miracle!* brings Savage's history of ableist rhetoric to focus. To be fair, Savage is an easy target. Criticized for his lack of empathy for persons living with disabilities, Savage openly uses offensive words such as "retarded" throughout his columns and interviews. In an April 30, 2009 letter to Savage from the online username The Real Other Sister in Savage's column *The Stranger*, Savage is told to "stop using the word 'retarded' as an insult" because his followers do not want to hear him "misuse the word" or Savage's "put-downs" any longer. [96] To this critique, Savage replies:

> I'm going to turn over a new leaf, TROS, and make a conscious, conscientious effort to break myself of the bad habit of using the word "retard." But I don't think the "retard jar" is for me. Instead, I'm going to use a substitution for the word. From now on, instead of saying "retard" or "that's so retarded," I'm going to say "leotard" and "that's so leotarded." I won't be mocking the mentally challenged, just the physically gifted. I will pick on the strong—and the limber—and not the weak. ("That's Leotarded")

Savage's tongue-and-cheek reply speaks to the ways in which he uses his ableist privilege to laugh off critiques. His comments are meant as jokes, and yet the humour he uses labels those deemed "mentally challenged" lesser and "weak."

This type of rhetoric runs counter to Savage's stalwart campaign to validate the fortitude of homosexual gay boys who have been bullied for being considered different or weak. Savage, however, sees no such parallel. In his April 8, 2011 *The Stranger* post

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[96] The name "The Real Other Sister" references the 1999 film, *The Other Sister*, directed by Gary Marshall and starring Juliette Lewis that tells the story of Carla Tate, a young woman with mental disabilities who defies the odds by going to college and finding love.

"Leotards and Gaywads," Savage responds to a comment criticizing his use of the word "leotard" instead of "retard" by forwarding his readers to Stephen Colbert's "anti-retard PSA" where Colbert tells America: "Kids don't use the R-word. It is totally gay" ("Steve Colbert's PSA"). In doing so, Savage is critiquing an audience who would attempt to censor his humour and his right to be loud and proud in the way he sees fit ("Leotards and Gaywads"). Yet, Savage overlooks the possibility that in parading Hellen Stellar on a stage in *Miracle!,* and representing him as a clueless, disastrous, gay, drag queen, the laughs he seeks come at the expense of those living with disabilities who have fought the stereotype that they are court jesters to be mocked and used for other peoples' amusement. As Garland-Thomson argues: "those of us with disabilities are supplicants and minstrels, striving to create valued representations of ourselves in our relations with the nondisabled majority" (qtd. in Sandhal 41). In a world where people with differences are treated differently "to be granted fully human status by normates … disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humour, or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort" (Garland-Thomson qtd. in Sandhal 41). While Savage might try to "relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort" with his proclamation at the beginning of his show that he knows the play is "offensive" and that this is fine as long as no one tells the deaf or the blind about it, he is actually turning the disabled subject into a joke for able-bodied amusement. Savage's comfort comes at the expense of other people.

It is true that Galloway too uses offensive humour and troubling parodies to approach disability as a topic. In fact, her authenticated experiences are made less so

throughout her works because she consistently refuses to offer her allegiance to any community or identity. So what are we to do with the inauthentic authenticity of Galloway's performances?

Cripplingly Tolerable: Terry Galloway's True Little Lies

I came across Terry Galloway's *Mean Little deaf Queer* in an Indigo bookstore. I sat in the memoir section and thumbed through the covers, bored, until I saw Galloway's book. It appealed to me both because of its cover art (a picture of a tiny, 'tomboy' girl wearing a cowboy hat) and its title. The idea that someone was writing so openly about being mean, deaf, and queer was an immediate draw. This was in 2009, and at that time Galloway was outwardly proud about being a deaf lesbian performance artist, touring across North America with her theatre troupes; her deafness and her lesbianism, and the impact these had on her identity formation, had been a significant focus of her politics, performances, artistic imprint, and certainly her life story. Galloway's honest engagement with affects such as loneliness and loneliness's relationship to feelings of misfittedness made her memoir about a queer person living with a disability seem like the dream find for an academic thirsty for someone's experience of being a lonely gay. Finally, an authority—someone to tell me the story about loneliness I had been yearning for, one that echoed my own.

In *The Body and Physical Difference,* David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder point out that "the discourse of disability has been largely defined by the genre of autobiography" (9). Such narratives often reflect a clichéd performance where the disabled subject

becomes the "lone character" fighting against the disapproving ableist society: suffering is always superseded by a "triumph over tragedy" (10). Pressures to be fantastical and extraordinary—heroic, unfazable, superhuman—are written into the very structure of the disability memoir genre. It is common of this genre to see the able-bodied promoted as good neoliberal citizens, while being disabled necessitates super human overcompensation (9). I seek to "slow" down conversations surrounding feelings of loneliness and the expectation of the body's capacities to forever thrive in order to argue that neoliberal imperatives which offer the promise of tolerance, accommodation, and "recapacitation" disable everyday politics, or what Puar refers to as "the ordinary work of living on" ("The Cost"). Turning to Terry Galloway's *Mean Little deaf Queer*, I suggest that Galloway's narrator defies the memoir genre of disability and its pretense to "privilege the agency" of the disabled point of view (Gilmore 10). In the process Galloway decenters neoliberal subjectivity. It is through the narrator's lonely humiliation about not being "normal" enough—and the lies and confessions this humiliation generates—that Galloway is able to interrogate the shameful fiction of accommodation and create a space for a sociality based on lonely ordinariness rather than normality and its pernicious opposite, exceptionality.

Particularly significant to my theorizing of loneliness as a socially constructed "debility" is that Galloway embraces the persona of "the liar." This person is central to her reimagining of a lesbian loneliness that pushes beyond neoliberal optimism while re-envisioning hope as that which comes from being uncertain about one's position as a sexual subject, especially when one feels physically vulnerable, in bits and pieces, and is

considered inadequately disjointed or capable. Put another way, I am arguing that Galloway's deaf-queer liar works to create an ethics of discomfort for her listeners, one that compels us all to hear and speak in different ways. Galloway uses lies in her memoir to carve out a space for herself, often at the expense of other people. Her self-identification as a "mean little deaf queer" (2) enables her transformation into a misfitted subject—a woman who refuses to fit, refuses to "perform wholeness," and who, in turn, seeks ways to turn her lonely "humiliation into love" (xv). Moreover, Galloway embodies a physical and emotional loneliness that enables her to perform her own versions of epiphanies, literal ruptures of the social world that surrounds her. It is precisely through her affinity with unbridled queer candidness and lies (a sheer audacity to air her 'shameful' unmentionables and dishonest memories) that she discovers her ability to re-imagine the value in lonely vulnerability, humility, and failure. Still, Galloway's performance as the liar is tricky to swallow, and this has been a difficult chapter to work through because of my own feelings of being betrayed by Galloway over and over again.

Growing up in the 1960s on U.S. military bases in Germany and then in the southern U.S., Galloway lived most of her young life in Austin, Texas, where being different in any way was often deemed either tragic or monstrous. Her deafness was the result of a medical malfunction: "because my mother was given an experimental antibiotic when she was six months pregnant with me, I grew up hallucinatory and deaf" ("Tough" 196). She spent her childhood trying to avoid becoming a "them"—the monstrously othered queerly un-able subject of her nightmares—and the tensions between her physical sensations and her emotional desires left her at war with her own body.

When she began losing her hearing at an accelerated rate she soon realized she could not stop "it" from happening. The same "it" that is implied throughout Dan Savage's "It Gets Better Project," the "it" that if subdued enables subjects to be understood as acceptable and successful, meant Galloway's potential for acceptance, progression, and recognition was not getting better. She states: "It was my body turning into a *them*, my body that was beginning to scare me" (27).

Although Lennard Davis argues that "the term 'disabled' is not a very good one," he concedes that rightly or wrongly deafness is turned to as the "best case scenario to describe general attitudes toward people with disabilities" (xii).[97] The *them* that Galloway references above is also the "them" that ableist culture understands to be disabled (xviii). As Galloway discovered as a child, the "ableist majority" often sees all "disability" the same way, because as Davis argues, no matter the way it is used, the "'us-them' mentality" presents an "us" (who is either the person who is presumed to have an "impairment," or ableist culture) against a "them" (those either with, or without a disability), placing the two in conflict (xiv, xviii). However, these hierarchies also exist within the deaf community, evidencing the politics that exist within subcultures. According to Davis, many in the deaf community consider themselves an independent "linguistic subgroup like Latinos or Koreans," and happily different from other persons "with disabilities" (xiv). Some Deaf people understand deafness to be a "state [that is] defined not medically but rather socially or politically" (xiv). And so for Galloway,

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[97] For a larger argument concerning deafness and the hierarchies found within groups of persons with disabilities (i.e. little 'd' deaf and Deaf), and throughout disability studies see Lennard Davis' *Enforcing Normalcy*.

having not been born deaf or to deaf parents ("CODA-child of deaf adults" [xvii]) already

separated her from the category Deaf. Deaf with a 'capital-*D*' symbolized "the attempt to

wrest deafness from the hearing world" (xix), while Galloway's position as a 'little-*d*'

deaf, labeled such by the Deaf community, left her confused about where she belonged.

As Galloway states:

> The deaf as a people don't regard themselves as disabled but simply a
> culture entire, like the Amish. And, like the Amish, they keep to
> themselves. There is a definite hierarchy in that deaf culture. If you are
> deaf of deaf—a deaf person born to deaf parents—and your language is
> Sign and the company you keep is primarily deaf, you are Deaf with a
> capital *D* … the lowest on the deaf totem pole are the waverers like me
> who came to deafness gradually or late and were 'mainstreamed' to be part
> of the hearing world … we are known as the little-*d* deaf. (78)

What seems most troubling to Galloway is her diminishing ability to communicate

linguistically with anyone in a "capable" manner. She believes as she is going deaf that if

she loses the ability to be verbally understood, she'll lose "the key to [her] own story"

(xvii); further, the fact she does not know Sign alienates her from even the Deaf

community. Her comprehensibility as a social subject is dependent upon her capacity to

speak in a language and tell a narrative the "normal" person—be it the "normal" able

person who is the majority, or the "normal" Deaf person in her community—understands.

Feeling incapacitated because of a lack of verbal "normalcy," where the "oddities of her

own speech" threaten to render her animalistic (her voice likened to the "grunting of

animals" [79]), and faced with her desire to sound like everyone or even someone else,

Galloway finds herself confused and lonely. She tries to convince herself that if she can

just listen hard enough her ears will become "normal," and if she can just *act* in the right

ways she will be normal. However, the only way that she can both act and feel normal and empowered is to dissemble—to lie.

It is important to note that Galloway reveals less her shame about lying, less a fear that her "credibility is at stake," and more a loneliness that stems from the pressure and expectation that she *should* lie in order to become an exceptional, neoliberal subject—that lying is a neoliberal proclivity, pinnacle to superiority and progress (Gilmore 47). While exploring the act of lying in memoirs, Leigh Gilmore examines the consequences of aligning "a self-representational account of trauma … with fiction" (47). Rather than focusing on judging storytellers for their lies, Gilmore suggests that non-truths in memoirs point to the multiple ways people feel and experience memory. Some, she argues, remember events differently than how they might have occurred. Others, she muses, simply have forgotten what happened in their pasts and therefore in order to tell a story and make it "better" they "make things up" (47). Still others might argue: "fiction offers truths that fact cannot" (47). Put differently, the idea of verifiable truth versus the desire to tell a story about one's life collide in the act of attempting to give an account of oneself in a context where social expectations see truths as fundamentally ethical and fictions about these truths or experiences as blasphemous.

Yet, a self-professed "liar," Terry Galloway's narrator recounts shamelessly lying about a lot! In fact, she lies about both mundane and very culturally sensitive issues such as virginity, rape, and death (125, 135, 54). So how do we handle a character like Galloway, who insists on celebrating and conversing about the "fiction" she sees in "self-representation," rather than being ashamed by it? Is the self-professed lonely Galloway to

be taken as a reliable narrator, her story as legitimate? Does she risk her "believeability" as a person because of her lies (Gilmore 49)? Let me suggest then that it is through the context of her situational lies (which is to say, the lies she tells to get into and out of particularly confusing situations that challenge her thinking and feelings around sexuality and ablebodiedness) that Galloway's narrator begins to physically perform and inhabit the neoliberal model of sociality. In other words, the lies Galloway deploys in order to communicate her confusion about being ordinary and lonely in a social sphere that demands her extraordinariness and happiness mimic the demands of everyday neoliberalism, where "drama trumps the day-to-day" and "the false, when perfectly enacted, can be even more poignant than the true" (Galloway 57). Neither normal nor extraordinary, Galloway is simply lonely. Her loneliness is both what triggers these lies and what eventually undoes the necessity to be special: rather than conforming to the autobiographical convention of triumph over tragedy, her story performs the loneliness produced by the false promises of neoliberalism (Gilmore 62).

Throughout her memoir Galloway confesses to telling a litany of lies. I will concentrate on the three lies that I argue force Galloway's narrator to face the neoliberal demands on her body, that decentre her subject position, and that enable her to embrace an everyday loneliness that leads her to find intimacies and social connections she never thought possible. The first of Galloway's lies comes when she is eight years old and she fakes her own drowning to get the attention of a pretty, lesbian lifeguard, coaxing her saviour into doing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on her. In effect, this is her first kiss (54). In Chapter Three I discussed the act of kissing as symbolic of a moment of

monstrous transformation for queer children who are immediately punished emotionally and physically for their same sex desire. For Hanna, the kiss she shares with Sophie is both erotic and a fairy tale breath of life enabling her to seek out the ordinary loneliness that accompanies everyday life in her own exceptional and misfitted way. For Minnie, her kiss with Tabatha and the reaction to that kiss by larger society leads her body to revolt, causing hurtful boils on her skin and suicidal thoughts in her head. For Nicholas and Bobbie, the kiss they share immediately transforms the boys into lonely zombies, too monstrous to share the title human any longer, and quickly abandoned for their queer longings. For Galloway, her kiss with the lifeguard serves as a gateway for her future lies: performing heteronormalcy while feeling queer leads her to constantly spin tales in order to appease the tensions between societal expectations of acceptability and her own lonely desires.

In the broader context of this chapter, entitled "The Performance of Drowning," Galloway recounts her experience at the Texas Lions Camp For Crippled Children, a camp that marks her "first summer as a disabled child" (43). Her changing identity, from a hearing child to a deaf child, is also conditioning her collision with an entirely separate social sphere than the one she knows. Having been warned by her mother that the camp is a "special one," Galloway takes her mother's words to "mean fun" until she arrives at the camp to see "a sea of bodies like none [she's] ever seen—bodies that [are] gnarled into knots or [have] stumps instead of arms or plastic legs instead of real ones" (44, 45). The changing meanings of the term "special" mark for Galloway a transition from thoughts and feelings of amusement and joy to images and fears of bodily monstrosity: "the site of

them unnerved [her] (45)." At this camp there is no clear distinction between what Galloway presumes is *human*, and what she presumes is *animal*, leaving her to wonder what "herd" she is now a part of (45). Fighting her own feelings of "scorn" and "distaste" for the physical anomalies she sees around her—these strange looking kids who she thinks should be silenced and "kept out of sight"—Galloway jumps into the pool and begins "forcing [herself] to drown" (53).

What is interesting to me here is not so much the melodramatic musings of a confused girl who is confronted with multiple embodied differences for the first time; rather, I am interested in the desire she articulates for what she understands to be a perfect body: "the deep-end instructor" (53). She describes her fake drowning as "first-rate, [a] compelling enactment" of going off the deep end that enables her to become "the pathetic victim" whose "performance" succeeds in having her audience completely enthralled, "taken in" (54). It is her deep-end instructor who dives in and plays "the role of savior," dragging her up from the "beckoning depths" of her watery despair to the "blue sky" with her "perfect strokes" (55, 54). And for that one brief moment Galloway and the deep-end instructor make "an elegant duo," Galloway weeping as she is held "tight against the wet, panting, perfect body that [she] loved" (55).

Galloway is saved by her hero and looking around at all of the children staring at her she imagines that she and her lie have gotten off "scot-free" (56); she likes the feeling of being "a martyred saint," extraordinary and fantastical, and convinces herself that the performance of debility is what yields the privilege of intimate contact with the better-than-normal: "art [. . .] had earned [her] [the deep-end instructor's] embrace" (57). After

winning the affection she seeks, Galloway becomes convinced that this fantastical feeling of acceptance and compassion can be hers again and again if she performs well, and she likes performing well. This anxiety, that she is not extraordinary enough to become like the instructor, is paradoxical. She sees the deep-end instructor as an extraordinary spectacle and sees herself as exceptional (unlike the other children at camp). However, she also realizes that her ordinary, everyday life is not the same as the swim instructor's. Her everyday existence as a deaf girl with sexual desire for other girls must be negotiated alongside her desire to be accepted by the extraordinary heterosexual swim instructor she seeks, without being found out as the mean little deaf queer she is.

The swim instructor, who seems at once perfect and normal, leads Galloway to create a role for herself. Galloway makes a space where she and the instructor can exist in tandem, overwriting the imperative towards quick and tidy hetero-socialities, by manipulating her perceived position as a disabled queer in order to become the special girl who is neither like the other camp children nor like the instructor. In this way, Galloway positions herself as extraordinary and superior. And yet the memoir critically equivocates, in that the language Galloway uses to achieve this greatness is that of lying: she lies to be understood as exceptional and always able, hoping "that somewhere in the thicket of all those words [she] kept struggling to hear and feared to pronounce was the key to [her] story" (xvii).

Later, when Galloway is in her early 20s, almost completely deaf, wearing hearing aids, and experimenting with her sexuality, she goes through a phase of telling every sexual partner that she encounters (and there are many) that she is a virgin. Enjoying the

sensation of her partners' reactions to the revelation that she is perfectly untouched,

Galloway decides that "being a professional virgin" is her best role yet (125).

I mention this lie in order to introduce the next, wishing to say only that in her multiple

performances of virginity, Galloway performs the body untainted, pure and perfect, a

composite of the neoliberal able-body she does not have access to. Bearing this in mind,

the lie I wish to focus my attention on is the one she tells when she finds herself in an

intimate relationship with two lesbians.

In a chapter entitled "Shhhhhh!," Galloway confesses to her current new lover,

Isabelle, her "most shameful of shameful secrets," a lie she told two lesbian lovers in her

past (135). The moment is contextualized as a vulnerable one for Galloway who has just

realized she might, indeed, be in love with Isabelle, a fact that worries her because "if

[she] did love her then it meant [she] was a lesbian and [she] wasn't sure [she] had the

guts to be one" (134). Coming face to face with this woman to "actually talk," which

Galloway admits is a "first" with someone she has "fucked," Galloway opens up to

Isabelle and begins her tale. Seeking to rent a home near the two lesbians she was seeing,

Galloway books a viewing at a duplex down the road from where they lived. She states:

"I went to view a duplex for rent and ended up dry-humping the yummy-smelling male

real estate agent on the counter of the empty kitchen, and then [I] ran over to the house of

those two lesbians and wept that he'd forced himself on me" (135).

The lie that she was "force[d]" to have sex with this man even though she knows

she "was the one who pushed him up against the wall a la *Last Tango*" begins to spiral the

moment the two lesbians interpret Galloway's words "forced himself on me," to mean

"rape." This interpretation shocks Galloway out of her extraordinary performance and

back into the ordinary, everyday moment she finds herself in. She explains:

> When one of them said the word 'rape' I came to my senses and tried to
> recant. But they weren't having any of it and insisted on calling the law
> until I said, 'Look, I'd have to tell them I raped *him*.' ...they looked at me
> in a new, uneasy light—*I'd* been the aggressor!? Ahhhhh! What to make
> of that! (135)

What to make of that indeed? What I find intriguing about this lie, or group of lies, is both

their extraordinary gravity and their incredible lack of necessity. It is as though the act of

lying, and its fantastical promise of dramatic feeling that "trump[s] the day-to-day," is

now losing its luster—so much so that Galloway resorts to lying just for lying's sake in an

effort to recall those feelings of "divine" poignancy she felt when she was a child and

lying was her way of accessing affection, status, attention, and love (57).

To further explore the importance of what I am calling Galloway's transition from

neoliberal socialities based on extraordinary feelings of happiness, perfection, and ability

to a politics of everyday loneliness, I want to remap the scene of the lies Galloway tells

the lesbians. In doing so, I suggest that during these lies Galloway suffers from a kind of

necessary "identity disintegration," one that challenges the foundations of neoliberal

subjectivity (Mollow 287). First, Galloway arrives at the domestic home of her two lovers

and lies about being raped—even if she doesn't name it as such, the lesbians were not

wrong to jump to that conclusion given the words uttered. Then, upon seeing their

reaction to her horrific claim and their worry and anger that she has been abused in such a

terrible way, she recants. Her confusion here as she is brought back "to [her] senses"

(Galloway 135) speaks to the weight of able-bodied words as these lesbians presume,

correctly or no, that Galloway shares their method of communication, and that their interpretation of Galloway's tale is the only possible interpretation. In this way, Galloway is not brought back to her own senses, necessarily, but she is brought back to these lesbians' able-bodied senses. But what is of note here is that upon hearing her honesty the two women then refuse her words, even her "recantation," not believing her anymore and instead painting her as a victim who simply feels ashamed of being abused. They believe her more when she is a liar and, in fact, demand that she remain one in order that their meaning making remains untouched. In this single exchange, Galloway has gone from feeling like the heroic, perfect performer—not unlike the deep-end instructor who saved her from her fake-drowning—who can get sympathy from these lesbians, to the hapless debilitated victim whose methods of communication are inept, not capable of being trusted. Why?

Tobin Siebers argues that "disabled people are not allowed to have agency, sexual or otherwise" because "achieving both political and sexual agency relies on the presupposition that the body and mind are nondisabled and will function properly if trained" (203, 205). Thus, feelings that are so endemic to neoliberal subjectivity, such as happiness, sexual desire, and fear, are also thought impossible for the disabled body to handle, harbour, communicate, and create; ideologically speaking, these are capacities only afforded the able-bodied mind and body. Returning to the scene of the double-lie, then, let us reimagine Galloway's lies. She states, and I am paraphrasing here: 1: I, the disabled-female-body who sleeps with women *was raped* by an able-bodied man; 2: I, the disabled, female body who sleeps with women *raped* an able-bodied man. The boundaries

between the binaries heterosexual and queerness, able-bodied and disabled body, male and female, masculine and feminine, and monogamy and non-monogamy are each upset, stirred and unsettled by these lies. The lesbian couple refuses to hear Galloway's renunciation and instead they presume she is unable to understand what has happened to her with this man. They decide she was raped, even though she tells them this is not the case. In insisting on the truth of the first story, they strip away her agency as a rational thinker making her own choices. These women become those who by virtue of their superior able-bodiedness always "know better."

So, what does Galloway do to fight for her agency? She lies again and claims she actually "raped" the male real estate agent, exalting herself once again to the status of the able-bodied superhero—yet, questions arise: Why would Galloway lie to these women at all? Why did she feel the need to say anything to these two lesbians who demanded nothing from her—no explanation as to where she had been or with whom? At first glance it appears that Galloway would rather take the firm positions of "victim" and "perpetrator" instead of saying simply nothing. However, we might reconsider Galloway's claim that she was the rapist. Arguing against the asexualization that befalls the disabled subject, Tobin Siebers points to the cultural gendering of ability. He argues "able-bodiedness usually connotes masculinity" while "femininity supposedly represents lack, defect, disability" (209). It is possible that Galloway's lie at this point in the confession to her lesbian lovers connotes her irreverent and "angry rebellion" against gender norms that she is not, as a disabled body, supposed to even have access to (209). Even in their position as two homosexual women, the lesbian couple's presumption that

they know more about what happened to Galloway than Galloway herself is reminiscent of patriarchal treatment.

We might also reconsider Galloway's problematic lies through her personas of the able-bodied hetero-masculine rapist and the disabled feminine subject. Rather than confess that she had sex with a man, she claims she was raped, a story which restores heteronormativity to her life, while at the same time demonizing this expectation as a normativity that was violent and forced upon her. But, by relinquishing responsibility and her enjoyment of the heterosexual act she can still appease what she takes to be an inflexible queer couple—a couple whom she sees as merely tolerant of her. Still, I think much more is at play here. I wonder if it is possible to consider this moment of claiming she was raped, recanting and then claiming she was a rapist, as a moment of rupture, the rupture of tolerance and the cultural ethics of accommodation that Galloway is certain she needs in order to be "fun special" and not "disabled special." Her performance of the role of a woman who is raped and then her performance of the role of the person who has raped become metaphors (albeit "nasty" and perhaps "unethical" ones) for a subject who feels boxed into identities she does not quite fit into, or even want, as she begins to discover. However, hers is not simply a hysterical performance of these categories (able-bodied rapist, victimized woman, man, woman, lesbian, heterosexual), and is not symbolic of a void within her that refuses categorization in general. Rather, Galloway's lies refuse to be sunk into a realm of "ethical relativism" or the demands of neoliberal truth and justice. Her humour and weighty performance as the victim, rapist, and consenting adult in a single moment perfectly parodies the neoliberal imperative to

represent the "inflat[ed]" self as free, valued, and entitled, and yet controlled by a host of impossible regulations and permissions (Gilmore 5). Galloway refuses, too, to "stand for others" and legitimate their modes of inquiry and self-sustainability (5). Although the two lesbians are aghast at the possibility that Galloway is a sexual "aggressor" (Galloway 135), they are forced to listen with new ears, beginning to "hear" Galloway's "problem of telling" (Gilmore 65).

Significantly, Galloway establishes for us from the beginning and throughout the memoir that, for her, performances and performing lead her to shifts in how she understands herself in relation to the social world. Earlier, of a comedy show she puts on, she tells us: "all of us, audience, performers, whatever ghosts were in the rafters, were caught up together in an enormous swell of shared emotion so complex I can only call it love, in all its wonder and woe … what happened in that space was a true community epiphany" (Galloway 114-17). She further states that it was here, on that stage, that "I first lived the word 'epiphany'" (122). If, as McRuer argues, "heteronormative epiphanies are repeatedly, and often necessarily, able-bodied ones" (13), then Galloway's lies and the epiphanies that follow are a fantastical performance of her behaving badly and inflexibly, a behaviour that actually epitomizes neoliberal sociality laid bare.

What is also interesting is that Galloway does not simply play throughout numerous identity categories, she decenters herself as subject in relation to the people she cares for. Therefore, whether she is in the living room of her lesbian lovers, or on the stage in a professional context, she actively performs the subjective voices of a body who says no to being anything in particular—man, woman, lesbian, heterosexual, able-bodied,

disabled, deaf. And the sum of her refusals—her accumulated lists of nos—speak loudly

to her non-heterosexual epiphany: she works to undermine the stability of identity

categories by performing and circulating a fun playfulness that accompanies the

wrongness of her lie. Her epiphany then, is that while she is not, but is a lesbian, and

while she is not, but is disabled, the loneliness and humiliation that complement these

states of being and not-being-enough undermine the neoliberal social imperative, where

relationships are based on becoming whole and filling or making up for what one lacks.

In Chapter Two, I argued that lesbian narcissism forges connections between lonely

subjects that defy lesbian alienation and spectacularization by making room for everyday

life and its ordinary affects. Here, in much the same way, Galloway uses her performative

lies to critique heterosexual, ableist expectations placed upon her and her body. However,

she also calls attention to the privilege that can too be found within lesbian narcisissm

itself. Whereas we have seen in Chapter Two, lesbian narcissism can condition a

relationship through loneliness, in this case Galloway's relationship to the lesbian couple

disallows her loneliness. The lesbians she cares for deny her the ability to express the

longing she had for the male real estate agent. She lies to them instead, not only to cover

up her shame for having that sexual encounter, but also to hide her loneliness from them.

If "disability represents a significant pivot point where the difference between sex and

gender becomes problematic," what becomes clear through these situational lies is that

Galloway, a lesbian woman, is repeatedly constituted as *the* problem (Siebers 212), even

by other lesbians. Her refusal to cater to the desires of the lesbian couple, to their belief

and potential fantasy that the disabled other was raped by a man and they now must save

her, troubles their subject positions as unprivileged others. In this instance, they are the social norm allowing an outsider, Galloway, as Sara Ahmed might say, to sit at their table (*Queer Phenomenology* 69). And their tolerance for Galloway's debility is pointedly not being rewarded.

The notion that Galloway was the aggressor troubles multiple discourses for these women including their ideas surrounding sexuality, gender, desire, and ability. Galloway's lie has unsettled her own and their social positions, multiple times, in a single moment. Oddly, their feelings of "uneas[e]," coupled with Galloway's shame at having lied does bring the three women together again; yet, theirs is now a "botched threesome"; the relationship they relied upon before has "dissolved" under the weight of Galloway's lies and their feelings about these lies, upsetting their presumably inherent sociality (Galloway 135). Importantly, for these women, their uneasiness with Galloway does not stem from the fact that Galloway has a "sexual existence" even though she is considered a person "with disabilities" (206). Rather, Galloway's lies upset their feelings about their relationships, and their "convivial[ity]" (Galloway 134). How can they tolerate Galloway now?

Returning to Galloway's confidante, Isabelle, it is clear she is not just going to tolerate Galloway. Instead, she wants to love Galloway in an ordinary way. Galloway, though, is confused by Isabelle's calm reaction to her lies. "Flee from my company," she orders, and Isabelle refuses. Galloway explains that "rather than have me committed, Isabelle smiled, stood up, and parked herself across the table, saying, 'these things take time'" (135). By confessing her lie to her present lover, recounting the confessional she

had with her past lovers, and enabling any reader to see this confession when they read her memoir, Galloway's admissions serve as an act of vulnerable self-disavowal that "takes time"; the loneliness she feels in front of Isabelle as "a bogus lesbian" who lies about her virginity and then about being "erotically in the know," and who is, in her own words, a "nasty little liar" is validated as an everyday feeling—common, ordinary, and lovely (136, 135). Perhaps this is because the uneasiness of Galloway's untruths is unextraordinary to Isabelle, and she is willing to allow Galloway to work with her loneliness, not pretend it away as some high drama that would leave Galloway "ecstatically happy in the moment" but miserable soon after (136). For Isabelle, false promises of "ecstatic[c] happiness" betray the senses, leading to false promises of perfection, and are unsustainable (136).

Isabelle's relationship with Galloway runs counter to neoliberal prerogatives that demand happiness and perfection; she is not going to save Galloway from her imperfect loneliness, cure or possess her, or expect her to shed lonely tendencies, and she refuses to offer false promises. She does not promise to be Galloway's saviour, cannot be the deep-end instructor who pulled Galloway from the "depths" of the water so many years prior, and refuses the role as the lesbian couple who were constantly "wanting to save [her] soul" (134). Instead, she offers Galloway a plentitude of everyday, ordinary moments. Galloway, though, does not see herself as ordinary. While as a child her deafness enabled "life [to] bec[o]me instantly more immediate," since without hearing in the ways others did she felt "nothing was going on in the world," the loneliness of this realization is devastating (104). As a girl she continuously felt strange affects, like loneliness, and

believed they ran counter to the society around her that seemed inaccessibly and "ecstatically happy," a feeling she lusted after but always eluded her (122). She explains: I would lie in bed at night awake with a "fear that I ought to be feeling something I [wasn't]" (73). However, after so many years of lying and aspiring to a neoliberal fantasy of perfection, her lies are what bring her back to the ordinary. It is the reenactments of neoliberal expectation, through the lies she tells, that enable her epiphany that she can have ordinary, at times uncomfortable, lovely, and pleasurable relationships in the immediacy of the now, the present, without needing to give up her loneliness.

Fuelled by Galloway's inability to communicate through what she considers effective means—able-bodied language—her loneliness leads her to perform herself out of her subject position as a sometimes-passing body full of neoliberal potential. Galloway is able to make a critical space where she challenges the disingenuous false promises of neoliberalism, through lies of her own. No longer beholden to a fantasy that "reminds [her] of [her] unworthiness" with constant jabs that "you are not *it;* you are not in the least what the beholder wishes to behold," lying, coupled with the altruism she finds through Isabelle's love of her, concede that Galloway's lonely feelings of inadequacy, desire, and victimization become part of a politics of everyday life (172).

Galloway now no longer feels compelled to "present" herself as extraordinary (128) or "special" (161). For instance, in recent years, Galloway has become a hearing subject. Deciding to get cochlear implants in 2012, something she had always professed she was "loathed to do" ("Deaf As a Post/ Tough as Nails"), places Galloway in uneasy tension with being able-bodied and disabled. To find out that Galloway, the woman who

was so stalwartly an activist for the deaf community, had chosen to stop being deaf? It seemed even the most ardent activist had fallen prey to a neoliberal, ableist agenda. I couldn't help but feel lied to. Did Galloway pull a fast one as she'd done so often to people in her life? Did she decide to succumb to a type of straightening, something queers are "loathe to" discuss, giving up her identity as a deaf queer in order to be able to hear 'like everyone else'? Had she stopped being the extraordinary woman I expected her to be? As a performer, had Galloway just given the best stage show of her life: a mean, deaf lesbian queer?

Little "s" special

     Galloway's influence on disability studies and activism cannot be understated; however, responses to her work vary. In a moment when female performance artists are tackling characters who are thought to "fal[l] short on physical perfection,"[98] Galloway's work has been considered both as an important model for reimagining the ways in which society understands disability and offensive to able and disabled persons alike with her political incorrectness and brash humour.[99] Some critics, such as Taft-Kaufman, regard

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[98] Consider performances of characters such as Laura, a young woman with a limp in *The Glass Menagerie*, Dot, a girl going blind and her lover, Eddy, a lesbian with a botched cleft pallet from *Blur*, and Dinah, an obese woman in *Lardo Weeping* (1995) and see write-ups about each in Robert Faires "Our Bodies, Our Selves." Also see Theatre Breaking Through Barriers and their past performances including 2009's *A Nervous Smile* and 2010's *Bass For Picasso* and PHAMALY, a British theatre company made famous for stand up and Sketch Comedy about and by differently-abled persons.

[99] While playing an obese woman, for instance, Galloway created controversy for seemingly choosing to "ridicule" the obese body by using "fat jokes" while erasing her own actual deafness from the script. She states:

Galloway's performances as problematic "narrative[s] of overcoming" (qtd. in Henderson 5). Joanne Gilbert, an academic and "practitioner of feminist comedy," understands Galloway's work contextually, placing her within a historical "tradition" of medieval court jesters and carnival geeks where "the physically deformed 'fool' of ancient times" was "marginal[y] humourous" and used as spectacle for the wealthy onlookers (qtd. in Henderson 2). Galloway's "liminal state between 'deafness' and being 'hard of hearing'" marks her as an anomaly in the disabled community and "reinforces the fact that disability is in itself not a monolithic experience" (Henderson 6, 8).

As has been discussed, throughout her body of work, Galloway presents herself duplicitously through lies and flip-flopping arguments. At times Galloway presents herself as a hero for "surviving" and being successful in spite of her disability. She is at once proud to be a disabled woman who has made a living being inspired by deaf culture, and yet will gladly become able-bodied if given the chance; she is a woman who came into deafness, lived with it, through it, made a life and career around it, and is currently choosing to come out of it willingly and happily. This exaltation is not in line with disability theorists who see disability as a "value[able]" identity that needs no overcoming (Henderson 5). However, Galloway's complicated understanding of her own deafness

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> When I first did [Lardo], I got lots of flak from people saying, "Why are you doing it? Why are you making it a figure of ridicule? If you're making fat jokes, why aren't you making deaf jokes?" There was all of this controversy about that kind of thing, but the whole idea is that nobody has a monopoly on any of that. Nobody has a monopoly on health, nobody has a monopoly on weight, body, mortality. Yeah, I don't really refer to deafness in *Lardo*. This isn't my deaf show, you know. I'm deaf, but so what? I pretend to hear the cues (Faires).

challenges any easy conceptualizations of disability. Like the lies she tells, her performances cannot be easily categorized as being either pro or anti disability. In much the same ways that she refuses to be a perfect neoliberal subject who is compliant to pressures for self-identification and assimilation, Galloway lives in any way she sees fit.

Galloway has worked hard to avoid what Robert McRuer and Abby L Wilkerson have called the "same old disability journalism intended for able-bodied consumption" (1). And her strength lies in the way she gets the audience to feel "ashamed" for their "indifference" to the "the suffering of others" (Henderson 4). As Henderson suggests, "there is not an ounce of self-deprecation in Galloway's work: she is too busy making her points, getting her laughs, and challenging our assumptions for that" (4). Neither seeing her deafness as an "individual tragedy" nor as a cause that enables her renegotiation of Western understandings of "normalcy," Galloway has never really ever aligned herself with Deaf communities (6). As Sandhal explains, "because she reads lips instead of signing, she considers herself an ally rather than a member of Deaf culture" (34). Instead, she has spent a lifetime loving to hate her own little "d" deafness.

Perhaps this is why in 2011 Galloway decided to have surgery and restore her hearing. One year later, Galloway went ahead with cochlear implant surgery.[100] The restoration of Galloway's hearing came as a shock to me as I tried to negotiate my own feelings of betrayal surrounding a woman I had heralded as a hero, a woman who understood there was beauty in silence and a politics in loneliness, both of which I

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[100] See her forthcoming documentary about her transition to cochlear implants called *ReWired* (beaconbroadside.com).

presumed were present at least in part because of Galloway's deafness. Certainly, Galloway's decision to choose to hear again is difficult for a hearing person to critique. Why shouldn't Galloway jump at any chance to hear again? Why shouldn't she embrace the possibility of technology enabling her hearing to return to her? But, remembering her many declarations that she had "made [her] peace with [her] deafness" and that "it'd become a huge part of [her] self-identity," I still find that Galloway's brutal honesty concerning what deafness had afforded her is shocking and can feel disingenuous. Indeed, the news cannot help but feel like a betrayal due to the provocative way Galloway speaks about the possibility that she will hear again.

Of her newfound opportunity to hear, Galloway recently stated: "I love sound. I hate silence. Now that I don't have to put up with it I don't have to romanticize it. Now that I don't have to write things like I did in my memoir" (Galloway, "You Are My Sunshine"). Dismissing her memoir, dismissing her readers, dismissing her experiences and in some ways her life as a deaf, queer woman, Galloway's nonchalant declarations that she "love[s] sound" and was actually simply "romanticiz[ing]" all that became of her without it seems like a letdown. As if to hurt us more she states frankly: "I'd gotten a book and a sold-out show out of it" ("You Are My Sunshine"). Had we all been had by a master performer? A mean little liar who'd gotten us to believe the declarations in her memoir that deafness had made her a better person? Should we not completely embrace Galloway's heartfelt determination to "want to learn all of [her] life [?]," to "want every little bit of sound [she] can get[?]" (Galloway, "Terry Galloway on Why" n. pag.). Why am I unmoved when I hear her profess that "three months ago [she] heard [her] mother's

voice for the first time since [she] was nine," or that her "new love affair with sound" enables her a "state of mind [that she can only] defin[e] [. . .] as happiness" ("Terry Galloway on Why")?

Galloway spent so much time convincing me as a reader and audience member that she was completely comfortable in her position as the uncomforting, performing rebel at every turn, professing her queer politics, refusing inclusion, rallying against exclusion, demanding something more than to be fitted into a heteronormative, able-bodied Western context that would make room for her only under the veil of tolerance. And I believed. So, when she observes that watching her friend learn how to hear again after a lifetime of silence was like "watching someone put points on their I.Q," I am not moved. I'm angry ("You Are My Sunshine"). What am I to make of Galloway's largest lie yet? But it is through this betrayal that Galloway challenges me to understand my own neoliberal underpinnings. While I am so busy feeling betrayed, I must ask myself what has bothered me so much. Romanticizing Galloway's deafness, and turning her into an extraordinary figure of rebellion, I am guilty of missing Galloway's point entirely: that for identities to remain fluid, queer, questioning, and political they will change as the bodies, moments, and the affects attached to these moments rewrite each other.

McRuer and Wilkerson seek a society where "desiring disability is no longer counterintuitive and in which disability is not simply tolerated or incorporated into already constituted (able-bodied) spaces (including that of queer theory as it has generally been shaped)" (13). Filled with contradictions, riddled with hypocritical discourses and declarations, Galloway's is not an identity to be analyzed for coherence or stability. Her

lies and the loneliness that accompanies being lied to as a subject living throughout this neoliberal moment are her politics, a politics that for Galloway is constantly social as she gives herself to performances every day in ordinary ways. *Mean Little deaf Queer* remains a memoir about "inchoate ramblings and obvious lies" (x). Galloway weaves the tale of a life constantly in transition: she is a jumbled mess of a person who is a liar, a cheat, a manipulative performer on and off stage, someone who is endearing for her refusal of neoliberal perfection. She is various incarnations of deaf, but her lack of listening has little to do with her lack of hearing; rather, she cleaves to the possibility that if she listens hard enough to what is not being said, she will be able to hear what must and should be said instead. In doing so, Galloway uses the memoir genre's mantra of the self-at-center to disavow the centrality of the individual and forge new social spaces. Although Galloway might begin her tale as the stereotypical "lone character" who is demoted and/or exalted to the realm of "specialness," while also suffering victimization by others, she becomes a "dirty little liar" whose loneliness renders her ordinary—neither exalted hero, nor tolerated "freak."

Galloway's work interrupts the binary between ability and disability; she does not want "to reify an exceptionalism that only certain privileged disabled bodies can occupy" ("The Cost"). Therefore, hers is not a narrative that seeks to prove the *bona fide* experience of disability or queerness; rather, she refuses to validate the "truth" of any identity. Instead, her many lonely performances as a mean, little deaf liar are social and queerly connective. In a "culture obsessed with forging equations between physical ability, beauty, and productivity," Galloway's ugly feelings, and dirty little lies repel and

rebel against neoliberal understandings of beauty and good citizenship. In addition, her loneliness and the lies she tells through it perform the emptiness of such neoliberal proclivities, rendering them unpretty (Mitchell and Snyder 10). Importantly, though, Galloway's work does not simply use the disabled body to point out the muddied "workings of nationalist ideologies." Her personal move to abandon the disability she was given enacts the tensions we neoliberal subjects struggle to negotiate daily (22). She, like Jeanine Blanchette and Chantal Dube who refused to live within the confides of the contemporary moment, push neoliberal subjectivity beyond its extraordinary status and beyond a neoliberal imperative that either assimilates, as Dan Savage's politics seeks to do, or renders invisible misfitted queers and subjectivities. Galloway's performance of everyday life crystallizes what being politically altruistic in this neoliberal moment requires: ordinary ruptures of our identities and everyday ugly feelings so that we are all enabled the constant fluidity of our own lonely playfulnesses and the socialities these willful moments might yield.

CONCLUSION

Other people's loneliness touches on our own possibility of loneliness...we evade it and feel guilty. (Fromm-Reichmann, "Loneliness" 5)

...If I'm lonely/it must be the loneliness/of waking first, of breathing/dawn's first cold/breath on the city/of being the one awake/in a house wrapped in sleep/If I'm lonely/it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore/in the last red light of the year/that knows what it/ is, that knows it's neither/ice nor mud nor winter light/but wood, with a gift for burning. (Rich, "Song" n. page)

Where We Turn Now

Moments after pressing send on the final draft of my thesis, I read an article about the science of loneliness that came to me both too late and right on time. Judith Shulevitz's "The Lethality of Loneliness: We Now Know How it Can Ravage Our Body and Brain," (n. pag.) landed in my inbox from a friend who has, for the past 5 years, sent me everything and anything she came across that had loneliness in the title. Her altruism has gifted me numerous articles that otherwise I would not have heard about, putting into practice the ways in which loneliness, the meanings we create behind it and the stories we tell about it, circulate, for better and for worse. Shulevitz's piece makes me think about the ways in which loneliness continues to be theorized by cultural, academic, and scientific discourses. Perhaps more importantly, however, "The Lethality of Loneliness" compels me to deliberate on the ways in which these discourses have influenced and impacted social media's investment in ideologies surrounding sexuality and gender.

For my purposes here, it is the matter-of-factness of Shulevitz's declarations about loneliness and the confidence she has accumulated *because* of the power scientific ideologies have on notions of fact and authenticity that worries me most. The language of Shulevitz's piece is telling. The "new biology of loneliness"— that Shulevitz heralds

defines loneliness as a "want of intimacy," as an "uncanny specter" that seeps into the body both through genetic predisposition and environmental experiences (n. pag.). According to this definition, loneliness itself is "monstrous," and "the lonely person [is] just about the most terrifying spectacle in the world," because she is a carrier of loneliness and can do little about it. The turn towards an evolutionary perspective pervades the scientific discourses Shulevitz chronicles, where there is a marked presumption that loneliness is genetic, and "transforms the brain and body" in detrimental ways. Words and warnings that pop up throughout this article such as "ravage" and "lethality," "hastens death" and "we now know" are not without their own weight here, as they create a narrative that suggests there is a universal "we" who has access to a finite, conclusive knowledge about loneliness (n. pag.) This "knowledge" creates a binary that pits ugly affects against requiems that determine health and well -being. As discussed in each chapter of this theses, the directives and regulations that determine health and happiness are driven and supported by scientific ideologies and a social body that punishes queer subjects for being lonely, effects the development of all children, especially queer ones, and works under the guise that white, heteronormative, masculine able-bodiedness is a prerequisite to good and happy citizenship. Accordingly, it is thus assumed that happy and healthy people are privy to an inherent unlonely disposition, and furthermore that "natural selection" aids and abets us, in that it "favor[s] people who nee[d] people" (n. pag.).

As though foreshadowing today's Western investment in the science of loneliness, Denise Riley argues in 2005 that in Western society the lonely person is so stigmatized

that "the admission of even occasional loneliness remains taboo" (*Impersonal Passions* 58). Even if a person surrounds herself with people, if her relationships are not considered socially and politically acceptable she is still considered a failed social subject—too lonely to build appropriate relationships, or too queer to connect properly with the right kinds of folks. I have argued throughout this thesis that loneliness is a particularly detrimental label when applied to persons without what are considered the "proper" visible social ties. Chief among these targeted non-normative intimacies are queer relationships. The loneliness label is used to isolate and mark the queer subject as questionable.

To be improperly associated is inexcusable in Western contexts of citizenry and happiness. What I have studied and experienced is a social system that perhaps especially since 9/11, promises "community" or "togetherness," and yet uses the collective notions behind the term "we" to police a patriotic unity at the expense of anyone who resists, interrupts, or queers this universal. This "we" of the West is incredibly narrow in its constitution, and the ways in which we are social manifest themselves according to, paradoxically, the monster we fear: individualism. Yet, what I have suggested in this thesis is that the lonely subject who enters into relational networks is a compound-lonely-subject creating relations, albeit lonely ones, with other subjects. The fear of *her* individualism, then, is misplaced. The lonely subject will seek out a connection with anyone because all are subject to loneliness; all are fair game. If anything, the lonely subject who I have explored in the textual analysis throughout this thesis is represented as she who refuses and cannot be discriminatory in her social choices; she is far less choosey

than the "non-lonely" subject who rejects others easily in favor of the "we" of Western sociality.

In the process of working on this dissertation, I have witnessed both the effects of presuming loneliness is an asocial impediment, and a reaffirming politics of social loneliness in action. As a community activist, I work as a public advocate, speaker, and educator connecting with queer youth who have been struggling to understand or hide their loneliness. The feelings of alienation that stem from being told loneliness is unhealthy, unhappy, and must be gotten over in order to "get better" are powerfully dangerous to queer youth. While I have been theorizing a politics of loneliness that acknowledges the important altruistic aspects of ugly affects, I have simultaneously had the pleasure of working alongside counselors, practitioners, parents, and teachers to use loneliness and its commonality in order to bring people together. Through a critical and political embrace of loneliness, we have been successful at challenging the social structures and cultural discriminations about queer people that typically exclude and hurt us all. For me, the goal, then, cannot be to help lonely people "fit in better" or to "teach lonely people how to get along better with others" ("The Lethality of Loneliness"). These directives miss the point that it is the social structures we foster and promote that are in need of changing, and not the people negatively affected by them.

To be sure, while the term "loneliness" itself suggests a condition of not-being-with-others, loneliness is not at all counter-intuitive to ideas of sociability and togetherness. The loneliness I know, feel, study, and politicize into action does not evidence a lack of the social; rather, this loneliness is the feeling and the condition of

knowing that there is something lacking *in* the social—the way we are in the world with others individually, and as a Western nation globally. I continue to imagine spaces where the lonely queer subject is re-envisioned as a self in a momentary stasis of political singleness which serves as her posture against the apolitical and the apathetic. This does not necessarily mean that science and the cultural narratives that promote its authority and authenticity have no place in this work. If, as John Cacioppo and his contemporaries believe we are "hardwired to find life unpleasant outside the safety of trusted friends and family, just as we're pre-programmed to find certain foods disgusting," then it follows that we are most certainly hardwired to feel the "unpleasant" effects of hatred and homophobia. Therefore, if loneliness *is* thought to be triggered by a lack of social connection, or an inability to find meaningful connections because of loneliness' pessimistic symptoms, than loneliness actually evidences the possibility that there is something unsettling about the current way we Westerners envision ourselves in relation to each other and other non-Western bodies.

I hope that my work continues to strive for "better" socialities, alongside all academic, scientific, cultural, and social discourses. After all, the stories we tell are also the stories we hear, and we need to make certain we are narrativizing our everyday lives and the affects, pretty and ugly, that make up these narratives. Loneliness is not simply an affective or existential state in which an individual finds herself, but a kind of trope for a way of being-in-the-world. Loneliness, thus, introduces a kind of theoretical implication, practice or an obligation upon the self to be political, to interrupt cultural stratagems based upon inclusion and exclusion, and to carry out these interrogations through

subversive politics. Oddly enough, it is in this regard that loneliness may be the most

social and socializing part of us all.

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APPENDIX

"Jeff, One Lonely Guy" Flyer

Figure 1: This is a photo of the original flyer Jeff Ragsdale posted throughout New York City in October 2011.

APPENDIX

"Reflection"

Figure 2. Kelli Connell's 2008 image entitled "Reflection." This image is one of a series of photographs taken for Connell's photographic compilation *Double Life*. The entire sequence of images can be seen on her professional website: www.kelliconnell.com

APPENDIX

"Kitchen Tension"

Figure 3. Kelli Connell's 2002 image entitled, "Kitchen Tension." This image is one of a series of photographs taken for Connell's photographic compilation *Double Life*. The entire sequence of images can be seen on her professional website: www.kelliconnell.com
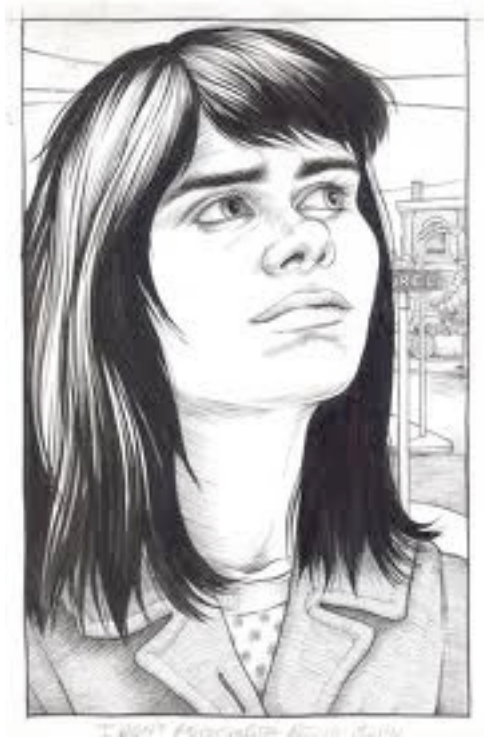
APPENDIX

"Healthy Minnie"

Figure 4. This image is of Minnie, from Phoebe Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl.* Here Minnie is seen as a healthy, robust girl who has yet to be tainted by the queer kiss she will soon share with her friend Tabatha.

"Monstrous Minnie"

Figure 5. This is an image of Minnie, from Phoebe Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenaged Girl.* Here Minnie is seen covered in boils and sores, a phenomena that occurred after she shared a queer kiss with Tabatha.