

QUEER AND DISABLED AFTERLIVES OF RACIAL EUGENICS

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GENDER, FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S STUDIES
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

November, 2025

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Abstract

This dissertation paints a picture of resistance, joy, hope and desirability of racialized, queer disabled subjectivity in a society that is built on the ability to breed out these “undesirable” traits through positive and negative eugenic and newgenic means. By interrogating the presumed fixity of dating and hook- up ‘preferences’, the institution that is marriage, child bearing and rearing and the construction of the ideal family, we can become more critical of these systems both in the scholarship and also our personal choices. I have argued that the ways in which we engage our sexual subjectivities is heavily influenced either consciously or unconsciously by these eugenic ideals. Additionally, I have presented the ways that discussing eugenics through discrete lenses do us a disservice especially as we try to dismantle these ideals through our organizing and activism. Integrating personal anecdotes, archival work as well as employing various methodologies, this dissertation challenges us to think about the interconnectedness of racism, ableism and queerphobia as we date, hook up, contemplate marriage and building our families, make informed choices and perhaps model our collective activism in ways that address these systemic issues.

The goal of this work is not to say that there is a utopia that exists where we can all retreat to remove ourselves from the current system. It is here to show that the decisions we make do not exist in a vacuum, especially those close personal and private decisions we make about our intimate and sexual lives. It demonstrates that there are ways of being that we can engage with that do not continue the cycle of oppression of those at the margins. It is a call to action for scholars to think more critically about their work and whose stories we leave out. This is especially important due to the current socio- political climate of increased hostility toward those whose work and embodiment do not continue to prop up the empires of North America in a way that privileges the White, cis- hetero patriarchy.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my village. A constellation of folks here and in the hereafter that have shown me what it means to be part of a collective.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the time to thank all of the people that made this dissertation possible. To my supervisor Dr. Rachel Gorman, committee members Dr. Amar Wahab and Dr. Mary Bunch, thank you for staying with me on the journey from comps to defense. To the program assistants Yemi Adebisi, Sue Sbrizzi, Celeta Irvin, your assistance was instrumental in navigating the bureaucracy of a doctoral program. Thank you for always being kind and generous with your time, energy and advice.

Lastly, to my family, friends, and my favourite coworker, Bernie, without you, this project would not have even been imagined, much less realized. The generative group chats, rants, zoom meetings and phone calls were all integral to the process as were the meals, hugs, assorted treats and beverages shared.

Thank You!

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Prologue

On an afternoon like many others during my undergrad, I sat in ‘the space’- this is what we called TBLGAY, the Trans, Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Allies¹ at York- discussing life and dating. After listening to a friend share yet another dating disaster with the exasperated conclusion that all men were terrible, I inquired, ‘Is it that all the men are bad or is it that you are choosing the wrong ones?’ Neither of us had an answer to this question but it would remain with me as I started to think of my topic for my MA Major Research Paper (MRP). Finding the answer to this question led to my MRP project Disability and Sexuality: Perceptions of Beauty, Sexuality and Desirability for Queer Disabled Youth where I interviewed a few queer, disabled, young people about their dating lives. Their narratives juxtaposed with the limited literature at the time resulted in the following conclusions: first, there was something going on below the surface level choices as it related to dating and more importantly; race and culture played a significant role in my participants dating lives regardless of the importance they placed on it. The drive to understand what these underlying tensions were led to this dissertation project on Queer and Disabled Afterlives of Racial Eugenics.

This work is impacted by my social location as a Black/mixed race/’dougla’, Queer, Disabled, Guyanese, Woman, Partner, Sister, Child, Kin and many other identities I hold. In the tradition of decolonial scholars, Haraway, 2016; Harding, 1986; 2008; Smith, 2021, I reject the notions of western objectivity in research as the researcher is always part of the decision-making process from the very first decision on what to study to the last decision on how the work is presented upon completion. The Initial iteration of this dissertation was a large scale traditional

¹ This has since been changed to Asexual to better reflect the expansiveness of the queer community at York.

social science project with multiple interviews and focus groups. However, after a meeting with my supervisor where they asked two key questions 1) Would I learn anything new or different to my previous work by doing more interviews? and 2) What was the goal of this work?

These questions forced me to reevaluate my theoretical frameworks and methodology. This dissertation is both Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary, incorporating Black Feminist Thought through the work of scholars such as Katherine McKittrick, Audre Lorde, Moya Bailey, and others; Queer of Colour Critiques from Sami Schalk, Jina Kim, Jin Haritaworn and more as well as Queer Theory, Critical Disability Studies, Intersectionality. These frameworks all question the assumptions made in the understanding of our material realities and in particular, how we understand sexual subjectivity and sexuality more broadly. These theories would allow me to untether desire from the racist, classist, ableist and heterosexist ideas embedded within it and allow for a rereading the archives and examining culturally specific artefacts such as life writing, articles, and photography etc.

Additionally, I shifted toward using a mixed methods approach engaging with Cultural Studies and Feminist Methodologies in a similar fashion to Riley Snorton, Sami Schalk, Katherine McKittrick, among others. I also opted to engage with historical analysis through Feminist Historical Methodologies as I reviewed archival records, life writing, and oral histories. Lastly, I incorporated Discourse Analysis to contextualize and discuss romance novels, classified advertisements and event posters. Discourse Analysis in particular, tells us that we do not always produce our own truths and identities, instead, these productions are discursively done (Phillips & Hardy, 2011, pg. 2). The focus here is on the processes by which meanings are made. It is epistemologically constructivist which allowed me to introduce and interrogate the idea of the worldbuilding of the everyday.

EUGENICS

GENETICS

EUGENICS IS THE SELF DIRECTION OF HUMAN EVOLUTION

LIKE A TREE EUGENICS DRAWS ITS MATERIALS FROM MANY SOURCES AND GIVES THEM ORGANIC UNITY AND PURPOSE

Medicine, Psychiatry, Surgery, Biology, Psychology, History, Anthropology, Development Study, Population Study, Family Stock Study, Applied Eugenics, Religion, State Selection, Generalogy, Biogeny, Education, Eugenic Forces, Migration, Race Crossing, Economics, Politics, Environment, Hygiene, Ethnology, Mental Testing, Anthropometry, Heredity.

Third International Congress of Eugenics,
American Museum of Natural History,
New York, on August 21-23, 1932.

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Eugenics is at its core a colonial and imperial directive. As a byproduct of animal husbandry, eugenics builds in to my choice to engage in the concept of contagion since the work of eugenics is to cure/ fix, eradicate and weaponize the diseases that are BIPOC, queer sexualities/ queer people and disability/ disabled people. The concept of survival of the fittest encourages us to kill, contain and subsequently eradicate that which will make the core crop weak. Further, eugenics creates scripts that we use when dating, hooking up, and building families well before we enter the field of dating. As its contemporary version, newgenics removes the veneer of morality that eugenics has by focusing on the flawed notion of objectivity in science.

The second reason to move toward a framework of contagion is to address the problem of discreet categorizations. Inquiries into eugenics as scientific method and methodology have been done within three specific categorizations; Race, Disability and Sexual Minorities. While Critical Race critiques and Queer theorists allude to disability in their discussions of eugenics, they often view disability as something to be rehabilitated from thereby divorcing race and queerness from disability in order to dismantle the eugenic underpinning. But this is problematic since they are dependant on the other due to the very nature of eugenics.

To attend to the way that eugenics is embedded within all aspects of society but particularly within the dating, marriage and family building spheres, I decided to use a nursery rhyme as instructive guide.

[Boy] and [Girl] sitting in a tree,

K-I-S-S-I-N-G

First comes love,

Then comes marriage,

Then comes [Girl] with a baby carriage.

Nursery rhymes like fairy tales are instructive and meant to orient us within our place in society through an understanding of individual and collective dos and don'ts. This rhyme in particular exemplifies Chen's (2021) "relationship escalator", there is an expected order to things and this order is underpinned by eugenics/ eugenic ideals. Love, Marriage and The Baby Carriage allowed me to structure the rest of the dissertation by interrogating the ways that we understand these taken for granted ideas and providing necessary interventions.

When discussing love, dating and intimate relationships, the key takeaway is that preferences do not exist in abstraction, they are consciously or unconsciously informed by the racist, ableist and queerphobic eugenic ideals that govern sexual and intimate fields. Queerphobia, Sexual Racism and Sexual Ableism all operate in service to monogamy and the pursuit of monogamous marriage. I used romance novels as a way to discuss the imaginary, idealized or otherwise. Queer stories specifically have shifted from tragic stories to happily ever after to happy right now to center a turn toward a present centered happiness. To shift from the imaginary to real life, I started with a look at classified advertisements to disrupt the demonization of digital spaces. Often times we blame digital anonymity for the ease with which people state their racist, ableist and otherwise bigoted ideas but these classified ads showed that this is simply not the case and in fact people will exhibit these traits in spite of the medium.

As an intervention, I proffer that we rethink compulsory sexuality by looking at relationship through an Asexual lens. I want to be clear; I am not advocating for everyone to become Asexual but merely adopt a lens to think about desire and intimacy beyond sexual

activity/ orgasm. Once we do, we can start to appreciate relationships that do not look like the ideal, for example, exploring other forms of intimacy and expansive relationship structures or non- monogamy, but also realize their importance to our existence (Garrick & Florance, 2016; Evans, 2024).

In understanding marriage, it is important to note that eugenic policies have transformed this union by exploiting the fact that marriage has rarely been about altruism or solely about love and feelings of affection. To discover how this came to be, I reviewed North American and by extension British laws on the topic, specifically Consent Marriage Laws, Divorce Laws, Anti-Miscegenation Laws, Civil Partnerships and Marriage Equality legislation. Assimilation to state sanctioned marriage by LGBTQ+ folks or disabled people ignore the reality that for every in group there is an outgroup but most importantly the removal of rights is always a possibility.

The intervention in this case is to dismantle traditional (eugenic) marriage. The current state apparatus only offers legitimacy to those it deems fit and pathologizes all who fall outside of this scope. The focus on ‘fitness’ shifts the moralistic eugenic implications to economic and scientific objectives for the greater good. Alternative relationship configurations such as common- law unions and non- monogamous relationship styles highlight the limitations of rights discourse and the degree of freedom possible in the absence of scrutiny from the state.

Finally, understanding The Baby Carriage or family building is to understand that the nuclear family standard is deeply flawed and rooted in the White nationalist eugenic policies. The structure of the nuclear family is a colonial system of violence (Finley, 2011, pg. 32). Procreation under the conditions of capitalist and liberal/ neoliberal conditions is eugenic. It is imperative to eugenicists that only those who embody ‘fitness’ be able to reproduce, and those who do not embody ‘fitness’, be disincentivized or forced out of the reproductive gene pool. Procreative

family building excludes most queer, disabled, racialized people from this ideal and its overarching supremacy has to be dismantled if we are to create a world where queer racialized and disabled kin can thrive.

Unsurprisingly, as an intervention, I recommend dismantling the nuclear family structure to untether parenthood from romantic relationships. Family building is world building. The way that we build kinship relations/ structures requires us to imagine futurity and lineages expansively, and understand what that looks like for us individually and collectively. We need to shift toward care webs/ care networks/ intentional kinship structures (mutigenerational households, queer Houses, polyamorous families) to allow us to engage in active community building and create these as sites of joy and pleasure that builds solidarity in our communities. We are not simply individuals, but an extension of a lineage whether biological or chosen. The village has to remain once we reach adulthood to provide us with comfort and care and engaging in Mia Mingus' concept of access intimacy (2011) offers us one avenue to remain active villagers.

Toward Abolitionist Theorizing

This work has engaged in abolitionist thought particularly around marriage and the nuclear family but is not firmly rooted within the politic of Abolition. It is my belief that there is no reformation of structures built on oppressive ideologies echoing Audre Lorde's declaration in 1979 that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984a). I do not offer a solution to make sexual citizenship more all encompassing, I do not offer solutions to make marriage more equitable nor do I suggest ways we can be less eugenic minded when we

think about having offspring. What I offer are ways that individuals have been rejecting those structures altogether or using systemic loopholes to reduce the harm faced by these systems. This is because the concept of worldbuilding of the everyday that I employ forces me to attend to the material realities presented within the narratives whether imaginary or realized and as such is not necessarily future focused. Abolition is futurity work. Therefore, I believe that this work makes strong links to the need for abolition of these state sanctioned categorizations for the racialized queer disabled kin to really thrive. This contribution among others, is what I hope readers take away when they read this body of work.

Introduction

Individuals within mainstream United States of America² and Canadian cultures think about sex, our sexualities and sexual expressions through an assumption of innateness (Barker & Scheele, 2016; Sommerville, 1994; Weeks, 2017). What this means is that within these cultural systems, we are taught, and come to believe ourselves to have a natural or hereditarily derived sexuality accompanied by a wish/ desire/ drive to engage in sex and sexual intimacy, that constructs us as sexual subjects. Moreover, due to this belief, we tend to construct these subjectivities of ourselves and also of any of our potential partners using a taken for granted lens of preferences³. We cast a net for intimate and sexual partners and advertise ourselves as same, in hopes that we can choose and be chosen as someone's ideal partner whether that is for a single interaction, for long term dating, for marriage or to build family relations.

What remains hidden is that these ways of understanding ourselves as sexual subjects and the ways that we show up in our full sexual subjectivity are heavily influenced consciously or unconsciously by eugenic ideals, largely understood as the science of improving humanity⁴. In spite of the many critiques leveled against eugenics since the end of World War II, these long-lasting principles are often rebranded through liberal and egalitarian lenses (Agar, 2004; Burke & Castaneda, 2007), and continue to underpin the very structure of the way that we live, love, date, hook- up, create relationships, have offspring and build families (Dolmage2018; McLaren, 1990; Ordoover, 2003; et al.). This perceived innateness of our sexuality, embedded with the liberal

² Throughout this dissertation The United States of America may be abbreviated to the following; The United States, U.S.A. or U.S.

³ Preferences in this instance, includes sexual preferences, but also encompasses preferences beyond that i.e. partnership preferences and idealized parental preferences.

⁴ This is a term coined in 1865 by Sir Francis Galton. Broadly, this theory applied agricultural practices of selective breeding for better stock to the project of improving humanity. This will be explored more concretely in the next chapter.

reframing of eugenic ideals, is the reason that individuals both within and outside of dating and hook-up spaces are eager to share their preferences for a partner in the form of the wish list, i.e., six feet tall, fit, [insert race here], or the more popular anti-wish list i.e. no [insert race here], no fats, no ghetto, no fems etc.

A common adage shared and critiqued by participants in my Masters research project, *Disability and Sexuality: Perceptions of Beauty, Sexuality and Desirability for Queer, Disabled Youth*, researchers who study sexuality and sexual fields, as well as writers and subjects of magazine articles and social media posts, is that we can't help who we are aesthetically attracted to and there's nothing wrong with being up front about that (Chan et. al., 2021; Han, 2021; Han & Choi, 2018; Midtgaard, 2023; Shakespeare, 1996; Stanley, 2014; Thai et. al., 2019; Tran et. al., 2020). But I want us to ask why? What constructs someone who is 6ft tall more desirable than someone who is 5ft 9 inches? What drives someone to use racially coded or racially explicit language to signal that they find no one of an entire race attractive? What does it mean when some disabled people have to consider if they should show up as their whole disabled identities and engage in the politics of medical disclosure to avoid being ghosted (Gerschick, 2011; Hall, 2017; Liddiard, 2018; Saltes 2013; Stanley, 2014)? These were the questions I was left with after completing my MA Major Research Paper (MRP). This MRP looked at the perceptions of beauty, sexuality and desirability for queer disabled youth. Through the interviews with my participants and in reviewing the literature, underlying eugenic stereotypes and scripts were present well before these young people even entered the world of dating.

In this dissertation, I argue that the originator of these scripts and stereotypes is eugenics

and its inheritor, newgenics. Newgenics, coined by Malacrida (2020)⁵, is also referred to as new/neo/liberal eugenics and describes modern or contemporary “medical, political and social practices related to ‘improving’ human kind on the one hand and erasing disability and difference on the other” (“What Is Newgenics?”, 2014). In separate Critical Disability Studies, Sexuality Studies and Critical Race Theory spaces, discussions about eugenics primarily turn on single axes of eugenics and disability, eugenics and sexuality, and eugenics and race, respectively. This separation has the unfortunate result of obscuring and obfuscating the interconnectedness of racism, ableism and queerphobia, which collectively form the bedrock of eugenic politics, past and present. Separately, these systems of oppression do not and cannot exist without the others. Collectively, these practices influence the way that we date, hook- up, get married and build our families.

By bringing together the fields of disability studies, queer/sexuality studies and critical race theory to bear on the politics of dating, marriage, and family creation in a society that disenfranchises one or more of our identities, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: How do we, as a society, i.e. mainstream United States and Canadian society generally, and queer, racialized and disabled communities specifically, reconcile the messiness of queer and racialized sexualities and the desexualisation of disabled bodies? How do we engage in worldbuilding in order to survive and thrive in a society that views us (read: queer, racialized and disabled people) and our lives as disposable? Specifically, how do we imagine/ envision and subsequently build and rebuild alternative realities and futures that center on building kinship structures and intimate relations that do not meet or comply with the dominant standards and

⁵ Malacrida (2020) defines the term to speak to the ways that disabled women’s reproductive options specifically are policed through subtle and informal ways (pg. 7). This term has since been taken up more broadly within the Critical Disability Studies field.

expectations?

Our sexualities are often under surveillance. Many disability studies scholars, primarily those whose work focuses on disability and sexuality, have critiqued the twin, contradictory ableist ideology that disabled people are eternal infants, and/or hypersexual deviants (McRuer, 2011, p.g.108 as well as, Hall, 2018; Liddiard, 2014; 2018), as both of these ideologies are consistently projected onto a single individual simultaneously. Additionally, this dual process constructs all disabled people as children or non- sexual beings, which means that any attempt to act on sexual impulses or urges is constructed as being symptomatic of a deviant psyche or an example of general deviance. This hypersexual deviant/ eternal innocent ideology is brought into sharp contrast for people of colour, and specifically Black people whose sexualities have been historically constructed, and continue to be viewed, as excesses. This hypersexualization leads to a representational double bind when attempting to depict the sexualities of Black disabled people. That is to say, do we want to emphasize sexuality to resist the desexualisation of people with disabilities or downplay sexuality to reject the hypersexualization of Black people? (Schalk, 2016) Representations of individuals whose identities fall into this intersection are under-researched and constitutes a gap in knowledge that this project hopes to fill. Further, for queer people, their sexualities have historically been constructed as excessive, and deviant due to its lack of contribution to procreation (Foucault, 1976; 1984).

This project exists as an extension of my previous research and also as an exercise in worldbuilding. This term, “often associated with science fiction and fantasy settings” (Heussner, et. al, 2023), speaks to the writer’s job of creating a world from the ground up. This world has to include a history of the peoples, geography, language etc.⁶ I use this term to highlight the spirit of

⁶ I am intentionally using this understanding of worldbuilding through the creative arts for two reasons. The first being that this project uses creative writing as an entry point through which authors say something about themselves,

imagination that drives the creation of the lives we wish for ourselves and those around us under circumstances of oppression. Science fiction and fantasy writing often take inspiration from times and events past and present to create worlds that challenge our current perceptions. This challenge is what I hope to evoke in this dissertation. However, I am not solely future focused i.e., this dissertation does not necessarily seek to provide a guideline to creating a utopia. I am interested in the ‘worldbuilding of the everyday’, by which I mean, the ways that we create and build our unique lives that turn on our intimate relations/ connections, and our kinship structures. That these realities can be used as a way to dismantle current oppressive structures and move us toward a better future is secondary.

My MRP participants engaged in politics of resistance to, and refusal of, the dominant structures of beauty, desirability and ways of expressing their sexualities by privileging queer disability identities and spaces. They created access intimacy (Mingus, 2011; 2017) and reframed beauty and desirability under crip beauty standards (Kafai, 2018) in their dating, hook- up and intimate lives without even having this language. So too will this work examine the ways that individuals at the margins are building affirming worlds further proving Anzaldua’s words that “[n]othing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.” (Anzaldua, 1990, cited in Schalk, 2018, pg. 1).

the current state of affairs, as well as the world they wish to draw us into and I feel that this particular definition attends to that origin. Secondly, although queer worldmaking (Otis & Dunn, 2021; Keehn et al., 2024) is as old as queer theory, and would seem to make sense as a thematic framework within this body of work, it would not be enough of an accurate representation. Worldbuilding or worldmaking whether it was understood to be queer, Black or otherwise has existed through a myriad of creative and lived expressions well before this term made its way to the academy. Octavia Butler’s work as well as other black speculative fiction easily comes to mind as examples of this. This project turns on the understanding that there are ways of being and knowing that have long existed (especially outside of the academic lens) which have been adapted, and in some cases co- opted, for use by others who were not party to their construction. It would therefore be antithetical to focus on queer worldbuilding/ worldmaking without acknowledging, its creative and robust frameworks taken from outside of the academy or more specifically from the everyday and the imaginary of theorists, writers, poets, and general community members. Further, I am positing that the ‘everyday’ or ‘day to day’ is an exercise in worldbuilding through invoking individual and collective imagination. Using Heussner’s definition allows me to attend to this nuance and decenters academia as the site of legitimizing worldbuilding.

Queering of the family structure allows for alternative expressions of parenting and kinship structures. These alternative parenting models and kinship structures resist the dominant nuclear family norm and are a form of worldbuilding that exist but are often hidden. Therefore, these alternative structures have led to the creation of dismodern world(s)⁷ within the existing framework (Rembis, 2010, pg. 56). This is important because these alternate expressions of family and kinship are under researched. I am particularly interested in the ways that familial structures shift and change to meet the needs of those whose families do not meet the dominant standard. The dual surveillance of racialized bodies and disabled bodies has not stopped racialized disabled parents from being good parents, nor has it stopped queer, disabled people of colour from worldbuilding outside of the traditional norms. I will look at how disabling sex and crippling rights discourses allow for ‘non- traditional’ familial structures, such as extended families, or Houses in the 2SLGBTQ+ community to exist and thrive. I will critically examine the ways that these families work and the contexts through which they emerge.

Throughout this dissertation I will be engaging with the politics of desirability in a more expansive way. Understanding desire as not solely sexual but encompassing an individual longing for self acceptance, acceptance in one’s community and socially affirmed identity that represents how one sees oneself, (Gilley, 2011, pg. 129), I can explore desire and desirability beyond simply sexual activity and partners. This is particularly important to me because asexual representation is missing when we discuss desirability in queer community, moreover, the desire to build families often turns on the ability to find someone who can be a good parent and, in queer and disabled communities, where much of parenting is intentional, desire cannot be limited

⁷ Dismodernism, coined by Davis (2002) was explored and expanded on by Rembis’ (2010), to speak to the construction of world that allows for the ‘normal relationship’ and cultural understandings of beauty and sexuality to be dismantled, thereby opening the discourse in such a way that alternative expressions of sexuality, relationships, and beauty will be celebrated and not restricted.

to only one's sexual partners, it has to also apply to desired offspring. This framing of desire will allow me to interrogate queer dating and marriage practices in a more nuanced way since dating is often used as a precursor to marriage and expanding one's family i.e., having kids. While families do not have to include children or offspring, heteronormative discourse around the construction of the family centres family units that include biological offspring.

I argue that focusing on eugenics in discrete categories and i.e. eugenics and race, eugenics and sexuality and eugenics and disability, results in scholarship that removes the interconnectedness of racism, ableism and queerphobia that underlies eugenic practices past and present as well as the ways that these practices influence the way that we date, hook-up, get married and build our families. The literature review, theoretical frameworks, and methodology sections that follow provide the lens and frame through which this argument will be posited.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed discussed race, desirability politics, disability and queer identity as well as eugenics and focused on key themes and topics such as: the definitions of race and language; the asexual (read: non sexual)/ hypersexual dichotomy of disabled people; politics of desirability; and personhood and rights discourse. This body of literature has been brought into sharp relief by the continued devaluing of BIPOC, queer and disabled bodies as we continue to live through a global pandemic, the publicly witnessed murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Colten Boushie, Sonya Massey and so many others in the United States and Canada; continued Black Lives Matter protests and backlash; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and backlash; and support of and backlash against Palestinian, Congolese, Haitian, Sudanese peoples

who are facing genocide and conflicts on a scale I have not seen in my lifetime. Not only are these genocides being downplayed by mainstream media outlets, but the Canadian and American governments are employing a “nothing to see here” policy while actively suppressing resolutions/ policy that would create space for an end to these genocides/ conflicts. This approach to policy is also evident as states and provinces across North America start to enact policies that stifle the rights of 2SLGBTQ+ people, primarily youth while the federal governments pretend that there is once again “nothing to see here”.

These actions and inactions coupled with unrests in my home country, Guyana, following the 2020 reinstallation of a dictatorship, known to support death squads that had previously killed Black people, primarily young Black men, with impunity, has made it difficult to re-read some of the articles and books necessary to build a rounded understanding of the fields I am engaging with. At once, McKittrick’s (2010) discussion of Sara Baartman and the inextricable link between science and creative knowledges/ labour that constructs the human, Weheliye’s (2014) deployment of *Habeus Viscus*⁸ and the discussion of pornotroping⁹ Black and racialized flesh and Snorton’s (2017) assertion of the body, specifically “the pelvis” [being] “a critical site for producing racial hierarchies [for those] intent on finding bodily “proof” of black inferiority” (pg.19) in *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, snapped into focus with a poignancy as I watch the depersonification of, and assault on Black bodies and body parts. Further, the constant loops of video and commentary asking to see ‘more’ and ‘from a different angle’ and debates about why we, the viewing public, are entitled to see these images as they would answer the question “what were they doing to make them deserve the fate that was meted

⁸ This is the name of the book; however, it is also defined as *You shall have the flesh* after *Habeus Corpus* which is a legal term that literally translates to *you should have the body*. Weheliye (2014) follows in the tradition of Hortense Spillers to signify a difference between the body and the flesh (pg. 2).

⁹ Defined by Spillers as “black suffering for a shocked and titillated audience” (Weheliye, 2014, pg. 89).

out to them?” highlighted an unconscious and definitely entrenched callousness within our collective consciousness. The undesirability of Black bodies, the criminalization of Black bodies, the inhumanness of Black bodies and the commodification of Black pain, underscored the ways that these authors and others discuss race, it’s origins and the ways that anti- Blackness allows for assimilation of “model minorities” into an approximation of rights and privileges.

Taken further, the way that these same principles are applied in different brush strokes to other racialized groups, the 2SLGBTQ+ community at large and disability communities, evoke a feeling of being unmoored or untethered to the accepted Canadian multicultural identity and a feeling that I, as a queer Black disabled woman, should not in fact want to be tethered to this identity in the first place. These cultural touchstones also made looking at the literature that discuss, race, desirability politics, disability and queer identity in a way that highlighted specific themes necessary. Moreover, watching other racialized minorities devalue Black struggle and engage in whataboutisms made clear the tensions that already existed within categories of solidarity. In turn, watching these same groups expect, nay demand, solidarity from the Black community when their own members are attacked and disenfranchised encapsulated the very core of what these bodies of literature were troubling.

Race and Language

The works by Crenshaw (1995), Hill Collins (2009), Hill Collins & Bilge (2016), Spillers (1987) and others were a great entrée into the field of critical race theory, whereas, Bailey (2021), Bailey & Mobley (2019), Blay (2021), McKittrick (2021) and others, offered more contemporary understandings of the field. So, while I was able to introduce a historical lexicon to my

understanding of race, I was also able to engage with how these historical ways of knowing and being underpin contemporary ontology and epistemology. Markus (2016), Weheliye (2014), and Zuberi (2001) defined race as a complex set of social relations that emerge through global historical power relations that are purported to be identical with, or to map on to a classification of bodily difference and phenotype. This allowed me to engage with a more grounded view of both the systemic and individual issues with racial classification. Since these hierarchical structures are ideologically maintained through a convergence of stereotypes, phenotype, and cultural performance to make assertions about groups of people, it is more easily understood how individuals are willing to make statements such as “No Asians” or as one of my friends mentioned once “no curry” on their dating profiles and still perceive themselves to be good or non- racist. Han (2008) discusses the dual narrative where those of the dominant groups dismiss, ignore, or adopt a “what can we do?” attitude when faced with concerns of those who occupy more marginalized identities. This opens up the space to start to interrogate these dual narratives and, I would argue, dual realities.

The social construction of race has allowed for areas of transit between desirability and undesirability since race is one area of contestation or a borderland to be traversed in hook- up and dating practices as individuals’ raced identities become subject to preferences. As such, my focus is on the following three areas. The first is the origin of. We know that race/ racial phenotypes and stereotypes are not innate, natural, or fixed. How then, are ideas of what constitutes White, Black, and other racialized categories re-produced within ‘progressive’ dating contexts? The second area of relevance is the impact that these phenotypes and stereotypes have on who we choose as partners. Dating and relationship building is often a precursor to family building. Therefore, who we date or have sex with, can correspond with whom we believe would

be a successful partner(s). These choices are also mitigated by those who we would feel comfortable introducing to our families (biological and chosen) to. Who we choose as partners has as much to do with various and sometimes conflicting community understandings of racial phenotypes and stereotypes, and the cultural performativity of potential partners as it does the individual's 'preference'. The last area of focus is that of shifting conditions. What are the factors that make areas of transit¹⁰ possible and can we use these shifting conditions to dismantle the existing stereotypes and shift the parameters of desirability? Here I am using the definition of desire from Gilley (2011),¹¹ desire/ desirability then goes beyond one's sexual or intimate partners.

The Asexual/Non- Sexual / Hypersexual Dichotomy

Texts from the Critical Disability Studies scholars like Clare (2013;1999), Erickson (2015), Kafer (2012), Liddiard (2018), McRuer (2011), Rembis (2010), and Shakespeare, et. al. (1996) provided an opportunity to slide back into a pool I was familiar with; while adding the knowledge I had gained to engage with its most recent works. All of these authors interrogated the lack of sexuality or sexual subjectivity that filled disability organizing spaces and the assumption of heterosexuality in the limited instances that sexual subjectivity was discussed. Further they challenged disability rights activists to consider the real lives of queer disabled people (Clare, 2013;1999; McRuer, 2011; Shakespeare, 1996), asked us to think of the importance of disability

¹⁰ I use the phrase areas of transit here to flag the lack of fixity that identity categories have and that there is movement within and outside of these categories. Particularly I am evoking the idea of transit i.e. a bus, train, etc., that traverses between identity categories as though they were temporary destinations through time. For example, at different periods of time or in different socio-political and geographical circumstances, the same person e.g. a mixed-race person can be considered emblematic of contagion and/ or an entity to be desired.

¹¹ Defined as not solely sexual but encompassing an individual longing for self acceptance, acceptance in one's community and socially affirmed identity that represents how one sees oneself (pg. 129).

representation in pornography (Erickson, 2015), while also troubling the complex intersections of desire/desirability and fetishization (Kafer, 2012).

Re-reading these texts also reminded me of one of the main problems I have had with the field, namely the overwhelming whiteness of it all; which was thrown into sharp relief by the cultural moments referenced above. Two issues were highlighted through this literature. The first being the divide between academia and online/grassroots activism in this area. This particular issue was one I encountered in 2013 when I was doing my MRP research and it was a bit disheartening yet unsurprising to see this divide persist. This divide, was between those who felt that the representation of disability and sex/ sexuality and sexual subjectivity within organizing circles was sorely lacking and should in fact be centered as this would allow for a fuller, more nuanced discussion of the power dynamics that come to bear on the lives of disabled people, and those who believed that this discussion of sexuality was a distraction and the focus should be on more tangible goods such as employment accommodations etc. (Erickson 2010; Rembis, 2010; Shildrick, 2009; Tepper, 2000). This scholarship lagged behind the creation of organizations such as Sins Invalid in 2005, theoretical frameworks such as Mia Mingus' Access Intimacy (2011) etc., and in the current landscape of disability and sexuality literature there is a turn to arguing for sexual citizenship (Ignagni et al., 2016; Liddiard, 2018). This turn is being critiqued due to the reliance on citizenship narratives and rights organizing as a means of reckoning with disabled people's sexual subjectivities without critically interrogating the concept of citizenship and rights discourse (Rankin, 2000; Richardson, 2017).

The second issue highlighted centered on the ways that queer and racialized sexualities are deemed as excesses and the way they are constructed as loose and promiscuous, which reminded me of the Anne Finger (1992) quote

“Sexuality is often the source of our deepest oppression; it is also often the source of our deepest pain. It is easier to talk about -and formulate strategies for changing- discrimination in employment, education, and housing than it is to talk about our exclusion from sexuality and reproduction” (para. 6)

In a world where, for most, your sexuality falls into a non- sexuality/hypersexuality dichotomy it is easy to see how hard lines can be carved out for how, why, and under what conditions, we look at disability and sexuality. The need to assimilate into a “our sexuality is just like yours” or “yes, we fuck too!” mindsets is tempting. On the other hand, it is easier to talk about sexuality and sexual access when you don’t also have to worry that your race makes it a messier topic. To return to Schalk’s (2016) point, there is a representational double bind when attempting to depict the sexualities of disabled Black people: do we want to emphasize sexuality to resist the desexualisation of people with disabilities or downplay sexuality to reject the hypersexualization of Black people? And when your sexuality is mitigated through the presence of parents and other caregivers (Banks, 2016; et.al.), how do we make sense of the narrative of the third type of “extraordinary sexuality” proposed by DeJardins (2012) that promises freedom of sexuality and sexual expression for disabled youth as long as they are sterilized to ensure no reproduction occurs (Brian, et al., 2020). The containment of the messiness of sexuality here is final.

Although much of the literature was focused on women and their access to reproduction and motherhood, the texts that looked at men and masculinity (Brian & Trent Jr, 2017; Liddiard, 2014; Shuttleworth et.al., 2012 etc.) often glanced over parenthood which I found curious. It was as if implicitly, claiming masculinity and the tropes of virility was not consistent with fatherhood/ parenthood. Even as masculinity was being reclaimed and reconstituted (Cromwell, 2006; DeBoer, 2015; Walcott, 2012), the parental aspect was an afterthought. When fatherhood and

disability were discussed together, it often situated disability in the child, with the nondisabled father raising/ helping to raise this child (Jackson & Andipatin, 2021; Potter, 2016; etc.). In the few instances that the father is disabled, there was an almost fatalistic tone to these articles at first glance (Marsh & Brown, 2023; Pini & Conway, 2017; etc.). This is not taking into consideration that articles discussing trans* disabled parenting (Walls, et al. 2018) are even less readily found, even as their popular media (Coleman, 2022; Guttman, 2023) and non- peer reviewed counterparts exist¹². Again, I am reminded of the ways that disability is still hidden and deemed illegitimate when we talk about parenthood and the misogyny that underpins our knowledge of family structure, which is very evident in the ways that we theorize about parenthood. Parenthood is so deeply intertwined with heteronormativity that even as disability scholars seek to dismantle the ableist ideas about it, the misogyny is unwittingly reinforced. Moreover, it is also a deeply racialized enterprise with the color of one's skin often being the determinant in how your parenting is perceived.

Scholars like Alexander (2012), Walcott (2003), and Markus (2016), elaborate on the ways that the construction of racial categories informs how people understand and define themselves within these categories. Particularly, when race is a visible marker, our daily interactions take on specific characteristics. Who we love, have sex with, and how we parent, is heavily scrutinized by community members and strangers. These acts all become political acts. Preferences can be weaponized for political gain. What I mean by this is that by constructing a notion of undesirability e.g., Black men are dead beat dads, then popularizing this notion through media and other means, a version of truth emerges. The result of this is twofold. First, Black men become undesirable for procreation and parenthood. Secondly, we can safely ignore the societal

¹² There is a growing number of blogs and gray literature about “seahorse parents”. This term is used by some advocates such as Kayden Coleman to refer to transgender dads or transmasculine parents.

forces that allow absenteeism to occur such as the disproportionate percentage of Black men who are incarcerated or killed through state sanctioned violence and the historical and contemporary economic structures that fosters absentee fathers.

Both attitudinal and structural barriers inhibit disabled people's ability to engage fully in these expressions of personhood and lead to isolation and feelings of inadequacy (Shakespeare, Gillespie- Sells, & Davies, 1996. pg.16). Consequently, if disabled people are not considered to be good parents (Fritsch, 2017), then they too come to be an undesirable quantity for relationships and procreation and as such we can ignore the erasure of disabled people from the population. It should be noted that even as disabled activists have been panned for being dramatic when they state this, the global pandemic has proven them absolutely correct. The multiple discussions in the early days of the pandemic where the fact that those who were older and those with compromised immune systems or had other disabilities would be the ones who would fall ill with this unknown virus was seen as a net positive.

The introduction of the social model of disability in the late 1980s to replace the medical model of disability, shifted disability from being located in the body of the individual, to being a product and construct of the social world. Under this model, disability becomes a complex set of social relations that shape the experience of impairment. (Clare, 2017; Liddiard, 2018). Beyond this, the literature shows a wealth of intersections with critical race, feminist, and queer theoretical frameworks, especially in the disability and sexuality research field. Sex and sexuality were, and I would argue continue to be, constructed as extraneous for disabled people (Erickson, 2015). It is unnecessary and defies norms. What I mean by this is that contravenes what McRuer (2011) calls compulsory able-bodiedness. This term is an amalgamation of Adrienne Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality and the societal ableism that produces the non- disabled

body as the standard, species perfect bodily iteration. In this paradigm sexuality must follow certain capitalist parameters. Sex and sexuality must follow the rules of heterosexuality within which is already embedded specific notions of race, class, and ability. In deploying the dual narratives of infant or deviant, protection *of* disabled people often sits with a protection *from* disabled people (especially from themselves) agenda (Banks, 2016, pg. 662, Rembis, 2010, p.53) where nondisabled experts always know better.

This queer erasure within the discussion of disabled people's sexuality makes the 1996 book *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires*, and the scholarship that has built on it, that much more important. Prior to this book, mainstream disability activists were predominantly focused on the advancement of the rights Finger noted, while simultaneously ignoring sexuality as a right. Even in discussions of disability and reproduction and reproductive rights, the notion of sex was always erased or ignored. This book changed the landscape for the disability rights movement. For the first time, sexuality and disability were intertwined within the call for citizenship rights. Furthermore, lesbian, and gay disabled peoples' narratives were used to illuminate the barriers that young people faced when trying to access their sexuality.

Personhood and Rights Discourse

Much of the Critical Disability Studies literature engages with Sexuality Studies and, Queer Theory, particularly, in intersectional ways. They interrogate the ways that race and ability impact queer or heterosexual sexual expression. This was important to the grounding of this project as it turns on the fact that with the passage of time, and shifts in socio-economic- political consciousness, certain expressions of sexuality have come to be understood as the 'normal' and

‘good’ type of sexuality. Gayle Rubin’s charmed circle and outer limits from the 1984 piece *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* continues to be relevant as we keep swapping sexual expressions from the outer limits to the charmed circle instead of asking why this divide exists in the first place, and dismantling the dichotomy altogether.

Heterosexual sexual expression has long been thought to be the ‘norm’. In the 1940’s Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues Pomeroy and Martin created what is now known as a ‘Kinsey Scale’ that sought to re-categorize sexuality. They noted that the participants in the studies *Sexual Behaviors in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual behavior in the Human Female* (1953) could not be categorized as either heterosexual or homosexual. Instead, they fell into other categories of sexuality. This study, although deeply flawed, opened a discourse around sexuality in a new way. As Chen (2021) notes this study also gives us the forgotten Category X, or Group X, who are a group of people that did not fit into Kinsey’s scale as they had “no socio- sexual contacts or reactions” i.e., those who would be considered under the asexual umbrella today. As Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, (1976, 1984), discussed, heterosexuality within the context of procreation has been reinforced while all sexual behavior outside this was deemed ‘deviant’ and repressed in ways that were both overt and systemic. These repressive techniques are still found throughout society at various institutional levels.

Further, it can be argued that in attempting to disrupt the heterosexual/homosexual binary the Kinsey scale essentially reinforces incorrect assumptions about sexuality and gender identity. The assumption that there are only a few types of sexuality, listed as: - ‘asexuality’, heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, is incorrect. There are many individuals whose sexualities are erased by these very limited categories. As feminist studies and sexuality studies started to critique these narrow views of sexuality (Drucker; 2012: Galupo, et al.;2014: Zietsch &

Sidari: 2020), other sexual identity labels began to emerge. However, this was not solely the purview of academia as many of these sexual identity labels were contested and are still contested today at the community and social level.

Collectively, these texts show the possibilities of integrating these three fields and the possibilities for new ways of defining and understanding beauty, desire, and sexuality and how these can work to reconstruct ideas about personhood and sexual subjectivities (Clare, 2013;1999; Erickson, 2015; Kafer, 2012; Liddiard, 2018; McRuer, 2011; Rembis, 2010; Shakespeare, et. al., 1996). Crip Beauty is a “self made and resilient political expression” (Kafai, 2018, pg. 233) that links to Crip femininity to untether the predetermined scripts to construct more intentional femininities and masculinities. The possibility here also exists for Crip Beauty to untether the gender binary altogether and construct a definition of beauty devoid of the strict rules of male/female binary. Beauty in interdependence and support that eradicates the foundations of compulsory ablebodiness allows for desire to exist within a sexual and sensual capacity outside of predetermined scripts is a possibility that already exists in the imaginary and small pockets of disability communities. Intimate citizenship (Santos, 2018, pg. 305) offers the space to discuss this as it views disabled people’s reproductive lives as key to living full lives. Disability allows for a full reconfiguration of how to optimize sexual pleasure (Santos, 2018, pg. 312) and this cannot be overstated. With what Skinner (2018) notes as the new cultural model of disability (pg. 351) the possibility for McRuer’s disabling sex (2011, pg. 110) that dismantles those prescriptive scripts have a place, and desire can be productive as well as sexual or sensual (Loeser, 2018, pg. 262).

To this end, the literature notes that sexuality is inherent to personhood regardless of what

that sexuality may be¹³. Moreover, sexual personhood (De Boer, 2015, pg. 75) and sexual citizenship (Liddiard, 2014; 2018) all encompass these beliefs. Therefore, the discourses of disability need to account for this. If it does not, then there is a specific part of personhood being made inaccessible because of ableist understandings of who gets to be a person or citizen in our society.

Sexual Citizenship includes

“access to information about sexuality; freedom of association in institutions and care facilities; demedicalization of disabled sexuality; addressing sexual needs and desires as part of health care; reprofessionalization of caregivers to recognize, not deny, sexuality; and privacy on demand” (Siebers 2012, pg. 47)

This sexual/ sexuality access discourse is taken up by Ignagni (2016), Santos & Santos (2018) and other scholars as Intimate Citizenship. In framing sexual expression in terms of citizenship rights, and explicitly stating some of these, it becomes easier to place the right to sexual expression into a rights discourse. As such, sexual rights become something tangible that disability organizations can fight for e.g., sexual rights as the right to information (Noonan, 2011, pg. 177) allows for there to be comprehensive sex education that covers consent and can offer disabled people language to report abuse experienced or even curb incidences of abuse.

The mere presence/visibility of disabled people is not enough to change the way that disabled people are viewed. Instead, there has to be larger shifts in the discourse about who is a desirable partner and parent. Engagement with Rembis’ (2010) construction of the ‘dismodern’ world, will allow for the ‘normal relationship’ and cultural understandings of beauty and

¹³ I want to note that this tends to always turn on compulsory sexuality whether that is heterosexual or not i.e. sexuality that is knowable, innate and that the individual wants to act on. This will be defined and explored later in the project.

sexuality to be dismantled thereby opening the discourse in such a way that alternative expressions of sexuality, relationships, and beauty will be celebrated and not restricted (Rembis, 2010, pp. 56- 59). Sexuality is interlinked with personhood regardless of what that sexuality may be. Moreover, sexual personhood (De Boer, 2015, pg. 75) and sexual/intimate citizenship (Liddiard, 2018; Siebers, 2012; et.al.) all encompass these beliefs. Therefore, any rights framework needs to account for this. If it does not, then there is a specific part of personhood being made inaccessible because of ableist understandings of who gets to be a person or citizen in our society.

There is also one other aspect of this notion of change that evolves from giving disabled people the power over their sexuality and that is the ability to redefine sexuality. Some scholars posit that for many disabled people, desire has been rethought in terms that do not center genital sexuality, or the goal of self-completion in sexual satisfaction. By reframing the idea of what it means to feel pleasure or be sexual, disabled people are better able to negotiate the world of pleasure (Santos et.al., 2018; Shildrick, 2009; et al.) Their ways of giving and receiving pleasure become valid because the discourse of pleasure is moved beyond genital sexuality. McRuer's *disabling sex* (2011, pg. 110) dismantles those prescriptive scripts and desire is productive as well as sexual or sensual (Loeser, 2018, pg. 262). In this way, "...desiring disability involves affirming the ways that disability blurs the boundaries between power and abjection." (Price, 2015, pg. 275). The world being built is immediately one that rejects and resists hegemonic dualisms embedded within the dominant sex/sexuality scripts.

While the integration of sexual/ intimate citizenship can push the conversation forward, the application of the citizenship narrative to sexual subjectivity ignores that citizenship is fraught with a neoliberal, capitalistic ethos that at its core disenfranchises the same populations it seeks to

welcome (Rankin, 2000; Richardson, 2017; Valverde, 2006). Further the creation of citizens means there must be those who fall outside of that category. So, if the goal is to argue for disabled peoples to engage in sexual intimacies, just as their non-disabled counterparts, we unintentionally narrow the discourse as we do not engage those whose sexual subjectivity falls outside of the non- disabled subjectivities in the first place. In seeking to redraw the lines of propriety we reinforce hierarchies of sexuality instead of dismantling hierarchies altogether.

It is not enough to call for the right to disability inclusive sex education, if this sex education will be rooted in heterosexual penis-in-vagina, procreative understandings of sex. It must encompass narratives that crip sex (McRuer, 2011). It has to explore sex/sexuality that centres pleasure and take differing Bodyminds¹⁴ into account (Andrews, 2020). The right to marry must be fought alongside the dismantling of heteronormative gender roles and untether masculinity and femininity from hegemonic scripts. This way disabled people will no longer be asked whether their non- disabled partners are their caregivers. Beyond this, we can confer those same privileges on family units that care with and for each other in the absence of a sexual relationship. I am thinking specifically of networks of care (Piepzna- Samarasinha, 2018) and those engaged in creating these access intimacies (Mingus, 2011) that are as strong as traditionally recognized relationships. In addition to this, a class analysis will allow space for disabled people to be considered inherently valuable and desirable as partners in spite of what their contribution is under neoliberal capitalist economies. Further, the fight for the right to access sexual surrogacy or sexual facilitation cannot erase asexual disabled people or low-income disabled people who may not be able to afford the services of sex workers, sex surrogates or sex

¹⁴ “Bodymind is a materialist feminist disability studies concept from Margaret Price that refers to the enmeshment of the mind and body, which are typically understood as interacting and connected, yet distinct entities due to the Cartesian dualism of Western philosophy” (Schalk, 2018. pg.5). Price (2015) notes that “mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other...” (pg.269).

therapists. To ignore these people would reinforce the assimilative nature of compulsory sexuality and compulsory ablebodiedness by locating sexuality in functionality and contribute to the hierarchy of sexual social privilege.

Politics of Desirability

Significantly, these texts afforded me a language to think through desire and desirability in a way that I had not been able to in my previous work. As mentioned previously, the ideas proposed by Gilley (2011) that defined desire as not solely sexual but encompassing a longing for self acceptance, acceptance in one's community and a socially affirmed identity that represents how one sees oneself (pg. 129) moves the discussion of desire and desirability beyond sexual activity and sexually desired/ desirable partners, to creating community (place and people) and engaging in worldbuilding. This is particularly important to the discussion for two reasons: Missing asexual representation and; conceptualizing family building/ expansion.

As mentioned previously, asexual representation is missing when we discuss desirability in queer, disability¹⁵ and racialized communities. When desire is understood as sexual or driven by one's sexuality, genitals, hormones etc. and the urges that one may have, that assumption of innate sexuality is invoked. Specifically, the assumption that all people wish to engage in all sexual activities, ranging from dating rituals, to kissing, to more at any given time. This is simply not the case as the books by Brown (2022), Chen (2021) and Decker (2015) prove. Further, this particular type of hyperfocus tends to flatten sexuality offering little opportunity to query what

¹⁵ Disabled people are often categorized as asexual however, as mentioned prior this, it is not done in the understanding of asexual as an orientation but instead meant to cast disabled people as non-sexual beings i.e. being neither asexual nor allosexual.

the purpose of these interactions are, and why we engage in these behaviours.

This is directly linked to the second reason an expanded definition of desire is needed for this project. The desire to build families primarily turns on the ability to find someone who can be a good co- parent for various reasons; medical, social, etc. Family expansion for many, but especially for queer and disabled people, is intentional, and as such desire cannot be limited to simply one's sexual partners. There has to be room to discuss desirable fetuses, babies, children i.e. offspring in general. Additionally, an expansive understanding of desire allows me to interrogate both queer dating and marriage practices in a more nuanced way since dating is often used as a precursor to marriage and expanding one's family i.e., having/ rearing kids. It also allows me to interrogate families of choice since oftentimes these families come together due to a lack of desirability that an individual holds in the eyes of their families of origin.

To invoke the work of Price (2015), McRuer (2004), Mingus (2011) and Warner & Berlant (1998), desire in this project also speaks to the wanting and privileging of difference to blur the boundaries "between power and abjection" (Price, 2015, pg. 275) in order to build the everyday. By desiring queerness, disability and Blackness, Indigeneity and other Racialized realities and corporealities in non exploitative ways, we can attend to the worldbuilding queer, racialized, and disabled people are already doing while interrogating the dominant ideals that undergird dating and hookup cultures, marriage and family building.

Overall, these strands of literature and more importantly the interventions of queer, racialized and critical disability studies scholars in the distinct fields show the importance of thinking of sexuality and sexual subjectivity through multiple lenses to challenge the dominant scripts of power. By engaging with the scholarship in these fields, I am able to think about eugenics as something that is systemic. It is embedded in our expressions of sexual autonomy as

we date, hook- up, marry, procreate and build families. This also informs our resistance to eugenic/ newgenic systems by showing the ways that we can engage in worldbuilding that is not solely dependent on rights discourse.

The literature offers ways to think about intimacy, intimate partnerships, kinship structures and worldbuilding in varied ways. However, we are still left with the question of how we can create worlds where queer, BIPOC, disabled communities are able to thrive as their whole selves not just their more contextually desirable identities. What are the ways that eugenic/ newgenic ideals underpin the literature above in unassumed and therefore unchallenged ways? Further, the way that we currently engage with and rely on rights and citizenship frameworks makes the literature covered above unable to truly answer the question of how we can dismantle the inherent eugenic structures embedded within the dating, hook- up, and family building fields.

Theoretical Frameworks

As shown in the literature review, this research incorporates work from adjacent critical fields and will be guided by anti-racist queer and crip theoretical principles. The main fields of inquiry are Intersectionality and Black feminist thought, Critical Disability Studies, Queer of Colour critiques, as well as Queer Theory and Queer Crip Theory. These fields all question the assumptions made in the understanding of our material realities. Engaging with these varied and nuanced theoretical frameworks will allow for a more holistic understanding of the topics. Concretely, this means that I will have the framework to reframe and articulate the worldbuilding that queer, BIPOC, disabled people have been engaging in. Further I can clearly pinpoint and add to the work of dismantling the eugenic and newgenic ideals within the dating, hook- up and

family building fields. Particularly, the concept of desire as defined by Gilley and used by Crip Theory specifically by Price (2015), McRuer (2004) and Rembis (2010), will be engaged with in all of these fields in that I will be seeking to untether desire from the racist, classist, ableist and heterosexist ideas embedded within it. Moreover, engaging in the frameworks presented from these fields will ensure that in rereading the archives and examining culturally specific artefacts such as life writing, articles, and photography etc., there will be a reverence for, and consideration of what desire means to the various communities represented.

Black Feminist Theory, and Intersectionality are frameworks that complicate taken for granted notions of race and culture, and allow for a grounded understanding of, and critical engagement with, the social and cultural productions of race. Crenshaw (1995), and Hill- Collins (2009) and Hill- Collins & Bilge (2016) all argue that an individual who has two or more marginal identities is affected by prejudice in a unique way as opposed to if they only belonged to a single of these identity categories. These theories have been adapted in ways that move the discourse beyond anti- Black racism and sexism to look at White supremacy as the dominant tool of oppression in legal, economic, and other institutions.

Critical Disability Studies challenges the dominant belief systems and taken for granted notions about disability and disabled people. This field, which emerged from disability scholarship, by disabled people, argued that the belief that disabled people are social, economic, and sexual burdens was factually incorrect and served only to further the dominant ableist ideologies. The introduction of the social model of disability in the 1980s¹⁶ to replace the medical model of disability, shifted disability from being located within the body of the individual, to being a product and construct of the social world. Under this social model, disability becomes a

¹⁶ Oliver is credited with coining this phrase in 1983.

complex set of social relations that shape the experience of impairment. (Clare 2017, Liddiard, 2018) Queer of color critiques by authors such as Annamma, et. al, (2013), Bell (2011) and Schalk & Kim (2020) and others engage with this field by using Intersectional and Black feminist thought to challenge the whiteness of the field and add depth to the discussion by acknowledging that race also impacts those social relations that shape disability.

Sexuality Studies, however, is an older discipline that emerged out of early sexological studies. This field questions commonplace notions about what sexuality is and how it is formed. Both Sexuality Studies and Critical Disability Studies trouble the concept of the normal and instead draft new ways of looking at experiences by not divorcing them from societal implications. The addition of Queer Theory adds a layer of looking at queer sexuality beyond the dominant Lesbian and Gay discourses. This is particularly important to this project since it challenges the assimilative norms that come to be embedded in lesbian and gay rights discourse. Informed by the work of Hammonds (1994) I will also “question how sexualities and sexual subjects are produced by dominant discourses and ... interrogate the reactions and resistances to those discourses.”

While these areas of study do not consistently overlap, there has been some work that bring them into conversation. This intersection is where this research will be nestled. In order to fully explore the research questions, set out above, I will engage with these theories through a queer and crip of colour lens in order to propose ways that Crippling/ Disabling Sex can allow for a freedom of desirability where disabled people do not automatically become deviant or eternal children. Instead, disabled people can be understood as fully realized beings that can express a broad spectrum of sexuality.

In addition to this, the Queer Theory, Queer of colour critiques and an Intersectional

analysis will allow me to meaningfully engage in Queering/ Crippling of citizenship/ intimate rights. Because rights- based research tends to operate by conferring rights on to a marginalized group that is really a constructed identity monolith, these theories will expose who gets left behind in these discourses. It is the stories of those left behind or who are underserved even as others assimilate that will offer the answers to the research questions posed.

Furthermore, this dissertation turns on discussions of eugenics, race, disability and queerness/ queer sexualities and for this reason, many of the authors and scholarship referenced use and are influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe and their work on Biopower/ Biopolitics, Bare Life and Necropolitics respectively. Introduced in the last chapter of Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and elevated in his later works, biopower and its application through biopolitics refer to a transformation away from sovereign power that had the right to “*take* life or *let* live” (pg. 136) to a disciplining power that would “*foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” (pg. 138) at the population level through politics, schools etc. (pg. 140). Agamben’s concept of bare life is interrogated in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare life* (1998) to parse out the difference between “bare life” and “qualified life” (pg. 66). The point of this conceptualization was to separate life from life itself, and bodies from beings, and to frame citizenry as a way to understand how authorities have always exerted influence to transform and control the quality of life of those under its control. Mbembe coined the term necropolitics in his 2003 essay *Necropolitics*. This framework draws on Foucault’s biopolitics and decolonial approaches to speak to the “subjugation of life to the power of death” (pg. 39) not mere disallowing of life as seen in Foucault.

It is easy to see how looking at eugenics and charting the way that its racist, ableist, queerphobic etc. underpinnings would be conceptualized within these frameworks as we discuss

love, dating, relationships, marriage and kinship structures. However, like Weheliye (2014), I do not agree that my work can fully be contextualized through the logics of bare life, necropolitics or biopolitics as race, disability, and queerness/ queer sexualities are central to my understanding of eugenics and newgenics and they inform and are built by each other. Weheliye notes that “these concepts neglect and/ or actively dispute the existence of alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation and racialization that define the modern human.” (pp. 1- 2). To follow the logic of biopower within my work, the life that is ‘fostered’ is that of Whiteness as understood through the lens of White supremacy. This Whiteness is at its core heterosexual, binary gendered, upper/ upper middle class, and non -disabled. This Whiteness/ White identity created is the purity of the eugenic ideal, however, this is not all eugenics does. Eugenics is at the same time death making as it seeks to destroy that which is not whiteness in this very specific sense. This death making ideology can be linked to necropolitics as well as the realities of bare life. However, I would also argue that the sovereign never left. The state may have fostered life (read: White life) and may even engage in subjection to death (slavery, colonization) however, the state also actively takes lives (death penalties, death by police), and the lives that are fostered are done so with the understanding that at any given time the state can change its mind (able-bodied white women losing bodily autonomy following the end of Roe v. Wade).

Moreover, the cycle of fostering life, subjection to death and active state violence is not specifically what this project is solely about. While these concepts can be used to understand why and how the eugenic/ newgenic interventions like sexual ableism and sexual racism lay at the foundation of dating/ hook- up fields, relationships, the institution of marriage and family building for queer, disabled, BIPOC individuals, this project is equally as centered on the worldbuilding of the everyday. This worldbuilding includes the tools used, spaces created and

other ways of being that BIPOC, queer and disabled people navigate in order to survive and most importantly thrive within the White supremacist states of Canada and the United States of America. These ways of being and worldbuilding embrace life and all of its vagaries. I am interested in the human; however, not as a cipher of bare life, as that type of thinking only exists within western oppressive thinking. I am interested in the ways in which BIPOC, queer and disabled people make meaning as they navigate society that would rather see them cured, institutionalized or dead.

The ways that marginalized communities engage in worldbuilding by creating families and relationships cannot be understood without engaging with all of these theoretical perspectives. Marginalized communities have been creating and embracing kinship structures outside of the nuclear ideal as a way to survive and thrive in a white supremacist society that would erase them from existence. As such, these theoretical frameworks will allow me to engage with archival and cultural artefacts in order to fully explore and answer my research questions and show the life and worldbuilding that already exists. These frameworks allow me to revisit these posters, writing, images etc. to view them as not mere artefact but record of a world built for and by those represented and interrogate what is there and what is hidden.

Methodology/Methods

Going into this project I knew that I did not want to do interviews. In building on my previous work, I wanted to get to the origins of sexual/ social stereotypes and scripts, as best I could. I believed that the best way to do this was to look at some historical records. Were these scripts new inventions, or had they always existed? At the same time, I wanted to think about the current

climate of dating and honor my previous participants' sites of resistance to the dominant ableist, racist, etc., ideologies that permeated dating/ hook- up cultures and structures. I also wanted to attend to the tensions between the turn to citizenship narratives and the grassroots, social media/ online activist discourses that either did not use this language, or rejected it outright; opting instead to create new language to think about meeting one's needs and the needs of the community outside of state granted rights. To do this, I chose to use online discourses and forums as archives as these new archives are just as important to the process of knowledge production as scholarly texts.

This confluence of desires led me to cultural and feminist historical methods/ methodologies and the work of Riley Snorton (2017), Sami Schalk (2016; 2018) and Katherine McKittrick (2021). These authors and their work, offered a template for how to work using mixed methodologies.

The writings of Sami Schalk, Katherine McKittrick, and Riley Snorton marry different analytic styles and methodologies in compelling ways. In *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Snorton, 2017), *Dear Science and Other Stories* (McKittrick, 2021), *Happily Ever After for Whom? Blackness and disability in romance narratives* (Schalk, 2016) and *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability Race and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Schalk, 2018) the authors blended intersectional analysis with historical, pictorial, archival and textual analysis. This produced a nuanced discussion on the ways that heterosexism, heteronormativity, and racism colour historical and contemporary writing and research. Schalk, McKittrick and Snorton offered a way of doing research that is at the same time affirmative and offers a challenge to the status quo. Much like the work produced by these authors, this project will also use methodologies from Cultural Studies and Feminist Studies in this blended way to ensure that

while the dominant discourse is attended to, room is also made for counternarratives of hope, joy and livingness that permeate the existence of queer, disabled and racialized communities.

Cultural studies emerged out of critical perspectives of many disciplines (Franklin et al., 1991, p.5) as a way to do content analysis. There are a few versions of cultural studies as the field has changed with intellectual shifts. Of the three main cultural studies methodology streams-- Marxist, Foucauldian and Discourse analysis -- I focus on discourse analysis in the tradition of Stuart Hall (1997) to analyse the topic of disability and sexuality as it pertains to my research project. In this way discourse analysis interrogates the content of culture, through its products to start to dismantle the embedded power structures. The way this is done differs from medium to medium. However, at its core, this methodology and method argues that we do not always produce our own truths and identities, instead, these productions are discursively done (Phillips & Hardy, 2011, pg. 2). The focus here is on the processes by which meanings are made. It is epistemologically constructivist. The concepts are constructed in as much as they create constructs. How best to deconstruct desire and sexual racism except to examine both of these as discursive products with meanings that shift and change across cultures. Here I will engage in a discourse analysis of two novels *Going Public* by Hudson Lin and *The Prophets* by Robert Jones Jr. These novels with queer romances at the center allow for an analysis of romance cultures and romance as a product of culture as produced by the authors who are themselves products of society. What specific kinds of romance cultures are they building or constructing through their writing and all such romance writings? How do we understand romance as a discursive product and using the analytic tools espoused by Schalk and Snorton, how can we parse out the categorizations of race, class, gender, etc., that are embedded implicitly or stated explicitly within the worlds that these authors have constructed. What implications might they have on the reader?

Historical methodologies have shifted with feminist interventions (Chenier, 2009; Couser, 2011; Gorelick, 1991). Feminist work has always been rooted in history as it is considered the way to understand our present selves through examining the past. For many feminists, the traditional means of doing historical research resulted in an absence of women in history. The effect of this absence relegated women to passive roles. Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of women writing history or doing historical research. For feminist historians, this was unacceptable. Therefore, feminist historical researchers sought to look for these missing pieces within the larger historical landscape. This meant looking in areas outside of the traditional records, which led to questions about where records of women's lives were kept and what these records meant in terms of race, class, and the institutionalization of knowledge.

Women's history seeks to discover women and their roles in history while the shift to looking at gender and history centers the construction of gender. That is to say, the focus is on the way the distinct categories of gender are created and structured. The argument here is that the category of women is already embedded with values and meaning of that particular historical period and therefore it is impossible to divorce 'woman' from the societal ascribed notions of what that gender role entails (Rahmun and Jackson, 2010). The post colonial approach takes this a step further and asks how these categories and histories come to be constructed in the first place, questioning the foundational principles of what we understand to be history and the power relations that have constructed those whose histories are produced and whose remain absent. It also takes into account how these categorizations and the powers that uphold them shift and morph as they travel across space and place. Hayden White's work rejects that there is a history that is fixed and true (White, 1973). Instead, he argues that history is fiction, an interpretation if you will, and that the only truthful aspect, is found within its status as 'historical fact'. In

producing a narrative, one also produces silences, as this production is a direct result of power mobilization.

As a researcher using the historical methodologies presented above, I will be relying on tools such as, archival research, life writings, and oral histories. The desire to find that which is hidden with a focus to attaining a type of social justice has led to a rise in the use of historical methodologies (Arondekar, 2005; Boyd, 2008; Bredberg, 1999; Couser, 2011; Chenier, 2009; Stoler, 2022; Strobel, 1999). Arguably, this enterprise is one of re-writing the common historical understandings of events or perhaps presenting the ‘whole’ (hi)-story as opposed to just the well-known story, as Smith (2021) notes, “Every issue has been approached by Indigenous peoples with a view to *rewriting* and *rerighting* our position in history.” (pg. 31). This process or “rewriting and rerighting” involves individuals from historically marginalized groups writing memoirs, or as will be used in this project podcasts as a contemporary memoir, that allow for representations of those stories not found within the archive (Couser, 2011). As well, this creates the conditions for social justice movements by challenging perceived societal norms (Chenier, 2009, p.251). Smith (2021), citing legal sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, notes that “there can be no global social justice without global cognitive justice” (pg. 270). We cannot hope to effect change or enact resistance if we cannot name what we are resisting or hope to change. In focusing on historical and life writings, I am engaging in a process that highlights representations from the margins as being an integral part of history.

I will be using the writings of queer, racialized and disabled individuals curated by The ArQuives formerly known as the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, the eugenics archive, found online at <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/>, The Repair Project and Guelph Civic Museum’s exhibit ‘Into the Light’, as well as other narratives found in grey literature and on social media

forums to ascertain what their views of race, queerness and disability are. Moreover, these writings would illuminate their personal understandings of beauty, sexuality, or desirability and how the identity categories of race, queer sexuality and disability affect their ability to form intimate or sexual partnerships. In using historical methodologies, there is a possibility of making meaning of another's life story or narrative in a way that is counter to the belief of the author. As a researcher, I am aware of the fact that even the ideas of queerness, disability, and race that I am reading into these narratives are derivative of my 21st century western understandings of these terms and this will influence my reading of the material.

According to Chenier, engaging with oral history is a means of uncovering the everyday lives of individuals and democratizing history (2009, p. 251-252). For many whose histories are a part of oral tradition, there is little to no written record. In addition, the overreliance on written work over oral history provides an entry point for post colonial analysis/ critique as to what histories are deemed legitimate within our research methodologies. As Smith (2021) notes, “[w]riting has been viewed as the mark of a superior civilization and other societies have been judged, by this view, to be incapable of thinking critically and objectively, or having distance from ideas and emotions.” (pg.32). This mindset, she explains, illustrates the power embedded within recounted history/ies (2021, pp.37-37) and as the works of Bredberg (1999), Boyd (2008), Burton (2003) and others note there is power in retelling the stories at the margins. Therefore, in using the oral histories of racialized, disabled, and queer individuals, not only will a larger subset of people's lives/ life stories be heard but this is also an exercise that engages in “a powerful form of resistance” (Smith, 2021, pg.38) to the dominant historical narratives of the groups represented. This project will be reviewing podcast episodes from *15- Minute History*, *National Public Radio (NPR)*, *Family Equality*, *The Longest Shortest Time* and *Masculine Birth Ritual*

understanding them as oral histories and new digital archives.

Historical methodologies offer a rich opportunity to research the lives of queer, racialized, and disabled people. It allows for life narratives to be used to trouble the fixity of these categories while challenging the absence of individuals whose experiences have been erased. The tools used to do this research also question the nature of academic research i.e. what constitutes avenues for academic inquiry and what ways are the best to present and represent these materials. There continues to be debates about what constitutes appropriate archives and the best way to use social media writing as life writing and archives and the larger implications of digital preservation (Englert, et.al, 2020; Fondren, 2018; McNealy, 2011; Stoler, 2002). Attempting to solely use the traditional archives completely changes the nature of the project as it would be forced to turn on the hinges of governmentality, particularly decision-making bodies that govern the lives of people who fall into those identity categories. I avoid this by expanding the archive to encompass archived documents, life writings and artefacts from non- governmental and community organizations.

The expansion of technology and its role in reframing historical methods is a welcome and necessary shift to allow for a more nuanced discussion as to the deployment of history and the way that these historical accounts often leave gaps that contain the most marginalized. Nonetheless, it is precisely because of these nuances that I will be engaging with this methodology and using these types of archival resources. It is within these oral histories both in the archive and through podcasts that the material realities of queer disabled people of colour are housed. I want to re-enter queer archives to find those moments where queer, disabled people of colour have lived, loved, hooked up, created and raised offspring and formed family units. I want to center their ways of being. I want to destabilize the White and White supremacist family

building at the core of North American society. This type of decentering and destabilizing work can only be done by re- reading the archives and uplifting what is hidden.

Memory is often constructed as unreliable (Burton, 2003, pg. 21) especially the memories of non- white, cisgender men, however, this is a fiction propagated by white supremacist and colonial understandings of history that juxtaposes memory with history in a way that erases the power and regulatory nature of history (Smith, 2021). This project does not seek to rewrite the historical timeline per se but will engage with the recorded stories/histories as though they are the timeline as the individual remembers it. To do the work in this way is to give agency to individuals and their memories and also acknowledges that not all history has been recorded and those who have had their histories recorded exist in a place of privilege. Even as I undertake reviewing archival work, ever present is the reminder that people are at the heart of these artefacts. Learning that personal conflicts will impact whose history is stored is a reminder that “the personal is political” is not just a slogan but has real world implications such as the absence of a large amount of queer history in one of the largest Lesbian and Gay Archives in North America.¹⁷

This project takes existing feminist scholarship across Queer, Critical Disability and Critical Race, Studies and places them in conversation with each other to provide a nuanced discussion on the ways that white supremacist eugenic/ newgenic ideologies frame our seemingly uncomplicated dating, relationship, and family structures. Beyond this, this research will start to dismantle these taken for granted notions to expose the ways that traditional worldbuilding is not simply problematic or harmful to queer, disabled people of colour, it also erases and obscures the

¹⁷ I was informed by the Archivist who helped me find the materials I reviewed at the ArQuives, that due to a rift between the leaders of *The Body Politic* and *Gay Asians of Toronto* there were no organizational materials i.e. meeting minutes, by laws, flyers, etc., from the *Gay Asians of Toronto* group housed in the ArQuives.

worldbuilding that these communities already engage in to support each other.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation will discuss the impact of eugenics/newgenics on the ways that queer disabled and racialized form intimate partnerships and kinship structures across four main chapters. I will begin by historically charting the eugenic origins of our sex, sexuality and sexual subjectivity belief systems. Then I will look at the way romantic and intimate love is impacted by these factors and how this shows up tangibly and intangibly. Following this, I will interrogate the way that marriage is used to discipline bodies and construct a preferred type of partnership. Lastly, I will look at the politics of family building and the ways that this process can reinforce dominant eugenic/ newgenic ideals. Throughout these chapters the way that queer racialized and disabled people are engaging worldbuilding through community, and resistance alongside these dominant tropes of desirability will be highlighted and then restated in the conclusion.

The first chapter of this dissertation will take a historical approach, engaging with the archival, academic and popular media representations of Eugenics movements across North America, particularly that of Canada and the United States. The purpose of this chapter is to re-read these seemingly discrete identity categories to engage in a more intersectional analysis of the Eugenics movement and its principles. By delving into the eugenic origins of racial categorization, disability classifications and sexual identity labelling we can call attention to those who exist in the margins of these seemingly distinct categories, specifically those who have been targeted and continue to be a target of these eugenic principles. The purpose of this chapter is to offer a historical context and grounding for the following chapters and introduce the tensions

created by white supremacists' hegemonic understandings of race, ability, and sexuality and how they impact the desirability of queer disabled people of color as subjects who feel desire and are desired.

Chapter two will explore the tensions that exist when queer disabled people of colour choose to engage their sexual selves in the dating/ hook- up fields. This chapter will define and historicize the concepts of sexual racism and sexual ableism, identifying their links to eugenic practices. Oral histories and narratives of BIPOC queer and disabled people in the ArQuives as well as those who have written themselves into the desirable imaginary through romantic/erotic novel publishing will be the artefacts used to explore the messiness of sexual exploration and identity for disabled, queer and racialized minority persons. This chapter will also try to untangle the ways desire and the desirable person become legible and how this contributes to the erasure of asexual individuals. Finally, chapter two will show possibilities for engagement with an expansive politics of desirability through Ace representation and experiences.

Chapter three builds on the previous one in that it also engages with the politics of desirability, sexual ableism and sexual racism to discuss marriage. However, this chapter focuses on the state institution of marriage as a disciplining measure. In this section, I will be looking at marriage as an ideal, an institution and an in/tangible good. To do this, I will be looking at more archival and legal artefacts inclusive of legal documents or court cases that turn on the shifting definition of marriage as well as any public discourse (newspapers, magazine articles etc.) surrounding these changes at the time. The goal of this chapter is to bring the conversations of desirability politics beyond sexual partners and elucidate the ways that marriage influences these conversations. This chapter will also investigate the ways that queer, racialized, and disabled persons have their relationships legitimized by state apparatus and how this may or may not be an

assimilative process or tactic. Further, in invoking eugenic scripts, the marriage narrative becomes elusive for folks in those categories and with many pushing to ensure that marriage rights are enshrined, who is left behind?

Chapter four takes the previous two sections on dating/hooking- up and marriage and brings it into conversation with family planning. This dissertation turns on the belief that family building is world building. Therefore, the way that we create our families is largely connected to recreating those “desirable” traits discussed in the previous chapters. Here I will discuss the ways that nuclear family structures are constantly reaffirmed both overtly and covertly. This privileges individuals of the middle class, while erasing marginalized communities (read: queer, crip, racialized, feminist communities) for whom this ideal is neither feasible nor preferred. Queer folks have created families of choice, such as Houses in Ball culture, and many racialized, feminist and crip communities have either created intergenerational/ extended households or have these family structures embedded within their cultural practice. Moreover, I will engage with the concept of “desirable procreators” and look at how sterilization practices, which emerged out of eugenic ideals, are used to shape parenting and the compulsory aspect of reproduction for some individuals over others, thus constructing idealized families and even states. This section will engage with archival sources; however, it will primarily focus on representational trends in the cultural imaginary e.g., podcasts, television shows, movies, and advertisements.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation will draw on the material in the previous chapters to present my synthesis of how eugenic ideals have led to the erasure of BIPOC disabled and queer people from the mainstream desirable imaginary. It will reiterate the arguments that show that engaging one’s sexuality is fraught with racist, classist, and ableist roadblocks. This chapter will synthesize all of the previous discussions to consider next steps. These next steps

will clearly identify the unacknowledged structures that resist and reshape the idealized norms and critically analyse these systems. While acknowledging that these spaces have allowed for life, love, and family relations to thrive, how do these communities engage in alternative world building that truly untether the dominant ideals in the public imaginary? This chapter will also offer limitations and avenues for further research.

Conclusion

Together this dissertation will paint a picture of resistance, joy, hope and desirability of racialized, queer disabled subjectivity even in a society that is built on the ability to breed out these “undesirable” traits through positive and negative eugenic and newgenic means. By interrogating the presumed fixity of dating and hook- up ‘preferences’, the institution that is marriage, child bearing and rearing and the construction of the ideal family we can become more critical of these systems both in the scholarship and also our personal choices. The goal of this work is not to say that there is a utopia that exists that we can all buy into to remove ourselves from the current system. It is here to show that these decisions we make do not exist in a vacuum, especially those close personal and private decisions we make about our intimate and sexual lives. It is here to show that there are ways of being that we can engage with that do not continue the cycle of oppression of those at the margins. It is a call to action for scholars to think more critically about their work and whose stories we leave out especially in the current conditions of increased hostility toward those whose work and embodiment do not continue to prop up the North American empires in a way that privileges the White, cis- hetero patriarchy.

Chapter 1: The Eugenics of it All: The importance of integrating race, sexuality and disability critiques

Good morning Fam,

I hate to keep coming to you with bad news. Social media loves bad news. Its algorithms make it so that bad news reaches more people, wider audiences. Despair, it seems, is more profitable than joy.

The first thing I would like to share with you is that we lost our Great Aunt, Ms. Doris White this morning. She contracted COVID a week ago, fell into a coma in the ICU, and never regained consciousness. We just celebrated her 89th birthday on December 19.

Her death has caused great sorrow in the several generations she created (She was a great-great grandmother).

To people without hearts, including those that lead the CDC, her death is preferable, desirable because she was old, a Black woman, poor, disabled, and had other illnesses.

I think that is why people feel they can be reckless; lead protests against wearing masks, social distancing, vaccinations, and all health measures. They feel like it is a test of one's strength, one's resilience, one's Americanness if they can take on COVID and survive.

And they also feel that those who get it and are permanently disabled or killed by it, deserve it because they are weak and should be subject to eugenics--the largest religious movement ever created by Europeans, their progeny, and those who seeks to emulate European paradigms.

It doesn't matter to them the wealth of wisdom that dies with Ms.

White (which is what those who respected her called her).

The testimony that is silence. The collard greens that will never be

matched or made again.

We went to Amy Ruth's in Harlem one time and she ordered the smothered pork chops and collard greens. Y'all she tasted that food and went OFF. She said how smothered pork chops this dry and these collard greens is bland as paper.

You couldn't take Ms. White to no restaurant because she knew her own cooking would always be light-years better. And it was.

While heads of state debate things like herd immunity and how to keep the economy going if people keep doing pesky things like getting sick and dying...

...and a nation full of citizens continue to demonstrate that they wouldn't know what humility, kindness, compassion, and community were if they were knocked upside the head with them...

...all I can think about is how Ms. White is the ninth family member to have died from COVID.

Today, when I think of human beings, I am reminded of a Toni Morrison quote from BELOVED:

"What are these people? You tell me, Jesus. What are they?"

Dear Ms. White: I'm still too tender, but you know my heart. I'm sure they are already gathered around you and smiling welcome; taking you by the hand and guiding you to your favorite chair, shining now, on some lovely porch, where you can sit and see as many dawns as you want to.

I'm still angry, but I hope all you know is boundless, everlasting love.

Ase.

Facebook post by Son of Baldwin

Introduction

How do we think about eugenics concretely when it is often whispered about in hushed tones as a dark historical secret? How do we think through this complex ideology and the ways it sneaks into our language, culture and or ways of thinking without being seen as alarmist or overreacting? The above post offers an excellent example. It looks at the relationship between technologies and power. It shares what and who is deemed unnecessary to the proliferation of empire and what we lose as a result. Further, it is an example of the realities of collapsing intersections of eugenic/newgenic ideals mapped on to people and populations that this chapter illuminates.

Son of Baldwin (S.O.B.) was a Facebook page I discovered some years ago during the time I started to pull away from active engagement in social media spaces. Run by Robert Jones Jr., this page was unapologetically Black and queer centered. Like his ‘father’¹⁸, Jones’ critiques of white supremacy and homophobic systems resonated with me in a way that other internet spaces had not. This is not to say that I agreed with everything said or that all posts made sense to my own subjective reality, still, they always made me think about my own politics and positionalities. One of the reasons I stayed active on the page/ within the S.O.B. community was because Jones was one of the very few moderators who, upon receiving critiques by community members, made the changes they suggested. In particular, this was the first page where upon hearing critiques from some disability communities, started adding image descriptions and ensured that the videos they posted either had captions or were clearly labelled as not having captions *consistently*. Jones Jr. checked in with the S.O.B. community to ensure he was doing it accurately and later ended up hiring community members to do this work.

This action of being receptive to accessibility calls to action and critique was striking for

¹⁸ Robert Jones is not related to the late James Baldwin. He adopted the moniker due to his love for Baldwin’s work.

two reasons. The first being that I had engaged with institutions and even some disability spaces that touted their ‘commitment to accessibility’ yet couldn’t be bothered to do the same. So, this willingness to learn from, interact with, and even hire community members to ensure that image accessibility for screen readers was possible was an exercise of disability justice principles¹⁹ even if they were not framed in this way. The second reason this action was striking was that it showed that image descriptions could be a product of culture. What I mean by this is that in these image descriptions, Jones’ ‘voice’ would come through. Not only did this text describe the image in the strict ways necessary, it also incorporated Black, queer and internet slang that allowed Jones to slip around the Facebook algorithm that at the time would flag and ban mere mention of White people as hate speech. It is important to note at this point that there is documented evidence of Facebook’s, now Meta, flawed algorithm and review systems that flagged critiques of white supremacy and White people as engaging in white supremacist actions and/or anti-Black racism. It was therefore all too common to see anti-racist content creators being flagged for hate speech. banned, shadow banned (i.e. they had their reach/ engagement limited), or de-monetized by the platform while actual racists and racist posts, particularly those that were anti- Black were deemed not to have broken the community standards.

S.O.B. was always quick to remind the audience who came to the page for his race analysis that the space was also pro- queer and went on to pen this quote that is often misattributed to James Baldwin himself,

“We can agree to disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist.”

It is no surprise that this quote spread and continues to be used to this day. Those of us forced to

¹⁹ Defined by Patty Berne and the Sins Invalid collective in 2015, there are ten (10) principles. The second, which is *Leadership of Those Most Impacted*, was being demonstrated in this moment on this online forum.

the margins are often met with shrugs and ‘well we’ll have to agree to disagree’ when we discuss our sexualities, access needs, or the necessity of dismantling oppressive systems. However, as Jones notes, this disagreement is rarely benign, but is in fact rooted in the beliefs that we should not exist, that our existence makes others uncomfortable and it is simply untenable. In agreeing to disagree the commenter flags that 1) they wish the conversation to be over, 2) they will not change their mind, 3) in the case of policy or other institutional measures, they do not wish to see changes made to reflect what they disagree with, 4) they wish we would stop talking about it as it makes them uncomfortable (see one) because we are making it our entire identity, and 5) if they never had to interact with us or another person regarding that topic, it couldn’t be too soon.

This context led me to the post highlighted above. In January of 2022, the world started to reopen for business as usual even as we continued to work diligently at a failing grade of the group project that is our reaction to the Covid 19 pandemic...at least in the United States and Canada. S.O.B.’s post about Ms. Doris White seemed especially poignant. From the acknowledgement that bad news and pain was more profitable than joy (Currie, 2022; Rathje, et al., 2021), to the many intersections of identities that Ms. Doris lived, to the systemic devaluing of those whose embodiments offer to capitalistic contribution to the economic powers that be, this post put into words my feelings about the insidious and systemic nature of eugenic ideology. This is a system that obviously does not value those bodies who fall outside of its very narrow acceptable margins but...it was the devaluing of the wisdom lost with the passing of those who inhabit these complex identities that exposed the eugenicist rotten foundation. For disabled, queer and racialized populations, the passing down of knowledges informally is how we organize, it is how build strength, it is how we survive, it is how we thrive. The willingness to see populations decimated by illness eerily simulated events in the not-so-distant past and exemplified that the

reproduction of the nation state requires sacrifices to bolster its supremacy.

Eugenics has been known by and organized using many names over the years. In Canada specifically it has been referred to by its purpose as population purification (Mosoff, 1993). Defined by Galton in 1883 as “the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally” (McLaren, 2014), this realm of pseudo- scientific inquiry sought to remedy the state of the populace. By incentivizing those deemed fit to continue to breed, and restricting the breeding of those deemed unfit, the population would reproduce those traits deemed necessary and acceptable i.e. *citizens of worth* according to Galton. This theory follows strides in science, particularly, animal husbandry that saw the breeding of hardy plants and animals to better withstand the harsh conditions of rearing. Not quite the religious movement as Jones categorizes in his post but it surely was feted and organized with the same fervor as major mainstream religions enjoy today. McLaren (2014) points out that for followers, eugenics was both science and an international movement. It was an ideology that transcended physical borders and intellectual sites of inquiry.

In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock states that “Imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of western industrial modernity” (1995, pg.2). She further argues that race, class and gender are not divorced from each other. That is to say, race is gendered, and gender is raced (Snorton, 2017, pg. 32). Additionally, I would posit that sexuality is both raced and gendered and each of these categorizations are interpreted through ability. This portrayal of the emergence of western civilization credits the categorization and weaponization of race to be the building blocks on which North American society was founded and through which it continues to flourish.

Western history proves rife with ideas of human differences and the worth attached to

these. For this reason, this chapter opens with a discussion of western imperialism and the drive to codify eugenic beliefs. This broad stroke understanding of western history will move from conquer/ colonization to slavery and indentureship through to the common contemporary contexts. For the purposes of this discussion, I am concerned with the apparatus of these institutions, not just specific details. What I mean by this framing is that I am interested in the ideology that launched these endeavors (conquest, colonization, slavery, indentureship) and their inheritors (eugenics and newgenics). It is in these particular ideologies that we can interrogate the work these beliefs have done and their continued reproduction in our society today.

Critical Disability Studies, Sexuality Studies, and Critical Race Theory scholars have been talking about Eugenics and its consequences within the North American context, however, they rarely, if ever engage with each other in their analyses. Black Feminist scholars like Bailey and Mobley (2019) take up race and eugenics, looking at the ways that Blackness was classified as disability with Black people assumed to be “intellectually disabled precisely because of race” (pg. 24), and highlighting that fleeing enslavement was constructed as mental illness through the diagnosis of drapetomania (pg. 25). Critical Disability Studies and specifically Feminist Critical Disability Studies scholars like Erevelles and Minear (2010) also take up critical race theory and critical disability studies to interrogate the lineage of eugenics and new eugenics, however, there is not a grounded understanding of critical sexuality and the eugenic implications even as some narratives discussed turned on sexual encounters or managing racialized disabled people’s sexuality. Other Black feminist authors like Strings (2019), Roberts (1997) pay particular attention to the intersections of race, gender and eugenics within medical systems but there is a gap in understanding these works as part of, or compatible with, the scholarship of Critical Disability Studies. Works by McRuer (2011), Tremain (2000), Shildrick (2009), discuss

Feminist, Queer and Critical Disability Studies and their links to eugenics. However, while these authors easily track the impact of eugenics/ newgenics on disability and queerness, there is a lack of grounding in the intersection of race and eugenics/ newgenics beyond cursory flagging that Black people/ Black women were constructed as other or non human within these systems. This intellectual divide leads to a disjointed and sometimes self-serving understanding of eugenics and eugenic motivations. As a result, engagement with eugenic afterlives is incomplete as there is within each field a lack of engagement with either the inherent racism, ableism or queerphobic nature of eugenic ideas. We cannot engage in resistance to these ideas without addressing the underlying trifecta.

Therefore, the next three sections will look at the work of these authors among others, to review these discrete categorizations of race and eugenics, disability and eugenics and sexuality and eugenics. Following this, there will be a discussion bringing these discrete categories into conversation with each other to attend to the overlap as well as explain the transition to newgenics. This overlap and turn to newgenics will form the underpinning of the themes of sexual racism and sexual ableism of the following chapters that discuss the fields of love (courting/ dating/ hooking- up), marriage and family building.

Eugenics, Race and Ethnicity

The ability to have the mindset to enslave or dominate another people or culture generally predates the scientific inquiry of those who engage in those practices. It is built on a sense of self that is unwavering, and a sense of self in relation to the perceived other. (da Silva, 2007) As bell hooks noted when talking about stereotypes, it is the way that when confronted with someone

who defies the stereotype of the other, we do not change our perception of those people, we instead create a separate category for that person which retains our worldview of ourselves and the other. (Freedom Forum, 2016). In this way prejudice and the promulgation of stereotypes backed by power structures or institutional powers work to create hierarchies and categorizations. Systemic failures such as racism, ableism, sexism, queerphobia etc. are birthed in this crucible with those powerful structures often working overtime to create and re- create confirmation biases and exceptions and exceptional others.

As Europeans entered their enlightened phases, complete with breakthroughs in science and philosophical inquiries, they decided that exploration was necessary, and chose to launch ships to the ‘new worlds’. Now this characterization is a large oversimplification of decades of European histories but as noted in the prior sections, this work does not seek to offer an in-depth review of this history. This task has been done by many authors in many ways. What this project is concerned with is the applications of these enlightened ideas. Ideas that created the Doctrine of Discovery and the concept of *terra nullius* existed pre contact, White supremacy as an ideal made institution, existed prior to contact. These ideals existed when Europeans set forth to “discover the new world”. The Doctrine of Discovery “provided that Europeans automatically acquired property rights in native lands and gained governmental, political, and commercial rights over the indigenous inhabitants without their knowledge or consent.” (Miller, 2011, pg. 330). The concept of *terra nullius* is a literal translation for the land being empty, null or void. (Ibid). Simply put, any lands and resources, (human or otherwise), discovered were acquired by those European explorers for their countries unless otherwise occupied by other Europeans.

As Strings (2019) explains, the belief in white supremacy was seeded prior to contact and were “proven” through contact. This process works as confirmation bias. Any system that was

not similar to that of the self styled “civilized” world was found inadequate such as matriarchal/ matrilineal societies, nomadic communities, community members who practice non- heterosexual activities and of course, the acceptance and exaltation of members with non- normate bodies. To this end,

“racialization figures as a master code within the genre of the human represented by western Man, because its law- like operations are yoked to species- sustaining physiological mechanisms in the form of a global colour line- instituted by cultural laws so as to register in human neural networks- that clearly distinguishes the good/ life/ fully- human from the bad/ death/ not- quite- human.” (Weheliye pg. 27).

Those societies and peoples that were met by Europeans on walkabout in the 15th century were automatically cast as inferior, their existence in fact absent, their bodies unusual, unworthy of notice while also problematic and a hindrance to the easy access to animal, plant and mineral etc. resources needing to be extracted in service to the empire. Their cultures, offensive and demonic and as such they needed to be saved from themselves, lest their souls face eternal damnation.

Race science became more popular, with 17th and 18th century philosophers like Bernier creating new classifications of race that moved beyond just visible difference to now encompass a division of the earth. So no longer was race simply a matter of difference, it was now framed as difference plus stereotype applied to geography that said something about the innate nature of those being discussed (Strings, 2019). By framing this construction in this way non- Europeans were not simply different because they looked different, they were different because their geographies and visible differences created them as other, as a different species with race specific failures (Bailey & Mobley, 2019; Cannon, 2012; McKittrick, 2010; Strings, 2019; Snorton, 2017; Smith, 2021; Weheliye, 2014). The importance of this shift is that these failures and inherent

otherness would follow them and their descendants regardless of where they travelled or more accurately, where they were kidnapped and sold to.

These codes of racialization that constructed the 'good', what constituted life, and who gets to be human are ostensibly linked with our contemporary understandings of the same. One only needs to look at the uneven application of laws or even more commonly the headlines of a newspaper to be told what these are. First our 'goods' as a society stems from those goods that benefit those descended from the owners of property and people, in addition to those who have been enfolded into their midst at the expense of enslaved and oppressed peoples and their descendants. Specifically, it is the denouncing, and willingness to be the oppressor, of these people and their descendants or those who look like them that allows for assimilation to the state.

Race specifically indexes a history in which group characteristics have been used to establish a hierarchy to accord one group a higher status and the other group lower status. (Markus 2016, pg. 186). Categorizing people as a racial group draws attention to the difference in the power relationships among this group and other groups. This affects how one is seen and how one sees themselves and others. Alexander (2012) notes that racial formation is a process by which social, economic and political forces ... imbues social subjects with immutable qualities (pg.139). Qualities that then become essential and innate and erases the power involved in both the creation and reproduction of these qualities. In this way the normalization of negative stereotypes becomes de rigueur. The mechanisms to continuously practice oppression lock smoothly in place to see these systems morph and shift as society does, and we are left playing oppression whack- a- mole. To be clear, colonization and colonialism does not end; these ideologies and practices did not sail back to Europe and remain there. They were and are used to mold and shape society as noted by numerous authors including Arvin et al. (2013) and Balsdon

(2024). Colonization becomes imperialism²⁰, becomes enslavement, becomes indentured labour, becomes the carceral system and so on and so forth.

Ethnicity categorizations focus on differences in meanings, values and ways of living (social practices) that are often regarded as equally viable and need not establish a status ranking among the groups. Oftentimes race and ethnicity are used interchangeably with little regard for the differences that they encompass. Ethnic categories were the bedrock for oppression and slavery (Zuberi, 2001, pg. 18) as it allowed for a classification of difference by so called scientists and leaders, and constructed essential behaviours, meanings and values to these differences. These modern scientific marvels operated on a premise that European civilization was better, more advanced and of a higher caliber than that of any peoples they came into contact with. In a post colonial²¹ context, these categorizations form the basis for identity (Markus, 2016, pg. 184).

Ethnicity concerns and racial categorizations created allowed for eugenic concerns and the dehumanization for those whose racial identities could be viewed as dissimilar. With ethnicity being coupled with identity and behavioral markers, society could talk about ‘problems’ that require scientific intervention that befell their neighbours, friends and family as opposed to simply correcting their behaviours. It was an indirect attack. These scientific methods not only affected racialized minorities but also those whose genes were deemed faulty race notwithstanding. This ideological shift allows for eugenics to enter into the realm of ability and sexuality and sexual expression with little pushback.

²⁰ Although it can be argued that imperialism is colonialism by another name i.e., a distinction without a real difference, authors like Arneil (2024) argue that they need to be understood ideologically as different.

²¹ This is the terminology used in the text, however, as mentioned above, it is not my belief that Canadian or American societies are ‘post’ colonial as they are still engaging in colonialism and imperialism policies and practices presently (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Further, throughout this dissertation, I argue that eugenics is integral to the colonization process and since it is still occurring, so too does the colonial project.

Eugenics as scientific method and methodology is the application of these “master codes” to create a “master race”²² (Coulthard, 2014, pg. 26; McLaren, 2014). The use of positive (incentivising fit persons’ fertility) and negative (restricting unfit persons’ fertility) eugenics ignored the humanity at the core of ‘fitness’ in service to the perfect idyllic outcome that was expected from its applications. One of the speakers at the *‘Into the Light: Living Histories of Oppression and Education in Ontario’* Exhibit²³, Elder Mona Stonefish, noted that “eugenics does not create it eliminates under the guise of making”. As our speaker shared, it is a way of death making that relies on eliminating the undesirable elements of society, a line that is constantly in motion as those who hold the positions of power deem it relevant to their interests. It is inherently a negative process that seeks to remove that which is already in existence. Even as it offers some positive reinforcement by offering financial, social or other incentives to those who buy into these ideals, these positive reinforcements can never work alone, and are often unsuccessful.

²² McLaren uses this term as the title for her book. I can’t help but think that they meant for this to operate on more than one level. The master race as the dominant race, and also the master race through the legacy of enslaving and oppressing others and also mastering race/ race science.

²³ Into the Light was co-curated by Mona Stonefish, Peter Park, Dolleen Tisawii’ashii Manning, Evadne Kelly, Seika Boye and Sky Stonefish and co-presented in collaboration with by Guelph Museums, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art and Social Justice, Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology and Access to Life, and Respecting Rights, Arch Disability Law.

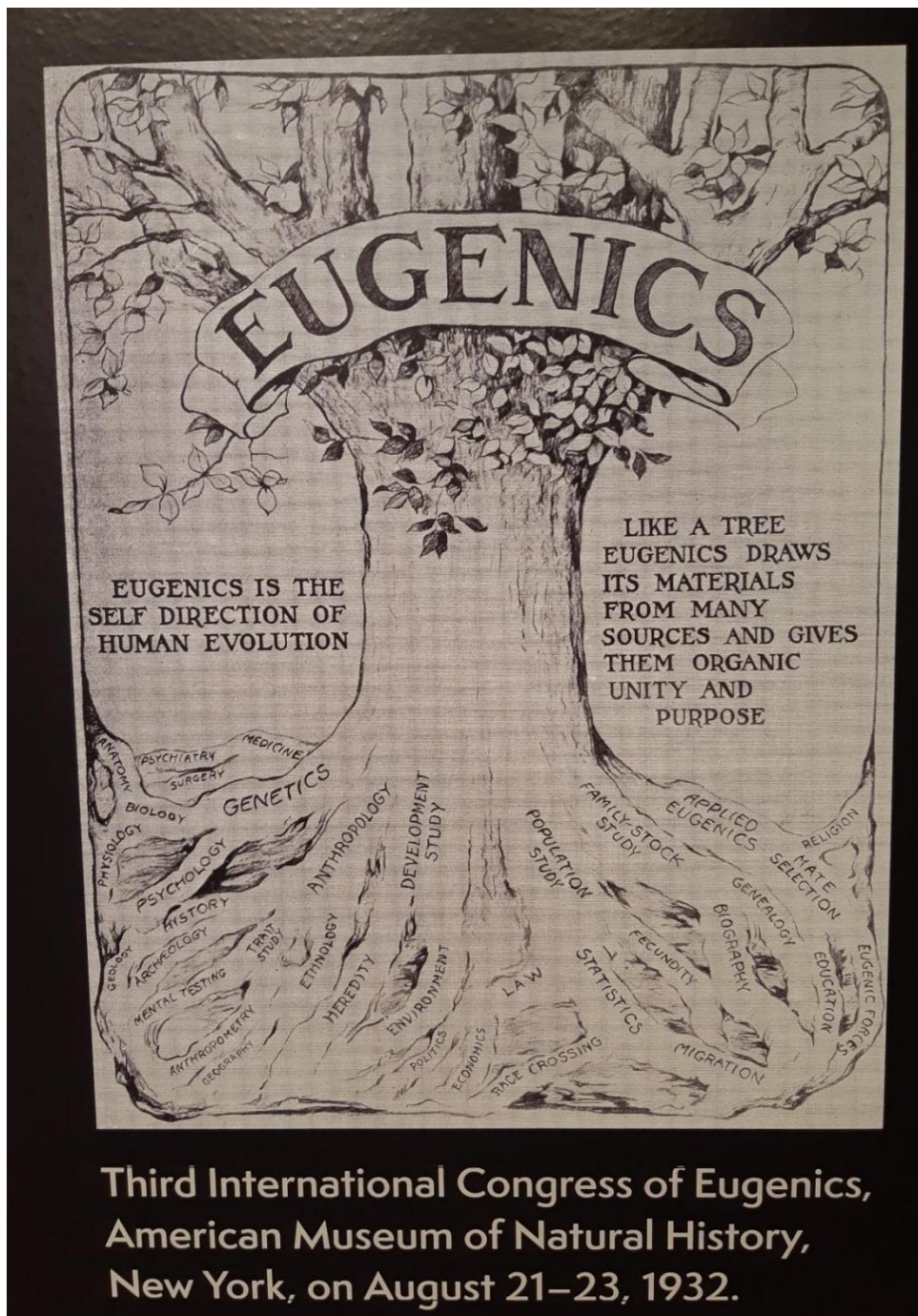


Image #1: Poster of 'Eugenics Tree'
Picture taken by me at the *Into the Light* Exhibit.

This poster image is one of the many curated works of the artists and historians who put on this exhibit. Striking was the placement of the Eugenic Tree on posters and even bags meant to hold grain as well as other easily shared materials. This implicit pervasiveness and the banality of this dispersive medium, which would no doubt enter into many if not all households at the time, was

not something I had previously considered. Important was the emphasis on the fact that eugenics was not a fly by night theory, it was meant to be deeply embedded within all areas of life and study as the roots show. It was to be the foundation that birthed the strong nation. This realization made sense of the fact that these beliefs could not be eradicated, only transformed, as it was too enmeshed within Canadian society unless those socio-legal-political fields and systems came to terms with, and dismantled these core tenets.

Eugenics here takes bodies, human and environmental, beyond a site of inquiry and constructs them as sites through which to consolidate power. One such site is power through racial difference turned racial identity through stereotyping. It also uses gender as a particular site of power as the emphasis is placed on the womb and its role in reproduction thereby requiring control to be exerted on those who have those reproductive organs (Harding, 1986, pg. 21; McLaren. 1990, pg. 33; Roberts, 1997). The emphasis placed on wom(b)en's roles in nation building is an exercise in organizational control. For eugenicists, true womanhood is defined by one's ability to reproduce the colonial project, literally. It is where creating identity through matrilineal genetics but patrilineal governance, becomes another tool in the colonizer's toolbox to dismantle societies. This dismantling is evidenced by clauses in the Indian Act of 1876 in Canada that assigned status only through patrilineal lineage. This dismantling process is further evident in the idea that anyone (read: any woman regardless of racial classification) could birth Black children aka assets during the colonial/ enslavement period due to the one drop contagion belief even as this belief shifts and changes what it means to be Black over time. This ideology of contagion works differently to consolidate Whiteness as it firmly rejects the adoption of this racial/cultural categorization for anyone whose matrilineal and patrilineal genetics are not White. Contagion broadly defined, refers to the spreading of disease to infect an otherwise healthy

entity. Within this specific context, Blackness is considered the disease that seeks to infect/ dilute/ weaken the otherwise healthy White population. Invoking the Foucauldian idea of biopower²⁴, Naidoo (2023) refers to contagion ideology as “biopolitical race thinking” where “black blood comes to stand for contagion” (pg. 119). Moreover, this ideology of contagion has been invoked using many racialized populations both casting race as the contagion or conflating race with diseases like Tuberculosis to construct raced medical diseases (Sinclair, 2016). The result of this ideology is that Whiteness remains a closed category with limited admission.

It is important to understand that contagion goes well beyond the biopolitical. It also has a non- corporeal component as well with this ideology becoming a part of morality.

“The concept of “moral contagion” helped sustain proslavery ideology by explaining how a supposedly obedient, happy, and docile slave population could come to resent and subvert slaveholder authority. Dangerous outsiders and foreign ideas were the culprits.”
(Schoeppner, 2019, pg. 3)

Schoeppner is speaking about the impetus that led to the enactment of laws that barred free Black sailors from landing in southern states that still practiced the enslavement of Black people for fear that there would be an “infection of liberty” (2019, pg. 2). As we will discuss later, this notion of moral contagion that hinges on the understanding of racial contagion, will continue to retain a foothold in the dominant imaginary over time.

²⁴ Biopower for Foucault was the form of power directed at controlling the body at the population level i.e. the power to “make live and let die” (Foucault, 1978, 138).

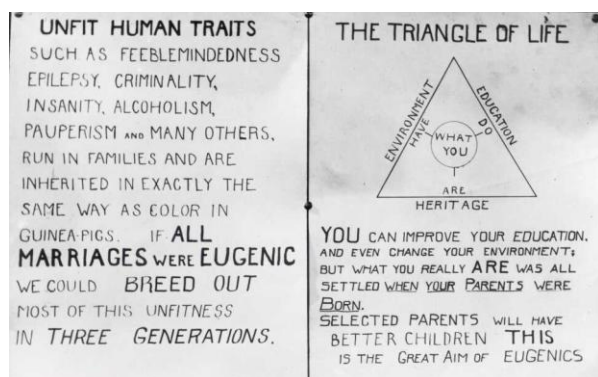


Image #2: The American Eugenics Society promoted ideas of racial betterment and genetic education through public lectures, conferences, publications and exhibits at county and state fairs — like this chart labeled "The Triangle of Life" from the Kansas Free Fair.

Images taken from the American Philosophical Society

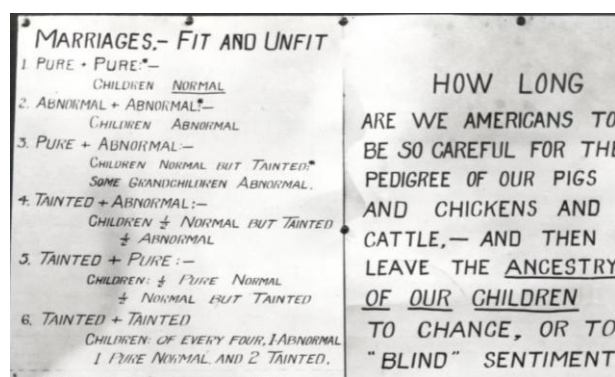


Image #3: Charts used at a Kansas Free Fair shows types of marriage. The American Eugenics Society organized a series of "fitter families contests" in which participants (divided into small, medium and large family classes) were ranked based on the mental, physical and moral health of family members.

The two images above show the deep preoccupation with heredity, lineage and growing populations. Promoted at the Kansas Free Fair, these posters targeted marriage minded individuals to impress upon them the fact that the only good marriages were eugenic marriages to ensure that one's "lineage can have an attractive sense of straightness, neatness, purity [and] exactness" (Tuana & Scott, 2020, pg. 12). It invites the populace to engage in 'personal responsibility' toward a goal of betterment especially for the children. Personal responsibility worked as a cipher to flag that your unfit human traits (feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, criminality, pauperism etc.) were the fault of your parents and unchangeable and the only way to breed these traits out was through three generations of eugenic marriages, i.e. yours, your children's and your grandchildren. Personal responsibility was not just limited to you. Personal responsibility had to be taught to the younger generations to ensure that they upheld the standards of 'fitness', after all if individuals could take pride in the pedigree of their farm animals, why should they not do the same with their families as stated in image two? These images also invoke the language of difference as understood to be vice, as a way to once again assert one's dominion of their environment, their bodies, their sex/ sexuality and of course that of others because as we know, when we create a norm, we create its opposite. As this era of individual personal responsibility

comes to be, we cast those whose ‘choices’²⁵ do not align with this convoluted reality as inherently deviant and in need of saving from themselves. Enter science.

Science is commonly posited as value neutral and objective. This ideal is tied to the masculinist nature of this research which is often positioned against the subjective and biased nature of other disciplines like the arts or humanities (Haraway, 2016, pg. 7; Harding, 1986; Harding, 2008, pg. 3). This taken for granted objectivity and neutrality has served to remove scientists from having to come to grips with the material realities of the work they do, especially their work with living beings (Smith, 2021). If we understand bodies as a site of inquiry as Spillers (1987) argues, then the quest to understand embodied differences through science is to be expected. However, what emerges when those making the scientific determinations intend for themselves to emerge from the scientific inquiry as victors? In this instance science is not value neutral nor objective but in fact riddled with confirmation biases. Science then operates as a tool to further expansion through a systemic devaluation of the inferior, as opposed to true inquiry with the goal of understanding embodied difference (Haraway, 2016; Harding, 1986; 2008; Smith, 2021).

Snorton (2017) as well as Roberts (1997) chronicle the rise of medicalization or the medical industrial complex²⁶ through experiments done on enslaved girls and women. The effects of these experiments and medical procedures produced, are lauded today in the field of gynecology, for example. He notes that these advancements were *only* possible because of the fact of slavery and the racialized and gendered ideas about African persons in general and

²⁵ I put the quotes on the word choice to flag that for many decisions about marriage and birthing offspring have not been subject to free choice due to economic, religious etc. constraints.

²⁶ Taking inspiration from the military industrial complex, the medical industrial complex has been taken up by folks in critical fields such as Critical Disability, Black, Feminist and Queer studies to describe the “intricate jumble” (Clare, 2017, pg. 69) of economic interests, scientific frameworks, public and private institutions, governmental regulations and cultural understandings that comprise the authority of our bodyminds (Clare, 2017, pg. 69; Mingus, 2015).

African women in particular. Spillers (1987) argues that the captive community becomes a living laboratory (pg. 68). And while this is directly related to enslaved people it can be applied post slavery such as in the *Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the negro male* in 1932. This decidedly unethical study saw black men with syphilis receiving substandard care even after there was a known and proven treatment available. In addition to this, experiments on Puerto- Rican women to further the creation of birth control in the 1950s preyed on the low-income status of women in small towns in order to persuade them to participate in a highly experimental drug trial (Blakemore, 2018). While these peoples were not technically enslaved, they were made captive due to their class and race, and they did provide the laboratory of their bodies all in the name of scientific discovery.

If your goal is to find the best way to cure fistulas, then the fact that your laboratory consists of unanesthetized enslaved women that you purchased- much like your scalpel- and have as much regard for, becomes irrelevant. If your breakthrough on numerous pharmaceutical interventions come at the expense of side effects faced by poor Indigenous, Latinx and Black people, that was/is simply chalked up to being the price of innovation. By divorcing ‘the final product’ from it’s horrific crucible, one can absolve themselves, their accomplishments and their descendants from of the taint of evil, prejudice, racism.... after all, “it was just what people did at the time”²⁷. As insidious as this mindset is, it serves another purpose; it engages in erasure, specifically and erasure of the socio- political power dynamic at work. Without these captive people, there could be no breakthrough, however, by removing their humanity, so too do you remove their need for compensation and shared credit. After all, “[t]he objects of research do not

²⁷ Smith (2021) notes that The Nuremberg Code of Ethics “is ...the first acknowledgement that there are some basic moral principles by which researchers must abide.” (pg. 263) but that this code came much too late to prevent research abuses like those categorized above and more.

have a voice and do not contribute to research or science.” (Smith, 2021, pg. 70) One cannot claim to be a scientific genius or be feted as the “father of gynaecology”, in the case of Dr. J Marion Sims, if they have to share credit with others, especially those they considered their ‘lessers’. The hoarding of accolades relies on this erasure. Further, by buying into and selling the narrative that these persons- again without whom the research and discoveries are impossible- are disposable, dispensable, and unimportant, the delusions of scientific grandeur and objectivity remain intact as accolades, awards, money etc. are hoarded. As the next generations become indoctrinated to this way of thinking, the duality of generational wealth and generational death are reinforced along the necessary lines to keep the colonial project alive.

I think here specifically of the story of Henrietta Lacks, a poor African American mother of five in the 1950s who was treated for cervical cancer. Her cancer cells were collected during the course of her treatment as was the practice at the time. Due to this being ‘standard practice’, it is unexpected that Mrs. Lacks would have been told of this harvesting, much less consented to it. What is important about these HeLa cells, named after Mrs. Lacks is that their ability to unceasingly multiply has been used to trial multiple drugs, toxins, viruses etc. much to the acclaim of researchers²⁸, and the Johns Hopkins institution itself. All this while the person whose genetics were directly responsible for these breakthroughs and her inheritors were not compensated. In fact, even naming the cells with her identifying information was not considered an issue...it was how things had always been done. It was in 1976 when information about Mrs. Lacks contributions to science through the use of the HeLa cells emerged and the hospital started to think about the ethical considerations owed to the family. So, for over twenty- five years the discussion of the ethical use of these genetic materials was subject to the scientific method’s

²⁸ There are three projects whose work used HeLa that have won Nobel prizes.

justification of ‘it is how we have always done things’.

The fierce belief in race science and the applications of eugenicist methods to accomplish its aims has constructed and continues to construct racialized peoples as having innate negative traits based on their race. It creates a version of truth that is marketed as an inescapable Truth²⁹ that can only be fixed through engaging in ahistorical and apolitical personal responsibility. What I mean by this is that for racialized peoples to slough off the inherent lack they have inherited they must accede to White supremacist structures. They must be educated in the White western traditions, learn, use and engage with the language, philosophies and religion of the state. They must abide by the laws, rights and responsibilities set out by the system for fear of reprisal. They must live, love, reproduce in the expected and acceptable ways or they and their families will be unable to access those societal goods. Any deviation from the script not only results in reprisal but also a confirmation of the innate deviance. We see here a revival of Cartwright’s drapetomania. (Bailey & Mobley, 2019) This ‘mental illness’ that pathologized Black desire for freedom is still deployed. Any resistance to the new civilizing mission is aberrant as the White supremacist standard is understood to be the default and unwillingness to assimilate to this is met with confusion and punishing correction.

Eugenics and Disability

With the definition of eugenics³⁰ understood as a means to improve the state of humanity, it is

²⁹ ‘Truth’ with the capitalized T refers to normalized ideas that are constructed as true, true for all time ideas. It is differentiated from ‘truth’ which acknowledges that there is no single truth and what we understand to be true can change with the shifts in societal understandings and power dynamics and scientific proof.

³⁰ This term, coined by Galton, refers to implementing various means of social control to improve future generations through either incentivizing those who were deemed to be good stock (positive eugenics) and restricting the breeding of those deemed unfit (negative eugenics).

easy to see how this socio- scientific point of view would choose to categorize and construct disabled populations. In a quest to breed a ‘hardy new aristocratic stock’, those with physical, mental and developmental differences would have to be removed, erased or cured under eugenic logic. Rosemarie Garland Thompson, notes accurately that persons who are “visually different [provoke] the imaginations of their fellow human beings” (1996, pg. 1) while also arousing anxiety. This anxiety and intellectual provocation duality is often the reason that disabled people are often asked to ‘account for’ their disabilities. By this I mean that people are asked to disclose details about their disability and are often asked to explain how they became disabled so that the interrogator can understand and contextualize how they came to be ‘ab/normal’. This disclosure of personal medical information can be met with a ‘well you do x well for someone with [insert disability here]’ or ‘my [insert relation here] has that and they did [insert cure], have you tried that?’ (Clare, 2017; Young, 2014). These interactions and reactions reinforce the tragedy model that disability studies scholars have argued against from the inception of the field (Barnes, 1999; Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 1996; et. al). Further, depending on how satisfactory this answer is, their place, role and utility to the interrogator is measured, and they are placed into an assumed hierarchy³¹ (Nichols, 2019; Sauder, 2015). Because this hierarchy is rooted in able- bodied exceptionalism, the further away you are from the ideal, the lower on the hierarchy you find yourself. It is for this reason that scientists and medical professionals have sought, and continue to seek explanations to the difference that is the disabled/exceptional body (Garland Thompson, 1996, pg. 1) and subsequent cures for these differences, to attempt to bring individuals closer to the ideal (Clare, 2017).

This search for meanings and cures has been the case since early historical periods. From

³¹ In addition to the blog posts cited, there are several articles in the 2024 edition of The Routledge International Handbook of Disability Human Rights Hierarchies that look at this continuing issue of disability hierarchies.

the Stone Age cave drawings, to the writings of Aristotle, Augustine and others, unexpected bodies have taken on various connotations (Garland- Thompson, 1996). For these thinkers, this body was viewed as a sign. The word ‘monster’ itself, is derived from the word *moneo* or *monstro*, meaning to warn and to show forth respectively (Fielder, 1978, pg. 20). A body that fell under these auspices was looked upon as divine warnings or divine design as well as a quirk of nature. The earliest medical classification of the unexpected bodies comes from Ambroise Pare. In his 16th century writing, *Des monstres et prodiges* (Of Monsters and Prodigies), Pare depicts conjoined twins who were born in Verona around 1475 (Eamon, 2011). He goes on to state “Monsters are beings that surpass Nature, prodigies are things that occur in opposition to nature, the maimed are blind, one-eyed, hunch backed, lame, or have six digits on the hand or foot or fewer than five or have them joined together.” (Sticker, 1999, pg. 91).

This type of classification is just one of many that have been used to stratify the differently formed body. Fielder goes on to state that there are subclasses of ‘monsters’: *monstres par exces*, *monstres par default*, and *mostres doubles* (Fielder, 1978, pg. 20). Each of these categories had different meanings. The first was an ill omen; the second was more ambiguous, however, it also portended ill while the last seemed to portend good luck. However, this explanation was different for varying cultural contexts and speaks to the complexity in the way that these bodies were viewed and the multiple emotions that were elicited.

Unsurprisingly, these types of stratifications allowed the category of the ‘freak’ to be created. Fielder (1978) notes that the very word ““freak” is an abbreviation for “freak of nature”, a translation of the Latin *lusus naturae*” (pg.19) Thompson (1996) claims that this link between “freak” and “bodily anomaly” occurred in 1847 and the discourse rapidly changed from one of awe inspired by these bodies to a need to define and regulate (pg. 4). However, Bogdan (1988) proposes that this is not the only understanding of the term. He saw ‘freaks’ as a social

construction. For him ““freak” is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people” (pg. 24).

This label is not solely contingent upon physical/ embodied difference. It can be applied to any differences that disrupt the hegemonic norms. Culture can then be seen as the determinant of one’s status as a ‘freak’. This status then attributes negative or quasi-positive connotations on that status. That ‘freaks’ were categorised as “born freaks”, “made freaks” and novelty acts” ascribed various premiums on the different bodies. “Born freaks” were those who were born with embodied differences, while “made freaks” were those whose bodies were altered to make them unusual enough to be exhibited and “novelty acts” referred to performances that were strange in nature (Bogdan, 1996, pg. 24). These three categories of ‘freaks’ were the fixtures in freak shows. However, they were another class of ‘freak’ that was the “gaffed freak” or the fakes and phonies. (Ibid)

This genealogy is important to note as it is a similar genealogy that is mapped onto eugenic categorizations of disability and who was deemed fit, or unfit and in need of cure. There were those who were born with a disability, whose bodies and behaviours were as a result of heredity. There were those who acquired disability through their upbringing, tragedy or other means. There were those whose disabled bodyminds were too far removed from the understanding of the day. Lastly, there were those malingerers, frauds who fake disability to take advantage of the system.

When we engage in discussions about the oppressions faced by disabled people, we often point to eugenic interventions as a starting point to how attitudes and policies were, and continue to be used to govern, change and/ or remove disabled people’s bodies and behaviours from mainstream society. With this understanding, Mitchell and Snyder’s (2003) declaration of “disability as master trope of human disqualification” (pg.859) roots disability-based oppression

in the societal superscript of the perfect citizen proposed by eugenicists meaning that by applying the label of disability to individuals they can be automatically removed from the category of human, thus making them subject to surveillance, abuses and other mistreatment on the individual and systemic levels.

We often point to the creation of categories of mental defectives, morons, the feeble-minded, insane, diseased, criminalistic etc.³² and the subsequent medical experimentation on, and institutionalization and sterilization of, those who were classified as such, as proof of this origin story. The liberal application of intelligent quotient (IQ) tests and developmental benchmarks that were/are often inconsistent and varied, created different classes of people whose status as good workers, citizens, partners and parents were subject to terms and conditions. However, the history is a bit more nuanced and complex. In the 19th century, human deviation was not under the gaze of the physician. It was only until after the 20th century and the rise of the eugenics movement that ‘freaks’ were surveilled by the medical community and were deemed to be sick. They were also deemed unfit to be in public. Their ‘diseases’ needed to be cured and this medical intervention needed to be done behind closed doors. Exhibiting oneself became a shameful act. Since, it was preferred that they be out of the public eye, this change ushered in an era of institutionalization and poor houses. There were also ‘ugly laws’ in place that effectively put a stop to begging and panhandling by the poor and “unsightly” (Coco, 2010; Schweik, 2009).

By pathologizing the ‘freak’ they were no longer ‘oddities’ to be in awe of, instead they were nature’s mistakes that nurture (medicine) should fix and if this ‘fix’ was impossible then pity was the appropriate response. As Thompson (1996) succinctly puts it,

³² Ordovery (pg. 29) offers this and other categories of “inadequate persons” as proposed by legislators proposing Sterilization Laws.

“Statistics quantified the body, evolution provided a new heritage; eugenics and teratology policed its boundaries; prosthetics normalized it; asylums cordoned off deviance...allopathic, professionalized medicine consolidated its dominance, casting as pathological all departures from the standard body” (pg. 12)

These multiple systems operating to construct disability coded as deviance and the ‘appropriate’ responses to the same were also in response to armed conflict and the economic fallout when those who are sent off to fight for the empire return home. Much of Canada’s disability policy emerged after World War I as disabled veterans started returning to the workforce, not to mention increased immigration following conflict (St. Pierre, n.d.). These social welfare models that governed attitudes to disability tended towards paternalism and a charity model of disability. These models and attitudes saw disabled people “segregated educationally and vocationally through rehabilitation, work programmes as well as social benefit programmes.” (Ibid). These programmes, charities and other organizations offered no self determination for those with disabilities as they were overwhelmingly shut out from the leadership and governing roles within these organizations in favour of those with medical, legal or other expertise.

Similar economic concerns drove the passage of so-called “ugly laws” in the 1800s (Coco, 2010). These were mostly municipal statutes in the United States that outlawed the appearance in public of people who were, in the words of one of these laws, “diseased, maimed, mutilated, or in any way deformed, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object” (Chicago City Code 1881). This disgust for and devaluing of disabled people was most commonly couched as anti-beggar legislation and turned on the narrative of the “able-bodied tramp” who was viciously idle, unwilling to work and only interested in taking advantage of the hardworking members of society. This belief led to there being two distinct types of charity work; outdoor relief which

provided alms for persons in their homes or on the streets and in –house charity that aided people in poor houses, hospitals and other institutions. Interestingly these laws were challenged by the proprietors of Freak Shows who leveraged their financial and social powers to ensure they were safe from prosecution.

Additionally, there emerged competing ideas about disability and work in this area. Workers were understood as being likely to acquire a disability due to the very unsafe working conditions at the time, this work-related disability was also seen as a sign that they were an experienced worker. So, while they could be constructed as deserving of alms, they were also thought to be able to hold down a job in spite of their disability (Schweik, 2009). This duality was a very fine line to straddle and they could be turned away from the poor house if it was thought that their circumstances were their own fault or due to their moral failings (Poverty and Poor Relief, n. d.). As the increased medicalization of difference continued to merge with ideas about hereditary vice, eugenic concerns about the need to create that idealized nation and citizen became increasingly concerned with breeding the right genetics. And in the tradition of race science, we start to see legislation emerge to stymie those unwanted genes from entering the population. We start to see this active organization emerge with the American Breeders' Association formation in 1906.

This United States national organization would launch a committee on eugenics, in this same year to examine the ways in which applicable theories of breeding better livestock could be applied to people (Kurbegovic & Leung, n. d.). This inquiry occurred during a time where there was a very real fear that there would be an overwhelming growth of inferior or unfit population due to immigration, vice and disability. In Ontario Dr. Helen MacMurchy was appointed as “Inspector of the Feeble-minded” where feeble-mindedness serves as a catchall for social and medical ills. Just one year later in 1907 the Eugenics Education Society was founded in Great

Britain with Galton serving as the first president. They would organize the first international conference in 1912 from which we get the eugenics tree imagery. Each of these societies, organizations and governmental roles served to create a climate of panic and permissiveness. Backed by scientists, religious leaders, politicians, legal and academic scholars etc. fears of inferiority were stoked and as a result permission to invalidate the humanity and rights of the individual were allowed. This was all done in the name of the greater good and the word was spread through academic papers, books, journals, newsletters and other promotional materials.

Indiana passed the first eugenic sterilization statute in the United States in 1907. This “law made sterilization mandatory for criminals, idiots, rapists, and imbeciles in state custody residing in state institutions”³³ (Kersten, n.d.). This law built on approved legislation from 1905 which prohibited issuing marriage licenses for “imbeciles, epileptics and those of unsound minds”³⁴ sought to manage degeneracy and set out the procedures and circumstances for the approval of sterilization of those in custody. These ranged from how these persons should be assessed, to who would be doing the assessment, as well as the compensation for the surgeons performing the procedures. In Canada the route to implementing eugenic sterilization statutes was a bit more circular. Alberta passed *An Act respecting Insane Persons* in 1907. Like the legislation in Indiana, it states that the goal is to only manage those who are considered “insane and dangerous to be at large”³⁵. It also set out the terms for mental assessment and how compensation for the costs associated with this task would be determined. However, it does not make any provisions for sterilization.

It would not be until the 1920s that calls for the sterilization of those deemed

³³ Laws of Indiana, 1907, Ch. 215, pp. 377-78

³⁴ Laws of Indiana, 1905, Ch. 241, pp. 215-16

³⁵ An Act respecting Insane Persons, SA 1907, c 7, <<https://canlii.ca/t/541f1>> retrieved on 2024-04-24

‘feeble-minded’ or ‘mentally deficient’ would be heard and codified in Canada, starting within Alberta. By this time, in addition to Indiana, California, Washington, Connecticut, Iowa, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Michigan, North Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Oregon, New Hampshire, and Idaho had all enacted sterilization legislation, sometimes with pushback and even legal challenge. According to the work done by Lutz Kaelber and their sophomore student researchers at the University of Vermont, these types of legislation were adopted by over thirty states across the United States (Kaelber, 2012). In 1928 Alberta became the first province to pass specific sterilization legislation and British Columbia followed with *An Act respecting Sexual Sterilization* in 1933. Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario all drafted sexual sterilization legislation, but these were defeated in the 1930s due to increased resistance, particularly from Catholics. Beginning in the 1960s, Quebec practiced “positive” eugenics, establishing baby bonuses and other financial incentives for large families, in the hope of increasing its population. In the Atlantic provinces, Nova Scotia institutionalized women considered unfit for motherhood.

These types of legislation and policies allowed for the surgical sterilization of “mental defectives,” in order to promote a healthy populace. Of course, enforcing these policies had the additional benefit of lessening the burden on the state financially. These so-called “mental defectives” would include those individuals officially classified by medicine and law as “imbeciles.”. Once again, we see the spectre of ‘the fraud’ as some of the definitions argue that these persons had the ability to “pass as normal individuals and more is expected of them than their capabilities permit.” (Leung, pg. 147). The conflation of fraud and disability is again cemented and not only is the non-disabled population being taken advantage of but this particular fraud becomes that much more dangerous as the bloodline of the nation is also subject to tamper.

The literature shows that the result of these assumptions was two-fold. These assumptions allowed for problematic legislation to be passed, and at the same time, they granted society wide permission to be dismissive of, and negative toward the choice of disabled persons to express their sexuality and experience pleasure. This legislation affected primarily institutionalized individuals, although the effects have lasted far beyond the repealing of these laws and can be directly shown to affect youth today as they are not exposed to sexual education at the same time as their able-bodied counterparts. As Loree Erickson (2010) argues “[m]any children who are born with or acquire their disabilities early on are told directly and indirectly to not expect to have a family or anyone ever romantically love them.” (np) This lack of expectation means that there is no offering of sex education for these young people. (Noonan & Gomez, 2011, pg. 176) The belief that disabled people will never have a family, or that no one will ever love them in a romantic way is debilitating to the self- esteem of a young person and abusive (Shildrick, 2009).

Beyond this, disabled people have to deal with potential partners either fetishizing them or ghosting them once they find out about their disabilities. Saltes (2013) interviews with disabled people who use online dating sites showed that disclosure is often a complicated thing with the potential for rejection being high and damaging to one's self- worth. Some persons mentioned that people with whom they seemed to have a rapport, ghosted them after finding out that they had a disability. Others mentioned encountering devotees. Some of the women mentioned that even though these devotees made them uncomfortable or engaged in hypermasculine behaviour, they chose to engage with these individuals for a few reasons: these men were available; this engagement was a way to affirm their womanhood and feel sexy; and this engagement allowed them to combat loneliness (Fiduccia, 1999; Kafer, 2012; Saltes, 2013).

Because eugenics was discussed through this lens of heredity and genetics, reproduction and primarily female reproduction was heavily scrutinized (Harding, 1986; McLaren, 1990). In

Canada, practices of “population purification” (Mosoff, 1993) saw many disabled women and men sterilized to avoid their reproducing disabled children. Since disability had become coded as deviance this process was one of the easiest ways to ensure that only the ‘fittest’ would be reproduced. These decisions were made with the understanding that these infantilized people needed to be protected. Their own embodied manifestations of puberty were one such thing on the continuum, that infantilized disabled people needed to be protected from. For disabled men, encouraging them to not engage their sexual selves often included segregation from others and fear mongering about the unnaturalness of a natural bodily phenomena e.g., ejaculation and nocturnal emissions. (Liddiard, 2018). Whereas for women who we would today label as having intellectual disabilities, the discourse was one that deemed them unable to handle the complications that came with menstruation (Rioux & Patton, 2011) in addition to the huge task of pregnancy and caring for a child. While sterilization may not have always been the medical solution, the use of coercive hormonal birth control³⁶, was a common practice (Fiduccia, 1999, pg. 278; Slater et al., 2018, pg. 18). The most striking aspect of this decision-making process was that these individuals once labelled disabled were not consulted as it was believed that they did not, and could not, fully understand the ramifications of these decisions.

The authority deciding whether the individual’s future would include offspring was a type of eugenics board that would consist of a combination of the following; a judge, psychiatrist, social worker and physician. While the person directly affected was assessed they were not thought to be an expert on their own body or behaviour. Their actions were filtered through the lens of legal, medical, and social expertise. Nowhere was this overlap more evident than in the case of *Buck v. Bell*. This case in Virginia was the first to be adjudicated by the United States

³⁶ Today the use of long- acting reversible contraception (LARC) in this way is considered “soft sterilization” (Brian, et al., 2020; Winters & McLaughlin, 2019)

Supreme Court. It turned on the fact that Carrie Buck who was a young White woman was raped by the nephew of her foster guardians and subsequently became pregnant. The family had her committed to the Virginia Colony for the Epileptic and Feeble-minded “on the grounds of immorality, an accepted indicator of mental impairment, just as her rape was an accepted indicator of immorality.” (Ordovery, pg.134) Further proof of her mental impairment lay in heredity as Carrie’s mother had also been institutionalized as it was stated that she had lived ““a life of her immorality, prostitution and untruthfulness””. (Ibid) Likewise, it was believed that her daughter Vivian would also be categorized as being feeble-minded. This case and Carrie’s story would be the test case for Virginia as to whether they could sterilize those whose disability was hereditary therefore making them and their offspring inadequate or unfit. The court found that Carrie Buck

““is the probable potential parent of socially inadequate offspring, likewise afflicted, that she may be sexually sterilized without detriment to her general health, and that her welfare and that of society will be promoted by her sterilization,” and thereupon makes the order... We have seen more than once that *the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives*. It would be *strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices*, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order *to prevent our being swamped with incompetence*. It is better for all the world if, instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime or to let them starve for their imbecility, *society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind*. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes.”³⁷ Three generations of imbeciles are enough.

³⁷ Jacobson v. Massachusetts, 197 U.S. 11 (1905)

But it is said, however it might be if this reasoning were applied generally, it fails when it is confined to the small number who are in the institutions named and is not applied to the multitudes outside. It is the usual last resort of constitutional arguments to point out shortcomings of this sort. But the answer is that the law does all that is needed when it does all that it can, indicates a policy, applies it to all within the lines, and seeks to bring within the lines all similarly situated so far and so fast as its means allow. Of course, *so far as the operations enable those who otherwise must be kept confined to be returned to the world, and thus open the asylum to others, the equality aimed at will be more nearly reached.*³⁸ (Buck v. Bell, 274) [emphasis mine]

This judgement in favour of the superintendent and institution, is threaded with eugenic talking points. There is the call to public welfare through sacrifice, a small sacrifice of one's reproductive organs and reproductive futurity³⁹ for the betterment of society. There is the disability and disability coded as vice constructed as burdensome with sterilization being the panacea to rehabilitate these otherwise assets to capitalism. There is also the deployment of compulsory vaccine legislation applied to that of major surgery. The lives, futurity and experiences of disabled people are likened to the same level of threat as the smallpox pandemic.⁴⁰ Lastly, there is the belief that sterilization as a protocol expanded will allow for true equality, thereby serving its true purpose of population purification as Mosoff eloquently stated. It did not matter that Carrie Buck was the scapegoat laid at the altar of the rampant misogyny, classism and an unwillingness to hold men accountable for their actions. It did not matter that she was

³⁸ Buck v. Bell, 274 U.S. 200 (1927)

³⁹ The term reproductive futurism was coined by Lee Edelman in his 2004 book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. This term for Edelman speaks to the belief that the future is only secure by having children.

⁴⁰ This is entirely ironic as the Covid pandemic saw a repudiation of even the idea of this type of blanket vaccination legislation in favor of watching those believed to be 'unfit' i.e. the elderly, or those with pre-existing conditions, die.

improperly assessed after only a few conversations, not even the standard, if faulty, IQ test at the time. Is it any wonder that this case in particular and the language of the judgement and procedure upheld would draw notice of the German Reich and cited as they produced their own versions of sterilization, and later extermination policies.

A shift in the discourse of sterilization from the fear of the reproduction of disabled children to being best for the ‘children’ came as a result of the fall of eugenics in popularity during the post WWII era. Eugenics was denounced as discriminatory and wholly lacking in acknowledging human rights. However, even though state sanctioned eugenic practices were dismantled the ideas that facilitated these procedures were/are still embedded in our society and manifest itself in social policy i.e. newgenics. These social and oftentimes medical interventions are sometimes wrapped in a paternalistic idea of protection. Women with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not categorised as ‘women’, merely as ‘children’. This was highlighted in the Canadian case of *E (Mrs.) v. Eve* in 1986.

This case, known as the case of Eve, involved a mother who wished to have her twenty-one-year-old daughter sterilized via hysterectomy so as to prevent future pregnancy. She believed that this was the only recourse since her daughter, who was diagnosed with expressive aphasia and was deemed to be “mildly to moderately mentally retarded” (p. 245), became close with a male student. Eve’s mother believed that not only did she not understand the ramifications of a relationship but also that she (the mother) would be the one who would have to take care of the child if Eve were to become pregnant. In spite of being twenty- one, Eve was viewed as a child incapable of making informed decisions. Her competence was judged solely on the words of experts’ understanding of her disability, and her disability stood in for her as a whole being. In this case unlike with Carrie Buck, the court found in Eve’s favour. They noted that there was no proof that giving birth would be more difficult for Eve than any other woman (*Eve*, p. 343). As

well, a hysterectomy is irreversible and would not allow Eve to experience the “great privilege of giving birth” (*Eve*, p. 345). However, most importantly was their acknowledgement that history has aided in the perception of “mentally handicapped as somewhat less than human” (*Eve*, p. 345). This acknowledgement coupled with the belief that this procedure would negatively affect the self-worth of women with Eve’s diagnosis, led to the understanding that a third party ordering a non-therapeutic sterilization contravened the rights of the individual being sterilized.

Eve’s level of competence was taken to be non-existent. It was not believed that she could act on her own behalf and instead needed someone, in this case the courts, to act in her best interests. Strange enough, although the courts decided that she should not be deprived of the gift of pregnancy there was no mention of whether she should even be exposed to any sexual education to help her be aware of this right to reproduce that she inherently had. I would imagine that like many disabled women of that time Eve had no education about anything related to her sexuality or even her bodily changes. While this is assertion cannot be confirmed as the case materials did not mention sex education, I feel confident in making it as consistent evidence from disability activists’ anecdotes⁴¹, research units⁴² and academic scholarship⁴³ show that sex education has not generally been inclusive to disabled students.⁴⁴ Further, when sex education is left to the parents of caregivers, they are uncomfortable discussing this with their children (Hole et al., 2022; Campbell & Santinele Martino, 2020) and even if they are comfortable doing so,

⁴¹ “‘I have sex. Get over it’: Disability activists call for sex education” (2017). This CBC Radio Interview with Disability Activists Andrew Gurza, Jessica Coole, and Kaleigh Trace discussed their specific experiences with sex education in provinces across Canada.

⁴² The Disability and Sexuality Lab at the University of Calgary is currently creating educational resources to fill the sex education gap for individuals with disabilities and their parents and care workers as their research showed that formal school-based education was inadequate.

⁴³ Bahner, 2018; Davies & Kenneally, 2020; Campbell & Santinele Martino, 2020; Namkung et al., 2021; Hole et al., 2022; Paulauskaite et al., 2022

⁴⁴ There is research done in many countries on this topic however, I have limited my scope to primarily North American and 2 European sources.

they have a difficult time finding the appropriate information (Disability and Sexuality Lab, n. d.). Therefore, it is not a stretch to believe that if this is information that disabled young people have difficulty finding today, with information more readily accessible, a woman who was deemed to be a child at twenty- one would not have had the same access.

Judith Mosoff argues that historically disabled women’s interactions with reproductive choice has been a road plagued with “lack of information about birth control, forced sterilization and prescriptions of unsafe contraceptives” (1993, p. 383). She notes that for these women, ideas about gender, sexuality and mothering capacity were largely ignored (p. 380). These beliefs about capacity have not necessarily changed as disabled women can still be segregated in the educational system as children. Within the Canadian and specifically the Ontario context, through *The Education Act* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* as well as other policies and litigation,⁴⁵ students who have special needs are identified and accommodated, however, this accommodation can look like removal from the larger classroom to a “special education or self-contained class” (Government of Ontario, n.d.) especially in instances where there is a shortage of trained staff (Wong, 2024).

As mentioned above students with disabilities are taught basic sex education as opposed to sex education that takes into consideration their disability. Moreover, in rare cases, parents will force their children and youth to undergo sterilization procedures and some adults have to fight to have these decisions overturned. The cases of Ashley X in 2007, the unnamed twenty- two year old woman in the United Kingdom in 2019, and the children of the parents interviewed in DeJardins 2012 research in Quebec all show the points of contention when deploying the rhetoric of ‘protecting the children’, where the children are at once the individuals whose reproduction is

⁴⁵ *Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities* | Ontario Human Rights Commission (n.d.)

a cause for concern i.e. in need of protecting, and future/ imagined offspring of these individuals i.e. who need protection from their disabled hypothetical parents.

Dejardins' study is a bit of an outlier within the Disability and Sexuality field as he posits that the asexual/ hypersexual dichotomy is inaccurate but that there was a third category of "extraordinary sexuality" (2012, pg. 73). This third category saw parents acknowledging and welcoming the genital sexuality and sexual lives of their teenage and young adult children to the extent where some of them were planning on enrolling them in sex education, and others still facilitated access to caressing, mutual masturbation and in one instance, sexual intercourse. However, the caveat to accessing sexual intercourse is that they be "liberated from a disruptive ability to procreate..." (Dejardins, 2012, pg. 78). He notes that this procedure is viewed as a means of empowerment by the parents and they provide this as an option to their children under persuasive means which sway the children to claim their right to be sterilized (pp. 80-81). Although Dejardins presents this third categorization as a liberatory engagement with one's sexuality, I would argue that this is infantilization masquerading as liberation since the 'informed consent' that parents receive is in fact coercive and grounded in the belief that there is no value in these teens/young adults having offspring and them doing so would be an additional burden on the caretakers and family members.

Panic over the good of the children also manifests when disabled parents and disabled mothers in particular do choose to have children. As previously noted, disabled women have been placed in the margins of womanhood. Their disability often casts them as non- sexual, and they are not given information about sex and sexuality. Social judgments are placed on their disability, which results in perceptions of incompetence because of their disabilities. Disabled women, specifically those who have chronic illnesses or intellectual disabilities, have a difficult time finding information pertaining to pregnancy and disability (Gill, 2015). Nurses and doctors

whose job it is to inform expecting mothers of what they should or should not do, tend to focus on ‘healthy’ mothers. This perspective can be seen as an implicit statement of the belief that only healthy (read: able-bodied) women should have children and disabled women who want to have children are being irresponsible and are simply not competent to deal with the rigors of pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing as they themselves need to be cared for (Vaidya, 2015). It is unfathomable that these women would want to be mothers.

The fact that embedded in the concept of motherhood, is the need to produce “perfect” offspring serves as an additional barrier to disabled women. The idea that disability is something tragic and not needed in society is the message that the search for baby perfection sends. For women with disabilities that are genetic, this message is particularly hazardous to their self worth. Their individual embodiment is attacked while their choice to have offspring with their genetic difference is questioned in ways that other mothers’ decisions are not. (Vaidya, 2015; Gill, 2015) and many chose not to reproduce because of the negative messages they internalize.

What is more troubling than these social/medical disapprovals of these women’s conceptions is the heightened scrutiny that these women face once they have had their children. Even after dealing with the messages that they should not reproduce and the interventions that can result from these beliefs, disabled women who are able to exercise their reproductive rights and have children are then bombarded with the message that they will still be unfit mothers. This negative perception leads to social interventions, such as frequent visits from social workers (National Council on Disability, 2012). Many disabled mothers feel they have to play the role of hyper competent mother in order for the nurses and hospital staff to feel comfortable enough to discharge them and the baby. Once the child is brought home, family, social workers, as well as their attendants scrutinize their mothering skills. Instead of offering supports, these new moms receive conflicting advice on how to do tasks ‘right’ as opposed to how the tasks can be adapted

to their disabilities. One area where many of the women were able to be supported was from their mothers and to a lesser extent their husbands (Tomasi, 2015). Curious enough, disability is also viewed as an advantage when a child has the same disability as the mother. The mothers are then seen as being able to better understand what their children are going through and are able to act accordingly.

Nonetheless, incidences of disabled mothers losing and, in some cases, giving up their child(ren) to Children Protective Services is higher than that of non-disabled women (Powell, 2018; Fritsch, 2017; National Council on Disability, 2012; 2016; Frederick, 2014; Rochman, 2012). This hyper surveillance is not because these women treat their children worse than able-bodied women but the deep-seated perception that they are not able to provide for the needs of their children in the ways that society has constructed 'good mothering'. A mother providing independent care to her child is the norm and women who need assistive technologies and additional informal supports are automatically cast into the 'incompetent mother' pile and are forced to undergo extra scrutiny to ascertain their capacity to be adequate mothers. The notion of heredity rears its head again to construct that idealized mother figure that can add to the gene pool.

Although there are no longer laws that allow for the sterilization of disabled people, and specifically for women who are labelled 'intellectually or developmentally delayed', the ideas that made this possible remain through social practices. (Ignagni & Fudge Schormans, 2016; Ignagni, et al., 2016). The lack of knowledge of health professionals on the subject of pregnancy and disability seems to suggest that there is no need for these professionals to care about this information. The increased scrutiny of disabled mothers seems to reinforce the belief that these women lack competence. The message sent to disabled women is that if you manage to clear all the hurdles and choose to have children, your decision will never be proven to be a competent

one unless you manage to prove your mothering skills above and beyond that of what is asked of non disabled women. Institutional oversight is ever present and willing to intervene (National Council of Disability, 2012; 2016).

In contemporary discourse the aftereffects of eugenic interventions on disabled populations construct ‘the disabled’ as those whose formal relationship to the state enables them to claim benefits, while others with similar embodied experiences continue to work through injury and illness, or languish without benefits or status. (Gorman, 2016). The relationship between disability and state or institutional benefits continue to be interconnected.

I pause here to reflect on my experience as a disabled graduate student who took a leave of absence from their program and had to petition to return and extend their degree term limits by one year on the grounds of disability. Upon completion of my petition with the requisite supporting documents, I was told that this was not enough. In the end, my petition was supported by i) three years worth of doctor’s notes ii) a letter of support from my previous graduate program director (GPD) iii) another letter of support from the incoming GPD as the back and forth between myself and the department responsible for granting petitions spanned the end of one term and beginning of another for these two GPDs iv) a letter of support from my graduate supervisor v) a letter of support from the Equity Officer of my student union and vi) a letter of support from my newly minted disability counsellor as a hail Mary as the letters from the previous individuals were at different stages deemed collectively and individually inconclusive to allow me to be

categorized as a student with a disability, deserving support.⁴⁶⁴⁷

As stated previously, the decision to categorize people as disabled or not is heavily mitigated by the capitalistic understanding of monetary supports. While institutions were and still are readily willing to place individuals under the umbrella of disability, going so far as presenting themselves as accessible havens, they draw the line at supporting all of these peoples unless these individuals prove themselves as disabled enough through specific language authorized by specific institutional actors to access these societal goods (Rutter, et al., 2023; Sturm, et al., 2024).

But if we just let everyone access these supports then people will take advantage? This has been the refrain used to create poorhouses and workhouses, charity models and even the Ugly Laws. The idea of the malingerer who is lazy and shiftless transposed onto the disabled bodymind creates disability as an alterable category. The fixity is removed, and not in the way that understands that some disability is episodic or that most of us inhabit temporarily able bodies. No, the flexibility is there to allow societal actors to apply their morality to those discreet “scientific” categorizations. It constrains, and allows for containment as a metric for development to hierarchicalize disabled bodyminds and at any point will make the claim of ‘not disabled enough’ to deny support.

Why? What are the conditions of society that would make a large portion of the population opt to pick up the marginalized and maligned identity of disability in order to escape their material realities?⁴⁸ The idea that individuals would readily don this identity to commit

⁴⁶ A screenshot will be provided in the appendix.

⁴⁷ This petition included a request for funding. Funding in this case is simply a guarantee of a Teaching Assistant position i.e. it is not simply a cash infusion to pay for this additional year but an exchange of labour for funds. I was told explicitly that if I was willing to drop the funding request then my petition for reinstatement would be completed and approved in a fraction of the time.

⁴⁸ There is not much academic research on this topic beyond Doron Dorfman’s doctoral dissertation *Disability Law & Perceptions of Fakery* and Blog post *Disability Law and Perceptions of Fakery: The Need to Restore Public Trust*

fraud seems to confirm the idea that this category of disability in its entirety is fraudulent at best, and should cease to exist, at worst. It also presupposes a deserving disabled population...the real question is, deserving of what? because when we look at supports offered, they often only meet the bare minimum of care and allow for mere survival in the best cases.

Who is harmed? Who is specifically harmed if many people identify as disabled? Other individuals? Or those in classes that do not wish to share the wealth except as a sop to their conscience to throw out a pittance of help in the name of altruism? Perhaps we are to take Shildrick's words to heart when she notes that difference creates a type of societal panic or anxiety where we are forced to face our own humanness.

We work hard, we don't want to support those who don't do their part! So, billionaires?? In a society where 1% of the population hoard more wealth⁴⁹ than the entirety of the rapidly vanishing middle class, we have to wonder what feats of labour they do to earn their way. Why are their instances of fraud not considered criminal? Why is the label of criminality not applied to the billionaire or multi millionaire classes as a whole? What makes a tax loophole that defrauds the government hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars less prosecutable than fraudulently filling out a form that awards you the princely sums of USD \$943⁵⁰ or CAD \$1,228⁵¹ a month.

The specious nature of eugenic ideals and its many permutations has conceived of a disabled population that is a monolith to be contained and regulated so as not to dilute and threaten the gene pool of the elite citizenship ideal proposed by eugenicists. It reproduces a

in Rights (2018) that support the arguments proposed that this fear of the disability con derives from a perceived belief of deservedness, on the other hand, there is ample anecdotal, blog and other writing that demonstrates this. One needs only to visit the comment section of any announcement of government supports or debt relief.

⁴⁹ This \$36.2 trillion-dollar figure is based on the 2021 Federal Reserve release on the distribution of wealth in the United States.

⁵⁰ This is based on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) data for 2024

⁵¹ This is the amount a single adult is granted through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) as of 2024.

nation state interpreted through science, which is interpreted through the socio- political- economic belief systems of those who hold the most power. It categorizes you as deserving while at the same time penalizing your deservedness should you dare to engage in intimate relationships with others. This belief system also ignores your competence when you act in contravention to the obeisance expected through feelings and acts of gratitude that your mere humanity has been acknowledged.

Eugenics and sexual minorities

“[T]he eugenicists sought by investigation, categorization and education to subject sexuality to greater control than had ever existed in the past” (McLaren, 2014 p. 68)

Understanding human sexuality within the boundaries of state sanctioned propriety is to center sexuality and specifically hetero- patriarchy as a disciplining power within western society. (Finley, 2011, p. 34)

These two quotes from McLaren and Finley highlight the systemic and institutional nature of sexuality and untethers it from the ideal of innateness. Oftentimes when sexuality is mentioned, especially in a research context, it refers to all sexualities with the exception of heterosexuality. We perceive of sexuality as being outside of the bounds of hetero patriarchy. We question the legitimacy of all 2SLGBTQ+ sexualities and identities. We research access, lack of access, dating and other cultural aspects of what it means to be queer but seldomly the underlying assumption of the naturalness of heterosexuality. Even as critiques are made, the default is always cisgender heteropatriarchy as a monolithic and static identity. What I mean by this is that even as we state

that sexuality is socially constructed, we do not always take the time to dismantle why these constructions exist and most importantly what function these supposedly opposed constructions serve. Moreover, because heterosexuality and queer sexualities are positioned in opposition to each other, there is little done to question the power inherent in this positionality and who gets to organize this particular power structure. It is in questioning this understanding of sexuality altogether, that we have an avenue to understand the focus of eugenic interventions into corralling individual expressions of sex and sexuality. It also allows us to understand the continuous need for causation theories and liberatory biologism that continue to emerge in scientific circles to explain queer communities.

Sexuality studies scholars and Queer Theorists have charted the origins of the categorizations of sex and sexualities in western history and many credit Karoly Maria Benkert⁵² with coining the terms heterosexual and homosexual in 1869, where the concern was predominantly about adhering to gender conventions (Ordovery, p.70). Richard von Kraft- Ebing is credited as the developer of the taxonomic system of inversion. Inversion for Kraft- Ebing referred to homosexuals and those we would consider to be part of the Trans community today. Like many thinkers of his time, he viewed any sexual behaviour that did not conform to heterosexual reproduction [i.e., penis in vagina sex with male orgasm] as both inappropriate and also psychopathic. Underpinning this system was the belief that those whose behaviours categorized them as inverts should be removed from the reproductive gene pool. These theories were adopted by eugenicists such as Havelock Ellis and others who insisted that there needed to be differentiation between those who would be fit for reproduction and those who would be considered outside of this category and therefore unfit to belong within society.

⁵² Sometimes referred to as Karl Maria Benkert or Karoly Maria Kertbeny

Shaw (n.d.) notes that homosexuality was viewed negatively alongside feeble-mindedness and most of the literature argued that homosexuality was viewed as a symptom of mental illness in need of cure. For this reason, we see records of homosexuals being sterilized in many countries that upheld eugenic principles. Giles (1992) notes that in Nazi Germany homosexuals were subject to castration. Under Indiana's sterilization law mentioned previously, approximately one third of the inmates of the Jeffersonville Reformatory identified by Dr. Harry Sharp as deviants who should be subject to a vasectomy were said to have committed the infraction of sodomy. Of course, sodomy would encompass many same sex interactions and sometimes even referred to sexual activities and behaviours that were outside of the scope of procreative heterosexual sex such as onanism or masturbation. Similarly, sterilization laws in Oregon targeted homosexuals in the 1990s.

In an application of positive eugenics, sexual education programs that sought to teach young men and women the appropriate ways to express their sexuality were popularized. The need to bring sex and sexuality into the realm of the public in this way was a tool in the eugenicist toolbox. This proposed curriculum of course coincided with purity culture as promulgated by Christian religious elements within the movement. As procreation was expected to only happen within the bounds of marriage, with those whose genetic material would bolster the nation, there was an emphasis on remaining chaste and keeping one's sexual energy saved for the purpose it was intended. It was believed that this regulation of the self and population would also limit the spread of venereal diseases. This education of course ignored the fact that the use of condoms as well as salvarsan, an antibiotic discovered in 1909 by Paul Ehrlich, would be more effective at stopping the spread of these types of illnesses (McLaren, 2014). Much like with the arguments against comprehensive sexual education today (Davies, & Kenneally, 2020), the historical sexual education curriculum was grounded in the belief that with competent education,

there would be a culture of ‘permissiveness’ where youth believe that it is okay to engage in non procreative and unmarried sexual activity (Bahner, 2018; Elia, & Eliason, 2010).

It is for this reason that sexual categorization was important. The process of categorization is integral to the normalization process. In creating separate categories of behaviours one can start to assign moral, social and other values to these, thereby constructing entire identities both positive and negative that map onto those who engage in those behaviours. This categorization of course is followed by the process of exclusion of those behaviours (now identities) deemed detrimental to the continued survival and moral fibre of the society. It is important to note that this process of normalization is not done by overall consensus. It is consensus by those who have the most socio- economic and political power at the time so these categories are never static and will change as the power shifts.

We see this dynamic play out in sexual categorization in different ways after the construction of the sexual invert or inversion as a whole. The categorization of the “sexual pervert” whose being and identity becomes intertwined with their so-called acts of sexual perversion becomes one such example. The language of perversion is evocative and creates a population that could be controlled for the betterment of the nation. For those like G. Frank Lydston, sexual perversion that was a result of physical difference bore no difference to sexual perversion from vice or overstimulation/ hypersexuality (Ordovery, p.75). This new understanding of perversion meant that the hereditary nature of sexual deviance was something to be on guard for and as such these sexual perverts could not be allowed to reproduce lest they increase the deviant class. To combat this problem, youth needed to be targeted with special education on the appropriate ways to express their sexuality and those who were on a path to deviance had to be corrected.

The conflation of identity and action is important as prior to this categorization, it was

possible to engage in so called acts of homosexuality, i.e. intercourse with a same sex partner, without being considered deviant, an invert or a pervert as long as you were still adhering to the gender conventions (Adams, 1997; Katz, 1995). Likewise, someone could be classified as an invert without having engaged in any acts of homosexuality. However, when actions start to determine identity and a population is pinpointed, ideas about the origins of difference become scientific touchpoints. It is at this point that interventions can occur. We can start to track the reasons why the individuals engage in that particular identity defining activity, which then says something about their morality and capacity which in turn feeds the narrative that these deviant behaviours are emblematic of *all* who we will now categorize in this way. It is once again that macabre mobius strip at work.

We see this unending intersection more clearly as the idea of heredity comes into play and the ideas that sexual inversion and sexual perversion are the fault of ancestors who were unfit. For those like James Foster Scott, these people could not be allowed to enter the gene pool lest they reproduce more weak and unfit offspring (Ordovery, 2003). These pathological interpretations of homosexuality seemed to champion a move from traditional carceral intervention to a ‘kinder’, ‘gentler’ medical intervention. I of course, put kinder and gentler in quotes as we would come to find out that these treatments were always violent and dehumanizing and were often carceral in nature even if not in an actual jail or prison (McLaren, 1990; Ordovery, 2003). These interventions could be pre-emptive or reactive and both of these could be dispensed by medical institutions. These interventions were there to provide correction through cure and where cure was not possible, a complete loss of freedom and autonomy.

Correction could be as benign as medical professionals recommending a change in diet to more bland food to avoid stimulating the senses as was the case with Kellogg’s creation of corn flakes. The goal of course was to create a breakfast cereal that would or could erase desire and

over stimulation of the senses that other breakfast foods like ham, bacon etc., could be perceived to promote. However, more often than not, these professionals prescribed “[h]ysterectomy, vasectomy, castration, clitoridectomy, and blistering of the vulva, prepuce, or thighs” (Ordovery, 2003, pg. 76). These very permanent ‘cures’ were not only seen as deterrents to engaging in acts of sexual perversions, they were at times a condition of release from the institutions. With proponents like Cesare Lombroso declaring homosexuals to be lower on the evolutionary stage than heterosexuals (Ordovery, 2003, pg. 77) and unable to contain their baser urges, there was a need for surveillance and targeting of youth with perversion inclinations early. This surveillance would allow for cures to be administered to the youth, or more likely their removal and institutionalization complete with medical experimentation.... or as they would claim, treatment. This belief is shared by both Lombroso and Moreau.

These categorizations, like all eugenic categorizations, shifted and changed depending on how the doctor perceived gender roles and individuals’ adherence to them. For lesbians at the time, the belief that some were ‘queerer’ than others was based on the “role” she played in the relationship. This perception directly affected the kind of care received. For the more feminine women whose gender presentation were in accordance with the societal ideal of femininity, she was viewed as being deceived by her more masculine counterpart who was suffering from “conversion”⁵³. This treatment model is an application of the discussion of sexual inversion which primarily focused on men and women who took on feminine and masculine roles respectively thereby inverting the ‘true’ behaviours of men and women. Fortunately, this ‘cure’ meant that the ‘deceived’ partner could be rehabilitated and put back in service to the state

⁵³ Conversion at this time described women who thought themselves to be men and would take female partners. This is sometimes seen as a pre- trans* discourse and while definitely folks who we would understand today as being trans would be perceived as having a conversion disorder, this also applied to women who were just interested sexually in other women.

project of reproduction.

Ordoover citing G Dorner's report writes that homosexuality as a label was applied in laboratories to the mounting female, and mounted male (pg. 95) and this concept was taken out of the laboratory and liberally applied to human sexuality. These individuals, who would then be labelled as deviant, would be subject to curative measures by institutions as their utility to the nation through reproduction was at an end. In this way, queer stands in for fraudulent and especially dangerous, as it is not only predatory but creates confusion in the minds of those would-be progenitors of the nation. Further, this consolidated power in the hands of physicians and medical professionals as they began to be the authorities on categorizations and the best way forward, to eradicate these people from despoiling the society, state and nation, all under the guise of being in the best interests of those in care. The resulting language of sterilization statutes thus reflected 'sexual perversion' as grounds for sterilization in states like Indiana, Oregon and Utah and as these statutes started to impact the population outside of institutions, these ideals about sexual perversions and how to manage them became firmly entrenched into the social fabric of society. One needn't look further than the *Immigration and Naturalization Act* of 1917 which used the crime of "moral turpitude" to bar entry. Anyone convicted of, or admitting to, this -open to interpretation- crime of depravity would not be allowed entry lest they dirty the pool of appropriate human breeding stock.

However, the thread of eugenics that ties together the fabric of belief in the predetermination of genes and identity has remained steadfast if a little frayed. Contemporarily these beliefs look like calls to engage in causation theory or the promise of liberatory biologism. In these paradigms, there is the firm belief that the science of eugenics, once used to control sexuality, started as a good faith means to understand difference. Therefore, it is no wonder that people are willing to turn to science to show that these differences are normal and natural. The

“born this way” discourse is one way that this newgenic⁵⁴ ideology has emerged in contemporary scientific inquiry. By arguing for a “gay gene” scientists can shift the narrative from one being born inherently deviant, to being born ‘normal’ with the label of deviance/ perversion and inversion applied through societal interaction turned identity (Kinsman, 2003). Ultimately though, this difference is simply an aspect of innate humanity. Ordoover argues that this belief is compliance with one’s own oppression. ‘We are just like you’ is never a call to action that ‘we are as flawed and problematic as you are’ but instead it rallies around the ‘we are as perfect as you are’ ideal. This ideal does not question the details of this concept of perfection, it merely acquiesces that a type of perfection is the default, as if homogeny and the cis- hetero ideal is the ordained default as opposed to the constructed and enforced default. By assigning a morally neutral value to the scientific inquiry of the day, it becomes divorced from the very real subjective socio- political, religious, economic etc. discourses and power relations of the time period (Kinsman, 2003; Ordoover, 2003; Somerville, 1994). Once again, science and scientists are able to mask their subjectivities and underplay its harm.

“...[D]ebates about genetics and sexuality have often revolved around the search for a “gay gene” (primarily for gay men)”. (Stern, n.d.) These debates seek to naturalize gayness/ queerness and the possibility of there being a biological determination can be met with sighs of relief by parents or parental figures as it can serve as a reminder that “it was not their fault” that their child is gay or queer. That sprinkle of hereditary eugenics adds a bit of flavor to the belief that queerness/ gayness cannot be solved for or more importantly removed, even with due diligence, from the gene pool. As is always the case with these things, when we create a normal through the normalization process, we must create the ab-normal/abnormal that has to be excluded. So, while

⁵⁴ Newgenics as defined as the contemporary medical, political and social practices that attempt to ‘improve’ human kind’

the individuals, couples and families that look just like their cisgender, heterosexual and patriarchal counterparts are folded into the ‘we are just like you’ demographic, others are unable to access this ‘good’ because their deviance, inversion and perversions cannot be solved for, but they can perhaps be cured? Because these theories look at eugenic interventions into the lives of queer people unlinked to the racist and ableist origins of the movement, it assumes that there is liberation to be gained by just plucking out the good aspects of the science. However, in this case, there is no baby in this bathwater.

Exclusionary Practices: The Negatives versus the Picture of Today

“The long-lasting appeal of eugenics has rested on its protection of the status quo, on its emphasis on individual and group “failings” over analyses of systemic culprits, and on its bedrock insistence on scientific/technological remedies over fundamental social and institutional change.” (Ordover, p. xii)

“So it isn’t only about class, or only about race, or only about gender, but it’s always about all of them. It’s poor people, it’s people who have hereditary diseases, but it’s often people of a particular social class or people whose behavior is seen to be as somehow outside the norm, deviant behavior.” (Phillippa Levine, guest on 15 Minute Podcasts)

“While campaigns of mass sterilization are in our past, the ideas that inspired those campaigns live on. Dozens of women were sterilized without their consent in the California prison system between 2005 and 2011. In 2017, a judge in Tennessee offered reduced jail time to inmates who agreed to be sterilized in order to, quote, “break a vicious cycle of repeat

drug offenders with children.”” (Vendantham, narrator of NPR Podcast)

It is easy to see the through lines where eugenic ideals and practices work to create discrete categories of sexuality, disability and race. Nonetheless, each of the previous sections, and the quotes above, prove that these categories build on, and are built by each other. There can be no ideal Canadian or American citizen without that citizen being white, specifically Anglo Saxon (McLaren, 1990, pg. 168). This citizen cannot be thought to have any sexual peculiarities, and they must be interested in furthering the species through sex for the defined purpose of reproduction. They must temper their desires and apply themselves to this work. Further this fine specimen must have no peculiarity of the mind or body that they could pass on to their offspring. They must be ‘fit’ in the narrowest sense of the word.

However, often these categories are positioned as separate and the histories flattened to create eugenic origin stories negating the racialized hetero- patriarchal, ableist fervor of eugenicists. Gorman (2016) argues that this characterization is a sweeping gesture of revisionism, when speaking particularly of US- based disability studies. This tactic, used as a means to engage with a liberal rights framework “aim[s] to elevate a white-defined disabled subjectivity to master status, and in its function of providing an alibi for the reproduction of race/class exploitation and oppression” (pg.254). How can we properly discuss disability oppression without discussing the racial categorization that made it possible? And how can we speak of either of these two things without acknowledging the disciplinary control that sexuality played/ plays in these interventions? Lastly, what does this erasure accomplish in general and in the community itself?

The answer: this erasure leads to the white man in a wheelchair trope as the universal symbol for disability with structures surrounding it working to accommodate this disability and bolster his masculinity and Whiteness. Other iterations become the abnorm, too difficult, too

complex. Nadia Kanani notes that ‘a prevailing, and problematic, trend in contemporary disability studies scholarship has been to frame disability as the foundational principle in the construction of race, as constitutive of race, thereby subsuming race under the category of disability’ (Kanani, 2012). Therefore, there is no need for race/culture specific understandings of disability as it becomes a single identity and a single access point. Defining disability in this way completely ignores the fact that diagnosis as a process is inherently racist and who has access to diagnosis and who is able to choose to access diagnosis is no simple task (Marschall, 2024; Rutter, et al., 2023; Sturm, et al., 2024).

The university’s insistence that I access the institution’s accessibility services and the scrutiny thereof instead of accepting my doctor’s notes does not account for the ways I as a racialized person choose to interact with these bodies. It allows for no cultural understanding that already scrutinized individuals are loathe to interact with different power structures to prove their ‘worthiness’ and ‘weakness’ as Piepzn-Samarasinha (2018) notes. This reluctance stems from the historical realities of racist institutionalization and infantilization policies mentioned in the preceding sections. Further, the idea of bodily sovereignty is so entrenched that it is anti medicalization/ anti medical establishment due to historical mistreatments. Ms. White’s story from the Son of Baldwin post situates her as a Black, poor, disabled woman whose death, like many who shared her axes of identities, is academically debated by institutions and politicians that are supposed to care for and govern all people. So how then, can we actually say that this belief about eugenics and bodily autonomy just sits at disability as defined by institutions, when the institutions filter disability through a lens of race, age, and class.

Gorman’s paper “proposes an engagement with aesthetic archives of post-colonial cultural production in order to uncover ‘the better story’ about the constitution of gendered-racialized identities through war, migration, and cultural dislocation.” (pg. 258) Similarly, this

chapter has tried to engage with eugenic artefacts and narrative to discover another story. A story that intertwines the cause and effect of eugenic policies that acknowledges it for the international movement it was, and continues to be (McLaren, 2014, pg. 49). This story is the foundation that the rest of this project is built on.

Intersectional scholars of eugenics like Bailey & Mobley (2019), McLaren (1990) Ordover (2003), Roberts (1997), and Strings (2019) focus on ways in which race and/ or sexuality have been constructed as disability in need of cure. Bailey & Mobley (2019) as well as Roberts (1997) and Strings (2019) look at Blackness classified as disability with the psychiatric diagnosis of drapetomania used to recapture and violently punish enslaved Black people who tried to escape (Bailey & Mobley, 2019, pg. 25). In charting the histories of eugenics, McLaren (1990) and Ordover (2003), pay attention to the construction of queer sexuality and desire as disability with the homosexuality in and of itself being classified as a mental disorder (Ordover, 2003, pg. 77). This characterization is used to push the conversation forward, and highlight the need for scientific/ medical pathologization that is integral to the eugenic project.

I contend that disability is already imbued with racist and heterosexist ideals, as result of the negative influences of medico- legal authorities, which continue to hold sway over disabled peoples' lives. Existing opposition between disability and the imagined white, able bodied, male figure makes it easy to subsume race and sexuality differences under the heading of disability. Nonetheless, constructing race and queer sexualities as disability has the unintended consequence of reinscribing disability as simply pathology i.e. reinscribing the medical model of disability. This is evident as the solution to dismantling these constructs is usually to untether these categories *from* disability. That is to say we are told by these authors, Bailey & Mobley (2019), McLaren (1990) Ordover (2003), Roberts (1997), and Strings (2019), that liberatory praxis comes from untethering Blackness or queerness from disability. This leaves disability firmly

rooted within the realm of pathology.

I am proposing that a better way to engage with the conflation of race and queer sexualities as disability is to think of race, queer sexualities *and* disability in terms of contagion and disease. What I mean by this is that BIPOC folks, queer folks, as well as disabled folks are all understood through a metonymy of contagion/ disease (Naidoo, 2023, pg. 119) where they each stand in for the other. The example Naidoo (2023) gives, as cited above, is where “two adjacent things being race (black essence/blood) and contagion (viral infection) come to mean the same thing or stand in for each other so then “black blood comes to stand for contagion” (pg. 19). Routed through the eugenic project, race, queer sexualities, as well as disability can each stand in for each other, as they emerge as contagion/ disease. This construction allows us to better understand the ideological implications of eugenic responses to BIOPOC, queer and disabled individuals. The work of eugenics is to cure/ fix, eradicate and weaponize the diseases that are BIPOC, queer sexualities/ queer people and disability/ disabled people. When eugenic proponents use their ideologies to construct their ideal society, there is no race without disability, or disability without queer sexualities. These categorizations stand as a metonymy for contagion or disease that must be eradicated in the best-case scenario, or managed or controlled in the worse case scenario.

It is for this reason that I have specifically charted the origins of eugenic practices because it allows for the shifting nature of categorization and cure to be laid bare. The discursive practices that define you as ‘fit’ in one way, will declare you ‘unfit’ in another. The fact that race or sexual identity can be enough of a classification of disability and vice versa is arguably the craftiest aspect of the eugenic project. It is this ephemeral categorization that causes its white supremacist foundational principles to continue to win out because it can be changed at will. It is also in these categorizations that liberatory practices come into play. For “what was meant for evil can be used

for good”⁵⁵, right? Or can it? Ordovery clearly states that there is a double-edged sword when using scientific classification for liberation. By invoking science to prove a ‘positive’, such as the gay gene, the ‘negative’ as in the potential for a fix/cure for gay adults- youth- babies, is also created. It is curious to me that there is not a study or series of studies to prove the straight gene...but that is unsurprising since this is how supremacy of oppressive structures work. It does not need to prove itself. Instead, supremacy forces it’s Other to prove its ‘naturalness’ over and over again.

In the insistence that it is mere biology that creates us as human beings we are left to be the interpretations of these biological markers by whomever is in power in the moment. In seeking to prove that our race, sex, sexuality, abilities, are strictly biological markers, we have to allow for alternate interpretations of those ideological prisons that we are then forced to inhabit. If it is a biological fact that makes me gay then it must also be true that this biological condition could and should be modified if it no longer serves the majority/nation. If it is an inherent biological fact that I am [insert any non-dominant trait here] then there must be a curative measure that will allow me to be forced back into the norm as simple as setting a broken bone. And lest we think that this is the game of scientists who are desperate to prove their theories, it is also intertwined with the legislative, judicial, and political enterprises in a cause-and-effect mobius strip. For how else do we accomplish the creation of that perfect ideal nation?

Hint: We never really do

What if we didn’t try?

What if we reframed these scientific truths?

What if we realized they were in fact not truths but the discourse of the day?

⁵⁵ A contemporary reworking of Genesis 50:20 that states that what one’s enemies intended for evil, God intended for good.

What if?

What...if?

Life is primarily described in words of consumption. The ability to have a good life is often measured in monetary or affordability indexes⁵⁶. Likewise, who gets to have life and remain alive is wrapped up in what they have to offer the society in terms of particular ideas of production. To be clear this production is mitigated by ability while also being raced and gendered, etc. Think of prisoners in the American carceral system who are used to fulfil quotas in a for-profit prison system. Their lives as bodies in cells (captives) are useful to the financial bottom line as they produce goods for example, hand sanitizer during a pandemic,⁵⁷ for a fraction of the cost. Their labour is useful as they work for anywhere between twenty- five cents to five dollars a day⁵⁸, and often the skills used are not transferable once they complete their sentences since their incarceration automatically disqualifies them from most jobs due to their implied inherent criminality.

Another example is the prison labour used to fight forest fires in California. These prisoners were paid in reduced sentences in some cases, as well as some monetary compensation. They were given two dollars a day with an additional dollar per hour for every hour they were on the line. However, to be a firefighter in that state you cannot have a criminal record. While this condition is not explicitly stated, the body in charge of EMT training, often overlooks and outright dismisses applicants with criminal records. EMT certification is necessary before one can apply to become a firefighter, thus making this career inaccessible even with prior experience. This situation is especially absurd as most job postings will require applicants to have

⁵⁶ Canada has a Quality-of-Life Statistics Program and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) uses a Human Development Index as an example.

⁵⁷ Bates, Josiah (March 9, 2020). *New York is Making its Own Hand Sanitizer Amid the Coronavirus Outbreak- Using Prison Labour*.

⁵⁸ This amount varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

extensive experience. Notably, in September of 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsome signed Bill 2147 that would see inmate firefighters have their records expunged therefore making it possible for them to earn EMT certification. Given the strong opposition to this bill by law enforcement groups and prosecutors, it is extremely/ unrealistically hopeful to believe that the EMT training body would not simply continue to dismiss those applications of former inmates.

Using carceral labour to create goods for the non carceral population while formerly incarcerated people are unable to join the labour force once they have served their time is one of the intentionally distorted images of our society. Through my limited knowledge of photography and owing to being raised in the era of the wind up and disposable cameras, I know that we have negatives/ film that are developed to form those great pictures that we frame and display. This photography process is of course not strictly the case with the advent of digital photography, however, some of the process remains the same with the advent of photoshop, filters and other corrective measures. We derive a product from the raw material. However, this product can be manipulated with highlights and shadows, filters and contrasts etc. It can be made better or worse, but the raw material forms the basis for this final product.

When I talk about the afterlives of the eugenics movements, I am discussing these negatives and specifically the photographs derived from it that have been manipulated with highlights, contrast and in some cases a good dose of photoshop. These photographs take on the shape of sexual racism, sexual ableism and so much more, as so-called dating/marriage/ child creating/ child rearing preferences are individualized to the point where the structural underpinning is all but non- existent. As seen through the prior sections, these pictures look like not even being able to imagine a reality where queer racialized disabled love exists and if they do, are perceived to be oddities, so off center as to be “one offs” instead of a sustained feeling and existence that have belonged over millennia. These photos show up as inadequate sex

education for youth and the adults they grow into, to the point where they do not believe themselves to be fit partners and parents but instead burdens on their loved ones, a flawed branch on the family tree. It shows up as the wilful recklessness that leads to the death of Ms. White and those like her, whose institutional knowledge and sense of self is lost with their passing. The reification of White supremacist dog whistles that saves some, eradicates others.

Similarly, any discussion of who gets to be human and access citizenship often assumes that there are those who are not and will not ascend to this status. When rights discourse turns on the ability to prove that group X is just as human and worthy of the same privileges experienced by group Y, it automatically informs group X that they are less than human/ sub- human. Moreover, it reifies and reminds group Y that they are human and are the arbiters of group X's humanity/ human status. Further, when calls by group X to recognise their humanity are considered divisive as opposed to empowering it shows a commitment to these master codes that Weheliye (2014) defined.

Here I think of how the phrase Black Lives Matter is always considered to be divisive as often the response given is 'actually *All Lives Matter*'...and yet we continue to see that *all lives* really do *not* matter. Some have not mattered since the days of traditional western imperialism that saw the Americas and its Indigenous populations colonized. Others have not mattered since the day that the western colonial economies needed to be propped up by the literal kidnapping, selling and purchasing of other humans as property. Still more have not mattered since the need for a cheap labour force caused others to be brought to the Americas as indentured servants and labourers. And even more have not mattered since the creation of the United States of America and Canada turned on forced removal, abuse and sterilization of those deemed mentally, socially and physically inferior. This dehumanization is a practice that continues to this day by other names.

Eugenic rhetoric has been rebranded as newgenics, however, at the core it is still national and international policy that controls and purifies populations even as it is positioned as individual choice and, dare I say, ‘personal responsibility’ as shown in the Kansas Fair posters above. It seeks to hide, cure, or punish those whose behaviour deviates from the norm. It looks like benevolence, in the service to those whom it seeks to treat, but acts like violence and a removal of autonomy as those in power appeal to what we the people should want. The Tennessee judge, Sam Benningfield, quoted above, was banking on the fact that as a society we would want there to be less children born to persons struggling with drug addiction. Note he is not advocating for services to be provided to aid the individuals who are struggling with addiction, just ensuring that they are no longer able to procreate with the trade off being a thirty-day credit toward one’s sentence, i.e., a carceral version of DeJardins’ “exceptional sexuality” (2012). Of course, we are not told of the conditions of the carceral systems these individuals are held in, although if we know anything about the US prison system, one does not have to stretch our imaginations very far to assume the desperation these people may have been facing (Thrush, 2022; Bagaric, et al., 2021; Wooldredge, 2020). I wonder if he would claim to agree with Oliver Wendell Holmes’ judgement and pronouncement in Carrie Buck’s case. In this case he certainly appears to be of the opinion that just ‘one generation of addiction’ would be enough. He is clear and direct in parroting the eugenicists’ party line of encouraging personal responsibility (Levenson, 2017).

Conclusion

Throughout this discussion we see that the ways that Eugenics has been applied historically and contemporarily concretely intertwine race, ability, class, sexuality and gender. In fact, while these

categories may seem discreet, they actually build on and are built by each other to create a system that has constructed racialized, disabled, queer folks as less than. Even as we struggle to dismantle the systems of White supremacist origins of race, sex, gender and ability, etc. in western society we need to ensure that we are not reifying its nationalistic and ableist tropes as we organize and relish in our experiences and pockets of freedom. One place that we need to pay attention to is often construed as solely private and personal. I am speaking here of relationships, romantic and kinship structures. As the whole prior discussion shows, there is nothing inherently private about the ways that we express our sexuality, enter into relationships and forms our kinship structures. Not only are these spaces not inherently private, they are heavily organized by our relationship to the public systems we interact with daily.

As our disability organizing constantly tells us, the personal is political so these decisions while deeply personal do have larger implications. We will discuss these in depth in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. The rest of the chapters follow a tongue in cheek rendition of the children's rhyme that goes

[Boy] and [Girl] sitting in a tree,

K-I-S-S-I-N-G

First comes love,

Then comes marriage,

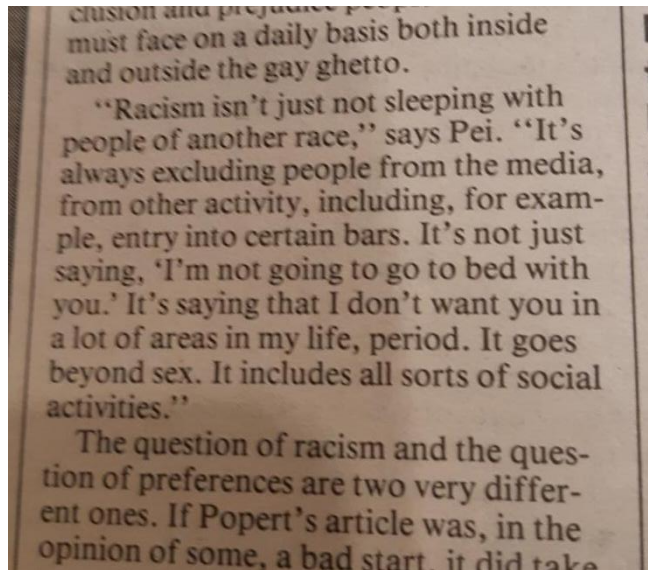
Then comes [Girl] with a baby carriage.

It is a rhyme that I teased my friends with when I was in primary school, grades 1- 6 if you are not familiar with the Guyanese/ British holdover school system. It was also a rhyme I was teased with if those around me believed I had a crush on a boy. This rhyme is ubiquitous, it has been

used as a reference for music, visual media and even romance novel titles. Its simplicity in that it is a children's rhyme exemplifies the fact that heteronormativity is constantly being taught, and reinforced. Rambukkana (2015) notes, "[a] third hegemonic fantasy is how we generally accept only one intimate life narrative as right and true; as Berlant (1998, 286) puts it, "First comes love, then..." (pg. 13). This poem lays out the appropriate order of events and who is expected to engage in these activities. It sanitized the ways babies are made and spells out the word kissing to emphasize the salaciousness of the word and activity, as it is for children to learn from after all. There should be one boy and one girl and while they kiss, this action is the precursor for falling in love, which is necessary and integral to marriage and then and only then should the girl show up with a baby in tow. The next chapter will take up the third line and, in some ways, the second. I will be looking at the ways that all of the ideas discussed prior inform our dating, hook up and intimate relationships. How has eugenic practices impacted our abilities to be in that tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G, metaphorically and practically?

Chapter 2- What's Love Got to do With It?

Introduction



- Image #4: Excerpt from "You've got a nice body...for an Oriental" by Tim McCaskell in Issue 33 of *The Body Politic* April, 1984.

"The question of racism and the question of preferences are two very different ones". This line in the snippet of the article "*You've got a nice body...for an Oriental*" by Tim McCaskell, caught my eye as I was reading through various articles in historical magazines and news publications at the ArQuives because it so closely resembles comments I have seen online and in the scholarship on dating, race and disability as I will explore later in this chapter. Like these authors, I believe that this statement is incorrect. In this chapter, I argue that we engage with the politics of eugenics every time we date, hook- up or are otherwise intimate with others. Specifically, I show that preferences do not exist in abstraction, they are consciously or unconsciously informed by the racist, ableist and queerphobic eugenic ideals that govern sexual and intimate fields. This entry to the *Body Politic* highlights a conversation that divorces racism from its systemic roots. Racism is not solely something that is actively done i.e. calling someone a racial slur or creating overtly segregated spaces, it is also embedded in our daily interactions and beliefs, like crossing the street or clutching your purse when you see a Black person or always asking any person of

colour ‘where are you really from?’ wholly unprompted. I found it particularly interesting as I looked over the archival materials that this discussion was happening in this way in the 1970s and we still have to be having it today in 2024.

I begin this chapter by outlining and defining some of the key terms and concepts that will be used throughout the chapter and dissertation, contextualizing them along a historical timeline. I will then look at these concepts and how they impact dating, hooking- up and intimate relations/relationships under the broad heading of Love and Relationships, paying attention to the ways that eugenic ideals underpin these concepts. I will follow this with a discussion of the imaginary. Invoking Haraway’s view that “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (2016, pg. 6) alongside the belief that “nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (Gloria Anzaldua cited in Schalk, 2018, pg. 1), I will look at romance novels as a site of the imaginary where we create romantic worlds. I will then move on to discuss what it looks like when we move from the imaginary to the “real” world by looking at historical and contemporary classifieds that constitute one of the major ways to date, hook- up or otherwise form intimate partnerships. Finally, I will discuss the exclusions to the dominant discourses of the imaginary and the hunt to make these imagined worlds real and what we can learn from these exclusions through a discussion of asexual identity. In doing this, I will attend to ways we can avoid the eugenic and newgenic afterlives that underpin dating, hook-up and intimate relations/relationships.

Racial tensions exist when queer disabled people of colour choose to engage their sexual selves in the dating or hookup fields. These tensions exist for most of us the minute we engage with other people and systems daily. However, in spite of negative experiences, queer disabled people of color are still showing up actively in dating and hookup spaces. More than that, queer, disabled and racialized people have been writing themselves into the desirable imaginary through

romantic/erotic fan fiction⁵⁹ and more contemporarily, novel publishing. Therefore, with the understanding of the eugenic foundations of the ideal desirable bodymind, as discussed previously, this chapter will explore the concepts of sexual racism and sexual ableism and the interconnected ways these concepts have moved from the historical to the contemporary to reify this idealized bodymind. It will chart the way this particular type of racism and ableism inhibits success in forming intimate partnerships for queer, disabled people of colour, while also historicizing and identifying their links to eugenic practices. Lastly, this chapter will interrogate the ways sexual desire and the desirable person become legible and how this legibility contributes to the erasure of asexual individuals.

Somerville (2000) argues that the

“ideological boundaries of race, sexuality, and gender were and continue to be sites of ongoing contestation and the meanings of these socially constructed identities are a way to gain currency through repetition, resistance and appropriation and shift are actually the ongoing processes of contestation and accumulation.” (pp. 13- 14)

This dissertation is grounded by the premise that race is a social construct, the effects of which are very real, since these constructs are bought into by the members of societies we live in, much like a price of admission. In fact, Sabrina Strings (2019) charts this understanding of race and the ways that we understand it, as a social construct first posited by Francois Bernier in the 18th century. This framework was easily taken up and used by other European thinkers to apply behaviours to racial identity, so no longer was sloth, gluttony etc., things people, specifically Africans⁶⁰, *did*, these behaviours became who they *were*. This framework is important to

⁵⁹ Fan fiction takes established characters from works of fiction and creates stories about their fictional lives that are sometimes contrary to how they are portrayed.

⁶⁰ I am using African here with full understanding that it refers to a continent of 54 independent countries, 3 dependencies and one disputed territory, not a monolithic single entity of people. However, this word is being used

understand as we think through the logistics of romance, love, dating, hooking up and the desires that drive these needs. Romance as an ideal has been defined across multiple fields, however, for the purposes of this project, romance draws heavily from the romantic novel genre to encompass future focused courtship rituals (Cheyne, 2017; 2019; Lee, 2008) that work toward the parties falling in love. Love in this section of the project refers to that indecipherable feeling that emerges when one engages in those courtship rituals. This feeling is mitigated by a pleasure ethic (Katz, 1990, pg. 71) and consumerism (Katz, 1990; Long, 2021) where love is linked to feelings of sexual desire and pleasure and the willingness to move from strictly the courtship rituals to the merging of lives. Hooking up and other intimate relations/ relationships speak to more temporary sexual arrangements between adults such as one-night stands or situationships⁶¹.

Sexual racism is a particular flavour of racist hostility that is sexual in nature. Stember introduced this concept to explain the resistance to desegregation and interracial relationships (Han, 2021, pg.8-9). However, this concept was taken up and expanded by queer communities and queer theorists to attend to the combination of exclusion and fetishization based on race, not simply the resistance to racial integration and interracial relationships (Han, 2021; Han, & Choi, 2018; Lim, & Anderson, 2023; Smith, et al., 2022). This exclusion and fetishization is rooted in a systematic devaluing of those whose sexual worth falls into those excluded and fetishized categories while the dominant group's sexual worth is elevated. In the same way that whiteness is seen to be polluted by desegregation and interracial relationships similarly we have here the overvaluing of White queerness as a construct and devaluing of those queers who do not fit this mold and a panic when queers of colour dare to enter these predominantly white spaces (CBC

in this way to flag that this construction was conferred by Bernier and his ilk to categorize all people indigenous to the African continent and these stereotypes persist to today.

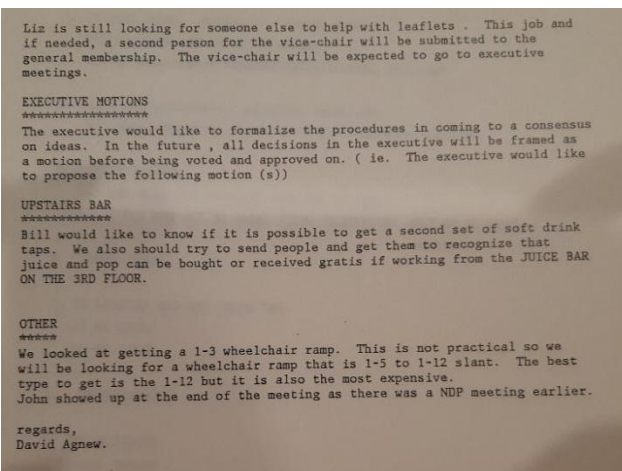
⁶¹ This is defined in popular culture as a romantic or sexual relationship that is not formalized.

News, 2016; Alturi, 2018).

Similarly, sexual ableism also speaks to a systemic understanding of the desirable bodymind. While sexual racism attends to the systemic exclusion and fetishization based on racial constructs, sexual ableism attends to the

“cultural and historical processes, juridical logics, institutional norms, and spatial practices that comprise a system of imbuing sexuality with determinations of qualifications to be sexual based on criteria of ability, intellect, morality, physicality, appearance, age, race, social acceptability, and gender conformity.” (Gill, 2015, pg. 3)

Here, the system accounts for race and also ability. Exclusion and fetishization becomes part of a larger socio- political- juridical-cultural practice, and due to these norms about the sexually desirable bodymind being so embedded in the revolving systems of power they become categorized as mere desired preferences.



Liz is still looking for someone else to help with leaflets . This job and if needed, a second person for the vice-chair will be submitted to the general membership. The vice-chair will be expected to go to executive meetings.

EXECUTIVE MOTIONS

The executive would like to formalize the procedures in coming to a consensus on ideas. In the future , all decisions in the executive will be framed as a motion before being voted and approved on. (ie. The executive would like to propose the following motion (s))

UPSTAIRS BAR

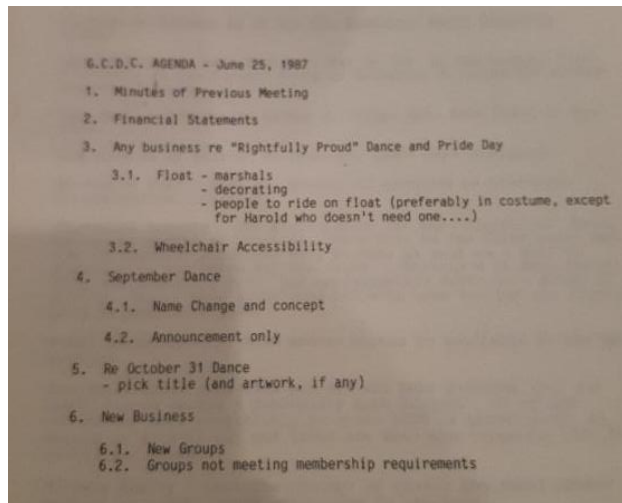
Bill would like to know if it is possible to get a second set of soft drink taps. We also should try to send people and get them to recognize that juice and pop can be bought or received gratis if working from the JUICE BAR ON THE 3RD FLOOR.

OTHER

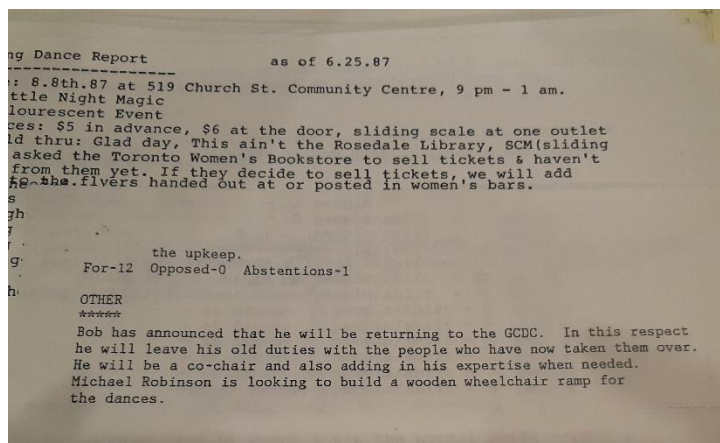
We looked at getting a 1-3 wheelchair ramp. This is not practical so we will be looking for a wheelchair ramp that is 1-5 to 1-12 slant. The best type to get is the 1-12 but it is also the most expensive. John showed up at the end of the meeting as there was a NDP meeting earlier.

regards,
David Agnew.

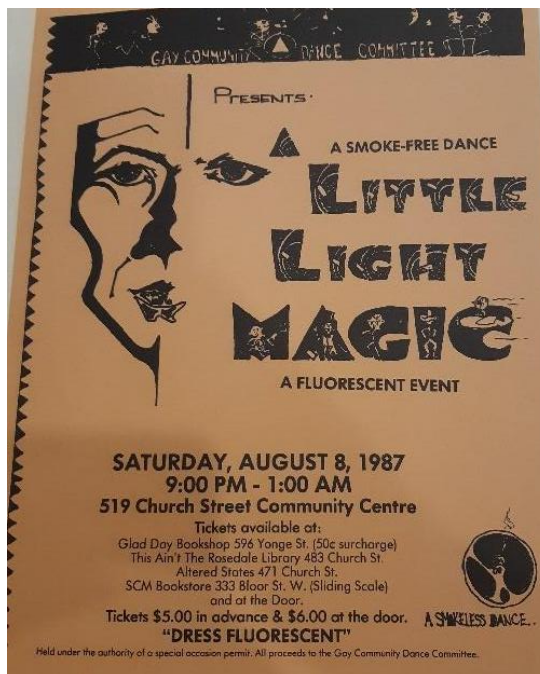
- Image #5: Snippet from Gay Community Dance Committee (G.C.D.C.) Executive Meeting Notes from August, 8th, 1988



1) Image #6: Snippet of the June 25th, 1987 Agenda for the Gay Community Dance Committee (G.C.D.C.)



- Image #7: Snippet from the June 25th 1987 G.C.D.C. meeting minutes showing 'other' i.e. the other business discussion.



- Images #8 and #9: Event Flyers from the G.C.D.C

-2-

Volunteers for the Community Outreach Fund Committee:
Dinah Draper, Bryan Nero, Francis Robichaud, Brian Shaw, Dana Taylor.

M/ Dinah Draper-that due to extenuating circumstances, the members who lapsed as a result of not having a representative at the meeting of Feb. 26, 1987 (being Otherwise) be absolved, and their membership be considered to be in good standing.
F-18 O-5 A-9 Carried

Groups not represented at this meeting:
Counterpoint, Gay Asians, Hamilton United Gay Societies (HUGS), Oasis.

Groups who have lapsed their membership:
Gay Asians.

M/ Isaac Gryphon-that the decision with respect to the artwork for the "Rightfully Proud" dance be left up to the executive.
F-26 O-0 A-0 Carried

Wheelchair Accessibility-- The idea of constructing a ramp seemed to be the most efficient way to make the Concert Hall wheelchair accessible. Michael Robinson agreed to investigate and attempt to find someone in the community to construct a ramp at cost or a minimal fee. He will report at the next meeting.

"Rightfully Proud"
M/ Bryan Nero-that the Tri-Aid Foundation be allowed the right to sell buttons for their 10th anniversary at the June dance.
F-30 O-0 A-0 Carried

Suggested Themes for the September Dance (and first vote):
Pot Luck and Plaid-0 Dinah's Tea-5
Fruit Salad-0
La Cage au Fall-2
Leaves and Lovers-0
Teddy Bear's Picnic-0
Is It a Dream-0
Fall Fantasy-1
The Late Show-0
Gadget Goes Gay-0
Imelda's Fire Sale-0

Second Ballot:
Dinah's Tea-8
La Cage au Fall-0
Toto's Twist and Shout-3
Jim and Tammy's Midnight Mascara Madness-8

Third Ballot:
Dinah's Tea-4
Jim and Tammy's Midnight Mascara Madness-15
Midnight Mascara Madness-15

Meeting of January 25th, 1987

Present: Mark Pratt, David Agnew, Liz Cahill, Dinah Draper, Bill Russell, Bob Scott, Phyllis Russell, Barbara Tarr, Leslie Turner, Francis Robichaud

Advertising the Committee looked at two possibilities for ads for the 1987 membership drive. The first was to use the space in the Yellow Pages at \$200 for one issue. The second was to use the space in the Yellow Pages at \$150 as opposed to the Yellow Pages at \$200. The committee decided to go with the second option. The committee decided to use the space in the Yellow Pages at \$150 as opposed to the Yellow Pages at \$200. The committee decided to use the space in the Yellow Pages at \$150 as opposed to the Yellow Pages at \$200.

Wheelchair Availability This issue has been brought up in the smaller dance meetings. It seems that the need for wheelchair access is being recognized, and it is going to be seen if the hall can have a ramp built for the back stairs. All of the executive agreed to make this a priority.

Open House A group from Open House got in contact with the executive and with a response, they will contact them.

Gold Carded old member of the committee requested a gold card be given to him for his 10th anniversary. After considerable discussion, this idea was vetoed.

One more than the executive would like to hear the reactions of the general membership to their 10th anniversary. The executive has heard that most people enjoyed the dance. It was noticed that there were less people after hours than most dances. It was seen that the dance was smoother than last year even though we still had trouble getting volunteers. It was suggested that the cleanup time for the dance be changed to 1:00 a.m. There was not a bottle pick in cost check this year at the back doors because of the doubling up of the volunteers. Some people being helped was noticed by a majority of people. This will be looked at. Generally the executive would like to hold another New Years Eve dance but it will have to be brought before the General Meeting for review on this also would mean more of a push in the advertising to gain more volunteers for this dance.

Idea for the "Classifieds" Once the cards have the ads themselves to be placed on the Yellow Pages with making executive duty will be set up along with 2 male and 2 female volunteers to take the ads themselves. There will also be a "runner" who will be responsible for placing the cards on the balcony. Also there will be a person looking over the envelopes. The cards to be posted will be 3x5" and the letters will be co-ordinated with Future Flash. Some of the male categories could be: sex, relationship, friendship, top seats bottom, bottom seats, top seats bottom, party, sex, sex/relationship. These categories were reviewed by the executive and will be brought to the General Meeting for approval with 3 on 6 being decided on for each respective group. The Xtra will be doing an article on this dance. The co-ordinators for this area will be brought to the executive two weeks before the dance, and the editing of the ads will be done along the same guidelines as the body politics.

G.C.D.C. Newsletter This will be done by Steve Zapp, and the voting of the non-members will be completed by 10:00 a.m.

G.C.A. Board of Directors The executive proposed to give 3 pairs of tickets for the Yellow/en 1987 New Years Eve Dance for the Get Wide Gay Dance as prizes.

Other Business The Officers will be printed on yellow paper at a cost of \$100. A sub-group, HUGS and the following, will look into the possibility of incorporating the G.C.D.C. into the HUGS, Mark Pratt, David Agnew, and Dana Taylor.

- Images #10 and #11: Page from the January 25th and 26th G.C.D.C. Meeting Minutes respectively

Prior to my trip to the ArQuives, I thought about what materials I wanted to review. I immediately knew I wanted to look up classified ads as I equated them to dating profiles. I was

interested to see if, or how, people advertised themselves as well as their wants to prospective partners. While searching their online database for the types of materials available at the ArQuives, I discovered the Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC). I was fascinated by the idea of a dance committee especially as someone who has worked in a queer community service group in my undergrad where part of what we did was put on dances. Further, the idea of throwing parties as fundraisers and dividing up the labour and funds raised between member organizations was intriguing as it promised to be a model of community care that acknowledged the fact that smaller organizations, especially those that serve BIPOC communities have difficulty raising funds due to size, capacity and racism. Bain (2017) in *Fire, Passion and Politics: The Creation of Blockorama as Black Queer Diasporic Space in the Toronto Pride Festivities* noted that there was a sustained lack of funding granted to the Blockorama stage year over year by Pride Toronto. Furthermore, one of the demands by BLM activists in 2016 as they halted that year's Pride Parade was in fact an increase to the funds allocated to the Black, South Asian and Indigenous stages and events as they had been historically underfunded (CBC News, 2016). So, I was curious to see how the GCDC dealt with these tensions or if they were even acknowledged. I wanted to look at the posters and advertising for these dances to see if the imagery was diverse or welcoming of all potential partygoers.

What I found were extremely creative, posters that used hand drawn art from community members. These events were theme heavy as the dances were all themed much like most places do for Halloween, however, this call to dress thematically was year-round. As I was flipping through these posters, however, I noticed that The *Pumpkin Faerie* event poster had the wheelchair symbol and the *Little Light Magic* event was advertised as a non-smoking event, both pictured above. This finding sent me down a rabbit hole as I was not expecting any type of event accessibility. I was immediately curious to know what the background for this choice was.

Having just worked on event accessibility checklists with a large non-profit organization months earlier, I knew the types of discussions we had regarding how to ensure in, person, hybrid and virtual events were as accessible as possible and I was desperate to know what the 1970s/1980s version of that discussion looked like. Luckily for me, the archivist had pulled the GCDC meeting minutes and I was able to get a glimpse into that discussion.

Seen above, these meeting minutes show a discussion about what was necessary to have an accessible washroom at the main event hall where most of the committee's parties were held. It appears that there was in fact what is defined as an accessible bathroom behind the stage, simply no way to access it easily for example a ramp or elevator. Therefore, most of the discussion turns on the need for a ramp so people can access this bathroom. There is a debate about the merits of buying versus renting a ramp and what size and incline is best. This discussion mirrored the ones I have had where there is a cost v. benefit analysis that occurs. Unfortunately, this analysis seems to skew in the same way these contemporary ones go⁶², where the cost of the assistive device (a ramp) is weighed against the benefit of having disabled people at the event. The monetary cost is almost always viewed as prohibitive since there is often no guaranteed return on investment since disabled people may not show up and spend money at the event and there is not a sustained belief that disabled people are worthy of their existence within a space. What I mean by this assertion is that by making assistive tech the exception rather than the rule, disabled people showing up becomes an option that could be removed as need be.

There is also a lack of awareness of access needs beyond physically accessing the washroom by ramp in the minutes I was able to review. There is no mention of how the floorplan is accommodating for someone who is using mobility aids or how the smoke from the smoke

⁶² There is a persistent myth that to make buildings, workplaces etc. accessible it is cost prohibitive in spite of feasibility studies like the one done in 2020 by the Rick Hansen Foundation (Barber, 2024; RHFAC, 2020).

machine could impact movement through the space. Similarly, there is not a statement about attendants. Can someone use the bathroom without help? If they did need help, would their caregiver or attendant have to purchase their own ticket? Would this ticket be subsidized? Whether these questions were discussed is hard to know by just reviewing the minutes I had access to, however, I would like to think that there were people in the room who were bringing up these concerns. Similarly, the discussion of having nonsmoking events was really interesting to see play out across these meetings and the fact that having nonsmoking events and even events with no alcohol were engaged to encompass more of the community and the mixed results these events had in terms of popularity and funds raised.

I am always struck by evidence of these discussions and the ways that they are replicated or transformed in contemporary discourse. These discussions about this ramp end abruptly and the wheelchair accessible symbol also disappears like it never was and I was left wondering, why? Were the people who were championing the cause tired? Did they move, become sick, die? Were there not enough disabled queers showing up to the parties to require an accessible bathroom? Did the dance committee decide that there were bigger issues such as the HIV/ AIDS crisis affecting the community and that access in this way needed to be pushed to the back burner in favour of the growing epidemic? These are all questions I had but due to time constraints I could not hunt for the answers. The mere presence of these discussions paints a complicated picture of access that mirror the discussions I had with the participants of my MRP as well as the sentiments felt by Andrew Gurza in his 2017 piece. These discussions paint a queer village in Toronto that has only limited physically accessible spaces and where certain bodyminds are privileged over others. Where events are usually not marketed as accessible and sometimes if it is, there is usually not an accessible bathroom on site or if there is a single hold washroom, you

may need to request the key from the bartender⁶³, and it may not have an automatic door opener so you will have to have someone aid you with entering/leaving. All in all, a bit of a hassle to do something as simple as going to pee.

This reality complicates the LGBTQ+ community respectability campaign that centres on gay marriage (Valverde, 2006; Wilkerson, 2012, p. 45). This campaign has led to an understanding of queer sexuality as either just like the normative ideas of what sexuality should look like or nothing like what the normative idea of sexuality looks like. This false dichotomy further marginalizes queer disabled people as they are unable to engage in the normative queer/sexual ideals. Moreover, since buildings have historically not taken accessibility into consideration in spite of these pockets of accessibility discussion as seen in the GCDC minutes, many of the establishments in queer hubs are not physically accessible. The popularity and prominence of clubs and bars as queer meeting spaces subtly, but no less firmly, lets the non-disabled population know that they are desired and hold social power while informing those who are disabled of the opposite. Privileging these spaces over others sends the message that you are not welcome in queer spaces. Moreover, you are not worthy within this space. And this messaging when realized and internalized will of course negatively impact your ability to meet, date and hook up with others. These sustained beliefs and behaviours lead to an interesting understanding of acceptable queer social behaviours which inevitably leads to an alienation of identity for queer disabled people, specifically, their queer identity. With buildings in Ontario set to become AODA⁶⁴ compliant by 2025 there is hope that more queer meeting spaces will become at least physically accessible in Ontario.

⁶³ The bartender then has to make a call on whether you are disabled enough to use that washroom or what the company's liability may be (Haig, 2017).

⁶⁴ Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act requires all buildings to be accessible by 2025 as long as this does not provide undue hardship for the business owner.

Love and relationships

As I have defined the key terms and concepts of this chapter and placed them into conversation with the historical timeline, I want to turn the discussion to the ways that these ideas explicitly construct the racialized, queer and disabled identities of those looking to engage in romance, love, hook-up and other intimate partnerships. Gilley (2011) notes that “desire is impacted by heterosexism and homophobia” (pg. 123) and is not merely sexual but “involves an individual longing for self acceptance, and acceptance in one’s community, social affirmed identity that represents how one sees oneself” (pg. 124). This acceptance and the identity derived from it is tied strongly into the way that ethnicity and race become defined and guide the ways we categorize potential partners in terms of their perceived value to a relationship. I would extend Gilley’s notion to also include class discourse. What I mean by this addition is that the particular brand of heterosexism⁶⁵ and homophobia that impacts desire cannot be divorced from the capitalist framework that we live in. The ability to be a hard worker and good provider i.e. earn income is deeply entrenched in notions of heterosexism and homophobia and is often used as a measure of worth. Thus, taking into account the mechanics of sexual racism and sexual ableism, the cisgender, heterosexual, White (read: Anglo-Saxon), able-bodied, upper or upper-middle class, educated, citizen is deemed most desirable. And the closer you are to this ideal the closer you are to the apex of desirability pyramid.

This construction is heavily evidenced by the ways that femininity and masculinity are interpreted through the lens of race, and class. McClintock (1995), Frohlick et. al (2018), Romano (2018) all show that Black womanhood and Black femininity are constructed as wanton,

⁶⁵ This term refers to “bias or discrimination in favour of opposite sex relationships and sexual attractions.” (Barker, & Scheele, 2016).

loose and in need of corralling and external control. McKittrick's (2010) discussion of the treatment of Saartjie 'Sara' Baartman in life and after her passing shows the objectification of the black female body, and I would argue it's reduction to body parts, that has transitioned into repetition as well as appropriation of the female form most attributed to women whose ancestors are from the African continent.

"Women who have curvy bodies know that your curvy body is a distraction everywhere. It is a distraction at the office, it's a distraction at McDonalds, it is a distraction at the mall. You actively are expected to reduce the distraction. Don't wear pants that are too tight, don't wear skirts that are too tight. Don't wear tight fitting clothes, button up your blouse It is your responsibility to ensure that you are not distracting all of the people because your body is deviant, your body is errant" (Kimberly Foster, May 26, 2023, Instagram)

The focus on Black women's large posteriors as a sign of beauty and womanhood is one that the young girls in Love's (2012) interviews speak to. Their relationship with their bodies is at once one of pride in one's body and its ability to inspire desire to the point of fetishism, while also a source of shame when one does not meet the physical criteria (exclusion). More so, the blatant sexuality and availability that women with this form express in music videos often lead to conflicting feelings. It is the inhabitation of being a thot/ video vixen as well as a regular woman. In this way I use 'regular woman' to speak to the normalization of 'the other', The 'bad' girl in stark contrast to the 'good' girl who would become a 'productive' member of society. This categorization illuminates McKittrick's (2006) assertion that black femininity is knowable, unknowing and expendable (pg. xv). These bodies are both human and inhuman. The idea we are

forced to accept is that Black women and their femininity are somehow stronger, self determined, and mule- like (Bailey, & Mobley, 2019; Brown, 2022; Roberts, 1997). It is a femininity that is devoid of the feminine. She is super human and barring that, masculine. This belief is harmful and is weaponised to abuse and dominate these women such as treating them as living laboratories (Spillers, 1987) or in our current climate ignoring their pain in medical settings due to embedded myths of their inability to feel pain (Hoffman, et al., 2016; Strand, et al., 2021; Trawalter, & Hoffman, 2015). This contrived inherent messiness of Black femininity uses embodied differences to create not just categorization but moral judgement that applies to all who fall within this category exactly as Bernier and others intended. It moves Black femininity further from the ideal by carefully constructing Black women as objects to be excluded and fetishized.

Frohlick et.al (2018) posit that the frame of White femininity is that of good femininity. Particularly they note that there is a servile nature to this femininity that is often perceived as a template to be followed. June Cleaver frying up the bacon after it is brought home is the metaphor that comes to mind. So, while stereotypes about women's bodies abound in our societal imaginary, placed there by colonizers who sought to use these stereotypes to control a mixed population and maintain dominance, these stereotypes were also there to discipline White women. Constructed as potential reproducers of the state, White women needed to be encouraged to reproduce with acceptable partners as was shown in the state fair posters through the unfit chart. When they chose not to adopt these behaviours, they were constructed as lacking in morality which was coded as disability in need of cure, much like non-white women whose sexualities needed to be disciplined and controlled based on their perceived looseness (Gilley, 2011, Love, 2012, McKittrick 2006). However, as Haritaworn notes there is a loaded concept of servility that is also embedded in stereotypes of Asian women and this label often sees them pursued and fetishized for this precise reason (2007). Fung also notes that this categorization

leads to the dehumanization of these women and the subsequent discarding of them when they no longer fit into the stereotypes (2017). Frohlick and these authors are engaging with early eugenicist interventions into the organization of feminist ideals. These ideas put forward by Bernier and Quetlet in the 18th century elevated White femininity at the expense of women on the African continent. These ideas were then taken up by actuaries to construct the notion of the BMI, conflating health and body size and true femininity (Gordon, 2021, Harrison, 2021; Strings, 2019).

The result is that desire moves beyond solely racial categorization to a desire for a ‘healthy’ partner who will be of service to their masculine coded partner. Health is thus embedded with racial implications as well as ableist implications. The decontextualization of these beliefs allow for this bias to be an unchecked preference. And as we always create the ‘abnorm’ when we create a norm, when the preference for this type of healthy, White femininity is created, the pathologization of the desire away from this ideal is also constructed. Therefore, those who are attracted to femininity outside of this narrow perception are subject to correction or cure. This correction can come from well meaning friends and family making statements designed to dissuade them from choosing that partner, to the popular and educational materials specifically promoting idealized bodies⁶⁶, to strangers online who leave comments trying to figure out what material goods that fat, Black, Indigenous, South Asian, disabled etc., person must have outside of themselves/ their bodyminds to warrant attraction.

Walcott (2003) and Bell (2011) show us that Black masculinity has been constructed and weaponized to further a white masculine ideal. These constructions of masculinity have been the

⁶⁶ I can point to the numerous health magazines, influencers or other talking heads as well as studies, pamphlets and other materials that promote diets, dieting, types of exercise to ‘burn stubborn fat’ and ‘get a beach body’. Gordon (2021) refers to this fatphobia that masquerades as concern as healthism (pg. 10).

focus of Black Male Studies scholars that attempt to shift the way that Black masculinity has been used as a cipher when discussing sexual excesses and sexual aggression (Hill- Collins, 2020, pg. 102). In a current context we see Wilson (2017) and Bell's (2011) assertion that the spectre of the Black male as a threat and polluting agent as it relates to HIV diagnosis as something that is particularly interesting as it provides a starting point to explain to the ways in which Black male sexuality is both vilified and lauded. The frenzy about black male bodies and specifically genitalia assume particular things about the *black man*. I use italics and a lower case 'b' for emphasis as there comes to be a single 'black male' template/stereotype/object. The case of the "Tiger Mandingo" (Thrasher, 2015) where Michael Johnson was charged with infecting two men with HIV and recklessly exposing four, was a primary example of this dehumanizing objectification. The salaciousness of the case turned on the fetishization of Johnson's genitalia. Originally the term Mandingo referred to the Mandinka people who were a West African ethnic group. However today the term 'Mandingo' is one used to refer to black men with 'abnormally large' penises. Beyond this change, it is important to note that this dehumanizing shift in meaning is embedded with visuals of rape/ sexual assault perpetuated against white women, due to a 1975 American film by the same name. This violent action and imagery again, is a perceived identity trait applied to black men, fueled by rumour and mythology that has continued to persist from the early days of scientific difference marking and slavery (Hill Collins, 2020).

Sommerville (2000) calls this particular identity construction a "notion of perversion that naturalizes the myth of the black rapist" (pg. 37). It is of particular import that this myth is often concerned with the rape of white bodies, particularly female or those who have been culturally feminized (Stacey and Forbes, 2022) either through the rape itself or through an outdated understanding of sexual orientation i.e. white cis gay men as understood as the 'mounted male' from the eugenic experiments. These so- called scientific discoveries of black men and women

with abnormally large genitalia marks them as being more promiscuous in a way that none of their racialized counterparts are marked (Dines, 1998; Hill Collins, 2020; Thrasher, 2014; 2015). It is intriguing that while this is the case for black people, there was a concerted effort to downplay the size and functionality of the genitalia of men from the Asiatic continent (Fung, 2017, pg. 87; Han, 2021; Yu, 2017). The trope of Asian men having small penises is one that emerged during the 1800s when there was an influx of Chinese and Japanese labourers to the Americas. With the fear that these men would turn to white women as a means to ‘slake their desires’ and that these women would be seduced by these ‘exotic’ men – mind you this tension emerges as many of these men were told that they could not bring their own wives for fear that they would never want to leave thereby prompting an ‘Asian invasion’ - these men were feminised and made undesirable in a way that persists today. J. Phillip Ruston led the scientific charge that linked race with member size in an attempt to show women that White men were the best sexual choice since Black men were overly large, Asian men were quite small and White men were just right (Fung, 2017, pg. 86; Han, 2021), the Goldilocks fit for penises, if you will. Finley (2011) notes that this feminization or queering of masculinity in service to the white supremacist idealized bodymind is also applied to Native men too as they must become an unavailable choice to Native women (pg. 36), and I would argue, any potential partners.

This elimination process produces the narrative of scarcity within these communities as it relates to eligible dating options. First there is a potential shortage of eligible Black men (Romano, 2018, pg. 127) and in differing ways this lack also applies to all racial categories outside of Whiteness. Therefore, there has to be a turn to interracial relationships to ensure Black and other racialized women’s happiness in an era when traditional marriage is still seen as a path to group and individual advancement (Romano, 2018, pg. 129). The push for women to expand their romantic horizons is fraught with loopholes and traps. This problem comes to a head when

one looks at the way that black male bi-sexuality/ queerness is represented. These sexual identities are perceived as a tragic loss to Black communities. And often the notion of the ‘down low’ strikes a death knell for Black men’s sexuality as this behaviour/ identity constructs a sexuality based on trickery, excess and epidemiology even as this same behaviour portrayed by white men is nominated for awards⁶⁷ (Bell, 2011, pg. 127). The narrative of scarcity is furthered as black men on the dating market have to be scrutinized for ‘gay’ or ‘down low’ behaviour.

In the television imaginary, Asian men historically fell into two categories, 1) the products of martial arts such as Bruce Lee, or 2) sidekicks such as Jacob Batalon⁶⁸. With box office hits such as *Crazy, Rich Asians* (2018) or *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (2021), the needle has started to move to encompass Asian⁶⁹ men as leading men who were strong, rich, and virile. However, the idea that all men from the continent of Asia are undesirable persists today as many dating site users including/ especially gay male dating site users state “no fats, no femmes, no Asians” to let people know who they are not attracted to or willing to entertain in conversation or more. Therefore, it is easy to see how undesirability can negatively affect mating/marriage, family building and kinship structures when racialized people are constructed as servile, rapists, unable to sexually perform or tricksters, thereby disqualifying them from succeeding in dating spaces.

The pursuit of monogamous relationships and regulation of marriage allows for sexual racism and sexual ableism to go unchecked as the ability to ‘be a good provider’ becomes the dominant refrain. People can gloss over their racist, sexist, ableist and classist beliefs and say that they are just looking for someone who can be ‘their equal’ or a ‘good provider’. We should not

⁶⁷ Brokeback Mountain was a 2005 film about two white cowboys who have an affair with each other unbeknownst to their wives. This movie and the heterosexual actors were nominated for many awards. Their performances were lauded as brave and ground-breaking, not dirty, dishonest or diseased.

⁶⁸ He was Peter Parker/ Spiderman’s best friend.

⁶⁹ It should be noted that both the leads are presented as East Asian.

forget that less than sixty years ago it was illegal for Black and White people to have sex, be in a relationship or get married in the USA and in Canada the Indian Act, which remains on the books, although amended as recently as 2017, originally penalized First Nations women for marrying non- First Nations men. Additionally, the employment landscape for people with disabilities still makes it difficult for many to gain and retain employment especially as employers run their cost benefit analyses to the erroneous result of accessibility being cost prohibitive (Barber, 2024). This makes disabled people fiscally risky partners under the proscribed dating conditions. Are we to believe that these values frittered away as amendments were made and laws were changed?



- Image #12: Snippet from the Classified Ads section for seeking female friends in Issue 79 of the Body Politic (1981)

Moreover, the biphobia that permeates these discussions of scarcity is also evident in queer spaces as seen above and is sometimes categorized as a fear of fraudulence. The second ad in the image above shows that even as this woman is looking for “friendship, companionship and perhaps more” she does not see a bisexual woman as being able to provide any of these relationships. The belief that these people who identify as bisexual are just ‘trying on the gay’ before they return to their heterosexual reality or that they are using members of the queer community as an experiment (Caldwell, 2010; Nelson, 2024). This deeply held belief that they just don’t know their own mind, turns on the ‘born this way’ belief where the only options are

heterosexual and homosexual. It couldn't be that the person simply found someone else who better fit their compatibility that happened to be of the opposite sex, it must be a sinister reasoning (Lagrange, 2024; Vonlanthen, & Roy-Charland, 2024). This essentializes queerness and assigns a right and wrong way to be queer which can negatively impact desirability. While there are legitimate gripes about being fetishized and treated as a unicorn or a bit of a carnival ride, to then dismiss a category of people because their relationship approximates that of the dominant ideal does nothing to question the veracity of that ideal, and engages in a politic of erasure of those we deem to be doing queer wrong.

The idea of scarcity also permeates the queer imaginary as popular culture representations of queer couples on television are primarily white (Han, 2021, pp. 176- 179) or if there is an interracial couple, one half of the couple tends to be white (Han, 2021). Perhaps proving this notion of the climb to the apex of desirability is the interesting way that mixed race individuals are understood within this context. Haritaworn (2007) notes that there has been a shift in the way that mixed race individuals within the Asian community are perceived. In the interviews with several Thai women, it is shown that there is a surprising rise in status that comes with being mixed race. Being desired and found desirable as a mixed raced individual marks a shift in the way that racial phenotype moves from the region of undesirable to that of a desirable body. In particular, this is a shift from one of pollution- usually of the white lineage- by the non- white blood, to one of preference. This shift shows a preference for the ability to pass as White or a close approximation for example, 'good'⁷⁰ hair or more European features (Clare, 2017) and the idea of blending the best of both worlds. One example of the narrative of contagion is the one drop rule in the United States of America that denoted that each person with as much as one drop

⁷⁰ Good in this instance is a stand in anything in the 1 and 2 ranges of types of hair.

of Negro⁷¹ blood was deemed African and subject to the treatments of the same, whether that be enslavement or the denial of certain rights and privileges.

This idea of one drop of blood from a Black person as a pollutant was used to maintain an enslaved, captive, and disenfranchised population. This area of transit where one is at once evidence of pollution to the dominant race, and simultaneously desired/ desirable due to your blood quantum of the dominant race, is of particular interest to me as someone who is mixed race and was raised to understand this racial identity to be an asset not an encumbrance as it moved me closer to the idealized bodymind i.e. lighter skin with “good hair”. How does this shift in transit from pollutant or evidence of contagion to desirable ‘subject’⁷² lead to a reification of those colonial ideals and how does it continue to exemplify areas of contentions? To answer, the way that mixed race individuals are expected to be accepted by the non- dominant group but that same entry is not extended by the dominant group and the normalization of this expectation is one way that this works. Not only is the non- dominant group expected to embrace the individual with one drop of blood, if the same individual tries to enter the dominant group, they are met with suspicion and treated as frauds. “Passing” becomes indicative of the criminality of the non- dominant/ ‘pollutant’ group as they are attempting to gain resources that are not theirs. This is a similar narrative used to marginalize disabled people, bisexual people, Trans people and other marginalized folks.

The next section of this chapter offers a more concrete discussion of the ways that these sites of resistance emerge through acts of rewriting the imaginary and the queer classified ad.

What happens when these expressions start to trouble the fixity of the concept of sexual

⁷¹ Blay (2021) notes through the diagram on page 5 that you were considered Black by Law if even one of your great, great, great grandparents was black “1/32 Negro Blood”

⁷² I add subject in quotation marks as personhood is still not ascribed to individuals once they are moved into this categorization.

preference? How are queer disabled racialized folks writing themselves out of the corners of fetishization? Discussing two novels specifically and publishing trends more broadly I will analyse the way that writing oneself into the imaginary creates space to speak back to the narratives of both exclusion and fetishization and the complex constructs of power that sexual ableism and sexual racism wield. Further, a discussion of the archival classified and contemporary classified i.e. dating profile, will chart the nuances to dating that continue to plague the dating/ sexual fields.

The Imaginary through novels

We imagine worlds daily. Imagination is the largest driver of innovation in the world around us as well as our inner worlds. We dream of changing, shifting, transforming and building lives and selves that bring us joy, pleasure, and self satisfaction. Some of us with talent channel this dream onto the page, canvas, audio and visual presentations, among other mediums. The imaginary offers us the opportunity to think beyond borders, be those physical, psychological, social, sexual or other. For those who have yet to see themselves represented in the factual, present and real, the imaginary is a way to show up as our whole selves. That is not to say that the imaginary has not been used as a disciplinary tool. We can easily point to children's fairy tales and rhymes as a way societies have tried to shape children's behaviours through the constant retelling. Similarly, folk stories across cultures serve as a way to not just share histories but also reinforce beliefs, prejudices and acceptable behaviours representative of that group (Lee, 2008).

In spite of this fact, the imaginary, and storytelling in particular, have been a place of subversiveness. For this reason, I want to delve into the realm of the imaginary as a site of resistance to sexual ableism and sexual racism. Admittedly this discussion could be done by

reviewing any number of the mediums mentioned. Much work has been done on representation of queer, disabled people of colour on television and in movies but as Cheyne (2017) points out, there has been a reluctance to engage with romance novels in the same way (pg. 201). These novels have historically suffered from an image problem. Considered to be the dregs of literature in a masculine centered society, these books were, and still are, derided as frivolous, ‘bodice rippers’, ‘chick lit’ and sometimes even ‘lady porn’ (Faircloth, 2015; Lee, 2008) as opposed to serious fiction or non-fiction. This derision of course ignores that this literature is in fact a multi million-dollar industry where in the United States alone romance books sold over \$336 million dollars in 2019. (Grady, 2020). There is something about a romance novel characterized by its centering of a love story which ends in a happily- ever- after (HEA) outcome (Cheyne, p. 202) that taps into societal desire for sex, love and/ or romance, and the appetite to see those desires reflected back at us.

To quote romance author Cecilia Tan “[r]omance is political in the ways that personal desires are political, in the way that personal desires drive people to vote in certain ways” (Grady, 2020). Therefore, to discuss the concepts of the imaginary I will be specifically looking at two novels *Going Public* by Hudson Lin and *The Prophets* by Robert Jones Jr alongside the general trends of romance novels that feature racialized, disabled and/ or queer protagonists. It should be noted that *The Prophets* cannot be specifically defined as a romance novel based on the definition above posited by the Romance Writers of America (RWA), however, it does in fact turn on a romantic relationship of two of its main characters and for this reason it will be used in this discussion for a juxtaposition between it and the other novel.

These two novels both feature gay male protagonists navigating a relationship amidst cultural and class conflicts, and on the surface, this plotline is where the similarities end. One novel looks at a contemporary relationship set in Toronto at a time similar to today, 2024, while

the other is set on a cotton plantation in Mississippi that is a forced labour camp for kidnapped and enslaved people and features perspectives from others besides our pair of lovers. However, all of our protagonists are dealing with complicated family/ extended family dynamics, for example, Elvin's elderly parents navigating disability and illness, complicated relationship dynamics and external forces that seek to split them apart.

From the novel blurb on the back cover, *The Prophets* is a novel about the forbidden union between two enslaved young men on a Deep South plantation, the refuge they find in each other, and a betrayal that threatens their existence. We are introduced to many characters on the plantation; however, the protagonists are Isaiah and Samuel. "Isaiah was Samuel's and Samuel was Isaiah's. That was the way it was since the beginning, and the way it was to be until the end. In the barn they tended to the animals, but also to each other, transforming the hollowed-out shed into a place of human refuge, a source of intimacy and hope in a world ruled by vicious masters. But when an older man—a fellow slave—seeks to gain favor by preaching the master's gospel on the plantation, the enslaved begin to turn on their own. Isaiah and Samuel's love, which was once so simple, is seen as sinful and a clear danger to the plantation's harmony." (Jones, 2021)

The blurb for *Going Public* reads "As an operating partner at Jade Harbour, Raymond Chao prides himself in fixing even the most disastrous of portfolio companies—no matter the cost. While his colleagues might not always like his methods, they love his results. But his latest business partner isn't cooperating, and what's worse, Raymond's underhanded tactics have landed him in hot water with the law. Elvin Goh has been Raymond's assistant for years, and he's been in love with the charming, ruthless playboy for just as long. There's very little that Elvin won't do—or hasn't done—for Raymond. Impossible crush aside, it's his job. But this time, even Elvin can't see a way out. When long nights in the office lead to whispered confessions and a newfound intimacy, it seems like a dream come true—for both of them. But with the prospect of

failure on the horizon, can this dream team beat the odds and come out the victors in the office and in their hearts?” (Lin, 2022). A more traditional romance novel, this book centers the main characters with the other named characters serving to push their love story forward.

Although the protagonists do not identify as disabled, disability plays a role in each story. Elvin’s father has a back injury that prevents him from working which negatively impacts the family’s finances. His parents are oftentimes unwilling to accept his financial help to cover the expenses for them and his three siblings. On the plantation, Maggie and Sarah both have gifts. These can be categorized as foresight as well as a way with plants and medicines. We are also told that after surviving a brutal attack by an overseer, James, Maggie acquired a limp and her powers/ gifts rendered James physically ill. We are also told that the long-lasting effects of this gift meant that he would come close to evacuating his bowels any time he looked at female slaves in a licentious way. This informs how Sarah and Maggie relate to the boys, particularly, their acceptance and support of the relationship calling it “an old thing” (Jones, 2021, pg. 39) from before the plantation. These women stand out from the cast of characters for good reason. We later come to find out that Sarah was sent to this plantation to separate her from her love, Mary, and Maggie is Samuel’s birth mother. The impact of these novels is more special. In one instance we have a traditional secretary/boss relationship trope applied to queer men, while the other positions the lovers on equal footing of being kidnapped, enslaved, and abused people who work and live alongside each other. In both instances, the couples are positioned as units, their realities are integrated with each other. The reader immediately understands that it is them versus the world. The world in both cases come in the form of an interloper hoping to sway, by coercion, the affections of the non- dominant partner and the community and familial pressures imposed by those around them. Perhaps more importantly, both of these novels explore identities that are often erased. In contemporary queer spaces, pansexuality and asexuality are erased in

favour of gay and lesbian assimilative identities. Those assimilative gay and lesbian identities are deemed less subversive when we can apply the “we are just like you” heteronormative metric i.e., homonormative⁷³ identities. In descriptions of stories of our formerly enslaved ancestors, stories of stealing joy are few and often weaponized by white supremacists to further the “happy slave” narrative⁷⁴, stories of love and relationships are fewer and almost exclusively accounts of heterosexual men and women ‘jumping the broom’⁷⁵. In this book we have a story of queer romance, love, sexuality and finding one’s soulmate in a time when whether one even had a soul was in question. Further the grounding of Samuel and Isiah’s relationship as something from the past long forgotten that predates western contact and white Jesus, constructs this relationship as usual as any other, as neutral. It is legible and illegible at the same time. This relationship sits comfortably in the sexual borderlands where, race, ability, queerness and Lorde’s erotic⁷⁶ meet.

What do they say about romance?

With protagonists described as pansexual (Raymond), demisexual (Elvin), woman/other/free (Isiah), and someone who chose man (Samuel), these romantic leads do not all find a happily ever after in the traditional sense. In Lin’s contemporary novel set in ‘present day’ Toronto,

⁷³ Defined by Lisa Duggan (2003) as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormativity assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them” and replicates and expects this to be replicated and performed by homosexual people.

⁷⁴ This especially egregious narrative is being peddled in parts of the United States, especially Florida under the 2023 State Academic Standards in Social Studies as a direct result of the 2022 “Stop Wrongs Against Our Kids and Employees Act” or the “Stop W.O.K.E. Act. to ensure that schools are not teaching white students to feel guilty when learning about the history of the Americas and the role that slavery played in the building of the United States.

⁷⁵ This practice was seen as a way for lovers to mark the sanctity of their unions outside of the bonds of marriage since as “non- humans” they could not be granted the right of marriage.

⁷⁶ Defined by Audre Lorde as a “resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (1984, pg. 87). In the conception of Samuel and Isiah’s relationship it creates the space to acknowledge the way that they share deeply with each other, really evaluate the meaning(s) of their lives and have a capacity for joy.

queerness is accepted, as noticeable as having a thumb or the sky being blue. The protagonists do not ever have to qualify their desires for their families. There is no closet in sight, at work or anywhere else. In addition to this fact, race is also akin to snow being white. While both protagonists have Chinese ancestry, the author has set the stage that race, like their sexuality, is a mere fact of existence. This utopia allows the protagonists to focus on the ‘true’ difficulties of making a relationship work, i.e. class differences and potential problematic power dynamics of the boss/ employee trope and industrial espionage as the conflict/ crisis point of the novel. There are no outsiders making problematic racist slurs and no homophobia in sight. It is an almost perfect utopia and an example of how we would date if we didn’t have to have those pesky fights to assert our race and sexualities as the neutral state neither bad nor good .

These protagonists are able to have their happily ever after following a brief separation when Raymond goes to white collar jail after pleading guilty to a charge of conspiracy to commit fraud. At least that is what the reader is left to infer. This story is not your typical ‘happily ever after’ with marriage and children. Instead, it ends with a homecoming to a space filled with love and support. So, what if the formerly incarcerated half of the partnership no longer has a job, and will no longer be able to work in the field he is qualified to. The audience can rest assured that he has enough family money, being an only child, and a son at that⁷⁷, that this situation is a storm that will be weathered especially since Elvin still has some career ideas that will give him purpose. The audience is not privy to these ideas however as these stay with the couple (Lin, 2022, pg. 345). Presumably also there is some sort of savings that make the impact of being in the carceral system negligible.

On the other hand, *The Prophets*’ narrative style of offering the perspectives of others on

⁷⁷ Within Lin’s world view, there is the privileging of the firstborn/ only son, although we are told that this is simply a matter of course as opposed to an integral aspect to the story.

the cotton plantation show us different understanding of queer romance and intentionally or unintentionally contrast heterosexual relations that are either transactional or coerced and forced. In this text, race is important, it is a defining factor and the closet is both a metaphorical and physical space i.e., the barn. Samuel and Isaiah's relationship exists as a flower growing through the cracks of the concrete. We get the perspective of the lovers and those around them like Be Auntie, Puah as well as the ancestors of the tribes/ nations we the audience are led to assume they descend from. The admonishment from others and each other to not get caught looking at each other lest they give themselves away, and the belief that this thing that they have that is just theirs show the complicated and illicit nature of their love and care as interpreted through the lens of the *toubab*⁷⁸. The comfort they freely give to each other exists outside of the new norm, it exists as part of the genealogy of their ancestors, it just exists.

In this way both authors construct an imaginary where queer desire both in the sexual sense as well as the expansive definition of desire as longing for acceptance in one's community, exists not as a cautionary tale *per se*⁷⁹ but as a means of support. This desire propels action, it propels resistance. Further these worlds, both of which construct race, queerness and ability as simply parts of the whole that is their main protagonists, offer an escape from the reality where this wholeness is simply not the case. This lens offers a glimpse perhaps of what desire would look like if not interpreted through a sexual racism/sexual ableism lens. However, like much of the queer romance novels in print today, these novels do not strictly adhere to the terms and conditions for happily ever after (Schalk, 2016. Pg.). There is no marriage at the end of either

⁷⁸ This is the word that the enslaved characters use to refer specifically to the enslavers, plantation owners, and their accomplices and White people more broadly.

⁷⁹ Historically, many of the queer stories written about love were tragedies or catastrophes (Jean, 2016). Television representation was not much different due to the Motion Picture Production code or 'Hays code' that categorized homosexuality under the heading of 'sex perversion'. This has led to two main tv tropes that still exist in contemporary tv and film "bury your gays" and "dead lesbian syndrome" (Guan, & Naing, 2023; Rizzuto, 2022) that refer to the untimely demise of gay and lesbian characters.

book. In *The Prophets* the reader has to infer that the two protagonists find each other in either the afterlife or as fugitives after they flee the plantation. In *Going Public* the couple repair to Raymond's downtown Toronto condo that Elvin has now redecorated to be something of a nest for the happy couple.

I see that as deliberate on the parts of these authors. While other authors such as Talia Hibbert, Helen Hoang, Rebekah Weatherspoon, whose protagonists are primarily queer, racialized and disabled people, center the love story with the explicit happy ending, Jones and Lin, offer us an alternative. This narrative is an alternative reality where happily ever after is complicated. In fact, I would argue that it offers a happy right now narrative which centers the possibility and capacity for joy and happiness that is not concerned with the future and futurity but the performance⁸⁰ of happiness in the present and the everyday.⁸¹

⁸⁰ I am using performance here in the context of Butler's performativity and Lorde's discussion of the erotic as sharing joy as a conscious decision.

⁸¹ Keis (2024) notes that within LGBTQ+ and queer media there is a turn to the 'anti-proposal' or 'I don't' moment that queers romances by not engaging in [homo]normative expectations of marriage as the conclusion to the love story.

The Modern day Classified and Hunt for the Imaginary

CLASSIFIED ADS COMMUNICATE

Get a message? We've got the way to get it across to gay people right where you live — and all across Canada and the U.S. too.

The Body Politic's Classified ads. Need a job? Want to sell your used square? Need a car? Find a friend or a place to live? A classified ad in TBP is a good way to let others know.

It's easy — and cheap. Just 10 cents a word for personal ads, 30 cents for businesses. You simply fill in your message in the form below, count up the number of words and send it off to us with a cheque or money order. Get in before the deadline and your ad will appear in the very next issue.

You can say just about anything, but there are a few things you should keep in mind. If you're interested in meeting people it's best to be positive. Tell them about your self and your interests — not about what you don't like. Specifying exclusions on the basis of race or appearance (saying no fats or Jews, for instance) is just plain rude, and being rude doesn't make friends.

Saying that you're interested in meeting people for sex is fine. But there are a few restrictions — the law's, not ours. Under the Criminal Code of Canada it is illegal to have sex with anyone of the same sex under the age of 21, to have sex with more than one person at a time regardless of their ages, or to solicit for the purposes of prostitution. Otherwise, sex is still legal, so far. But to protect both you and us, we reserve the right to alter or refuse any classified ad.

If you want people to answer you directly, put your address or phone number in your message. Or, you can take advantage of our forwarding service. For only a dollar extra we'll assign your ad a drawer number and collect answers in our office to be sent to you once a week.

If you want to answer someone else's ad, that's easy too. Put your reply in an envelope, seal it and send it to us, making sure to mark on the front the drawer number you're responding to. This way we'll send any replies that match the person you're answering in just a few days.

So go ahead. Pick up a pen and communicate.

Name	Phone
Address	Address
Drawer No.	Topic Words
	From To
	Subject
	Location
	City
	State
	Zip

- Image #12: Classified Ads Explainer: What classifieds are and how to use them

Classified ads questioned

We think **The Body Politic** is consistently one of the finest gay publications we read. The collective appears sensitive to many issues such as classism, ageism and the other -isms that pervade so many of the gay publications in the United States.

However, we are somewhat concerned that **TBP** publishes very oppressive "personal" ads on the community page. Phrases such as G/W/M, "young chickens", "very masculine appearing", and others are offensive to persons struggling to free themselves from a culture which, for openers, is racist, classist, sexist and ageist.

There are literally hundreds of homosexual publications that will happily print individual communications that are insulting to people. **TBP** need not be among that group.

**Susan Henderson
Peter Prizer
Portland, Maine**

- Image #13: Letter to the editor titled *Classified Ads Questioned* by Susan Henderson and Peter Prizer in Issue 26 of The Body Politic (1976)

SEXY, DARK, masculine dude, 27, 5'8", 143 lbs, into heavy J/O, porno mags, movies, poppers, french front and rear, verbal abuse, top or bottom. Seeks masculine guys under 35. Photo, phone for mine. Drawer B324.

BLONDE, COLLEGE GRAD, looking for sensual encounters with young black males. West Indians welcome. Try me for fun in and out of bed. Drawer B313.

BLACK FRIENDS WANTED by white professional male, early 40s, own car and apartment, many interests, affectionate and sincere. Drawer B312.

BLOND, BLUE-EYED and handsome 28 year old male seeks sincere friendship. I have a well-balanced personality, good adjustment to sexuality, am versatile physically, with a well defined and proportioned build from regular swimming. 6', 155 lbs, Articulate and self-reliant, I have an enthusiastic and

ATTRACTIVE, SECURE YOUNG professional with a good sense of humour, 28, 5'7", 135 lbs., would like to meet creative, discreet, together male, similar build between 21 and 30 to enjoy the pleasures of the good life and companionship. Drawer B101.

SUCCESSFUL, DISCREET young male, 28, 5'7", 135 lbs., looking forward to meeting good looking intelligent Asian guy for friendship. Interest in the pleasures of sex, travel and the arts important. Drawer B100.

BLOND, 37, 155 LBS., 5'11", somewhat shy, looking for young guys, preferably black, for good times in bed and out. Send photo if possible. Drawer B83.

TALL CHUBBY HAIRY ARTIST warm, gentle, kind and loving. Looking for same in Toronto, 25 to 45. Will answer all replies. Drawer B82.

MASCULINE GUY, 24, OVER 6', strong medium build, seeks masculine guy under 30 for evening

KINGSVILLE

WINDSOR LEAMINGTON LONDON. Greek, oral pleasure. Good top-man wanted. Husky, masculine, well-built male. Clean, healthy body. Hot mouth, tongue, glory hole. Hands expert at oil rub, massage. Passive and submissive. Good companion. Mixes well. Straight in appearance. Doesn't smoke or take drugs. Social drinking only. My service is satisfaction and contentment for you. No charge. Strict confidence. Straight, gay, married, single. Any age. The right man/men won't be sorry. 1 hr drive from Windsor, London. Reply John. Drawer 678.



Images #15- 20: Sample of classified ads form the Body Politic from 1976- 1979.

Once again, I want to bring to mind Gloria Anzaldua's quote to locate the imaginary within "real" life (Schalk, pg. 1). This imaginary is where I situate romance novels. As I asserted previously, stories and novels in general tell us something about ourselves and our cultures (Lee, 2008). They show us different ways of being and can offer language that we can use to help construct our subjectivities. If the novel represents the potential of the imaginary, the classified shows us the real life or at least a microcosm of it. So, I want to move beyond the construction of the imaginary as exemplified by the novel to think about the hunt for the same. If as author Cecilia Tan (Grady, 2020) believes, we are at any given time engaging our political selves when we are engaging in romance/ romantic endeavors, then dating and hooking up is a way to bring intimate and sexual fulfillment to reality. How do we seek to attract that which we are hoping to achieve? We engage in the age-old practice of advertising. This can be advertising our own qualities for prospective engagement, as well as sharing our wish lists in hopes that our

advertisement attracts what we want while repelling that which we do not. We are looking for an imagined perfect partner for either an interlude or the long term and we present ourselves in a way that piques the imagination and interest of potential partners.

It is within this context we see an imaginary that reinscribes lack to queer, disabled and racialized communities concretized. Unlike within the novels discussed above, the joy and happiness of the now is tempered by the interpretations of desire and desirability that focuses on that idealized bodymind. I am always reminded of a conversation I had with a friend about his experience on Grindr, a gay male dating app. After liking the profile of someone they found attractive, the individual promptly responded '*Sorry, no curry*'. My friend who is of South Asian, specifically Indian, descent recounted this story with some amusement as they were used to this type of behaviour from primarily white men on these dating sites. This sentiment evokes the same '*no fats, no fems, no asians*' rhetoric that authors like Lui (2015), Han (2008, 2021), and others interrogate. Within the confines of sexual racism, the desirability of the Asian male is devalued to the point where one is no longer an individual. They are instead relegated to a continental category or even a type of food.

This behaviour is not new. A random sampling of classifieds, seen above, from *The Body Politic*, a queer magazine that ran from 1971- 1987 showed that when it came to advertising, queer men and women were explicit in their self advertising and in sharing their desirability wish lists. Of the classifieds reviewed, these individuals described themselves by star sign, age, sexual activities they were willing to engage in, body types, their openness for drug and alcohol use as well as clear financial incentivization for those who were expecting prospective partners to travel to them. Their wish lists however showed more of a morality tone. In these lists of descriptors there were explicit requests for certain ethnicities or races, a disdain for those who frequented bars and whether the man responding should be circumcised or not. Interestingly, after 1981

these lists become more explicit in describing the sexual acts the authors of the classifieds wished to participate in. There is more of a focus of taboo sexual acts and the ads sampled show an appetite for rape, daddy and slave fantasies⁸² which by some metrics are still controversial in mainstream discourse (Griffin, 2024; McDuffie, 2023). In fact, there is a turn to explicitly requesting Black men for ‘stud’ service in the 1982 issues by white men.

This advertising is juxtaposed by articles and letters to the editor abhorring the hypersexualized nature of not just the classifieds being published but also gay male behaviours in general. The authors of these letters to the editor, like Susan Henderson and Peter Prizer seem to be engaging with the narrative that happily ever after cannot be found in these explicit encounters but instead in a more sobering sexual experience, going as far as to call it “oppressive”. Further, the advertisement of Gordon Merrick⁸³ novels add a legitimacy to the call for safer sex and more connected sexual expressions. This juxtaposes the encounters advertised and being advertised for in classifieds with romance and love even as some ads do claim to be looking for long term and romantic relations/relationships. This reinforces the ideas that the only appropriate sex is “private” (Rambukkana, 2015, pg. 17; Warner and Berlant, 1998, pg. 559) and within a respectably partnered context (Valverde, 2006).

Stacey and Forbes (2022) point to a similar categorization and use the term “online disinhibition effect”, to apply it to modern day online dating, whereby users feel justified in expressing overtly racist and crude comments that would materialize less often in face-to-face interactions. (Pg 374; Suler, 2004). Clearly this attitude is not simply a thing that only exists

⁸² Just this year, Jerrod Carmichael (a Black man) faced backlash for telling a joke in his show *Jerrod Carmichael Reality Show* that touched on the concept of he and his partner (a white man) engaging in slave play even though he was referring to this in a nonsexual context. Donald Glover, has also experienced backlash for making jokes about his non-Black partners calling him the N- word during sex.

⁸³ Merrick was an actor and author of books with gay romance themes. His best-known book was *The Lord Won't Mind* in 1970.

online, it can emerge in any medium that is slightly removed from face-to-face contact. This behaviour is because the dating game is filled with stereotypical challenges that impact the participants ability to win; whether that is winning one night, a few encounters, a long-term partnership or marriage. The game is rigged from the beginning and the house of white supremacy is set up to always win. Their study built on those done previously and found that

“Sexual stereotypes and fetishization have similarly ranked high in structuring the online dating experience and have consequently evoked a body of research. Asian men are stereotyped as effeminate, submissive, docile, and are sexually constructed as “bottoms” (Han, 2006) and Latino men are viewed as passionate and having uncircumcised (or “uncut”) penises (Wilson et al., 2009). Sexual stereotypes also run rampant when it comes to Black men, and they are constructed as aggressive, hypermasculine, well-endowed, and as strictly being “tops” in sexual encounters” (Martin Jr., n. d.; Paul et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2009).

This objectification has been collated across pages on the internet, however, there is one webpage that stood out. *Douchebags of Grindr* offers users a space to highlight the profiles of users of the popular gay app Grindr who they deem to be douchebags. Interestingly enough, many of these men replicate the same language of these early classifieds. For anonymity, many men advertise their bodies without their heads but this disembodiment/pictorial decapitation is also done to display the prime specimen that a lucky suitor would have access to, and it can be inferred that it is not the whole person that is available. I am choosing not to share any of the images and profiles here due to the questionable ethics of these sites (Rambukkana, 2019, pg. 326). While it is generally understood that anything posted on the internet can and will find itself somewhere unintended, screenshotting and posting someone’s profile on a dating app with no information erased walks right up to the line of doxing that I am uncomfortable with, even if they

are displaying their racism, prejudice, ableism and ignorance for all to see.

Instead, I point to the fact that these dating or hook up sites have or have had filters for race, sexual position etc., (Robards, et al., 2020) in addition to location to show that there is an understanding of the market that is heavily influenced by racist stereotypes. If the goals were simply to facilitate hookups, or dating then we could conceivably leave people to their own devices, however, in this sexual concierge system, there seems to be a desire to deliver whatever one is craving: racism and ableism added with no charge (Chan et al., 2021; Conner, 2021; Hall, 2018; Robards et al., 2020).

To think about the classified as a site of the imaginary is to construct both ourselves and that which we are seeking within the context of the desired. We are engaging in the politics of self acceptance and community acceptance as we list our attributes within the frameworks of sexual racism and sexual ableism. We proudly state that we are ‘fit’, ‘have a bodybuilder physique’, ‘curvy’, ‘athletic’ or in the contemporary dating app space we upload a picture that shows off our physical attributes in a way that aligns with the ableist understanding of the preferred body (Tran, et al., 2020). Where these physical attributes don’t exist, we list the ways that we align with the preferred desirable mind/ mindset. We describe ourselves as ‘funny’, ‘articulate’, ‘a good communicator’ or even adding the results of those all-important IQ or EQ tests (Tong et al., 2019). To head off racial stereotypes of the uncultured savage, we present ourselves as having hobbies like travelling, speaking multiple languages (read: European languages), reading complicated literature...definitely not romance novels, and loving foreign films (read: those directed and acted by Europeans and people of European descent). That is not to say that it is somehow wrong to like the above things but their collective presentation serves to construct a socially affirmed representation of the idealized bodymind or our closest approximation to maximize our success in the dating/ hookup fields (Hogi, 2016; Tong et al.,

2019).

The goal of these actions is to attract that partner with whom we can engage in romance, fall in love, hook – up or otherwise have an intimate relationship. Our presentations, like most advertising, are there to spotlight us in the best, most flattering light. Our imaginations supply us with happily ever after or happy for now ideas where we can share our lives with someone who is willing to stick with us through thick and thin and engage in those courtship rituals or exchange sexual energies and often an idea of what that person looks like. Our advertisements through classifieds in newspapers or digitally offer us a way to realize our imaginations and build these intimate lives. However, what happens if we go even further within Kies’ (2024) notion of the queering of romance and say ‘I don’t’ to all of it? I am speaking of folks who choose not to partake in romance, hooking up or sexual* intimate relations/ relationships⁸⁴; asexual folks. In the next section, I investigate the tensions that arise with discussing sexual racism and sexual ableism within dating, love, hook- up and intimate relations/ relationship only within the context of sexual desire. What does the erasure of asexual people from this discussion do? What can we add to these discussions to be less newgenics driven by looking at Ace experiences?

The Ace up My Sleeve

Person: “You’re straight, right?”

Me: “Technically no...I’m actually Ace”

Person: “But you live with a *man*!?”

Me: “Yup”

⁸⁴ I am specifying sexually intimate relationships here as the next section discusses intimate relationships that do not include sex/ sexual activity.

We get interrupted by people coming to the table and the music changing to an upbeat dance track.

This exchange is a conversation that happened at a gay bar last year while hanging out with some friends of a friend. I have had some version of this ‘coming out’ conversation with a select number of people over the last five or so years. Usually, I try to do it when all parties are sober, and generally when there is a deep familiarity or affection toward the person(s) I am disclosing this information to. About 90% of the time, I have been met with a response along the lines of that above. It is an interesting mix of confusion and concern and a sprinkle of worry that I may have been less than truthful with my partner. My partner and I will have been together for nine years by the time this dissertation is completed and as he is a White cisgender man, our relationship presents as a typical, semi- traditional interracial relationship.

My Ace identity is a complex one for me for many reasons although it was an identity that I came to quite early on. For one, I am mixed- race, Black, West Indian⁸⁵, and as Brown (2022), McKittrick (2006), Schalk (2016) and numerous other authors have shown, there is already a colonial and imperial understanding of Black sexuality as excess and hyper sexual that continues to permeate and impact our representations and reception. Added to this, I am a woman and as I have already discussed previously in this dissertation, there are additional gendered and sexual expectations, and representations of Black female embodiment and sexuality. However, at the core of this is the belief that Black people are not asexual (Brown, 2022, pg. 12), moreover when Black women are presented as asexual (read: non sexual) she is a caricature in service to white supremacy i.e. that of the ‘mammy’ (Chen, 2021, pg. 77).

⁸⁵ I use all of these descriptors because they are some of the identity markers that I hold as I move through space and place.

The first time I remember reading about asexuality, I was a teenager who had gone down an internet rabbit hole to find this definition. I couldn't tell you what website it was or even what I was searching. However, I remember reading the definition and feeling a sense of rightness. It helped me to make sense of my feelings, or lack thereof when it came to boys, girls, and sex. I would move in and out of Ace designations and asexuality altogether until I landed on demisexual⁸⁶ as I did form attractions once there was an established sense of trust and love. Once I entered into my current relationship, I often struggled with reconciling my identity and my relationship. In the sport of the oppression Olympics⁸⁷, I didn't make the podium so I was always careful of taking up space in queer spaces. Also, like with all sexualities when you claim yours you unintentionally tend to say something about your partner's sexuality and even the type of sex you have (Chen, 2020, pg. 168). Much of this ideology is assumed and mapped along heteronormative lines. With asexuality though, it is an assumption of deficiency because the underlying assumption is that there is no sex and no sex = bad. No sex = are you even in a relationship or are you just roommates? No sex = what's the point then in having a relationship?

As we have already established through this chapter, sex is considered integral to the relationship. Further, there is a belief that sex is essential and intrinsic to our beings, this is understood as compulsory sexuality (Chen, 2021, pg. 35; Brown, 2022, pg. 7) which borrows from Adrienne Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). Not only that, this sex is expected to look a certain way, married, vanilla, using bodies only, etc. (Rubin, 1984) and has to have an expected output i.e. children. There is a panic when relationships do not follow along what Chen (2021) calls the relationship escalator or the lines of the children's rhyme my

⁸⁶ Demisexuality as defined by Chen (2020) "describes the conditions under which someone develops sexual attraction after an emotional bond is formed..." (pg. 27).

⁸⁷ This term is understood to describe 'who has it worse' as it relates to marginalization and oppression. (Copeland, 2021)

chapters allude to. The fear that the species will cease to exist permeates these discussions. The notion that there cannot be love and intimacy without sex also permeates these beliefs. Asexuality offers us a different lens to trouble these taken for granted notions. What if we as people sought connection with people outside of sexual intimacy? What would our dating profiles look like? How would we think about the purpose of the relationships we were trying to enter into? How would we conceptualize and prioritize romance? How could we understand concepts like desirability, likeability, consent and even ‘fitness’? How would we react to bisexuality? Would we still regard this with suspicion?

We are often offered statistics and anecdotes that show that when a partner in traditional heterosexual relationships gets ill, men will overwhelmingly leave their female partner while women are more likely to stick around to care for their male partner (Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, 2009; Pawlowski, 2022; Vinopal, 2022). Two studies on this issue found that when women were diagnosed with serious illnesses such as cancer, multiple sclerosis, heart disease, the rate of divorce was around six to seven times higher (Glantz, et al., 2009; Karraker & Latham, 2015⁸⁸). The reasons for leaving were not studied beyond noting that serious illnesses tended to change the marital relationship because it introduces stressors to the relationship. However, popular media sources like Strickland (2009), Parker- Pope (2009), Vinopal (2022) speculate that reasons can range from the inability of men to take on caretaker roles, the social currency that men have on the marriage market as well as the lack of sex/ sexual activity, sometimes discussed as alienation of affection. The lack sex is a dealbreaker for these men as it constructs women as inherently needing less sex and men as needing sex to the exclusion of what would have been seen as a loving relationship otherwise. This problematic construction assumes

⁸⁸ I want to note that there was an initial error in coding for the data set used in this study. The authors have retracted those initial results and re- released the article with that error accounted for.

that the woman does not mourn the loss of this aspect of their relationship and provides a convenient excuse for men to take advantage of their stock as marriage material (England & McClintock, 2009).

These statistics and the beliefs that underpin them reinforce dominant tropes of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘emphasized femininity’ (Connell, 1995) that speaks to a deeper understanding of how we have organized heterosexual relationships. In this estimation, women who are disabled, coded as disabled through their inability or unwillingness to engage in this particular politics of care ideology, usually Black women, Ace women, some Lesbian and Bisexual women, Trans women, etc., are automatically constructed as undesirable and not relationship material. They are constructed broadly as ill-fitting candidates for love as seen through the lens of Chen’s relationship escalator (2021).

Arguably, shifting to thinking about why we engage in desirability politics both for ourselves and prospective partners will force us to engage in a more honest evaluation of our wants and needs as it relates to entering into these partnerships. Just above, I posited that asexuality offered a new lens to answer the following questions; What if we as people sought connection with people outside of sexual intimacy? What would our dating profiles look like? How would we think about the purpose of the relationships we were trying to enter into? How would we conceptualize and prioritize romance? How could we understand concepts like desirability, likeability, consent and even ‘fitness’? How would we react to bisexuality? Would we still regard this with suspicion?

Decker’s 2014 book, the work by the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), a few academic scholars as well as countless other blogs, podcasts and other forums started by Ace individuals start to wrestle with and answer some of those questions. They offer an educational roadmap to understanding asexual identity (Brown, 2022; Chen, 2021; Decker, 2014;

Scherrer, 2008), as well as tips on dating, love, hooking up and engaging in intimate partnerships that center asexuality (Glovanetti, 2022; Miller, 2023; Reading, 2014). The takeaways seem to be that by thinking about desire and intimacy beyond sexual activity/ orgasm we can start to not just appreciate relationships that do not look like the ideal, for example, exploring other forms of intimacy and expansive relationship structures or non- monogamy, but also realize their importance to our existence (Garrick & Florance, 2016; Evans, 2024). We also start to imbue the humanity back into individuals beyond their abilities to get us off or fit into a proscribed agenda. If we dare to engage these changes, we could dismantle the agenda altogether. We can move beyond the headless figure to show up as our whole selves, even if the desire for short term interaction is the same.

Conclusion

Thinking of the imaginary as a site of power allows us to understand it as a site of resistance. While intimacy is mitigated through scripts of racism, ableism, coloniality and imperialism, it also allows us to engage ourselves in an intentional way. We can, through this call of the imaginary, construct worlds where we are desirable and where we desire. And while this creation is often a daunting task in the face of these systems, the novels by Lin and Jones, Jr. offer an alternative way to think about our desirability that centers acceptance of our whole selves by those who we are in intimate relationships with. Samuel and Isiah, as well as Ray and Elvin, show a possibility for “intimacies that are kinds of connection, affinity and affect that go beyond gender and sexuality to comprise kinship and community...” (Berlant, 2000, pg. 4). It offers us a space where we can show up as ourselves and access love. Love that is not simply the end or after in happily ever after but instead a love that does the work of sustaining us through hardship.

A love that creates us as human with flaws, faults and a soul. This conception of love moves the discussion of desirability to encompass more than sexual enticement and engagement. This new configuration of love and desire can challenge the societal implications that our whole selves as racialized, queer, and disabled, are not wanted.

The next chapter of this dissertation looks at what happens after the happily ever after or even the happy for now. In taking up the next line of the nursery rhyme “then comes marriage”, we go up the relationship escalator to discuss marriage. The chapter builds on the eugenic/newgenic and sexual ableism and sexual racism concepts to interrogate this institution, it’s origins and the ways that we as a society understand the power of marriage.

Chapter 3: Marriage and its Discontents

Introduction

Can I make a confession?

I LOVE weddings. Not necessarily the ceremonies, although they can be poignant and beautiful but the spectacle of the wedding and the receptions.

To clarify my dislike for ceremonies, I grew up attending primarily Christian weddings (denominations other than Catholic or Anglican), and these often followed the structure of a church service. This structure often meant that ceremonies featured several bible readings, multiple choir renditions, as well as a sermon by the pastor. The result was sitting in the heat, as weddings are generally held around 2 or 3pm, for upwards of two hours to see two people share vows and be declared married in front of God and man. It was not really my idea of a good time. For those who opted to get married outside of the church, you got lucky as time constraints at many of the venues used meant you were only held hostage to the heat and protocol for about an hour.

I attended a wedding for strangers this spring. I was my best friend's plus one to his work colleagues' wedding. I remember mentioning that I was planning on attending this event to some folks to overwhelming positivity. We talked about expectations and what I was going to wear etc. Weddings are a generally positive event for most people regardless of their personal feelings about marriage or the practicalities of throwing a wedding. It was my third wedding in Canada and I am always interested in the differences and similarities that the union of two people can have. This event reminded me of the things I loved about weddings; the outfits, the food, the music, the cheesy and awkward games, the general wholesome feeling of communities coming

together in celebration of the happy couple. It also reminded me of the parts of this spectacle I did not like; the forced intimacy of the couple for the amusement of the crowd by pressuring them to kiss multiple times, the very boring and often self-serving speeches by family members, friends and acquaintances, the performance of thanks that the couple have to engage in as hosts to their guests, the unsubtle heteronormative pressures embedded throughout the whole thing that I feel especially now as an adult.

Leading up to the event, I asked my friend how he wanted me to introduce myself at the event. He is a single gay man and ‘out’ to some of his colleagues, just not to all who would be at the event and so this type of identity negotiation was necessary. The default assumption when a man and a woman are in these types of situations is always that they are dating. I jokingly said that I could always introduce myself as his PLP or Platonic Life Partner which he thought was hilarious although we thought that may be a bit much for this very heterosexual crowd of strangers. In the end, I simply said “I’m [friend’s] plus one” when asked if we were a couple, or how I knew the married couple or if we had plans to get married.

So, I love weddings for the spectacle they provide, however, I am also someone who is in a long-term relationship who is constantly asked when I will be providing my own spectacle. Of course, it is not just the spectacle that my family and friends are interested in, they are also concerned about my future, particularly my future as a wife. As my late grandmother would often state, and I am paraphrasing here, ‘you have to get married so you can have access to the assets if he ever leaves’. I would always pause and smile at the irony because she and my grandfather never officially divorced after he left the family and she still had no access to their cumulative assets after his departure. This notion of asset division was emphasised when I was talking with a friend recently where after talking about how filing our Ontario taxes jointly, made being able to access certain government credits impossible. She surprisingly said ‘Wait you file taxes

together?... So, you don't want to get married...so you will take the shitty parts of marriage without the benefits?' Again, there is this idea of benefits that underlie both of these women's comments, most importantly it underlies that real fact that at its core marriage is not simply the spectacle of love through the wedding. Marriage is a contract; marriage is an accumulation and eventual division of assets if one leaves the union (Bernstein, 2006). It is also an acknowledgement that marriage as an institution has not historically been a positive thing for women as they have been subject to abuses and coercion that was difficult to escape as the legitimacy of the marriage license tended to construct them as an appendage of their husbands as opposed to autonomous beings (Ingraham, 2006). So, women have historically needed to ensure their economic safety should the relationship break down.

I share this personal anecdote because I want to preface some of the discussion points of this chapter laid bare through experiencing a wedding and discussing one's long-term relationship with kinfolk. I want to highlight the community aspect of marriage, the business/financial contract nature of this union, and the heteronormative and compulsory sexuality expectations that underlie the entire experience. Marriage is not simply an expression of love. It is a thing of complex mechanics.

Keeping all of these nuances in mind is how I will be approaching this chapter. Building on the previous one in that it also engages with the politics of desirability, sexual racism and sexual ableism, I will tackle the fourth line of the children's rhyme, 'Then comes marriage'. The mobilization of social, political, economic, and other systems of power to create a nouveau aristocracy built on the principles of 'fitness' (eugenics), does not pre-date two or more humans choosing to consecrate their relationships (marriage). However, eugenic policies have transformed this union by exploiting one important facet of marriage; which is that the unity of individuals has rarely been about altruism or solely about love and feelings of affection (Coontz,

2006; Katz, 1990; Valverde, 2006). As someone who has not studied the marriage practices of all peoples, I am sure that there are cultures that were very much in favour of marriage for love or those tender emotions but I can also say with some measure of certainty that many more would not. The fact that unions were meant to bring something better to those individuals involved and the families being brought together, meant that while love is an excellent motivator, one is also going to try to make an advantageous match. What that looks like will differ from culture to culture, nevertheless, that point remains.

This chapter is not interested in marriage in all its iterations, but instead marriage as the institution we know today within the North American context as it has derived from English Common Law. For this reason, I will be looking at the evolution of marriage as an ideal, an institution and an in/tangible good as legislated by our United States and Canadian governments. Marriage in this project is specific and I argue that the utility of the institution i.e. the rights granted, relies on the oppression of relationships that do not adhere to this structure. The ways that queer, racialized and disabled persons have their relationships legitimized by state apparatus is at once an assimilative process or tactic, and a means of disenfranchisement. This is made clear because we see that accessing this good is heavily gatekept through the mechanics of queerphobia, sexual racism and sexual ableism as created by eugenic/ newgenic ideologies.

Marriage as we know it

“Family starts with marriage and family is the basic building block of any community or nation” (Moore quoted in Romano, (2018) pg. 147.)

The institutionalization of marriage and the nuclear family that is expected to follow from the

marriage has allowed for an oppressive framework of “true/good family” that unwittingly casts those who are unable or unwilling to embody these lived experiences as less than. Specifically, by codifying marriage in the way that it is, two things occur simultaneously, those who wish to enter it are privileged and prized (DeMaris, 2018, et al.; National Marriage Project, 2010; Waite & Gallagher, 2000) while those who do not, or are unable to, face economic, social and even religious sanctions (Dush, 2005; Dush et al., 2008; Lee, 2015). In fact, the normalizing of the monogamous married lifestyle ignores the benefits that non traditional relationships and familial structures have. These two systems, marriage and the nuclear family are presented as the ideal relationship and family structure with the colonial/ white supremacist eugenic foundations cleverly disguised and hidden over time.

Traditional marriage⁸⁹ and the nuclear family emerged as a means of population control rooted in the colonial understandings of white superiority and non- white inferiority. I will first provide an overview of the lineage of traditional marriage to explain the ways that marriage has been, and continues to be, a white, able bodied, middle- class ideal, used to stigmatize racialized people and exclude lower class and disabled individuals. This lineage will be based in British and Anglo- Saxon constructions of marriage as much of the North American socio- legal understandings of marriage follow these common law traditions. It is due to this heritage that sexual racism and the sexual stereotypes attached to BIPOC and queer individuals, pre-empt their success in becoming coupled and married.

Traditional marriage as an institution, and its resulting familial structure, have been a cornerstone of Western society for centuries and was primarily used to ensure that personal

⁸⁹ In this chapter I use the term traditional marriage to refer solely to the legal/ state sanctioned union of one cisgender heterosexual man plus one cisgender heterosexual woman, oftentimes characterized by the Christian influenced white wedding. The newer/ more contemporary form of this is what Mary Louise Adams (1997) calls companionate heterosexual marriage (pg. 94) where the expectation of friendship/ tender feelings was expected between couples.

property was passed down through the appropriate patriarchal lineage. As Spillers (1987) notes, this structure ensured “a vertical transfer of bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of “cold cash”” (pg.74). As a result, preferred family structures shifted from large extended families where children also served as a work force during the pre- industrialization era, to smaller families whose parentage, particularly patrilineal parentage, was overt and clear (Engels, 1884; Spillers, 1987). I say preferred family structures because working class and poor individuals would have continued to have many children to maintain farms etc. because it afforded them a mostly unpaid source of labour.

However, this nuptial structure has not always been the way western society has understood marriage. With practices such as Endogamy being one of the oldest forms of what we could conceivably identify as marriage. Endogamy being defined as marrying someone from within one’s own tribe or cultural group. This practice is sometimes juxtaposed with exogamy which saw marriage between members of different tribes or cultural groups. Exogamy was primarily done to ensure that people were not marrying into families where both parties could trace their lineage to a single ancestor. According to Coontz (2006), much of these marriages within early Anglo- Saxon and British society were mediated by the need to build stronger ties, whether these were diplomatic or trade related. She argues that these customs start to shift with the addition and redistribution of wealth within communities, i.e. economic shifts. Parents started to see their children’s marriages as a way to consolidate wealth and wanted them to engage in marriages with counterparts that were as wealthy and powerful as they were, or of a higher status.

At this point there was no conception of consent. Marriage partners were extensions of their parents or families, so their needs or wants were irrelevant since people could be betrothed or married by proxy i.e. without being physically present. This practice shifted in the 12th century with the Benedictine monk Gratian requiring verbal consent of both parties as well as

consummation of the union to ensure the legitimacy of the marriage bond. These changes were codified in *Decretum*, a canon law textbook and forms the foundations of the Church's marriage policies.

From this time to the 16th century, we get the Catholic and Protestant churches integrating marriage as a sacred event with different types of rituals. In particular the need to have wedding vows which were tied to what the purpose and role of marriage was, saw the union of two people for better or worse, richer or poorer, until death, etc. However, the area of marriage is situated squarely within the realm of the church, not strictly a state apparatus as we understand it today as there was no true separation of church and state at this time. This jurisdictional split changed in the mid 16th century with *The Clandestine Marriage Act* of 1753 that sought to curb unruly marriages that were a threat to power and property. This *Act* once again situated consent within the family for persons under the age of 21. Marriage was now governed by the publication of banns or formal marriage announcements, obtaining a license and had to be performed in a church to be valid. These changes meant that marriages could maintain their original purpose of creating strong and wealthy alliances as approved by the family. The penalty for not following these rules was harsh. *The Marriage Act* of 1836 finally allowed for non religious civil ceremonies. These ceremonies, held in register offices across England and Wales, released some of the responsibility from the Church and placed it in the keeping of a civil official who could be trusted to record the occasion.

With the introduction of divorce, we see state intervention become more apparent. In the 17th century with the Parliamentary Act allowing Lord Roos to divorce his wife on the grounds of her adultery, there was an increase in the number of cases seeking dissolution of marriage. Each of these cases needed parliamentary approval through an Act of Parliament for the divorce to be legal as this was the only way in which the parties could remarry. Dissolving a marriage was

complex, expensive and only available on the strictest of grounds, primarily female infidelity and life-threatening cruelty by the husband. When this process shifted to the civil courts, specifically the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, in the 19th century, divorce became slightly more accessible. However, it was not truly accessible for the masses until the Divorce Reform Act of 1969.

This Act, 1920s legal aid reforms, along with more courts assigned to hear these types of cases, plus no longer having to prove the other party was at fault i.e. being able to simply cite marital breakdown as the reason for dissolution, meant that marriage shifted from the life sentence ‘until death do you part’, to something where the both parties should seemingly enjoy fulfilment. Within the context of the United States of America and Canada, marriage takes on similar shades of state intervention as we see this ideal enshrined in legislation as an institutional tool. In fact, these become foundational to the origin of these nation states.

This history is important to track as the turn to eugenic marriage meant a turn to a particular version of endogamy or marriage within the same cultural group. This type of marriage would benefit the group and the ideal potential family that would emerge through the union was attainable with three generations of eugenic marriage. This historical background is also necessary to understand as we are in a cultural moment where there are calls to return to traditional marriage with the popularity of social media ‘Trad wives’ (Beatty, 2024; Elmhirst, 2024) performing a revisionist narrative of how happy women were in the Leave it to Beaver era. It is necessary to understand this history to identify the danger in this revisionist narrative and more importantly recognize the white supremacist/ eugenic ideologies at the root of traditional marriage. The push to return to the days when dissolving a marriage was intentionally difficult for those without social, financial and other resources in order to ‘repair the fabric of society’, as parroted by the lawmakers in the United States (North, 2024), has an origin point. This history

helps us to contextualize the mechanics of marriage laws and policies that will be discussed later, and explore the spaces of resistance to these laws and policies.

I hereby affirm that I believe the statements as to color of parents on the other side of this card are correct and that I am signing this with the knowledge that the penalty for making a false statement as to color is one year in the penitentiary.

PERSON REGISTERING
SIGNATURE

ADDRESS

WITNESS TO SIGNATURE

ADDRESS OF WITNESS

***SIGNATURE OF PHYSICIAN**

IF NOT SIGNED BY PERSON REGISTERED STATE KINSHIP OF SIGNER

PLACE OF FILING **DATE OF FILING**

If the person signing statement cannot write, he or she must make a mark between the given name and the last name, Thus: his [her] *If the doctor present at birth signs, it will be accepted as
John X Doe to age for labor, school, etc.
mark (OVER)

Image #21: back of the Registration of Birth and Color card from Virginia.

REGISTRATION OF BIRTH AND COLOR-VIRGINIA

FULL NAME
[GIVEN NAME FIRST. GIVE FULL MAIDEN NAME IF MARRIED WOMAN OR WIDOW.]

PLACE OF BIRTH **DATE** **SEX**

NAME OF HUSBAND
[IF MARRIED WOMAN OR WIDOW]

FATHER
FULL NAME

BIRTH PLACE ***COLOR**

MOTHER
FULL MAIDEN NAME

BIRTH PLACE ***COLOR**

REMARKS:

*A white person is one with no trace whatever of blood of another race, except that one with one-sixteenth of the blood of American Indian, unmixed with other race, may be classed as white. The date of birth may be omitted if desired.
Form 59-3-17-24-65M.
(OVER)

Image #22: Front of the Registration of Birth and Colour card from Virginia

The two images above show registration forms from the library of Virginia. These forms

were for all residents of Virginia at the time. Everyone had to register as either White or Coloured and this categorization determined much of how you were able to move through the world, be it which school you were allowed to attend and most importantly who you could marry. It was proof of race, a race id card, if you will. They list the names of your parents, where you were born, marital status and of course legitimacy as provided by the medical establishment and witnesses. This registration was enforced by threat of the loss of freedom of a year long jail sentence should you decide to lie on this very official form. It also specifies what the parameters of whiteness are for the Virginian policy makers.

This form is extremely important within the American context as it provides the basis for our understanding of two case studies; that of Susie Guillory Phipps and her husband Andy and Atha Sorrells and Robert Painter. Sorrells and Painter applied for a marriage license in 1924. This application was denied by the clerk at the circuit court of Rockbridge County who claimed that Sorrells was not in fact White but actually Coloured and as interracial marriage was illegal in the state, this marriage would be illegal and a license should not be issued. At this time, one could only be White or Coloured since Native American status appears to be policed under different legislation. Sorrell's argument was that her family had some [read: negligible] Native American ancestors *not* African American ancestors and therefore had always been considered White. The ruling in her favor in 1924 changed the legal definition of White to the one you see on the form above where the allowable limit of American Indian blood quantum was 1/16th of one's ancestry. While legislators would tweak this legislation and change the blood quantum levels, one definitive aspect of these policies was that you could not have multiple types of ancestry and still wish to be classified as White.

This brings us to the case of Susie Guillory Phipps and her husband Andy. Their story occurs in Louisiana and turns on the application for a passport in 1977. After deciding that they

wanted to travel, Mrs. Phipps applies for a copy of her birth certificate so she can fulfil the requirements of the passport application. She is then told that this documentation cannot be issued as there is a discrepancy between the race on her birth certificate and the race she indicated in her application. Her birth certificate indicated that she was born to two parents who were designated as Coloured which by default made her and her siblings Coloured. She is quoted as saying that finding out this news made her physically ill for three days. (Blay, p.2) Not only did she have this negative reaction, but like Atha Sorrells she points to the lineages and privileges she holds to prove her whiteness.

“When I found out about this Marguerita person [the enslaved Black woman who was her great- great- great- great- grandmother] I was so sick. I was so sick...I am White. I am all White. I was raised as a White child. I went to White schools. I married White twice. My children are White. My grandchildren are White. Mother and Daddy were buried White. My social security card says I’m White. My driver’s license says I’m White. There are no Blacks out where I live except the hired hands” (Phipps quoted in Blay, p. 2)

Genealogy showed that Mrs. Phipps had 3/32 Negro blood and as such did not meet the Louisiana blood quantum requirements of only having 1/32 or less of Negro blood to be classified as White. As a result, she lost her case. While this law would be repealed later in 1893, it would not affect her status. Both of these case studies show that genealogy and blood quantum science was meaning making, it constructed identity across race and desirability to ascribe to particular identities to access goods and services. It also reinforced the notion of purity attached to Whiteness and constructed non- White identities as pollutants. These are decidedly eugenic ideals legislated to determine so many integral facets of life from birth to death. So, although

marriage is a milestone accomplishment, and we are meant to think of it as simply driven by romantic affection, it is in fact a contract between you, your potential spouse and your governing body as determined by your physical location. The point that these two case studies prove is that racial designation and the attached stereotypes that persisted post contact and colonization determined who you could and could not marry. And these same ideals flavour the context of who is perceived as marriageable today.

The strict nature of these types of anti- miscegenation legislation meant that often people would go to different jurisdictions to get married when their own home state did not allow for these unions. This loophole exists when the split governing systems i.e. federal vs. state or province, are not in agreement with each other as the state or province is usually subject to the federal legislation and will have to uphold or challenge the action of the couple. So, while there was federal non discrimination laws, states could circumvent these with convoluted reasoning. Moreover, since states and provinces are mostly self -governing there is no consensus and they will have differing legislation on the same issue.

These two case studies provide a bit of context of law in action as at its founding, seven of the thirteen United States introduced legislation that governed [read: banned] marriage between Whites and People of Colour. These acts, often styled with the language of ‘preservation’ for ‘racial integrity’, governed not just the ability to legally enter into the union of marriage but also cohabitation and sexual activity. This legal framework is not surprising considering that at its foundations the United States was built on forcibly removing Indigenous peoples from their land and building ‘civil’ society through slave and indentured servant labour on account of these peoples being considered non- human. These beliefs in the lack of humanity of these groups of people impacted the way the governing White majorities viewed interracial marriage. More than this, legislators and others in power worried that race mixing would dilute

and pollute the purity of the White race and weaken the consolidation of ‘White power’. I use that term with all of the meanings behind it, including the White power movements that have seen an exponential revival in the last 5 or so years. It was not until the 20th century that anti-miscegenation laws are deemed unconstitutional in the U. S. with the case of Loving v. Virginia. This long-standing belief is in spite of the fact that marriage was legally enshrined as a right since 1888 with the US Supreme court stating as much in several of its rulings.... just not marriage between White folk and ‘Others’.

Loving v. Virginia is considered to be the case that created racial marriage equality. It is often cited as a case where “love won” (Obasogie, 2017). This case centered on Richard Loving, a White man and Mildred Jeter, a woman of mixed African American and Native American ancestry. This couple travelled to Washington D.C. where it was legal for interracial couples to get married and got married in June of 1958. Their license granted; they returned home to Virginia. In July, the police would enter into their home in the middle of the night i.e. break into their home, specifically their bedroom hoping to catch them in the midst of sex... also illegal through Virginia’s 1924 *Preservation of Racial Integrity Act*. Despite Richard’s claims they were in fact married, they were arrested and charged with violating state law. After spending several days in jail both parties pleaded guilty to violating Section 20-58 of the Virginia state code which prohibited a “White” person and a “Coloured” person from leaving the state to be married and returning to live as man and wife (Blay, pp23-24, Duigan, n.d.). The punishment set out by this section of the code was a jail term of one to five years.

They were sentenced to one year in jail. They were able to have their sentence suspended on one condition; they would have to leave Virginia and not return for at least twenty- five years. The Lovings moved to Washington D.C. and settled there, however, in 1963 they filed suit in a Virginia state court to get their convictions overturned. This multi year endeavor would see their

case i) rejected at the state court level, ii) accepted for review by the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals where their sentences would be voided but the state law upheld as it did not violate the constitution since both parties White and Coloured were being treated [read: punished] equally and iii) appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court where they eventually win their case. Not only do they win but marriage is re-affirmed as “one of the basic civil rights of man, fundamental to our very existence and survival” (Duignan) by Justice Warren, writing for the unanimous court⁹⁰. Likewise, the court ruled that racial classification in this instance did in fact amount to racial discrimination which was prohibited by the Fourteenth Amendment as there was no state objective accomplished with this process of racial classification besides discrimination. As a result, Virginia’s as well as the other sixteen (16) states’ racial integrity acts also known as anti-miscegenation laws, were struck down as unconstitutional and legally interracial couples could get married in whichever state they were residents of.

Undoubtably this ruling was cause for celebration as many would not have to fear legal repercussions for simply being in love with someone of a different race and could now solemnify their love through marriage. Of course, that does not mean that this judgement was accepted widely or easily as many county and state legislatures did accede quietly and some judges, clerks and the like had to be sued or pressured into compliance. Similarly, attitudes did not change overnight when the laws did and many couples would still face social, religious, and other repercussions in the form of harassment and terrorism at the hands of White nationalist and White power organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

Within Canada however, anti-miscegenation sentiment followed a different type of

⁹⁰ Research done by journalists, academics and interest groups like Waite & Gallagher (2000), Dush (2005), Dush et al. (2008), National Marriage Project (2010), DeMaris (2018), Lee (2015) and many more have studied the ways that marriage provides certain advantages over being single. In particular some note that married men benefit most from the institution.

trajectory. While there were no blatant laws banning interracial marriage, there was more than enough stigma and societal pressures that made this relationship an unpopular choice, to put it mildly. In fact, Constance Backhouse's 1999 book *Colour- Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada 1900- 1950* charts six cases that illustrate the ways that white supremacy underpinned the legal system and particular types of legislation. Further, she notes that the presence of the Ku Klux Klan of Kanada created an environment where the mere presumption of a mixed-race relationship, particularly that of a racialized man and White woman was cause enough to commit acts of terror and harassment against one or both parties.

The closest approximation of U. S. anti- miscegenation laws that Canada enacted was *The Indian Act* of 1867. This law which was revised in 1951 and then lastly amended in 1985 was a linchpin in the colonial project to eliminate First Nations' cultures in order to assimilate Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island to Eurocentric and White western ways of being. As mentioned in the first chapter, decimation of Indigenous ways of being was part and parcel of that civilization mission that would see Indigenous peoples declared less than human and incapable of governing themselves and most importantly their lands (Cannon, 2012 Harding, 2008; Smith, 2021). It also created the legal category of 'Indian' which had the intended consequence of flattening histories, and cultures into a caricature of a people that could be ascribed status and just as easily have that status withdrawn by the state apparatus at will. Once again, this law would track blood quantum to manage the assignation of status and the rights and responsibilities thereof.

One departure from the laws in the U.S. however is the use of family relations to ascribe status. This act made provisions for people to be considered 'Indians' if they were members of a "Body or Tribe of Indians" which meant that individuals could marry into or be adopted into status. As with all of these types of legislation it is never meant to work in favour of the non-

White people being governed and often ascribes dubious morality to these populations, therefore constructing them as pollutants to the pristine White gene pool. For the purposes of this discussion, we will be paying attention to the enfranchisement sections of this law which defined and Indian as

“any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band.” Indian status also applied to “any child of such person” and to “any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person.” (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2022)

This clause meant that any Indian woman would lose status if she married a non- status man, became a doctor or lawyer or if her status husband died or left/ abandoned her. By consolidating status along the patronymic, the Canadian government was able to codify their misogynistic and racist beliefs about the assumed promiscuous sexuality and inferiority of First Nations women. While this section would be amended by Bill- C31 in 1985, there still remains a contentious second generation cut off rule that means that after two generations of intermarriage one would lose their status.

In this way while there was no prohibition on interracial marriage there was a heavy incentivization on the part of the government to ensure that these marriages were few or that when they did occur particularly for Indigenous men, the women were able to share status and the rights, responsibilities and privileges associated with it. This use of incentivization is readily apparent in the cases of Isabel Jones and Ira Junius Johnson in 1930 and Velma Demerson and Harry Yip in 1939. While these couples were not married at the time of the defining incidents, they were affianced and as such, the challenges to their relationship are still useful to the discussion.

Backhouse (1999) notes in chapter six of her book *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* that on February 28th, 1930 about seventy- five (75) individuals

dressed in the quintessential white gowns and hoods of the Ku Klux Klan, descended onto a community in Oakville. They were kind enough to attempt to alert the authorities as to why they were there, however the police chief was absent at that time since it was late in the day. Their next order of business was to find Johnson's residence to mete out discipline to the Negro upstart Johnson in order to force him to put an end to his relationship with Jones, a White girl. Upon finding out that the couple was out visiting Johnson's aunt they quickly repaired to that residence demanding the presence of Jones. When she emerged, they whisked her off to her mother, and then to the home of an officer of the Salvation Army who would then play jailer. It was believed that her mother was behind the terror that evening as she had an issue with the fact that her daughter was seeing someone who was not White. They returned to the home of Johnson's relatives where they forcibly removed him and his aunt and uncle, and took them to Jonson's house. They then circled the residence with the family in the front yard, nailed a large cross in front of the door and set that cross on fire. They issued a warning that should Johnson be seen with a White girl again; they would take action. Further, when the Black citizens alerted the police chief - you know the one that the Klan members went to visit to state their business to when they first arrived - he showed up to shake hands with the fellows who were from Hamilton, whom he knew well. He then decided that as there had been no property damage he did not see the need to issue warnings or make any arrests. (pp. 173-174). It is not until several Black Toronto lawyers put pressure on the Ontario government that four of the seventy-five (75) men would be arrested for being "disguised at night", usually a crime associated with breaking and entering and petty thievery. Of the four men, only one would be convicted. He would first be given a \$50 fine and when he challenged this conviction, he would be sentenced to a three-month stint in prison. Jones and Johnson would go on to get married one month later.

Nine years later we get the case of Velma Demerson and Harry Yip. Demerson was a 19-

year-old White woman who met, dated and moved in with Yip, a Chinese man. They were engaged and Demerson was pregnant when she was arrested at the home they shared, due the intervention from her father. She was convicted of being “incorrigible” under the 1897 *Act respecting Industrial Refuges for Females* which became the *Female Refuges Act* of 1913 that was a catchall category used for population hygiene. What is meant by this law and vague terminology used is that women’s behaviours were policed and those who committed moral crimes of promiscuity, public drunkenness, vagrancy and pregnancy out of wedlock, among others, could be incarcerated or institutionalized at reform schools as these so-called immoral behaviours were coded as mental illness, requiring cure. In the case of Demerson, she was not only incarcerated for the duration of her pregnancy and had her infant son removed from her care three months after his birth. She was also experimented on. These genital experiments conducted by doctors who were proponents of eugenics tried to figure out why someone would choose to engage in these acts of degeneracy and if there was a cure that could be administered. Degeneracy for these doctors was a White woman dating, having sex with and getting pregnant and engaged to a Chinese man instead of a good White boy.

These events coincided with anti- Chinese sentiment and the 1923 *Chinese Immigration Act* or *Exclusion Act* as it was commonly called that restricted immigration to Canada. These sentiments were what allowed her parents to be able to rely on the Toronto police and judicial system to arrest and subsequently incarcerate their daughter. Demerson and Yip got married after her release, however, as a result of this union, she was stripped of her Canadian citizenship as, much like with the *Indian Act*, citizenship status flowed through the man. Demerson was expected to take her husband’s citizenship but her application was denied by the Chinese embassy officials and she officially remained stateless until 2004 due to some faulty paperwork during her attempt to reacquire Canadian citizenship. She would later sue the Ontario government

and while the Ontario Superior Court cited that the Ontario government was immune to lawsuits related to incidents from prior to 1963, the case would be settled outside of court and the Attorney General of Ontario would issue an apology.

Both of these case studies and the Indian Act show that while Canada did not enact anti-miscegenation marriage laws, there was a definite culture of anti-miscegenation that incentivised interracial couples to reconsider dating and marrying. Moreover, the underlying assumption that White women needed to be saved and were acting contrary to their nature by choosing to be with men thought to be inferior was the eugenicist's worst nightmares come true. The belief in true love is absent in these moments. The idea that one should be choosing to marry for the betterment of oneself, one's family, community, race and species, i.e. eugenic marriage, is the expectation and women as carriers of the next generation in particular must be shown the best way to make this choice.

These cases show the attention to racial eugenics and its importance to the structure of traditional marriage and monogamous relationships more broadly. The use of socio-medico-legal measures to control race constructed as contagion/ disease through race registration cards, police and community approval of White supremacist intimidation and scientific experimentation, shows the intersection between race, disability pathologization and eugenics. By positioning Black and Indigenous peoples and their blood specifically as something so vile as one would become physically ill upon learning that their ancestor was Black is to evoke a collective consciousness that turns toward contagion management. Further, heterosexuality is implied, expected and enforced. With Indigenous populations in the Americas having their men constructed as feminized and therefore undesirable within this eugenic worldview, and Chinese and Black men cast as hypersexual deviants, there is a highly gendered understanding of race that denotes who should be allowed to enter into traditional marriage.

In Canada, the U. S. and Britain, the idea of love did not come into play until the 19th century with what historian Jonathan Ned Katz views as the construction of the heterosexual and the belief in Victorian love. Of course, this understanding of love within marriage is not the one we understand it to be today. Katz (1990) notes that love within 1820- 1860 America revolved around gendered male and female identities. True love was characterized by purity where desire should only be reserved for procreation. Marriage was then characterized as a temple of purity that was threatened by uncontrollable and illicit lust. However, Katz notes that in the late 19th century, a shift started to happen with the turn to consumerism and the understanding of bodies as not simply a site for work but one that can experience pleasure as well. Katz credits this shift with the rise in medical men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries where women's desire previously pathologized through the lens of nymphomania, was now constructed as normal with the lack of desire now pathologized as a mental disturbance and "frigidity" (pg.71). It is important to understand that this turn to desire was still in service to procreation and these ideals of masculinity and femininity were meant to reproduce the state (Adams, 1997). And in the post World War II era, this service was seen as dutifully enacted through the baby boom.

Although the Lovings, Johnsons, Demerson and Yip were merely couples in love who wanted to have the right to prove their love was true by getting married and having babies, they were told that those sentiments were irrelevant in the face of the state. Love was met with terror, harassment, incarceration that would take years, money, and lawyers to 'win'. This idea of love winning would be one that was echoed during the fight for Gay and Lesbian marriage equality. Today, marriage in Canada and the United States of America (USA) involves being united as spouses (both Canada and the USA recognise same sex unions as marriages) in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law (Miriam- Webster, n.d.). It performs legal, social, economic, and religious purposes in our society. This simple union can provide protections for,

and give rights to, a spouse should the other become ill or die e.g., in the event of illness and death a person's spouse has the right to make end of life decisions and has access to their assets e.g., pension plans etc. Furthermore, marriage has historically been a way to legitimate a relationship and any children born into that union. That is not to say that there are no provisions for children born outside of wedlock, however, these provisions are newer in Canada and sometimes non-existent in parts of the United States.

Finley's (2011) argument that colonialism operates as a disciplinary power through heteropatriarchy (pg. 34) and as a means to produce the modern racial state by producing sex (pg. 31) is on display through the iterations that marriage laws have gone through. Colonialism, race and sexuality continuously construct, inform, and reshape each other. This heteropatriarchal structure of traditional marriage and the nuclear family is a mere manifestation of the colonial ideal steeped in eugenic ideologies. An ideal that has softened to allow some individuals whose sexual orientation or race categorized them as undesirable in the marriage mart⁹¹, to access some of the privileges of these structures if their relationships look like that normative ideal.

Homonormative⁹² ideals were at the forefront of the same sex marriage fight. With the ability for same sex couples to be married in Canada (2003) and the USA (2015)⁹³, individuals now had most of the same rights as heterosexual couples e.g., being with their spouse in the hospital without needing a power of attorney or being paid alimony if there was a dissolution of the relationship. However, the state-granted right to marriage was not merely given because the

⁹¹ 'Marriage mart' is loosely defined as a business that arranges marriage contracts. It is a term used in historical romances, primarily regency era romances to refer to events held during the social season (spring/summer) where eligible parties are able to socially engage with each other with a view to forming advantageous matches/ marriages. It was marked by aristocratic families coming to London from their country homes to conduct business, attend to their parliamentary duties etc. Marriage was simply one such business matter to attend to.

⁹² As defined by Duggan (2003).

⁹³ Although some states had allowed for same sex marriages, the Supreme Court ruling in this year made this allowable thought all 50 states, with those previously reticent, being forced to recognize marriage certificates from other states.

state was moved by the love shared by gay and lesbian couples. In Canada it took a fight for the access to spousal pension benefits by Jim Eagan and his partner Jack Nesbitt in 1988 to have sexual orientation be added to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a protected class. Although the pair lost their case, this shift in ensuring protections for gay and lesbian partners saw the codification of the *Civil Marriage Act* in 2005 all across Canada as opposed to the piecemeal adoption started in 2003 through provincial licencing policies.

In the United States of America, a triple challenge to the legality of Hawaii's statute that prohibited same sex marriage, triggered the passage of the *Defense of Marriage Act* (DOMA) that federally defined marriage as being between one man and one woman. This specific section was ruled unconstitutional in the case of the *United States v. Windsor*, and in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* all state bans on same sex marriage were deemed unconstitutional. It is not surprising that in each of the cases⁹⁴ that made same sex marriage legal, the legality in question was establishment of spousal benefits, spousal inheritance, as well as the establishing of parentage. Within these challenges, the reconstruction and continued reification of marriage as a contractual and economic relationship remains. Of course, these couples love each other, and in many of these particular cases, they had been partners for decades, nonetheless, the mere fact of love and affection and building a life together is not enough to warrant state protections.

Dissolving the Union

“We always talk about gay marriage but never gay divorce”

- Colleague in my 3rd year Law and Society undergrad class

⁹⁴ Each of these rulings, although posed as singular turned on several different cases brought forward by different states.

“Article 91 of the British North America Act (1867) gives the Parliament of Canada exclusive legislative authority to deal with marriage and divorce. Similarly, Article 51 of the Australia Constitution Act (1900) empowers the Commonwealth Parliament to make laws with respect to marriage and divorce. The Constitution of the United States, however, reserves authority over marriage and divorce to each of the forty-eight states. That is our starting point. In a country like ours, where each state has the constitutional power to translate into law its own notions of policy concerning the family institution, and where citizens pass freely from one state to another, tangled marital situations like the one immediately before us inevitably arise.” (Justice Frankfurter in *Williams v. North Carolina*, 37 U.S. 287 1942).

Historically the dissolution of marriage was an especially difficult thing to accomplish, that is not to say that it is ‘easy’ to accomplish today but there were particular concerns that couples today do not have to navigate. This complicated process was due to the economic, social and other pressures embedded within the union itself as previously discussed. Furthermore, the fact that marriage was a disciplining tool for young men and women (Adams, 1997, pp. 99- 100; McLaren, 1990, pp. 76-77) meant that choosing to dissolve this union was met with suspicion and scrutiny as the married state was at once aspirational, and part of one’s duty, not to mention there was the ‘until death’ clause built into the ceremony. In the height of eugenicist concerns about heredity and population management it offered the only avenue to properly reproduce the nation state. It was only in submitting to the appropriate tests to ensure that you were free of disease and ensuring that you were of the correct White stock that the state could be comfortable in its ability to reproduce the new aristocracy (McLaren, 1990, pg. 74). So, it made sense that initially, the only way that one could attain a divorce was on the grounds of a wife’s infidelity since this action directly affected inheritance.

Divorce legislation, like Marriage legislation in Canada followed the British common law, however with the federal/ provincial split following Confederation, the laws governing marriage were divided with the federal government overseeing marriage and divorce while ceremonies and licencing being the purview of provinces. Canadian divorce legislation was unified in 1968 and much like the British context was to be based on matrimonial offence and in cases of marital breakdown the couple had to live apart for three years before the divorce could be obtained. It was not until the *Divorce Act* was revised in 1985 that the no-fault divorce was introduced. This *Act* constitutes marriage breakdown as living apart for at least one year, adultery or treating the spouse with physical or mental cruelty.⁹⁵

The U.S. context is a little more fraught. Like with Canada, the colonies that would become the United States initially followed the English common law, however, these colonies started to break away from this jurisprudence in some jurisdictions. For example, in places like the New England colonies, the belief that marriage was a civil contract meant that authorities were more likely to grant a divorce if shown sufficient cause (Clark, 2015; Hoffer, 1998). Upon independence, states that joined the union had a more liberal attitude to divorce but individual states would retain the right to govern their citizens with regards to marriage and divorce as opposed to this legislation being decided on at the federal level. This belief is cemented in the 1942 ruling in *Williams v. North Carolina*. This case saw Carrie Wyke and Thomas Hendrix leave their home state for Nevada, set up residence, then after the allotted time apply for divorces from their respective spouses then marry each other. They then moved back to North Carolina and lived as man and wife until they were sued for bigamous cohabitation. They lost their case as

⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that with all of the official sources reviewed for Canadian and British marriage and divorce not much is evident about these countries anti- miscegenation leanings. It is presented as though these jurisdictions solely cared about class.

the court found that they did not truly establish a domicile in Nevada but instead sought to defraud the Nevada courts and as such North Carolina did not need to recognize the Nevada decrees (*Williams v. North Carolina, 1942*).

In both countries, the introduction of the ‘no fault’ divorce would completely revolutionize the institution. A no fault divorce basically allows spouses to separate without having to prove that the other party was at fault due to their acts of cruelty, adultery, mental illness, abandonment etc. (Beiber & Johnson, 2023; Legal Information Institute, n.d.). This shift in requirements was particularly impactful for women who had up until this point struggled to get their marriages dissolved as the burden of proof for them was often higher than their male counterparts due to the hetero- patriarchal brand of misogyny that imbues the legal system.

Why is it important to think about the dissolution of marriages? If marriages are built on a legacy of eugenic ideals, then the dissolution of marriages must be a net positive right? Actually, no. If anything, the dissolution of marriages is important to the overall discussion because it lays bare the privileges associated with the marital state that are underscored by the institution. Not only that, these ideas about who makes a fit partner directly affect how those benefits are adjudicated once the marriage contract is broken. In the discussion of the fight for gay and lesbian marriage equality this fact is very evident. When we think about the way that assets are divided, alimony is granted or child custody is awarded, we can see that irrespective of jurisdiction, there are particular understandings of fitness that underlie a split.

What is most important to bring to this discussion however is the fact that these overt eugenicist attitudes have seen a rise exponentially in the post Trump presidency. With increased popularity of violent White supremacist rhetoric and terrorist organizations like the Proud Boys, and the dog whistle of ‘Make America Great Again’ or ‘Canada for Canadians’ or even ‘Make Canada Great Again’ there has been a shift to reconsider marriage and divorce. With panic about

the declining birth rates generally and the smaller number of White babies (Government of Canada, 2024; Office of the United States Census Bureau, 2012), there is the rallying of these groups to calls of ‘You will not replace us’ or ‘Jews will not replace us’ as was the case in Charlottesville Virginia in 2017 (Green, 2017). These calls are inspired by the ‘Great Replacement’ theory. Originating under the Nazi regime and popularized by Renaud Camus, this theory has been adapted to argue that there is a trend of replacement of cultures and peoples occurring across Western civilizations (Cosentino, 2020; Ekman, 2022; Wildman, 2017). In Europe this trend is often shown as a replacement of European culture by Black Africans and Muslim migration. In the United States and Canada there is a similar belief, though the migrating demographic changes based on the speaker, and what issues they are fear mongering. Declining birth rates and what was/is seen as increased migration also comes at a time of economic upheaval following a worldwide pandemic and as history has proven, in times of economic change there is always a need to exert tighter control over the populations.

One of the ways that this population control plan has come to play is in stricter abortion legislation. The striking down of Roe V. Wade in the United States and rumblings in Canada by conservative politicians about the best ways to use the notwithstanding clause and talks about “pre- born” children show that there is a concerted effort to strip individuals of their decision-making powers and place it back into the hands of those in political power (Osman, 2023). While this shifting political rhetoric is in itself horrifying, it comes with an additional talking point of repealing the idea of the no fault divorce. So not only is the hope that these women will be forced to reproduce the ideal citizens i.e. White babies, but should they have the misfortune to be married, they would not be able to leave unless they could prove fault. Unsurprisingly, many of the talking heads who are in favour of these reversals also do not believe that marital rape or reproductive coercion are real or should be prosecuted (Godfrey, 2022).

This idealized and fantastical version of the 1950s June Cleaver/ Leave it to Beaver reality has focused radically on White hetero patriarchal reproduction. And in an attempt to ensure that this fantasy occurs, there has been an uptick in proposed legislation and legal challenges primarily in the U.S. that would make their eugenic forefathers proud⁹⁶. Not only are the proposed immigration laws and policies stricter, but there is a liberal application of pathologization for those whose sexual identities fall outside the heteronormative norm. The laws targeting Trans folks generally and youth specifically (Laviertes & Ramos, 2022; Lee et al., 2024; Mallory & Redfield, 2023; Trianon, 2023), to ensure corrective measures to turn them back into the good heteronormative members of society, the laws that are expanding conservatorships for disabled peoples as well as elderly people (Nguyen, 2023), the sustained expansion of policing in areas populated by BIPOC folks (Chappell, 2023) are all tools necessary to ensure that the white supremacist project goes off without a hitch.

The idea of oversight into the mechanics of marriage is not new, as racialized and disabled people face this scrutiny daily. Wilkerson (2012) offers the example of two individuals (a man and a woman) who lived in an institution for people with epilepsy that wanted to get married. She noted that they asked permission of their physician to get married. They were told that while they could get married, they were not allowed to have sex (p. 33). This need to control the sexuality of these individuals seems to stem from a fear that, were these two people left to explore their sexuality together, that there would be an undesirable outcome. Canadian history has proven that “population purification” (Mosoff, 1993) was the given reason behind the sterilization of many disabled children, to avoid the possibility of them reproducing disabled children. The fact that disabled people’s marriages are supposed to be sexless is an indictment on

⁹⁶ Project 2025: Presidential Transition project (2022) produced by conservative organizations with funding from The Heritage foundation is one such proposal.

the way that institutions, and the physicians therein, view their residents' sexuality and which babies, even if White are preferred.

The fight for the right to be married, as championed by early LGBTQ activists, while useful, has left many Queer kin out of this state apparatus of legitimacy. There needs to be a dismantling of proscribed gender roles/norms to ensure a true class and race intervention into the construction of marriage and marriage laws, thereby avoiding the construction of a privileged disabled state identity or raced state identity or even a queer state identity. This dismantling would allow disabled people to be included in the fight since the ability to be married is not something poor disabled people, especially those on government supports like Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), can access. Moreover, disabled people, many of whom rely on state financial aid, are penalized for choosing to legitimize their relationships this way, with disabled people losing access to some of their benefits if the combined assets they and their partner i.e. their household, have is deemed above the threshold for need (Balintec, 2021; Luterman, 2023; Mahoney, 2022; Nassar, 2024; Saunders, 2023). This reality reinforces the idea that disabled people are not meant to have sexual, or romantic lives and are definitely not expected to get married. This reality means that marriage immediately becomes a bigger site of contention where the roles and responsibilities are shifting steadily and political and economic powers shift. Love is not winning, marriage equality is not quite there yet, and couples need to examine the presumed privilege that they hope to gain from this institution.

Alternatives and their necessities

The rise of the common-law union has provided an interesting touchpoint to think about resistance to the institution of marriage. That is not to say that all individuals who enter into common law unions are actively or even consciously resisting the marriage institution built on problematic principles, it is merely that the presence and popularity of this alternative to marriage allows us to critically analyze both entities. Statistics across the United States and Canada up to 2021 have shown a decrease in marriage and divorce rates (Statistics Canada, 2022; United States Census Bureau, 2023). Naturally as less people are getting married, so too are less people getting divorced. These same statistics show an increase in cohabitation and common law relationships. This terminology refers to unions where people are choosing to live together and complete the other traditional rituals of coupledness, whether that is purchasing property, adopting pets or having and raising children. Oftentimes this relationship is a precursor to marriage and sometimes it is not.

Common law relationships are legislated by districts and provinces and their legality can vary from place to place. These relationships are commonly characterized as long-term partnerships between two people who have not legally decided to marry. Sinikka Elliott, an associate professor in sociology at the University of British Columbia comments “[m]arriage has become de-institutionalized, so it’s not the only institution available to establish a committed relationship... It’s not the only route ... but it still carries a highly symbolic role in North America; it’s often tied to religion.” (Bowden, 2020). However, even as more people are opting for this type of relationship as a way to buck tradition and resist the heteronormative relationship structure, the state does not in fact acknowledge these relationships in the same way as it does marriage. This is the reality for Ontarians, especially as it relates to property rights (Government of Ontario, 2021).

In Canada common law unions are governed by provincial jurisdiction while in the U.S. it is up to the individual states to determine whether they will recognize these types of unions. This federal vs. provincial/ state split means that common law couples are at the mercy of their residences and could be subject to particular requirements such as having lived together for a period of time, filing tax returns together, or referring to the other person as your spouse while in public (Bowden, 2020; O’Flaherty Law, 2024). In places where these unions are acknowledged, they are for the most part bound by similar legal obligations as a traditional marriage and some even require a legal separation or divorce to end the union. The disjointed nature of the legislation however, means that there is no impetus for a state or province to recognize this union if they don’t want to. This legislative nuance puts the couples in a precarious position should they need to move. This legal apathy has the intended consequence of making marriage the default better option to ensure that you are able to access societal goods like insurance, pensions, etc.

What would be lost if common law unions all over were subject to the same terms and conditions as married couples while keeping both entering into and exiting the union informal? Would this change make custody, alimony and property division any more complicated? Would it mean that instances of fraud would skyrocket? Again, this story is what we are told. Or would we as individuals be more intentional about the way we organize our personal lives.

Moreover, I think about the ways that this dismantling could be used to legitimize non sexual relationships and frameworks. Chen (2021) discusses Boston Marriages which featured two individuals, usually women who were platonic life partners who would purchase property together, live together and share all their expenses and essentially live as a coupled unit without the sexual component. This relationship would not be technically recognized under the common law or marriage constructs as marriage (common law or official) is predicated on there being conjugal relations between the couple, i.e. consummation laws (Decker, 2015, pg. 58). However,

as we have discussed, for those who identify as asexual, this legislature approved relationship is not inclusive. And these relationships should be privileged as much as those that will fit the ideal, to avoid discrimination (Chen, 2021; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993; Scherrer, 2008).

“Monogamy...in this economy” (Social Media commentators)

However, since marriage involves being united as spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law, only two individuals are allowed to be legally married, there is no room in the legalities for persons who practice polyamory⁹⁷ or any version of non- monogamy⁹⁸. In fact, both Canada and the United States have explicitly codified the illegality of polygamy or plural marriage as it is sometimes called. Within this polygamy discourse, it is of note that the only brand of polygamy that is explicitly legislated against is that of polygyny or one man with multiple female partners or wives and not polyandry which is the practice of one woman having multiple male partners or husbands. I would argue that the social construction of lineage through paternity plays a huge role in this focus, as well as the liberal application of purity culture and the slut shaming that emerges as a result of women having multiple partners.

In the United States, the *Edmunds Act* of 1882 made it a felony to engage in bigamy or unlawful cohabitation. This *Act* not only challenged the legal application of marriage made by a man who wants to have multiple wives, but also makes the *appearance* of such illegal. This law within the United States targeted primarily those from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter- day Saints (LDS Church) and led to the church discontinuing this practice officially. I use the word

⁹⁷ “Polyamory describes a form of relationship where it is possible, valid and worthwhile to maintain (usually long-term) intimate and sexual relationships with multiple partners simultaneously.” (Haritaworn et al., 2006, pg. 515).

⁹⁸ “Non-monogamy describes a range of relationship styles and structures that involve multiple intimate, romantic or sexual partners, with the full knowledge and consent of everyone involved” (OPEN, n.d.).

‘officially’ here as there are still some sects that still continue this practice today. The reality tv shows *Sister Wives*, and *Seeking Sister Wife* on the network TLC show some examples.

In Canada, state denunciation of polygamy occurred on two levels. We first get the ruling in *R v. Bear’s Shin Bone* in 1899 where an Indigenous man, Bear’s Shin Bone is convicted under the Criminal Code. His marriage with two women from the Kainai Nation was deemed illegal and contrary to the provisions found within the Criminal Code and as a result he would be subject to either five years imprisonment or a fine of five hundred dollars (Lenon, pg.89). This ruling marked a turning point in Canadian/ Indigenous relations as through the Indian Act, polygamy came to be constructed not only as uncivilized but also a “threat... to the nation’s moral and racial identity...” (Lenon, 2015) and it is therefore necessary to “impose British norms of lifelong, Christian, heterosexual marriage” (Lenon quoting Carter, pg. 89). As Indigenous communities saw custom marriages as a way to keep their youth out of the residential school system, these marriages which sometimes were polygamous in nature were a way to circumvent colonial powers, thus keeping young people in their communities and within their cultures. The ruling in this case reflected the concern some had with Mormon, specifically LDS Church members, migrating to escape persecution in the United States. The concern was that these settlers would occupy Blackfoot and other territories and see these communities’ practicing polygamy think that this activity was acceptable within Canada as this would circumvent British colonial principles.

The second and most definitive statement on polygamy within Canada is the 2011 *Reference* decision. In short, this decision upholds the Criminal Code marriage provisions as seen in the *R v. Bear’s Shin Bone* case, and also “asserts that polygamy is antithetical to the value of gender equality, which is part of western civilization” (Lenon, pg.82). This decision came as there were two competing legalities at play, the first being the freedom of religion under the

Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the other being the Criminal Code's provision against polygamy. What emerges is a particular understanding of the institution that is marriage that holds true to its Catholic and Protestant roots. Further, this belief is expressed by the need to protect women and children which is only accomplished through monogamous marriage. This type of marriage is also elevated to a building block of civilization (Cannon, 2012; Lenon, 2015).

Naturally this privileging of monogamous marriage means that societies that engage in non monogamous marriage are savage, uncivilized, foreign and generally unsafe and violent against women and children. The work of monogamous marriage is to create "men much less likely to commit crimes such as murder robbery and rape" (Lenon citing para. 509 of the *Reference* decision, pg. 86). Marriage's civilizing power harkens back to the Victorian Love narrative of constraint within the marital bonds (Katz, 1990). Of course, the criminality of men under polygamy is due to there being a lack of access to the feminizing constraint, i.e. women to marry/ procreate with, since polygamy in the LDS Church meant that young men were/are kicked out of communities to allow for multiple young women to be married to established/ powerful elders. The assertion that there is no "good polygamy" (Lenon, 2015 pg. 87) has reverberated through the Canadian context and influences marriage, inheritance, immigration and all areas that marriage as an institution has touched.

Coded within polygamy legislation is the fear of contagion that permeated anti-miscegenation laws and eugenic policies. The fear that if this type of marriage should be allowed then Canada and the United States could become havens for those undesirable non- white foreigners who already practice polygamy (Haritaworn, 2006; Lenon, 2015). This immigration would dismantle the structure of western civilization as not only would there be an influx of this 'foreign element', but because of the high levels of fertility of these communities, the good citizens of the nation state would be soon outnumbered, i.e. that pesky great replacement theory

seemingly confirmed. And as we have already established, reproduction within the state is a cleverly coordinated effort to ensure the proscribed race, class, gender, sexuality and ability are limited within the gene pool.

Beyond this xenophobic and nationalistic ideology, the contemporary skepticism of non monogamous relationships calls into question the commitment of partners to each other. To engage in these types of relationships forces individuals to engage with other parts of the legal system through wills, social services etc. should the parties choose to legitimize these relationships in the eyes of state apparatus. In the same way that the fight for same sex marriage was fought through the applications for spousal benefits and parental acknowledgment, non monogamous relationships have to rely on these means to ensure their loved ones are taken care of. Traditional marriage's narrow rights-based framework often invites frustrations and the reliance on these specific economic measures to make these relationships legible reinforces tenets of sexual racism and sexual ableism as the ability to 'be a good provider' becomes a dominant lens through which we look for potential partners. People can gloss over their racist, sexist, ableist, and classist beliefs and say that they are just looking for someone who can be 'their equal', a 'good provider', or even 'a good parent'. The eugenic underpinnings of what it means to be a 'good provider', or 'someone's equal' are so deeply hidden that its machinations work to create that nouveau aristocracy with our willing participation.

These are largely ahistorical categorizations which ignores the legacy of White supremacy and its ongoing impact on racialized communities. We should not forget that less than sixty years ago it was illegal for Black and White people to get married in the USA and in Canada the *Indian Act*, which remains on the books, although amended as recently as 2017, originally penalized First Nations women for marrying non- First Nations men as they lost their status. Are we to believe that these values frittered away as amendments were made and laws were changed? The

answer is a resounding no!

Moreover, for low- income individuals who are on state support like Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), their marriageability is further reduced as again the idea of the provider comes into play. Poor families can face penalties such as a loss of benefits or losing low-income tax credits should they marry (Romano, 2018, 148). Therefore, if marriage and the nuclear family are really the metrics by which we build a community and nation, then racialized, dis/abled, and many queer people will never be able to fully attain those goods or be good citizens. This is intentional as the eugenic nation state is built on the absence of those within these categories.

Conclusion

Curbing the birthrate of the unfit, and positively influencing those deemed fit to reproduce is a feature, not a bug of the traditional marriage system. The societal ideal privileges intimate relationships that consist of two persons, one male (dominant/ breadwinner) and one female (submissive/ nurturer) who come together and get married for procreation purposes. Although these roles have been critiqued in feminist theory for as long as this has been a field of inquiry, (Bernstein, 2006; Ingraham, 2006; Rich, 1980; et al.), feminism has not yet permeated society to the point where gender roles have been unhitched from biological sex (Butler, 1990; Rahman & Jackson, 2010). As such, it is expected that someone who is biologically male will engage in hegemonic masculinity⁹⁹. They will have masculine traits as ascribed by society. These traits include an expectation of dominant, aggressive, and logical behaviour, and a shunning of perceived weak behaviours e.g., emotional displays. This construction is in direct opposition to

⁹⁹ Coined by Connell in the late 80s. This term refers to a dominant ideal of masculinity that is generally unattainable but is still considered the standard to apply to. The opposite is 'emphasised femininity'.

the ideas of femininity which expect those identifying as female to be softer, more submissive, have longer tresses, wear heels, be more prone to emotional displays, be more nurturing etc. This ideal has effectively been used to silence alternative sexual expressions (Shildrick, 2009) and these deeply raced/ racist, queerphobic and ableist ideals construct a version of ideal partners who should want to get married i.e. enter into eugenic marriage. It constructs a gender identity and expression that will not want to leave a marriage because of the duty to self, family and the state apparatus.

The preceding discussion has shown that although we perceive marriage as a natural extension of love as seen in the children's rhyme, it is in fact a cleverly orchestrated contract between the parties and the state that helps to govern not just the population but also their assets. We are incentivised to make advantageous matches that skews toward the privileging of White supremacist eugenic ideals in spite of the fact that there are other models that seem to work for many. Models that would afford us a greater degree of freedom from state scrutiny are cast as dysfunctional and morally- wrong and this thread continues to weave as we discuss family building next. We will be engaging with the last line of the children's rhyme in the upcoming chapter. While the [Girl] shows up with the baby carriage following the marriage, we will be interrogating the idea that family building is equal to having children and what can be gained as we move away from this deterministic ideal.

The next chapter will build on this discussion of traditional marriage to discuss it's expected outcome, the nuclear family. If the new aristocracy is to be formed then babies are a necessary part of this equation. After all, we have to have three generations of eugenic marriage to build the 'ideal' society. Using podcasts and government statistics and other research, the upcoming chapter will discuss the way that we build kinship structures and attend to the sites of resistance to the nuclear family ideal.

The Baby Carriage

Introduction

"The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth"

- Proverb of unclear origin popularized by the movie *Black Panther*

"It takes a village to raise a child"

- Proverb of multiple origin points across the African continent and diaspora

"Who is in your family and how was it formed?"

- Emily McGranahan

The last quote is the opening question by Emily McGranahan who is the interviewer and narrator of the podcast, *Outspoken Voices: a podcast for LGBTQ+ families*. This way of asking about the makeup of one's family acknowledges that families come to be in a multiplicity of ways. As we get to the end of the children's rhyme, this chapter takes all of the previous discussions of race/sexuality/disability and eugenics/newgenics and brings them into conversation with family planning. I will argue that the nuclear family standard is deeply flawed and rooted in the white nationalist eugenic policies. Procreation under the conditions of capitalist and liberal/ neoliberal conditions is eugenic. Procreative family building excludes most queer, disabled, racialized people from this ideal and its overarching supremacy has to be dismantled if we are to create a world where queer racialized and disabled kin can thrive.

When thinking about how to contextualize this chapter, it was necessary to constantly

reframe my own thinking about the way that we, as a society understand family¹⁰⁰. As someone who is constantly asked “When are you going to have children?” or told that I should have at least one, I have a complicated relationship with the concept of family building not being informed by having biological offspring. I often joke that Guyanese people don’t have retirement plans; they have children. This joke is usually meant to offer commentary on a few facets of Guyanese society from my experiences growing up. The first of these being that due to a history of colonization, constant imperial intervention by the ABC countries¹⁰¹ and the mismanagement of ‘elected’ governments, many Guyanese of working age find themselves living below the poverty line and very few are able to properly plan or save for their old age. While government granted old age pension has been increased, it still cannot compete with the cost-of-living inflation and the only ones who are able to live off of their pensions usually have had a job that also offered a pension plan so they have multiple pension streams or some passive income that they are able to manage in their ‘retirement’. The result of this income inequality is that most older adults rely on the help of others, primarily their children, for care both financially and otherwise in their retirement years.

The second facet of this bit of commentary directly relates to that aspect of care. Usually when I am told, ‘you should have at least one child’ it is followed up with ‘otherwise, who will look after you when you get old?’ Culturally, there is the expectation that our children will look after us when we get older. It is expected that they will provide financial support or care if, and when, we need medical or other economic help (Miyawaki et al., 2023). In the event that I am physically unable to look after myself due to disability, then they would step in and care for me

¹⁰⁰ I flag this moment of reflection as the following discussion, more so than within the previous chapters, troubles the taken for granted ideologies within society and also interrogate my own taken for granted perceptions and how it might shape the way that I would engage with the material to be reviewed.

¹⁰¹ This is an acronym for the United States of America, Great Britain and Canada

in those ways. While the expectation was that the child would be the one providing that care, hiring care workers has now become a more acceptable option. The common thought process is that your parent provided this care for you as a child and it is now your turn to return the favour as a thank you of sorts for all of the good that they have done by raising you.

Returning this favour is of course heavily gendered as usually this care is the purview of the female child/ children or the wife of the married male child. It is at this point when the misogyny of ‘Mama’s baby, Daddy’s maybe’ becomes more expansive as choosing not to care for one’s mother is often met with more disapproval and derision than not caring for one’s father, especially if the father has not been particularly active in the child’s life. Essentially, my hypothetical child would be shamed for not caring for me in my retirement years, especially if that child was a girl. In this way there is a reproduction of intergenerational households where parents move in with their children and grandchildren in order to receive care and if the grandparent is capable, share in the housework or even babysitting the grandchildren. This intergenerational household can become fraught with feelings of gratitude and guilt if shifting roles and responsibilities are not managed correctly. In this moment we have parents who are used to running their own households having to defer to their children or children’s spouses on how they wish to run their households and this power struggle can cause tensions especially if the familial relationship was conditional and not very strong to begin with.

Therefore, my conceptions of family building or planning have always revolved around children, particularly having biological children because even though adoption happens formally and informally, it is seen as a last resort option. Further, there are sometimes undertones of illegitimacy of the familial relationship that permeate discussions of adoptees where the fact that the child is not biologically related to the parent is highlighted. This difference signalling is not always done maliciously, but there is always a seeming need to flag that the relationship is

different. So, I have had to check in with myself throughout the writing of this chapter to ensure that this belief is not presented as Truth. I had to ensure that this taken for granted idea was not presented as the default or foundational but instead something that is idealized and constructed. Having children is a worthwhile endeavor for those who wish to do this, and I also needed to ensure I didn't overcorrect and diminish this desire as being unnecessary or frivolous.¹⁰²

My other complicated feeling about family and family building is the way that culturally family is interlinked with identity. In the country community where my family hails from, my cousin and I would often get asked the question 'Who are you?' when we would visit our extended family for August vacation¹⁰³. This question, posed by virtual strangers was a confusing one at first as we would answer with our names and be met with a blank stare. They would then ask who our parents were, and at this point being citified kids, my cousin and I would start to get uneasy because, *stranger danger*. In spite of this, we would very reluctantly share our parents' names. Our training to be ultra respectful to adults would war with our fear that the strangers would use this information for some nefarious purpose, with the ingrained belief of respecting of one's elders winning out. However, being the small community that it was, someone would come along and catching the line of questioning would inform the inquisitor that we were in fact children of [blank], grandchildren of [blank], niece or cousin to [blank] and extended relations to [blank]. In this way, we were vetted and granted belonging to the village society. We were not simply individuals, but an extension of a lineage. In fact, who we were as individuals, especially children, was practically irrelevant outside of our familial relations. Understanding this context, we quickly learned to answer this question in the way it was meant. Of course, there is some

¹⁰² This is a reflexive note that links to footnote 95. My research rejects objectivity and the scientific method as it seeks to tell a different type of story/ history which means not reifying one version of truth over another, and instead places them in conversation with each other.

¹⁰³ I am using August Vacation instead of summer vacation because Guyana has a 3-semester school system that ends in July so we would only get August off for our break.

negotiation as we try to highlight relatives that the interrogator would have the most knowledge of, sometimes going as far as to attach a geographical biomarker. What I mean by this term is, sharing an address that marks ancestral land that has been in my family for generations to aid in the recognition of who I am.

This topic is complex for me as in addition to having a child for the potential caregiver role they will play; the idea of lineage is also invoked. The idea that I must continue the family line so that my child can one day add them to the lineage recitation as they answer the question ‘Who are you?’ The idea that without a child, my father’s line will end and that should be impetus enough for me to go forth and birth. Undercutting this belief system, is that my choice to not procreate is ultimately posed as a selfish one as after all I was birthed and why would I choose to not engage in this time-honoured process. I am always quick to remind the people raising those particular talking points that my father does in fact have other children who may choose to engage in birthing and raising kids. I remind them that my mother made her choice to have me and the notion of biological baton passing is not a real thing.

In spite of having these frustrating conversations about lineages, I loved answering the question of who I was with the recitation of my relations. I loved having myself placed within a complex web of people and places. It was a grounding experience that reminded me that even as I was myself, I was also a part of so much more. I was more than Angela, I was also Uncle Sam and Auntie Claire’s granddaughter, Baby¹⁰⁴ and Selwyn’s big¹⁰⁵ daughter, Julian’s great niece, family of Io from 42 Village etc. etc. etc. Ancestral grounding was a privilege I was/ am fortunate to have, as I often think of those who have a negative experience with this type of lineage; those who don’t want to be attached to these relations; those whose relations refuse that link to them.

¹⁰⁴ This is my mother’s nickname. She was the youngest of her siblings i.e. the baby of the family.

¹⁰⁵ Big in this instance signifies oldest within the common parlance.

What I note is that these folks create a lineage, it just looks a little different. They integrate those who have chosen to love them unconditionally in their web of relations. It is a fine line to walk where one retains one's individual identity but is also able to engage the individual as part of the collective.

This complex and nuanced web of relations and relationships and my complicated feelings expressed above is why I choose to think about family building as world building. I use the phrase world building as opposed to society or state building because I want to evoke a larger, grander, grandeur to think of the process of creating families. The way that we build kinship relations/ structures requires us to imagine futurity and lineages expansively, and understand what that looks like for us individually and collectively. It is an exercise in building the realities we want that allow us to live our best selves. The way that we have historically created families is largely connected to recreating those desirable traits discussed in the previous chapters.

Throughout this chapter I will argue that the nuclear family structure is constantly reaffirmed both overtly and covertly as the best version of the family structure or best world view to state futurity. Engaging with the concept of “desirable procreators” I will discuss the ways sterilization practices, which emerged out of eugenic ideals, are used to shape parenting and the compulsory aspect of reproduction for some individuals over others, thus constructing idealized families and even states. It is this construction that is concerned with one's bloodline dying out that then hyper focuses state, religious and other reproductive coercive means to ensure that it does not. Through these discussions we can understand why societies view having offspring as integral to the lineages and necessary for building communities while at the same time overlaying an individualistic nuclear ideal that removes much of which is necessary to give these offspring the village they need to thrive.

The nuclear ideal privileges individuals of the upper and middle classes, while erasing

marginalized communities, (read: queer, crip, racialized, poor, communities), for whom this ideal is neither feasible nor preferred. Queer folks have created families of choice, such as Houses in Ball culture, and many racialized, feminist and crip communities have either created intergenerational/ extended households or have these family structures embedded within cultural practice. These familial organizations have often been intentionally created to shelter those who fall outside of the ideal citizen, i.e., that perfect child who will grow up to reproduce the state. In this way, I hope to create a discussion where we can decide as a collective or village that perhaps we need to burn down the structures that create insider/ outsider groups and actually allow for us all to thrive. Where we can recontextualize our web of relations to encompass ourselves more fully; where we can think of families as being formed through a process of worldbuilding; when the worlds we build are for all kin not just the ones who can assimilate us to the normative rights-based frameworks.

The Nuclear Family as the Ideal

“Blood is thicker than water”

- Popular saying

Parenthood is deemed to be a natural offshoot to marriage. The belief is that if you get married, the next logical step is familial expansion through pregnancy and subsequent birth(s) to finally make it off of Chen’s (2021) relationship escalator. Ideological wisdom states that this outcome must occur naturally i.e. with sperm and egg from the couple through the appropriate expressions of sex (McLaren, 1990), and if pregnancy fails to occur naturally, then availing yourself to all

assistive technologies that exists is the next step¹⁰⁶, and in the event that this extra step does not accomplish the task, then adoption is considered a viable option (Cregeen, 2022). After all, a community or nation cannot exist if there are only two individuals. With a reproductive futurity ideology that is obsessed with patrilineal lineages, paternity has to be easy to trace (Spillers, 1987). It is no surprise then that within this idea, that marriage inevitably leads to parenthood, that some individuals as well as any cultural beliefs that belie this proposed ideal, become classified as un/ desirable for child rearing. One only needs to look at the ways that single parents or those who practice non monogamy, polyamory, polygamy etc. are constructed as unfit parents or even sometimes a danger to the children in their care to see the truth of this viewpoint (Hazeldean, (2021; Moors & Ramos, 2022; Wall, 2021). In as much as parenthood is perceived as a gift or blessing, it is often obscured how much work child rearing is and who is expected to do this work¹⁰⁷. Moreover, the ways that individuals are constructed as good or bad parents shift as we take into consideration race, gender, sexual orientation, and class.

Within the imaginary of North America, a particular idea of the family emerged after the second world war. This imaginary, one of the male bread- winner, stay- at- home mother, 2.5 kids with a pet, often erases the racialized and classed nature represented. Movies and shows of this era paint a White, middle-class picture. This representation indicates to the viewing public that there is one ideal and functional version of the family. This is a version that has been protected through policy, the media imaginary as well as some major religious entities under the guise of

¹⁰⁶ There is broadly a dualism at play when it comes to using assistive technology for reproduction. On the one hand there is some stigma attached to this because of the narratives we have around infertility, primarily for women as womanhood becomes tied to fertility and being able to birth offspring (Carson et al., 2021; Karmoukos, 2024). While on the other hand there is the Chistian belief that life begins at conception which makes one of the potential processes of assistive reproduction i.e. the destruction of unused embryos, incompatible with religious belief and therefore there is an additional type the stigma of being unable to have one's own child (McLaren, 1990, pg. 87) as there is no other option.

¹⁰⁷ Statistics Canada (2021) noted that women still did most of the child care although the gap appeared to be lessening. This was echoed in the 2023 research conducted in the United States by Pew Research center.

protecting the children. As seen through our discussion of marriage this particular ideal is the natural culmination of a traditional marriage. With children being the primary purpose of marital sexual relations, couples are encouraged to build family units deemed incomplete without the pitter patter of little feet (McLaren, 1990, pp. 53-55).

This imaginary coincided with the campaign to return women back to the home. During the war efforts, women were usually expected to do their part, which included working outside of the home even in non- feminized industries¹⁰⁸ such as in factories or on farms. With the men returning, there needed to be jobs created for them so women in these workplaces became a bit of a hindrance, especially for married women who were expected to turn their focus to their marriage and households (Mcdermott, 2023; Striking Women, n. d.). Further as we have seen in the previous chapters, when there are times of physical, social and economic upheaval societies have a tendency to engage in stricter population control measures. With the end of the war came mass movements of persons impacted by the realities of war which led to mass migration. Similarly, shifting geopolitical realities means that economic standing is up for grabs and in the era of industrialization and innovations, the race to the top requires a change in how we do work and who does what type of labour. So, we start to see women being encouraged to seek out marriage as a way to elevate their status instead of status elevation through their own hard work. By this I mean that women were encouraged to reclaim their heterosexual feminine status by doing their familial duties (McEuen, 2016, pg. 13). Further with limited ways for a single woman to support herself and access material goods, they were strongly encouraged to go to the marriage mart. Additionally, the “marriage bar”, which referred to the practice of employers firing single women when they got married and refusing to hire married women at all, clearly reminded

¹⁰⁸ These were professions like nursing and switchboard operator and later secretarial jobs

women of their place in society (Goldin, 1988). As a result, there starts to be a clearer line on the types of work appropriate for women where nursing and teaching or even secretarial and switchboard operator roles are similar enough to caregiving/ child rearing, service and subordinate gentle jobs that were deemed acceptable. Childrearing, caregiving and keeping the house become intrinsic to heterosexual womanhood and femininity as opposed to simply expected. While work outside of the home i.e. ‘breadwinning’ or ‘bringing home the bacon so his wife can fry it up’ becomes intrinsic to manhood and masculinity (Thistle, 2006, pg. 48). Marriage and the nuclear family are sold as a way for women to leave the labour force and engage their true, natural feminine selves and become home makers. This “revival of domesticity” constructs specific forms of masculinity and femininity (Adams, 1997, pg. 94).

In fact, it was this so-called biological imperative that drove eugenicists, particularly ‘feminist eugenicists’, to invest into the science of building or breeding a better society. Since mothering was intrinsic to a woman, it was necessary for eugenicists that only those who embodied ‘fitness’ be able to reproduce, and those who did not embody ‘fitness’, disincentivized or forced out of the reproductive gene pool. The latter was done in a myriad of ways from sex education campaigns that targeted youth (McLaren, 1990, pg. 69), to correction when these young people were considered to be contravening the heterosexual expectations (McLaren, 1990, pg. 71), to medical experimentation, torture and sterilization of those deemed unfit within those strict parameters (McLaren, 1990, pg. 71; Ordovery, 2003, pg. 76).

For Margaret Sanger and her supporters, it was imperative that “the ‘fit’...have large families in service to race and nation” (Ordovery, pg.140). Naturally, if the ‘fit’ are expected to have large families, those perceived to be unfit should have their fertility curbed. While it was quite easy to dream up ways to prevent those considered unfit from having children, it was harder to incentivise the middle- class couples and women especially to have larger families. This

recommendation was particularly difficult to enforce as scientific breakthroughs in the realm of birth control emerged.

In Canada feminism was cast as the scapegoat that “lured women away from their natural duties as wives and mothers toward the professional world of men” (McLaren, pg.79). Helen MacMurchy, doctor and Ontario’s 1913 Inspector of the Feeble- Minded, is quoted as saying ““Those who marry but voluntarily refuse parenthood are robbing themselves of their greatest joy, and are failing to serve the highest interests of their country and generation”” (McLaren, pg.79). Much like the discourse around polygamy, use of contraception became the driving force of criminality due to the denial of one’s natural urges. Only in this case, women were the unintended immoral and criminal actors, with the personal choice to take birth control being pathologized.

One incentive started by Manitoba in 1916 was providing mother’s pensions. While initially for the poor, this compensation was extended as support for ‘fit’ women to remove themselves from “the masculine world of labour...returning them to “their more important work” of breeding” (McLaren pg.80-81). This idea was implemented across the western provinces and similar mothers’ allowance schemes would be present across all provinces by 1930. However, even these incentives, appeals to motherly nature and encouragement to do their share for the state was not doing enough to drive up the number of appropriate births. To this end, the need to control the use of birth control became the next step in the fight with the medical officer of health in Toronto, Charles Hastings, declaring that ““...an intelligent birth control...should be under the control of the medical profession, the legal profession, and the clergy.”” (McLaren, pg.81). The women and couples making decisions about their bodies and family planning could not be trusted to do their duties. As a result, this shift to having a governing body for birth control would have a sustained legacy in the intervening years as this ‘science, law and religion knows best’ approach

would be operationalized through sterilization campaigns, sterilization boards, as well as their newgenic iterations of prescribing birth control solutions to disabled women without their informed consent.

While it is easy to point to the ways that these eugenic decisions targeted White middle-class families, it is important to note that within the Black middle class generally, and Black middle-class feminists, specifically, this type of positive and negative eugenics was popular (Roberts, 1997, pg. 82). When we talk about eugenicists wanting to create a new aristocracy, we must always remember that class assimilationists are not impervious to these theories. In particular, this notion of birth control and family management was attractive to those who believed that this scientific breakthrough would improve the African American race (Roberts, 1997, pg. 85). Thelma Berlack Boozer, noted activist and columnist for the *New York Amsterdam News* argued that “reproductive control could resolve many of the social problems facing the race and society at large” (Nuriddin, 2017). Nuriddin quoting Boozer from her 1934 piece titled *Birth Control Gains Sanction* states, “[m]ore well-born babies, fewer ill-born babies, and sterilization of those unfit to become parents will aid society in solving some of its major problems” (Ibid). This sentiment about Black exceptionalism was echoed by many activists at the time who were concerned with the state of African American society like W. E. B. Du Bois, Rebecca Stiles Taylor etc. It strongly echoes the respectability politics that underpin ‘we are just like you’ narratives that are used by marginalized groups in order to become legible to the white supremacist state apparatus. It posits that to care about African American futurity, one must make the best decision in choosing a potential partner for the sake of potential offspring and until individuals were educated and elevated enough to make the appropriate decisions about their own reproduction, then sterilization and forced or coerced birth control needed to be deployed.

Finley posits that the structure of the nuclear family is a colonial system of violence (pg.

32). This appetite for violence can be seen in the way that Indigenous family structures were dismantled to make way for traditional monogamous marriage and also the nuclear family that was expected from this type of marriage. This violence continues to be evident as we discuss state sanctioned coercive reproductive control that Black and Indigenous women face today. The involuntary sterilization of women in California's correctional facilities and the sterilizations of Indigenous women in BC, Manitoba and Quebec under threat of either having their children removed from their care, promises of a successful welfare application, or even medical professionals obtaining 'consent' while these women were still anaesthetized brings to mind the "Mississippi appendectomy" (Ordovery, pg. xxvi). This procedure so named for the state that it was popularized in, relied on the lack of informed consent of women who were in the carceral or other state institutions, to ensure compliance. These women would go into the operation expecting to have an appendectomy and come out with a tubal ligation, hysterectomy or other procedure, depending on the institution or jurisdiction. In both the historical and contemporary timelines, a determination was made about the fitness of these women to be good parents as well as what their family should look like, specifically, how many children was acceptable for them to have and/or rear.

In 2015 while travelling back to Canada on a Caribbean Airlines flight I was seated next to an older countryman¹⁰⁹. It should be stated that this man was Indo- Guyanese, meaning his ancestors were East Indian¹¹⁰, likely brought over by the British as indentured labourers. We got to talking about family. I mentioned to him that I lived with my dad, and was raised with my paternal family. He expressed surprise and mentioned that 'it was rare 'cause a lot of those guys

¹⁰⁹ I am Guyanese. Both myself and the passenger boarded at the airport in Guyana.

¹¹⁰ Within Guyanese culture East Indian refers to those who were brought over from what is now India as indentured labourers. East India/n is of course juxtaposed with West India/n due to European faulty navigation that led them to believe they were in India when they were in fact in what is now the Caribbean. I will be using these constructs nonetheless as they contextualize this story.

don't stick around to raise their kids' all while giving me a knowing look. The "*those guys*" he was referring to in his statement were Black men, or specifically Afro Guyanese men. At this point I feel the need to situate myself socially and contextually. I am a mixed-race Guyanese woman, a 'douglar' woman, if you will. 'Douglar'¹¹¹ in Guyanese parlance refers to someone of mixed Afro (African) and Indo (East Indian) Guyanese parentage. Being this particular mix and presenting with my sometimes-ambiguous phenotype, I have often had Guyanese individuals of those two ethnic groups believe that they can state negative opinions of the other to me without repercussions and with the belief that I share their opinions. So, while I had heard the term, mommy's baby, daddy's maybe¹¹², I never thought someone would apply this principle to my own family, at least not to my face in such a casual manner. It reminded me of being asked by the Canadian officer at the Embassy when I went in to uplift my permanent resident visa which would see me moving to Canada to live with my father, whether I had taken a DNA test. My response of 'no' saw him drawing his head back in surprise as he went to check that my passport and visa were ready. In this instance, it made sense seeing as Canadian immigration policy is notoriously strict when it comes to the reunification of families, oftentimes rejecting applications if the paperwork showing legitimate relationships are in any way faulty and even when the paperwork is in order, a child's ill health or disability can be cause for rejection. 'Mommy's baby, daddy's maybe' has stuck with me in the intervening years because it is one that is often repeated about Black men in North America. I had never heard this sentiment applied in the same way to Afro- Guyanese men, at least not to my face, or in my social circles, as growing up,

¹¹¹ The term was adapted as a derogatory epithet used to specifically describe and denigrate progeny of Indo-Afro mixed-race heritage; a common place occurrence that resulted, as previously noted, when Indians voyaged to the Caribbean as indentured plantation workers (Barratt & Ranjitsingh, 2021).

¹¹² This phrase stems from the fact that mothers who birth babies cannot repudiate their offspring in the same way that their fathers who provide sperm can and illuminates the way paternity is often called into question when pregnancy occurs.

paternity denial was not something deemed intrinsic to Afro-Guyanese men but to Guyanese men in general¹¹³. Governmental documents that chart this particular belief can be seen in 1945, within the *Report of the West India Royal Commission* also known as *The Moyne Report*. Chapter XI of the Moyne Report states that fathers could evade paternity and the “application of legislation under which he would be made financially responsible for his illegitimate children...” (pg. 220) and linked this to the rise in promiscuity and lack of permanent cohabitation or marriage between parents.

The root of this gentleman’s statement locates a failure to parent within Black men in a way that presupposes that there is something about Blackness and the way it *shows up* in men that makes one an inherently bad or absent parent/ father and a failure to form a strong Black family. It presupposes that parenthood/ fatherhood needs to and must look a specific way in order to be successful. It takes all of the eugenic ideals about Blackness and transforms it into one’s capacity for parenthood and specifically fatherhood. Moreover, it continues to enforce a racialized, classed and gendered family structure. Spillers (1987) views this structure as a dominant feature of the master class (pg. 75). This structure ignores any alternate familial structures created under oppressive systems by deeming them less worthy. This reification relies on ignoring alternative ideas of kinship and kinship structures that emerged under the hegemony of the nuclear family for the survival of those who could not or were barred from creating anything that approximated this ideal, even if they wanted to.

In as much as this man’s comments and the racist ideas that underpin it, say something

¹¹³ Chapter XXV of the Moyne Report notes that “illegitimate birth rate was always very high, standing to-day between 60 per cent and 70 percent.” (The Royal Commission 1935- 1938) and noted in chapters prior that there was a breakdown in family values, which led to a breakdown in social standards. This belief seems to have held true to the contemporary setting of my youth, and as Harrison (2011) notes, this indictment stands only within a strict understanding of family/ family values i.e. the nuclear family ideal and does not take into account other types of family values like that of the intergenerational family.

about fatherhood, it assumes something about motherhood as well. It assumes that Black motherhood, in particular, is either done as an endeavor of singlehood as in the trope of the single Black mother or she is partnered with someone of a different race, since it is alleged that ‘black men never stick around’ (Family Story Report, 2020; Roberts, 1997; Spillers, 1987). And often this representation is the diet of television that we are exposed to that constructs non-Black women who have children with Black women as unwitting dupes who now become single parent statistics. It harkens back to the anti- miscegenation theories about Black men and their uncontrollable lusts who seek to despoil the pure version of womanhood with White women occupying the top of the desirability pyramid. For this gentleman, it would be the Indo Guyanese women that occupy this pinnacle as even within the Guyanese context many families still repudiate relationships between Afro and Indo Guyanese people generally and Afro Guyanese men and Indo Guyanese women specifically. Admittedly, this attitude is changing but pockets of this ideology still continue to permeate society as the two main political parties continue to stoke race wars among the two groups thereby shoring up white supremacist, eugenicist understandings of race left over from the former colonial/ imperial masters¹¹⁴ (Bissessar, 2017; Gomes, 1979; Smith, 1971). The international project of eugenics continues to persist in spite of its assumed fall from favour post WWII.

In a similar vein, we can see that queerness as well becomes a hindrance to approximating this idealized version of the family as queer people regardless of their relationship status continue to be denied adoptions. Further, it wasn’t until birth registration forms changed to allow for there

¹¹⁴ Distinctions about the innate behaviors of East Indian and Negro populations are also raised in *The Moyne Report* with characterizations of East Indians as “...economical in his habits...fond of saving money...” (pg. 17), and “the negro ...is disinclined to continuous labor...careless as to the future...excitable and difficult to manage, especially in large numbers...” (pg. 17). These stereotypes, along with the deliberate separation of the labour forces on plantations following the abolition of slavery, in addition to the subsequent creation of racial community enclaves, have conspired to reinforce colonial stereotypes of each race as is seen through this man’s statements.

to be parent 1 and parent 2 as opposed to mother and father, that queer couples could be considered to both be the parents of the child (Epstein, 2005, pg. 9). Often the biological parent or parent whose genetic material was used, would sign the form and the non biological parent would have to adopt the child, termed “second- parent adoptions” (Ibid), in cases where surrogacy or other assistive technologies were used. This convoluted process was the only way to ensure that that parent would be the one raising the child in the event that something happened to the bio- parent (*Bottoms v. Bottoms*, 1995; Kendell, 2003; Laviertes, 2023). The state clearly is not as invested in its commitment to the children as it would have us believe, as children continue to be removed from Black and Indigenous women on various manufactured grounds.¹¹⁵

The podcast series, by Family Equality, showed the ways that queerness complicates, and is complicated by, the idealized family structure. In the episodes, *Parenting is Political*, *LGBTQ+ Adoption & Foster Families*, *Listening to Adoptees* and *Donor Conceived Queerspawns*, the host discusses with the interviewees the fact that parenting is very political and the ways that queer folk construct their families are no exception. Throughout these discussions, each of the interviewees note that their families just existing, is radical, whether that be the blended family, or the couple with adopted kids.

For those who have expanded their family through adoption, they note that there is a privileging of White adoptive parents (Listening to Adoptees, 15:30- 16:16) that can mitigate some of the queer panic that is part and parcel of the adoption journey. For all of the interviewees however, there is a deep concern about raising Black or racialized children as a White parent. The overrepresentation of racialized children in care systems and the costs associated with adoption means that there are often more White prospective parents who do not have the cultural

¹¹⁵ Indigenous children are in foster care at a 2.6 %higher rate than the child population. For Black children it is 2.2% higher (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016; Children’s Bureau Express, 2020).

competence to raise these racialized children. This can lead to racism and racist micro aggressions in the home unless parents take the time to educate themselves properly and foster race specific communities for their offspring.

For these children as well as other queerspawn¹¹⁶ there is pressure of respectability or ‘poster child syndrome’ where you and your family become a stand-in for all queer families. As Mo and Jasmine state,

Jasmine: ...for queer families, or families that fall outside of that [nuclear] standard, we will never match up. We were set up to fail from the very beginning...

Emily (Host): Queerspawn, people with LGBTQ parents feel pressure to, to uphold that perfectionism. We have to be happy; our family has to be healthy and happy and we have to be doing great in order to like prove something.

Mo: Right, and so much social pressure of hide what’s happening because if they see queer folks can’t keep it together, it will prove that we didn’t deserve to be a family in the first place or that we shouldn’t have been given the right to marriage. But listen heterosexual people have been jacking up the institution of marriage for far longer on the books so uh, if anything, I feel like we’re improving it and expanding the definitions and boundaries of love and what makes up family.

The assimilative ‘we are like you’ narrative simply does not work for queer families as queer exceptionalism is the expectation. This is something Rachel Epstein noted in her 2005 article

¹¹⁶ An identity term used by youth and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer parents/guardians. It is often used to articulate one’s connection to queer community and claim a space in it.

while reflecting on her fifteen years of experience as a queer researcher and organizer and it has been echoed by many researchers like Valverde (2006), Kouri- Towe (2012), Aydemir, 2022 and others and most importantly, these sentiments are echoes throughout the podcast narratives. Further, when adoptees are brought into families there is an additional expectation of gratitude where these children are supposed to be grateful for being saved from care systems. The race disparity tends to make these adoptions seem like it is feeding into the White saviour trope. As Schai from the *Listen to Adoptees* episode puts it, sometimes “Love is not enough” especially in the case of transracial adoptions. Sometimes even the most well meaning queer White parents can allow their misconceptions of the level of homophobia in racialized communities to stop them from integrating their children into their respective communities of color. This misconception means that these children can face an alienation of a very important aspect of their identities.

We can see that the state is clearly not as interested in whether the parent is hardworking or loving. Instead, what seems to be the primary concern is that these parents are not White, heterosexual, wealthy or middle- class people who perform parenthood in the appropriate ways (Cenat et al., 2021; Drake, 2024). What becomes hidden are the ways in which this ideal is used to decimate and delegitimize family structures of BIPOC communities. Hortense Spillers’ seminal piece *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book* (1987) chronicles the fallout felt by the Black community in the USA following the Moynihan Report. She argues that that this report produced lies as Truth that are still handed down today such as the myth of the absent Black father as a determinant of criminality, even as this status has been debunked ¹¹⁷. It also produced the narrative of the welfare queen who was a Black woman who had multiple children with multiple men, and having no active father in sight who was dependent on state

¹¹⁷ A 2003 study by the US Department of Health and Human Services showed that this statement was false and that black men were engaged with their offspring even in cases where they were no longer married to the mother.

welfare to take care of herself and the children (Roberts, 1997, pp. 17-19). These myths gained permanence during the so called ‘War on Drugs’ declared during the Nixon era and continued through to the Clinton era and they have not been shaken from the North American imaginary in spite of the many studies that show that they are inaccurate (Roberts, 1997, pg. 19, Family Story Report, 2020). More insidious, is that these myths that define Black men and women as unfit parents demand state intervention, since race once again becomes inextricably linked with criminality.

Likewise, the notion that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ was replaced by the traditional nuclear family structure and values as this insular and independent unit became the standard. It is an improbable structure as unless one parent is staying at home, this unit will have to rely on some form of care outside of the home, whether that is a trusted adult such as a nanny, babysitter or grandparent or a daycare/ pre- school set up. Those of the wealthier classes have always been able to share the duties of childcare with hired care workers, many of whom have been BIPOC women. This care work usually highlights a bit of irony where racialized women are at once trusted to care for their charges even as their own motherhood is questioned.

Beyond this, the shift toward the insular model of the nuclear family also disqualifies some disabled people from the structure of parenthood. As many disabled parents may rely on support staff, family or assistive tech during their day-to-day life, their parenting style will not look the same as the traditional nuclear model. As noted in the previous chapters, there is a fatalistic undercurrent to the discussion of disabled parents, not to mention that there has been significant work done by the state and their own parents to ensure that disabled people do not procreate. This has not stopped disabled people from becoming parents, however, and as we will discuss later in this chapter, it is precisely this purported disqualification of requesting and requiring external help that make disabled parents good and successful parents.

In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act banned Chinese immigration, specifically Chinese women immigrants, at the same time that European immigration was exploding. This act was the most significant immigration in U.S. history. In 1942, approximately 110,000 Japanese people were forcibly interned in the United States, losing their homes and businesses, in Canada this number was around 21, 000. While the Indian Act of 1876 in Canada regulated the marriage of Indigenous peoples to confer lines of descent, property, and landholding to men, even though most societies were matrilineal (Barker 2008; Simpson 2008). Furthermore, across the United States and Canada, boarding schools removed Native children from their homes, aiming to both sever their ties with their families and home communities and to destroy the transfer of Indigenous identity, politics, and culture to the next generations. Called residential schools, this process to "kill the Indian in him, and save the man"¹¹⁸ attempted to mold Native children into Western gender identity and gender roles, often subjected them to physical and sexual violence (Arvin et. al, 2013, p. 15; Starblanket, 2017). These interventions made it so that family structure for these groups were reshaped to fit with the White, heterosexual, middle class imaginary. The last residential school closed in 1996 in Canada. Each of these racist laws, policies and measures exemplify the implementation of a structure that shifted the family ideology to one of inheritance, specifically patrilineal- needing to ensure that things are passed in this line of succession- while positioning White people as the sovereigns who would usher in the true/ good family structure. Not only were people prevented from creating the families they wanted, their eventual 'freedom'

¹¹⁸ This phrase was said by Captain R. H. Pratt in 1892 in a speech delivered during the National Conference of Charities and Correction in Denver Colorado (Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, n.d.; Sniderman, 2013). It has been attributed to Duncan Campbell Scott who ran the residential school system in Canada at its peak (Facing History & Ourselves Canada, 2020; Abley, 2013). It is important to note that while he did not utter those exact words, he did in fact say "I want to get rid of the Indian problem...Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic..." (Facing History & Ourselves Canada, 2020). These beliefs led to the mandate of residential schools across North America being explicitly about "killing the Indian in the Child" (Marty, 2018; Facing History & Ourselves Canada, 2019).

would force them to accede to the state's understanding of how they should think, act and be and this forced assimilation would include how they formed families.

“In 2021, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7% of children under 15 but for more than half (53.8%) of all foster children. Among all children in Canada under 15, Indigenous children were about 14 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in foster care (3.2% and 0.2%, respectively)” (Vanier Institute, 2024)

These statistics bear a startling similarity to the Sixties Scoop that saw Indigenous children, especially those with one White/European descended parent, removed from their homes and placed with White, middle- class families to assimilate them into that culture. This overrepresentation in foster care systems is being referred to as a ‘Millennial Scoop’ (CBC Radio, 2018) and advocates are fighting for a complete restructuring to combat the anti-Indigenous foundational principles at the core of the foster care system¹¹⁹. And even as Canada has issued apologies and are currently supposed to be going through a reconciliation process to address the cultural genocide committed by the government against First Nations communities, much is still left to be desired when it comes to Canada and its relationship to First Nations peoples, and other racialized communities. This is especially true as we await the rulings in the involuntary sterilization class action lawsuits¹²⁰ such as the one in Saskatchewan (NPR, 2018) and corrections to the overrepresentation of Indigenous and Black children in foster care that feeds into the ideology that Indigenous and Black families and mothers are unfit and unsafe.

If masculinity and femininity are tied to one's ability to be a desired parent then the way that men and women of colour are juxtaposed to their White counterparts will always show these

¹¹⁹ The Federal court approved a \$23 billion settlement agreement for First Nations children and families who experienced racial discrimination through Ottawa's foster care/ family care systems (Major & Stefanovich, 2023).

¹²⁰ Lawyers, Alisa Lombard and Koskie Minsky are representing women of Saskatchewan (Senate of Canada, 2019) and Alberta (Minsky, 2018).

parents as wanting. Moreover, the way that the cultures of these individuals often conflict with the individualism of the ‘ideal’ family puts them at odds with state institutions. This conflict directly ties into the way that the reproduction of these communities is surveilled and contravened. This is done in both tangible and intangible ways.

Alternatives to the Nuclear Ideal

“The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb”

- Medieval saying

“The concept of ‘family’ within the Family Camera Network takes many forms. During the CLGA phase of the project, family is being defined as broadly as the LGBTQ2+ community participants conceive it to be for themselves. In Canada our understanding of family continues to proliferate with various types of family structures, partnerships, and marriages, transnational adoptions, or dislocations due to migration for example. Our family photos trace these expansions in unique and important ways.”

- Introductory Blog Post for the CLGA and the Family Camera Network

Families of Choice: Queer Families/ Queering the Family

The mistranslation of the medieval saying above to erase the importance of covenant ties, to simply be “blood is thicker than water”, has often been used to justify the behaviours of blood relatives. Often these are negative behaviours that we are told that we should accept because ‘at the end of the day, that’s your father, mother, sibling, or other family member’. We are told to

prioritize these relationships above all others often to the detriment of ourselves, and to always give actions done by these relations the benefit of the doubt. However, the complete saying tells a different story. It argues that the blood of the womb or our biological family, is not a superior relationship by virtue of sharing DNA, referring to it as water. Instead, it is our chosen connections or covenants, that create a superior relationship. It is in our intentional commitments to others that we affirm and reaffirm, through our actions that really constitutes family. Using this adage as scaffolding, I will discuss how we create strong ties through these commitments or covenants to survive and thrive.

Family in Canada has changed and evolved from the nuclear ideal with family size decreasing over the last decade as seen in the 2021 census (Statistics Canada, 2022). As noted in the previous chapter, there is an increase in common law relationships in both the United States and Canada, and these couples may or may not have children. There are more single parent households as well as blended families, step families, and grand families (Kramer, 2019; Livingston, 2018; The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2024; United States Census Bureau, 2021). Additionally, there are more adults living with their parents either due to economics or for assuming caretaking roles (Pew Research Center, 2010; The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2024). There is also a rise in couples choosing not to have or adopt offspring (Hurst, 2024, Minkin et al., 2024). All this to say that what constitutes family across North America has been shifting for a while in spite of law, social pressures and economics that favour the nuclear ideal. Heading up these alternative family structures are usually queer, racialized and disabled people who find that the nuclear ideal does not align with their politics or ability to thrive.



- Image # 23: Better Baby Certificate from Mrs. Frank DeGarmo Papers, Ms.1879. University of Tennessee, Knoxville — Libraries



- Image #24: Mothers and babies gather for a "Better Baby Contest" in Minnesota in 1920. © Minnesota Historical Society / Corbis via Getty Images

As we have discussed in the previous section, there is a heteronormative foundation of the nuclear ideal and what constitutes a fit parent, child and family. These foundational principles

were heavily promoted through fitness contests and exhibitions that were held at state fairs and other events as seen in the two images above. Within this ideal is also a religious underpinning that directly affects how people perceive their own offspring in relation to fitness. This type of projection emerges as soon as couples find out that ‘they’ are pregnant. Pregnancy becomes a bit of a spectator sport with many parties weighing in on how to get the best outcome. Of course, what is best is dependent on who is offering advice. For birthing people, there is a battery of tests and actions that are recommended¹²¹ depending on those test results. In the time of these fitness tests, other than the racist and classist reasoning for these tests, there was a very real worry about infant mortality¹²²; White infant mortality primarily, but infant mortality nonetheless. Individuals like Mary DeGarmo, whose papers the first image of a better baby certificate comes from, were concerned about this mortality rate and thought that creating a criterion for a fit child would help to promote child wellness. This idea spread with the “Better Babies Bureau” coming up with a scorecard to greenlight this pseudo- scientific notion of “healthy babies, standardized babies, and always, year after year, *Better Babies.*” (Uenuma, 2019).

This preoccupation with a standardized, healthy baby made fertile ground for the application of the amniocentesis or amnio, an in-utero test for Rh-factor incompatibility as standard practice. This test is used to check for incompatibilities between birthing parent and foetuses, which can cause complications thus reducing the viability of the foetus. Complications from this incompatibility can range from anemia to jaundice or even enlarged organs. However, the way that this test has been used since the 2010s is to check for chromosomal or neurological

¹²¹ It is understood that birthing people are expected to have checkups, bloodwork and other tests where/ when possible, to ensure that the fetus and parent are healthy.

¹²² There was a real issue with high incidences of Venereal Diseases across the public and this was linked to high infant mortality rates (Ordovery, 2003; Roberts, 1997; McLaren, 1990). It is for this reason that couples had to have blood tests completed prior to marriage to ensure that they were not passing on any diseases that would result in miscarriage or infant death. It should be noted that the discourse around this testing was heavily anti- sex worker and ableist (Gutoskey, 2023).

conditions, and in some cases, gender (Dyrbye, n.d.). In this way people are able to, and many times encouraged by medical professionals and others, to engage in selective abortion of those fetuses that present with Down Syndrome, spina bifida or as female (Jones, 2020; Wakeman, 2018; Newport, 2018; Urquia et al., 2016). The latter is seen as negative in countries with specific gender policies that privilege male children. This reality supports an idea that there is an element of fitness ascribed to the foetus. The application of this testing and the medico- socio-economic recommendations prove that although the nuclear ideal requires children, it only seeks to encourage the birth of certain children. One only needs to look at the popularization of gender reveal parties (Gieseler, 2018; Jack, 2020; Nahata, 2017) and the reactions of the parents and loved ones at these events to see that even in countries without laws or social policies that favour one gender over another, there is sometimes deep disappointment when the blue or pink confetti/ smoke/ cake is revealed. This is defined as gender disappointment (Frost, 2024; Jayarajah, 2023) and refers to “subjective feelings of sadness when discovering the sex/gender of a child is the opposite of what the parent had hoped or expected” (Jayarajah, 2023, pg. 1). Automatically there is something valuable about the ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ the blue and pink denotes respectively. Not only is there an assumption of genitals = gender, there is also an invented behaviour, personality and relationship that comes with that presumed gender. We can watch the digital conversations about ‘boy moms’¹²³ and ‘girl dads’¹²⁴ to see this value system play out (Hall et al., 2023). At once this foetus is not simply valuable to the continuity enterprise, they become particularly valued for how they will reproduce relationships that the ‘family’ deems appropriate (Nahata, 2017;

¹²³ A term of dubious origins that has been popularized across social media platforms to refers to a “parent [mom] who is perceived as being overly fixated on their [her] male children, often to the detriment of other female children or people in their lives” (Walrath- Holdridge, 2024).

¹²⁴ Another term popularized online, can be broadly defined as “...working to make the world better for your girls. A girl dad plays princesses, does hair, and gives manicures...there’s nothing we could teach our sons that we can’t teach to our daughters, but there is a lot that our daughters can teach us.” (Nance, 2021)

Newport, 2018). What is also understood in this moment is that failure to engage in these relationships in the expected ways will result in disappointment, and for the child that emerges while the idea of unconditional love is popularized, conditional love is more the reality.

Nowhere is this conditional love more prevalent than when we talk about queer, racialized and disabled offspring. We see continuous abuses meted out to these children that range from abusive therapeutic interventions that queer¹²⁵ (Campbell et al., 2023; Higbee et al., 2022; Human Rights Campaign, n.d.) and some disabled children (Leaf et al., 2022; Shkedy et al. 2021) are exposed to in order to cure them and make them more (hetero) normative¹²⁶, i.e. fit in with the rest of the kids, to the non medical interventions such as skin lightening or hair straightening measures for racialized children to ensure that they can assimilate to the dominant beauty standards (Clare, 2017, pp. 77- 78). For this reason, we see folks from these communities forming chosen families and creating those covenants of care to create that village that they do not have inherently. These new families may approximate a nuclear ideal, however, only up to a point.

One such example is Queer Houses. When I talk about Queer Houses, I am referring to both those physical homes and spaces that house queer youth who have been displaced by their families of origin as well as Houses in contemporary ballroom culture. Often the two are interlinked as historically those who participated as a House in ballroom culture have also lived together. House/ Ball communities refer to primarily “a community and network of Black and Latina/men, and transgender women and men who are lesbian, gay, straight, and queer.” (Bailey, 2011, pg. 367). Revitalized in the 1960s after breaking away from the racist ‘mainstream’ drag

¹²⁵ Conversion Therapy became illegal in Canada in 2022.

¹²⁶ An important note is that one of the pioneers of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), a controversial treatment/therapy for autistic individuals/ youth commonly used today, O. Ivar Lovass, was also a proponent of “behaviour modification to treat young boys who displayed feminine characteristics” (Shkedy et al., 2021, pg. 127).

balls, this new ball culture provided a safe space for people to express their sexuality and gender and gender expression. It filled a familial void for those who had been kicked out of their biological family units, as well as those who had to and were able to repress their queerness to maintain a tenuous connection with their biological families. This space and the people within, for some ball participants, were their only source of family, (Herzog and Rollins, 2012, pg. 9), with members providing the same types of emotional, financial and other resources and support for each other.

This emergence and subsequent revitalization were occurring alongside the civil rights movement in the United States. As such, there were conflicts between the two factions with civil rights leaders condemning and attacking Black queer culture. Again, we see the trouble with assimilative propaganda. By relying on a ‘we are just like you’ narrative to claim rights and humanity, these leaders believed that by suppressing this supposed outlying behaviour, more acceptance could be gained from the dominant white supremacist powers that be. Buckner notes, “The African-American working class more openly accepted and showcased homosexual behavior compared to the Black middle class. “Black homosexuals came to represent all the elements of African American working-class culture that civil rights leaders identified as obstacles to the attainment of citizenship.” (Buckner, 2024). This statement emphasizes the trouble with creating single issue claims to citizenship as there tends to become a single version of entire populations. There is never a monolith and when we seek to enter a category without troubling why that categorization exists in the first place, we end up reproducing harmful power dynamics that persist in spite of our best efforts. As Buckner eloquently puts it “[t]he polarity of the [B]lack community in regards to the civil rights movement and queerness created a persistent struggle for queer [B]lack Americans to fight for their rights as both [B]lack and queer individuals.” (Buckner, 2024). This struggle exists to this day as there continues to be a belief

that Blackness and queerness cannot coexist (Alturi, 2018; Hill Collins, 2020; Walcott, 2003).

Alturi (2018) notes that Black and Brown queer bodies are consistently perceived as violent when as they enter white washed spaces such as Pride Toronto. Moreover, the halting of the Pride Parade in 2016 and the subsequent fall out is something that proves the effect of co- opting and re- shaping the queer rights struggle to fit a kind of assimilationist ‘we are just like you’ humanity. My former co- worker’s question “Why were they [BLM] there anyway?” proves McKittrick’s (2006) notion that racism and sexism are not just body/ identity based but also and most importantly [a] spatial act (pg. xviii). Spaces and places are subject to the terms and conditions of the hegemony of the day. The fact that this reality is often forgotten is a credit to the systemic nature of oppression.

Ball culture has its own unique organizational structures and values. With many queer youth joining balls at a young age these families are “led by "mothers," who are mostly butch queens (gay men) or femme queens (transgender women) and "fathers," who are mostly butch queens or butches (transgender men).” (Bailey, 2011, pg. 367). As parents these mothers and fathers provide support in the form of guidance on how to navigate the job market, or medical surveillance, especially as it relates to Transitioning and Trans identity. It is important to note that the children are usually of all ages, genders, races and ethnicities. The children of each House in this subculture will take the surname of the house parent and all members of the family work to support and sustain each other in addition to the general community.

Specific portions of this subculture, such as the drag performances and voguing which are featured in the competition aspect of the Ball have made their way to the mainstream with the documentary *Paris is Burning*, Madonna’s song and music video for *Vogue*, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, HBO’s *Legendary* among other programming. This crossover has created an interesting climate where on the one hand there are more opportunities for community members with

participants of these mainstream shows like *Legendary* going on to be background performers with artists like Beyonce or Taylor Swift. However, on the other hand, there is a flattening of the discourse around why these Houses and spaces exist and an insistence that these spaces no longer be gatekept, i.e. become more open to predominantly cisgender, heterosexual women to enter into these spaces. If asked, many of these women, including those in bachelorette parties, will state that these queer spaces feel safer for them as they no longer have to contend with cisgender heterosexual men and they can be themselves (Santos, 2022). However, oftentimes their actions vacillate between treating queer people and queer performers as unicorns or objects for their amusement a la the freakshow or as visitors, by taking up more space literally and figuratively, sometimes engaging in entitled and harassing behaviours (Dommu, 2017; Cheves, 2017). This problematic behaviour oddly enough further emphasises the need for these discrete and safer spaces.

Regardless, queer Houses fill a gap left behind when those whose DNA we share are incapable of showing us the love and support necessary for us to live life and thrive as our entire queer selves. That is not to say that these spaces are perfect. As we have shown in previous chapters there is work to be done within queer community to address racism and ableism. However, the openness within ball culture where sex and gender categorizations are played with and articulated in non normative ways, allow for gender diverse kin to find affirmation, community and family.

Another way that family structures are challenging the nuclear ideal is with the rise of polyamory and families created with polyamorous partners. As noted in the prior chapter, both Canada and the United States have legislation that criminalizes polyamory generally and polygamy specifically which means that this information is not recorded in census data. However, a 2016 study by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family noted that

even though Statistics Canada did not track polyamorous Canadians or Canadians who engaged in polyamorous relationships, their three-week-old survey, promoted through social media, managed to net 547 valid responses (Boyd, 2017). Of this number 68% were currently involved in such a relationship (Boyd, 2017). In the United States it is believed that about four or five percent of people are polyamorous or engaging in an open relationship (Zane, 2018). Unlike common misconceptions, the individuals who are forming these types of partnerships are diverse, not simply White people who are either very religious e.g. FLDS church members, nor are they liberals¹²⁷ who believe in free love, in spite of which media you engage with. The research shows that people who are engaging in polyamorous relationships are younger, post secondary educated and identified primarily as bisexual or pansexual and while most are white, individuals of various races and ethnicities were also forming polyamorous relationships (Boyd, 2017; Zane, 2018). In Canada, they reported having higher than average incomes (Boyd, 2017) while in the United States the income gap between individuals in polyamorous relationships and those in monogamous relationships was much larger (Zane 2018).

The respondents of these various surveys reported valuing equality in decision making and relationships, whether those decisions have to do with adding members, chores or child rearing. The argument is that for these types of relationships to be successful there has to be clear and ongoing communication about one's needs and expectations. In fact, the Organization for Polyamory and Ethical Non- monogamy (OPEN), has listed in their fact sheet that when asked respondents why they have chosen non- monogamy, they said “[d]esire for honesty and lack of deception” and “Open and honest communication” (OPEN, n. d., pp.2-3) Added to this reasoning is a desire for a larger group in order to have one's social and emotional needs met.

¹²⁷ This term is being used as defined by Merriam- Webster as inclined to be open to ideas and ways of behaving that are not conventional or traditional not to refer to political ideologies/ affiliation.

This point is particularly important when it comes to adding children to the relationship. The nuclear ideal would argue that children raised in a non- monogamous households are confused, and harmed by not having a linear understanding of a mother and father who engage in the expected gendered rules of behaviour. However, this ‘logic’ becomes muddled and is ultimately disproved when the mere presence of blended or step- families exist and prove that children are able to form attachments to multiple parental figures. Further, having a larger support network of caregivers and role models offers a child and their parents a more fruitful child rearing experience. A parent is able to access a network of care (Alarie, 2023: The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2024) instead of relying solely on another single human co- parent. This network is imperative if a parent has a strained relationship with their biological family/ family of origin. The child also gets to have a reliable network of adults that can step in in the event that there is need.

As useful as that all sounds, our current legal, educational and other systems do not support this type of family structure. People in polyamorous relationships sometimes struggle with school permissions, and medical disclosure, for any children that they share, access to life and medical insurance, pensions, as well as who gets to be considered a legal parent when adoption or assisted reproductive technologies are employed to expand the family. However, we have started to see piecemeal remedies by judges in different jurisdictions. “In 2018, three unmarried adults in a relationship in Newfoundland and Labrador were declared legal parents of a child born within their polyamorous family.” (Vanier Institute, 2024). Similarly, “[i]n 2021, a British Columbia court ruled that a second mother in a polyamorous family be added to a child’s birth certificate.” (Ibid) In both of these rulings, the judges cited the best interest of the child as reason for making these rulings. In addition, both judges stated that the law must change with the changing realities of Canadian families.

The one statement I take issue with is in the BC case *British Columbia Birth Registration No. 2018-XX-XX5815*, where Judge Sandra Wilkinson stated that the legislature did not contemplate polyamorous families as they constructed the *Family Law Act*. History has shown us that the courts, specifically the Supreme Court of British Columbia, did in fact consider the polygamous family and found it to be in contravention with the criminal code when the Chief Justice released what we know today as the *Polygamy Reference*. This decision criminalized and generally belittled polygamous relationships. Perhaps the 2021 case is more favorable due to shifting attitudes, and because the three individuals were not multiply married and therefore only practicing polyamory not polygamy. So, the criminality and other harms that the Supreme Court of British Columbia ascribed to polygamy in 2011 did not apply in this instance and as a result these two legal decisions can be considered distinct types of family structures. However, I consider this a distinction without a difference.

In the United States, three men in California became the first to have all of their names on their child's birth certificate (Feldman, 2020). Cities in Massachusetts, namely Somerville, Cambridge and Arlington have all recently passed ordinances in 2021 that recognize polyamorous domestic partnerships. Overall, we have started to see the needle moving to acknowledging the benefits of these partnerships and family structures, however, these types of piecemeal changes are only as good as the administration/ people in power and they can be removed given sufficient opposition.

The theme of the need for support under a shifting family dynamic also comes into play when we consider that one parent households¹²⁸ are becoming more common (Kramer, 2019).

¹²⁸ I am choosing to use the terms 'one parent household/ families' or 'solo parent' as opposed to 'single parent' or 'single parent household' due to the racist, sexist etc. implications of those terms and the fact that it is deficit language. With that said, my preferred terms do tend to invoke isolation as if there are no supports for these parents which is not the case.

These households, sometimes referred to as, single parent, lone parent or even solo parent, families have existed for various reasons throughout time, primarily due to the loss of or abandonment by one's partner. However, there have been some people who choose to embark on the parenting journey without a partner and these are the folks I want to focus on (Bock, 2000; Livingston, 2018). Before starting that discussion, I want to acknowledge some realities of one parent families, starting with the statistics and terminology.

According to census data in Canada in 2021 77.2% of one parent families were parented by women (Vanier Institute, 2024). In 2022 data from the US census bureau, this number is 80%. (United States Census Bureau, 2022). In spite of there being an increase in solo parent households headed by men, the narrative of the 'single parent' is heavily gendered and stigmatized (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2024; Jones et al., 2022; Livingston, 2018). Additionally, racialized stereotypes are brought to bear on this term which are then popularized through media representations. The myth of the 'welfare queen' haunts Black mothers to this day and the surprise when confronted with the statistical evidence that Black men are in fact active fathers show the power of this stigmatization (Dixon, 2018). A similar narrative exists for Indigenous women who also have one parent households. These women are considered inadequate and unfit parents due to the stereotypes about their sexuality i.e. the immoral nature of their sexuality as linked to their race as well as immorality as shown by their children being born outside of the bounds of marriage (Drost, 2024; Balsdon, 2024; Rule, 2018). This narrative of course is the assumed reality based on racist fictions. It is also assumed that they require state support based on their 'poor decision making' (Maki, 2021) which is always coded language for the presumed promiscuity of Black and Indigenous women (Brown 2022; Cohen, 1997; Flores & Alfaro, 2023; Hammonds, 1988; 1994). The reality is that these women find themselves seeking state supports because racialized women are often overworked and underpaid more so that their

White counterparts in the workforce and definitely less than the men in their respective positions which in turn affects how they are able to manage as head of their one parent households (Kochhar, 2023; Marotta, 2024; McGinn, 2024). While having only a single income earner is difficult for all one parent households, it is especially more difficult when these racist, classist, sexist, etc. economic realities are taken into consideration. Therefore, while having a discussion about single people opting into parenthood or creating family units that fit within their needs, I want us to remember that there are real parents who are socially, economically and otherwise stigmatized for living this reality.

The podcast episodes, *The Sperm Series*¹²⁹ and *He Was With These Wonderful Queers* offered us a glimpse into the decision-making process that goes into creating a one parent household through two very different lenses. In *The Sperm Series* we follow host, Andrea Silenzi across three episodes as she decides whether solo parenthood is for her. The series opens up with her talking about this decision with her mother and brother. At thirty- four and single Silenzi sees this option as something of her only opportunity to have the family, specifically children, that she wants. Her mother is generally understanding and supportive. Her brother offers a few counterpoints that coincide with the dominance of the nuclear ideal. He tells her that she is still young and has enough time to look for a partner. He argues that this is the best option for raising a family. Her mother interjects that choosing to parent solo is like having a back up plan in case the nuclear option does not come to be. This discussion is particularly fascinating to me as it is a miniaturized version of dominant talking points of family expansion in heterosexual circles in North American society as discussed earlier in the chapter. Solo parenthood is presented as the option b when option a, the nuclear family breaks down or is no longer available. Through the

¹²⁹ This was a series of 3 episodes.

series Silenzi downloads the *Just Baby* app which matches potential egg and sperm donors with prospective parents, she visits a sperm bank and then considers asking a friend to donate.

What is striking about the discussions about the app and the sperm bank are the way that creating babies take on overtly social, political and medicalized eugenic tones without much reflection on behalf of the individuals participating. When screening sperm donors on *Just Baby*, she notes that among sperm donors there are those who she deems to have a breeding kink, i.e. those who believe that male reproductive drive is innate and this drive manifests as wanting to impregnate as many women as possible, primarily through natural means.¹³⁰ Due to the unregulated nature of the app this mass impregnation is something that is possible as there is no real limit as to how many people a donor can donate to. An interesting sub group of these men were the White nationalists who wanted to reproduce as many White babies as they could. It is an interesting albeit not surprising deviation to White supremacist ideals. What I mean by this is that with the growing panic over the decline in white fertility rates as discussed in the previous chapter, this ‘lack’ demands remediation by any means. So, while the ideal environment for expanding the White population is within the nuclear family, it would make sense that ‘by any means necessary’ within the model of the replacement theory could also include ‘fathering’ as many children as you can. I put fathering in quotes here as these men are unlikely to engage in parenting of potential offspring while they would still classify themselves as fathers due to having donated genetic material.

The host’s uneasiness about treating donation in the same casual way that we treat online dating was curious and more telling of how as a society we view dating and hooking up as so innate and not meritorious of deep reflection and research. This is simply not true. Sure, the

¹³⁰ This is understood as penis in vagina sex with male orgasm.

decision to swipe right or left happens quickly, however, as shown in chapter two, it is a product of all our value systems, conscious and unconscious biases and beliefs all coming together to tell us whether we like or dislike the other person. We are simply more conscious and caring of the potential offspring we may have due to our beliefs about children and their dependency that we are more aware of our decision-making processes, when it comes to building families using donated genetic material.

Her visit to the sperm bank and discussions with the Vice President of California Cryobank and some parents who have used the sperm bank show a process that is regulated, where the donors are screened for physical and mental health issues, i.e. physical and mental fitness. While you do pay hefty for the privilege of accessing this service, you also get peace of mind that there is a limit to how many half siblings your potential offspring will have in the world. Silenzi notes that American sperm is also a huge export as the regulations are a bit less strict. However, the parts of the discussion that I found fascinating are the ways that these medical screenings and privileging of education and other traits like height, are presented as neutral and good when they are in fact not value neutral at all¹³¹. Further, hearing one of the parents talk about looking at baby pictures and picking out ‘flaws’ that she did not want passed on to her potential offspring exemplified how comfortable we are with engaging in eugenic rhetoric when it comes to our own potential offspring under the guise of wanting the best for our children.

In the end she does not actually move forward with the decision to solo-parent and instead goes back into the dating pool with an expanded knowledge of her choices should she decide to later on have a child this way. She goes back to plan A. The takeaway from this entire series is

¹³¹ This coding of this language as ableist and racist driven by eugenic ideologies was discussed in the earlier chapters.

that different people make the choices that best suit their lives, whether that means having children with donors from the app, anonymous donors through a sperm bank or even asking a friend whose traits you feel would add great genetic material to yours, thus creating wonderful offspring. However, I am left with the feeling that the child was not the focus here. It was a mere manifestation of an unfinished plan. While the host was on the quest to figure out if solo parenthood was for her, it seemed as if it was not for the joy of parenthood or expanding her family, it was instead a consolation prize after the game i.e. attaining the nuclear family, was lost. It is perhaps why the resolution made sense.

Perhaps unintentionally on the part of the interviewer, the ideals of eugenic marriage and better baby nuclear ideals were evoked through some of these conversations. What I mean by this is that the ‘better baby’ was not the actual goal, instead *having* a baby/ child was. Further, having a baby/ child in service to a larger plan that did not really center the potential child relies on a notion of compulsory parenthood that is espoused by pro natalist¹³² activists, policy makers etc. This version of parenthood has to follow from marriage or a committed relationship to be legitimate. More than this, it wasn’t that any child was wanted and would be accepted and loved. This potential child had to come from ‘good stock’ and choosing this is/was positioned as part of being a parent, and I would argue, being a good parent. While this could be an unintentional overlap as podcasts do tend to be edited to facilitate more manageable listening times, from what I have discussed so far, I believe that this series of conversations offer a glimpse into taken for granted ideals that underpin family expansion even as we try to be intentional about having children.

The episode of *Masculine Birth Ritual: He Was With These Wonderful Queers* offered a

¹³² “Pronatalism is the policy or practice of encouraging the bearing of children, especially government support of a higher birthrate.” (Peluso, 2023).

bit more nuance and focused more on pregnancy, birth and parenting. In this episode J Carroll, a transmasculine, nonbinary single person takes us through their journey to parenthood. Like Silenzi, J Carroll talks us through their thought process of wanting to be a parent, however, where these two discussions diverge is that moving forward with parenthood was top of mind for J Carroll while for Silenzi, parenthood is still wrapped up within the partnered ideal as a potential outcome. After a discussion with their therapist, J Carroll embarked on their parenthood journey. This discussion is more focused on the process of the birth and rearing of offspring as opposed to the donor selection process and it is unclear how these decisions were made. Perhaps there was a similar deliberation process as shared by the parent in Silenzi's podcast; however, we are only told of the results, not the selection process.

We are offered a glimpse into a process where the parent due to their queer, trans and non binary identities opted to limit their interactions with the medical establishment (Carpenter & Neisen, 2021). Opting for a home birth with a midwife and doula who were queer as well as their mother and sister allowed for a supportive, and safe experience. Throughout this narrative, the focus is on creating groups of people to support them prior to the birth such as during the highly gendered pre- natal classes; creating a support team for during the birth; and cultivating support groups after the birth to share knowledge and time resources. J Carroll pointed to the gap in knowledge for queer non- binary parents and those who identify as cisgender and heterosexual. They noted that much of this knowledge exists in online spaces and forums and through discussions with others who share similar identities.

What emerged from this discussion was the importance of affirming and supportive networks throughout the process of family expansion (Goldberg et al., 2011) that disassembles the isolationist narrative of the nuclear ideal (Furstenberg et al., 2020). This reframing is emblematic of care webs and care networks as posited by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna- Samarasinha.

Piepzna- Samarasinha argues for an ethic of care that shifts it from “an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that’s maybe even deeply joyful...” (Piepzna- Samarasinha, 2018, pg. 20) Arguing that care webs have existed throughout time, these webs met the needs that Black and Brown folks had regarding access to care, knowledge and other resources without having to interact with medico- legal institutions that would lock you up and violate your human rights. By shifting the understanding of access and care in this way, we engage in active community building and create these as sites of joy and pleasure that builds solidarity in our communities. This care without judgement, sees value in the individual because of their differences, not in spite of it and privileges these different lived experiences. Importantly, “care must emerge between subjects considered to be equally valuable... and it must be participatory in nature, that is, developed through the desires and needs of all participants” (Price 2005, p. 279). Positively valuing kin in a way that is not transactional, creates those covenant bonds that we can lean into when necessary.

While all of these care models are not successful, they do offer an avenue to reconceptualize family structures. In 2022, four moms who were single, made headlines after buying a house together to support each other, share costs and raise their children amidst the Covid- 19 pandemic and rising cost of living. This co- housing system had rules and regular meetings to discuss the practicalities of home ownership like fixing the roof (Ciridon and Dube, 2022). This system meant that the moms have space to do things for themselves without worrying that there is not another responsible adult to keep an eye on their child/ children. Also, being that these parents are all single moms, there is a point of shared experience that they can support each other emotionally and socially. Creating these types of structures untether parenthood from requiring parents to be in a romantic partnership. This serves to create that ‘village’ with whom we can raise our children.

“...People from the baby shower offering to babysit: And yeah, so like, people just like all kind of made it happen. And like, I think he was like, he probably was a different person, like each day or two months. But it was like, it just kind of it wasn't I was working part time. So, it wasn't every day, but probably about three days a week, or two months, or just like he was kind of just with a different career. Every day just either either I would like drop him off, or they would come pick him up or kind of just depending on different circumstances. It was like really wonderful to have those people who were just like, yeah, like, I'll come hang out with a baby. Why not like so yeah, so it was like, really wonderful to have that community still still be there for me. That's impressive. Yeah, it was impressed. I mean, it took a lot of coordination on my part, but I was just like, it was worth it because he wasn't a daycare, and he was like with these wonderful careers. And like, you know, they all did it for free...”

-He Was With These Wonderful Queers: an interview with J Carroll on nonbinary single parenting and birth

This section of the transcript from the discussion with J Carroll exemplified this type of care web where they were able to have their little one taken care of as they went back to work. Their community offered their time and resources to ensure that the child was taken care of in an informal and non-judgemental way.

“...And then yeah, so when I was pregnant, I was like, I need to find other pregnant folks. So I just posted, like, asked around and posted a few groups and just being like, Hey, are you other queers that are pregnant. And so there was a few people that I just met, I met through that. And we formed a pretty good little group. And they were all people that

were like, friends of friends like that I kind of had met before, but didn't realize you're pregnant. And so they were like, I don't know. And then maybe one or two that I've never met before, like, ever remember, even, we're not friends of friends. But yeah, so we like came together. And we met up a few times when we were pregnant and had like, a, like a Text group that we were all just like, venting to each other. I'm just like, this is terrible, or like, amazing, you know, like, all of the feeling all the time. And then yeah, after after our kids are us are... kids are born, like within a few months of each other. And we like continued those, like those meetups with our kids, and continue with the text conversations of like, what do I do about this sleep thing, what I do about this feeding thing, or like this might look at how awesome my baby is just at this great thing. And so, yeah, it was, like, really wonderful to have that community of folks around me. Just like other queers...”

- *He Was With These Wonderful Queers: an interview with J Carroll on nonbinary single parenting and birth*

This community of care was cultivated over a period of time and offered collective support to each other in whatever form was necessary. These engagements are sites of queer joy and knowledge sharing from those who have experienced or are experiencing child rearing challenges. It also allowed J Carroll to avoid having to put their child into daycare, thereby avoiding the cost.

This type of knowledge and resource sharing is one of the reasons many opt to live within an intergenerational household. J Carroll specifically talks about the benefits of having this family structure for the first year of their child’s life.

“...So it's pretty close by Yeah, my so my mom. So the year, the first year of my kiddos

life. My I lived with my mom, my sister, y'all like lived in a house together. It was like very simply, that was like the modern, modern full house. We like to call ourselves but yeah, so it was like me, my mom, my sister and shared an apartment. And then my mom and I moved to Boston at the same time. So, this past year, she lived with us as well. And then just recently, like, two weeks ago, my mom bought a condo and we moved into an apartment. Yeah, so and like, so. Like very close with my family. Like, yeah, I talk to my mom every day talk to my grandmother every day. Like talk to my aunt, like a couple times a week. Yeah, we're all just like, pretty close. Little, little knit group..."

- *He Was With These Wonderful Queers: an interview with J Carroll on nonbinary single parenting and birth*

Families are by their nature multigenerational entities. However, there has been a marked increase in households with multiple (three or more) generations in both Canada and the United States. According to 2021 surveys carried out by various research think tanks, an estimated 66.7 million or just over 1 in 4 Americans are living in a multigenerational household, (Generations United, 2021), while 442, 000 of 2.4 million people or 6.4% of Canadians are living in multigenerational households. These types of households have always existed; however, they have not historically been a dominant structure.

"Starting right after World War II, the extended family household fell out of favor with the American public. In 1940, about a quarter of the population lived in one; by 1980, just 12% did. A range of demographic factors likely contributed to this decline, among them the rapid growth of the nuclear-family-centered suburbs; the decline in the share of immigrants in the population; and the sharp rise in the health and economic well-being of adults ages 65 and older." (Pew Research Center, 2010).

However, with increasing aging populations due to a rise in life expectancy, rising economic costs such as housing, and healthcare, increased immigration, as well as the devastating effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on middle- and lower-class persons, this model has seen a resurgence. There are some marked benefits that come with living in a multigenerational household. Pew Research Center data noted that “[p]overty levels are lower for Americans living in multigenerational households (10%) than other types of households (12%).” Being that the racial and ethnic makeup of these households across North America tend to be primarily Asian, Black, Indigenous and Hispanic, (Cohn et al., 2022; Pew Research Center, 2010), these families are able to pool financial resources even as the number of family members are higher.

Practically this statistic means that as the cost for houses continue to grow exponentially (Statistics Canada, 2024), these types of households allow for a measure of affordability that a nuclear unit or solo parent family could not afford (Generations United, 2021). In addition to this, potential bonus caregiving costs can be reduced as children can take on some of the caregiving roles for their aging parents while grandparents can take on some of the caregiving for the child/children in the household thereby limiting the need for daycare, after care or babysitting. This increased facetime has been cited as a bonus to this type of family structure as it can enhance familial bonds among family members and give younger generations access to generational histories and archives that they may not have had otherwise.

The positive effects of this intergenerational type of kinship have led to the creation of care programs for children and older adults that share the same buildings in the hopes that this contact can foster relationships across generations (engAGED, 2021; Generations United, 2021). These types of programs exist in cities across the globe and have been shown to not only increase the health and well being of the participants but also curb social isolation (Chamberlain et al., 1994; Murayama et al., 2019). They are places of joy where resources allotted for the care of the

elderly and youth could be compiled to avoid the shortages that plague both of these industries individually (Butts & Jarott, 2021). In Toronto, the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre even has Youth/ Elders Programing that includes monthly conversations and a podcast that bring together queer youths with queer elders to ensure that networks of support and queer histories are not lost (*Youth/Elders Programming*, n.d.). While these are not families in the strictest of senses, they are support webs that share important life lessons and guidance and most importantly the youth in these instances are able to form long lasting community ties.

The last form of family I want to briefly discuss is the family that chooses to be child free, i.e., those couples who choose not to have children biologically or through adoption. These are usually categorized as Dual Income No Kids (DINK)¹³³ households (Bromwich, 2024; Giandurco, 2023). For those who are not partnered and are also not planning on having offspring, those folks are sometimes categorized as Single Income No Kids (SINK). Although there is very little research on the topic overall and especially within a North American context, I wanted to end this discussion of family by featuring the folks in these categories precisely because of the child centered dominance that flavours discussions of families. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, we were all children and our need for the village does not end once we become adults. More importantly, as non- parents, our roles within our families can be overlooked and sometimes not even considered within our social and other circles¹³⁴.

A single or even partnered person without children can tell you of one or more instance where they were expected to accommodate a coworker's familial schedule because it was

¹³³ This term was popularized by Nikki Finke in her 1987 piece, *Dinks—Double Income, No Kids—Is Baby Boomers' Newest Moniker*.

¹³⁴ It should be noted the current Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, Senator JD Vance stated in a 2021 interview on Fox news with host Tucker Carlson, that "It's just a basic fact — you look at Kamala Harris, Pete Buttigieg, AOC — the entire future of the Democrats is controlled by people without children. And how does it make any sense that we've turned our country over to people who don't really have a direct stake in it?" (Greene, 2024).

believed that since they were single or had no children, they had nothing else they would be doing (Pew, Research Center, 2024¹³⁵). This adjustment can encompass the way that vacation or shifts are allotted and approved or even the types of work events that might be organized. These modifications do not take into account the fact that these individuals may be taking on caregiving roles outside of childrearing, that they may be volunteering or that they would like to engage in different ways. There is the assumption that the person without children is spending their time on frivolous activities and pursuits. This has become a talking point for contemporary right-wing conservatives in Canada and the United States. These people, who wish to see a pronatalist policy view people without biological children as dangerous and not having enough of a stake in the future (Hurst, 2024) and espouse ideas about the supremacy of parents' rights (Greene, 2024; Talbot, 2024). There is an assumption that there has to be a deference toward childrearing, and in being a team player we are all members of that child's village if only peripherally. This assumption speaks to a general devaluing of individuals who do not have children, especially women, as those eugenic echoes of being a traitor to one's true nature can still be heard (McLaren, 1990). Further, it makes creating families by having or adopting children less about those small humans and more about the fetishization of the state of parenthood in service to the society and ultimately, the state.

Conclusion

“‘Family’ is a powerful and pervasive word in our culture, embracing a variety of social, cultural, economic and symbolic meanings: but traditionally is seen as the very foundation of society.”

¹³⁵ This is the only study that has looked at this so far, nonetheless, this is something that there is ample anecdotal evidence for on social media forums and in my own personal life.

(Weeks, et. al, 2001, pg. 9)

I started this section by defining family building as worldbuilding as a way to evoke a sense of more and intangibility when it comes to family. In queer, disabled and racialized communities, often the word ‘kin’ is used to speak about those who we hold dear to us irrespective of whether they are connected by blood. Our kinfolk are those with whom we feel a sense of belonging. Our spaces for truth and safety are removed from the strict economic, socio- legal etc. specifics of family and in particular the nuclear family. Oftentimes the language of ‘the village’ is invoked. We have all heard, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ yet nothing is ever said about the role of the village after the child is grown. I would argue that the village remains once we reach adulthood to provide us with comfort and care. In disability communities the use of care collectives, offer us another way to think about relationships and our relationality to care and interdependence. Mia Mingus’ concept of access intimacy shows us that there is more at play to create spaces where we can show up as our whole selves. This concept challenges us to think about intimacy and access differently and this is how I want us to think about family building.

As shown in this chapter, we live in a world governed by monogamous marriage that leads to a nuclear family. Within this paradigm, cracks start to appear instantly. This structure has to be shored up constantly. The naturalness of it must be reinforced through incentives to buy into it and punishments for those who dare to contravene it. We are told that we should want to have children, while simultaneously, if you are poor, racialized or disabled, you are gently, or not so gently, steered away from this path. We are told if we have difficulty conceiving children we should engage with all available scientific methods, regulated or not, and as a last resort we could consider adoption. However, these options are incredibly costly and married, heterosexual couples are overwhelmingly preferred as adoptive parents. We are told that the family unit is two

parents plus their children, however, emerging research shows that children raised in intergenerational homes i.e. homes with grandparents or older adults actually benefit from this exposure and those older adults also benefit and have a better quality of life (Generations United, 2021).

In truth, I have never quite understood the privileging of the nuclear ideal as I have never lived in this type of family structure. It was a family structure that two of my five closest friends had yet it was never something I envied. I grew up in what was called an extended family. It was one of three options whenever we were quizzed about family structures. Option (a) being the nuclear family, option (b) being a single parent family and option (c) being the extended family where you live with your parent/ parents and also extended family like grandparents, aunts or uncles. I grew up with my grandmother, dad, aunt, uncles, a second cousin and when I turned thirteen, my aunt had a son. I was the only child for my dad for twenty- one years, and my second cousin filled the role of sibling as she was a mere year and two months older than I was. My parents had me when they were quite young and my paternal family provided my support system. I always had someone present at all my school and extracurricular activities as there was always someone available to take me and show me support in the crowd. I never wanted help with my homework. I had built in partners in crime who provided support and helped me to sharpen my arguments to get around rules like curfews, alcohol usage etc.

When I moved to Canada, I lived with my dad and step- mom. It was a pseudo nuclear setup although I was already a legal adult at nineteen. This familial structure quickly became a step- family as my stepmom had my sisters. I remember once my sister asking me why I called her mom by her first name. I replied that it was because she was *my* stepmom. She became distraught at this answer. Having just been introduced to fairy tales, she thought this way of defining my relationship to her mother meant that her mom was evil since ‘stepmothers are evil’.

It took some fast talking and explanations to get her to realize that stories were not real life. Once she started school, I was the third contact person for her school. I helped with pick- up and drop off once my work schedule allowed for it. I was known as '[name's] sister' in the same way as parents become disidentified once their kids start to socialize and engage with the outside world. I became part of their lineage, someone whose name they could recite if asked 'Who are you?'.

Tangibly though this meant that my sisters generally always have a person at their events, they have another support adult. Their parents don't usually have to worry in the event of an emergency which allows for a measure of relief. I now live with a partner, to whom I am not married. We do not plan on having a child but we do have a dog. This family structure is the closest approximation to the nuclear ideal that I have lived in. Although we do live a 10-minute drive away from his retired parents who provide us with doggy daycare when we travel or have hectic work schedules.

I bring this lived experience to the fore to note that the necessary support that extended relations provide cannot be understated. Even within a nuclear ideal, outside support is necessary. The erasure of that support is a bit of slight of hand that misogynistic fingers hide up the sleeve of the white supremacy/ eugenicist jacket, as it constructs an idea of parenting that is left to the woman exclusively. She is forced to be a stay-at-home mom as her dedication must be to her family, first and always. In instances where this type of dedication is not possible, she is plied with guilt from social messaging so she works the second shift¹³⁶. In this way, the father figure is absolved of daily responsibility but will 'babysit' his kids from time to time (Frank & Frenette, 2021; Minkin & Horowitz, 2023). This slight of hand continues to reinscribe working mothers,

¹³⁶ The second shift is a term coined by Arlie Hochschild in 1989 that describes the additional labour in the home i.e. household and child rearing chores, that working mothers are expected to perform after completing their workday outside of the home.

parents of color, queer parents, disabled parents, and any family formations that sit outside of this ideal as invisible in the best-case scenario and wrong, harmful and detrimental to the child in the worst-case scenario. I would argue that this manufactured ideal is deeply anti-family and anti child and its only purpose is to reproduce humans who buy into this ideal in service to the state. It is a pro-birth eugenicist agenda.

If the role of the family was to raise better ‘agents of the state’, then families of choice, care webs, kinship structures or even the village do a terrible job at this as they themselves do not fit within the eugenic new aristocracy. If we remember the image from the Kansas fair it takes three generations of eugenic marriage to produce/ reproduce the eugenic state and these versions of family will never fit the mold. That is the point. The child that is raised and nurtured within these alternate structures is not the ideological subject the state desires, nevertheless, they are the one that is necessary to create tension and slowly work towards the ideological breakdown of our concept of ideal families. As the new judgements in the Canadian and American court systems show, different familial formations are gaining legal recognition. This is a great temporary measure as people are able to immediately organize their familial affairs socially and economically. In the long term, however, there needs to be a more equitable understanding of what constitutes family. We need to dismantle the hierarchies as they no longer serve us and instead realize that the need for family does not end when one becomes an adult. Instead, our needs morph and change and we need to create a society with the space for these shifting relations. These systems of care need to be evergreen as we work to dismantle the current systems and ideologies that govern the proverbial baby carriage.

The Conclusion

[Boy] and [Girl] sitting in a tree,

K-I-S-S-I-N-G

First comes love,

Then comes marriage,

Then comes [Girl] with a baby carriage.

And they lived happily ever after?

My favourite part of a good book, tv show or movie is the epilogue or a glimpse of what happened after the credits rolled. They tend to give you a snapshot into the future of the characters you were rooting for...or whose demise you were hoping for. There is something satisfying about seeing the characters get their just desserts. So, as we come to the end of the children's rhyme, I think about the epilogue of this couple. What does their story look like and what lives do those seemingly traditional benchmarks hide?

Through the chapters, I have provided ways to conceptualize how we think about our intimate and family lives to try to untether them from the dominant eugenic ideals. To think about those very moments that are hidden. Through these discussions, I have argued that the way in which we engage our sexual subjectivities is heavily influenced either consciously or unconsciously by these eugenic ideals. Additionally, I have presented ways that thinking of eugenics through discrete lenses do us a disservice especially as we try to dismantle these ideals through our organizing and activism. Integrating personal anecdotes, archival work as well as employing various methodologies, this dissertation challenges us to think about the interconnectedness of racism, ableism and queerphobia as we date, hook up, contemplate

marriage and building our families, make informed choices and perhaps model our collective activism in ways that address these systemic issues.

Chapter one provided a history and an overview of eugenics in the North American context. It provided definitions and an origin story for this ideology that took much of the world by storm. In naming the motivations and utility of eugenics, its progenitors and inheritors I laid the groundwork to interrogate some of our most personal choices and ways to resist the eugenic scripts provided for us.

First up was the dating and hook up field. In thinking about love, romance, sex and sexuality, and the ways that we express ourselves, I discussed the ways that ‘preferences’ were deployed as a way to be uncritical of the ways that some bodyminds are privileged while others were devalued. In tracing the discussion from the general understandings of binary gender identities and the masculinity and femininity ascribed to these roles, the power of the imaginary emerged. This excavation was important as before we can hope to create anything, tangible or intangible, an idea of it must exist in our imaginations. To this end, I chose to start the conversation with a look at the imaginary through literature, specifically romance novels. Keeping with this theme of the imaginary, I discussed what it looked like when we put these imaginations into action. How does what we hope to attract, interact with a system that is set up to only benefit some and how do we resist falling into the trap? This question was answered by looking at relationships that exist at the margins and taking those lessons to heart. By shifting the way that we understand desire we can engage our full selves and the erotic in order to have fulfilling encounters, relationships and more.

Next was what is considered the second step in adulthood markers or the next phase in the children’s rhyme, marriage. Specifically, this chapter was concerned with marriage as it is understood within the legislated context in North America. It argued that the way that this

institution was set up to grant rights to some, directly oppressed those who do not conform to this ideal. Using legal artefacts, it charted shifts in marriage legislation to the present day (2024) state of marriage equality. Lastly this section asked us to think about why alternatives to this ideal were becoming popular and what they can teach us about partnerships and relationships in general.

The last chapter closed out the children's rhyme, tackling the discussion on building and expanding the family. Arguing that procreation under the conditions of capitalist and liberal/neoliberal conditions is eugenic, this chapter sought to help us understand how the nuclear standard is rooted in white supremacist, eugenic ideals and that merely reproducing it in queer, disabled and racialized communities did nothing to dismantle these foundations. Instead, this chapter looked to alternatives to show that family and family structures can thrive outside of this ideal and can work out to be better economically, and socially for many in vulnerable communities. It also asked that we think about why the deferring to and borderline fetishization of children reinscribes these problematic ideals and how we can think of families without children to help readjust our perspective on how we conceptualize and value all of our family members.

I do not believe this to be a terminal project. Quite the opposite, I want it to be a beginning to think about the structures built for "death making" in the words of Elder Stonefish and how we live and thrive in resistance alongside them. It is my belief that there is no reformation that of structures built on oppressive ideologies as Audre Lorde declared in 1979, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984a). There can only be stopgaps that mitigate the harm done by these oppressive ideologies, to borrow phrasing from harm reduction principles. These stopgaps or acts of resistance are beautiful in and of themselves and also messy and ever changing as the discussions highlighted. This is not a study that

proposes answers or solutions per se. It spotlights alternatives and suggestions on how to live within the resistance.

Our interpersonal relationships as seen through the lens of the relationship escalator moving up from love, to marriage to the baby carriage, cannot be rehabilitated. As an example, the only way that poor disabled people who receive government assistance would be able to marry would be to no longer view household income as cumulative between partners. Alternatively, we could change the amount that disabled people could have/ save to keep up with inflation¹³⁷. However, to do this there would need to be changes made to the entirety of the supports systems especially those like ODSP and SSI as well as changes to the attitudes that position disabled people as relying on society's largesse instead of viewing them as necessary members of the society who require supports to survive and thrive. Having something like Universal Basic Income implemented to avoid the trap of means testing for disability needs by bureaucrats would be a good start. However, this is unlikely to happen within any cultural climate that prioritizes eugenic policies for futurity. As such, worldbuilding of the present offers not just hope and a politics of resistance, but practical, tangible ways to thrive until such time as there can be a system reboot.

Challenges and Limitations

Completing a project like this one was complex and challenging. I expected this to be a challenge for two reasons. First, I had not done anything like this previously and embarking on new research and research methods always requires learning and unlearning. Secondly, I wanted to

¹³⁷ We could also choose not to care how much money disabled people have in the bank in the same way that we do multi- millionaires or billionaires.

remain true to myself and all of the experiences academically and others that have shaped my understanding of my work. To my mind, this project would be my ‘official’ introduction into the academic world and as such would set the tone somewhat for how I wanted the audience and my communities to perceive me as an academic. Once I started the project, one challenge I encountered was a lack of sources. As mentioned in the introduction, there was a lack of information about queer organizations that served racialized populations at the ArQuives. This was not known to me prior to my visit and as such due to time, financial constraints and physical distance, travelling to another archive to access this information was not feasible. I see this as a limitation and something that can offer an avenue for future research should time, opportunity and funding allow. Looking at the ways that these organizations created communities of care and if or how they understood accessibility in their organizing would be an interesting project.

In addition to this, there is also a lack of scholarly research that focused on asexual adults, particularly those who date and are in relationships; common law couples who reject marriage; the inability of disabled people on government supports to marry; as well as Dual Income No Kids as a family unit. The individuals in each of these categories have crafted worlds that exists in direct resistance to eugenic/ newgenic ideologies of family and kinship structures. Each of these communities provide a source of inquiry that if researched can offer us insights into alternative ways of being that can destabilize the fixity of monogamous marriage and natalist rhetoric.

The last major challenge was balancing the tone and tenor of personal stories with the needs of a dissertation. As I noted in my introduction, I took inspiration from Schalk (2018), Snorton (2017) as well as Katherine McKittrick’s 2021 book, *Dear Science* to think through what I wanted this work to look like. I am admittedly not as eloquent as these authors are in weaving the threads of the contemporary with the past as story but it was something I wanted to try to do.

My reason for this was because I see these three fields, Love (broadly), Marriage, and The Baby Carriage/ Nuclear Family as stories/ narratives about who we are as a society. They encompass both the dominant narratives of race, sexuality and gender as interpreted through the eugenic/newgenic lens, as well as worlds created by queer, disabled racialized people that exist concurrently throughout all points of history. So, within this project, I do not offer a solution to make sexual citizenship more all encompassing, I do not offer solutions to make marriage more equitable nor do I suggest ways we can be less eugenic minded when we think about having offspring. What I offer are ways that individuals have been rejecting those structures altogether or using systemic loopholes to reduce the harm faced by these systems.

Throughout this project, I have looked at the many ways that people have been engaging their sexual selves in ways that have allowed for life, love, and family relations to thrive, paying attention to how these communities engage in alternative world building that is truly freed from the dominant ideals. However, these measures are not without their concerns and it is important that they are not pedestalized as there is no one size fits all solution. Since we still live within imperialistic nation states under the conditions of capitalism and settler colonialism, people also need to construct their immediate lives in ways that serve their families for today even as we engage in and move toward what Syrus Ware calls “possibility models” (2024).

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Appendix

Attachment 4

Attach supporting documentation relevant to support the request (medical letter, Student Accessibility Services letter, CUPE Executive Service letter, etc)

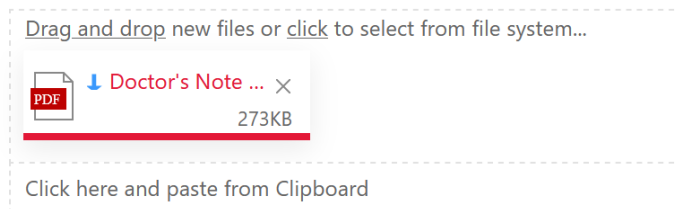


Image of a screengrab of the petitions' portal showing the "issue"

Fw: Petition Decision - Action Required

Angela Stanley <angela_stanley@live.com>

Mon 2023-08-21 8:06 AM

To: Natalie Vacianna <vacianna@yorku.ca>

Cc: Equity Officer CUPE 3903 <cupe3903equity@gmail.com>

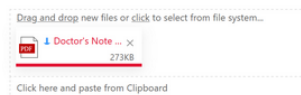
Good Morning Natalie and Nadia,

I hope that you are both well and that your summers have been good so far.

I received this update/ letter concerning my petition on the weekend and I guess I am just a bit confused. The petitions form that we are meant to fill out asks for one of three documents as seen in the image attached below : a doctor's note, **or** a CUPE Exec letter **or** a letter from Student Accessibility Services.

Attachment 4

Attach supporting documentation relevant to support the request (medical letter, Student Accessibility Services letter, CUPE Executive Service letter, etc)



I have provided my doctor's note. In fact, I have provided two doctor's notes spanning 3 years, that show that I have a history of disability that requires accommodations. I discuss the exact nature of this disability in my personal statement.

I am now being asked to provide more documentation. So, this means that FGS is asking me to go beyond what is asked originally. Why is this the case? That reason is not in the comments left on the petition and, if I can be frank, as a student with a disability whose worse symptom is largely brought on by stress and anxiety, this additional request just a mere two weeks before the semester is due to start is very stressful and anxiety producing.

So, I am now writing to ask, what are my next steps? Am I meant to provide more documentation with no explanation as to why, even though what I have provided along with supportive statements from various parties (doctoral supervisor, 2 GPDs, Medical Doctor) meets the threshold set out by FGS in the first place?

Regards,
Angela Stanley.
St#210090777.

Image of the email sent to the FGS representative cc'ing my union rep.