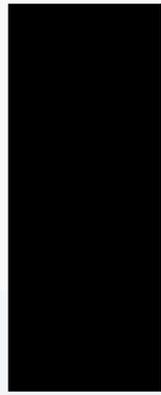
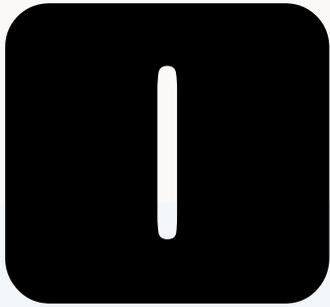


our lives



Shasparay Lighteard



Vica Steel



Keith Streicher

HEALTH & FAMILY

Leadership and Resources by and for Our Local Queer Community

Madison's LGBT&XYZ Magazine

Wisconsin's Battle Over Transgender

November &
December
2019

HEALTH CARE

Alina Boyden

Boyden is one of two women who took the state to court over providing transition-inclusive coverage. This is how they won.

BLACK-MARKET PLASTIC SURGERY

Without coverage, many transgender people are left with riskier options for treating their dysphoria. A local woman shares her story.

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A WOMAN'S TOUCH

Co-owner Ellen Barnard on 23 years of providing sexuality products and education.

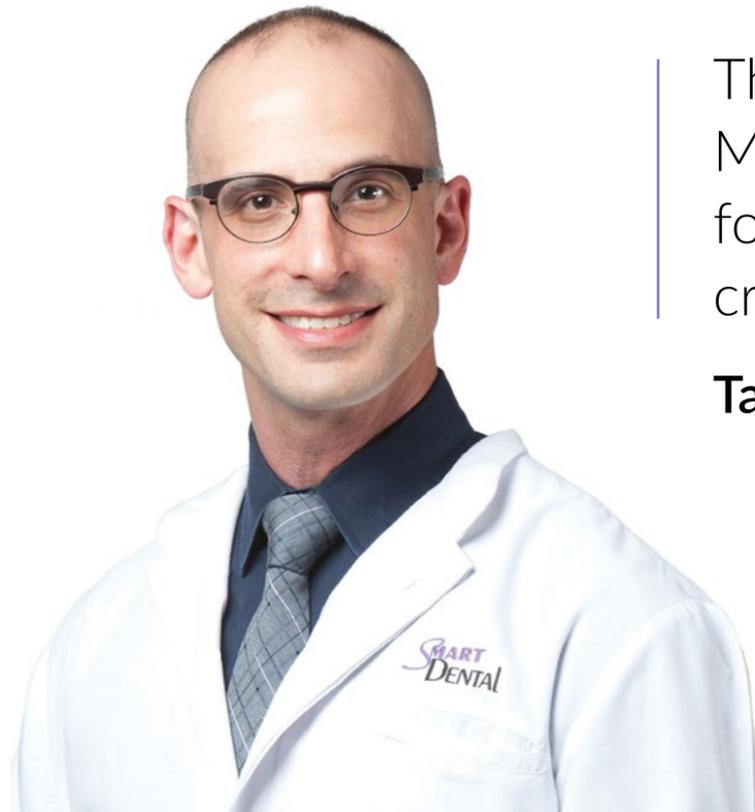
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- Pete Buttigieg

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Cover photo by **Spencer Micka**.
Hair & makeup by **Daisy Quintal-Lepinski**.



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John DeMain, Conductor • Joyce Yang, Piano

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- Schumann** Symphony No. 2

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE PATRICK FARABAUGH

FORWARD

Changes—and a statewide expansion—are on the horizon.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE READERS have seen my face in this spot in the magazine, and I'm hoping by stepping back into the editor role for the near future I can share with you what has been happening over the past few years, and where I hope all of it leads us to. There are a few big things that have either happened already, or are in progress that I'd like to announce.



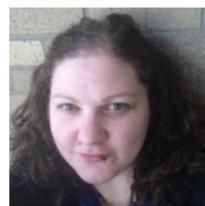
1. In 2017 I went through a painful buyout of my business partner. Most didn't know I ever had a business partner, and I did my best to not let that struggle translate to how readers experienced the magazine. It led to one of the hardest years both the magazine and myself has had recently, and some challenging decisions, but ultimately I'm proud of how we navigated it and the personal and professional growth that both I and the magazine have experienced as a result.

2. At the moment I am running *Our Lives* as a full-time staff of just myself. This has been an intentional decision that has been in the works for almost a year now, with the goal of building our cash reserve back up after the aforementioned buyout, and to give the magazine solid footing for some exciting steps and transitions that are on the horizon. As I write this I've just wrapped my second month of operating all of our full-time responsibilities solo. That's not to say that I don't have some help. Emily Mills, our "editor emeritus," is continuing on as a regular freelance contributor, as is Emily's predecessor and our other "editor emeritus"-turned copy editor, Virginia Harrison. Virginia has graciously agreed to step into a contributing Features Editor role while the magazine's structure continues to evolve. I do need to ask for a lot of patience over the next couple months while we do our best to keep all the plates spinning. The goal of the thinner staff is to give the magazine greater flexibility to maneuver through some restructuring that I've wanted to move forward with for a while now.

3. Back in January *Our Lives* became the only LGBTQ media left in the state of Wisconsin, so around the same time I began exploring expanding it into a viable statewide LGBTQ news hub. To do so involves some revisioning of how we do and accomplish this work, so I've begun working with an attorney to establish a nonprofit arm for *Our Lives*, and a web development company to build what the next phase of *Our Lives* will look like. This is a very organic, evolving process. While the print publication continues to amaze me as it bucks trends and thrives, I see it remaining unique to the Madison media market. As for covering people, news, jobs, and events around the state, the website is going to become a much more robust portal. I'm hoping for a soft launch in the first quarter of 2020 of that new online experience.

4. I need to say thank you, again 100x over, for helping create space for *Our Lives* in this community. It's a real gift to be able to do this work, and for all the support we've received during our first 12.5 years publishing. Right now feels like we're a caterpillar about to begin metamorphosis. I'm eager and excited to share the butterfly that will emerge afterwards and will be asking for your continued support as we all learn and grow together. ■

CONTRIBUTORS



KIRSTEN SCHULTZ is a queer, trans, and disabled activist. In addition to working at a local non-profit, they run a sexuality education site focused on living well at the intersections they experience. In their free time, they enjoy playing hockey with the Madison Gay Hockey Association, performing burlesque, and fostering empathy in others. You can read more about their work and find information about their podcasts at kirstenschultz.org.

JILL NAGLER grew up in Prairie du Sac but has lived in Madison for nearly 20 years. They are white, queer, trans, non-binary, disabled, and working class. Jill has spent their time in Madison gaining education on the greater issues of systemic violence towards marginalized persons. Jill works at the UW in addiction research, serves as President of the Board of Directors at OutReach, is a member of Disability Pride and Groundwork, and is a screamer/shedder in the local queer, feminist, punk band, The Hasbians.

CHRIS WALTON was born and raised on Milwaukee's north side, and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with minors in African-American Studies and History from Mississippi State University. With his love of public service and past experience working on campaigns around the country as a national political operative, Chris has developed a passion for creating a more socially and politically active LGBTQ people of color community in Milwaukee. Chris is the Chairman of the Democratic Party of Milwaukee County. He is the first African American male chair since the 1980s; the first openly gay, African American ever elected; and the youngest county party chair in county history.



CELEBRATING LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

2020 Love List

Helps us recognize and celebrate your relationship(s) in our January/February issue while creating visibility across our state. We want to lift up and feature LGBTQ *Our Lives* readers from across Wisconsin while creating a portrait of LGBTQ love that reflects our diverse community.

To be included, submit your relationship at ourlivesmadison.com/lovelist

CORRECTION SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2019



In our September issue we featured a profile of local out firefighters and accidentally swapped the statements provided by Maj Williams and Becky Blaschka. We apologize for the error.

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EQUALITY LAW ADVOCACY POLITICS

Still Fighting for a Fair Wisconsin

Our Lives Publisher **Patrick Farabaugh** checks in with Fair Wisconsin Executive Director **Megin McDonell** to take the pulse of the organization and learn what's on their agenda going forward.

FOR ANYONE UNFAMILIAR, CAN YOU SHARE WHAT THE THREE BRANCHES OF FAIR WISCONSIN ARE?

Sure. We have the Fair Wisconsin Education Fund as our 501c3. That's the traditional nonprofit model that allows us to do educational outreach and for people to make charitable donations.

Fair Wisconsin, the 501c4 is the more direct lobbying and advocacy arm. It can engage in certain kinds of activities to influence policy that a 501c3 can't. Having both entities allows us access to different types of funding and advocacy strategies.

The Fair Wisconsin PAC is our political action committee, where we do our direct political and electoral activity. There's clear legal limits once you get into the electoral side, but even in that world there's different things that each of our entities can do.

An easy way to think of the three arms are: Changing hearts, changing minds, and changing faces. The 501c3 is changing hearts through education and public awareness and getting people to understand the issues that our communities face. We want people to have that personal, emotional connection, just like they did around marriage, as they realized, "Oh, that's my coworker." Changing minds is where we're lobbying. We want to convince you to prohibit this practice of conversion therapy or we want to explain how nondiscrimination should be more inclusive, etc. Changing faces is basically when you don't have enough pro-equality decision makers on your side and you need to start replacing people.

After marriage equality passed, many who knew Fair Wisconsin wondered if their work was done.

This has been an issue for a lot of state equality groups. After marriage passed, all of the national groups were regrouping and figuring out the new landscape. We all know there is tons more to do, especially around nondiscrimination. We don't have federal protections. Only half the states



As soon as Tony won, we were prepared to work with the transition team to say, "These are things that you can do." We're basically saying, "We want to be a resource to you. Here's something that you can do as an executive order. Here are some other things that you can't do."

have some kind of protections, or less than half, so we have to figure out a game plan for all the other work that has to happen.

While funding opportunities were pulling back, at the same time a large percentage of the public was thinking, "Oh, marriage was it, right?" They weren't aware of all the other work left to do. No one at the state equality groups thought, "Okay, we're done." Everybody in the movement understands there's all this extra work to do. But, for the general public, marriage was the most visible issue to them.

The funding from individual donors also just went down dramatically. It was almost like our community's own "mission accomplished" moment. Obviously this was before the 2016 election. Now nationally and at the state level, you have increasing attacks on other movements too, like racial, gender, and reproductive justice. All the attacks on these other progressive movements has caused this kind of recession in

our movement. Resources are increasingly overstretched.

AFTER MARRIAGE EQUALITY PASSED, WHAT WERE FAIR WISCONSIN'S PRIORITIES?

As the organization began contracting, I took over from Katie Belanger, Fair Wisconsin's previous President & CEO.

Our focus has never changed. We'd been focused for years before marriage equality on nondiscrimination efforts—passing local protections, filling in the holes in various Wisconsin laws, and adding nondiscrimination protections specifically for gender identity. These have always been our core priorities. When the individual donors began falling off after marriage equality, it became much more urgent to find a way to continue getting public and financial support. Public education around these other issues became a real priority, along with figuring out what we can realistically do as a smaller organization.

WERE YOU EVER CONCERNED FAIR WISCONSIN WAS AT RISK OF NOT EXISTING? SOME EQUALITY ORGANIZATIONS AROUND THE COUNTRY FOLDED AFTER MARRIAGE EQUALITY.

No, I don't think I ever really felt we were at risk of folding. Some groups intentionally disbanded, like Project 515 in Minnesota. They were always designed around marriage; 515 was code for the 515 legal protections that marriage offers. OutFront, Minnesota's LGBTQ equality organization, has continued on.

When I first started at Fair, there were five states that had sexual orientation protections, but not gender identity. Now eight years later, 21 states protect gender identity. None of the state equality organizations ever thought that because marriage and possibly nondiscrimination are accomplished that we're finished. We still have conversion therapy, school safety, and all the myriad of intersectional issues like immigration and racial justice. I never felt like folding was an imminent risk, though that was the tide I had to fight against. It helps that we are small.

AT WHAT POINT DO YOU FEEL LIKE A CORNER WAS TURNED, AND MAYBE THE POST-MARRIAGE EXODUS HAD BOTTOMED OUT? WHAT DOES FAIR'S TIMELINE POST-MARRIAGE LOOK LIKE?

Gay marriage in Wisconsin was legalized in 2014 and nationally in 2015. Then, there was the horrendous election in 2016. The climate post-election was depressingly grim. Honestly, it also felt like another regrouping year in the sense that people had started to figure out how to apply our

marriage playbook to nondiscrimination. In 2017, the Trump administration was literally just doing one thing after another and it was horrible. I was explaining to a doctor about how I felt like every day I would wake up and try to go about my work, but would just be waiting for what next horrible thing was going to happen. I remember her reaction was, "Wow, that sounds extremely stressful and terrifying." That, I thought, was interesting. She's a doctor, so it's not like she has a low-stress job.

All the various protests that were happening in 2017 created a good opportunity for us to strengthen our partnerships with the other state organizations like Outreach, Diverse & Resilient, GSAFE, and the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center. For a while we maintained standing conference calls with all the different organization heads keeping each other updated, trying to coordinate. The feel was definitely that we recognize we need each other.

Then came 2018, which for me was personally really challenging. In January, I found out I had stage two breast cancer. I had to have surgery, then chemo, then radiation. It took a lot out of me. Just when you think things can't get any worse than 2017... Right as we got our feet under ourselves again in the Trump world, cancer

happened. Immediately the goal shifted to just do what we could to keep moving forward, to exist, to keep our head above water, and get through it. The board was especially great. Board members stepped up and transitioned into a working board. At that point, while I was doing treatment, was when we decided to begin sharing an office with GSAFE. Because of the similar organizational dynamics, they had also gotten smaller.

DO YOU MEAN LOSS OF FUNDING AFTER MARRIAGE?

Yeah, the State Equality Fund ended. It was the Gill Foundation and other national philanthropic funders, giving fairly substantial multi-year grants. These were grants to support state-level nondiscrimination efforts, so we had some. GSAFE did as well. Fair was supporting efforts to pass local ordinances. For GSAFE, it was local school board policies.

I WANT TO DOUBLE BACK TO 2018 FOR A MOMENT. WAS FAIR ENGAGED IN THE MIDTERM ELECTIONS?

We did an independent expenditure specifically for Tammy Baldwin's race and for Tony Evers. We did some mail program around that, as well. Those were through the 501c4 arm—the changing minds arm.



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HOW DID FAIR WISCONSIN MANAGE TO LAND GOVERNOR EVER'S FIRST EXECUTIVE ORDER, BANNING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY WITHIN STATE AGENCIES? THAT WAS QUITE THE START TO 2019.

Once the election was coming up, I started planning for the possibility that we would have a pro-equality governor. We knew Tony had become the nominee, and that he would be an ally. He already had been as the State Superintendent at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). In 2015's bathroom bill, DPI was one of the organizations that was critical in stopping it.

Knowing that, I started figuring out what can be achieved by a pro-equality governor when you don't have legislative support. Pro-equality elected officials are outnumbered in the GOP-controlled legislature.



PATRICK FARABAUGH founded *Our Lives* in 2007 and has published it since. He also founded the Madison Gay Hockey Association in 2006. Before moving to Wisconsin, he was a Senior Creative at *Condé Nast Traveler*, and an Art Director for *OUT*.

That fall I met with lots of groups. I had conversations with the Trans Health Coalition, GSAFE, and our various partners, such as Diverse & Resilient, to ask, "What are the most important things that we can tackle?" Then I got assistance from policy experts in researching what we can legally do in Wisconsin.

As soon as Tony won, we were prepared to work with the transition team to say, "These are things that you can do." Even though it seems political, this is purely in the educational wheelhouse. We're saying, "We want to be a resource. Here's something that you can do as an executive order. Here are some other things that you can't do."

It has been great to just refocus in 2019.

WHAT ARE SOME 2020 GOALS FOR FAIR?

Again, with the makeup of the legislature, actual legislation is still a challenge. At the same time, I feel like conversion therapy has really been the issue of this year. In August alone, three cities passed protections. Big credit to Milwaukee for kicking that move-



McDonnell with Lt. Governor Barnes, as Governor Evers signs his first executive order prohibiting discrimination in state employment, public services and contracting.

ment off. The folks in Milwaukee really did an amazing job, and really launched the effort. We've been involved with most on different degrees, offering some guidelines, information, or language on occasion.

And 2020 is also a big election year, so we'll definitely be doing some different kinds of electoral programs on the 501c3 side (changing hearts), and that will be looking at basically trying to identify and turn out pro-LGBTQ voters. One of our goals is that we want LGBTQ people to be able to

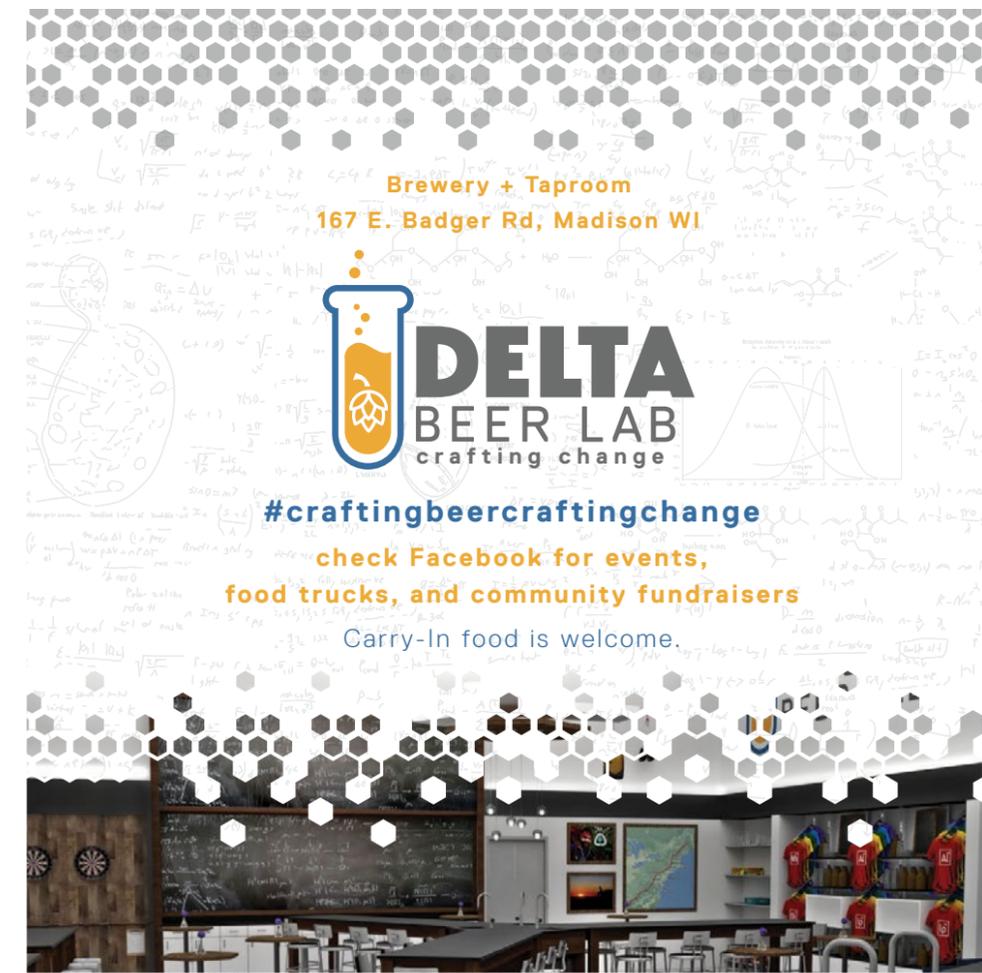
engage in democracy, so we're hoping for more representation on the ballot and more participation in elections.

BACK IN 2008, WHEN SCOTT WALKER FIRST CAME INTO OFFICE, I REMEMBER FAIR'S WORK SHIFTING FROM A TOP-DOWN EFFORT TO FOCUSING ON LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES TRYING TO PUSH UP. NOW WITH A PRO-EQUALITY GOVERNOR, ARE THERE ANY TOP-DOWN EFFORTS THAT YOU FORESEE WITHIN REACH AGAIN?

On the subject of conversion therapy protection, we do have a state bill that was introduced as part of the Equality Agenda back in June. The conversion therapy bill has achieved bipartisan cosponsorship. I think that that's really promising.

FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO ENGAGE WITH FAIR, ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES TO PLUG INTO?

As we're moving into another election year, we'll need people to help canvas. Workplace giving is another major path to sustain our work. We don't have tons of grants, so we depend on a loyal, reliable base who give each month or each year. That has truly sustained us through all these ups and downs. I'd also encourage people to sign up for our mailing lists, and follow our socials to stay informed. You can find them all from our website, fairwisconsin.com. ■



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Safe Schools Under Attack

A right-wing legal group is pushing the Madison school district to undo its policy designed to protect transgender students.

MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT | TRANSGENDER | ANTI-LGBTQ

A RIGHTWING LEGAL GROUP is challenging the Madison Metropolitan School District, seeking to repeal its official guidance document that provides protections for students who are transitioning at school. The document also instructs teachers and staff on best practices for supporting trans and non-binary students, including using proper pronouns and helping them access facilities that correspond with their gender identity.

The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, or WILL, is upset that the guide prohibits staff from revealing to parents if their child identifies as transgender or is transitioning, unless the student gives permission.

“Our problem is with the systematic exclusion of families, even to the point of instructing district employees to actively deceive

families,” Rick Esenberg, president and general counsel for the Milwaukee-based organization, told the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

MMSD’s LGBTQ+ Social Worker, Sherie Hohs, pushed back on the characterization. “There’s going to be cases where we’re going to follow that student’s lead, and if it’s not the right time to involve family and because we want all students to feel safe and welcomed ... we’re going to use their affirmed names and their pronouns, and we’re going to get their consent on where those can be shared,” Hohs said.

The 35-page guidance document was put into practice last year and includes best practices for supporting children who may wish to begin the process of transitioning at school but are not necessarily ready to be out at home. It includes topics like when a

NON-PROFIT MANAGEMENT | HOUSING INSECURITY | LOCAL POVERTY

Shared Vision

OutReach Board President **Jill Nagler** talks with with **Robin Sereno**, the Tenant Resource Center's new Executive Director, about the shared work of both organizations.

Let's start with the people cracking down on the homeless at the top of the capitol, near State Street. I'm sure that Mayor Rhodes-Conway felt pressure from people who have to walk past them and find that uncomfortable.

I attended a couple of City Council meetings when they were having those briefings about what's going on. I thought it was really striking that the central district's captain and one of the lieutenants were there and said, "You understand that we're not going to ticket our way out of this. You're missing the root issues here. The space is being used exactly how it was intended to be used. It's a gathering place and these are folks steeped in poverty."

There's been this back and forth about, "We've made good headway on housing people." And as a community, yes, we have. We've decreased the numbers of street homeless individuals, but that is a tiny percentage of people. When we talk about housing and security, my question is still,



Nagler



Sereno

"Please, you're ticketing people so it's easy for you to have information about it. Look at income levels and rent burden of the folks up there and understand what the root cause is. These are crimes of poverty that are happening." These homeless people are saying, "I'm going to take that opportunity to make some money because I don't make enough money." All those elements of criminality that tie right back to poverty are real. And that's a really hard thing. When we talk about median income in Dane County, it's \$70,000. We know the rent burden is 30%, but often more than 30% of the renter's income is going toward rent because average apartments are around \$1,300 for a one bedroom.

Sure, there are a lot of apartments or units for less, but often the quality of the unit is abysmal. And so just because you make less and have less economic opportunity, you're supposed to settle for \$500, \$600, \$700, \$800 a month unit because that's what you can afford. And it's okay for you to live with bed bugs and mold and lead and look the other way.

That's supposed to be acceptable? If you're black and poor and encountering all these barriers, disabled, you often live in neighborhoods that are also closed off with no good transportation. Then we're going to redistribute school, and send your kids to a suburban school district, but we're not going to actually invest in saff there that really understands accessibility of populations that are steeped in poverty, face racial discrimination, or are LGBTQ+.

My hope with this current local administration is having an economic background and belief in creating action from evidence. It astounds me that we have solid evidence right here, being produced out of our flagship university, and we're not acting on it. Even student poverty is here. There's solid evidence around housing insecurity, traumatic stress, all these pieces, and how it affects children. And we're hardly doing anything with it.

Because one of the barriers to homelessness is finding housing, what kind of agency do the homeless have in their own housing?

We've had so many missteps and that's part of doing good work. But our community seems to be constantly trying to shortcut the deep work that needs to be done. When it's around trauma-informed community building, believe that housing first is a thing and internalize it. This past year has been a steep learning curve. It feels like people are forgetting that while you're in this learning process, how much more trauma did you cause these 45 families and where's the responsibility in that? It certainly wasn't in their evictions, their displacements.

It's how we conceptualize what housing first means, how our financing

→ Continued on Page 16

student's name may be changed in the district's system, restroom and changing-area use, and when and how to communicate with the family of a student about their identity.



Hohns



Juchems



Esenberg

The document is based on state and federal laws, in addition to school board policy. Though it was not voted on by the Madison School Board, that body did get regular updates while it was being composed.

An opening message from then-Superintendent Jennifer Cheatham expresses support for the policy:

"As a school district, MMSD is committed to creating inclusive and welcoming learning communities to ensure that all students are able to graduate college, career, and community ready. We take seriously our responsibility to provide safe and nondiscriminatory

environments for all students. We have incredible transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive students, staff, and families throughout our district, and we want our schools to be places where every child thrives."

At issue, WILL claims, is the provision within the document that instructs school staff not to disclose "any information that may reveal a student's gender identity to others, including parents or guardians and other school staff, unless legally required to do so or unless the student has authorized such disclosure."

The guide also requires staff to communicate with parents or guardians using the name and gender of a student in the district's student information and records system. Students who are transitioning can have their names and gender markers changed in the system, but permission is needed by a parent or guardian.

"This might involve using the student's affirmed name and pronouns in the school setting, and their legal name and pronouns with family," the document points out.

The approach is to be used among students in all grade levels in Madison schools.

The need for compassionate and comprehensive training and guidance for teachers and staff when it comes to ensuring a safe space for LGBTQ students was highlighted by a 2018 Dane County Youth Assessment Survey. The survey found that, much like in the rest of the country, transgender and gender non-conform-

ing students reported higher rates of suicide attempts, self-harm, homelessness, and other problems. Much of that is due to the higher rates of bullying and even abuse suffered at the hands of unsupportive peers and adults, including family members.

About 4% of Madison students identified as transgender, non-binary, or gender-expansive, Hohns said, but added she predicts the number is higher given the figure reflects the students willing to provide information about their gender identity.

WILL, however, makes the claim that such a policy is potentially unconstitutional, arguing the state and federal constitutions recognize, to a degree, the "inherent right of parents to be involved in the upbringing of their children."

Esenberg said parents are normally presumed to be involved in important decisions regarding their children, with some exceptions where there is reason to believe a parent could act in a harmful manner toward the child.

"This turns that presumption on its head. It systematically excludes families," he said. "It presumes that the families are going to do something that will harm the children, and it's hard to think of a single example, other than this, where we do that."

The UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 13 through 16) is clear, however, that kids have the right to freedom of thought, expression, association, and a reasonable expectation of personal privacy (so long as there's no threat to public safety).

Asked about what the effort to repeal the guidance could mean for the fragile progress made on behalf of LGBTQ students in the community, Brian Juchems, co-director of GSAFE, says that "Transgender youth still risk being kicked or pushed out of their homes by their families when they come out or are outed. WILL wants to force schools to out their

students to their families. Outing students is irresponsible and a danger to the health and well-being of our younger people."

Juchems notes, "Madison's guidance document recognizes that coming out to families is one of the biggest risks an LGBTQ+ individual takes and provides educators with tools to help students—and ultimately families—navigate that process. The guidance helps educators create affirming spaces at school while they work with the student to figure out when and how to share their identity with their family and others. It gives young people agency and control over their own coming out journey—something every LGBTQ+ individual should have."

Esenberg claims that WILL is first asking for the district to repeal the policy before any litigation would be considered.

"Whether there's any aspect of the policy that can remain in place, there might be," Esenberg said. "I'm not entirely sure that it is the school district's job to take positions on things called the gender-binary. But our concern here, the thing that we're concerned with as a legal organization, is the exclusion of the parents."

WILL has circulated a letter among some Madison parents seeking potential plaintiffs if it were to sue. Esenberg wouldn't say whether WILL would pursue a lawsuit in state or federal court.

A Bradley Foundation-funded and ALEC-affiliated organization, WILL has a history of rightwing advocacy, including anti-labor, anti-LGBTQ, pro-deregulation efforts with conservative Christian underpinnings.

Meanwhile, MMSD continues to use the guidance document and train teachers on how best to support LGBTQ students. There's also the Transparent Family Support Group, which is run by the Madison School District but open to any families with transgender or non-binary children. —Emily Mills



LGBTQ Organizations Update

News | Awards | Staff & Board Changes
Calls to Action | Events

Reported by **Emily Mills**

Stay up-to-date with area LGBTQ+ and allied organizations and non-profits, be informed, and get involved.

NEWS
Important notes about area LGBTQ groups.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT Data from 2019 Milwaukee Pridefest about violence in the lives of

LGBTQ people has recently been released by Diverse & Resilient's Room To Be Safe Anti-Violence Program.

FORGE FORGE has completed a suite of trans-specific resources on sexual harassment in

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and grants work, who is responsible for what care? How many people are realistically needed to fill in the gaps and not cause more trauma.

That peels back so many layers that the community can no longer deny it, especially from the funding processes. Many social service agencies are underfunded, with the exception of county and city agencies who are able to poach some of the best workers because of pay and compensation packages. Because agencies that want to do good work are underfunded, they then traumatize their staff, who eventually leave because the work is untenable.

And you're stuck between this person I know personally needs help, but I need help, too. Our communities want to help, but they're struggling, too.

It's tough and it overwhelms an agency. Then, the agency can't do the work they want to do, and it rolls down. The same amount of dollars that go into the county around similar work isn't provided for private social service agencies, yet they are expected to come to the table and do the same level of work without the budget.



There's a need for the work that OutReach and Tenant Resource Center is doing with LGBTQ+ people facing homelessness, housing insecurity, and discrimination.

A decade before I came to the TRC, the trans population had been prioritized because of work that they had done and staff that they had. They're a priority here.

You think, "Oh, how did this come to be that it was a very intentional?" No, it was just a need. At the moment there's two of us there that have done a lot of youth work, specifically with trans youth.

TRC already had this reputation. But you know, I think because of the elevated presence now we're seeing folks routinely saying, "Hey, here's a person that I know needs some help that identifies as trans or non-binary." So now we're seeing a big influx of folk, and we know we're going to have to

bulk up our partnerships and professional development within the organization because we all know what harm happens when you are not educated about specific populations of individuals. And again, it doesn't matter what your best intentions are. The harm happens.

When your privilege is in not having that harm occur to you, how can you use that privilege to prevent that harm? You have to be comfortable with thinking, "How can I do the least harm? And if I do, what are the restorative steps?"

A trademark of dominant culture is to be reactive instead of proactive, particularly on pieces of harm. When is it going to change? Why can't we just do solid planning on the front end? We have all the advantages: privilege, money, education. We know this stuff, but we still half-ass it.

The whole group at TRC were on a retreat recently and talking about the F-35 military planes debate in Madison. Something about it struck me as, "What is this piece of the issue that I can't connect to?" Finally I realized it. The people who are giving the topic the most attention are getting social capital. There's an easy buy-in, it's a safe white thing to talk about. We don't see those same people at "A Day Without Immigrants." We don't see them supporting abolition efforts or removing police from Pride.

How do we hold each other accountable in a way that isn't harming our communities and alienating people? How do we also coach each other to not have that defensive reaction? This can translate to your work with housing insecurity and with privileged people's interactions with the homeless population.

There's some of those intersectional pieces, growing up housing insecure, growing up white and working poor, growing up queer. I think that attaches you in some ways to existing in this space of othering. We talked about this place of constantly being in discomfort because you hold these marginalized intersecting identities. From as early as I can remember, watching people being othered always felt terrible to me. I was enrolled in a school district that → *Continued on Page 18*

employment. The webinar, social media toolkit, and fact sheets all help explain workers' rights. Multiple links provide resources (including free legal and advocacy consultations) for trans and non-binary workers. Find it at forge-forward.org/publications-resources/sex-harassment.

MADISON MINOTAURS RUGBY The team has been having a great start to its fall season. The traditional first practice of the year, the Rugby101 session held in August intended for new players, was well attended and seven new players have joined as a result. The first two games were also successes, with wins over the Minneapolis Mayhem (38–32) and Milwaukee Beer Barons (31–15).

The Minotaurs October match against the Chicago Dragons was special because it was a part of the IGR's #PrideinRugby anniversary weekend. The weekend marked the start of IGR's Twentieth Anniversary year and was designed to promote and celebrate gay and inclusive rugby on an international scale.

AWARDS / RECOGNITION / GRANTS

Special thanks for those who do good.

CREAM CITY FOUNDATION After a record-breaking number of applicants, CCF announced its 2019 LGBTQ+ Scholarship recipients. Twelve Milwaukee-area students currently enrolled in a collegiate academic program were selected as this year's winners and each will receive a \$2,500 scholarship.

The winners are:

- Tavyonia Davis, UW-Parkside
- Christopher Durian, Concordia-Wisconsin
- Kimberly Hernandez, Carthage College
- Mallory Krumrei, UW-Milwaukee
- Hugo Ljungbäck, UW-Milwaukee
- Victor Magana, Medical College of Wis.
- Dawn Matlak, MATC
- Ash O'Higgins-Lowrey, MIAD
- Kim Otzelberger, Alverno
- Justin Roby, Concordia University-Wisconsin
- Adriana Rodriguez, UW-Milwaukee
- Amy Stuhlmacher, Alverno

Thank you to the 2019 Scholarship committee: Chair Angela Harden, Husch-Blackwell; Zachary Eastburn, Quarles & Brady; Michelle Gran, Marquette University; Sangeeta Rajput, GE Healthcare; Rev. Brad Toebben, St. Paul's Episcopal Church; Rev. Tory Topjian, Milwaukee Metropolitan Community Church; Christopher Tsukichi, Community Member.

NIGHTLIFE GAY BAR

Prism's Last Dance

Williamson Street nightclub will close its doors after just eight months of its new life.

RICO SABATINI, co-owner of Prism Night Club, announced on October 23 that the Williamson Street spot would permanently close in early November.

The decision comes just eight months after Prism opened, following a rebrand after Sabatini and **Apollo Marquez** bought out previous owners of the club formerly known as Plan B.



Sabatini

Writing on Facebook, Sabatini thanked the neighborhood and various partners, employees, and supporters for the total 10 years that Plan B and Prism had its run. Sabatini and **Corey Gresen** first opened Plan B in 2009 as a LGBTQ-focused night club that hosted the annual Fruit Fest. Its closure marks the loss of one of Madison's few remaining queer-centric social spaces.

Sabatini first left the club in 2014, and Gresen brought in **Josh Scherer** and **Albert Borokhim** as co-owners shortly thereafter. Problems began almost immediately after, as complaints came in from patrons and employees alike, finally boiling over in late 2018 when drag performers made accusations of being pushed out.

After the news broke, Sabatini decided to buy out all three owners, brought on former Inferno owner Apollo Marquez and promoter **Lili Luxe**, and reopened the club as Prism in March 2019. Since then, changes were made to provide more accountability for patrons and staff alike, and safety measures were put in place to support DJs and artists. Still, some in the community expressed continued skepticism that the business could become a safer and more inclusive space.

Further challenges posed by the changing face of the entertainment landscape in Madison, as well as "some landlord/lease/legal/property development stuff," combined to lead Sabatini to the decision to close the doors.

"Entertainment options are more abundant, and the grind to get people in the door is just that, a grind. Prism isn't doing terrible, but it isn't doing terrific either," Sabatini wrote. "I just have to say 'I gave it my best shot' and call it a day. There is only so much a person can give of themselves before they start neglecting the people they love and other important things in their life."

In addition to events scheduled for the next two weeks, a final, "last call" party will be held at the club on Saturday, November 9. —**Emily Mills**



DIVERSE & RESILIENT

Congratulations to D&R Board Member **Elle Hallo** for her role as keynote speaker at the UW-Oshkosh Harvey Milk Awards Program, President & CEO **Gerry Coon** for receiving the Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee's Equal Justice Award, and Anti-Violence

Program Manager for receiving End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin's Founding Aviator Award.

MADISON MINOTAURS RUGBY

The team voted **Adam Albers**, the friendly resident Canadian, as Captain for the season. He has been on the team



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we didn't live in, and I knew right away I'd never get busted. I could use the privilege of being white, of getting a really good education, and learn how to take standardized tests. Because if I could get an education, that would create massive access.

Kids grow up experiencing homelessness under the radar. Youth do everything they can, and use all the privilege they have to master hiding their homelessness because they don't want to be judged in that way.

Also grew up working class/poor, in a privileged community. In a small town that is predominantly white, being poor, queer, and assigned female at birth meant my GPA didn't matter, my education didn't matter. Being white helped me to not get busted for drugs or drinking, but I still had my rights violated, and I still didn't have a voice.

Growing up with some of those identities, you have to sit in discomfort from an early age. Kids who grow up in trauma become extremely observant. You have to know what's happening all around you, always.

Hypervigilance.

I think we're doing some solid work with a very small percentage of the population. I think that the majority of people that experience homelessness and housing insecurity, particularly in Dane County, don't ever fall on the radar. And youth are a huge part of that because doubling up isn't considered homeless by the federal HUD definition. And that's problematic because we know youth are an extremely vulnerable population. Those youth grow up. They become adults and are the folks out on the street with families and children of their own.

It's really frustrating that on a larger level it feels like there's willful ignorance from the city, the county, and the state because Tenant Resource Center is a Madison-based, statewide agency.

And that privileged piece of our community—not investing in this organization that impacts so many parts of housing and housing security, homelessness—is a disgrace.

This is unacceptable considering the level of poverty that exists not only in Dane County, but in all counties.

Right, we provide this service throughout Wisconsin. We're the only place that does it to the degree we do. We do seminars across the state to teach anybody who wants to know about tenant landlord law.

A single person making over \$21,000 doesn't get any financial assistance. We all know that you can't live in Dane County on less than \$40,000 or \$50,000 before you're stuck in that cycle of, "oops, next tiny financial shock puts me at risk of homelessness."

I think we're moving in the right direction in housing, in general. As we look at housing and health programs and removing restrictions like income limits at 500% of poverty level.

That helps with the historical poverty.

It takes planning, time, and community commitment. If the community values organizations such as Outreach and Tenant Resource Center, please come to the table and do this with us. Please don't just use us when it's convenient.

Or bash us because you don't understand or will never have to. That's one of the things that I imagine you can relate to—just bashing the former Tenant Resource Center Executive Director, bashing the missteps that TRC has done without ever having knowledge of what the TRC does, or ever having to need TRC's services or resources.

I believe that our community is ready to step forward and do this work deeply together. That feels really good and important to me. I think we can conquer this.

Having met enough people who are doing so much good work in the community, and trying to do all we can because we're deeply affected by this, that we have to have hope. And there is opportunity for growth. If we hold ourselves accountable, if we hold others accountable, and if we hold that expectation of doing anti-oppression work—of uplifting the most marginalized in our community—then it's going to benefit every single person.

There are so many important things happening. And for our community to be involved, it's only going to enrich those pieces. And I know that both of our organizations have a robust need for volunteers. Please come join the work with us, it's an incredible way to be involved. ■

for two years and plays as scrumhalf. Albers is now their fearless leader and, for the better, the only one allowed to talk to the referee, per the laws of rugby.

NEW HARVEST FOUNDATION Congratulations to the recipients of the Second New Harvest Grant Cycle of 2019. **Music Theater of Madison** has been awarded a grant toward staging the production of "Indecent" by Paula Vogel. The play will run January 30 through February 15 at the Play Circle in the Wisconsin Union. A grant has also been awarded to **Arts + Literature Lab** for the Art of Conscious Teaching: Mental Health First Aid for Teaching Artists. New Harvest is pleased to help fund these fine programs and encourages grant applications for our Third Cycle. Information can be found on our website, newharvest-foundation.org.

SUMMIT CREDIT UNION **Heidi Duss**, Summit's manager of diversity and inclusion, wellness, and community engagement, received the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber's Advocate of the Year Award. The award honors Heidi's advocacy for inclusion within the business community.



MADISON BLAZE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL MAKES ITS FINAL TACKLE

Madison's only professional, full-tackle women's football team announced in late September that it had ceased operations. In the Facebook message, the team thanked fans, players, coaches, and the Madison community for seven great years.

The Madison Blaze was run as a non-profit and was part of the Independent Women's Football League (IWFL), one of three women's tackle football leagues in the U.S. with teams in dozens of cities.

Begun as a combination of other women's football teams from the area that had formed and then fizzled out, the Blaze provided a space for all types of women to learn and play full-tackle football, and the end of the line brought many testimonies of how much the experience had meant to former players.

The Blaze had an award-winning history, with three IWFL Midwest Division Championships and one Founder's Bowl Championship under its belt. ■

STAFF / BOARD CHANGES

Who's moving on or moving into org leadership.

OUTREACH LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER **Angie Rehling** left her post as Program Director after 10 years there on November 8. She said in a Facebook post, "I very much value all the relationships, experiences, and knowledge I have gained [at Outreach]."

Longtime volunteer **Crystal Wipperfurth** has joined the board of the center. Crystal brings a wealth of knowledge around financial planning and a wonderful energy and ideas around special event planning.

GSAFE **Yante Turner** was hired as Inclusion & Equity Coordinator. Turner began working with LGBT+ youth in 2016 as an outreach coordinator at UW-Milwaukee. While there he started a student organization called Queer and Trans People of Color. His non-profit connections started in a program called Public Ally in 2018.

NEW HARVEST FOUNDATION The foundation welcomes **Emily Francis** to its Board of Directors. Emily has more than 15 years of experience working to promote equity for communities in need through nonprofit organizations, real estate development, and in the public sector. Emily currently works at the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority in real estate finance for low income housing development and lives on the east side of Madison with her wife and two daughters.

WISCONSIN LGBT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE **Kat Klawes** has joined the Chamber as its newest staff member, taking over the Emerging Leaders Program. She will be assisting with event organization in addition to the mentorship programs. Born and raised in Wisconsin, Klawes attended Northern Michigan University and graduated with a Bachelors in Education and a certification to be a College and Career Counselor with the Michigan College Access Network.

DEVELOPMENT & CALLS TO ACTION

New programs, outreach, or changes in mission.

DIVERSE & RESILIENT Through a grant from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), D&R is expanding its Anti-Violence Program (AVP). This funding enables D&R to have two new LGBTQ AVP Advocates to support survivors in Appleton and Milwaukee. Because of all this growth, D&R is also opening a new D&R office in Appleton.

OUTREACH LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER The Board of Directors is working with Genia Stevens of



DIVERSE & RESILIENT IS EXPANDING, OPENS OFFICE IN APPLETON

In October, Milwaukee-based Diverse & Resilient opened its first Appleton office, which will house their Northeast Wisconsin Room to Be Safe Anti-Violence Program.

At a press conference at the new space, the group highlighted its new programming in Northeast Wisconsin and discussed increased violence against LGBTQ people, including the increase in LGBTQ intimate partner homicides in Wisconsin in the past year.

Diverse & Resilient has provided LGBTQ programming in Wisconsin since 1995 and opened its first office space in Milwaukee in 2002. Diverse & Resilient has provided a number of programs over the years including trainings, technical assistance for programs, sexual health programming, youth leadership, HIV and STI testing and treatment, and a statewide anti-violence program that began in 2016.

The organization's mission is to achieve health equity and improve the safety and well-being of LGBTQ people and communities in Wisconsin.

"At Diverse & Resilient, we see a future in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in Wisconsin thrive, living healthy, satisfying lives in safe, supportive communities," Kathy Flores, Room to Be Safe program manager, wrote in a statement. "Our name serves as a reminder that LGBTQ people are everywhere, engage in interesting and meaningful lives, and contribute to the welfare of each other and the broader community." ■

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NOV. 15th - DEC. 31st

BRETT BLOMME ANNOUNCES RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE IN MILWAUKEE



Cream City Foundation President & CEO Brett Blomme announced in August his candidacy for Milwaukee County Circuit Court Branch 5.

"I have dedicated my career to fighting for equity and justice and this work

and experience has prepared me to serve on the Milwaukee County bench," Blomme wrote in an announcement to friends and supporters.

Blomme has worked as a legislative aide at the state capitol, and as a Wisconsin State Public Defender where he focused his efforts on some of the state's most disadvantaged families. Blomme also fought to provide comprehensive care for individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS. His work with CCF provides resources and programs for the LGBTQ+ community.

"I am now running for judge to continue my fight for Milwaukee County families by ensuring fair-minded justice and an honest court system that works for all people," he wrote. ■

Belwah Media to develop an agency strategic plan, starting in January 2020.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Plan ahead to join in.

ARCW The annual Jolly Holly Folly will be held December 1 at the Marcus Center for the Performing Arts in Milwaukee. This year's event will feature The Band's Visit, a 2018 Tony Award Winner for Best Musical. Tickets and further info is available at marcuscenter.org/show/bands-visit.

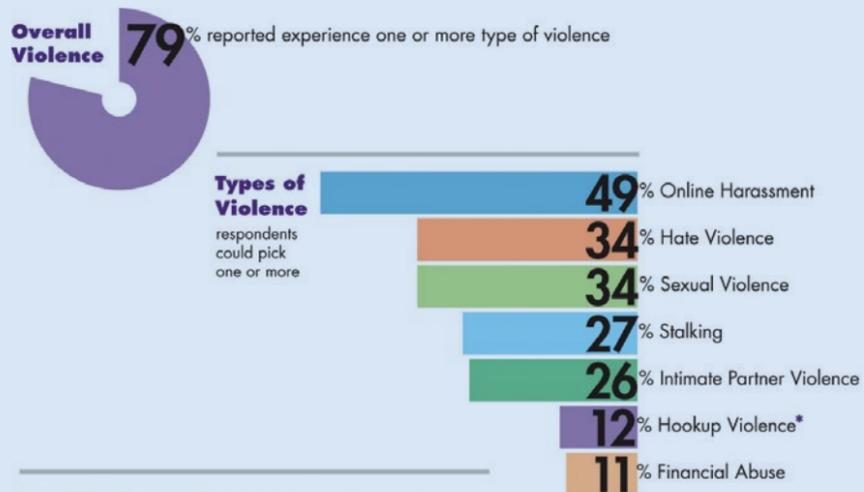
MADISON MINOTAURS RUGBY The annual turn-about drag show fundraiser will be held on No-

vember 23 at 7:00 p.m., at FIVE Nightclub. It's an opportunity to witness 12 burly Minotaurs don their best drag to raise funds for essential team functions. Please come out for a fun night to support the team.

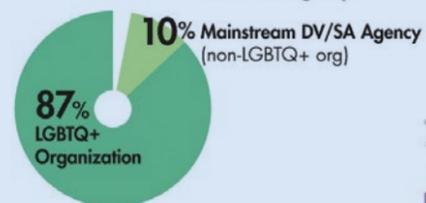
OUTREACH LGBT COMMUNITY CENTER The LGBTQ 50+ Alliance would like to welcome you to the Annual Thanksgiving Potluck on November 24 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at OutReach, 2701 International Lane. Suggested donation of \$10 or bring a dish to pass.

The Eleventh Annual Holiday Celebration will be held on December 7 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. This year's event will take place at the newly renovated Governor's Mansion Inn, 130 E. Gilman Street in Madison. ■

Data from 2019 Pridefest about violence in the lives of LGBTQ people has been released by Diverse & Resilient's Room To Be Safe Anti-Violence Program.



Services Agency If they were a victim of violence which would feel most comfortable when seeking help



For more information or to talk to an advocate, call or text the **Room to Be Safe Resource** line at 414-856-LGBT or visit www.roomtobesafe.org

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EDGEWOOD COLLEGE'S LGBTQ STUDENTS GET THEIR OWN SPACE



After almost a decade of lobbying, LGBTQIA students at Madison's Edgewood College will finally have a designated space to meet, starting this semester. The new space is located on the second floor of Predolin Humanities Center, the main building at the entrance to campus.

Sean O'Brien, an Edgewood student and president of SAFE, the campus' main LGBTQ group, told Wisconsin Public Radio that having

the dedicated space makes him feel more at home on the Catholic school's campus.

"Every once in a while, you'll have a student on campus say a derogatory remark," O'Brien said. "It's nice to actually have someplace where you can go, and know that no matter what, you're accepted and you're valued and you're loved, because the fight isn't over."

Previously, queer students had used the Women and Gender Studies Office as an informal meeting space. The new center is funded entirely by donations, but O'Brien hopes the center will receive designated funding from the college beginning next year.

The center faces other challenges. Given the Catholic Church's stance against contraception, for instance, a plan to provide free condoms in the new space was shot down. Though O'Brien himself doesn't identify as religious, he says he feels torn between wanting independence for the center and respecting the students who adhere more strictly to Catholic doctrine. "I want to make sure that it's open and available to everyone," he said.

Ultimately, the new Queer Student Center is a big step forward for LGBTQ students on the liberal arts campus. An open house held in October provided the official welcome, with students, faculty, and other visitors celebrating its kick-off. ■

ARTS + LITERATURE LAB RECEIVES MAJOR CITY GRANT TO MOVE INTO NEW SPACE



Arts + Literature Laboratory is planning to leave its original space at 2021 Winnebago Street this December, and re-open in February 2020 in a new, 9,910-square-foot location at the corner of East Main Street and South Livingston Street.

The City of Madison owns the space, which is located in the same building as a parking garage across the street from The Sylvee and the Starting Block tech building, and has

proposed awarding ALL a \$500,000 grant to help turn it into a three-story facility with significantly expanded gallery space, classrooms, performance space, and artist studios. Currently the new space is something of a blank slate—it doesn't even have flooring yet—and gives ALL a chance to build from scratch to suit its needs, in more than quadruple the space of its current location, a small retrofitted industrial building with an occupancy limit of 49.

ALL's initial lease at the space would be for 20 years, giving a young-but-vital arts organization a long-term presence in a central, rapidly gentrifying area defined by high-end housing,

the tech sector, and a new concert venue operated by a subsidiary of the world's largest concert promoter. ALL's programming would be a cultural counterbalance, taking a more community-driven approach and relying more on small donations and grants than it does on major corporate or philanthropic funders. Since opening in 2015, the venue has focused on adventurous gallery shows, experimental and jazz music, low-budget film screenings, literary readings, and a variety of art and literary workshops for children and adults, including a book club by and for queer youth.

(This article is a shortened version of one that originally appeared on tonemadison.com and was written by Scott Gordon. It is reprinted here with permission.) ■

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Man in the Arena

Milwaukee Democratic Party Chairman **Chris Walton** chats with **Keith Streicher**, a gay, black, disabled, Iraq War veteran, and the founder of the Veterans Leadership Coalition.

TELL ME SOMETHING, KEITH. WHAT COMPELLED YOU TO JOIN THE MILITARY?

A household of service and servant leadership. My mom, an entrepreneur and community leader, served in the church as the pastor. She always taught me to be a good Samaritan and practice egalitarianism. Those teachings culminated to my military service. Not to mention my ardor as a war and political history buff.

Then 9/11 happened, and I knew war was coming. At the time I was too young, so I waited. By the time I was 18 a recruiter approached me, and the rest is history. Go Army!

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HAS BEEN INTERESTING FOR ME, IS WHEN YOU JOINED THE MILITARY, "DON'T ASK DON'T TELL" WAS IN EFFECT. HOW DID THAT AFFECT YOU?

Let me start off by saying I don't regret anything from my military experience. I've learned so much and those lessons/experiences continue to sustain me.

During DADT, I faced a lot of harassment because I never believed I should have to hide—military or not. And I didn't. I came out to my First Sergeant at my first duty station in South Korea. There was vulgar harassment. There were soldiers who told me they were going to rape me. There were soldiers who pulled their genitals out and waved them at me.

There were a lot of people that basically threatened my life; however, my work and work ethic protected me. So, no matter how many people I had harassing me or in my ears saying negative things, "gay," "fag," threatening or harassing me, the majority respected me. Even the ones disrespecting me eventually were standing up for me. I was a logistics expert; I took pride in my job, and that inspired them.

WHERE WERE YOU BASED?

Basic training was at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. I did AIT at Fort Lee in Virginia. I was stationed in South Korea at Camp Stanley. Camp Stanley is in area one. So it's close to the DMZ. I was about maybe 30 minutes away from Seoul. From South Korea, I went to Fort Stewart, which is where I began training for deployment to Iraq.

WHAT WAS YOUR RANK WHEN YOU RETIRED?

I was a specialist. So, corporal/specialist. I spent a little shy of four years in the military.

HOW DOES IT FEEL, BEING A PERSON OF COLOR WHO IS GAY, TO BE APPROACHED FOR SO MANY DIFFERENT POSITIONS IN SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP?

I am humbled to have these opportunities in front of me, and I feel blessed. But I dream so big, so I don't catch an ego. That's a quote by Quincy Jones I've always practiced. I'm amazed by the opportunities, but I'm not surprised by them because I dream big—I always have.

Being gay, a person of color, disabled, an Iraq War veteran, a mil-



lennial, has been an advantage, thanks in part to the driving discussions around diversity. I'm grateful that people see my talent, and just like in the military, they know my work ethic so opportunities are there at my door. It takes hard work to move the needle, to be innovative, and transform environments. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I believe I'm reaping the benefits of my mother's prayers as well as hard work.

SO TELL US, WHO IS KEITH?

Keith is compassionate and a strong proponent of equality, practicing humanitarianism and egalitarianism. Keith is the apotheosis of what it means to be LGBT, veteran, disabled, millennial, black, and ambitious.

I love service. Service, especially in the non-profit space, is not a zero-sum game. Some people miss that.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT SKILLS TO HAVE TO BE A LEADER FOR A COMMUNITY?

Transparency, compassion, and hope. We have to be able to inspire others and give them a glimpse of what can be even if their current situation seems far from the life they dreamed of. And always show empathy. Know thyself and thine craft. And if you are truly willing to be a leader, you have to be willing to eat last.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GO INTO POLITICS AND BE INVOLVED?

I have a mother and entire family that practices servant leadership, and I was inspired by the idea of a great society. Helping to make and shape laws and policies to better the lives of all—not just a few. History

was always an inspiration. I studied monarchs, authoritarian and autocratic regimes, theocratic and democratic governments. And being on the forensics/debate team in high school helped as well.

DO YOU SEE YOURSELF MORE AS A CANDIDATE OR CAMPAIGN MANAGER?

Well, I'm currently a campaign manager. I love advising and helping to steer the ship. I don't see myself as the candidate out front.

AFTER YOUR WHITE HOUSE AND DC YEARS, YOU CAME BACK TO MILWAUKEE. WHY?

Because this is home. I wanted to come home to contribute to the efforts of a positive change happening right now in our communities. And I wanted to come home to make a change, period.

SO, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES YOU'VE EXPERIENCED AS A GAY PERSON OF COLOR DEALING WITH A LOT OF THESE INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS THAT WE SWIM IN ON A DAILY BASIS?



Where do I start? I've interviewed with organizations or volunteered, and I've heard things like, "You seem very boisterous or flamboyant," or "You seem too flamboyant for this job," or "You're too clean for this job." Anyone can volunteer, so why are you turning me away? I've been the only person of color in rooms that we should definitely be represented in. I've been the only LGBTQ person in rooms we definitely should be in from DC to Silicon Valley. It's hard being the first in some of those rooms,

but I know my challenges while in the room makes room for me and others like me to sit at the table.

Although I've faced discrimination and challenges as a gay black man, I don't shy away from the fight. I am the man in the arena. Growing up gay and black is hard work to penetrate the hearts and minds of others, but I'm always willing to educate because I believe that this world can be a better place, and it will be a better place in our lifetime, so that's why I tackle challenges.

HOW DID YOUR FAMILY HANDLE YOUR COMING OUT?

I have an older brother who's gay. From a young age, I've always been told there was something different about me and that was like a code way of saying, "We believe you're gay."

I'VE HEARD THAT A COUPLE OF TIMES MYSELF.

Right? My mom talked to me when I was younger. She knew; it wasn't a secret to anyone, so I didn't come out officially to my family because they always thought I was gay. So one summer, I brought my boyfriend home, and that was that.

My mom, a pastor, always said, "I don't believe in your lifestyle, but



CHRIS WALTON has developed a passion for creating a more socially and politically-active LGBTQ people of color community in Milwaukee. He is currently serving as the Chairman of the Democratic Party of Milwaukee County since November 20th, 2017. He is the first openly gay, African American ever elected and also the youngest county party Chair in county history.

I still love you. I support you." And she did just that. She took in and opened her arms to anyone I brought home. She didn't say anything crazy to them. She fed them, she loved them, and gave words of affirmation. I mean, that's the kind of person my mother is. My dad's the same way. My family as well.

HOW DO YOU INTERACT WITH THE LOCAL MILWAUKEE COMMUNITY?

Thankfully, I've been successful with being myself while advocating for others. It's been a blessing to have had more successes than failures when it comes to communicating with local populations. I don't take most things personally. If you choose not to interact with me—that's fine too. I would like for you not to judge me, but if that's what you choose to do, I'll keep it moving. Ultimately, that says more about you than it does me.

My mom always said you win more flies with honey than with vinegar. So that's how I move—I've always been sweet and kind to others. She also told me to be as the duck emerging from the water and shake off the naysayers, the roadblocks, and keep striving toward the high calling.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER TO OTHERS WHO SHARE YOUR IDENTITIES WHO ARE CONSIDERING MILITARY SERVICE, OR GOING INTO POLITICS OR OTHER WAYS OF DOING COMMUNITY SERVICE?

I would say don't shy away from who you are. Believe in yourself, love yourself. I believe that once you have that, it touches everyone. Be a light in a world that is dark, that is in need of more people willing to go the extra mile to change it for the better. Seek advice from wise counsel as needed, and dream so big it humbles your ego. Be an expert when possible, and never give in to the challenges and calamity that may befall you. Life is beautiful, and you have the power to write your own story. Never allow others such a privilege.

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm currently the director for Veterans Upward Bound at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; campaign manager for Chantia Lewis's re-election; board member of the Rite-Hite YMCA Metropolitan Milwaukee; and chairman of VLC, Veterans Leadership Coalition, which is a DC-based non-profit.

WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. Therefore, I'll continue to allow him to order my steps, and I'll keep doing my best and continue to develop and grow personally, mentally, spiritually, as well as professionally. I will continue being the best son, soldier, volunteer, servant leader, gay, black, disabled individual that I can be.

ANY FINAL WORDS FOR READERS?

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. So never dim your light for the sake of acceptance. ■

Friday, Dec. 6, 2019, 7:30 pm
 Sunday, Dec. 8, 2019, 3:00 pm
 Christ Presbyterian Church
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 \$20 advance/\$25 at door
 Perfectharmonychorus.org

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CHORAL MUSIC GENDER COMMUNITY GROUP

A Welcome Change

More than 20 years after their founding, **Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus** adopts a new gender-expansive membership policy, and breathes fresh life into a Madison institution.

JULY 17, 1997 saw 10 brave men performing their first concert. Since then, Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus has grown and changed, always sticking to their mission to create, enrich, and transform our community through music. This past year has brought a level of impact that they had not seen in recent years, and with their recent concert celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising and the history of the LGBT+ movement, they had some serious reevaluation to consider.

FOUNDING

At the time of Perfect Harmony's founding, there were no men's choruses in Madison, but several women-only and mixed choruses. The name Perfect Harmony was chosen symbolically as pH—it's creation representing an attempt to bring balance where there was an imbalance in the lack of spaces for men to be artistic. For many of the founding members, it was particularly significant and vital to them, offering a

place where these men were able to be open and out with their sexuality. As more members joined, more audience members attended, and more venues requested performances, the men of Perfect Harmony lived their mission for an increasing audience. Last season was their first performing at Christ Presbyterian Church, which took their sound to a new place. However, the expansion did not come without growing pains. In recent years, an ever-increasing diversity in their membership and trends within the community of gay choruses called their discrimination policy into question. More specifically, "Who was welcomed as a singing member?"

THE TIPPING POINT

Their mission to enrich the community has brought many original commissioned pieces to Madison including Heartlands and Naked Man. And in June, Perfect Harmony Men's Chorus performed a newly written piece that they co-commissioned with other LGBT+ choruses around the U.S. "Quiet No More" tells the story of the Stonewall Riots, and while learning the music, Perfect Harmony dug deeper into their own history and role within the larger LGBT+ movement. As the chorus dove into the music and the stories of those who were at Stonewall, some members commented that the riot might never have happened at all if it weren't for the diverse members of the community coming together. They were joined by LGBT+ speakers from the Madison community who read lines telling the story of the Stonewall Riots while the chorus sang.

The PHMC board of directors was also working behind the scenes, evaluating the demographics of their membership and comparing that to both the Madison community and the community of LGBTQ choruses. A vote was put before the board of directors to revise their discrimination policy to make PHMC more welcoming and inclusive. Board President Burt Tower noted, "On the surface, we looked open and accepting, yet our policies told a different story." Citing decisions by other GALA member choruses in recent years to move toward a more expansive membership policy, Tower further explained some of the board's reasoning for the decision. "The topic of gender is more fluid than it ever has been, and we are compelled to examine our current policies that guide us in our mission to 'create, enrich, and transform' our present-day community through music."

MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY EXPANDED

The decision that was passed by the board opens up membership to all singers with tenor, baritone, or bass (TTBB) vocal ranges, regardless of gender, gender expression, or sexuality. Responses both within the chorus and from members of the community through social media have been overwhelmingly positive, with people reaching out to say how happy they are to hear of the change and that they support the chorus' new direction. Singers from other GALA choruses have reached out to share stories of similar policy changes in their own groups, while others criticized how long it took PHMC to join them. Others still have yet to change their policy. Chorus member Danny Atwater wrote in support of the board's decision, "I think here and now, as we honor the 50th Anniversary of Stonewall, a time that the Ls, and the Gs, and the Bs, and the Ts, and the As came together to take a stand, that we can look to our past as a guide to the future."

NEW SINGERS AND VOLUNTEERS

September saw the first open rehearsals since the new membership decision, where singers interested in joining Perfect Harmony can meet current members and sing with the chorus for the night, before deciding whether to continue as permanent members. Between the two nights open to the public, a record 14 new singers attended; a drastic increase from the previous year's attendance of four. "I think we might need to buy more music!" the chorus' librarian joked in excitement and shock about the turnout after the first night of open rehearsal.

The decision that was passed by the board opens up membership to all singers with tenor, baritone, or bass (TTBB) vocal ranges, regardless of gender, gender expression, or sexuality.

In addition to singers, the membership initiative extends to all volunteers within the organization. It takes more than just singers to make the non-profit hum, and they are actively looking to add community members to their board of directors and numerous committees. If you have time to help support their mission, and are looking for a non-profit with which to volunteer, they would love to have you. Visit perfectharmonychorus.org/volunteer to get involved.

WINTER CONCERT: LET US GATHER

The theme of this winter's concert is Let Us Gather, and will feature songs of gatherings and winter celebrations around the world. Artistic Director Kevin Hage continues to push and encourage the chorus to grow musically, with numerous a capella pieces and six- or more part harmonies to impress and entertain the audience. Musical selections range from classic holiday choral pieces, to modern pop and cinema songs rewritten for a chorus setting.

When: Friday December 6 at 7:30pm Sunday December 8 at 3:00pm
Where: Christ Presbyterian Church 944 E. Gorham Street, Madison, WI

Tickets: \$20 each and may be purchased from perfectharmonychorus.org or directly from a chorus member. —Lucca Hermes



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Saving the World One Hug at a Time

Angela Baerwolf speaks with **Free Mom Hugs Wisconsin** organizer **Amy Voss** about how something as simple as a hug can be both political and therapeutic.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF FREE MOM HUGS?

We are a group of affirming parents and allies who love the LGBTQ+ community unconditionally. We are dedicated to educating people and encouraging people to affirm and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO JOIN THIS CHAPTER?

I live and work in a more conservative part of the state. I have heard people talk about LGBTQ+ family members in a derogatory manner and of banishing them from their lives. I cannot sit by in silence and watch this happen. I had to do something.

WHAT EVENTS HAS THE GROUP PARTICIPATED IN THIS SUMMER?

We have been to several different events this summer, ranging from Milwaukee PrideFest to small potluck picnics. I have also been to Beloit, Green Bay, Fond Du Lac, Door County, Stevens Point, and more. I know there are some that we missed this year—we hope to get to more next summer.

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR EXPERIENCES SO FAR IN YOUR HUG EXCHANGES? ANY STORY THAT REALLY STAYED WITH YOU?

I have hugged thousands of people, and each one is special and unique. Each hug I give is accompanied by heartfelt love and words of encouragement. There are times where people are overcome with emotions and cry. We are there to hold and comfort them and, yes, cry with them.

I was at a Pride event and saw a college-aged person looking at me from a distance with uncertainty. I looked right at them and opened my arms. They started to cry and ran into my arms, having no words to express themselves, just tears. I held them tight, telling them they are loved, I had them, and it's okay to cry. I cried with them. I never let go of my hugs first—I'll hold anyone for as long as they need.

Another encounter that stands out is from a smaller-town Pride. I saw a mother with her teenager hanging on the outskirts of the festival. I wandered over to talk. It turned out the teen had just come out to their mother a few days before. This mom was overwhelmed and worried about how people would treat her child, so they went to Pride looking for direction. I got her connected with local resources and we talked for about an hour, answering questions and reassuring her that unconditional love was the best thing she could do for her child. You don't have to understand everything right away in order to love or be allies. Later that day, I saw them dancing together with pride flags wrapped around their shoulders.



Sometimes it's us Moms who need encouraging. There was a particularly emotional conversation that I had with someone, and so I needed a break and had to walk by myself for a few minutes. While I was on my own, a person I had talked to earlier gave me an encouraging note saying I looked like I could use a hug. That hug was just what I needed.

There are tears when we hug, but there are also laughs and smiles. We are there to give people whatever type of support they need at that time.

WHAT ARE YOUR UPCOMING EVENTS?

We are a support organization, attending Pride events and other types of community events. We are always adding new places where we will be. If anyone would like us at an event or needs us, we can be contacted on our Facebook page, Free Mom Hugs Wisconsin or email me amy.voss@wi.freemomhugs.org. ■

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Access Denied

Kirsten Schultz details the state of access to health care for transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people, personalized by the experiences of Madison's own Cass Marie.

THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS have been arduous for transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in the United States. The Trump Administration continues to attack the trans community, from banning trans troops to approving discriminatory policies. Anti-trans voices continue to stand out, whether in the White House or our communities. Despite how far we've come, trans people are being denied basic human rights, including the ability to live.

The one saving grace for many trans people locally is that we have seen improvements. In August 2019, U.S. District Judge William Conley overturned a ban on covering gender-affirming measures for Medicaid patients. That follows a 2018 ruling requiring insurance for state workers to cover these same measures.

These wins only happened in the last few years. Despite Madison being a fairly welcoming place, difficulties persist in achieving access to health care or other gender-affirming measures.

CASS' STORY

Cass Marie Downing, a 47-year old trans woman, knows all too well the price people pay for gender-affirming care.

In the 1990s, Cass wanted the ability to see her true self reflected in the mirror. At the time, she was told breast implants would be around \$20,000 and wouldn't be covered by insurance. The surgeon Cass spoke to about the procedure wouldn't do it anyway, as she's HIV-positive.

The dysphoria Cass experienced was intense. A substance user at the time, she says she craved the type of "instant gratification" to change her gender expression as she did for drugs.

One day, Cass found help in the late Amanda Love. Amanda was a queen who, through whispers and word of mouth, would carry out black market silicone injections for feminization. Cass spent \$125 at the time to get injections in her face. Amanda gave Cass a "mercy pump," meaning Cass got extra product for the same price.

Within a few years, Cass began to get more black market injections. A man named Mark, who worked on a lot of well-known trans women, diluted the injections with water, ripping off his customers.

A woman named Michelle would come into Cass' life next, bringing a trainee named Shawna. In Milwaukee, they performed multiple injections. "It was very much, 'You take care of us, we'll take care of you,'" Cass explained. She would get discounts for leading others to Michelle and Shawna.

Amanda was a queen who, through whispers and word of mouth, would carry out black market silicone injections for feminization. Amanda gave Cass a "mercy pump," meaning Cass got extra product for the same price.

Soon, Cass was holding what she called pumping parties at her place, bringing multiple clients to these women at the same time. Cass estimated the amount of money those administering the injections could make in one weekend to be around \$50,000–\$60,000.

PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT

The areas Cass had injected would bruise and always be a slightly different color than the rest of her skin. However, later on, more prob-

lems began to develop in these areas. Physically, Cass still deals with considerable pain. "The silicone encapsulates and can be painful," she shared. Upon feeling the areas she's had injected, one feels a similar sensation to an older ice pack. There are individual beads, lumps where the silicone has fused, and even sharp edges. Cass has been told to massage these areas often to avoid additional complications including embolisms and possible death.

The injections actually make it hard for Cass to do her job, not only because of her persistent pain but also muscle damage. The silicone has also broken some vessels and pushed others toward the surface. This is both painful and a source of self consciousness.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

This experience has been hard on Cass mentally as well. She has anxiety, which can be a side effect of the silicone itself. She also feels embarrassed, regretful, and even guilty over leading others into the black market. She said this feeling is very much like when she was using drugs.

All in all, this has also had an impact on her relationships. Her current boyfriend says it doesn't bother him. Cass, though, feels self-conscious about it. Her breasts are one of the heavily affected areas where a few of the sharp edges are. That's made some sexual activities painful and somewhat awkward.

The FDA released a warning against using these injections, but that wasn't until late 2017—long after Cass' experiences. The statement describes many of the issues Cass has faced, including chronic pain, scarring, and interference with blood vessels. It also warns that other complications including stroke, infection, and death can result from the silicone migrating throughout the body.

That warning followed another from a more popular source—rapper Cardi B. Cardi went through a similar process, paying \$800 for injections into her buttocks. While her alterations weren't done for transition purposes, she wanted to enhance her figure as a dancer. There weren't many affordable options for her, either. Like Cardi, many people who engage in sex work see benefits to these quick and cheap changes to their bodies. Many women, both cis and trans, see bigger tips and more work if they have the right curves in the right spots.

NEXT STEPS?

When asked if she wanted to pursue getting medical treatment to remove the silicone, Cass said absolutely. The main problem is the cost, followed closely by how involved the process would be. To repair her breasts alone would essentially take a double mastectomy.

After that, spacers would have to be put in to expand the skin on her chest to make room for implants. Cisgender fitness influencer Jenelle Salazar Butler has documented her own recovery. Not only did Butler nearly die, she went through multiple surgeries and a very long wound-healing process.

To repair her breasts alone would essentially take a double mastectomy. After that, spacers would have to be put in to expand the skin on her chest to make room for implants.

The amount of time needed for healing and growth is time that many trans folx don't have. While not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria, it can be an intense experience that can contribute to poor mental health and suicidal ideation.

MADISON'S CURRENT STATE

For those looking for gender-affirming care in Madison today, the picture is a little brighter. There are multiple resources out there, such as Outreach and the Wisconsin Transgender Health Coalition.

That said, Madison is lacking a number of providers well-versed in gender and transition. Despite being a world-class teaching hospital,



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the University of Wisconsin has very few trans-competent providers for adults. Currently, there are no primary care physicians listed on the UW gender page or the Transgender Health Coalition page who are currently accepting new adult patients. The one saving grace is that, despite only one of their providers specializing in trans health care, all family medicine physicians at the Northeast Family Medical Center do have training in trans-related care.

That's only one clinic in one part of the city, though.

The lack of providers only grows when we look outside the UW Health system. SSM Health, formerly Dean, has a history of poor trans healthcare throughout its clinics in Madison. This isn't surprising when one learns that it's a Catholic group. Earlier this year, the Vatican released a statement sharing their views that people cannot "choose" their gender identity while simultaneously rejecting non-heterosexual intimate relationships. Currently, the doctors in-network for SSM that are interested in trans health are all OB/GYNs.

The lack of providers only grows when we look outside the UW Health system. SSM Health, formerly Dean, has a history of poor trans healthcare throughout its clinics in Madison.

One person I spoke with—we'll call her M—has insurance through work that only allows her to utilize SSM Health. When she met with the physician SSM had told her was their go-to doctor for trans-related issues, M was asked to suggest a dose of hormones that she thought she should start on. The physician had no idea what dose to prescribe. Bottom surgery wouldn't be covered by her insurance, either. Add to that the lack of access via public transit to an SSM clinic where this doctor works, and she really doesn't have access to quality health care.

Another person—P—currently works for SSM and is concerned about what will happen when they transition off their current insurance and into the SSM network.

UnityPoint Health, formerly Meriter, doesn't even list transgender health as a speciality on their "find a doctor" tool. They're a smaller network and partner with the UW Hospital & Clinics. Still, it's odd that, in 2019, the one mention of trans people on their site is from a mother of a trans child.

The one system that seems invested in

providing quality trans health care is Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin (GHC-SCW). On their LGBTQ health page, they list not only which physicians are knowledgeable in discussing Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) but which primary care providers specialize in trans care. Granted, they likely see fewer patients than UW overall. This makes it easier for physicians to keep their patient lists open. Still, with UW being a teaching hospital, one has to wonder why GHC-SCW appears as the best option for trans folk in the Madison area.

THE STATE OF TRANS HEALTH CARE NATIONALLY

Nationally, things aren't much better.

Thanks to the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, we know that people with multiple marginalized identities face an ever-more difficult time. A Latinx trans woman is going to have a far different experience than a white trans woman. That's especially true as we consider access to health care. We know that cost is already prohibitive. In a 2015 report released by the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), 33% of trans people avoided seeking medical care when needed due to that cost. Breaking that down further, 42% of multi-racial people, 41% of American Indigenous people, 40% of Black people, and 37% of Latinx people did the same. While 23% of respondents overall were concerned about being discriminated against at the doctor's office, this number rose to 37% for American Indigenous people and 34% for those with a Middle Eastern background.

In April 2019, a study was released which showed that, overall, trans people are in worse health. This only puts even more pressure on us as a society to improve access to health care for trans folk.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN MADISON

When it comes to mental health care, things aren't much better. We're dealing with a shortage of mental health providers in Madison. Many providers who are taking on new clients don't take insurance. This may not seem like a barrier for many since, according to the Census Bureau, the average Madisonian income was nearly \$60,000 per household in 2017. Sadly, there are multiple studies that show how various levels of discrimination lead to lower income levels for transgender and gender non-conforming people across the country.

When we take into account how many insurance companies require the combination of adequate health care and counseling to access

any gender-affirming measures, we can see how potentially fatal the above combination is. In the 2015 study from the NCTE, 48% of survey respondents stated that they had seriously considered suicide within the past year. Roughly 24% had made plans and 7% had attempted to go through with those plans. As with access to health care, attempted suicide rates were higher for communities of color as well as those with disabilities.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

One potential for change could be with the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. Currently, health care providers are able to choose which topics they learn more about in Continuing Education. As such, they often don't get much experience in topics they're not passionate about. Requiring all providers, from receptionists up to head physicians, to take gender-related courses could help lessen the gap in care.

Each local health care organization should also be looking into expanding its roster of trans-competent health care providers. While GHC-SCW has a great roster currently, it's the only local group that does. Trans people deserve to have not only primary care physicians who understand trans issues, but also specialists who are aware of the difficulties they face from rheumatologists to allergists and beyond.

On a national level, there is hope, too. The Democratic candidates for president have fairly progressive ideas around LGBTQ+ inclusion. The majority of them support The Equality Act which would expand and protect civil rights for all in the LGBTQ+ community. Julian Castro mentioned the need to include trans folk in the reproductive rights conversation during a presidential debate (although he corrected his language later as he had botched it a bit in the moment). More books and trainings are coming out to help educate everyone in health care and beyond about trans issues.

Of course, none of these measures change what's happened to those who have been harmed by a lack of access to better health care. It doesn't change the amount of pain Cass feels on a daily basis or the self-esteem issues this experience has caused.

At the end of our conversation, I asked Cass what she would say to herself if she had the ability to travel back in time. "Don't do it. Get implants," she said without hesitation. ■



KIRSTEN SCHULTZ is a world-renowned queer and disabled writer, activist, and sex educator. They hold an MS in Healthcare Administration from Utica College. You can learn more about them and their work at kirstenschultz.org and on Twitter @kirstie_schultz.



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FAITH HOUSING MEDICAL CARE

A Place to Recover

Lesbian women of faith lead the effort to open **Healing House**, a place where families experiencing housing instability can recover after hospitalization or emergency room visits.



IT TOOK A FEW YEARS and a massive fund-raising effort, but now Madison is home to the nation's first medical respite center that welcomes families who are homeless. It's called Healing House and its doors opened in July of 2019 due to the help of community partners and the leadership of Linda Ketcham from Madison Area Urban Ministry and Reverend Eldonna Hazen from First Congregational Church.

IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS

In 2012 Madison Area Urban Ministry was a part of a Dane County Board study where people who were living in an encampment near East Washington Avenue were asked about their needs, gaps in their resources, and the broader issues that were making their experiences more difficult. Through the study, MUM learned that one of the deeper challenges people face relates to health care, especially for those who have hospital or emergency room visits but who do not have a safe or stable place to rest and heal.

It is sustained entirely by private funds, so no city, county, or United Way funding yet supports the effort. They set a million-dollar goal for their capital campaign and they reached it. Ongoing support is needed, however, since it will take around \$330,000 a year to sustain the program.

Clergy rallied around the idea of a place where there could be a medical respite program. They knew the limitations of our local shelter system: there aren't enough beds, and shelters are only open overnight. Parents and children may also be living in vehicles or in temporary

housing (or couch surfing). Family members who are discharged from the hospital due to surgery, illness, or after giving birth needed a place to go to recuperate.

WHAT MAKES HEALING HOUSE DIFFERENT

While there are other medical respite homes in the United States, Healing House is the first to put its whole emphasis on welcoming families, whether it's a parent or child who needs to recuperate, or people who have a high-risk pregnancy.

Support goes beyond providing beds. Healing House provides coordination with home health providers, volunteers from local churches cook the meals, and The Road Home provides case management. First Congregational Church owns the house on Lathrop Street and MUM runs the program.

"I see our work at MUM in general and Healing House specifically as our response to the call across faith traditions to hospitality, welcoming the stranger, caring for the sick, for children," said Ketcham. "It's walking our talk. MUM was born out of faith communities, including First Congregational UCC."

Even in the first few months of operation, Healing House has taught its organizers a lot about disrupting the cycle of homelessness for families and about the needs of our community.

"We have learned that there are a lot of children in our community who need surgery and don't get it because they have nowhere to recuperate," said Ketcham. "We have learned that hospitals still don't fully acknowledge that they serve families experiencing homelessness. Whether it's to avoid increased challenges with discharge planning or some other

reason, they don't see it. We have had the racial disparities in our community related to homelessness and health care confirmed as we see 90% of our guests are people of color."

Hazen's conversations with residents of Healing House also helped her understand the complexity of challenges families face.

"They can't imagine how they would be navigating the system without the safety of housing and care for their children. They would be living in a car or on the street trying to keep themselves and their children safe. Their children would not have been able to have necessary surgeries."

OVERCOMING THE STIGMA OF HOMELESSNESS

As members of the LGBTQ+ community, Ketcham and Hazen see the ways we all have more in common than we have differences, but social stigma is a heavy force that keeps us separated.

Eldonna says that while she cannot claim to have experienced marginalization the way friends without housing are marginalized, "I think being part of the LGBTQ+ community helps me understand how easily labeled people are and pushed to the margins. Education is the best way to help people understand the plight of others. Most of our brothers and sisters do not choose to be without homes, it comes back to a system that makes it difficult for all to have access to the essentials of life, like healthcare, food, housing, and safety."

"There is a stigma that exists related to homelessness, and there is a tendency for people to not want to see what is right in front of them," said Ketcham, who reflected on her own struggles with coming out, overcoming alcohol addiction, and her brother's experience of housing insecurity when he contracted HIV and died of AIDS in 2005.

"It isn't lost on me that having family to move in with to die is a kind of luxury," she said. "Stagnant wages, the lack of affordable housing, and a broken health care system contribute to housing insecurity and homelessness. Anyone could experience homelessness. It's a social construct, as is poverty."

COMMUNITY GENEROSITY

The biggest thing the leaders behind Healing House have learned is about the generosity of local individuals, congregations, and foundations. It is sustained entirely by private funds, so no city, county, or United Way funding yet supports the effort. They set a million-dollar goal for their capital campaign and they reached it. Ongoing support is needed, however, since it will take around \$330,000 a year to sustain the program.

"Our biggest sources of support early on were faith communities," said Ketcham. "Support came from across faith traditions as we

Healing House provides coordination with home health providers, volunteers from local churches cook the meals, and The Road Home provides case management. First Congregational Church owns the house on Lathrop Street and MUM runs the program.

received support from over 20 congregations, including our first gift from First Congregational UCC of \$75,000, their \$75,000 loan for renovations, and Blackhawk church's Advent Conspiracy. Support has come from many individuals, families, local grants and foundations including CUNA Mutual, EPIC and National Guardian Life, and the Oscar Rennebohm and the We Raise foundations."

They hope local hospitals and hospital foundations in particular will begin to see the value in Healing House. In 65 other cities, recuperative and medical shelters exist due to the support from local hospitals because they recognize how much they save when adults and children experiencing homelessness have a safe place to fully recuperate.

"The best way for individuals, organizations, companies, congregations to help Healing House is to invite someone from MUM to tell the story of the House and the residents who have already been helped," says Hazen "The story is compelling and people's lives are being changed. How could anyone NOT want support such a great project?" —Stacy Harbaugh



Hazen



Ketcham

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ELEMENTARY EDUCATION | COMING OUT | TRANSGENDER

The Education of Mx Steel

The learning curve was steep for everyone when **Vica Steel** came out as transgender.



I AM TRANSGENDER.

Can you understand what that means? I didn't. I'm not sure I do even now.

I came out first with my wife at the end of February. I came out last to my students in March.

And the truth is that saying "last" is a lie. I will never stop coming out. I will always meet people who wonder at me, who question me, who hate me just for existing.

And people who love me.

I am a teacher. I run an elementary school science enrichment space full of animals and plants. Leopard gecko, cornsnake, hissing cockroaches!, finches, turtle, fish, and...well... more. I live in the progressive section of a liberal city. I am not the only transgender teacher, but I am the first in our school district to publicly transition so openly. Male to Female. Sort of. Male to feminine, definitely. Non-binary. When I first came out, I saw non-binary as a necessary compromise. Which, by the way, is a hugely negative way to think about my full truth. When I was a child, I was the girl. In my dreams, only ever in my imagination. Anne of Green Gables with only glimpses of the books, because boys don't read books like that. I have decades of testosterone to hide or acknowledge, and I'm done with hiding. What I've come to understand since I came out is that I don't have to diminish what decades of testosterone gave me. I can bring that girl into the light of day and still embrace all of who I am. I am a mix. I am both and I am neither and I am very quickly getting oh-so-sick of binaries! Are you red or are you blue? Darling, I am so very purple.

I gave up my last secret when I stepped forward and told the world my truth. I am transgender.

I can't say when I knew I was who I am, but I know that I had learned to hide my truth by the time that I was in kindergarten.

Kindergarten.

And for decades I did what I could to keep hiding my truth. Boys don't dance, at least not where I came from, when I came from there. We saw that lie repeated recently when a host of "Good Morning America" publicly mocked a prince of England for taking ballet. Growing up, a boy starts to dance. He moves his hips too much. The "jokes." He learns to stand stiffly. He loves being with his girlfriends. But he's a boy. Exclude. Mock if he persists. He learns to stand away from the group. Shy they

Timeline

FEBRUARY 27–MARCH 16 I came out to my wife, school leadership, friends and family, colleagues, and finally to my students. I am still surprised and in love with the warmth and support that I met each step of the way.

MARCH 16 Teachers from Kindergarten through 5th grade shared a powerpoint created by our school leadership and a video that I made. Students learned my truth for the first time and embraced me and my story. All my fears, all my worries from a lifetime believing the lies that shaped the world I grew up in, were pushed down and shattered. Our youth truly lead!

JUNE 4 The Liberty Counsel published a hate piece about me. Their premise seemed to be something to the effect of: "OMG! A teacher! Transgender! Let's attack!" Their attack set a standard that would be echoed through conservative media to the level where, if you type my name into a Google search, all that you see is their hateful view of me, and really, of anyone who is transgender. Fox News picked up the story by The Liberty Counsel and repeated it verbatim. I really hate giving their hate any airtime, but they are so persistent in their attacks on transgender people everywhere, that I know we cannot just ignore them.

The Liberty Counsel also put forth an open records request on all emails concerning my stepping forward. After that, the conservative echo chamber tossed my story around, mixing up elements and consistently misgendering and denying my name or my truth.

My story went national to the extent that our school had to stop using the main number—too many hate calls demanding I be fired. Emails came in from around the nation. Not many, but enough, and they were vile. I stopped picking up my phone and put my Facebook page behind a privacy wall. I ignored Messenger for a while, then later went in and deleted the slurs.

JUNE 5 & 6 TERFs [Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists] on Reddit's "Gender Critical" brought their attack against me. At the same time, the website slowlyboiledfrog.com published a defense of me and an attack on The Liberty Counsel's smear campaign. Thank you! Random people contact me from around the nation, sharing their love. Sharing their support. Teachers and students from around the school district rallied to my support. I walked in one day to find my room filled with posters and cards from the students at another school! They wanted me to know that they thought I was amazing! They watched my video. They embraced me.

JUNE 24 Interview on Wisconsin Public Radio's *The Morning Show* with Kate Archer Kent. I am so impressed with how clearly Ms. Kent could reach out and help share my truth.

I am hate-candy to conservatives. I check off ALL of their boxes. Transgender. Teacher. Elementary school. Masculine body. Wears skirts, dresses, and such cute shoes! I am their man-in-a-dress, their hate joke.

say. Quiet.

Hate and fear, those twin forces that defined our world for so long. For far too long. They haven't gone. They persist and try for pervasive. Transwomen die. Murdered by men encouraged to hate. Trans teens commit suicide. Why? I can't speak for them, but I know the indignity of being faced daily with negotiating the simple truth of existence in a world not quite ready for our prime time.

And I live in a progressive section of a liberal city. I have privilege beyond my recognition. And yet I face the hate. The scowls as I sit down in a nearby booth, the anger-stare as I walk out to dance on the rooftop in summer, the snickering-not-so-secret-picture-taking of young jocks at a local microbrewery. I am hate-candy to conservatives. They dole me out

on their websites and in their opinion pieces when they want more hits and shares. I check off ALL of their boxes. Transgender. Teacher. Elementary school. Masculine body. Wears skirts, dresses, and such cute shoes! I am their man-in-a-dress, their hate joke. I get hate from people who claim that they love me and want to save me. They use the old words. Pervert. Sissy. Disgusting.

All of that, and more, actually. But I am so done with giving airtime to hate and fear because I am so very much in love with this world. Seriously. Since I came out, a world that I always new was beautiful beneath the surface has shown itself fully and brightly.

Hate and fear? I always knew that I would face them. But love? Warmth? Embrace? I honestly expected a tepid, struggling, I-guess-if-that's-what-makes-you-happy-it-takes-all-kinds sort of acceptance. Instead the love I see is powerful and sometimes loud!

My experience? When I came out, my principal sought me out to personally tell me I had every piece of her support and love. My school's leadership rallied to me. My colleagues cried for me and hugged me. Our district has embraced me. My school nurse

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and our assitant principal made a school pride shirt that is a school PRIDE shirt for me and in support of each one of our mostly closeted LGBTQ students.

Our students, who had previously thrown homophobia around like hate confetti, slowed. And stopped. Mostly. One of our worst offenders came to tell me my name, Mx Steel, sounded like a superhero name. Other students told me that they were trying to teach their parents so they would understand. And this year, when a new student heard me say that I am transgender, she cast her eyes across the room looking for reactions from the others. There were none. My truth is just as accepted as the fact that this day is a beautiful day. And it is, my darlings. It is.

My friends rally to me. Close friends have become closer. A dear and constant buddy has become my sister-in-spirit. Strangers reach out from across the nation. Iowa. Florida. Louisiana, my darlings!

My genetic sisters welcome me as sister. Nieces have reached out to me. My nephew and one of my mentors has welcomed me into the life of his husband and himself. And yes, my nephew, Tristen, was brave and forward in his own truth so long before I could even imagine stepping out myself.

And my wife? In a world where far too many transwomen face divorce as a common first step, where older transwomen are too often disowned and young transwomen are kicked out of their families, my wife was the one who first named my truth. My wife is the one who has guided me forward and has embraced me and is sometimes my tiger-wife ready to take on all comers. My lesson there was that really, for all the rest of the love I've met, that one person standing in my corner was really all I needed. All I need. The foundation that allows me to stand tall (in wedge heels because you can never be too tall) and smile. The star that I can strive to reach.

And what does this truly mean? If you are reading this, how can you respond? If you are young, I hope that you can see there is hope and beauty in this world. While you begin to navigate a world that persists in forcing us to choose where to pee and where you will see the daily hate toward you, you will also see love. And you will see so much more love than you could ever have imagined. If your parents cast you out, there are so many more parents who will welcome you and embrace you. There are amazing organizations here and everywhere that will welcome you.

Yes, that old woman in the booth behind

you and your friends will scowl, but 10 other old women will smile and welcome you. If you let them, they will engage you in conversations and yes, they may seem a little patronizing, but know that they are stepping forward, too. They are bringing love.

Our students, who had previously thrown homophobia around like hate confetti, slowed. And stopped. Mostly. One of our worst offenders came to tell me my name, Mx Steel, sounded like a superhero name.

And here is the truth. I know that being trans, openly, is to open yourself to the hostility of the world. And for those of you out there struggling with being true to yourself in the face of that anger and fear, we all know that you may face different repercussions than I did. But know that the love you will find is bright. So much brighter than the white heat of hate.

So. I am asked. Often and regularly. Was it hard to come out? Yes. And no.

Yes, it was absolutely hard to come out. Absolutely the hardest thing I've ever done. And I opened myself to hate but I opened myself to love so much more powerful. And know this: when you come out, or when someone you love steps forward as I did, that it isn't one

person's story. It is all of our stories. We all come out with them. And I cannot pretend that my story will mimic the story of anyone else. Others will face a harder road than has been true for me, but in each case, the love is there. And it starts with the love of one person, for me my wife. But it could have been a friend. It could have been a colleague. It could have been a minister or a niece or an aunt. Do you need that person to be your rock? Are you the person to be there for those you love?

It was so hard to step forward, but it was so very necessary. I watched as kids faced the same hate and fear that were my world as I grew up, for decades. I saw bright shining stars sink deeper into hoodies or disappear into the corners of their classrooms. My hope, my powerful hope is that by stepping forward and shining a light on a path they may not believe exists, our students can glimpse a beautiful future. And it is beautiful, my darlings. Each day is beautiful, and if each of us steps up and each of us says, in the face of hate, "I am lesbian; I am gay; I am bisexual; I am transgender, my darling; I am intersex; I am asexual; I am absolutely and loudly an ally; I am so very, very QUEER!" If each of us can do this, if each of us can smile at the stranger and dance and laugh, then that white heat of anger will fade into ripples in the air.

And each day will be a beautiful day. ■



Joe Luginbill named to list of 7 Rising LGBTQ Leaders in the U.S.

THE LGBTQ VICTORY INSTITUTE has announced its nominees for the 2019 Tammy Baldwin Breakthrough Award—an annual recognition given to an up-and-coming LGBTQ elected official whose promising political career will move equality forward for LGBTQ people.

Of the seven leaders recognized by the Victory Institute as rising LGBTQ leaders in the United States, one is **Eau Claire School Board member Joe Luginbill**. First elected to the Eau Claire School Board in 2015, Luginbill is the youngest elected official in Eau Claire history and the first openly-gay member of the School Board.

Luginbill has authored over 155 policies and resolutions while on the school board, including policies on non-discrimination, student voter registration, sexual assault prevention, and restorative disciplinary practices. He has served as the Board's Vice President and President, and was a leading voice behind the successful ban on Conversion Therapy in Eau Claire.

Outside of his role on the School Board, Luginbill is the founder of a nonprofit children's foundation and CEO of the State Theatre and Community Center. He serves as a Child Protection Advocate with UNICEF USA and is currently a member of the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth.

Other nominees named to the list include Maryland Delegate Gabriel Acevero, North Carolina State Representative Deb Butler, Peru Congressman Alberto de Belaunde, Colorado State Representative Leslie Herod, Nebraska State Senator Megan Hunt, and Pennsylvania State Representative Malcolm Kenyatta.

The LGBTQ Victory Institute is one of the largest LGBTQ political action organizations in the United States, dedicated to increasing the number of openly LGBTQ public officials at all levels of government. —Emily Mills

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CONTEMPORARY ART QUEER ART ACTIVISM

Political, Diverse, Queer, Liberating

Karin Wolf looks back on perhaps the most heterogeneous Whitney Biennial, and what it means for the future of contemporary art.

WE HAVE BEEN a very busy people over the decades. We have been coming out, falling in love, breaking up, raising children, going to school, establishing careers, celebrating gay marriage, and mainlining double-shot lattes with 2% low-foam. Somehow, while all that living was distracting us, we slipped into a dystopian state in which oligarchs and corrupt politicians mortgage the long-term future of humanity to line their own pockets.

While some of us, like lobsters unaware of our collective fate, rubbed CBD oil into our burning muscles and binged watched episodes of “Queer Eye” on borrowed Netflix accounts, many LGBTQ and other activist artists were honing their craft, taking risks, and getting noticed. A few of those artists were included in this year’s Whitney Biennial, a fairly accurate barometer of the current state of contemporary art in the United States.

Measured in terms of racial, gender, emerging artist, and LGBTQ diversity, the 75 artists represented in the exhibition made for one of the most heterogeneous Biennials since the Whitney began hosting these showcases in 1932. The curators, Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley with Ramsay Kolber, have received great kudos for creating space for the new youthful majority minority, but that is not to say they achieved full inclusivity.

The most glaring imbalance in the Biennial was geographic. Wisconsin artists did not receive a single life preserver from the mother ship during the 2019 voyage. But we were not alone, most landlocked states were entirely overlooked by the curatorial team.

Flyover country sour grapes aside, it doesn’t take a futurist to understand that despite its claims of being about what’s happening now, interest in the Biennial is more about the legacy it leaves and how will impact the art world. “Political, diverse, queer, humorous, serious, angry, anxious, collective, liberating, covert, subversive, resigned, and futile” describe my first impressions last May when I spent two full days absorbing the dense exhibition. But by September 22, the day the show ended, I conceded to remove futile from the list, because in

a relatively short time, these artists proved they could change the world—a little bit.

The devotion and attention this Biennial paid to liberty and justice for all was touchingly patriotic. Take, for example, Kota Ezawa’s 2018 video National Anthem depicting NFL players taking a knee to protest police violence against African-American men. Ezawa’s piece brilliantly reflects the elegance of Colin Kaepernick’s non-verbal gesture in a poignant two-minute watercolor animation. Or consider Daniel Lind-Ramos’s, *Maria-Maria* (2019), in which the artist used objects he found in his neighborhood in Puerto Rico, after hurricane Maria, to create a Virgin Mary sculpture memorializing the 3000 Americans who were killed in the deadliest hurricane to hit the United States.

There were many works in this year’s Whitney Biennial that registered as an unapologetic presence, a kind of witnessing, as if to say, “We are here. We are (insert intersectional identities). We are not going anywhere. And we brought our friends.” And in that casual contemporary way, just by authentically showing up, reflecting what they have seen, too brave to cheat or lie or cower in intimidation, their work is inherently activist.

Take the work of Paul Mpagi Sepuya, who has become known for his fragmented homoerotic photographs. For the Biennial, Sepuya invited friends to share the Whitney’s limelight. An image titled, *Darkroom Mirror Portrait* (1000510) 2018, by the artist and A. L. Steiner, shows a topless, reclining Steiner reaching for the camera while Sepuya’s arm enters the frame and also reaches towards the camera, emphasizing communal production over the elevation of the individual creator.

Martine Syms, *People Who Aren’t Friends or Lovers or Exes* (2019) includes her video *Intro to Threat Modeling* (2017). From within a monitor, placed into a frame about the size of a 1980’s arcade cocktail table, Syms’s avatar says, “If this were a reality show, I would definitely be the person who was like, ‘I’m not here to make friends.’ Because there has to be that person, and I’m that person. Once you under-

stand your threat model, what you wanna keep private, and who you want to protect it from, you can start to make decisions about how you live your life. You’ll find yourself empowered, not depressed. What do I want to protect? My image.” In this piece, the artist, who has previously identified herself as black, female, and lesbian, hints at what it might take to protect oneself from all who seek to deny, exploit, and



There were many works in this year’s Whitney Biennial that registered as an unapologetic presence, a kind of witnessing, as if to say, “We are here. We are (insert intersectional identities). We are not going anywhere. And we brought our friends.”

prevent one from having a thriving existence in racist, sexist, and homophobic America.

Jeffrey Gibson’s bright sculptural garments, rooted in pop and Native American materials and culture, proudly hung like flags above the rest of the exhibition. One piece, included the words, “people like us,” turns a phrase, which is often an offensive generalizing insult, into a celebration of comradeship. Gibson’s work, often endeavors to reclaim his culture and proclaim his self-acceptance, a theme across many works in this Biennial. (His solo show at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, from June 8–September 15 was reviewed in the *May/June* issue of *Our Lives*.)

Works such as Elle Pérez’s *Dahlia and David* (fag with a scar that says dyke) 2019 and *Mae* (three days after) 2019 honors the artist’s queer and Latinx community in New York. Though their work is too staged to categorize as documentary, the photographs testify the intimacy and trust between them and their gender-fluid community in this strong-yet-vulnerable series.

Nicole Eisenman’s absurdist sculptural installation, *Procession* (2019), received great critical acclaim. Occupying the entire outdoor deck on the sixth floor of the Whitney, this installation depicted dejected and apathetic individuals created out of fiberglass, clothing,

bronze, plaster, metal, wood, and wax. The sculptures appear to be exhausted, yet cooperative, serfs burdened by the drudgery of existence. One character, sporting colorful bright blue and red knee-high socks, is pulled on a cart with square wheels. The figure genuflects on both knees so deeply that they release gas from their protruding behind. The piece seems to ask, who is the cruel oppressor who imposes

such misery on the down-trodden masses? Technology? Trump? Capitalism? The Art World? How stupidly unaware are these subjects? Though typically dismissive of scatological humor, I found myself paradoxically amused by the fog machine farts, both identifying with, and wishing to distinguish myself from, the fools depicted in Eisenman’s larger than life tableau.

Another of the most powerful works in the exhibition is Alexandra Bell’s *No Humans Involved: After Sylvia Wynter*, (2018–19) a series of prints based on newspaper pages from 1989 when a group of black and Latinx teens were falsely imprisoned for rape and battery of a woman jogging through Central Park. The images reveal the racism and bias that dominated the media and fed the cultural imagination of the time. Potently, the last image in the series is a reproduction of the advertisements that Donald Trump took out in four major U.S. newspapers calling for the return of the death penalty so that the teens could be executed.

Nothing defined this year’s Biennial more than the piece *Triple-Chaser* (2019), which led Artforum to dub the exhibition, “The Tear Gas Biennial.” The 10-minute work infamously exposed Warren Kanders, who was then co-chair of the museum’s board and CEO of Safariland Group, a company that produces tear gas grenades and other weapons. Safariland’s tear gas grenades were used against asylum seekers at the U.S. border and in other attacks against civilian populations around the globe. The film’s narration explains, “While tear-gas is banned from use in war, governments use it to suppress the right of civilians to collectively protest in public space.” Not only did the artists, an architect-led research group



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called “Forensic Architecture,” demonstrate a new arts-based method of critical inquiry and analysis, but brazen curators and museum staff included this film in spite of the financial benefits Mr. Kanders’s board position offered the museum, an unusual move in today’s climate of corruption and greed.

Much like the film’s subject, the sting of *Triple-Chaser* stayed in the eyes long after it was over. By delivering an acrid fact bomb with an indisputably articulate visual argument, the piece connected dots in complex systems, encouraging viewers to imagine that a “public truth” is possible. Mr Kanders initially seemed unmoved by the film’s critique of his direct enabling and profiting from crimes against humanity and the resulting publicity he received. On July 19 eight Biennial artists, including Forensic Architecture and Nicole Eisenman, asked to have their work withdrawn from the exhibition in protest. By July 25, Mr. Kanders announced his resignation from the Whitney’s Board of Directors.

If this year’s Whitney Biennial foretells anything, it is not that a diverse army of underdog artists with slingshots are on the way to knock out giants for us, but that America’s diverse artists have the power and competence to create the art that will elicit the facts, empathy, human connection, and empowerment that we all need to knock out these giants together. ■

Jeffrey Gibson’s bright sculptural garments
Paul Mpagi Sepuya’s *Darkroom Mirror Portrait* (1000510)
Nicole Eisenman’s *Procession* (2019)

Opposite page:

Elle Pérez’s *Dahlia and David*
(fag with a scar that says dyke) 2019
and *Mae* (three days after) 2019

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SOCIAL SPORTS BOWLING

An Extended Honeymoon

One of Madison's oldest LGBTQ sports leagues, **Honeymooners Bowling**, has a rich history of building strong social relationships.

MADISON IS LUCKY to have so many sporting and social organizations that are LGBTQ inclusive and also LGBTQ friendly. Its longest-running tradition has had some rough times with venue changes, membership decline on occasion, and uneasy political and social climates, but the secret society-type mentality of the Honeymooners Bowling League still strikes on to provide a fun environment for those who not only know where to find it, but also for those who still enjoy a cherished, albeit diminishing, past time.

That camaraderie keeps this league strong. And it's because of that dedication and sense of community that helps maintain the league's and Madison's longest organized charity event, MILMAIDS.

Word-of-mouth has been the sole advertising and recruitment strategy of the league. It comes from being a product of the mid-1980s when being LGBTQ wasn't nearly as socially acceptable as it is today. The league doesn't have the sponsorship and advertising power of the other prominent sporting groups in Madison. The primary recruiting booth is always seen each year at WOOF's Pride Block Party in August next to the Minotaurs rugby dunk tank and is always met with reactions like "I had no idea that was still a thing!" or "Madison



has a gay bowling league?" or the ever popular question, "Is it still a Sunday brunch league?" The response is a resounding "YAASSSS" to the first two items. In the case of the final question, the league used to be a brunch event that would start in the morning and run into the afternoon on Sundays. That was the league before it was switched to Monday nights. As times and technologies change, so do people's schedules. Their free time impacts structures. It's this factor alone that has seen a steady decline in bowling league memberships nationwide over the past 25 years.

TIME COMMITMENT

Traditional bowling leagues can run for as long as six consecutive months and can become not only a huge time commitment, but also very expensive. And with each night of bowling lasting as long as 2.5 to 3 hours, that's more time than one is willing to spend on a Monday night for six full months. The Honeymooners panel of officers, which



includes this author, has taken several steps to evolve and has come up with new ideas to shorten the league's time and also split it into halves. Instead of having 3 weeks off between Christmas and just after the new year, it was voted and approved to not bowl at all in the month of December this season. The league also offers four fun nights to better reinforce the sole reason this league was founded upon: Community. This league has never been about bitter rivalries or vein-popping aggressive competition. There's points to be earned that get converted into prize money at season's end, but it's more about socializing and engaging with other members within our LGBTQ circles. Members past and present have made lifelong friends via the group and are the core of the Honeymooners. That camaraderie keeps this league strong. And it's because of that dedication and sense of community that helps maintain the league's and Madison's longest organized charity event, MILMAIDS, one of the best AIDS fundraisers in the state.

MILMAIDS FUNDRAISING EVENT

For those uninitiated, MILMAIDS is the combined efforts of both Milwaukee's Monday Night Irregulars bowling league and Madison's Honeymooners bowling league to raise funds for AIDS research and one other designated charity chosen by the hosting league. It alternates between the two cities. Madison will again in 2020. It's a great cause, and an absolute blast, with its multiple prizes and raffles during a 9-pin tap bowling tournament. If you want more information on this event in April, join the Milmaids Bowling

Tournament Facebook page or catch the sign-up booth at Camp Bingo.

For more information on the Honeymooners Bowling League, join the Facebook page and follow it for updates. The first half will conclude on November 25. The second half of the 2019-20 season will commence on

January 13, and will conclude on March 30 at Bowl-a-Vard Lanes near East Towne Mall. Whether you'd like to sign up as a free agent substitute or find some friends to make a team of 3 to 6 people, the league members would love to see you out there on the lanes. Grab your balls: We're going bowling.— Kyle Mertz

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The Standard-Bearer

After years of navigating a transphobic health care system, **Alina Boyden** enlisted the help of the ACLU in her case against the state of Wisconsin for transition-inclusive health care coverage—and she won.

DISCRIMINATION **HEALTH CARE** **TRANSGENDER** **MEDICAL GATEKEEPING** **ACLU**

“WE DON’T TREAT TRANSGENDERS HERE; you’ll have to go someplace else.”

Those were not the words I expected to hear from the nursing staff at Dean’s Fish Hatchery clinic when I called to make an appointment for a cancer screening in May of 2015 with Dr. Clarisse Etheridge. For months, I had suffered from a hormone imbalance that my doctor was at

a loss to regulate, and he had been harboring concerns that I might have cancer or another underlying illness. He had urged me to see an endocrinologist, and as a state employee in Madison, Dean’s Fish Hatchery clinic had the only endocrinologists in my benefits network. So, when I was told that my kind wasn’t welcome at the clinic, I was at a complete

loss as to what steps I should take next.

I still remember clearly the anger I felt that day, the shame, the guilt, the feelings of worthlessness. As I drove in my car to make a personal appearance, thinking they would find that harder to refuse, I cried. They would have treated a criminal, but they wouldn’t treat me. What had I done that was so awful that I didn’t even merit a few simple blood tests to see whether or not I had cancer? I asked myself, but I already knew the answer, and had always known it. I was transgender, and for many people in the state of Wisconsin in 2015, that was more than enough reason to deny me the dignity that was mine by right as a fellow human being.

To be sure, this encounter with Dean Health Plan’s bigotry was not my first. Ever since I began my transition in 2002, I had become acutely aware of the frequency with which private health insurance companies denied transition-related services to transgender patients. Like many transgender persons, I had heard horror stories of people losing their insurance due to pre-existing conditions, of doctors discovering their transgender status and refusing to treat them, or treating them inadequately. I had sought to protect myself the only way I knew how—by going stealth, as we call it. That is, I had committed myself to never telling a soul about my transgender identity, to hiding it from all but a select few medical practitioners who were willing to prescribe me hormones without using the coding numbers which would raise the dreaded red flags that would eliminate my access to health care entirely—gender dysphoria, gender identity disorder, transgender, etc.

I had believed in those days that by hiding my transgender status, by keeping my head down and not rocking the boat, that I could slip like a rodent through the cracks in the barriers erected by the insurance companies. But that changed on that day in May, 2015, when Dean Health made it plain that no matter what I did, no matter how quiet I was about my identity, no matter how carefully I concealed my transgender status, no matter how cautious I was in the procedures I sought out to treat my gender dysphoria, there was no way to be silent enough, no way to be invisible enough to satisfy their bigotry. On that day, when I was told that I wouldn’t be allowed to be screened for cancer, in spite of the concerns of my primary care physician, I got angry, and I decided to do something about it.

In mid-2016, a year after Clarisse Etheridge and Dean Health Plan had illegally denied me access to necessary medical care, I was shocked when I received a communication from the ACLU asking me if I was interested in having them take up my case.

THE FEMINIST ROADBLOCK

To understand how I got to this point, it’s instructive to know a little something about the history of transgender healthcare in America. Before 1981, it was actually quite common for insurance companies to cover transition-related procedures in the U.S., and for the federal government to chip in funds as well. As being transgender was treated as a medical condition, and the treatment itself was medical, most insurance companies took doctors’ judgments on medical necessity at face value. It wasn’t until Janice Raymond, a professor of gender and women’s studies at UMass Amherst and Smith College, worked together with the Reagan administration to draft a report for the National Center for Healthcare Technology which declared transition-related procedures to be “experimental, controversial, and expensive,” that insurance companies in the United States began routinely denying transgender health-

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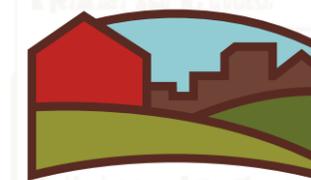


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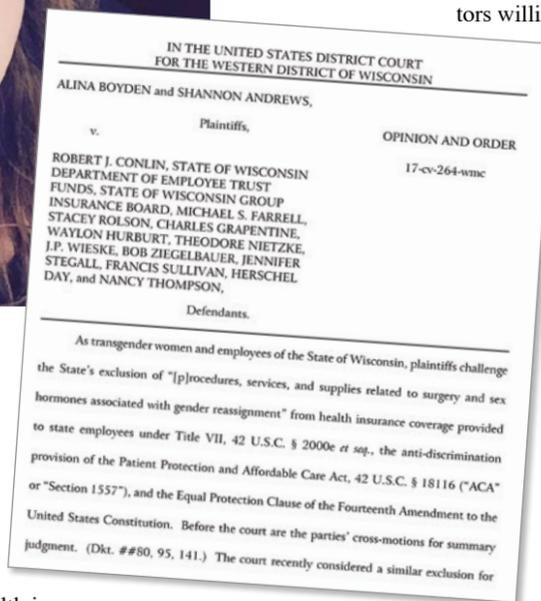
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Shannon Andrews.

I was forced to turn over every bank statement I had for the better part of a decade as they sought to prove that I had been wealthy enough to afford to pay for surgery myself, and therefore my failure to do so was evidence that I never really wanted it to begin with.

in 2002 in Southern California. Like most transgender women, I had an incredibly difficult time finding access to doctors who were willing to treat me, so like most of us, I started my transition journey with hormones I'd purchased off the black market. Even once I found doctors willing to treat me, they weren't transgender specialists. They didn't really exist at that time, thanks to the fact that transition-related procedures were now so rarely covered by insurance. So, I learned to make do with advice I found on the internet and with frequent blood work to make sure that no mistakes were being made.



After college, when I moved out of California, things became even more difficult. I spent a few years living in North Carolina, and before the passage of the Affordable Care Act, I had to live every day with the fear that I would lose my insurance if my transgender status were to become known, as it was a pre-existing condition. As transition-related procedures weren't covered by my health plan, I had to find doctors willing to omit my transgender status on all official paperwork. I learned to survive inside a system which had been set up by Janice Raymond and her allies with the express intent of driving me to suicide.

WELCOME TO WISCONSIN

So, when I came to UW-Madison in the fall of 2013 to begin my PhD in anthropology, I was thrilled that the university had a non-discrimination policy in place that prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Finally, I thought, I wouldn't have to sneak in the shadows any longer. I wouldn't have to tell half the truth to my doctors to avoid losing the right to visit a doctor in the first place. One can imagine my disappointment when I discovered, upon opening my "It's Your Choice!" benefits packet that October, that all transition-related procedures were explicitly barred from coverage—as were any procedures, services, surgeries or medications which were even tangentially related to one's transgender status.

It was all right, I told myself. I'd been through that before. I was used to it. I was disappointed, but I could cope. I would just carry on like I had before, not rocking the boat, and if I was lucky, I'd be able to get my hormones and live my life without any major disturbances. For two years, that strategy worked, just like it had in the years prior. But then, in May of 2015, I was told I might have cancer, and Dean Health Plan wouldn't let me see a doctor to be screened for it.

After my refusal of care, I was angry, and at a loss for what to do. My first step was to go to the Office of Equity and Diversity at UW-Madison. I told the staff there what had happened to me, and that this was clearly

a violation of the non-discrimination policy UW had in place, protecting employees from discrimination on the basis of gender identity. After weeks of playing phone tag to try to get a response, I was told by OED staff that this wasn't discrimination, it wasn't their purview, and that if I had questions about my insurance, I could contact an ombudsperson.

I was devastated by this result, because I genuinely had no idea where else to go, and in the meantime my hormones were still unbalanced, and I still had no new directions or medications in order to get them under control. So, I went to the LGBT Campus Center for help, where I was told that the university's flagrant discrimination against transgender employees was well-known, and that it was very unlikely it would change any time in the near future. I couldn't accept that. I knew that if I left things alone, I would survive, but a sizable percentage of my transgender siblings would not. So, I decided to be the change I want to see in the world, like all those motivational posters hanging on the university's bulletin boards recommended.

For my first step, I called Chancellor Blank's office to make an appointment to discuss the ongoing discrimination transgender employees were facing at UW-Madison, and I was promptly told by her secretary that the chancellor didn't just meet with random graduate students who dialed her number. So, I wrote an email laying out the discrimination I was experiencing and how the university was violating its own non-discrimination policy, and I was immediately sent to meet with the Dean of Students. The Dean listened to my concerns, made no policy changes or promises, and suggested I meet next with the Title IX compliance officer, David Blom. David told me in our meeting that a denial of transition-related procedures to transgender patients was no more discriminatory than a denial of laser eye surgery, and that he could see no reason why the university should change its policy.

It was at about this time that I realized that if the University of Wisconsin was ever going to treat its transgender employees equally, that I was going to have to take matters into my own hands, and move outside

official university channels. So, in December 2015, after seven months of arguing and begging and pleading, I filed discrimination complaints against the University of Wisconsin with the Office for Civil Rights and the EEOC under Title IX and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, alleging sex discrimination. I also contacted the ACLU, never imagining that they would respond to my email, let alone take my case.

For months, nothing happened. My abnormal hormone levels continued to go untreated, the university did nothing to live up to its obligations under the law, and I was beginning to feel increasingly despondent. I tried to apply for surgery, hoping that might fix my hormone issue, but this was categorically denied by Dean Health Plan. And worse, it was an election year, and the EEOC and OCR seemed reluctant to take up cases when the composition of the next administration remained uncertain.

ACLU TAKES THE CASE

In mid-2016, a year after Clarisse Etheridge and Dean Health Plan had illegally denied me access to necessary medical care, I was shocked when I received a communication from the ACLU asking me if I was interested in having them take up my case. I agreed to their representation, and together with Larry Dupuis of ACLU Wisconsin, and John Knight of the ACLU's LGBT Project, we began preparations to take the state of Wisconsin to court for their discriminatory policies.

But lawsuits are slow to develop, and it was well into the spring of 2017 before we ever actually filed our case. By that time, the ACLU had agreed to add a second transgender woman who had been discriminated against by the University of Wisconsin-Madison to our case, Dr. Shannon Andrews, a cancer researcher with a PhD from Princeton University. Shannon and I hit it off at once, becoming best friends before the case ever went to trial, and I'm sitting next to her on the couch as I write this article. Our friendship made the next 18 months tolerable as our case wound its way slowly through federal court.

If you've never sued a state before, I can tell you that it's mostly a lot

care as a matter of course.

The truth is that even in 1981 transition-related procedures were not experimental (they'd been in use for about 50 years), nor were they controversial (they were considered to be the only available treatment for gender dysphoria at that time—and still are), they also weren't particularly expensive, and still aren't. A recent study on the costs associated with adding transgender health care to the state employee health insurance program found that the likely cost to plan members was less than one nickel per person. But Raymond wasn't interested in making an accurate assessment of the medical value of transition-related procedures to transgender patients. In her book, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, she made plain that it was her intent to eliminate transgender women from society, and her research as an academic had suggested to her that the swiftest and most efficacious way to do this was to deny us health care access. Without health care access, she knew, transgender women not only couldn't have the hormones and surgeries we needed to live normal lives, we were also incredibly likely to kill ourselves, thus providing the final solution to the transgender question that she and her Republican allies were after.

I was born two years after Janice Raymond destroyed transgender health care in America. I started my transition about 19 years after that,



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of waiting, followed by brief periods of frantic activity. It's stressful, always present in the back of your mind, even when it's been weeks since you've had contact with your attorneys. But you're almost grateful for those long lapses when the periods of activity arrive, because they are so profoundly dehumanizing. The state of Wisconsin forced me to surren-

Thanks to Janice Raymond, American insurance companies have had 40 years to become accustomed to the idea that transgender patients can be denied their necessary medical care with impunity. And for those 40 years, transgender patients largely suffered, and many died, in silence

der all of my medical records going back to the time when I was a teenager in California, being treated for my gender dysphoria at Children's Hospital Los Angeles in 2002. They made me give up every therapy record, every record of every meeting with every psychiatric professional, every note from every doctor's appointment, and every prescription I'd ever received for any medication. Then they went through those records with a fine-toothed comb, searching for any evidence that I wasn't transgender enough to merit surgery or hormones, so that they could use it against me in court.

They also decided that they would request all of my financial records going back years as part of their investigations. I was forced to turn over every bank statement I had for the better part of a decade as they sought to prove that I had been wealthy enough to afford to pay for surgery myself, and therefore my failure to do so was evidence that I never really wanted it to begin with. They made me account for all of my property,

the value of my car, my clothes, everything I owned. And then they grilled me in my deposition about all of this information, probing for holes, searching for a way to deny me my civil rights.

In the end, despite the demeaning questions Shannon and I faced from state attorneys Steven Kilpatrick, Colin Roth, and Jody Schmelzer, despite their transphobia, and their commitment to discrimination, we won and they lost. A jury of ordinary Wisconsin citizens found the way we had been treated to be so egregiously illegal and unjust that we were awarded a combined total of \$780,000 in damages. Later, when our attorneys' fees were factored in, the total loss to the state of Wisconsin amounted to \$1.67 million.

THE ROAD AHEAD

You would think that that would be the end of the story, but it isn't. Even after a dramatic defeat in court, a landmark payment in damages and attorneys' fees, and a change to state law, insurance companies in Wisconsin remain committed to discriminating against transgender patients. Quartz, Dean, and GHC, the three largest HMOs in the state, two of which serve state employees, are currently denying transgender patients access to transition-related procedures as a matter of course. Dean Health Plan, after leaving my hormone levels uncontrolled for two years, after denying me any avenue for necessary treatment to bring them down to normal levels, now refuses to pay for the procedures I need to undo the damage those unregulated hormones did to my body. They are also actively denying necessary medical care to other transgender state employees, in violation of the victory Shannon and I won in court, and more importantly, in violation of federal law and state policy. GHC is currently denying transition-related procedures to its members, declaring them to be not medically necessary, all while making public appearance at queer festivals in Madison and bragging about

its inclusivity. And Quartz, a company partly owned by the University of Wisconsin hospital, is actively denying transition-related procedures to state employees in flagrant violation of federal law.

Thanks to Janice Raymond, American insurance companies have had 40 years to become accustomed to the idea that transgender patients can be denied their necessary medical care with impunity. And for those 40 years, transgender patients largely suffered, and many died, in silence, because we knew that the odds were against us if we fought back. Today that landscape has changed. Shannon and my victory in court proved that even in a purple state like Wisconsin, citizens and judges will not tolerate the kind of flagrant discrimination that the government, the University of Wisconsin, and its associated HMOs were engaged in. Dean, and its parent company SSM Health, Quartz, and GHC have yet to catch up to this new reality. We must all force them to do so.

The next few years in Wisconsin are not going to be easy for transgender patients. We will continue to face unjust denials of care. We will continue to battle companies which claim to care about our health while enacting policies which are intended to see us dead. But they are on the wrong side of the law, and if *Boyden et al. v. Wisconsin* proves anything, it's that the wrong side of the law is a very expensive place to be. ■

GHC updates website with list of LGBTQ-specific care providers

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO KNOW which medical professionals are specifically attuned to the needs and wellbeing of LGBTQ patients, and it's still rare to find lists that highlight these services on provider websites. That's no longer the case with at least one Madison-area HMO.

Group Health Cooperative of South-Central Wisconsin now provides just such a resource (ghcscw.com/health-care/lgbtq), where prospective and current patients can research and connect with primary care physicians who are committed to providing knowledgeable and affirming



care, including a section specifically for trans-inclusive and HIV preventative care. Ginger Francis, Director of Community

Care and Health Equity, says that GHC "understands and values the importance of care in an environment that is both safe and welcoming. We know LGBTQ+ patients have experienced barriers to equitable and inclusive health care, which has resulted in harmful patient experiences, poor health outcomes, and distrust with health care systems."

She goes on to note that GHC-SCW has a LGBTQ+ Health Committee "dedicated to removing barriers and improving equitable and inclusive care for our LGBTQ+ patients." One of the committee's projects was to create this dedicated resource page to highlight LGBTQ primary care service information, including patient rights, GHC-SCW's commitment to providing patient-centered, culturally responsive care, and a directory of providers who self identify as having special clinical interests, experience, and additional training specific to LGBTQ health care.

"At GHC-SCW, we believe health care is a human right; we believe in treating all people with dignity and respect; we believe there is strength in diversity; and we believe equity celebrates our humanity," Francis goes on to say. "For members of the LGBTQ+ community, we see you and we hear you. Your experiences matter to us. Our hope is that our actions demonstrate our continued commitment to ensuring personalized, equitable and accessible care for LGBTQ+ patients." —Emily Mills



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Sex Education

A Woman's Touch co-owner **Ellen Barnard** shares the mission behind and wisdom gained from 23 years of providing sexuality products and education to Madison and beyond.

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ORIGINS/EARLY YEARS

WHEN YOU OPENED A WOMAN'S TOUCH (AWT) IN 1996, WHAT WAS THE SEXUALITY LANDSCAPE LIKE FOR WOMEN AND THEIR PARTNERS? WHAT NICHE OR NEED DID AWT FILL?

In some ways the landscape was very similar—women were not getting good education about their bodies and frequently were being sexual in response to cultural or partner pressures. “Sex and the City”



A Woman's Touch co-owner Ellen Barnard.



was on HBO and began changing the conversation about women's sexuality to a more empowered, pleasure-focused conversation, but the show was also full of myths and heterosexual relationship-driven partner sex.

There were few places in the country where women and their partners could find information and products that truly allowed them to put their own desires and preferences in the center of their sexualities. Our goal was to provide such a place, where sexuality and pleasure were defined by each customer, regardless of what the wider cultures preached/taught/pushed.

There were also only five other stores in the country where sexuality and pleasure were presented from women's perspectives. The name we chose was because we believed that it required “a woman's touch” to present sexuality in this person-centered, pleasure-centered way. None of these stores was in the Midwest and so we thought it was about time that we had such a place.

It is also true that the sex information that was available was not always very accurate, and this inaccurate information was publicized widely in women's magazines and on talk shows. I am a social worker and certified sex educator, and my spouse and store co-owner Myrtle Wilhite is an MD, and we felt that we needed to contribute more accurate information to the world through our store and our efforts.

WHAT WAS THE REACTION OF THE MADISON COMMUNITY WHEN AWT OPENED? WERE YOU WELL RECEIVED OR WERE YOU MET WITH ANY PROTESTS OR DETRACTORS?

We were very well-received and had absolutely no push-back. In the first year, we got a few anonymous letters telling us that we were going to burn in hell, but we took that as a sign that we were doing the right things. The alder, our immediate neighbors (including a daycare center), and our landlords were enthusiastic and supportive. Clearly it was a good time to start a store like ours.

WHEN THE STORE OPENED, WERE YOU ALREADY PROVIDING BOTH SEX EDUCATION RESOURCES AND SEXUALITY PRODUCTS, OR DID THE EDUCATIONAL COMPONENT EVOLVE LATER? TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT PAIRING THE TWO.

We did start with the goal of providing information and education through books and movies, in addition to pleasure-oriented products. As people began asking the same questions over and over again, we decided to write our educational brochures to answer those questions. We had launched a website in 1997 and put those answers online as well as writing the educational brochures. We figured if we were hearing these questions from those brave enough to ask them, there must have been many more people with the same questions, but who were too shy to ask them. As we developed the educational brochures, more health care providers and educators took notice and sent people our way for the information. It was a nice feedback loop that helped us deepen our identity as a place that offered resources as well as products.

IN YOUR OPINION, HAS SOCIETY BECOME MORE SEX-POSITIVE OVER THE YEARS OR LESS SO, AND WHY?

I think that there is more conversation about sex and consent than there was 23 years ago, but it was happening then, just more nested within the public health community working to prevent HIV and other STIs. I see pockets of more positive attitudes about sex but it is not society-wide. There are plenty of cultures that are still repressive and shaming. We've seen wider conversations about identity and orientation, partly driven by the media and the arts becoming more vocal about the ways that people can inhabit their gender identities and sexual orientations/preferences.

Our goal was to provide such a place, where sexuality and pleasure were defined by each customer, regardless of what the wider cultures preached/taught/pushed.

In terms of becoming more or less sex-positive over the years, as with everything that is related to culture, it depends. I see younger people seeming to be growing up with a more open attitude to sexual pleasure and variations in gender and identity. But then I meet some younger people who grew up with abstinence-only education and are just as shame-filled and repressed, though they may be fighting those things to become more affirming of their sexuality.

CO-OWNERSHIP

PLEASE TALK ABOUT THE DIFFERENT ROLES YOU AND MYRTLE HAVE WITH THE STORE.

We are Janes of all trades at times, but we do split the responsibilities. Myrtle does the bookkeeping, wholesale, and website order processing, and manages the lingerie and much of the back end of our website—photos and adding products. She does the initial training for staff, which includes some basic anatomy and physiology and explanations of how our products work with sexual arousal and pleasure processes.

I focus on the store experience, working with staff on how to talk with customers, how to help them make choices on products, I do the store inventory ordering (other than lingerie), interface with our distributors, landlord, IT folks, and all the other administrative ephemera.

We both work in the store and we both do education outside of the store, albeit for different audiences.

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WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUR RETAIL CLIENTELE AND WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS? HOW HAVE THOSE DEMOGRAPHICS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS, OR HAVE THEY?

Our demographics include everyone, from teenagers to those in their 90s, all genders, all relationship styles, all orientations. And no, it hasn't changed at all over the years. Our goal was to create a welcoming place for everyone, and we hear from customers that we have done that pretty well. We realize that gay men may be put off by the name, but when they come in they realize that we carry a lot of products for those who have penises. Everyone is welcome, and we work hard to find resources for everyone, even if we don't carry what they need in the store.

HOW HAVE YOUR PRODUCTS AND/OR WORKSHOPS AND RESOURCES THEMSELVES CHANGED TO ADAPT TO THE EMERGENCE OF GENDER FLUIDITY AND NON-BINARY IDENTITIES?

Although we have always tried to offer products and workshops that are welcoming to everyone, we have developed more depth for those who are trans masculine, and somewhat for those who are trans feminine. Our book selection is evolving as more become available that are inclusive of all identities. Our games have been chosen to be as non-specific of gender and relationship as possible.

We have designed and patented a medical device (called the FeMa-ni therapeutic massage wand) that is being used really successfully by trans-feminine folk after bottom surgery. It works better to reduce scar tissue and help their new vaginas function as they ought. This device is also intended for post-menopausal women to address their vaginal health, so anyone with a vagina benefits from it.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING DO YOU GIVE EMPLOYEES? DO YOU HAVE (OR HAVE YOU HAD) MALE OR TRANS EMPLOYEES, AND IF SO, WHAT HAVE THEY CONTRIBUTED TO THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF AWT?

We do training in sexual anatomy and physiology and specific training on how health challenges and changes can affect sexual function and the ways that our products and resources can be used to help people address those changes in function. Definitely beyond retail training!

We have had one cis male employee and one trans masculine employee, as well as one employee who was exploring transition to trans masculine. They were wonderful staff, and some customers loved that they were here. Some older folks, mostly cis het women, were too uncomfortable to talk

Overheard In the Store

- "Orgasms are the best pain medication I know!"
- A phone message: "Please send me a catalog; in my old age I'm getting horny!"
- At the checkout counter: "I feel like I just took a course in sex, and this bag of goodies is my graduation present!"
- "It's so naughty to buy yourself earrings when you don't need them. Not that the rest of the store isn't naughty..."
- "My kid was doing an art project and grabbed my bottle of lube because they thought it was glue. They were so frustrated that the glitter wasn't sticking to the paper, and they came to me with the bottle and said, 'Mom your glue doesn't work.' It was everything I could do to keep a straight face."
- "My dog ate my dildo..." (a very common occurrence)
- "This is my favorite place in Madison. It's like a candy store but, but better for you."
- 3 friends come in:
 - "I need one with a silencer."
 - "Yeah, you wouldn't want to wake the kids."
 - "Or your husband..."
- "It's like classical conditioning. Every time I hear the noise of a vibrator like mine, my ditoris perks up!"

to them, so we always have had a staff person present who appears female (but may not be...if we have a trans feminine person who can pass, they would probably be perceived as safe enough). It's always a dance to make sure customers are comfortable and to keep a good variety of staff so that we can both have lots of represented perspectives and representation. We have struggled more with finding people of color to work in our store, and it is our wish to be able to have more representation available in that way.

WHAT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS DOES AWT HAVE? WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF THESE PARTNERSHIPS TO AWT AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY?

Many health care providers refer to us, and us to them. We work with sex therapists, Western and integrative medical folks, pelvic floor therapists, and more. What this means to our community is that we are able to integrate different types of approaches to try to improve outcomes when people are experiencing sexual function changes and challenges.

We have designed and patented a medical device that is being used really successfully by trans-feminine folk after bottom surgery. It works better to reduce scar tissue and help their new vaginas function as they ought.

We also have good relationships with people in the kink community and often help people get connected to that community when they are new to Madison or new to exploring that lifestyle.

LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE STORE IN 10 YEARS?

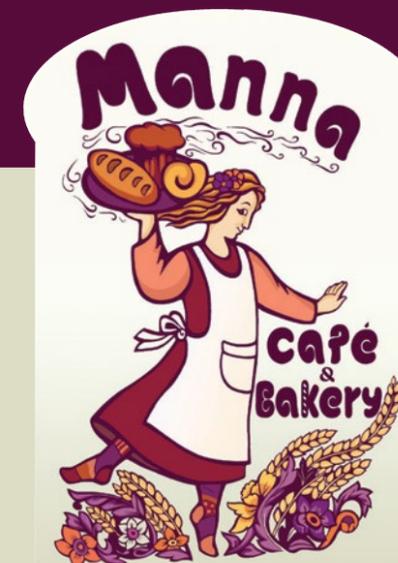
Being run by someone new, we think. It's our hope that we can find someone who wants to come in and learn the business and education parts to take it over so we can retire. In 10 years we'll be 70-ish, and there are things we want to do in our lives that will require some time and energy.

We also think that it's possible that the store could be bought and changed into whatever kind of shop that Madison needs. We are doing a good job of meeting many of Madison's needs, but it is possible for someone to have a different vision of what a sexuality shop could be for Madison, and that would be a good thing as well. So either option should mean that Madison has a comfortable, respectful place for people to shop for resources and products to help everyone define and create the sexual lives that they desire.

LOOKING BACK OVER THE PAST 23 YEARS OF AWT, WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS YOU HAVE LEARNED AS PEOPLE, SEX EDUCATORS, SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS, OR EVEN AS A COUPLE?

- So many lessons!
- Don't take things personally.
 - Trust your gut.
 - Take risks, but have a safety net.
 - Running a business is hard; don't let anyone tell you otherwise.
 - We are always learning and are never experts. We have learned to listen and evolve our understanding as our customers teach us new things, as research discovers deeper truths, and as we recognize that we never know it all—and some days we know nothing.
 - Never make assumptions; that big macho guy may well crave being dominated or dressed up as a little child and that mild-mannered older woman may have several lovers half her age who can't keep up with her sexual appetite. ■

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WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE TO BE BOTH BUSINESS PARTNERS AND LIFE PARTNERS? WHAT HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO DO BOTH WELL?

It is good, hard, good, hard...takes a lot of work and communication and the ability to work things through so that we can still like each other after a disagreement. Not all that different from what it takes to be good life partners in general.

SALES, DEMOGRAPHICS, COMMUNITY

HOW DO YOUR WEBSITE AND ONLINE SALES INTERFACE WITH YOUR BRICK-AND-MORTAR STORE AND OVERALL SALES?

We started selling our products online in 1997 when there were few online stores. Amazon was not yet a thing, so we actually had a great deal of traffic and high sales volume in the early days; much higher than now.

Everything we sell online is also in the store. We do not sell lingerie or earrings online because they are so hard to keep updated. We do put stockings online since they can be hard to find for people who are taller or wider.

From a business standpoint, our website serves as a pre-shopping catalog for many store customers. So many times people come in and say "I saw on your website..." and want to see the product in person. Or they have a list all made out from seeing things on the website. So that is its main purpose for us now. That means that we need to have the stock be consistent so folks are not disappointed.

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I am One in Four

It takes courage to talk about having a miscarriage, even moreso for queer folk, whose fertility journeys are often more isolating, more intentional, and at greater emotional and financial cost. **Angela Baerwolf** helps to break that silence.

FERTILITY MISCARRIAGE FAMILY PLANNING ISOLATION

SOMETHING THAT HAS ALWAYS been important to me as a queer person is visibility. Being able to read something and see my experience mirrored back at me is powerful and important to my self-acceptance. When I had my miscarriage, I felt very alone in my experience. Even though statistics bear out that one in four experience a miscarriage, people don't talk about it. More specifically, when I looked for a queer version of my experience, I only found stories of all the fertility journeys with happy endings, complete with pictures of the newly formed family, which was triggering. Telling my story is not only healing for me personally (although it took a while before I was ready, since there is no sense-making of this experience), but I also hope to provide both a mirror for others like myself, and a window to those who don't know that such an experience exists.

My wife and I have been trying to get pregnant for two years. We have a known sperm donor, a generous friend, with whom we wrote a legal agreement, and began trying with home insemination, once a month for about 10 months (I lost count a little bit due to how many tries). Our friend was making plans to go to med school in the Caribbean, so we knew the next step would be for him

I looked at the future and it was blank. There was a good chance I was no longer pregnant and that was the news that I didn't feel I could bear at the moment. How would I go to work the next day? How would I un-tell the few people I told?

to make deposits so we could keep trying, specifically with medical assistance through a fertility clinic. Because he was a known donor, they had to quarantine his sperm for six months as per FDA rules, before he could take another blood test to clear him (which luckily was during his winter break). We hated the waiting, but in the meantime I had to get my body prepped with hormones to induce egg growth, followed by a procedure to extract the eggs, followed by a process called ICSI, where they cut the tail off the sperm after



inserting it into the eggs, then inserting back into me. We ended up having only two embryos that were viable. Our first round of IVF was not successful, so a lot was riding on that last little embryo. We tried again and were overjoyed to find we were pregnant 10 days later. Then there was more waiting before the ultrasound at seven weeks.

The ultrasound did not go well. They could find the sack, but not the "yolk." Since payment didn't cover another ultrasound, they had to transfer care to my primary care doctor. My wife got very emotional, so I tried to hold it together for her. We weren't really given a definitive answer at the time, so I wasn't sure how to feel. I called my regular doctor to get an ultrasound in a week as I was instructed, and was told to wait two weeks. I told the man on the phone that's not what our fertility clinic

said, plus I was on progesterone and estrogen, which I would have to come off of if the pregnancy wasn't viable. This man was very cavalier about the situation, not understanding that this is the worst possible news, or how many times I've tried to get pregnant, or that this is the only way I can get pregnant. I was ultimately told to go in for a blood draw after work to check my levels. I didn't know why this was happening, spiritually or physically. I looked at the future and it was blank, which was an uncomfortable feeling. There was a good chance I was no longer pregnant and that was the news that I didn't feel I could bear at the moment. How would I go to work the next day? How would I un-tell the few people I told?

The second ultrasound came one week later. Again, it did not go well. I was not going to be having a baby any time soon, if at all. The doctor, who was in training, gave such an unclear answer that the overseeing doctor had to tell us the pregnancy wasn't viable. At first I just listened, not really knowing how to take it. Usually we've just kept trying, but this was the last try. The morning after the appointment, after a mostly sleepless night, I awoke to my new reality of remembering what happened the day before. Both of us struggled with how to proceed with the day. As my wife started to leave the room, I just hugged her and started crying. I told her I was thinking about all the people I told and that I'd have to tell them it didn't work. I felt lost that night, like I didn't know what to do next in any part of my life. I prayed for faith, patience, and strength. We took a shower, and as I was drying off, I fell apart. I couldn't bring myself to

take the progesterone patches off my stomach. I didn't want it to be over. It felt like pulling the plug after trying so hard to keep it alive, and I worried that maybe the doctors were wrong. I didn't want to say goodbye. I was so thankful that I had my wife, as my partner in life, holding me throughout. I was also grateful for my friends who distracted us when we needed it, and respected when we didn't want to talk about it, and listened when we were ready. But even with my support, I felt so alone. Other people in my life either didn't know or didn't get it. I was either pretending nothing had happened, or was given unhelpful responses about stories of other couples who were eventually successful after setbacks. I knew it was well-meaning, but it wasn't what I needed to hear.

The grieving and the miscarriage itself were far from over. We learned at our next appointment that I would have to have surgery called dilation and curettage, typically used for an abortion, to take the miscarriage out. They thought it might be a molar pregnancy, which needed to come out since the multiplying cells, a benign tumor, could become something more dangerous. We had to find an OB who could do a consult and the surgery itself.

Four days later, we arrived for surgery. My wife got to stay with me during pre-op, which was helpful because this was the first surgery I had ever had, so I didn't know what to expect. It was mostly a lot of waiting while I laid in bed in a gown that was way too big for me. They did a blood draw, had me meet everyone on the team, sign some papers, and get an IV. My bed was then rolled down the hospital corridor, being pushed by invisible people down an empty hallway. I never felt so alone. I got to the operation room, where they gave me some oxygen and put in the anesthesia, knocking me out. I barely remember waking up, but I noticed my throat was sore from the tube that was in my mouth. I was hoping to leave at 5:00, since I

wasn't allowed to eat all day and wanted food. But when I hopped off the bed and stood up, blood dripped between my legs onto the floor. Since I was still bleeding, they had me wait 20 minutes, then a half hour, and eventually we were out the door and on our way home. I was told that recovery would last two days with some bleeding like a light period. It was anything but. Over the next two days I passed clots the size of half-dollars. I called to see if it was normal. They told me I was fine, even though they never went over passing clots with me. So I continued my life.

Four days later was a night beyond expectation. I was soaking a pad an hour, so after an initial call and monitoring the situation, we decided to go to the ER at around midnight. I had a urine sample, blood draws, an IV put in, and an abdominal and vaginal ultrasound over the course of the night. I cried after the ultrasound because it was triggering to look up and see that a screen that once showed an embryo, was now empty. I was empty inside. I was tired and wanted to go home, especially since the heavy bleeding and pain stopped. My poor wife tried to get comfortable sitting in a chair, but didn't sleep at all. I slept in the hospital bed a little bit while waiting for an attending OB to see me for a pelvic exam. Ultimately, I was told to call the doctor the next day to schedule a follow-up. I was fine. I hadn't lost enough blood to need a transfusion. No one could really explain why it was happening, only that it was no cause for alarm.

It has been four months since the miscarriage. We are still trying to figure out what's next for us. There are still hard days where my wife or I will start to cry. We are more hesitant to talk about the things we will do with our future child, the names that we picked, the kind of parents we would be. It's hard to imagine a world where these things are not to be. This is our fertility journey thus far, and I do not know how it will end. ■

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QTPOC RACE FETISHIZATION CONSENT

Race is not a Fetish

Dr. Sami Schalk explores how racial identities become fetishized, and why that's problematic for creating inclusive spaces and relationships.

Dear Sami,

Can you please explain why calling a person of color "exotic" is NOT a compliment?

Sincerely, Not Exotic Queer
Person of Color

DEAR QUEER WHITE PEOPLE,

Let's talk about a little thing we like to call fetishization. Fetishes are sexual desires that are tied to a particular object, behavior, or body part that are not widely regarded as sexual. Fetishization is the act of sexualizing these objects, behaviors, or body parts. I want to make clear here that there is nothing inherently wrong with fetishes or fetishization. I am 100% pro-sexual expression and experimentation. I support the rejection of sexual shame around our various desires. However, for this edition of Dear Queer White People I will be discussing non-consensual fetishization—when one person sexualizes another in an objectifying way without their consent. I am specifically talking about how non-consensual racial fetishization—as opposed to consensual sexual race play which is a whole other topic—is harmful.

Here's an example. Recently a friend of mine who identifies as a gay man of color was approached at a local Madison gay bar by a white man who talked about how he "just loved brown skin." This is a form of non-consensual racial fetishization because it fixates on racial markers—here skin tone—as the primary object of attraction. It reduces a person and their value to the speaker down to this single aspect. It is both objectifying and dehumanizing. For my friend, it made him uncomfortable in the bar and hesitant to go back and socialize in that particular white-dominated queer space.

To return to Not Exotic's original question: Exotic is a term that implies fetishization of difference and, particularly in the



Often folks call someone "exotic" when they mean "you don't look like you're from here" or "you look different than most people I see."

U.S., difference associated with non-white people and nations. Exotic literally means "introduced from another country" though it has been taken up in everyday speech to mean excitingly different or unusual, as in, you know, exotic dancers. Often folks call someone "exotic" when they mean "you don't look like you're from here" or "you look different than most people I see," and they intend it as a compliment. It's OK to have those thoughts. It's natural to recognize difference, but you don't have to then say it out loud to that person. Some thoughts are best kept inside our heads.

For many people of color, particularly Asian, Arab, Latinx, and Southeast Asian folks, exotic is experienced negatively as a code word for foreign or strange. Instead of calling a person exotic, you might tell a person you really like their hairstyle (but don't touch it!) or their outfit—things they chose and put effort into as opposed to being born with like skin color or hair texture. I would generally recommend avoiding talking about a person's body (their skin, their eyes, etc.) if you don't know them, or at least wait until it's VERY clear that the other person is interested and flirting with you. Even then, there is a difference, for me, between when someone says, "I love how you twerk," or

ILLUSTRATION BY RACHAL DUGGAN.

Non-consensual racial fetishization in queer communities particularly occurs when people of color are put into racial-sexual stereotypes; when it's assumed that black masculine people are sexually aggressive tops with big dicks/dildos or that Asian people are inherently submissive feminine bottoms..

"Your ass looks great," and "I love your big black booty." I am inherently suspicious of someone who focuses primarily on race in how they talk about attraction to me because it generally indicates fetishization of my blackness.

Non-consensual racial fetishization in queer communities particularly occurs when people of color are put into racial-sexual stereotypes at the start of a sexual or romantic interaction; when it's assumed that black masculine people are sexually aggressive tops with big dicks/dildos or that Asian people are inherently submissive feminine bottoms. Race does not determine our sexual identities or practices and ideally, in most circumstances, race should not determine your attraction as a white person to a person of color. That doesn't mean race isn't a part of attraction or part of the reason you love a person. This is not a treatise against interracial sex/relationships. But if a person's race is the only thing you are attracted to then you are treating that person as an object, not a fully complex human being.

Dear single and non-monogamous queer white people, please examine how you interact romantically and sexually with people of color in our local bars, on the apps, and in other shared spaces to ensure that you are not further marginalizing us in your attempt to date/sleep with us. Doing so only pushes us out of these spaces and further perpetuates racial harassment in our community.

Your local fierce black femme on a mission, Sami ■

Want more from Sami? Follow her on Twitter (@drsamischalk), Facebook (facebook.com/drsamischalk), or Instagram (fierceblackfemme).



DR. SAMI SCHALK is an Assistant Professor of Gender & Women's Studies at UW-Madison. Her research focuses on disability, race, and gender in contemporary American literature and culture, especially African American literature, speculative fiction, and feminist literature.

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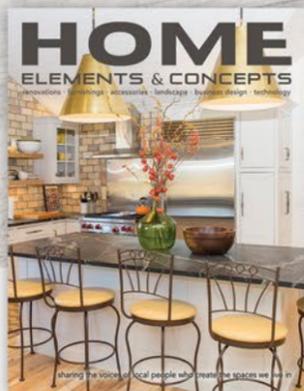
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The Prescription Problem

The opioid crisis is impacting the LGBTQ community harder than the general population.

Candace Peterson looks at why and outlines basic steps for prevention and support.

YOU MIGHT KNOW ME. *I work in a restaurant, or a warehouse. Or I'm a student or a manager at a downtown business. I slipped and fell at work, and hurt my back, or my shoulder. Or some bozo on Highway 12 rear-ended me, and I hurt my neck. I don't have health insurance, or I do. I'm your cousin, or your best friend, or your brother...or I'm you.*

I saw my doctor, and was prescribed an opioid, a pain killer, with instructions on how many pills to take (one) and how often (every four hours). Though I took my prescription as instructed, I was still in constant pain, making it hard to concentrate at work. I started taking a pill and a half, instead of just one, to see if it would help (it did). I began to take the pills every two hours, instead of the recommended four hours (this helped, too). My prescription ran out, and I called my doctor and got one refill, plus some stretching exercises to try to ease the pain.

It is a month later. My prescription ran out two weeks ago and could not be refilled. My pain is still constant. I turned to an acquaintance of mine for more of the only thing that has seemed to work...more pain pills. As of last week, I was taking up to four pills at a time, every couple of hours. It's Wednesday, I've been out of pills since Sunday morning, and I feel desperate. What do I do?

This is the start of a common story—one that starts with an injury and becomes a story of abusing opioid pain medication. Sadly, it sometimes ends in unintentional overdose and death. The opioid epidemic is devastating communities across the country, and the LGBTQ community has not been spared. As a population, no matter our age, we are disproportionately affected by all substance use disorders (SUDs), and this includes the misuse of and addiction to prescription opioids¹. In fact, our community is at three times greater risk of addiction to opioid use disorder than our heterosexual counterparts¹.



Many people who misuse prescription pain pills get them from friends or family, with or without their knowledge.

MINORITY STRESS

Why are SUDs, including opioid misuse and abuse, higher in our community? Perhaps we should look at this through the lens of minority stress¹. Starting at a young age, LGBTQ people live with discrimination, marginalization, and victimization every day, based on our sexual and gender minority statuses. To a greater or lesser degree—depending on our situations—many of us, consciously or not, are constantly assessing our environment for safety. The resulting stress can be exhausting and can have a huge impact on our physical health, but also on our ability to adapt and cope, to handle our emotions in a positive way, and to have healthy interpersonal relationships.

For some of us, the stigma we face externally, in ways both large and small, becomes internalized. This can lead to feelings of worthlessness, fear of rejection, and self-concealment. Again, consciously or not, some of us try to escape or mute these challenging emotions by turning to alcohol, opioids, or other substances that provide a sense of euphoria or relief. But this temporary relief comes at a cost. Misusing or abusing opioids or other substance often

leads to worse mental and physical health outcomes, such as addiction, depression, and other mental health disorders. And that's just the personal cost. Those who love us also bear the cost when we abuse prescription opioids or other substances.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

So what is the solution to widespread prescription opioid abuse and the harm it causes in our community? Back in 2017, the people who formed what is now known as the Pride in Prevention Coalition (PIPC), a project of Safe Communities Madison-Dane County in partnership with OutReach LGBTQ Community Center, works as a broad-based community coalition to address prescription opioid abuse and other substance abuse in the LGBTQ community in Dane County.

Steve Starkey is a co-chair of PIPC, and the Executive Director of OutReach. Speaking on behalf of PIPC, he said, "I encourage all of us to become more aware of the problem of substance abuse, and particularly the misuse and abuse of prescription pain relievers, in the LGBTQ community. While there are certainly environmental factors that underlie why our community is more susceptible to the misuse and abuse of prescription pain pills, there are some simple things we as individuals can do to help prevent misuse. For example, many people who misuse prescription pain pills get them from friends or family, with or without their knowledge. Keep prescription medications in a safe place, out of reach and out of sight."

PIPC and Safe Communities Madison-Dane County have provided some guidelines for safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription pain pills:

Do:

- Talk with your health care provider so you understand the benefits and risks of prescription pain pills before you take them.
- Ask about other options for treating pain.
- Ask whether there are medications other than opioids that treat pain, and ask about other ways to treat pain, like stretching or exercise.
- Use prescription pain pills exactly as directed.
- Talk to your health care provider if your pain does



CANDACE PETERSON, PhD, has worked for more than three decades in training and technical assistance for substance abuse prevention. She currently coordinates Partnership for Success, an opioid misuse prevention grant, at Safe Communities Madison-Dane County.

not improve.

- Avoid storage places for your prescription opioids that others can easily access. Lock them up!
- Dispose of expired, unused, or unwanted pain pills safely.

Do Not:

- Take pain pills in greater amounts or more often than prescribed.
- Take pain pills with alcohol or other drugs.
- Share your pain pills with anyone.
- Take someone else's pain pills, even if you're doing so to ease pain.
- Take pain pills for emotional escape, or to get high.

If you live in Dane County, PIPC can provide you with a lockbox to safely store your pain pills and other medications. We also have information on where and how to safely dispose of expired or unused pain pills and other medications, and on resources for help with substance abuse. Email dlane@safercommunity.net for more information. ■

Reference:

1. Addressing Opioid Use Disorder among LGBTQ Populations, *Boston, MA: National LGBTQ Health Education Center, The Fenway Institute; 2018. Retrieved at: lgbthealtheducation.org/publication/addressing-opioid-use-disorder-among-lgbtq-populations*



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DRAG FUNDRAISING QTPOC BRUNCH

Brunching with Queens

By combining their brunch with a drag performance, **Fuegos** has given a home to a new way to fundraise while being in community.

DO YOU LOVE BRUNCH? DO YOU LOVE DRAG? Of course you do, you beautiful stereotype. And because you are not alone in that love affair, Fuegos on Willy Street is combining those two loves into a monthly event. That is right my lovelies—there is now a Drag Brunch available to you right here in Madison. There have only been three events to date, but the plan is that this will happen once a month on non-game days.

Drag Brunch is exactly what it sounds like. It is full of magnificent brunch fair: For \$25 you get the buffet, which includes shrimp cocktail, some sort of roast beast at the carving station, a custom egg scramble station, a fish option, a vegan option, waffles and pancakes,

rice and beans, and some vegan desserts. There are also pitchers of mimosas and bloody Marys. If you aren't hungry, or you just want to get your drink on, \$15 gets you a spot at the bar. There is no cover for the show, but best to bring some singles to tip the entertainers.

So the food is great, the price is right, the only way to make this situation any better is to add drag queens—which is exactly what happens. The doors open for brunch at 10:00, and the first show starts at 11:00. If you are like me, and 11:00 is a time when you are often still in your jammies, don't fret. At 1:30, there is a second show.



Villarreal

Now, I know what you are thinking! You are thinking that for just \$25, if you are getting great food, and you are getting booze too, AND a show, that the show must be terrible, that the queens in question have to be some no-talent queens, rejects, sassless queens who couldn't get a better gig, maybe a Chihuahua in a dress barking along to the music. And you would be wrong. The always beautiful and talented Cass Marie is responsible for recruit-

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ing and organizing talent for the event, and she brings in top queens from Madison, Milwaukee, and occasionally Chicago.

So what gives? Good food, booze, great entertainment, great prices, something has to give right? Everyone involved. That is what gives. The events are done as a way to raise money for local non-profits. Each month a different organization is selected, and in the month leading up to the brunch the folks at Fuegos advertise for that non-profit.

When I sat down with Chef Oscar Villarreal, the executive chef at Fuegos, he told me about why he started Fuegos, that it had been a



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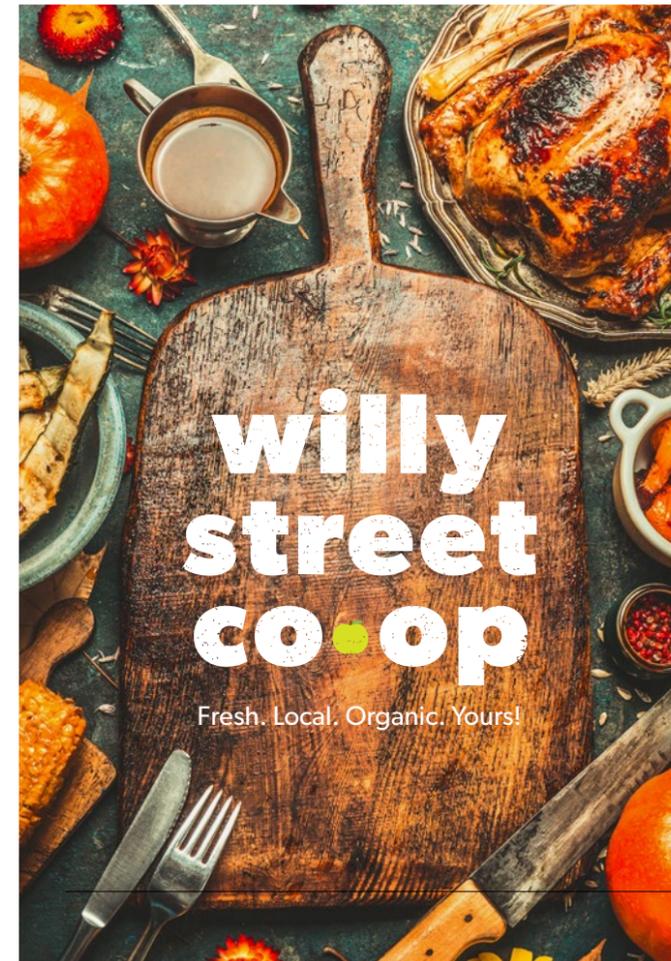
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response to tragedy in his life, and a way to concentrate on building something positive. He showed me pictures of him and his family building out and customizing the space creating artwork and getting ready to open. The Drag brunch, he says, is an extension of that ethos. It is a way to give back to the local community, and he puts emphasis on the local part. "I am selective about what non-profits I am sponsoring. They have to be local," Oscar tells me.

Whatever else it is, according to Oscar, Drag Brunch is a party-like environment. It's an opportunity to have fun, experience some joy, and to just be laid back and fun. —Vivienne Andersen



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APPROPRIATION QTPOC THEATER UW-MADISON

In Her Defense: Calling in UW

Art activist **Shasparay Lighteard** uses her voice to challenge the overt racism in UW-Madison's production of *Clybourne Park*.



RECENTLY, I RESIGNED as the assistant director of UW-Madison's *Clybourne Park* which is being produced by the University Theatre and Drama department. It would have been my first directorial credit. I am an actor, writer, performance poet, producer, and an aspiring director. But before all of this, I consider myself to be an art activist. Some march, some rally, I have always chosen to create. As an art activist I believe that art is a tool of persuasion, one that can be utilized to address socio-political issues and maybe, just maybe, change people's hearts and minds.

WHY I RESIGNED

Clybourne Park is a play by Bruce Norris that is a "spin-off" of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. I first took offense to this play when I discovered that this spinoff was unapproved by the Hansberry estate and that he does not pay royalties for using her work. He never has. In a *Playbill* article, he joked about the matter, saying 'We await the lawsuit.'

Norris went on to win a Pulitzer and a Tony

Lorraine Hansberry, the first African-American playwright to have their play on Broadway, went to UW-Madison in 1948. She experienced persecution, including housing discrimination, which contributed to her dropping out of the university after less than two years.

for *Clybourne Park*. He is acknowledged and elevated at the expense of a Black woman playwright, whose work he has profited from.

Lorraine Hansberry, the first African-American playwright to have their play on Broadway, went to UW-Madison in 1948. She experienced persecution, including housing discrimination, which contributed to her dropping out of the university after less than two years.

My first year at UW-Madison, I read *A Raisin in the Sun* in Professor Sandra Adell's class and got to learn about this history. I also did a monologue from *A Raisin in the Sun* for one of my theater classes. At the same time, I was feeling extremely isolated after moving

here from Texas and can tell you, I felt like this was a hostile environment. I wanted to leave the university and knowing that someone I admired so greatly wasn't able to make it here, was discouraging to say the least.

Now, it's my senior year. Most people I talk to are unaware of Hansberry's history here.

We should all acknowledge our unfortunate history and the persisting issues we face today, but how that is done is important.

Why is UW doing a show about race written by a white man? Yes, everyone is welcome at the table, but why aren't we prioritizing marginalized voices to speak on these issues.

This very much reads as "Hey, we have this problematic history. YOU KNOW WHAT? Let's give this white man, co-opting a Black women's work, CENTER stage to acknowledge that problematic history."

A STEP FORWARD, TWO BACK

I have to say, the UW Theatre and Drama department vocally and financially supported the Black Arts Matters Festival that I produced last spring. The department celebrated me, and they supported the aims of my event. That was a step forward. Producing *Clybourne*, is taking two steps back.

Bruce also wrote a deaf character in this play, whom is laughed at many times in this play for no other reason than that she is deaf. UW-Madison cast a hearing person to play this role, rather than casting someone on the deaf or hard-of-hearing spectrum. This is problematic, and ableist. If Black face isn't okay, then neither is "deaf-voice" which Norris writes into the play rather than have the character sign during the scenes she is present.

As a Black and disabled student, I do not support this work. This is not the bar. This is not the standard. We have to do better. To those who would say that I am biting the hand that feeds me, I think I am feeding the hand.

I do not wish to promote shows that speak on racism in a way that thrives off of the complacency of white people.

As an art activist, I want to work on shows that I believe in, and I am not content with UW-Madison mounting this production. This is not the legacy I want to leave.

Rather than working on *Clybourne Park*, I have decided to take on a new project with my new-found free time. It is my intention to establish a permanent memorial for Lorraine Hansberry on campus. The institution should acknowledge its history with Hansberry and celebrate her accomplishments in spite of itself.

That is what I want to leave; she deserves it. ■



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