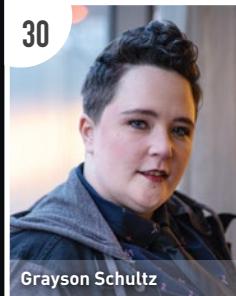


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Advocates advancing LGBTQ health equity across our state

November / December 2020

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Dana Pellebon

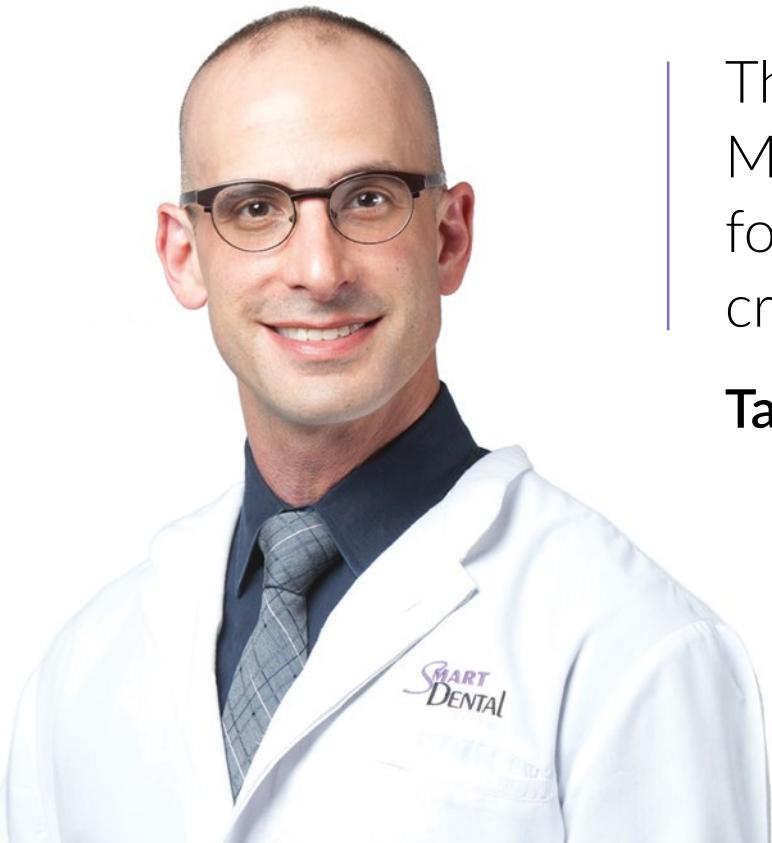
The co-executive director of Rape Crisis Center on creating change and making a difference in the lives of traditionally underserved people



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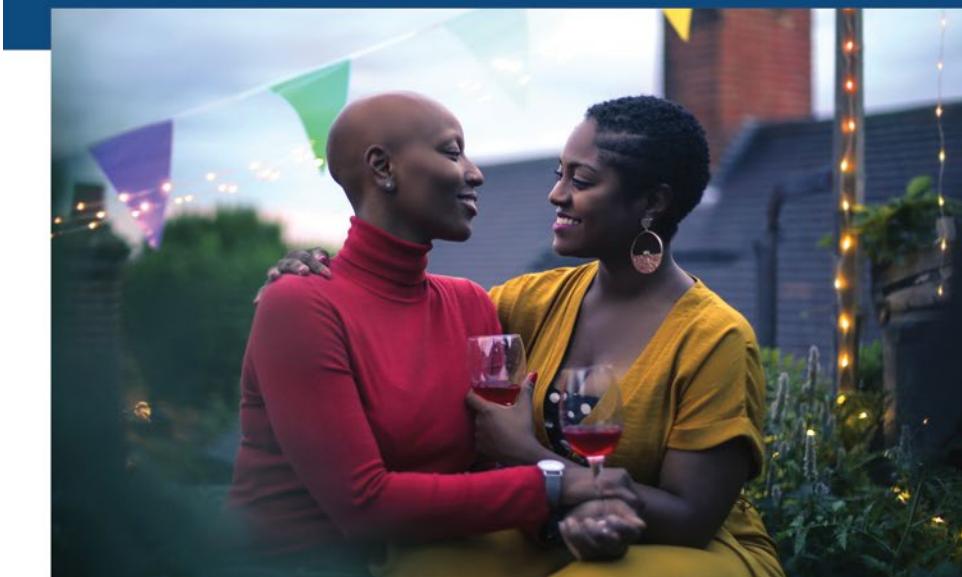
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"I don't see this election as being about choosing a candidate who will be able to lead us in the right direction. It will be about choosing a candidate who can be most effectively pressured into allowing more space for the evolving anti-racist movement."

- Angela Davis

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2021 Love List

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE ■ PATRICK FARABAUGH

CHECK YOUR BLIND SPOTS

I DO MY BEST to be a good ally to the diversity of identities in our community. Even so, it's inevitable that I'll have my blind spots. Over the years I've actively worked on trying to identify them when they come up. To do this, I focus on listening, learning, changing, and then advocating for the voices expressing the harm that I am contributing to. I think part of the unlearning we all need to do is around feeling defensive or doubling down on a position we hold when a group more marginalized than ourselves tries telling us that it's causing them harm. This issue's take on health and families is filled with opportunities like this to unlearn harmful patterns—and then take in—ways that we can come together to collectively lift each other up.

First, **Jill Nagler** unpacks the complicated and messy fallout over the revelation that a community activist had been leveraging a false identity as a person of color. They look at how whiteness enables this kind of harm, and how it is something that only whiteness benefits from. The fact that this happened here, within our local queer community, is something especially concerning.

All of our featured community members in this issue—**Dana Pellebon**, **Keith Borden**, and **Rita Adair**—have opened up to share how anti-Blackness has impacted them and the resilience they've forged to not only survive it, but to help find joy and provide leadership.



→ Continued on next page

Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH gives us all a lesson in allyship, as a white, cisgender gay man who helped use his power to leverage the highest levels of the U.S. military to lift the ban on open transgender service. Now he's the new director of the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment, working to build a healthier future for all marginalized populations.

And finally, given that I'm writing this before the election, I'm hoping that by the time you're reading this we may have some hope in a new administration to start undoing the harm caused by the shift we've just experienced at the Supreme Court. UW law professor **Steph Tai** tries to forecast ways that the newly cemented conservative majority can not only suspend our progress, but will most likely actively begin rolling it back. We're all in this together, so here's to our shared struggle and potential growth through it. ■

CONTRIBUTORS ■



MELANIE JONES (she/her) is a photographer who has been working in the Madison area for around five years. She specializes in dogs, women in agriculture, and weddings. When she isn't working in town, she is most likely out west, either working for the box office at Burning Man or photographing clients in Montana. She lives with her spouse on the northside of Madison with two dogs and three cats.

MAX WENDT (he/him) enjoys a life steeped in photography: he's been a freelance photographer for more than 20 years, and has the extreme good fortune to have a 'day job' of creating image processing software for photographers. He also has a passion for music and plays the upright bass. You can follow him on Instagram @maxwendt.

JILL NAGLER (they/them/theirs; ze/hir/hirs) 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 is serving their second term as president of the board of directors at OutReach where ze has brought a focus to issues of racial justice and representation in the LGBTQ+ community, including co-founding and facilitating Reading Antiracism: An OutReach Book Club. Ze is also a member of Disability Pride Madison, which has launched the Black and disabled virtual showcase that features Black disabled artists. Also a member of Groundwork, a local antiracism coalition, ze has co-founded twice-weekly discussion groups that center on antiracism work. Outside of Covid restrictions ze is a screamer/shredder in the local queer, feminist, punk band, The Hasbians, and is also guitarist in the experimental duo, dirty cops.

STEPH TAI (they/them) is a professor at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Their academic research focuses on the role of science in the legal protection against health and environmental risks. They also regularly draft amicus legal briefs on behalf of scientific communities. Apart from academic and legal work, they have also actively advocated for the interests of the LGBTQ community at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, through service on the UW LGBTQ faculty/staff/student committee. These efforts include advocating for full transgender health care coverage, provision of affordable PrEP coverage, and provision of sufficient mental health services for LGBTQ students. Steph also serves on the executive board of Trans Law Help Wisconsin, which provides aid and training with respect to name and gender change procedures. They were a student of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's husband, Marty Ginsburg, in law school. May both their memories be a blessing.

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GSA QTBIPOC TITLE IX YOUTH LEADERSHIP SCHOOL POLICIES

Inside the Movement with GSAFE

Our Lives Publisher **Patrick Farabaugh** checks in with GSAFE Co-Executive Directors **Ali Muldrow** and **Brian Juchems** to learn what the organization's current priorities and challenges are, from navigating the pandemic to juvenile criminal justice reform.

HOW HAS GSAFE BEEN HANDLING 2020?

Ali Muldrow: An important thing to understand about GSAFE is that it has interacted with large-scale educational systems for about 25 years. When schools close, and in Wisconsin schools close often because of snow, the GSAFE office closes based on the immediate school district. So our approach to the pandemic, as an organization that prioritizes the health and safety of kids, was to look to public safety experts and try to align our practices with those that made people safe. At first that meant canceling some really meaningful events, and then shifting a lot online. It also meant closing our office similarly to something we would do for a snow day and aligning with school districts.

Brian Juchems: Just like everybody else, we've had to pivot. Recognizing that we have a small staff made that easier.

HAS GSAFE BEEN HIT HARD FINANCIALLY BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC?

Ali: It's all a negotiation of where you're at in terms of reserve and investment. And I think for us part of the hit is being able to effectively deliver services to students. We've still been able to give young people scholarships. We've still been able to maintain programming. But it's a more complex time to fundraise and so much of GSAFE's funding comes from individuals who just want to make sure that kids all across the state feel welcomed in their schools. When you don't have an event to showcase the work, you see that reflected in the bottom line of an organization. But, because of the long-term leadership of some really talented people, GSAFE's been able to withstand this current moment.

Brian: Yeah. I think it's made it hard to move ahead. We're currently on a hiring freeze, which impacts certain levels of programming that we'd like to be doing.



How do we make sure that students have medically accurate LGBTQ consent-based human growth and development throughout their education? These kids need accurate information that isn't designed to be exclusionary or discriminatory.

WHAT ARE GSAFE'S TOP PRIORITY RIGHT NOW?

Ali: The priority is racial justice and as much online youth programming as possible. We're mailing things to students, and providing support through a variety of remote communication channels so that kids still have support and resources without risking anybody's safety. Because the work is district, state, and citywide, a lot of the time we're supporting kids from multiple schools.

Brian: I feel if the pandemic had to hit,

PHOTOS BY AMBER SOWARDS & SPENCER MICKA.

at least the beginning of it hit at an okay time for us. Not that it's ever okay, but our summers slow down as far as interactions with young people. Although this year it hasn't really slowed down. It's been picking up as we got closer to the start of the school year, and with concerns about how to support students in a virtual setting. It's been particularly concerning to folks about how we support our trans and non-binary students. Reminding folks that our QTBIPOC youth have been out in the streets this summer and are very much impacted by the uprising and the revolutions that are happening.

Ali: The fun part of the work has been amplifying the voices of young people doing movement work, because we train young activists. We see our students leading real movements across the state, in particular across Madison and Milwaukee. Also, young folks who organize their GSAs in places like Gays Mills and go to a school with 12 people have been organizing marches on a street with two stop signs. There's a lot of really cool things that our young people are doing. We get to amplify their voices and help them tell those stories in this moment.

WHAT ARE CHALLENGES IMPLEMENTING RACIAL JUSTICE WORK AT THE BOARD LEVEL?

Brian: I feel really good about the capacity



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Brian: We often think about the northwoods as a pretty homogenous population, but it's important to remember that it's also indigenous. It feels like forever ago, but we did a Northwoods GSA summit. I remember working with the young people and advisors to say, "We want to lead sessions or we want sessions on what it means to be indigenous and queer here." With GSAFE it's always been part following the lead of the students, part empowering them. We're providing a platform and opportunities for people to have important conversations without all the work of educating being on the students.

WHAT ABOUT FROM THE DISTRICTS THEMSELVES?

Brian: A lot of our work has been working with the students more so than with the districts as a whole.

Ali: I would say we're really lucky to have a good relationship with the Department of Public Instruction, and a state superintendent who believes that every child deserves to be welcomed at their school. I think having the Seventh Circuit rule in the favor of trans students twice has been a really big deal for districts across Wisconsin. And I think that having Donald Trump undermining Title IX right now is a large problem for us as an organization doing this work. It really is doing harm here. Districts that were just coming

around to racial justice work and making sure trans students are affirmed aren't feeling the same level of pressure under the Trump administration that they did under the Obama administration in terms of the interpretation of Title IX.

Brian: On that, every school district has a different perspective. Again to use the northwoods as an example: The Bayfield school district didn't have a GSA until this past year. The folks that are working with the GSA are also the ones working with the indigenous student population up there. They already get the equity and racial justice issues and recognize that whether it's talking about cultural competence or cultural practices, they recognize how those are all interconnected.

FOR YEARS GSAFE HAS BEEN WORKING TO GET DISTRICTS TO ADOPT GENDER NONDISCRIMINATION ORDINANCES. HOW HAVE THOSE PRIORITIES ADVANCED OR EVOLVED?

Brian: We're still working on the policy. We're also partnering with Fair Wisconsin on an equality map to help identify where regions and districts are at. Right now two-

thirds, if not three-fourths of Wisconsin school districts have a policy. When we started in 2005, there were zero.

Ali: Wisconsin is a school choice state, which means that you can have abstinence-only sex ed. You have abstinence-only sex ed in Waunakee, for example. So some of our priorities expand and broaden the work we've always been doing. How do we make sure that students have medically accurate LGBTQ consent-based human growth and development throughout their education?

?

These kids need accurate information that isn't designed to be exclusionary or discriminatory. I think looking at what it looks like statewide to broaden and deepen this work does really look at the composition of our legislature. And because we believe in youth leadership and youth voice, we're profoundly interested in making sure every young person in Wisconsin is registered as a senior in high school to vote. It's a priority that I have

ARE THERE COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS WITH FREEDOM, INC. THAT GSAFE HAS BEEN ABLE TO HELP OR REINFORCE?

Ali: Yes. GSAFE first started taking a stance on police in schools about four years



GSAFE staff accepting the Friends of Education Award given by State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor in 2019.

ago. Freedom, Inc. and the young people at Freedom, Inc. really led the way and the charge to forcing our community to have that conversation. We are very lucky to have a good relationship with Freedom, Inc. and to amplify the voices of their young people. We're currently working on a documentary called Child Correction that's all about juvenile incarceration. We also did a residency with the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center for about 14 months where we taught in the jail. We have a vested interest because we're a racial justice LGBTQ organization focused on young people. We have a vested interest in all kinds of issues, including immigration. We don't want young people of any identity being subject to any level of cruelty or discrimination because that always impacts everybody within marginalized identities.

DID GSAFE ADVOCATE FOR REMOVING STUDENT RESOURCE OFFICERS? DOES GSAFE CONTRIBUTE TO A PLAN FOR HOW TO FILL THE PERCEIVED GAP AFTER THE OFFICERS ARE GONE?

Ali: When we originally took a stance, it was that the school district should not be funnelling funding into the police department. School districts should pay for teachers and counselors. If the city wants to put police wherever they want to put police, they can do that. They just need to pay for it.

HAS GSAFE BEEN IMPACTED BY THE WISCONSIN INSTITUTE FOR LAW & LIBERTY (WILL) LAWSUIT AGAINST THE MADISON SCHOOL DISTRICT'S GUIDANCE & POLICIES TO PROTECT TRANSGENDER, NONBINARY, AND GENDER-EXPANSIVE YOUTH?

Brian: When the lawsuit was announced, as a statewide organization a lot of people turned to us to get a perspective on it or to understand what it means. They wanted to know what impact it has on their students. They also wanted to know more about the procedures Madison follows, why those still make sense. So we were happy to be a voice—particularly because the Madison school district wasn't in a position to respond. We've been providing a kind of statewide response to their questions. It's not unusual for GSAFE to receive several emails and calls each month or even each week with people asking, "Can we do this? Can we not do this?" There's been a lot of inquiries from school districts; either administrators, GSA advisors, or teachers, wanting to know what it means for them. Helping them recognize that again the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals decision and then the recent Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals decision again and again reaffirms that schools need to treat

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trans and non-binary students equally or with equity. They can't single them out and say, "We're going to treat you differently than your cisgender peers."

HOW MANY OTHER DISTRICTS OUTSIDE OF MADISON HAVE SIMILAR PROCEDURES?

Brian: We have about 30 school districts that have passed some type of procedures that are in some way similar to Madison. Madison's probably the most robust in the state, followed by Milwaukee. We were working with one school district and it's been a really long process—like five years. That's an example of why we love our individual donors, and our monthly donors. They help sustain us as we do the work on these long projects that people aren't funding. Another district was ready to pass procedures and then literally that week the WILL lawsuit got announced. As a result they said, "Well let's put a hold on that."

I think the WILL lawsuit presents it as the Madison school district is trying to keep secrets or to hide information from families. The thing that we have to remember is that 95, 96, 97 percent of the time the family is already aware of the situation. They know that their child identifies as trans or non-binary. It doesn't necessarily mean that they're excited about it, but they know and are in conversation with the school about it.

What the Madison procedures do is, in those rare occasions where the student isn't ready to be out to the family, acknowledge that we're going to work with and going to support the student while they figure out how to have those conversations with their family. Whether now or later. And it's also trusting the knowledge of the student's awareness of their family to recognize it's not safe to be out to them right now.

DOES GSAFE HAVE ANY SORT OF STATE LEGISLATIVE GOALS?

Brian: In the last year or two we've built a closer relationship with Fair Wisconsin. Oftentimes if we're thinking about policy, that'd be something we would develop in collaboration with them. They have the expertise as well as the seat to do that. Obviously we're still looking to pass a statewide non-discrimination policy for our trans and non-binary students. I'd still be looking for sex education to be comprehensive, consent-based, and medically accurate. We had something like that at one point, but then

back in 2010 that changed.

Ali: I think there are a lot of things that we would like to change in terms of state statutes. There are building codes in state statute that really change how you can facilitate restrooms. We would love to get rid of those. We're not poised in this current political climate to do that.

I think as far as Governor Evers goes, we're lucky to have a relationship from when he was our state superintendent. He has consistently been on our side. He has consistently listened to LGBTQ groups, and it's great to have him listen to GSAFE and to support GSAFE and support young people.

HOW HAS THE UPRISING IMPACTED GSAFE'S WORK OR ADVANCED OR ACCELERATED MAYBE PARTS OF THE WORK?

Ali: In the long term, GSAFE is an organization that's committed to ending the incarceration of children. We spoke to this for a while, and I've spoken to this pretty passionately. The uprising highlights things like the practices that were going on at the Department of Corrections' Lincoln Hills School. What happened to George Floyd

It directly speaks to why having school-based policing in which not a single white student was arrested in a district where the largest single demographic is white students, to have every single child who was arrested in school this year be a student of color, is something we have to examine closely.

highlights what happens to people when they're incarcerated. It directly speaks to why having school-based policing in which not a single white student was arrested in a district where the largest single demographic is white students, to have every single child who was arrested in school this year be a student of color, is something we have to examine closely.

And this movement has to get credit for opening people's eyes and saying you have to look at things you don't want to. It's not easy to watch somebody die for eight minutes and 46 seconds, but it happened. I feel very grateful to be an activist in this moment in which people are confronting our reality and in which GSAFE has created a

parallel narrative around prison abolition that is about young people. Wisconsin's prison system is one of the most disproportionate prison systems in the country, but that's for adults. Our juvenile justice system is twice as disproportionately African American as our adult prison system.

There's not a single time we went into a Dane County Juvenile Detention Center over the course of 14 months where the majority of children there, in our city, weren't Black.

The Lincoln Hills School isn't different. If you're funneling Black and brown students from Milwaukee, those are the most likely kids. They're most likely gay, living in poverty, and have disabilities. What does that say about us as a community? And if we have to face that, we have a shot at changing it. So it's an energizing moment as tragic and as devastating as it is. It's a moment in which we can get a lot done.

AS FAR AS CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM, WHAT ARE GSAFE'S CHALLENGES IN DOING THAT WORK?

Ali: I would say the most devastating problem with talking about criminal justice reform at the school level is when you talk about disproportionality and discipline. Who gets suspended? Who gets expelled? Who gets kicked out of class? The biggest problem is that there's this idea that the kid deserves it. That the kid isn't being discriminated against. That it's just a coincidence that the kid who shows up and is a little more fem gets bullied everyday but he's not actually getting bullied because of that. Or it's just a coincidence that every kid that got arrested was a Black or brown child last year, but they're not really in trouble.

The counter-narrative to that seems too easy for me because I grew up in Madison. There's no shortage of young white people breaking the law. There's no shortage of young white people underage drinking or stealing or engaging in drug use. It's who gets therapy and who gets a cage. That's the conversation we have to have as a community. Who gets to go to a festival and hang out by the lake unpoliced and who doesn't.

DOES GSAFE HAVE A FIVE-YEAR PLAN?

Ali: The long-term goal of the organization is to make it sustainable. It's to create educational opportunities that we didn't have



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*.

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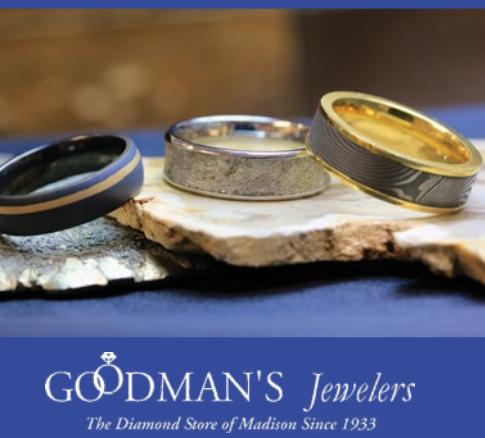
as kids and to allow for our students to feel fully embraced in who they are at school, but also to reach their full intellectual potential. And to have information that keeps them safe. I'm going to give you a sad fact. La Crosse is the only county in all of Wisconsin's 72 counties where STIs are declining.

SO HOW DO PEOPLE SUPPORT GSAFE, BOTH SHORT- AND LONG-TERM?

Ali: There's always a lot of things you can do, but I'll say specific to the pandemic. If you read a book with your kiddo that is LGBTQ-affirming and post it on your social media, you are helping us do this work. Giving to the organization is always great, but there's still ways to volunteer. I would also say showing up in your immediate community. In your immediate neighborhood, your immediate city council and saying that you want to advocate for the rights of all people. That you care about Black Lives Matter. That you understand that LGBTQ students need to be supported and welcomed in all environments. That's the work, and you're doing it with us by doing those things.

Long-term ways to support GSAFE is to follow us. To attend our events. To get really committed and do something like order a bumper sticker from us and put it on your car and just let people know that you care about pronouns. It can be as simple as that. ■

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OL

Our community had to reckon with the question of how could someone so seemingly dedicated to the cause—and by all appearances so giving to others—be exploiting racial and rhetorical ambiguity for their own personal and professional gain?

The Harm of Racial Fraud

CV Vitolo-Haddad, a trans non-binary UW-Madison grad student, was recently outed for an extensive history of falsely identifying as a person of color. OutReach board president **Jill Nagler** looks at the events that lead up to—and the fallout from—their outing, and the ways that whiteness contributes to the harm that BIPOC experience from acts of racial fraud.

QTBIPOC RACIAL FRAUD UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN QUEER ACTIVISM

I MET CV VITOLO-HADDAD in the summer of 2018 at OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center. We were both attending an event that followed the last OutReach Pride parade, featuring HRC National Press Secretary and current Delaware candidate for State Senate Sarah McBride. McBride was taking questions from a small group of trans folks about HRC and their problematic past in regards to trans advocacy. CV and I spoke

briefly at the event about academic interests and shared our trans coming out stories, which was memorable to me at the time, as I hadn't met a lot of other trans non-binary folks that used they/them pronouns in Madison.

CV and I didn't become close friends, but we shared some close friends, social circles, social media circles, and activist groups. We were never close enough for me to learn



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CV's backstory or to have an opinion of them outside of what I saw on social media. Their social media image told a story of interactions with academics, queer leftist activists, mutual aid networks, and gun advocates, as well as with Proud Boys and other white supremacists. Their professed intentions with befriending Proud Boys and white supremacists were framed as research as well as an attempt to expose the fallacies in misogynistic, white supremacist thinking. CV seemed to simultaneously exude both altruism and arrogance, a combination that is not uncommon in both academia and leftist activist circles. I expected to hear people question and challenge CV, their many identities, their politics, and their principles, their controversial platforming of Proud Boys and white supremacists; however, I never thought to question their claims of African and Cuban ancestry. That is until I read the compelling anonymous claims made in a Medium blog entitled, "CV Vitolo 'Haddad': Another Academic Racial Fraud," and the fallout that ensued on September 4, 2020.

OUTING AND FALLOUT

The first response I saw from CV about these allegations was in a post denying their racial fraudulence on their Facebook page—which has since been deactivated. The response from the activist community was as confusing as the fraudulent racial claims, with white folks and Black, Brown, Indigenous, and People of Color (BBIPOC) defending and attacking CV, and one another. Friends came to CV's defense with a ferocity that was matched by those who were ready to pounce on any claim that brought CV down, those who were suspicious of CV's claims, and those who were destroyed by the realization that their friend, TA, confidant, partner, fellow activist, comrade, street medic, fundraiser, and role model had built their racial identity on lies and racial and rhetorical ambiguity. CV's responses went from arrogance and indignation, to awkward and elusive half-apologies. It is no surprise that an academic champion of rhetoric has an answer for every question and deflection of any accountability for the questions that remain.

It was quite the disaster to watch in real time, as it was painfully obvious that CV had built many parts of their academic and activist identities on twisted rhetoric, while folks were reckoning with the fact that

CV had forged deep relationships through their altruistic work with the Dane County Community Defense Fund and Covid Mutual Aid efforts, as well as helping as a street medic in local and regional protests in support of the Movement for Black Lives. Our community had to reckon with the question of how could someone so seemingly dedicated to the cause—and by all appearances so giving to others—be exploiting racial and rhetorical ambiguity for their own personal and professional gain?

OTHER RECENT STORIES

I was not entirely surprised by CV's racial fraudulence considering the stories of Rachel Dolezal—an academic and artist who was working at the NAACP when it was uncovered that Dolezal had lied about her racial identity—and Jessica Krug—UW-Madison alum, academic, and activist who admitted to fabricating her North African/Caribbean racial identity which she had used to advance her career and to secure funding for her research. And while there has been plenty written about CV, Jessica Krug, and Rachel Dolezal, what their motivations were and what they gained from claiming to be Black, their stories are more complex than their personal actions, especially when considering that they used what they learned from being white to protect and insulate themselves from questions about their racial

CV undoubtedly benefited from the assumption, presumption, and posturing that they were not white, effectively taking attention and resources away from BBIPOC folks. They weaponized their racial lie to silence and delegitimize actual BBIPOC folks, while claiming to uphold a politic rooted in racial justice.

identity. They used what they knew about white fragility and racial politics to use their fraudulent racial identity as a weapon of manipulation that was impenetrable due to the complexities of how BBIPOC experience racial identity politics, both personally and systematically, as well as the very real and credible assertion that white folks cannot question the legitimacy of a BBIPOC's racial identity.

THE HARM

CV undoubtedly benefited from the assumption, presumption, and posturing

that they were not white, effectively taking attention and resources away from BBIPOC folks. They weaponized their racial lie to silence and delegitimize actual BBIPOC folks, while claiming to uphold a politic rooted in racial justice. CV's research that focused on Proud Boys and other alt-right white supremacist groups in an effort to expose the fallacies in their beliefs, as well as attempt to convert them to antiracists, has been brought up a lot in the context of their fraudulent racial claims, both in the terms of giving space and credibility to white

We must also consider the disparity in fallout between white folks fraudulently claiming to be BBIPOC, who are impacted by losing material and social standings, and BBIPOC who pass as white who face violence and death if they are found to be BBIPOC.

supremacist rhetoric as well as through questionable actions such as dressing up as a Nazi avatar for Halloween and shouting down BBIPOC who challenged or disagreed with them. This should have been an indicator of their whiteness as they were hoping to save the white supremacists from whiteness, from themselves. It begs the question, was CV's research an attempt to absolve themselves of the guilt of pushing a false racial narrative?

Or was it a misguided attempt to undermine the construct of race through rhetorical gymnastics and performative racial ambiguity? An attempt that would really only serve to uphold white supremacy and reinforce the notion of colorblindness rather than the recognition of the fallacy of race as a construct that was created by white men in order to hold power over others they deemed less-than, and to rationalize the subjugation of those with dark skin and/or who were not deemed white.

ACCOUNTABILITY

How many people protected CV and actively hid the truth? How can we hold our community members accountable if they are held to such esteem that the only way to expose their fraud is through an anonymous Medium post? We must also consider the disparity in fallout between white folks fraudulently claiming to be BBIPOC, who are impacted by losing material and social standings, and BBIPOC who pass as white who face violence and death if they are found to be BBIPOC. The stakes are higher because of white privilege, because although

white privilege doesn't shield someone from losing their job, their community, and their livelihood, it can protect them from immediate physical harm and violence.

At the core of these incidents of racial fraud is whiteness, because only whiteness can benefit from racial fraud. Whiteness lays the foundation. Whiteness gives the language. Whiteness allows the ambiguous manipulation. Whiteness protects whiteness. And whiteness is at the center of both the questions and the answers to this phenomenon of betrayal, of racial fraudulence, and of centering individual identity politics over collective justice.

THE ROLE OF WHITENESS

Only in the system of white supremacy can white folks use racial ambiguity to their advantage, because when a person who claims to be Black is really white, they are insulated by the safety of whiteness, whereas when a BBIPOC person is caught passing for white, the punishment is the violence of whiteness. Violence which cannot be overlooked in the context of BBIPOC and the atrocity of colonization, enslavement, genocide, and miscegenation that BBIPOC have experienced in the history of the U.S., the American continents, the legacy of the British empire, and globally—especially in the context of racial politics where colorism has been a tool of whiteness that shifts blame away from whiteness and onto "white passing" and light-skinned BBIPOC. This shift in blame from whiteness places "white passing" and light-skinned BBIPOC in the position of not being white enough while also giving them opportunities that their dark-skinned community members are not given. And while some "white passing" and light-skinned BBIPOC have been able to use their racial ambiguity to expose and exploit white supremacy in the name of antiracism and racial justice, it has also come at the cost of erasure, loss of agency, exploitation, and imposter syndrome.

HISTORIC & CURRENT IMPACTS OF RACIAL FRAUD

The depth of the harm that racial fraud causes, especially with white folks pretending to be light-skinned Black folks, needs to be recognized and named for what it is as it has historically and currently impacts BBIPOC and how BBIPOC are treated. We must consider actions such as the paper bag tests, skin bleaching, Westernization plastic surgery, fetishization of "exoticness," hair straightening and rules prohibiting natural hairstyles, and frankly, too many forms of dehumanization

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that is normalized in white supremacy socialization. We must also consider the historical roots in terms of laws that determine personhood: Blood quantum and the one drop rule were used to oppress even “white-passing” folks through ethnic/racialized genetic ancestry, deepening the false narrative of racialization that fed a white supremacist racial hierarchy; racialization that white folks have used to exploit cultures that they do not belong to, to co-opt racial oppression that they have not experienced, and to absolve themselves

While it is necessary as white folks to believe that anyone claiming to identify as BBIPOC is who they say they are, we know that white folks are quick to look into BBIPOC’s past and ancestry to attack their credibility. Whether this is through the “birtherism” that BBIPOC political candidates face, or whether it is through CCAP and looking up criminal records, the default for whiteness is to question the authority and credibility of BBIPOC who dare to enter white-dominated spaces.

of the guilt and shame of whiteness; and a perverse interpersonal neocolonialism, an extreme form of cultural appropriation, appropriating oppression.

CV claimed ancestry and culture that was not theirs to claim: Black, Cuban, Habesha, Latinx, as well as possibly claiming other racial/cultural identities. CV continues to refer to themselves as Italian/Southern Italian instead of referring to themselves as white. It is surprising that their racial/ethnic claims were not publicly brought into question considering a dossier entitled, “A Third Step” that was released by CV shortly after their racial fraudulence was exposed, was able to easily trace back all four sets of CV’s great grandparents using census data, showing that they are $\frac{3}{4}$ Italian descent, $\frac{1}{4}$ Austrian descent, and that all four sets of great grandparents identified as white. And while it is necessary as white folks to believe that anyone claiming to identify as BBIPOC is who they say they are, we know that white folks are quick to look into BBIPOC’s past and ancestry to attack their credibility. Whether this is through the “birtherism” that BBIPOC political candidates face, or whether it is through CCAP and looking up

criminal records, the default for whiteness is to question the authority and credibility of BBIPOC who dare to enter white-dominated spaces. This is not to say that BBIPOC people need to take the lead in outing folks who are claiming to be a member of their community, as we know that whiteness and white supremacy defends itself, and that whiteness will take any BBIPOC intercommunity turmoil and use it against that community in the name of white supremacy. Rather, the question is, how do we deal with issues of racial fraudulence within our communities without furthering a narrative of suspicion of BBIPOC, while also recognizing that BBIPOC cannot necessarily trust white folks to have their best interests in mind when calling suspicion to someone’s claims of racial identity?

Only white people get to have ancestry work both ways, where they can sit in the comfort of whiteness, while claiming oppression through ancestry. This is not to erase the historical trauma that many ethnic white folks have experienced in the past, however, ethnic white genocide has been perpetrated by white people who decided that a certain ethnic identity was, for lack of better words, not white enough. But this is 2020, and in the U.S., white folks, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, have white privilege, which doesn’t mean that life is easy for all white folks, but rather that our racial/ethnic identity isn’t making our lives more difficult. This should go without saying, but considering the current political regime, and the recent Executive Order prohibiting the use of federal funds for antiracism and antisexism training that names the socio-political mechanisms of current and historical discrimination, and names such trainings “unpatriotic,” it is imperative that white folks, and cisgender men, use their privilege to understand, recognize, and fight oppressive systems at the cost of our own unearned privilege.

CHOICES

While the impact that this uncovering has had on CV has been inarguably devastating, and it is unlikely they can regain credibility in academia, much less their community, it is possible for them to choose to move on, move away, reinvent themselves and leave this mess behind. They’ve already worked on concealing and protecting themselves through deactivating their social media accounts. Of course, they can’t leave this

incident completely behind as the evidence exists even when social media pages are deleted and even when the person moves on, but they could find a way through this that doesn’t require accountability and transformative justice.

it is necessary for all of us to reflect on what part we all play and continue to play in upholding white supremacy, racialization, and systems of oppression, especially within the greater LGBTQ+ community, and particularly in the activist community in Madison.

However, I hope that they choose to travel a path of accountability and transform the harm they have caused. I hope that they can look at the pain that they have caused themselves and others. I hope that they take full responsibility for the active role they played in their own undoing and really face the totality of their actions. And even though they can choose a path of leaving it all behind and moving on without giving the community closure, I hope they can choose to truly transform the harm they’ve caused by de-centering themselves, de-platforming themselves, and using every ounce of privilege that they have to uplift the BBIPOC who deserved every opportunity that CV was given through their racial fraudulence.

But before we can discuss what that looks like, CV is going to have to admit to their loved ones, community, and most importantly themselves what they did, why they did it, and how they can transform the harm they caused without looking for absolution. It will be hard work but if they truly center a politic of justice, it is the just way to try to repair the harm that they inflicted—hard work that I authentically hope they take on, and take on selflessly.

Additionally, it is necessary for all of us to reflect on what part we all play and continue to play in upholding white supremacy, racialization, and systems of oppression, especially within the greater LGBTQ+ community, and particularly in the activist community in Madison. We need to continue to ask ourselves, and really honestly answer: “Who am I centering in my antiracism efforts? How am I benefitting from what I am willing to tolerate in defense of whiteness? What do I really have to lose in speaking out against white supremacy? And how do I move closer to antiracism rooted in collective liberation?” ■

NEWS BRIEFS

WRITTEN BY STACY HARBAUGH

WISCONSIN LGBT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNOUNCES 2020 BUSINESS AWARD WINNERS

IN SEPTEMBER, the Wisconsin LGBT Chamber announced its 2020 Business Award winners. The Chamber’s annual awards recognize members who are building a more diverse and inclusive business community in Wisconsin.

Award winners include:

CORPORATE PARTNER OF THE YEAR: American

Family Insurance in Madison for growing and supporting the LGBT Chamber by serving as a member since 2016, being a leader in the LGBT Workplace Alliance, which connects area LGBT business groups, and serving as a past host and sponsor of a number of Chamber events, including the annual Madison Area LGBT Business Equality Summit.

LGBTQ BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: Delta Beer Lab

in Madison for being an active member of the Chamber and for its notable philanthropic involvement in the LGBTQ+, nonprofit, and progressive community, contributing the tips guests leave to a different nonprofit partner each month. Delta Beer Lab is a certified LGBT Business Enterprise by the NGLCC.

ALLIED BUSINESS OF THE YEAR: Red Shoes Inc.

in Appleton for its active participation in Chamber events, such as presenting at the 2020 Northeast Wisconsin Business Equality Summit and their intentional work to be inclusive in their new podcast, Sole Source, including doing an episode on the future of LGBTQ rights in the United States.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR: Diverse & Resilient in Milwaukee for its close work with the Chamber to advance a diverse and thriving business community since 2014. Diverse & Resilient has been a lead partner in the LGBT Workplace Alliance since its founding and has been engaged in numerous events and activities. Their leadership team has also supported employees going through the Business Leadership Academy.

BUSINESS LEADERS OF THE YEAR: Rick Clark &

BJ Gruling of Kilwins Milwaukee-Bayshore in Glendale for their passionate leadership in growing the LGBT and small business communities throughout the area. Partners in life and in business, these owners of a nationally certified LGBTBE have been actively engaged in getting more businesses certified. They have attended nearly every Chamber event and have been personal

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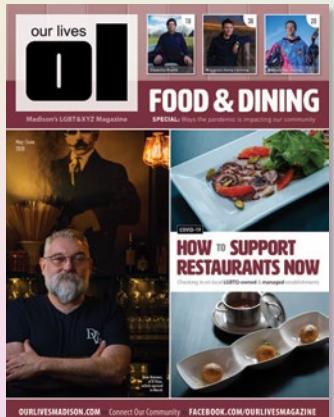
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advocates and champions of the Chamber.

ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR: **Refilwe Goll of Northwestern Mutual**

Mutual in Milwaukee for being an advocate and champion for building a more inclusive supply chain in procurement. She serves as the Senior Category Manager & Supplier Diversity Program Manager at Northwestern Mutual, has been a regular and active participant in the Chamber's Leadership Council, and has served on the Board of Northwestern Mutual's LGBT Employee Resource Group.

BUSINESS RESOURCE GROUP OF THE YEAR: **Kohl's #PrideAtKohls group** in Milwaukee for being a leader in creating a welcoming business environment. The group supports its national partner, The Trevor Project, as well as Courage MKE locally. It also participates in the LGBT Workplace Alliance and helps advocate and support the development of Pride clothing, making a positive impact on the community and within the company.

JUDGE ISSUES INJUNCTION AGAINST MADISON SCHOOL DISTRICT'S GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF REGARDING DISCLOSURES OF STUDENTS' GENDER IDENTITY

IN LATE SEPTEMBER, a Dane County Circuit Court Judge issued an injunction against the Madison Metropolitan School District's guidance for teachers and staff regarding disclosures of students' gender identity.

MMSD guidance allows teachers and staff to not be required to share a student's name and pronoun preferences with parents if it is in the student's best interests for their safety and support at school.

The lawsuit was filed by the conservative law firm Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty on behalf of 14 parents who say it is a violation of their rights to not be informed of the name or pronoun used for their children at school. The injunction prevents the school district from enforcing the guidance. The school district maintains that the guidance is not policy, and the court's decision did not order a change in guidance.

FUTURE OF LEZTALKMADISON UNKNOWN AS YAHOO GROUPS SHUTTER

THE COMPANY BEHIND the webportal Yahoo.com recently announced it was discontinuing the Yahoo Groups feature which was launched 20 years ago. Moderators of a Madison-area group called leztalkmadison were left with questions about the future of the community they

built over the last 13 years with around 900 members.

Patti Thompson began leztalkmadison as an electronic replacement to the bulletin boards you'd find in public places like A Room of One's Own bookstore. It was an online way to exchange information and referrals, announce events, find roommates or a supportive community. There was even an offshoot group geared for dating called lezdatemadison. All posts to the group were moderated and sent out as emails or a digest newsletter.

"I would like to thank my co-moderator **Leanne Gray**, and of course, our beloved **Dana Alder** for moderating for many years with me," said Thompson. "And thanks to **Donna Wess** who co-moderated the first few years and helped us lay the groundwork. Thanks to **Amber Ault** who inspired the name while we sipped coffee one day in Lazy Jane's Cafe in 2007(?). And thanks to **Deb Vandenbrouke** who created our beautiful logo. And to all the women who have posted over the years. It's been great!"

As other online communities evolved and grew—most notably Facebook's capacity to disseminate information for groups and events—the leztalkmadison Yahoo Group became more quiet. Moderators of the group say they don't plan to maintain the discussion list on another platform, though a Facebook group called leztalkmadison exists and may be an iteration of the lesbian-identified community in Madison's future.

OUTREACH LGBTQ COMMUNITY CENTER ANNOUNCES AWARD RECIPIENTS FOR THEIR 28TH ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATION

ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD: **Steven Wang** is a UW-Madison student whose dissertation focuses on LGBTQ+ health inequality. In 2020 he spearheaded a public humanities

project, forming a coalition of LGBTQ+ community groups including OutReach, OPEN, Freedom, Inc., UW GSCC & Orgullo Latinx. The coalition work has publicized LGBTQ+ health inequality. He's worked on the Mad Rainbow project and MBLGTACC. He is also involved with a hotline project for Chinese-speaking LGBTQ+ people.

ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR: **Freedom, Inc.** provides free, confidential services to low income Black and Southeast Asian women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people in the Madison area. The organization advocates for victims

and survivors of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Freedom, Inc. also helps clients with housing assistance case management. Recent events hosted by the group include Get Out the Vote and Meet & Greet for Queer Black Folk and People of Color (POC). Freedom, Inc. will collaborate with OutReach in our virtual COVID-19 Resource Series "The Road Forward" and our new Queer/Trans Persons of Color support group in 2021.

ALLY OF THE YEAR: **Shiva Bidar-Sielaff** is the Chief Diversity Officer at UW Health, and is also a City of Madison Common Council member. At UW Health Bidar-Sielaff has advocated for LGBTQ patients to ensure the company provides quality, culturally competent health care to our communities. As Madison City

Council member Shiva has regularly advocated for LGBTQ+ community organizations. Bidar-Sielaff has spearheaded large UW Health grants to Madison community organizations including OutReach that are working with low income and marginalized communities to provide homeless services and other relief efforts. Bidar-Sielaff has made an impact on Madison through her work on the Madison Community Foundation Board, MATC Board, Latino Health Council of Dane County and more.



Bidar-Sielaff

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COURAGE AWARD: Kayleb Hawj has been the Queer Justice Coordinator at Freedom, Inc. for the past four years. Kayleb was born and raised in Madison, their parents were Hmong refugees.



Kayleb works with Southeast Asian boys on ending patriarchy and to increase the visibility of women, queer, and transgender leadership through photography and videography. Kayleb has supported local campaigns in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and documented their work through photography.

UPDATE ON UW CAMPUS LGBTQ+ STUDENT SUPPORT WITH WARREN SHEARER

THIS FALL, University of Wisconsin System students returned to class, but it was only a matter of time before the COVID crisis returned to campus as well. As some students quarantined in dorms and classes on the UW-Madison campus became a mix of virtual and in-person instruction, LGBTQ+ students were left without some of the sources of community and support they might expect from a traditional campus experience.

Fortunately, the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center at UW-Madison is actively listening to students' needs and responding in new and creative ways.

"Students are navigating a desire to build community, especially as they are managing isolation, psychological distress, and a lack of support," said Assistant Dean and Director Warren (War, per/pers) Scherer. "They are rightfully frustrated. They are removed from their respective support networks, friends, and community on campus because gathering is limited. Students who, upon returning home last spring and this fall, may not have a home that is supportive or affirming. They are navigating an experience where they cannot fully be themselves, express themselves, or if they are out it may be a hostile environment."

To meet students wherever they are, the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center has found a tool more commonly used in online gaming communities to get students connected. Through setting up an online Discord instant messaging and digital distribution platform server, staff have found ways of supporting students through threads of online conversations based on students' interests—everything from exploring gender identity to

their passion for baking or cultivating plants. Combined with virtual events and discussion, students are still finding a sense of community.

"LGBTQ+ people are incredibly resilient," per said. "They have had to find ways to not only survive but thrive in the environment they find themselves and they have found avenues to access support and community. It mightn't be the robust community they want. They can't kiki with friends to watch *She-Ra* or *Pose*. It's not exactly what they envisioned for college, but they are finding ways to thrive and be resilient to all that is going on."

QUARTZ HEALTH SOLUTIONS RELEASES ORGANIZATION'S FIRST-EVER ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

AN OFFICIAL ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

followed a statement shared by Quartz's then-president and CEO, Terry Bolz in June, which condemned the systemic racism faced by Black people and other communities of color in this country. In that statement, Bolz said, "Racism is a public health crisis. We must speak up and act to end the preventable and untimely deaths that are its consequence."

Dr. Mark Selna, Quartz's new President and CEO, echoed Bolz's sentiments, expressed his support for the announcement and his commitment to eliminating health care disparities while improving health care outcomes for communities of color.

The official anti-racism statement is below.

At Quartz, our company values are clear:

*Respect
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We respect and value the differences and perspectives of our employees, customers, and communities. Our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts support our values by:

Creating an inclusive workplace environment.

Teaming up with community collaborators to improve diversity awareness.

Educating, building, coaching, and promoting diversity and inclusion.

Being accountable and measuring the impact, influence, and path of our efforts.

Basic human and civil rights are critically important, as are issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion

We have listened and learned from our employees, customers, and communities as they have expressed emotions that span from anger to frustration to exhaustion about the

history of social injustice and inequities in our country.

Quartz promotes the health and well-being of people. We owe it to ourselves and each other to do better. At this moment, regardless of our past efforts and good intentions, it's clear we as an organization, as well as a society, need to do more and at a faster pace.

The Quartz executive team believes it is necessary to condemn systemic racism and the continued oppression of our communities of color. In alignment with our core values, we stand for anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion for all.

We stand with our Black employees, customers, and communities in our network service areas, across our country and around the world.

As an anti-racism organization, we vow to intentionally identify and discuss issues of racism and color and the impacts they have on our organization, systems, and people.

We challenge ourselves to understand and correct any inequities we may discover and gain a better understanding of ourselves in the process.

We are committed to supporting and being actively involved in the communities we serve to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, and eradicate systemic racism. ■

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Queer We Are, Together We Heal

Student activist **Steven Wang** formed a coalition of Madison-based LGBTQ+ organizations to launch a campaign to address health equity issues and promote cross-group collaboration during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"COVID SUCKS." This is what I have been hearing from people since the pandemic blew up. Whether it is a chit-chat with Grindr strangers, a check-in with long-time friends, or working with community organizations—the steadily increasing number of Covid-19 cases always lingers at the backdrop for the conversation, gradually consuming the little optimism left in people to believe that life will resume to normal soon.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected LGBTQ+ communities and aggravated systematic inequalities in health. The exact impact of Covid-19 on LGBTQ+ people is difficult to trace due to negligence of official data collection and lack of access to health services. Financial hardship related to employment, housing, and social isolation further impairs LGBTQ+ people's capacity to cope with the pandemic.

The campaign "Queer We Are, Together We Heal" originated as a collaborative initiative to address health equity issues within and beyond LGBTQ+ communities in Madison. Several community organizations formed a coalition to work together, including *Our Lives* magazine, Freedom, Inc., the Gender and Sexuality Campus Center (GSCC) at UW-Madison, MadRainbow, Out Professional Engagement Network (OPEN), OutReach LGBTQ+ Community Center, and Orgullo Latinx LGBTQ+ of Dane County.

We spent the summer meeting and discussing what the community needs were concerning health and launched the campaign in September. We now have a public presence on social media through community partners' publicity channels and the campaign's main Facebook page (@QueerHealthEquity) and Twitter handle (@we_queer). We are also lucky to have *Our Lives* magazine as the campaign's primary media partner.

The goals of the campaign are to document how the pandemic has affected local communities, to highlight structural inequities behind health disparity, and to rally support for community care. As organizations occupying different and overlapping spaces, we also want to use the campaign as an opportunity to cultivate trust and facilitate collaboration.

STRUCTURES FOR HEALTH EQUITY

According to a research report by the Human Rights Campaign, many structural factors disadvantage LGBTQ+ communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides the long-existing gap in access to health coverage, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to work in highly affected industries, have no paid leaves, and experience poverty and housing insecurity. Historical discrimination in health care practice and policy also leads to a higher rate of chronic illness including HIV infection among LGBTQ+ people.

Ticia Kelsey works as the LGBT Senior Advocate at the OutReach Community Center. She has been checking on elderly people who have a connection with the center after Covid-19 cut off in-person events. "A



lot of LGBTQ seniors have difficulty with things like teleconferences and tele-appointments," Kelsey says. "Because our seniors are kind of segregated away from the main population of seniors, we haven't had as many classes telling us how to do this."

Such social isolation hinders access to health care while elderly people are already at higher risk to get severe illness from Covid-19. LGBTQ+ seniors usually get health information through word of mouth among themselves, Kelsey says. "Many transgender seniors walk into a clinic and are treated so badly they never want to go back in. And then other LGB seniors were outed by their physicians when they were younger. And so they don't trust those people now."

The closure of social spaces for LGBTQ+ people also affects the younger generation. "We have data from students, and these data are clearly indicating that students, or young adults broadly, are seeking and are hungry for connection and community," says Warren Scherer, the Director of GSCC. Thus, being unable to find those communal connections adds on an underlying mental health concern, Scherer points out.

Participating in the campaign, Scherer wants to raise public awareness of health equity and create a better environment for LGBTQ+ youths to get health services. "Folks who upon moving away from or off campus may have different access to supportive and affirming health care providers," says Scherer. "Whatever we can do to change the landscape so folks are having better interactions to address those health inequities is important."

Trans people are among the LGBTQ+ groups who face constant challenges to get support for health care and living arrangements. During the pandemic, many providers have to postpone transition-related care such as gender reassignment surgery. "This can be a really stressful experience for trans folks, in that it can feel like they have less control and agency over their own bodies," says Sergio Domínguez, a Ph.D. student and researcher at the Trans Research Lab affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Domínguez cites the statistics showing that Trans Lifeline, a major non-profit crisis hotline serving trans people, has gotten 40 percent more calls than usual in the past few months.

HEALTH EQUITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Health disparities are a symptom of structural inequities regarding race, citizenship, class, age, ableness, gender, and sexuality. Domínguez says that the Trans Research Lab promotes a cultural shift from gender

equality to gender justice. Reproductive injustice, racism, classism, xenophobia, and whore-phobia are all contribute to trans people's experience of discrimination, Domínguez says. "There has to be justice for all trans people, not just a select few who are white, able-bodied, middle class, documented, et cetera."

A social justice approach to health equity highlights intersectionality in LGBTQ+ people's everyday experience. Freedom, Inc., an avid advocate for racial justice, participates in the campaign and helps to connect organizing around health equity with the police abolition movement. A public statement co-signed by more than 170 LGBTQ+ organizations urges to "defund the police and invest in communities." The statement provides concrete alternatives to police that would premise health equity on affordable housing, inclusive workplace, quality education, and other community services.

For many Latinx LGBTQ+ people in Dane County, housing and employment insecurity put them in limbo during the pandemic. Access to basic health services can be a problem for Latinx people with no immigration documentation, says Baltazar De Anda-Santana, the Director of Orgullo. "They are undocumented, so they don't have a lot of support financially to deal with all the health issues right now."

Taking jobs that necessitate on-site activities and customer services further expose some LGBTQ+ Latinxs to the risk of Covid-19. De Anda-Santana recalls talking to a job seeker: "When I asked this person, 'Where do you want to work?' she said a restaurant or a factory because that's the only place where this person could work." Orgullo has been working with other Latinx organizers to coordinate resources and rally support. Mutual aid and extensive community network help the situation most, De Anda-Santana says.

The Trump administration has been systematically rescinding policies and laws protecting LGBTQ+ rights. For example, in November, 2019, the Department of Health and Human Services stopped prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation in the department's grant programs, some of which address the HIV, opioid, and youth homelessness epidemics. These administrative actions are accompanied by other attacks on people of color and non-white immigrants, causing extra harm to LGBTQ+ people of racial and ethnic minorities.

COLLABORATION CULTIVATES TRUST

Despite its devastating impact, the Covid-19 pandemic presents as an opportunity for community leaders to work together and address a common challenge. "I'm excited that we're all trying to work together to try to create a cohesive message," says Justin Williams, the President of OPEN. "Typically, we all work in our little silos on the issues that our organizations work on and we don't have a lot of crossover."

One major barrier to collaboration among LGBTQ+ organizations is limited staffing. With so many things still needing to be done for LGBTQ+ communities, it can be difficult to find the right time between two organizations trying to connect with each other, says Ticia Kelsey at OutReach. Organizations run entirely by volunteers are particularly under strain. "I wish I could put more time into collaborative community projects, but I do have a day job," says Baltazar De Anda-Santana at Orgullo.

CONVENING AND RECRUITMENT

This was the situation I had to navigate when I started to convene the coalition for the campaign earlier in March. The entry point was to coordinate a communication platform for community partners to talk with one another. Collaboration then grew organically when trust was built and specific community needs were identified. The initiative to foster a coalition among LGBTQ+ organizations was part of the "Humanities Responders" program sponsored by the Center for Humanities, UW-Madison.

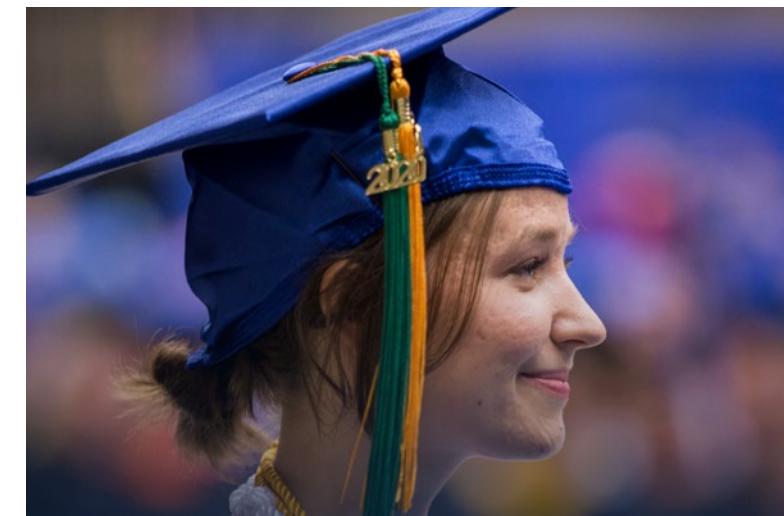
Through the Humanities Responders program, I recruited two project assistants who had expertise in community communication and were passionate about promoting health equity. Eli Krebs, a recent alumnus of UW-Madison in Sociology, is interested in researching LGBTQ+ health; and M.Rose Sweetnam, a UW-Madison undergrad student, Event and Accessibility Coordinator at GSAC, and member of the Trans Research Lab, serves as the graphics coordinator and media assistant for the campaign.

LINKING UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER

"It's so hopeful to build coalitions during this time, because that means you're looking toward a future together and you're not mired in this hopelessness that you can easily fall into when everything has such chaos," says Aaron Fai, the Assistant Director of Public Humanities at the center. "Creating that link across university and community is rough, and it requires a lot of cultural humility on the side of the university."

To mobilize structural changes of intersectional justice and health equity, institutions like universities and hospitals need to hold back their privileged position and recenter community perspectives. OPEN has been partnering with UW Health to facilitate the institution's diversity training. Justin Williams at OPEN insists that the partnership reflects the experience and need of LGBTQ+ people. "I was telling them, 'We'll bring people to the table. They might call you out on it, and you just need to be humble and accept that,'" says Williams.

The "Queer We Are, Together We Heal" campaign builds on this reciprocal model of collaboration to face the challenge of Covid-19. "It's up to community organizing and mutual aid networks to support the ongoing needs of LGBTQ+ and multiply marginalized people who are being failed," M.Rose Sweetnam says. "That's what this project is doing, highlighting the ongoing needs of LGBTQ+ communities so that we can continue building better support networks." ■



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Challenging Institutions

With LGBTQ advocacy spanning health care, academia, and the military, as the new director of the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment, **Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH** is working to build a healthier future for all marginalized populations.

I ADMIT IT. I'M A GEEK. Growing up in a small town in Delaware, I was never the most fashionable, outgoing, or sociable kid. But I grew up in a small family surrounded by love and with constant encouragement to chart my own path. What I may have lacked in markers of popularity, I made up for in the drive to dance to my own beat. I still love to dance, and I did manage to take home first place in the Delaware State Computer fair in sixth grade.

HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

I took an early interest in science and medicine. Both of my parents are health professionals—my mom is a neuropsychologist, and my

father is a dentist. Each dedicated themselves to the health and well-being of their patients, including taking calls during dinner and making emergency trips into the office on weekends to help someone in need. While I knew I wanted to become a physician early in my life as a way to give back and serve those in my community, what was less clear was how that professional identity would intersect with other aspects of my life—namely being gay. I did not have many LGBTQ role models growing up, and saw few on TV or in the media. I remember coming out at Haverford College and being unsure if that would impact my chances of getting into medical school or how being gay might be relevant to my desire to become a physician. I had only met a handful of LGBTQ people in my life, and none of them were doctors.

A MILITARY TRADITION

While I do not think of myself as having come from a military family, I do come from a long line of veterans. My father was a U.S. Army dentist, one grandfather served in the Merchant Marines and the Army, and another grandfather was also an Army man. My mom's family came to the U.S. in the 1600s, and a direct ancestor of mine, Reverend Ebenezer David, enlisted as a chaplain under George Washington at the beginning of the Revolutionary War and died while serving as a medical officer during the infamous winter at Valley Forge. In short, our family has been serving our country in many ways for a long time. That is one of the reasons I became a physician—to serve others. Ultimately, it is also one of the reasons I decided to join the Navy after I finished medical school at the University of Chicago—to serve my country.

One of the reasons I chose the Navy was because I always figured that if I deployed, I'd rather be on a ship than in a tent in the middle of the desert. Little did I know that in 2014 I would receive orders to staff a combat trauma hospital at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. The hardest part about deploying was leaving my then-partner (now husband) Judd behind. I knew that because we were not married (nor at the time could we legally be married in Tennessee where we lived), if something were to happen to me, he would have been afforded no rights or protections. But we did what thousands of military couples do each year and figured out how to minimize the stress that time, distance, war, and uncertainty brought while I was overseas.

During my deployment, I was given orders to lead the anesthesiology department at the NATO Role III Trauma Hospital—the primary receiving facility for all wounded servicemembers and enemy combatants for the southern half of the country. Established in 2005 and originally supported by the UK, Netherlands, Denmark, Australia, the U.S., and Canada in 2009, the U.S. Navy took over running the 70,000-square-foot facility. Here I spent the better part of seven months, caring for many critically ill patients who had been wounded in battle. It was a privilege to bring the lessons I had learned and taught at Harvard Medical School to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines on the front frontlines.

THE QUESTION HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

During my deployment, then Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter visited for a town hall meeting with the troops less than a week into his tenure. I had never been in a room with such a high-ranking leader before. I was excited but nervous to hear and meet him. After a few opening remarks, thanking us for what we were doing, he asked if there were any questions. I could not help myself. I made my way to the microphone, in front of a hanger full of soldiers and with the traveling press corps watching I asked, "What are your thoughts on transgender service members serving in an austere environment like this, here in



I could not help myself. I made my way to the microphone, in front of a hanger full of soldiers and with the traveling press corps watching I asked, "What are your thoughts on transgender service members serving in an austere environment like this, here in Kandahar?"

Kandahar?" At the time, there were an estimated 15,000 transgender people in the military, but they could not come out as transgender because of a longstanding ban. Until I asked my question, Carter had not publicly stated where he stood on the issue. "I don't think anything but their suitability for service should preclude them [from serving]," he said.

To ask that question was uncomfortable, yet it was the right thing to do. The Secretary's response was the most favorable from a senior U.S. military official to date. Within hours, the event was being reported by news outlets all over the world, and by the next afternoon the White House added its support. A year later, in 2016, the ban was repealed. When Secretary Carter announced the repeal of the ban on transgender service at the Pentagon, my Kandahar question was described as "the spark that led to the end of the ban on transgender service" by then Secretary of the Army, Eric Fanning.

CHANGING THE FACE OF LGBTQ HEALTH

There are notable gaps and disparities in the health of LGBTQ people all over the country. LGBTQ people are less likely to have health insurance, a regular doctor, access to preventive health screenings, or avoid harmful behaviors like smoking. While there are many factors that contribute to this, the inaccessibility of medical care is something that pains me deeply. As a result, I have dedicated a substantial portion of my life and professional portfolio to advocating for more accessible systems that are better equipped to meet the needs of LGBTQ people.

In Massachusetts in 2007, I led an effort to create the Massachusetts Committee on LGBT Health which continues to this day to work to advocate for policy change. When I relocated to Nashville and joined the faculty at Vanderbilt University, I co-founded and led the Vanderbilt Program for LGBTQ Health—a multidisciplinary effort that ultimately launched four regional transgender health clinics and a comprehensive gender confirmation surgery program. We also created a first-in-the-nation, free, on-demand transgender patient navigator program to provide advice and support using trained transgender peer advocates called "Transbuddy." This work had the effect of changing the face of care for LGBTQ—and particularly transgender—people across the Southeast and has become a model nationwide. I led numerous research studies about



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the health of LGBTQ people, illustrating among other issues the gaps in medical training curricula around LGBTQ health and the policy impacts of insurance access on LGBTQ care. Given that the field of LGBTQ health is still emerging, one of my proudest moments came when I received the inaugural Sex and Gender Minority Research Award from Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health in 2018.

LEADING THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

In 2014, I was elected to the Board of the American Medical Association (AMA). Founded in 1847, the AMA is the largest association of physicians and medical students in the United States. My election to its board as an openly gay physician was a milestone—as was my subsequent election to lead the AMA as its Chair in June, 2018. Remarkable to think that just 25 years earlier, I could not have even been a member of the AMA as it wasn't until 1993 when the AMA amended its bylaws to include sexual orientation in its nondiscrimination clause. During my time on the AMA Board, I have had many opportunities to advance the cause of health equity. I have met with senior government officials, testified in Congress, and participated in countless meetings at the White House about LGBTQ health and ways to better meet the health needs of our community. But I have also tried hard to serve as a role model for others who might be asking themselves “so what does becoming a doctor have to do with my identity as an LGBTQ person?” I may not have known the answer to that when I was just starting out, but I do now: Everything.

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These disparities should be unacceptable to all of us, and I am deeply committed to solving these challenges.

In my work leading AHW, I'm focused on building a healthier future for all marginalized populations, including LGBTQ individuals.

As Chair of the AMA, I championed the call for LGBTQ equity. I advanced a call to ban conversion therapy nationwide. I stood up to amplify physician voices in a nationwide call to end police brutality and racial injustice. And now, in Wisconsin, I look forward to adding my voice to those who know our world can, and must, be a better and more just place.

This past year has been a truly challenging one for all of us. We have all experienced stress and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. I continue to struggle personally with trying to make the best decisions I can to keep my family safe as we navigate an ever-changing landscape. I also grapple with the ongoing daily challenges posed by the inequities and injustice that continue to bubble up around us. Recently, I cared for a patient from Kenosha who described to me the unfathomable sight of watching armed men roam around her neighborhood with machine guns. We can, and must, do better.

PHYSICIAN. VETERAN. HUSBAND. DAD.

As you can imagine, there are many words that people ascribe to me and my career—mostly related to my advocacy or professional identity. But in closing, the two words that I am most proud of represent my most important accomplishment, my family. Those words are “husband” and “dad.” I could not be more grateful to have a beautiful son, Ethan, and a loving husband, Judd. Their support is what makes all my achievements possible and meaningful. ■

1. In the operating room.
2. Testifying in Congress alongside transgender servicemembers.
3. Their wedding.
4. Deployment in Afghanistan.
5. With Secretary Carter after the town hall.
6. Leading an American Medical Association national conference on health advocacy.



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Finding Home

Sex educator and disability rights advocate **Grayson Schultz** came into their activism by transforming personal hardships into purposeful empowerment.

WHEN MY EX-HUSBAND asked for a divorce mid-2019, my mind flashed back to a journal article I read years earlier. Research indicated that most marriages—around 75 percent—involving a chronically ill partner end in divorce. Despite my laundry list of health issues, I was adamant we wouldn't fall into that statistic, that I had found my forever home. Yet, I found myself sitting on my bed consoling him while my world—all I had of family—fell apart.

When I had initially learned about the high divorce rates in illness-involved relationships, I was terrified. For a lot of my life, I didn't feel connected to others. My family of origin is very right-wing, and I never had a ton of close friends. Most of the friends I did make didn't stick around long. I didn't let them get away with saying or doing harmful things and, hon-

estly, was more of a background character in others' lives. It really felt like my ex was all I had. Within a few years, we were living together and engaged. The entire time, I was afraid to make any ripples—not because of him, but that lingering fear. After we were married, I tried to focus on the fact that we were happy.

Still, that question loomed over my head.

In 2015, I went to a conference in Milwaukee centered around one of my conditions. I mostly saw it as a great chance to see friends I'd never met in person. On one of the days, several of us popped into a conference room for a session on sex and relationships. People the ages of 18 to 70 and from across the U.S. sat in that room around me. The questions from the audience shocked me—not because of their explicitness, but rather the opposite. People

in their 60s were asking questions covered in many sex education classes—and that's coming from someone who watched *Riding in Cars with Boys* for part of that week!

I always knew that sex education was sub-par in areas of the US. In high school, I wrote a senior capstone comparing sex education in the United States to key countries in Europe. Even in the mid-2000s, it was clear that the American way of doing things was not providing the right kind of information to the average person.

Flash back to a hotel ballroom in Milwaukee. As we sat together, I wondered how some of the personal questions being asked hadn't been brought up to medical professionals before. Needless to say, I dug into the topic more and realized two things: 1) Sex education isn't just awful for the average person. Primary care doctors get an average of less than 10 hours in the U.S. and Canada! That's mostly focused on fertility and erection-related issues. No one has really cared as much about the clitoris; and 2) People were afraid to ask their doctors about things related to sex. It took me a while—and becoming a sex educator—to see why.

Running with the ideas in my head, I began to focus more of my work on convincing fellow patients that they deserved a fulfilling sex

life. Ableism tells us that lives with disabilities or pain aren't as precious, that those of us in that position should just be happy we've alive over craving love, sex, etc. No one deserves to have their sex lives deemed unimportant, but especially when that's due to a denial of our basic humanity and autonomy.

Frankly, it wasn't until recently that vaginismus came up as the diagnosis. In talking with someone else describing their pain and how it was misdiagnosed, I realized this is what had happened to me, too. Thankfully, the physical therapy gave me the tools to ease those muscles. It's very rare for me to have any spasms now, let alone in the same way.

Within a few years, I began to struggle with my own sex life. I had come out as being transgender and queer in the fall of 2016. As I shifted to become more masculine in appearance, my husband struggled. At the same time, it felt like I was oversharing or overburdening him when talking about my pain levels or trying to put a name to undiagnosed conditions. That distance carried over to the bedroom and the sex life we had slowly disappeared.

I assumed that he would speak up and ask questions, something he'd done with my health issues. While he was supportive, there was a disconnect, a tension there. We had settled on what we thought a cause was at one point, but it never felt like it got resolved.

Ever true to myself, I assumed a lack of communication meant things were okay. In reality, neither of us likes conflict, so we both retreated into our own things.

In the height of this, we hit our two-year wedding anniversary. Missing touch and knowing that asking for it never led anywhere, I brought up the idea of polyamory, or 'opening up' our relationship. It didn't go well, and he thought I had fallen out of love with him when the reality couldn't be further from the truth. I wanted him to not feel the pressure that comes with the toxically monogamous notion that he would have to be my everything. Instead, I feel like I broke his heart. Over a week, we had conversations about what that meant about our emotional bond with me assuring him that I still adored him.

My ex never bought into too much toxic masculinity, but he doesn't cry much. That week was different, and I knew it was my fault. In classic fashion, I internalized that pain.

Within weeks, I began having alarming symptoms. What I now know is that I was suffering from vaginismus, a condition that causes intense muscle spasms in the pelvic floor muscles. That pain is something so incredibly difficult to describe—it was hot, throbbing, sharp, dull, achy, and more. I've had chronic pain since kindergarten and this was a whole different ball game. I stopped sleeping through the night, instead waking up around 3:00 a.m. ready to pass out from the pain, but trying desperately to calm it down.

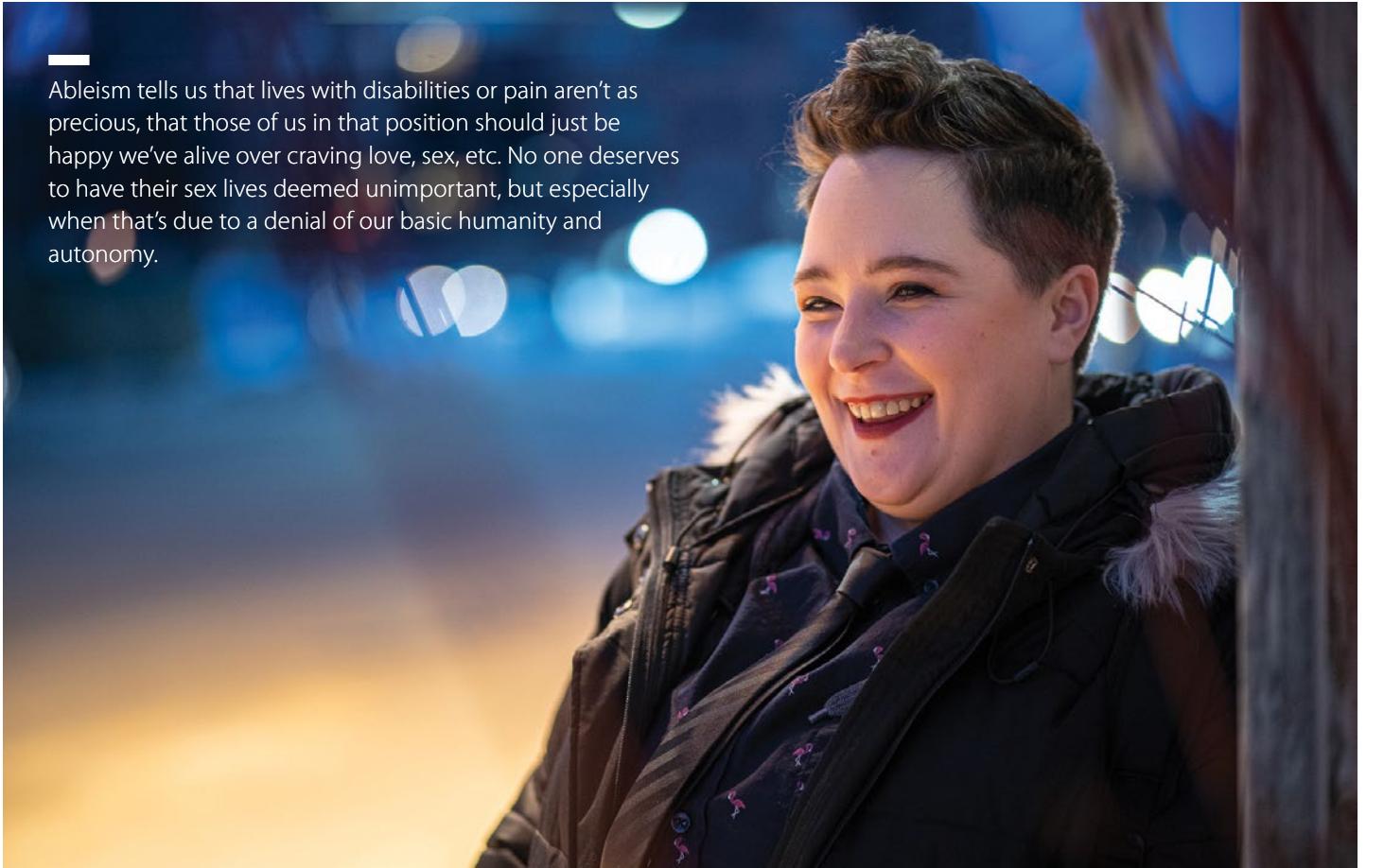
When I brought this up to my primary doctor—an ob/gyn—she ran some tests but

promptly tossed me aside when they came back fine. It took me asking for a referral to physical therapy to get any help. That was after nearly two months of waiting for an answer.

Thankfully, the last few years have brought me a good kind of change.

I loved my ex a lot, but we are better as friends. That relationship isn't gone, but just shifted as many do over time. I've gained other partners locally and across the U.S., solidifying that my being trans or on testosterone isn't a deal breaker for the right people. The vaginismus only hits here and there, leaving me to have as much or as little sex as I want. My chronic pain has improved, a combination of finding the right providers, physical therapy exercises for new diagnoses, and being both privileged and lucky. I found a healthy physical outlet in hockey, one that brought the best people across Madison into my life.

The world is a dumpster fire. Things are terrifying and have been for a while. Back in June 2019, I thought my world was ending because it was turning into something I didn't recognize. What I learned, though, was that home isn't a person or a place. It's a feeling. Despite all of the uncertainty around us, I finally feel like I'm right where I need to be. May we all be so lucky to find our place in the resistance. ■



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Go Do Something Good

Dana Pellebon is co-executive director of Rape Crisis Center and is on the OutReach board, among others.

Both are places where she can create change, advocate for others, and make a difference in the lives of traditionally underserved people—values instilled in her at a young age and reinforced along the way.

QTBBPOC RACIAL INEQUALITY BURLESQUE AUTISM RELIGION MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY



ONE OF MY EARLIEST memories of New Orleans, at age six, was political canvassing with my grandfather when he was running for the city council. Holding my hand, he would let me knock on the door. When they opened, I would smile big with my pigtails and hot pink shirt saying, “Vote for Melvin Jones, Sr.!” I was too young to remember exactly what he said, but I know that he wanted to help people in the community. This followed what I knew about him as a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church. He and my grandmother, Helena, facilitated support groups for children and adults at the church. Finally, every morning when he drove me to school, we would say the Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, and when we got to school, instead of a typical “Have a good day.” He told me, “Go do something good.”

ANCESTRY

I have a hobby of ancestry tracing. My immediate families originated from New Orleans, and I’ve tracked our trajectory from France, West Bengal India, Mississippi, and Indigenous persons from Florida. But we have been a part of New Orleans since its inception in the Louisiana Purchase. We are mostly ethnically Creoles. However, the South leaves no question of your Blackness using “the one-drop rule” of African blood to avoid the white racial category. In NOLA in particular, there are mulattos, quadroons, octoroons, all kinds of words to say, “That person right there? They still Black.”

BLACK IDENTITY

I grew up aware of some basic truths in life. One of which was my identity. My Blackness defines me. I’ve heard the stories from my grandparents about Jim Crow and my parents of post-Jim Crow desegregation.

uity for them meant the ability to create their own trajectory. Even after Hurricane Katrina, my grandfather was so focused on getting back to New Orleans because he couldn’t be away from his business he fought hard to keep from going under.

My father fought through protests and writing. He has been active as long as I remember. Pushing limits and making points that people didn’t want him to make. When I lived in Madison during a couple of years in high school, my dad had us out canvassing for Ada Deer. He was protesting as a graduate student at UW-Madison. I still run across pictures of him in archives of African American groups at the UW. He was one of the co-developers of Project Ujima with Charlene Benford and Patricia (can’t recall her last name). Project Ujima was the first Black culturally

They described the anger of being out with their children and unable to find a “colored only” bathroom to use. How embarrassing it was to walk into stores and be treated as less than human. I remember my father talking about participating in the “race riots” in high school because of resistance to integration.

Even simple pleasures were racialized, such as Mardi Gras float riders targeting white children to toss the beloved doubloons, necklace beads, and favors while ignoring Black families, leaving them to scrounge what was left on the street. To assure some rewards for us, my dad sometimes hid next to white families, waiting for the toss and intercept the trinkets that would never be thrown to his kid, me.

FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE

Most of my childhood was centered in the South and was acutely aware of the injustice and differential treatment of Black folks. My family fought. They fought through economic means. A family of small business owners who believed eq-

specific mental health program in Madison based in the Black community. After school, I would go to the building behind Mt. Zion Baptist Church to hang out with the kids in the program, or to visit the Beske home. The Beskes became my second family with diversity abounding in their house. I learned early that you work to center your clientele and your culture. And, that family grew beyond the people in your house.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

One of the other large influences in my life has been religion. While I don’t have a lot of positive associations with the current religious community, there were three impressions from my religious life. First, the ritual of Roman Catholicism sticks to me. To this day, I collect relics, antique Bibles, and rosaries/crucifixes. I incorporate them into my daily personal rituals. I also forever have respect for Reverend Alex Gee. He was the first Black preacher I met when he came to our church and gave guest sermons. I felt he understood me as a Black kid, and I knew he

As a survivor of sexual assault, my sexuality was very much defined by trauma, religious fervor over a woman’s place, and how other people viewed me. I remember my first time on stage, taking control of my narrative. I cried afterward.

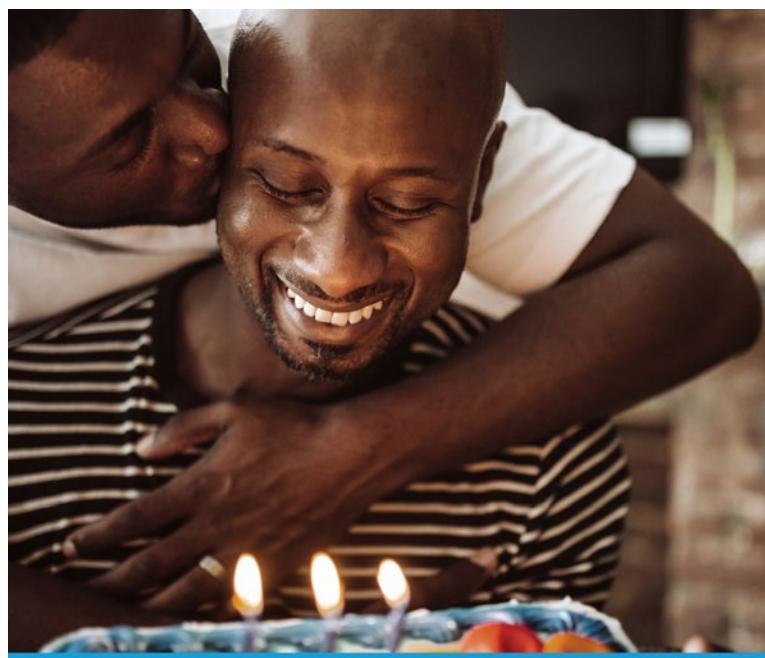
was just a good person. And, most importantly, I love me some Jesus. I paid close attention to his teachings: How he said his work was meant for those most marginalized, his unequivocal love for each person, and his message to treat others as one wants to be treated. That was defining for my family and me.

YWCA SECOND CHANCE PROGRAM

When I moved back to Madison as an adult, my path was not very clear. I got married young, and I started working instead of going to school. My first professional job was working in housing. In that job, I started to expand where I saw inequities. I saw Black mothers and children not being able to obtain or maintain housing due to racism, low employment, poor childcare options, and financial inequities. I worked with my mentor, Kevin Senke, and the YWCA to form the Second Chance program. It was a collaboration between housing providers and social services to create a learning opportunity for residents to learn about financial literacy, their rights as tenants, and our responsibilities to them as housing providers. At the end of the program, they were offered housing where I worked. As the years went on, the program grew beyond what we were doing, received city funding, and became a better program that helped people for years.

LIFE CHANGES

It was during this time I decided to pursue my degree. I started at MATC and then transferred to UW. It was a great time and I was working and learning so much. By then, I had divorced. My father had moved to be the first Black tenure-track professor to earn tenure at the University of Oklahoma’s School of Social Work. My mother had resettled in one of the cities of my youth, Las Vegas. My world of what was next changed with a friend of mine fleeing New York with her two children due to a domestic violence situation. She and her kids stayed with me until we could get her settled. We connected with the Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS), and I quickly learned about how domestic violence affects survivors. I decided to leave college and focus on them. We relied on DAIS all the time, and I always said that one day I would repay them for all the help they gave us to keep all of us safe. Life became very different from



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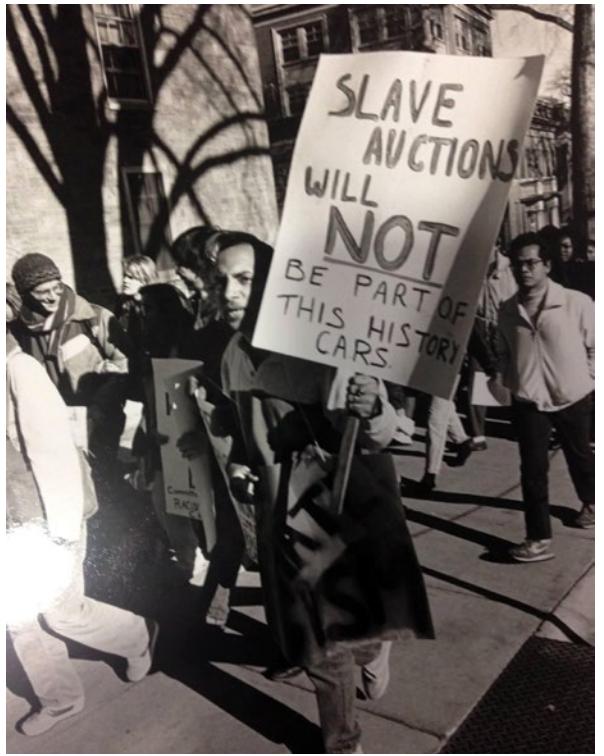


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Dr. Dwain Pellebon protesting slave auctions at UW. Cobain Pellebon-Bohan praying for President Obama's safety at a 2012 rally.

that point forward. I put off going back to school and worked on creating my own family built with my friends, and, eventually, my wonderful son.

MY SON, MY TURNING POINT

My son was the turning point for my whole life. All the experience advocating for others became practice for him when he was diagnosed on the autism spectrum at about age 2. It began with my need to be a better person for him, by dealing with my mental health more productively. I went from being suicidally depressed, anxiety-ridden, and avoiding dealing with my previous trauma to working hard with several therapists to manage my post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. I had so many new things to learn about autism, beginning with unlearning my own ableism to get the best care for my son.

Back in 2006, services for autism were not covered by insurance. My son's father and I were facing \$50,000.00 in bills for a year and a half of only part-time therapeutic services. I connected with other mothers and allies in the community, and we all fought hard for an insurance mandate that was passed in 2009. Since then, my son has also been a part of my activism. From being a part of the protest in 2011 to working political cam-

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paigns with me, I've given my son the gift of knowing the world does not center around him. I gave him the gift of fighting for himself and the people around him without his advantages. Every day, as I watch him grow, I'm proud of who he is becoming as a young Black man.

ARTISTIC OUTLETS

One of the ways I regained myself during this time was through artistic outlets. In 2001, on a whim with a friend, I auditioned for a play at the Broom Street Theater. I was cast in my first play, starting an almost 20-year journey of my artistic pursuits. Beforehand, I had done commercial modeling, ending up in a couple of national magazine print ads and several local ads. I was a "bikini model" and even won a state pageant in WI. (For fun, ask me the story of how I lost hilariously at the National Pageant in FL.) But, acting was the place where I could add my own artistic voice. As I grew and learned under so many talented people, I noticed the lack of Black actors, plays, and artistic positions. Over the years I have been able to partner with local groups to bring plays and roles about Black culture not rooted in anti-Blackness. It's something I am still passionate about and work toward. I

look forward every day to the moment I can work with T. Banks again and have us all bring Madison its first Black Theater Festival. Celebrating our voices and our art with Black people in all the major positions on stage and backstage. My arts experience was quite a positive influence, and I continue to focus on equity in the arts.

BURLESQUE AND RECLAMATION

During my artistic pursuits, one of my best friends, Jessica Jane Witham, started a Cabaret group, "Foxy Veronica's Peach Pies." She asked me to be involved as a producer and performer. I was trepidatious. I had a young kid. I grew up in a religious background. My body did not look like the women traditionally performing burlesque—or even much like the women who were in the group. As a survivor of sexual assault, my sexuality was very much defined by trauma, religious fervor over a woman's place, and how other people viewed me. I remember my first time on stage, taking control of my narrative. I cried afterward. I did not tell my family what I was doing. I did not tell anyone at work. I had to work through my own shame and body image issues. I have been doing burlesque since 2007. In those 13 years as a burlesque performer, I have reclaimed my body, my sexuality, my power, my bisexuality, and most importantly myself. Our shows have always been well attended by women, with their faces looking up at us with pride. There is not a show where I did not have several women come up to me to tell me how empowered they felt and how our example gave them a point of security and learning for themselves.

FINDING MY PLACE PROFESSIONALLY

Professionally, I had run my course through corporate work. Though I was on the Board of Directors for Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, I was unhappy and felt trapped until I started to work at Porchlight making life better for persons experiencing homelessness. I felt all of my work had meaning again. I was working with people whose voices were unheard and marginalized. I was able to work to transform the housing

program to one that was kinder and easier to get through. One where all of us worked together to try to make a better situation for everyone. Everyone I worked with at Porchlight was committed and wanted to make the company better. But, even in that job, I still was unsatisfied. I had to make choices that took people out of housing. I had to fight battles I was never comfortable taking on. After almost eight years, I felt that I was in the wrong place to be able to focus solely on the needs and solutions for those most marginalized.

Then, I was given the opportunity to work at the Rape Crisis Center. It is here that I feel that I'm firmly in place. My work centers around survivors and their needs. My advocacy work to improve systems for victims of sexual assault is imperative. I work with an amazing team who are supportive and committed to our mission. We are doing transformative work which actively helps people every day. Working on ourselves to support a mission of anti-oppression, I am proud to be the co-executive director and look forward to the future.

THIS IS WHAT BLACK LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE

Through it all, I'm actively subverting ideas of what Black leadership looks like, talks like, and dresses like. I am being myself in all aspects of my life now, and it's a damn good feeling. I know I'm looking forward to what the next half of my life brings. Forty-five is a great number for me. It's the age where I finally feel in place. ■

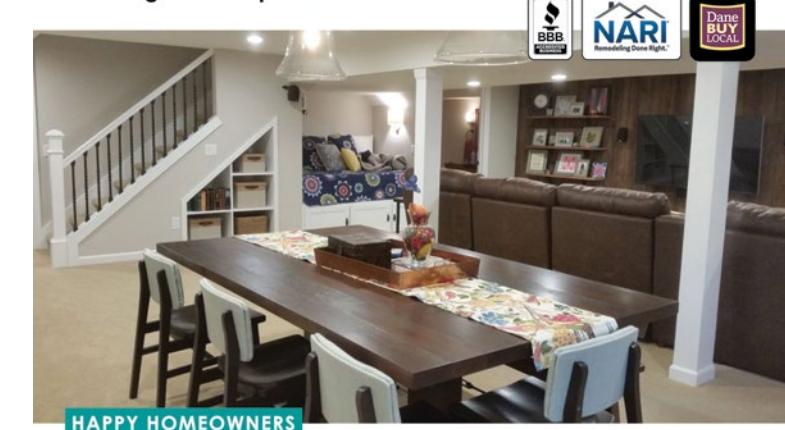


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NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2020

Representation Matters

Throughout **Keith Borden**'s life, he has strived to be seen and be light in spaces where people of color are often invisible or missing altogether. Sometimes that has meant imitating those he admires, and sometimes that has meant forging his own path.

QTBIPOC | YOGA | AUTHENTICITY | ROLE MODELS | PFLAG

I'M KEITH

I'm a yoga teacher. I'm a husband. I'm a singer. I'm a father. I'm an ordained interfaith minister. I'm a lot of things, but mostly I'm just me.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, occasionally someone would say to me, “You’re a Borden, right? Who’s your father?” “Joe,” I’d say. “I’m Keith.” In high school, I volunteered for the local clothing bank. One evening, the woman in charge asked my last name. “Borden, I told her.” “Are you Edmonia’s son?” “Yes, I’m Keith.” Growing up in Evanston, Illinois, I was never anonymous. As the only out gay, Black man during my years at DePauw University, a small, predominantly white liberal arts university in rural Indiana, most people knew who I was. And as an adult, there has always been some part of my life more public than many people’s. All of that could be challenging for someone who is mostly introverted. Luckily, I’ve (almost) always been comfortable being me, Keith.

INTEGRATED SCHOOL

Evanston was a great place to grow up. I started public school in 1979 when integration was no longer just happening in theory but was actually beginning to happen. I thought it was totally normal to be in racially diverse classrooms and to be friends with kids of all races. My parents had migrated north to Chicago from Alabama—Dad in 1955 and Mom in 1961—for a better life and better opportunities. They told my brother and me stories about segregation, Jim Crow, and the early days of the Civil Rights movement in Montgomery. My mother was a student at Alabama State during the bus boycotts. In my childhood home, a picture of my white great-grandfather, whose family had been slave owners, hung on the wall with all the other ancestors. During summer vacation, we always went south for part of our break to visit my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. And because my mother and her sister were our family’s genealogists, those trips included gathering stories from aging relatives, tracing family history in archives and on plantations, and looking for names on the faded headstones in overgrown cemeteries. I was fully aware of the racial injustice that is American history, but it wasn’t my lived experience growing up. For a long time, it seemed like just that: history.

MUSIC, THEATER, AND ART

My brother was an athlete. He played baseball and football and ran track. It was assumed that I would play some sport, too, but I had absolutely no interest. I was drawn to music, theater, and art. I was a music nerd who spent almost all of my free time in rehearsal for everything from *South Pacific* to Madrigal Singers to Bell Choir, and if I wasn’t perform-



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ing, I was building the sets. My parents didn't always relate to the things I was into, but they were supportive of all of it. I was a moody 80s teenager, into everything from the genderbending pop stylings of Boy George and Culture Club to Prince and the Revolution. I was always listening to music. My circle of friends were quirky, eccentric, and funky. I wasn't out in high school. No one was, not really. But I knew I was gay. Years after high school, a few of us sat around and talked about that. So many of us who were hanging out together are queer, and we went to a school where we probably could have been out, but we weren't. It was different then.

In 1991, I left home for college to study classical voice. It was an opportunity to pursue my dreams and be more fully me. I studied performance. I was a performer. I didn't want to be a teacher. If you'd asked me if I'd be teaching anything, the answer would have been an unwavering, "No."

And yet here I am, a yoga teacher. And I love it.

YOGA

What I do is important. I hold space for people. I attempt to show up as authentically as possible to give others permission to do the same.

I STARTED "OFFICIALLY" practicing yoga in 1999, but I started exploring movement—dance, Alexander Technique, martial arts, and rolling around on the floor—long before that. I credit my father and his father for my yoga practice and my commitment to it. Neither one of them practiced yoga per se, but both men had a morning regimen that I would qualify as yogic. My father always left for work before the rest of us were awake, but I have memories of waking early, coming out of my room, and seeing him lying on the living room floor twisting and stretching before heading out the door. My grandfather's morning also started early, but rather than the physical things that my father did, he would set out for a long walk through the back roads of his rural community. Was my father doing yoga

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asana? No, but there was a mindfulness to his movement. Was my grandfather meditating? He probably wouldn't have used that word, but I feel certain that he was communing with nature, praying, and centering himself. At some point, it became my habit to wake early, move my body, and to begin the day by centering myself. It wasn't a conscious decision to do what they had done, but I admired both of these men, and we imitate those we admire. My grandfather died when I was in high school, and my father died when I was in college, but they live on in me and in my practice.

NEW YORK CITY

I moved to New York two days after my college graduation to continue studying music. Yoga became a real discipline for me when I started practicing at Laughing Lotus Yoga Center in New York City's West Village. Movement had always been a useful tool for my body and my mind, but the longer I hung around the Lotus, it also became powerful medicine for my soul. Two reasons for that: the approach to movement was a joyful exploration driven by curiosity rather than competition, and in every class we chanted together. Practicing there brought it all together for me: my love of movement, my spiritual curiosity, and my passion for music, all in one place. I feel lucky to have started seriously practicing when and where I did. It was the late 90s. Yoga didn't seem like an industry yet. Yoga clothes meant whatever was comfortable and allowed you to move. *Yoga Journal's* subhead was still "For Health and Conscious Living." To say that the yoga scene in New York was truly diverse wouldn't be accurate, and yet it was rare to not have Black or brown people in the room when I practiced in the West Village and when I later taught in Chelsea. And the community was definitely queerer. Starting public school in the late 70s set up my expectations for life in general, and starting yoga in late 90s New York set up my expectations about the practice and its community.

MARRIAGE

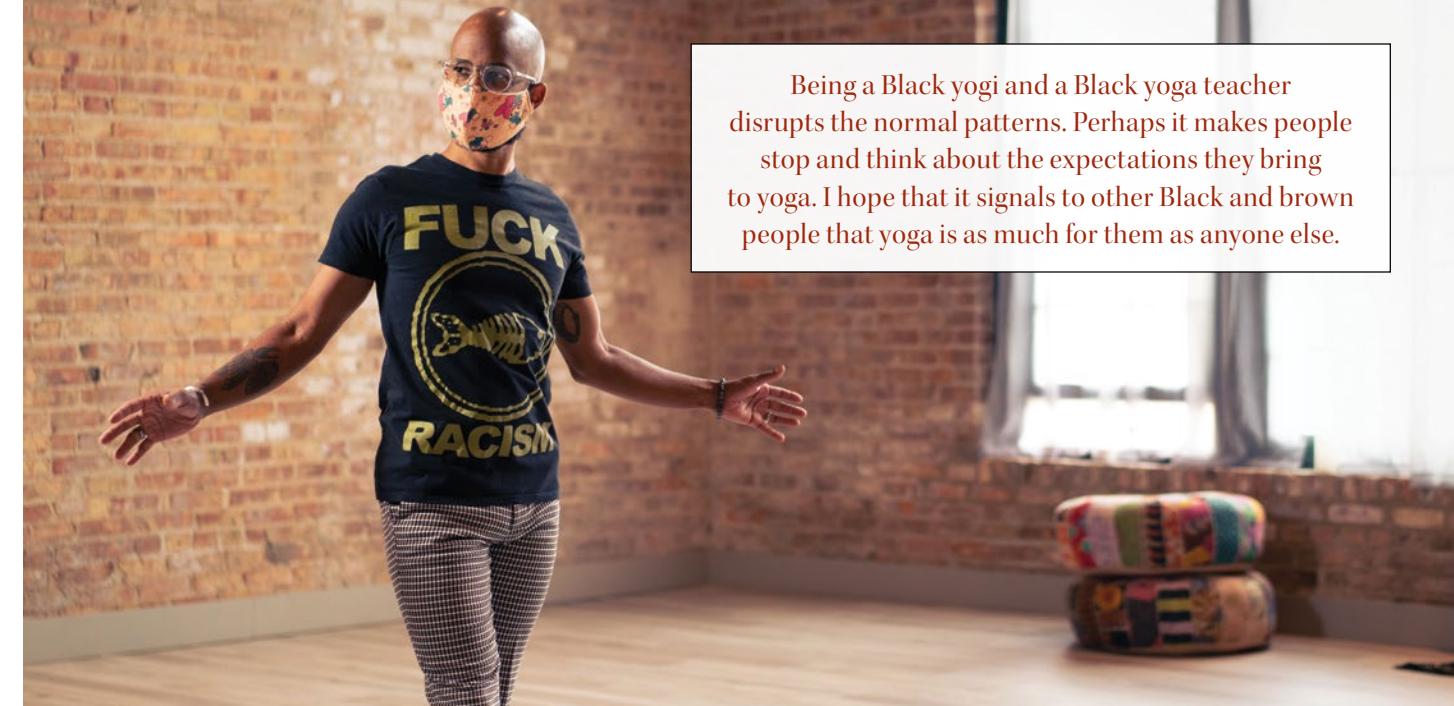
In 2007, after nine years together, Johannes Wallmann and I got married on Vancouver Island. Soon after that, we left New York for Oakland, CA. He took a job running a college jazz program, and I was among a small group of teachers from Laughing Lotus NYC to help open Laughing Lotus San Francisco. San Francisco isn't as racially diverse as New York, and that was absolutely reflected in the yoga community. Because SF is another city with a well-established yoga tradition, I found a spiritual curiosity similar to what drew me to the practice in New York. When my husband accepted a job offer at UW-Madison in 2012, I did a fair amount of research on the yoga community here. I was excited to see that there were so many yoga studios but was pretty stunned that I could find only one Black teacher in the entire city—a woman who, by the time we arrived, was nowhere to be found. There are a handful of Black yoga teachers in Madison now, but the number of teachers does not truly reflect the number of Black folk who are practicing yoga.

MOSTLY WHITE SPACES

I've spent a lot of my life in mostly white spaces, and I never gave it a second thought because I felt seen. There is something altogether different about being a Black yoga teacher in a mostly white yoga community in a state where in 2016 *The Milwaukee Business Journal* reported that, "Wisconsin is the worst state for Black Americans with the country's biggest gap between Black and white Americans." It is a common experience for me at yoga studios in Madison, when I'm not actually teaching, to simply not be seen; it can sometimes seem like I'm invisible.

MADISON

When we arrived in Madison in 2012, the same question kept coming up for me, "Where are all the Black people?" We lived around the corner



Being a Black yogi and a Black yoga teacher disrupts the normal patterns. Perhaps it makes people stop and think about the expectations they bring to yoga. I hope that it signals to other Black and brown people that yoga is as much for them as anyone else.

from East High School in that first year, and I saw plenty of Black, brown, and Latinx students there, but anywhere else downtown or on the near east side those folk were nowhere to be found. Everywhere I've lived has had a thriving Black middle-class, but when "the median annual income of Black households in Wisconsin is just \$26,053, much lower than the median for Black families nationwide, and equal to just 46.5 percent the median income of white Wisconsin households of \$56,083," according to *The Milwaukee Business Journal*, that simply isn't possible.

Yoga is a middle-class activity; you need to have leisure time available, and you need some amount of disposable income to do it in a studio. Much of middle-class Madison isn't used to really seeing Black and brown people. If you aren't living near and working around and interacting with people of a different race, it's harder to really see them. No one wants to practice in a space where they aren't seen. I know that there are people who practice in my classes in Madison for whom I am one of very few Black people with whom they interact in the course of their day or week. I still get a little giddy inside when I teach a class in Madison where more than one Black person shows up, and I have had more than a few of those Black students tell me that they appreciate being able to take a class with Black teacher. These are some of the reasons I still teach.

Me being a Black yogi and a Black yoga teacher disrupts the normal patterns. Perhaps it makes people stop and think about the expectations they bring to yoga. And I hope that it signals to other Black and brown people that yoga is as much for them as anyone else. Representation matters. Seeing yourself in your teachers matters. I know from my own experience with my father and my grandfather that positive modeling makes an impact in subtle and powerful ways. I know that practicing makes me engage with the world in a better way. If that's true for me, then it must be true for others. I love that my three-year-old daughter Clea is already curious about yoga and will sometimes slip into the yoga room in the morning just to sit on my mat while I finish my practice or roll out her mat near mine to do a pose she's seen me do—or to make up one of her own. Maybe one day she'll credit me for inspiring her to practice.

For a couple of seasons, I taught yoga to the East High School Boys Varsity Basketball team. At the end of one of the first classes with them, I chanted Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu with them. "May all beings everywhere be happy and free, and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life contribute in some way to that happiness and to that free-

dom for all." I beat out a rhythm on the floor and just started chanting. I wasn't sure what they made of it until the next class when I wasn't going to do it. They looked at me and asked, "What about the song?" That lit up my soul! Representation really matters!

LIFE & ACTION

"If you ask me what I came into this life to do, I will tell you: I came to live out loud." —Emile Zola

WHEN I WAS STUDYING with Rabbi Joseph Gelberman at the All Faiths Seminary, he told us that the biggest part of our work as ministers is to be light. He also said that we don't end up as ministers (or yoga teachers or holders of space) by accident; we are preordained. Being light also means dispelling darkness. And Rabbi was right, I'd been attempting to be light for years before I started teaching yoga or studying theology. I've never considered myself an activist, but I've always taken on the darkness the way my father and grandfather would have: head on and with just the right number of words. In college, I remember sitting outside my voice teacher's studio waiting to go in. Another student ran up, realized he had missed his appointment, and said, "Ah man, that's gay!" I looked up and replied, "No, I'm gay. You missed your appointment. That sucks."

When Johannes and I moved here in 2012, we'd been together for 14 years and married for five. California recognized that, but Wisconsin didn't. When the local PFLAG chapter suggested that we be added to the list of plaintiffs suing the State of Wisconsin for marriage equality, we didn't hesitate. It was a chance to tell our story and to disabuse people of the notion that our family is somehow different from theirs simply because we are the same gender. That's how I choose to take action in the world; I aim to live as fully and honestly as I can. I let these words from *The Bhagavad Gita* guide me: "It is better to do one's own dharma, even though imperfectly, than to do another's dharma, even though perfectly. By doing one's innate duties, a person does not incur sin."

I'm a lucky man. I've always had what I needed. Most of the time, I feel safe, and I've come to no harm. My parents always supported the kid I was, and my mother continues to support the man that I am. I've lived in amazing places. I'm married to an incredibly loving and talented husband. We have an amazing daughter who lights up our lives. I do work that I love, and that work is meaningful to the communities I serve. ■



Photographed by Melanie Jones for Our Lives magazine.

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2020

Family & Self: A Life's Journey

Community elder and organizer **Rita Adair** is a mom and foster mom who endured unimaginable tragedy but found her way back to herself. She reflects on growing up in a mixed-race family, early lessons on tolerance and civil rights in Madison, and her life's work creating equitable support for communities of color.

QTBBPOC | **MENTAL HEALTH** | **FOSTERING** | **SOCIAL WORK**

THERE WAS A PHOTO ON THE WALL in my family home. It was my mother's 1936 kindergarten classroom. They sat and stood in order with smiles, the teacher by their side and my mother in the front row with braids, ribbons in her hair, saddle shoes and quite simple apron dress. Her best little friend was leaning into her. I think Lauren knew in Kindergarten that my mom would always be there for her no matter their paths. Lauren and my mother remained friends until Lauren's death, and after.

My mom, who had a Norwegian/Irish background, grew up middle class, connecting herself to Madison's Black community because of her love for R&B and racial equality issues. My father, an African-American, was from Arkansas and was sent north to Wisconsin as a child and placed in the Sparta Orphanage. He returned to Madison after serving in World War II.

I was the first African American to get an alcohol license in the Downtown Madison Entertainment District and was under pressure to have an establishment of success.

In 1956, they traveled to Iowa to get married, as it was illegal for interracial couples to marry in Wisconsin. For them, becoming the first visible and married interracial couple in the Madison community was an honor, but it did carry many burdens and unrest for our family.

BAIRD STREET AND BEYOND

I grew up in Madison, starting out on the south side during the 50s. It was a simple and much smaller community on Baird Street, five blocks of Black, interracial couples and two white families. Families were larger at that time, along with my family of seven children and many families with stay-at-home moms, we shared our lives. Baird Street was a place where we played in the streets and everyone knew and took care of each other, and I felt special to be in my family and live in a place where my color did not matter. The life of a very young child.

When I was five years old, my father became a WWF (now WWE) wrestler, and we moved to New York City. Our lives changed forever as he gained national notoriety and fame. We moved around the country and spent four years in Toronto. After several moves, when I was 12 years old, we came back to Madison and moved to the near east side.

LARRY

It was then that I met Larry, my mom's childhood friend who I knew

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1. Brandi Grayson, daughter. 2. Rita & Bernell, fiancée. 3. Dad & Mom in the late 70's.
4. Ciara, granddaughter. 5. Granddaughter & great granddaughters. 6. Tyrone, son.
7. Raven, daughter. 8. Granddaughter & great granddaughter. 9. Rita with her siblings.

from photos as Lauren. It was 1967, a time of civil unrest and involvement with Vietnam. She sat me down and explained that Lauren, her childhood friend, was now Larry and transgender. She was clear about her friendship and expectation for me to be respectful and accepting of Larry. (Thank you, Mom.)

Larry was married with a daughter the same age as my youngest sister. His family and my family lived in the same neighborhood and spent many holidays and great times together. There was an unspoken acceptance, respect, silence, and understanding of those needed secrets. Larry lived as a successful family- and businessman in Madison. Today I cherish and know it was my first lesson in civil liberties, justice, and living your own truth.

A CALLING AND A CAUSE

Civil unrest around the country, especially on the UW campus and the Vietnam war was in full force. I was curious and wanted to be involved, so I spent a lot of time on campus at the Afro House, the Memorial Union, State Street, and at protests—instead of in school and with neighborhood friends. This was my beginning into community advocacy work and a drive to make a difference. It was an amazing time to be young, involved, and exposed to the work of making changes. It is not surprising for me to understand that I became a social worker. It was a calling and the cause I needed to feel—and a measure of community and legacy that I carried. My work life was guided by the Madison community needs and my willingness and need to step forward.

I had three children, divorced twice, and became a foster parent 1980 thru 1997. My youngest daughter—a previous foster daughter who is now adopted, many know as Brandi Grayson, community activist—completed my tribe. During those years, I fostered four-to-five teen girls at a time and ended up caring for a total of 23 adolescent foster girls. It was an unending experience of offering my most and receiving my best. So much of what I have learned in life is because of them. While I had the guts to think I could save the world, I learned that I needed to save myself more. I reconnected with my home church, Mt. Zion Baptist, and spent 20 years in the choir and giving my children a connection to God and the Black Madison community.

A SURPRISING TURN: COMING OUT

Then, at 45 years old, I came out. And life took a new, surprising turn. Being an out gay, Black woman in Madison was not easy. It was suggested by one of the ministers that I find another place of worship that would be more accepting. It was heartbreaking for me, as my great-grandfather was the first pastor of the church, and I had become identified as a Christian woman with a commitment to my church and community. It felt like I was not just losing the church, I was losing my family history, my Black community, and God's acceptance.

That was 20 years ago, and the church has made more progressive gains, but not enough for me. I will always miss my church family and the gifts I was given, but that was then, and my now is different. A blessing that I experienced was attending church in Chicago. I found a Black church that was more than 90% lesbian, open, and affirming. It showed me a vision of another community I needed in my life and gave me a safe place to be myself and worship.

RELENTLESS WORK

My work in Madison included 15 years in the Dane County District

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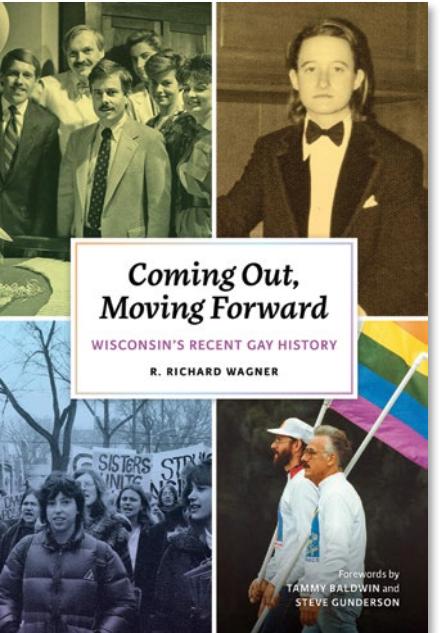
The Pen is Mightier Than the Ignorance

Wisconsin has a rich history of LGBTQ media, dating back to the early 70s. In his new book, historian **Richard Wagner** recounts the many publications that sought to give light to our community.

COMING OUT, MOVING FORWARD: Wisconsin's *Recent Gay History* published this fall by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press is my second volume on the state's LGBT story. In it I trace the post-Stonewall events in the state. A large part of the volume is how a small-but-dedicated LGBT community created tremendous political progress of national significance in creating the nation's first equality rights law and created a climate to be the first state to elect three out people to the United States Congress. Another large part of the book is how the effect of these efforts made Wisconsin a gay laboratory for democracy, encouraging LGBT folks all around the state to stand up for their rights. I would like to recap here how the Wisconsin activists used journalistic skills to advance the cause.

One chapter is dedicated to how the state developed a robust tradition of gay media that continues to benefit the readers of *Our Lives*. These efforts begin in the early 1970s right after Stonewall. The grand-daddy was *GPU News*, published from Milwaukee. This was a monthly publication put out by the Publications Committee of the Gay People's Union (GPU), hence the GPU in the title. Later it was a separate organization, Liberation Publications, the publication would last a decade. The spark plug was Eldon Murray, a stockbroker, and a dedicated band of volunteers. Murray would announce that the magazine which had a large number of national subscribers would be sent to major libraries in Wisconsin "to reach and educate the non-gay public." Local activists of the Fox Valley Gal Alliance ensured that it would be in the Appleton Public Library. For Murray, "Communication is indeed the essence of liberation."

One of the important writers trained at *GPU News* was Lou Sullivan, a trans man. Sullivan contributed during the 1970s several articles on



trans issues. He would become a national figure with the publication of his groundbreaking *Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual*. He would also publish a biography of an early 20th Century trans person, Jack Garland.

Another very early Wisconsin publication began in 1971. Though it lasted less than a year, *The Scarlet Letter* was published by a Madison women's collective including lesbians. An early article was "Come Out, Come Out Wherever You Are" by Judy Greenspan. She would go on to run as an out lesbian for the Madison School Board in 1973 and is believed to be the first out lesbian candidate in the nation. In the September 1971 issue, she wrote, "Finally gay sisterhood is blooming all over this country. And our lives will never be the same."

In Milwaukee another women's collective published *Amazon* from 1972 until 1984 which would carry articles on "Dyke Tactics" and "How to Identify a Real Lesbian." One of the journalists who emerged from *Amazon* would be Jamakaya (J. M. Domebeck) who was the sole editor for later editions. She had been a counselor on the Women's Crisis Line and office manager for the Milwaukee Women's Coalition. She wrote, "Until we take our own lives and contributions as feminists seriously...how can we expect to be taken seriously by others or by history itself?"

In Madison the *Renaissance Newsletter* was published in the 1970s on behalf of the Gay Center. One of its editors and contributors was mainstream journalist Ron McCrea. Lively issues in its pages included the "Dynamics of Drag" and the "Disco Debate." *Renaissance* was followed in 1978 by one issue of *The Gay Endeavor* and then by *Gay Madison* 1979–1982 which had started as the newsletter of the United.

The last editors of *Gay Madison* Peter Klehm and Brooks Egerton launched the new publication *OUT!* in November 1982 as a monthly Wisconsin Lesbian/Gay Newspaper. As a pitch to a statewide audience they noted, "In Wisconsin roots are taking hold in a rural gay presence that's very uncommon in this country." As evidence, when the Rice Lake librarian rejected its free copy as "too sensitive" she was overruled by the library board. Publishing 5,000–10,000 copies, it would achieve a state reach. Editor Brooks Egerton calling for solidarity authored in 1983 an article "What Do Gays and Transsexuals Have In Common."

Begun in 1987 and succeeding *Amazon* in Milwaukee, *Hag Rag* proudly boasted itself "Wisconsin's Lesbian-Feminist Press." Running until 1993, its editors were drawn from both Milwaukee and Madison. The October 1988 bimonthly issue was heralded as the "Lesbian Sex Issue" determined "to go boldly where no lesbians...have gone before."

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It praised sex educator JoAnn Loulan as the Dr. Ruth of Dykedom. The magazine covered the annual Lesbian Variety Show at the Barrymore Theater put on by Kissin Girls Productions.

Also begun in 1978 and lasting about 20 years, *Leaping La Crosse News* featured the Western Wisconsin lesbian community. The name derived from a Meg Christian song. The newsletter highlighted the La Crosse area annual tux parties where women could enjoy a night out.

"This was the prom we never went to or had a miserable time at." Some years the fabulous Cumberbunnies would perform.

In November 1992 came *Bi-Lines* the publication of Bi?Shy?Why?. It lasted until 1996. In the February/March 1993 issue, a writer observed, "It is only the gay and lesbian population who have taken bisexuals into their movement (sometime willingly, sometimes with hesitation)." The Madison group would march proudly with a banner at the 1993 national march on Washington.

For almost a decade and a half, from 1987 to 2000, the state LGBT paper was *The Wisconsin Light*. It was the beloved creation of publisher Jerry Johnson and editor Terry Boughner, who were also partners. It picked up where *OUT!* left off. Their first printer ditched them as sinful which the paper denounced as "snot-nosed bigotry." Like *OUT!* it claimed a statewide LGBT community. From gay bookstores in the state, it published lists of best-selling gay and lesbian books. Jamakaya provided her "Sister News and Views" and often historical pieces. Dr. Karen Lamb focused on health and AIDS issues.



The above highlights just some of the LGBT media history of the state that preceded *Our Lives*. These journalists realized that the collective act of coming

out by the community in the media was a powerful antidote to the oppressive attitudes of society. And it had its effects to change perspectives both within and without the community.

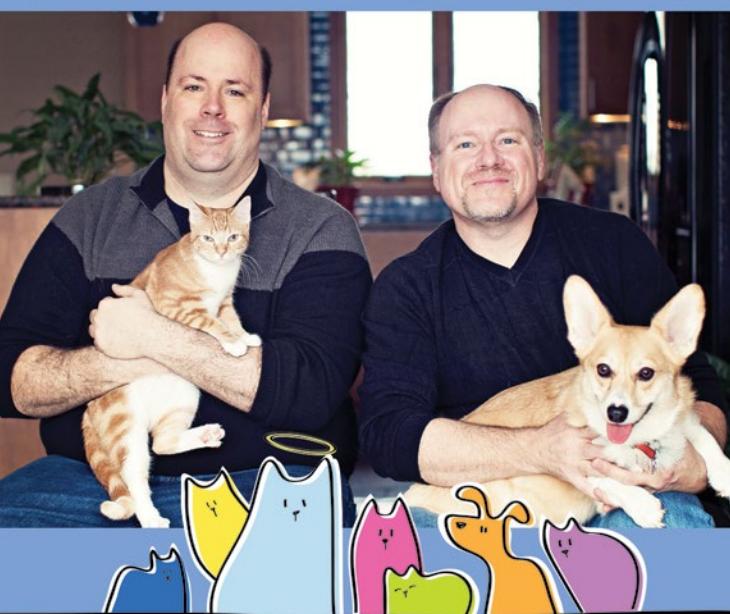
In December 1990 in the newsletter *New Lessons* a young gay person imbibing the air of liberation would write that "despite facing ridicule of my lifestyle every day," he could still say, "I have dreams of high fantasy, dreams of the perfect mate, dreams of pleasant days and blissful nights, dreams that far outweigh the consequences of my sexuality.

Dreams that I will make a reality." Ignorance vanquished. ■



RICHARD WAGNER (rrickwagner@gmail.com), openly gay former Dane County Board Chair and co-chair of Governor Earl's Commission on Lesbian and Gay Issues, is the author of both *We've Been Here All Along: Wisconsin's Early Gay History* and *Coming Out, Moving Forward: Wisconsin's Recent Gay History*.

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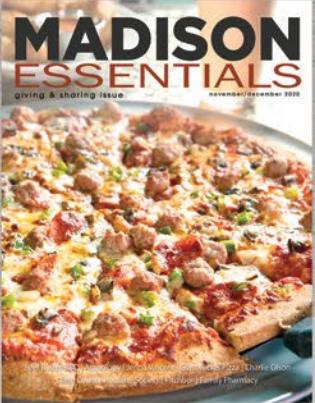
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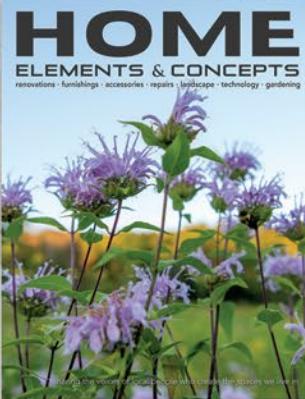
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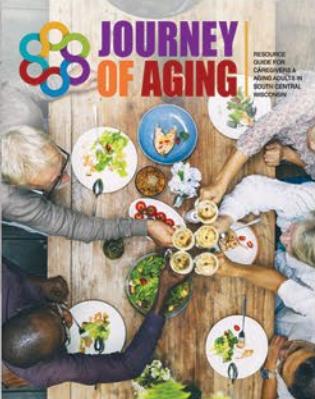
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LAW & POLITICS | SEX WORK | CONSENT

The Equitable Case for Sex Work

Destigmatizing and decriminalizing sex work can improve the safety and support available for those often in the furthest margins of our community. Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA board member **Alex Corona** outlines how it also creates equity.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, people have exchanged the commodity of sex for money to survive against poverty, to empower themselves against miserable life circumstances, and to challenge societal norms. “Sex work” is an umbrella term that describes a spectrum of transactional relationships between consenting adults. Sex work has always existed in society to varying degrees of legality. The modern Sex Workers’ Rights movement seeks to decriminalize all forms of sex work in order to lessen violence against sex workers, validate the existence and rights of sex workers, increase their autonomy, and destigmatize what sex work is and who engages in it.

People from all over participate in the facilitation and consumption of sex work. However, people in marginalized communities are often more prone to engaging in sex work due to extenuating circumstances such as poverty and employment discrimination.

WHAT IS SEX WORK?

Sex work predominately refers to prostitution, but it also encompasses escorting, camming, erotic dancing, adult film, phone sex, being a sugar baby, pro-domme/pro-sub work, and any other labor where the explicit purpose is to produce a sexual or erotic response.

Sex work is NOT sex trafficking. Trafficking victims do not consent and are having their rights violated and need to be protected. Sex work only refers to consenting adults who engage in it, and this is why it should be decriminalized. There should be no legal repercussions for those who engage in sex work, because there is nothing legally wrong about transactional relationships between consenting adults. In a world where sex work is decriminalized, sex trafficking is still illegal and still prosecuted. The key differences are the concepts of “consent,” meaning permission, and “autonomy,” meaning a person has the ability to make decisions for themselves. Trafficking victims



There is no room for a moral discussion when it comes to what other people do with their bodies. This is not a debate about whether or not sex work exists. The debate about whether or not consenting adults deserve protection and autonomy is an easy one. Yes, they do.

and survivors are stripped of their autonomy and do not give consent. This is antithetical to sex work, and sex workers rights advocates are vehemently against trafficking. By increasing the rights and power of humans engaging in sex work, their quality of life is improved.

Although sex work is consensual, marginalized folks more often have to engage in sex work because of poverty and discrimination. Black and brown people, transgender people, people living with disabilities, undocumented folks, and other communities facing disparities are involved in sex work at higher rates because they are not afforded the same opportunities and advantages of white, cisgender, heterosexual people.

WHAT IS DECRIMINALIZATION?

Legalizing sex work is not the same as decriminalizing sex work. The legalization of sex work creates a system in which sex work is still regulated by government and law enforcement agencies. This still creates barriers and problems for adults engaging in sex work because of required background checks, licens-

ing, government oversight, and discrimination. The regulations still say who can and cannot engage in sex work and the system of legalization removes autonomy from the sex workers.

Decriminalization means that sex work is free from criminal sanctions and that sex workers and clients are able to make decisions for themselves about how they engage in sex work. This is safer for sex workers, because the threat of legal repercussions is removed and sex work is normalized like any other form of labor. Sexual assault and sex trafficking are still illegal and should be prosecuted.

HOW CAN SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS BE SUPPORTED?

More than likely, you know a sex worker. Sex workers are your friends, family, coworkers, retail employees, and neighbors. The rights of sex workers can be supported through education, advocacy, voting, mutual aid, and by showing compassion for those who engage in it. Legislation such as Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) are aimed at helping victims of trafficking but have had large negative effects on adults engaging in sex work. Supporters of sex workers can contact their legislators to craft new legislation that doesn't endanger sex workers.

This conversation around sex work should not be taboo or only whispered. By having this discussion in the open, work can be made toward lessening the stigmas surrounding it. There is no room for a moral discussion when it comes to what other people do with their bodies. This is not a debate about whether or not sex work exists. Sex work will always exist—it is work—and sex workers deserve rights and protections. The debate about whether or not consenting adults deserve protection and autonomy is an easy one. Yes, they do.

If you want to support sex workers, work through your own understandings and mental blocks about what you think about sex workers and their rights. Fight your moral objections and look at sex workers as humans who deserve autonomy and freedom from criminalization.



zation. Stick up for sex workers when friends and family and those around you have negative opinions about these concepts. Make donations to organizations fighting for sex workers' rights and against the stigmas they face. Do research about how sex work can empower people to succeed who are not afforded traditional opportunities for success. Educate yourself and others on how the lives of sex workers can be greatly improved with public and legislative support.

SEX WORK & COVID-19

The limiting of human contact to help curb the spread of COVID-19 has greatly impacted the lives of sex workers. In-person work ceased greatly, and those who still engage in sex work to survive take on greater risks. Online sex work has seen a boom, and people who were not previously engaging in sex work are doing so because of loss of employment. Online marketplaces such as OnlyFans, a site on which users can upload pictures and videos to paying subscribers, are completely saturated with people from all walks of life who are using sex work to maintain income and provide for themselves. These online avenues are not accessible to everyone, and people who are engaging in street sex work still face greater danger and scrutiny because of law enforcement and the looming danger of contracting COVID-19.

WHO AM I?

My name is Alex Corona. I am a transgender Latina woman and born Wisconsinite. I am a transgender community advocate, an HIV prevention and awareness consultant, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Sex Workers Outreach Project-USA. SWOP-USA is a national organization focused on giving information, destigmatizing sex work, legal/policy creation and advocacy, and support for sex workers all over the United States. SWOP-USA collaborates with local chapters to provide direct services and resources for sex workers, and we work with other organizations to fight for decriminalization and increased protections for sex workers. I believe in the mission of SWOP-USA and dedicate myself to improving the lives of sex workers everywhere.

I'm just one person, but fight for many. I see a world where sex work is as supported as any other profession with the same rights and advantages and paths to success and happiness. Sex workers are humans trying to make the best of what we have in life and contribute to the betterment of our world. We are not the enemy, we are not worthy of degradation, and we are not going anywhere. Be on the right side of this fight for autonomy, human rights, and empowerment for sex workers. ■

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SCOTUS: What to Expect Now

While a decidedly conservative Supreme Court may make advancing LGBTQ rights difficult, there are still places to have hope. UW-Madison Law School professor **Steph Tai** gives us a preview of the 2020–21 term and beyond.

THIS HAS BEEN A ROLLER coaster year for our community. On one hand, we had a large legal victory in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, Georgia, in which the U.S. Supreme Court held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which creates antidiscrimination protections for workers “because of . . . sex,” does indeed protect LGBTQ folks. On the other hand, we lost Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, whose absence will affect the outcomes of future Supreme Court cases. And we had an election in November, before which I am writing this column. What does this all mean with respect to our legal rights?

BEFORE THE SUPREME COURT THIS TERM

In *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, the Supreme Court will hear a case between the City of Philadelphia and Catholic Social Services—a religious non-profit organization that provides both foster care and other services for at-risk children—that may address how courts should factor in First Amendment religious protections when addressing government actions attempting to protect same-sex couples. The legal dispute began in 2018, after the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Catholic Social Services would not work with same-sex couples as foster parents. In response, the Philadelphia Commissioner of Human Services issued an “intake freeze,” informing Catholic Social Services that the City would no longer refer new foster children to the organization.

Both Catholic Social Services and a few foster parents sued the city. Their claim was that Philadelphia violated their rights by only allowing them to participate in the foster care system if they made foster care referrals to same-sex couples. According to them, this violated the First Amendment rights by requiring them to take actions which directly contradicted their religious beliefs. The orga-



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Amy Coney Barrett



To the extent that the Supreme Court is moving in a direction where anti-gay or anti-transgender religious views are held to take priority over equal protection and due process, we may find ourselves in a much more difficult position in our battle for our rights.

nization pursued this action despite the fact that the City continued to work with it in other areas, such as operating with group homes for at-risk children. The case was argued on November 4, 2020.

WHAT'S NEXT

The outcome of this case will be a preview of other legal decisions to come. Writing for the majority in *Bostock*, Justice Neil Gorsuch expressly stated that the Court could further elaborate on how “doctrines protecting religious liberty” may interact with legislation protecting against employment discrimination “because of . . . sex.” *Fulton* could be the avenue for Justice Gorsuch to express his views on these interactions; that is, he could use *Fulton* to define the outer limits of *Bostock* by outlining how religious liberty considerations may limit the degree to which people may be protected by legislation “because of . . . sex.”

Other Justices share Justice Gorsuch’s con-



cerns. Already, on October 5, 2020, Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito suggested that *Obergefell v. Hodges* infringes on the rights of those who have religious objections to same-sex marriage. (*Obergefell* was the 2015 Supreme Court decision that held that both the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment

to the United States Constitution guarantee same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry.) Many legal commentators suggest that Judge Amy Coney Barrett, nominated to the Supreme Court on September 26, 2020 to fill the vacancy left by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, may share the views of Justices Thomas and Alito.

What this means is that in upcoming cases, the Supreme Court could limit the gains for our community made by *Obergefell* and *Bostock* in areas where religious beliefs conflict with them. As I’ve written before in *Our Lives*, the language of *Bostock* appears to apply to many other statutes, ranging from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Affordable Care Act, and the Fair Housing Act, all of which use the language of prohibiting discrimination based on “sex.” The same goes for various state laws, such as our own state law which bars K-12 “courses in physical education or physical training” from discriminating “on the basis of sex in the provision of necessary facilities, equipment, instruction or financial support, or the opportunity to participate in any physical education or training activity.” To the extent that the Supreme Court is moving in a direction where anti-gay or anti-transgender religious views are held to take priority over equal protection and due process, we may find ourselves in a much more difficult position in our battle for our rights.



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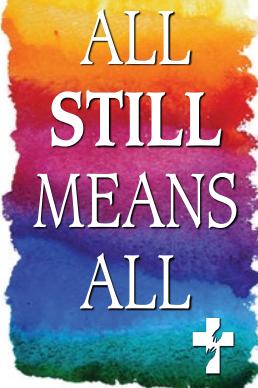
HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH THIS?

This article was written in October. So by the time this is published, Amy Coney Barrett may or may not have been appointed to the Supreme Court. And we may or may not have a different president and/or a different Senate.

But regardless of what has happened between the time of this writing and the time of publication, the next President (as well as the next Senate, through its advice and consent process) will shape other appointments to come. And it’s not just about the Supreme Court. Very few cases reach the Supreme Court. Indeed, the Court only hears around 80 cases a year, even though it receives around 10,000 petitions for lower court cases to be heard (and most cases that are decided in lower courts don’t even get petitioned to go before the Supreme Court). What this means is that the bulk of legal decisions stay within lower courts, either in lower federal courts or within state courts.

And there are still many vacancies within federal courts and, indeed, within state courts. So much of what will happen to our legal rights, especially with respect to the relationship between LGBTQ+ protection and religious claims, depends on the results of the November 2020 election. Good luck to us all from the before-times! ■

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Performing Gender

Bailey Mosling found that performing in drag helped him carve out space between gender identity and gender expression—all while keeping it fun.

GENDER REVEALS SET AN EXPECTATION for an unborn child to follow. For me, my parents put me in a gender box that would be hard for me to see beyond until I was 11 years old. My family's version of a gender reveal was a present filled with pink rose petals and a sonogram picture of me given to all of my family members as a Christmas gift. The pink petals lead my family to believe that I would be a girl 100 percent of the time. They were not entirely wrong, I would be a girl 40 percent of the time.

Hi, my name is Bailey, and I am 14 years old. For the most part I am a typical teen. I love animals, I like watching YouTube, spending time with my family, and reading about World War II. Oh, I'm also a transgender boy. This means that I was assigned the gender of female at birth but that I identify and live as a teen boy. For the past 8 months, I have found excitement in performing as a drag kid and being part of the drag kid community. Recently, I have come to realize that me being a transgender boy that does drag makes people uncomfortable. People are willing to accept me as a trans boy, but they want me to stick to the "male" side of the gender spectrum in all parts of my life.

I am way more complex than that. I think we all are.

Some people get confused when they find out I was assigned female at birth, identify as a boy AND also find joy in performing as a female drag kid. Gender identity is how you feel on the inside. For me, my gender identity is boy. Gender expression is the way you express yourself to the public. My gender expression does not change my gender identity. I like to think of gender expression as an accessory, one that I have control over putting on and taking off. Part of the freedom I have in gender expression is me doing drag.

My drag name is Nemo. The name was inspired by a non-binary character in the book *The 57 Bus* by Dashka Slater. As Nemo I am able to make people laugh, make fun of myself, make fun of gender norms, and be more confident than I am as Bailey. Being Nemo is not just about putting on a wig and makeup, although that is a part of it. It's about becoming someone else and creating a character with a point of view. I use my social media presence as Nemo on Instagram and YouTube: Nemo_drag to fight for causes important to myself and the LGBTQ+ community, to spread awareness of gender non-conforming individuals like myself, and to spread happiness. One of my goals as Nemo is to push the boundaries of who can and cannot express themselves through the art of drag. Some people do not approve of and will not hire "bio queens" (assigned female at birth, identify as female, and are drag queens) to perform saying that they have an unfair advantage or that drag is meant to be female impersonation and illusion. Similarly, there is lots of controversy around members of the transgender community participating in drag art and performance. I feel that drag is for anyone who wants to push the boundaries of gender expression.

I believe the time has come for us to rethink our response to doctor assigned gender at birth. Gender reveals are a big topic now due to the environmental damage we have seen done recently for the sake of celebrating a gender identity that may not fit for a child. When I read *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin it allowed me to see a world of colors beyond 100 percent pink, and that allowed me to start the process of discovering who I really was. As a society, we need to reconsider the pressure we could be putting on our children by making assumptions of who they will be, based on their assigned gender at birth. Let them play with whatever toys they want, let them dress however they want, let them express themselves freely. Let them be the ones to decide who they will become. Most of all, let them have fun in this process. For me that fun was found in drag. Allow them to play with gender expression and be open to their gender identity falling outside of the binary boy vs. girl our society is so fixated on. ■



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