

LGBTQ2S IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION: “ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE THEM GAY?”

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TERMS

- Sex assigned at birth (AFAB, AMAB). This assignment is based on measureable organs, hormones, chromosomes, etc.
- Gender identity: an internal sense of gender
 - Cisgender: Sex assigned at birth matches internal sense of gender
 - Transgender: Sex assigned at birth does not match internal sense of gender (oppositional)
 - Genderqueer: Sex assigned at birth does not match internal sense of gender (in between)
- Sexual orientation: who you are physically, spiritually, emotionally attracted to (lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual)
- Gender expression: a demonstration of gender that is culturally understood (through dress, mannerisms, behavior, interests) (masculine, feminine, androgynous)
- Queer: gender and sexual minority people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit), an understanding of the fluid or non binary nature of gender, label-less desires, beings and doings of gender

▪ Dr. Fenton Litwiller, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, Reproductive and Sexual Rights Seminar, October 31st, 2018



CONTEXT

- Queer youth will conceal gender identities, sexual identities and expression to participate in community recreation (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Lewis & Johnson, 2011, Oakleaf, 2010)
- Therefore, leisure sites where youth can freely express their gender are imperative
- Drag performance, an exaggerated expression of gender, is an ideal site



DRAG PERFORMANCE, YOUTH WORKSHOPS

- Drag: a parody or imitation of masculinities or femininities exaggerated on stage, often through Drag Kings and Drag Queens sharing space and performing in bars.
- Why is drag so pleasurable to watch? Drag illuminates quite clearly that that sex assigned at birth, gender expression, and gender identity are differentiated. Drag tears apart what normativity seemingly seamlessly sews together and presents as natural and necessary
- In this project, adult drag artists supported youth to freely explore their gender and be intentionally creative in this expression through the use of make-up, movement to music, and costuming



PROJECT PUSHBACK

- Gatekeepers have expressed concern about the workshops turning otherwise straight youth, gay
- While concern for, and protection of, children and youth is paramount, I argue that the pushback on this project reveals untenable narratives that are reliant on cultural understandings of the innocence of the child.
- In this paper, I deconstruct the main problems resulting from this implicit understanding of childhood sexuality
 - Children are positioned as 'empty vessels', yet filled with the heteronormative fantasies of adults
 - Queerness is positioned as perverse
 - Inherent homophobia, as if being gay only occurs as a result of coercion
 - Gatekeepers are concerned with already privilege kids (white, middle class)



CULTURAL INVESTMENTS IN THE EROTIC LIFE OF CHILDREN

- 'there is currently a dominant narrative about children: children are (and should stay) innocent of sexual desires and intentions. At the same time, however, children are officially, tacitly, assumed to be heterosexual' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, ix).
- gender play threatens 'comfortable stories of child (a)sexuality' because of what Judith Butler terms the 'heterosexual matrix', whereby transgressions of gender (e.g., illuminating the multiple axis of gender) necessarily threaten heteronormativity.



DEFINING THE CHILD

- In a Western context (white, European) and our current time and place, the child, or childhood, is quite often defined in relation to deviance and victimhood
- How children are defined:
 - Age-of-consent laws
 - Heinous crimes, children are tried as adults
 - Capacity to reproduce
 - Tri-Council Policy: competency



IMPACT ON RESEARCH: IRBS WHO INTERPRET TRI COUNCIL POLICY

- Youth who are engaging in minimal risk research and who are competent to make informed decisions about their research participation can provide consent (TCPS-2, 2014, p.32)
 - minimal risk 'as research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life' (2014, p.22).
- Mature Minor was requested for participants (youth age 14-18 years) from institutional review boards (IRBs) as parental consent places many youth at *greater* risk than their everyday lives
- In spite of the risk youth are placed in by requiring adult consent, IRBs have been reluctant to grant Mature Minor status because they are nervous about the 'overly sexualized' nature of the workshop



CULTURAL INVESTMENTS IN THE EROTIC LIFE OF CHILDREN

- Through the rhetoric of innocence, children are assumed to be blank slates of sexuality and gender that are maintained until such time as puberty renders an unavoidable determinant of a binary expressed gender (and sexuality).
- Queer children make visible a process of sexuality that is usually unobserved, unnoticed, or taken for granted.
- Queerness is produced not only a sex practice, but a perverse way of being (immoral)
- The Child is our future, but the future imaginary is the stuff of only some kids (white, middle class, straight)



QUESTIONS?



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

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This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada



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