

The background is a dark purple gradient. A large, vertical rainbow-colored prism is positioned in the center-left. A bright rainbow beam enters from the top right, passes through a rectangular block with a circular hole, and curves downwards. Another rainbow beam enters from the bottom left and curves upwards. Various geometric shapes are scattered throughout: a sphere in the top left, a small cube in the middle left, a tall rectangular prism on the right, a wireframe cube in the bottom right, and a small triangular prism at the bottom center. In the top right corner, there are three small white star-like symbols. The title 'THARUNKA' is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters across the upper middle. Below it, the subtitle 'UNSW'S STUDENT MAGAZINE / SEPTEMBER 2017' is written in smaller, white, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom center, the word 'QUEER' is written in white, sans-serif capital letters.

THARUNKA

UNSW'S STUDENT MAGAZINE / SEPTEMBER 2017

QUEER

THARUNKA

THE TEAM

/

MANAGING EDITOR

BRITTNEY RIGBY

SUB-EDITORS

ALICIA D'ARCY, SHARON WONG,
DOMINIC GIANNINI

DESIGNER

LEO TSAO

/

CONTRIBUTORS

ALEX LINKER, ALEXIS, EMILY OLORIN, AMY GE,
ANNA TRAN, EMILY VAN ARENDONK, EVA CALEY,
FEI GAO, INCONTINENTIA BUTTOCKS, JACOB
COURTENAY, JORDAN DALY, KATIE KENDALL,
MERIADOC WILSON, MIRACHAEL RACELA, PRIYA
GAUCHAN, ROISIN MCGEE, ZARA KHAN

/

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WE'D LOVE FOR YOU TO JOIN US ON THE INTERNET.

f THARUNKA
@THARUNKAUNSW
@THARUNKA

GIVE US A LIKE AND A FOLLOW AND A RETWEET AND SEND
WHATEVER YOU HAVE TO SAY TO tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au
(WRITING, ARTWORK, IDEAS, FEEDBACK, LOVE LETTERS, PICTURES OF
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THIS ISSUE DEALS WITH
THEMES OF:

- RELATIONSHIP ABUSE,
SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND
VIOLENCE

ZNMENTS

A statement by the People of Colour Caucus at Queer* Collaborations 2017

This statement addressed Queer Collaborations 2017, held at the University of Wollongong, as a protest against racism. Specifically, it raises the voices and the anger queer* people of colour have against the racism they face in queer* communities. Unfortunately, Queer Collaborations is not the only queer* community that benefits from an ingrained racism and oppresses POC members of a queer* experience, and as such this statement is being released to as many publications as possible to finally get our voices heard.

It is important to note that this statement was created by a group of gender diverse individuals, particularly lead by a queer* woman of colour, genderfluid and non-binary individuals.

Hi to everyone here, we're the people of colour caucus and we're tired, of being marginalised, being ignored and being spoken over at the same time. This is something that happens year-in, year-out at QC, but not just that; it happens everywhere.

As we write this, we're laughing, we're joking, we've found humour in the midst of being suffocated by whiteness. But sorry, you're not invited. It's autonomous!

First off, we'd like to remind you that we don't owe you an apology, an explanation, or our cooperation. By standing here today and saying this, we're doing you a favour. We're giving you the chance to be better allies. You're welcome.

Whiteness is everywhere, and it's overwhelming. But when you yourselves are white, you can't see it and what it does. White people benefit from this privilege in every aspect of your lives, and that includes your queerness*. Just because you have faced oppression as a queer* person, it doesn't mean that you no longer benefit from your whiteness.

There is a history of white supremacy everywhere, in broader Western-dominated societies and in queer* culture. People of colour have been bogged down by this trauma for decades, for centuries. In addition to the struggles we face within our communities for being queer* and within white culture for being people of colour, to be sidelined because of our race within queer* spaces is *fucking exhausting*.

Of course we're angry. When marginalised people are angry, they protest, they shout, they demand change. The privileged don't always like this, because to acknowledge that they have an edge over others by default, is to acknowledge that something needs to happen. And so, you call us aggressive, you say we're not engaging in productive discourse. You ask us to be nicer.

Calling people of colour - and black people in particular - aggressive when we're expressing the frustration and anger we have IS a way of shutting us down. You want us to talk about our oppression on your terms. You don't want to be confronted, because there's the urge to maintain the status quo: whiteness. You want people of colour to be palatable, agreeable, inoffensive. You want us to assimilate.

To the white people in the audience nodding along to what we've been saying, to whatever we've been fighting for, we see you. We see your canned responses to our anger, the reposts on Facebook, the "yaaas queen"s (which, by the way, is cultural appropriation). And we don't need your half-assed solidarity.

What we need is - we've said this before, but apparently you didn't listen, so we'll say it again - for you to shut up and listen. That means acknowledging and confronting your whiteness in every single aspect of your lives, and recognising your privilege. It means knowing that if you're out there on the streets fearing discrimination for being queer*, we're fearing that *and* being told to go back where we came from. (Believe us, it still happens. Turns out racism isn't over.) Oh, and remember, unless someone is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, they aren't from here either.

Challenging your privilege is confronting, and pretty damn uncomfortable. It's scary to know that everything you took for granted your whole life so far could break down. I mean, can you imagine not being given jobs, or being terrified of just walking home at night, just because of your race? What a concept!

These conversations aren't easy to have, and discomfort is normal. Feeling this unsettlement can take a toll on your mental health, but we're here to remind you that mental ill health is not an excuse to be an asshole. Your struggles are entirely valid, but there's a difference between not having the energy or spoons to have a conversation on a given day, and shutting down a conversation in its entirety because "it messes with your mental health". White fragility masked as mental ill health is racist and unproductive. You are still benefiting from your whiteness, and you still have an obligation to learn and unlearn.

On that note, has nobody considered that white supremacy may have fucked with our mental health too? I mean, you'd think that centuries of colonisation, oppression and abuse at the hands of white people would affect us in at least some way. And yet, we're still here, we're still queer* and we're still fighting.

You expect us to march for marriage equality while having "no fats, no femmes, no Asians" on your Grindr profiles. You want us to stand behind - never with - you, while using our cultures and vernaculars as a costume. You think we're here to conform to your presentations, your expressions, your conceptions of queerness* - which are bland and unseasoned. No thank you. But here's the problem: we aren't here for you.

The people of colour in your lives are some of the strongest people you will ever know. Every day, we wake up in the face of white supremacy and keep going. Queer Collaborations does not exist without people of colour. This movement, as well as many others, is built on the backs of people of colour. And you still haven't stepped off.

We're sorry that our existence and struggles inconvenience you. We're sorry that you're made uncomfortable by us calling you out. We're sorry that we're going to continue to make you uncomfortable for as long as it fucking takes. We're sorry that white privilege has done so little for you. We're sorry for trying to break down a system that isn't made for us. We're sorry, we're sorry, we're sorry.

Wait, actually, we're not.

We know that a lot of people here are going to, by the end of today, forget all about what we've said and continue taking your privilege for granted. And maybe you'll say, "But you haven't *told* us how to be better white people?" If you *really* want us to spell it out for you: stop taking up our space. Start reading things people of colour write and let us speak for ourselves. Recognise that you will never understand our struggles, and know your place. Stand behind us and use your privilege to uplift our voices. Ask us what we want, and never assume that you know. Acknowledge that we never have to give you an answer, which you're just going to have to deal with. And for once, don't be racist, just be quiet.

Thank you for listening, we wish you no good fortune in the upcoming new year. This message has been brought to you by our Asian sister Scarlett Johansson.

This statement was followed by an act of protest. All POC that were present and standing in solidarity turned their backs to the almost entirely white audience to proclaim-

"And finally, you're behind us on this!"

Letters From the Editors



CREATIVE

SHARON WONG

With the marriage equality plebiscite looming ahead of us, it's as vital as ever to recognise, celebrate, and commemorate the beautiful, wonderful, and rainbow community that exists at UNSW. For me – and hopefully all our readers – this issue of *Tharunka* isn't to pigeonhole queer students into just one token issue, but rather to take the chance to amplify the multitude of voices and diversity of stories that our community offers. We are not always a single and perfectly unified collective, but it's our differences and our experiences that make us so strong. This one issue is by no means enough to represent all the LGBTQI+ students at UNSW, but I hope that, at the very least, it's a good start.



DESIGNER

LEO TSAO

As we continue to dismantle the bullshit that is the gender binary, sexuality and gender are naturally being increasingly identified on a spectrum. Although this dismantling process has allowed people to be more and more comfortable with expressing themselves and their identity, it has also been met with huge backlash (such as the introduction of transphobic bans, and increasing transphobic violence).

Against this dark backdrop, I wanted to celebrate the spectrum for this very queer issue of *Tharunka*, and all the vibrant, colourful, diverse and beautiful people in the queer community who exist in all parts of these spectrums.

But where's the glitter, drag queens, dildos, unicorns, leather, cunts, dicks??? This is the QUEER ISSUE!!! Artist Gordon Hall coins these common tropes, so often associated with queer art, as "the glitter problem". Although there's nothing inherently wrong

with this form of expression, like many other stereotypes, it poses dangers and limitations. If we primarily associate queer art with glitter and other archetypes, we run the risk of trivialising queer people and their experiences. We run the risk of silencing other forms of queer artistic expression. We run the risk of pigeonholing ourselves.

At the root of transphobia and homophobia is the idea of perceiving a person's body to be indisputably something, imposing a set of rules. To move past this, we have to relearn how to perceive the relationship between the body and gender.

Hall, among other contemporary queer artists, utilises non-representational and abstract methods to focus on relearning how to see. What can non-representational sculpture and objects teach us about reading people, and how we perceive gender and body? The ambiguous sculptural forms depicted on this cover is a cheeky homage to this idea.

I take great joy frolicking on this colourful spectrum with all of my beautiful, queer friends. Let's continue to shatter the dangerously monotonous heteronormative world of the cishets.



GUEST EDITOR

MIRACHAEL RACELA

Hello UNSW!

It's been a long time coming but the Queer Collective are back with the Queer Issue for *Tharunka*! I know many Collective members have worked hard to contribute to this issue and I thank them for putting time and effort into their works.

2017 has seen us continue on with 2016's work and ensure things are bigger and better. The 2017 version of the Big Gay Wedding saw us collaborating with so many bodies on campus (UNSW Dog Appreciation Society, Society of Orchestra and Pipers, and Disney Society, just to name a few). I'm sure my co-officers agree that we were astounded by the engagement we had with the event.

Our weekly Queer Collective meetings have almost doubled, which is crazy. We can't believe that the Collective has grown to about 200 current members.

This year, we even saw the launch of UNSW's Gender Affirmation Guidelines, which was spearheaded by the LGBTIQ Champion himself, Mark Wilcox, and his LGBTIQ Advisory Group (of which I am a part of), which helps university staff who identify as trans/non-binary/sex and gender diverse navigate their way

QUEER OFFICERS



GUEST EDITOR

ANNA TRAN

through necessary changes like name changes and such. This year has really been the year that we have heightened the visibility of the queer community on campus, not just on a student level, but also on a staff level.

For some of you, you may remember me as one of last year's Queer Officers, and here I am again. I feel so humbled to be holding a position that allows me to fight for queer-identifying people on campus, as well as representing students whose voices have not yet been heard. I'm so proud of how far the Queer Collective has come since I was in first year and, as my 2016 co-officer, Joe, would say, a baby gay.

Being a part of this community for almost three years has allowed me to grow and flourish at UNSW and I hope that people in the Collective feel the same. I'm sad to say that I won't be sitting as Queer Officer beyond November, but at least I'll be sticking around and watching the Collective continue to grow until I graduate.

2017 has been an eventful year for the UNSW Queer Collective: the feature of our "QQ band" on the UNSW Facebook page, the Big Gay Wedding and now, the equal marriage plebiscite. We have worked so hard this year and this issue is yet another tribute to the queers.

This Queer edition is not just about queer issues and our struggle. It is also about celebrating and appreciating queer people and their art. The stigma of us appearing "weirder" than what society tells us is "normal" needs to stop.

"You are [insert adjective here] for a queer person" is not a compliment.

We are just like you; our identities and/or sexual preferences do not change the fact that we are human beings and we deserve the right to be treated as such.

For a lot of us, including myself, this is goodbye. I hope our Collective will continue to be the awesome Collective that we know and love in the future, with many more positive changes (fingers crossed for new furniture). Lastly, I would like to personally thank the previous Queer Officers for making QC such a welcoming and wonderful place (legacy,

we'll remember your name) and allowing queer students of UNSW to freely express themselves and be proud of who they are.



GUEST EDITOR

PRIYA GAUCHAN

To our fellow readers,
I am proud to present to you this year's *Queer Tharunka*. A lot of hard work and time has gone into creating this issue of the magazine. As a fellow reader and queer student myself, I am grateful to have a platform dedicated to highlighting the issues and triumphs of current LGBTQI+ youths. I am proud of the work we have accomplished. Especially in trying times such as these, I am happy that we are projecting important voices and important pieces to uplift and encourage our community.



GUEST EDITOR

JACOB COURTENAY

Hey everyone, I'm Jake, one of your 2017 Queer Officers.

Originally, I was intending to write a brief post outlining all the stuff we've done this year, with an eye towards the exciting events we've still got to go. Events have been going well and engagement is at an all-time high.

But now the plebiscite is happening and it's kind of hard to talk about anything else.

If I were to compare the oncoming weeks (and the weeks we have already gone through) to anything, it'd be a dietary cleanse. That may seem like a rather toothless metaphor, but I'll take an optimistic stance rather than use one of the number of other comparisons which more immediately spring to mind. I say this because the end goal seems to be to reach a healthier state. Legislation will be made (supposedly), public discourse will leap onto the next hot topic and, if all goes well, my friends and I will finally be considered equal under the law. But, as in the case of any cleanse, there's a lot of shit in the way first.

A lot has been said about the effects of a full-fledged public debate on marriage equality. Initially, it seemed patronising

to be told that it might be too much to bear and that debate should be shut down. Ours is a community that has struggled through decades of slander and discrimination, and I couldn't name a single queer person who hasn't had at least some kind of exposure to this through the mere fact of their existence. As a people pushing for change, it is inevitable that we'll face pushback.

But thinking about it further, I realised how easy it is to lose perspective. Not too long ago, I was a first year who was terrified to approach the Queer Collective stall. Before that, I was closeted in school, making up fake preferences so as not to give any evidence that I was anything other than straight. Before that, I was 12-years-old, crying into my pillow because it seemed so unfair that I'd never get to be like everyone else.

It's easy for me to take for granted that I've had three years surrounded by queer role models. That I have a whole network of understanding individuals to go to when I feel uncomfortable or alienated or alone. More than that, I have the privilege of a family who's come to accept me. Not everyone has had that opportunity, but they'll experience the public derision, scorn and disdain of this debate all the same.

These are the victims of the plebiscite and of a government too paralysed to do its job without forcing an overpriced opinion poll upon us all.

Marriage equality must happen. I just hope we can get it done without losing too many to the side effects.

Agony Ibis

Dear Agony Ibis,

I'm all for marriage equality, and it's been great to see groups on campus advocating for queer people. The real question is, how do we make sure our vote counts?

Kind Regards,

Allied Allyson

Dear Allyson,

It's not that hard to make sure your vote counts, trust me. Let Mama Ibis bring you under her wing.

1. Don't glitter bomb the poor people getting paid to count these ballots

Why settle for mini glitter bombs in those tiny, baby envelopes encasing our votes when we can go big? You know what I'm talking about. And no, it's not the website that lets you send packages of glitter to your enemy (which I may have done once or twice).

I bet Arc has a huge cannon stored way somewhere. Maybe they used it at a Roundhouse party back in the good ol' days? We need that cannon and loads of glitter. I'm talking Costco quantities (there's nothing like buying in bulk). We need to make it rain glitter, all over campus.

Now that I think about it, I could recruit my siblings and friends to roll in glitter (just like we roll in rubbish) and you could shoot us out of the cannon. We can drop rainbow Skittles and M&Ms from our glorious beaks into the adoring crowd below. PETA will be pissed. It will be worth it.

2. Actually fill the ballot out properly

You know you've got to tick the box you like the most? Yes, this is a multiple-choice survey. Read the instructions very carefully, read the wording of the question very carefully, and vote away!

And that's all you need to know really. Make glitter cannons, not glitter bombs, and tick the box before chucking it in the post-box (they still exist, I promise, us ibii sometimes mistake them for terrible bins with no food).

Sincerely Yours,

Mama (Agony) Ibis

PASSING

BY ALEX LINKER

I first heard the term "passing" when I discovered other trans people. In the trans community, passing means being seen as the gender you identify as.

However, the idea of passing implies that being seen as cisgender (rather than transgender) is the goal for all trans people. Unfortunately, this enforces cis-normativity and continues to alienate trans people from each other and the broader community.

For a long time, I thought it was my goal to be seen as a guy, but now that I have achieved that, I realise the implicit erasure of parts of my identity. I'm lucky in the sense that I am a transmasculine person who "passes" as male. But I am also unlucky because this means that strangers and acquaintances assume that I am a cisgender, binary man, when I actually experience life outside of the gender binary, embracing my trans identity as an important aspect of myself.

Passing is not only relevant in the context of being seen as cis though. I also pass as neurotypical/abled and queer.

I am queer. I look queer, because I am queer (and anyone who is queer looks queer). But I walk around as a masculine-presenting individual with dyed blue-green hair and (often) painted nails. I am visibly queer in the sense that I am different from the societal norm. I do not "pass" as straight. My mannerisms can be quite effeminate (partly due to my social upbringing as a girl), and I am outspoken about being queer.

Because I am seen as a cis guy, my appearance and behaviours are also seen as queer. My behaviour is also "queer" in the sense that it is unusual. Being autistic, I behave in ways that others might not expect, by responding in an atypical way in a social situation or through stimming (repetitive behaviours used for self-stimulation and regulation).

But I usually pass as neurotypical (nt), or a bit quirky. This makes me feel like my autistic identity is invalidated and I'm not entitled to behave in more unusual ways. I feel like because I can pass as nt, I should always strive to act that way, even if it is detrimental to my mental health (as it often is). I know that this is partly due to internalised ableism caused by societal pressures and restrictions, but that doesn't stop me from feeling pressured to conform to society's expectations of me.

I also pass as abled. I have multiple chronic illnesses, but they are all invisible, meaning that I often appear perfectly healthy. But this appearance is deceiving. I am often in significant pain, but I make my way through each day as if I am fine, often pushing myself too far because I don't feel disabled enough (because I don't "look" disabled, whatever that means).

My life is a juggling act of trying to meet social expectations, and trying to break those same expectations in ways that embrace all facets of my identity.

I am constantly trying to remind myself that passing shouldn't be the goal. Passing as something I am not does not change who I am.

BY EMILY VAN ARENDONK

Percentages: The Underlying Maths to Being Bisexual

“You’re just confused.”

“You just want to be on trend.”

“You’re gay and don’t want to admit it.”

“Don’t be selfish, just pick one!”

These are the phrases I have heard from friends and family. These are the phrases I will continue to hear. However, the one that really grinds my bisexual gears is “So...what’s your percentage?” I despise this question. Besides the fact that I dropped maths in Year Eleven and went on to study arts and humanities, it is one of the most undermining questions to be asked regarding my bisexuality.

I look at “percentages” in the same way I look at chocolate bars. One doesn’t just like Kit Kats 40 per cent and Cherry Ripes 60 per cent. Each is appealing in its own way and can be more or less desirable at different moments in time. Why can’t someone’s sexual preferences be like their chocolate preferences? Why must I have to turn to numbers to describe my sexuality?

The realisation that I could (and do) feel affection for both women and men came slowly, but at the same time, I always knew,. Never did I think that I would need to, or should, dissect those feelings into a percentage. The question came from a straight, white, male friend the first time, who I now realise only wanted my percentage so he could fantasise about sleeping with me and another woman.

Much like men asking about bra sizes (as though their hand and lotion are going to have a date thinking about my 12C breasts), the question is unrealistic, objectifying and stupid. I understand that it is human nature to label things and place them into little boxes – I myself was once a “Percentage Prober”, demanding the percentages of someone’s sexuality in an effort to normalise my own internalised feelings.

However, after meeting people who hold more accepting understandings of bisexuality, the label became obsolete. I don’t need my sexuality and identity to be defined by numbers. If I were to say that I was 60/40 men to women respectively, it wouldn’t contribute to my self-identity or bisexuality. It would contribute to another’s assertion that I’m “more straight than gay”. So I’m asking, please stop asking me for my percentage, and leave me to like both my Kit Kats and Cherry Ripes.

CW: relationship abuse, sexual harassment and violence

It's Not Just "Dyke Drama": Recognising Abuse as Queer Women

I wish I could say that my identity as a young, bisexual woman and my history of violence aren't inextricably linked. But since coming out to myself, moments of joy and pain have always come together in one rush. Holding a girl's hand or kissing in public (even on campus) have always meant cat-calls and hurrying to get behind a locked door, being tipped money, recorded without consent, groped, propositioned for threesomes, and threatened by men who want to change my mind.

This has always been my greatest danger – men who see my queerness only as a denial of their sexual access to me.

A mistake to correct, a challenge to overcome, a fantasy to exploit.

I've run straight into traffic to escape a group threatening to fuck me straight, too busy scrambling off the road to be grateful that the car hadn't been going faster when it hit me. I've held a crush on the cobblestoned ground of a crowded square halfway around the world, her unconscious body limp and bleeding in my hands, because campaigning for marriage equality had earned her a rock to the head and the police watching just said we were sick. I've been followed into a nightclub bathroom and dragged across the floor by my hair, head smashed repeatedly into a sink by a man whose attention turned from attraction ("Bisexual, huh? Hot") to resentment ("Stupid dyke bitch") as soon as I rejected him.

This is why I call myself queer. It is a reminder to myself that I'm still here, alive, despite the dangers of being out, let alone the harm I've done to myself out of shame. I'm no stranger to abuse. But I was completely unprepared for how different it would feel, how unrecognisable it would be, coming from her.

We met just as we were coming out. For three years, we held each other fast through friends

and family dissolving, through the darkened atmosphere of our city post-lockouts, where the act of walking at night with deliberate distance between us felt like smashing a fist into an old wound. But we were beautiful. To finally be out and in love, to have someone who understood me, was a life I may have never lived. She was everything that 20-year-old me, bloody and screaming and begging for her life on a nightclub bathroom floor, would never have believed she deserved.

Before her, when exploring girls was all drunken and heady and deceptively shiny, more seasoned girls warned me that things could get out of control. Everyone seemed to tell stories, almost brazenly, of running into their crazy ex-girlfriends at the only girl parties in the city, wildly jealous, blowing up their phones long after break-ups. But it was all par for the course. Just dyke drama. Girl-girl relationships are always intense.

There were many reasons why I didn't recognise it at first. My girlfriend was (mostly successfully) managing a mental illness, it was my first relationship, I was young and in love, and honestly, I thought I was too aware to be manipulated. The word "abuse" felt too major, even when she used it to describe her own behaviour, in tears, promising to do better. It was nothing like my prior abuse by men. And most of the time, our love felt too beautiful to wear such a horrible name.

But the issues were there, in small hints, from the start. She had unwarranted bouts of paranoid jealousy, convinced I would cheat because I'm bisexual. I could not miss a call or be five minutes late. Every new friend was a threat. At times, she would scream at me in public for not doing what I was told. She viewed my accessing queer support services as an opportunity to leave her, prioritising her insecurities over my mental health. Even watching shows with queer characters was

emotional cheating. My work and hobbies were selfish.

Her apologies eventually fell away. "If you'd just done what I told you, I wouldn't have to do this. Stop crying. Shut up and take it. This is your fault."

She never hit me, but I wasn't safe. When I withdrew consent during sex, she wouldn't always stop. She'd stand over me and scream until I was sobbing in a ball on my bed. She'd say I wanted men instead, that my bisexuality was disgusting. She'd demand sex as proof that I loved her, threaten harm to herself if I didn't do what she said. I'd wake up naked after saying no, after passing out drunk, my body screaming that something happened but my mind never knowing.

It took several months, and endless patience from scared friends, for me to finally leave.

This happens.

In our community, we talk a lot about abuse from family or in public – and that's incredibly important – but we don't talk enough about this. I know a lot of newly-out girls who stay in unhealthy relationships because they feel like this community is so small that they'll never find anyone else. But this is never worth staying for.

I had to learn the hard way that even if she's amazing 99% of the time, those red flags should never be ignored.

They matter.

And they add up faster than you think.

ON GAY TRIARCHY

A trend within LGBT+ spaces of late is to vilify cisgender gay men, especially white ones. Being agender and gay, I've seen this firsthand, and at times have been complicit. Occasionally, I have even been exposed to the sentiment that gay men are no longer oppressed, and therefore shouldn't be allowed to reclaim the term "queer".

Cisgender, white, gay men are not without fault: racism, misogyny, transphobia, body shaming, and countless more harmful patterns of behaviour are rife. Even recently, some cis lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have moved to "drop the T" (that is, to exclude the trans community). And some gay men seem to think that it's okay to sexually harass women, since there's "no intent behind it". We should, however, remember that gay men are still subjects of systemic homophobia:

- Until 2005 in Victoria, 2008 in Western Australia, 2014 in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory, and 2017 in Queensland, the gay panic defence could be used to downgrade murder charges. It was essentially legal to murder a gay man

if you argued that his sexual advances constituted provocation. The defence is still available in South Australia.

- Marriage is still only recognised between one man and one woman.
- Gay men continue to be objectified and vilified by the mainstream, seen as shallow, as accessories for straight women, as paedophiles, or as anything else besides human individuals.

Gay men are not the only people who suffer this sort of treatment. Indeed, marriage equality will benefit lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people too.

LGBT+ people have fought together for a long time. The issues we face all stem from the same source, and have similar expressions. Consider trans women. They, too, are seen as failed, emasculated men. They, too, are often called "faggot". They, too, suffer from compulsory masculinity.

It isn't just them: as a non-binary, masculine (or masculine-adjacent) presenting person who dates men, I, too, suffer homophobic abuse.

Transphobia and homophobia are inextricably linked in the broader structures of systemic sexism.

We should respect lesbians, respect bisexuals, respect trans people, and think twice before asserting the existence of a "gaytriarchy". Being gay still isn't a "privilege" and still isn't respected by the patriarchy. We must continue to work together.

THE SEXUALITY

The existence of a gender pay gap is pretty well-established unless you're a Men's Rights Activist. It's probably one of the few things you can get the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Council of Trade Unions and Workplace Gender Equality Agency to agree on.

However, you may not know about the *sexuality* pay gap in Australia.

The University of Melbourne revealed in 2015 that gay men earn a “gay pay gap” of around 20% less than heterosexual men, whereas lesbians earn a “lesbian wage premium” of around 33-40% *more* than straight women. However, the gender pay gap still applies: gay men still earn, on average, more than women of any sexuality.

The study took into account variations in personality and job characteristics. Therefore, the key explanations for the pay gap appear to be lifestyle choices and discrimination. Lesbians are less likely than heterosexual women to have children and will subsequently work longer hours. They're also less likely to have their career progression interrupted by parental leave. However, often their hourly rate is similar to that of straight women – increased earning capacity is mostly due to working more, not making more per hour.

However, let's not pretend workplace discrimination is dead. On average, the hourly wage and wage growth of gay men is far lower and slower than that of straight men. Lesbians with partners have a higher wage than those without and straight women with partners; this is referred to as the “wife penalty”. Meanwhile, gay men who are “observably gay” or live with a partner face larger “earning penalties” than those who are discreet or closeted, pointing to significant discrimination in terms of pay and promotions. This is especially true in the case of gay men and is interesting considering heterosexual men are more likely to be responsible for hiring, firing and promotions.

A researcher from the University of Sydney found that other studies conducted on the topic overseas have found fairly similar results. They largely agree on the existence of a sexuality wage gap, but dispute the specific gaps in earning proportions. The lesbian wage premium is contested, especially when taking into account the “wife penalty”.

Some further food for thought: at least some respondents would be closeted or not yet have come to terms with their sexuality. This would have skewed the results. Could there be an asexual or bisexual pay gap? What other axes of oppression have an influence on pay? Most importantly, what can we do about it?

Staying closeted is simply not a solution.

If you're curious about the study, you can check out Andrea La Nauze's original article in The Economic and Labour Relations Review 26(1), pp 60-81 or watch this space – similar research is currently being conducted at the University of Sydney.

SPOTLIGHT ON

Senthorun Raj



Senthorun Raj is a queer academic focusing on the intersection of gender, sexuality and human rights. He loves Grindr, glitter and Twitter, and has written for The Guardian and the Sydney Morning Herald. Sen is a current law lecturer at England's Keele University, a former Scholar in Residence at New York University School of Law's Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, and it was a pleasure to speak to him for this special Queer edition of Spotlight On.

BY PRIYA GAUCHAN & BRITTNEY RIGBY

WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING PART OF THE LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY?

I find it difficult to prioritise what I love about being a part of the LGBTQI+ community. The ways in which glitter, rainbows, and pride are used as protest symbols are particular highlights for me.

DO YOU HAVE ANY HELPFUL TIPS TO NAVIGATING THE DIFFICULT COMING OUT CONVERSATION, WHETHER IT BE AT HOME, WITH FRIENDS, OR IN A PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT?

There is really no right way to “come out” (even if you accept that “coming out” is something that you have to do). The best advice I can offer for coming out is, affirm your feelings and seek support from those who will not judge you (this sometimes means going online or to a LGBTQI+ group than talking to family or friends). Coming out is an ongoing process that does not really have a start or end date.

HOW WOULD YOU BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR JOURNEY TO BECOMING AN

ACADEMIC WHO FOCUSES A LOT ON QUEER ISSUES?

There are three things that spring to mind for what sparked my journey to becoming a “queer academic.” I'm a gay man. I read feminist theory in high school and then did Gender Studies alongside Law at university. I also joined Amnesty International when I turned 18. Basically, reading feminist theory opened me up to the ways in which the personal (aka being gay) is political and Amnesty was the first place I felt comfortable disclosing my sexuality to others and where I could work on a range of human rights issues that I felt passionate about.

HOW HAS BEING QUEER AFFECTED THE WAY YOU'VE EXPERIENCED THE WORLD AND YOUR CAREER?

I think we are all affected by our social privileges, positions, and experiences. My friends describe me as a “Professional Gay,” which I think is quite apt. My life as a gay man definitely shapes the kinds of politics I'm invested in, the advocacy work I've undertaken, and the academic work that I do.

HAVE YOU FACED ANY SPECIFIC DIFFICULTIES?

I've been very lucky because I have never had to “closet” myself in order to succeed professionally or academically. In fact, I've built my professional profile in policy and academic spaces around being queer. Because I love what I do and because I'm so intimately connected to my work, the greatest challenge I face is creating space away from the demands of work. To crudely paraphrase the feminist slogan I mentioned above: if the personal is professional, sometimes it feels like I do not have an entirely separate personal life anymore.

DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS TO HELP OUR QUEER STUDENTS WHO WISH TO FOLLOW A SIMILAR PATH TO YOURS?

Some of the most vital things for me to become a queer academic were the people and spaces that nurtured me along the way. So, regardless of what you want to do (I never expected to become a queer academic when I started at university), find groups, mentors, friends, family, objects, and activities that can help you thrive.

Asexual?

Aromantic?

What’s That?

Asexual: people who feel little to no sexual attraction towards others.

Aromantic: people who feel little to no romantic feelings towards others.

Many of my friends don’t know this, but I identify as aromantic.

“You? Aromantic? But aren’t you like a lesbian?”

“You’ve dated someone before. Didn’t you feel any romantic feelings towards them?”

“Aren’t you dating someone now? How do they feel about it?”

These are just some of the questions I get when I tell people that I identify with the aromantic label *and* the lesbian label.

Yes, I can identify as aromantic whilst identifying as a lesbian. Those two labels can coexist, as do many labels in the queer community. Identifying as one label doesn’t mean you identify as *only* that label.

This is my identity. This is who I am.

I dated someone before and felt romantic feelings towards them eventually. This is really hard to explain. I am able to love people as their friend but struggle to love anyone romantically. To me, romantic love is such an outlandish concept. I don’t know how to explain it; I just can’t completely comprehend it.

Maybe I didn’t love my ex-girlfriend, maybe I did.

I am dating someone now and it was kinda hilarious explaining it to her. I had to explain that just because I identify with the aromantic label, that doesn’t mean that I don’t want to be with her. I remember our conversations about it and I’m glad she does understand that it’s just another part of me.

Some people who identify as asexual or aromantic may never want to be in a relationship, but I know many who do. We really need to break down this idea that people who don’t experience certain feelings can’t be in a happy relationship.

I have gradually learnt to accept that being aromantic is a part of me, even though it’s difficult. I just hope that in the future, people will have a greater understanding of asexual and aromantic-identifying people. A greater understanding of *me*.



One boy has a frangipani in his hair

One boy has a frangipani in his hair–

They sit, he smiles

On a crowded bus,

I can barely see him.

The others–

They all attach to the different

Veins you can see

Running through my arms.

I am a body made up of colours–

A working network hidden underneath my skin,

Hidden just like I am,

And just like he is too.

Knock and the door will be answered
It's freezing out here
Cold hands cold steel and stone

Seek and you shall find
A corner to pray in
If you're quiet enough

I don't wear cross necklaces
I hold my hands in front of my chest
I am
Enough; because of Him!
I am
Too full
Too blessed

Hammer on it!
Let the church aisles ring!
There's a girl out here!
She's trying to get in!

I will climb the parapet
I will look through the window
They can say things
Over over over
But they cannot make me go

Maybe I could kiss another
Jesus lover
Perhaps on this outside step
She knocks
A girl with bloodless hands
Like me

The
Outside
Step

Six Variations for a Female Vocalist

I.

I think I choose to remember the wonder. I was entranced. “Charmed” was the word I think you would have used. I remember the nights of dancing, talking, secrets shared from whispered lips, and dripping crystal eyes that flickered, candle-like, in the darkness. I remember the silences covered by tin music flowing from a phone screen, a symphony to us as we sat on the frozen concrete floor ‘round your heater that you called a fire. I remember its push on my shoulder, warmth forcing through my leather jacket and pressing into my icy skin. You warned me not to burn.

II.

I think I choose to remember the nights when music ran through me, no longer tin, but gold and hot steel. You'd wear your hair long, pony-tailed down your spine, your jewellery carefully chosen to match your smile glowing with chemical love. It was a song we both hated, but still we danced along. The room was full of people who danced like they cared too much, but you would spin and move like nothing I'd ever known, hypnotic, ephemeral, perfect. You were joy as I'd never seen it, purple lights and flashing silver, everything a joke to laugh with, every person a body to love.

III.

I think I choose to remember a stranger's lips on mine, her fingers pressing hieroglyphs into my gasping ribs and her body that fit my own as though she had always been there. She tasted sweet, of cigarettes and something else that turned her into candy. Her hands wove magic ‘round my neck and down my back, and nothing could have lifted me higher than her, than us crashing like icebergs in the night, moving together in the darkness. Later we curled together as feet kicked past us, our backs pressed to the wall in a room full of people, the only still things in a space packed with sound.

IV.

I think I choose to remember another stranger, another night – no lips or bodies this time, just words. I remember white wine and a wooden table, her brilliant eyes in a room full of chatter. Her shoulders were calm but her legs folded and stretched again and again, never seeming to find a position to accommodate their spirit. When she laughed, her life danced across her face. She told me the most wonderful story that night, a story of two lovers, of her lover. There was a chance meeting on a train, and more meetings since, all by accident. I've wondered since if that story was true.

V.

I think I choose to remember the first snow of the year. You and I walked home together, dawdling our way in the dark and scrawling messages in the snow settled on parked cars. The cold seeped through my trousers to my skin, and you made me tea and toast, and I'd never, ever been happier. I have videos of that night, stolen from you, of Linda singing Bowie songs into naked lamps. He'd died just days before.

It's all lost now. But I was so happy.

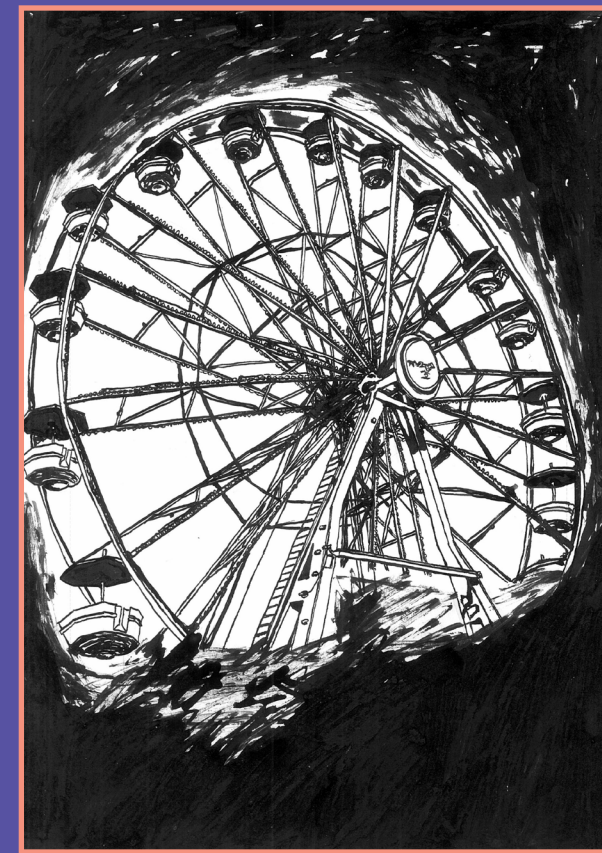
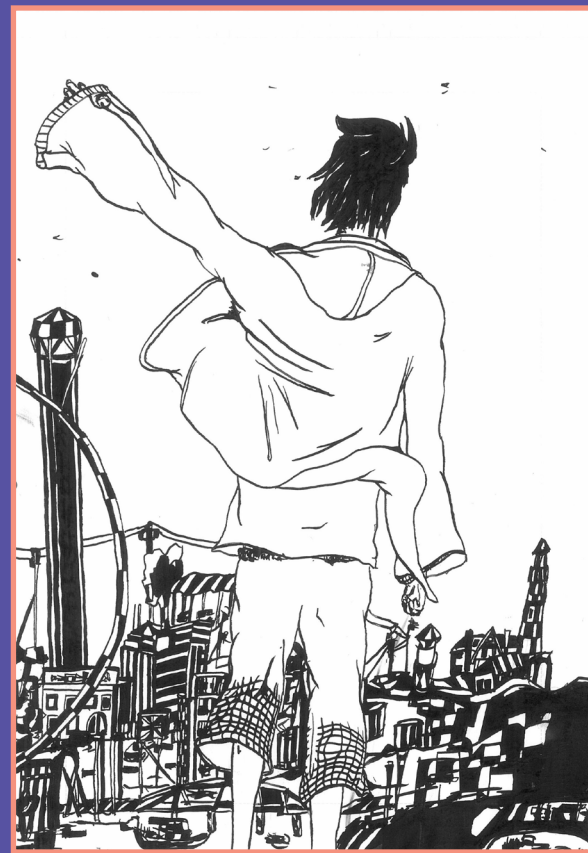
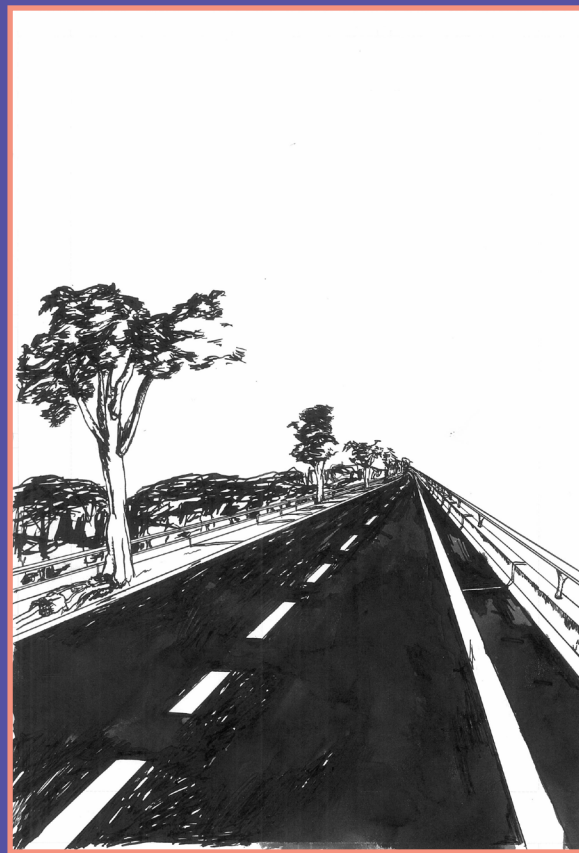
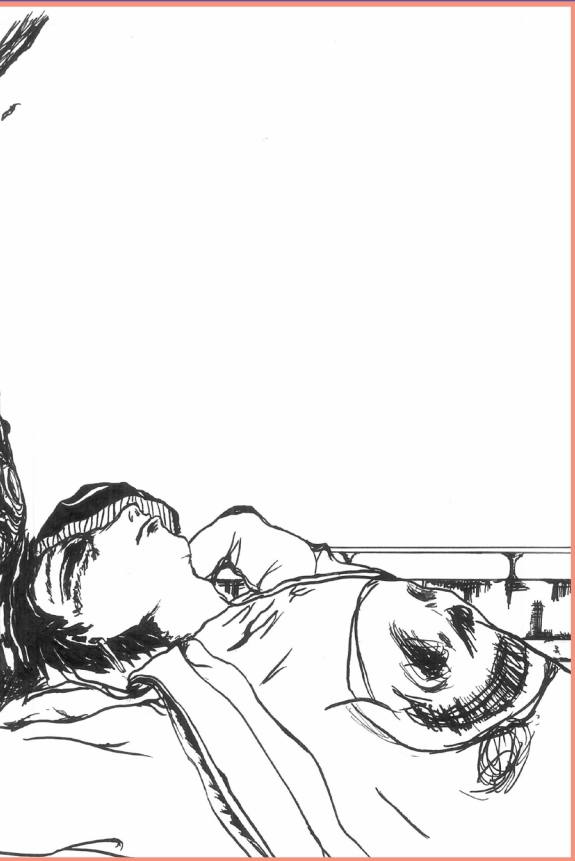
VI.

I think I choose to remember the living nights, the nights straining at their seams, because otherwise I'd have to remember the stillness of the days. I'd remember the silence, the agonising silence that filled my mind just hours before the nights would come alive. I choose not to remember the days spent alone (in parks, on buses, on trains, in my bed) as my head would spin and tug and cry, and all I could do was stay silent, nails pressing crescent moons, skin chewed off my fingers, eyes wide and terrified.

If I choose not to remember those hours, those days, if I erase them in my mind I can pretend

that all I had was the warmth on my jacket and the ice on my cheeks. I can pretend that I was never, ever alone because being alone is something that swallows you whole and grinds on the back of your neck as you stand in a crowd of people you can't touch. It presses your scalp and your chest and all you want to do is cry, but you cannot cry because nothing is wrong. You're simply on your own.

All I want is to keep the lover's hands and the words from the stranger with restless legs and stories. I want to keep your eyes and your tea and your smile, so that when people ask me I can tell them about the magic. So I choose to remember the wonder.



Hunger

undo

She takes me out for dinner just to watch the waitress undo her sugar hair behind the kitchen door. That's the kind of girl I like, she says. I don't remember when I stopped trying to become myself. I watch the waitress, her smallness, her curves.

I wonder how I'd look in her apron, with her bones in my body,

blonde.

twin size

When we woke, the fitted sheet had come away and pooled around our feet. It was too small for the bed.

It wasn't right.

You complained about how many times I woke you in the night.

the little prince

She takes me to the bookshop in the mid afternoon. The shelves frame her like art as she wanders. The books lean down and whisper the smell of home. There's a messy wash of yellow light catching the ends of her hair and bouncing off her rings.

We were there looking for a book, and now it's been months since she's mentioned it.

She buries love quickly; she forgets what it was that she was loving.

telling

The story of our bodies in the car with the radio whispering sounds better if you had already left her.

sink

I fill the bath to the edge, let a little water splash over it as my body sinks under the writhing heat. I force my skin to stomach the sting. Within minutes, what was burning feels almost cool.

All the heat rushes up into my cheeks.

Maybe this is what you meant when you said it doesn't feel the same anymore when you touch me.

pathology

While my mother lay sleeping in the hospital bed, sewed into tubes and wires, she promised to call.

I spent the weekend by the phone. I spent the weekend by my mother's bedside. I walked through the gutted hollows of the home I used to know, empty without my mother, without my brother—

everything was cavernous.

I needed to be filled with her; I needed to know I could hear her voice and swell like I used to. I wonder who she slept beside that weekend, I wonder whose bed she made feel full. After dinner, I knew she was forgetting me and I burned my body down in the shower—

loneliness is poisonous.

When I got out, I dried myself slowly, brushed my teeth, and looked into the mirror. I couldn't focus. I couldn't see myself. I slept in my mother's bed and pulled the covers over my head. I slept with the phone on loud—

no one called.

borderline

Down low in the wall my voice was shaking. We opened or came apart. The two things are almost the same. The first girl opened like

the bottle, the hinges, the tomb.

She called me crying to tell me she missed me but to remind me she was not going to change anything. So I came apart like

excuses, pulled threads, long tattered love notes swallowed by the rain.

There was so much rain.

the harp

When the winter ended I was so thin I could see my ribs. I made a harp of my ribs. I made music of becoming thinner, imagined some day she'd wrap just one finger all the way around my waist.

She loves big girls.

I get smaller.

I get smaller, and smaller, and want her more.

The next time she took my clothes off she dragged her strings across my open bones. There's nothing to hold in all that empty.

the gift

I gave her back my ribcage.

We both agreed a gift should come in a box. I tied a ribbon too.

Under the ribbon, a note:

this does not protect me, anymore.

toes

This is the form of the body. She must have an end.

hunger

She tells me to keep eating and I push my food around. I'm not hungry. Hunger slipped away months ago. Instead I've been eating because I am supposed to. Each day waking, and going out, and calling my mother because I'm supposed to.

I take another bite because she remains calm when she thinks I'm fine. I'm holding her up to the light while her shadow chews me.

I can't swallow.

Being queer is my identity and
I wear it out every day.
Being a woman is my identity and
I wear it with my head held high.
Being a person of colour is my
identity and
I wear that daily too.

All these tags inked
on every inch of my skin.
All these labels surrounding me
like an aura.

For the longest time
I was suffocated by them.
For the longest time
I was ashamed.

No longer.
No longer am I tied
down by who I am.

I am liberated by my choices in
life.
I am liberated by my pride.
I am liberated by my defiance.
I am liberated by my ability to
accept my differences.

Inked



Demokratia

*In a democracy, there is
first that most splendid of
virtues equality before the
law. Secondly it has none of
the vices of monarchy: for
all offices are assigned by
lot, all officials are subject to
investigation and all policies
are debated in public.*

- Herodotus, The
Histories, III, 81

We wear porcelain masques,
you and I,
gleaming cheeks
like oiled skins of oriental warriors,
painted blushes, rivulets and swirls of
ancestral blood

to adorn crests of
victorious claims to love.
Little king,
before I condemn you
for treason,
corruption of our liberties,

our rights, *our hearts*
I join with you in a sort of
grotesque matrimony,
skeletal hands
bound by a
single ring –

We find it hard to perform
objectively, calmly, perfectly.
It is not enough
to sigh, grunt, *moan*
at the right times

as fingers tick
ballot slip boxes,
daring to score through names inscribed
in our paper skins,
relishing the touch of metal

upon flesh
to store memories of
amendments and civilian protection,
green-black tattoos of
our law.

No, it is not democracy;
though there are cries for
Demos! Demos! Demos!
Split jury: Half condemning, punitive shrew,
half forgiving, curious
for unforeseen consequences of *dementia*,¹

(though we threw Tiberius into the Tiber)
and we are the twisted voyeurs

of the exposed webs of our individual
threads,
waiting for the abhorred shears
of the ghastly, beautiful Morta.²

We almost love each other
for the glassy smooth peal of china glaze
shields,
shields painted on plates placed before us,
from which we are fed piecemeal sludge of
factory formed feasts.

We who sit blind as
votes were cast without us,
who cry in civilised outrage for
Kratia! Kratia! Kratia!
Yet struggle to rise to claim the

double-edged throne of swords.

1. Ancient Roman virtue of
forgiveness and mercy
2. Roman equivalent of Clothos
of the Greek Moirai

Dear Aunty Aileen

I'm supposed to be writing your eulogy now. Mam called last night and asked if I could speak at tomorrow's service, because she couldn't bring herself to. I couldn't force myself to say "no" to her shaking voice. I haven't even seen her yet.

Dad picked me up from the airport yesterday. We met Ruairí in the Wilton pub for tea. I had the Sunday roast, pork with crackling. It was soggy. We didn't talk much at first, just about the weather. The barman changed the channel to the Dublin v Cork match halfway through. Lifted Dad's spirits a bit. He asked me about football in Australia and I said it was nowhere near as good. He laughed at that, clapped me on the back, ordered a round for the table. We pretended everything was normal, and that you weren't lying on a slab somewhere.

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say tomorrow. Everyone will be expecting some grand speech from me, after flying all the way back from the other side of the world. What do you say about a loved one who you didn't love? Everyone's looking back with rosy retrospection, imagining you as this sweet old lady. You were two of those things, at least.

I suppose I could speak of your faith. Of how you believed God had a plan, but it wouldn't happen by itself. We had to follow our set paths. Complete the Sacraments, have children, go to Church every Sunday, repent for our sins. I'm sitting in your kitchen right now and I can see Jesus on the cross staring down at me. Sometimes I think you placed him (Him?) there deliberately so he'd be staring down at whoever was at the end of the table. You always sat me right here when we came over for tea, my legs swinging off the chair and my face covered in ketchup from all the fish fingers that missed their mark. I've always thought you put me at the end of the table so I'd be looking up at the ceramic figurine with his golden halo. More likely, you sat me here because sitting me next to Laoise or Ruairí would result in a food fight.

We stopped coming by as much once we became teenagers. We visited Nana and Granda still, but our great aunt was slowly left out of our weekly visits to family. I didn't really care. I dreaded visiting here, where everything had its place and it smelt of moth balls and Chanel No. 5. To this day I can't stand that fucking perfume. It's being promoted by a supermodel at the moment—a young one who's friends with the Kardashians—and all I can think is that this girl, worth millions of dollars, smells like my aunt. I doubt you knew who the Kardashians are, but I'm sure you wouldn't have approved. You were a fan of Marilyn Monroe's pictures though, and that scent was apparently all she wore to bed. I wonder what she'd think of her sheets smelling of a 78-year-old Irish widow. Not sure that'd sell much perfume.

Your house is still as pristine as when I was last here, before I moved a hemisphere away. Your mantelpiece is adorned with cards wishing you a happy 78th birthday, a thin layer of dust sticking to all the shiny cardboard. The fireplace even has a stack of wood ready for winter, probably chopped up by Ruairí. He was always your favourite – I'm sure he'll have a lot to say tomorrow.

I'm trying to think of you through his eyes, but it's hard. All I can see is the downward turn of your lip aimed at me, the disgust you didn't even try to mask. There's a photo of me on your fridge door. That really surprised me, because I never sent you any. Nana must have given it to you alongside photos of all the grandkids. It's been cropped though, Sophia's face cut out of the side. Nana wouldn't have thought a thing of it, just another selfie taken with a friend. She couldn't possibly imagine her granddaughter, her "shooting star", being a dyke.

I can imagine you faking a smile as you looked through the prints with your younger sister, only cutting it up when she left and sticking it on the fridge to keep up appearances. Or maybe she gave it to you cropped, assuming you only wanted photos of family and not strangers –

Ruairí and Laoise and all the cousins are all mostly alone or with family in their photos too.

I'm probably projecting.

Most of my memories of home blur together, unfocused footage of parks and pubs and greenery. The green here is so vibrant, like the saturation levels have been turned up by a thousand per cent. Australian green is muddied, streaked greys and browns, more dusty than lush. But here? It's a whole other colour, almost as if your eyes had never really worked until you stepped off that plane. You'd have known this, you spent so much time in your garden. I can see it through the window now, overgrowing from its neglect in the last month.

When I first arrived, I went straight out there to escape the house. The dog roses are taking over half the garden. I think it's beautiful, though I'm not sure you'd agree. Years and years of tending to the flowers, pulling weeds, keeping pests out, and now it's going wild. Back to nature. Maybe your house will go that way, moss growing along peeling wallpaper and weeds shooting through the floorboards. Chanel No. 5 replaced with mildew and dirt. Your front hedge closing up and hiding your home away. Dad says the market is shite at the moment so we might not be able to sell.

It's raining at the moment, like it always seems to be when I come home. The garden is alive, dancing as it's pelted with raindrops. Even in its current state of overgrowth I think you'd still enjoy it, or at least its potential. It's the only place I ever saw you act human, smiling and laughing whilst you got dirt under your fingernails.

I've come home a few times over the last decade, but the last time I was in this house you had just turned 72. Mam and Nana dragged me along and I couldn't make up a good enough reason not to come so I allowed myself to be driven here and propelled through your front

door. I busied myself making tea whilst they went out the back to find you. Looking out the kitchen window was like gazing through a portal to the past, the uneven glass obscuring the signs of your age and leaving a figure in green overalls kneeling amongst the starry eyes. You stood up to greet the others, laughing as you kissed Nana on the cheek. For a moment I had felt the tension in my shoulders soften, thinking that maybe you'd be in a good mood, and I'd ask how the snowdrops were going. I brought a tray of tea and biscuits into the garden, sitting down on the bench that Donal made for you, when you bought your home together. I caught your eye, about to smile, when you looked away into the flowerbeds. You told Mam you were thinking about pulling up the snowdrops. I picked up a sugar cube to stir into my tea and it crumbled beneath my fingers.

The bench is still under the cherry tree, even though it was a constant target for bird droppings. It's covered in them, barely hiding the fact the left side is rotting away. It's neither functional nor ornamental, but there it sits, surrounded by petals and greenery. If I looked, I'm sure I'd find "DL & OL '62" carved into the back inside a heart. I can't reconcile the image of a 72-year-old you, refusing to look at me, with a newlywed bride giddy to start a life with her love.

I used to question why you didn't remarry after him; 38 isn't that old, surely you could have found love again, or at least companionship. But looking around your house now I don't think you could have. You never moved on. Your wedding photo is still on the mantelpiece and photos of your life litter the house. His glasses are still on the bedside table, on what must have been his side of the bed forty years ago, untouched. They bear no more dust than anything else. Did you pick them up and clean under them every week, placing them back exactly as they were in 1976? You must have. His suits still take up half the closet, your wardrobe crammed into the left side as to not disturb them. You even have brandy glasses in the kitchen, even though you didn't drink. Ruairí said your liver couldn't process it properly, yet there are bottles in the glass display cabinet in the sitting room. The only place free of him seems to be the guest bedroom, with its plain pink walls and a single bed that was piled

high with cushions and a teddy bear, before I dumped them onto the floor at 1 o'clock last night.

I still can't think about what to say tomorrow. This home is full of memories, but none of them are mine. My memories of Ireland are of grandparents and cousins and school and friends, not of great aunts. The memory that sears into my brain when I think of you isn't one I can tell. I can't, I don't want to, and I'm sure you wouldn't want me to either. You'd want me to keep it buttoned down, to stay tight-lipped and straight-laced. We kept this secret for so long, what's another few days, months, years.

I can still feel the jolt in my stomach that Wednesday afternoon, followed by another jolt and a feeling of sickness when I saw you. School had been let out early for the last day of term and I'd snuck into the pictures with Sinead to see some rom-com about a boy and a girl and miscommunication. Afterwards we'd gotten 99s and sat out the back of the shopping centre, gossiping and giggling and doing whatever else 16-year-olds do when they have infinite time and empty wallets. It's fuzzy in my head, and I can't really remember how it happened.

I had chocolate on the corner of my mouth and Sinead leaned over to wipe it off with her thumb and next thing we were surging into each other and I could smell her Hello Kitty perfume and taste the watermelon lipgloss she'd nicked from Claire's. We broke apart, her cheeks were red, and I was going to say something, when her eyes drifted over my shoulder and she froze. I whipped around, my hair stuck to the lipgloss transferred onto my mouth, and I saw you staring at me. I waited for you to yell at me, to drag me back home and tell my mam I was a degenerate, or maybe to church to sit in the confession box.

But you just looked at me. It felt like forever but it must have been no more than a minute before you straightened up, tugging your cardigan as if to cover yourself and turning to the carpark to leave. I almost yelled out but Sinead tugged at my collar and told me not to make it worse. We waited for something to happen, for one of our mothers to call us and demand we come home immediately. After an hour, it seemed like the

inevitable fall out would wait till dinner, so we waited around until we saw a sixth-former we recognised, and paid him to buy us cheap vodka. I drank till I threw up, and then more after that. Sinead fell asleep on my lap in her basement, and we never spoke of it again.

I never asked you why you didn't out me. I never got the chance as you never spoke to me beyond formalities after that, ignoring me at family events and letting your eyes simply slip over me like I was just a shadow. The "inevitable fall out" didn't happen that night, or the night after that, or the night after that. It's been 14 years and you literally took my secret to the grave. If I'm being honest, I'm grateful. I was home last year when Ireland legalised same-sex marriage and when the news came out Mam rolled her eyes before changing the radio station. I wonder about how it would've gone if you'd gone straight to my parent's house and told them. If they'd have been angry or disgusted, or just had that look of disappointment on their faces that's somehow worse than being yelled at.

If I was to say anything tomorrow, it would be to thank you. You hated me, I'm sure of it. You made no show of hiding it. But I didn't hate you. I still don't. In a way, I want to. It'd be easier than trying to figure out how you could call a man on the telly in tight pants a "queer", but not tell our family that I actually am one. I hate that you thought that way, I hate thinking of the look of revulsion you aimed at me, I hate the fact that your house is dotted with crosses and there's a bible on the beside table, but I don't hate you.

Anger would be easier but I never got that experience. I never got the big fight that every single book and movie and TV show tells me will happen, when you're caught kissing another girl. Instead I got a Catholic great aunt who kept a secret that might have ruined my life if it had come to light, even though it was against everything you believed in. I can't figure out why. I'm not sure I want to know. I still wish you could tell me. Maybe it'd help me write your eulogy.



Kawa Akari (川明かり, “Riverlight”)

She was like the sunlit moon

Blessing the world with her light

And I was one of many stars

Negligible, indiscernible

But hoping she would see me one night.

I was just a simple student from a small, unknown university, learning the dying art of the poet. That night was a terrible night, full of unwanted noises and unnecessary sounds, and I needed to get away from it all. I needed to think, to be inspired. I took nothing with me except the clothes on my back. My feet were left bare; gravel stung my soles while dewy grass soothed.

The more I wandered, the more disoriented I was. The Murogawa Basin called out to me then, in that moment of lostness. Dancing lights pulled me towards their leafy homes. It was far past the time for tourists to be awake, but I was no tourist, and a poet’s mind never slept. The fireflies wrapped themselves around my arms and snaked into the gaps between my fingers. Guided by curiosity, I touched the glowing tail-ends of their bodies. They burned like windows of skyscrapers at night, blinked like the yellow neon lights embedded in store signs.

The fireflies led me to the edge of a lake, where the water rippled with every breath of wind. Each concentric wave lapped at my toes, advancing then receding, drawing me in with calm oscillations. My eyes followed them as they returned to their origin, to the middle of the lake.

And there she was, ethereal elegance lit up by lightning bugs as she stood in a gondola. Her hair was dyed a dark maroon, almost the colour of blackberry wine. It trailed down the

nape of her neck in waves, and then curved to her front at the edges of her clavicles. Her kimono reflected the autumn warmth in hues of brown and red, with printed creamy white bush clovers and purple bellflowers. A pastel beige kimono ribbon was wrapped around her slender figure.

Pink cheeks, long eyelashes, cherry red lips came together to form a delicate and refined profile. Light from the fireflies angled shadows on her face. In both hands she held a charcoal-grey *yunomi*, wisps of steam curling from it.

She smiled and beckoned me over, but I was at a loss. How was I supposed to reach the boat? I did not have the abilities of a water-strider, nor was there a bridge to walk on. So I told her as such, hoping my voice would carry across the large pond. She nodded once in understanding. She raised a hand, and a tiny yet intensely bright firefly landed on her finger. She brought it to her mouth, whispering words that were too quiet to hear.

As she uttered her final instruction, an outbreak of fireflies rushed between us. Their cacophonous buzzing was overwhelming, and I had to block my ears before it became any more deafening. Before my very eyes the swarm of bugs drew close to the lake, layer after layer covering the surface to form a luminescent bridge to the gondola. As the final few settled down, their hums subsided.

I looked up; the woman beckoned me over again. Stepping on the bridge of fireflies, I dashed across to the boat with light footsteps.

In the middle of the gondola was a full tea set atop a small table. The kimono-clad woman sat, her legs folded underneath her. I did the same, though not as gracefully. She poured out hot tea into another cup and offered it to me.

We sipped sweet gyokuro tea from *yunomis* in silence. The only sound I could discern was the rustling of silver grass as fireflies weaved

between the leaves. I opened my mouth to speak, to ask the questions that buzzed in my mind, but she shook her head. Her quiet, mysterious smile was the only answer to my unspoken questions.

The basin was calm, reminding me of when I was a child and when I used to frequent the local library after school hours. The library held very few modern books, and its shelves were filled to the brim with old myths and poetry. I was one of less than ten people in the building, and often spent my time curled up on a windowsill with the fading sunlight illuminating the pages in my hands.

I was so engrossed in that fond memory of my younger days that I failed to notice when the fireflies went to sleep, their tail-ends dimming until only blackness remained. It was only when the woman gently coughed into her sleeve that I noticed that darkness engulfed the Murogawa Basin.

The *yunomi* was icy in my grasp; the tea had cooled. My companion had vanished.

In her place, reflected in my irises, was the silver glow of the moon mirrored on the surface of the lake, perfect doppelgängers. Moonlight kissed the skin on my bare arms and feet. I inhaled, taking in a deep breath of the crisp water. Without the fireflies the night sky suddenly seemed brighter, the stars winking at me from where they resided.

I would gladly have lived in this moment forever if it were not for my tired eyes. Try as I may, heavy eyelids gave way and closed. I awoke.

Storm

Love is the storm,
That set me adrift
That set me gasping
That cut me free from my moorings
Left me for dead.
Love is both executioner,
And enabler,
Depending on where my body lands.

I run my fingers through your hair and realise,
Oh,
This is love.
The first inhalation
out of water
Damp, gasping,
Euphoric.
I breathe you in.

You are the glimpse
Of dry land in a storm.
Your skin
An island
My touch
The slow mapping of unknown planes
As a storm rages above.

In another sea, perhaps,
Another time,
I would flounder under the weight of the waves;
Desperate, gasping,
Drowned.
But instead,
In your hair, your skin,
The mingling of our breath,
I have found safe harbour.



PRESIDENT’S STATEMENT

G'day UNSW,

I hope everyone’s tracking along well with Semester Two.

This is the Queer edition, and it’s an important time for queer people across the country. Make sure you vote YES in the marriage equality plebiscite. The SRC is strongly committed to doing everything we can to make sure that everyone has their basic rights protected and fought for.

While it is hurtful and ridiculous for myself and other queer people to have to ask the whole country to vote on our rights, the best thing for us to do is get out and fight for a yes vote and show the strength of our love and power.

If you are finding anything about the plebiscite difficult to deal with, you can come along to Queer Collective meetings and you can always drop me a line at srcpresident@arc.unsw.edu.au, or at any of our Collective’s emails!

ABOUT THE SRC

The Student Representative Council (SRC) is the peak representative and advocacy body for students at UNSW. We run campaigns aimed at improving UNSW for all students, fighting for the issues you care about, and also providing you with a community to chill out and socialise with. The SRC is a platform for you to shape your own educational experience, create real change for you and your fellow students and make community connections that will last you a lifetime.

WHAT’S ON

Check out our website in Semester 2 to check out what’s happening!
<http://www.arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/src/upcoming-events>

ABOUT COLLECTIVES

Our collectives include Education, Environment, Ethno Cultural, Indigenous, International, Queer, Students with Disabilities, Welfare and Women’s.

The Collectives are a great way to get involved in a community, make some friends, and campaign around the issues that matter to you

Campaigns include:

Fix the 891 Queues - Accessible and safe transport to and from UNSW

Divestment - UNSW must divest from fossil fuel companies and invest in a sustainable and ethical future

Stop the UNSW Trimonster - Fighting back against the introduction of harmful trimesters

End Sexual Violence on campus - After the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission survey on 1 August, action must be taken by universities and governments to end sexual violence on campus

Free Speech Isn’t Free – Focusing on the mistreatment of Women of Colour who have spoken out in the media

Free Breakfast

And heaps more to come in Semester 2!

ABOUT SPACES

Need somewhere to chill out on campus? A quiet place to study? A place to connect with like-minded people? Maybe just a microwave or fridge for your lunch? The SRC has you covered. We have equity rooms – safe spaces for you to hang out, nap, or get some readings done.

Welfare and Disability Room - A place for autonomous collectives, and also for any student to chill out in the meantime.

International & Ethno-cultural Room - A safe chill place for ethnically and culturally diverse students and international students.

Women’s Room - The women’s room is a safe and autonomous space for women identifying students.

Queer Space - A safe autonomous place to relax and connect with other LGBTIA/Queer students. Meetings and other activities are run by the Queer Collective on a weekly basis.

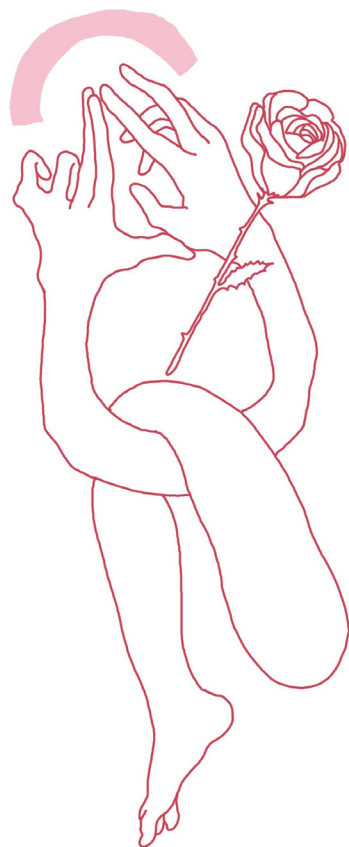
Head to the website to find out where the rooms are located and how you can use them.

COLLECTIVE TIMES

Check out our website and Facebook page to find updated Semester 2 Collective times!

a ro mantic
a se xual

a rose is a r
ose is a ros
e is a rose



my hands are always cold but
i don't want you to hold them

the comfort that we want
it's not the same thing

feels better to be alone
so good and selfish

BY AMY GE

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE?

SEND YOUR STORIES, IDEAS AND OTHER SUBMISSIONS TO
tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au



