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The False Idealization of Heteronormativity and the Repression of Queerness

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THE FALSE IDEALIZATION OF HETERONORMATIVITY
AND THE REPRESSION OF QUEERNESS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Arts

in

The Interdepartmental Program in Liberal Arts

by
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B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2012
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Dedicated to all who have suffered and endured against all odds.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, entitled “The False Idealization of Heteronormativity and the Repression of Queerness,” I examine heteronormativity as a social structure that is idealized over, and against, queerness. In the first chapter, I define heteronormativity and queerness. “Heteronormativity,” here, is simply a set of standards that dictate what one *must* do with their gender and sexuality, such as having sexual relations with the opposite sex, getting married, or having children. Heteronormativity is visible, validated, and normalized in society. Conversely, “queerness” refers to the social structures that dictate what one must *not* do with their gender and sexuality. Thus, queerness is condemned, threatened, and prohibited. Furthermore, I argue that all of us have transgressed the social structure of heteronormativity since no one can consistently maintain all that heteronormativity implies. Therefore, we all have embodied queerness in one way or another. However, we have also been systematically taught to repress queerness within ourselves and others in an attempt to reduce our fear of it. Moreover, the widespread repression and fear of queerness in society supports and justifies a hierarchical capitalistic system. Since queerness is devalued and considered inappropriate, those who hold power over us, such as in the workplace, have the right to control and regulate our gender and sexual expression. In the second chapter of my thesis, I turn my attention to Hegel’s ethical family where parents are obligated to repress their children’s queerness through the use of discipline. In the third and final chapter, I offer a solution to the problem of the repression of queerness. I argue that, if we can recognize that all of us embody queerness in one way or another and if we can allow ourselves the chance to try to understand each other’s queerness without the impulse to repress it, we can achieve queer solidarity. We will see that our struggle with gender and sexuality under a heteronormative social structure that is enforced all around us is a collective struggle. Therefore,

the recognition of each other's queerness without the impulse to condemn it can act as a bridge to help us recognize that we are integrally connected to one another.

INTRODUCTION

When Taylor, one of my interview participants, first came out to her mother as bisexual, Taylor's mother reacted negatively and proceeded to denigrate her daughter's identity. Upset and screaming at Taylor, she questioned her daughter's identity, telling her that bisexuality did not exist. Taylor, confused, hurt, and crying, began to hate herself and became depressed—wishing that she was not bisexual. In the below quote, this is what Taylor had to say about her coming out experience with her mother:

When I came out to my mom she didn't get it at all...[S]he said, "Why are you doing this to me? What's wrong with you?" And then I was crying and freaking out and wishing that I wasn't... [S]he tried to tell me that I'm either gay or straight. She told me bi didn't make sense, and I just felt like she was ashamed of me. I still kinda do actually. Even now. Because she still doesn't get it... She was just yelling at me, "You're either this or you're either this. You can't be bi. That doesn't even make sense. Bi isn't a thing. It's not real. You just don't know what you want, Taylor." She sounded pissed. And she's like, "Why are you doing this to me? Why are you doing this to our family?"¹

Having established that Taylor's bisexuality meant there was something wrong with Taylor, Taylor's mother questioned why Taylor was coming out as bisexual. After Taylor came out to her mother, their relationship was strained. Her mother, ashamed of her daughter, did not want to hear anything about her bisexuality, nor be involved in any way with that part of her life.

Taylor's negative experience coming out to her mother as bisexual is not an uncommon one. In a society where heteronormative gender and sexuality is romanticized to such a degree that we feel we cannot be happy without it, non-heteronormative gender and sexuality comes to be seen as an unfortunate and indecent way of being. If we conceive non-heteronormativity as an inappropriate way of being, such as Taylor's mother believing her daughter's bisexuality is

¹ Taylor, personal interview, 15 Jan. 2015.

wrong, then we are lead to repress non-heteronormative ways of being. In this thesis, whatever form non-heteronormativity takes, it will be denoted by the term, “queerness” or “queer.”

In the first chapter of my thesis, entitled “The False Idealization of Heteronormativity and the Repression of Queerness,” I examine how heteronormativity in society is idealized to support and justify a hierarchical capitalistic social structure that represses queerness. I consider heteronormativity to be an oppressive social structure. “Oppression” here includes the social structures and forces that ensures what one *must* do to be recognized, visible, and validated in society. Oppressive social structures are upheld and idealized, and they are considered normal, natural, right, and real. For example, “heteronormativity,” which refers to a set of standards and norms that dictate what one *must* do with their gender and sexuality (such as having sexual relations with the opposite sex or performing masculinity if you were born male), is an oppressive social structure that is thought to be natural and right. Thus, heteronormativity is a specific type of oppression. Heteronormativity is romanticized endlessly in our media and in almost all other realms of social life. “Repression,” on the other hand, refers to the social structures and forces that dictate what one must *not* do to avoid public shame and disapproval. Whatever is repressed is condemned, threatened, and silenced since there is a fear reaction attached to it; it is also considered to be inconsistent, fake, and unreal. For instance, queerness is repressed. “Queerness” refers to a set of standards and norms that dictate what one must *not* do with their gender and sexuality (such as having a non-normative gender or sexual identity). Queerness is prohibited in society since we have been socialized to feel uncomfortable with its appearance. Queerness is also systematically repressed because we have been taught to idealize heteronormativity over, and against, queerness. Furthermore, it is undeniable, as I will argue throughout my thesis, that all of us are “queer” in one way or another since no one can

consistently maintain all that heteronormativity requires. We all, in our own ways, have transgressed heteronormativity, and we all have been, to different extents, punished for it. We have all been forbidden to express our gender and sexuality in society as we understand it. I argue not one of us have escaped the clutches of the repression of our queerness.

Moreover, the structural arrangements of oppression/repression, such as heteronormativity and the repression of queerness, is operational in society because it supports and justifies a hierarchical capitalistic system. Our understanding of heteronormativity as a better way of being, and queerness as an unfortunate way of being, produces hierarchical gender and sexual social relations that support and justify a hierarchical capitalistic system. For example, since we have been socialized from birth onwards to fear queerness, we panic whenever we see queerness' appearance in social life. Queerness panics us because it, often unconsciously, recalls every instance of our own repression of our queerness in the past and, consequently, we have internalized the perception that queerness is wrong. This panic reaction induced by the appearance of another's queerness often leads us to strip others of their power, legitimacy, and authority since we reflexively attempt to crush the appearance of queerness by repressing the person who encodes queerness within social life.² This temporarily ends our panic induced fear of queerness until it inevitably reappears again at another time.

² For instance, in 2011 Crosby Burns and Jeff Krehely showed that up to 43 percent of gay people and 90 percent of trans people experienced some form of workplace discrimination or mistreatment. Workplace discrimination ranged from denial of a promotion, being fired or passed over for a job, negative work performance evaluations, and verbal and physical abuse. See Crosby Burns and Jeff Krehely, "Gay and Transgender People Face High Rates of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment," 2 June 2011, Center for American Progress, 27 Mar. 2015 <<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2011/06/02/9872/gay-and-transgender-people-face-high-rates-of-workplace-discrimination-and-harassment/>>.

This panic induced fear of queerness that we have been socialized to dread supports the subordination of queerness under capitalism since our fear of queerness produces hierarchical power differentials that devalue the one whose queerness is being actively repressed in society. For example, April Mora, who I will talk about more extensively in the first chapter, was attacked and beaten by three men who pinned her down and etched into her skin with a razor blade the words “dyke” and “R.I.P.” When April called for the police’s help, instead of the police investigating the crime the men committed against her, the police proceeded to question April about her supposed unstable mental health and whether or not she was fighting with her girlfriend. The police, panicked by the appearance of queerness on April’s body, proceeded to question her, subordinating her experiences, thereby overlooking the men’s violent heterosexist attack.³

The second chapter of my thesis, “Hegel’s Ethical Family and the Repression of Queerness,” first examines Hegel’s dialectical movement, which will set up my examination of Hegel’s ethical family based in marriage where man and woman become husband and wife in order to produce ethical children. Parents, in their ethical role as husband and wife, are assigned the task of educating and disciplining their children where they must repress the sensual, natural impulses of their children. I argue that Hegel’s ethical family legitimates heteronormativity’s foundation as an oppressive social structure where queerness is necessarily repressed by the family. Since parents are ethically obligated to establish heteronormativity within their children in a society based in heteronormative social structures, they necessarily repress their children’s queerness. Taylor’s mother, for example, told Taylor there was something wrong with her

³ Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 118-19.

because of her bisexuality. In an attempt to reestablish heteronormativity in the family, Taylor's mother yelled at her, questioning Taylor's identity when Taylor's mother posited bisexuality as not real while also questioning why Taylor was doing this to their family.⁴

In the third and final chapter, "Queer Solidarity," I first examine how oppressive social structures, such as heteronormativity, separate and divide us under capitalism. Under capitalism, hostile social environments are needed to perpetuate fear induced disconnection and isolation from others. Heteronormativity's repression of queerness provides a way for capitalism to maintain our separation and isolation from each other. Since we have been taught to reduce our panic and fear by reestablishing heteronormativity through repressing queerness, we disconnect ourselves from others since we are caught up in an attempt to prohibit "wrong" forms of social life within ourselves and others. Heteronormativity's repression of queerness breaks down solidarity among people and prevents them from relying upon each other for their well-being, thus forcing us to rely on capitalism to survive. If we are afraid of each other and unremittingly repress each other out of that fear, we disconnect from each other, becoming reliant on capitalism to survive. In chapter 3, I also argue that recognizing each other's queerness without the impulse to fear or condemn it can act as a mediator for solidarity. If we can recognize that all of us are "queer" in one way or another—that all of us have not only experienced the drama of oppression and repression within our lives but have also all actively repressed others and ourselves in an attempt to diminish our panic and fear of queerness—we can recognize that all of us have had similar repressive experiences that are integrally connected to capitalism that perpetuates repression. We can see our queerness—recognizing each other's collective struggle with gender and sexuality—as a way for us to move beyond heteronormative oppressive social

⁴ Taylor interview.

structures that separate one from the other under capitalism. Queerness can act as a bridge that helps us recognize others' collective marginalization in society, allowing us to connect our different struggles, such as the struggle of a white gay man who is regularly called a "faggot" and beaten, a trans Latina immigrant working as a janitor who is disowned by her family, or a straight woman who is frequently demeaned by her peers because she is not as feminine as society expects her to be. Recognizing that everyone has struggled with heteronormativity can enable connection and solidarity if only we can allow ourselves the chance to understand others without the impulse to repress.

Before moving on to the first chapter, it is important to note that I conducted face-to-face interviews with 5 people who identified as gender and sexually non-normative in one way or another. These interviews informed the structure of my thesis, particularly the first chapter where the repression of queerness is elaborated upon. Throughout my thesis, you will see quotes from these interview participants. Their names have been changed to protect their identity. My interviews with them lasted from approximately 2 to 4 hours and were conducted at a location chosen by the interview participant. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Once I transcribed and coded the interviews, I read through the interviews again to find common themes. Questions that I asked ranged from topics of identity, experiences with sexual and gender normativity and non-normativity, coming out experiences and work experiences, and friendships and relationships with others. All respondents identified as white or Caucasian, except for Logan who also identified as Sicilian American. Also, all interview participants were in their mid to late 20s, except Alex who was in his mid-30s at the time that I interviewed him. The expression of my interview participants' gender and sexual identities are complex and in no way easy to classify, nor should they be. Emery, for instance, who was assigned female at birth,

said that he does not have a gender identity, but “for the purposes of explaining myself to the general public, I would say something like genderqueer, gender variant, or nonbinary.”⁵ While these interviews are in no way generalizable to the experiences of all people who are gender and sexually non-normative, they will provide us a path to understand our own experiences in a society where heteronormativity is idealized over, and against, our queerness.

⁵ Emery, personal interview, 6 Jan. 2015.

CHAPTER 1. HETERONORMATIVITY AND CAPITALISM'S SUBORDINATION OF QUEERNESS

1.1 Introduction

In 2002, while walking to a store in Denver, Colorado, April Mora, a teenaged lesbian of African American and Native American descent, was attacked by three men, one of whom disparagingly referred to her as a “dyke.” They pinned her down and choked her, and when she began to scream, one of the men cut her tongue. They proceeded to carve the words “dyke” and “R.I.P.” into her skin with a razor blade. When they were done with her, the men kicked her in the ribs, and before leaving, told her that she was lucky they didn’t rape her, and that next time they would. After the men left, April walked home and called her girlfriend for help, and when she arrived, they called for an ambulance and the police. However, when the police arrived, April and her girlfriend were interrogated by the police who asked if they had been fighting or using drugs. The police also insisted on April taking a polygraph, believing she was not telling the truth about what happened since they thought she self-inflicted her injuries. Instead of focusing on searching for the men who assaulted April, the police ransacked her house looking for a razor they believed she must have cut herself with, even though health care providers offered to confirm in writing that her injuries were not self-inflicted. This insistence on focusing on April and her relationship with her girlfriend, rather than investigating the men who beat her foreclosed any possibility of finding her attackers.⁶

This violent heterosexist attack against April’s queerness is just one example among many instances of the repression of queerness witnessed throughout society. Currently, there is

⁶ Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, 118-19.

an epidemic of violence against queerness as a result of our internalized fear of it.⁷ In *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*, Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock affirm that violence against queers is being reported across the country at an alarming rate, whether on the streets or in our homes.⁸ In 2008 alone, there were over two thousand reported cases of queer violence, a 26 percent increase since 2006.⁹ To overcome our fear of queerness, we repress it through violence. For example, April's attackers most likely feared April, whom they identified as a "dyke."¹⁰ They were able to overcome their fear by condemning and threatening April's queerness, communicating to her that she deserved to be raped, beaten, and killed.

Furthermore, the violent repression of queerness maintains a heteronormative, oppressive social structure and supports a hierarchical capitalistic system. As stated in the introduction, "oppression" here refers to social structures, such as heteronormativity, that dictate what one *must* do, such as embodying heteronormative gender and sexuality. Furthermore, oppressive social structures are visible, validated, and recognized. "Repression," on the other hand, refers to social structures and forces that dictate what one must *not* do, such as queerness, to avoid violence and shame. The oppressive structure of heteronormativity represses queerness to reestablish heteronormativity as a natural and normal given. Also, the repression of queerness is upheld through our panic induced fear of it that we have internalized in a society that perpetuates

⁷ Autostraddle reported that three black trans women were murdered in the first three weeks of January 2015. Their brutal murders are just one example of the violence experienced by queer individuals. See KaeLyn, "Already Three Black Trans Women Have Been Brutally Murdered in 2015," 28 Jan. 2015, Autostraddle, 27 Mar. 2015 <<http://www.autostraddle.com/already-two-black-trans-women-have-been-brutally-murdered-in-2015-274588/>>.

⁸ Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, 119.

⁹ Ibid, 119.

¹⁰ Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, 118-9.

the idea that queerness is wrong and abnormal. Lastly, the repression of queerness also leads to a power differential where heteronormativity is upheld over, and against, queerness.

April's attackers illustrate how heteronormativity reestablishes itself through the repression of queerness. First, April's attackers were able to reestablish heteronormativity as the right way of being when they assaulted her and threatened her with rape. Secondly, the police, instead of investigating the crime the attackers committed against April, concentrated their efforts on proving that April was lying, thereby dismissing her own account of events. The police insisted April was not telling the truth since they believed the cause of her injuries were located within her queerness as a "dyke" and in her relationship with her girlfriend, thus absolving the men who assaulted her of their heterosexist crime and upholding a heteronormative social structure where heterosexist acts are condoned.

In the next section of this chapter, I will first elaborate upon and clarify what I mean by heteronormativity as an oppressive social structure. Secondly, I will define queerness and then examine its repression, which has three defining characteristics under a heteronormative structure: a lack of awareness of the existence of queerness, feelings of discomfort towards queerness, and the annihilation of queerness. The annihilation of queerness is expressed in two key ways: the first being violence against the self where one attempts to overcome their own queerness and the second being violence against others where the appearance of queerness in social life is attacked. Then, in the second section of this chapter, I will examine how queerness is devalued and subordinated by those who hold power over us in the workplace to maintain and justify hierarchical capitalistic relations where queerness is considered inappropriate.

1.2 Heteronormative Oppression and the Repression of Queerness

Heteronormativity, as stated previously, is an oppressive social structure in society that is idealized and perceived to be natural and right.¹¹ Heteronormativity as an oppressive social structure determines what one *must* do with their gender and sexuality to be considered normal or real and to be recognized and validated. Examples of heteronormativity as an oppressive social structure include abiding to appropriate standards of femininity or masculinity based on one's assigned sex, dating the opposite sex and having romantic experiences with them, falling in love with the opposite sex, being sexually available in a suitable and monogamous manner, getting married, and, lastly, having children. All of these are idealized in our society, and we are expected, often obligated, to embody them within our lifetime. Taylor, one of my interview participants who was assigned female at birth, illustrated this point quite clearly when I asked her how normative sexuality and gender was celebrated and reinforced in her personal experience: "It's everywhere [laughs]. It's almost how is it not. You hear your whole life you're supposed to act and dress a certain way and stuff like that, and I didn't really like that. My mom used to tell me I'm supposed to grow up and find a man to marry that will support me and care for me."¹² Taylor relates to us how heteronormativity is everywhere and how we are expected to embody it. For Taylor, she was expected to perform femininity by dressing and acting a certain way and to

¹¹ Barbara J. Risman argues that conceptualizing gender as a social structure allows us to put gender on "the same analytic plane as politics and economics." Conceptualizing heteronormativity as a social structure will do the same. See her article: "Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism," *Gender and Society*, 18.4 (2004): 130-1. Furthermore, Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook define heteronormativity as "the suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attraction between these 'opposite' genders is natural or acceptable." See their article: "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity," *Gender and Society*, 23.4 (2009): 441.

¹² Taylor interview.

find a man to marry who would support her. Taylor felt obligated to abide to these heteronormative expectations, such as dressing femininely and marrying a man, even though she preferred wearing pants, polo shirts, and baggy clothes, and did not want to be dependent on someone to support her.¹³ Taylor, like all of us, was obligated to fulfill oppressive heteronormative expectations to feel validated and accepted by society.

The term “oppression” often invokes cruel or unfair treatment. One of the first definitions of “oppression,” after all, is “the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner.”¹⁴ However, oppressive social structures would not be able to uphold themselves without being able to satisfy certain desires or aspirations. The problem is not that we have certain desires or aspirations, such as the heteronormative desire to have sex or raise children.¹⁵ Rather, the problem is that oppressive social structures, such as heteronormativity, direct and control our desires and aspirations with the intention of repressing other desires and aspirations that frighten us, such as queerness. Take Alex, another one of my interview participants who was assigned female at birth but is now perceived to be male since taking testosterone, as an example: “[Normative gender and sexuality is] sort of reinforced by complements about how I dress or how I look. And I sort of get an eye roll if I have my nails painted or if I’m transgressing gender that way. I think it makes them [people] uncomfortable a little bit.”¹⁶ We do not normally think of complements or positive reinforcement as oppressive, and they are not necessarily so, but they can be when they are systematically directed in certain ways under oppressive social

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Oppression.” *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 24 Feb. 2015
<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/oppression>>.

¹⁵ Heteronormative desires are not a problem in themselves since people should have a right to their own gender and sexual subjectivity and choices. However, heteronormative desires become problematic when they are prescriptive and when they are upheld against queerness.

¹⁶ Alex, Personal interview, 20 Jan. 2015.

structures. For example, women who dress femininely or men who perform masculinity are rewarded for doing so, but when a woman dresses in a masculine way or a man wears a dress, this sort of gender bending is often considered a joke or violently repressed.¹⁷ Back to Alex's own understanding of how heteronormativity is reinforced, he received compliments for dressing in a way that was perceived to be normative; however when he wore nail polish, people expressed their disapproval,¹⁸ revealing how heteronormativity is a directed and controlled desire and aspiration.

Oppressive social structures are also presupposed and normalized. Since they are considered natural and right, they are not questioned and go by with little notice. The normalization of oppressive social structures becomes apparent when considering the experiences of people whose queerness is regularly misrecognized and obscured by heteronormative social structures. For instance, Emery, who was assigned female at birth and prefers male pronouns while also not subscribing to any gender identity in particular, describes how he is often assumed to be a heteronormative woman:

I'm assumed to be [gender and sexually normative] a lot. This has happened all my life of course. If [my male bodied partner] and I go to a restaurant together, sometimes the server will refer to him as "Sir" and me as "Ma'am." And they'll give him the check, and I think it's sort of them assuming that we're a heterosexual couple.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gender bending in the queer community, however, is often seen as a means of self-expression and as a way to communicate attraction to others. For example, butch/femme aesthetics in lesbian communities often acknowledge and validate different sexual and/or gender preferences that are largely repressed in a heteronormative world. See Mignon R. Moore, "Lipstick or Timberlands? Meanings of Gender Presentation in Black Lesbian Communities," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 32.1 (2006): 113-139. See also Heidi M. Levitt and Katherine R. Hiestand, "Gender within Lesbian Sexuality: Butch and Femme Perspectives," *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18.1 (2005): 39-51.

¹⁸ Alex interview.

¹⁹ Emery interview.

Emery is quite frustrated when he is assumed to be heteronormative. Assumptions of heteronormativity are a common occurrence for those who explicitly identify more with their queerness. Let's take a look at another example where heteronormativity was presupposed. Logan, who was assigned male at birth and who has an ambiguous non-normative gender and sexual identity, has often been assumed to be straight and gender normative by others:

There's plenty of times when people assume that I'm straight or assume that I have a normative gender... I had an experience with my landlord where I was waiting at the house with him... when a plumber was supposed to be coming... He was an older guy, and he was giving me all kinds of life advice like, "When your wife does this you gotta, blah, blah, blah." And I just had nothing to say... I wasn't about to be like, "Well you know I don't exclusively identify as a man. I've had experiences with men."

Logan's landlord not only assumed Logan was straight, but he also assumed his partner was a woman and his wife, even though Logan's partner is neither and actually publicly identifies more with genderqueer. Logan and Emery are often assumed to be heteronormative because oppressive social structures have no other frame of reference than themselves, since all others are repressed. As Judith Butler argues, identity categories, such as heteronormativity, tend to install themselves through the exclusion of something else.²⁰ For instance, those who "refuse to go by the rules and conventions, as well as those who refuse to or cannot speak the common language" are considered to be outlaws and mad.²¹ Heteronormativity's exclusion results in queerness' disappearance and misrecognition. Alex explains this phenomenon well. When he was younger, Alex subsumed anything that was gender or sexually non-normative into a normative framework:

Even if it was not normative, I assimilated it into normative... It wasn't even something I had to consciously do. I just assimilated it into being normative... I

²⁰ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," *The Material Queer*, Ed. Donald Morton, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 180-81.

²¹ Monique Wittig, "On the Social Contract," *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1992), 40.

assimilated it into the realm of normativity somehow where I consciously or unconsciously didn't see femininity on men or masculinity on women... I didn't have any names for it. I didn't have labels... I just had no frame of reference and so it was really unnerving because if other people could be masculine women and feminine men or trans, my whole worldview was up for grabs. So it just made me really uncomfortable, and it took me a long time to come around to it.²²

Alex points to the fact that heteronormative social structures have no names, no labels for anything outside of themselves, and if there were it would cause trouble since Alex's worldview would have been up for grabs. Our discomfort towards queerness due to the lack of awareness of it is where the violent aspect of the repression of queerness begins to become more apparent.

Alex, like most of us, grew up with no other frame of reference outside of an oppressive structure of heteronormativity, and he was unnerved and uncomfortable for a long time about the idea of there being anything else.²³ Because we grow up thinking there is no other frame of reference than heteronormativity, there is a sort of blank space that cannot be comprehended where it becomes difficult to realize queerness as a social possibility. As Christiane Rochefort, a French feminist writer, argued back in 1979, being limited to "heterosexuality is to not really comprehend."²⁴ This incomprehensible blank space that is unrecognized and hidden breeds panic and fear,²⁵ thus marginalizing queerness.

Now that I have described heteronormativity as an oppressive social structure, I will move on to further elaborate upon the repression of queerness under heteronormativity.

²² Alex interview.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Christiane Rochefort, "The Privilege of Consciousness," *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts*, Ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 104.

²⁵ Wittig points out that the category of sex (man/woman) "grips our minds in such a way that we cannot think outside of it." Because we cannot think outside of heteronormativity, whatever is outside it, such as queerness, becomes unrecognizable and hidden. See Wittig's "The Category of Sex," *The Straight Mind and other Essays*, page 8.

Repression, as I have already expressed, can be described by what one must *not* do in social life. There are three defining aspects of the repression of queerness that I would like to consider in this chapter: the lack of awareness of its existence, feelings of discomfort towards it, and its annihilation. Before considering these three defining characteristics of the repression of queerness, I would like to clarify and further define queerness.

Queerness is neither an essence one is born with, nor is it simply a non-normative gender or sexual identity socially constructed within a particular historical moment. Queerness is the enactment of thoughts, gestures, embodiments, activities, and social relations that are socially, politically, and economically repressed by a heteronormative social structure. Queerness is simply anything that diverges from the oppressive structure of heteronormativity, and it is everything that one must *not* do with their gender and sexuality. Some examples of queerness that have been repressed over the last century include: having sex in ways that are not considered appropriate (examples include having sex under a certain age, sex in public, anal and oral sex, sex outside of marriage, sex work, and masturbating), having children outside of marriage, divorce, not abiding to appropriately gendered attire or dressing in a way that is not considered fashionable or proper, teenage sex or pregnancy, public nudity, having an abortion, having a non-normative gender or sexual social identity (lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, trans, queer, polyamorous, etc.), and refusing to marry or have children. What ties these examples of queerness together is their shared departure from an idealized heteronormative narrative, as described above.

Departing from heteronormativity and entering the realm of queerness is understood to be abnormal in many aspects of social life. John Burnside, who appeared in the 1978 classic gay and lesbian documentary, *Word is Out*, explained how heteronormative social structures

responded to queerness as an aberration. John laughingly remarked, “Until recent times as a homosexual, you realized that you were three things: to the doctor you were sick, to the lawyer you were a criminal, and to the minister you were wicked.”²⁶ Here, the medical establishment saw homosexuals as sick and in need of help, a court of law considered homosexuals criminal and locked them away in prison to protect others from them, and religious institutions perceived homosexuals as sinful.

Now that I have defined queerness, I will move on to discuss the three defining characteristics of the repression of queerness. The first characteristic is the lack of awareness of the existence of queerness under heteronormativity. Secondly, we are uncomfortable with the appearance of queerness in social life, which leads us to the third characteristic where we annihilate queerness through our violence. Our violence against queerness is expressed in two ways. One where we annihilate our own queerness within ourselves. The other way we express violence against queerness is through the annihilation of others’ queerness.

The first defining characteristic of the repression of queerness that I will elaborate upon is our lack of awareness of queerness in society. Emery when he was younger, for example, used to consider himself straight before he was aware of anything else other than heteronormativity: “When I was really young, 11, 12, 13, I don’t think I knew that I could identity any other way [other than straight], but I was like other people. I considered myself to be like other people who were straight.”²⁷ Emery could not define himself outside of heteronormativity, and he saw himself as straight like others who also seemed straight. Logan also expressed a similar thought concerning his lack of awareness of queerness in social life: “I got very little input from people

²⁶ Peter Adair, et al., *Word is Out*, New Yorker Films, 1978.

²⁷ Emery interview.

around me that things could be done in very different ways.”²⁸ This lack of awareness of queerness, particularly when we are young, allows for the perpetuation of heteronormativity as a social structure. If we are raised in a society where heteronormativity is highly visible and acceptable, while queerness is relegated to an unrecognized and hidden position, queerness has no place in society and it becomes difficult to realize it as a possibility.

Even when queerness is present, it often goes by unidentified, left unnamed. Taylor’s aunt, for example, was gay, but Taylor did not find out about it until much later in life because no one in her family talked about it:

I didn’t even find out my aunt was gay... until I was in my teens, but she always had a woman with her [laughs] at family functions and stuff like that. My parents never actually said anything until later, but I had started putting the pieces together.²⁹

Logan also had a similar experience with his uncle: “I later found out that my dad had a gay brother. Nobody ever told me that as a child.”³⁰ Since there is a lack of awareness surrounding queerness due to an oppressive heteronormative structure, we become uncomfortable with queerness, which is the next defining feature of the repression of queerness.

The repression of queerness would not be possible without our discomfort towards it. Since we have been socialized since birth to accept heteronormativity as an unquestioned normal and natural given,³¹ it leads to our discomfort towards the appearance of queerness in social life. Even when we believe queerness is not necessarily wrong, we are often still uncomfortable with it since we are not accustomed to anything else other than heteronormativity. Alex’s experiences

²⁸ Logan, personal interview, 7 Jan. 2015.

²⁹ Taylor interview.

³⁰ Logan interview.

³¹ Wittig, 11. Monique Wittig argues that the category of sex (man/woman) is taken to be a social given that belongs to a natural order.

growing up illustrate this point well. He did not believe being gay was necessarily wrong for other people, but he did not feel comfortable with it for himself: “I knew being gay wasn’t wrong, but I just never saw it as something that I had access to or that would be okay for me to do... It wasn’t something that I felt comfortable enough to even consider for myself... I didn’t perceive it as an option.”³² We are uncomfortable with queerness because we have not been allowed to seriously consider it as a possibility under heteronormativity. We may know it is not wrong, but our discomfort towards queerness overrides our ability to accept it since we do not know what to do with it. Sometimes, for example, when Alex comes out to others as trans, people have laughed due to their discomfort: “I’ve had a lot of people laugh, and I don’t think its laughing at me, like, ‘Oh my god, you’re such a freak.’ I think it’s just a really uncomfortable laugh cause they don’t know what to say.”³³ People are not necessarily derisively condemning Alex for being trans, but they do not know how to respond to him because they are uncomfortable with his queerness. This discomfort towards queerness leads to its active repression in society, bringing us to the last defining feature of the repression of queerness: its annihilation.

Because we are uncomfortable with the appearance of queerness, it leads to its annihilation where we attempt to eradicate queerness within ourselves and within others. One way queerness is annihilated that I would like to elaborate upon now is within ourselves, which is self-annihilation.³⁴ For instance, for a long time Jordan repressed any thought of her queerness

³² Alex interview.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Furthermore, when one annihilates or denies their own queerness, it is often an attempt to achieve or reestablish legitimacy under an oppressive system of heteronormativity that castigates queerness, thereby upholding heteronormativity’s repressive function of queerness. Annihilating one’s queerness not only reestablishes heteronormativity in its supposedly superior position in

because she was ashamed of it: “More or less for a stretch of 9, probably like 8 years, I suppressed any thought of gender identity... I was very ashamed of it.”³⁵ Jordan’s discomfort towards her queerness was defined by her feeling ashamed of it, which led her to actively suppress any thought of it. Jordan went on to say that, even after allowing herself to be aware of her queerness, she felt like her life depended on concealing it from others.³⁶ Nevertheless, after some time, she worked up the courage to come out to a handful of friends as genderqueer, and then later came out to them as transgender, but she still experienced a tremendous amount of anxiety and fear over it. Here, she explains why:

It terrified me so much to be labeled as something different... I was fairly self-loathing... Even once I moved toward coming out to those same people [who I came out to as genderqueer] again as transgender or transsexual, I still harbored a lot of anxiety and fear about the implications of doing that and having that be my outward social identity.³⁷

Jordan feared having an outwardly queer social identity because it terrified her to be considered different. Queerness makes us uncomfortable because it is repressed to produce a heteronormative social structure. Queerness is dreaded since it is different, too out of the ordinary, and, therefore, abnormal. One definition of the word “queer,” after all, is to be considered strange, odd, and eccentric.³⁸ Furthermore, our fear of others’ negative reactions is another significant characteristic of self-annihilation. For example, Jordan was afraid of the negative consequences for coming out as genderqueer and later trans.

society, but one also internalizes and naturalizes capitalism’s hierarchical divisions in society where the expression of queerness is subordinated and feared.

³⁵ Jordan, personal interview, 6 Jan. 2015.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Cherry Smith, “What is this Thing Called Queer?,” *The Material Queer*, Ed. Donald Morton, (Westview Press: Boulder, 1996), 277.

Another way queerness is annihilated in society is through overt acts of violence. When queerness appears on others or when it is seen in social life, we often attack it, even sometimes involuntarily, since we have internalized an intense fear of queerness. Physical violence against queerness is expressed in many ways, from brutal physical attacks like in Mora's case, to brutal dismemberment, strangling, shooting, videotaped beatings, rape, and murder.³⁹ However, violence against queerness is not predominately physically violent as we saw in April Mora's case. In fact, violence against queerness is more commonly verbally violent, but it serves the same overall purpose that physically violent acts have against queerness. Similar to physical acts of violence against queerness, verbal acts result in overt condemnation and disapproval. Since the widespread use of verbal violence creates hostile social environments where queerness is condemned, it results in the perpetuation of queerness' invisibility and marginalization.

For instance, while Logan was in choir class in eighth grade, the choir director made a homophobic joke in reference to a boy band that was popular at the time: "NSYNC, they're crap. They're a bunch of pretty boys. I think they're faggots, if you ask me."⁴⁰ The other guys in the class, agreeing with the choir director, reaffirmed the teacher's statement by repeating the word "faggots" in a dismissive tone. Logan became uncomfortable sitting in the class after this incident, particularly since he had already had some homosexual experiences by that time.⁴¹ The choir director and the boys in the class created a hostile social environment when they overtly condemned queerness. The condemnation of queerness resulted in Logan feeling uncomfortable and in his inability to speak up about his own homosexual experiences, thereby perpetuating queerness as an invisible social possibility and marginalizing the expression of queerness. The

³⁹ Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, 119.

⁴⁰ Logan interview.

⁴¹ Ibid.

marginalization of queerness thus results in its subordination within a hierarchical structure where heteronormativity dominates.

Verbal violence against queerness also is not necessarily always directed at one particular individual who is singled out as queer. Sometimes, it is directed at a particular subgroup of queers in general. Generalized verbal violence against queerness especially effects those who identify with their queerness where they feel the need to silence their own thoughts or to separate themselves from the situation to reestablish a sense of safety. For example, Taylor, who has at different times identified as bisexual and as a lesbian, had to listen to her male co-workers disparagingly refer to lesbians as “stupid dykes.”⁴² Another time, Taylor’s co-workers homogenized all lesbians into one group, inferring that they all acted like men when they said: “I don’t know why these lesbians have to act like they’re men.”⁴³ Even though these comments were not directed at Taylor, she was hurt by them, and, feeling angry, she excused herself from the situation. In another homophobic situation, Logan, who all his life has been in gay and queer sexual relationships, had a similar experience where gays were collectively referred to disparagingly while driving one of his co-workers home from work. When they passed by one of the popular gay clubs on the way home, she said, “Oh, that club is popping on Friday nights. All them gay people up in there. Oh, I don’t like them, man with a man, a woman with a woman.”⁴⁴ Logan did not say anything back to her and continued to drive. In both of these situations, Logan and Taylor found themselves in a hostile social situation where they felt it was necessary for them to stay silent about their own queerness or to separate themselves from the situation to regain or maintain a sense of safety.

⁴² Taylor interview.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Logan interview.

Verbal violence against queerness also often results in others undermining one's queerness. After some of my interview participants came out to others as queer, some typical responses included: "You're not gay. You just don't know what you really want."⁴⁵ "You're confused."⁴⁶ "It's a phase."⁴⁷ "That's not a real thing. You're delusional. You're a sexual assault victim that thinks that because you're broken."⁴⁸ "You're not a woman. That doesn't make any sense."⁴⁹ All of these statements have one thing in common: they imply that their queerness is not real, thereby invalidating their identity. Even though many of my interview participants responded that, overall, their coming out process was a positive one, the verbally violent comments that invalidated and condemned their queerness had a large impact on them that sometimes undermined their positive experiences.

Frequently, violence against queerness is neither verbally or physically violent. It can also be non-verbally violent where one's intense discomfort towards queerness leads them to gawk or stare, thereby silently condemning their queerness. Jordan, who was assigned male at birth and has recently transitioned from male to female, has experienced this type of non-verbal violence when she recently flew on an airplane. She said that a family on board the plane "gave me this death stare, like, 'You're going to burn in hell.'"⁵⁰ Here we see that violence against queerness does not have to be overtly physical or even verbal to have the same overall effect where queerness is condemned.

⁴⁵ Taylor interview.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Emery interview.

⁴⁹ Jordan interview.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

To summarize, heteronormativity, which is what one *must* do with their gender and sexuality, is an oppressive social structure in society that is idealized and upheld through the repression of queerness. Queerness is repressed since it is what one must *not* do with their gender and sexuality. Additionally, heteronormativity is presupposed and normalized since it is considered normal and right. Since everyone is assumed to be heteronormative, queerness is unrecognized and hidden. Because queerness is hidden, we come to fear it and become uncomfortable with its appearance in social life, leading us to feel the need to repress queerness. The repression of queerness is first defined by a lack of awareness of its existence. This lack of awareness of queerness causes us to feel uncomfortable with it, which is the second defining feature of the repression of queerness. Our discomfort towards queerness leads us to the last defining aspect of the repression of queerness: our impulse to annihilate queerness to resolve our discomfort towards it through violence, whether through physical, verbal, or non-verbal violence. I will now move on to the next section where I argue that the subordination of queerness in the workplace supports and maintains capitalism as a hierarchical structure.

1.3 Capitalism's Subordination of Queerness

According to theorist Miranda Joseph, social formations and social activities are mobilized for particular political and economic purposes.⁵¹ Monique Wittig has also made a similar argument regarding the category of sex: “masculine/feminine, male/female are the categories which... always belong to an economic, political, ideological order.”⁵²

Heteronormativity and its violence against queerness is one such social formation mobilized for the purpose of upholding hierarchal, capitalist relations. Because we have internalized the idea

⁵¹ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2002), xxxii.

⁵² Wittig, 2.

that queerness is wrong under heteronormative social structures, we subordinate queerness through repressive means. The subordination of queerness leads us to strip those who embody queerness in social life of their power, legitimacy, and authority, thus producing a hierarchical power differential where queerness is considered inappropriate and heteronormativity is considered right and acceptable. If one embodies queerness or if one is merely perceived to be queer, one is often subordinated, unable to speak about their experiences. Heteronormativity, however, is given more power and authority since it is validated and taken seriously in society.

This hierarchical power dynamic that plays out between heteronormativity and queerness enables the subordination of queerness in society. The subordination of queerness is any act where queerness is devalued in an attempt to control or regulate the way someone else expresses their gender and sexuality. The subordination of queerness is seen as reasonable since the unequal power differential found between heteronormativity and queerness is seen as natural, appropriate, and necessary. If we believe queerness is wrong, inappropriate, and something to be feared and also believe heteronormativity is right and reasonable, then we can also believe that it is necessary to subordinate queerness.

Furthermore, the subordination of queerness is prominent in the workplace, thereby supporting and justifying a hierarchical capitalistic work structure. When the expression of queerness is widely subordinated and feared in society, we are more easily controlled in our work environments under capitalism. Since our queerness is perceived to be inappropriate and wrong, queerness is constrained at work, thus justifying our subservience to those in power over us who prohibit our queerness. We are forced to abide to supposedly appropriate, heteronormative work standards that repress and subordinate the expression of our queerness under capitalism. Thus, workplaces that have internalized heteronormative work standards

cultivate a culture based in the fear of self-expression. Heteronormative workplaces force us to inhibit our queerness and uphold heteronormativity, which is considered appropriate and valid. Furthermore, if we uphold heteronormative expectations, we are rewarded in the workplace. If we go against heteronormative expectations by expressing our queerness, there is a chance we will be laughed at, seen differently, fired, teased, reprimanded, or violently threatened by those who have power over us in the workplace.⁵³

To clarify how this hierarchical power dynamic between heteronormativity and queerness plays out in the workplace, let's examine a few cases in particular. It was common in Taylor's work environment at a drug detection center for men to make heterosexist and gay bashing comments.⁵⁴ These comments were condoned and implicitly seen as a valid means of social interaction at work. In one particular incident, one of Taylor's co-workers, Mark, told Taylor, "Oh, I can turn you back straight with my big dick. You're not gay. You just haven't met the right guy yet."⁵⁵ In a work environment where heterosexist comments and behaviors are accepted and normalized, Taylor's identity as a lesbian was invalidated by another co-worker. Mark's comments made Taylor feel uncomfortable, but she was too afraid to tell her boss because she

⁵³ For example, the Movement Advancement Project affirms that 28 states have no laws against sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination. They estimate that 52 percent of LGBTQ people live in states without such protection. Some states include: Montana, Oklahoma, Ohio, Michigan, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arizona. See "Employment Non-Discrimination Laws," 25 Mar. 2015, Movement Advancement Project, 27 Mar. 2015 <http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/employment_non_discrimination_laws>. Furthermore, the criminalization of sex work in the United States dismisses sex work as a delegitimate means of survival, thereby justifying the policing of sex acts, particularly non-normative sexuality and gender. On a nightly basis in Washington D.C., for example, anyone who is perceived to be a sex worker is rounded up and arrested, particularly LGBT sex workers and transgender women of color. See Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock, 61.

⁵⁴ Taylor interview.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

did not want to be labeled as “that girl that claimed sexual harassment.”⁵⁶ Taylor felt if she told her boss about Mark she would be negatively labeled and further degraded by her other co-workers if they found out. Taylor also did not tell her boss because she felt he would have fired her for it. Fearing being reprimanded in a work environment that operates within a heteronormative framework that implicitly condones heterosexism, Taylor felt the need to constrain her knowledge of Mark’s heterosexist comments that demeaned her queerness.

Another example of queerness being subordinated in the workplace includes Alex’s experience working for a Christian organization. When Alex came out as gay within this organization that he worked for on a Christian college campus, he was immediately fired. Here is what he had to say about it:

I was surprised by how quickly it [being fired] happened. I told my leader [I was gay] on Friday and by Monday morning not only had I been fired but passwords were changed. I wasn’t allowed to talk to my kids anymore [who I worked with]. They were really sort of aggressive about it... For some reason, they all of a sudden didn’t trust me.⁵⁷

When Alex’s employers fired him, they told him being gay was wrong. Also, Alex’s friends who he worked with would no longer talk to him. Because Alex’s employers believed being gay was wrong, they no longer trusted him and so they fired him. They perceived Alex’s expression of his queerness as inappropriate, and they felt the need to repress it by firing Alex to maintain heteronormative work standards.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Alex interview.

⁵⁸ While many religious denominations engage in this pattern of discrimination against queerness, others are coming out in partial support of queerness. See, for example, Presbytery of the Cascades who voted to redefine marriage as a “commitment between two people,” thereby allowing same-sex marriages in their congregation. See Rachel Zoll, “Presbyterians Approve Gay Marriage in Constitution,” 21 Mar. 2015, *The Columbian*, 27 Mar. 2015

There is one last situation I would like to discuss where queerness was subordinated in the workplace to uphold heteronormative expectations. When Emery worked for a retail, corporate store, Emery's employers illegally discriminated against his gender expression, thereby subordinating his queerness. Emery's employers forced Emery, who was assigned female at birth but was passing as a man as far as the public was concerned, to use the women's restroom and also required him to put his legal name on his nametag. Emery's employers not only believed using the women's bathroom was more appropriate for Emery, but they also believed Emery should use his legal name. Emery's queerness was subordinated by his employers in an attempt to control his expression of his gender. They believed Emery's nametag should reflect his "true" gender, which they believed should be his legal name. Even though other employees were allowed to use their nicknames on their nametags, they specifically discriminated against Emery, forcing him to use his legally given name. Furthermore, Emery was forced by his employers to use the women's restroom, even though Emery said he "was passing as a man pretty much 100% of the time."⁵⁹ Emery soon confronted his employers and told them they were illegally discriminating against him. Here is what Emery had to say after he confronted his employers:

And they [my employers] were like, "We're going to talk to our lawyers." They did, and they came back and said, "Well the bathroom thing still stands but the nametag thing we can't do that. So you can have whatever name you want on your nametag." So I followed their rules on the bathroom thing for a couple of weeks, and then I just went back [to using the men's restroom]... [later] I quit and got a different job. All that stuff was really shitty, and I didn't want to work in retail. It was this big corporate bullshit thing.⁶⁰

<<http://www.columbian.com/news/2015/mar/21/presbyterians-approve-gay-marriage-in-constitution/>>.

⁵⁹ Emery interview.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

After Emery confronted his employers, they were required by law to allow Emery to use what name he preferred for his nametag, but they still forced Emery to use the women's bathroom, even though he was perceived to be a man by the public. Since Emery was forced to follow his employers' explicit heteronormative rules and expectations, he was prohibited from expressing his gender the way he wished to present himself, thereby subordinating his queerness.⁶¹

As I have illustrated through these examples of the subordination of queerness, queerness is often not considered proper nor appropriate in the workplace since it goes against the aims of heteronormative social structures that are socially enforced and normalized in society. Since our queerness is subordinated, we are more easily controlled within capitalist work environments that cultivate a culture of fear. Because we fear being reprimanded for expressing our queerness, we are forced to hide our queerness and uphold heteronormativity in the workplace. We are, essentially, implicitly coerced into repressing our queerness in work environments to avoid being fired, reprimanded, threatened, or harassed, thereby supporting and justifying a capitalistic hierarchical structure that subordinates our queerness to the demands of those in power over us.

⁶¹ Emery's experience with public bathrooms that segregate people by sex (female/male) is just one example of the problematic marginalization of queerness. Jody L. Herman points out that public spaces in the United States have "gender-segregated facilities, which serve to determine who is and is not allowed to use a particular space," such as locker rooms, jails and prisons, shelters, dressing rooms, and, of course, restrooms. Using data from an original survey conducted in Washington D.C. in 2008, she states that 70 percent of survey respondents who identified as transgender and gender non-conforming reported being denied access to public bathrooms and subjected to verbal and physical violence while using public bathrooms. See Herman's article for more: "Gendered Restrooms and Minority Stress: The Public Regulation of Gender and its Impact on Transgender People's Lives," *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy Social Policy*, 19.1 (2013): 65-6.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed how heteronormativity is an oppressive social structure that is idealized and seen as normal, right, and real. Heteronormative social structures, such as having children in opposite sex marital relationships, are validated and recognized, and we are often obligated to reproduce these social structures within ourselves. I then defined queerness as anything that is repressed by heteronormativity since it diverges from a heteronormative social structure. Examples include having a non-normative gender or sexual social identity, sex outside of marriage, and refusing to marry or have children. The repression of queerness has three defining characteristics. The first is our lack of awareness of queerness since it is unrecognized and hidden, thereby perpetuating heteronormativity. The second defining feature of the repression of queerness is our discomfort towards it since we have internalized the idea that queerness is wrong. The last defining feature of the repression of queerness is queerness' annihilation, which is expressed in two ways: violence against the self and violence against others. Violence against the self is where we may feel ashamed or uncomfortable with our own queerness and repress it. Violence against others' queerness is where we attack it either through physical, verbal, or non-verbal means. Furthermore, the devaluation of queerness justifies hierarchical capitalistic social relations in the workplace where queerness is subordinated to control or regulate our gender and sexual expression by those who hold power over us. Since queerness is perceived to be inappropriate, it is subordinated in the workplace, thereby upholding heteronormative social structures that are seen as valid and appropriate.

In the next chapter, "Hegel's Ethical Family and the Repression of Queerness," I will examine Hegel's ethical family, which is an objective manifestation of the dialectical movement. I argue that Hegel's ethical family is an oppressive social structure that upholds

heteronormativity since Hegel posits that parents have the ethical duty to discipline their children by repressing their children's queerness.

CHAPTER 2. HEGEL'S ETHICAL FAMILY AND THE REPRESSION OF QUEERNESS

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the oppressive social structure of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is oppressive because it dictates what one *must* do with one's gender and sexuality to be normal, right, and treated as real, such as having children or having sexual relations with the opposite sex. I then examined the repression of queerness, which refers to the social structures that dictate what one must *not* do with their gender and sexuality to avoid punishment or disapproval. Furthermore, heteronormative social structures support capitalism since they justify hierarchical social relations where queerness is subordinated.

In this chapter, I will first look at Hegel's dialectical movement and then his idea of the ethical family where he sees the movement of the dialectic concretely observed in society. Examining Hegel's ethical family, which restricts contingency, will lead us to a discussion of the repression of queerness in the family. In *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel describes how the unity of the ethical family is produced through the negation of what he calls our contingent nature.⁶² "Contingency," associated with crime and perversity, refers to one doing as one pleases without regard to one's ethical duties to society. The ethical family, where one's ethical duty to marry and have children is fulfilled, necessarily punishes and prohibits contingent phenomenon, which are outside of one's ethical duties. After examining Hegel's ethical family, I will explain how queerness can be considered to be a type of contingency that is repressed in the family. Before

⁶² G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 170 and 173.

elaborating upon the repression of queerness in the family, I will begin by exploring Hegel's dialectical movement in more depth to provide a better understanding of Hegel's ethical family.

2.2 Hegel's Dialectical Movement and the Ethical Family

Hegel's dialectical movement refers to a chain of concepts held together in an oppositional relationship with one another, striving to manifest unity.⁶³ This unity is achieved through the unification of oppositional categories. Opposition for Hegel is necessary for the development of universal ethical life, which brings about freedom, truth, unity, and wholeness. Concepts under a dialectical framework are seen as inherently prey to contradiction, generating conflict and strife that allow for new concepts that manifest greater freedom.⁶⁴ Unity is "a state of total integrity" where oppositional categories are unified.⁶⁵ Humanity, according to Hegel's dialectical thought, works towards unity where there is no sense of the alien, foreign, or other, which deters humanity from realizing unity.⁶⁶

Let us grasp Hegel's dialectical movement in more concrete terms. There are three general movements of the dialectical that ultimately manifest greater freedom. The first movement of the dialectic is the conceptualization of some notion or idea in society.⁶⁷ For example, there is the conceptualization of kindness where one is benevolent towards others. The second movement of the dialectic is the realization of this concept's inadequacy; it is the revelation that kindness is inadequate due to the realization that its opposite exists.⁶⁸ Here, we see the oppositional category of misconduct appear, which goes against the aims of kindness.

⁶³ J.O. Wisdom, "Hegel's Dialectic in Historical Philosophy," *Philosophy*, 15.59 (1940): 243.

⁶⁴ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 131.

⁶⁵ Taylor, 148-9.

⁶⁶ Taylor, 148.

⁶⁷ Taylor, 133.

⁶⁸ Taylor, 134.

This category of misconduct includes crime and wrongdoing. The second movement of the dialectic leads to conflict in society due to the realization that these contradictory, oppositional categories come to exist alongside each other. Using our example, misconduct comes to exist alongside kindness, bringing about conflict in society.

To resolve this conflict, the third movement of the dialectic incorporates the contradiction into a unified whole where both oppositional categories are held in a unified state.⁶⁹ In other words, misconduct continues to exist alongside kindness in an oppositional, yet unified, relationship to each other. To achieve unity one category cancels out the other by overcoming it.⁷⁰ Since one category is overcome to achieve oppositional unity, one category dominates over the other. For example, kindness dominates over misconduct, which is necessarily overcome without abolishing it to achieve freedom.⁷¹ Misconduct is maintained through its incorporation as part of a unity alongside kindness.⁷² In short, the unification of oppositional categories that are held in a contradictory relationship with one another, such as the unification of kindness and misconduct where misconduct is overcome, brings about greater freedom. Let's explain the contradictory relationship between kindness and misconduct in another way. To maintain kindness, misconduct is negated to overcome it. Misconduct, such as stealing or killing, is necessarily overcome through its negation. The negation of misconduct does not mean that it no longer exists. Misconduct is still embodied in society. Misconduct, however, is subordinated to kindness, allowing for ethical life in society. The contradictory categories of kindness and

⁶⁹ Taylor, 136.

⁷⁰ Taylor, 150-1.

⁷¹ Taylor, 152.

⁷² Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

misconduct are both maintained, unified into an integrated totality in society where kindness is dominated through its negation of misconduct.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that the dialectical movement depends upon differences to produce unity. The goal of the dialectical movement, as stated above, is not to obliterate differences, which are conceived as a particular, individual state of being that is one sided and partially false.⁷³ The goal is to hold differences in a state of tension with its opposite to produce unity. Philosopher Stephanie Adair expounds upon this point concerning Hegel's dialectic: "In order to have a unity, there must be differences that compose it, as a unity unifies different elements. If in unifying these elements they cease to be different from one another, however, then the whole is no longer a unity, as it no longer unifies anything—it is reduced instead to a simple singularity."⁷⁴ To produce unity or wholeness, the dialectical movement depends upon oppositional relationships that exceed their singularity. Kindness and misconduct, for example, are unified through their differential relationship with each other. They are incorporated into a unified whole where they depend upon each other to exist. If kindness and misconduct cease to be different from each other, then they are reduced to a singularity without any sense of differentiation between kindness and misconduct. Oppositional unity, therefore, is necessary to produce ethical life since it allows us to distinguish between kindness and misconduct.

According to Hegel, ethical life is an objective manifestation of the dialectical movement in the world that produces unity in society through the conceptualization of universal ethical duties that require the negation of contingency. Ethical duties are "the concept of freedom

⁷³ Wisdom, 245.

⁷⁴ Stephanie Adair, "Unity and Difference: A Critical Appraisal of Polarizing Gender Identities," *Hypatia*, 27.4 (2012): 847.

developed into the existing world” such as the laws and institutions of a society.⁷⁵ They are considered ethical because they are universally applicable in society and liberate the subject from their dependence on particular impulses or desires.⁷⁶ Because ethical duties are universally held, it leads to the necessary negation of contingency, or what can be considered one’s differences, which consists of the impulses and inclinations of the purely subjective will of the individual outside of one’s universal duties.

The negation of contingency to produce one’s universal ethical duties leads us to a discussion of contingency. Contingency in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* is associated with natural impulses, immaturity of thought, and arbitrariness; it is self-seeking, passionate, and shameful. Contingency, which is in opposition to a subject’s ethical duties or obligations in society, is associated with perversity and may give rise to wrong and crime.⁷⁷ It is to do as one pleases where one’s particularity is held in higher regard than one’s universal ethical duties to one’s community.⁷⁸ Contingency is also embodied in women and seducers who have particular inclinations and feelings.⁷⁹ Surrendering oneself to sensual impulses based in the “inwardness of love” is presented as a wrong.⁸⁰

When contingent feelings and desires of the subject are overcome through the embodiment of universal ethical duties, subjects gain their freedom, allowing for the unification of subjects within an ethical community. To produce Hegel’s ethical family based in “chastity

⁷⁵ Hegel, 154-5.

⁷⁶ Hegel, 157.

⁷⁷ Hegel, xxiv.

⁷⁸ Hegel, 38.

⁷⁹ Hegel, 168.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

and modesty,” there must be restraint against contingency where shame is present.⁸¹ When a subject disobeys their ethical duties, their position is one of contingency, which violates all that is moral and right. Punishment or retribution is required when this ethical code is broken, whether by the state or the family, to reestablish ethical life.⁸² Therefore, contingency is necessarily restricted to produce ethical life based in unity.

The ethical family is an example of an objective manifestation of ethical life that Hegel considers important to the embodiment of a subject’s universal ethical duties and to the realization of freedom and unity through the necessary negation of contingency. The ethical family, which is conceived as “a universal and enduring person,”⁸³ is characterized by three foundational features that make its universal existence in society possible: man and woman, marriage, and children. Man and woman in marriage become universal ethical subjects as husband and wife who have an ethical duty to raise, discipline, and educate children. Man and woman, through their universal ethical duties as husband and wife in marriage, are united as one person, allowing them to overcome and liberate themselves from their individual, contingent personalities and rising them above their natural, transient drives.⁸⁴ Their sex roles as husband and wife are defined by differential ethical duties that unite them and secures their universal character in society. Woman’s ethical duty to society revolves around her “substantial vocation in the family to imbue family piety.”⁸⁵ Man, on the other hand, have an ethical duty to “struggle

⁸¹ Hegel, 167.

⁸² Stephen Houlgate, “Introduction,” G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxv.

⁸³ Hegel, 171.

⁸⁴ Hegel, 164-5.

⁸⁵ Hegel, 169.

with the external world,” such as the state or public law.⁸⁶ The children conceived in marriage are the external, objective manifestation of their ethical unity.⁸⁷ Furthermore, a husband and wife have a universal ethical duty to discipline and educate their children to produce universal subjects capable of overcoming their contingent personalities. Now that I have briefly reviewed the three foundational features of the ethical family, I will now elaborate upon each one in more detail.

The first foundational feature of the ethical family is marriage. Marriage, like other manifestations of ethical life, is seen as an ethical duty of individual subjects that “restrains purely natural impulse,” raises one above “contingency of feeling and particular inclination,”⁸⁸ and allows one to act rationally “not as a particular individual but in accordance with ethical life.”⁸⁹ In other words, the ethical duty of marriage allows subjects to free themselves of their individual, particular personalities that are necessarily subordinated. Marriage, through surrendering oneself for the sake of unity,⁹⁰ allows subjects to enter a “unity of one with the other,”⁹¹ thereby allowing the couple to escape their isolation as individual subjects through their mutual recognition of each other in their universal ethical roles. Hegel argues that it is a subject’s obligation to participate in ethical duties like marriage since it allows for a society of individual subjects to overcome their contingent, finite existence through the realization of their universal ethical purpose, thereby allowing them to gain their freedom through their mutual recognition of each other. Through surrendering oneself for the other in marriage, one is no longer an isolated,

⁸⁶ Hegel, 168-9.

⁸⁷ Hegel, 172-3.

⁸⁸ Hegel, 167.

⁸⁹ Hegel, 39.

⁹⁰ Hegel, 167.

⁹¹ Hegel, 163.

finite subject alone in the world, but, rather, a member in an ethical relationship of marriage based in the consciousness of unity with another that allows them to recognize each other.⁹² Marriage, therefore, is the objective realization of Hegel's dialectical movement in the world that produces unity in society through its negation of contingent, individual persons. In marriage, man and woman are able to overcome their individual selves and able to recognize each other through the production of their universal ethical duties as husband and wife.

Man and woman united as husband and wife in marriage is the second foundational feature of the ethical family. Marriage, as stated above, is an obligatory and universal ethical duty that, Hegel argues, is the "natural sexual union" of man and woman.⁹³ In marriage, strictly conceived as monogamous in nature,⁹⁴ man and woman are united through their sexual differentiation, allowing them to become one entity. Hegel states: "the [marriage relationship's] objective source lies in the free consent of the persons, especially in their consent to make themselves *one person*."⁹⁵ Man, on the one hand, is the sex of free universality and conceptual thought; he is powerful and active; and his ethical life is based in the political state where he struggles with the external world and regulates his actions through the demands of universal concerns, such as philosophy, science, and art.⁹⁶ Woman, as man's opposite, is the contingent sex who embodies concrete individuality and feeling; she is passive and subjective.⁹⁷ Hegel argues that woman "has her substantial vocation in the family" where she regulate[s her] actions

⁹² Hegel, 162.

⁹³ Hegel, 163.

⁹⁴ Hegel, 169.

⁹⁵ Hegel, 164.

⁹⁶ Hegel, 168-9.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

not by the demands of universality but by contingent inclinations and opinions.”⁹⁸ Woman’s ethical life, therefore, is grounded in the family and in her contingent inclinations and opinions.

Regardless of man and woman’s differential sex roles in marriage, both sexes must surrender their distinct, individual personalities to uptake their universal ethical duty as husband and wife.⁹⁹ The overcoming of man and woman’s individual personalities allows for their unity in marriage where they have differential ethical duties. Man, in marriage, becomes the head of the family as the husband, attending to his ethical duty to secure assets and resources in the external world to provide for the needs of his family.¹⁰⁰ Woman, regarded as incapable of a universal faculty such as man’s, rests on a plane of feeling and has an ethical disposition to uphold family piety in her role as wife.¹⁰¹

The third foundational feature of the ethical family involves the husband and wife’s children who embody their union fully and objectively, since the children’s existence is the result of their combined substance.¹⁰² Husband and wife, as the children’s parents, have the universal ethical duty to educate and discipline their children to bring about their moral character where they are instilled with ethical principles through the overcoming of their arbitrary will.¹⁰³ This arbitrariness, which is a child’s immediate will, is defined as “a freedom still in the toils of nature” where one acts on “immediate fancies and caprices, rather than on reasons and ideas.”¹⁰⁴ Because the children’s arbitrary will is in opposition to their universal ethical duties, it must be overcome. The parent’s punishment and education of their children breaks their self-will, thereby

⁹⁸ Hegel, 169.

⁹⁹ Hegel, 169-70.

¹⁰⁰ Hegel, 171.

¹⁰¹ Hegel, 169.

¹⁰² Hegel, 172-3.

¹⁰³ Hegel, 173-4.

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, 173.

eradicating what is merely sensuous and natural within them and lifting them into universal ethical life.¹⁰⁵ The children's subordination, which involves the negation of their contingency by their parents, produces a longing to grow up and become universal in character where they are able to recognize their superiority as adults.¹⁰⁶ Children, subordinated by man and woman in their universal ethical roles as husband and wife, are "held in check by the power of universality."¹⁰⁷ Man and woman's universal ethical roles as husband and wife keep children in line through the negation of their contingency that must be subordinated to reproduce the ethical family. Children's subordination, therefore, is what maintains and sustains the dialectical movement in its objective sense within the ethical family and within wider society.

2.3 Repressing Queerness in the Family

Hegel's conceptualization of the negation of children's contingent nature to produce the ethical family is important to consider when discussing the repression of queerness in today's society. To reiterate, contingency is surrendering oneself to sensual impulses, self-gratification, and impulsive feelings.¹⁰⁸ Contingency is wrong because it is to do as one pleases without regard to one's universal ethical duties,¹⁰⁹ and, therefore, it is necessarily prohibited and restricted. The role of the ethical family is to prohibit contingency to reestablish ethical life.

While the image of the family "projects a model of equality" that "protects and balances the interests of all its members," it, in actuality, lays "the foundation for many social

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hegel, 173-4.

¹⁰⁷ Hegel, 182.

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, 168.

¹⁰⁹ Hegel, 38.

hierarchies.”¹¹⁰ First, parents are expected to overcome their own contingent nature through their union in marriage where they are expected to subordinate their gender and sexual expression by abiding to gender and sexual norms appropriate to their sex. Woman, for example, is expected to nurture her children and act in a feminine, subservient manner. Man, on the other hand, dominates over his wife and children, and he, as a paternalistic figure, is expected to provide for his family and protect them. Since it is the parents’ obligatory social function to discipline their children to overcome their contingent nature, parents are mandated, often through societal pressure and the internalization of the legitimacy of the ethical family, to break their children’s self-will. Within Hegel’s ethical family, parents are given the right to dominate over their children, which establishes and reproduces hierarchical relationships within society. To avoid societal disapproval and shame, parents or guardians use their right to punish and discipline their children to instill within their children the ethical principles of their society, thereby realizing acceptance and status within their community.

In line with Hegel’s notion of contingency, queerness can be considered to be a type of contingency that is necessarily overcome to produce the ethical family. Since society, for Hegel, is grounded in heteronormative social structures, such as the ethical family that is necessarily heteronormative (one man and one woman should be married and raising children together), queerness goes against the universally accepted form of social life since it is one’s ethical duty to be heteronormative to maintain cohesion and unity. Queerness is a type of contingency, and is considered wrong, because it disregards heteronormative social structures. To justify a society based on the ethical family, queerness is repressed in the family to uphold heteronormative social

¹¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” *Hypatia*, 13.3 (1998): 64.

structures. If a child steps outside of their obligatory ethical duty to be heteronormative, they have broken their ethical duty to society, and the family necessarily prohibits and censors their queerness to reestablish heteronormativity in its universal position.

In this section of the paper, I will show how heteronormative social structures within the family negate queerness, thereby naturalizing hierarchal, repressive social relations. I will first examine how heteronormative sexuality is reinforced in the family by parents or guardians who repress their children's queerness. Then, I will look at how heteronormative gender roles are reinforced through repression in the family. Lastly, I will examine parents' or guardians' negative reactions to their children coming out to convey how parents often perceive their children's queerness as a threat to their child's and the ethical family's standing in the community.

Now that I have briefly outlined this section, I will turn my attention to heteronormative sexuality in the family. Heteronormative sexuality is reinforced in the family through the prohibition of children's queerness, thus normalizing hierarchical social relations. When Taylor was in 5th or 6th grade, for example, she had a best friend who she hung out with frequently. Her mother, who must have noticed how much time her daughter was spending with this other girl, told her, "Oh, I hope you don't like her. It's not okay to like girls."¹¹¹ Although lesbianism was unnamed by her mother, the comment Taylor's mother voiced to her daughter presented lesbianism as a type of wrong, thus establishing and normalizing a hierarchical relationship between heteronormativity and queerness. Taylor's mother also implied that it is not something she wants for her daughter, which attempted to prohibit Taylor from embodying queerness. This

¹¹¹ Taylor interview.

prohibition of queerness reestablished heteronormativity within the family as the right way of being over, and against, queerness.

Emery had a comparable experience with his mother when he was younger. When Emery was still considered to be a girl, she¹¹² became interested in another girl for the first time when she was 7 or 8 years old. However, when Emery told her mother how much she liked lying in bed with and holding her friend, Jamie, her mother became uncomfortable and may have discouraged her daughter from doing so:

[S]he was like, “Oh, maybe you shouldn’t do that.” I just remember she had this palpable discomfort. I don’t know if it’s something she said. I had this interest in my friend Jamie, and I just really liked lying in bed with her and holding her, and I was telling my mom all about it. And my mom was like, “Uh, okay.” I just remember she was uncomfortable, and I didn’t understand why because it just seemed like a normal thing to me.¹¹³

Here we see again, as we saw with Taylor’s mother, parents’ discouragement of their child’s queerness. Because Emery’s mother was intensely uncomfortable with her daughter’s sexual expression and her affection for another girl, she conveyed her disapproval to Emery.

Consequently, Emery’s mother, whether consciously or not, created an environment where queerness was presented as a wrong. Her discomfort communicated to Emery that Emery’s association with another girl who she enjoyed lying in bed with should not be done, a repressive act that discouraged Emery’s queerness.

Both Taylor and Emery’s mothers, whether through their discomfort or their overt disapproval, prohibited their child’s queerness by overcoming their child’s way of thinking,

¹¹² Because Emery was raised to be a girl when he was younger, I use the pronouns “she” and “her” to denote his social identity as a girl, even though he now prefers male pronouns. I will switch gender pronouns when referring to Emery in the past where I will use “she” or “her” or in the present where I will use “he” or “him.”

¹¹³ Emery interview.

laying a foundation that attempted to establish heteronormativity within their children. Emery and Taylor did not understand their mothers' reactions since they did not consider their behavior to be out of the ordinary. Taylor stated that she thought her mother's statement was weird while Emery said he did not understand his mother's discomfort.¹¹⁴ This way of thinking could be considered to be what Hegel refers to as a child's arbitrary self-will still "in the toils of nature," where children still have not internalized a society's ethical principles.¹¹⁵ These repressive experiences instilled in Emery and Taylor a memory of their mothers' discomfort and disapproval: Emery remembers his mother's "palpable discomfort" while Taylor remembers her mother telling her, "It's not okay to like girls."¹¹⁶ Their mothers' reactions instilled in them a sense of what is and is not appropriate to say or do with their gender and sexuality, thus establishing hierarchical social relations where queerness is subordinated to heteronormativity.

Parents or guardians also often repress their children's queerness to reinforce heteronormative gender roles. For instance, Alex's mother was very strict when it came to her¹¹⁷ daughter's hair, particularly her leg, armpit, and facial hair. When Alex was young, beginning when she was 13, her mother was really intense about getting her daughter's upper lip regularly waxed. Later, when Alex was more androgynous and "dykey,"¹¹⁸ her mother and aunt, who both raised her, were fine with her having short hair and being "super dykey," as long as she still dressed appropriately for weddings. When Alex began to identify as trans and stopped shaving, her mother was uncomfortable with it and told her it was disgusting. Years later, Alex's mother

¹¹⁴ Taylor and Emery interview.

¹¹⁵ Hegel, 173.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ I refer to Alex here in this paragraph with the pronouns "she" and "her" since I refer to him in the past where he identified as a woman. He now identifies as transmasculine, but he still identifies with his identity as a woman. However, he does not identify as a man either.

¹¹⁸ Alex interview.

told Alex it was disgusting for women to have leg hair when Alex started growing her hair out. Alex felt that her mother's comment was a very clear form of shaming.¹¹⁹ Alex's mother and aunt also had certain expectations for how they wanted Alex to present herself:

[T]hey wanted me to be feminine. They wanted me to have no facial hair. They wanted me to be thin. They wanted me to dress femininely... I think they would have pushed back if I had tried to dress more masculine. I was supposed to shave my legs. I was supposed to shave my armpits, and if I hadn't my mom would have been really hard on me.¹²⁰

Alex knew that if she went against her mother's wishes, her mother would have been hard on her. Alex said that this made things more difficult for her to be more "dykey," and she always experienced a lot of anxiety because of these expectations to be a woman.¹²¹ Alex's mother and aunt attempted to regulate Alex's outward social identity to conform to heteronormative gender expectations for a woman, thereby negating his queerness. Since he was assigned female at birth, Alex's queerness as a transmasculine person was deterred to reinforce and naturalize heteronormative feminine expectations in its supposedly superior position in society. Breaking his ethical duty to his family to be heteronormative, Alex's mother shamed him, a repressive act that attempted to prohibit his queerness, which led to a lot of anxiety on Alex's part. Consequently, his mother's shaming set up a social relation where queerness was relegated to heteronormativity, thereby normalizing queerness as abnormal and wrong.

Logan also experienced the repression of his gender expression in the family when his mother told her son that his queer interests were "sick" and "creepy."¹²² When Logan was in college, his mother made some snide, disapproving remarks in response to her son's interest in

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Logan interview.

David Bowie and in Logan's presentation of himself in a gender non-normative way. Logan had a picture of David Bowie, an English singer and popular gay icon, whom Logan identified with, on his wall. Logan described the picture as Bowie's glam phase where "his eyebrows were shaved off and he had this makeup on, bright red hair, and he was wearing skin tight shimmering clothes." Logan's mother saw the picture and told him, "Oh, so creepy. I can't believe you're into somebody so sick." His mother also referred to Logan as sick and creepy a few times when he dressed in a gender nonconforming way, such as wearing eyeliner, or when she found out that he went to gay bars in drag.¹²³ Logan's mother described her son's queerness as "creepy" and "sick,"¹²⁴ thereby subordinating his queerness in an attempt to uphold heteronormativity.

Additionally, parents and guardians often feel obligated to repress their children's queerness because of societal pressure, as well as the need to repress children's queerness to protect their children's wellbeing and safety. Logan's parents, for example, were concerned with other people's perceptions of their preadolescent son who often insisted on wearing a pointed witch's hat everywhere he went and who also wore many gender bending outfits, such as wearing women's clothes and nylon pantyhose. His parents attempted to prevent him from wearing these clothes, and, "It was a constant struggle for my parents... They would tell me I couldn't wear the hat to school."¹²⁵ The way Logan dressed was a constant struggle since he was always compromising with his parents. Because of these experiences with his parents and because he was aware that the way he dressed was different from other people, Logan learned how he could and could not dress in front of strangers or certain family members. Because Logan's parents' were worried about other people's perceptions of the way Logan presented

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Logan interview.

himself, they attempted to repress his queerness to avoid societal disapproval. Logan's parents also felt obligated to repress Logan's queerness since they knew their son would be respected and approved of if he was perceived as heteronormative.

Now that I have elaborated upon the family's repression of queerness in their children, I will now move on to examine parents' and guardians' negative reactions to their children coming out to them where they perceive their children's queerness as a threat. Since heteronormativity is naturalized and internalized as right, a child coming out as queer is not only perceived as a threat to their child's social standing and well-being in society but also seen as a threat to their family's social standing. As Kelly Oliver points out in her examination of women's subordination in society, the only family that is valued is the heteronormative family, and "[a]ny alternative to the heterosexual nuclear family is seen as a threat to the family and, as a consequence, a threat to society."¹²⁶ She goes on to say that:

Women who choose not to have children are seen as incomplete and suspicious characters. Women who choose sexual relations with other women rather than men threaten the notion of community that demands that women provide emotional and domestic support for men... [W]ithin the rhetoric of family values, they, like single mothers and homosexuals in general, threaten a decline in morals...¹²⁷

Here, Oliver argues that women's queerness (being a single mother, women's refusal to marry, women's refusal to have sexual relations with men, and women's preference to have sexual relations with other women) disrupts the heteronormative family as a functional system where women are supposed to support and nurture the family. Likewise, a child coming out to their family as gender or sexually non-normative is often negatively received since this act disrupts

¹²⁶ Kelly Oliver, "Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," *Hypatia*, 11.1 (1996): 86.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

the proper functioning of the family, and it is seen as a threat to heteronormativity as a social structure.

For example, Alex's mother and father both, at first, reacted negatively to Alex's coming out. Alex's father, for example, reacted negatively to his coming out as trans. When they were emailing back and forth about it, Alex's father blamed himself for Alex's queerness, saying, "Oh, it's probably my fault. I wasn't around."¹²⁸ Here, we see that Alex's father interpreted Alex's queerness as an abnormality due to supposedly abnormal family conditions. Alex's father blamed himself for not upholding his ethical duty as a father to be around his daughter. Perhaps Alex's father thought if he were around more, he could have established a typical heteronormative father-daughter bond where his daughter could have turned out "normal." Alex's father interpreted his lack of engagement with his daughter as a threat to his daughter's normative gender as a feminine subject. Alex's mother also reacted negatively at first to Alex's transition process. She was really confused when Alex made the transition from being a dyke to being transmasculine, and they had some negative interactions. In reference to his mother, Alex said that, "It was much harder for at least my mom. She didn't understand why I didn't want to wear dresses anymore. It just didn't make sense to her."¹²⁹ Alex's mother could not understand why Alex did not want to enact a feminine social identity where he wore dresses. Alex's mother also, as stated above, had a difficult time when Alex stopped shaving since she thought it was disgusting. Since she could not understand Alex's queerness and she thought of it as disgusting, she may have perceived Alex's queerness as an unnecessary threat to her own and Alex's social standing in society.

¹²⁸ Alex interview.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Parents repress their children's queerness in a variety of ways, whether unconsciously or not, since queerness is thought to be a threat to the well-being of the heteronormative family, which is considered to be the only proper family structure in society. Parents' emotional manipulation, even if unconsciously used, is another method that represses their children's queerness. Logan's mother, for example, cried a couple of times after he came out to her as gay. She really did not understand her son's gay identity at the time, and her negative emotional response made things more difficult for her son. Logan often felt he had to hide his queerness from his family to keep tensions within the family down.¹³⁰ Also, even though Jordan has her mother's support now, when she first came out to her mother as a transsexual woman, Jordan's mother went through a depressive period. Jordan described her mother as going through a grieving process since she was experiencing the loss of her son. She was angry and in denial about her daughter's transsexuality, even going so far as wanting Jordan to take tests to find out if Jordan's queerness was real or not. She also told Jordan that she may not ever be able to go back to work and even told Jordan that she had to get on multiple anxiety medications just to function in daily life because of her daughter's queerness.¹³¹ Here, Jordan's mother, even if unconsciously or unintentionally, used emotional manipulation in an attempt to get her daughter to question her desire to transition. Jordan's mother perceived her daughter's transsexuality as a threat to her own well-being.

In summary, Hegel's idea of the ethical family is still pertinent to today's society where children's queerness is a type of contingency that is repressed to produce the ethical family where it is one's social obligation to uphold heteronormative social structures. Heteronormative

¹³⁰ Logan interview.

¹³¹ Jordan interview.

gender roles and sexuality are obligatory, even if only by convention, since they are perceived as the only valid way to achieve social approval and status. I have also explained how the repression of queerness in the family normalizes hierarchical social relations within children where we internalize heteronormative social structures as the right way to be over, and against, queerness.

In the next chapter, I will offer a solution to the problem of the repression of queerness in society. In short, everyone embodies queerness to varying degrees in one way or another; therefore, everyone is queer, and we all have experienced the repression of our queerness, which has the political function to isolate us from each other so that we are dependent on capitalistic social structures to survive. Through recognizing each other's queerness without the impulse to repress it, I believe we not only establish a better understanding of what has been done to us by an oppressive social system that separates us, but we can also realize our need for each other as opposed to relying on a capitalistic system for our needs. By recognizing each other's queerness without repressing it, we can achieve connection and solidarity and realize a society that can no longer support a capitalistic system based in the repression and subordination of our queerness.

CHAPTER 3. QUEER SOLIDARITY

How can we tear down the electrified barbed wire that has been placed between us to keep us separated, fearful, and pitted against each other?... [This question] can only be answered when we begin to organize together, ready to struggle on each other's behalf. Understanding each other will compel us as honest, caring people to fight each other's oppression as though it was our own.

—Leslie Feinberg¹³²

3.1 Introduction

Leslie Feinberg, a trans activist committed to defending “the right of individuals to express and define their sex and gender,”¹³³ first poses a question in the above quote: how can we tear down heteronormative social structures in an oppressive society that pits one against the other through the repression of our queerness? Then, in the next sentence, Feinberg answers this question: we must be “ready to struggle on each other's behalf;” that is, we must be compelled to take on each other's oppression as our own through our efforts to understand one another. We must understand that we all face the repression of our queerness in one way or another, and, only through our collective solidarity will we be able to stop the attacks against queerness. This effort towards solidarity is not easy nor simple, but it must be done if we want to create a world where heteronormative oppression and the repression of queerness are not institutionalized. As Ti-Grace Atkinson, an influential second wave feminist philosopher and artist, has argued: “we must help each other... alliances are very, very hard, but I think they must be done.”¹³⁴ In the current dominate capitalist structure, which is dependent on our isolation, separation, and

¹³² Leslie Feinberg, *Trans Liberation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 12.

¹³³ Feinberg, 3.

¹³⁴ Luce Guilbeault, Nicole Brossard, and Margaret Wescott, *Some American Feminists*, Women Make Movies, 1997.

division to support hierarchical social relations, alliances are very difficult to maintain. However, our very survival is dependent upon us coming together in a way that is not antagonistic towards each other's queerness. Furthermore, we must be able to connect our struggles in meaningful ways. When we see that our struggles under an oppressive system of heteronormativity are integrally connected to one another, we will realize that we are, in fact, fighting for our own freedom.

In this chapter, I will first examine heteronormativity as a form of conformity that supports and justifies capitalism. I argue that heteronormative conformity prevents our solidarity since we are forced to deny the expression of our queerness. Denying our queerness results in our isolation and separation from others, which is necessary under capitalism. Then, in the next section, I will elaborate upon how queer solidarity can be achieved even under an oppressive capitalistic system that not only demands us to hide our queerness but also perpetuates the use of division and competitive social relations dependent upon a hierarchical social structure.

One area where we can discover how to achieve queer solidarity is by examining historical movements where solidarity was capable of transforming society in dramatic ways, even while their efforts were unevenly accomplished. I will limit my analysis to a few second wave feminists in the United States, particularly those active in lesbian or trans liberation, such as Leslie Feinberg and Sarah Lucia Hoagland. I focus on second wave feminists because they witnessed the remarkable impact that second wave feminism had on society as women's roles were dramatically changing, largely due to their efforts. Also, feminists during the second wave had time to reflect back and evaluate their participation in solidarity movements. Their understanding of what effective participation in a solidarity movement looks like and what

breaks solidarity down will help point us towards understanding how to realize queer solidarity. I will now move on to elaborate upon heteronormativity as a form of isolation.

3.2 Heteronormative Conformity as a Form of Isolation

As I have stated previously, everyone is queer in one way or another since we all have transgressed the strict boundaries of heteronormativity that discourage us from enacting our queerness. For example, we may have wished to not marry or not have children, but felt pressured to do so. Or maybe we failed or refused to date and have sexual, romantic experiences with the opposite sex when we were expected to do so. Moreover, even when we participated in heteronormative activities, such as the ones described above, we may not have enjoyed our involvement in those activities and only participated to achieve a sense of normalcy or to be accepted by others. Furthermore, maybe we found joy in our queerness but were discouraged from expressing it. For instance, we may have liked to play with dolls or ride motorcycles and dress in high heels or suits but were told not to because of our assigned sex and gender. Or we might have fantasized about being with someone of the same sex or being the opposite sex but feared society's criticism or disapproval. Because none of us can fit these narrow heteronormative gender and sexual social expectations, we are all forced to repress our queerness. We know if we do not repress our queerness, we will be "shamed, threatened, beaten, and terrorized into conforming" to heteronormativity.¹³⁵ There is no doubt that it is easier to conform, to stop fighting the current that pulls us away from ourselves and our queerness, but it is a death sentence for many of us since gender and sexual conformity requires us to deny the full expression of ourselves.

¹³⁵ Feinberg, 33.

Because we are expected to conform to heteronormative social structures, we are often forced to deny who we are in society. Logan, for instance, has always felt different from others in a world that perpetuates and enforces heteronormativity, as many of us have felt at one time or another. Because he felt different from heteronormativity, which is upheld as the only valid way of being, Logan could never fully express or share himself. He knew people committed to a heteronormative belief system would not be able to understand him:

All my life I've had some sense that I didn't fit in, in multiple ways. Whatever I was doing or feeling or thinking there was always some sense that I couldn't share everything... Like walking around with this constant assumption that I can't share myself because it's going to be too weird or people aren't going to understand it.¹³⁶

Logan has never been able to feel completely a part of society since he does not fit into a heteronormative social structure that strictly binds him. Heteronormativity as an assumed fact of social life has restricted his self-expression. Logan felt if he expressed his differences from heteronormativity, he would have been thought of as weird or incomprehensible to others. Because heteronormativity is assumed in social life to be the normal, natural way of being, Logan is often uncomfortable expressing his queerness in public, blocking him from being able to express his sexuality and gender fully:

By no means do I feel comfortable expressing my sexuality in public or in mixed, unknown company. I definitely would not feel comfortable holding hands with a man or a masculine presenting person on Main Street in my small hometown... Since coming out, I don't feel completely comfortable in all company.¹³⁷

Logan knows, as we all know, that if he presents himself in a way that goes against heteronormativity, such as holding hands with another man or masculine presenting person, he will feel uncomfortable. He knows others will respond to his expression of queerness with

¹³⁶ Logan interview.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

discomfort, which can lead people to glare at him or use verbal or physical violence against him to reestablish heteronormativity in its supposedly rightful place. We are uncomfortable with queerness because it questions heteronormativity, which we have relied upon all our lives to construct the way we present ourselves in public. Even if in our private lives where we may be able to express our queerness more fully, we are still uncomfortable with queerness in public life because we do not know how to handle it. We do not know how to handle other's queerness since we have internalized the idea that it is wrong. We do not know what to do with queerness nor how to interact with it since heteronormativity has been reinforced as the only acceptable and visible social possibility. Since we do not know how to handle queerness and have internalized the idea that it is wrong, we become uncomfortable with it and repress it.

The repression of each other's queerness not only leads us to deny our expression of ourselves. It also leads us to consider ourselves to be abnormal and unusual in comparison to heteronormative social structures. For example, at work Emery has often felt weird and different in comparison to his co-workers:

I think I'm kind of weird so I feel like when I'm in the workplace a lot of times I'm not sure how weird to be. I always take it a step at a time. Sometimes you can be more yourself with certain co-workers than others, but usually I'm pretty private. I don't want people to know much about me at my workplace because I am different in a lot of ways and just kind of weird.¹³⁸

Emery is aware of his differences from heteronormativity at his workplace, which made it difficult for Emery to express himself since he did not want others to think he was too weird or different. Because heteronormativity is normalized and taken for granted, Emery is often in a position where he considers himself different or unusual from others around him. Because he feels different from heteronormative social structures where difference is considered to be weird,

¹³⁸ Emery interview.

he has become very private about his differences. The idea that queerness is weird or abnormal leads to self-isolation where one is forced to hide their differences from heteronormativity to prevent their subordination.

In an oppressive heteronormative society, those parts of us that do not align with heteronormativity are necessarily repressed from social life, particularly mainstream social life. Our queerness, however, is not eradicated. Rather, it becomes hidden, forced underground. For Emery and Logan, their queerness is often concealed from social life, but it is not destroyed. They still go against the expectations of heteronormativity in their lives. However, Emery and Logan, like all of us, are often forced to conceal their queerness in particular situations, such as in public or in the workplace, to avoid condemnation and disapproval. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that queerness includes a wide range of other gender and sexual activities. For instance, some other examples of queerness that are hidden include those who receive an abortion and often feel they have to hide it from others so they will not be shamed. Those who are sexually assaulted are also often forced to hide it to avoid victim blaming. Lastly, sex work is explicitly condemned and criminalized by the state, and so it is forced underground. What connects all of these examples of queerness together is their shared condemnation in a society where heteronormative social structures are idealized over, and against, queerness. The idealization of heteronormativity leads to the repression of queerness where the expression of queerness is hidden and isolated off from social life.

Heteronormative social structures that force us to conform to gender and sexual social norms not only lead to our inability to express our personal experiences and our queerness. Heteronormative social structures also lead to our inability to connect with one another. Because we fear our differences from each other we are forced to distance ourselves into particular

subcultures to survive. Sometimes we are even forced to isolate our queerness off altogether from the rest of society because our queerness is so divisive or unaccepted. Most of my interview participants, for instance, expressed their need to distance themselves from particular people or groups to keep themselves safe. Taylor, for example, distanced herself from some of her friends who she felt were homophobic. She stopped talking to them, ending all communication with them, and never came out to them. Taylor distanced herself from anyone who she felt would react negatively to her coming out so she would not have to deal with it.¹³⁹ In a world where heteronormative social structures are idealized and upheld over, and against, queerness, Taylor was forced to distance herself from friends who outwardly viewed heteronormativity as the only proper way of being. She knew if she maintained her friendships with some of these friends, she probably would have experienced homophobic violence or disapproval when they found out she was in a relationship with another woman. She ended these relationships to protect herself, which is not an uncommon tactic of survival under capitalism since separation and isolation become necessary to avoid violence and condemnation.

Logan, similar to Taylor's experience, said he distanced himself from people who were homophobic to reduce his risk of harm: "Generally speaking, I don't make friends with people who are highly homophobic. So I've tended to, in every aspect of my life, gravitate towards people who would be okay with that."¹⁴⁰ Logan also expressed that one reason why he "got by relatively unscathed" is because he tended to isolate himself from those who were more openly homophobic. He tended to surround himself with people who he felt would be more accepting, intentionally staying out of certain social situations that he felt threatened his safety. Logan

¹³⁹ Taylor interview.

¹⁴⁰ Logan interview.

stated that this was one way that he protected himself against homophobic violence.¹⁴¹ In a society that values heteronormativity over, and against, queerness, Logan was forced to separate himself from many aspects of social life because of his differences from heteronormativity.

Leslie Feinberg has said that we have been “isolated by difference in a society that demand[s] conformity.”¹⁴² We become isolated from each other because our unavoidable differences from a heteronormative narrative must be hidden to avoid being ignored, threatened, beaten, fired, evicted from our homes, or thrown into jail.¹⁴³ When we do not conform to oppressive social structures like heteronormativity, we face repression, whether from the police, the courts, and the prisons or in our schools, workplace, and in the family. Under oppressive social structures that present heteronormativity as right and natural, queerness is criminalized. Any expression of queerness, which is an indispensable part of who we all are, is necessarily isolated, cut off from heteronormative social life. Any transgression from heteronormativity leads us to be viewed as “guilty of the same crime: queerness.”¹⁴⁴

Our queerness is criminalized and hidden because queerness’ criminalization supports and justifies a capitalist system. Capitalism requires hierarchical relations where some are given more power and authority over others who are subordinated. Those whose queerness is subordinated face harsher economic and sociopolitical conditions such as lower wages, dangerous or unsupportive workplaces, poor environmental conditions like pollution or contaminated drinking water, and health disparities.¹⁴⁵ Capitalism stabilizes hierarchical relations

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Feinberg, 55.

¹⁴³ Feinberg, 97.

¹⁴⁴ Feinberg, 98.

¹⁴⁵ For example, LGBTQ people face higher than average rates of uninsured health care, denial of health services because of their gender and sexual expression, and, in some instances, face

by cultivating the idea that those who are subordinated are inferior, thus justifying their exploited, impoverished condition. Those who embody queerness, for instance, are considered inferior and their queerness is perceived to be a type of wrong, therefore justifying their subordination and impoverishment in society. Impoverishment under capitalism produces the need to escape such conditions, and we are told the only way to escape is through overcoming our supposed inferiority. For instance, queerness must be overcome to escape a sense of inferiority and to achieve legitimacy. We also must compete with one another to climb the hierarchical ladder where our legitimacy and freedom from impoverishment are found. To be competitive in a heteronormative world, we must repress our queerness and reproduce heteronormativity. This upward, hierarchical movement requires the subordination of those below us. The idea that we must compete with each other to obtain our legitimacy and freedom produces hierarchical divisions where we attack, look down upon, and condemn those we perceive to be below us, such as those who embody queerness or who are perceived to be queer, thus separating us from each other and deterring solidarity. Our separation and isolation from each other perpetuates the need to rely on capitalism to survive. Instead of relying on each other to build a society free from oppression, we are caught up in a system that requires us to maintain oppressive social structures, such as heteronormativity, to exist.

Because we fear the criminalization of our queerness in wider society where heteronormativity is normalized and accepted, we are separated from each other under capitalism, forced to isolate ourselves into subcultures where our queerness is more accepted.

violent, discriminatory health care providers. See Travis Franklin Chance, “‘Going to Pieces’ over LGBT Health Disparities: How an Amended Affordable Care Act Could Cure the Discrimination that Ails the LGBT Community,” *Journal of Health Care Law & Policy*, 16.2 (2013): 375. Also, Burns and Krehely, point out that discriminatory workplaces “pose a real and immediate threat to the economic security of gay and transgender workers.”

For example, women, who are often subordinated by men under an oppressive system of patriarchy, separate from men to regain a sense of respect and dignity. Queers often separate from heteronormative society to reclaim acceptance since heteronormativity condemns their different sexualities and genders. These subcultures, however, while often necessary to live under capitalism to find acceptance and respect, divide and separate us into groups that are supposedly in opposition with each other. And, indeed, these social groups are in opposition to each other under a system of oppression. Women are pitted against men. Queers are attacked by those committed to heteronormativity. However, that does not mean these groups are not experiencing similar conditions where the repression of difference, such as the repression of queerness, is used as a political weapon to uphold capitalism as a hierarchical system.

In this section, I first showed how heteronormative conformity requires the repression of our queerness, leading to our isolation and separation from each other and forcing us to rely on capitalism to survive, such as heteronormativity. I also showed how the criminalization of queerness supports and justifies capitalism since it perpetuates the idea that queerness is inferior and, therefore, its subordination and impoverishment is legitimate. In the next section, I will elaborate upon how queer solidarity can be accomplished under an oppressive system of heteronormativity.

3.3 Queer Solidarity

As I have stated in the previous section, capitalism requires our separation so that we are dependent upon capitalism to survive instead of relying on each other for our survival. To separate us, repression is used, such as the repression and criminalization of queerness. Because queerness is repressed, we are forced to hide and deny our queerness, to push it underground. The forced denial of queerness allows heteronormative social structures to flourish, which are

oppressive since they are generally the only way to achieve validation and acceptance.

Repression in society leads to hostile social environments where we are forced to splinter into subcultures to find acceptance. However, one social group is pitted against another, thereby supporting capitalism's need for hierarchical, exploitative social structures. In this section, I will move on to discuss how solidarity can be achieved under oppressive capitalistic conditions.

Leslie Feinberg stated that "the foundation of unity is understanding."¹⁴⁶ Solidarity, then, can be achieved through understanding each other's struggles. However, in a heteronormative society where we have a rigid gender and sexual education that restricts queerness and where certain forms of sexual and "gender expression [are] mandated by edict and enforced by law,"¹⁴⁷ understanding is difficult to establish. Since we have internalized the idea that the only way to achieve freedom is through restriction and through upholding rigid forms of being, we feel it is necessary to discipline and penalize wrongdoing. Yet disciplinary methods result, at every turn, in us accusing others and ourselves of committing wrongdoing, thereby cultivating a culture of fear. For so long the queer community has faced accusations of wrongdoing for not conforming to heteronormative standards that are considered to be the right way of being. Women, too, have faced similar accusations when they do not conform to traditional gender and sexual roles that are perceived to be the best for them. Male feminists, such as Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufman, have also pointed out the devastating effects of gender and sexual norms on men where men are caught up in a triadic cycle of violence with other men, women, and themselves

¹⁴⁶ Feinberg, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Feinberg, 10.

to uphold their manhood.¹⁴⁸ Wounded by a repressive society, we unleash our discontent, anger, and rage against each other in an attempt to establish ourselves in a rightful position that overcomes our fear of wrongness.¹⁴⁹ Knowing all of this, then, how can we begin to build a foundation of understanding where genuine solidarity based in understanding can be expressed?

Let us move on to some solutions for building unity among us through understanding. The documentary, *Lesbiana: A Parallel Revolution*, documents the experiences of lesbians who participated in the second wave feminist movement and who also chose to live in community with other women to escape restrictive heteronormative expectations placed on women at the time.¹⁵⁰ Philosopher Sarah Lucia Hoagland is one voice that is recognized in the documentary. At one point, while referencing the work of Maria Lugones, Hoagland said that we tend to organize through commonality but, really, we need to come together through our differences.¹⁵¹ Here Hoagland offers us a path towards understanding genuine solidarity. Societal transformation is not solely accomplished through uniting with those who we have most in common, even though, as stated previously, the need for subcultures based in commonality that validate and affirm us is a necessary survival technique under capitalism. Solidarity capable of societal transformation, however, is achieved through uniting with others who are different from us. Consciousness-raising is one way to facilitate understanding of others who are different from us. Through consciousness-raising, we are able to talk among each other in a non-hierarchical manner that allows for our genuine express.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Kaufman, "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence," *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*, (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2.

¹⁴⁹ Feinberg, 55.

¹⁵⁰ *Lesbiana: A Parallel Revolution*, 2012.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

In terms of queer solidarity, it is critical to take the time to understand the struggles of others whose queerness is different from our own. By recognizing and taking the time to understand the struggles of others whose queerness has been condemned, we will not only be able to understand their struggles better but also able to improve our own understanding of our struggles with queerness. For instance, if you are a straight man who was assigned male but who feels unnerved by society's rigid, gender expectations, and you talk to a transman who was assigned female at birth about their experiences, it will become clearer to you how your own gender and sexual oppression is connected to theirs.

Talking to others whose queerness is different will bring to light how heteronormative social structures affect us all in detrimental ways. Through our discussions, we will also be able to better understand each other's struggles, allowing us a way to move forward and to act since we will be able to recognize our common struggle under heteronormativity. Consciousness-raising, for example, was an important organizing strategy among second wave feminists where women gathered in small groups all throughout the United States during the 1970s.¹⁵² Consciousness-raising brought together women from different backgrounds, which allowed them access to a space where they could speak freely with other women about their lives outside of a heteronormative context where it was nearly impossible to speak freely. Consciousness-raising also allowed them to create a sense of solidarity amongst themselves since they were able to talk about their different experiences under patriarchy. They knew consciousness-raising was a

¹⁵² Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Rengar credit Kathie Sarachild with "developing feminist consciousness-raising... [as] a rhetorical strategy that [feminists] deliberately cultivated to enable women to share personal experiences of gender discrimination in conversations and meetings... in order to relate to one another and generalize experiences." See Sowards and Rengar's article, "The Rhetorical Functions of Consciousness-Raising in Third Wave Feminism," *Communication Studies*, 55.4 (2004): 535.

powerful organizing strategy that allowed them “to think about our lives, our society and our potential for... building a women’s movement” where they were able to act in solidarity and build a political platform to affect change.¹⁵³

However, as I have previously pointed out, we are terrified of speaking about our differences—and necessarily so—under capitalism since our terror keeps us separated and divided from each other. Even though at the same time there are a lot of conversations about accepting diversity, our differences from each other are used as a political weapon by those in power who sow division amongst us.¹⁵⁴ In the media, for example, Democrats and Republicans are pitted against each other in an ideological battle. The very representation of Democrats and Republicans in opposition to each other in mass media sets the stage for polarization in all other realms of social life. Through our consumption of mass media that polarizes political issues, we come to feel it is necessary to reenact the polarization that divides us. Feinberg emphasizes that those in power, such as Democrats and Republicans, have “learned in a highly refined way that the success to maintaining its rule is to split up the majority, make us point our fingers at one another, focus our anger at each other” to distract us from uniting in solidarity and understanding.¹⁵⁵

In a society where a heteronormative ideology reigns over queerness as the predominate way to achieve acceptance, we quickly point our fingers at and marginalize anyone who we perceive to be different or queer. Because we have learned to focus our anger and discontent at those whose queerness is different from ours, who we perceive to be committing wrongdoing

¹⁵³ Pamela Allen, *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women’s Liberation*, (New York: Times Change Press, 1970), 6.

¹⁵⁴ Feinberg, 132.

¹⁵⁵ Feinberg, 136.

because they are not doing what we do, we are prevented from being able to see our interconnections, thereby preventing our solidarity.

Furthermore, solidarity is difficult under heteronormative social structures that repress queerness because of the widespread use of polarization that defines us in terms of good and bad. What is considered to be good is upheld, validated, and glorified, such as heteronormativity as an oppressive force. Conversely, what we consider to be bad is denigrated, prohibited, and threatened, such as queerness as a repressive force. Rita Mae Brown, a feminist author and poet, believes polarization leads us “to take up these positions and defend them as though our whole egos were on the line.”¹⁵⁶

Polarization is necessary under capitalism since it supports and justifies capitalism by producing a hierarchical social structure. What is considered “bad” by others is condemned while what is considered “good” is endorsed, thereby producing a hierarchical structure where “bad” is subordinated to “good.” Feminists Gloria Escomel and Carolyn Gage realized that in their personal experience in lesbian social activism during the 1970s, they were repeating the same hierarchical structure that they were fighting. Gloria Escomel states:

When we were trying to write something together, we fought about every word and did not get anywhere. There was always a lesbian ideology or theology espoused by a theorist in the group who would stop the discussion... [W]e could not proceed because there was this to keep in mind and that to take into account, and you could not do this because it was too hierarchical like a pyramid...¹⁵⁷

Escomel points to the fact that a hierarchical structure, such as the one she describes, is not worthwhile since it prevents us from being able to speak or get anywhere. Efforts that polarize issues halt understanding, thereby thwarting collective solidarity. Escomel goes on to say that we

¹⁵⁶ *Some American Feminists*, 1997.

¹⁵⁷ *Lesbiana: A Parallel Revolution*, 2012.

need new structures, which can be achieved through “stretching the imagination.”¹⁵⁸ Carolyn Gage also makes a similar point regarding polarization efforts within lesbian social activism: “I learned to be impeccable in my writing because, *seriously*, someone would take the stage in the middle of your performance and shut it down if you said something that offended them.”¹⁵⁹ Rita Mae Brown believed that we do not have to take up these polarized positions that pigeonhole us within a hierarchical framework where we attack one another.¹⁶⁰ Instead, when we feel the impulse to attack, condemn, or reject someone because of our fear and terror of other’s differences, we can redirect that energy into an attempt to understand each other better. When we feel the impulse to condemn out of our fear, we will know that there is something crucial dividing us, and when we listen to each other we will be able to come to some better understanding.¹⁶¹ In terms of queerness, instead of resorting to the impulse to condemn queerness, such as restricting one’s gender and sexual expression in the workplace or threatening one’s own child with punishment for coming out as gay or trans, we can understand one another’s queerness, thereby realizing our collective struggle with heteronormativity and allowing us the possibility to act together to achieve queer solidarity.

3.4 Conclusion

To reiterate, if solidarity where we are able to act is ever to be achieved, it is to be done by disengaging in the desire to point fingers at each other and by disengaging in the need to condemn each other’s queerness, which results in our isolation and separation. Because we are forced to conform to heteronormativity by those in power, whether in the workplace or in the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *Some American Feminists*, 1997.

family, this task is a difficult one since we must repress the expression of our queerness to survive. Heteronormative conformity also leads to our fear of difference and to the inability to connect to each other. Furthermore, the criminalization of queerness supports and justifies capitalism where queerness is subordinated. Because capitalism relies upon hierarchical, exploitative structures, the idea of inferiority legitimates subordination, such as the supposed inferiority of queerness. We are taught to overcome our inferiority through our participation in hierarchical social structures where one competes with others to gain power and legitimacy. To gain power, one must subordinate others by condemning them as inferior and, therefore, subordinate. Also, to be competitive within heteronormative social structures one must embody heteronormativity and repress the expression of their queerness. The reenactment of hierarchical social structures where one is pitted against others leads to our separation and isolation where we are forced to rely on capitalism to survive.

One such capitalist social structure we become reliant upon is the perpetuation of hierarchical social relations, such as heteronormativity as an oppressive social structure and queerness as a repressive social force in society. Heteronormativity, which refers to norms that dictate what one *must* do with their gender and sexual expression, is oppressive since it is idealized and normalized over, and against, queerness. Queerness is repressed in society to reproduce heteronormativity as a superior form of being within a hierarchical social structure. The repression of queerness refers to the norms that dictate what one must *not* do with their gender and sexual expression. Queerness, then, is necessarily prohibited and restricted. Because heteronormativity is presented as normal and natural while queerness is presented as abnormal, we become uncomfortable with the appearance of queerness within ourselves and others and commit violence against queerness to reestablish heteronormativity. Our fear of queerness leads

to its subordination, thus supporting hierarchical power differentials that justify the perpetuation of capitalism.

I examine two realms of social life where the repression of queerness maintains heteronormativity as an oppressive social structure: the workplace and in the family. In the workplace where heteronormativity is perpetuated, queerness is devalued and considered inappropriate. Those who hold power over us in the workplace have the right to regulate and control our gender and sexual expression, usually resulting in violence against queerness since it is considered inappropriate. In the family, children are taught and disciplined by their parents who are obligated to repress their children's queerness. Parents repress their children's queerness to establish heteronormativity within their children, thereby reproducing not only the heteronormative family, but also reproducing hierarchical social relations that justify and support capitalism.

The reproduction of hierarchical social relations, such as the subordination of queerness and the idealization of heteronormativity, leads to our separation and division from one another. However, as Feinberg argues, we can focus on “connecting our issues and our struggles,”¹⁶² which will help us move beyond hierarchical social structures needed to perpetuate capitalism and lead to us to understand each other better. Through connecting our struggles, we will be able to see that everyone embodies queerness in one way or another. Recognizing that everyone is queer, as an oddity that is different from us, will help us withdraw from the desire to destroy out of fear and repulsion since we will see that we are, in fact, destroying ourselves, our queerness.

Furthermore, as Hoagland argues in her book, *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Values*, instead of engaging antagonistically with Hegel's self against the other where we are caught up

¹⁶² Feinberg, 124.

in a polarized system of subordination and domination, we can embrace difference through perceiving ourselves as “one among many.”¹⁶³ In this way, we cannot define ourselves antagonistically through the perceived threat of queerness and respond defensively with fear, discomfort, and violence. We will no longer have to rely on repressing our queerness where we annihilate it through our violence against it, resulting in its invisibility in society. When we can perceive ourselves to be “one among many,” our differences or queerness can no longer be polarized into opposing forces where we repeat the same oppressive/repressive problem where one is pitted against another in a contradictory manner.¹⁶⁴

If we can recognize each other’s queerness without attacking or invalidating one another out of our fear of it, we will be able to move beyond the confines of hierarchal, heteronormative social structures that have repressed our queerness and have separated us. We can enable genuine solidarity when we connect our different struggles, whether we consider ourselves to be straight, a man or a woman, lesbian, gay, non-binary, trans, bisexual, pansexual. Our collective queerness can act as a bridge, establishing connection and recognition of each other. As illustrated in the documentary *Lesbiana*, Hoagland paraphrased Audre Lorde when she said, “Difference is not dangerous. Difference is what makes everything possible for us.”¹⁶⁵ Additionally, Myriam Fougère, the narrator of the film *Lesbiana*, declared that we need “the courage to reinvent our lives.”¹⁶⁶ To reinvent ourselves, we must first find it within ourselves to disengage in the impulse to perceive queerness and difference as dangerous. Once we have done that, we will be able to

¹⁶³ Hoagland, 240.

¹⁶⁴ Sarah Lucia Hoagland, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value*, (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1988), 239.

¹⁶⁵ *Lesbiana: A Parallel Revolution*, 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

pave a path that will help us reinvent ourselves and society outside of a hierarchical capitalist context through the act of collective solidarity.

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VITA

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