

Obviously, leadership emerges as central to this dilemma. While there is a renewed call for unity and diversity from some corners of our movement, others (women of color who have dedicated years to this work) are appalled at the persistent whiteness of the nationally recognized leadership. As the bureaucratic and institutional apparatus of the anti-violence movement grows—bringing more funding, more recognition, and also more collaborations with partners who do not share our radical goals—there is little evidence of increasing racial/ethnic and class diversity. Despite some notable exceptions, the lack of women of color in leadership roles in anti-violence programs is startling and contrasts sharply with the rhetoric of inclusion, diversity, and commitment to antioppression work. While there may be structural excuses for this, the fact that so few national organizations (even feminist ones) have successfully promoted the leadership of women of color is almost a mockery of the values on which the movement was built. Given the similar invisibility of women of color as leaders in struggles for racial justice (again,

with some exceptions), the situation can seem dire as we face the new millennium.

Yet, for better or worse, the solutions are not enigmatic; they exist within our core values and the principles on which the anti-violence movement was organized. Feminist women of color need to step forward as never before, reclaiming our place as leaders both in the anti-violence movement and in struggles for gender equality in our communities. The anti-violence movement needs only to acknowledge the contradictions between its rhetoric and practice and to deal honestly with the hypocrisy in its work. As members of a social justice movement committed to ending oppression, we must reconsider the complexity of rendering justice by paying attention to specific vulnerabilities of race and class. As we claim victories on some very important fronts, our understanding of gender oppression must be broadened to include state-sanctioned abuse and mistreatment of women. If we are prepared to go there, we can begin the millennium ready to face the really hard, radical work of ending violence against women—for each and any woman.

46. • Courtney Bailey

A QUEER #METOO STORY: Sexual Violence, Consent, and Interdependence (new)

Courtney Bailey, an associate professor of communication arts at Allegheny College, specializes in critical cultural studies and feminist, queer, and critical race theory. She has a particular interest in visual culture and visual representations of the body in popular culture. Her research has appeared in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*, *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking*, *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies*, and the *Journal of Popular Culture*. Focusing on her own experiences with disability and sexual/gendered violence, this essay was written for this collection and explores the potential of writing from personal experience while still grounding that experience in larger theoretical insights.

INTRODUCTION

I think of myself as one of the lucky ones, a woman who somehow moves through the world of heteropatriarchy without encountering the worst kinds of sexual violence. Sure, I have some experiences that I problematically file under “bad sex,” but I tell myself they cannot match the horrific stories emerging from the era of Trumpism and #MeToo. In many rape accounts, forced penetration (usually penile-vaginal) emerges as the primary site of trauma. This makes sense given that penetration itself carries so much cultural baggage: according to dominant U.S. culture, it is an indispensable component of procreation, the consummation of heteroromanticism, and the sign that sex “really” happened.

My queer story of sexual violence exists on the fringes, recognizable only if seen around the corner of the “textbook” case in which a man violates a woman via penile penetration. I suggest instead that sexual violence *feminizes* victims and *masculinizes* perpetrators, no matter how they individually identify. Dominant culture *produces* the categories of women and men through acts of gendered sexual violence. This binary constructs masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive opposites, insists they are the only two options, and renders femininity inferior and masculinity superior (Stryker 2006, 253). Because anti-rape social movements understandably focus on violence against women perpetrated by men, they usually center heterosexuality and/or heterosex. This essay centers queer sexual experiences instead, arguing for an understanding of the stakes of sexual violence that shifts from consent and bodily autonomy to sexual agency and bodily integrity.

The following story contains sexually explicit and violent scenes. I respect strategies used to minimize voyeurism and re-traumatization, such as eliding the details of a sexual assault. But such strategies only erase the very things I need to say. I err on the side of specificity because the white heteropatriarchal devil really is in the details.

THE STORY OF KIM

I meet Kim through an online dating site, and we embark on a loving nine-year relationship also fraught with mistreatment and abuse. When we first decide to have sex, I tell her that penetration physically hurts me so it's off limits. She nods and honors my wishes . . . until the night she jams her finger up my ass with no warning. Surprised and shocked, I feel thrown off balance. I feel guilty because my dislike of penetration keeps denying *her* a pleasurable sensation, purportedly the pinnacle of sexual and emotional intimacy. I want desperately to prove that I'm not selfish, frigid, and aloof; I want to show her how much I love her, so I stay silent. My silence arises, at least in part, from the demands of hegemonic femininity, including passivity, selflessness, and deference to others (Bordo 2004 11–12). Kim takes my silence as permission to penetrate me anally whenever she decides it's in my (her) best interest, which is not often but often enough.

She also threatens me with rape on more than one occasion, usually right before I leave for work. “One of these days, I'm going to tie you to the bed and rape you all day long, over and over again,” she says in a flirty tone as if she's giving me a sexy compliment. I laugh these statements off until my feminist conscience rears its head and I tell her to knock it off. “But it's just a joke!” she exclaims, as if a woman raping another woman is *prima facie* ridiculous. Once we divorce and I begin to understand our relationship as abusive, her rape jokes appear more like rape fantasies of control, possession, and dominance.

I wonder if my boundaries come across like a challenge to her, an eerie echo of the infamous “no means yes, and yes means anal” slogan popularized by Yale fraternity members in 2010 (Orbey 2018). This slogan relies on the peculiar cultural charge that adheres to anal penetration, simultaneously forbidden and the ultimate sign of heterosexual male conquest. Heteropatriarchy frames women's pain around penetration as expected and normal, desired and desirable, proof of her chastity, and a guarantee of greater male pleasure at her expense—hence the

value accorded to "tightness" (Loofbourow 2018). Anal sex heightens this dynamic because of its taboo status. By doing something that will presumably hurt her and that society frowns up, he asserts his will in the face of reluctance and resistance. In the cultural imaginary, anal heterosex becomes a realm where real men prove themselves and real women exist for male sexual gratification and bravado.

What happens when this dynamic plays out between two queer-identified women? Kim exerted a masculinist form of power over me, but our status as queer women complicates it. Historically excluded from and marginalized by masculinist power, queer women can only access it in partial, limited, and unstable ways. In the absence of a penis and clearly demarcated gender roles, we can only approximate heterosex by engaging in a shadowy, perverse version of it. My experience of anal penetration at Kim's hands is either proof of sexual/gendered pathology or "not that bad."

WHEN CONSENT IS NOT ENOUGH

Mainstream anti-rape activism usually presumes that consent is the cure for sexual violence and that to enact consent, we need more/better communication (Harding 2015, 44–46; Friedman 2017, 188–89). Activists assume that well-intentioned people know how to read interpersonal cues and simply need to pay more attention to them. But *how* do people know? As a scholar of communication, I believe communication constructs our reality; that is, it shapes our understanding of ourselves, others, and the world. Far from a panacea, communication is part of the problem because it produces and circulates dominant norms. For instance, Hollywood often propagates a "no eventually means yes" model of heterosex, in which *both women and men have always already consented*. These scenes depict the man as an aggressive pursuer who won't take no for an answer (McIntosh 2018, "Abduction;" McIntosh 2018, "Stalking"). When the woman explicitly resists, he persists until she reveals, often enthusiastically, that she really wanted it

all along. If this sort of portrayal pervades the cultural air we breathe, then we learn that women's verbal and non-verbal cues of resistance do not, in fact, mean "stop." They mean "keep going."

My experiences of sexual abuse, therefore, are not just a matter of interpersonal miscommunication. U.S. rape culture frames my silence and non-verbal cues as an invitation for Kim to keep going, to overpower me, until I give in and start enjoying myself because maybe I want it to happen. Women don't want to be subjected to rape and perhaps qualifying as a "real" (white, cis, straight, middle-class) woman under the dominant rules requires being "rapeable." Perhaps being acknowledged as rapeable brings with it protection—the masculinist, paternalistic and controlling kind.

Yet what do we do when white heteropatriarchy deems white women perfect victims, black and brown women never victims, black and brown men always perpetrators, and white men heroic saviors? What do we do when these systems deny lesbians sexual agency by portraying them either as non-sexual in the absence of straight men or hyper-sexual in the presence of straight men? What do we do when these systems need a clear distinction between men and women and so punish trans, non-binary, and genderqueer folks? Consent may not be a strong enough term to bear the weight of what it needs to accomplish under these conditions, especially when considered outside the white, heteronormative charmed circle (Rubin 1984, 153).

SHOULD I CALL IT RAPE?

As the astute reader might note, I have not explicitly called my experience of anal penetration "rape." If communication constructs our world, then it's not just a matter of semantics; it's a matter of reality, politics, and belief. Calling what happened to me "rape," for one thing, invokes a legalistic framework of crime and punishment, which locates the remedy for sexual violence in the criminal justice system. Turning to this framework allows anti-rape activists to agitate

for important reforms like affirmative consent laws (Friedman and Valenti 2008, 5). Yet even when the legal system decides to prosecute rapists, a rare occasion indeed, it can re-traumatize victims/survivors by enacting a kind of "second rape." It thus *produces* sexual violence as an integral part of its punitive functions. By conceptualizing rapists as irredeemable monsters, a legalistic framework settles for blaming evil individuals rather than interrogating the systems that make rape possible in the first place.

Like all spheres of life, sex exists within systems of domination and oppression, lending it a potentially traumatic quality even outside technical or legal definitions. White supremacy, for instance, hypersexualizes women of color, thereby excusing—and erasing—sexual violence against them (Hill Collins 2005, 121). Heteropatriarchy eroticizes male domination and female subordination under the rubric of romantic love (Griffin 2008, 501). Treating rape as a singular, aberrant incident, therefore, obscures the ubiquity of rape culture and its normalization of sexual violence (Dworkin 1987, 66).

The injurious potential of sex exists alongside pleasure, intimacy, and love, but that does not necessarily mitigate it. Laura Kipnis argues that dominant notions of romantic love imagine intimacy as the merging of true selves, which she describes in the following terms:

Lovers fashion themselves after doctors wielding long probes to penetrate the tender regions. Try to think of yourself as just one big orifice: now stop clenching and relax . . . Needless to say, all this opening up will leave you feeling somewhat vulnerable, lying there psychically spread-eagled . . . But remember, it's for your own good—even if it subjects you to whatever pain [or] chafing the partner may happen to inflict on you. (2003, 76)

This passage suggests that sexual violations are normative, that is, culturally expected and encouraged. Kim's actions, then, are hardly aberrations or deviations from romantic love; on the contrary, romantic love justifies and expects those actions in the name of wholeness and completeness, of two interior selves becoming one. Kim's penetration of me is for

my own good, showing me what it's truly like to open up to someone else.

Alongside my concerns about legalistic and romantic frameworks, I also worry about reinforcing the pernicious myths that link queer people to sexual perversion. The last thing I want to do is give homo/transphobia more ammunition, especially in an era when lawmakers are rationalizing the persecution of LGBTQPAI+ communities in the name of "religious liberty." The last thing I want to do is give sexism more ammunition, especially in an era where lawmakers are undermining reproductive justice and a self-avowed sexual abuser sits in the White House. The last thing I want to do is provide fodder for the male gaze, which has historically co-opted lesbian sexuality for straight male titillation (Ristock 2002, 16). Refusing the term "rape," then, might be a protective move that attempts to shield queer and lesbian communities from further voyeurism, trivialization, and violence (Girschick 2002, 11).

But still I wonder, is refusing to use it running away from something far too daunting to confront? For all its limitations, the word "rape" carries a certain kind of weight; it has a certain kind of specificity and rhetorical force. Calling it rape does not feel liberatory or redemptive, but by not calling it that, am I trying to distance myself from it and, in the process, underselling it? As Ristock and Girschick note in their studies of woman-to-woman sexual violence, the pacifism, gentleness, and care for others associated with hegemonic femininity can make it difficult to believe that women are even capable of intimate violence, especially when rape typically connotes brutal male force and aggression (Ristock 2002, 48; Girschick 2002, 93). Maybe I feel like a finger up the ass cannot compete with a dick up, well, anything. If lesbians cannot have "real" sex, then we cannot have real rape, and Kim's insistence that it's just a joke lingers. In this context, calling it rape refuses simplistic connotations of queerness with liberation and gives shape to harms otherwise erased or marginalized. Perhaps calling it rape opens up as many possibilities as it shuts down, including rethinking rape (and sex) itself.

CONCLUSION: SEXUAL AGENCY, BODILY INTEGRITY, AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Although often treated as interchangeable, the terms "consent" and "agency" do not index the same thing. Consent remains anchored to the notion of the autonomous individual with free will, historically the exclusive property of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than locating the self in free will and self-sufficiency, agency places the self within larger sociopolitical systems and it recognizes that these contexts both enable and constrain creative riffs on dominant norms. Agency relies upon a radical notion of interdependence in which we only make sense in relation to one another (e.g., men only exist because women do, and vice versa). If we take agency as our starting point rather than consent, sexual mutuality and reciprocity do not arise from one person respecting or merging with another person. Instead, they arise from the very grounds that make personhood possible.

Along with sexual agency, I invoke bodily integrity to signify what's at stake in sexual violence. Bodily integrity does not refer to a body that is impermeable, but one that is inviolable. All bodies are permeable and interdependent. Inviolability recognizes and respects such interdependence, refusing both complete separation and complete merging. In my own case, I suffer not because my partner fails to respect my free will and bodily autonomy (which dominant culture denies me anyway), but because she breaks the promise of mutuality and reciprocity necessary for sexual agency and bodily integrity.

It's tempting to assume that love represents a viable alternative to rape culture. But our love never quite escapes the dominant terms of (hetero)romance because it is constituted, in part, by those very terms. The romantic belief in an internal, true self

contributes to the Western fantasy of the atomized individual, one who enjoys autonomy, independence, willpower, and control. The harm of sexual violence arises from one individual's decision to breach another's sense of self. This view cannot capture the damage sexual violence does to *relationships* among and within people. If we are defined through our relationships, then sexual violence shatters the grounds of selfhood, only to remake it—and our relationships—in the image of dominant structures.

In sum, *the harm of sexual violence arises not from a violation of independence, but from a violation of interdependence*. The alternative of sexual agency and bodily integrity I propose here does not presume to eliminate such harm completely; after all, we're still operating within dominant culture, and my alternative is a riff, not a totally different song. Like consent, it's aspirational, a goal to put our energies toward. It may be harder to enact than consent, given that it challenges deeply cherished values in U.S. culture, including the belief that my desires are my own, I should control my own body, and love conquers all. If we truly seek a just and compassionate world, we need to interrogate these beliefs, even when they might serve our own interests.

The textbook case certainly enjoys the most attention in public discourse and the #MeToo movement's status as a hashtag makes it open to a range of different, even contradictory stories. Mine will never be perceived as media-worthy as the ones around Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, and Brett Kavanaugh, but it exists nonetheless, ready and waiting to be shared. Sharing it is not only key to my survival, but an extension of my politics. Like bearing witness, sharing this essay represents an enactment of interdependence. From one feminist to another, I could not—and would not—be here without you.

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47. • Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Richie, and Kay Whitlock

FALSE PROMISES:

Criminal Legal Responses to Violence Against LGBT People (2011)

The following piece, excerpted from *Queer (In)Justice: Criminalization of LGBT People in the U.S.* (Beacon, 2011), was collectively written by the three authors. Joey Mogul is a partner at the People's Law Office, where he fights for justice for people who have suffered from police and other state torture, abuse, and misconduct. He also directs a clinic at DePaul University's College of Law. Andrea Richie is a leading black lesbian police misconduct attorney who has written extensively on the profiling and policing of women of color and litigated *Tikkun v. City of New York*, a ground-breaking case that challenged unlawful searches of trans people in police custody. In 2014 she was awarded a Senior Soros Justice Fellowship to continue her work. Kay Whitlock is an activist and writer committed to dismantling structural violence. She co-authored *Considering Hate* (with Michael Bronski; Beacon, 2015) and is the co-founder and co-editor (with Nancy Heitzeg) of the Criminal Injustice Series on the blog *Critical Mass Progress*.

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